

European Year for combating poverty and social exclusion (2010)



National Programme of the Netherlands

1. National context and challenges

The European Commission has proposed that 2010 be proclaimed the European Year of Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion (hereafter: European Year or EYCP). The European Parliament approved this proposal as did the Social Council (2 October 2008).

The European Year should reach all EU citizens and everyone publicly, socially and economically involved. The four specific objectives and primary guidelines are:

- (a) Recognition of rights — recognising the fundamental right of people in a situation of poverty and social exclusion to live in dignity and to play a full part in society. The European Year will increase public awareness of the situation of people experiencing poverty, particularly that of groups or persons in vulnerable situations, and will help to promote their effective access to social, economic and cultural rights as well as to sufficient resources and quality services. The European Year will also help to combat stereotypes and stigmatisation;
- (b) Shared responsibility and participation — increasing public ownership in social inclusion policies and actions, emphasising both collective and individual responsibility in the fight against poverty and social exclusion, as well as the importance of promoting and supporting voluntary activities. The European Year will promote the involvement of public and private actors, inter alia through pro-active partnerships. It will foster awareness and commitment and create opportunities for contributions by all citizens, in particular people with direct or indirect experience of poverty;
- (c) Cohesion — promoting a more cohesive society by raising public awareness of the benefits for all of a society where poverty is eradicated, fair distribution is enabled and no one is marginalised. The European Year will foster a society that sustains and develops quality of life, including quality of skills and employment, social well-being, including the well-being of children, and equal opportunities for all. It will, moreover, ensure sustainable development and solidarity between and within generations and policy coherence with EU action worldwide;
- (d) Commitment and concrete action — reiterating the strong political commitment of the EU and the Member States to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty and social exclusion and promoting this commitment and actions at all levels of governance. Building upon the achievements and potential of the OMC on Social Protection and Social Inclusion, the European Year will strengthen the political commitment, by focusing political attention on and mobilising all interested parties, in the prevention of and fight against poverty and social exclusion and give further impetus to the Member States' and the European Union's action in this field.

The primary policy areas for the EYCP are:

- Child poverty and 'legacy' of poverty from generation to generation;
- A labour market focused on integration; arrears in education and training;
- Access to basic facilities, such as decent housing;
- Discrimination and promoting the assimilation of immigrants and the integration of ethnic minorities in society and on the labour market, and

- The needs of people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups.

The European Year offers opportunities to increase knowledge and awareness by focusing public and political attention on combating poverty and promoting participation, intensifying information provision and actively engaging stakeholders. The activities, including the proposed activities, will support the existing policy efforts and as such constitute part of the comprehensive approach to the poverty and participation policy.

The Strategic Framework Document, a guideline for the 'national implementation organisations' and the other parties involved in the European Year, states that it would be advisable to establish a connection with the national objectives.

The National Action Plan for Combating Poverty and Promoting Participation 2008 (NAP 2008, chapter 2 of the National Strategic Reporting on social protection and inclusion) includes the following four priority objectives:

1. Increasing participation through the acceptance of work, schooling and/or socially worthwhile unpaid activities;
2. Combating poverty and promoting participation among children and young people;
3. Encouraging the use of income provisions;
4. Addressing over-indebtedness.

When the NAP 2008 was put together (summer 2008) the economic crisis had not yet reached the Netherlands. It was not until the end of 2008 that it became clear that the Netherlands too would be hit by the economic crisis. Forecasts indicate that unemployment will rise from 304,000 in 2008 to 675,000 in 2010. A number of measures will ensure that purchasing power development remains favourable in 2009, which will also have a favourable effect on the poverty figures. No estimates are yet available for 2010, the European Year for combating poverty and social exclusion, it can be assumed however that the number of low-income households will increase.

Particularly the first two priority objectives will immediately come under pressure as a result. The efforts for these two objectives are being monitored closely; different measures than originally anticipated may be necessary, especially with regard to the people who have been in the margins for some time. Considering the number of 'first-timers' (people who will be facing poverty for the first time), the efforts for the last two priority objectives will have to be stepped up.

Since the poverty and participation policy in the Netherlands is largely implemented locally, the extra funds that the government is allocating for combating poverty will be added to the Municipalities Fund. On the national level, a number of departments work on the topic of social exclusion. The coordination of the poverty policy is the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment. It is therefore this department that will be satisfying the obligations with respect to the European Year (in particular the subsidy scheme and the opening and closing conferences). However, ideally the activities will take place on the local level.

Based on the outcomes of the consultation *and* an estimation of which topics and activities can best utilise the momentum created by the European Year, it was decided to focus on the following two topics as part of the European Year on the national level:

1. Promoting the cooperation between (primarily local) parties/organisations towards a long-term approach to combating poverty and social exclusion of the group of people who have been in the margins for some time.
2. Promoting the use of facilities, especially aimed at the group of first-timers.

The objectives cited in article 2 of the decision (Recognition of rights; Shared responsibility and participation; Cohesion; and Commitment and concrete action) are the guideline in working out these objectives.

2. National programme, activities and communication strategy

2.1 2009 activities

In the run-up to 2010, a number of measures and activities will be put in motion in 2009. Mainly those activities that are not yet included in the NAP 2008 are discussed below (the breakdown used in the NAP 2008 is adhered to here).

Priority objective 1

In the supplementary policy accord 'Working on the future', the government states first and foremost that it will be putting full efforts into keeping as many people as possible involved in the labour process via training and other means, such as knowledge and innovation; for social reasons, but also with a view to the future needs of the labour market. The government is providing 6 billion euros for the total package of measures. These funds and the accompanying measures are therefore in addition to what is already included in the NAP 2008.

For the problems on the labour market, a total of €250 million will be available in 2009, €350 million in 2010 and €100 million in 2011. The measures encompass, among other things (see the annex for more detailed information; letter to the House of Representatives of the States General, dated 25/3/09, containing an overview of measures for the labour market. NB Annex is Dutch only):

- Making accessible and utilising labour market information
- Intensifying placement
- Possibilities for retaining employment relationship
- Support for labour mobility
- Facilitating training
- Extra attention for vulnerable groups on the labour market

Priority objective 2

Studies into poverty among children

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (SZW) and Youth and Families (J&G) have commissioned two in-depth studies from the Social and Cultural Planning Office (SCP):

1. A study into the scope and causes of poverty and social exclusion among children, expected to be ready in December 2009.
2. A study into the long-term effects of poverty on children ('scar study'). This study is expected to be ready at the end of 2010.

Action plan for youth unemployment

The government has allocated 250 million euros to combat youth unemployment. Young people are being kept in school longer and more intensively guided to work, and more apprenticeships and traineeships are being offered to young people.

The action plan has five main points (see the annex with action plan for more information):

- Keeping youth at school longer, School Ex-programme
- Agreements with 30 regions
- 'Matching offensive'
- Apprenticeships/traineeships
- Opportunities for vulnerable youth

Priority objective 3

The government is working with four objectives to combat underutilisation of schemes.

1. Ensuring the municipality knows which residents are entitled to facilities: stimulating cooperation between municipalities and intermediary organisations. In addition, the possibilities of linking databases are being explored.
2. Ensuring the client knows there are schemes that he can make use of: information provision.
3. Ensuring the schemes are uncomplicated: simplification of schemes and applications.
4. Ensuring applications are manageable: support for the client in submitting applications (by means of teams that can help with filling in forms).

In the past years, both the national government and municipalities have put a great many measures in motion in this area. Underutilisation may increase as a result of the crisis however, since the unemployed, many of whom are first-timers, do not know how to find their way to facilities. There is also a vulnerable group of people who are unable to make their way to the facilities for other reasons. Municipalities cite residents with psycho-social problems for instance. Municipalities are actively in search, or want to do so, of these residents who are entitled to facilities but who do not receive them. At the moment it is being looked into what extra measures will be necessary in the coming period.

Priority objective 4

The economic crisis and rising unemployment pose a heightened risk for poverty and the need for debt assistance. The focus of municipalities must remain targeted on increasing participation (and, by extension, income) and preventing social exclusion. Municipalities play an important role in preventing problematic debt and in actively pointing people in the direction of the available facilities for debt assistance, at the benefit intake for example. Municipalities have different sources of financing for combating poverty and debt assistance. On top of that the government has allocated extra funds for debt assistance, €30 million in 2009, €50 million in 2010 and €50 million in 2011. A large part of the €130 million will be given to the municipalities to help cushion the extra influx of debt assistance requests as a result of the financial and economic crisis. Efforts are also being deployed to support municipalities so that they can work more effectively, which will be necessary because of growing demand. Municipalities must process a request for debt assistance within four weeks

at the most. The package of measures also incorporates attention for small-scale initiatives on the level of the neighbourhood and city district. For this, use is made of volunteers.

Governance

A number of meetings are being organised in the second half of 2009 with respect to steering policy efforts to fight poverty and social exclusion, including:

- SZW work conference with approximately 30 municipalities on poverty and debt assistance;
- Conference 'Erop af: Doen en Delen' (Go for it: Doing and Sharing) on poverty, in the last quarter of 2009;
- The municipality of The Hague is planning to organise a conference in December in the run-up to the European Year;
- SZW conference in November to extend the cooperation between municipalities and food banks to other local NGOs; and
- Interdepartmental theme meeting for the planned theme group on combating poverty & promoting participation.

2.2 2010 activities

The aforementioned activities in 2009 and the activities already mentioned in the NAP 2008 will be continued in 2010. Where possible and appropriate, attention will be called to the European Year when carrying out the activities. For instance, during their working visits and speeches government members can state that it is important precisely in this year, the European Year for combating poverty and social exclusion, that everyone work towards making the policy under implementation a success. More about this is included in *2.3 Main points of the communication strategy*.

The three most important topics and activities that will be specifically highlighted in the context of the European Year are discussed below. These are the topics and activities that could best make use of the momentum created by the European Year. These will also be discussed in more detail in *2.3 Main points of the communication strategy*.

1. Focus based on national priority and other objectives: Subsidy scheme and conferences

The most important measure that will entirely be characterised by the European Year is of course the subsidy scheme. The Netherlands plans to only use the subsidy scheme for NGOs and pressure groups, research institutes and consultancy agencies. The government bodies that deal with combating poverty and promoting participation will be granted a budget for this.

There is a sum of 350,000 euros available for subsidies, which must be spent on projects that support the priority objectives of the NAP and the governance surrounding fighting poverty and encouraging social inclusion. More about the subsidy scheme is included in chapter 4.

In February 2010, an opening conference will be held to generate attention from politics and the media. At the end of November 2010 the EYCP will be concluded with a closing conference in which the results of the projects will be presented, once again attracting the attention of politics and the media.

2. Focus based on national priority and other objectives: Governance

a. National level

The consultations, and other sources, indicated that much ground could be gained in sharing information about poverty and social exclusion on the level of the national government. In order to bring about improvement in this area, an interdepartmental topic group for combating

poverty & promoting participation will be set up in the autumn of 2009, which will meet about 3 times per year.

b. Establishing connection between the local and national level

The connection between the local poverty monitors and action plans and what is being developed on the national level - in particular the NAP - can perhaps be improved. The goal is to gain a better insight into local developments and incorporate these in the national reporting. The possibilities for this are being explored in 2009 during an expert meeting that will probably take place in September 2009. Depending on the outcomes of the meeting, this will be further worked on in 2010.

c. Local level

Since both the labour market policy and the combating of poverty play out primarily on the regional and local level, the national government will have to make efforts to stimulate the parties that operate here. In consultation with the VNG (Association of Netherlands Municipalities) and Divosa (national association of managers of municipal services in the fields of work, income and social welfare), it is being looked into to what extent a 'city relay event' is among the possibilities. The municipality of Utrecht (one of the G4 cities, i.e. one of the four largest cities in the Netherlands) gave the following input in this regard during the consultation:

'A series of 'local manifestations' is the focus. The intention of the 'relay' is to show how thanks to government and private initiative – and, in the first place, thanks to people who themselves are experiencing poverty and social exclusion – efforts are being undertaken on the local level to promote social participation in the Netherlands. At the same time the initiators want to give an extra impulse to local poverty policy by bringing partners on the local level together and by putting creative initiatives in the spotlight nationally. Finally, the initiators hope that this will also prompt a national public debate on poverty and social exclusion in the Netherlands and that this will influence the national poverty policy and the perception of poverty and those who are struggling with it.

The beginning and end of the relay will be marked with a starting event and closing conference. In addition, the idea is that participating municipalities will offer a local survey to exactly chart out on a national level what public and private, professional and volunteer organisations in the municipality are involved in the poverty policy and which activities are being introduced. Finally municipalities/organisations will be invited to nominate local initiatives for a national contest celebrating innovative local initiatives to fight poverty and social exclusion.'

All of this still depends on the financing. Since a number of municipalities have expressed interest and would like to contribute, the city relay is expected to be incorporated in the 'Erop af: Doen en Delen' project. This project is financed by SZW from the Innovation programme Employment and Social Assistance (IPW) and carried out by Divosa and the VNG. 'Erop af: Doen en Delen' gets a lot of input from the municipalities and is more or less given shape by the municipalities.

3. Focus based on national priority and other objectives: Promoting the use of facilities

The focus in terms of content during the European Year will be on facilities. This is very important in order to combat (financial) poverty. Especially the group of first-timers, which is growing due to the economic crisis, will benefit from applying as soon as possible for the facilities to which they are entitled. Not only financial facilities are available, there are also courses to learn budgeting skills, for instance, in order to deal with a weaker financial situation more responsibly. This can prevent these people from getting themselves into problematic debt. Efforts will be made to put this topic on the agenda during the local

conferences (the city relay). Other activities in this context are still being considered (see 2.1 under 3rd priority objective).

2.3 Communication strategy

Since 2010 is not only the year in which the effects of the crisis will be clearly perceptible, but also the year of the Dutch local elections and the year preceding the national elections, poverty and debt are expected to receive a great deal of attention from politicians and the media.

Briefly summarised, we understand that the Commission sees the following as the primary communication objective for the European Year: informing the general public about poverty and social exclusion and in doing so possibly enabling them to have a more positive image of the approach to these problems and the role the public can play in this. In this context we can also join in with the relevant communication activities that are already taking place on the national level and as part of European publicity about the Year.

The means of communication can be divided into two clusters. In the first place two conferences are being organised in 2010: an opening event and a closing conference. These are explained above. Since the available funds are limited, the second cluster will primarily consist of free publicity.

We are looking into to what extent this free publicity on the European Year can primarily be generated from the municipalities, considering the local nature of the poverty policy. Where possible, attention is devoted to the EYCP mainly at the local manifestations (for example in the city relay undertaken by municipalities and described above). Experience with the ESF (European Social Fund) has shown that the local media is more readily interested in our topics than the national media *and* that they have a large reach.

Attempts will be made to present both existing and new activities under the flag of the European year. Cooperation with other departments will be attempted in this context. Combating poverty and in particular preventing social exclusion is a topic in which the ministries of Housing, Communities and Integration (WWI), Education, Culture and Science (OCW) and Health, Welfare and Sport (VWS) are also involved. For example, attention could also be devoted to the European Year in the activities of the Youth Culture Fund and Youth Sports Fund (subsidised by OCW and VWS, respectively). Members of the government will be asked to call attention to the European year during their working visits and in their speeches.

More concretely: we are putting our efforts into combining activities that fit in with the theme of combating poverty and social exclusion and providing these with the logo and message of the European Year. Section 2.1 describes which national activities can be considered. To support these activities, a website will be launched containing information on the European Year and a digital post box will be opened.

The communication strategy has not yet been worked out in detail. Everything also depends on what the Commission will present about this in September 2009; the Netherlands would like to join up with the European campaign.

3. Consultation

The organisations that were also consulted for the NAP 2008¹ were asked the following questions by e-mail:

1. In what way can the national government involve the target group in the European Year?
2. In what way do you think the municipalities could devote attention to the European Year?
3. What (other) organisations/parties could be involved in the European Year?
4. Do you have ideas/wishes/expectations with regard to the starting conference and would you or your organisation be able to play a role in this?
5. Does your organisation already have ideas about what it wants to organise in terms of activities during the European Year, if so what?
6. Do you have other comments with regard to the (organisation and preparation) of the European Year?

Colleagues in other departments (outside SZW) were also asked whether they anticipate activities for 2010 (organised by the department or subsidies granted) that could be promoted as an activity in the context of the European Year and/or that could carry the logo of the European Year. They were also asked in what way their ministry/department wished to be involved in the further preparation and execution of the European Year.

Where possible and applicable, the opinions and ideas of those consulted were incorporated in this National Programme. Striking points are:

- From several sides it was indicated that poverty bears a stigma in the Netherlands: ‘if you are poor, you do not work hard enough’ and ‘being poor is for losers.’
- Almost all social and other organisations opt for an integrated approach on the local level as the most important focal point for the EYCP.
- A number of organisations point out that 2010 marks fifteen years of anti-poverty policy in the Netherlands. It would be nice to show the results of this.
- From the field it was pointed out that the occasion of the EYCP should be used to make agreements, including accountable agreements, on the further combating of poverty and social exclusion in the coming years. The EYCP 2010 would then be the year in which the process of making the agreements takes place.

The breadth of the topic and the diversity of the target groups give many opportunities to join in the proposed activities, but also a risk of fragmentation. There are initiatives focused on children, the elderly, working poor, benefits recipients, immigrants, women, single parents, people in debt, etc. The nature of the proposed activities is also extremely varied: from sporting events to a bus tour, theatre performance, art caravan, festival, workshops, developing teaching modules, studies, etc. The diversity not only creates many opportunities to reach a broad audience, it also makes it difficult to get an overview of the activities. It is also difficult to evaluate which activities can and which activities cannot be presented as a part of the European Year.

¹ These are approx 40 social organisations, pressure groups, research and advisory institutes, municipalities and professional organisations that work to combat poverty and social exclusion or deal with topics that have ground in common with this area.

4. Arrangement for implementing the subsidy scheme

The government bodies (in particular the municipalities, but also other departments) that are concerned with combating poverty and promoting participation are given a budget for this. That is why the Netherlands plans to use the subsidy scheme for NGOs and pressure groups, research institutes and consultancy agencies.

A sum of 350,000 euros is available to be distributed as subsidies; these funds must be spent on projects that support the priority objectives of the NAP and the governance on combating poverty and encouraging social inclusion. A minimum of 20,000 and maximum of 50,000 euros is made available per project. As a result at least 7 projects will be selected.

The subsidy scheme will be published in the 'Staatscourant' (Government Gazette) and placed on the website of the National Implementing Body (NIB), the Agentschap SZW (SZW Agency). The subsidy application form will also be available on the website. Full applications, provided with a clear budget, will be evaluated in terms of quality.

Using an evaluation scheme, the applications submitted will be ranked in order of quality. The subsidy will be granted to projects until the subsidy cap of 350,000 euros is reached.

The aim is to publish the subsidy scheme in the Government Gazette in September 2009. Organisations that wish to apply for a subsidy can do this from the end of September until mid October 2009. The evaluation and selection of the projects will take place in October and November 2009. Following on this, at the beginning of December the decisions can be sent out and the advance amounts be paid out. The projects can then start with the preparations at the beginning of 2010.

With regard to the activities proposed in the context of governance and promoting the use of facilities: these will be financed from the regular policy budget and are thus not included in the doubling of the European funds requested by the Commission. For this reason an account of these funds and activities, outside what is done for example in the NSR /NAP, is not at issue.

5. Indicative budget

A sum of 350,000 euros is available for the subsidised projects.

In addition to this there are the costs for implementing the subsidy scheme: 141,575 euros. An amount of 208,300 euros has been budgeted for the conferences and structuring and implementing the communication campaign.

Budget for EYCP 2009-2011

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| A Basic cost of implementing subsidy scheme | 70,700 |
| B Intake subsidy applications | 2,456 |
| C Evaluation and decisions | 19,194 |
| D Monitoring of projects | 9,300 |
| E Management of files, payments, answering questions | 2,713 |
| F Assessing final declarations, determining subsidies | 17,175 |
| External costs Audit Department | 20,000 |
| Subtotal subsidy scheme | 141,575 |
| A Basic cost of conferences and communication campaign | 118,300 |
| External costs for conferences | 50,000 |
| External costs for communication strategy | 30,000 |
| Translation costs | 10,000 |
| Subtotal conferences and communication | 208,300 |
| Total | 349,875 |

6. Monitoring and evaluation of subsidy scheme, conferences and communication strategy

The monitoring of the European Year for combating poverty and social exclusion will take place along two channels. The publicity events will be monitored in order to gain insight into the effect of the communication strategy. All subsidised projects (about 7 to 10) will also be visited, in order to gain insight into the progress, results and accountability information that is necessary for the final settlement.

The evaluation of the Year still needs to be worked out in detail. Within the available budget, a closing conference will in any event be organised, at which conclusions and recommendations will be formulated both for the national and European level. In addition, a measurement of the effect of the EYCP is being considered, via a panel of clients or an SCP (Social and Cultural Planning Office) survey; and/or the sending of evaluation forms to local conferences, in order to gain insight into the usefulness and necessity of an EYCP.