



REPORT OF THE  
STATE COMMISSION  
DEMOGRAPHIC  
DEVELOPMENTS  
2050

MODERATE  
GROWTH

State Commission  
Demographic  
Developments 2050

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**The State Commission Demographic Developments 2050 was set up as a temporary advisory body on 1 August 2022, in line with Article 6(1) and (3) of the Advisory Bodies Framework Act. Composition of the state commission:**

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# OUTLINE OF THE REPORT

## MODERATE GROWTH - REPORT OF THE STATE COMMISSION DEMOGRAPHIC DEVELOPMENTS 2050

- The introduction sets out the mandate given by the government and the House of Representatives to the State Commission: to advise on demographic developments, especially in terms of population ageing and migration through at least 2050, in the context of the pursuit of general welfare.

### PART I: DEMOGRAPHIC SCENARIOS AND FACTORS

- Chapter 1 discusses demographic developments in a historical perspective, then describes the demographic future of the Netherlands: a more crowded (densely populated), more diverse (migration background) and double-ageing country (more people aged 65 and over and, within that group, more people aged 80 and over).
- Chapter 2 discusses population forecasts over the past decades. Because of forecasted volatility in childbearing rates and migration the use of various scenarios have been considered. Such demographic scenarios are not predictions, but outline possible developments in terms of migration and population ageing.
- Chapter 3 analyses the drivers of demographic changes: population ageing (due to changes in life expectancy and childbearing rates) and net migration (balance of emigration and immigration, including all forms of migration like labour, asylum, family and student migration. Current population forecasts for 2050 are based on the assumption that current policies will remain in place. The future scale of migration is difficult to predict, partly because of geopolitical uncertainties. That is why migration scenarios have been explored: The chapter highlights that the Netherlands now has 18 million inhabitants; over the coming 30 years, under scenarios of low

immigration and low childbearing rates, this number would be 16 to 18 million in 2050; in scenarios with high growth, it would be 21 to 23 million.

## PART II: THE IMPACT OF DEMOGRAPHIC DEVELOPMENTS ON SPACE, ECONOMY AND PUBLIC SERVICES

- Chapter 4 describes the diverse impact of economic and social activities and demographic developments on space and place. For example, the increase in single-person households affects housing needs. At the same time, demographic changes are complex and have an uneven geographical impact: both population decline and growth occur simultaneously in the Netherlands.
- Chapter 5 identifies two possible problems for the Dutch economy in an ageing society: persistent labour market shortages and stagnating productivity. As a result, the per-capita income and the availability of public services are under pressure. In general, migration is not a solution to the challenges posed by population ageing.
- Chapter 6 deals with public services: social security, education and healthcare. It addresses the problem of growing staff shortages and greater inequalities in health and educational attainment. The need for social security is changing and the affordability of healthcare and social security are under pressure.

## PART III: SOCIAL COHESION AND ROBUST CHOICES

- Chapter 7 describes the interaction between demography and social cohesion. Demographic developments can increase inequality and thus reduce social cohesion. On the one hand, if the Dutch population remains at its current level or decreases as we approach 2050, population ageing would continue, and we can expect labour market shortages and inhibited economic growth. On the other hand, high population growth would increase pressure on space and facilities and does not provide a structural solution to ageing. Moderate growth to 19-20 million inhabitants towards 2050 offers better outcomes in terms of general welfare. This requires moderation of migration.
- Chapter 8 provides robust policy perspectives to achieve the desired moderate growth and strengthen societal resilience in order to cope with demographic changes: shaping spatial planning, establishing a high quality economy and keeping public services accessible. A migration range is needed as it provides guidance. The government and parliament must and can make choices in this respect.

# INTRODUCTION:

## MANDATE TO THE STATE COMMISSION

In the context of the elections to the House of Representatives on 22 November 2023, the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP) examined the state of trust in politics. What do Dutch people expect from a new government? On what should the government spend more or less money? The results of the ‘Burgerperspectieven 2023 Extra verkiezingsbericht’ (Citizens’ Perspectives 2023 Extra Election Report), published in October 2023, show that trust in politics remains low. People want the new government to address current societal problems, including income, immigration, housing, and accessibility of healthcare and education. The results also showed that the Dutch population think politicians should be more decisive and listen better to the wishes of citizens. People have high expectations of a new government, but, at the same time, few hope that anything will actually change.

The present report of the State Commission Demographic Developments 2050 was published in 2024, shortly after the 2023 elections to the House of Representatives. The report is primarily intended for the government and parliament, but also to help citizens and organisations that are and feel involved in shaping the Netherlands towards 2050.

Maintaining general welfare and social cohesion in particular cannot be taken for granted on the way to 2050. There is already scarcity and inequality. The origin of the state commission is in September 2018, when the House of Representatives passed the Dijkhoff/Buma motion, with a large majority of 127 votes. This motion read as follows: “Considering that recent forecasts show that the population could grow to 18, 19 or 20 million by the middle of this century; considering that the composition of the population is also changing due to population ageing, differences between growth and shrinkage within the Netherlands and immigration; considering that these demographic developments have important consequences in many policy areas, such as housing, spatial planning, infrastructure, energy supply, social security, healthcare, education and integration, the government calls for mapping these developments in different scenarios and presenting policy options for those different scenarios.”

This motion thus gave the government a twofold mandate. Part of the initial mandate was realised in the 2021 report titled ‘Bevolking 2050 in beeld’ (A picture of the population by 2050) from the Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute (NIDI) and Statistics Netherlands (CBS), in collaboration with ministries. But the questions about the range of those scenarios and about the impact of demographic trends on areas such as spatial planning, infrastructure and social security had not been explored at the time. Nor did that report address the possibly resulting policy perspectives.

Three years after the original Dijkhoff/Buma motion, the House of Representatives asked for a follow-up. The motion of member of parliament Den Haan stated, among other things, “that the demographic scenario study resulting from the Dijkhoff/Buma motion has not yet received the necessary follow-up and does require urgency.” In this new motion, the government was again asked to do two things, namely: to work with the planning agencies to develop a methodology to

provide periodic insight into demographic developments and to explore whether and how a state commission on «population growth and ageing» could make recommendations for policy options. The first part of the motion was implemented by creating a policy information and monitoring structure.<sup>1</sup>

Regarding the second part of the motion, the urgency enshrined in this motion led to a letter to the House of Representatives in July 2022 in which the government announced the establishment of a state commission: “The mandate of the State Commission Demographic Developments 2050 is to advise on scenarios, policy options and policy perspectives of the government in relation to the societal consequences of demographic developments, in particular of population ageing and migration, until at least 2050 against the background of the pursuit of general welfare.”

Half a century after the last state commission on demographic issues, the Muntendam commission<sup>2</sup>, this new state commission started its work in autumn 2022 and concluded this report by the end of 2023. The state commission was well aware of the context in which it had to fulfil its broad mandate. While the population is changing due to migration and ageing, the country faces a number of transitions in terms of space and climate, economy and labour market, and public services.

At the same time, society is facing other changes like the transition to an increasingly digital world due to all kinds of technological developments, with artificial intelligence (AI) certainly in the spotlight at the moment. All this takes place in a context of current geopolitical tensions and changes, right on the European borders and further afield.

Major transitions challenge policy and the government. There is also a lack of long-term thinking in many areas. At the same time, in reality, many policies are squeezed into

four-year cycles; the term of the coalition agreement of the incumbent government is limited, but it usually takes much longer to achieve societal changes. The big tasks at hand and finding support for them call for a longer and different approach. Demography can help with this, as demographic developments, its consequences for general welfare and opportunities to promote these, naturally force us to look further into the future.

The Council of State gave an update in its 2022 annual report: “Reconsider what the government is capable of. Financial resources are limited. Manpower is also an issue, given the labour market shortages across the public sector. When the government promises a lot, but cannot deliver in practice, it damages people’s trust. We quite often quote here the words of Willem Drees senior: ‘Not everything is possible, and certainly not at the same time.’ That realisation should resonate more often.”<sup>3</sup>

In this context the state commission tried to fulfil its mandate. The state commission has to relate to demographic changes, mainly due to population ageing and migration. That change is taking place, as mentioned, at a time of major environmental, social and economic transitions that reveal vulnerabilities and limitations. This is also contained in the broad mandate of this state commission and in the time horizon of 2050. It is about the next 25 years; perhaps far away, yet also very close.

The considerations that follow are amongst others based on the population forecasts by Statistics Netherlands (CBS). More specifically, the forecast of 2022 was used. After completion of the work on this report, a new forecast released in mid-December 2023, which, however, did not differ much in scope from the earlier estimate. In 2022, CBS assumed that the population would grow to 19.8 million people by 2050 while the forecast of 2023 is 19.7 million people. In contrast, the 2014 and 2018 forecasts still expected a population of respectively 18 and 18.5 million by 2050.

Not only these changes in the population forecast over the years but also some assumptions in those forecasts, which will be discussed below, were an invitation for the state commission to consider population ageing and migration scenarios. Exploring diverse scenarios of population growth - from slight shrinkage to rapid growth - can provide a better understanding of the possible effects of demographic developments on various domains. The use of scenarios also provides guidance in answering the question as to which of these scenarios can offer the better outcomes.

The state commission's report has three parts. Part I discusses meaning and content of demographic scenarios in general and those for the Netherlands in particular. This part concludes with the main demographic trends for the next 25 years: population ageing and migration. Part II examines the potential impact of these trends on three domains: space (including housing), economy (including labour market) and public services (social security, education, healthcare). Part III focuses on the effects of these trends in these domains on social cohesion in the country; as, demographic factors have varying consequences for groups of inhabitants of the Netherlands. The report ends with policy perspectives for the government and parliament, starting from moderate population growth towards 2050 as a desired orientation, in order to maintain general welfare in the long term. In doing so, the state commission aims to provide direction for discussions and choices for the future of the Netherlands.

It is important to think ahead and graft political choices onto the major transitions the country is going through as it becomes busier, with a more diverse and ageing population. This is in line with a long Dutch tradition of building through cooperation.

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| <p>1 See letter dated 14 November 2022 from the Minister of Social Affairs and Employment to the House of Representatives.</p> <p>2 This was the commission headed by Piet Muntendam, which began its work in March</p> | <p>1972 and published the report titled 'Bevolking en Welzijn van Nederland' (Population and Prosperity in the Netherlands) in December 1976.</p> <p>3 Council of State (2022a)</p> |
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# CHAPTER 8

## CHOICES TOWARDS 2050

The State Commission was asked to examine and weigh the effects of demographic scenarios towards 2050, to then outline policy perspectives for the government and Parliament. With the aim to preserve, and, where possible, increase general welfare for the Netherlands.

The urgency expressed in the House of Representatives' motions on the establishment of a state commission is also felt by citizens. The previous chapter outlined the *multiple divisions* in society that, as a result of structural demographic developments, can lead to increasing inequality and a decline in social cohesion. Surveys among the Dutch population reflect concerns about the consequences of a growing population. These concerns also emerged in the state commission's working visits and discussions with citizens and experts. Younger generations are consciously thinking about what a change in the size and composition of the population means for their future, as shown by the conversations with young people organised by the state commission.

The previous chapter concluded that moderate population growth, resulting in the population of the Netherlands in 2050 being 19 to 20 million, offers the strongest prospect of maintaining general welfare. Neither zero population growth (or population decline), nor higher levels of growth would address

**the consequences of an ageing population for public services or space allocation: zero growth slows the economy; high growth can sharpen divisions in society.**

Moderate growth offers prospects for planned optimization of space, economic growth and maintaining public services while sustaining the social fabric, thus meeting the goals of general welfare and social cohesion.

Such a perspective does not arise automatically and requires political choices by government and parliament and action by the government. However, this is not just about the government and policy makers; citizens, businesses and civil society organisations also have a role to play in this. These choices are urgent in many domains: The Netherlands faces structural net immigration and its population is already ageing, which will become even more pronounced in the coming years and will result in a older population also in the future. Between now and 2050, we must be proactive about population developments and leverage policies for moderate growth.

Section 8.2 reviews policy perspectives and options for coping with population ageing and migration: two demographic developments highlighted in this report. Section 8.3 discusses policy perspectives relating to space, the economy and public services. Before that, section 8.1 presents principles for a good understanding of the possibilities and limitations of policy perspectives.

### 8.1 REFLECTION AND STARTING POINTS

Part I of this report has shown that population forecasts have been regularly adjusted over time. This gives an impression of the uncertainty that characterises these developments. At the same time, it is clear that a number of population trends for the next 25 years may be considered to be fairly certain: ‘double aging’ of the population, with the population becoming more diverse and the Netherlands becoming more crowded. Population ageing is already a reality and the current growth in the population is, on balance, due to migration. Part II sets out that these demographic change is complex and intertwined with social, temporal and geographical factors.

The state commission speaks of “policy perspectives and options based on demographic developments” rather than “steering of” or “controlling” demography. There are limits to the controllability and manipulability of population size and composition for the next 25 years. That in no way means that action would not be possible or necessary. For instance, Part II shows that there is urgency now and in the coming decades in the domains of space, the economy and public services. It is the responsibility of the legislature, of the government to take action.

In some scenarios, targeted action is needed because the consequences are too adverse, as in the population decline and high growth scenarios. Policies should focus on promoting the moderate population growth scenario. In addition, there are policy options that are useful in all demographic scenarios. The state commission seeks robust policy perspectives that do not require substantial adjustments to public policies and the design of collective facilities every time the population forecasts are updated.

Such policy perspectives involve three general principles. 1) The unpredictability of demographic developments requires strengthening the *resilience* of citizens and governments to respond to change. 2) Where demographic developments put pressure on social cohesion and increase inequality, attention to *connection* is of utmost importance. 3) Finally, to develop robust policies, the Netherlands must be actively *shaped* based on moderate growth as an orientation, as a desired choice.

The mandate to the state commission focuses on the government, parliament and civil service. However, the European level is also relevant. The importance of the EU is evident in many areas, including the economy and migration. The European Commission recognises the importance of demography; it adopted a communication in late 2023 with a set of policy tools for member states on how to deal with demographic changes and their consequences.<sup>1</sup> The Netherlands is one of the few countries within the EU with sustained population growth, compared to an increasing number of countries facing population decline now or in the near future. The Dutch government should engage actively in this European debate. and the European Commission should take note of our country’s relative exceptionality.

Demographic changes also affect municipal, provincial and water authorities. These subnational authorities are faced with the consequences of future changes in space, the economy and public services. They are also experiencing the tension that exists between the increased desire for control at the national level, for example in the spatial and economic domain, and the desire to organise local tailor made solutions and proximity of responsible policy makers. There is also tension between collective services that have traditionally been organised

separately (such as large parts of the housing, education and healthcare sector and the social security system) and the need for regional coordination across separately organised services, especially after the decentralisation of the social domain that was initiated a few years ago. Municipal, provincial and water authorities and partnerships are also discussing how to shape the Netherlands in the coming decades. Choices made by national politics on actions based on demographic trends should be made in consultation with them.

None of the policy perspectives can be implemented without citizens, businesses and civil society organisations: it is also up to social partners, the market and organisations in the healthcare, education and housing sector and climate organisations. Chapter 7 contains a reflection of citizens' perspectives based on representative research, supplemented by experiences and observations by the state commission during working visits and interviews. A number of organisations - the Social and Economic Council (SER) at the forefront - are orienting themselves to the medium-term development of the Netherlands. With its report, the state commission aims to contribute to a social dialogue on demography and the consequences of demographic developments. The state commission is aware that this report is only a first step to this end.

The fact that the EU, subnational authorities and society are also part of the debate to be held does not take away from the fact that the policy perspectives will rely heavily on the government, parliament and civil service. There is a tension between declining trust of citizens in institutions (including politics and government) and an increasing reliance on political direction and vision. This tension is increasing along with the pressure that has been exerted on the (executive) capacity of the government for years. Recently, this tension has been identified by the Council of State, the Netherlands Court of Audit, the National Ombudsman, the WRR, the Council for Public Administration (ROB) and the SCP, among others. Complexity of problems, complexity of laws and regulations and complexity in (IT) implementation accumulate. For the government, parliament and the civil service, to pursue a course of moderate population growth, a good knowledge infrastructure in the field of demography is a prerequisite. A survey by the state commission among ministries shows much room for improvement when it comes to knowledge, use and mutual consistency of demographic and other data and assumptions. The House of Representatives previously requested a proper monitoring and knowledge system, partly for its monitoring task. In section 8.3, the state commission proposes an addition to this earlier request.<sup>2</sup>

Various policy perspectives for government and parliament are mentioned in section 8.2 on demographic developments and in section

8.3 on the consequences of demographic developments. For the instrumental and policy development of these topics, many studies and policy reports are already available from the permanent advisory councils, ad hoc commissions, planning agencies and ministries. This abundant material means that there is no lack of available policy instruments, as long as choices are made. There are many advisory bodies and advisory commissions in our country, but decision-making in our democracy takes place in a complex situation where political majorities must be found every time. The state commission has limited itself to presenting policy perspectives that are directly related to demographic trends and their consequences. Policy options that are not directly related to this - even though they may be of value in terms of dealing with certain consequences of demographic developments - are beyond the scope of this report.

In presenting the policy perspectives, the state commission also sets a priority. To put it - as mentioned earlier in this report - as statesman W. Drees: “Not everything is possible, and certainly not at the same time.” Many policy options have trade-offs, some with unintended or undesirable consequences for other outcomes or groups. Choosing one option could reinforce or undermine another and prioritising one option may mean postponement of another option. When it comes to this type of consequences, a further assessment of the options for action based on demographic developments is therefore important. In its deliberations on this, the state commission has as much as possible included the general welfare perspective.

## 8.2 POLICY PERSPECTIVES I: RESPONSE TO DEMOGRAPHIC DEVELOPMENTS

The Dutch population is currently shrinking because fewer children are being born than the number of people dying; it is only through international migration that there is a net population growth. This chapter discusses the different policy perspectives based on these demographic developments. This will show that population ageing (including a growing share of “oldest old”) is mainly a given, with policy perspectives having limited impact. The policy perspectives for different forms of migration, while complex, can have more substantial effects.

## POPULATION AGEING

As outlined earlier in this report, population ageing results from decreasing childbearing relative to previous generations and increasing lifespan, in addition to migration. It involves, in other words, caring for the elderly as well as caring for children. This caring takes place in family and household relationships that have, on average, become smaller over time. They have more often acquired different and distinct types of compositions and their composition also changes over time.

### *Life expectancy*

A long and healthy life is a great good and should also be considered as one of the benefits of general welfare. Challenges for the coming decades are to reduce inequality in healthy life expectancy, prevent impoverishment of the healthcare system and ensure accessibility to healthcare to allow people to age in a healthy way. The foundation for healthy life expectancy is already laid in childhood. Investments in young people and a healthy start to life have major effects on health and life expectancy later in life. International research shows that investments in early life aimed at reducing socio-economic disparities are effective in preventing later health disparities. In recent decades, the Netherlands and most European countries have become accustomed to an ever-increasing life expectancy. However, recent developments in the US show that life expectancy can indeed decline when there are large socio-economic disparities in childhood, limited access to healthcare and unhealthy lifestyles leading to chronic diseases.<sup>3</sup> These factors affect maternal and infant mortality and health at all ages, especially for socio-economically disadvantaged groups. Thus, further increasing life expectancy is not a given, not even in the Netherlands. Policies aimed at reducing socio-economic disparities from childhood, such as through equal access to quality childcare and education, are of great importance. The same goes for equal access to good healthcare throughout life.

The prevalence of multiple conditions and a rapidly growing population of people aged 80 and over requiring care is putting great pressure on healthcare and elderly care now and in the near future. Policies aimed at reducing morbidity will take a long time to succeed, as they mostly intervene on changing lifestyles and habits. Countering inequality promotes health in a society and thus provides a policy perspective. Policies in this area are multifaceted: increase the health knowledge level of the population to break acceptance of dietary, working and living habits. Obesity is a major factor that is still relatively limited in the Netherlands, but is already making its mark in the United States and the United Kingdom. It is also important to focus on investing in scientific research that can reduce the chronic (non-infectious) diseases

that affect older people more than average, such as dementia.

For this factor too, the societal importance of living longer healthy lives is undisputed, but as such towards 2050 it does not offer a solution for the controversial effects of demographic scenarios for the Netherlands.

The advancement of average lifespan and an ageing or aged society that is already virtually a reality in a number of developed countries, both in Europe and parts of Asia, has caused researchers to think differently about life stages. Much research is now based on four, rather than three, life stages. This different view creates a shift in the division between age groups, with instead of 65/67+ a tipping point at 75+ to the oldest age group, as described by researchers. A different way of thinking about healthy living offers opportunities for social participation and for employment.

Based on demographic trends and their consequences for social cohesion, the state commission identifies the reduction of the large and possibly widening differences in life expectancy, in healthy life years between different groups in society as a policy perspective. Reducing this can be achieved indirectly through general socio-economic policies aimed at participation and socio-economic security. In addition, social security schemes specifically linked to advancing age can be considered in order to reduce inequalities. For example, the state pension age linked to average life expectancy will be more disadvantageous for people in physically demanding occupations than for people in other occupational groups; they cannot be expected to work in the same (demanding) occupation until they reach state pension age.

Policy is also relevant to strengthen accessibility to healthcare for vulnerable groups and people in vulnerable neighbourhoods and regions. Although its effects are difficult to measure, prevention policy in a broad sense is particularly important. So it is not just about the medical side but also about combating loneliness, for example. After all, other domains, and in particular work and housing, can also contribute to living healthy/healthier lives and reduce the gap in life expectancy (“living is the new caring”, see section 8.3).

The question is then how additional policies can be realised, given the shortage of people and resources in healthcare, now and certainly on the road to 2050. Making substantive and financial choices in healthcare will be a prerequisite in that case. In that context, many studies point to forms of healthcare (medical procedures, medication) that are not demonstrably effective. In an ageing population, room can be found here that is needed to give (more) priority to closing the gap in health and life expectancy between groups. Personalized care and effective chains of care requires removing barriers to cooperation between and

costing of different care systems. Looking ahead to 2050, the importance of health promotion and prevention in the broadest sense is crucial. In addition, staff shortages (see also section 8.3) make it necessary for the healthcare sector to innovate. Innovation in the healthcare sector must have a place in healthcare systems and funding arrangements.

### *Childbearing*

Public policies aimed directly at increasing childbearing rates often have no, or only temporary, effect.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, increasing childbearing rates have no effect on the old-age dependency ratio for the first 20 to 30 years and actually increases the young dependency ratio (=number of dependent children) in the first instance; indirectly, also it inhibits participation in the labour force by men and women.

The government can indirectly potentially do a great deal to help people realise the number of children they would like to have; international research shows that two children is generally seen as the most desirable outcome, but that there is often a gap between this wish and its realisation.<sup>5</sup> The desire to have children is often adapted over the course of a lifetime, and the realisation of that wish is limited partly because of the advanced age at which one has one's first child. Research in other European countries shows that access to (good quality) childcare can have a slight effect on having the desired number of children. Policies to influence childbearing will therefore have to focus on facilities to combine childcare (day nursery and school) and work.

Unemployment and other work-related factors equally affect the realisation of a desire to have children. For instance, the number of children depends on the income level and having a temporary or permanent employment contract. Being able to find suitable housing for a family is also important. The significance of subjective economic uncertainty is often overestimated when it comes to the decision to be made about the desired number of children. Previous economic experiences (unemployment or a precarious economic position) play a role in that decision. The transition to parenthood is a long-term process, on which economic uncertainties have a long-term effect. However, the effects of government policies appear to be limited in this respect.

Whereas the income requirements young people set on parenthood have increased over time, the incomes of young adults have actually stagnated. This is the case in several countries. The precarious economic position of many young adults in rich countries have been a major contributor to delaying parenthood and the decline in childbearing in these countries.<sup>6</sup> Improving the income position of young people and reducing the cost of having and raising children are important measures

in that regard. This may include increased opportunities for parental leave, childcare and other measures that allow combining work and childcare, as well as available and affordable housing.<sup>7</sup>

While higher childbearing rates cannot solve bottlenecks such as labour market shortages in demographic scenarios over the next 25 years, it is possible to influence them and there are also arguments to remove such barriers. After all, when people do not or cannot have children or have fewer children than the desired number of children, this is a social issue. Socio-economic and income policies that support families are important, as are specific schemes for parents and children, from childcare and education to healthcare. There are two starting points in this respect: first, strengthening the quality and accessibility of childcare in combination with the first phase of primary education, and second, targeted income support for families with young children in the lowest income groups. Given the large staff shortages in the childcare and education sectors and given the limits to the state budget, further innovation in these sectors is also desirable.

## MIGRATION

Robust policy designs in the face of demographic trends mean that a socially supported, future-proof vision of migration is needed. A vision that is both broad and precise. A vision that allows for making long-term plans instead of being lived through crises. And a policy that recognises that where great uncertainties are at play in a context of great geopolitical turbulence around Europe and around EU enlargement, the Netherlands should actively work with other EU member states to shape future migration management in the EU framework. Support for migration policy is important from a resilience perspective. Polarisation of society over migration makes society vulnerable.

This section outlines indirect and direct policy options. These include policy perspectives on labour migration, study migration, family migration (family formation and family reunification) and asylum migration. As explained in Chapter 3, over the period from 1999 to 2020, family migration was the largest category (33%), followed by labour migration (25%), study migration (15%) and asylum migration (12%). Family migrants and asylum migrants stay in the Netherlands for a relatively long time: when looking at which immigrants are still in the Netherlands after ten years, 46% of them turn out to be family migrants and 23% asylum migrants.<sup>8</sup>

For all types of migrants, greater efforts are needed to foster participation and connection in society. Furthermore, policies are needed for the major social issues such as scarcity of affordable housing, which are

also relevant from the perspective of migration. These issues are addressed later in this chapter in the sections on space, the economy and public services.

By a broad and political vision of migration, the state commission refers to a coherent policy, as related policy areas are an important pull factor for migration. Future labour migration to the Netherlands, for example, is directly linked to urgent choices the Netherlands has to make about our desired future economic structure and the corresponding industrial, business, labour market and education policies. In fact, migration is mostly steered indirectly, but those choices regarding our economy and the consequences for labour migration need to be made more explicit.

By a precise vision, the commission means that the legislature needs to make choices on migration policy. Choices, because the desire to maintain general welfare necessitates a course of moderate growth of the population. Because a scenario of rapid, strong growth through migration leads to spatial problems, to unwanted scarcity and inequality, and to issues regarding the integrating capacity of the Netherlands. Moreover, replacement migration (as explained in Part I) cannot be a general solution to population ageing.

Moderate population growth at the present juncture means moderate migration and a supported design and implementation of that migration space. On the one hand, it is about labour migration, which is necessary to become and remain a highly productive, sustainable economy and meet the most difficult labour market shortages in vital public sectors. This does require policies to identify those labour market shortages, attract suitable labour migrants and ensure that the level of labour participation of this group is high enough.<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand, policy perspectives are also needed in restrictive terms. Among other things, the social costs and external effects of labour migration in the context of undesirable business models will have to be better internalised in decision-making. The private business model in using labour migration - characterised by private benefits and public burdens - encounters social limits, according to the inspector general of the Netherlands Labour Authority.<sup>10</sup> In short, a pursuit of general welfare means that not only economic but also social considerations should be included, as well as the distribution of costs and benefits of migration across society.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to consistency and choices, robust policy designs also require continuous shaping in order to be future-proof. There is considerable uncertainty about the nature and extent of asylum migration from outside the EU due to geopolitical developments and instability around Europe. Also, a further enlargement of the EU due to

geopolitical dynamics could lead to a significant increase in labour migrants from within the EU. In light of uncertainties about future EU enlargement; the number of asylum seekers due to wars and instability around Europe; and possible instrumental use of migration by leaders of EU neighbouring countries, thinking in scenarios and preparation of additional or alternative steering instruments remain important in a European framework.

Finally, robust policy designs require that an active and structural policy be pursued to enable newcomers and established residents to participate in and connect with Dutch society (see also Chapter 7). The mix of labour migrants, study migrants, asylum migrants and family migrants coming to the Netherlands every year means a big challenge to integrate people with a wide variety of motives for migration, countries of origin and length of stay in the Netherlands and allow them to live together in very different local contexts.<sup>12</sup>

#### *Migration policy ranges*

A multi-year political agreement on migration ranges for the different forms of migration (labour, study, asylum, family reunification) can help shape a robust migration policy, and thereby bring much-needed direction and calmness. Building on the study by the Advisory Council on Migration on guiding numbers in migration policy and considering the cumulative effects of different scenarios of the migration balance that the state commission has calculated, the state commission recommends that the national government sets ranges for different types of migration. It is important to properly communicate that this is a range of the *migration balance*, i.e. immigration minus emigration. During the last decade, between 140,000 and 180,000 people left the Netherlands every year. This means that if this pattern continues, there is also room for different types of immigration based on a path of moderate population growth.

The size of the ranges that are set, for both separate migration types and total migration, is ultimately a political choice. The state commission had the cumulative effects for a number of scenarios of the total migration balance calculated by CBS for the year 2050 (see Chapter 3). The state commission's analysis that neither population decline nor rapid, strong population growth is desirable from the perspective of general welfare does imply an appreciation of the different scenarios. Relatively small differences in the annual migration balance have cumulatively large impacts by 2050. For example, an annual migration rate of 20,000 on average between now and 2050 means a population size of 18.1 million in 2050; at 40,000, the population size is 18.8 million. An average net migration of 100,000 up to 2050 means 21 million

inhabitants; at 120,000, the number of inhabitants will be 21.7 million. So a difference of 20,000 in the migration balance shows that - based on the current demographic context - implies a difference of about 700,000 inhabitants in population size in 2050.

The purpose of a multi-year political agreement on ranges in migration policy is to contribute to the realisation of a path of moderate population growth and provide clarity to policy and society. Such ranges can guide government and parliament to make choices. It can promote cooperation between different policy levels (state, provinces and municipalities) and coherence between adjacent policy areas. Admission criteria for different forms of migration and related policies in adjacent policy areas can thus be discussed, weighed and applied in their consequences for the migration balance. Attention can also be drawn to the Dutch situation in the European framework if ranges are exceeded.

These ranges are not hard quotas or ceilings, but target numbers. The ranges and their creation are used to arrive at supported political choices, underpin selective labour migration and also organise and deliver with respect to refugee protection in terms of planning and operations. The determination of migration ranges should be linked to a sound infrastructure of knowledge and monitoring, which is discussed later in the chapter. Monitoring should enable politicians to implement additional policies in time when needed. This should also include emigration: if precisely those people with certain much-needed qualifications leave the country, this too may call for readjustment measures. Whether a multi-year political agreement with ranges actually contributes to migration management would have to be evaluated after one or two terms of government.

A number of separate ranges, adding up to a target with a view to moderate population growth, is necessary because different types of migration are diverse in nature and cannot be simply exchanged against each other. Considerations on labour and study migration relate to the desired direction and structure of the Dutch economy and society. While considerations on asylum and family migration are of a humanitarian nature in relation to the carrying capacity of society. The possibilities for exerting influence also vary by type of migration. For instance, the Netherlands has considerable freedom to influence labour migration from outside the EU. when it comes to labour migration from outside the EU. For influencing labour migration *within* the EU, the Netherlands relies more on indirect policies that fit within the rules of free movement of people within the EU. However, both can be targeted at, on the one hand, a desired minimum in vital sectors on which active policies are developed, and, on the other hand, a desired maximum that

is made explicit as a sign to investors, countries of origin and to the European Commission about the desired economic development of the Netherlands and desired moderate growth given our relatively high population density. The Van Weyenberg and Maatoug motion<sup>15</sup> adopted by the House of Representatives in June 2021 (calling for the establishment of a broad commission to periodically advise on the sectors and occupations for which labour migrants are needed) also points in this direction.

Asylum policies of the Netherlands are bound by European and international law and relate to uncertainties and crises outside Europe. But here too, in the context of international and European frameworks, the Netherlands can formulate a humanitarian mission in the form of a commitment to the Dutch share of the EU's protection mission. This commitment could be discussed with implementing agencies and should lead to a range that does justice to a shared task in a European context. The range in this respect acts as a guideline for a robust reception capacity, and would better enable national and local governments to plan and implement the reception mission with social support. The Netherlands can make the case in Brussels that, in addition to population size and GDP, population density is also taken into account in the distribution of asylum seekers within the EU. Because family migrants are people who want to live together with Dutch residents and holders of a residence permit, or follow labour and asylum migration, this form of migration is more difficult to influence directly<sup>14</sup>; this chapter will mainly focus on this group when it comes to promoting participation in society.

In summary, given the differences by type of migration described above, the state commission suggests that a multi-year political agreement on a range of the migration balance should be accompanied by separate ranges for different types of migration. The structural embedding of an inclusive process of decision-making on ranges for the migration balance and different types of migration and their monitoring can give direction to migration and contribute to societal support for policies. It can contribute to a consciously pursued development and planning of social tasks, which are the result of supported political decision-making rather than a phenomenon that happens to society.<sup>15</sup> This positive choice can also contribute to a society in which migrants feel welcome and can feel at home and in which they are given opportunities to participate in Dutch society.<sup>16</sup>

*Indirect migration policy*

Indirect migration policy means focussing on the underlying factors that influence migration. This can include both country of origin and country of destination factors. Indirect migration policies are implemented through policy areas other than migration policy, such as policy measures aimed at the economic structure, labour market policy or foreign policy.

Where indirect policy perspectives regarding labour and study migration are concerned, the main question is: which economy and society does the Netherlands want to be? The answer to these questions has major implications for the type of migration required and the distributive and societal effects of migration.<sup>17</sup> Concerns about the resilience of critical value chains<sup>18</sup>, the availability of space, the necessary energy and digital transition and the desire for moderate and targeted labour migration call for a clarification of the desired Dutch economic structure and the associated industrial, business, education and labour market policies. The section on policy perspectives for the economy discusses this in more detail. A key aspect with regard to indirect migration policy is that in a Dutch economic structural and industrial policy to be further developed, the support of highly productive economic sectors should also be considered in terms of their needs for knowledge and study migrants.

Instruments to attract desired talent from inside and outside the EU are mostly indirect in nature, but require a structural effort, involvement of direct stakeholders and long-term planning. For instance, highly productive sectors with high demand for highly skilled migrants can contribute to urban area development, employment and affordable housing for local residents. By better connecting this spatial dimension with the ‘smart industrial policy’, companies and governments can also cooperate in this on a long-term basis.

Besides spatial policy and planning, education policy is an important indirect route to attract the highly skilled migrants required. The choice of studies offered in English should also be considered more in conjunction with the economic structural development desired by the Netherlands and the desired range for the migration balance.

Making clearer choices in industrial policy and labour migration policy means, on the one hand, initiating a transition to high-productivity sectors; on the other hand, this will be a transition away from low-productivity sectors or sectors that can only exist by the grace of undesirable business models. The latter is especially true for sectors in which labour migration seems to have become the business model, including an undesirable combination of contracts on working, living and transport, which puts these labour migrants in a precarious and

dependent situation, and passing on external effects to the local environment and future generations in the Netherlands.<sup>19</sup> In fact, employers and temporary employment agencies in these sectors use labour migration from countries within the EU and through secondment arrangements from outside the EU as a way to effect savings on the labour factor and cause scarcity and costs elsewhere in society, especially among weak target groups and vulnerable neighbourhoods.

Various indirect strategies can be used to work towards alternatives to migration. For instance, innovation policies can support automation and robotisation processes in the long term, with implications for the range of the net migration balance. Furthermore, outsourcing and internationalisation strategies of Dutch business may have an effect on migration, with a share of labour migrants no longer coming to the Netherlands, but being shifted to available labour supply inside and outside the EU.

In addition, increasing the volume of labour mainly through increasing the number of hours worked is an alternative to migration, as is promoting longer working lives. One example of why such a policy is meaningful is women's participation in the labour force. If we take into account that women's labour force participation can increase not only through higher participation, but especially by working more hours per week, the effect of a higher women's labour force participation would be substantial.<sup>20</sup>

The NIDI/CBS report titled 'Population by 2050' concluded that: "The stronger increase in women's educational attainment compared to men's will narrow the gap in employment rates. If as many women as men start working in paid employment and if the difference in working hours per week between women and men halves, the labour force measured in fulltime equivalents will increase by about 700 thousand. This effect is similar to the effect of an increase in the average annual migration balance from 60 to 90 thousand."<sup>21</sup>

An outsourcing and internationalisation strategy of the Dutch business community as an alternative to migration is also relevant from a perspective of indirect steering of potential asylum migration. For instance, preventing irregular migration is a key pillar of the integrated migration agenda of the Netherlands. Irregular migration arises because people leave for political reasons such as conflict, insecurity, repression, economic hopelessness as well as climate risks and living conditions. Addressing these root causes of irregular migration requires good international cooperation and various instruments, including development cooperation, civil-military efforts and fair trade and investment.<sup>22</sup> Here, additional investments in employment and climate adaptation in countries of origin are an important indirect instrument

of migration management.<sup>23</sup> Incidentally, economic development in a country can actually encourage migration at the macro level as people will then acquire the financial resources for migration. However, as more perspective emerges in the country of origin itself - and this is a long-term process - countering irregular departure through cooperation with the countries of origin can be justified better.

Stimulating employment is also an important tool to support reception and protection in the region and a second pillar of the integrated migration agenda. The number of refugees and displaced people around Europe is expected to be significant in the coming years and is likely to increase further.<sup>24</sup> The vast majority of refugees are hosted in the regions of origin. Substantial support will be needed from the Netherlands and Europe to give refugees and vulnerable local communities there the prospect of a dignified life. Instruments aimed at strengthening local resilience and self-reliance, promoting integration of refugees into the economy and society of the host country and supporting local communities are of great importance here.<sup>25</sup>

These are also indirect instruments that limit transit to Europe. For research on drivers of migration shows that refugees' aspiration to transit decreases when there are sufficient prospects in the country of first arrival, although this is only one of the influencing factors (alongside, for example, family situation, social networks, et cetera.)<sup>26</sup> Sustainable protection in the region of origin requires responsiveness to host country interests and support for refugee reception in host communities. With the successful PROSPECTS Partnership instrument, the Netherlands is among the pioneers of support for protection in the region. This approach could be strengthened considerably. The upcoming demographic developments and geopolitical dynamics mean that the Netherlands as well as Europe will have to shape shelter and reception efforts in the region on a much more substantial scale. The state commission sees this as an important part of the policy perspective, with a separate budget system and explicitly not at the expense of other development cooperation.

#### *Direct migration policy*

Direct policy instruments for migration are admission criteria and their application to particular types of migration.

Further enlargement of the EU towards Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans taps a sizable labour potential within the EU, with probably even larger numbers of labour migrants who would want to come to the Netherlands than in the years following the previous enlargements of the EU towards Central and Eastern Europe, given the socio-economic development in the current candidate countries. As

argued in the section on policy perspectives for the economy, the critical factor is the direction in which the Dutch economy will develop and the attraction that the economic structure will have on labour migrants. The coming years are therefore important to make choices in the direction of quality in the economy and a sustainable labour market. A discussion on the secondment of third-country nationals offering their ‘services’ in the Dutch labour market is part of this. The EU acquis further allows for transitional periods to phase in the free movement of workers from a new member state over a period of, say, five to seven years, to avoid disrupting the labour markets of the member states concerned. The Netherlands can decide whether or not to apply these transitional periods. In addition, the discussion on differentiated forms of integration is back in full force, where - temporarily or permanently - not all member states have the same rights and obligations.<sup>27</sup> In the event of further enlargement, the Netherlands could take an agenda-setting role in the European context, together with other European countries and in connection with other (geopolitical) interests, regarding this issue.

The Netherlands already has a selective policy where labour migration from outside the EU is concerned. The existing instruments mainly promote the arrival of desired highly skilled migrants, while other labour migration is strictly regulated. For highly skilled migrants, the current scheme focuses on short stays; it could be steered towards longer retention of migrants who make a valuable contribution to the Dutch economy.<sup>28</sup> The same applies to study migration: relatively many international students leave the country relatively soon after graduating, and targeted policies on retaining students in fields where there is demand on the labour market may make sense. A global battle for talent is expected in the coming decades, due to an increasing ageing population, especially in prosperous parts of the world, and a rising labour market demand for specific workers.<sup>29</sup> It is not a given that migrants will also want to come to the Netherlands, and in addition to indirect steering (as described above), well-considered labour migration policies in the future will have to increasingly focus on attracting and retaining these migrants. This is not just about highly skilled migrants. There is also a need for labour migration from outside the EU to meet labour demand in the middle segment, such as the metal industry and for the energy transition.<sup>30</sup> With a view to shortages in the healthcare sector, it is further recommended to also focus on labour migration of skilled migrants from level 3 of senior secondary vocational education (MBO) upwards, as this can make an - albeit limited - contribution to filling the demand for employees in long-term care. This requires direction from the government to ensure that this migration benefits the country of

origin, the migrants themselves and Dutch society. Through structural cooperation between educational and healthcare institutions in the country of origin and in the Netherlands, more people can be fairly recruited and trained than the number of people eventually migrating to the Netherlands, on a circular or other basis, to prevent a brain drain in countries of origin.<sup>31</sup>

The need for broad cooperation with third countries around Europe has been mentioned several times above. This broad cooperation with third countries is also very important in the framework of policy perspectives on asylum migration. War, coups and internal conflicts, as well as climate change and lack of economic prospects in large areas around Europe give reason to expect that the number of displaced persons and asylum seekers will increase in the coming period. A large part of them will (temporarily) seek refuge elsewhere in the region, but depending, among other things, on opportunities in the region and social networks in Europe, some will also consider asylum in an EU member state.

The EU has been engaged in intense negotiations in recent years in an effort to better equip the common asylum system to handle larger numbers of asylum seekers. This is a tough process in which the EU is trying to get a better grip on asylum migration through two major agreements. Firstly, an internal agreement is needed among EU member states on (1) the ‘asylum gates’ to Europe, with a fast procedure to distinguish at the EU external borders between migrants with a low-potential and high-potential asylum application respectively; and (2) a system of redistribution of high-potential asylum applications among EU member states. Within the European Union, the Netherlands can draw more attention to the exceptional demographic situation in the Netherlands when fleshing out and elaborating such an agreement by using population density as a criterion for absorption capacity, in addition to population size and gross national product.

Secondly, a series of external and equivalent agreements are needed between the EU and neighbouring countries, covering more than just migration. These agreements aim to offer prospects to people in the EU’s neighbouring countries, combat irregular migration, offer more opportunities for legal entry to Europe via selective labour migration gates, and make the return of rejected asylum seekers more effective.<sup>32</sup> If an internal agreement on this is reached within the current legislature, the main issue for the Netherlands is to develop instruments at an EU level that ensure proper implementation of this agreement.

In addition, several countries are exploring innovative policy perspectives that may, in the longer term, offer a way to better manage asylum migration.<sup>33</sup> These include, for example, more far-reaching

cooperation with safe third countries. Further research on international experiences with territorial and extraterritorial access to asylum (United States, Canada, Denmark, United Kingdom) is useful to this end.

Finally, at the national level, the focus should be on bringing the asylum application chain in order.<sup>34</sup> As previously noted by others, the current funding and organisation of the asylum procedure and reception not only leads to “crises” but also to long waiting times, a lot of moving within the Netherlands and therefore “inactivation” of newcomers and ultimately to a poorer starting position and participation of asylum migrants.<sup>35</sup> The state commission underlines the importance of getting the asylum process in order in a way that does not directly address the numbers coming to the Netherlands but has an effect on the impact of this form of migration on Dutch society. Early cooperation by the central government with municipalities in implementing asylum policy should be part of better organising the asylum process. By involving municipalities earlier, people can be placed at locations where they will eventually integrate. Small-scale reception and a substantial investment in permanent structures for temporary occupancy can provide a solution to an asylum influx that varies over time and the great need for temporary housing from others in society. Return of rejected asylum seekers can be improved through the above-mentioned equal partnerships with countries of origin, and through more tailor-made solutions for the targetted groups, including employment projects in countries of origin.

#### *Participation and reciprocity*

In each of the three demographic scenarios outlined, the population of the Netherlands becomes more diverse. Even with moderate population growth, this growth, on balance, comes from migration. Regardless of the scale of migration, Dutch society will have to relate to migrants and vice versa.

In addition to increasing diversity, a not unimportant factor here is that an increasingly larger group of migrants are staying here for shorter periods of time.<sup>36</sup> In general terms, the WRR therefore argues for a societal policy aimed at so-called ‘everyday diversity’: recognising diversity that is self-evident and committing to connection through shared institutions and emphasising commonality.<sup>37</sup> Specifically, this is about measures aimed at a good reception for all migrants. In the case of asylum migrants, in addition to the aforementioned improvement in asylum reception, this involves, for example, faster access to employment and also to childcare and education. Education is essential for everyone who is in the Netherlands to participate in the labour market

and society according to their own ability. In addition, there are now no reception facilities for labour migrants and (some of the) family migrants, unlike asylum migrants. It is also important for these groups to find their way in society, learn the language and participate in a broader sense than just through employment.<sup>38</sup> This is not only with a view to coexistence and social cohesion, but also with a view to the aforementioned retention of migrants for the labour market. In particular, this applies to accompanying partners of labour migrants.

The WRR lists a number of policy options relating to social cohesion. Firstly, good physical and social infrastructure at the neighbourhood level (like semi-public facilities, community work) is a prerequisite for social safety and social interaction. Secondly, strengthening intercultural competence in public sectors such as education ensures recognition of both long-term residents and newcomers, leading to better participation. Thirdly, upholding the basic rules of coexistence in a democratic rule of law is an important task for the government. Every resident can be asked to contribute to society and, at the same time, everyone must be given the space to do what they want. This reciprocity as a principle becomes even more important as the proportion of migrants in society increases. Binding stories and institutions, including also language, also play a role. This also concerns liveability, especially in densely populated and diverse neighbourhoods where social cohesion is under pressure most. In short, a focus on migration in a scenario of moderate population growth in the Netherlands towards 2050 is mainly about indirect policies. Primarily with regard to moderating and shaping labour migration (from inside and outside the EU) and in several domains simultaneously, such as economic structure, education, housing and labour market participation. Another part of the possible actions to be taken in this area is to work with other EU member states on European agreements on asylum migration and the Dutch commitment to this and its share in it. Ongoing thorough research into new developments and policy perspectives remains necessary here. All migration scenarios address the themes of participation and reciprocity for a more diverse population.

### 8.3 POLICY PERSPECTIVES II: ROBUST POLICY DESIGNS

An analysis of the domains space and environment, the economy and public services in Part II shows that demographic developments can cause friction. For the legislator, the government, there is a mandate to act on this as expressed in the Constitution: promoting sufficient employment (Article 19), securing the means of subsistence and achieving a distribution of wealth are concerns of the government (Article 20), the concern to keep the country liveable and to protect and improve the living environment (Article 21), promoting public health, providing sufficient housing and accommodation (Article 22) and education is the constant concern of the government (Article 23).

For the following outline of policy actions to manage the impact of population growth on the domains of space, the economy and public services, the focus in their elaboration and design is on a scenario of moderate population growth. The policy perspectives aim to contribute to robust services and robust policy designs; given the inherent uncertainty of demographic scenarios, trade-off choices should be made that are “shockproof” to unexpected developments. The state commission summarises a number of priority policy perspectives based on demographic developments: 1) managing space and housing, where housing is also important for provision and organization of care and diminishing inequality 2) opting for a high-quality economy, where productivity and higher labour participation counterbalance labour shortages and poor terms and conditions of employment; 3) putting the basics in order in the healthcare and education sectors in order to maintain accessibility precisely for the weakest groups in society and 4) more room for labour participation and lifelong development.

#### SPACE

Demographic developments have a strong spatial dimension. They take place in a physical space in which many interests compete. A larger, older and more diverse population will require more focused choices and thus decisiveness; while this is already a complex spatial puzzle with urgent bottlenecks, such as the shortage of housing and lack of a high-quality living environment for large groups of people. Besides understanding population size, understanding population composition (more single-person households), housing needs and human behaviour is essential. The spatial effects of demography also show wide urban and regional variations: from deprived neighbourhoods to regions experiencing population decline. Housing, mobility and accessibility are central to the trade-offs to be made. All these spatial effects of

demography, towards 2050, add up in space and time with simultaneous transitions in climate, energy, the electricity grid, agriculture and nature.

The main questions that demographic developments raise for the spatial domain - over the longer term and across sectors - can be summarised in three tasks: spatial distribution, how and where to construct housing and a sustainable future in the context of major climate changes.

The premise of 'shaping the Netherlands' manifests itself pre-eminently in the domain of space. The policy perspectives are in line with the 'Mooi Nederland' (Beautiful Netherlands) programme, a central government initiative to improve and preserve the spatial quality of the Netherlands. This programme focuses on major tasks in the areas of public housing, energy transition, agriculture and nature. It shapes the turnaround made in the recent period to take more control of the country's spatial planning at the national level. The 'Climate Plan of the Netherlands' (based on the Climate Agreement and the Climate Act and elaborated in policy programmes) is also shaping the Netherlands. Policy perspectives should also be seen in this context. It is important to keep in mind that the opportunities offered by the spatial challenges are also exploited by tackling them from a joint perspective and as a transformation in which spatial design is linked to the desired economic changes. The state commission points to two priorities: spatial planning and housing. Both priorities contribute to the cross-domain action advocated by the state commission. Spatial strategies are linked to economic development, to the distribution of public services and, of course, to the major climate challenges. The housing task is also a task for elderly care and for maintaining social cohesion, including between generations and it relates to where and how to build and thus the building culture that the Netherlands advocates in the coming period.

Choices in spatial planning and related physical infrastructure can address a variety of geographical impacts of demographic trends, including land use (agriculture versus housing, nature and other economic activities), distribution of housing, and facilities and infrastructure across the country. It is also about making choices to keep our country liveable, both in rural areas (population decline and population ageing) and in urban neighbourhoods (busier and more diverse). The 'housing task' resulting from current and future demographic developments revolves around improving the quality of life in the existing built environment. This will require a different building culture, aimed at a household composition that is constantly changing due to population ageing, migration and an increase in single-person households. Firstly, this requires facilitating communal housing, for example through

subdivisions, retirement communities or annexes, so as to address also care needs and social problems such as loneliness. Secondly, the focus can be on more flexibility, both in location (urban densification) and type of construction (relocatable). In the medium term, these can meet the sharply rising demand for senior housing due to an ageing population - thus also accelerating the movement in the housing market - and the fluctuating demand for housing due to migration. In the long run, they can be used in other locations and for other purposes. By starting from existing construction and using bio-based building materials, a new building culture can also help achieve sustainability goals that put less pressure on scarce space.

The housing task must be able to move with demographic changes over the next 25 years. For instance, population ageing will increase over the next 10 to 15 years and then remain stable or decrease slightly, which has significance for the extent of housing needs for the elderly. More or fewer single-person households and specific housing needs in an increasingly diverse population will also have to be translated into what will be built, where and for whom.

## ECONOMY

The economy and demographic developments are firmly interlinked. Many of the economic effects of demography can be traced to how people live, work and learn. Demography cannot ignore the economy either: prosperity, technology and globalisation affect childbearing, life expectancy and migration. Part II analysed the possible impact of demographic developments - in particular that of an ageing population - for the Dutch economy until 2050 if everything stays the same. Namely: a contraction of the (potentially) working part of the population, stagnating productivity and persistent labour market shortages.

With unchanged policies, this leads to long-term lower economic growth, putting pressure on tax revenues in particular to finance public spending. Labour market shortages will also manifest themselves persistently in the healthcare and education sectors (see the next section).

Targeted labour migration makes a positive contribution to the Dutch economy. However, general welfare is at stake when labour migration is linked to low-paid work and poor working conditions.

Increasing the resilience of both people (vitality) and of society as a whole (adaptivity) is particularly visible in the economic domain. Neither demographic nor economic scenarios are exact predictions. This makes it difficult for citizens to get a grip on such developments. In unpredictable times people are strongest when they themselves are

strong: thanks to their education, family and social connections, and through paid work under decent conditions. This applies in a similar way to the Dutch economy. In times of radical technological change, it benefits from a strong adaptability thanks to a well-educated labour force, a well-functioning labour market, the right preconditions in public financial and fiscal policy, but also administrative stability and thus room for innovation and investment.

As a policy perspective, the state commission expresses a clear orientation towards a high-quality economy. Economic sectors that exist only because of a large supply of low-paid labour under poor working conditions do not fit into the envisaged development of the Netherlands towards 2050 for that reason. After all, general welfare is the aim and, due to demographic trends, quality and productivity will have to be more important for the economy than the quantity of labour supply. Therefore, a proper analysis of the current economic structure of the Netherlands, a dialogue with employers, employees and social parties and the vision of the government and parliament on the desired development towards 2050 are important. This should include an analysis of vital sectors, ranging from energy supply, logistics and transport, IT and food supply to healthcare. The Social and Economic Council (SER) can play a role in bringing about this broad analysis and the social conversation about it. A high-quality economy is largely underpinned by international cooperation and exchange between knowledge institutions, businesses and governments. So it is important to keep an eye on this.

From a demographic perspective, it is also necessary to consider the (different) use of space by economic sectors when answering the question of how to shape a high-quality economy.

The general socio-economic and financial and fiscal policy, as expressed annually in the Budget Memorandum, should be aligned with such a qualitative orientation in connection with the general welfare indicators that are now also increasingly part of the national budget.

Increasing the employment rate of the current labour force is a robust policy perspective. One example is the employment rate of the first and second generation with a migration background. The earlier NIDI/CBS study concluded that higher employment rates could lead to an increase in the labour force by 300,000. The share of people from migrant backgrounds in the labour force could then double from 20% today to 40% in 2050.<sup>39</sup>

In addition, this report highlighted the possibility of increasing the volume of labour, especially for women. Dutch women now work part-time at an above-average rate, also compared to other European countries. Childcare in particular and support for families with young

children in general will contribute directly and indirectly to increased labour force participation by parents. Policies to make work more rewarding by reviewing allowances and tax schemes that are counter-productive in this respect are one possible interpretation. Another necessary route is promoting more working hours in particular and guiding people with poor job prospects into work in general. The education sector can better anticipate future societal needs and requirements. Vocational training that most strongly promotes future general welfare can be encouraged financially or otherwise. In all these policy perspectives, it is important to look at financial, fiscal and other schemes more from the perspective of people and to place these issue in a broader demographic perspective rather than use the technocratic perspective of individual schemes.

Analyses and choices then include the minimum wage (Social Minimum Commission), the organisation of the labour market (Commission on the Regulation of Work), exploiting potential on the labour market (Commission on the Future of the Occupational Disability System), lifelong development (advice from the Social and Economic Council) and, very specifically, combating unacceptable working conditions of labour migrants (Migrant Worker Protection Task Force). An orientation towards a high-quality economy and the creation of financial means to support it from the government requires a critical scrutiny of government policies, fiscal and otherwise, that intentionally or unintentionally drive economic activities that do not fit in with this now or in the long run.

A cross-domain approach to a high-quality economy includes promoting working at older ages. In particular, life-long development is an important link between the economy, social cohesion, health, education and the labour market. If choices have to be made, a breakthrough on this issue - in cooperation with business, the education sector and workers - is more important than spending time and energy on individual projects and system changes in the education sector. Lifelong development depends on adequate opportunities for development and continuation of income while one is pursuing such opportunities. To promote longer working lives, more attention should be paid to occupational health, especially relating to physically demanding occupations.

A focus on innovation and technology in various economic sectors can help enable change in the labour market, in the economy and in public services, precisely given the fact that not everything can be done (at the same time). What is important here is that technology should not be developed in isolation, but as part of and in order to support innovation in the wider systems where the technology is applied. This means that such focus should be developed in collaboration with end-users

(including employers and employees) and research institutions; the involvement of experts from different disciplines is essential here.

## PUBLIC SERVICES

Demographic developments challenge general welfare in the domain of public services. The current shortage of staff in the education and healthcare sectors and the increasing financial pressure on social security show that the Netherlands cannot continue as things are right now. In all demographic scenarios towards 2050, the size of the future labour force relative to the non-working population is insufficient to meet the total demand for public services.

Population ageing not only leads to higher social security spending, but also to changing needs. Education is under severe pressure due to rising staff shortages and deepening social and regional disparities in development opportunities. In the healthcare sector, demographic developments also manifest themselves in staff shortages, but also through different needs. The tasks in relation to demographic developments for the education and healthcare sectors currently still focus primarily on staff shortages and innovation. However, the social security task, besides budgetary issues, focuses on the changing need for social security schemes.

Public services are particularly important for the aforementioned principle of connection. After all, this is about strengthening social cohesion by countering inequality. The Dutch population is already diverse and will become even more diverse in the coming years, in all sorts of ways. A well-educated and healthy population is a key prerequisite for co-existence on an equal footing. Basic collective services should therefore provide adequate support to the most vulnerable groups of people. In particular, the difference in healthy life years between different groups of people is large and worrisome. Therefore, access to and prevention in healthcare are essential. Moreover, health promotion in the broadest sense is a priority, in view of general welfare, but also in view of the anticipated increasing pressure on services.

The principle of connection is essential in the public service domain. Healthcare is a societal task that is not limited to costs and systems. Childcare and education for children in the youngest ages (and beyond) are equally crucial. In addition, all that is being done on social cohesion through citizens' initiatives and social organisations is essential to promote connection in society in the coming years. This is also done so as to meet the demands for healthcare coming from society.

The state commission looked at policy perspectives based on a dual approach that answers labour market shortages and strengthens social

cohesion. Education obviously has a formative value in itself. Access to education and quality of education are enshrined in the Dutch constitution for a reason. From a demographic perspective, childcare and qualifying education should be given priority. Within the healthcare sector (GP care, dental care and youth care), basic services and access to these services are important. In the healthcare sector, support and guidance from non-physicians can relieve pressure on basic and specialised services in cure and care. Coordination of housing and healthcare can reduce the burdening of informal care. This will require cross-domain thinking and calculations between healthcare systems and between cure and care. New perspectives can arise from less institutional thinking and by making better use of the power of civil society (funds, organisations and associations).

Even with changes such as these, staff shortages in the healthcare and education sectors will persist in all demographic scenarios. Therefore, working practices, work processes and organisational form (administrative burden, management structures) should be innovated in order to improve productivity in those sectors.

Social security spending could be considered on the basis of demographic trends; for example, reliance on social security for unemployment could be significantly reduced; and with an increase in the number of elderly people, their varying financial situation could be better recognised. Room can also be found by looking at the interplay of wage and support measures in labour market participation; for example, by not only facilitating labour market entry, but also making working more rewarding than it is today. Lifelong development need not be charged exclusively to the government budget on education and social security spending; (personal) contributions from employers and employees can be considered, for instance. As lifelong development does not come about by itself, an approach that transcends the domains of education (legislation and funding) and social affairs (legislation and funding) is urgent and necessary.

## ACROSS DOMAINS

It is important to look closely at the connection between domains. Education and healthcare, for example, are prerequisites for economic growth; economic growth in turn helps finance these and other public services. Shaping the living environment and space in Netherlands also means shaping social cohesion by allowing people to meet more. Migration exerts a pressure on space, the housing market and public services. Selective migration can contribute to economic development. Investments in the infrastructure are also an important economic

activity that stimulates employment and innovation. Innovation and business are needed to carry out the housing, climate and energy tasks.

The importance of cross-domain thinking, action and funding cannot be emphasized enough. For example, an view on space, housing and the living environment can help the healthcare sector, but this is currently not yet the case. It would require coherence and working beyond compartmentalisation, all the more so as a goal is also to strengthen the adaptivity of collective services and of government arrangements, thereby increasing social resilience.

The following policy options can achieve this when they are implemented together:

Knowledge infrastructure. A permanent independent ‘demographic parameters’ commission could be set up to support the knowledge infrastructure. It includes CBS, NIDI, WRR and the planning agencies, in addition to several independent members<sup>40</sup> and an independent chair, and with representatives of some ministries as advisory members. Have this committee - in tandem with CBS and NIDI’s Population 2050 monitor – produce long-term (25-year) forecasts and scenarios in the form of medium-term demographic forecasts once every four years, in parallel with CPB’s medium-term economic and budget forecasts<sup>41</sup>. Link demographic insights to the general welfare analysis and indicators of CBS and the planning agencies. Also unlock the existing knowledge and information to ensure the availability of the proper data and knowledge on demographic developments. Examples are labour market forecasts from the Employee Insurance Agency (UWV), statistics from CBS, et cetera. Links can also be sought with EU instruments<sup>42</sup> targeting labour market needs. Also develop training programmes on demography, for those inside and outside the civil service. It is crucial for discussions on demographic developments to be based on facts and figures. Therefore, links should be sought with the programmes and advices provided by the permanent advisory councils, at least the WRR, the Council for Public Administration (ROB), the Council for the Environment and Infrastructure (Rli), the Education Council, the Advisory Council for Science, Technology and Innovation (AWTI), the Council of State, the Advisory Council on Migration and the Clingendael Institute.

Policy and budget cycles. The subsidy, funding and financing systems of the government (and of the central government in particular) should be made ‘demography shock-proof’, and therefore also cross-domain and cross-ministerial. The ministries and other government organisations should adopt the same demographic assumptions, these should also be

with sufficient buffers to be robust to changes in demographic developments. Interdepartmental Policy Research, for example, can be used to examine existing budgeting and financing systems from this perspective. In this context, the mechanism of social cost-benefit analysis should include demographic factors. The current domain orientation of the national budget and the related political decision-making may seem logical, but it also inhibits an overarching approach where this is of great importance for addressing demographic developments, for example, through combining investments in housing and healthcare or work and education. A few comparatively small programmatic efforts and investments are not sufficient to achieve this. There should be a connection of demographic insights with the annual consideration of general welfare in the Budget Memorandum and the macroeconomic outlook contained therein. These demographic, general welfare and economic medium-term forecasts will help to set timely preconditions for the future in, for example, the education, healthcare and spatial planning sectors.

Political guidance. For government and parliament, the knowledge infrastructure and policy and budget cycles based on it can culminate in a quadrennial State of Demography. A ministerial commission on demographic developments for coordination and direction within the government could be helpful in this regard. Combining migration and participation in a single ministerial portfolio is essential given the nature and importance of this theme. In addition, the House of Representatives can consider making parliamentary agreements of its own in the scope of demographic developments and what is outlined in this report. In some countries (like Denmark and France), such forms regarding migration and defence in the long term exist alongside a coalition or governing agreement. Former informateur Herman Tjeeenk Willink also spoke of a “parliamentary agenda” in 2021 in that light, alongside (or partly instead of) parts of a (detailed) governing agreement.

Implementation. What is needed is a programmatic approach for a longer period, e.g. to 2050, combining the national implementation of political decision-making in the government and parliament partly on the basis of the State of Demography in terms of policy and legislation based on demographic developments. The Netherlands can draw on experience with a long-term programmatic approach and implementation with the Delta Works and the Delta Programme, as well as at the regional level with the National Programme Rotterdam South.

Support, carrying capacity and dialogue. Choices will ultimately have to be made by the legislature, government and parliament at the national level. It is important to involve national organisations, at least the Social and Economic Council (SER), the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG), the Association of Provincial Authorities and the Union of Water Boards, in the preparation with a view to support and then in the implementation with a view to carrying capacity. The government and parliament can then expect them to integrate demographic trends into their long-term agendas - such as the Netherlands 2040 vision of the VNG and the medium-term opinions of the SER - and a State of Demography, respectively.

Public surveys and the working visits and interviews conducted by the state commission show awareness among citizens of demographic trends, awareness of where things cause friction and awareness that choices are not easy. Choosing one thing sometimes means excluding something else. A focused dialogue by the government with citizens and their social connections can make choices more substantive and increase support for them.

#### 8.4 IN CONCLUSION

The following applies to all perspectives and actions: consequences of demographic developments occur differently over time. Population ageing is already structural and will accelerate between 2030 and 2040. The diverse composition of the population is expected to evolve more gradually. How population growth will proceed is difficult to predict, but there is a real chance that it will be with 'migration spikes'. This means that public policy should vary over time. Public services and policies must therefore be robust, resilient and connective enough in order to shape the Netherlands.

Thinking about the Netherlands towards 2050 from a demographic perspective touches on general questions about shaping the future of the country. What kind of society does the Netherlands want to be? What economy does the Netherlands want to have? What is the Netherlands' position in Europe and the world? How can trust between citizens and politics be improved? The policy perspectives outlined aim to guide political and societal responses to these questions.

In answering these questions, the state commission recommends to keep on focusing on the year 2050. This will shift the focus to a somewhat longer term than the here and now and encourages the above and other questions to be answered together.

Many choices looking at the next 25 years, towards 2050, will have to be made relatively quickly to ensure that they are feasible, especially

given the current overload of the government. This also ensures that the positive effects can be seen earlier. Some choices will have to be made quickly because the problems are current and acute. In the public services domain, such problems include staff shortages in the health-care and education sectors and the affordability of healthcare. For example, when it comes to the living environment there has been an acute shortage of suitable housing in various parts of our country for some time. In the economy, society is struggling with negative consequences of certain forms of labour migration. The legislature's public policy choices will have to expressly include a time dimension. The tools proposed to move 'beyond compartmentalisation', such as a long-term programme-based approach and a quadrennial State of Demography, aim to support this and make it visible.

A range with a view to moderate growth provides orientation not only for those choices but equally - with the help of the aforementioned programmatic approach and State of Demography - for monitoring effects of choices and for demographic developments over the coming years. If consequences or developments deviate too much from the range of desired moderate growth, a timely decision can and should be made by the government and parliament on additional measures.

Many of the policy perspectives identified by the state commission have been described more frequently or in more depth in reports and opinions by commissions, advisory councils, planning agencies, independent researchers and ministries. There are therefore enough data to further substantiate, specify and elaborate the proposed approach, aimed at implementation. All the more reason to act together in making choices and in elaboration and implementation.

The choices to be made call for a large-scale shift in terms of policy. Demographic developments call for more than marginal shifts in existing policies and for actively shaping the future of the Netherlands. Robust policy designs ('shockproof') based on demographic trends are necessary and possible. There is no lack of policy and other tools. It is up to the legislature - the government and States General - to make choices, with moderate population growth as orientation and with general welfare as a goal. Then, on the road to 2050, there is still much that can be done to better shape the Netherlands.

- 1 European Commission (2023b)
- 2 The periodic monitor with key data is now being set up by NIDI and CBS.
- 3 Case and Deaton (2020)
- 4 Gauthier (2007)
- 5 OECD (2016)
- 6 Alderotti et al. (2021)
- 7 Van Wijk (2023, p.241)
- 8 See CPB (2023a) and Obermann (2023).
- 9 See Verbon (2022b).
- 10 See De Boer (2022).
- 11 See, among others, Hartog (2023).
- 12 WRR (2020)
- 13 House of Representatives (2021b)
- 14 WRR (2020)
- 15 Scheffer (2018)
- 16 Advisory Council on Migration (2022)
- 17 De Haas (2023)
- 18 See Advisory Council on International Issues (2022)
- 19 De Boer (2022)
- 20 NIDI & CBS (2020, p.73), De Beer (2022)
- 21 Ibid, p.15
- 22 Ministry of Justice and Security (2018)
- 23 See Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2022).
- 24 Netherlands Institute for International Relations Clingendael (2023)
- 25 Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2023)
- 26 Crawley et al. (2016)
- 27 See, for example, the Report of the Franco-German Working Group on EU Institutional Reform (2023).
- 28 Buers et al. (2018)
- 29 European Commission (2023b)
- 30 Cörvers et al. (2021)
- 31 Advisory Council on Migration (2022)
- 32 See Advisory Council on International Issues (2020)
- 33 See Koopmans (2023) for a description of the Australian, UK and Danish measures and studies, and a 'realistic utopia'.
- 34 For this, see also the Fundamental Reorientation of Asylum Policy and Asylum System, which aims to make the asylum system more stable and prevent the recurrence of asylum crises.
- 35 Advisory Commission on Migration Affairs (2017), Dagevos et al. (2021), Investigative Commission on long-term resident foreign nationals without permanent right of residence (2019).
- 36 WRR (2020)
- 37 Ibid
- 38 Ibid; Buers et al. (2018)
- 39 See NIDI & CBS (2020, p.15).
- 40 Including expertise in intercultural aspects and international-regional aspects.
- 41 We can learn from experiences from abroad. In England and Canada, there are migration commissions where multi-year studies of demographic developments lead to multi-year plans with targets. For more international comparisons, see Advisory Council on Migration (2022).
- 42 E.g. EU labour market information system.

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