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IF YOU DON'T FIT THE MOLD,  
YOU'RE LEFT IN THE COLD

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2016

*Summary of the 2016  
Annual Report of the  
National Ombudsman  
of the Netherlands*

de Nationale  
ombudsman

35  
JAAR

# HIGH-PROFILE INVESTIGATIONS

## Goodbye to the tax envelope

The Dutch Tax and Customs Administration must also use alternative channels to communicate with citizens who are unable or unwilling to communicate digitally.

## Citizens' perspectives on debt counselling

Less self-reliant citizens encounter obstacles both before and during the debt counselling process and are excluded.

### **Jamal Libari:**

(Complaints Officer, National Ombudsman's Office)

*'Thanks to our direct intervention and the cooperation of the bodies involved, the provision of debt counselling services was extended and the debtor was not subjected to coercive detention.'*



## Ombudsman for Veterans

In 2016 the Ombudsman for Veterans received 119 complaints from veterans. Many of these complaints concerned the special duty of the Ministry of Defence to provide appropriate care to veterans. This is about more than just financial or medical support; the Ministry should also recognize signals and devote genuine attention to veterans' concerns.

## Retrospective investigation: recording of conversations

Government authorities must engage in dialogue if citizens wish to make audio recordings of conversations that are important to them.

## Arrangement for defaulters on healthcare insurance premiums

The National Ombudsman has defined a number of lessons learned from the implementation of the arrangement for defaulters. This task has been transferred from the National Health Care Institute to the Central Administrative Office for Exceptional Medical Insurance (CAK) with effect from 1 January 2017.

# ON LOCATION

## Highlights of our activities on location in 2016

(Bonaire, Saba, Sint Eustatius)



### 1. Gouda

Careful communication is key to controversial development project

### 2. Utrecht

Privacy in 'kitchen table conversations'

### 3. Amersfoort

Limits to public consultation process

### 4. Delfland Water Authority

Customized approach to tax collection

### 5. Rotterdam

Arrests of demonstrating Feyenoord fans

### 6. Bus tour

Meetings and conversations at local markets in provinces of North Holland and Limburg

### 7. Nijmegen

Focus on Heumensoord Asylum Seekers' Centre

### 8. Enschede

Access to debt counselling services

### 9. Bierum

Impact of natural gas extraction on local residents in Groningen province

### 10. Amsterdam Airport Schiphol

Day-to-day work of the customs authority

### 11. Saba and Sint Eustatius

Absence of rent assessment committee

### 12. Leeuwarden

Award for municipal complaints officer

## An unexpectedly high bill

A lack of adequate information about personal contributions payable under the Social Support Act resulted in a large number of complaints because people have insufficient opportunity to prepare for the financial consequences of the new system.

## Key Register of Persons

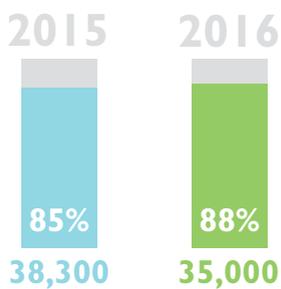
Everyone must be able to register with the Key Register of Persons.

# OUR WORK IN FIGURES

## Number of complaints

2015	2016
38,300	35,000

## Pointing the way



## Judgements

2015	2016
287	207

## Investigations launched on our initiative

2015	2016
19	28

## Interventions

2015	2016
3,506	2,254

## Complaints from citizens of Caribbean Netherlands

2015	2016
126	212



### **Evalien van Toor:**

(Complaints Officer, National Ombudsman's Office)

*'Sometimes people call to tell me the problem's been solved. Then I know my work has not been in vain.'*

# KEY ISSUES

## **Debt and poverty**

A growing number of citizens are having difficulties making ends meet. Municipal authorities and the central government offer a wide range of – often highly complex – income supplementation schemes. Citizens' dependency on these schemes requires effective communication with the responsible government authorities. The National Ombudsman has long devoted attention to matters like the attachment-exempt threshold, debt counselling and collection by government.

## **Access to facilities**

The government should provide services to everyone, but this principle is not always upheld in practice. Not everyone is heard and seen, and some citizens are even excluded.

## **Protecting civil rights**

An essential element of the rule of law is that government must abide by the law and may not limit citizens' rights and liberties without good reason. The National Ombudsman is receiving complaints about infringements on the right to freedom and security, and about the state's application of its monopoly on the legitimate use of force.

## **Citizen participation and public consultation**

The relationship between citizens and the government is undergoing significant change. Participation and public consultation play a key role in this process. The National Ombudsman is receiving complaints from citizens about enforcement. Citizen participation challenges the government to pursue innovation. The government must strike the right balance between the wishes and requirements of individual citizens, the interests of other citizens, and the public interest.

## **Digitization**

Society as a whole is becoming increasingly 'digitized', and the government is following suit. The National Ombudsman is receiving complaints about identity fraud, incorrect data, and data that have not been properly linked. Many people do not possess the required digital skills and are in danger of falling by the wayside. This development requires the Ombudsman to remain alert to ensure that citizens are not systematically excluded.



### **Marjorie Ong-A-Kwie:**

(Complaints Officer, National Ombudsman's Office)

*'Sometimes people don't know who to turn to with their problem. That's why I consider it important to help them find their way as effectively as possible.'*

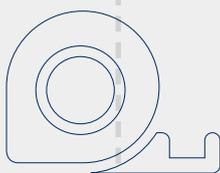
### **Jop Schampers:**

(Complaints Officer, National Ombudsman's Office)

*'When I perform an intervention, I can quickly see the results of my work. I focus on finding out what's going on. How would I feel if this happened to me?'*

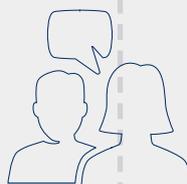


## WHAT IS NEEDED?



**A customized approach, leniency and compensation**

**Clear communication**



**Focus on the citizen**

You will find the complete Annual Report 2016 of the National Ombudsman (Dutch only) on our website at [www.nationaleombudsman.nl](http://www.nationaleombudsman.nl).

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