

Coalitie Erbij

YSI - Netherlands - Country case 1

1. Basic information

What does the Coalition do? - Characteristics and activities -

In 2008 a national Coalition, consisting of 8 large social support organisations, was introduced. This 'Coalitie Erbij' (freely translated as 'Coalition Connect') is still active today and is a national initiative and campaign against loneliness, solitude and social seclusion among Dutch citizens. The Coalition is a foundation, with its own director and its board members consisting out of the directors of the core member organisations. The Coalition has its own bureau, located in Utrecht.

The 8 large national social support organisations (among others the salvation army, Humanitas and the national elderly fund) are the core of the Coalition, but as of 2017 around 40 national and local social service organisations, municipalities, pressure groups and knowledge institutes are co-partners within the initiative. These partners together both organise activities for people who feel lonely or who are in danger of becoming socially isolated, and stimulate the awareness amongst Dutch citizens for the problem of social exclusion and loneliness. The Coalition thus actively engage in multiple activities, such as organising:

- a Week against Loneliness yearly in September. During this week hundreds of activities are organised in the entire country. The Coalition invites and stimulates both Coalition members and non-members, organisations and individuals to join in this initiative by joining in the activities or organise an activity by themselves. One of the activities is organising the longest dinner table of the Netherlands, especially aimed at people who are socially isolated.
- The National Conference on Loneliness, where the Coalition offers both professionals and policy makers topicalities on the approach to loneliness.
- Support for volunteers, professionals and municipalities in the fight against loneliness through local workshops, meetings and advice.
- A platform for knowledge sharing and cooperation between organisations. The Coalition yearly stimulates research into (certain facets of) loneliness, lectures and informational gatherings. They offer current information on (opposing) solitude and seclusion.
- The National Loneliness Prize, aimed at engaging both professionals, volunteers and civilians to think of innovative ways to oppose solitude and seclusion. The best ideas will be offered support by the Coalition.

The Coalition is thus an instigator of awareness, attention and activities. They 8 core partners of the Coalition all have their own qualities. For example Humanitas' volunteers organise actively engaging house visits, Resto van Harte organises opportunities to eat together in the neighbourhood, Sensor offers a post for telephonic aid and the Zonnebloem (i.e. Sunflower) organises escorted outings and holidays for the elderly.

The activities offered by the Coalition and their partners are thus, depending on the particular organisation (or individual) provided by both professionals and volunteers. It must be said that most probably the volunteers are overly represented.

Funding

Although the initiative of the Coalition *Erbij* lies with the 8 national core organisations, the strength of the Coalition is that it has become a true national initiative, thus also involving the Dutch government. The Coalition receives a yearly subsidy (of € 150.000) from the Dutch Ministry of Public Health, Wellbeing and Sport. On top of that, together with this Ministry and the Association of Dutch Municipalities (i.e. the VNG), the Coalition *Erbij* has also written the Action Plan against Loneliness. For the execution of this Action Plan the Ministry also gave a great financial impulse, which was only intensified in 2014 (with € 900.000) in order to truly secure the Dutch approach or fight against loneliness. Out of this funding of the Action Plan the website of Coalition *Erbij* was created.

The partners within the Coalition sometimes receive funding by local municipalities or provinces. For example the various regional organisations of *Sensoor*, the organisation offering telephonic support to citizens, is financed by almost all provinces and the four great municipalities in the Netherlands (i.e. Amsterdam, The Hague, Utrecht and Rotterdam).

Target groups

How are the target groups identified and reached?

The target group for the 'Coalition *Erbij*' are generally people who are lonely, who miss a strong emotional connection with others or those who experience a growing sense of social isolation as they have less contact with others than is their wish. The initiative can therefore include people living in single-person households, but is also aimed at people with disabilities, elderly who are less mobile, those people who lack friends and social contacts and people who experience social exclusion through for example unemployment, financial problems, bullying, loss of their loved one(s) and/or divorce (either living alone or with others). The various activities (for example outings, opportunities for people with the same feelings and experiences to meet, engaging house visits, projects in which people are partnered with another -usually a volunteer- to engage in activities and talk (i.e. *maatjesprojecten*), opportunities to eat together and offering a listening ear or counselling) are thus not aimed at a particular age group. Both the elderly and Dutch youth or for example students can all be engaged in the project.

Goals - Evaluation

The main goals of the Coalition are to raise awareness on loneliness and defeat loneliness in Dutch society, thus lessening the amount of Dutch citizens that feel lonely, secluded and socially isolated. There is no clear target set; the goals remain general in their nature.

The Coalition (and others in the Netherlands) does invest in research into this topic in order to gain knowledge on the consequences of their activities and the national Action Plan on Loneliness. This mostly involves gathering numbers on loneliness amongst the Dutch population, for example by means of the Loneliness Monitor (i.e. *Eenzaamheidsmonitor*). Other numbers are to be gained from the Health Monitor amongst Adults (by, among others, the Dutch

Central Bureau of Statistic), a monitor amongst over 700.000 Dutch citizens from 19-64 years old.

The Coalition itself, as being on the receiving side of governmental funding, is evaluated from time to time in order to gain insight in their expenditures, outcomes and impact. In light of these evaluations the future financial scope and wishes with regard to future content are decided upon by the Dutch government (i.e. the Ministry of Public Health, Wellbeing and Sport).

A national initiative/cooperation and quite well known

Coalition Erbij is a national initiative which receives quite some attention by the media, because they organise annual activities and involve a multitude of partners. Interesting is that three scientific (unpaid) advisors offer their association and knowledge support to the Coalition: a professor of the Free University of Amsterdam, a head teacher at the Humanistic University and a organisational advisor. These experts are specialised in for example research into vulnerable elderly citizens, loneliness and social isolation, financial exploitation, self-sustainability and the workings of social interventions e.g. the cooperation between professionals and volunteers in the aid of vulnerable citizens.

Another sign of the success of the Coalition and the attention created for the (opposition to) loneliness are spin offs. In the city of Rotterdam a local initiative MDR+ was started aimed at helping vulnerable citizens in all sorts of manners, from help with financial problems, social isolation and family affairs such as divorce.

1.1 Role of the public sector

What is the role of the public sector in creating Coalitie Erbij and what is its role in its operations?
As made clear above, the public sector (in the form of the Dutch government and especially the Ministry of Public Health, Wellbeing and Sport) plays a role as a funder of both the Coalition and more particularly the Action Plan against Loneliness. As this Action Plan was written by both the Coalition, the Ministry and the Association of Dutch Municipalities, it can be derived that the activities and services offered by the Coalition and/or through the Action Plan against Loneliness, benefit the goals of the public sector. The Dutch government has high stakes in fighting loneliness, social exclusion and the consequences of these problems in the Dutch society such as higher health risks (both psychosocial and physical consequences and thus a heightened appeal on the health care system), a lessened (sense of) well-being, experiencing hindrances to engage in Dutch society, etc. Dutch governmental policy is aimed at keeping people living at home for as long as possible despite for example sickness and/or high age. This policy goes hand in hand with for example the necessary reforms of long term care and the stimulus of more participation in the society of Dutch citizens (i.e. Dutch citizens taking more care of each other).

The attention to oppose loneliness in Dutch society is also stimulated by other Governmental actions. Examples are the in 2013 written covenant on the Elderly and Culture, in which cultural activities and well-being in for example meaningful day activities are linked, and the solidification of anonymous help offered from a distance in the 2015 Law on Societal Support (i.e. WMO, Wet Maatschappelijke Ondersteuning). Thus offering people with feelings of loneliness the opportunity to gain help, a listening ear, when they are not able to find support

elsewhere. Policy advisors of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, are also involved/engaged with the (support of the) Coalition. The function as sparring partners for example.

2. Recommendations

What recommendations does the Coalition give for advancing the situation of those living in single-person households?

The importance for the Coalition lies in working together with the public sector, in order to stimulate the awareness country-wide for problems occurring in for example single-person households. As the Dutch government aims at developing the Netherlands more as a participation society in which the Dutch citizens support each other (more than relying on the government for support) this is the first step: creating awareness. The Coalition already receives support from the national government and numerous local governments, in the form of various municipalities, are already engaged in boosting awareness and (financially or otherwise) stimulating the activities set up by the Coalition Erbij and its partners and/or even some individual initiatives which support the goals of the Coalition. It is on this local scale that the attention for the subject of loneliness (also in single-person households) has the most to gain still. Policy workers and advisors from municipalities must be included into the programme, goals and ambitions of the Coalition and can function as sparring partners. This can be the start of more cooperation between the local authorities and the organisations in the Coalition, where shared interests and goals are put on the agenda and actual action is taken. It is thus not the financial stimulus that is most sought after by the Coalition, but it is the mutual understanding, awareness and action on the subject.

3. Sources

Websites:

www.eenzaam.nl *(In Dutch: website on loneliness: offering information on the topic of loneliness, advice, experiences of others suffering from feelings of loneliness and social exclusion, information on activities and initiatives, contact information, etc.)*

<https://www.samentegeneenzaamheid.nl/sites/wte/files/activiteitenplan-coalitie-erbij-2017.pdf>
(In Dutch: pdf on the activities of the Coalition Erbij in 2017)

<https://www.samentegeneenzaamheid.nl/sites/wte/files/coalitie-erbij-brochure.pdf>
(In Dutch: Brochure on Coalition Erbij: partners, activities, etc.)

<https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2014/07/16/kamerbrief-over-het-intensiveren-en-verankeren-aanpak-eeenzaamheid> *(In Dutch: Link towards the governmental letter on intensifying and anchoring the approach to loneliness.)*

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