



Exit from and non-take up of public services

A comparative analysis: France, Greece, Spain, Germany, Netherlands, Hungary

[GLOSSARY]

EXNOTA consortium

Dutch contribution to the glossary about non-take-up of social benefits in Europe

*Central terms in the official discourse about non-take-up or access
to social rights in the Netherlands.*

1. **Niet-gebruik** (van sociale zekerheid)
2. **Onderbenutting** (van sociale zekerheidsvoorzieningen)
3. **Bijstand**
4. **Sociaal minimum**
5. **Individuele huursubsidie**
6. **Cliënt**

Besides special literature mentioned later on in the present paper, use was made of the Groot Woordenboek der Nederlandse taal, Amsterdam & Antwerp, Van Dale, 13th edition, 1999.

1. Niet-gebruik (van sociale zekerheid)

English: Non-take-up (of social benefits))

French: Non recours (aux prestations sociales)

"Niet-gebruik" is the Dutch translation of the British concept "non-take-up". Antoine Math showed that the translation of non-take-up in the French language is problematic (1996). It is also the case as for the translation into the Dutch language. "niet-gebruik" is based on the verb "gebruiken" (to use) and emphasises the fact that some benefits are available but not used by eligible recipients. This is a rather good translation but just as for the French translation "non recours", "niet-gebruik" suggests that the cause of the problem is to be found on the side of the eligible person (A. Math, 1996). Nevertheless the nature of the cause is rather open: "niet-gebruik" may be either the result of a conscious choice or the result of an external exclusion process.

Sociologist Wim van Oorschot has used the Dutch term "niet-gebruik" since his early publications on the limits of the social security system in the late 1980s (Van Oorschot & P. Kolkhuis Tanke, 1987). "Niet-gebruik" is also used by the COSZ, a commission appointed by the government and assigned to promote research into the field of social security and to advise the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid) in that matter (J. Terpstra, 1994). The theme of non-take-up was introduced in the research programme of the COSZ in 1985, first with regard to the AAW provisions only (inaptitude to work for medical reasons) but the scope was soon enlarged. As from 1987, the COSZ commissioned the Research group Social Security of the Catholic University of Brabant for an "international comparative study of the figures, theories and research methods regarding non-take-up" (W. van Oorschot & P. Kolkhuis Tanke, 1987).

The term "niet-gebruik" seems to be used in a rather unanimous way as a technical concept to measure the efficiency of social policy.

Literature

Math, A. « *Non-take-up, niet-gebruik ou non recours ? Comment traduire des termes de protection sociale* », *Recherches et Prévisions*, n° 43, 1996, pp. 19-22.

Oorschot, W. van, Kolkhuis Tanke, P., *Niet-gebruik van sociale zekerheid: feiten, theorieën, onderzoeksmethoden: een overzicht van de stand van zaken in binnen- en buitenland*, Den Haag, Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, 1989.

Terpstra, Jan, *Tussen actualiteit en reflexie, evaluatie van tien jaar COSZ-onderzoek*, Den Haag, VUGA, 1994.

2. Onderbenutting (van sociale zekerheidsvoorzieningen)

English: Subutilisation of social security provisions

French: Sous-utilisation de prestations sociales

“Onderbenutting” is difficult to translate either in English or in French. This noun is based on the old (1505) but common word “nut”: usefulness. Onderbenutting means that something (a budget for instance) is not used as much as it could be. According to <http://open-dictionary.com> this word could be translated in English by subutilisation / incomplete use of a budget.

Onderbenutting is not a common word in the everyday language in the Netherlands. It is primarily part of the governmental language. In 1999 for instance, the Ministry of Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid (Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment) launched research programmes into the “onderbenutting” of the “Toeslagenwet” (a law creating a new specific social benefit), in order to improve the efficiency of the provision of the benefit in the light of the implementation of the law in its first years.

The term “onderbenutting” seems to be used in a rather unanimous way as a technical concept to measure the efficiency of social policy. Therefore it is used either by proponents of neoliberal reforms who doubt the relevance of social benefits or those who claim to reinforce the Welfare state and introduce improvements. As such “onderbenutting” reflects an important side of the non-take-up issue in the Netherlands: a primarily governmental matter.

3. Bijstand

English: Assistance

French: Assistance

Bijstand is commonly translated into the English language by assistance. Such a translation is absolutely relevant but it might lead to misunderstandings as a result of the fact that assistance is often used in a very broad sense, both in English and French, even in the field of social policy studies.

First, the Dutch noun *bijstand* has the general meaning of assistance and support (provided by the police or by a lawyer) but since 1963, the observers of social policy and social law closely associate the word *bijstand* to the financial provisions created by the *Algemene Bijstandswet* (General Law on Assistance). Second, the use of the word "assistance" might suggest a rather ancient and somewhat paternalistic way of supporting the poorer segments of society. On the contrary, in the Netherlands, *bijstand* is considered, generally speaking, as a rather modern and progressive support. There are two main reasons for that: on the one hand it is opposed to the old "armenzorg" ("care to the poor") in so far as it is only of financial nature. On the contrary "armenzorg" could also consist in the provision of goods or support of moral/spiritual nature. On the other hand, *bijstand* is part of the social security system: as for the proponents of the *Algemene Bijstandswet* it is generally considered as a social right awarded to all citizens who are in need of a second chance in a spirit of "human solidarity"

4. Sociaal minimum

English: Social minimum

French: Minimum social

Sociaal minimum designate the minimum level of income for which people are eligible for minimum social income guaranteed by the State and given to people who do not manage to make a living on their own. In studies about poverty and precarity in the Netherlands one may also find the word *armoedegrens* (poverty line)

As such social minimum is a merely technical word. Nonetheless there is an intensive political discussion about what the level of the social minimum should be: lower (according to proponents of neoliberal rationales in the reform of the Welfare state) or higher (according to the trade unions and NGO's supporting the poorer segments of the Dutch society like those acting into the frame of the *Sociale Alliantie*)

5. Individuële huursubsidie

English: Individual housing benefit

French: Allocation individuelle de logement

The *individuële huursubsidie* was created in 1970 at the end of a long process and extensive discussion about housing benefits. In the Netherlands rental housing stock is very important and the Dutch governmental input in the field of housing policy is very highly considered. The IHS is a typical means-tested benefit: it is reserved for renters whose housing expenses/income ratio is considered as too high to afford a proper living and the renters are requested to apply for such a benefit explicitly. After income investigation the eligible renters are granted with a rent reduction in relation to their income. As from its creation the IHS has been under investigation from many sides and non-take-up of housing benefits has soon become a systematically investigated topic, mainly as part of broader recurrent housing needs surveys commissioned by the Ministry of Planning and Housing.

One of the earlier research works into IHS is due to Hugo Priemus and C. Lucassen and it was commissioned by the above named ministry. Research into non-take-up of the IHS especially developed in the early 1980s with the commitments of many researchers based in academic institutions or the Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau (Social Cultural Planning Office), an advisory body of the central government.

Literature

C.T.J. Lucassen & H. Priemus, *Individuele huursubsidie, evaluatie van een instrument van volkshuisvestingsbeleid*, 's-Gravenhage, R.I.W. – Instituut voor Volkshuisvestingsonderzoek, 1977.

6. Cliënt

English: Client

French: Usager

Although the Dutch Welfare State has developed quite far, naming users of social benefits and social facilities is a difficult task in the Netherlands. At the early stages of the history of the public assistance, users were mostly heard in terms of "patient" (patient) which reflected a strong medical connotation. In the late 1960s and at the beginning of the 1970s, the use of the noun "patiënt" was highly criticised. Step by step it was replaced by the word "client" which was supposed not to have such a paternalistic connotation. In some other European languages the word "client" would immediately call to mind the pecuniary aspect of a commercial relation. On the contrary, the Dutch noun rather emphasises the professional specialised dimension of the relation between the "client" and a lawyer, a solicitor, a banker, a social welfare worker among others. As such there is a slight difference between "client" and "klant", the latter outlining the commercial aspect of the relation. Nevertheless, nowadays there is a growing trend towards the use of words from the market sector in the sphere of public policies. Nonetheless, the word "client" is still in use, as well as the word "patient" in the medical sphere.