

# 10 highlights of Ecorys in 2023

We are currently facing some significant societal challenges in the Netherlands. Themes such as maintaining a stable livelihood, equal opportunity, asylum and migration, health and support, environmental sustainability and labour market competition are high on the agenda. At Ecorys, we are helping our clients to be able to address these challenges. In light of these challenges, we are pleased to present some of our highlights of 2023.



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## European ports remain vulnerable to corruption

European ports are targeted by organised crime to smuggle in illegal goods (such as drugs). Ports are therefore also vulnerable to corruption. Think of port workers being threatened or bribed to give their access pass to criminals. A significant problem, but how do we solve it? In our project POSEIDON, we map vulnerabilities in the supply chain of European ports. We identify good practices to counter corruption and exchange them between different European ports. Examples include training port staff, digitalisation of processes and measures to restrict and control access to port premises.

## Dutch supermarkets more expensive than abroad

Why are some products much cheaper in a supermarket just across the border? Territorial supply restrictions (TLBs) cause higher consumer prices in the Netherlands. TLBs are restrictions that producers impose on their customers, allowing buyers to buy only within a certain geographical area. Ecorys mapped which TLBs Dutch companies face and the consequences which they have. The most common consequence of TLBs is that consumers end up paying more. Retailers report that the wholesale price of products could be 5% to 30% lower, if the product could be sourced in other European countries.



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## High-speed train remains too expensive on short journeys

By train or by plane? For short distances, it is (now) usually still possible to choose both options. Ecorys was commissioned by Brussels Airport to investigate the costs of replacing short-haul flights from Brussels to Amsterdam and Paris with a direct train connection by high-speed train (HSL). In our business case, we calculated what passengers will pay for a train ticket. Our study shows that the HSL is more expensive than air travel on short distances. Half of the cost of running the HSL consists of rail costs. The cost of running the train as the staff costs are relatively low. It can be concluded that governments will have to step up to ensure that train travel remains competitive to air travel.

## The traditional family does not exist (anymore)

The government pursues an active policy to support families in the Netherlands with income, work, health and child welfare. After all, stable, strong and harmonious families are the cornerstone of our society and play a crucial role in strengthening and developing society. The idea of the traditional family has changed significantly in 2023. It has therefore become increasingly important to understand how public policies can respond to new family structures and norms as a result of social, cultural and economic changes. In our study, we look at 7 neighbouring countries and see that policies have adapted to these developments over the past 20 years. These include measures such as paternity leave, informal care leave, right to free and high-quality childcare and adjustments in benefits and taxes. These insights can assist the Dutch government in making its family policies even more future-proof.



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## Green energy in conflict zones and fragile states is not always positive

Green energy generation is increasingly occurring in regions that have (had) conflict and instability. Think of wind farms in Western Sahara, solar energy from Ethiopia and wind energy from the Democratic Republic of Congo. Research by Ecorys shows that projects generating green energy in such areas do not always have a positive impact on local conditions. These projects can actually give rise to new conflicts. They create the expectation that local conditions will improve, while this does not (directly) lead to major changes, or only for limited groups. It is therefore important for such greening projects to first properly identify the local context and take measures to reduce risks.

## Making home more sustainable can lead to savings of €1,100 a year

In 2022, Dutch households paid on average more than four times more for natural gas and electricity than in the previous year. This was the direct result of the war in Ukraine. Making energy use more sustainable can help combat energy poverty. That is why the Dutch Sustainable Energy Association (NVDE) called on the government to focus sustainability efforts first on low-income households with high energy bills or homes with a low energy label. Ecorys studied the effects of this sustainability drive, and arrived at the conclusion that NVDE's plan will reduce the energy bills of households on a tight budget by an average of 1,100 Euros annually.



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## Drones offer the Netherlands opportunities

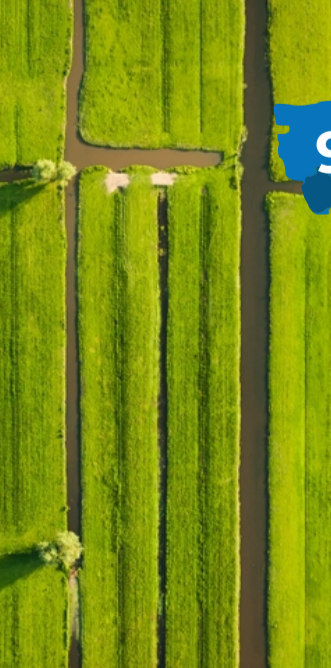
Drones are increasingly being used in many ways (emergency response, inspection, transport, defence, movies, entertainment, leisure). By 2035, drones will be an integral part of our lives. By then, the Dutch drone market will be around 500 million Euros, with a potential of up to 920 million Euros. Ecorys drafted an advisory for the development of the Dutch drone strategy. Our roadmap to a mature Dutch drone ecosystem looks at seven different focal areas: development of national laws and regulations; development of partnerships; steering for societal impact; creation of infrastructure; development of technology; market development and financing; and development of knowledge and skills.

## Tackling digital skills backlog pays off

Some 2.5 to 4 million people in the Netherlands lack digital skills. As a result, they have no or poor access to all kinds of digital services, as well as to education, healthcare and the labour market. To close the digital gap, Alliantie Digitale Samenleving (ADS) and the labour market. To close the digital gap, Alliantie Digitale Samenleving (ADS) have developed a 'Local Chain Approach'. In this approach, public, social and private parties work together to promote digital inclusion. Ecorys has studied that this approach pays off and can have a clear positive social return, especially for citizens but also for companies and the government. There are significant benefits on the labour market and in effectiveness of social services. Other benefits include a decrease in online fraud victims, increased justice, health gains and increased efficiency for business and government.



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## Farmers who want to become more sustainable often relatively young and highly motivated

In 2019, the cabinet has set aside 500 million Euros to tackle the nitrogen emission problem. Part of this amount is available for the conversion fund that supports farmers and horticulturists to become more sustainable and reduce nitrogen emissions. Ecorys found that this pilot has been well received by both banks and the agricultural sector. Applicants to the fund are relatively young and highly motivated in finding ways to become more sustainable.

## Relatively few migrants start their own businesses

Relatively few migrants start their own businesses in the Netherlands. It turns out that language skills and knowledge of Dutch regulations are a barrier to starting a business. With a grant from the Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB), Qredits Microfinance provides migrants with training on how to start a business in the Netherlands. Ecorys is researching the impact of these trainings and is also doing so for three similar projects in Italy, Finland and Belgium. In doing so, we learn and advise on what does and does not work and thereby contribute to increasing migrants' financial and social inclusion.



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