

MANIFESTO FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS



There is a growing and widely supported desire in Dutch society to give the well-being and the interests of future generations a more central place in current decision-making.¹ On an international level, the Netherlands is already working on this. The Netherlands also supported the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment for current and future generations. This new human right was (unanimously) adopted by the United Nations on July 28, 2022² and requires protection by all governments. Furthermore, The Netherlands is also committed internationally to the appointment of a UN Special Envoy and the UN Declaration for Future Generations.³

Despite previous calls and a growing number of international examples – including our neighboring countries – the Netherlands does not yet mention future generations in legislation. Our democratic system still does not embed an institution or office that protects the rights of future generations.

This needs to change.

Change the Constitution

Recognized human rights such as the right to life, to health and to a healthy, clean environment and sustainable environment are essential for everyone – including generations yet to be born. This means that the Dutch government has a duty to ensure clean air, water and soil, to protect nature as well as protect its residents, including future residents, against the consequences of climate change. The Netherlands recognizes this internationally, but this is not yet reflected in our own country. Almost no attention is being given to the long-term consequences of current policy. As a result future generations are far from assured of sustainable development and a healthy living environment. That is why the Netherlands must now move from a mere recognition to the practical realization of the protection of future generations in legislation, policy and in society.

Through this manifesto, political, social and youth organizations are making an urgent call to adapt our legislation in such a way that it does justice to all human rights. We also ask the government to comply with new international developments and to recognize the interests of future generations in national legislation, so that these interests will be taken into account when developing, testing and applying new legislation. This would entail that the government – as it should based on human rights – complies with its positive obligations to ensure that it and other actors, such as companies, do not compromise the rights of future generations. No longer would the protection of future Dutch citizens require for current citizens to sue government and companies (e.g. the Urgenda and Milieudefensie – Shell Climate Cases).

We therefore call for a Constitutional amendment that guarantees the right to a healthy and clean living environment for both current and future generations.

1. This manifesto is a follow-up to:

- the Terlouw manifesto from 2017, which calls for: “The cabinet will carry out every assessment of its effect on the quality of the earth, nationally and internationally, now and in the future.” and:
- the Manifesto article 21 from 2019, which proposes a new article 21 for the Constitution with the right to a healthy and clean environment for current and future generation and an Ombudsperson for Future Generations.

2. The United Nations General Assembly recognized [‘The human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment’](#) on July 28, 2022.

3. Policy brief [‘Our Common Future’](#), March 2023.

Independent supervisor: an Ombudsperson for Future Generations

In 2019, eight political youth organizations presented a manifesto calling for an Ombudsperson for Future Generations and handed it over to minister Dijkma.⁴ This role, independent from policy, can check the government's policies, the coherence between ministries, planning agencies and other advisory bodies of the government and guarantee and promote the interests of future generations.

It is up to politicians now: develop a legislative amendment that will create a mandated Ombudsperson for Future Generations.

Other countries are ahead of us

The Network of Institutions and Leaders for Future Generations has developed an overview of what other countries have already achieved in embedding future generations.⁵ In Belgium and Germany, future generations are mentioned in the Constitution. Hungary has had an Ombudsman for Future Generations since 2007, and Wales (following the passage of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act) a Commissioner for Future Generations since 2018. In countries such as Finland and Lithuania, a Parliamentary Commission for Future Generations is installed.

Future generations also deserve a voice in the Netherlands

We urge the Netherlands to implement nationally what it has internationally recognized and supported for the UN Special Envoy and the UN Declaration on Future Generations.

We call on our legislative and advisory bodies:

- Amend Article 21 of the Constitution to recognize the human right to a healthy, clean and sustainable living environment for current and future generations;
- Ensure, through a 'Law on the well-being of future generations', that the High Councils of State and government, planning agencies and advisory bodies at all levels (national, provincial and municipal), weigh the interests and well-being of future generations in considering regulations and policy, licensing, monitoring and enforcement;
- Establish an independent supervisor for Future Generations. This role would fit well within the Ombudsperson system. Beside the National Ombudsman, the Veterans Ombudsman and the Children's Ombudsman; an Ombudsperson⁶ for Future Generations.

4. The call back then was regarding a new text for Article 21:

- The right to a healthy and clean environment is recognized for both current and future generations.
- The government's duty is focused on the habitability of the Netherlands and the protection and improvement of the living environment for both current and future generations.
- The law sets rules regarding the safeguarding and improvement of the environment.

5. See the website of the Network of Institutions for Future generations: futureroundtable.org and the report [Building our common future](#)

6. 'Ombudsperson' is gender neutral.

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STAND UP
for your
RIGHTS



This manifesto was drawn up by the Future Generations Lab in the Netherlands: Jan van de Venis (acting Ombudsperson for Future Generations), Jessica den Outer (acting Ombudsperson for Future Generations) and Marga Boneschansker (project coordinator).



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