

Dear Minister Dijkgraaf and Minister Schouten,

Virtually all local authorities across the Netherlands have excluded students from the energy-assistance support scheme (energy credit scheme), on the recommendation of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment. Indeed, the budgets of the local authorities do not account for funds allocated to students under this scheme. However, the Gelderland District Court recently ruled that students may not legally be excluded from the categorical allocation of the energy-assistance benefit (energy credit). The court also found that compensation through individual special assistance (*bijzondere bijstand*) does not constitute a reasonable alternative to this benefit.

As a result of this court ruling, it would appear that local authorities can be held responsible for paying compensation to all students in their communities who are living independently. The ramifications of this court decision are substantial: in several Dutch university towns, the number of beneficiaries of the scheme would more than double as a result.

We would like to take this opportunity to urge you to support students with their energy bills through a nationwide compensation system rather than through the existing scheme.

Local councils in a bind

Local authorities will not receive any funds to support compensation for students and lack the human resources to implement this. This means that the work involved in processing and paying these applications will come at the expense of other residents and children who require assistance from the council. Furthermore, local councils have dedicated so much of their staff resources to processing the energy-assistance benefit applications in recent months that this has affected their other duties. One consequence of this is that waiting times have increased for residents entitled to special assistance or other forms of financial support.

New blow for student generation

Large numbers of students are feeling the pinch and experiencing the impact of the higher energy prices. Not all students can rely on financial assistance from their parents or secure support from other sources. As a result, young people, who have already been seriously financially affected in a number of ways, are now left to fend for themselves, creating the risk that they will start their adult lives with substantial debt. Local authorities lack the financial and human resources required to be able to support them because this specific community is virtually unknown to the councils.

Need for a nationwide solution

We would therefore urge you to come forward with a nationwide solution to compensate those students in need of support. We believe a national implementing body, such as DUO, could play a key role in this regard, as they have access to relevant data on the student community, including the correct bank account details. In other words, this would present a more efficient solution than assigning local councils to take on this responsibility individually. It is also pertinent that this alternative solution would honour the commitments previously made with councils, as they would be able to continue implementing the current scheme. Besides, a nationwide solution would offer local authorities the opportunity to keep the focus this autumn on supporting the growing contingent of residents at risk of falling into serious financial distress.

On behalf of:

Linda Voortman,
Vice-mayor of Utrecht City Council

Marjolein Moorman,
Vice-mayor of Amsterdam City Council

Arjen Kapteijns
Vice-mayor of The Hague City Council

Enes Yigit
Vice-mayor of Rotterdam City Council

Eelco Eikenaar
Vice-mayor of Groningen City Council

John Brom
Vice-mayor of Nijmegen City Council

Esmah Lahlah
Vice-mayor of Tilburg City Council

Saskia Lammers
Vice-mayor of Eindhoven City Council

Arjan Kampman
Vice-mayor of Enschede City Council

Guido van Vulpen
Vice-mayor of Wageningen City Council

Abdelhaq Jermoumi Vice-
mayor of Leiden City Council

Joëlle Gooijer,
Delft City
Council

Alex Meij
Vice-mayor of Maastricht City Council

Mark Lauriks
Vice-mayor of Arnhem City Council

Lukas van Dongen Chair of
Jonge Socialisten (Young
Socialists)

Iris Vergeer, Chair
of DWARS

Sophie
Koppejan, Chair
of CDJA
(Christian
Democratic
Youth Appeal)

Jens Mostert, Chair of
PerspectieF

Xenia Minnaert,
Chair of Pink!

Joris Hetterscheid & Kalle Duvekot, Chair of
Jonge Democraten (Young Democrats)

Bilal Gacha
Deputy Chair, OPPOSITION

Daphne Lodder,
Chair of JOVD
(Youth
Organisation
Freedom and
Democracy)