
TRUST IN GOVERNMENT

2011

*Summary of the 2011
Annual Report of the
National Ombudsman
of the Netherlands*



13,740



168



13.1



29,717



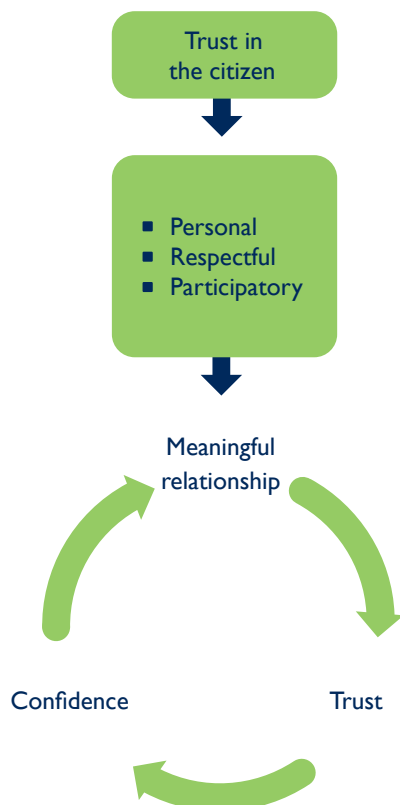
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TRUST IS FUNDAMENTAL TO GOOD CITIZEN – GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

Ombudsman's model of trust and confidence



- Confidence = trust in systems
- Trust = trust in people
- There is a two-way relationship between confidence and trust

Recommendations of the National Ombudsman

- Focus on quality of contacts with citizens
- Don't avoid 'difficult conversations'
- Design interfaces between citizens and government on basis of trust:
 - make contacts as personal as possible
 - treat citizens with respect
 - take decisions with citizens, not about them
- Reduce the complexity of legislation
- Care more about the quality of implementation, based on trust
- Deepen knowledge: how can trust be created?
- Trust is created by the actions of individual human beings
- Give professionals the freedom to create it

What should be done?

Trust/confidence and proper conduct

- Proper conduct is the key issue in the work of the National Ombudsman
- Proper = personal, respectful and participatory
- Trust/confidence is created through the relationship between lawfulness and proper conduct (ombudsquadrant)
- Proper conduct increases trust/confidence

What is the effect of proper conduct on trust/confidence?

Why trust?

Context

- The current credit crisis and minority government have focused attention of the issue of trust
- The Netherlands is a high-trust society: relationships are based on trust
- Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP): how we relate to each other is the most important issue facing society today

What is wrong with citizen-government relations?

Relations between citizens and government

- Government tends to invest in systems, not relationships: rules are rules, legal instruments
- Citizens want to be treated properly (= relationship)
- In-built conflict between government as a system and people's individual experience produces an erosion of trust

Real-life examples

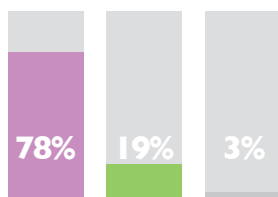
- Mother of baby Jelmer: "You are confident the inspectorate will do its job and ensure patient safety. So you have confidence in something that doesn't actually happen."
- Self-employed people had confidence in information from the Employee Insurance Agency (UWV). When it turned out to be incorrect, they were accused of fraud.
- Military veterans feel let down by the strictly legalistic attitude of government.
- Q fever sufferers' trust in government has been deeply shaken. Government systems and rationales have far-reaching consequences for the lives of individual people.
- Gays have lost confidence in government because of its failure to deal effectively with homophobic bullying.



Alex Brenninkmeijer,
National Ombudsman
since 2005

STATISTICAL OVERVIEW

Justified/ unjustified



- Partly/fully justified 78%
- Unjustified 19%
- No decision 3%

Developments in 2011:

- Ombudsman for Children started work
- National Ombudsman became ombudsman
- Alex Brenninkmeijer re-appointed for another 6 years
- Plans for whistleblowers' support centre under National Ombudsman

Respectful

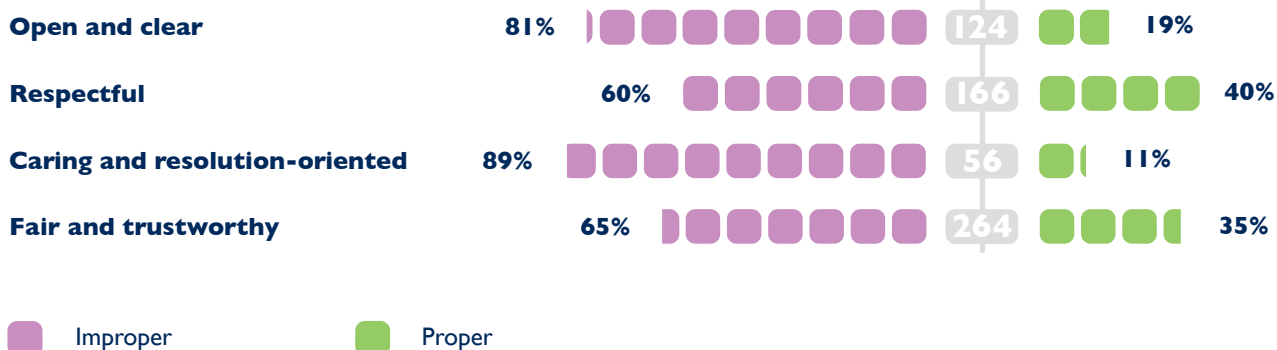
Jacques is unemployed and enrolls as a jobseeker with the Employee Insurance Agency (UWV) via the werk.nl website. He discovers that, by clicking on 'employers', anyone can gain access to jobseekers' CVs, including his own. He is indignant.



This complaint led the National Ombudsman to ask the UWV to modify the website to improve jobseekers' privacy. The UWV has since improved the site (report no. 2011/191).

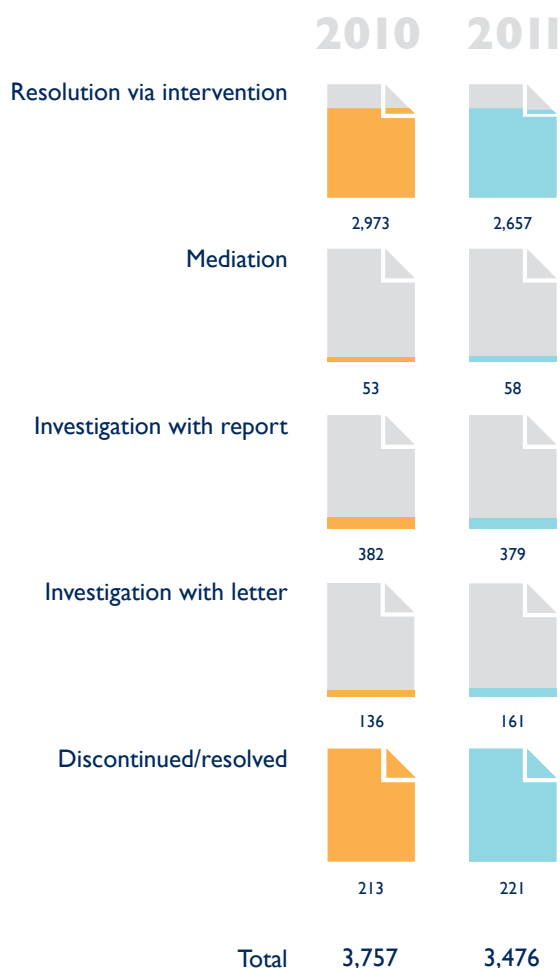
Subjects of complaints

Proper administration is: open and clear; respectful, caring and resolution-oriented, fair and trustworthy.



The National Ombudsman only gives a decision on proper conduct if he issues a report.

Method of dealing with complaints



Complaints by policy field

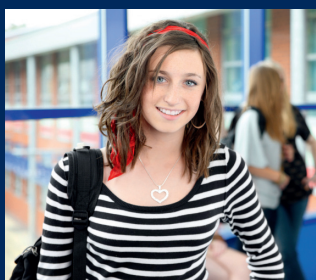
Ministries
General Affairs
Foreign Affairs
Security and Justice
Interior and Kingdom Relations
Education, Culture and Science
Finance
Defence
Social Affairs and Employment
Health, Welfare and Sport
Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation
Infrastructure and the Environment
Police
Regulatory industrial organisations
Subnational government
Extraordinary investigating officers with municipalities outside the jurisdiction of the National Ombudsman
Water boards
Municipalities
Provinces
Joint bodies
Total

Key statistics for 2011:

- 13,740 complaints received
- 29,717 contacts (phone calls, visits and e-mails)
- Most complaints about the Tax Department (2,265)
- More complaints about the Education Executive Agency (DUO) and from veterans about Defence
- Fewer complaints about the Care Insurance Board (CVZ) and Employee Insurance Agency (UWV)
- Ombudsman competent to deal with 86% of complaints received
- 76% of complaints resolved via intervention
- 379 reports issued
- 78% of complaints found to be justified in written investigation
- Most decisions concerned lack of fairness and reliability
- 157 recommendations issued

Open and clear

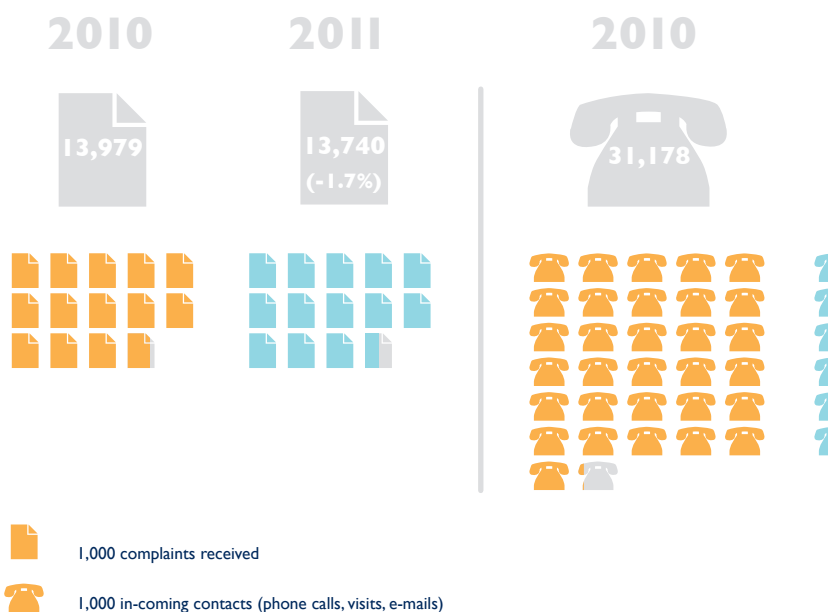
Saskia's Bulgarian partner needs a residence permit. Saskia asks the Immigration & Naturalisation Service (IND) for an application form. The fee is € 401. Later she is told she should have been given a different form, for which the handling charge is € 41. After the application is turned down, Saskia explains the misunderstanding and asks for repayment of the difference in the fees. But the IND says it was up to her to make sure she used the right form.



The National Ombudsman thought it was odd that the IND had accepted the application for consideration when it was on the wrong form. In the end, the IND repaid the difference.

2010		2011	
number	%	number	%
11	0.1	16	0.1
158	1.3	150	1.2
1,233	10.4	1,092	9.1
167	1.4	402	3.3
477	4.0	692	5.7
2,363	19.9	2,366	19.6
64	0.5	193	1.6
1,625	13.7	1,422	11.8
1,597	13.4	1,417	11.8
156	1.3	152	1.3
537	4.5	584	4.8
1,219	10.3	1,226	10.2
13	0.1	20	0.2
7	0.1	10	0.1
120	1.0	103	0.9
1,890	15.9	1,953	16.2
68	0.6	51	0.4
170	1.4	200	1.7
11,875	100	12,049	100

Number of complaints and contacts



Powers of National Ombudsman

2011

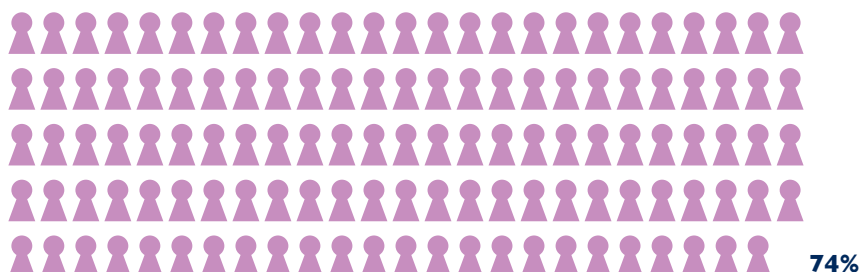


Competence of National Ombudsman in %

The National Ombudsman can only deal with complaints about government.

The National Ombudsman's staff in 2011:

124 women



44 men



2011



Main issues:

- At-risk groups
- Digitisation
- Health
- Personal contact
- Access to information

Caring and resolution-oriented

Trudi lives on Saba and has been waiting for years for repayment of her old age pension (AOV) contributions. She is sent from one authority to another: the Inspectorate of Taxes on Saba refers her to Sint Maarten, which refers her to Bonaire, which refers her back to Saba.

The National Ombudsman submitted the case to the successor authority, the Tax Department for the Netherlands in the Caribbean. The Tax Department apologised and told Trudi that its Saba office would now repay the contributions. Measures have been taken to prevent such problems occurring in future.

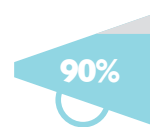


Top 10 complaints

1. Tax Department 2,265	↑ 0.6%	32.5%	6. Education Executive Agency (DUO) 485
2. Municipalities 1,953	↑ 3.3%	36.3%	7. Central Office for Motor Vehicle Driver Testing (CBR) 327
3. Police 1,226	↑ 0.6%	↓ 12.4%	8. Youth Care Agencies 310
4. Employee Insurance Agency (UWV) 1,134	↓ 13.1%	↓ 23.1%	9. Care Insurance Board (CVZ) 303
5. Central Administrative Office for Exceptional Medical Insurance (CAK) 499	↓ 6.0%	↑ 12.8%	10. Social Insurance Bank (SVB) 247

Number of recommendations made and implemented

2011



157

 % recommendations implemented

Fair and trustworthy

Between 2006 and the end of 2009, the Tax Department wrongly received over € 6,000,000 in health care insurance contributions from Dutch nationals living abroad. The Finance Minister acknowledged the problem but felt it was impracticable for the Department to repay the contributions over those years on its own initiative: it was up to the people entitled to repayments to apply for them.



The Ombudsman urged the Tax Department to adopt a proactive approach. Between the end of 2011 and the end of 2012 the Health Insurance Board is sending letters to over 13,000 people who may be entitled to repayments. And from the 2010 fiscal year the Tax Department has agreed to make spontaneous repayments.

For reasons of efficiency and effectiveness, the full 2011 Annual Report of the National Ombudsman of the Netherlands is being published only via www.jaarverslag.nationaleombudsman.nl. Visit that website to find or download the Ombudsman's Report to the House of Representatives, his views on the subject of trust and confidence, statistics, annual letters to individual authorities and a timeline showing the main events of 2011.

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