

Monitoring the Participation of Older People in the Netherlands

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Like many countries in the world, my home country The Netherlands are facing an ageing population. The number of persons of 65 years and older will increase to about one quarter of the population in 2030 in the Netherlands. The demographic changes will lead to social changes as well. Governments are challenged to think how to handle these demographic and social changes.

It is important for governments to be well-informed on the social consequences of the demographic changes, so they can take evidence-based decisions. To show how this can be done I will present an example from the Netherlands where an Elderly Policy Monitor has started that informs the government on the social changes, in particular the social participation of older persons.

The Dutch Elderly Policy Monitor is in line with the UN Plan of Action on Ageing, formulated in Madrid in 2002. The UN wanted to monitor the progress of the actions. The IFA conference committee proposed to assess the progress in implementing after 5 years. I am glad to inform you on the progress which has been made in the Netherlands.

In 2005 the Dutch government published a plan of action on ageing, entitled “Memorandum 64” after the song “When I am sixty four” by Paul McCartney, who happens to be 66 years now. In this memorandum, the Dutch government not only described the main social developments with regard to the ageing population, but also set 14 targets for 7 basic values concerning active social participation (paid and unpaid work), adequate income, adequate housing, mobility, staying healthy, caring for vulnerable elderly, and dying with dignity

The Dutch government asked the Netherlands Institute for Social Research to empirically test how far the targets have been met in 2007. Our research institute not only looked at short term targets, but also determined if they were in line with longer term trends. And we analyzed not only if the targets had been met for the main group, but for specific groups too like ethnic minorities, people with chronic illness and disabilities.

We have studied fourteen target figures. 10 of them we could empirically evaluate: 7 were met and 3 not (or almost). Further, the results show that not all the target figures have been for all groups of older persons, and that long term trends confirm these results.

To illustrate the monitor I have selected 5 targets: employment, voluntary work, income, housing, and health.

Employment

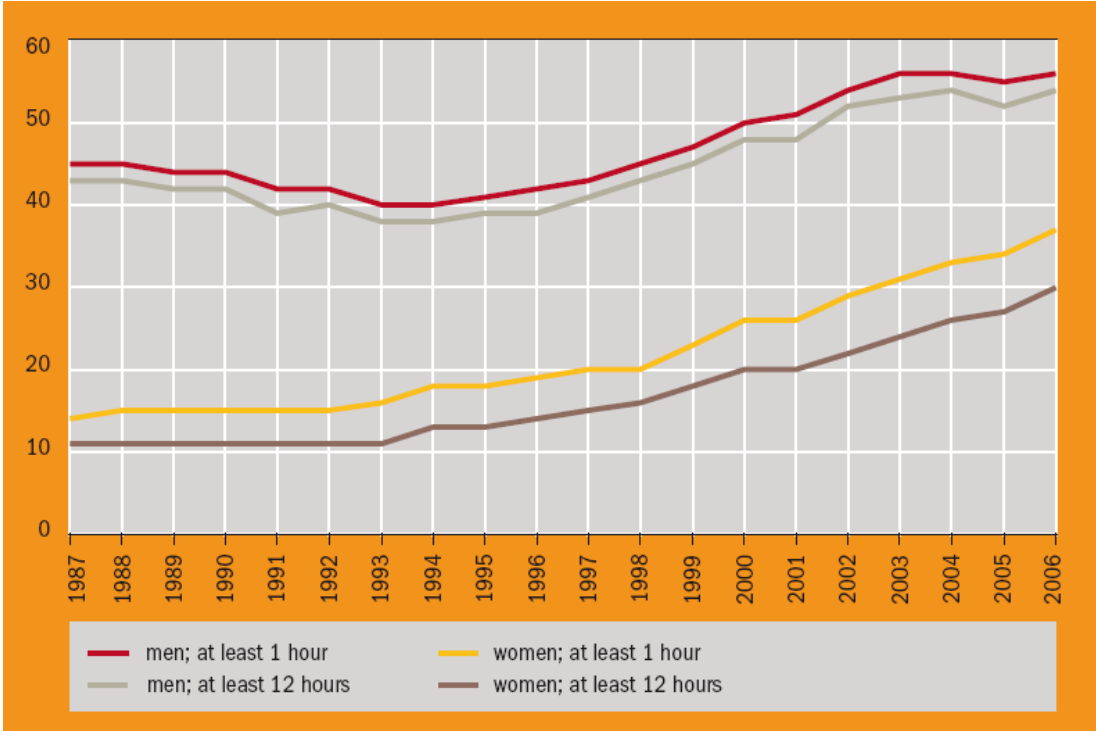
The target is an employment rate of 50% among people aged 55-64 by 2010. This will be achieved if the increase in the rate continues at its present pace. In 2003, 43.3 % of 55-64 year-olds were working for a least one hour per week; this had risen by more than three percentage points in 2006, to 46.7% (Table 1).

Table 1

	2003	2004	2005	2006
paid work for at least one hour per week	43,3	44,7	44,8	46,7
paid work for at least 12 hours per week	38,6	39,8	39,7	41,8

Analyses over a longer period show that the activity rates of men and women in this age group have developed differently (Figure 1). The turnaround in the labour market participation rate of working men aged 55-64 years began to change in around 1993/94, when the Dutch economy began to climb out of the economic decline. The activity rate of older women has by contrast shown a rising trend since the middle of the 1980s, though the starting level was very low.

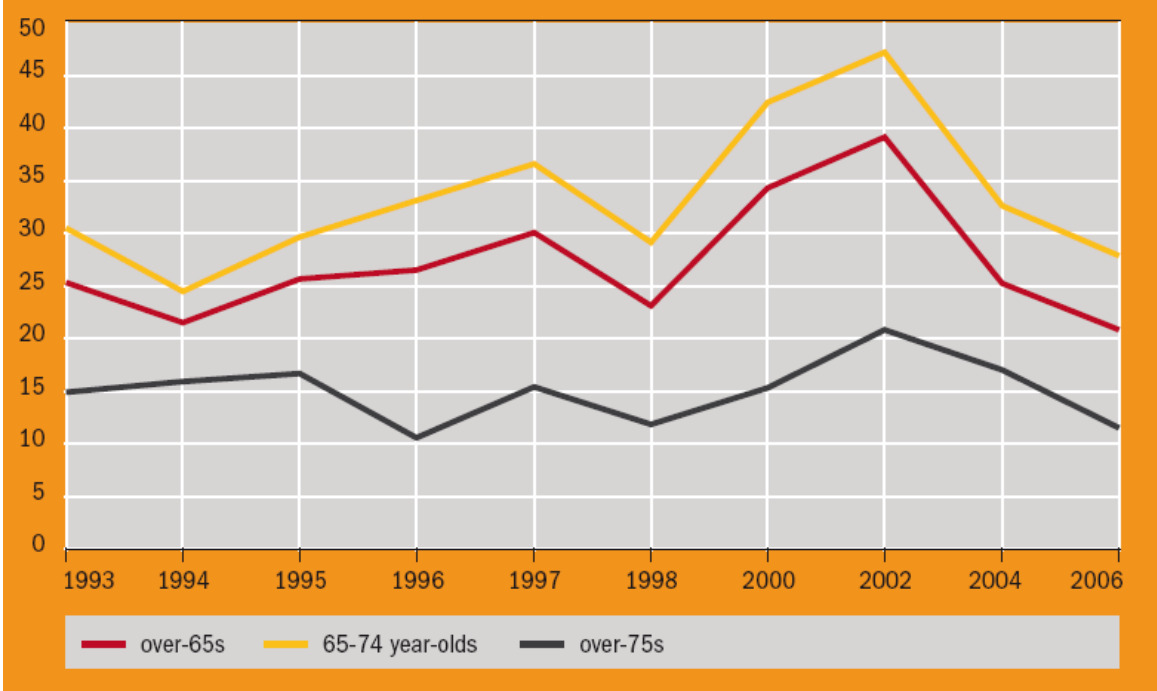
Figure 1



Voluntary work

The target is to maintain a constant share of volunteers among the over-65s. This has not been achieved in recent years. An analysis of long-term trends shows that, following an initial increase, the proportion of volunteers began to fall after 2002 (Figure 2).

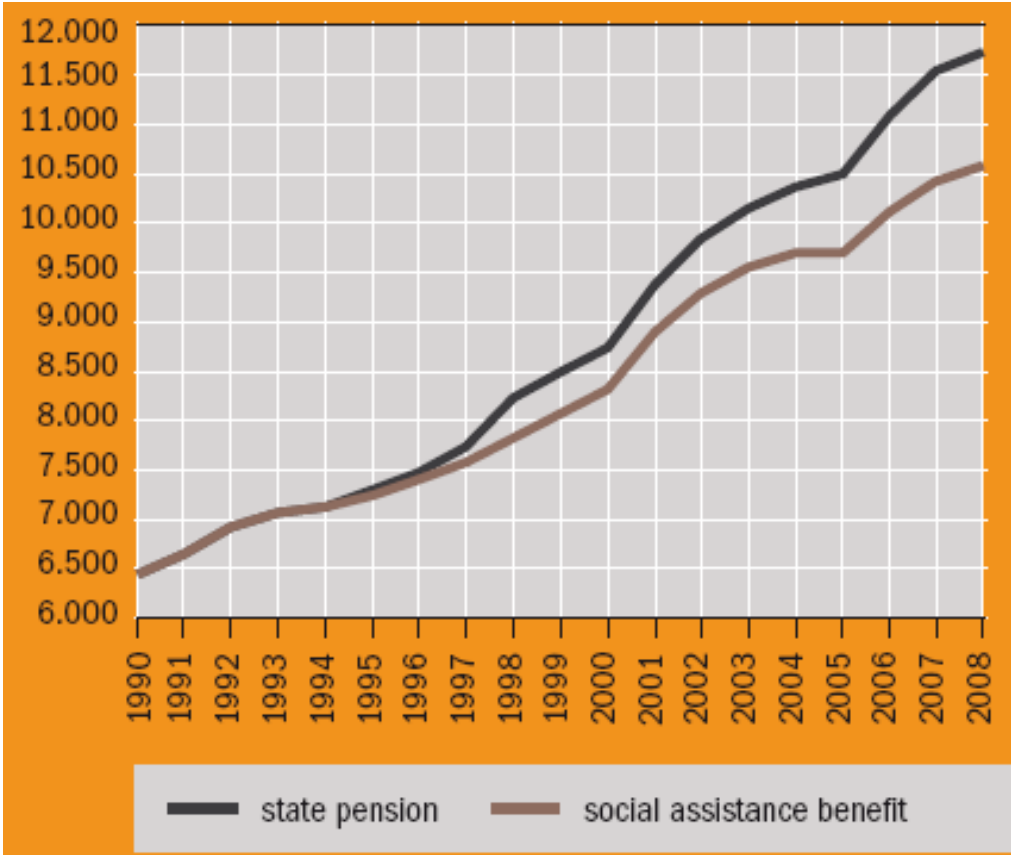
Figure 2



Income

The policy objective is that older people must have a sufficient income to enable them to live independently. This target is translated into a target for improving the purchasing power of older people living alone and receiving only state retirement pension. The policy target is to maintain the purchasing power improvement for single elderly people with only state pension relative to single social assistance benefit claimants under 65 years. This ratio was 106%. Figure 3 shows that this ratio has increased to 111% in 2008. The target has been achieved.

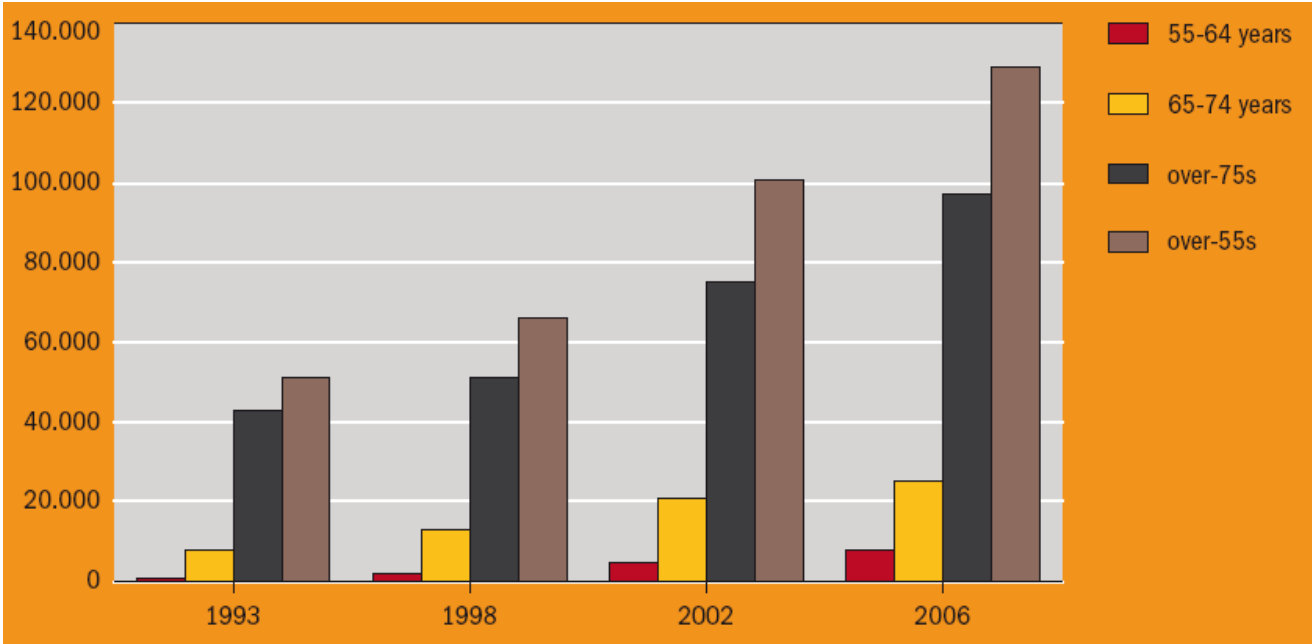
Figure 3



Housing

Older people must have access to adequate housing, which is tailored to their individual needs and supported by customised care provision. This policy objective is operationalised in targets for sufficient homes with local on-call care facilities. The number of homes for the elderly with on-call care facilities (‘supported living’) rose from around 101,000 to approximately 129,000 between 2002 and 2006 (Figure 4). This increase of more than 7,000 homes per year was however not sufficient to achieve the target (14,000 per year).

Figure 4



Health

The policy objective of encouraging older people to remain fit and healthy for as long as possible is translated into a target for the proportion of people aged over 65 who undertake sufficient exercise and sport. The norm has been set at half an hour of moderately intensive physical activity on at least five days per week. The target of 45% of people aged over 65 attaining this norm was achieved in 2004, and the target of 50% by 2010 was achieved as early as 2005 (Table 2). It is only in the group of over-65s who assess their health as poor that a minority (21%) achieve the exercise norm.

Table 2

year	percentage
2000	42
2001	39
2002	42
2003	43
2004	45
2005	52

Conclusion

The main conclusion that can be drawn from our study is that it is possible to track the achievements of the Dutch Plan of Action on Ageing using an empirical monitor. Using target figures is clear and concrete (shows successes and failures)

Though a monitor can only be realized, provided a number of conditions are met. The targets need to be empirically based on periodic research. Long-term analyses and subgroup analyses are essential for confirmation.

A problem is that an integral policy on the elderly is lacking in the Netherlands. The translation of policies by different ministries into targets has resulted in a fragmented picture of divergent and dissimilar indicators. Coming monitors, by contrast, should devote attention to the interrelationship of policy indicators from one perspective of the older citizen and thus highlight new developments and problem areas in the participation and well-being of the elderly.

In conclusion, a start of monitoring the older persons in the Netherlands has been made, but the current set of indicators does not provide an integral vision of the quality of life and participation of older persons. Additional and alternative indicators are needed to monitor the main developments with respect to the Madrid 2002 topics.

Reference

Cretien van Campen (Ed.) Values on a Grey Scale: Elderly Policy Monitor 2008. (The Hague: SCP, 2008).

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