



Netherlands

Tackling child poverty and promoting the social inclusion of children

A Study of National Policies

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Summary

1. The extent and nature of child poverty in the Netherlands

Most studies in the Netherlands do not use the European relative poverty threshold, but either what is called the low income threshold (Social and Cultural Planning Office — SCP) or policy-related threshold (Government).

Figures and qualitative data

Almost 14 % of all children, i.e. one in seven, live in low-income households. For couples with children, a social security benefit is the major income source in 30 % of the cases, and this is the case in more than 60 % of the one-parent households. Of the children with a non-western background, 37 % live in low-income households. Low incomes affect these children four times more those with a Dutch background.

The persistence of poverty is decreasing. Nevertheless, in 2004 still one in eight to nine one-parent families had to live with a low income for at least four years, which is three times more than the average.

According to the SCP, a large majority of low-income households in the Netherlands do not have members with a paid job. Most of them have a minimum income benefit (social assistance), but there is also a growing number of low-income households benefiting from unemployment benefits. But according to the Denktank Armoedebestrijding [Combat poverty think-tank], 'More than half of lone parents have a paid job, but this is of insufficient volume or level to make a living, c.q. to gain more than the minimum income benefit. The group of 'silent poor' is also composed of important numbers of agrarian families and small shopkeepers. Even if their income is below the poverty line, they often do not ask for a benefit, because of the poverty stigma.'

One of our first findings is that even though children run the highest risk of growing up poor, their financial situation is not a clearly defined subject for research. This lack of research on the material poverty of children affects all the following paragraphs. Either the focus is on households (with or without children) or on children 'with problems' (personal, family, neighbourhood contexts). Moreover, there is little research on the effects of poverty for child wellbeing in different existential fields. There is reasonable knowledge about the effects on participation, but for other fields such as health, housing, etc., the evidence is poor.

Non-monetary aspects

Being poor is not only a question of money, but comes with all kinds of exclusion from participation as well. People with a low income spend relatively little on sports, games and holidays (3 %, against 7 % spent by people with a higher income), and on transportation (11 % against 15 %). Couples with children and low incomes spend most of their money on development, relaxation, and transportation, while single parents and childless couples spend a much smaller part of their budget on these items.

In the Netherlands, there is little recent literature about the relationship between poverty and health among children. A study in one province confirms that children's health is threatened by a situation of poverty. The study shows that the children's groups at health risk are to be found among three kinds of households: single-parent families, families where both parents were born abroad, and large families.

Within these kinds of households, health threats due to poverty are three to eight times greater than in other kinds of families.

Although there are many studies on the psychosocial wellbeing of children, usually the financial situation in which children grow up does not play any role in these. Often, no questions about the parents' income were asked.

The Dutch research available on the educational opportunities for poor children shows diverging results. Some researchers underline the effect of poverty on school achievements but others do not find this effect. Most researchers, however, find a relationship between parents' income and school achievements.

The spending pattern of low-income families differs greatly from that of higher-income families. Comparatively, they spend a lot of money on their home. In 1999 and 2000, 46 % of their budget was spent this way, against 37 % of the budget of higher-income families. Among these expenses are, beside the rent, the costs of heating and electricity and the costs of furniture.

In the Netherlands there is little evidence about children living in poor housing situations. As far as living conditions are concerned, the focus is on problematic neighbourhoods or areas. According to this definition, the number of children living in deprived neighbourhoods increased between 2000 and 2004 from 14.6 to 15.94 %. In 2005, the percentage is 16.54 %.

Many people assume that there is a connection between youth criminality and the socioeconomic environment in which youngsters grow up. Dutch studies indeed show a strong relation between the extent to which children show rule breaching or delinquent behaviour, and the extent of their deprivation at home. This applies to almost all forms of rule breaching behaviour, independent of the method used to determine the deprivation.

Children's coping strategies can be distinguished in: problem solving, problem avoidance and role reversal, i.e. children protecting their parents.

Backgrounds of children's living conditions

Poor living conditions of children are associated with different backgrounds: parenting conditions, and the parents' coping strategies in dealing with a low income. Maybe the most important conclusion to be drawn from the different studies on parenting conditions within poor families is the great diversity of the situations. Poverty does not have the same effect on all families and all parents. A lack of finances is a serious problem in all of these families, but in some, this is nothing more than a purely financial problem. The parents in these families can deal with the situation reasonably well, and show almost no signs of depression. These families would really be helped out with a little financial support. However, in other families, the problem is far more complex, with poverty being only one aspect of it. These parents are weighed down by an accumulation of setbacks and failure in life, and their poverty can be accompanied by sharp psychological stress and other kinds of problems. For these families, just financial support or a job offer will not be sufficient. The researchers conclude that to help these families effectively, interventions of a more drastic nature are a necessity.

2. Policies to prevent and alleviate child poverty and social exclusion

National policy framework

The overall policy framework for preventing and alleviating child poverty and social exclusion in the Netherlands can be considered as weak. There is no comprehensive policy responsibility for this issue.

The strengths of the policy framework are to be found in the creation of the Programme Ministry for Youth and Families, although child poverty as such is not mentioned. Furthermore, some overall policy choices of former Dutch Governments can be considered as strengths of the framework. Decentralisation and integration of policies are the keywords.

We recommend including the combating child poverty as a specific coordination responsibility of the new Programme Ministry for Youth and Families. This would then also include the mainstreaming and (budget) monitoring of this policy domain.

National policy measures

Income policy

Assessment: According to the Innocenti Research Centre (Unicef) study on child poverty, the Netherlands are in the top third of all countries for the different indicators of child wellbeing. For material wellbeing however, the Netherlands comes only in 10th place. Depending on the rates used and the years compared, child poverty in the Netherlands was slightly growing, stabilised or slightly decreased in former years. But all studies give evidence to the fact that children are a category at high risk of poverty within the Dutch population. But in the National Action Plan on social inclusion (NAP inclusion) child poverty has not been a real priority. Currently, more measures are planned and being developed for vulnerable youth and families, including financial measures.

Recommendation: We therefore recommend to put more emphasis on child poverty and even broader, on the material wellbeing of children, within Dutch income policy. This could be done by implementing and broadening the current plans of the newly created Programme Ministry. A close monitoring of the outcomes of these policies will also have to be put in place.

Intervention in problem families

Assessment: In the past, support for youth and family in the Netherlands was very fragmented, and cooperation between different support structures was not self-evident. A number of measures have clearly been taken to improve this situation. At the same time, general youth workers complain that they are asked to make the problematic situations of a minority of children their highest priority, with the risk of neglecting the real preventive role among all children. Therefore extra financial means are absolutely necessary to implement Government's priorities.

Recommendation: We recommend to continue implementing the extra efforts for the most vulnerable young people, without neglecting the preventive role and function of general youth work.

The participation of children and youngsters

Assessment: Participation of youngsters in society has been a high priority for the Government for several years now. It essentially focuses on children from ethnic minority backgrounds and children in deprived neighbourhoods. Although these two groups certainly account for many of the children at risk of poverty, it is not clear to what extent this policy reach excluded and poor children. Efforts to stimulate more 'regular' social participation of excluded children as described in section 1.1.2. are not developed by central Government.

Recommendation: We would recommend to continue the current measures for improving participation in sports and culture, but also to give more attention to 'regular' social participation of children at risk of poverty and exclusion. As to the social practice placements, there is lot of enthusiasm among all parties involved, but more means are needed for the accompaniment both by schools and professionals in the field, to make this initiative a success.

Combating educational disadvantages and premature dropout from school

Assessment: This is certainly one of the issues in which the Dutch Government has put great efforts for many years. Educational priority areas policy has been one of the important predecessors of the social renewal policies (1990...) and the current Major City Policy. It is also part of the *brede school* [community school] approach that establishes stronger links between schools and their environment. The Dutch Government has supported and supports many innovative initiatives to improve both the access and chances at the beginning, during and at the end of the school career. These measures are surely reaching the most vulnerable children.

Recommendation: We recommend to continue these efforts, including the community school approach as an integral approach to social problems at local level.

Fighting youth unemployment

Assessment: The measures in this field have undoubtedly been very effective. It is a consequent support for the Work First approach at local level, i.e. to confront young people asking for a minimum income benefit first with a proposal for work or training. Therefore, municipal social services need to be able to make real proposals to these youngsters. The initiatives of central Government helped provide these.

Recommendation: We would strongly recommend continuing the activities of the taskforce Youth Unemployment.

Regional policy

Assessment: The provinces have an important role to play in the central Government's objective of better coordination of support to and accompaniment of vulnerable children. They do so in different ways and to different extents. The influence of children themselves is also very different from province to province. Besides this compulsory role, provinces also have the possibility of supporting innovation in different fields, including youth policy and more particularly in the fight against child poverty and exclusion. Some provinces take up these possibilities with more enthusiasm than others.

Recommendation: We would recommend to better organise the exchange of knowledge and experiences between provinces in order to improve both the implementation of the coordinating role and the fulfilment of the innovation function.

Local policy

Assessment: Municipalities play a crucial and ever-growing role in the implementation and development of policies to combat poverty and exclusion, and thus also to combat child poverty. They can and do alleviate child poverty by extra measures for children in low-income households and precarious situations. But they do not influence the basic income problem of these households. The level of child wellbeing in the Netherlands, being the highest in OECD countries, according to the *Innocenti Report Card 7*, is due a great deal to municipal initiatives for integrating policies in different fields and for steering, stimulating and supporting the voluntary sector in this.

Recommendation: We recommend to further stimulate the integration of local social policy, i.e. the activities of municipal social services and municipal services for care and wellbeing. This means the consequent development of the social support act (*Wet op de Maatschappelijke Ondersteuning — WMO*), but combined with measures and tasks devolved from the Ministry of Social Affairs (SZW).

Furthermore we would recommend central Government to listen carefully to the suggestions and complaints of municipalities as to the problems of implementing national measures, due to complex regulations and/or lack of means both for the good functioning of municipal services and for a decent living for individual citizens.

3. Monitoring the implementation and impact of policies to prevent and alleviate poverty and social exclusion among children and to promote the wellbeing of children

Since each NAP inclusion describes the progress made on each specific objective (according to the defined indicators), and since there are specific objectives touching youth in particular (see section 2), this can indeed be considered to be a policy monitor and even (limited) policy evaluation report concerning children and youth. But it is limited to the specific targeted objectives within the NAP inclusion.

Besides this monitor, there is no official national system in the Netherlands for monitoring the implementation and impact of policies for combating poverty and social exclusion among specific groups. Although a specific monitoring system on youth poverty and wellbeing (policies) does not exist, the general monitoring instruments pay regularly attention to specific vulnerable groups such as children. Most of these are not monitoring the policies and their impacts, but the state of affairs as to poverty, exclusion, wellbeing of children and youth.

The most comprehensive national child monitor is a private initiative, called *Kinderen in Tel* (Steketee, 2007). It is sponsored by several funds, steered by interest and lobby organisations, and constructed by an independent research institute on the basis of the American model 'Kids count'. This monitor gives a mapping of child wellbeing in all Dutch municipalities on a restricted number of indicators, covering domains of wellbeing derived from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Currently, a national youth monitor is under construction and should be operational in the course of 2007. It is not clear so far to what extent this monitor will go beyond the collection of relevant data on youth wellbeing, in order to become an instrument for monitoring and evaluation — *ex ante* and/or *ex post* — of policy developments, or even a participatory monitoring and evaluation system.

Recommendation: In view of the growing problem of relative child poverty in the Netherlands, we would strongly recommend developing a national system for *ex ante* and *ex post* monitoring and evaluation of the development, implementation and impacts of policies for combating child poverty and exclusion. This national youth monitor under development could be a major instrument of such a system. But it is of course crucial that poverty and social exclusion of children becomes a political issue and one specific and distinctive policy domain.

1. The extent and nature of child poverty in the Netherlands

1.1 Figures and qualitative data

According to the Ministry of Health, Welfare, and Sport (VWS) (2002), against the almost 4 million youngsters who are experiencing a more or less unproblematic childhood, an estimated 240 000 children are developing serious problems, while between 500 000 and 700 000 children are in danger of getting into trouble. This mainly involves young people growing up in a situation characterised by an accumulation of risk factors, like poverty, social isolation, and dysfunctional family members, as well as by an absence of enough protective factors, such as a strong social network, or a warm family atmosphere. These youngsters run a higher risk of an arrested development, which will increase the chances of problem behaviour later, like learning and behavioural problems, and leaving school without a diploma.

As to income poverty, there is an ongoing discussion in the Netherlands about the kind of poverty threshold to use. Recently, the SCP published a study about the issue (Soede, 2006). The study refers to the different poverty thresholds used in the Netherlands. Together with the Netherlands Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (central statistics office — CBS), they set standards by introducing years ago the 'low-income threshold', while Government consequently uses what is known as the 'policy related poverty threshold'. The former one is based upon the national minimum income (social assistance) level for 1979, indexed for inflation. The policy-related poverty threshold is 105 % of the national minimum income. The European standard (60 % of median equivalised income) is only used for international comparison. The SCP itself describes the advantages of the low-income threshold with the following arguments:

- it makes comparisons over time reliable;
- it is not influenced by policy decisions;
- it does not use higher income groups as 'the standard'.

The SCP also points out the advantages of the European 60 % median income threshold, more in particular the comparability and the simplicity: you only need regular income data to define the threshold. But it also mentions important inconveniences:

- the threshold is not based on a definition of needs (by the way, the same goes for the thresholds used in the Netherlands, which is one reason for the current study);
- the threshold is more a measure of relative income distribution than for poverty.

The Dutch Government underlines this last argument for not using the European standard in the Dutch policy discussions and developments on poverty. It points out that regularly used incentives for activation, such as increasing the gap between social assistance and minimum wage, does stimulate people to escape from poverty, but would increase the actual at-risk-of-poverty rate if the 60 % median income threshold was to be used.

It is clear that the discussion about the most adequate poverty threshold in the Netherlands is not finished. In the meantime most studies and certainly the official government-related ones and the poverty monitor of the SCP use the Dutch standards (low income threshold/policy related threshold).

To give an impression of the outcome differences of the different currently used thresholds, we present some figures given by the SCP.

Table: Persons in households with an income below different poverty thresholds, 1995-2004*

	Low income threshold	Policy related threshold	European threshold
	X 1 000		
1995	1 860	1 240	1 480
1996	1 870	1 260	1 530
1997	1 820	1 220	1 520
1998	1 660	1 190	1 470
1999	1 600	1 170	1 540
2000	1 480	1 130	1 550
2000*	1 560	1 120	1 410
2001	1 260	1 020	1 420
2002	1 240	1 090	1 420
2003	1 340	1 190	1 420
2004*	1 440	1 280	1 500

* Income statistics have been revised. Therefore, figures in the series 1995-2000 are not fully comparable with those in the series 2000-04.

Source: CBS (income panel study) adaptation by SCP (*Armoedebericht 2006*).

More recent (corrected but for 2005 provisional) figures of the CBS for persons under the low income and the policy-related threshold are somewhat lower but the differences remain, as is shown in the following table. For the European threshold we do not have more recent figures.

	Low income threshold	Policy related threshold
	X 1 000	
2000	1 558	1 122
2001	1 256	1 022
2002	1 237	1 094
2003	1 343	1 191
2004	1 313	1 166
2005	1 364	1 118

Source: CBS (income panel study).

In this first chapter, we will present the results of Dutch research into the living conditions of children at risk of poverty. This involves both quantitative and qualitative data. We will discuss the following issues: income, participation, physical wellbeing, psychological wellbeing, school achievements, living conditions (the safety of the environment), unadjusted behaviour and criminality, and the children's coping strategies.

1.1.1. Income

During the past decade in the Netherlands, the number of children living in a minimum wage earner's household has increased. The poverty monitor 2005 concludes that more and more children are growing up in poor families on or below the poverty line. Although some years ago this percentage showed a slightly decreasing trend, during the past couple of years it has been increasing again (*Armoedemonitor 2005*). Just like in 2000, 12 % of the Dutch municipalities had a percentage of children living in minimum-income families in 2004 that was higher than the national average (Steketee and Mak, 2006).

Child poverty rates vary widely across rich countries. Different studies do not provide comparable data, since they differ either in the age range covered (e.g. 0-15 or 0-18) and/or the poverty threshold used (e.g. 50 or 60 % of median equivalised income). According to Unicef, using the 50 % threshold, for instance, relative child poverty rates vary within the first 15 EU Member States from 3 to over 15 %. The Netherlands takes an average position of 9.8 % (Van der Hoek, 2005). In a number of rich countries, child poverty rates have increased; the Netherlands is the 17th out of 24 OECD countries in which child poverty rates have grown. A recent publication of Eurochild, using the 60 % threshold, gives figures showing that in 2004, 20 % of children aged 0-15 were at risk of poverty in the first 25 EU Member States compared to 16 % of the wider population. Variations across Member States are more striking. For instance, 30 % those aged 0-15 in Slovakia — and 24 % in Spain — were at risk of poverty in 2004, while the comparable figures stand at 14 %, 10 % and 9 % in France, Finland and Denmark respectively (Eurochild, 2007).

Using the same 60 % of median income threshold, the *Armoedebericht 2006* says that in 2004 12 % of Dutch population was to be considered as at risk of poverty, while the average for the first 15 EU Member States was 17 %. The Netherlands had the fifth lowest poverty risk, after Luxembourg and three Scandinavian countries. For children aged 0-15, the risk of poverty rate was 18 % in the Netherlands (20 % average), and for the age group 16-24 it was 20 % (21 % average).

The most important indicator for determining the number of children living in poor conditions is the income status of a household with children. When we look at the Dutch distribution of income, we see that almost 14 % of all children younger than 18 are currently living in a low-income household. This comes down to one in every seven children. This makes children the largest group at risk for poverty and social exclusion, because the percentage of 14 is considerably higher than the average of 9 % for all people in general (*Armoedebericht 2006*). In 2000 the percentage of children in poor households was 15 %. Likewise, during the past decade, the number of poor children has been higher than the average for all persons. The difference is always from 3 to 4 %.

Of the 461 000 children in low-income households, the majority live with both parents. A smaller number live in a one-parent household. Between these two groups there is a clear difference as to the major income source. For couples with children, social security benefit is the major income source in 30 % of cases, while this is the case in more than 60 % of the one-parent households. Of the children with a non-western background 37 % live in a low income household. A low income affects these children four times more than children with a Dutch background (*Armoedebericht 2006*).

Absolute number of low-income children			
	2003	2002	2001
Total number of children between 0-15	3 206 283	3 192 464	3 165 660
Low-income children (12.5 %)	400 785	399 058	395 708
Applied to age group 0-18			
Total number of children between 0-18	3 783 047	3 753 751	3 717 146
Low-income children (12.5 %)	472 881	469 219	464 643

When we apply this percentage to the three age groups, we obtain the following numbers:

Estimated absolute numbers among the three age categories			
Age	2003	2002	2001
Total number aged between 0-3	820 289	818 713	807 374
Low-income children	102 536	102 339	100 922
Total number aged between 4-12	1 797 818	1 789 903	1 782 548
Low-income children	224 727	223 738	222 819
Total number aged between 13-18	1 164 940	1 145 135	1 127 224
Low-income children	145 618	143 142	140 903

As this table shows, the percentage of children living below the poverty line quickly decreases relative to the increase in a child's age. The highest percentage of such children was found among children up to the age of 10: more than 14 %. Compared to this percentage, of the children who were 17, 8 % were living below the poverty line. A similar development is to be found regarding the percentage of youngsters who are living below the poverty line for an extended period of time — for four years or more — only on a lower level (CBS, 2003).

Children living in single-parent families run the greatest risk of financial poverty: almost 40 % of these children are sharing a low income with one parent, mostly the mother (*Armoedemonitor 2005; Armoedebericht 2006*). An additional important role is played by ethnicity: 26 % of the poor children are of allochthonous origin. Another characteristic of this group of children is the mother's low level of education: many of the mothers have at best finished a technical and vocational training (Kroesbergen et al., 2002).

In the following table, the difference between male and female minima income with children is clearly visible. Overall about 30 % more children are supported by women than by men.

Table: The number of men and women with children, living on minimum income

	Year	Number of children supported			
		total	1 child	2 children	3 children or more
Men	2000	148 930	10 940	10 240	10 850
	2001	143 380	10 460	9 890	10 590
	2002	144 460	10 360	9 630	10 310
Women	2000	204 640	47 210	33 200	17 670
	2001	198 850	45 700	32 070	17 370
	2002	197 020	45 330	31 200	17 440

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Persistence of poverty

In 2004, one third of low-income households were in that position for at least four years. This is about 225 000 households. The number of long-term low-income households was about the same as in 2002 and 2003, but significantly lower than in 2000, when almost 350 000 households had to live for four years or longer with a low income. 2001 was the year with the major decrease, which caused a decrease from 5.2 % in 2000 to 3.4 % in 2004. The decrease was more than average for older single persons, but also for one-parent households. Nevertheless, in 2004 still one in eight to nine one-parent families had to live with a low income for at least four years, which is three times more than the average (*Armoedebericht 2006*).

Concerning intergenerational poverty, what is known as *Denktank Armoedebestrijding* mentions it as one of the six 'types' of poverty situations. It is called the 'hard core' poor from generation to generation: 'In the Netherlands, a few thousand families are poor for several generations. This group is composed of the "autochthonous intergenerational poor" but there is also a growing group of allochthonous families getting into this category. Often they combine a number of characteristics such as: low education, bad health (both physic and mental), continuous indebtedness. Parents have a long history of dependency from institutions and the future perspectives of children growing up in these families are (extremely) low.' (Ansems, 2004).

Working poor?

According to the SCP, a large majority of low-income households in the Netherlands do not have a paid job. Most of them have a minimum income (social assistance benefit), but there is also a growing group of low-income households with an unemployment benefit. This is due to the growing importance of low unemployment benefits between 2002-04. The most important group of 'working poor' are self-employed people. About 17 % of these households have a low income. In most case this low income does not have a persistent character. Among employed people the percentage of low-income households is the lowest, i.e. 4 %. There are no clear indications about the family situation (children) of these households. (*Armoedebericht, 2006*).

A contradictory image is given by the *Denktank Armoedebestrijding*. In their typology of the poor, there is a place for the people who work hard for little money which they describe as follows: 'More than half of lone parents have a paid job, but this is of insufficient volume or level to make a living, i.e. to gain more than the minimum income benefit. The group of 'silent poor' is also composed of important numbers of agrarian families and small shopkeepers. Even if their income is below the poverty line, they often do not ask for a benefit, because of the poverty stigma.' (Ansems, 2004)

One of our first findings is that even though children run the highest risk of growing up poor, their financial situation is not a clearly defined subject for research. This is all the more remarkable, since the financial costs of growing up can be separated from other household costs quite well. These costs are, for example, for food, clothing, school fees, pocket money, and for taking part in social life, etc. This lack of research on the material poverty of children affects all the following paragraphs. Either the focus is on households (with or without children) or on children 'with problems' (personal, family, neighbourhood context). Moreover, there is little research about the effects of poverty for child wellbeing in different existential fields. There is reasonable knowledge about the effects on participation, but for other fields such as health, housing etc. the evidence is poor.

1.1.2. *Participation*

Being poor is not only a question of money, but comes with all kinds of exclusion from participation as well. People with a low income spend relatively little on sports, games and holidays (3 %, against the 7 % spent by people with a higher income), and on transportation (11 % against 15 %). Couples with children and a low income spend most of their money on development, relaxation, and transportation, while single parents and childless couples spend a much smaller part of their budget on these items (Vroomen, 2003).

Hoff, Dronkers, and Vrooman (1997) have studied the extent of social participation of children aged between 6 and 18. They asked whether children and youngsters participate in certain cultural activities (such as drawing, needlework, playing an instrument or acting), whether they make use of certain recreational facilities (such as community centres, football stadiums, amusement parks, etc.), and how many hours a week on average they spend on sports activities. The results show that children coming from poor families participate significantly less in cultural activities, and make significantly less use of recreational facilities than children coming from more prosperous families. However, this does not hold for participation in sports activities. These effects apply primarily to children from poor households not entitled to social assistance, and children from poor households that have already been receiving a form of benefit for more than a year. The study also shows that non-financial characteristics are at least as important. These are, for instance, the mother's level of education, or the parents' divorce.

Another study by Snel et al. (2003) shows that living on an income at, or even below, the minimum wage sometimes results in serious forms of exclusion for children. More than 80 % of these parents cannot take their children on holiday or a day out because of a lack of money, and 50 % indicate that their child cannot join a club for this reason. This is consistent with the findings of Nistelrooy (2003), who studied the spending pattern of twenty 'poor families'. When people are poor, their expenditure on school and health drops to the danger zone, while expenditure on after-school care, clubs, and holidays totally disappear from view. The purchase of a computer is out of the question, too. With regard to the regular use of public health, education, and recreation facilities, children are at risk of being socially excluded. Their parents experience limitations directly connected to the lack of money. For these families, it is difficult to pay for school books, parent's contributions, school trips, or school camps. Playgroup is dropped, for although the parent's contribution is not that high, it still is too high to even consider the pros. Recreational and commercial facilities ask for a contribution that deters or even blocks parents from using them.

1.1.3. *Physical wellbeing*

In the Netherlands, there is little recent literature about the relationship between poverty and health among children. Most studies come from one research group at Tilburg University and concern studies and experiments initiated by public health services in the province of Noord-Brabant.

In 1999, a study was conducted in two large municipalities in the province of Noord-Brabant, on the ways in which poverty posed a threat to the health of children (Kroesbergen et al., 2002). Parents filled in a questionnaire about the material and social deprivation of their child, caused by a shortage of money. These are a few examples of the results conveyed by these questionnaires: children do not get enough clothing (4.9 %), they cannot take part in swimming lessons (4.6 %), they do not get the medication or aid they need (1.2 %), or do not drink milk or eat vegetables and fruit every day (0.9 %).

A paediatrician and youth nurse assessed the risk posed by a situation of poverty to the health of 4 272 examined children. They found that the health of 6.2 % of these children to be threatened by poverty. For more than a quarter of the children coming from families with an income below the level of social assistance (28 %), their health is in danger. With regard to children whose parents are having trouble paying their recurring expenses, this percentage amounts to 47.4 %. The study shows that these at-risk children's groups are to be found among three kinds of households: single-parent families, families where both parents were born abroad, and large families. Within these kinds of households, the health threat due to poverty is three to eight times greater than in other kinds of families.

1.1.4. *Psychological wellbeing*

Although there are many studies on the psychosocial wellbeing of children, usually the financial situation in which children grow up does not play any role in these. Often, no questions about the parents' income were asked (Snel, Van der Hoek and Chessa, 2001). A study by Dekovic, Snel and Groenendaal (1997), however, discusses the possible relation between poverty within the family and problem behaviour in children. Within problem behaviour, a distinction was made between internalising and externalising problem behaviour. The first form of behaviour refers to internally directed, withdrawn behaviours, such as anxieties, depression, social withdrawal, and psychosomatic symptoms. The second form refers to externally directed behaviour (acting out), such as disobedience, aggression, breaching the rules, and hyperactivity. With regard to these different forms, the researchers found a clear sex difference. The indicators for internalising problem behaviour are depressed feelings, a low self-esteem, and sometimes, suicidal thoughts. This occurs more frequently among girls than among boys. Externalising behaviour occurs more frequently among boys; its indicators are overt behaviours like lying, running away, aggressive behaviour, and sometimes, vandalism and delinquency.

Sure enough, Dekovic, Snel and Groenendaal did find a significant relation between poverty within the family and the occurrence of both forms of problem behaviour. They could only determine this relation among children up to the age of 12, not among adolescents.

1.1.5. *School achievements*

The Dutch research available on the educational opportunities of poor children shows diverging results (Snel, Hoek and Chessa, 2001). Snel et al. refer to Hoff, Dronkers and Vrooman (1997), who in their analysis did not find a correlation between the school achievements of children aged between 15 and 17, and poverty within their family. On the basis of these same data, however, the *Youth Report of the SCP* has come to the conclusion that growing up in a household with an income below the poverty line has a direct negative effect on the educational level of the children (Beker, 1997). Dekovic, Snel and Groenendaal (1997) also found a relation between poverty and school achievements of children, although only for children aged 12 and younger. For children older than 12, they did not find this relation.

Dronkers, Roeleveld, Ledoux and Robbijns (1999) conclude that parents' income has a significant effect on the school achievements of pupils in primary education. The parents' income is important to differences in school achievements, not living below the poverty line. This latter variable has no significant effect on the scores for language or arithmetic. According to the researchers, this means that the importance of the parents' financial scope is not limited to the group of poor children; it is important for all children. At the same time, this result means that living below the poverty line does not result in

an extra educational disadvantage, on top of the effect produced by the parental income (Dronkers, Roeleveld, Ledoux and Robbijn, 1999).

These results do not correspond with findings from other studies. Other researchers found, for instance, that poverty has been considered more powerful for differences in children's cognitive ability and school performance than for differences in socio-emotional development (Van der Hoek, 2005).

Negative effect can be reduced by social support. Thus, DuBois (1994) found that when children received direct support from school personnel, this was associated with a variety of positive academic and socio-emotional outcomes.

1.1.6. *Housing*

The spending pattern of low-income families differs greatly from that of higher-income families in two respects. Comparatively, they spend much money on their home. In 1999/2000, 46 % of their budget was spent this way, against 37 % of the budgets of higher-income families. Among these expenses are, beside the rent, the cost of heating and electricity, and the cost of furniture (Vrooman et al., 2003).

Recurring expenses, like rent, energy and insurances, take up a large part of the budget of low-income families. In comparison to the mid-nineties, the share of the total expenses taken up by recurring expenses has decreased slightly. In the period 1994/95, 41 % of the budget of low-income families was spent on recurring expenses. The figures indicate a decrease for the period 1999/2000 to 40 % and to 38 % for the period 2003/04. For higher income families these figures were 34 % in 1994/95, 33 % in 1999/2000 and in 2003/04 (*Armoedebericht 2006*).

Studies from abroad put more emphasis on the influence of housing conditions on the intelligence and cognitive capacities of children. They state that these children show lower levels of school achievement, as well as increased levels of socio-emotional problems (McLoyd, 1998).

In the Netherlands there is little evidence about children living in poor housing situations. As far as living conditions are concerned, the focus is on problematic neighbourhoods or areas. The youth monitor Kinderen in Tel (Steketee, 2007) gives a ranking of Dutch provinces and municipalities according to the number of children (0-17 years) living in deprived neighbourhoods. The definition of these neighbourhoods is given by the SCP. According to this definition the number of children living in deprived neighbourhoods increased between 2000 and 2004 from 14.6 % to 15.94 %. In 2005 the percentage is 16.54 %. The Nordic provinces of Friesland and Groningen have the highest percentage of children living in deprived areas, 33.01 % and 30.64 % respectively. For the bigger cities the percentages are much higher: in Amsterdam it reaches 65.82 % and in Rotterdam 63.71 %. These figures however do not give evidence about the specific housing situation of poor children.

There is not much information available about homelessness of children. The Foundation for Homeless Youngsters (Stichting Zwerfjongeren) mentions some 5 000 homeless youths between 15 and 25 years old. Most studies on homeless children are regional or local, and study the specific situation and problems of children living with their mothers in sheltered housing (often after domestic violence).

1.1.7. *Maladjusted behaviour and criminality*

Many people assume that there is a connection between youth criminality and the socioeconomic environment in which youngsters grow up. Youngsters from the low socioeconomic classes are supposed to be more frequently involved in criminal behaviour than youngsters with a more prosperous background. Dutch research, however, has not resulted in unequivocal findings on this point.

Snel, Van der Hoek and Chessa (2001) refer to Rovers (1998), who, based on the data provided by a study among almost 4 000 children from the highest form of Rotterdam primary education, has examined whether there is a relation between the extent to which these children breach the rules and the extent of deprivation within their families (Rovers, 1998). When rule breaching behaviour had occurred, on the one hand questions were posed about problem behaviour that is not punishable by law, such as skipping school, arguing with teachers and beating or kicking parents. On the other hand, the children were asked whether they engage in acts punishable by law (that is, for children older than 12): vandalism, theft and violence.

Certainly, the analysis showed a strong relation between the extent to which children show such rule breaching or delinquent behaviour and the extent of their deprivation at home. This applies to almost all forms of rule breaching behaviour, independent of the method used to determine the deprivation.

Youngsters who by their own account frequently engage in rule breaching behaviour (what is known as the 'multiple offender'), comparatively come often from very deprived families. Furthermore, the percentage of multiple offenders turns out to be considerably higher among youngsters with limited expectations for the future, than among youngsters who expect a lot from the future.

1.1.8. *What children say*

In a recent study, Van der Hoek focused on the experiences of children with living in poverty (2005). She is the first to quote another study, which made clear earlier that children constitute an important source of knowledge (Ridge, 2002). Attention paid to the experiences of children makes clear, for instance, how important a role pocket money plays in their lives. Children who do not get pocket money, will tell about the negative effect this has on their social life. Earning money then becomes a necessity, since money plays an essential role when it comes to autonomy and safety. Ridge's research shows how children use the earning of money for relating to other children, to take part in social events and to purchase important status symbols of childhood, such as new clothing.

Yet Van der Hoek still goes one step further. She emphasises that children need to be recognised as social actors, instead of as the outcome of social processes. For this reason, Van der Hoek not only focuses on children's daily experiences, but especially on their coping strategies. These strategies show that children are reflexive social agents, who construct and make sense of their lives and experiences. The fundamental assumption of her study is that childhood should be the unit of analysis, and children the unit of observation. Van der Hoek interviewed poor children from 65 families. The study group was very diversely composed.

Van der Hoek found the following coping strategies:

1. Problem solving:

The group of children using this strategy, tried to actively improve their situation. They saved the money, for instance, that had been given to them on their birthday, in order to buy their own toys. Or they went out to do small jobs, like delivering newspapers.

2. Problem avoidance:

'I used to think it was actually a bit mean. Now I think...I can live with it now.

I have accepted it. It is like it is.' (13-year-old Dutch girl).

This strategy seems to be used by children to resign themselves to the situation and make rather fatalistic remarks. Other children try to avoid particular confrontations with for instance their peers: 'When it is my birthday, I keep quiet. At school, I tell nobody that it is my birthday. Because well, then I have to keep saying 'no man, I cannot invite you.' (10-year-old Surinamese boy).

3. Role reversal — children protecting their parents:

Van der Hoek encountered several children who hid their disappointment over certain matters, because they did not want to give their parents a hard time.

Van der Hoek's appeal to actively involve children in research is supported by children's interest groups. The Child's Collective (Kindercollectief), for instance, is a group collaboration of several organisations. In 2002, the Kindercollectief wrote a report on children's rights in the Netherlands. Children from poor families were involved in writing the chapter about poverty. One of the messages formulated by these children was: let children join in the discussion about ways to deal with poverty (Kinderrechtcollectief, 2002). In the data book *Kinderen in Tel*, the Dutch Foundation for Children's Stamps (Stichting Kinderpostzegels) calls for letting youngsters feel that they are an integral part of society, by letting them join in the thoughts, discussions and decisions about things that matter to them (Steketee and Mak, 2006).

1.2. Backgrounds of children's living conditions

In the literature, poor living conditions of children are associated with three different backgrounds. The most is written about parenting conditions and the parents' coping strategies in dealing with a low income. We will give a short overview of existing research on raising poor children, to then let the parents speak for themselves.

1.2.1. Parenting conditions

In the Netherlands, until now, hardly any research has been done on the issue of possible explanations of the consequences of poverty for children. Among the Dutch studies discussed earlier, this issue has only been raised by Dekovic, Snel and Groenendaal (1997), and by Rovers (1998).

In their analysis, Dekovic, Snel and Groenendaal (1997) are leaning strongly on the pedagogic approach of the issue of children and poverty. They examine whether the differences they have found between poor children and children who are better off, can be traced back to certain differences in the parenting and family climates of poor and more prosperous families. They show that such differences do exist. Parents from poor families (although these data are about the mothers only) more often feel depressed and less competent in their role as parent than other parents do. In addition, mothers of poor families often have fewer social contacts and receive less support from a third party than other mothers. These poor mothers also more often report a bad relationship with the co-parent (if present) and with the child itself. According to Dekovic, Snel and Groenendaal (1997), the differences found between poor and more prosperous children (among other things, regarding their school achievements and the extent to which they engage in problem behaviour) can be traced back in large part to these differences within the family and parenting climate. They argue that the main effect on children of poverty within the family is indirect. Precisely the characteristics of the family and parenting situation discussed here constitute the cause of the negative effects associated with growing up in poverty.

Foreign studies support the idea that depressions in mothers are of influence on the sex differences in children's behaviour we mentioned earlier. For example, Hops, Shirman and Biglan (1990) found that maternal depression was directly related to the problematic development of early adolescent girls, but not boys. Other researchers found that the mother's depressed mood in particular appeared to be disruptive to the social development of their daughters (Van der Hoek, 2005).

1.2.2. *Coping strategies of the parents*

Researchers have also examined what parents themselves do to deal with the limitations of their financial situation and what the effectiveness of their strategies is. The respondents' stories reveal a number of things. Parents resort to different strategies to stay on top of their precarious financial situation: while some try to live frugally and deny themselves everything, others try to secure support (from their informal network, as well as from the Government), and a few of them succeed in procuring an extra income. The first strategy proved to be not very effective. People who deny themselves a lot, turned out to end up more deprived (at least materially). They more often have a hard time making ends meet than parents who are not denying themselves so much. Snel, Van der Hoeven and Chessa (2001) do not know the precise reason for this phenomenon. Maybe the financial situation of the families where the parents efface themselves so completely is so bad to start with, that it has hardly any positive effect. Or maybe the parents' behaviour does not return much financially. For that matter, the parents' self-sacrifice might also produce some unintended effects. Parents might suffer from it mentally as well as physically, which can have repercussions on the children.

In addition, Snel, Van der Hoek and Chessa (2001) examined whether there is a possible relation between poverty, depressed feelings among parents, and the quality of their parenting behaviour. This research question arose from the results of earlier Dutch studies, indicating that poverty in particular has an indirect effect on children, in the form of a lesser quality of parenting behaviour.

An important finding from their study is that poverty within families does not necessarily result in strong feelings of depression among the parents. Poverty is a psychological burden for parents in a number of different ways: because of the daily limitations and disappointments that are typical when you have to make do with little money, because of deeper-seated negative feelings (feelings of failure and of being unwanted), and finally, because of feelings of guilt for not being able to offer the child or children a better life. These sources of depression do not exclude each other but, on the contrary, often reinforce one another. The extent of the feelings of depression is not so much connected to the actual income

situation, — after all, all the families in the study were poor — but to the subjective experience of poverty. Additional guilty feelings toward the children might make this even worse.

However, depressed feelings are not always caused by poverty. In the interviews conducted with parents, four different sources of depression were mentioned. Some parents (all of them women) were scarred by negative experiences (violence, sexual abuse) they have gone through earlier in their lives. Other parents were more inclined to see their divorce or the loss of their partner as the cause of their depression. The third source of depression, mentioned most often, is that of single parenthood, which many parents experience as being an extremely heavy burden.

Snel, Van der Hoek and Chessa (2001) examined psychological stress and feelings of depression made parents less able to engage in qualitatively good, that is, warm, involved and consistent) parenting behaviour. The results show that there is hardly any relation to be found between, on the one hand, the extent of a parent's depressed feelings and subjective experience of poverty and, on the other hand, her or his parenting behaviour. In the cases where a relation could be found, it pointed to a direction opposite to the relation assumed by the 'good parenting' theory. For instance, parents who have a hard time to make ends meet, turned out to be a little more consistent in their parenting than parents who can make do reasonably or really well. In general, we can conclude that the parenting behaviour of parents who are experiencing poverty and feelings of depression (of which poverty might only be one cause among others), differs only slightly or not at all from that of other parents.

Maybe the most important conclusion to be drawn from their discussion of the parenting conditions within poor families is the great diversity of the situations they studied. Poverty does not have the same effect on all families and all parents. A lack of finances is a serious problem in all of these families, because it limits the possibilities of the families and the children growing up in them. But in some families, this is nothing more than a purely financial problem. The parents of these families can deal with the situation reasonably well and show almost no signs of depression. These families would really be helped out with a little financial support. However, in other families, the problem is far more complex, with poverty being only one aspect of it. These parents are weighed down by an accumulation of setbacks and failure in life, and their poverty can be accompanied by sharp psychological stress and other kinds of problems. For these families, just financial support or a job offer will not be sufficient. The researchers conclude that to help these families effectively, interventions of a more drastic nature are a necessity.

2. Policies to prevent and alleviate child poverty and social exclusion

2.1. National policy framework

Child poverty and social exclusion is not a political issue of its own in the Netherlands. Youth policy on the contrary became of growing political importance due to a number of critical events showing the difficulties of integrating many different specialised intervention systems for youngsters in problem situations or areas. The recent appointment of a Programme Minister for Youth and Families is an important signal and step in this development. This means that the attention for inclusion of all children and youth is growing.

The Programme Ministry for Youth and Families has its major link with the VWS. According to the Ministry's website the responsibility will cover 16 existing policy domains. Since child poverty is not an existing policy domain, it is not covered in this list. Most of the issues to be considered under child poverty and inclusion were until now covered by the SZW (labour market and income) and VWS (all other issues) ministries. The SZW does not see itself to be responsible for child poverty. It is responsible for youth as far as the transition from school to work is concerned and the labour market position of youngsters. It is also responsible for guaranteeing a minimum income for all adults (+18 years). This means that it is responsible for the poor parents, but not directly for poor children. Most issues concerning children are thus under the responsibility of the VWS but not for such important issues as education and housing. The new Programme Ministry, besides the 16 mentioned policy fields for which it will be responsible, also mentions 'links' with issues covered by other ministries in the fields of education, youth protection and safety. Housing issues are not mentioned in that list.

The overall policy framework for preventing and alleviating child poverty and social exclusion in the Netherlands can be considered as weak. There is no comprehensive policy responsibility for this issue.

The strengths of the policy framework have to be found in the creation of the Programme Ministry for Youth and Families, although child poverty as such is not mentioned. Furthermore, some overall policy choices of former Dutch governments can be considered as strengths of the framework. Decentralisation and integration of policies are the keywords. The shift of responsibilities from central to local government in many policy domains did indeed create chances for local governments to develop tailor made approaches for local problems. The proliferation of local innovative practices is a positive effect of this development. One of the negative side effects is the lack of knowledge at national level about these local developments. This has been recognised by Government in several fields. The current development of a national youth monitor is a way to overcome this problem. The further decentralisation of responsibilities for the minimum income scheme in recent years and the decentralisation of most issues concerning care and wellbeing are the most important developments in the field of poverty and social inclusion.

As to the integration of policies, two important fields of intervention have to be mentioned: the Major City Policy (Grotestedenbeleid) and the WMO.

Essentially, the Major City Policy made it possible — through local policy freedom, budget transfers and commonly agreed (national) objectives — to develop really integrated territorial (neighbourhood) policies for social inclusion through better education and housing, guaranteed income and job creation, health and welfare actions. The most positive effects of this policy are probably to be found in the housing sector, thanks also to the investments (both physical and social) of social housing companies. But it is difficult to assess the influence on the fight against child poverty and exclusion because of the lack of specific information on the issue.

The WMO, recently introduced, should make it possible to improving the collaboration between local municipal services and institutions to collaborate in the fields of minimum income, care and wellbeing.

But once again, child poverty does not appear as a specific policy issue. Section 1 of this report has shown that child poverty as such is an important phenomenon in the Netherlands but this poverty remains to a large extent a blank spot in debates about youth.

Recommendation:

We would therefore recommend to include combating child poverty as a specific coordination responsibility of the new Programme Ministry for Youth and Families. This would then also include the mainstreaming and budget monitoring of this policy domain.

To describe and discuss the different policy areas that are of relevance for combating child poverty and exclusion in the Netherlands, we will differentiate between the different policy levels. But it will be hardly possible to include and assess the budgets linked to each of the policy areas described. There are different reasons for that:

- In a former expert report we already noted that there is no comprehensive overview of budgets of the different policy sectors and levels for the fight against poverty and exclusion;
- Due to the fragmented responsibilities and policies in the case of the issue of child poverty there is even less material available to find about budgets and outcomes: the existing material either concerns larger groups than only children, or the age groupings are different, or the policies concern not only poor children or population groups (integral policies).
- The assessment will therefore have to remain tentative and have essentially a qualitative character.

2.2. National policy measures

The most recent and clear summary of specific national policy objectives in the field of combating child poverty and social exclusion is to be found in the response of the Dutch Government to the questionnaire on existing tools to monitor child poverty and social exclusion at national level (SZW, 2007). They can be presented as follows:

Policy domain	Target objective
Intervention in problem families	Improving the cooperation between support agencies
Participation of children and young people	Children and young people from families with fewer opportunities will be given the possibility to engage in leisure activities (such as sport) in a way that contributes to their personal development
Reducing learning arrears and the number of early school-leavers	Reduction of language arrears of 'weighted students' (ethnic and native Dutch students) compared with 'non-weighted students' by 5 % in 2008 (1)
	Reduction in number of students leaving school early by 50 % between 2000 and 2010
Tackling youth unemployment	Reduction of youth unemployment
	Creation of 40 000 extra jobs suitable for young people by 2007
Income support for minimum-income households with children	Balanced income development with attention to the position of minimum-income families with children

This summary however does not reflect the broad, and in some way fragmented field of policies touching child poverty and social exclusion. In this next section, we will go through the various policy interventions. We will discuss the measures issued by the different Ministries.

2.2.1. Income policy

The coordination of policy against poverty is primarily the national Government's task. In the first place, this involves a general income policy, through which the Government strives to attain a balanced income development. This is how, each year, the level of the social minimum is determined. With regard to policy specifically aimed at income support for families with children, we can conclude that, in recent years, there have been a number of positive developments. However, likewise, these developments are generated by a generic policy for the benefit of all households. In 2004, for instance, Government increased the tax advantage for people with children to EUR 200 million, again increasing it with EUR 50 million in 2005, and to EUR 150 million in 2006. In addition, in 2006, the children's tax reduction became simpler (source: Ministry of Finance). Now, in 2007, families receive a little more child allowance. This enables them to purchase one percent more on average. In 2007, again, more funds have been allocated to child allowances (source: press announcement of the SZW, 2007).

In addition to this, several Ministries have other instruments at their disposal to give financial support, targeting (poor) families and youngsters more specifically. The SZW is responsible for checking whether the implementation of the Reformed Social Assistance Act (WWB) has any undesired side effects. Whenever necessary, it can make adjustments and bring about a better fit with the financial possibilities of poor families. Within its own field, the Ministry of Education can take measures to make the educational system more accessible to children and youngsters from a poor background (Ansems, 2004), for example, through student grants or a reimbursement of the costs of schooling. Parents of

children younger than 18 can apply for such an indemnification provided the child in question is getting a full-time education, an initial professional education, lower secondary professional education, vocational training, pre-university education, higher general secondary education, or lower general secondary education. Also, the school contribution for 16 to 17-year-olds has been cancelled.

The newly created Programme Ministry for Youth and Families plans to introduce a child-related budget, aimed at providing parents with an income-dependent reimbursement of the costs of raising children (Letter of the Minister of Youth and Families to Parliament, 2007). Other policy actions include free schoolbooks and use of social assistance in terms of goods.

Assessment:

According to the Innocenti Research Centre (Unicef) study on child poverty, the Netherlands are in the top third of all countries for the different indicators of child wellbeing. For material wellbeing however, the Netherlands comes only at the 10th place. Depending on the rates used and the years compared, child poverty in the Netherlands has slightly grown, stabilised or slightly decreased in previous years. But all studies give evidence to the fact that children are an at-high-risk-of-poverty category within the Dutch population. But in the NAP inclusion, child poverty has not been a real priority. Currently, more measures are planned and being developed for vulnerable youths and families, including financial measures.

Recommendation:

We therefore recommend to put more emphasis on child poverty and even broader, to material wellbeing of children, within Dutch income policy. This could be done by the implementation and broadening of the current plans from the newly created Programme Ministry. A close monitoring of the outcomes of these policies will have to be put in place.

With regard to combating the social exclusion of children in a more general sense, more than only financial support is offered to (poor) families and youngsters. In order to map all the Government's activities in this area, we will use the division of the NAP. According to the NAP, for policy aimed at combating poverty and stimulating participation to be effective, policy needs to be deployed regarding the future perspective (education, dependency on social assistance, health, etc.) as well as income and behavioural factors (debts, non-use). In part, this will involve preventive measures, but curative actions will be fitting as well. The objectives for combating poverty and stimulating participation will provide the framework for this mix of preventive and curative actions. This is the Government's interpretation of the objectives outlined by the EU (SZW, 2006).

This first semester report centres on Objective No 3, 'combating poverty and stimulating the participation of children and youngsters'. In the NAP, we can read: 'looking at the future, the hereditariness of poverty must be prevented. For this reason, early policy interventions in the life cycle are important. This begins with interventions in problematic family situations, and continues with the stimulation of the opportunities for children in disadvantaged situations to participate, with correcting educational disadvantages, decreasing the dropout from school, and combating youth unemployment. In addition, the income position of families is important. With these policy priorities, the Netherlands also gives form to the attainment of the goals of the European Youth Pact' (SZW, 2006).

2.2.2. *Intervention in problem families*

Government considers itself to be responsible for the coordination of youth policy and wants to achieve more coherence within it. For this purpose, the interdepartmental working group 'Operation Young' was established in 2004. Its goal is to find the solution for the most important bottlenecks in the developmental chain for young people at local level, to increase the coherence of youth policy and to simplify and improve integral policy directions. To this end, Operation Young has formulated directional advice for future youth policy (Operation Young, 2006/07).

Already, the new Government, and the Minister of Youth and Families in particular, have entered their period of contemplation, tackling the question on which advice they will act. At this moment, this Ministry is working hard to come to a more streamlined welfare programme for children and adolescents, in which the long waiting periods and duration of treatment will be dealt with and in which the Centres for Youth and Family will be able to spot problems with parenting and growing up early, also offering assistance at an earlier stage (Letter from Minister Rouvoet to Parliament, 2007).

During the past years, the Government has already deployed extra means for parenting and family support. The previous Government wanted parents and children to get the support they needed while growing up, parenting and caring, in time. However, the responsibility for the execution of this policy lies on the shoulders of the municipalities. During the period 2006-08, for example, seven municipalities will get the sum of EUR 32.5 million, to be used in programmes for families at risk (Parenting in the Neighbourhood).

Furthermore, since 2004, the Government has structurally allocated funds for parenting and family support on the local level, called 'Impulse to parenting and family support'. The four largest cities (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht) and 47 other municipalities are eligible to receive extra funds and take part in a trajectory for parenting and family support on the local level. Thus, the great majority of municipalities do not share in the financial compensation for this kind of support. The amount of extra funds is rising, from EUR 3.4 million in 2004 to EUR 15 million as of 2007 (www.nji.nl).

Assessment:

In the past, support for youth and families in the Netherlands was very fragmented and cooperation between different support structures was not self-evident. A number of measures have clearly been taken to improve that situation. At the same time, general youth workers complain that they are asked to make the problematic situations of a minority of children their highest priority, with the risk of neglecting the real preventive role among all children. Therefore the extra financial means are absolutely necessary to implement the Government's priorities.

Recommendation:

We recommend to continue implementing the extra efforts for the most vulnerable young people but without neglecting the preventive role and function of general youth work.

2.2.3. *The participation of children and youngsters*

In 2005, Steketee, Mak et al. made an inventory of the policies pursued by the different ministries regarding youth participation. It turns out that especially the VWS, and that of Education, Culture, and Science (OCW) occupy themselves with the promotion of youth participation, even though this is not what it is called in the budget (Steketee, Mak et al., 2005). The VWS takes initiatives to encourage equal opportunities for children from disadvantaged families to participate in meaningful activities on which to spend their free time, such as sports and social activities. These are, however, measures primarily aimed at taking part in sports. In cooperation with a number of municipalities for example, the Government has started the 'Participation of the allochthonous young through sports 2006-10 programme'. The programme's goal is to show allochthonous youngsters the way to the sports clubs, as much with an eye to the opportunities for integration as with an eye to the fact that these youngsters participate less in sports. The implementation takes place at local level, for which EUR 65 million has been allocated (SZW, 2006).

Another example is the temporary encouraging arrangement 'Neighbourhood, Education, and Sport' (the BOS stimulus), which was started in 2004. This is a subsidy arrangement meant to promote the combination of the neighbourhood, sports, and the young among the municipalities. The core consists of the development of an effective local approach, both for the activation of youngsters at risk of bad health, social exclusion and derailment, and for the improvement of the liveability of neighbourhoods and boroughs. Municipalities can ask for a reimbursement of half the costs of the BOS project for a period of four years at most, up to a maximum of EUR 50 000 a year (Steketee, Mak et al., 2005).

The OCW Ministry occupies itself with participation in a broader sense, by its execution of the action plan 'Reach of Culture'. The Ministry facilitates municipalities and provinces in their efforts to improve the reach of culture among youngsters with the aid of national funds. It stimulates a more intensive involvement of particular groups, such as adolescents and allochthonous people. Another project is 'Culture and school'. In its project group, different school boards are represented (Primary and Secondary Education, Special Secondary Education, Higher Vocational Education). The group's objective is a rapprochement between the cultural and the educational sectors. The most important instrument is the voucher (called the 'culture card' since 2007), coupled to the subject 'cultural and artistic training'. With this voucher, youngsters themselves can take the initiative to go to a theatre or the movies for free.

This ministry also stimulates the 'social practice placement', aimed to increase adolescents' social participation. This measure targets all the pupils in the last years of primary and secondary education. This involves a form of training, both in and outside of school, in which pupils are introduced to various aspects and sectors of society by doing volunteering work (Steketee, Mak et al., 2005).

Assessment:

Participation of youngsters in society has been a high priority of the Government for several years now. It is essentially focused on children with an ethnic minority background and children in deprived neighbourhoods. Although these two groups certainly include many children at risk of poverty, it is not clear to what extent these policies reach excluded and poor children. Efforts to stimulate more 'regular' social participation of excluded children as described in section 1.1.2 have not been developed by central Government.

Recommendation:

We would recommend to continue the current measures for improving participation in sports and culture, but to give more attention to 'regular' social participation of children at risk of poverty and exclusion. As to the social practice placements, there is lot of enthusiasm among all parties involved, but more means are needed for the accompaniment both by schools and the professionals in the field, to make this initiative a success.

2.2.4. Combating educational disadvantages and premature dropout from school

The national Government considers combating educational disadvantages and premature dropout from school to be of paramount importance. These efforts comprise an important contribution to the improvement of the future position of pupils on the labour market, thus preventing poverty from becoming hereditary. For example, the Government is focusing on improving both the quality and the reach of pre-schooling and early schooling (VVE). The VVE is a way to deal with educational disadvantages at an early stage. In addition, since August 2006, in the context of a new Act on Educational Disadvantage Policy (OAB), municipalities have the opportunity of creating intermediate classes in primary education. These are created for pupils with a big educational disadvantage regarding the Dutch language. The intermediate class provides one year of intensive language training to these pupils. The objective is that, after this year, their language skills will be sufficiently brushed up for them to be able to take part in regular education on their own level.

The Ministry of Youth and Families will focus on 'unwilling youngsters' pilots: research has shown that an estimated 12 000 to 14 000 youngsters stay away from school, do not have a job or any starting qualification, do not receive social assistance benefit and are not looking for employment or schooling. Many of these youths are not reached by the existing services. In order to prevent these youngsters from slipping still further, the Government has decided to conduct a number of pilots, in which they are offered intensive trajectories for schooling and re-education on campus (letter from the Minister for Youth and Families to Parliament, 2007). Youths under 26 years old will encounter a learning/work obligation.

Assessment:

This is certainly one of the issues in which Dutch Government has put great efforts for many years. Educational priority areas policy has been one of the important predecessors of the social renewal policies (1990...) and the current Major City Policy. It is also part of the *brede school* (community school) approach that establishes stronger links between schools and their environment. The Dutch Government has supported, and supports many innovative initiatives to improve both access and chances at the beginning, during and at the end of the school career. These measures are surely reaching the most vulnerable children.

Recommendation:

We recommend to continue these efforts, including the community school approach as an integral approach of social problems at local level.

2.2.5. *Fighting youth unemployment*

The activities undertaken by the SZW with regard to the exclusion of children consist of investments on the terrains of youth unemployment and the prevention of premature dropout from school. Much money, for instance, has been invested in the taskforce Youth Unemployment. This taskforce was established for the period 2003-07, in order to facilitate regional vocational training institutes (ROCs), the Centres for Work and Income (CWIs), and the local governments during the development of an effective approach. The taskforce Youth Unemployment will cease to exist in the spring of 2007. Since its foundation in 2003, much has been accomplished. For example: 40 000 youngsters above the normal number have been assisted in finding a youth job. The number of unemployed youngsters to be found in the CWI statistics has decreased from 65 000 to less than 30 000. However, the taskforce argues that the combat against youth unemployment cannot stop at this point. For this reason, it has now drawn up advice for the new Government.

The Government has also allocated EUR 35 million to give pupils in secondary vocational training easier access to practice placements. As in 2006, another EUR 100 million will be spent in 2007, to prevent youngsters from leaving school without their diploma (press announcement from the Ministry of Social Affairs, 2007).

Assessment:

The measures in this field have undoubtedly been very effective. It is a consequent support for the 'Work first' approach at local level, i.e. to confront young people asking for a minimum income benefit first with a proposal for work or training. Therefore, municipal social services need to be able making real proposals to these youngsters. The initiatives of central government have helped to provide these.

Recommendation:

We would strongly recommend continuing the activities of the taskforce Youth Unemployment.

2.3 Regional policy

The provinces are responsible for child and youth welfare, which the Youth Welfare Act describes as follows: 'supporting and providing assistance to young people, their parents, stepparents, or others, who provide care and rear the youngster as if he or she belongs to the family, with regard to parenting issues or problems connected with growing up, or the threat that such problems might arise'. The Youth Welfare Act came into effect on 1 January 2005, and has the following guidelines:

- a. The central focus is on the client's question;
- b. Everybody is entitled to (indicated) youth care;
- c. Youth care has one central, recognisable point of entrance;
- d. The integration of a number of services in one Youth Care Office;
- e. The introduction of family coaching.

In 1992, child and youth welfare work was decentralised to the twelve provinces under the old Youth Welfare Act. In addition, in this work, the three metropolitan regions, Amsterdam, Rotterdam and the Haaglanden, came to hold the same position as the provinces did. The new Youth Welfare Act transferred all responsibility for child and youth welfare to the provinces. Each province has one Youth Welfare Office with several regional offices. Although child and youth welfare is the primary responsibility of the provinces, the municipalities have their own role to play.

This municipal role is strengthened by the WMO. The foundation of Centres for Youth and Family (national policy, see section 2.1.) fits in with this trend. Such a centre, the heart of which is the child health centre, offers a number of pedagogic functions regarding parenting support. It is, so to speak, home to the 'pedagogic GP'. This is a municipal service, as opposed to the more specialist care provided by the provincially organised child and youth welfare. 'Within this legal arrangement, there is room for the provinces to create their own youth policy. Each province is to draw up a four-year plan, which is elaborated upon each calendar year. This planning procedure also contains the possibility for the provincial government to exert influence. Depending on the extent to which provinces are allowed to add their own financial means to national funding, there are possibilities to add one's own interpretation of youth care policy as well'.

According to the data in *Kinderen in Tel 2007*, almost every Youth Welfare Office has created a clients' council as demanded by statutory regulation. However, this can mean all kinds of things: sometimes the clients' council mainly consists of parents and sometimes it is 'dormant'. While one clients' council has a maximum of two members, another has a maximum of five. Some clients' councils convene twice a year, compared to nine times of another. Furthermore, of the previously flourishing network of more than 15 children's advice bureaus, only a few are left. Thus, at this moment, there is no reasonable distribution of simply accessible legal aid for minors. It is the province's competence to give financial room to its Youth Welfare Office to maintain the service of a children's advice bureau (Steketee, 2007).

This responsibility strengthens the involvement of the provinces with the large group of children who are experiencing poverty and social exclusion. Several provinces have introduced financial arrangements for projects to combat the social exclusion of poor children, for instance, projects focusing on participation in education and in socio-cultural activities. In 2005, the projects supported by Utrecht province included the following:

1. Handling money: in a preventive trajectory, youngsters are trained how to handle money in a sensible manner;
2. To take part in extramural education: the encouragement of children to take part in sports and cultural activities;
3. The digital highway: the stimulation of municipalities to provide children with computers;
4. An art project: art education for children coming from minimum wage earner families between the ages of 9 and 13;
5. The Youth Sports Fund: children between the ages of 6 and 12 from minimum wage earner families can join a sports club.

One initiative in the field of child poverty and health has to be mentioned. After the study mentioned in section 1.1.3, an intervention was developed in the province of Noord-Brabant to reduce the differences in health among children. To this end, Youth Health Care and the municipal social services have set up a collaboration, by means of a process of detection, referral and the distribution of extra financial means to be allocated to specific objectives. The first assessment of this intervention shows the following strong points: the method of detection, the parents' acceptance, the goal-oriented deployment of extra

means, and the support experienced by the parents (Rots-De Vries and Kroesbergen, 2002). Lesser points were the limited reach, incidental character, and labour intensiveness.

In the meantime, after six years of practice, the lesser points have been improved upon (Rots-De Vries et al., 2005). Thus, the intervention has become much better known, because parents are talking about it among themselves. Based on the years of experience, a protocol has been drawn up, determining which matters entitle a parent to reimbursement, and which criteria have to be met. The protocol's motto is: 'Work with the rules, instead of by the rules'. This refers in particular to the knowledge that the conditions caused by poverty are different in every family, and that each family needs its own approach. Furthermore, a training course has been set up for those executing the intervention. Because there is insufficient proof of the intervention's effectiveness, an organisation is currently writing a handbook, funded by a subsidy from the Government. The objective is to further disseminate the intervention throughout the Netherlands.

Assessment:

The provinces have to play an important role in the central Government's objective of better coordination of support to and accompaniment of vulnerable children. They do so in different ways and to different extents. The influence of children themselves is also very different from province to province.

Besides this compulsory role, provinces also have the possibility of supporting innovation in different fields, including youth policy and particularly in the fight against child poverty and exclusion. Some provinces take up these possibilities with more enthusiasm than others.

Recommendation:

We would recommend to better organise exchange of knowledge and experiences between provinces in order to improve both the implementation of the coordinating role and the fulfilment of the innovation function.

2.4 Local policy

Municipalities implement various measures to combat poverty among their citizens. On the one hand, they are responsible for the payment of benefits, based on the WWB, which also includes the minimum income benefit and the supplementary benefit. The fact that, during the past years, the emphasis has shifted to acquiring an income for work, the position of children in poor households has been affected, among other things because of the abolition of categorical measures especially beneficial to children and youngsters (Ansems, 2004; SGB0, 2005). The objective of central Government was to stimulate local governments into the development of more tailor-made, individual income policy approaches. In addition, budgets were reserved for municipalities to use for this purpose. Despite the fact that this approach was not always what municipalities would have preferred, they are now developing initiatives regarding income support and the promotion of participation according to the new rules. For this, municipalities need to take into account the growing number of low-income households, the rise in the number of people with problematic debts and several legislative developments, such as the WWB and the WMO. Municipalities need to be able to create a closer connection between measures specifically

targeting the fight against poverty and measures targeting social participation (SGBO, 2006). In the WMO, children are not a specific target group, but this is likely to change in the future.

The municipalities themselves determine the budget they want to allocate to their local policy for combating poverty. A study conducted by the SGBO on policy for combating poverty in 27 middle-large municipalities (known as the G27), shows that these municipalities in total spend more money on this policy than their budget covered for. Municipalities also underline that households with only a minimum income for several years are not able to cope with this income level. They plea for a general increase of the minimum income benefit.

With regard to youngsters and minimum wage earners' families, municipalities might consider taking the following measures:

- Arrangements for target groups;
- Arrangements to reimburse the direct and indirect costs of education (bound to a maximum);
- The creation of services that enable social participation, such as funds for children from poor backgrounds, like the Youth Sports Fund and the Tuition Foundation;
- Investments in public health policy (SGBO, 2005).

'In this way, people living on a minimum income can get a compensation for the costs of sports-, cultural- and educational activities. Municipalities can, for instance, give a discount on a newspaper subscription, provide a computer to poor families, or set up membership arrangements for joining sports clubs. Many municipalities have a discount pass, or an arrangement for the declaration of expenses, enabling poor people to get a discount or compensation for taking part in social activities. For this, a municipality is not obliged to check the necessity of these costs, but they do need to be exclusively related to socio-cultural and sports activities' (SGBO, 2005). Local examples are:

- Amsterdam: a discount pass for adolescents, XXXS. With this, all youngsters get a discount on their membership of sport schools and clubs, movie theatres, books, festivals, museums, music, clothing, the theatre, computers and the internet (source: the municipality of Amsterdam, in SGBO, 2006). In 2004, Amsterdam started to focus on youngsters through a reimbursement of school costs, a reimbursement of the costs of public transportation and a computer arrangement. The aim of the latter is to prevent the children of minimum wage earners from lagging behind at school. In 2003, the welfare services created an arrangement which enables them to apply for a free computer, under the condition that they are residents of Amsterdam (living with the parents), will go on to secondary education and that their parents' income level is no higher than that of social security. Furthermore, the children must obtain a certificate of their computer skills by attending a workshop (Amsterdam municipality, 2005).
- Boxmeer: an arrangement for the reimbursement of the costs of secondary education; a reimbursement is possible for parents with children aged between 12 and 18 in any form of secondary education. This involves the following indirect costs of schooling: the parent's contribution, a school trip, school camp, excursions, the school bag, writing tools, the bike and educational tools.
- Dordrecht: free admission to preschool kindergarten. The city of Dordrecht has signed an agreement with the (subsidised) schools to directly charge the social services for the parent's contribution of parents with a low income.

- Youth Sports Fund: a national foundation that supports local initiatives by means of a franchise formula. The goal is to offer the opportunity of doing a sport to as many children as possible for whom money is a limiting factor. Social workers and other intermediaries can apply for a contribution at the Youth Sports Fund for the youngster with whom they are in contact (SGBO, 2006).

As we have indicated above, the provinces are responsible for providing child and youth welfare, based on the Youth Welfare Act. This involves providing assistance to youngsters experiencing problems while growing up, and to parents experiencing serious parenting problems. Not the Youth Welfare Act, but local preventive youth policy applies to less serious problems. For that, the municipality is responsible.

Under the Youth Welfare Act, municipalities have been made responsible for the prevention, if possible, of problems with parenting and growing up (preventive youth policy). When they do not succeed, they are responsible for the provision of light forms of assistance. Their concern is the execution of the following five functions:

a) providing information and advice; b) detection; c) directing people toward services; d) providing light pedagogic assistance; and e) the coordination of care. These functions can be taken care of by different social organisations (child health centres, among others). In coordination with these organisations, with the municipality acting as director, a closed network must be maintained, with an adequate package of services and activities on offer (SGBO, 2005). As we have indicated in section 2.2, the national Government has many funds at its disposal for parenting and family support. The responsibility for the implementation of this policy lies with the municipalities. They can apply for the extra funds by making local plans for:

- detecting families and youngsters at risk (detecting function);
- approaching these families and/or youngsters, with the aid of the optional use of pressure, at the local level, taking into account the specific allochthonous background (providing light pedagogic assistance);
- providing a package of light pedagogic forms of assistance, targeting the group mentioned, or coordinating care at the local level. These activities need to dovetail with the existing local structures. (Source: www.nji.nl).

Within the municipality, with regard to parenting support, there are cross-connections with several other policy departments of the municipality, which also deal with issues occurring while parenting and growing up, as well with parenting support. This is, for example, the department of education, working in the context of the municipal policy to combat educational disadvantages (GOA). Other examples are the departments dealing with social policy, public health care, socio-cultural work, social work, safety, etc.

Municipalities can also appeal to the BOS stimulus, introduced by the national Government (see section 2.1.). This is a subsidy arrangement meant to promote the combination of the neighbourhood, sports and the young among the municipalities. The core consists of the development of an effective local approach, both for the activation of youngsters at risk of bad health, social exclusion and derailment, and for the improvement of the liveability of neighbourhoods and boroughs. Municipalities can ask for an indemnification of half the costs of the BOS project for a period of four years at most, up to a maximum of EUR 50 000 a year.

It is the Denktank Armoedebestrijding's conviction that being able to participate in society is of crucial importance for children and youngsters (Ansems, 2004). Now that the welfare of children has been decentralised to the municipal level, the municipalities see themselves confronted with the task to extend children's rights — being the foundation on which local youth policy is based — to all children. This includes the right to a standard of living above the poverty line. Many municipalities organise all

kinds of inclusion projects, such as the Youth Sports Fund, the School Fund, etc. In different reports, the interest groups argue that for these inclusion projects to succeed, the youngsters themselves will have to be involved in their design, set-up and execution.

The research department of the Association of Dutch Municipalities has mapped all municipal projects for combating poverty and promoting the participation of children and youngsters. To this end, it has cooperated with municipalities, assistance authorities, educational institutions and other social organisations dealing with the target group. The projects have been presented in *Jeugd en armoede. Een eerste inventarisatie van praktijkvoorbeelden voor het verbeteren van de participatiemogelijkheden van kinderen en jongeren uit arme gezinnen* (2005). A few examples of these projects are:

- Amsterdam: the CATch projects. These projects target youngsters at risk between the ages of 16 and 23, who are not being educated and are not regularly employed. The goal is to restore the connection with an education or the labour market, working from different angles (the educational system, the labour market, youth welfare, sports and cultural education).
- Den Bosch: a website for adolescents, www.xshero.nl. This website contains all kinds of information for youngsters between the ages of 12 and 25. One of the subjects is how to find information about money problems.
- Amsterdam and Spijkenisse: the project Brotherhoodband. This project is about music bands for allochthonous youngsters.
- Hengelo: the Centre for Young Mothers. This centre offers assistance to mothers and pregnant women between the ages of 14 and 25. These women experience problems regarding their housing, education, finding jobs, social environment, health and finances. Also they often live in social isolation and do not make use of the regular services.
- The Hague: assistance for homeless youngsters and teen mothers.

Assessment:

Municipalities play a crucial and ever growing role in the implementation and development of policies to combat poverty and exclusion and thus also to combat child poverty. They can and do alleviate child poverty by extra measures for children in low-income households and precarious situations. But they do not influence the basic income problem of these households. The level of child wellbeing in the Netherlands, being the highest in OECD countries according to the *Innocenti Report Card 7*, is due a great deal to municipal initiatives for integrating policies in different fields and for steering, stimulating and supporting the voluntary sector in this.

Recommendation:

We recommend to further stimulate the integration of local social policy, i.e. the activities of municipal social services and municipal services for care and wellbeing. This means the consequent development of the WMO, but combined with measures and tasks devolved from the Ministry of Social Affairs.

Furthermore we would recommend central Government to listen carefully to the suggestions and complaints of municipalities as to the implementation problems of national measures, due to complex regulations and/or lack of means both for the good functioning of municipal services and for a decent living for individual citizens.

3. Monitoring the implementation and impact of policies to prevent and alleviate poverty and social exclusion among children and to promote the wellbeing of children

For the monitoring of combating poverty and promoting social inclusion in general, the NAP inclusion declares that 'the monitoring of progress in the presented policy is ensured through the formulation of objectives and indicators. Important measures in the field of combating poverty and promoting participation, such as the WWB, are evaluated. The effects on vulnerable groups are included in such evaluations. The fact that some of these policy domains are decentralised means that the accounting for local policy takes place mainly towards the municipal council. This asks for a new role of central Government. In stead of asking municipalities to provide data, Government facilitates public access of local councillors and other interested parties to steering data. An example of this is the *Kernkaart WWB* (core map WWB). Moreover, Government invests in spreading good examples, e.g. in the guidelines on Municipal Poverty Policy (2006) and via www.armoedebelid.nl.' (SZW. 2006, p. 34)

Since each NAP inclusion describes the progress made on each specific objective (according to the defined indicators), and since there are specific objectives touching youth in particular (see section 2), this can indeed be considered to be a policy monitor and even (limited) policy evaluation report concerning children and youth. But it is limited to the specific targeted objectives within the NAP inclusion. The Dutch answer to the questionnaire on existing tools to monitor child poverty and social exclusion at national level (SZW, 2007) gives the following indicators for the specific youth objectives within the NAP inclusion.

Intervention in problem families

<i>Target objective</i>	<i>Indicator</i>
Improving the cooperation between support agencies	The number of families at risk that are reached

Participation of children and young people

<i>Target objective</i>	<i>Indicator</i>
Children and young people from families with fewer opportunities will be given the possibility to engage in leisure activities (such as sport) in a way that contributes to their personal development	The backlog in the participation by ethnic youths in sport has been eliminated by 2010

Reducing learning arrears and the number of early school-leavers

<i>Target objective</i>	<i>Indicator</i>
Reduction of language arrears of 'weighted students' (ethnic and native Dutch students) compared with 'non-weighted students' by 5 % in 2008 (1)	The reference figures are the scores on language tests in the PRIMA cohort survey 2006 Reduction of percentage of students in secondary education at or below reading level PISA-1 to 10 % (currently 11 %)
Reduction in number of students leaving school early by 50 % between 2000 and 2010	Percentage of 18-24 year olds that are not in education and have no higher secondary education diploma (EU definition)

Tackling youth unemployment

<i>Target objective</i>	<i>Indicator</i>
Reduction of youth unemployment	Percentage of unemployed youth (aged 15-22)
Creation of 40 000 extra jobs suitable for young people by 2007	Number of 'youth jobs'

Income support for minimum-income households with children

<i>Target objective</i>	<i>Indicator</i>
Balanced income development with attention for the position of minimum-income families with children	Purchasing power of minimum-income families with children compared with other groups

Besides this monitor, there is no official national system in the Netherlands for monitoring the implementation and impact of policies for combating poverty and social exclusion among specific groups. Dutch Government in general chose some years ago to leave behind policies for specific target groups. This does not mean however that policies, targeted at specific vulnerable groups such as children, were not developed. Section 2 of this report is illustrative of that. Both at national, regional and local levels, specific policies are in place in the field of poverty and social exclusion of children. Moreover, the recent appointment of a Minister for Youth and Families can be seen as a sign for a return towards more targeted policies. The support of national Government for the creation of a National Youth Institute (Nationaal Jeugd Instituut) is another such sign. But for today, the conclusion of the Netherlands chapter in Petra Hoelscher's report of 2004 is still timely: 'In difference to Germany and France the Netherlands doesn't have an explicit child or family policy although the provision of child and family services is comprehensive and highly specialised. The lack of a specific child and youth policy might explain, however, that child poverty is not a public issue yet and that consequently there is no coherent strategy of preventing and reducing child poverty and its outcomes.' (Hoelscher, 2004, p. 102-103)

Although a specific monitoring system on youth poverty and wellbeing (policies) does not exist, the general monitoring instruments pay regularly attention to specific vulnerable groups such as children. Most of these are not monitoring the policies and their impacts, but the state of affairs as to poverty, exclusion, wellbeing of children and youth.

In the first place this is the case with the biannual *Armoedemonitor* of the Social and Cultural planning Office, in collaboration with the CBS, although the 2005 monitor does include a separate chapter on ethnic minority groups and the elderly, but not on youth (Vrooman, 2005). The report has a section (one page) on children living in families with low income. The same goes for the *Armoedemonitor 2003*.

Specific policies, such as *Operatie Jong* (Operation Young) (Dam, s.d.), are evaluated at the end of their existence. But this remains then an ad hoc activity. Also more general new measures are systematically evaluated, but all recent measures in the field of social policy are concentrated on activation and access to the labour market. Evaluations of measures such as the WWB do not pay any specific attention to youth, since the minimum income scheme on which these measures are based, are for people beyond the age of 18.

Most other public youth monitors are done (or commissioned) by regional and local governments. A number of these are not comprehensive, but for specific policy domains, such as safety (province of Gelderland) or health (city of Rotterdam). The province of Zeeland developed a youth monitor as a dynamic database, in collaboration with the most important public and private partners in youth policy. Another example is the youth monitor of the city of Apeldoorn (150 000 inhabitants), which is in fact a study among youth about their perceptions in different existential fields (Last, 2003).

These monitors can be considered as bottom up public initiatives. The most comprehensive national child monitor however is a private initiative, called *Kinderen in Tel* (Steketee, 2007). It is sponsored by several funds, steered by interest and lobby organisations and constructed by an independent research institute (Verwey-Jonker Institute) on the basis of the American model 'Kids count'. This monitor gives a mapping of child wellbeing in all Dutch municipalities on a restricted number of indicators, covering domains of wellbeing derived from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child:

- health;
- youth delinquency and safety;
- youth unemployment;
- children growing up outside families;
- children in deprived neighbourhoods;
- children in poverty;
- child abuse;
- education;
- public playgrounds;
- teenage mothers;
- leisure time;
- youth participation.

Kinderen in Tel does not monitor or evaluate youth policies, it only maps the actual situation of youth in each municipality on the basis of statistical data, but it is meant — and actively used — as a basis for public and policy debate among (local) partners. In that sense it gives an objective picture of child wellbeing, but it is also a most productive instrument for (participatory) policy-making.

All together, one could say that a number of instruments for monitoring and improving child wellbeing are present in the Netherlands:

- information on the (lack of) progress as to the child and youth targeted measures included in the NAP inclusion;
- public access to relevant data for all local and national interested parties (more in particular for local government);
- information about examples of good local social inclusion policies;
- ad hoc evaluations of new policy measures and regulations;
- evaluations of specific actions;
- indicators based information about child wellbeing in each Dutch municipality.

Many stakeholders are involved in different ways and on different levels in the construction, implementation and use of these instruments. Besides that, there are several (fragmented) ways for stakeholders — including children and youth — to participate in evaluation, debate and construction of youth policies on all governance levels. But there is absolutely no comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system — neither ex ante nor ex post — for policies in the field of combating poverty and promoting wellbeing among children and youth.

Currently, a National Youth Monitor is under construction and should be operational in the course of 2007. It is not clear so far to what extent this monitor will go beyond the collection of relevant data on youth wellbeing, in order to become an instrument for monitoring and evaluation — ex ante and/or ex post — of policy developments, or even a (participatory) monitoring and evaluation system. The answers from the Dutch Government to the questionnaire on existing tools to monitor child poverty and social exclusion at national level report clearly on the objectives and indicators of specific policies for combating poverty and social exclusion among youth but as to the monitoring and evaluation system, it only mentions that 'The Netherlands Youth Institute (www.nji.nl) is responsible for collecting relevant

data on youth and can be contacted for further information on available data sources (such as the Dutch Youth Monitor, which is currently in development at Statistics Netherlands, www.cbs.nl).

Recommendation

In view of the growing problem of relative child poverty in the Netherlands, we would strongly recommend to develop a national system for ex ante and ex post monitoring and evaluation of the development, implementation and impacts of policies for combating child poverty and exclusion. This National Youth Monitor under development could be a major instrument of such a system. But it is of course crucial that poverty and social exclusion of children becomes a political issue and one specific and distinctive policy domain.

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