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The Netherlands: Greening the European economy: responses and initiatives by member states and social partners

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→ The Netherlands – Greening the European economy: responses and initiatives by Member States and social partners

In reaction to the recession, the Cabinet has announced extra measures to stimulate the economy, including several 'green' measures. All major green issues are covered by the tripartite Social and Economic Council. All in all, the government and the social partners are in agreement on the agenda, but recently the social partners are critical on the speed with which the government operates. Employers reject interference in company affairs.

This mapping and inventory exercise will help to take stock of what the different Member States and social partners are doing to mitigate the effects of climate change and harness the potential of the green economy. It will also help to identify particularly interesting and successful initiatives which can be shared and disseminated as positive practice examples.

Mapping Member State responses, initiatives and tools

Please describe the main actions and policy strategies of your country in the following areas:

1) In the context of the current global recession, has an economic recovery program or strategy been launched by the national government in the last 12 months? If so, what coverage, attention, actions are envisaged with a view to greening the national economy, with a focus on employment, as a way of emerging from the present downturn? If there is a wide range of issues, please focus on the main issues.

General remark: in the Dutch context, no (fundamental) difference is made between the concepts of 'green', CSR (in Dutch: MVO), and 'sustainable'.

Yes, such a program has been launched. The cabinet took measures to stimulate the economy to an amount of € 6 billion. The Cabinet measures can be broken down into four categories: labour market and education, infrastructure, sustainability and innovation, and maintaining benefit levels. An amount of €1.2 billion will be directed at sustainability measures including wind energy and corporate social responsibility incentives, as well as making homes, schools and hospitals more energy efficient. Domestic expenditure will be maintained. This will be achieved by investing in green energy and scrapping flight tax. One fifth of the country's energy must come from sustainable sources by the year 2020.

The measures taken by the cabinet rested on a tripartite agreement with the social partners.

2) Have there been any specific ministries or government departments set up to deal with green issues? If so, what is their mandate and remit?

There is no specific ministry responsible for green issues (green issues should be of concern to all departments), but in practice most issues are covered by the following two ministries:

- the Ministry of Economic Affairs (Ministerie van Economische Zaken)
- the Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment (Ministerie van Volkshuisvesting, Ruimtelijke Ordening en Milieubeheer)

3) Have any tripartite social dialogue structures and/or procedures been set up to deal with green issues? If so, what is their aim and how do they operate? If there are a wide range of structures and procedures, please focus on the main ones.

All major socio-economic issues are covered by the Social and Economic Council ([Sociaal Economische Raad](#), SER) consisting of an equal number of representatives from employers' federations, union federations and the government (independent members). No new structures have been created to deal especially with green issues.

About this document

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4) Have there been any of the following initiatives or actions in your country: Where the answer is yes, please provide a brief account of each one, focusing on the main ones.

- awareness-raising initiatives
- recurrent research (since 2004) by the Ministry of Economic Affairs into the annual accounts of companies with regard to CSR. A major goal is to increase awareness of companies on green issues. By law, companies are obliged to pay attention to non-financial issues in their annual accounts since 2005.
- The establishment (in 2004) of a CSR-centre, focusing on SMEs. This centre cooperates with sectoral organisation and employers' organisations.
- Support for the National Contact Centre for the OECD-directives for MNCs
- Stimulating involvement of NGOs and social partners in CSR-policy
- Stimulating awareness on the (possible) link between CSR and remuneration in listed companies.
- Increasing the availability of reliable information for consumers on CSR issues (e.g. certificates)
- Stimulating the development of coherent, transparent and easily applicable CSR-directives on an international level.
- Implementing CSR in all missions to stimulate Dutch trade
- actions targeting specific sectors
- The financial sector (and especially pension funds) are relatively large compared to the size of the Dutch economy. The cabinet supports initiatives in the financial sector to increase CSR investments.
- Measures, directed to universities to stimulate scientific research on CSR.
- actions involving green procurement
- The government aim is to have 100% of green government procurement.
- financial support and stimulus packages to boost eco-innovation
- The Cabinet has started a project called Netherlands Enterprising Innovation Country (Nederland Ondernemend Innovatieland)
- The Cabinet has introduced so-called CSR innovation vouchers to lower the threshold to innovation for SMEs
- support for green start-ups and entrepreneurial schemes
- training programmes to prepare the workforce for the transition to the green economy
- investment schemes in emerging products and services that could lead to the creation of green jobs in the future
- any other relevant initiatives or actions

To introduce a CSR threshold in government supported projects abroad and to include CSR (within the limits set by the OECD) in export insurance facilities.

Mapping social partner responses, initiatives and tools

Please summarise the **main** unilateral and bipartite initiatives in your country in the following areas:

5) Positioning and stance in relation to the green agenda (eg any position papers)

The main forum on the national level is the Social and Economic Council (Sociaal Economische raad, SER), which is a tripartite (and not bipartite) body. The SER has issued several (mostly unanimous) advices and recommendations. The most important ones are:

- Sustainable globalisation, a world to win (2008)
- Advice on agriculture (2008)
- Advice on nuclear energy and sustainable energy (2008)
- Towards a sustainable energy policy (2006)
- Environment as an opportunity (2005)
- Certification and sustainable development (2004)
- Towards a more efficient, sustainable EU agricultural policy (2003)
- Towards sustainable consumption (2003)
- Innovation for sustainable 'food' and 'green' (2002)
- National strategy for sustainable development (2002)
- The profit of values (2000)

All these publications (including a summary in English) can be downloaded from the site of the SER (<http://www.ser.nl/nl/publicaties/adviezen/2000-2007.aspx>).

As is clear from this list, the subject of CSR (including 'green') features high on the agenda of the SER. This explains that bipartite and unilateral initiatives are rare and far less important: social partners usually point to the SER.

6) Attitudes and approaches of the social partners in relation to the green agenda

Social partners are united on the importance of CSR, and both are critical on the perceived lack of

activity of the government with regard to CSR-issues (a major example being sustainable energy).

However, there are important differences of opinion with regard to policy measures. The employer federations stress that the government should not interfere on the enterprise level: CSR is a subject that requires tailor-made solutions by companies themselves. Union federations are less weary with regard to active government measures, including legislation.

7) Any unilateral and joint strategies and actions, including:

- awareness-raising campaigns for members
- bilateral dialogue structures, including those at sectoral level
- capacity-building initiatives
- training programmes for members

To our knowledge no such measures have been taken recently

8) The main initiatives for reviving the economy and promoting the green agenda, both general and sector-specific

With regard to the government policy, see under 1.

In spring 2009, the trade union federations (FNV, CNV and MHP) have published a Social and Green Investment Plan to cope with the crisis (social en Groen Investeringsplan – Samen de crisis te lijf). The core of the plan are investments to an amount of € 7 billion, directed towards:

- the labour market
- stimulating the economy (including greener production, reduction of energy use, increase in wind energy, green VAT-tarif, replacement of outdated central heating systems).
- changing the financial sector, both in the short and the long run

In addition, the federations propose a long term policy for industry and services.

9) Any relevant studies and research

There is a host of publications on the issue. Every year, the Ministry of Economic Affairs publishes the Transparency Benchmark on CSR-reporting in companies' annual accounts. Many reports give examples (best practices) of CSR. Quantitative research however is very scarce.

10) Any other relevant responses, initiatives or tools

Views of the national centre

Greening the economy has been high on the agenda of both the government and the social partners for quite some time, as can be witnessed from the publications by the tripartite Social and Economic Council since at least 2000. On the other hand, the number of concrete initiatives seem to lag behind the policy announcements. An example is the field of sustainable energy, where the Netherlands do not score particularly well compared to surrounding countries. Social partners have voiced criticism of what they consider a lack of measures by the government.

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