Introduction

Inflation will remain high in 2023 and poverty will continue to increase. It is estimated that by 2024 around one million people will live in poverty. Add to this that measures taken in 2022 to keep the lowest and low incomes somewhat afloat will expire in 2023 and it will be clear that action is urgently needed. The fall of the government makes this extra difficult, but fortunately a large majority of the Parliament is putting pressure on the outgoing cabinet to come up with additional policy. In September, when the budget 2024 will be presented, it will become clear which measures will be maintained and what additional measures can be expected. One of the spearheads of the poverty policy, namely reducing child poverty, has clearly not been successful, given the figures. Child poverty is increasing and will reach 7%. At EAPN NL, we have been saying for years that there is no child poverty in a rich country like the Netherlands, but that parents have too low an income, which creates poverty, which of course also affects the children. It is not without reason that we have been opting for an additional increase in benefits, the state pension and the minimum wage of 5% for years. We are therefore pleased that the this year installed Social Minimum Committee, led by Professor Godfried Engbertsen, recommends increasing this minimum income by an additional 7%. Despite this clear recommendation, it is still unclear how the government will respond to this. The increase in the minimum income and the minimum wage, which was implemented on January 1, 2023 and which was historic in itself, has been completely eaten up by 2022 inflation.

Fate

Poverty and/or exclusion are not fate. Both are the result of political and economic decisions. As EAPN NL, we have decided to send a number of proposals to the boards of all democratic parties that can immediately help to significantly reduce existing poverty. Measures that immediately generate money, are easy to implement and are in line with the discussions and activities already initiated by the government. The letter can be found as Appendix 1 in this report.

Poverty has many faces, including a lack of resources. A second example is the fact that the Netherlands, which has signed the UN Convention on Disability Rights of people with disabilities in many cases still leaves much to be desired in terms of implementation. Inclusion Netherlands constantly points this out and Zonnebloem Netherlands has made a very clear poster for it and hung it everywhere.

(DThis traffic sign does not exist, but you can find it nearly everywhere)
Poverty

In “The Effects of Poverty on Feeling, Thinking and Doing”, Arnoud Plantinga, Marcel Zeelenberg and Seger M. Breugelmans state: What is poverty?

The low-income limit is one of the many poverty lines. Another, perhaps more realistic poverty line is the not-much-but-sufficient criterion of the Social and Cultural Planning Office (SCP). This limit is determined by the minimum expenditure required to add up for basic needs and participation. Other commonly used limits are the European poverty line (60% of the median income in a certain country) and the policy income limit (equal to the social assistance benefit or AOW pension). All these boundaries only provide a limited picture of poverty.

For example, these limits only look at income, not at expenses or assets. A family with the same income as another family but five hundred euros higher fixed costs is more likely to have difficulty making ends meet.

In addition, there are also many people who live above a set poverty line but still have difficulty making ends meet. Even among people with a high income (more than €2,750 per month), 18% have difficulty making ends meet.

The idea of relative poverty takes into account the fact that living standards differ per country or situation, and that people therefore have different expectations about the minimum required to make ends meet. While one person can easily survive on a certain income, another will have much more difficulty.

In summary, different forms of poverty can all have an effect on feelings, thoughts and actions. The findings we discuss use different definitions.

Poverty is associated with a range of social problems. People living in poverty are on average less happy and less satisfied with their lives. They experience more stress due to financial, social and emotional problems. They come into contact with stigma and shame more often. And they experience less control over their lives. In short: poverty is not only a financial problem, but also has important psychological consequences.

Participation Act

The activities that should ensure that the Participation Act (social assistance) is implemented less out of mistrust and more in line with what is actually needed, will again be the focus this year. At the request of the ministry, we are organizing two Round Tables, in which, in addition to 15 experienced experts, officials from the ministry and, at our request, a researcher from the Social and Cultural Planning Office (SCP) also participate. These are two intensive meetings where a lot is discussed. Everything is aimed at improving implementation, including looking at the role of client managers and making proposals to adjust the law.
One of our conclusions is that the client manager should be given more space and more time to discuss with the client and to point out the existing arrangements. A brief overview of what was discussed can be found in Appendix 2.

During the discussion of the Participation Act in our Parliament, it became very clear that a number of parties expect a lot from the renovation. Some members of the Committee for Social Affairs and Employment explicitly requested that experts by experience be involved in the processes. Afterwards we had a discussion with some and let them know which steps we were involved in. We hope that the role of experts by experience will also be appointed by the Commission after elections in November.

Climate

As we wrote before, at the time around the European Commission’s Green Deal, a climate policy can only succeed if low incomes are taken into account. Measures must be affordable and have a positive effect, also and especially for those who cannot incur large costs to insulate their home, switch from gas to electricity or otherwise. Microsoft Word - 2020_reactie_reactie_EAPN-NL_op_Green_Deal EU (eapnned.nl)

Since 2022, energy poverty has been discussed. A strange word, given the situation we find ourselves in as a country. There is by no means poverty in energy. Even though energy has become a luxury product, it is available in abundance and you can easily 'download' it. The problem is that people can no longer afford the costs. For that reason, from now on we prefer to talk about 'energy inequality'. In addition to poverty and social exclusion, people are also excluded in terms of energy. People live in poorly insulated homes, often still have to deal with single glazing, how is it possible in 2023, and often see no action from landlords to change this.

Energy inequality arises when people with a low income, people who do not have access to support measures for essential services, people who are also digitally poor and people who experience a rapidly increasing disadvantage, are forced by financial circumstances to reduce energy consumption because they cannot afford energy costs and when the concerns about high energy costs determine their lives so much that they have to make a choice between heating their home or doing their daily shopping, which affects their physical/mental health and their (full) participation in society. It is clear to us that this will lead to a tsunami of healthcare costs, especially in the longer term and certainly for children and young people. This results in other negative consequences for the same group(s).
We see support for this opinion in the WRR_Samenvatting_Klimaatrechtvaardigheid.pdf report in which the Scientific Council for Government Policy states: “Climate justice, just like efficiency and legality, must be an important pillar of Dutch climate policy. The climate and climate policy will change in the coming decades. Not only must CO2 emissions be reduced to net zero by 2050, the Netherlands will also increasingly have to deal with rising sea levels and extreme weather. These tasks are associated with high costs. If the distribution of these climate costs is not perceived as fair, support for climate policy will come under pressure.”

The recommendations are based on this:

Recommendation 1. Substantive broadening: treat climate policy as an issue of distributive justice. The WRR comes to the conclusion that the three tasks within climate policy must be treated as an issue of distributive justice. After all, climate costs are distributed as a result of policies for mitigation, adaptation and climate damage. And sometimes other matters are distributed, such as reduction assignments. The WRR recommends discussing fair distribution using the ten distribution principles from this report. These principles provide concrete tools to clarify the principles of climate policy in the social and political debate.

Recommendation 2. Procedural anchoring: organize early, focused attention for distributive justice and explicitly substantiate choices for distribution principles. Attention to distributive justice must be anchored systematically and in a timely manner in the policy process. This can be done by addressing a number of questions in a structured and explicit manner in policymaking. Substantiate policy choices based on distribution principles and make clear why a given distribution is chosen. Including citizen perspectives is also important. Justice in climate policy.

Recommendation 3. Institutional safeguards: ensure that attention to fairness of distribution is safeguarded in the policy process. To ensure that systematic attention continues to be paid to distributive justice, this must also become part of the system of checks and balances surrounding climate policy. This means that such attention must also be institutionally guaranteed. This can be done, for example, by having the Advisory Division of the Council of State explicitly take into account the distributive effects of climate policy and its fairness in its assessment framework. The Council of State is already involved in assessing the Climate Plan. Another body where such institutional safeguards could partly be invested is the new Scientific Climate Council.

Climate expert Dr. Martien Visser (Windesheim University of Applied Sciences) states that in the last 12 years the share of homes with a valid energy label B has increased from 15 to 50%. In the same period it is striking that energy label G has not decreased. And those are the homes where people with low incomes live! So time for targeted action.

Minimum wage

Despite the increase of just over 10% as of January 1, 2023, the statutory minimum wage is still too low. The European Commission's Legal Minimum Wage Directive shows that the minimum wage will have to be increased additionally to meet the standard. Another step that has consequences for the minimum wage is the decision of the Senate to adopt the initiative proposal of the House of Representatives to introduce a minimum hourly wage. This will happen on January 1, 2024 and will have immediate consequences for those who currently work 38 or 40 hours at minimum wage. Because the number of hours for which you receive minimum wage is, from that moment on, set at 36 hours per week, the additional hours are paid extra.
An increase in income of 5% for those who work now 38 hours a week and 10% for those who work 40 hours. Now it remains the basic salary itself, which must be increased, of course with 100% maintenance of the link with the benefits and the state pension. So with regard to additional increases, for benefits and including social assistance, the Wajong and the state pension (AOW). The claim of some that the AOW is high enough does not hold water for those who rely on the AOW alone or who also have a very small pension are living in poverty.

War

Unfortunately, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has not ended yet. Apart from the enormous human and material consequences for people in and from Ukraine, this also continues to have consequences for low-income people in our country because yes, energy costs have fallen, but are still high compared to the time before the invasion. The expectation that this will remain the case for the time being makes it clear that additional support remains necessary. This year, those who received the extra financial support of €1.300 in 2022 will also be able to apply for it this year. However, this measure will end this year, as will the additional increase in healthcare and rent allowances. Steps are urgently needed to prevent low incomes from falling through the ice in 2024. This applies to the extra support in the field of energy, but also to the maintenance of the higher allowances for care and rent.

As we already wrote, we no longer talk about 'energy poverty', but about 'energy inequality'. We are in the process of formulating a definition for this new phenomenon.

Subsistence security

In 'Subsistence security as a promise towards a local subsistence security agenda', the Association of Municipalities (VNG) gives its vision on the residents' security of existence. bestaanszekerheid-als-belofte-essay-vng-20230329.pdf

Subsistence security as a constitutional concern of the government is in crisis. We help residents to survive with unprecedented compensation measures. Municipalities have seen the number of households they have to help with income crises double in recent years to almost a million households. The sustainability of this crisis approach is limited both financially and in implementation. It requires fundamental and feasible choices. We must turn the tide to secure a dignified existence. If we are not able to do this in the next ten years, a group of insecure people will emerge that could create a social divide.

Long-term vision with better social costs and benefits. We have seen that steps have been taken in the right direction in recent years: the rent and childcare allowance are being changed, the Participation Act is being adjusted and flexible labor is becoming less attractive.

Because these steps are being taken within short cabinet periods within existing frameworks, regulations, budgets and organizations, the chance of an implementation debacle is high. Our assessment is that it is also financially more profitable to work with long-term solutions instead of sub-optimal short-term solutions. It also prevents contradictory policies from being pursued in adjacent areas, as we see in the increase in the number of young people with debt registration that coincides with online gambling and post-payment. We propose a reversal by setting a joint target on the horizon and from there making breakthroughs for a local agenda for social security.

The promise of social security is important in the current time of transition. Without the basic security of income, work and a government that stands by your side, every change becomes a threat. In order for municipalities to fulfill our role, it is necessary that there is a dot on the horizon.
• Income is enough to live on again. Everyone has an income that you can live on and pay for all basic social services. This means that the minimum wage is at an adequate level to meet living costs. In order to have a secure income. Insecurity as a revenue model (such as the online debt industry and post-payment) is removed and sectors are held responsible for the undesirable effects that their revenue model has on livelihood security.

• Everyone participates in society. Everyone is needed. Municipalities have a special responsibility for residents who need support to participate in the labor market and society. With permanent contracts and (re)training opportunities, everyone can take career steps with certainty. Working on social assistance must always pay off. By investing in human capital, we contribute to reducing the shortage in the labor market caused by an aging population, greater healthcare needs and social transitions. There have to be sufficient sheltered workplaces and daytime places available so that everyone participates in society every day.

• The government trusts residents and becomes reliable. As governments, we know that we have treated residents with distrust in recent decades. In legislation and implementation, we adapt images of humanity based on trust in people and we act from compassion. To do this properly, we ensure that human contact with the government is possible. Residents do not have to apply time and again for what they are entitled to, but the government will grant this in advance. Independent support such as social counselors and ombudsman positions are available so that no one is alone in the bureaucracy.

This important document shows three things that we at EAPN NL have been recruiting and fighting for for decades, namely the right to a living income for everyone, full participation must be (and become) possible for everyone and three, the government ends its distrust of the citizens. The latter in particular is very important for people who are directly dependent on the government, for example because they receive benefits from the Participation Act. Ending mistrust also means that people are no longer excluded on 'feeling grounds' and that every citizen is treated fairly and openly. EAPN NL is not only very pleased with these policy intentions, which reflect what we have been experiencing for years within the G40’s 'Apathy and Debt' working group, namely that municipalities are doing their utmost to support people with a low income. We see the discussions, in the context of the renovation of the Participation Act, about the task of customer managers as a good example of changing policy.

In his research 'Effects of welfare policies based on autonomy and unconditionality A social experiment with social assistance recipients', Janos Betko states.

An important motivation for early social contacts. The policy was based on the fear of criminal behavior by (groups of) poor people who are unable to maintain themselves. Anti-poverty laws are intended to prevent the poor from wandering around (De Swaan, 1989). The themes found in these first 14th-century social policies repeated themselves in the following centuries up to the present day. These themes include the following: the moral question surrounding whether ‘being poor’ could be seen as a consequence of an individual’s own moral failure (e.g. being lazy); the extent to which poor people might be forced to perform labor; and the question of how the ‘deserving poor’ could be separated from those whose ‘own fault’ it was supposedly.

The views about who deserved help and who did not often led to a combination of repression and care, a combination that was therefore appropriate at the beginning of Western social policy (De Swaan, 1989). The idea that poverty is a result of personal moral failure and has resulted in the idea that the poor needed to be morally educated, or that governments were justified in creating degrading and degrading conditions in which the unemployed are forced to work. This has been put into practice since then, well into the 20th century (Lis & Soly, 1980; Paz-Fuchs, 2020).
His research shows that when the government offers its dependent citizens more space, the distrust of those citizens towards that government decreases. An important conclusion at a time when distrust towards each other has become a central theme. During the experiment conducted by the municipality of Nijmegen, it turned out that clients who were given more space developed further and therefore became less distrustful and easier to communicate. They also created more opportunities to improve their situation. An important lesson that can be used when renovating the Participation Act.

Subsistence security is an important theme in the upcoming elections in November.

**Class culture**

The Social and Cultural Planning Office published a remarkable report 'Contemporary inequality, The post-industrial class structure based on four types of capital' 'Difference in the Netherlands 2023'. It is remarkable that a class culture is mentioned, which makes everything fall into place. This also makes it clear where policy has led in recent decades, namely leaving large groups within society behind. A summary of this remarkable report is included as Appendix 3.

Contemporary inequality involves more than divisions between, for example, the elite, white-collar workers, and agricultural or industrial workers. Resource differences manifest themselves in various combinations in seven social classes in Dutch society. These together form a social hierarchy from much to little capital.

1 The working upper class (19.9% of the adult population) is active in the labor market and has the largest share of self-employed people. This group has the most capital in three of the four types. They occupy just the second position in cultural capital.

2 The younger, promising people (8.6%) are highly educated and have many resources in other respects, but can still grow in their income, liquid assets and home ownership.

3 The majority of people belonging to the upper class (12.2%) are retired. Their average liquid assets are by far the highest, as is the equity in their home. They also generally have a good income and are often highly educated. However, due to their advanced age, their health and social networks are under pressure.

4 The large working middle group (24.9%) occupies a middle position in almost all forms of capital and can therefore be characterized as a middle class.

5 Low-educated retirees (18.1%) are largely no longer active in the labor market. They generally did not reach the secondary level of education that practically trained professionals need today (secondary vocational education level 2 or higher). However, the poorly educated retirees do have quite a lot of financial assets – especially equity in their home – and a reasonable income. On the other hand, they have little cultural capital: they have a frugal lifestyle, limited digital skills, and a limited command of English. Physically they are often unhealthy, and outside the circle of family, friends and neighbors, social networks are limited.

6 The social position of insecure workers (10.0%) is shaky in two respects. First of all, they have difficulty entering the labor market: this group has relatively many unemployed people, employees without a permanent contract and self-employed people. In addition, this social class has the least mental capital: these people often have periods of depression, little self-confidence, and a negative image of themselves. In many other respects too, the resources of insecure workers are lagging behind: among them we find many low-income people and people with debts, and many renters. The insecure workers are physically quite unhealthy, the social network is limited, the lifestyle is austere.
The precariat (6.3%) is the lowest for all four capital types. Four out of ten people are retired. An equally large group does not perform paid work, nor does it seek one (e.g. due to incapacity for work). The social classes also differ in their composition according to age, gender and migration background.

One of the parts of the discussions in which we are involved clearly shows that this new way of looking at our society is of great value. People fear their 'old age'. Care for the elderly, especially the elderly with disabilities and the very elderly, is coming under increasing pressure. Lack of financial resources and personnel causes people to talk about excesses. For example, in institutions the very elderly are often put to bed at 8 p.m. (sometimes even earlier) and have to stay there until 8 or 9 a.m. the next day. A lack of staff seems to be the cause here.

Participation

The Netherlands once led the way when it came to participation. Client participation, built up in the 1980s and 90s, seemed self-evident. Yet the negative forces succeeded in destroying this process of deploying experts by experience. It still exists, here and there, but leads a somewhat hidden existence. Recently, people have become open to the use of experts by experience, actually another word for -indirect- client participation. In its piece 'View on Citizen Participation', the Social Economic Council opens the discussion about the introduction of Citizens' Councils. Ireland is at the forefront of this citizen commitment and shows how valuable this process can be. A striking conclusion shows that EAPN NL and its founders were right long ago in their plea to include participation in the
education system and that the courses offered by the National academy for Capacity Training for Beneficiaries (LKU, founded and lead by the national self organisations of beneficiaries) were indeed valid.

“The problem with citizen participation is that most people participate little and a small group participates a lot. This group often consists mainly of white, highly educated men aged 50 and older. In addition, theoretically trained people are better able to put their interests on the table and are often listened to better than practically trained people. That is exactly why many people drop out and no longer make themselves heard, or only in protests. The more participation, the greater the differences in influence and control between citizens. That is the participation paradox. That is why the great challenge in citizen participation remains to reach all groups of people and make all voices audible.”

Naturally, we support such a Participation Policy and will certainly play our role in implementing it properly and strengthening our democracy.

Poverty definition
In 'Towards a new poverty line Interim report of the joint project 'Uniforming poverty delineation'' they announce that the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) and the Social and Cultural Planning Office (SCP) decided at the end of 2021 to introduce a uniform poverty delineation. come. The SCP used the 'not much but sufficient criterion' and the CBS the 'low-income limit'. It is better, both socially and policy-wise, if both agencies carry out their core tasks in the field of poverty and social security on the basis of one and the same poverty line. The establishment of the Social Minimum Committee in July 2022 was an excellent opportunity for CBS and SCP to develop the new uniform delineation of poverty together with the National Institute for Budget Information (Nibud). At the request of the House of Representatives (TK 2021/2022a), the cabinet has established this independent committee to investigate the level and system of the social minimum (TK 2021/2022b). Within the 'Uniforming poverty demarcation' project, the three institutes are working independently of the committee on the new uniform poverty line, but the findings and results have been submitted to the committee in the meantime. These are included in this interim report, which is available at the same time as the first advisory report from the Social Minimum Committee on June 30.

Conclusion
It looks like 2023 will be the year of change. The government indicates that its distrust towards its citizens is not justified and seems prepared to convert this into trust and a Parliament that continues to put pressure on the outgoing cabinet to tackle poverty. That gives hope for improvement.

Unfortunately, it is also known that the UWV -the Institute for Employee Insurance Execution- has spied on its clients for years via social media. Wrongly, as the politicians’ reactions also show. But it did happen and without legal basis. What does politics do with this? Will they take the UWV at its word that they will not do it again or will there be a proper investigation with consequences? We will see.

Despite this downer on the part of an important benefits agency, we see positive developments. Extra exciting since elections will take place in November. Will the new government retain the Minister for Poverty? Will the benefits and the state pension (AOW) be 100% linked to the increases
that will have to be implemented for the statutory minimum wage? Does the outgoing cabinet and the new government follow the recommendations of the Social Minimum Committee? Will poverty become a priority for the new government? And, above all, how much will the benefits and the state pension be increased as of January 1st 2024 to make up for the large backlog?
Proposals to the boards of political parties regarding the approach to poverty and exclusion for the government period after the elections of November 2023

Ladies and gentlemen

You have probably already started writing the election program for 2023-2027. We would like to present you with a number of proposals that will greatly improve the approach to reduce poverty and exclusion. The proposals are in line with the findings of the Social Committee Minimum, installed by the Minister for Poverty to bring forward proposals to improve the position of the low incomes, with the Directive Statutory Minimum Wage and with the Recommendation for a Statutory Minimum Income, both from the European Commission. We also looked at the proposals made by the Commission Borstlap where clear signals are given that the existing labor market is due to a strong reform and the minimum income needs to be raised sharply. Because every increase in the minimum income means a significant increase in the government’s budget, we have looked at where resources can come from to make this possible. Also here we join research and proposals that are already being discussed. You will see that this combination means that we can immediately achieve three things:

1. The proposed direct increase of the minimum income proposed by the Social Committee Minimum, can also apply to the Wajong (Disability Act) and the AOW (state pension) and are free of charge. There even is money left over to pay for the increase that the Law on the Statutory Minimum Wage of the European Commission, taking into account 100% linkage for all benefits and the AOW (state pension), required, to be paid for.

2. The social security system, which has had to deal with quite a few blows in the last two decades, needs being renovated. That this is necessary is shown by the mere fact that is shown from many sides, substantiated by research, that the Netherlands has become a country where poverty and working poverty have become normal.

3. It strengthens the position of the people who earn their living every day in a job that was identified as a key activity during the pandemic. In addition, we know, also supported by research, that a well-functioning social security system ensures that workers feel secure and that productivity therefore remains high. The uncertainty in which many paid workers live, creates uncertainty and doubt. That causes stress and other health costs in addition to fear of losing the job, so that in the long run the savings on wages are canceled out by the ever-increasing healthcare costs.
Our proposals.

1. We want to start with the Ministry of Finance’s own investigation, which shows that a number of tax reduction schemes have no effect. We therefore propose as of 1 January 2024 to end the 41 schemes which the research shows to have no effect. As the research shows, this directly results in savings of 17 billion per year for the treasury. This completes the 6 billion needed to implement the Commission Social Minimum proposal to increase the minimum income immediately and our proposal to implement this increase for the others benefits and the AOW (state pension) is amply covered as well. The same applies to the increases that will still be necessary in connection with the implementation of the Minimum Wage Directive of the European Commission. Without the need for extra resources or even a shortage for the government’s budget.

2. We propose to continue the discussion, that is also within the European Union and the United States conducted, to put as of January 1, 2024 a law on the Financial Transaction Tax (FTT) in effect. Incidentally, the European Union has in it policy intentions included introducing the FTB in 2026, so we're only running slightly ahead. In addition, there are already countries within the EU that have such a tax such as Sweden and France. President Macron of France has during the conference on Finance, which he organised in Paris in June 2023, established that such tax will be included in the consideration of extra funds generating for the climate crisis. To avoid discussion in advance, it is clear that this FTT will not apply to Dutch pension funds. This is the only exception made.

3. In Germany there is a lot to do about the so-called Cum Ex scandal. This is abuse of the possibility of reclaiming tax paid on dividends. By now it is clear that this has also been used en masse in our country. There are two schemes to which this applies, the aforementioned Cum Ex and the Cum Cum. Strong, fast and effective approach can, according to reports, yield 26 billion in tax refunds from those who wrongly did ask for a refund, without paying taxes. There is urgency and an effective approach required. In addition, we ask that you create legislation that will prevent such excesses forever and to end the tax scheme as of January 1, 2024.

As you can see, we have not introduced anything new, but have listed facts. It is on the new government to act quickly. These proposals make that possible and contribute to a fairer distribution, an improvement in the position of the working poor and of the people who daily have to survive at an absolute minimum. It will also help reduce child poverty and possibly even prevent this in the future. In addition, reduction of the health care costs will be an additional effect, because people will be confronted with less daily stress.

Finally, we would like to address another subject, namely the evaluation of the Participation Act, which is being heavily scaffolded by Minister Schouten. We are pleased with this clear approach and certainly already see the first results. However, there is one case, which has been proven in practice that things have to be done differently, which may be delayed due to the fall of the cabinet, but that does not deserve this delay, namely the fact that people who are incapacitated for work are not at home in the Participation Act. We propose that either to reinstate the Disability Act or remove the blockade of the Income Provision for Disability Act and bring the people who belong under this Act. That will have a significant effect on the Social Assistance (Participation Act), where the number of clients will decrease. This also reduces the pressure on the municipalities. To give people with disabilities a real chance on the labor market we need social enterprises with sheltered jobs.
Perhaps the new Minister of Poverty wants to set up an extra committee for this call to change the position of handicapped persons. We are happy to be involved in this, together with our network partners.

We wish you all the best of luck in the upcoming elections and hope that democracy will prevail.

Sincerely, Quinta Ansem, president of the European Anti Poverty Network Netherlands

www.eapnned.nl  www.sterkuitarmoede.nl  www.onzedroombrummen.nl

Doorn, 2 augustus 2023
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Summary of the results of the Participation Act Round Tables

August 2023

Introduction:
To improve the Participation Act (Social Assistance), the European Anti Poverty Network Netherlands was asked by the ministry of Social Affairs & Employment to organise two Round Tables with about 15 experts by experience on the so-called tracks 2 and 3. We organized these meetings, at which also representatives of the ministry and of the Social and Cultural Planning Bureau took part, starting with track 3. Then we made a follow-up step to track 2. Track 1 was about the more short-term goals that could be realized comparatively “quickly”. Relatively quickly, because some policy proposals still need to be implemented at the implementing agencies and, for example, do not take effect until 2024. Track 3 is about improving implementation. Both among client managers and executives who ideally should be facilitators of the intended improvements expected of client managers. Track 2 is about fundamental changes to the law in terms of being able to bring back the human touch. These are long-term goals, as this will likely require legislative changes and is also a story of political color and whether or not all political parties cooperate with these changes.

The meetings are structured to arrive at proposals for improvement from the experiential knowledge of participants in combination with the collective knowledge they have gathered in their "work" from three rounds of discussion on the basis of working questions.

Work questions at track 3 meeting

Central theme: We are going to work on supporting the client manager, so that the client manager can 'shine' in his/her profession, can be happy with what she/he can do for others (benefit recipients). And we do this by using our knowledge of experience, sometimes supplemented by stories of experience.

Work question 1 - What is going well?

Work question 2 - What needs attention and how can it be improved?

Point of attention - asking for examples of what 'better' looks like. What do people say, what do they do. Making visible the desired improvement.

Work question 3 - look at the output and see what needs deepening, what can be sharpened and make an initial order based on:
- System (room in the law, room in implementation)
- Client managers (treatment, skills, personal communication)
- System (other forms of communication)

Work questions at track 2 meeting

Work question 1 - How do we ensure that this is more in line with what people can and want? How do we take into account differences (the situations)?

Point for attention - Strengthening and supporting intrinsic motivation: the emphasis in the Participation Act is on punishment and reward, for example by cutting benefits.

Work question 2 - How can we ensure that we motivate people more and enable them to get the best out of themselves?

Point of attention - An appropriate perspective on participation: work is not possible for everyone in the short term.

Work question 3 - What other forms of participation are valuable in society? And how can this help welfare recipients further?

Guidance questions on track 2:

Where is trust in particular, in the content of rights and obligations, communication about them, enforcement of them? How can we add simplicity. What is particularly complex in practice, application, obligation to provide information, changes, concurrence with other provisions, etc.?

The results of the meeting were developed into reports. The reports were qualitatively labeled according to the intended goals and a first global analysis was made based on the labeling and accompanying pieces of text. This analysis is before you and contains the most important findings and suggestions for improvement identified in the two meetings.

Quinta Ansem, project leader
August 2023
Most to be gained from improvement relationship

Overall, it can be said that the positive experiences also reflect the "ways" that we think all consultants/client managers should be able to do. The positive experiences are there, but in the minority. Most of the improvements are in the area of treatment. And most of that is about making more humane contact. All kinds of examples were mentioned. The time factor was mentioned several times. "Healthy empathy (now often missing) time for intake when and where you see the person".

But also the aspects "working from trust; working together with others; taking space (out of the box); Reflection and (obstructing) perception; rights and opportunities advisor; role as a supporter, whole person and context; the same contact person for everything; understandable language and connecting to need, want and ability.

Life stories at the center

Another thing that keeps coming up in the conversations is the value of life stories, combined with approaching people in their whole context. It's about more than "work" or benefits. It's about the life of the benefit recipient. And what support can provide an improvement in quality of life (and destiny in one's own eyes) (Lineke Verkooijen, 2018). Something 'methodical' could be learned from the way most recovery vision-based experiential training programs work with sharing stories of experience. Both so that there is a sense of 'value' because you are then seen, heard and understood, as well as because from the life stories the 'person' can be helped to identify his/her sources of knowledge (increase self-esteem). A person with more self-confidence and self-esteem, also moves more. Hence, life stories in the picture is pasted in the place of the heart.

Training for client managers

The question has been raised whether it would not be a good idea to set up a training course for customer managers that would focus on building relationships with benefit recipients. One expert by experience remarked that this should not necessarily be in the framework of existing levels (Higher professional education, university of A.S.), because this would mean that there are also people, experts by experience for example, who would like to be client managers, but cannot make the step to Higher professional education because of their own "interrupted" education. In other words, should we continue to maintain the system of levels of education when it comes to the profession of client manager, and of experts by experience, or is it a matter of 'learning' core skills that can be tested for 'quality satisfaction present' regardless of prior education?

Lack of reflection on own perceptions and effect on relationship

Several experiences of treatment have been named that seem to be based on a certain perception of the people with whom the client manager has contact, or on values and norms that one may question whether they belong in the profession of client manager. In the research on the effect of
substantive and emotional reflection, Without Reflection No Connection, (Ansem, 2019), it already emerged that hardly any and certainly no structural embedded intervension or supervision is done together with client managers. This while "working" with people who have a lot of "baggage, traumas and barriers". How is it possible that this is not a subject of 'concern'? Especially if you hold this against the light that yet again most of the experiences and improvement proposals from the two round tables are about treatment.

Example - In the area of motivation, the research 'Inclusive Work: Room for Client Motivation (Jeanet van de Korput, 2021), shows that the current empowerment-based personal approach and questioning can unintentionally activate a damaged self-image in people. To support professionals, such as client managers, in that research is the demanded differentiation. The difference is about being able to tilt a person-centered question to a more value-free, context-oriented question. Example question, which is person-centered: what have you done (or been able to do) in the past few weeks to be able to find a job? The demand tilt: how have you done in the past 2 weeks? And what is needed so that..... = more context-oriented and more value-free. Prevents unintentional confirmation of "damaged selfimage.

Change needed from focus of sustainment on well-being and quality of life versus focus on labor market participation

Searching for what people have said about what the Participation Act has most focused on so far, namely participation in the preferably paid labor market, texts emerged showing that these experiencers are quite willing to work, but that this can only be addressed when: life is in order.

"It is important that there is awareness of a person who has a life that is broader than WORK, do you or don't you have contacts, are you busy getting finances in order, if you don't know if you have money to eat tomorrow."

The desire to make the shift towards supporting benefit recipients in increasing their quality of life (and destiny in their own eyes), is also there because people themselves think and have experienced that if guidance takes place on the basis of focusing on what they can and want to do, or what they are already doing, there is a greater chance that someone will then also start to get room for the option of paid work. Voluntary work is mentioned as a possible stepping stone.

"Neighbor who goes around the neighborhood with coffee is also doing valuable WORK, even if it is voluntary."

Revalue volunteering = revalue what people already do for each other

The thing most often mentioned about volunteering is appreciating what people themselves already do "often" in their social context. What matters is feeling that you can be of significance that also gives meaning to your own life and humanity. And that in turn has far-reaching effects on one's perception of well-being and self-image.

"Insight: Changing human image from (now) potential fraudster to (future image) human being who also wants to be of SIGNIFICANCE."
"Taking stock of what are you actually already doing in terms of participation in society. So first look at what IMPACT someone already has in doing things and appreciate that!" "Being of SIGNIFICANCE = feeling VALUABLE!"

The straitjacket called Participation Law prevents human connection to what is needed

What was also striking is the fact that most experts by experience acknowledge that the client manager is often willing, but that they experience "lack of space" to support "out of the box.

In the study, “Together in search of change or How do I make contact with the client more efficient?” (EAPN NL, 2014, p. 5), this was also mentioned. Including examples about rewarding and how to avoid fines and e.g. "giving" a moped so that someone can travel to its (volunteer) work and is already advocated for connecting to what someone can, wants and needs.

In the outcomes that deal with the law and its implementation, at the municipal and national level, there are points of interest and ideas being put forward to actually give client managers that space.

Some quoted statements

"Give the client manager space and time- to really get to know a new client. This is the start of a process that the client does not enjoy starting. Nobody likes to go on welfare."

"At that 'start' also begins the use or non-use of schemes. Can the client manager point out all the schemes and supplements to the new client and help, where necessary, in applying for them? Or will he/she be whistled back by the team leader in doing so for financial reasons?"

"Suppose the client manager thinks the new client needs additional support. Here we rely on the experience expertise of the client managers. Then the client manager can ask if he/she can/may make a home visit. Never mandatory."

"Collaborate with other support organisations, such as client organisations. The client manager doesn't have to do it alone. Collaborating with ‘others’ who also play a role in the citizen/resident's life makes for more consistency."

And lastly:

"We advocate a proper job description of the client manager’s role. In doing so, also create space for client support. What is allowed? How far can I go? And: what is the commitment, the intention of the law?"

Participation a favor or a right?

Another special thing is the experience that it is a 'favor' if one is 'allowed' to do volunteer work. It even takes dispositions to be allowed to do this unpaid work because paid work 'always' takes priority (until now). This hyper-focus on paid work ensures that people are not seen or are afraid to go into voluntary work. For a law called "participation law," surely extraordinary that this is still the case.

Explaining humane participation act

To help realise the cultural shift, the tilt toward a more humane participation law, the option is to create a "thorough" explanatory memorandum, which primarily addresses the intent of the law, where
participation is a right, not a duty. And where room for all kinds of participation is possible. Paid or unpaid.

Collaborating with experts by experience
What is needed is a change in the law and comprehensive that allows the client manager to be able to take on a role as a "supporter" of what people want, can and need, and a supporter that connects to what people are already doing in terms of giving meaning in their social context. This involves working together with experts by experience, both those working from the recovery vision, as buddies, coaches and hope givers, and those working from the inclusion vision (Quinta Ansem, 2021). Where at all levels this experiential knowledge, as an equal source of knowledge can be of value as indicated in the horseshoe (see drawing below) (Ansem, Handreiking PARTICIPATIE BOUWSTENEN. Kennisdeling leidt tot deskundige ervaringsdeskundigen (translation, Handbook PARTICIPATION BUILDING BLOCKS. Knowledge sharing leads to expert experiential experts, 2016, p. 13).

![De Hoeslag](image)

Figure 1 - The hoefslag, Source Quinta Ansem, 2016

References


Summary report Social and Cultural Planning Office 'Contemporary inequality, The post-industrial class structure based on four types of capital. Difference in the Netherlands 2023'

Structural inequality is substantial and persistent. The disparities in resources among the seven capital groups are substantial. There is a large gap between the total capital of the working upper echelon and the precariat, and there is also a wide spread among the other social classes. If the total capital does not differ much between two social classes, then the four sub-types have a different score profile, as shown in Figure ES.1. The disparities in total resources and their composition mean that the seven social classes have widely varying social positions and life opportunities. There are also indications that this structural inequality is persistent. An earlier SCP study showed that the Dutch class structure remained largely unchanged between 2014 and 2019/2020, despite social developments (e.g. economic prosperity, retirement among baby boomers, new influxes of refugees) and policy efforts aimed at tackling inequality during that period. Furthermore, in the present study, we have expanded the measurement of the capital types in many respects (see Table ES.1). Despite this, we still do not see a completely different class structure, which is a second indication of its persistence.

The class structure is associated with disparities in well-being, perceived cohesion and legitimacy. The seven social classes differ in their level of well-being (see Figure ES.1). Insecure workers and the precariat are much less satisfied with their lives than the other classes. They also view their position as disadvantaged: in accordance with their limited resources, insecure workers and the precariat generally place themselves much lower on the social ladder than the other classes. In addition, there are clear disparities between the capital groups with respect to the cohesion they experience. Members of the working upper echelon and privileged younger people rarely think that the Netherlands ‘is clearly moving in the wrong direction’. This sentiment is slightly more common among the leisured upper echelon and the employed middle echelon, while it is shared by 20-34% of low education pensioners, insecure workers and the precariat – not a majority, but a substantial group nonetheless. There are also indications of class-related legitimacy problems. Among insecure workers and the precariat, there are a relatively high number of non-voters; and if people intend to vote, they often choose parties at the fringes of the political spectrum.

The same two capital groups, plus low education pensioners, have significantly less trust in the Dutch House of Representatives. Although they are quite often dependent on the government for their healthcare and other assistance, over half of those in the three social classes at the bottom of society feel that the government does not do enough for people like them (compared to no more than 25% among the social classes at the top). Nearly two-thirds believe that people like them have no influence on what the government does (compared to one-third among the top two social classes). This is a pressing concern, as it is precisely these social classes that are likely to depend on the government for healthcare and benefits.

Box ES.1 Has anything changed? The data used for this report were collected from late 2019 to early 2020, i.e. at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and prior to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine (which resulted in an energy crisis and high inflation). Both events could have an impact on the class structure. However, this is unlikely for several reasons. Whereas structural changes take place over a long period, for example, the COVID-19 pandemic was relatively short. There could be consequences if high inflation persists for a long time, but
the effects on income and wealth seem limited for now and are being cushioned by policy. Examples include substantial government support during the pandemic and, more recently, measures to reduce the impact of the energy crisis and other rising costs of living, although these efforts have not solved the poverty problem in the Netherlands. Furthermore, a comparison between 2014 and 2019/2020 reveals only limited changes in class disparities, despite developments that also occurred during that period (including strong economic growth). The existing disparities may have been exacerbated, however, since it is easier for people with more resources to replenish them than it is for people with fewer resources. In addition, an increasing number of people are concerned about the Dutch economy and their personal finances. Attitudes in the Netherlands have changed since 2020: a majority are now pessimistic about the future of the country, and trust in politics has been low for quite some time. There are major disparities between the social classes in this regard as well. However, as the recent decline has occurred among many groups, it is unlikely to have a significant effect on the differences between social classes with respect to views on life, society and politics as presented in this report.

Motives for addressing structural inequality through policy Structural inequality can theoretically require attention in policy for four reasons.

1 It can, in itself, adversely affect the nature of society. This occurs when there is a class structure with large and persistent disparities in social positions.

2 It can be based on causes that are difficult to justify. Examples include inequality of opportunity; the favoring or disadvantaging of certain groups through services, taxes and withholdings or informal expectations; discrimination by other citizens, authorities or employers; intergenerational transfers that give certain groups a decisive advantage; and accumulations of bad luck or good fortune.

3 It can lead to unwanted effects on society. This can occur when the structural disparities in resources lead to significant class differences in well-being, political trust, a lack of social cohesion or reduced legitimacy of government policy.

4 The abovementioned aspects can remain problematic or become more urgent in the future. This is due to factors such as the continuing ageing of the population, migration that results in a more diverse composition of the population, and the ongoing digitalization of the economy and broader society. It is plausible that all these conditions are met in the Netherlands in practice. This makes structural inequality an urgent social issue that should not be underestimated and should be addressed through policy. We have therefore identified six possible courses of action. Based on our analysis of the class disparities in resources, three of these options are less promising, while the other three offer better prospects. Less promising courses of action

1 Tackling structural inequality through a purely economic approach is unlikely to provide enough relief. Resource disparities do not automatically disappear when we pull the obvious ‘levers’ of economic capital: promoting equal opportunities in education, reducing discrepancies on the labor market, combating excessive income and wealth gaps. For some groups, such as the ‘cannot’s’ of society, the possibilities to catch up are limited. Due to the interconnectedness of resources, a decrease in economic disparities also does not automatically translate into a more balanced distribution of opportunities and positions. Whether one fits in, who one knows and who one is (cultural, social and person capital) can
in that case still make a difference. Finally, future developments may cause non-economic resources to become more important for people’s social position. This includes the way in which the class structure has been impacted by the growing importance of digital and 21st-century skills, and the further ‘aestheticization of society’. Physical characteristics and self-presentation are becoming crucial to accessing and completing a promising education, securing a well-paid and enjoyable job, finding a life partner who has a lot of resources and so on. This is not to say that economic resources are unimportant, but a one-dimensional, purely ‘economic’ approach to tackling contemporary inequality is unlikely to solve this complex social issue. Policy should therefore also devote attention to disparities in terms of cultural and social resources, as well as health and attractiveness.

2 An approach that focuses on traditional target groups is also unlikely to properly address the complexity of contemporary inequality. This is because policy categories such as young people, the elderly, migrants and women cannot be accurately attributed to one specific social class. If we focus on such target groups, we ignore the fact that many young people can be found among both the insecure workers and privileged younger people, for example. Elderly people often belong to the precariat and low-education pensioners, but are also found among the leisured upper echelon who have many more resources at their disposal. People with a migration background are over-represented in the classes with few resources, but this is not true for everyone: their share among privileged younger people is significant as well. Women are relatively common in the three classes with the least capital, but they are not disadvantaged with respect to all types of resources. In the youngest cohorts, they attain a higher level of education on average than men. An intersectional approach therefore holds the potential to be more productive than a traditional approach based on target groups.

3 Only having people invest in their resources themselves is not expected to be sufficient to resolve or reduce structural class differences either. People can try to achieve this by pursuing retraining and refresher training, looking for a different job and investing their money; engaging in activities that expand their cultural resources or increase or enrich the resources in their networks; and adopting a healthy lifestyle and focusing on their appearance. However, there are some potential drawbacks to a policy strategy that places the responsibility for such investments solely on people themselves. First and foremost, it puts structural inequality at risk of being reduced to an individual problem. Furthermore, not everyone is able to make these investments. People may not have financial start-up capital or may be unable to invest because they are in ‘survival mode’ as a result of debt. It is also difficult for people to invest in non-financial resources if they are not familiar with cultural codes, feel uncomfortable in certain circles, are unable to change unhealthy routines or are not allowed to dress in an attractive manner within their group. In addition, a shortage of a particular resource (e.g. poor health or little money) can make it more difficult to invest in other resources (e.g. acquiring skills through training or finding a better job). On the other hand, if someone has a lot of a particular resource (e.g. excellent health or vast financial wealth), it is actually easier to invest in other types of capital. Because the first scenario is generally more common among the social classes at the bottom and the second scenario among those at the top, a strategy that focuses on individual responsibility for investing in resources can ultimately increase class differences. Finally, not everyone who is able to invest will want to do so, and a policy focused on self-responsibility may lead to more resource competition and group rivalry, which could have detrimental effects on social
cohesion. In practice, we see that social classes tend to invest more in the four types of resources if they have many resources and are younger. Placing the responsibility for such investments solely with individual citizens could therefore have the opposite effect.

Promising courses of action

1 A more promising option is a course of action in which the government supplements shortages of resources within specific social classes. Because the resource shortages differ among the social classes, a one-size-fits-all approach is not possible here. This strategy can be particularly effective in the classes with the least capital: low-education pensioners, insecure workers and the precariat. Among low-education pensioners, policy could primarily focus on physical health, digital skills and mastery of the English language. With regard to insecure workers, attention should be devoted to both physical and mental health, as well as to their income, wealth and labor market position. The precariat is lagging behind in all areas. It is important to realise that finding a job and pursing further training is often not (or no longer) possible for this group. Over half of the precariat are 65 or older, and the younger people in this class often have health problems and long-term dependency on public benefits. For this social class, it could be more effective to maintain their income (e.g. among the group with a reduced state pension) and ensure that they use the allowances and services to which they are entitled (minimizing non-take-up). Focusing on other resources, especially social and person capital, could be helpful as well. Options include policy aimed at combating loneliness, building support networks and alleviating the physical and mental issues this group struggles with. This course of action implies a ‘levelling up’ strategy in terms of resources. It should be noted here that, while this strategy may reduce the disparities between the social classes, it probably will not eliminate them completely. For example, some people’s parents have or had financial wealth, extensive networks and high cultural capital they can rely on, while others do not or did not. Such disparities are difficult to rectify retroactively. Furthermore, levelling up will often be easier for young people than for older people, since the later group has largely already completed the process of capital accumulation or loss. Finally, this policy strategy ignores the ‘systemic’ causes of contemporary inequality.

2 Structural inequality is partly influenced by the way the government designs laws and regulations and organises their implementation. Another promising course of action therefore involves changes to the systems of formal institutions, organisational structures and implementation processes. The existence of a class of insecure workers arguably cannot be viewed separately from the labor market policies that have been pursued over the past 20 years (including reduced contract security for employees and elaborate tax incentives for self-employment). The leisured upper echelon and low-education pensioners likely reflect the extensive Dutch pension schemes, as well as the facilitation of home ownership, specific tax exemptions and healthcare benefits. Within this course of action, an initial option is to focus on institutional-organisational causes. Current examples include the impact of the large Dutch wealth inequality on class differences, the (in)sufficiency of the guaranteed minimum income and the recent string of ‘government scandals’ (childcare subsidies, earthquake damage in the province of Groningen, problems in the youth care system, etc.). A second option is to explore the possibility of remedying class differences by changing institutions and organisations. This is in line with recent changes in the government’s policy paradigms and views on citizens. A successful remediation strategy for contemporary inequality requires a policy vision that explicitly clarifies the relationship between social rules,
organisational structures and social class disparities. In this context, it is first and foremost recommended that the government make social investments in resources at crucial transitions in the life course. In addition, the objectives, rules and implementation in various government domains must be properly aligned, and compartmentalization of different administrative levels and implementing organisations should be avoided as much as possible (optimal institutional-organisational complementarity). Furthermore, the principle of ‘proportional universalism’ – also known as ‘targeting within universalism’ – could guide the design of a remediying public system. This means that every citizen would be entitled to certain public services and facilities, without further conditions. Some groups of citizens would receive additional compensation for the existing inequality in resources, while an additional contribution could be required of other groups to this end. This approach would address the disparity between groups of citizens and likely reduce the need for individual customisation of entitlements, a recent issue in the Dutch policy debate. As a last option within this strategy, the government can try to prevent resource shortages via the institutional-organisational route. Examples of such a preventive approach include implementing a ‘pre-distributive’ policy regarding wealth gaps, promoting talent development and preventing learning deficits in education, ensuring adequate and high-quality housing, and providing systemic preventive healthcare.

3 As a third promising course of action, policy can focus on breaking the link between capital disparities and well-being, social cohesion and legitimacy. An important policy challenge lies in the interplay between disparities in the capital held by the social classes and the subjective perceptions and experiences of these classes’ members. Compared to classes with fewer resources, members of classes with more capital have more positive views on society, better well-being and greater trust in other people. In accordance with their objective position, they also place themselves higher on the social ladder than groups with less capital. Furthermore, they are more likely to believe that people themselves are responsible for meeting their needs and that the government has a limited role to play in this regard. This is less common among groups with fewer resources. There is no easy policy solution in this case either. It seems important that policy and politics are sufficiently responsive to the way changing social circumstances affect the lives and behavior of groups of citizens with varying levels of resources. Clear and effective laws, regulations and implementation processes can be helpful in this regard.