



INEQUALITIES IN THE NETHERLANDS

NETHERLANDS – ABOVE AVERAGE IN
THE EU BUT THERE ARE WORRYING TRENDS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The first Netherlands national report on the SDGs paints a mixed picture. There is positive progress on several goals – decent work and economic growth; responsible consumption and production; and peace, justice and strong institutions. In contrast, the trends for SDG 1 (No Poverty) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) are not so encouraging.

Poverty, income inequality, employment

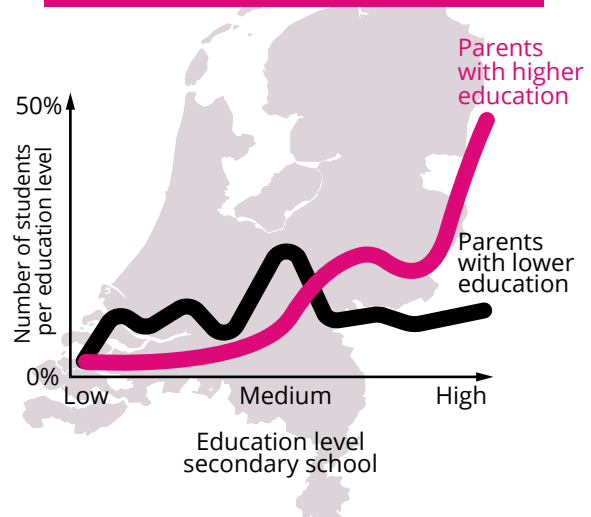
Netherlands' per capita income of USD 51,340, the ninth highest among OECD countries.¹ This prosperity is not equally shared, however: the top 20% of the population earn four times as much as the bottom 20% (Gini coefficient is 0.28,² slightly below, and therefore better than, the EU average of 0.30);³ over 1.4 million people (8.8% of the population) live below the poverty line; and 125,000 children (7% of all children) are growing up in long-term poverty.

There is low unemployment overall – 3.3%⁴ (down from 7.9% in 2014) but rates are higher or lower for different groups of workers/employees. People with a migrant background are more likely to be unemployed, and it is worse if they are from a non-western background.⁵ However, in 2017, having a job is no longer a guarantee of that a household is not at risk of poverty – the number of working poor has risen by 60% since 2000, from 210,00 to 320,000,⁶ but this is still low compared to other European countries.⁷

Gender

The hourly wage rate is 5% higher for men in the public sector and 7% higher in the private sector. Netherlands has by far the highest rates of part-time work in the European Union for both women and men: more than three-quarters of the 61% of women who have paid employment work part-time; more than a quarter of men work part-time.⁸ The proportion of women in the national parliament and local government in the Netherlands is high (38%, 57 seats) and stable. The proportion of women in top positions and on supervisory boards has not yet reached the 30% target set by the government.

EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITIES IN THE NETHERLANDS



Source: <https://www.onderwijsinspectie.nl/binaries/onderwijsinspectie/documenten/rapporten/2019/04/10/rapport-de-staat-van-het-onderwijs-2019/Rapport+De+Staat+van+het+Onderwijs+2019+.pdf>

Education

Children of professionals and university educated parents more likely to go to university and enjoy better opportunities in life. Teachers appear to have lower expectations of children of parents of lower educational achievement or of parents with a migration background and as a consequence they receive less support from schools in their attempts to access tertiary education, even when they have satisfactory test scores.⁹ Changes in the loan system, selection in education and internationalization may exacerbate these differences.

Environment

The level of atmospheric PM2.5 particles that are small enough to enter and damage the lungs, is 14.0 micrograms per cubic metre, exceeding the 10 micrograms limit set by the World Health Organisation. Negotiations are under way to agree to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 49% by 2030 with the target to be underpinned by law.

International cooperation

The Netherlands' large agro-food sector has an unsustainable carbon footprint with negative impacts in third countries. The 2017 VNR¹⁰ stated that 'high environmental pressures are placed on low-income countries and middle-income countries to meet the Netherlands' food production needs.¹¹

Netherlands is the eighth-largest donor country, spending US\$5 billion on net ODA in 2017 (0.6% of GNI, down from 0.65% in 2016). Its four priorities are security and the rule of law; water management; food security; and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR, including HIV/AIDS).

Migration, young people and discrimination

The Netherlands has a higher than average population of people born outside the EU, 11.5%¹² (EU average is 4.1%).¹³ With regard to migration generally the Netherlands is performing less well, falling from a score of 69/100 in 2010 in the Migration Policy Index to 60/100 in 2014.¹⁴

Life is becoming more difficult for young people. Increases in flexible working practices and precarious work means that gap in income and wealth between generations is growing.

Recommendations

- Make agriculture and agro-food business sustainable and reduce Netherlands' carbon footprint.
- Speed up climate adaptation.
- Do more to promote emancipation – provide social security and equal treatment for every individual; advance the economic independence of women and promote them to higher positions.
- Do more to narrow the growing opportunity gap in Dutch education, based on ethnicity and socio-economic class - this is a cause for concern and demands action.
- Invest in achieving the SDGs, both in the Netherlands and in developing countries.

INTRODUCTION

1. What are the most striking inequalities in The Netherlands? Which social groups in are the most affected by inequalities?

In the Dutch context, inequalities exist and will become even sharper as indicators for both SDG1 and SDG10 suggest negative development in The Netherlands. Areas for improvement include: social inclusion, such as people living below the poverty line and gender inequality; high fossil fuel consumption and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions per capita, along with a low share of renewable energy in the total energy supply relative to other European countries; and high environmental pressures placed on low-income countries and middle-income countries to meet the Netherlands' food production needs.^{15 16}

In 2017, the four countries of the Kingdom of the Netherlands (Aruba, Curaçao, the Netherlands and St Maarten) reported jointly to the UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) with a Voluntary National Review (VNR).¹⁷ The government reported on strengths including GDP per capita, confidence in institutions, healthy life expectancy, participation in lifelong learning, and official development assistance (ODA). Areas for improvement included: social inclusion, such as people living below the poverty line and gender inequality; high fossil fuel consumption and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions per capita, along with a low share of renewable energy in the total energy supply relative to other European countries; and high environmental pressures placed on low-income countries and middle-income countries to meet the Netherlands' food production needs.^{18 19}

If possible, can you describe the situation in your country with regards to the relevant targets of SDG10? Common themes for all countries: Income, at-risk-of-poverty, gender and environmental inequality.

The Netherlands faces inequality regarding income as well as wealth distribution despite being one of the richest countries in the world. In 2017, The Netherlands gross domestic product (GDP) amounted to 51,340 billion per capita, ranking 9th among OECD countries.²⁰

Income

The Netherlands has a relatively flat income distribution. The differences in standardised disposable income between people are small by European standards. Together with Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Belgium and the Scandinavian member states among others, the Netherlands has the most egalitarian income distribution within the EU. However, the level of prosperity in Slovenia and the Czech Republic is significantly lower than in the Netherlands, Belgium and the Scandinavian countries.

In 2016, the total income of the highest income quintile in the Netherlands was nearly four times larger than the total income of the lowest income quintile. This ratio was also nearly four to one in 2006. Together with the Czech Republic, Finland, Slovakia, Slovenia and Belgium, the Netherlands belongs to the group of EU countries that has a relatively small difference between the highest and the lowest income group. In the Netherlands, **the average household net-adjusted disposable income per capita is USD 28 783 a year**, lower than the OECD average of USD 30 563 a year. But there is a considerable gap between the richest and poorest – the top 20% of the population earn four times as much as the bottom 20%. However, The Netherlands exhibits income inequality of 0.28%,²¹ where the top 20% of the population earn about four times as much as the bottom 20%.²²

At-risk-of-poverty

In the Netherlands, about 75% of the working-age population aged 15 to 64 has a paid job. This figure is higher than the OECD employment average of 67%. The problem is that having a paid job no longer means that you will be able to provide a living for yourself or your family anymore. **The group 'working poor' is an ever-growing group.**²³ The poverty rate in the Netherlands is 8.8 percent, which means over 1,400,000 people still live below the poverty line. The number of children growing up in long-term poverty in the Netherlands is about seven percent, which is about 125,000 people. In 2017, 8.3 percent of the low-skilled labour work force were unemployed. From the highly educated 2.9 percent was unemployed. The part of the labour force that has a migrant background (first and second generation), was more often unemployed in 2017 than average. This is especially true for people with a non-western background:²⁴ 11.1 percent of them unemployed, compared to 5.7 percent of those with a western background back ground. People with a Dutch background (including third generation or longer) are relatively low in unemployment at 3.9 percent.

Gender

Work inequalities can also be found in the reward for work. Men earn on average per hour more than women. This difference is greater in business than with the government. The differences pay can partly be explained by differences in background characteristics such as age, level of education, professional level, working time (part-time or full-time), origin and work experience. After correction women civil servants still earn 5 % less than men. Diversity at the top of organizations is important for an economy where innovation and creativity are crucial for growth and development. Nevertheless, the growth in the proportion of women in top positions is still lagging behind the target that at least 30% of the seats on the board and on the supervisory board should be occupied by women. The entrepreneurial organizations and the Minister of Education, Culture and Science are taking joint action to encourage companies that have to meet the objective to find out where they stand now in this endeavour. Progress is a cause for concern because companies must reach

the target by January 2020. The cabinet will take stock in spring 2019. The discussion focuses primarily on the top of business, but it is also about the flow from the layers below. In support of this, a database can be used that now contains the profiles of more than 1,500 highly qualified women who are ready for council positions.

The proportion of women in the national parliament and local government in the Netherlands is high internationally and remains stable. In 2017, 38 percent of seats (57 seats) in parliament were occupied by women, compared with an EU average of 27 percent. Conversely, with a share of 26 percent in 2015, there are relatively few women in middle and senior management in the Netherlands, compared with other EU countries. The level of 30 percent formulated in the coalition agreement of the second government under Mark Rutte has therefore not yet been reached.

Education

The quality and accessibility of education is an important factor in combating inequality in Dutch society. But the trend of a growing opportunity gap in education is worrying youth organizations. The educational level of your parents, a migration background or a functional limitation should not have any influence on your school advice or your diploma. Changes in the loan system, selection in education and internationalization are potential risks of losing the emancipatory function of education.

Students with higher educated parents get higher school advice after primary school, than students from lower educated parents, even if they are corrected for personal characteristics, including the final test score.²⁵ School advice is a constant assessment of chances and opportunities. Teachers estimate the possibilities of children of parents with a university degree or higher professional education considerably higher. They receive at 12, after primary school, a higher school advice compared to the test advice (on average 60 percent one school level higher) than children of parents with a maximum of secondary vocational education (on average 27 percent one school level higher). This leads to unequal opportunities.

Health & Environment

In terms of health, life expectancy at birth in the Netherlands is 82 years, two years higher than the OECD average of 80 years. Life expectancy for women is 83 years, compared with 80 for men.

- **Gender:** Men are more positive about their health than women: 81.7 percent of men indicated in 2017 own health (very) good to find, opposite 77.0 percent of women. Women also suffer more from long-term disorders, physical limitations and pain barriers compared to men.
- **Age:** The (experienced) health decreases with age. From children up to 15 years 95.2 percent feels healthy, this is only 59.2 percent among people over 75. In line with this, the proportion of people with long-term disorders is increasing, including physical limitations and obstacles due to aging.
- **Education:** Highly educated (in the population of 25 years or older) are positive about 83.6 percent of the cases their health, against 74.9 percent of those only having finished secondary school, and 61.5 percent of those who are vocationally trained.
- **Migration background:** People with a migration background experience their own health less often as (very) good than average; that applies to 75.5 percent of people with a western background and 74.1 percent of people with a non-Western background.
- Especially with people with a non-Western that migration background is striking, because this group is relatively young and young people are on average more positive about their health.
- **Environmental Health: The level of atmospheric PM2.5** – tiny air pollutant particles small enough to enter and cause damage to the lungs – **is 14.0 micrograms per cubic meter**, slightly higher than the OECD average of 13.9 micrograms per cubic meter and higher than the annual guideline limit of 10 micrograms per cubic meter set by the World Health Organisation. The Netherlands perform better in terms of water quality, as **93% of people say they are satisfied with the quality of their water**, higher than the OECD average of 81%. The *Public Health Status and Forecast Report 2017 (Volksgezondheid Toekomst Verkenning 2017)* forecasts that the percentage of smokers will continue to fall, to 14 percent in 2040, but differences in smoking behaviour between higher and lower educated groups will increase (RIVM, 2017).

2. How is the Netherlands responsible for inequalities at the international level/between countries? For example: trade, migration, development cooperation, tax policies etc...

Colonial history

The Netherlands has a heavy responsibility when it comes to inequalities at the international level as a former coloniser.²⁶ At the end of the 16th century, the Dutch started to engage in maritime trade activities, marking the beginning of the Dutch colonial empire and introducing a black presence. The Dutch maritime trade was carried out by three important trade companies: the Vereenigd Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC), the West-Indische Compagnie (WIC) and the Middelburgsche Commercie Compagnie (MCC). The VOC traded mostly with Asian territories trafficking in spices, silk, ivory and slaves. The WIC was mostly active on the Atlantic Ocean shipping gold, sugar and slaves. Enslaved people from West-Africa were shipped to the Caribbean and the Americas, where they were mostly forced to work on plantations. Worldwide the slave trade lasted from 1519 until 1867, and during this period a total of a total of 11 to 12,5 million enslaved had been traded and shipped. An estimated thirteen percent of all the enslaved transported would not survive the transatlantic voyage. In the 18th century the slave trade came to a head and was mostly driven by British and Portuguese shipments (50% and 30 % respectively). The Dutch participation in slave trade takes up 5% of the total amount of shipments in this century. The involvement in slavery and slave trade by the Dutch lasted for more than two hundred years and was formally abolished on July 1, 1863.

ODA budget

The Netherlands is the eighth-largest donor country, spending US\$5 billion on net official development assistance (ODA) in 2017. This corresponds to 0.6% of its gross national income (GNI), down from 0.65% in 2016. Traditionally, the Netherlands focuses on four traditional thematic priorities: 1) security and the rule of law, 2) water management, 3) food security, and

4) sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR, including HIV/AIDS). These four themes will remain in focus for this government's term of office. Advancing gender equality and strengthening the position of women and girls is a cross-cutting theme of Dutch development policy, and the government has taken leadership on the matter, including on issues related to SRHR.

3. What are the structural causes - underlying political, economic, social, environmental, historical reasons - of these internal and external inequalities (as mentioned in questions 1 and 2)?

The Netherlands population is marked by relatively strong ethnic heterogeneity. Due to historical (colonialism), political, social and environmental reasons, its ethnic variety differs from many other European countries. There is a strong sense of black identity and emancipation of Afro-Caribbean Dutch people, demanding their rightful and just place in Dutch society. The integration of immigrants is also an important aspect of social cohesion. The Dutch government is performing less and less well in the field of migration policy. On the migration policy index²⁷ with a scale from 0 to 100 (100 is the highest attainable), the Netherlands is falling from 69 in 2010 to 61 in 2014.

Absence of colonial awareness

Typical for the Netherlands is the absence of colonial awareness. Suriname, one of the former colonies of The Netherlands, only gained independence in the mid-1970s. Consequently, the Dutch did not experience, like the USA, the difficult transition from a society with a racial master-slave structure to a society with more emancipated people of colour. While gaining independence, inhabitants of Suriname had full citizenship rights in The Netherlands, which they could use to legally work and live in the former 'motherland.' When the people from Suriname

arrived in The Netherlands, Dutch society had already forgotten about their exploitative past and could not link the difficulties experienced by the descendants from slaves to the historical and systematic patterns of inequality, subordination, and discrimination. Due to this absence of awareness, it is possible that colonial mentality continues to seep through in discussions of colonialism, discrimination, and racism. On the other hand, compared to other European countries, there is a strong sense of black identity and emancipation of black people in the Netherlands, demanding their rightful place in Dutch society.

Discrimination

The proportion of citizens who feel discriminated against as members of a specific group is seen as an indicator for the level of social capital in a country. Social capital refers to the networks with shared values; it is the 'lubricant' that keeps society working. Compared with other EU countries, the Netherlands is around the middle, with 7.6 percent of citizens feeling discriminated against. Significantly higher rates are reported in the United Kingdom (13.7 percent) and France (12.4 percent), which are also marked **by relatively strong ethnic heterogeneity**. Extremely ethnically homogeneous member states such as Poland and the Czech Republic have the lowest percentages of experienced discrimination.

Young people

Only a small proportion of young people indicate that they themselves have been rejected on the grounds of origin, skin colour, age, sexual orientation or gender identity. Yet just over a quarter (27.1%) of young people indicate that they know someone who has been rejected on the labour market for this reason. Groups such as girls and vocally educated indicate 'yes' significantly more often - which shows that exclusion hits harder on specific groups. A small majority of young people therefore think it is a good idea to apply anonymously.

Specifically, young people with a migrant background and those with a disability who have to do with youth care or youth mental health care experience additional obstacles with regard to study and work. It is important that in education there is more understanding and customization for these young people to give everyone an equal opportunity in society. In addition, the position of young people in society is becoming increasingly difficult. Flexible jobs mean that the difference in income and wealth between young and old in the Netherlands is increasing. The disappearance of certainties results in a large increase in psychological complaints among young people. All kinds of youth organizations stand up for the interests of (specific groups of) young people. It is important that they are heard and supported by other parties.

“Maakbare Samenleving”

From the 1960s to the 1980s or even longer, many in Dutch society believed in the idea of socially engineered society, or in Dutch, the 'maakbare samenleving' ('society that can be made'). This idea presupposed that government intervention could achieve a lot to improve people's lives, the quality of society, and happiness levels. Over time, in the Netherlands like elsewhere the mood has shifted to a society where people are responsible for their own lives and the state does not interfere with people's personal sphere. Happiness, or quality of life, is seen as a purely personal issue.

Regional inequalities within the Netherlands

The socio-economic indicators vary considerably between municipalities and regions. In many municipalities, the recovery after the economic crisis translates slowly into greater participation in the labour market. Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague and the three northern provinces have the largest share of poor households. Some of the households have to deal with structural poverty and social exclusion. Since 2015, municipalities have been responsible for the most vulnerable groups.

More and more municipalities are developing an integrated approach with new role divisions between the municipality, residents, healthcare providers, social organizations, provinces and companies. In addition, they have started to focus more on general facilities that are accessible to everyone. Small municipalities often succeed in involving vulnerable people more in their daily lives. In 2017, there was greater recognition at all levels of government that "self-sufficiency" of citizens does not always work, particularly in stress situations, and that the system of government allowances and debt collection is also the cause of problem debts

Polarization in Dutch society The place where you grow up has a lot of influence on your future. In some places strong inequality is experienced, while other young people are hardly concerned with this. Some young people experience injustice and look for a group where they feel heard and understood, which sometimes results in radicalization. Cultural sensitivity and low-threshold contact within institutions, the use of creative forms of participation in subjects that

concern young people and offering sufficient facilities for young people can help to prevent polarization. When it comes to radicalization and extremism, young people are seen mainly as negative: as perpetrator or victim, while the positive contribution of young people to security should be emphasized and supported (in line with UN resolution 2250 on the role of young people in conflict)

Opportunity inequality, also identified by the CBS as an important point for attention, forms a potential breeding ground for unrest, polarization, radicalization, extremism and populism, and therefore also a security risk. (Growing) inequality between rich and poor, between those with a high and low education, between population groups, between urban and rural areas, based on age, sexual orientation, gender identity or disability, undermine social cohesion. SDG 10 is related to and influences many of the other goals 3, 4, 5, 8 and 11. Specifically, the growing opportunity gap in Dutch education, based on ethnicity and socio-economic class, is a cause for concern and demands and for action.

4. Do you think there are good practices/instruments/policies that have been developed by your government and civil society in your country to reduce/fight inequalities? If yes, please specify which.

In the VNR from 2017 the Kingdom of the Netherlands made clear that high environmental pressures are placed on low-income countries and middle-income countries to meet the Netherlands' food production needs^{28, 29} Reducing inequality within and among countries helps to counter economic migration and strengthens the voice of developing countries in international economic and financial decision-making.

One way to reduce inequalities within the Netherlands was the start of the Prosperity Monitor. In response to the wish of the House to have the theme of broad prosperity play a more important role in the Accountability Debate, the government has ordered Statistics Netherlands to develop the Broad Prosperity Monitor. The Monitor establishes the relationship between the SDGs and the various policy themes that are important for broad prosperity. There is a large overlap between the CBS publications on the SDGs and the Broad Prosperity Monitor, respectively.

In Dutch society, people with higher education levels and with a native Dutch background enjoy a higher level of well-being than average. This is one of the conclusions in the Monitor of Well-Being 2018, which has been published by Statistics Netherlands (CBS). This annual publication describes trends in well-being among the Dutch population in the broadest sense of the word, not just in the material sense. The disparities in well-being among the various groups in Dutch society have been determined using ten different themes. Since the concept of distribution does not apply to every aspect of well-being, e.g. the environment, the themes only partly overlap with the broad well-being themes for the Netherlands.

The Dutch government promised in 2018 to take the following initiatives in these areas:

- Ambitious steps are being taken in society with regard to climate adaptation and making industry more sustainable. Together with various social partners, the government will come to a Climate Agreement to limit greenhouse gas emissions by 49% in 2030. The government is consulting with the initiators of the Climate Act to come to a widely supported law.
- The promotion of emancipation is another point of attention for the Netherlands, in particular offering social security and equal treatment for every individual, promoting economic independence and the promotion of women to higher positions (SDGs 5 and 8). The emancipation memorandum forms the starting point for improving economic and social gender equality.

Parliamentary Committee on a Broad Definition of Prosperity

The fact that gross domestic product (GDP) is consistently (and mistakenly) equated to welfare and progress (WRR, 2013) was the reason for the Dutch Parliament to investigate what GDP actually does and does not measure, and the role GDP plays in policy-making and political decision-making. In addition, the temporary committee that was tasked with this investigation was asked to examine whether it would be useful to develop other indicators in addition to GDP to clarify prosperity and well-being in a broad sense and, if the answer to this question was yes, to identify which indicators should be developed and how they could be used. In a memorandum to this committee, CBS mapped out the strengths and weaknesses of GDP and what CBS is already doing to develop criteria to measure prosperity and well-being in the broad sense (Smits, 2015).

After thorough research and after having heard a large number of experts, the committee found that GDP is a solid and usable indicator but is indeed too limited to measure prosperity or well-being in its broad sense³⁰. The committee recommended implementing the CES indicators for a statistical description of prosperity and well-being. Therefore, it recommended developing this monitor into a Monitor of Well-being.

For the visual presentation, it recommended using the OECD's Better Life Index as a source of inspiration.

CBS will seek to align these CES themes with the SDGs, among other things.

For the purpose of assessing the disparities under the ten themes, CBS uses a total of twelve indicators, namely: satisfaction with life, personal well-being, income, wealth, education level, unemployment, perceived health, crime and victim rates, perceived housing costs, volunteer work, trust in other people, and satisfaction with commuting time.

High well-being among higher educated and native Dutch

In most areas, [people with higher levels of education](#) enjoy a higher level of well-being than those with lower levels. This is the case for income, wealth, unemployment, health, self-perceived cost of housing, volunteer work, trust in other people, satisfaction with life and personal well-being. However, the higher educated are relatively more often victim of crime. Levels of well-being among people with intermediate levels of education are like the overall level of well-being of the population in most areas. Another noteworthy finding is that in many areas, people with a migration background – and particularly those with a non-western background – have lower levels of well-being than native Dutch people. These disparities are partly related to the fact that people with a non-western migration background are relatively younger and lower educated than average.³¹

Fewer disparities by age and gender

For almost all indicators, disparities are seen among the different age groups, although no distinct pattern emerges. Young people tend to have a relatively low income and low level of wealth, for instance. In addition, young people are more likely to be victims of crime than older people. In terms of health, the opposite is true: the percentage of people with a positive perception of their own health decreases with age. Education levels are also higher among young people than among the older age groups. Differences in well-being between men and women are small. Their respective positions hardly deviate from the average for ten out of the twelve indicators. However, men are less often affected by unemployment and have a more positive perception of their own health.

5. What are your demands to your government to reduce inequalities/to achieve SDG 10 (at the national level and within the EU)?

In the report *Our Common Future* (WCED, 1987), the Brundtland Commission explores social (and sustainable) development from the perspective of justice. This report examines the intra-generational distribution of wealth within the current generation (wealth distribution between the rich and the developing countries) and the inter-generational perspective, where the focus is on whether the current generation is not exhausting too many of the resources, which could threaten future generations' pursuit of prosperity. According to the Brundtland Commission, a development is only sustainable if both the intra-generational and inter-generational justice requirements are met. The concept of sustainability originates from ecology

The Brundtland Commission arrived at the following definition of sustainable development: *Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present (generation) without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.* CBS' *Sustainability Monitor of the Netherlands 2014* added to this definition: *both here and in other parts of the world.* Sustainable development therefore mainly deals with the question of whether we are creating our quality of life here and now in such a way that it does not place too great a burden on the possibilities for people elsewhere and in the future to have a enough quality of life.

Looking at the first Monitor of Well Being is shows that overall, the Netherlands has a high level of quality of life and it shows the negative externalities like the massive unsustainable footprint of The Netherlands, something you don't see in indicators like GDP. Many indicators show a positive trend over the last eight years, or a positive change with the year before. Only three out of 21 indicators were markedly negative: the number of people with obesity, satisfaction with free time, and size of nature areas.

Nonetheless, the figures aren't equal. Some groups report lower scores: women, some age groups (below 25 and 55-65), those with low education levels, and migrants. And wellbeing scores are clearly higher in the here and now, then they are in the future and regarding the impact on elsewhere. Indicators concerning the future that post lower scores are primarily the environmental ones: CO2 and nitrogen emissions, fossil energy reserves, and biodiversity. Possibly, policy changes may see improvement here in the future, as energy is becoming cleaner and the Netherlands is due to stop all domestic gas production.

These are our recommendations:

- **Make Agriculture and agro-food business sustainable.** The Netherlands' large agro-food business has a massive and unsustainable footprint and relates to a negative impact in third countries. On top of that only 4% of agriculture is organic.
- **Reducing inequality within and among countries helps to counter economic migration and strengthens the voice of developing countries in international economic and financial decision-making.** The Netherlands has a large carbon footprint and imports resources and biomass from elsewhere, including from least developed countries (LDCs). That means that natural capital is moved from those countries. In the VNR from 2017 the Kingdom of the Netherlands made clear that high environmental pressures are placed on low-income countries and middle-income countries to meet the Netherlands' food production needs.^{32 33}
- **Fasten Climate Adaptation.** The Netherlands are taking steps regarding climate adaptation and making industry more sustainable. Together with various social partners, the government will come to a Climate Agreement to limit greenhouse gas emissions by 49% in 2030. The government is consulting with the initiators of the Climate Act to come to a widely supported law.
- **The promotion of emancipation** is another point of attention for the Netherlands, offering social security and equal treatment for every individual, promoting economic independence and the promotion of women to higher positions (SDGs 5 and 8). The emancipation memorandum forms the starting point for improving economic and social gender equality.
- **The growing opportunity gap in Dutch education, based on ethnicity and socio-economic class, is a cause for concern and demands action.** The socio-economic indicators vary considerably between municipalities and regions. In many municipalities, the recovery after the economic crisis translates slowly into greater participation in the labour market. Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague and the three northern provinces have the largest share of poor households. (Growing) inequality between rich and poor, between those with a high and low education, between population groups, between urban and rural areas, based on age, sexual orientation, gender identity or disability, can undermine social cohesion. SDG 10 is related to and influences many of the other goals 3, 4, 5, 8 and 11.
- **Invest in achieving the SDGs, both in the Netherlands and in developing countries.** Inequalities in wages and positions between women and men are large, the percentage of renewable energy is very small, greenhouse gas emissions are very high, and biodiversity is under serious pressure. More awareness should be paid on the urgency of these problems, for example with a big public awareness campaign about the SDGs.
- **Solutions can be found in:** greening the tax system, more robust implementation of human rights treaties and more coherence of (sustainable) development policies are examples of how achieving the SDGs in the Netherlands can be encouraged. In short, all Dutch policies and actions must be coherent with the SDGs!

- ¹ OECD, Data. The Netherlands Gross domestic product (GDP), <https://data.oecd.org/gdp/gross-domestic-product-gdp.htm> (20.02.2019).
- ² OECD, OECD Data. Income inequality, <https://data.oecd.org/inequality/income-inequality.htm#indicator-chart> (20.02.2019).
- ³ OECD, Better Life Index. The Netherlands <http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/countries/netherlands/>
- ⁴ Eurostat, March 2019. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Unemployment_statistics
- ⁵ In 2017 the unemployment for migrants with a non-Western background was 11.1% compared with 5.7% for migrants with a western background In the Netherlands only first and second-generation (with one parent born in a non-Western country are regarded as having a non-western background).
- ⁶ <https://www.dutchnews.nl/news/2018/10/number-of-working-poor-has-risen-by-60-this-century/>
- ⁷ https://www.scp.nl/Nieuws/Aandeel_werkende_armen_in_Nederland_gegroeid_en_overtreft_dat_van_Denemarken_en_Belgi
- ⁸ Statistics Netherlands (2018). Sustainable Development Goal 10: the situation of the Netherlands. Page 30.
- ⁹ <https://www.onderwijsinspectie.nl/documenten/rapporten/2019/04/10/rapport-de-staat-van-het-onderwijs-2019>
- ¹⁰ https://www.sdgnerland.nl/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/VNR-Kingdom-of-the-Netherlands_final.pdf
- ¹¹ [Statistics Netherlands Press Release](#)
- ¹² Migration Integration Policy Index 2015. Netherlands. <http://mipex.eu/netherlands>
- ¹³ Eurostat 2016 https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=People_in_the_EU_-_statistics_on_origin_of_residents#Foreign-born_residents_from_countries_outside_the_EU.
- ¹⁴ <http://mipex.eu/netherlands>
- ¹⁵ [Statistics Netherlands Press Release](#)
- ¹⁶ [2017 VNR report](#)
- ¹⁷ [The Sustainable Development Goals: The Situation for the Netherlands](#)
- ¹⁸ [Statistics Netherlands Press Release](#)
- ¹⁹ [2017 VNR report](#)
- ²⁰ OECD, Data. The Netherlands Gross domestic product (GDP), <https://data.oecd.org/gdp/gross-domestic-product-gdp.htm> (20.02.2019).
- ²¹ OECD, OECD Data. Income inequality, <https://data.oecd.org/inequality/income-inequality.htm#indicator-chart> (20.02.2019).
- ²² OECD, Better Life Index. The Netherlands <http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/countries/netherlands/>
- ²³ https://www.scp.nl/Nieuws/Aandeel_werkende_armen_in_Nederland_gegroeid_en_overtreft_dat_van_Denemarken_en_Belgi
- ²⁴ In the Netherlands only first and second-generation (with one parent born in a non-Western country are regarded as having a non-western background).
- ²⁵ <https://www.onderwijsinspectie.nl/documenten/rapporten/2019/04/10/rapport-de-staat-van-het-onderwijs-2019>
- ²⁶ <https://www.kritischestudenten.nl/bibliotheek/geschiedenis-bibliotheek/zwarte-piet-bitter-treat-racial-issues-netherlands-u-s/>
- ²⁷ <http://mipex.eu/netherlands>
- ²⁸ [Statistics Netherlands Press Release](#)
- ²⁹ [2017 VNR report](#)
- ³⁰ House of Representatives, 2016b; see also the thematic edition of the Tijdschrift Milieu (2016) on the theme Green Well-being
- ³¹ <https://www.cbs.nl/en-gb/artikelen/nieuws/2018/20/well-being-not-distributed-equally/education-level>
- ³² [Statistics Netherlands Press Release](#)
- ³³ [2017 VNR report](#)





The European-wide project **Make Europe Sustainable for All (MESA)** is coordinated by the European Environmental Bureau (EEB) and implemented in 15 European countries by 25 partners. It aims to raise citizens', CSOs', and policy-makers' awareness on the Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by the 193 Member states of the United Nations in 2015. At the core of the project are campaigns and advocacy on inequalities, sustainable agriculture, gender equality, climate change, migration and sustainable consumption and production. This report was produced as part of the **Fighting Inequalities** in Europe campaign of the project, and contributes as well as the global **Faces of Inequality** campaign, which gives social exclusion, poverty and discrimination a face.

#SDGS4All ■ <https://makeeuropesustainableforall.org> ■ <https://makeeuropesustainableforall.org/fight-inequalities>
<https://gcap.global/faces-of-inequality>

WECF (Women Engage for a Common Future) is a nonprofit network dedicated to a gender just and healthy planet for all. Our international network consists of over 150 women's and civil society organisations implementing projects in 50 countries. We believe that a sustainable future and environment needs holistic solutions reflecting the lives of people on the ground. We work on transformative gender equality and women's human rights in interconnection with climate justice, sustainable energy & chemicals, less toxic waste, safe water & sanitation for all.