

Let's get to work

Building a better Netherlands

2026-2030 Coalition agreement

Democrats '66 (D66), People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD)
and Christian Democratic Alliance (CDA)

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Introduction

It is time to get to work on building a better Netherlands. In the years ahead, D66, the VVD and the CDA intend to do just that, working with others and taking the collaborative approach that is characteristic of our country. In the past a great deal was achieved thanks to a culture of consultation and compromise, thanks to freedom and enterprise, as well as a social tradition of community spirit and taking responsibility. There are enormous reserves of strength and initiative in society itself. These qualities helped shape our country, and they can help us take it forward together.

The three political movements presenting this agreement have their own individual histories, worldviews and visions of humanity. But we are united in the conviction that the Netherlands can start moving forward once more if politicians engage in respectful, constructive debate and have the courage to make clear choices. We believe our society wants a politics that can demonstrate that we achieve more by working together than by working against each other. That is why we are eager to show that things can be done differently.

For generations, it was generally expected that children would be better off than their parents. This is still possible; we are optimistic about that. The Netherlands has what it takes to fulfil that promise once more. But we must also be realistic, because it is *not* a given. A great deal is at stake in the years ahead. The world around us is becoming increasingly unpredictable. Old international certainties are disappearing, and threats to our free way of life and the rule of law are increasing. Our security, freedom and prosperity therefore demand resolute action and a sense of urgency.

This is an agreement containing choices and ambitions that, with hard work and determination, can truly be fulfilled. To achieve that, in the coming years the Netherlands will sometimes need to have the courage to hold steady for a while with a view to creating something bigger and better for the longer term, in the knowledge that each euro can be spent only once, and must benefit future generations.

We are already well aware that in a fragmented political landscape parliamentary majorities must be earned. A government without a majority must listen carefully and argue its case, must give and take, in order to get results. Our promise is to adopt an open attitude and demonstrate the will to find compromises. Our hope is that other parties will see opportunities in this approach to bring their own ideals a step closer. In this way we can jointly achieve things that are good for our country.

We want to finally make breakthroughs on issues like nitrogen policy and the housing market. Our farmers, home-seekers, entrepreneurs and natural environment deserve better. We want to get asylum migration and labour migration properly under control, by asking ourselves how much our country can absorb and what it needs, and taking action accordingly. We can see that over the next 10 to 20 years major investment in our defence and our economy will be necessary to keep our country safe and ensure that Dutch businesses can remain competitive at international level. We firmly believe that innovative climate policy and sustainable economic growth are two sides of the same coin. We are opting for a strong Netherlands in a strong Europe, working with all our allies to foster security, legal certainty and prosperity. We will cut unnecessarily complex rules, for individuals and companies alike. Government should make life easier instead of harder. Above all, we want to help ensure that teachers, police officers, nurses, shopkeepers and all the other people who keep our country going every day can look to the future with a sense of certainty. Those people who did not vote for our parties can also rest assured that we will do our very best to achieve this.

We believe that this is what the Netherlands should be: a country of opportunities for everyone, regardless of age, origin, health or income. An enterprising country where

everyone is free to make their own choices, but never at someone else's expense. A country where hurling abuse at each other on X is not the norm, because the vast majority consider such behaviour unacceptable. A country where you help someone if they need it, and look out for each other. A country where the government is an ally to all people who make a positive contribution, and takes action against anyone who undermines the strengths of our society. We will protect our way of life and we will protect each other.

We will work with heart and soul to help build that country, together with as many other people as possible. We are ready to get to work, and build a stronger Netherlands.

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Working together is our joint mission

In this coalition agreement, three parties – D66, VVD and CDA – have set down agreements about the measures needed to get the Netherlands moving forward again. They have done so in the full knowledge that this government requires broader support in both houses of parliament than these three parties currently command themselves. This government's success depends on the willingness to work with the House of Representatives and the Senate, subnational authorities and civil society organisations.

The Netherlands does not have a tradition of minority governments. In that regard we are entering uncharted territory. At the same time, there are other countries that have a great deal of experience in this area. Although it is impossible to make a direct comparison between the Dutch situation and, for example, a country like Denmark, which has a long tradition of minority governments, we can certainly learn from their experiences.

The most important lesson is to relearn the art of cooperation and consultation. First and foremost we have to restore the cooperation between the government and civil society organisations, trade unions and employer's organisations, and subnational authorities, with due respect for one another's different roles and responsibilities. In recent years this cooperation has deteriorated, even though we sorely need each other. A government can only make sensible policy if it has conferred with civil society organisations. Such consultation is also an expression of our desire that this government listen to *all* voices in society. Civil society has a key role to play between the government and everyone living in the Netherlands (including those who did not vote for D66, VVD or CDA) and between government and the business sector.

Relations with subnational authorities will also have to be restored. Good relations between central and local government are essential in order to deal effectively with big societal issues, as rightly noted in the report 'Building Results Together' (*Samen bouwen aan resultaten*) by the Study Group on Central-Local Government Relations. We aim to implement the building blocks and recommendations contained in that report, such as making clear agreements about tasks and financing, designing a feasibility test of government policy for subnational authorities, and engaging in regular consultations.

Secondly, the government will have to work differently with the House of Representatives and Senate. This will necessitate a cultural transformation in the way that individual members of the government deal with parliament and how the coalition parties deal with the other parliamentary parties. It will require a willingness to engage in discussion with all parliamentary parties about what is necessary to work together. This goes beyond mere practical exchanges. The key questions are what we want to achieve and where we can find points of commonality. We need a mutual understanding of what we can and cannot expect of each other.

We express the hope that the parliamentary parties in turn will be willing to assess this government's proposals on their merits. We are seeking shared responsibility without thinking in terms of winners and losers on every issue. In our discussions with the heads of the parliamentary parties, we found most of them to be willing to do what is best for the Netherlands, and that gives us confidence that most politicians want to help address the problems facing our country. The government bears primary responsibility for submitting proposals and legislation, but it will always invite the House of Representatives – opposition MPs as well as members of the coalition parties – to offer input at an early stage, both formally and informally. It is conceivable that agreements will be made on some issues with parliament and civil society partners. The government will take the initiative in this regard, and all parties will be invited to participate. At the same time, this government hopes that it can count on the House of Representatives and civil society partners to help move the Netherlands forward. This way, we can achieve years of stable policy.

A secure Netherlands and a strong society

A government that operates effectively

Many people – young and old, members of the business community and civil servants charged with implementing policy – find the government large and complicated. The government apparatus itself is becoming bogged down by its increasing complexity, and it consequently cannot fulfil its promises. This undermines trust, and given the major transitions and challenges we are currently facing, we simply cannot afford that. The present situation does not call for even more rules, but requires a government that makes clear choices, works as a team and delivers. This is why we are building a streamlined and effective government that focuses on what is truly necessary. We are setting a clear goal: a government that is straightforward and reliable. A government that is honest about what can be done and that takes responsibility for its actions. A government that is rooted in society and accessible to people. We intend to restore public trust by demonstrating that the government *can* deliver.

Simple, feasible and predictable

- The people who implement policy are often the face of the government. Those who implement policy, subnational authorities and support services will be involved with policy from the start, so that rules are aligned with what people actually do (and are able to do) in practice.
- A periodic Simplification Act will continually improve laws and rules. We will start by scrapping or simplifying at least 500 rules, and will subsequently set a target for each ministry.

Breaking down barriers between government bodies

- We will work more often with multidisciplinary, cross-domain teams for major, long-term projects, such as the National Liveability and Security Programme and Project Beethoven. We will focus on goals instead of procedures and avoid micromanagement.
- Central government will enhance the exchange of knowledge with the private sector, educational sector and research community, with a view to addressing shared societal challenges. There will be exchange programmes between ministries, implementing agencies and civil society organisations.
- Together with the regions, we will work with strategic agendas to jointly and comprehensively carry out major tasks in a given area. This means that we will work together to improve quality of life, housing and employment for local residents and businesses. Regional challenges often require regional solutions. With this in mind we will prioritise the knowledge and expertise of people in the regions themselves and build on the recommendations contained in the report 'Every Region Counts'.

A more productive government

- The government has grown considerably, but productivity levels have not kept pace. There is room for improvement. Over the next few years the Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations will coordinate the modernisation of the civil service. We seek to move towards a fundamentally more efficient and effective government, with far less (complex) legislation, less overhead and a more compact civil service. To that end we will also be implementing government-wide retrenchment targets.
- From IT and procurement to HR, we will make central government operational management more uniform, in part by introducing mandatory standards and shared services, with the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations playing a coordinating role.
- We will establish a Digital Service for the Netherlands: compact, equipped with expertise and having the necessary decision-making power. This service will support the digitalisation of central government, set quality standards and safeguard good design choices. We will reduce dependence on external IT providers by employing

more IT talent in the civil service. We will facilitate the responsible use of data and AI within the government.

- We will tackle the multitude of organisational forms within central government. We believe that policymaking and implementation should be more closely linked. For this reason we will explore whether certain autonomous administrative authorities (such as the Employee Insurance Agency (UWV)) can be placed under the direct responsibility of a minister.
- The Netherlands has fallen behind when it comes to the availability of digital services to members of the public and companies; we will make considerable efforts to address this problem. Estonia serves as a model for digital service provision. All government services must be accessible online.
- Implementing agencies will be given an annual target for efficiency savings, half of which can be reinvested in efficiency and improvement.
- The Senior Civil Service (ABD) will limit its focus to senior management. The most senior positions in the ABD will not be replaced more often than once every seven to nine years, unless there are compelling reasons to do so. There will also be external recruitment, and a clear specialisation structure will be set up for positions dealing with complex issues.
- We will work to enhance the government's expertise and professional skills by taking on more people with specialised knowledge as permanent employees instead of hiring their services, and by giving them parity with managers when it comes to job evaluations and career opportunities. For that purpose we will review the Top Incomes (Standardisation) Act, taking inspiration from Singapore. In this way, external hiring can be reduced where possible from the current 15.4% of total staffing expenditure to 10% (the 'Roemer norm').

Trust as a basic principle

- Politicians determine the 'what', and those implementing policy determine the 'how'. Those implementing policy will be given more scope and a greater mandate to make professional assessments in the public interest. Where possible, we will choose simpler norms which do not make provision for every single exception. In doing so we will allow for individual, customised solutions by the professionals responsible for implementing policy.
- We will organise regular tripartite dialogues between members of the government, policymakers and those responsible for implementation in order to obtain quick feedback and make adjustments.
- Placing trust in the public will once again be our point of departure: there will be less mistrust and simpler rules, but if that trust is betrayed, the consequences will be severe.
- We will make multiannual, robust agreements with subnational authorities. This will give rise to a partnership of equals in which each tier of government can shoulder its responsibilities and deliver results.

A strong democracy

Freedom and democracy can never be taken for granted. That is why we will not only protect our democracy against external threats, but also work to make it more robust and resilient. We will strengthen the democratic ethos throughout our society, taking the Dutch Constitution as its foundation. Here is what we aim to do:

- We will make our democracy under the rule of law more resilient, in part by increasing the independence of key democratic institutions. We will build more checks and balances into appointment procedures for the Electoral Council, the (yet to be established) Netherlands Authority for Political Parties and the central-government-wide advisory bodies. We will also enhance the protection of those who work to uphold the rule of law. We will improve the interplay of checks and balances by ensuring that inspectorates and supervisory authorities have sufficient resources and powers.
- We will improve the parliamentary system by implementing several modernisation proposals made by the National Commission on the Parliamentary System (Remkes Commission): reforms to the Senate electoral system, introduction of a right for the Senate to propose amendments to bills and return them to the House of Representatives, and a second reading of constitutional amendments in a Joint Session of the two Houses of the States General. In addition we will explore the introduction of a minimum threshold for representation in parliament and a new electoral system for the House of Representatives in which preferential votes carry greater weight. Comprehensive legislation on political parties will be introduced.
- We aim to deepen the democratic ethos throughout society, including by focusing more on citizenship education.

Dependable government with a human face

Government and politics can do more to increase public trust by showing transparency and a human face. And by using plain language: letters from the government should be easy to understand. Provinces, municipalities and water authorities face the same challenge. We will therefore involve subnational authorities more closely in our policy. Here is what we aim to do:

- We will formalise the right to make a mistake and the right to communication in plain language. We will proceed with the Bill amending the General Administrative Law Act in order to strengthen the system of safeguards that it provides.
- We will improve cooperation between public authorities, proceeding on the basis of recommendations made by the Study Group on Central-Local Government Relations. When tasks are to be transferred to subnational authorities we will perform a feasibility check as standard (such as the Subnational Authorities Feasibility Assessment (UDO)).
- With regard to the operation to redress the consequences of the Groningen earthquakes, we will ensure stable implementation by appointing a government commissioner to oversee the process. This individual will be tasked with the smooth organisation of the compensation process and the speediest possible completion of the reinforcement operation. The commissioner will also be jointly responsible for implementing the Bright Future (*Nij Begun*) programme, which aims to bolster the future prospects of the Groningen and Noord-Drenthe regions.
- We will introduce a lobbying register that is practical and workable for public authorities and stakeholders alike. We will make the Open Government Act easier to apply. Working on the basis of the evaluation expected in 2026, we will also examine whether amendments to the Act are needed. In the meantime, we will focus on its practicability, including though more effective information management and better use of artificial intelligence.
- We will work at EU level on a revision and simplification of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the application of the current GDPR in the Netherlands.
- Clubs and associations are crucial for meeting other people and fostering social engagement, but they are being hamstrung by regulatory pressure and liability risks.

We will make a clearer distinction between professional organisations and community associations, and will limit the liability of volunteers. We will amend the Management and Supervision (Public and Private Companies) Act, and will ensure that making charitable donations remains attractive from a tax perspective. We will make agreements with banks and municipalities to reduce practical obstacles associated, for example, with banking and event management regulations.

Meeting places are under pressure, especially in villages, older neighbourhoods and new housing estates. We will therefore establish a Community Fund aimed at developing and maintaining facilities such as community centres, club houses and village shops. This will be done in collaboration with local authorities, the business sector and society at large.

Equal treatment

Everyone in the Netherlands is equal under the law. This principle is in keeping with the Dutch traditions of tolerance and openness. The freedom to believe what we wish, be true to ourselves and not be judged on account of our background is essential to who we are. Racism and discrimination have no place in our society. Here is what we aim to do:

- We will strengthen the roles of the National Coordinator against Discrimination and Racism and the National Coordinator on Combating Antisemitism by enshrining their tasks in law. We will take action to combat ethnic profiling. Sometimes there is a legitimate reason for making distinctions on the basis of ethnicity, such as in the context of healthcare. But ethnic profiling has no place in the activities of public authorities.
- By establishing a national antidiscrimination agency with physical offices we can obtain a more detailed picture of discrimination and antisemitism. We will increase the number of antidiscrimination detectives, police officers who prioritise the investigation of discrimination cases. We will strengthen police networks such as Pink in Blue and the Jewish Police Network, and we will involve them in efforts to tackle discrimination effectively.
- In order to obtain a licence, professional football organisations are required to draft plans for promoting antiracism, equality, inclusion and a climate of social safety. As a standard practice, disciplinary investigations will be conducted in response to reports of discrimination. In order to tackle discriminatory and antisemitic chanting more effectively, legislation prohibiting participation in such chanting will be enforced more strictly, and mouthing the words along with such chants will be made a separate criminal offence.
- Working together with the six islands in the Caribbean part of the Kingdom, we will work actively to raise public awareness about the Netherlands' colonial past and role in the history of slavery, as well as their enduring impact.

We are one Kingdom

The fact that we are joined in a kingdom with Aruba, Curaçao and St Maarten makes the Netherlands much more than a country on the North Sea coast. At the 2026 World Cup the Kingdom will, for the first time in its history, field two qualifying teams. The Kingdom of the Netherlands offers many opportunities to strengthen our society and economy on both sides of the ocean. We will therefore work to foster social equality, reduce poverty and make far better use of opportunities for green growth. Working in collaboration with Aruba, Curaçao and St Maarten, our focus will be on promoting good governance, protecting human rights and strengthening the rule of law. We will help these countries to enhance their self-sufficiency and combat corruption. Here is what we aim to do:

- New policy in the European part of the Netherlands will, as a rule, be implemented in the Caribbean part of the Netherlands unless there are compelling reasons not to.
- In the Caribbean part of the Netherlands we will work to develop a decent minimum income standard based on the recommendations of the Caribbean Netherlands Minimum Income Standard Committee (Thodé Committee). One focal point will be ensuring the affordability of utilities and basic needs on Saba, St Eustatius and Bonaire. We will ensure that business costs remain affordable, and that entrepreneurs have the freedom they need to do business.

- To improve the quality of governance and financial management, we will modernise the administrative and financial framework acts for Bonaire, St Eustatius and Saba. We will also implement the Public Administration (Probity Screening) Act, in order to safeguard the integrity of public administration. The Netherlands will continue to work with Aruba, Curaçao and St Maarten on good governance, tackling corruption and crime that undermines society, and strengthening the foundations of their economies and education systems on the basis of long-term agreements.
- The Charter for the Kingdom of the Netherlands forms the basis of relations between the countries of the Kingdom. The Charter provides that the islands may declare independence if they choose.
- The Netherlands has a responsibility to protect the Caribbean part of the Kingdom. We will therefore maintain a credible military presence in the region. This will enable us to better protect our interests.
- We will make it easier for island residents to vote in European Parliament elections.
- The Caribbean part of the Kingdom is already experiencing the effects of climate change, including coral erosion and flooding. We will therefore lose no time in implementing a common climate agenda, and we will proceed with the policy plan for nature and the environment of the Netherlands in the Caribbean.
- We will work to ensure a sustainable economic future for the islands. To this end, we will establish a Caribbean Economic Growth Platform, aimed at stimulating economic development and innovation across the six islands. The new national investment institution will be able to invest in all four countries of the Kingdom, and the same conditions will apply to all four countries.

Safety and security in a state where the rule of law is strong

Safety and security start where you live: in your own home, street and neighbourhood. Being safe and secure means being able to go home without fear after a night out. It means knowing that help will arrive if you need it and trusting that the rules apply to everyone. But now all too often we see violence in the streets. Emergency workers are attacked. Criminal complaints go unprocessed for too long. We want to be a country where criminals are punished and where authority is respected. We are grateful to the police, emergency workers and other guardians of the rule of law, and will ensure that they have enough people, resources and capabilities to do their jobs properly.

In order for society to be safe and secure, the rule of law must also be strong, nobody should be above the law and our democracy must be protected from threats at home and from abroad. The rule of law requires constant maintenance. Here is what we aim to do:

Rule of law

- The right to demonstrate is fundamental to our democracy but, as we have seen in recent times, demonstrations sometimes get out of hand and develop into large-scale public order disturbances. In order to safeguard this important right, we will amend the Public Assemblies Act. Mayors will be given powers for administrative enforcement or to move demonstrations. In addition we will amend the criminal law, so that the courts will treat criminal offences committed during demonstrations more seriously.
- We will build a solid partition between the independent courts and the political sphere. We will make the appointment of members of the Council for the Judiciary independent of the minister. There will be a separate budget for the courts.
- In order to strengthen legal protection, article 120 of the Constitution will be amended to enable constitutional review against the classic fundamental rights laid down in the Constitution's provisions.

A safe and secure society for everyone

- The police have the challenging task of preventing and tackling crime in ever more places – from minor offences in the neighbourhood to online extortion.
- We will support the police and invest across the board in its operational effectiveness and organisation. This means that we will train more community police officers and detectives specialised in investigating cybercrime and sexual offences, and deploy them at more police stations. We will also invest in expanding the provision of weapons and defensive equipment to the riot police.
- We will take our lead from what the police and local authorities need to uphold public order effectively in the streets, in our neighbourhoods and online. They must be equipped with all the powers and resources that they consider necessary for this purpose. Special enforcement officers and police officers who need bodycams to carry out their duties will be given them, so that they can work more safely.
- We will examine how we can expand the number of volunteers who work for the police, creating a year-long programme in which young people can familiarise themselves with police work, similar to the voluntary service year in the Defence organisation.
- The National Liveability and Security Programme and the Prevention Through Responsibility Programme are making neighbourhoods safer and preventing a great deal of crime, for example by stopping young people from developing into career criminals after an early misstep. We will therefore continue these programmes at the same level.
- In order to prevent disturbances, we will provide more effective help to people presenting psychologically distressed or misunderstood behaviour. In doing so we will take into account the recommendations of the parliamentary study on psychologically distressed and misunderstood behaviour and safety, which include giving mayors more scope to order care interventions and creating more places in emergency shelters. We will be mindful of avoiding additional complexity or regulatory burden for

the criminal justice system.

- All too often football fans and society are harmed by hooliganism in and around stadiums. We will get to work on measures to limit incidents, including a system of fines for clubs when police need to be deployed in a stadium itself.

Effective on-the-spot penalties

The criminal justice system – from custodial institutions to the courts, and from the police to the probation service – is overburdened. We will ease the pressure through more effective punishment and faster penalties. Here is what we aim to do:

- We will give the police greater scope for disposing of criminal offences, enabling them to respond more swiftly and effectively to minor offences and specific serious offences, such as theft, shoplifting and criminal damage. Under these expanded powers, police will be able to issue on-the-spot fines and/or penalty orders, while there will also be sufficient legal protection safeguards in place.
- It is entirely unacceptable that the perpetrators of serious offences sometimes go unpunished because the authorities obstruct data sharing. We will therefore improve the sharing of data for use in the criminal justice system.
- Cybercrime is having a growing impact on the safety of people in the Netherlands. For this reason we will be increasing the penalties for serious cyber offences.
- The Public Prosecution Service plays an indispensable role in our criminal justice system but is hampered by major IT problems that can potentially have an impact on criminal cases. We will ensure a more settled policy regarding the Public Prosecution Service and make effective agreements to get its digital operational management in order once and for all.
- We will continue the fight against organised crime, taking inspiration from the anti-Mafia strategy pursued by the Italian authorities. In this connection we will take action against the continuation of criminal activity from inside custodial institutions and develop a proposal to protect lawyers more effectively against pressure from criminals, particularly suspects being held in more restrictive custodial regimes. For example, we will expand the scheme for suspects-turned-witnesses and tighten the enforcement of rules against contraband, such as phones smuggled into custodial institutions.
- It is untenable for convicted criminals to be released early owing to cell shortages. We will invest in the Custodial Institutions Agency and expand and improve cell capacity. We will do this by for example paring down facilities, introducing separate regimes for low-risk detainees and taking additional measures.
- We will take measures to ensure that it is easier to hold private proceedings in sexual offences trials involving minor victims. The names of victims in this category will more often be anonymised in major sexual offences trials.
- Clients in the forensic care system often receive similar care to that received by psychiatric patients who have not committed offences. We will therefore require convicted persons to make a co-payment for forensic care.
- It is often too complicated for victims to recover damage from perpetrators in criminal proceedings. We will make this easier for victims. In this connection we will consider establishing norms and fixed amounts for compensation, expanding the scope for group claims and introducing a separate, accessible procedure alongside the criminal trial.
- Under the rule of law, everyone is entitled to a fair trial, which includes the right to a lawyer. In order to safeguard access to justice for everyone in the Netherlands, we will reduce court fees and invest in the funded legal aid system.

Sensible policy on drugs, gambling and sex work

Online gambling and sex work are legal in the Netherlands but can often be exploited for the purposes of crime and human trafficking. We want to prevent vulnerable people in those sectors from being exploited by those who aim to profit from them. Soft drugs are subject to a tightly regulated policy of toleration. We will denormalise the use of hard drugs and tackle the sale and trafficking of these substances. Here is what we aim to do:

- The Controlled Cannabis Supply Chain Experiment is intended to examine whether

regulation results in improved safety and health. We will continue the experiment, evaluate it and on that basis decide on next steps.

- Large festivals will be required to produce a drug prevention plan. People convicted of offences under the Opium Act will more often have an education order imposed on them as part of their sentence.
- Young sex workers are particularly vulnerable to coercion and exploitation. In three years' time we will therefore raise the minimum age for sex work from 18 to 21. Exit programmes for those wishing to stop doing sex work voluntarily will be continued. We will also examine whether a ban on the illegal employment of sex workers could be enacted in the form of a ban on pimp-controlled prostitution. We will strengthen the legal status of sex workers by, for example, providing better access to insurance cover, business bank accounts and other financial services. We will continue the programme Together Against Human Trafficking.
- We will strengthen the duty of care on providers of online gambling services, take tougher action against illegal gambling websites and introduce a complete ban on advertising for online gambling. We will examine the scope for limiting the number of licences granted for online gambling websites.

Stopping violence against women

The government is opting for a clearer and more resolute approach to tackling domestic and gender-based violence, so that women and girls can be safe wherever they are. Here is what we aim to do:

- Management of the approach to tackling violence against women, as laid down in the National Action Plan to Stop Violence Against Women, will be overseen by a national coordinator. We will bring existing programmes for combating abuse, harassment, stalking, violence and femicide within the scope of the national coordinator's office and make clear agreements on the responsibilities of and cooperation between emergency workers, the criminal justice authorities and ministries. In this connection we will consider how the role of the 'Safe at Home' centres can be utilised more effectively in tackling gender-based violence.
- We will devise a system-wide approach. Violence committed in a domestic setting has been underestimated for too long and should be given more priority by emergency workers and be regarded as high-impact crime. Professionals who play a role in the approach to tackling violence against women will be given proper training on domestic violence, intimate terrorism and the red flags that precede femicide. We will aim to make more use of 'combined hearings' (which address multiple cases concerning a particular family) in criminal law and family law. We also need to increase awareness about how women and girls are treated. This means talking about these issues at school and at home.
- We will continue the Enhanced Approach to Online Sexual Violence, including online misogyny and online sexual harassment, as laid down in the National Action Plan.
- We will tighten legislation on domestic violence in order to comply with the Istanbul Convention and introduce a domestic violence disclosure scheme (in line with the UK's Clare's Law) as well as a separate criminal offence of psychological violence. We will also make it easier to require perpetrators to follow compulsory assistance programmes. A statutory duty to seek advice will be introduced for educational and healthcare professionals where there are signs of domestic violence and other harmful practices.
- In order to improve protection for victims of honour-based violence, the position of the National Expertise Centre on Honour-Based Violence (LEC) will be safeguarded and we will introduce the possibility of imposing an exit ban in cases where someone is at risk of being subjected to genital mutilation or forced marriage. The government will get to work on improving the scope to punish those who perpetrate or are accessories to honour-related violence.

National security

The Netherlands needs to defend itself against a great many threats to our national security: cyberattacks on companies that provide critical services, suspect drone flights and crime that undermines society (for which even young people are being recruited). There is also growing geopolitical uncertainty and an increase in hybrid, military and terrorist threats. The most visible is the heightened risk of further escalation (inadvertent or otherwise) between Russia and the West. Even now Russia is engaging in hybrid activities, including sabotage, espionage and cyberattacks.

At the same time we are increasingly the target of the undesirable transfer of knowledge and technology by countries such as China and Iran. Our national security is also still under pressure from jihadist and other forms of terrorism, the rise of anti-institutional extremism and the normalisation of right-wing extremist ideas.

Due to this accumulation of threats to our national security, we will have to deal with at least five major challenges in the coming years:

1. Strengthening our resilience against hybrid activities (including sabotage) by state and non-state actors.
2. Combating the threat from jihadist and extremist networks in the Netherlands, paying specific attention to online radicalisation.
3. Countering threats to democracy and the rule of law posed by organised crime and crime that undermines society.
4. Expanding our technological capabilities (including intelligence capabilities), so that our intelligence and security services are leaders in technology.
5. Strengthening independent, unique intelligence capabilities, thus contributing to Europe's strategic autonomy and making us less dependent on other countries.

This requires the intelligence and security services and the National Coordinator for Counterterrorism and Security (NCTV) to be able to act quickly, resolutely and proactively. We will maintain our unique system in which the services operate within the framework of the democratic state governed by the rule of law. At the same time we need to invest in the robustness of the intelligence and security services, so that they can operate effectively and proportionately in all circumstances, make use of new technologies, and have adequate digital infrastructure at their disposal. Here is what we aim to do:

- Prevention is better than cure. We will therefore step up cooperation at European level in the area of intelligence and security services. We want to have a European equivalent of the Five Eyes alliance, so that we can work together on intelligence as part of a leading group of European countries.
- We will expedite the drafting of a new, stronger Intelligence and Security Services Act. This legislation must be technology-neutral, so that the services are not put at a disadvantage by technological advances. We will draft this Act so that it focuses on threats, unlike the current Act, which focuses on intelligence resources. This will enable us to take flexible and effective action in response to threats. Lastly, we will merge the supervisory authorities, to ensure comprehensive supervision with sufficient safeguards, including in terms of the rule of law.
- We will expand the operational capabilities for intelligence investigations of the Defence Intelligence and Security Service (MIVD) and the General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD), whereby the services can develop independent intelligence, thus contributing to Europe's strategic autonomy.
- We will enable the services to make maximum use of new technologies and anticipate what our adversaries are capable of, by ensuring those services have the best technical talent and the necessary technological capabilities, and by enhancing cooperation with innovative tech companies.
- We will expand defensive and offensive cyber capabilities against threats from abroad, including through the development of active cyber defence measures. We will focus on earlier and better recognition of cyber threats, by means of an integrated

intelligence overview based on data from various public and private organisations. We will strengthen the legal basis for sharing data with private parties, with safeguards to ensure that this data does not fall into the hands of foreign powers. This requires a coordinated approach to monitoring and detection, by means of cooperation between the intelligence and security services, the NCTV, the National Cyber Security Centre, the private sector and our European partners.

- Cyber criminals with obvious links to the Russian regime will be placed on the EU's sanctions list.
- There will be differentiation in supervision with regard to, on the one hand, operations to counter foreign threats and intercept military communications and, on the other hand, intelligence operations in which Dutch citizens are investigated directly.
- We will combat disinformation and online influencing. We will increase the scope for removing disinformation at European level. We will also make full use of the scope for reminding social media platforms of their responsibilities. We will assign the task of monitoring the sources and dissemination of disinformation to the NCTV and the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations.
- We will encourage the services to publicly disclose tactical intelligence more often, as long as this can be done without compromising their position from an intelligence perspective.

A resilient society must be collectively self-reliant. For that reason we will involve all of society in security and crisis management. This starts in our neighbourhoods and villages, where people take responsibility, look out for each other, and can rely on each other in an emergency. Organising this will help enhance our readiness in the face of the threat of hybrid warfare and other crisis situations. Here is what we aim to do:

- Together with local authorities and safety regions, we will set up neighbourhood crisis teams consisting of civilians who can be deployed in the event of a disaster or crisis.
- We will ensure that the locations in neighbourhoods and villages where people can go to in a crisis situation, such as community centres and fire stations, are available for this purpose.

Furthermore we will adopt an enhanced approach to counterterrorism, tackling radicalisation, and strengthening the Surveillance and Protection System. Here is what we aim to do:

- We will enhance the approach to counterterrorism (including at local level) and develop a coordinated approach to young people who are becoming radicalised. We will counter online and offline radicalisation by taking preventative action, ensuring early detection and expanding the knowledge and skills of professionals in the field.
- Terrorist content must always be taken offline within one hour of an order to that effect being issued by the supervisory authority.
- We will ensure that terrorist organisations can be banned in the Netherlands and in the EU as quickly as possible.
- Anyone with dual nationality who joins a terrorist organisation will lose their Dutch nationality. Therefore, in the interests of national security, we will continue the legislative procedure for the Revocation of Dutch Nationality (Permanent Authorisation) Act. We will provide more legal scope for expanding the monitoring of terrorist offenders who have been released from prison and whose Dutch nationality has been revoked, but who cannot yet be expelled and could otherwise disappear out of sight of the authorities. We will turn the Counterterrorism (Interim Administrative Measures) Act into permanent legislation, create a temporary national security monitoring measure by analogy with practice in the United Kingdom and Germany, and enable electronic monitoring in combination with an order to remain within a specified area. The temporary monitoring measure will be reviewed periodically and will not entitle a person to benefits. At the same time we will also focus our efforts on removal from the Netherlands.
- We will invest in the Surveillance and Protection System in order to counter the increased threat against politicians, journalists, lawyers and others. Recommendations in the report by the Dutch Safety Board following the murder of

Peter R. de Vries will be implemented in full. The threat against individuals in these categories emanates in part from criminal networks that seek to undermine the rule of law. In addition to the efforts of the National Police and the Public Prosecution Service, which both work to counter this threat, the AIVD will boost its involvement – within its existing mandate – in analysing threats and collating relevant intelligence.

Big choices facing the Netherlands

Construction and housing

Having a home of your own is a fundamental aspiration for everyone in the Netherlands. A home is the place where people's dreams come to life. Where families are started. Where we meet with friends and loved ones, or retreat to take time for ourselves. We seek out a home when life opens doors for us, presenting us with a new job or course of study, or indeed when other doors have closed.

A home is so much more than bricks and mortar. It is the key to an independent and enjoyable life. For many people in the Netherlands, however, obtaining an affordable and suitable home is no longer a given. All generations are now being impacted by the housing shortage. Young people are putting their lives on hold because they can't find a place to live. Families are stuck in cramped accommodation and cannot move up the housing ladder. Older people who wish to downsize, or who want to move with a view to their future needs, cannot find suitable alternatives and so are forced to stay where they are. The housing shortage is affecting both the homebuyers' and rental markets; the social housing sector and the deregulated rental sector; the countryside and the cities. Achieving a lasting solution therefore demands an approach under which we break trends and make unorthodox choices. Tackling the housing shortage will be our top priority.

This situation has not arisen overnight. In recent years, too few new homes have been built, while our society has changed enormously: for years now it has been impossible to meet the target of building 100,000 new homes each year. Owing to the combination of lengthy permitting and other procedures, local and other regulations, affordability requirements and the tax climate, it takes years to build a new housing development. In fact, the number of permits that are actually being granted is declining. People who wish to build or invest in new housing are too often hindered by rules that were introduced with the best of intentions.

We consider it our responsibility to confront this reality. The housing crisis demands an honest assessment of the scale and causes of the problem. It demands clear choices and cooperation between central government, regions, municipalities, businesses and civil society. We are opting for a three-track approach: more construction, affordable housing, and fewer obstacles.

Obstacles: scrapping, relaxing and simplifying rules

The housing market's heavy regulatory burden means that many potential homes are coming onto the market far too slowly or not at all. More properties can be built, converted and rented if we cut rules, permits and procedures. We will therefore get to work on day one of the new government's term. Here is what we aim to do:

- We will cut down on objection procedures. We will introduce a single opportunity for judicial review (ending the accumulation of judicial reviews on top of objection procedures) and fixed time limits for judgments, and we will limit the scope for suspending construction (for example by means of fixed payments). We will raise the threshold for lodging objections and applying for judicial review. A permanent national scheme will be launched for the advance arrangement of compensation for loss in general and compensation for loss resulting from changes to a land-use plan. We will also make agreements with municipalities to scale up civil service capacity for permitting and parallel planning.
- We will work with an annual Simplification Act to systematically simplify legislation and rules. For example, simpler rules will be introduced for upward extension and splitting properties, and these will be permit-free where possible. Municipalities will be required to draft clear policy on the circumstances in which property developers may do this. Central government will set minimum requirements on the circumstances in which it should be possible to split, convert or upwardly extend properties. We also

aim to make house-sharing and renting homes by room/student room easier. Municipalities will need to have compelling reasons to restrict the splitting of properties into rooms or studios. Homes created on one's own property for family use or informal care purposes will not require a permit, and obstacles to live-in tenant/landlord arrangements will be removed.

- We will standardise sustainability and other requirements and ensure that all municipalities scrap any construction requirements that go beyond those laid down in statute, so that the same rules apply everywhere. We will require provinces to harmonise nature conservation rules, so that these do not hinder housing construction. Municipalities will establish the clearest possible spatial planning/environmental quality frameworks with standardised rules, making the work of aesthetics committees surplus to requirements.
- The Structures (Environment and Planning) Decree will be simplified in order to eliminate unnecessary and costly building requirements.
- Both legislation and the tax climate for the rental market will be shaped in such a way that the investment climate improves and more rental homes can be made available. Before the evaluation of the Affordable Rent Act takes place we will examine how the Act can be optimised to maintain the supply of rental homes.
- Municipalities' scope to impose residency requirements and purchasing restrictions aimed at deterring property investors will be drastically reduced and made more targeted. The specific approach taken in this regard will depend on the evaluation of the Act.

Construction: a clear path for new housing

Property developers, building contractors and contracting bodies such as housing associations are ready and waiting to start building more homes. They must be given the freedom to address the housing shortage by ramping up construction. Here is what we aim to do:

- We will create at least 30 large-scale new housing developments in the national interest, spread throughout the country. These may take the form of new housing estates or neighbourhoods, as well as entire new towns. We will take a comprehensive approach: housing, work, accessibility, green spaces and other facilities will be developed coherently. We will also work to add new streets and neighbourhoods to established areas.
- Central government will now play a stronger role once more in spatial planning and housing construction. Municipalities that exceed their homebuilding targets will be rewarded. Municipalities that lag behind in this regard will receive support from the responsible ministry in order to raise production. We will invest in the realisation incentive and homebuilding incentive schemes, and will safeguard the National Liveability and Security Programme (NPLV). The locations, numbers and timeframes of new homes to be created will be laid down in national legislation.
- We aim to dramatically increase the number of homes available to rent and to buy. In order to achieve this, new homes must be built as soon as possible. These must be viable construction projects. Public funds will not only be spent on affordable rental properties; a proportion will be earmarked on a structural basis for the delivery of affordable homes to buy.
- In new regional agreements on housing (*woondeals*) concluded between central government, local authorities and housing associations, we will aim for two-thirds to be affordable housing, 30% of which will be for the social rental sector and 25% will be affordable homes available to buy. This may vary from one region to another. There is also a housing shortage in relatively expensive regions, such as the Randstad conurbation, and these regions too will require more investment and construction. In other respects property developers will be free to build homes in accordance with the needs of home-seekers, whether these homes are to buy or rent.
- All regional improvement grants will be bundled into a single budget to prevent fragmentation, and we will apply instruments contained in the former Crisis and Recovery Act in order to considerably shorten procedures.
- New housing estates need to be easily accessible by both road and public transport.

We will ensure that sufficient funds are available not only for construction but also for accessibility.

- In order for more homes to be built, the financial position of housing associations and private landlords needs to improve. We want to enhance housing market mobility, and therefore we will introduce annual means testing to determine whether rental prices are still appropriate. Agreements will be made with housing associations about setting appropriate levels of rent. Means testing will also be introduced for new tenants in the social rental sector.
- We want to use innovation to accelerate the construction of new housing. Prefab homes can be built more quickly and sustainably. However, different rules apply in every municipality, and as a result it is proving impossible to scale up production sufficiently. We will make prefab homes much more affordable and quicker to build by aligning the rules and developing a digital planning process. We will introduce a fast-lane permitting process for repeatable building concepts and type approval for factory-built and standardised construction. Such housing solutions will also help us to more quickly meet statutory housing targets for special groups, such as homeless people, people moving from care homes to independent living facilities, and people with refugee status.

Affordable housing: a suitable home for every budget

Everyone deserves an affordable home, be it home-seekers or people already in decent accommodation. Therefore, our plans for a healthy housing market not only involve the building of new homes, but also address concerns about whether the people who live in them can afford to pay for them. Here is what we aim to do:

- In order to keep homes affordable and the housing market stable, the tax treatment of owner-occupied homes will remain unchanged.
- The housing market mobility we stimulate will help groups such as first-time buyers/tenants and older people find decent homes. After all, many older people want to move to a home that meets the requirements of their time of life. However, the supply of decent 'homes for life' for older people is currently too limited. We will encourage the construction of new living concepts for older people so that they can stay in their communities with their neighbours for longer, while enjoying a better quality of life.
- A housing market mobility bank or an attractive mortgage product for older people ('mobility mortgage') will make it easier to convert bricks and mortar into cash.
- We want more shared living concepts for young people and students. Having fewer studio apartments and more house-sharing will not only quickly increase the supply of affordable homes, but will also help tackle loneliness. We aim to incentivise this with property-based subsidies.
- Given the major shortages in the housing market, we want to make permanent occupancy of holiday homes possible. We will also work to solve policy implementation issues. Procedures for the sale of properties by housing associations will be simplified. This will give housing associations more financial scope to invest in newbuild homes and sustainability.
- Municipalities will have more opportunities to pursue active land policy and to purchase land at reasonable prices, including through a firmer and more active application of preferential rights, and a facility to help fund the purchase of land. We want to prevent prices being driven up by increased demand. In this connection an instrument could be used to allow landowners' private profits to be used more for public purposes, such as housing construction and infrastructure. Expanding the cost recovery system would be the quickest and most suitable option.
- The National Performance Agreements and other outcomes of the Dutch Housing Summit will be continued. Housing associations are crucial both for public housing and for neighbourhood liveability. We will therefore give housing associations more scope to invest in developments that are not currently being addressed adequately by the market. Expanding the opportunities associated with commercial activities – as distinct from activities deemed to be in the general economic interest (*diensten van algemeen economisch belang*; DAEB) – could be useful in this regard.

- In order to manage demand on the housing market, the government will also work to gain greater control over all forms of migration, who is able to come to the Netherlands and what housing options we make available to them.
- Educational institutions will be given more responsibility for providing sufficient housing for international students. We will establish rules allowing such institutions to charge rent for accommodation.
- Employers that wish to engage labour migrants must take account of the availability of housing facilities in the region concerned. If no such facilities are available, the employer will be responsible for providing them.

Agriculture, nature and nitrogen

We believe in the professional expertise and innovativeness of the Dutch agricultural sector. Sustainable food production, healthy businesses and a more robust natural environment go hand in hand. The Netherlands urgently needs to resolve the current deadlock on nitrogen emissions. The nitrogen problem is causing enormous uncertainty for the agricultural sector, impeding economic development and harming the natural environment. We are making a clear choice for a future-proof agricultural and food system and a robust natural environment. Resolving the nitrogen deadlock will enable entrepreneurs to grow their businesses, offer prospects to farmers including holdings that through no fault of their own do not have the necessary environmental permit (*PAS-melders* and *interimmers*), and allow us to build new homes. It will also enable us to restore biodiversity and the natural environment, both of which are under immense pressure.

The onus for ending this crisis and easing the pressure on the economy lies on those in the political arena, who will need to make decisions to arrive at a coherent package of measures that the sector can get behind. We will build on the robust proposals already put forward by various parties and public authorities over the past several years. This package will create scope in the short term for the construction industry and other businesses to go ahead with projects and make their operations more sustainable. It will also include a customised approach to legalise the operations of *PAS-melders* and *interimmers* and enable resumption of the permitting process. Money is needed for implementation, monitoring and enforcement. That is why we will reserve sufficient funding until 2035. We will also reinstate the Nitrogen Fund, which will be used to finance projects for nature restoration, integrated area development and the agricultural transition, that will achieve a legally demonstrable reduction in nitrogen emissions. This coherent package of measures will be elaborated in four tracks, outlined below, which we will lay down in law as soon as possible.

General nitrogen emission reduction

We will work on emission allocation ceilings and lay down emission reductions for all sectors (agriculture, industry, transport), allowing the process of issuing new permits to resume. Here is what we aim to do:

- We will lay down sector-specific statutory emission targets for 2035, and interim targets for 2030. The targets for 2035, compared with 2019 as the reference year, are: a 42% to 46% reduction in ammonia (NH₃) emissions from agriculture; a 50% reduction in NH₃ emissions from industry; and a 50% reduction in nitrogen oxides (NO_x) from transport. The non-binding interim target for agriculture is 23% to 25% fewer NH₃ emissions by 2030, compared to 2019.
- The critical deposition value (*kritische depositiewaarde*, KDW) will be replaced as soon as a legally sound alternative becomes available. Management will be aimed at achieving emissions reduction and be based on the actual ecological condition of nature areas. We will introduce a new system of permitting based on achievement of the targets. We will invest in greater implementation capacity for the competent authorities.
- The government proposes a clear national approach to achieving the targets for nitrogen and CO₂ emissions reduction and for improved water quality. In consultation with the provinces, area-based approaches will be developed setting out targets for specific areas and, as soon as this is possible, targets for individual holdings. Management and control based on these specific targets will give farmers clarity about how much their holding can emit, putting them in the driver's seat.
- We will use an effective monitoring network to measure national and regional progress towards targets in the areas of nature, soil and water every two years and make adjustments where necessary. With regard to nitrogen, we will carry out more extensive measurements of nitrogen deposition, and soil and satellite measurements to validate models and monitor emissions of NH₃ and NO_x.
- If the 2030 interim target is not achieved, supplementary measures will be taken in

consultation with the parties involved. If the nitrogen target for 2035 is not achieved, the last resort will be a mandatory reduction in farms' animal production rights or phosphate production rights. Companies in the industry and transport sectors will also have to take stricter measures if they fail to achieve their targets.

- When a package of measures is developed that demonstrably guarantees the reduction targets will be met, a legally tenable mathematical threshold level will be introduced. Where possible, area-specific limit values will be introduced as soon as possible.
- We will improve the legal basis for animal production and phosphate production rights, and extend this system to veal calves and goats. Animal production and phosphate production rights will be subject to a mandatory reduction when a holding is sold to a new owner outside the family. The existing legal basis linked to manure production ceilings will need to be expanded for this. The various reduction percentages will be determined before the summer, after consultation with the parties concerned and based on what is necessary in light of the broader societal challenges.
- In addition, general reduction measures will also be agreed before the summer in consultation with the parties involved, with a view to achieving the 2030 and 2035 targets, and lowering the outstanding amount that will need to be achieved through goal-centred management.
- Efforts should be made to create a closed-loop system as much as possible at farm or regional level, as this produces less pollution and benefits water quality. To this end we will introduce a simple land-based application standard by 2032 at the latest. Holdings that comply with the goal-centred approach will be exempted. We will also investigate the scope for a grassland requirement and a cover crop requirement in areas with a high leaching potential.
- We will ensure ongoing financial support for the further development of area-based processes, such as extensification, innovation and management measures. Farmers who are helping to manage these processes will receive payment for their time.
- More scope for experimentation will be created via 'Field Labs' for technical and social innovations, extensification, revenue models and a discretionary policy with regard to permitting and manure rules and groundbreaking innovations.
- We will continue the schemes for voluntary cessation of farm operations, focusing them more specifically on livestock holdings in a certain radius around Natura 2000 areas suffering from excessive nitrogen deposition and on outdated farm holdings. The goal here is to restore the quality of nature areas and achieve effective nitrogen reduction. We will develop a separate scheme to accelerate the phasing out of outdated farm holdings.

Area-based nitrogen reduction around sensitive nature areas

Our nitrogen strategy is aimed particularly at improving the situation in nitrogen-sensitive Natura 2000 areas where the deposition value is currently exceeded, through a combination of voluntary and less optional measures. Here is what we aim to do:

- We will establish zones around Natura 2000 areas that are wide enough to ensure the goals for the area in question are reached.
- We will start with the most sensitive nature areas. These zones and the accompanying goals and measures for the most sensitive areas will be determined by the summer, in consultation with the provincial authorities. Within the zones near nature areas, a greater reduction in emissions will be necessary, for which the provincial authorities will adopt area-based approaches made up of innovation, extensification, converting to sustainable production, and moving or ending operations.
- We aim for area-based approaches to tie in where possible with ongoing processes in the provinces, as approaches need to be tailored to the area in question. In the interests of a level playing field, provincial plans will need to satisfy requirements laid down at national level. Disbursement of funds will be conditional on uniformity of approaches (in terms of zone width and measures required) around comparable nature areas.
- We will give priority to implementing this approach around at least five nature areas

in 2026 where the situation is the most critical in terms of the impact of nitrogen deposition, including the Veluwe and the Peel. The approach in each area will combine measures to reduce nitrogen with nature conservation and restoration, improving water quality, combating groundwater depletion and restoring ecosystems.

- We will also continue the area-based nitrogen approaches already initiated in a number of economic clusters, including the Port of Rotterdam and the Brainport Eindhoven region.
- Based on monitoring results, land management organisations should be compelled to carry out nature restoration measures within fixed restoration objectives. Participation in the priority areas will be formally established, so that all parties involved – from the sector, nature conservation and other parties in the system – will have a shared role in steering towards the goals.
- Agriculture will be facilitated in areas where it is feasible. Besides regional land banks, an integrated National Land Bank will be established to help holdings in the vicinity of nature areas to relocate if they wish. Through long-term structural policy, central management and incentive schemes, we will facilitate the transfer of parcels of land and farm properties from farmers without a successor to others, particularly young farmers. All parties in the system will be urged to contribute to this.

Nature conservation and restoration

We are proud of our Dutch landscapes and nature areas. We want to keep these areas in good condition for future generations to enjoy too. Here is what we aim to do:

- We will work with provincial and water authorities, farmers and nature organisations to restore degraded nature areas. This will involve tackling the nitrogen problem and implementing an area-based approach to stop groundwater depletion and eradicate invasive alien species.
- We will implement the Nature Pact and make new agreements for the period after 2027. More robust links between nature areas will reduce habitat fragmentation and reinforce biodiversity. Structural funding and clear accountability for effective nature management will enhance the results of conservation efforts. Where necessary, we will enlarge nature areas. Where possible, we will opt for agri-environmental stewardship and shared use.
- With a view to fair payment for agri-environmental stewardship, we will aim to agree long-term contracts and expand the area covered by these schemes. We will pay farmers for development and management activities, based on what is most beneficial for nature and water.
- We will provide structural funding for land management organisations through the grant system for nature areas and landscapes. Among other things, funding will be available to carry out (or intensify) vital conservation activities and take mitigation measures to restore the quality of nature areas, especially nitrogen-sensitive Natura 2000 areas. Grants will be tied to an obligation to achieve results.
- We will implement the Nature Restoration Regulation. In disbursing the available resources, the focus will be on urban greening and nature restoration in the North Sea and the Wadden Sea. In determining how the Nature Restoration Regulation should be implemented we will also consider, within the existing legal frameworks, broader interests relating to spatial planning and the economy. We will conduct an evaluation of the objectives for Natura 2000 areas to find out if they can reasonably be achieved.

Targeted support

We are aware that we are asking a lot of farmers. But we are standing by them and want to help them transition to future-proof agriculture. Here is what we aim to do:

- If farmers need to make changes to their farm management or if they have to cease operations in a particular location under the area-based approach, we will compensate them for the costs of extensifying, relocating or, if there is no other alternative, for compulsory buy-out and for depreciation of land and/or other losses. Farmers who adopt more sustainable practices or convert to less intensive or nature-inclusive agriculture will receive support. Funding for agri-environmental stewardship

could give this an extra boost.

- AI, drones, green gas, sensor technologies, robotisation, biotechnology and genetics, cultured meat and innovative fermentation will all play a role in the food production of the future. We will support private investment with grants and credit schemes. By collaborating with agribusiness and knowledge clusters, we can scale up and roll out proven innovations that will help us develop a future-proof, sustainable food system.
- We will talk with parties in agricultural supply chains on how government can draft policy that will support sustainable chains in growing their markets in the Netherlands and more widely in Europe. We will also make agreements on bringing fruit and vegetables onto the market that have been grown using sustainable methods or that have an imperfect appearance. We will encourage the consumption of organic and sustainable products, and to this end will proceed with the action plan on increasing organic production and consumption.
- We will work on improving the sector's implementing capacity. To this end we will make a start on establishing a 'marketing board 2.0'.

Other areas

We are also going to take measures in a number of other areas. Here is what we aim to do:

- We will make national, binding agreements with greenhouse growers, arable producers and parties in the chain, aimed at substantially reducing the use of plant protection products, based on environmental impact points. The scope for integrated crop protection will be expanded. At European level, we will advocate authorisation of CRISPR-Cas and cisgenic technologies in plant breeding.
- The government will support young farmers and growers, with a view to promoting generational renewal in agriculture. Existing startup aid will be continued at the current level until at least 2035, and any extra space within the Common Agricultural Policy will be utilised. In addition, 'farm succession' will be added to the Green Projects scheme and the Investment Fund for Sustainable Agriculture as a separate category. For young farmers and growers, this means the take-over price and the loan required to buy or lease land will be taken into consideration too.
- The government will introduce a standard for methane-reducing additives in cattle feed as of 2029.
- A draft order in council on humane livestock farming will be presented to the House of Representatives in the summer of 2026. It will set out the elements of a humane livestock farming standard, to be introduced in stages, based on voluntary agreements made with stakeholders in the Humane Livestock Farming Agreement. Pursuant to that agreement, this government will establish a national authority on humane livestock farming that will be tasked with monitoring the implementation of the livestock farming standard. In consultation with the parties to the Humane Livestock Farming Agreement, the authority will also advise on any adjustments to the timetable for the standard's entry into force for reasons including feasibility. The government's investment in humane livestock farming will take the form of grants and tax relief, offering economic prospects for family-run farms. There will be extra attention for young farmers.
- By investing in technological and social innovation and in sustainable fishing techniques, we will help make Dutch fisheries fit for the future. Innovative aquaculture and new forms of cultivating crustaceans, shellfish and seaweed offer additional opportunities for sustainable fisheries. We will work with other North Sea countries and advocate clear European rules on these topics.

On track for the climate and green growth

We want to see a prosperous, clean and autonomous Netherlands. We believe that a thriving economy and a liveable planet can go hand in hand, but that requires us to roll up our sleeves and work together. The challenges are significant: our earning capacity is under pressure and decarbonisation in the Netherlands is stalling.

This affects all of us. People are worried about their energy bills. Companies that want to become more sustainable are encountering the limits of grid capacity. And we would like our children to grow up in a clean and safe world. All this will take a united effort. From the kitchen table to the boardrooms of the largest companies, it's time for us all to get to work.

The government will take the lead. We will do everything possible to reduce congestion on the electricity grid. We will work at full speed on clean, domestically produced energy, and we will use our raw materials wisely. Targeted investment will enable companies to become more sustainable.

In this way we will create opportunities for green growth and reduce our dependence on repressive countries. We will continue working towards the climate targets and building a clean and safe future. And we will achieve this by the following means.

Investing in energy security and affordable energy from Dutch sources

It is crucial to invest in energy security and affordable energy, including for the long term. Here is what we aim to do:

- We will tackle grid congestion with the highest priority. The most urgent projects will be carried out first. Available grid capacity must be used more efficiently, including through grid tariff incentives, flexible contracts and energy hubs. In addition to ongoing measures and the legislative programme to accelerate the expansion of the electricity grid, we will introduce a Grid Congestion Crisis Act to speed up permitting procedures and intervene if construction stalls.
- We will fully commit to electrification, as this is the main route to decarbonising industry. Carbon storage in the North Sea will also be necessary. Government investment in carbon capture, storage and utilisation (CCUS) will take place through state holdings.
- For clean energy produced in the Netherlands, we will continue to invest in achieving 40GW of offshore wind capacity through Contracts for Difference. Supplementary to this, we will better align electricity supply and demand in industry and improve connections with other countries' grids.
- We will extend the SDE++ renewable energy grant scheme with six new application rounds to accelerate the rollout of renewable energy sources. New sustainable electricity sources must be integrated into the energy network in a 'grid-aware' way.
- We will invest in green gas and green hydrogen production and delivery. Under strict conditions, blue hydrogen (combined with CCS) can play a role in scaling up the Dutch hydrogen chain during the transition to a sustainable energy system.
- We will strengthen the nuclear power cluster in the Netherlands, accelerate the small modular reactor (SMR) programme, and support nuclear innovations for maritime shipping. Using the available budget from the Climate Fund and in cooperation with market parties, regional authorities and industrial clusters, work will continue on the development of at least four new nuclear power plants. These may include both conventional reactors and SMRs.
- We will continue strong investment in district heating networks, which will also help reduce grid congestion. People will receive clarity as soon as possible about whether they will be connected to district heating or be offered another sustainable heating solution. To accelerate the rollout and keep heating affordable for households, the government is prepared – within existing financial frameworks – to nationalise private-sector heating companies and invest in new developments. Where district heating is not the most suitable solution, we will have incentives and standards in

place for the rollout of hybrid, smart heat pumps from 2029 onwards.

- We will launch a capacity market for electricity supply security, so that there is always sufficient electricity available to meet peak demand.
- We will prioritise improving homes' energy efficiency, for example through a National Insulation Initiative, helping to keep energy bills structurally affordable. In the years leading up to 2030, neighbourhoods with the highest energy poverty will be supported through the National Liveability and Security Programme (NPLV). Landlords will be required to phase out rental homes with E, F and G energy performance certificates (EPCs) by 2029 and with C and D EPCs by 2040.
- The Groningen gas field will remain closed. No new permits will be issued for gas extraction in the Wadden Sea. Existing sector agreements will be upheld, and gas extraction in the North Sea will continue. We will work with the sector to ensure a responsible phasing out of gas extraction on land.

Building a clean and safe future

We will work at full speed to achieve the climate targets. Meeting the 2030 climate target will be challenging, but we will keep pursuing that ambition. We will continue to implement measures that have already been agreed, resolve bottlenecks in implementation and accelerate breakthroughs wherever possible. Through strong long-term policy and a smart European approach, we will do everything necessary to achieve the climate targets for 2040 and 2050.

We will therefore continue working at European level to meet climate targets and uphold the targets laid down in the national Climate Act. Here is what we aim to do:

- The agreement in the EU is to achieve a 90% net reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2040 compared with 1990 levels. This will require additional efforts. In 2026 the European Commission will present a package of measures aimed at 2040. The Netherlands will advocate an ambitious European package to ensure a level playing field. After the European measures have been adopted, we will align as much as possible with this approach. If necessary, additional measures will be provided for at national level in spring 2027 in order to meet the goals for 2040, taking affordability and feasibility into account.
- We are working towards a fully circular economy by 2050, partly with a view to the supply of strategic raw materials. We will strengthen the National Circular Economy Programme and set sector-specific circularity targets, preferably at European level. This will boost innovation and market development, make European and Dutch businesses more competitive, and provide long-term certainty and scope for investment. We will also focus on implementation and on scaling up circular solutions in the market, for example by acting as a 'launch customer' and removing bottlenecks to create a level playing field.
- We will expand charging infrastructure for electric vehicles and keep tax incentives for electric driving. We will encourage the use of carsharing, cycling and public transport.
- We will continue operating an emergency energy fund to assist low-income households with their energy costs while accelerating the energy transition.
- We will work with Germany and France to set standards on the use of biofuels in road transport and inland and maritime shipping after 2030, while safeguarding a level playing field for the transport sector and filling stations.
- We will accelerate the agricultural transition, so that the sector contributes proportionately to achieving the climate targets.
- We will stimulate national innovation in negative emissions and carbon removal. Internationally, we will work on establishing a knowledge cluster for carbon management.

Accelerating sustainability in energy-intensive industry

We are fully committed to green industry with lower emissions. This requires close cooperation between government and industry, taking a European perspective. This will increase strategic autonomy and help build a country that is fit to pass on to future generations. Here is what we aim to do:

- We will create a level playing field and implement stable long-term policy to enable companies to invest in decarbonising their operations. To this end, we will abolish the national carbon levy and seek to lower electricity costs, with a view to a European level playing field and accelerating electrification. We will make clear administrative agreements with industry to ensure sustainability goals remain on track. When introducing new policy we will systematically assess the effects on the level playing field with neighbouring countries.
- We will phase out financial incentives for fossil fuels, coordinating this with EU partners as much as possible.
- We will uphold existing customised agreements; new customised agreements will focus on clusters or regions. The 'Green Growth Package' will be further developed.
- We will draw up a national spatial-economic strategy for the energy-intensive port and industrial clusters designated as areas of national importance¹ in the draft National Spatial Strategy, with a view to concentrating heavy industry activities in clusters.

¹ Rotterdam-Moerdijk, North Sea Canal Area, Chemelot, Northern Netherlands and Zeeland-West Brabant.

The strongest economy in Europe

A strong economy is the basis for our prosperity and welfare. We can only afford to pay for our healthcare system, social security, education and safety because people get up every day to work. And because there are entrepreneurs who have the creativity, professionalism and courage to help our society make progress. However, our earning capacity is under pressure. When productivity grows faster in other countries, the Netherlands falls behind. We therefore need to place renewed emphasis on the fact that every euro we spend has to be earned first. For this reason, economic growth will be one of our main missions. In order to maintain our prosperity in the future, we need to pursue modernisation, sustainability, innovation and investment.

The most important step we can take now for the sake of our prosperity tomorrow is ensuring that people and businesses are willing and able to invest more in the economy of the future. Yet despite the great need for economic growth, investment is currently in decline. This affects our earning capacity and our future prosperity. It is therefore necessary for the government to spend less on consumption, invest more and facilitate more private investment. We are prepared to make the choices required for a strong economy, an efficient government and a strong Netherlands. We are aiming for calm, stability and predictability because we realise that decisions to invest are made over the long term. We must foster confidence that working, investing and doing business in the Netherlands pays. This will enable the Netherlands to become the strongest economy in Europe, with the best investment climate.

Investment

It is our goal to ensure that businesses – whether they are SMEs, startups, scaleups or large corporations – can successfully raise finance in the Netherlands. It must become possible once more for groundbreaking companies to become big in the Netherlands. We are therefore taking extra steps to free up more investment and strengthen the investment climate and finance ecosystem. Here is what we aim to do:

- Within two years after the government takes office, we will establish a national investment institution to strengthen the Dutch capital market and enhance our long-term earning capacity. The institution will provide financing to projects and businesses that are unable to raise it independently in the private finance market. The institution will predominantly offer financing on market terms, consisting of equity capital and various types of loans.
- Existing instruments can be integrated into the institution, which will be the Dutch partner of the European Investment Bank and will operate at a remove from politicians and ministries. Geared towards private investment, the institution will aim to mobilise institutional capital without crowding out private capital. We will make an additional capital contribution and also incorporate suretyships and guarantees. The institution will not exist to perform public tasks. Investments will be accounted for in the central government budget.
- To ensure that businesses have better access to financing, we will work at European level towards the capital markets union and the completion of the banking union. We will harmonise supervision of the financial system, deepen national capital markets and streamline regulation. We will form a leading group of like-minded countries to harmonise rules, for instance on insolvency, without delay.
- Where possible we will make use of European cofinancing and investment opportunities, for instance through the European Competitiveness Fund, the Chips Act 2.0 and Important Projects of Common European Interest (IPCEIs). Through a national EU funding arrangement we will provide Dutch businesses and knowledge institutions with predictability and access to European innovation programmes.
- We want a stable tax climate for businesses. We want to support businesses in making investments that are aligned with our economy of the future, by expanding the Research and Development (Incentives) Act (WBSO) for the development of AI and technology and retaining the innovation box tax relief scheme. Where possible, the Energy Investment Tax Credit (EIA), the Environmental Investment Tax Credit for

Entrepreneurs (MIA) and Accelerated Depreciation of Environmental Investments for Entrepreneurs (VAMIL) will be merged into a single robust investment scheme. Credit arrangements for SMEs, such as the SME loan guarantee scheme (BMKB), will remain in full force. We are committed to a level playing field in Europe wherever possible and will therefore not raise corporation tax. The freedom contribution for businesses will take the form of an increase in invalidity insurance fund contributions. The details will be worked out in consultation with employers' organisations.

- We will encourage people to invest more of their savings in the Dutch economy. There will be an EU investment account and we will study the option of win-win loans. In addition we will incentivise long-term investment by evolving the new box 3 system, which is based on actual return, into a capital gains system.
- A robust financial sector is essential for driving investment in the Netherlands. We will continue ambitious efforts to tackle the regulatory burden, including making the Laundering and Terrorist Financing (Prevention) Act more risk-based. We will ensure that the rules for fintech companies are in line with international standards.

Innovation

Investing in innovation is vital to maintaining our prosperity and ensuring the long-term affordability of the entire public sector. The money needed will be earned in the future using technology that does not yet exist. Furthermore, in today's global landscape, economic strength increasingly translates into geopolitical power. Innovation and applied knowledge will therefore be decisive to our geopolitical position in the world. Here is what we aim to do:

- The government will work towards reaching the 3% target for R&D investments. While the private sector will have to provide the majority of this funding, the government can also use public investment to stimulate private investment. The government must also create the necessary conditions and act more often as the 'launch customer' for innovative technologies. We will continue implementing the National Technology Strategy and will support regional innovation clusters.
- In order to help innovations progress beyond the development phase, we will deploy the National Growth Fund and where possible seek alignment with European cofinancing.
- To drive the implementation of the National Technology Strategy forward, we will invest in regional innovation clusters and in participation in European innovation programmes and public-private innovation programmes.
- The Netherlands remains fully committed to the construction of the Einstein Telescope. To secure this ambition we will specifically seek to cooperate with Germany and will upgrade the ETpathfinder R&D facility.
- We will leverage the government's procurement power to encourage disruptive innovations and offer an initial market using the DARPA model. For this purpose we will establish a National Agency for Disruptive Innovation.
- We will make use of the scope offered by European legislation for 'regulatory sandboxes' and give young tech firms more freedom to experiment.
- More economic value needs to be created from scientific knowledge. In order to establish more successful spin-outs from educational institutions, the aim is for Dutch knowledge institutions (including academic hospitals) to offer the best deal terms for startups in the entire Western world. We will merge the technology transfer offices (TTOs) into a single national TTO responsible for the development and rollout of best practice.
- In line with the National AI Delta Plan, we will, among other things, work on developing an AI Compute Power Plan, remove structural barriers to the construction of AI infrastructure related to spatial planning, energy and permits and boost AI adoption and AI literacy in the Netherlands.

Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurs are crucial to achieving more economic growth, generating broader prosperity and meeting the challenges of the future. They therefore need to be given the freedom to do business, achieve growth and transition towards sustainability and be

given the appreciation that they deserve. Businesses do not operate in isolation; they reinforce one another and need a government that facilitates growth while providing stability and predictability. Here is what we aim to do:

- We will continue the approach to tackling the regulatory burden. Each year we will scrap or simplify at least 500 rules. We will adopt ambitious reduction targets for each ministry, to be coordinated by the Minister of Economic Affairs and Climate. We will have all legislation assessed and scrap rules that entail high costs and/or that do not function well. Working with municipal authorities, we will develop standards for a lower regulatory burden and clear rules, so that local rules are not unnecessarily burdensome for businesses.
- The government will simplify complicated rules for members of the public and businesses. To this end it will submit an annual Simplification Act to parliament, containing concrete proposals from ministries, supervisory authorities and implementing bodies. The first Simplification Act will enter into force in early 2027.
- Our ambition remains the elimination of 'gold-plating' – the practice of imposing stricter national requirements on top of EU legislation. European directives and rules will be implemented more quickly and wherever possible exactly as they are. We support the EU's Omnibus legislation. We will make agreements with supervisory authorities that rules will not be interpreted more strictly than necessary and that administrative burden will be limited.
- Permit procedures for businesses must be accelerated, for instance through digitalisation. In the case of simple applications, we will examine whether (and if so, how) permits can be granted automatically and the fees waived when the authorities fail to comply with deadlines. In the case of larger projects, where possible we will allow construction to run parallel to the permit application. In addition, municipalities will be required to decide on objections to permits within 12 weeks.
- Entrepreneurs can only do business when policy and taxation are stable. With a view to a level playing field, we want to retain schemes that are important to business but that have often been the subject of debate. Take for example the flat-rate tax allowance for expats, the innovation box (tax relief for innovation), the business succession scheme, loss offsetting, the participation exemption and the Research and Development (Incentives) Act (WBSO). Tax reliefs for entrepreneurs, such as the WBSO and the work-related costs scheme, will be simplified and the administrative burden will be reduced. The tax burden on director-major shareholders needs to be in balance.
- The social security system needs to work for employees and employers, so that offering a job becomes a more appealing option.
- The Dutch labour market needs talent. We will train talented students specifically for the labour market at our secondary vocational schools (MBO), higher professional education institutions (HBO) and universities, and where necessary we will attract international talent in a targeted manner. The measures for this are set out in the chapter on education.
- It must be possible for startups and scaleups in the Netherlands to grow. We will therefore make it easier for staff to be paid partly in shares/share options and expand the possibilities for giving employees a financial stake in companies in a tax-friendly way. The investment institution that is being set up will increase the availability of venture capital for startups and scaleups.
- We will create more scope for self-employed people. We will tackle false self-employment by splitting up the Employment Status Assessment and Legal Presumption (Clarification) Bill, which deals with this subject: its legal presumption of employee status will be introduced and the other provisions replaced as quickly as possible with the Self-employed Persons Act.
- We will promote sustainable and responsible business conduct. We will make provision for the 'steward-owned company' in statute as a possible legal form for businesses. We will reduce the administrative burden and costs of businesses that want to operate sustainably.
- The Dutch economy is strong partly on account of leading large companies that have opted to pursue growth and a sustainable future in the Netherlands. We will not scale

back the flat-rate tax allowance for expats.

- Businesses in high streets give a village or town centre its soul, sponsor local football and hockey clubs and create a festive mood around Christmas and Sinterklaas time. We will therefore continue the strategy to improve shopping areas.
- Family businesses are crucial to our economy and therefore we will not scale back the business succession scheme or the deferral scheme for director-major shareholders passing on a substantial interest in a business.
- We will encourage women's entrepreneurship through the Code-V initiative and set ourselves the goal that by 2030 women entrepreneurs will raise just as much finance in relative terms as male entrepreneurs.

The government is going for growth

The government is going for growth, aiming for innovation, sustainability and productivity increases. In accordance with the Wennink Report, we will actively pursue 1.5% structural economic growth and if that target is not achieved, we will make adjustments. The Netherlands has ecosystems that operate on the basis of cooperation between major companies, SMEs, startups and knowledge institutions. We have therefore chosen to take a targeted and focused ecosystem approach and will pursue economic policy geared towards these systems. Here is what we aim to do:

- We will continue the new strategic industrial policy focusing on certain domains and markets on the basis of potential earning capacity, societal challenges and the importance of our strategic autonomy.
- In line with the existing focus on industrial policy, we will opt for four domains that are essential to our future economy and societal welfare: digitalisation & AI; security & resilience; energy & climate technology; and life sciences & biotechnology. Within these domains, we will focus on building up technological niche positions.
- We will further expand the Netherlands' strong position in clean manufacturing, with opportunities for circular construction materials, green chemicals, biobased plastics, hydrogen and the maritime sector.
- We will allow businesses sufficient physical space to expand their operations. To this end we will designate areas of strategic importance around innovation clusters and pencil in sufficient space for business zones. Municipalities that transform business zones or end their use as such will, in partnership with other municipalities, ensure that new space is made available for businesses. When it comes to industry of national strategic importance, central government will coordinate where necessary.
- In order to promote the healthy operation of the markets, we will give the Netherlands Authority for Consumers and Markets, as market supervisor, two new instruments: the call-in power and the new competition tool. In the detailed implementation arrangements we will limit the regulatory burden and uncertainty.
- A more effectively operating European single market is crucial to our economic growth. We will therefore in so far as possible harmonise legislation relevant to entrepreneurs, such as company law and employment legislation. We are also committed to the completion of the single market.

The Netherlands in the world

Defence and international security

International relations are changing rapidly. On Europe's external border, Russia is waging a war of aggression against Ukraine. Within the borders of Europe, we are faced with hybrid threats on a daily basis. Countries such as Russia, China and Iran are working ever more closely together in order to put pressure on the foundations of our security. Political developments elsewhere in the world are also a source of increasing uncertainty. In order to respond to these threats, the Netherlands must pursue a realistic foreign policy in which Dutch and European interests are the main priority.

NATO is the cornerstone of our collective security. The United States is the global power with which we share the most interests. At the same time our future and our prosperity are inextricably linked to a strong Europe. The Netherlands must be the driving force behind a strong, geopolitical European Union that acts decisively. Our policies in all areas must reflect a geopolitical awareness. Reducing our one-sided dependencies and building a European pillar within NATO will enable us to credibly call the US and other major powers to account when their actions impact on our fundamental values and interests. To do this we must invest in our own security, better protect our innovation, encourage scaling up within Europe, and forge new strategic partnerships outside Europe and the US. We will enter into these partnerships on the basis of equality and enlightened self-interest.

Being realistic does not mean letting go of our ideals. We will continue to stand up for our free values, and the Netherlands will approach the world with self-confidence. Making fundamental choices now will enable us to protect our free way of life. We choose a resilient and outward-looking Netherlands that takes charge of its own future.

We will strengthen our Defence organisation and support Ukraine

The Netherlands and Europe must become resilient. We consider it unacceptable for us to remain dependent on others for our protection. We are opting to build armed forces that can both provide a deterrent and conduct sustained operations. This requires not only investment, but also – and even especially – a change in mentality: from peace dividend to combat power. Here is what we aim to do:

- We will scale up defence spending in order to meet the NATO target of 3.5% of GDP. In order to guarantee long-term continuity, we will enshrine the 3.5% commitment in law. That will provide the armed forces with the long-term certainty they deserve.
- In order to be prepared for the wars of tomorrow we must give our own defence industry space to grow. The guiding principle is that the industry must scale up in order to strengthen our own armed forces, enhance the economy's earning capacity (including in the high-tech sector) and provide added value in Europe. By having government, the business sector and knowledge institutions work together, such as in the Defport platform, we can ramp up the production capacity of the Dutch defence industry considerably. We will also work to simplify contract award procedures and participation, and provide prefinancing and long-term security, so that Dutch and European defence startups have the opportunity to scale up too.
- We will work to build scalable armed forces, consisting of at least 122,000 personnel. We will scale up the voluntary service year significantly, and as a first step we will introduce a mandatory survey among young people. If this does not yield sufficient results we will consider other steps, such as reintroducing selective compulsory military service.
- The Defence organisation needs space to accommodate its personnel and conduct exercises. For this purpose we will introduce the Defence Readiness Act as soon as possible. Within the European Union we will also work to establish the necessary exemptions for defence, a process which has already been set in motion by means of the current Omnibus package.

- Besides protecting our own and allied territory, we will strengthen the protection of our critical infrastructure in the North Sea and the defence of the Caribbean part of the Kingdom.
- The war in Ukraine concerns the security of Europe as a whole. We will therefore continue to provide our own unwavering military and financial support in the years to come, and to call for the use of frozen Russian assets. Ukraine is on an irreversible path to EU and NATO membership. The speed of its accession will be determined by its own efforts and the fulfilment of the applicable criteria. The Netherlands will offer Ukraine assistance where possible in this respect.
- We will deepen European defence cooperation, focusing on joint procurement – in user groups – of strategic capabilities that are too expensive for individual countries. The Netherlands is at the forefront of efforts to establish a European pillar within NATO. We will also take a constructive approach to strengthening a European nuclear deterrent. We will accede to the Aachen Treaty.
- The Netherlands will work to reduce dependencies on countries outside the NATO alliance for the supply of essential weapon systems. The main priority in our materiel plans will be to fully meet the capability targets set within NATO in a timely fashion. We aim to carry out 40% of our defence procurement and production jointly with European partners. We also aim to make 50% of our purchases from Dutch and European enterprises (including licensed production and maintenance). We will continue to call for the opening up of closed national defence markets in Europe.
- The government will work towards the establishment of a defence innovation authority following the example of DARPA in the US. This authority will also cofinance joint research projects with knowledge institutions that have added military value for the Defence organisation. In order to provide this authority with the long-term certainty that is necessary for the development of new technologies and industrial scale up, we will allocate it a portion of the defence budget rising to 10% during this term of government.

Europe and the world

Europe

We can only guarantee our peace and security if we work together with allies in Europe. The European Union brings prosperity and security, and ensures that our voice is heard in the world. Geopolitical tensions are putting pressure on European values and interests. It is a matter of great urgency for Europe to become independent and rapidly achieve better cooperation in the areas of defence, energy, technology, finance and industry. If Europe is to mature as a power bloc, a new mentality is needed. The Netherlands wants to play a leading, constructive role in the shift towards a stronger and safer Europe. Here is what we aim to do:

- We will take a realistic stance on European Union enlargement; this includes looking at the matter from a geopolitical perspective. Neighbouring countries that share our values should have the prospect of accession. To be allowed to join the EU, countries must continue to meet the Copenhagen criteria. We will forge ties between strategically positioned candidate countries, such as countries in the Western Balkans, and the Netherlands and Europe by means of enhanced cooperation. And we will work towards a multi-speed European Union.
- We will take firm action against countries that actively undermine the EU, such as Hungary and Slovakia, by doing our utmost to ensure simplification of the EU's article 7 procedures, so that member states' voting rights can more easily be suspended. Hungary will lose its entitlement to EU funds. Within the EU we will work to abolish the rule that decisions on the Common Foreign and Security Policy must be taken by unanimity.
- We will advocate a strong Multiannual Financial Framework that contributes to the EU's strategic goals. We will reprioritise funds in favour of investments in security, defence and innovation.
- The Netherlands will be a driving force in the rapid implementation of the Draghi and Letta reports, focusing on reforming and strengthening our economy.
- We will take a constructive stance on European defence investment. Through the European Defence Fund, EU funds can be used for joint investment in the European defence industry. Joint defence investments can be further developed by means of the EU's SAFE defence loan instrument, which enables major investment in national defence industries under favourable financial conditions. Member states guarantee the loans in proportion to the size of their economies. This instrument can also be made available to allies such as the United Kingdom, Norway and Canada.
- We will look into the possibility of establishing an intergovernmental European Defence Mechanism (EDM) for common procurement of defence materiel and harmonisation of product standards. This too will be done in close collaboration with non-EU NATO partners, such as the United Kingdom, Norway and Canada.
- In order to render sanctions against Russia and other malicious state actors more effective, we will work towards the establishment of a European sanctions body.
- We will step up cooperation at European level with regard to the intelligence and security services. We want to have a European equivalent of the Five Eyes alliance, so that we can work together on intelligence as part of a leading group of European countries.

The world

Our earning capacity and our security and democracy demand realism. We live in a multipolar world where international law does not automatically prevail. This means we must adopt the stance of a country that defends international law but also learns to speak the language of power. We cherish our position as a trading nation, but we will draw a firm line if our technology or security is in jeopardy. Here is what we aim to do:

- We will protect our freedoms against countries such as Russia, China and Iran. *Vis-à-vis* Russia, we will work to ensure maximum punishment for its aggression by enhancing sanctions enforcement and taking firm action against the shadow fleet. We will make use of any further opportunities in our relationship with China. At the same time we will be uncompromising in taking action against theft of our intellectual

property and undesirable interference with our critical infrastructure. We will also hold China to account for human rights violations, subversive activities in Europe and its support for Russia.

- We will continue to stand firm for our Western free values and defend human rights. Around the world we will actively promote the rights of women and minorities, paying specific attention to children and the LGBTI+ community, and to the protection of freedom of religion or belief and media freedom. Countries which actively implement reforms in the areas of human rights, democracy and the rule of law, such as Armenia and Moldova, will receive our active support.
- It is in the Netherlands' interest to guarantee regional stability, gain more access to critical raw materials and counter the growing influence of autocratic regimes. In this context it may be necessary to enter into dialogue with countries that do not share our values.
- We will continue working to foster our transatlantic bond. At the same time we will use diplomatic channels to call the US to account if its actions undermine our values and interests, while remaining mindful of our relationship and our critical security interests. We will also reduce our one-sided dependencies, for instance in the areas of defence, software and critical raw materials.
- The Netherlands has a responsibility to actively promote international law. One of the ways we do this is by hosting international organisations. The Netherlands' foreign policy complies with judgments of the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court. We work to combat impunity in conflicts around the world, including in Ukraine, Gaza and Sudan.
- The Netherlands advocates a two-state solution to the Middle East conflict, i.e. an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian state alongside a secure Israel. The terrorist organisation Hamas must not play any role whatsoever in the governance of the Palestinian Territories. Illegal settlements (and their expansion), acts of violence committed by Israel against civilians in Gaza, and the obstruction of humanitarian aid must all be brought to an end. Together with the international coalition, we will contribute to the reconstruction of Gaza. The effectiveness of the assistance provided is key. Within the budget for aid to the Palestinians, we will restore cooperation with UNRWA and also focus on collaboration with other aid organisations that are active in the region. National measures and European sanctions against the Netanyahu government, its members and its associates will remain in force until meaningful steps are taken towards peace and compliance with international law. The subversive influence of Iran and organisations (including terrorist groups) affiliated with the Iranian regime, such as the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, must be countered by means of maximum sanctions.
- Together with the other affected countries, the Netherlands will keep doing all it can to establish the truth and achieve justice and accountability with regard to the downing of flight MH17. This includes working to ensure that the perpetrators and other responsible parties do not escape punishment and evade responsibility.
- We will work towards a robust network of missions abroad, so as to ensure that the Netherlands is fully and strongly represented in important growth markets, in countries that are of key geopolitical importance, and in order to support the protection of human rights and democracy. We will use our influence to build stable partnerships, open up markets to Dutch businesses and strengthen our strategic autonomy.
- Free trade bolsters our economy and helps reduce our dependence on a single region. We will therefore urge the European Commission to negotiate new trade agreements and open up markets, for instance with strategic partners such as India, Australia and Indonesia. In this regard we will work in accordance with the OECD Guidelines, including on combating child labour and climate change.
- We will tighten investment screening and block the transfer of sensitive technology (such as photonics and quantum technology) if it serves our strategic interests to do so. In order to enforce a level playing field, we will urge the Commission to take measures against countries that do not play by the book. We will also continue to strengthen our ties with like-minded countries such as Canada, the United Kingdom,

Japan and Norway.

- We will invest in development cooperation, thus taking a step towards reaching the international OECD target. We will improve people's prospects by investing in young people, education and women's rights, and will contribute to the global health strategy and food security. When it comes to reception in the region for refugees and managing international migration flows, we will also continue to contribute – both directly and through migration partnerships. In addition we will contribute to humanitarian aid to alleviate the great needs in this world and to provide future prospects at local level. By doing so we will help ensure more security and stability worldwide, reduce irregular migration and counter the influence of China and Russia in the Global South.
- Development cooperation will also be used as an instrument to protect our interests and strengthen our international position. In this context we will make use of the synergies created by the 'Dutch Diamond' approach. At European level, development cooperation funds should be used more efficiently in order to achieve economies of scale.
- We will pursue a modern aid and trade agenda based on the areas in which the Netherlands excels and focused on mutual interests. We will build equal partnerships through a broad Africa strategy.

Asylum, migration and integration

For too long, migration has been the subject of great political conflict, while at the same time too few choices have been made to address the issue. Now, in order to get the situation back under control, we are going to make those choices. We will do so not only by stepping up controls and reducing the influx of asylum seekers, but also by providing decent reception facilities and fostering swifter participation in society. We will focus on labour migration that genuinely meets the country's needs, and we will combat exploitation. Our plans are as follows:

A clear migration model in Europe

At present, anyone who comes to the Netherlands has the right to apply for asylum. This plays into the hands of people smugglers, who earn vast sums off the suffering endured by refugees. At the same time, the most vulnerable people are often unable to find protection: they lack the resources and contacts needed to make the perilous journey to Europe. The EU Pact on Migration and Asylum is a major first step towards gaining more control over who is able to come to the Netherlands. To obtain complete control in this regard, we will work at international level to develop a modern, strict and humane migration model. Here is what we aim to do:

- The Netherlands – together with other European countries – will take the lead in seeking support for measures aimed at modernising international refugee law. To this end we will organise an asylum summit and launch various diplomatic initiatives. The ultimate goal is to make it possible for asylum applications to be submitted and dealt with outside the European Union and to ensure that asylum procedures no longer need to be conducted in the Netherlands. Recognised refugees can then be resettled throughout Europe, where they can build new lives. In this way we can destroy the ruthless business model employed by people smugglers in the Mediterranean region.
- We will support the new EU Return Regulation. Its provisions include mutual recognition of national return decisions and greater scope for detention prior to expulsion. In this connection the Netherlands also supports broadening the scope of the 'ties criterion', which will make it easier at EU level to make agreements on return with countries outside Europe. When making agreements on return hubs and transit hubs, the Netherlands will ensure that migrants are never sent back to a country where they are at risk of persecution. Wherever possible we will make such agreements in collaboration with the EU or like-minded countries. In the wake of the recent elections in Uganda, the Netherlands' cooperation in this area with that country will be put on hold.
- In accordance with the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, the external border procedure will provide for secure centres for asylum seekers whose applications have little prospect of succeeding. The Netherlands will contribute to such centres in order to ensure that they are safe and humane. Until such time as the reception system in the Netherlands is functioning properly the Netherlands will contribute financially to the solidarity mechanism under the Pact.

Measures at national level

When it comes to reducing the influx of asylum seekers and preventing misuse of our migration law, national and EU measures must go hand in hand. Here is what we aim to do:

- If the Dutch senate passes the Asylum (Temporary Measures) Act and/or the Asylum (Two-Status System) Act, we will implement this legislation in full.
- If the asylum system struggles to cope because the number of people applying for asylum increases dramatically in a short period and it was not possible to anticipate that increase, we will take additional measures to stem the flow. These may include a temporary emergency brake on admission of beneficiaries of subsidiary protection for the purpose of family reunification. A hardship clause will be applied in cases of exceptional distress.
- The Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND) needs to be able to decide on applications more quickly, and so we will simplify the asylum procedure. For example,

we will abolish the General/Extended Asylum procedure (*AA/VA-procedure*), compulsory procedural steps such as the preliminary interview (*aanmeldgehoor*), the compulsory medical advisory opinion, and written notification of the intent to deny an application (*voornemenprocedure*). This will give the IND more flexibility in reaching a decision with due care. Failure to cooperate with procedures will be a ground for rejecting the application, and repeated applications for asylum will be assessed much more strictly. This will ensure that procedures do not take longer than absolutely necessary. With regard to the time limits for lodging an application for review, we will align with the minimum terms laid down in the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum. In accordance with EU legislation, applicants with little prospect of obtaining a residence permit will be granted legal aid only after their application has been denied.

- We want the refugee foundation VluchtelingenWerk, working in collaboration with the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA) and the IND, to provide walk-in advisory services at reception locations. This should reduce the workload of the COA and the IND.
- Some migrants obtain the right of residence in the Netherlands by means of false acknowledgement of paternity, without providing any care whatsoever for the child concerned. To combat this, arranging acknowledgement of paternity of foreign children will, from now on, be possible only via a select number of municipalities that have the relevant knowledge and expertise. Anyone who falsely acknowledges paternity will be prosecuted.

Stricter approach to asylum seekers who break the law

Asylum seekers who cause nuisance or commit criminal offences ruin it for genuine refugees. The people of Budel and Ter Apel should be able to sleep peacefully at night. Here is what we aim to do:

- Any criminal conviction received during the asylum procedure will be given added weight in the decision on the asylum application. The 'sliding scale' will be applied as strictly as possible.
- Asylum seekers on the 'Top X list' will be dealt with more strictly. In this connection more account will be taken of repeat offending. Travel bans will be more readily imposed on asylum seekers who repeatedly cause trouble when using public transport or who try to avoid paying their fares.
- We will greatly expand the number of enhanced supervision locations (VTLs) and restricted processing locations (PBLs). Where possible, the most serious troublemakers will be placed in immigration detention and expelled.
- Municipalities that have an asylum application centre will be given scope to permanently increase police deployment levels.
- Ensuring asylum seekers are able to be active is an effective way of preventing nuisance. Besides work and language training, where necessary daytime activities will be arranged, and trauma therapy and addiction care improved.

Getting the asylum system in order

Almost every day at present, the asylum system is operating at the limits of what it can handle. We will therefore base the approach for the entire system (IND, COA, Nidos (refugee youth protection) and the Repatriation and Departure Service (DT&V)) on a multiannual financial plan underpinned by realistic forecasts. Here is what we aim to do:

- In accordance with the agreements the government made with the COA in 2023, we will enable the COA to provide sufficient long-term and flexible reception places, with stable financing based on the most recent Multiannual Production Forecast. Locations used for emergency reception facilities (such as cruise ships and hotels) will be closed in the coming period and replaced by regular reception facilities. This will also ensure that children are not continually having to move. When the number of new migrants falls, municipalities will be able to use the flexible locations to temporarily house groups requiring special attention, as referred to in the Housing Allocation Act. At the request of the municipalities and implementing agencies, the Dispersal Act will remain in place for the time being, so as to ensure a fair distribution of asylum seekers among municipalities. Once the COA has sufficient long-term and flexible reception

- places available, the use of the Dispersal Act will no longer be necessary.
- Vulnerable groups staying in reception facilities – such as LGBTI+ persons, children and religious converts – will receive greater protection. Anyone who makes such facilities unsafe for these groups will more rapidly be placed under enhanced supervision and have their residence permit application rejected. Where necessary, vulnerable unaccompanied minor refugees will be supervised until the age of 21 rather than 18, to prevent young asylum seekers from falling into problematic or criminal behaviour.
 - In certain municipalities, giving beneficiaries of international protection priority for social housing is becoming increasingly untenable, in view of the long waiting times faced by Dutch nationals. For as long as there is no good alternative way to house beneficiaries of international protection, we will leave policy in this area to the municipalities themselves. In the meantime, we will tackle the problem in three ways: 1) reducing numbers of incoming migrants, 2) increasing housing construction and 3) arranging alternative housing options between COA locations and regular housing. We will conclude a binding agreement with municipalities on the rapid development of flexible locations for temporary homes that beneficiaries of international protection, Ukrainians and Dutch nationals who need temporary accommodation can use as an alternative to social housing. As soon as sufficient alternative housing is available, it will no longer be possible under the law to give priority for social housing to beneficiaries of international protection.

Decent rules for labour migration and measures to tackle abuses

Labour migration can be valuable to our economy but cannot be allowed to go hand in hand with exploitation and abuses, such as those that currently occur in the Netherlands. Here is what we aim to do:

- By implementing the recommendations made by the Roemer Committee and in the Social and Economic Council's advisory opinion 'Value-based Labour Migration', we can deter unscrupulous labour providers, protect the position of employees and combat abuses such as underpayment and poor housing.
- Since registering labour migrants individually is complex in practice, we will explicitly involve employers in this process, to ensure that supervision and enforcement are in order from day one.
- We will assign employers more responsibility for providing sufficient housing, and we will put an end to relationships of dependence, where a labour migrant ends up on the street if their job comes to an end.
- In sectors where abuses against temporary, low-paid labour migrants persist, we will impose bans on temporary agency employment.
- We will use spatial planning instruments and municipal business impact reports to ensure that housing, services and living standards are in proper order before more workers are recruited. This must also be laid down in a provincial spatial planning ordinance.
- We will launch a three-year pilot for an active, targeted programme that – subject to strict conditions – will attract well-qualified workers who can add value in the Netherlands in pre-determined industry sectors. Those conditions will include salary and housing requirements and a maximum employment term of three years. Those eligible to apply for this pilot will in any event include nationals of EU candidate countries.

Integration: protecting freedom, ensuring swifter participation

Freedom and community spirit are the foundations on which the Netherlands was built. Such freedom means being able to be yourself, to be safe and secure, and to freely profess your religion or belief. Such freedom cannot be taken for granted. Sometimes people face racism and discrimination, which create barriers to their participation in society. In some communities, women are oppressed, or religiously inspired violence is committed. Regimes use their long reach to exert influence over their diasporas in the Netherlands, sometimes even resorting to indoctrination and intimidation.

Most people want to play an active part in their community, and many come to the Netherlands precisely because of our free and open society. That is why we expect everyone to embrace the values of our democratic society, including freedom of religion, equality between men and women, and acceptance of LGBTI+ persons. We respect our differences and each other's backgrounds. Anyone who wishes to play an active role in the Netherlands will get every opportunity to do so. But anyone who ruins it for others can expect a firm response. Here is what we aim to do:

Protecting and strengthening freedom

From international students to the grandchildren of those who came to the Netherlands long ago, many people have to deal with unwanted foreign interference that undermines our open society. Unfortunately there are also individuals and communities that decide for themselves to reject our way of life. Here is what we aim to do:

- We will create a reporting centre for foreign interference, which will be part of the Ministry of Justice and Security. Here diaspora communities and international students will be able to report cases, anonymously if necessary, of transnational repression. These reports will be used to develop an effective approach, and the individuals who lodge reports will be referred to law enforcement agencies and/or other bodies that can offer them support.
- Some religious institutions are misused by repressive countries in order to undermine our freedoms. We therefore want to make sure that such institutions are transparent about the funding they receive. We will prevent foreign funding of mosques and other religious institutions wherever possible.
- For years now there have been major concerns about repressive regimes using diaspora policy to pursue an agenda that undermines our democracy and the rule of law, and obstructs integration. When they use evening and weekend classes for this purpose, it is important to be able to intervene. We will therefore develop legislation that facilitates targeted supervision of such places, under certain conditions.
- We will support the initiative of the European Parliament to place imams who incite hatred on a blacklist and impose entry bans on them. In preparation for such a measure we will draw up a national list of such individuals.
- We will continue the interfaith dialogue coordinated by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment. We will embrace joint initiatives from Christian, Jewish, Muslim and other communities, and will strengthen them where necessary. Organisations that obstruct integration are not welcome in this dialogue.
- We will take action against honour-based violence, genital mutilation and forced marriage, and will introduce scope for a court-ordered exit ban in cases where someone is at risk of being subjected to genital mutilation abroad. An aggravating circumstance will be introduced for criminal offences such as the perpetration or joint perpetration of honour-based violence.
- The partial ban on face coverings will be maintained, and we will enforce it more actively by issuing fines more frequently.

Participation will be the norm

We want everyone, including newcomers, to actively participate in and contribute to society. This requires making a quick start on learning the language, getting a job or going to school. Here is what we aim to do:

- Asylum seekers with a good prospect of obtaining a residence permit will be granted the right to work once they have been in the asylum procedure for three months. We will cut the administrative burden by introducing an alternative to the employment permit (*tewerkstellingsvergunning*). From the start, these asylum seekers will receive help and support in finding work, so they can both integrate more quickly and contribute to the cost of their reception facilities. Asylum seekers with little prospect of obtaining a residence permit will not have the right to work.
- Language proficiency is crucial. For asylum seekers with a good prospect of obtaining a residence permit, we will introduce language training at the very start of the asylum procedure.
- A 'Participation Resource Centre' (*Meedoenbalie*) will be set up at all large asylum

reception locations. There, people in the asylum procedure will be assisted in arranging language training, volunteer activities or paid work.

- Up until 2027, Ukrainian refugees in the Netherlands will continue to fall under the Temporary Protection Directive. From 2027 they will be granted temporary residence status, in accordance with existing policy. This will give them certainty and enable them to contribute.
- By modernising Dutch legislation on nationality we will ensure that Dutch nationals abroad do not lose their nationality sooner than is the case for nationals of Germany, Belgium, France and the United Kingdom. Newcomers who wish to obtain Dutch nationality through naturalisation will in principle be required to give up their other nationality.
- In various municipalities we will expand the pilots aimed at helping refugees find entry-level jobs. Beneficiaries of international protection will be given entry-level jobs immediately, as a springboard to regular employment, which they will combine with language training. We will explore the scope for incentivising the swift acceptance of entry-level jobs by means of benefits. We will ensure that the Participation Act and the Civic Integration Act are better aligned to ensure that people are incentivised to work during the integration process too.
- All women are entitled to be economically independent. Therefore, female as well as male members of refugee families will be asked to apply for jobs if the family is receiving benefits. We will explore reducing such benefits in the event of refusal to do so.
- Beneficiaries of international protection who have a degree or professional training are often unable to convert their qualifications. We will make more use of certificates of competence to ensure that they can take on a job at their own level.
- Under the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum the permanent residence permit will be abolished. This means that it will no longer be possible for someone to obtain Dutch nationality through naturalisation on the basis of such a permit. We will therefore make naturalisation possible on the basis of a temporary residence permit, although the bar will be set higher than was previously the case. Anyone who has been granted two temporary residence permits and meets the B1 language requirement will be able to obtain Dutch nationality through naturalisation after six years. A hardship clause will be applied in cases where meeting the language requirement is impossible.

The Netherlands at work

Work and certainty

Most people in the Netherlands derive their income, development, social contact and sense of purpose from work. It is the foundation on which families, communities and our economy are built. We consider it important that work should pay more and should offer people prospects: a decent income, certainty when faced with setbacks, and opportunities to develop in line with an economy and labour market that are rapidly evolving. We are mindful of people's purchasing power. And those who are unable to work must be able to rely on a good social security system. This is what can be expected of a society with a strong middle class, where people contribute as much as possible and are rewarded for doing so. And a society where they receive help when difficulties arise – after all, that can happen to anyone.

The economy is changing fast, partly due to the rise of AI and other technological developments, and as a result the labour market is changing too. This is causing people to feel uncertain about their work and income. At the same time, employers are experiencing large staff shortages and crucial vacancies are going unfilled. All too often, talent does not reach the places where it can add the most value. More movement is needed to keep our economy competitive and to offer people certainty about their work and income. What is more, the population of the Netherlands is ageing and the number of people unable to work due to sickness or disability is increasing. This is putting pressure on the continued viability of our valued social provisions.

Time for choices

That's why it's now necessary to make choices. Choices are needed in the short term, as well as choices for the medium term to push ahead with important reforms. Decisiveness and ambition won't lead to success without societal support and cooperation. In the Netherlands, employees, employers and the government always cooperate as social partners and take bold action in difficult times. Together we find the solutions that our future prosperity requires. We want to continue that cooperation. The structural challenges of demographic ageing, labour shortages and increasing pressure on social security call for ambitious choices that will contribute to economic growth and financial viability. It is important to work towards a future-proof and flexible labour market, not least so that we can protect jobs in the Netherlands. The Wennink and Draghi reports are a key source of inspiration in this respect.

We invite the social partners to work with us on an ambitious cooperation agenda, centred on fundamental solutions for the medium and long term. Choices of this nature need to be made in various areas, and we realise that this will take time. But not every subject will require the same amount of time, and some choices are too urgent to postpone for too long. We will therefore present a supplementary work agenda for the short term, setting out various specific and urgent actions to be taken.

In view of our aim to work towards a common social agenda, the government attaches great importance to constructive cooperation with the social partners. We would like to enter into talks with them to elaborate the measures in the work agenda, especially those concerning unemployment benefit (WW), transition pay and 'from work to work' policy. We also want to discuss continued payment of salary in the case of sickness and while receiving benefits under the Work and Income (Capacity for Work) Act (WIA), all within the applicable financial frameworks.

In these tripartite consultations, the government, represented by the Minister of Social Affairs and Employment and the Minister of Economic Affairs and Climate, will work with employers' organisations and unions towards concrete objectives for a more effectively functioning labour market and a better system of work and income. Speed is a crucial

requirement in this respect because we want to reach solutions in a fast, straightforward and practical manner for issues that cannot afford to wait. This will require serious efforts from all parties concerned.

In doing so we will align almost entirely with the recommendations made by the Social and Economic Council (SER) to the three parties regarding:

1. completion of the labour market package arising from the SER's medium-term advisory report for 2021-2025;
2. implementation of the Pension Agreement and the agreement aimed at helping workers reach retirement in good health (*Gezond naar het pensioen*);
3. improving the position of non-Dutch workers and reducing demand for low-paid work;
4. increasing labour productivity.

More space in the labour market

Short-term work agenda

- Employers experience the long duration and high cost of having to continue paying salary in the case of sickness as a considerable burden. As a result, small businesses are afraid to give people permanent contracts, which is highly disadvantageous for employees and jobseekers. The biggest impact is on small and medium-sized enterprises. On the other hand, we also see that continued payment of salary in the second year is an effective incentive for an employee's reintegration with their own employer. The government will therefore work on proposals to make the continued payment of salary in the case of sickness more workable for employers, particularly SMEs.
- In order to limit the administrative burden, we will remove bureaucratic obstacles currently contained in the Eligibility for Permanent Incapacity Benefit (Restrictions) Act, such as certain reporting obligations, and minimise uncertainty at the outset about sanctions. By clarifying duties and fostering a more tailored approach with more frequent employer-employee contact, we aim to accelerate reintegration and encourage employers and employees to work on recovery.
- The collective labour agreement (CAO) is and will remain an important pillar underpinning employment and working conditions. We therefore consider it important to increase support for collective agreements and to modernise this instrument. As part of the broader approach to limiting the regulatory burden, we will discuss with the social partners how we can reduce unnecessary regulatory burden within collective labour agreements. We will also examine where there is friction between the possibility of exemptions and innovative new areas of industry and look at broader involvement of non-union members while preventing competition on the basis of employment conditions. The advice of the Labour Foundation regarding collective labour agreements will be the starting point for this examination.
- Unfortunately discrimination in the labour market in the Netherlands is still too common. We will get to work on action to eliminate it. We will ask employers to shoulder their responsibility for bringing an end to discrimination in the workplace and in recruitment and selection. The government will enter into dialogue with the House on the subject as soon as possible.
- We will launch a three-year pilot for an active, targeted programme that – subject to strict conditions – will attract well-qualified workers who can add value in the Netherlands in pre-determined industry sectors. Those conditions will include salary and housing requirements and a maximum employment term of three years. Those eligible to apply for this pilot will in any event include nationals of EU candidate countries.
- We want to increase productivity in key sectors, from market leaders to SMEs. We will also focus attention on sectors that do not operate productively at present. Through public-private partnerships, we will support businesses with digitalisation, automation and smarter operation. We will continue the approach already initiated

under the productivity agenda.

Self-employed people

- An ever-growing group of self-employed people are an inherent part of a modern labour market in which workers' desire for autonomy is increasing. We want to give this group the freedom and the clarity that they deserve. We will therefore implement the Self-employed Persons Act as quickly as possible. We will do this in a phased manner so that the timetable takes account of European obligations. We will begin the introduction of the legal presumption of employee status from the Employment Status Assessment and Legal Presumption (Clarification) Bill (the clarification part will therefore be scrapped), as well as the sectoral legal presumptions and assessment committees under the Self-employed Persons Act. The government will submit the rest of the Self-employed Persons Act to parliament as soon as possible after that.
- We will move forward with the parliamentary consideration of the Standard Disability Insurance (Self-employed persons) Act, including the possibility of opting out and taking out private insurance, as laid down in the Pension Agreement.
- We want to encourage people to remain employed in public and semi-public sectors such as healthcare and education. For this reason we will promote good employment practice, among other things through social innovation. And we will take the Social and Economic Council advisory report on this matter as our starting point.

'From work to work' policy in a changing labour market

- In a rapidly changing labour market it should be easier to move 'from work to work', so that employees do not get left behind as the economy changes and so that employers are more flexible in an evolving world. For instance, we will offer more scope for tailored application of the age distribution principle in redundancy procedures, allowing greater account to be taken of personal circumstances. We also call on employers to modernise non-competition clauses so that employees have more freedom.
- Labour markets vary from one region to another. That is why we will continue to pursue an approach involving regional labour markets and employment centres, in which parties such as municipalities, the Employee Insurance Agency (UWV) and social partners cooperate to offer differentiated and customised services aligned with the needs of the local labour market and population.
- We will invest in lifelong learning. This will help ensure that employees are in a strong position in a rapidly changing economy. In the short term, we will pursue this aim by establishing a new scheme, to be deployed in targeted manner, looking at sectors where there are shortages and occupations with many potential opportunities (as identified by the UWV, for example). In the meantime, we will work towards a system of individual lifelong learning entitlements. We will ensure that the people who would benefit most from retraining and upskilling (such as people in vocational occupations and small or medium-sized business owners) can also make the most use of it.
- We will reform the existing transition pay scheme so that it serves its intended purpose, namely to facilitate the transition from work to work. Transition pay will therefore be linked – in any case as regards what it can be spent on – to the new lifelong learning infrastructure. Employers who have invested in a sufficient and timely manner in upskilling and retraining or who make maximum efforts regarding reintegration obligations under the Eligibility for Permanent Incapacity Benefit (Restrictions) Act will have fewer obligations, or none at all, under the new transition pay scheme. We expect employers and employees to also do their part by, for example, using the resources from the Training and Development Funds more broadly and flexibly. We will abolish the compensation employers receive for transition pay awarded to employees who are dismissed after two years of illness.
- In this connection we will also incorporate more focus on activation into the unemployment benefit (WW) system, in keeping with a new system of 'from work

to work' policy and lifelong learning. Unemployment benefit will therefore be higher at the start and the payment term will be reduced to one year. That way, working people will have more financial security and breathing space to find appropriate new employment quickly. However, the requirements for the accrual of entitlements and for claiming those entitlements will be tightened up somewhat.

- The disability benefits system is almost impossible to administer and has become gridlocked, resulting in many vulnerable people not getting the help they need in a timely and effective manner. We will tackle this, drawing a distinction between the short term and the long term. First, we will follow up on expert recommendations regarding the operation of the system and the human dimension. For instance, we will invest in reallocating tasks, stepping up enforcement by the Labour Authority to boost prevention, improving cooperation between occupational health physicians and insurance physicians, and an evolving reintegration process. We will also set more conditions for reassessments under the Work and Income (Capacity for Work) Act (WIA). We intend to implement the recommendation of closing the income support scheme for individuals registered as fully and permanently incapacitated (IVA) to new claimants, in order to prevent the WIA from becoming impossible to administer in the short term. In addition, we want to build more activation into the disability benefit system, where that can be done in a way that takes account of the human dimension.

Medium-term cooperation agenda

In addition to the proposals that we want to introduce in the short term, we will work with the social partners on a labour market for the medium term. Here is what we aim to do:

- We want employment security for working people and flexibility for business owners. We will examine where flexibility has gone too far at present and where permanent employment has become overly restrictive, and make reforms where necessary. Key requirements are that employers, particularly SMEs and startups, have more flexibility to move in line with economic developments.
- To benefit employees and jobseekers, we will set the requirement that a labour market package must encourage new job creation in order to foster employment security, particularly in the SME sector and the sectors of the future.
- We will work together on a social security system that is understandable and reliable for people, and robust and practicable in its implementation. That is why we are opting for a fundamental revision of the system as regards sickness and disability. We want to work towards a system in which the primary focus is on fast and effective guidance into work. The underlying principle is that investing in reintegration efforts will pay off and that we will offer a decent and secure safety net to everyone who is unable to reintegrate. These efforts will begin during the first period of sickness. The process of integrating and improving the service offering of regional employment centres will also play a part.
- Together with employers and employees, we will focus on prevention in order to encourage healthy working and reduce the number of new claimants under disability schemes. Obstacles to working or earning additional income will be eliminated, for instance by developing a fall-back option. The new system must also increase the attractiveness of being an employer.
- We want to promote the work-to-work pathway as well. This will be the main pathway in the case of dismissal (or likely dismissal), but also if work becomes too physically demanding or people wish to make another step in their career.
- People are indeed living longer, healthier lives. Although this is a positive development, it does necessitate sensible choices about how – and how long – we continue to work. In this connection, with effect from 1 January 2033 we will link the state pension (AOW) age directly to increases in life expectancy to keep the state pension affordable in future. We will of course take account of people with physically demanding occupations who are unable to continue working longer. Finally, in the next six years we will reduce the tax relief for supplementary pensions for those on the highest incomes. In this way we will be asking everyone

to contribute in order to maintain our social provisions.

A good work-life balance

- We will carry on with the implementation of nearly-free childcare for working parents. By abolishing the largest of all the supplementary benefits we will eliminate the greatest uncertainty factor affecting the finances of working parents.
- In the same context, working more hours should be financially worthwhile. We will examine unorthodox measures for achieving this, such as relaxing the Working Hours (Discrimination) Act (to allow for a full-time bonus), an hour-based employment tax credit and benefits for additional hours.
- It must become easier to combine work with family and care responsibilities. We will simplify the leave system, taking the Social and Economic Council's advisory report on a balanced approach to social leave (*Balans in maatschappelijk verlof*) as our starting point.

More support for families with children

- We want to support families and offer them more certainty. For this reason we will work towards reducing the multiplicity of schemes and the risk of claims for repayment. We will begin by merging child benefit (*kinderbijslag*) and supplementary child benefit (*kindgebonden budget*) into a single child benefit scheme, which will provide a higher fixed amount and lower variable amount. This will increase certainty. Making one implementing agency responsible for the scheme will also make it simpler. Parents will only need to submit a single application and the amounts will be paid together on a monthly basis.

A good income

- Given the need to future-proof our social security and healthcare systems, it is necessary to make reforms that will not always be directly experienced by everyone as improvements. It is important to us that nobody slips through the cracks. That is why we will make ambitious efforts to lift as many people as possible out of poverty or prevent them from ending up in that situation in the first place. We see that, even though the number of people in poverty is declining and is now at a historically low level, the intensity of the poverty that remains is increasing. We consider this to be a concerning development and will therefore take targeted measures to help this vulnerable group, which largely consists of the working poor. We will invest in poverty policy and an effective approach to tackling and preventing debt. In addition we will help chronically ill people cover their healthcare costs.
- We want more people to find their way into work through the Participation Act, particularly given the shortages on the labour market. However, we will not be constantly asking the small group of people who are truly unable to work to look for a job. We will reform the Participation Act with a focus on highly intensive guidance, investment in communities and effective cooperation with employers, including social enterprises. We will continue to pursue the course that has already been set, in which we operate more on the basis of trust but also carry out effective enforcement of the associated obligations, such as the language requirement and anti-fraud efforts. In this connection we will look to proven successful models, for instance in Rotterdam.
- We will work on building financial resilience. To give people a more secure grip on their finances, we will ensure that all government schemes make payment at a fixed time of the month. We will also work with service providers to whom people pay their regular expenses – such as banks, health insurers and energy companies – to endeavour to move to a single fixed payment date for these monthly outgoings if the customer so wishes. In consultation with municipalities, we will work towards simplification and providing a basic level of supplementary municipal schemes, so that people are able to make ends meet, whatever postcode area they live in. This will also make it easier for people to understand the range of schemes offered and to apply for them. Municipal policies on poverty, debt and reintegration will also become more uniform.

Good quality education and science

Education is the foundation for being able to live in freedom as a member of the community. At school, children and young people acquire skills that build their self-confidence and increase their opportunities to participate fully in society. Good quality education is also vital in order to maintain our standard of living and improve our earning capacity. Yet our children are becoming less proficient in reading, writing and arithmetic, so something needs to change. The Netherlands' position in international rankings of educational achievement such as PISA is falling. Not only does this mean we are failing to make the most of our children's talents and to create opportunities for them, it also has repercussions for our future economy and the tight labour market, which needs skilled workers. Already, we have shortages of the skilled professionals needed to build our homes, install solar panels and care for patients. Our universities, which play a crucial role in innovation ecosystems and generating startups and scaleups, are falling in global rankings.

Quality education is a key factor in enabling the Netherlands to continue building a strong economy and society. Schools are not just places of learning – they are communities in their own right and anchors within the wider area. Thousands of teachers, teaching assistants and other education professionals do their work with passion every day. But all too often these same teachers end up leaving the sector because they are dissatisfied with the lack of opportunities for professional and personal development. Pre-vocational secondary education (VMBO) needs particular attention, because these are the schools with the greatest teacher shortages and language delays among pupils, while they educate the boys and girls who will grow up to work in sectors with labour shortages. Furthermore, we must ensure the quality of post-secondary education and research if the Netherlands is to maintain a leading position. It is not just about innovation, but also about the capacity of basic research to generate new ideas. It is about attracting and holding onto talented people, whether they come from our own country or abroad. And it is about enabling good ideas to evolve and eventually become successful enterprises.

Quality in the classroom: investing in teachers and basic skills

Good quality starts with good teachers. The government must create the right enabling conditions and do more to direct efforts to improve quality, so that our children will be taught by the best possible teachers. Here is what we aim to do:

- Focus on language and arithmetic. We will continue with targeted investment in reading, writing and arithmetic to prevent children from falling behind early in life. Secondary vocational schools (MBO) will have more time to teach occupational skills if gaps in basic skills do not need to be remedied first.
- Preventing learning delays also means investing in proven concepts aimed at young children, like preschool/early childhood education as well as enrichment activities at school, financed from municipal funds for compensatory policy. All children must be registered with a primary school from the age of four.
- We will make a structural investment in teachers' professional development. Teachers will be given demonstrably more time for this and for applying proven, effective knowledge to achieve lasting improvements in basic skills, with clear educational attainment objectives. In the longer term, teachers' professional associations will establish mandatory, ongoing professional development, to achieve continuous quality improvement and ensure that the resources for educational quality are used.
- We will ensure that teachers and school leaders are prepared for the future. We will strengthen the role of school leader as an education expert by setting clear competency requirements. We will improve career pathways and prospects, and give teachers scope for specialisation. We will also ensure that expertise is rewarded and outstanding teachers remain in the profession. This in turn will encourage more university-educated teachers to opt for a teaching job in primary education.
- We will ensure that investments in education are effective and efficient. Regulatory pressure and administrative tasks take up too much of teachers' time. The Inspectorate of Education will visit every school at least once every four years, and

will also be tasked with monitoring regulatory pressure. We see the regulatory burden calculator developed by the Flemish education inspectorate as a good example of an instrument to structurally reduce regulatory pressure. At the same time, we will ensure scope and stability for educational institutions by providing structural funding, in the form of block grants and by converting other grants into permanent resources. These will be targeted and earmarked, so as to improve educational quality.

- We will tackle the teacher shortage by making a mid-career switch to teaching more attractive. We will build on sector plans for lateral-entry teachers. We will encourage increases in teachers' contract hours and shorter teacher training programmes, carry out a pilot study into smaller class sizes and reduce schools' reliance on freelance and agency staff.
- Some children know at a very young age what they want to be when they grow up. Others need more time to discover their talents. That is why we will ensure that each region has a good mix of multilevel and specific transition years (*brugklassen*) for pupils in the lower years of secondary education. The multilevel transition years grant scheme for secondary education will be revised to ensure a sufficiently comprehensive curriculum in the lower years.
- We have high expectations of everyone: pupils, teachers, school administrators and educational consultants. Responsibility lies with everyone who has an impact on the classroom. School administrators will therefore continue working with the professional profile developed by the sector. Accreditation will become the norm. As part of the quality framework for teaching material, a quality mark will be developed for teaching methods related to basic skills, including methods for language-based subjects. In consultation with the sector, we will lay down a quality framework for educational consultants, which will also apply to self-employed consultants.
- In addition to these measures, we will establish a National Commission to investigate the decline in pupils' performance in reading, writing and arithmetic and to recommend long-term solutions.
- A solid, standard foundation will underpin all teacher training programmes. Teachers and academics will jointly determine the national core curriculum, which will put more emphasis on basic skills like reading, writing and arithmetic. Teacher training programmes nationwide will use the same method of assessment, so that every new teacher has the same solid foundation on entering the profession. We will devise measures jointly with the sector to boost the number of male teachers. In close consultation with the education sector, we will proceed with the legislative process to provide for learner-differentiated primary teacher training and with the findings of the pilot project, with a view to increasing enrolment in primary teacher training and improving the deployability of teachers.
- We are committed to providing appropriate education for every child, based on the principle of inclusive education where possible and special education where necessary. We will look more closely at what children need for their development, and we will allow for more flexibility in the case of children who are at risk of dropout. We encourage every region to offer sufficient educational options catering to gifted learners.
- Freedom of education is a fundamental right enshrined in article 23 of our Constitution, and allows parents and children to choose a school whose teaching is in accordance with their religious or ideological beliefs.
- Freedom of education may not be misused to undermine the core values of our democratic state governed by the rule of law. Schools have a statutory obligation to provide citizenship education conveying the importance of personal freedom and the equality of all people.
- The implementation of the More Scope for New Schools Act has led to unforeseen problems and will therefore be revised as quickly as possible.
- Through the Freedom and Safety in Education Bill we will ensure that schools are safe spaces for everyone. The Inspectorate can and will take enforcement action where necessary. We will use proven methods to curb bullying. And we will ensure that these principles are upheld effectively.
- We will better support schools in carrying out renovation and building projects. We

will use existing instruments and resources, such as the growth fund project, to this end and also study the scope for public-private partnerships, modelled on the system in Flanders.

- We will strengthen young people's civic awareness and engagement, and societal resilience by continuing the community service scheme for young people between 12 and 30 who choose not to do a voluntary military service year.

Vocational and professional education are the backbone of the regional economy

Secondary vocational education (MBO) and higher professional education (HBO) form the economic backbone of our regions. MBO and HBO institutions train the people who keep the wheels of our economy turning. That's why we're committed to providing these educational sectors with the stability and appreciation that they deserve. Here is what we aim to do:

- We will provide stable and predictable funding to MBO and HBO institutions. This will reduce their dependence on and vulnerability to fluctuations in numbers of incoming Dutch and international students.
- Cooperation between educational institutions and the business community will be further strengthened. The MBO Regional Investment Fund will be maintained and expanded, to ensure close alignment between secondary vocational education and the labour market. We will also modernise and harmonise legislation in order to facilitate collaboration between companies and practical training (PRO), pre-vocational secondary schools (VMBO) and MBO schools.
- In MBO schools, languages, arithmetic and citizenship classes will be taught by qualified teachers. The grant scheme for practical education will be retained and we will encourage companies to invest in their own specialised training. We will make block or day release courses (BBL) in MBO more attractive by improving supervision and guidance, offering more opportunities throughout the year to start BBL training, and making it easier to switch between school-based vocational training courses (BOL) and BBL. We will also increase the practical training hours for students in the BOL pathway.
- We want more applied research. We will strengthen collaboration between MBO, HBO and academic institutions so that knowledge can be applied in the field more quickly. We will continue the process towards a pact on training young people for the labour market of the future.
- All students, whether they attend an MBO or HBO institution or university, have equal status. MBO students should be given equal access to facilities for students such as housing, sports clubs and cultural associations, and opportunities for extracurricular activities such as serving on the board of a student association. Active steps will be taken to combat work placement discrimination.

Research and science are the basis for progress

Dutch higher professional education (HBO), universities and research institutions are keystones in our innovation ecosystems. To ensure the Netherlands' continued international prominence, investment in science will be targeted at research that aims to find solutions to the major challenges of our time. We will also strengthen collaboration and offer better prospects to talented researchers. Here is what we aim to do:

- Structural investment in research and science. We will make structural investment in research and science, moving towards the Lisbon target of public and private investment in R&D together equalling 3% of GDP. The government will also increase its contribution to the target by stepping up investment in science and innovation.
- A strategy will be developed to select and retain the crucial talent that the Netherlands needs. This will ensure we have enough professionals for sectors facing the greatest challenges and can attract the talented researchers we need for groundbreaking research and innovation.
- Universities and HBO institutions (universities of applied science) will be given more scope to attract talented internationals and retain 'home-grown' talent. We will abolish the mandatory assessment of courses to be taught in another language than

Dutch. We will maintain the current range of courses and subjects not taught in Dutch. We will make binding administrative agreements with higher education institutions regarding the capacity of courses not taught in Dutch and regional capacity, where necessary restricting intake to bachelor's degree courses taught in English. In addition to these agreements, the Internationalisation in Balance Act will contain provisions on restricted admission of non-EEA students and the option of a temporary enrolment cap in the case of unexpectedly high numbers of students seeking admission to a course.

- Higher education institutions need talented internationals in order to maintain regional economic and knowledge ecosystems such as Brainport Eindhoven, Wageningen's Food Valley and Novio Tech Campus in Nijmegen. We will give them the latitude they need for this.
- We will strengthen the role of campuses as springboards for startups, scaleups and partnerships between the fields of education and research and the business sector. Valorisation will be given more prominence, with more new businesses using knowledge to enter the market.
- Universities will work together to tackle the challenges of the future. We will invest in research and innovation. In return, we ask universities to focus more on collaboration and specialisation and less on competing to attract the most students. The periodic re-accreditation assessments of bachelor's and master's degree courses should look more closely at the extent to which courses meet labour market demand.
- Knowledge security must be safeguarded. Research funding from repressive countries can pose a risk to our knowledge security. Knowledge institutions, security services and other government agencies will work together to keep Dutch knowledge secure. We will introduce a knowledge security screening act, so that we can screen prospective researchers and PhD candidates from countries outside the EU in cases where this is necessary. By implementing screening procedures, we will be aligning with knowledge-intensive businesses and international practices.

Good student years prepare talented young people for the future

All students deserve to enjoy their student years – a time that sets them on the way to a bright future. We will encourage students to pursue academic excellence and make the most of their student years. We also expect educational institutions to deliver quality and to challenge students to grow as individuals. An increasing number of students are struggling with financial insecurity and high academic pressure, resulting in high dropout rates in MBO and concerns about students' mental wellbeing. We risk losing students this way, despite this being a time of severe labour market shortages. We will therefore invest in students' financial security and pay closer attention to their mental wellbeing. Here is what we aim to do:

- We will strengthen students' financial position. We will increase the basic grant for students living away from home, cap the interest rate for student loans at 2.5% and improve the financial position of BBL students.
- Through the talent strategy we aim to provide more guidance to help prospective students choose what to study, by providing better information about employment opportunities, ensuring courses are better aligned with the labour market and promoting MBO certificates as fully-fledged qualifications.
- We will invest in students' mental wellbeing and resilience. Educational institutions will be given scope to provide effective support and counselling, including through student psychologists. We will actively encourage initiatives by students and young people themselves, and take measures to reduce the dropout rate in MBO.
- We will introduce a statutory work-placement allowance. Together with educational institutions we will examine the feasibility of setting up a work-placement fund for sectors with labour shortages and make agreements on job guarantees.
- Employers will have more scope to help employees pay off their student loan faster using the work-related costs scheme.

Media and culture

Press freedom and cultural freedom are both fundamental to a free democracy. We are

firmly committed to the independence of the media, the safety of journalists and artistic freedom. Here is what we aim to do:

- We will draft a comprehensive media policy that promotes diversity of content in the media landscape, consisting of both public and commercial broadcasters. In response to the steady decline in viewers of linear television, the public service broadcaster NPO is focusing its efforts on digitalisation with a view to reaching younger audiences, closer cooperation with commercial parties and coproductions. We will continue the process of reform, aimed at increasing the transparency and efficiency of NPO in its coordinating role. The various broadcasting associations on public television will partner up to form four broadcasting groups, with NOS/NTR forming a fifth, separate group.
- We will streamline management within the groups by prohibiting double roles. Executive roles can be held for a maximum of two four-year terms. Broadcasting associations will be embedded in the governance structure of the broadcasting groups. The degree to which they are embedded in Dutch society will be determined by the size of their membership as well as their reach on digital and traditional channels, and their public value. Closer collaboration with NPO will lead to stronger regional and local broadcasters.
- We will continue to provide targeted investment for professional development of public service broadcasters, independent and regional reporting and press freedom.
- To preserve a level playing field for commercial and public broadcasters and media, we will compensate for the NPO's task of raising additional advertising income.
- We will review the financing system for the cultural sector. The aim is to provide long-term certainty to creative makers and cultural institutions, with due consideration for a fair regional distribution. We will reduce the regulatory burden in the cultural sector.
- We will foster culture and the arts – from world-class orchestras and museums to vibrant folk art and traditions. Cultural policy will pay specific attention to talent development, music schools and a good distribution of cultural organisations across the country.
- We will boost public libraries nationwide. Libraries are not just places for borrowing books, but also for getting help with overcoming functional illiteracy, navigating the digital world and language learning.
- We are proud of our languages and dialects, and will support and promote the preservation of our national languages, regional languages and dialects.

Equal rights

The Netherlands has a proud tradition of tolerance and equality. We will continue our efforts to ensure that everyone can be open about who they are. Here is what we aim to do:

- On the basis of the Rainbow Agreement, we will continue to work for acceptance, safety and equal opportunities for the LGBTIQI+ community, in the public space, in schools and in the workplace, both in the Netherlands and abroad. We will implement this agreement carefully by means of legislation (including private members' bills) and policy.
- People with a disability are too often dependent on the government. The government should set an example in order to promote an accessible society in which everyone is able to develop their own talents and participate on an equal basis.
- With a National Action Plan to stop violence against women we will develop approaches specifically addressing sexually transgressive behaviour, femicide and misogyny.
- We will continue the process of developing sound regulations on surrogacy, with due regard for the recommendations set out in the WODC (Research and Data Centre) report on surrogacy, 'Het gedragen kind', and the points of concern highlighted in the report of the Committee Investigating Intercountry Adoption in the Past.
- The Pay Transparency Act will be introduced, without placing unnecessary administrative burden on businesses.
- We have high regard for knowledge institutions and civil society organisations that

operate in the field of sexual and reproductive health, and will involve them where necessary in the development of new policy.

- We will build on the National Strategy for Women's Health, which is aimed at both women-specific issues and women-sensitive healthcare.
- We will continue working towards equal status for women in society, including through initiatives such as 'Women at the Top' and placing a spotlight on women role models.

A healthy society

Good health and good care are invaluable. With a good-quality, accessible healthcare system staffed by dedicated and skilled professionals, the Netherlands has much to be proud of. We need to cherish and preserve this, and that is why it is time to look ahead and make better choices for the future.

The sector has always focused strongly on medical treatment. But while the quality of curative care is high, good healthcare is about more than restoring people to health. People want to be able to participate in life, even if they have an illness or disability. Quality of life, mental resilience and social support therefore deserve to be given centre stage. Currently, however, the environment where people grow up is a factor that determines their health. There are too many people who have no access to a general practitioner (GP) or do not have a regular GP – despite the important advantages of a GP knowing the patient. And it is not always easy to make healthy choices in an environment where the circumstances and available options are often unhealthy.

With a stronger focus both on prevention and wellbeing and on new treatment methods and technologies, we aim to increase people's healthy life years, so that they can enjoy their lives, continue to work and stay independent for longer. We must make better use of the opportunities available to us, because a healthier society is not only happier, but also more robust and productive.

Demographic ageing is putting pressure on our health and care system, but it also presents an opportunity. More and more people are staying fit well into old age. They are also living at home longer and eager to keep taking part in society. We can support these trends with smart technologies, suitable housing and strong, caring communities. Not only will this ensure older people receive the care they need, it will also make care jobs more attractive.

Reforms will be needed to make all this happen. If we do not take action, the combination of ever-increasing demand, demographic ageing and staff shortages will cause the healthcare sector to collapse. Staff are reaching the limits of what they can do, and more and more people are having to wait too long to receive the care they need or are not receiving it at all. This is unacceptable. By stepping in and making tough choices now, we will be able to safeguard the quality of care in the future.

In the short term we will take measures to improve the accessibility, quality and affordability of our healthcare system. A National Commission on health and care will make recommendations for reforms to ensure the system remains financially viable in the long term in the face of demographic ageing and staff shortages.

We are opting for a joint approach. Together with clients and patients, their families and carers, and volunteers and professionals in the health and care domains, we will build a society where preventing illness and loneliness comes first, where we remind people of their own responsibility, where we aim for social wellbeing and where good care is always available for those who need it. These are our proposals:

Prevention is better than cure

We are working on creating the healthiest generation ever. And the basis for good health is not found in hospitals, but in people's daily lives: at home, at school, at work and in the neighbourhood where they live. A healthy environment and strong social ties help increase people's healthy life years and enhance quality of life, thus contributing to a robust and resilient society. This will also reduce health disparities and the burden on health and care, and enable people to work for longer, whether in care or another sector. All this demands a fundamental shift in focus from care to health, from treatment to prevention and from individual solutions to a strong social foundation. We will look for solutions both within and outside the sector. Tackling problematic debt and ensuring a

healthy living environment, for instance, also contribute to better health. Here is what we aim to do:

- We will invest in prevention and welfare to create the healthiest generation ever. We will ensure prevention efforts pay off once more, focusing on children's health, and promoting daily exercise, and sports for everyone, including people with a disability. We will make unhealthy choices less attractive. And part of the return on these measures will be spent on steps to improve health. Free fruit will be distributed to children at primary and secondary schools. We will tighten legislation on marketing directed at children. A community-based approach will ensure that healthy choices are available to vulnerable groups too. By investing in social cohesion we will create caring communities. We will invest in renovating sports facilities, also making them more energy efficient, for instance by increasing funding for the incentive scheme for the construction and maintenance of sports facilities (BOSA). We will also create more places for children to play outdoors. We will invest in the Solid Start (*Kansrijke Start*) action programme aimed at improving care and support for vulnerable or struggling families. We will continue initiatives aimed at a tobacco-free generation and raise the legal age for buying products containing nicotine to 21. Keeping stocks of illegal vapes will be made a criminal offence, and there will be a greater focus on enforcement.
- The role of volunteers and informal carers is crucial in a caring community. We will continue supporting informal carers with facilities for respite care.
- We will extend the healthcare agreements and include provisions on volume growth. We will also bolster these agreements with legislation.

Medical care

The quality of care provided by Dutch hospitals is outstanding. To maintain this, healthcare needs to be more patient-centred. At the moment, it pays for hospitals to perform as many interventions as possible, regardless of whether patients benefit from them. Healthcare should improve patients' health and quality of life. Here is what we aim to do:

- Appropriate care is the norm, including in terms of care entitlement. We will implement this faster, so that reimbursement will only be given for therapies and procedures with proven value for patients. Stricter statutory requirements will be laid down with regard to the conditions, quality and development of professional guidelines. The National Health Care Institute (ZIN) will be given a bigger role in this.
- Incentives that encourage unnecessary treatment will be curtailed. Proven effective treatments and procedures will take precedence in insurance coverage, the organisation of care and funding. There will still be scope for new medical technologies and treatments, but they will be assessed more stringently in terms of proven effectiveness and the extent to which they contribute to appropriate care.
- Insurers will be given both freedom and responsibility in this regard, with better collaboration between primary and secondary care providers. The government's role will focus more actively on shaping the future care landscape, steering distribution and concentration processes and, if necessary, laying down stricter requirements for licensing. We will also work on creating a more level playing field between hospitals and independent treatment centres.
- The focus on appropriate care also means ending reimbursement for non-contracted healthcare. There will be a transitional period, with due attention paid to staff retention. Insurers must contract sufficient capacity with care providers for care covered by the basic package, offer a restitution policy (e.g. for treatment abroad), and enforce cooperation, to ensure that appropriate care becomes the norm.
- To prevent increases in health insurance premiums, the current mandatory excess will be maintained and index-linked. The excess will be increased by €60 as of 2027. We will ensure people never have to pay the entire excess all at once, introducing a cap of €150 per treatment.
- While these reforms aim to ensure that healthcare remains accessible to all, extra attention will go to reducing the financial and practical burden on people with chronic disease or a disability. We will provide an allowance towards their healthcare costs,

via the municipality, and we will stop the unnecessary periodic assessments that only serve to reaffirm that someone still has a chronic condition or disability. The Municipalities Fund will receive extra money for this and we will make national, binding agreements with municipalities to ensure that schemes are simpler, more effective and more equal.

- This shift also means we will strengthen and improve access to primary care, notably GPs. Some regions in particular face a shortage of GPs, and we will work to reduce this problem. We will also continue joint initiatives with municipalities to help GPs find suitable accommodation for their practices.
- We will continue with undiminished efforts to combat medicines shortages. To this end, we will encourage more production of medicines in Europe, and work to reduce overmedication and wastage.
- Appropriate care is inclusive care. We will ensure that proven, effective treatment reaches the people who actually need it, regardless of their background. With regard to both women-sensitive and women-specific healthcare, we will invest in expanding the available therapies and medicines.

Long-term care and care for people with disabilities

Every person who needs long-term care is unique, but what they have in common is that everyone prefers to be cared for in their own, familiar surroundings. This care could be provided by a neighbour, a family member or a professional carer. Informal carers are the cornerstone of a society in which people look out for each other. The day-to-day care they provide is also crucial for the continuity and quality of care, complementing and relieving the pressure on professional care. Recognition and support for the work of informal carers helps reinforce their own wellbeing as well as that of the person they are caring for.

Guided foremost by the principles of quality of life and ageing with dignity, we will therefore invest in caring communities and in deploying professional carers and resources as efficiently as possible. Here is what we aim to do:

- We will shift the focus of investment from intramural care to developing caring communities, so that older people and people with disabilities can live at home for longer with appropriate support. We will keep accommodation and care as separate components in elderly care provision, and will work towards a single care package for home-based care and separate components for living accommodation, temporary care accommodation and care. This will lead to new forms of housing in caring communities, focused on social connection, combating loneliness and looking out for each other.
- We will implement the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, with a view to improving the care for and quality of life of people with disabilities.
- The Long-term Care Act will be implemented more efficiently thanks to appropriate care, quality standards and corresponding rates.

Youth care

In the Netherlands we want children to grow up healthy, happy and resilient. This is primarily the task of parents and guardians, supported by 'pedagogical civil society'. Currently one in seven children receive some form of youth care. The system is heavily institutionalised and too focused on helping children with mild problems – which is more profitable for care providers – sometimes impeding timely interventions for children with complex care needs. The sector is also too fragmented, with a large number of buyers and providers, and not enough continuity of care for children and families. Too often, care is based on the system, not the needs of a child and their family. Here is what we aim to do:

- Too often, youth care services cater to problems that do not in fact fall in the care domain. For instance, children who are struggling because their parents have problems, such as a divorce or debts, should be referred to social services, the authority best equipped to deal with these types of issues.
- In youth care, we will make adjustments to the scope of entitlements, clearly

distinguishing between prevention, mild support needs / parenting support, and problems requiring specialist care. Assistance with mild support needs or parenting support will no longer be financed or organised collectively. Appropriate care will be the norm, and where possible reimbursement will only be provided for proven effective interventions.

- Not the system but the position of the children and families will be the leading factor in deciding what is needed. We will reform the way youth care is organised and financed, aiming to minimise the number of parties involved in the care system, and ensuring capacity, in terms of personnel and funding, is available for children with complex needs. We will phase out incentives for care providers to focus on milder interventions and move towards outcome-based management.
- We will continue with the reform of youth care, in the interests of children.

Mental healthcare

Mental difficulties are a part of life. Family, friends, neighbours and people at school or work can all be sources of support. Professional help isn't always necessary. But specialised care should be available to those who truly need it. Nobody wants to have to wait months for help if they have serious mental health problems. With a more coherent and collaborative approach, people will not get caught in a confusing web of healthcare rules, schemes and offices. Here is what we aim to do:

- We will focus on preventing mental health problems in young people and adults. Early interventions can prevent difficulties from spiralling. We will invest in mental resilience programmes at school, at work and in the community. We will reform the way mental healthcare is organised and financed, ensuring sufficient capacity, in terms of personnel and funding, is available to help people with complex mental health problems. We will phase out incentives for care providers to focus on milder interventions and move toward_ outcome-based management.
- The way the different laws are applied will be coordinated more centrally, so that people do not fall between the cracks when one law stops being applicable to their situation, and they must apply for support under another law instead (for instance, when they legally become an adult). We will continue to seek greater insight into the demand for care in order to be able to set priorities better. We want more scope for mayors to order care interventions for people avoiding care or presenting psychologically distressed or misunderstood behaviour. This will also help to alleviate the pressure on the police.

We will achieve these reforms by implementing the programmes 'Working in health and care' (*Werken in de zorg*), 'Data exchange and smart use of technology' (*Goede gegevensuitwisseling en slimme inzet van technologie*) and 'Money for healthcare goes to healthcare' (*Geld voor zorg naar zorg*).

Working in health and care

Health workers are the backbone of the health and care sector, but the shortages on the labour market require us to rethink how we train, deploy and retain these professionals. Here is what we aim to do:

- Current health professionals will be deployed more efficiently, by organising tasks better, reducing the administrative burden and providing more scope for innovation and professional autonomy. Having time to do what they are trained for – providing the best possible care to those who need it – will also make it more appealing for staff to work more hours.
- We need to train professionals for the care domains where they are needed most. Education and training will give more attention to non-hospital careers. We will also increase training places in primary care, home care nursing, elderly care and the social domain. We will make it easier to transfer to a new job in another care domain.
- Aggression and intimidation towards health workers is unacceptable and any such incidents will be dealt with robustly.

Data exchange and smart use of technology

- Deploying new technologies and digital consultation will reduce the administrative burden on health professionals and contribute to better diagnostics and smart healthcare, giving professionals more time to see clients, patients and families.
- We will put in place a data exchange infrastructure with nationwide coverage, supporting collaboration between health workers and where relevant the social domain. Such an infrastructure will also enable good-quality research in the field of patient care.

Money for healthcare goes to healthcare

We will take tough action against fraudulent use of healthcare funds and lay down clear, stricter standards on responsible business conduct in the sector. This will also include rules to curb the excesses associated with private equity firms in healthcare. In this way we will ensure that every euro earmarked for healthcare is well spent, giving priority to the accessibility and quality of healthcare and patients' interests. Here is what we aim to do:

- We will ensure that the Healthcare Fraud Information Hub (IKZ) can share more information with relevant partners, so that healthcare fraud can be detected more quickly.
- We will step up the prosecution of fraudsters and if found guilty they will be banned from working in healthcare.
- Supervisory authorities will be given more powers, for instance to temporarily halt takeovers or take enforcement action against questionable business arrangements. The Chamber of Commerce will introduce stricter requirements for setting up a healthcare business.
- A police task force on healthcare fraud will be established.

Medical ethics

- There must be scope for carrying out medical research and applying the findings, but this scope is not unlimited. It is controlled by laws that also have a medical-ethical dimension. By extension, caution will prevail over speed when it comes to making political decisions on medical-ethical issues. These issues revolve around values such as autonomy, the need to protect human life and advances in medical research. They require careful and respectful debate, giving due consideration to social dialogue, recommendations by the Health Council of the Netherlands, ethical reflection and legislative evaluations.
- We will issue a government response to the recommendations of the Health Council of the Netherlands concerning the 14-day rule in the Embryo Act. In line with Rathenau Instituut's advisory opinion, the government will seek to engage in a social dialogue about this issue.

The Netherlands as a leader in a digital world

Digitalisation and AI are crucial for innovation, economic growth, the tight labour market and future prosperity, but they also directly impact our security, freedom, democracy and the rule of law. The Netherlands can excel in this area by becoming a leader in responsible innovation with strong ecosystems for knowledge, investment and enterprise. With this in mind we need to invest in a strong and independent Dutch and European tech sector. This not only makes sense from an economic perspective, but is also essential for our democracy and national security.

There is a need for more control and democratic oversight. When it comes to crucial digital infrastructure, the Netherlands and Europe have become highly dependent on a small number of international players. This makes us vulnerable in a world where technology is increasingly being used as an instrument of geopolitical power. That vulnerability is real: on a daily basis the Netherlands is subjected to cyberattacks by both state and non-state actors. This is another reason why the Netherlands must become a leader in responsible digital innovation and develop strong Dutch and European capabilities. This requires a government that demonstrates leadership, consciously embraces technology, knowledge and talent, and systematically boosts digital resilience in order to phase out strategic dependencies in a targeted way.

Digital government and society

The government's digital services must be reliable, accessible, efficient and resilient. Even now, the opportunities presented by digitalisation to bring about a more efficient government are still not being taken advantage of to a sufficient extent. We intend to do things differently. Here is what we aim to do:

- The government's guiding principle should be digital autonomy. We will opt for a European digital infrastructure, phasing out strategic dependencies in cloud, data and critical systems in a targeted way, and we will divide up major projects in order to enable more Dutch and European SMEs to become involved.
- Digital procurement and contract award procedures will be standardised and centralised, shaped by the principles of security-by-design, zero trust, sovereignty, open source and chain security. The government will use its market power to enforce security standards and draw up minimum security requirements for the whole of central government.
- In order to be eligible for funding, government IT projects (> €5 million) must be assessed against centralised IT standards.
- We will strengthen the government's technological capacity by introducing a competitive salary scale for IT specialists and by training civil servants in technology and the use of AI.
- Government services will be designed in an accessible and comprehensible way so they can be used by everyone, including people with disabilities. We will ensure that there are an adequate number of helplines and physical help desks.

Digital technology as a driver of economic growth

Digital infrastructure and key technologies will determine our future earning capacity. The Netherlands has a strong starting position, but Europe is losing ground in terms of its global competitiveness, which is causing greater dependence on the US and China. Targeted choices with regard to upscaling, innovation and conditionality are necessary in order to safeguard our economic growth and strategic position. Here is what we aim to do:

- We will work to craft a national approach to digital infrastructure focused on knowledge, research and innovation, in order to get new technologies off the ground more quickly.
- The Netherlands will be a leader in digital innovation and key technologies. When it comes to the development of key technologies such as AI, we will no longer be a 'pilot country' but rather a 'scaleup country'.
- We will encourage the construction of autonomous European data centres and an AI

factory in the northern Netherlands. We will build a digitally resilient society on the basis of an ecosystem approach, in which the government, the educational sector and the business community will take a step forward so that everyone can reap the full benefits of artificial intelligence.

- We will educate young people, from children to university students, on cybersecurity and digital skills and strengthen public-private educational pathways.
- Public-private investments will focus on applications with both economic and security value (AI, cybersecurity, semiconductors, quantum and photonics), with an emphasis on scalability, productivity and adoption in critical sectors. We will reinforce our position in the semiconductor industry and work to build a quantum computer in the Netherlands.
- We will make sure the Netherlands remains an attractive location for innovative companies by accelerating procedures for digital infrastructure, with due regard for security and the human environment.

Digital resilience

Cyberattacks, digital espionage and disinformation pose direct threats to our economy, democracy and national security. This threat emanates from state actors, cybercriminals and large-scale influencing campaigns, and with the use of AI, it is becoming faster, smarter and more scalable. Critical sectors, the government and semi-governmental bodies must therefore be cyber resilient, so we can prevent societal disruption. Here is what we aim to do:

- We will ensure the rapid implementation of the NIS 2 Directive on cyber resilience, so that our critical sectors are prepared for cyber threats and can respond swiftly.
- In line with the advice given by the Cyber Security Council, we will ensure centralised control of cybersecurity to prevent fragmentation from leading to vulnerability.
- We will prepare actively for large-scale cyberattacks, conducting exercises that involve the government, SMEs and critical sectors, encouraging ethical hackers and fostering the targeted exchange of threat information between the public and private sectors.
- We will use the Cybersecurity Act to boost companies' resilience to cyber threats and strengthen the statutory basis that allows intelligence services to systematically share information with private firms.
- We will seek to gain insight into and phase out strategic technological dependencies, by conducting national stress tests on risks of national importance and by pursuing an unbundling strategy which includes European alternatives, procurement guidelines and shared best practices. In order to protect our national security, we will continue to bar digital hardware originating from high-risk countries in critical sectors.
- Supervisory authorities will be given sufficient freedom to attract talent and to innovate, so that legislation can also be enforced effectively.

A safe and healthy online environment

The internet must be a safe and healthy environment, particularly for children and young people. In today's online world, addictive algorithms, harmful content and inadequate moderation give rise to risks such as addiction, intimidation, abuse and fraud. To address these issues and protect our democracy, we will set clear limits and strengthen oversight. Here is what we aim to do:

- We will press for an enforceable, Europe-wide minimum age of 15 for social media with privacy-friendly age verification for young people, for as long as social media is not adequately safe. There will be stricter supervision of major online platforms, with mandatory transparency about algorithms and income, and with effective moderation of illegal content. Addictive, polarising and anti-democratic algorithms will be banned, and illegal content will have to be taken down within one hour after the supervisory authority has issued an order to that effect. We will work together with other leading countries in Europe to this end.
- We will reduce unhealthy screen time among children and young people, through better education, clear health guidelines and support for local parents' initiatives. Parents will be given viewing advice for online channels.

- We will protect vulnerable groups better, with stricter rules for 'kidfluencing', 'finfluencing', marketing that targets children, in-game purchases and 'buy now, pay later' practices. We will crack down on online abuse.
- We will introduce stricter mobile phone guidelines for schools. During the school day, telephones will have to be left at home or placed in lockers, though necessary exceptions will be possible.
- We will address the issue of deepfakes (including those of a sexual nature) by updating legislation to give people more control over their likeness, body and voice. We will establish a centralised, accessible reporting centre where victims can receive better help, for example with takedown requests and criminal complaints.
- Actions that are illegal offline are not acceptable online either. Content depicting criminal offences will not be tolerated online, except in a journalistic context. We will investigate whether such content can be prohibited or removed.
- We will strengthen our approach to online fraud, step up public-private cooperation, and work to improve prevention and support for victims in the handling of compensation claims.

Investing in accessibility, water management and the environment

Infrastructure and accessibility

Good infrastructure is the foundation for economic success, ensuring that everyone can reach their workplace, family and new neighbourhoods by road, rail or water. New priorities need to be set in relation to all the tasks we currently face, from infrastructure maintenance to the construction of new roads and railway lines. Here is what we aim to do:

- Many bridges, tunnels, railways and locks are nearing the end of their lifespan. To keep the Netherlands safe, accessible and economically strong, maintenance will be given priority when allocating available funds in the years ahead. We will draw on strategic dual-use opportunities with the Defence organisation, and where possible link maintenance to improvements in road safety, regional accessibility and traffic flow.
- We will invest in the delivery of new infrastructure for housing developments. In prioritising new infrastructure projects, preference will be given to projects that demonstrably contribute to housing development, accessibility and economic growth.
- In addition, we will make extra funds available for several priority projects. We will also restart the 17 paused road, waterway and rail projects. These are crucial for addressing the housing shortage and improving regional accessibility.
- We will ensure that infrastructure investments contribute to homebuilding and economic growth in all regions. In this way, we will improve road safety, access to housing developments and traffic flow on our roads.
- The planned A27 motorway expansion near Utrecht Lunetten will be achieved within the existing motorway structure, preferably under the current planning procedures order, in consultation with the region. The funds released by this will partly be invested in improving traffic flow in the Utrecht region. More than €1 billion will go to other major priority traffic projects.
- If we do nothing, driving will become increasingly unaffordable for many people in the Netherlands. We will therefore extend the reduction of excise duty on automotive fuels. We will also investigate a future-proof reform of car taxation, where the motor vehicle tax is based on vehicle measurements, on the condition that motorists are not disadvantaged. Possible effects on people and businesses in rural regions must also be taken into account.
- Bicycles are both a practical and healthy mode of transport. We will therefore implement the National Cycling Strategy and ensure that public transport hubs are accessible by bicycle.

Traffic safety

We will make the Netherlands safer for pedestrians, cyclists and motorists. Selfish and reckless behaviour in traffic will be tackled through stricter enforcement and behaviour change campaigns. Here is what we aim to do:

- We will introduce a separate vehicle category for fat bikes, including a minimum age and helmet requirement, and give municipalities the option of creating fat bike-free zones.
- We will implement a zero-tolerance policy towards driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs. We will increase enforcement, impose heavier penalties, introduce the alcohol interlock system, and tighten the points-based licence system. As soon as possible after new validated drug tests become available, we will start using them in roadside checks.
- Together with municipalities, we will improve road safety by installing more speed cameras at unsafe locations and deploying mobile speed cameras. Together with municipalities we will also examine where reducing the maximum speed to 30kph in built-up areas would be worthwhile.

Rail and public transport

For many people, public transport is indispensable. We are therefore working towards a rail and public transport network in which access to services is central. Public transport must remain a serious alternative to the car. Here is what we aim to do:

- Nederlandse Spoorwegen (NS) will hold the concession for the main rail network until 2033. The concession includes firm agreements on many aspects aimed at ensuring high-quality passenger rail services. Interim adjustments can be made where necessary, for instance with regard to the minimum standards per route for seating availability, punctuality and overall customer satisfaction.
- The government will decide by early 2027 on the future market regulation of the rail sector after 2033. This decision will include whether and how a market analysis will be performed.
- We will create space for innovative new rail operators, specifically for night trains and international rail connections. At the perimeter of the main rail network we will also create space for regional operators, particularly if they can serve stations with a minimum of two trains per hour. The interests of passengers and their need for a dependable service will remain paramount.
- We will enable special enforcement officers working in public transport to tackle antisocial behaviour effectively. To this end, they will have access to the aliens database and, under certain conditions, to the criminal justice system database. The starting point is that any train conductor who wishes to do so can become an enforcement officer in public transport. The Rotterdam RET pilot projects, in which transport operators and police cooperate much more closely, will be rolled out nationwide.
- A tougher approach to fare evasion, with higher fines, stricter enforcement and actual collection of amounts owed, will help keep public transport affordable and reliable.

Aviation

Aviation and Amsterdam Airport Schiphol's hub function are important for the Dutch economy. At the same time, aviation places a burden on the environment, climate and quality of life in surrounding areas. We will strike a balance by clearly delineating the scope for aviation. Here is what we aim to do:

- Lelystad Airport will be brought into operation as an air force base for the Defence organisation with joint civil/military use. Provided the airport complies with all legal requirements, including obtaining a nature permit, it will also be able to open for commercial air traffic, initially with 10,000 flight movements.
- The Airport Traffic Decree will introduce a limit of 478,000 flight movements for Schiphol. To reduce noise nuisance, a new balanced approach procedure will establish that Schiphol must be 50% quieter between 23.00 and 07.00 by 2030, compared with 2024. This will include closure at night between 00.00 and 05.00. Schiphol will invest €50 million in a fund to insulate homes in the vicinity of the airport. Total CO₂ emissions from civil aviation at Schiphol and Lelystad Airport combined must be lower in 2030 than at Schiphol in 2024.
- We will advocate a single European aviation tax across all EU countries instead of a national ticket tax. This will create a level playing field that rewards airlines for using cleaner aircraft types and taking other sustainability measures. Together with the sector, the Netherlands will expand the blending mandates for sustainable aviation fuels and stimulate the production of these fuels in the Netherlands.

Water and the environment

We will choose ambitious, forward-looking policy on the environment and water, taking the Clean Air Agreement as our starting point. Structural measures will achieve lasting improvement in water quality. Here is what we aim to do:

- With regard to the revision of the Water Framework Directive, the Netherlands will press for simplification, aiming for a directive that is ambitious yet realistic and that provides scope for working with relevant water partners on concrete plans to improve the quality of our water and reduce the risks of water pollution.

- We will safeguard the availability of clean drinking water now and in the future by implementing the Water Availability Action Plan.
- We will continue working on flood safety, implementing the Delta Programme and reviewing the Delta Decisions.
- Our spatial planning decisions will be focused on the long term. In the National Spatial Strategy, water and soil are lead considerations.
- PFAS pose significant risks to human health and the environment. The Netherlands will take the lead in advocating a European ban on PFAS. In the meantime, we will work with stakeholders to reduce consumer demand for products containing PFAS and help consumers choose PFAS-free alternatives. We will examine whether and how a short-term discharge ban can be introduced.
- Environmental pollution by substances of very high concern will be addressed by critically reviewing existing discharge permits and tightening them where necessary. New discharge permits will be issued only under strict conditions and based on the best available techniques.

Healthy public finances

Healthy public finances are important for macroeconomic stability and ensure a good investment climate. Thanks to its prudent fiscal policy, the Netherlands has a high credit rating. This means it can borrow at low rates of interest, which creates scope for investment. This contributes to economic growth, which is needed so that our public services can be paid for. This is why we believe it is important that our public finances remain in good shape and that no bills are passed on to future generations. Sustainable public finances are an essential precondition for the broad-based prosperity of future generations. They are also an important insurance policy against unforeseen situations such as pandemics or crises, so that people and businesses can be protected in an emergency. We are therefore proposing measures to improve the sustainability of the budget. We will do that by controlling expenditure on healthcare and social security, and by taking measures to make government work more efficiently and effectively. We aim to raise earning capacity by means of targeted investments that remove barriers to sustainable economic growth. In combination with sufficient space for the market sector, these targeted investments will provide a stimulus for a reduction in regulatory pressure and a stronger European capital markets union, with a view to achieving higher structural and sustainable economic growth. Sustainable economic growth will also result in healthier public finances.

Fiscal rules

We will follow the fiscal rules proposed by the 18th Working Group on Fiscal Space and laid down in the Sustainable Public Finances Act. We will therefore pursue a trend-based fiscal policy, involving a separation of revenue and expenditure, a predetermined expenditure and revenue framework, and a single fixed moment in spring for key decision-making. In accordance with the rules on budgetary discipline, setbacks will in the first instance be absorbed within the budget in which they occur. Windfalls can be used to offset setbacks or will flow back to general public funds. If setbacks cannot be absorbed within the expenditure framework, planned expenditure will not be able to go ahead or supplementary downward adjustments will be necessary. If there is no other alternative, the wage and price adjustment can be withheld to avoid exceeding the expenditure framework. On the revenue side of the budget, setbacks will likewise be covered. Increases in expenditure or decreases in revenue will have to be offset by corresponding amounts. As recommended by the Working Group on Fiscal Space, the expenditure framework will be adjusted for cyclical expenditure on unemployment benefit and social assistance benefit that does not stem from policy.

If the financial picture shows that net windfalls are structural in nature and the EMU balance is lower than the deficit recommended by the Working Group on Fiscal Space on a multiyear basis (-2% GDP), one third of these net windfalls may be used for tax reduction measures, one third for investment in further strengthening the Netherlands' earning capacity, and one third for repayment of the national debt, provided the European limit for the national debt is not exceeded (windfall formula).

In budget documents a greater distinction will be made between expenditure on consumption and investments, so that the benefits of investments can be seen more clearly. In addition, in accordance with the recommendations of the Working Group on Fiscal Space, a proposal will be drawn up for extending the budget horizon to eight years so that the long-term perspective is better reflected in fiscal policy.

European public finances

The Netherlands will also adhere to the EU fiscal rules laid down in the Stability and Growth Pact, including the limits that apply to the budget deficit and the national debt. Deviation from the prescribed net expenditure path will only be possible if the EMU balance and the EMU debt remain within the applicable limits under EU rules. In addition, reforms will be carried out to achieve structural reductions in expenditure and improve debt sustainability in the longer term.

The Netherlands profits from a strong European economy and a stable eurozone. All EU member states must respect the limits agreed in the Stability and Growth Pact. Member states that do not do so pay a higher rate of interest and have a lower credit rating. Responsibility for national budgets lies primarily with the member states concerned. Therefore the Netherlands does not act as a guarantor for the national debts of other countries (eurobonds). Subject to certain conditions, the Netherlands will take a constructive stance on using existing instruments for joint investments, as already occurs via the European Investment Bank (EIB), macro-financial assistance (MFA) and the Ukraine Facility, where countries guarantee only their own share in the capital (GNI key). Joint defence investments can be channelled via the existing European Defence Fund and the EU's Security Action for Europe (SAFE) instrument. The Netherlands will also explore opportunities for intergovernmental cooperation aimed at the joint procurement of defence equipment, the harmonisation of product standards and joint defence projects. This will be done in close collaboration with NATO partners, such as the United Kingdom, Norway and Canada.

The development of a modern and future-oriented EU budget will continue. The budget must have a stronger focus on enhanced European competitiveness, a robust migration and asylum policy, security and defence. In order to ensure that the Netherlands' net payment position does not worsen, the national reduction in contributions to the EU budget must remain in place.

Investment

A national investment institution (NII) will be set up to strengthen the Dutch capital market. This institution will operate at a remove from the political arena, and will be aimed at private investments, co-investments or loans and will not crowd out private capital. The investment institution will work with market-based required rates of return and therefore focus on projects with a positive business case for which finance proves impossible to obtain in the market because, for example, of higher risks or a lack of available venture capital. This occurs for example in larger funding rounds of startups and scaleups. A unit that can serve as a successor to the current National Growth Fund will be added to the NII. The proceeds from the proposed privatisation of state-owned enterprises can supply the investment institution's core capital. On the basis of the above criteria, these capital contributions are in principle not relevant to the EMU balance, but will increase the EMU debt. Only the institution's operating result will weigh on the balance.

Reform of the tax and supplementary benefits system

Our tax and benefits system and other income and insurance schemes are in need of reform. The coexistence of many different income-related schemes with different definitions and conditions has made for a very opaque and unpredictable system. We will continue to simplify and make improvements where possible and will ensure that we get the fundamentals in order. But we will also set long-term objectives which we will work towards. Several tracks will therefore be pursued in parallel:

1. Step-by-step simplification of the tax, social security and benefits system, and further measures to simplify implementation. This will mean, among other things:
 - harmonising concepts and conditions for income-support schemes including social security and supplementary benefits (*toeslagen*)
 - bringing the implementation of supplementary benefits under the Work and Income (Implementation) Structure Act (*Wet structuur uitvoeringsorganisatie werk en inkomen*), so that information can be exchanged between implementing bodies and service provision can be improved
 - reducing non-take-up and the risk of repayment demands by providing a proactive service, including working towards the automatic payment of supplementary benefits

- gradually reducing the multiplicity of income-related schemes in the tax system, starting with tax credits (*heffingskortingen*)
 - merging child benefit (*kinderbijslag*) and supplementary child benefit (*kindgebonden budget*) into a single child benefit scheme, with a higher fixed amount and lower variable amount
 - examining how the complexity resulting from the 21 forms of joint household recognised under the General Old Age Pensions Act (*Algemene Ouderdomswet*; AOW) can be overcome
 - abolishing childcare benefit and replacing it with direct funding.
2. The government will prioritise completing the modernisation of the IT landscape within the Tax Administration and the Benefits Office and resolving staffing issues. This should clear the way for the implementation in practice of a concrete reform scenario.
 3. Before the end of 2026, the government will present a reform agenda with specific milestones to be achieved by set times, starting with the reform of the income tax system and specific steps to be taken in relation to the supplementary benefit system, other income schemes and social security. The reform process will be underpinned by the following principles: keeping implementation simple, ensuring rules are clear and predictable for people, ensuring that work pays, and avoiding further income redistribution through the tax system.

The minister whose portfolio covers tax affairs will have primary responsibility for advancing the reform agenda, in cooperation with the Minister of Social Affairs and Employment.

Supplementary benefits

Confidence in the government among parents who suffered the consequences of the failings in the childcare benefit system has been seriously damaged. Redress for the financial loss and emotional distress they have experienced is urgently needed. Action to follow up on the lessons that emerged from the parliamentary inquiry and the parliamentary committee is therefore warranted. In order to complete the operation to redress the consequences of the serious failings in the childcare benefit system as soon as possible, all possible steps will be taken to:

- process claims for financial loss
- help municipalities fulfil their responsibility to provide broad-based support to parents
- establish a space for emotional recovery
- provide better-targeted support through the scheme set up to help the children affected (*kindregeling*).

A designated minister will be appointed for the duration of the childcare benefit redress operation so that it can be completed as soon as possible.

Appendix

Agreements concerning the budget

The amounts in the tables in the budgetary appendix are authoritative as far as the implementation of the coalition agreement is concerned.

The financial decision-making table is balanced, both as at the end of the government's term in office and on a structural basis. This entails a budget deficit at the end of the government's term in office of -2.1% (position in the 2026 Budget Memorandum). The movements of funds included in the financial decision-making table will be allocated proportionately across budget chapters in an introductory memorandum.