

The Human Side of Transition: Demographic Patterns in Public Perceptions of Societal Change

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents findings from a December 2024 survey of 4,908 Dutch residents examining perceptions of major societal transitions. Using the representative LISS panel, we investigated which transitions residents view as most impactful to their daily lives and how these perceptions vary across demographic groups.

1.1 Key Findings

Most Impactful Transitions

- When asked openly, Dutch residents most frequently mentioned *political changes and challenges* (27.5%), *climate change and sustainability* (27.3%), and *economic changes and inflation* (27.0%).
- When rating predefined transitions on a scale from 0 to 10, *international conflicts* ($M = 4.79$) and *digitalization* ($M = 4.75$) emerged as most impactful, followed by *demographic changes*, *climate change*, and *housing shortages* (all ~ 4.5). While the transition to a more *diverse and inclusive society* was perceived as least impactful ($M = 3.45$).

Two Latent Dimensions of Transitions

Analysis of the ratings of the predefined transitions revealed that residents perceive transitions along two separate latent dimensions:

- Local transitions: *housing shortage, demographic changes, diversity and inclusion.*
- Global transitions: *climate change, digitalization, international conflicts.*
- Limited demographic differences: Surprisingly, demographic factors (age, gender, education, urbanization) explain only 5% of variation in the perceived impact of the latent dimensions. More specifically:
 - Education emerged as the strongest predictor, with higher-educated residents reporting greater impact of both global and local transitions.
 - Urbanization followed with urban residents reporting greater impact than rural residents for both types of latent transitions.
 - Male residents reported being more influenced than women by global transitions.
 - Younger residents felt more impacted by local transitions, while no clear age-related pattern was visible for global transitions.

1.2 Demographic Patterns Across Specific Transitions

While demographics explain only 5% of overall variation of the two latent dimensions of the predefined transitions, distinct patterns emerged for each of the individual predefined transitions. More specifically:

Age Effects:

- Young adults residents felt more impacted by *digitalization* and *lack of space* with effects declining sharply into middle age and to a lesser extent into old age.
- There was a linear decline with age where each older residents reported less impact of *diversity and inclusion.*
- Older residents reported stronger influence from *international conflicts.*

- There were no significant age differences for *climate change* and *demographic change*.

Gender Effects:

- There were minimal gender differences in perceptions of transitions.
- Males residents reported slightly higher impact for *digitalization* and *international conflicts*.

Education Effects:

- Highest-educated residents reported higher impact across all transitions.
- *Climate change, digitalization, diversity and inclusion, and lack of space* showed U-shaped patterns, with the lowest and highest-educated residents reporting higher impact relative to the middle-educated residents.

Urbanization Effects:

- Urban residents consistently reported higher impact across all transitions.
- *Climate change* showed a U-shaped pattern where residents in very highly urban areas and those in non-urban areas reported higher impact.
- For *digitalization, diversity and inclusion, lack of space* and *international conflict*, the results show a sharp drop in perceived impact between residents in urbanized areas with more modest differences between residents less urbanized areas.
- *Demographic changes* followed a simple linear pattern where residents of less urban areas perceived less impact.

1.3 Policy Implications

- *Perception-Reality Gap:* Political emphasis on migration does not align with residents' primary concerns about economic and geopolitical stability. This could lead to inefficient policymaking, an erosion of public trust and populist backlash. Such misalignment can delay effective policy responses and lead to suboptimal allocation of resources.
- *Universal Concerns:* The minor role of demographics suggests that there exists greater variation within different demographic groups than between-groups, in contrast to polarizing narratives about the impact of transitions on different segments of the population. This implies that broad-based policies addressing shared topics may be more efficient and cohesive than targeted measures based solely on demographic distinctions.
- *Communication Strategy:* Policymakers should adapt their communication strategies to distinguish between locally and globally managed transitions, ensuring that policy responses align with residents' actual concerns while building awareness across all demographic groups. Failing to make this distinction risks reducing public support for necessary interventions.

1.4 Conclusion

At the end of 2024, Dutch residents most frequently cited political change, climate change, and economic pressures including inflation as having the greatest impact on their daily lives. When asked about specific predefined societal transitions, respondents identified *international conflict* and *digitalization* as the most impactful, while *diversity and inclusion* as the least impactful. Notably, the perceived impact of these transitions cut across traditional demographic lines, underscoring the importance of inclusive policy responses that address shared societal concerns rather than relying on assumptions about group-specific differences.

II. INTRODUCTION

Societies today are in the midst of multiple major transitions that are reshaping how people live and work.¹ We define societal transitions as *sequences of events* or *processes* unfolding over time at the societal level. The Netherlands, for example, faces a confluence of significant changes, including:

- Climate change and environmental sustainability
- Rapid digitalization of economy and daily life
- Growing diversity and inclusion of minorities in society
- Demographic shifts such as an aging population and immigration
- International conflicts and geopolitical instability
- Housing and space scarcity in urban areas

Each of these broad shifts carries substantial implications for daily life and the future of society, demanding adaptation from both individuals and institutions. Understanding which of these transitions people perceive as most impactful is crucial for guiding collective action. Public perceptions can signal which challenges loom largest in citizens' minds and which might be underestimated. For instance, climate change has long been widely acknowledged by Dutch citizens as a paramount challenge,² yet different groups experienced varying levels of concern. More recently, however, the perceived urgency of climate change has diminished, especially among the youth who prioritize tangible, everyday challenges like housing and migration.³

This report addresses the need to discern the most recent perceived impact of concurrent societal transitions on the everyday life of Dutch residents. It draws on new survey data from a representative sample of Dutch residents, who were asked to evaluate the personal impact of various societal changes in their lives. While prior studies often examined single issues like climate or technological change in isolation, there has been limited understanding of the wider range of transitions the public sees as most influential. By examining multiple transitions side by side, our work offers a more comprehensive picture of the perceived impact of a variety of societal transitions undocumented in prior work.

Importantly, we also explore how perceptions differ across various demographic factors. Factors such as age, education, gender, and urbanization,⁴ key markers of social position, are analyzed to understand individual differences in the subjective experience of transitions. This approach recognizes that people's experiences of transitions are not uniform: what an older, higher-educated individual finds impactful may differ from what a younger person living in an urban setting finds more impactful.

The insights from this research have significant relevance for adaptation and resilience planning. Understanding which societal transitions are perceived as most impactful and by whom enables policymakers and community leaders to anticipate public needs and respond effectively. If pressing issues like climate change or housing scarcity are widely recognized, initiatives addressing these can gain greater public support. Conversely, transitions such as digitalization or demographic change might be overlooked by certain groups and as a result identifying these

¹<https://www.ser.nl/-/media/ser/downloads/adviezen/2024/visie-perspectief-op-brede-welvaart.pdf>

²<https://www.eib.org/en/press/all/2021-357-majority-of-dutch-people-think-their-country-will-fail-to-drastric>

³<https://nltimes.nl/2025/06/12/dutch-less-concerned-climate-change-immediate-issues-take-precedence>

⁴While many more factors could have been examined (e.g., political ideology, personality, income, health, etc.) we limited the scope of demographic variables to maintain a parsimonious report. Given the exploratory nature of this report, our aim was to highlight the most salient patterns without introducing unnecessary complexity.

perception gaps helps target communication and educational efforts, ensuring inclusive policies that address inequalities, and building a socially responsive, resilient society.

In the following section, we outline the methodology employed to collect data on the perceptions of various societal transitions from a representative sample of the Dutch population.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted using data collected via the LISS panel (Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social Sciences),⁵ a probability-based panel administered by *Centerdata*, which is representative of the Dutch population. The data collection was part of the “Tilburg University Monitor of Social and Behavioral Issues” and took place in a single wave in December 2024. The survey targeted 6596 adult respondents, selected to reflect the national population in terms of age, gender, education, region, and other demographic characteristics.

Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social Sciences

The Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social Sciences (LISS) panel consists of a representative sample of the Dutch population.⁶ The panel, established in 2007, is based on a probability sample drawn from the population register by Statistics Netherlands (CBS). Each month, respondents complete a set of online questionnaires. Within the questionnaires, ten topics from the *LISS Core Studies* (such as *Health*, *Social Integration and Leisure*, and *Economic Situation*) are repeated annually. Participation in the panel is by invitation only, in order to ensure representativeness. Panel members receive compensation of €15 per hour and are provided with a computer and broadband internet connection if needed.

3.1 Demographic Composition

A total of 4,908 individuals participated in the survey, of whom 48% were men and 52% women. The average age of respondents was 54.75 years (SD = 18.39), ranging from 16 to 96 years. In terms of education, respondents reported the following highest attained levels: 6% completed only primary education (basisonderwijs), 16.5% intermediate secondary education (vmbo), 9.4% higher secondary education (havo/vwo), 25.2% intermediate vocational education (mbo), 27.3% higher vocational education (hbo), and 15.6% university-level education (wo). Regarding urbanization, 21.8% of respondents lived in very urban areas, 28.5% in urban areas, 20.0% in moderately urban areas, 17.1% in slightly urban areas, and 12.6% in non-urban areas. As for housing, 71% reported living in a home owned by themselves or a family member, while 29% were in rental accommodation. Relationship status was as follows: 51% were married, 30% unmarried, 12% divorced, and 6% widowed. Employment status revealed that 45% of respondents were employed, 4% self-employed, 28% retired, 6% enrolled in education, 7% identified as homemakers, 4% were unable to work due to a disability, and 1% were actively seeking employment. Finally, the median gross monthly household income was €5,100.

3.2 Survey Design

The primary objective was to explore which societal transitions are perceived as most impactful by Dutch residents and to examine how perceptions vary across demographic and psychological profiles. The survey consisted of two key components:

Open-Ended Identification of Transitions

Respondents were first asked to freely name the societal transitions they perceive as personally impactful: “*Please list the societal transitions that influence you the most today. You can list multiple transitions.*” Respondents were able to enter up to five transitions. This qualitative data was coded into a set of categories by research assistants and students at Tilburg University guided by standardized instructions. Each entry was coded by two assistants. Any disagreement was resolved by the lead researchers. The categories were identified by the researchers after considering the first 200 entries. The coding instructions can be found in the appendix.

⁵<https://www.lissdata.nl/>

⁶Scherpenzeel, A. C., & Das, M. (2011). “True” longitudinal and probability-based Internet panels: Evidence from the Netherlands. In *Social and behavioral research and the Internet: Advances in applied methods and research strategies*. (pp. 77-104). Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.

Quantitative Rating of Predefined Transitions

Next, respondents rated the extent to which a set of predefined societal transitions affected their lives, using an 11-point Likert-type scale: “Please indicate the extent to which the following societal transitions influence you today using the following scale: 0 = ‘not at all’ to 10 = ‘extremely’.” The listed transitions are based on the Dutch report *Perspectief op Brede Welvaart in 2040*, which identifies six relevant and dominant trends that may significantly impact broad prosperity nationally and internationally in the coming years.⁷ These include:

- Climate change and sustainable development (e.g., availability of renewable energy, loss of biodiversity in nature)
- Digitalization (e.g., increasing use of artificial intelligence (AI))
- Diversity and inclusion (e.g., declining or increasing inclusion in terms of gender, LGBTQI+, race, ethnicity, religion, poverty/financial inequality)
- Demographic changes (e.g., aging population, increasing immigration, declining birth rates, labor shortage)
- International conflicts (e.g., wars, trade, diplomacy)
- Scarce space (e.g., increasing urbanization, lack of housing)
- Other: [Free text entry]

In the next section, we discuss our results. First, we present descriptive statistics based on open-ended questions. Next, we provide descriptive statistics, a psychometric analysis of responses to the predefined societal transitions and identify demographic factors that shape the latent dimensions of the predefined transitions (local vs global transitions). We conclude by examining how age, gender, education, and urbanization are related to perceptions of each of the six predefined societal transitions.

⁷Visie: Perspectief op brede welvaart in 2040 - Bouwen aan de economie van de toekomst. <https://www.ser.nl/-/media/ser/downloads/adviezen/2024/visie-perspectief-op-brede-welvaart.pdf>

IV. MAIN FINDINGS

4.2 Most Impactful Freely Mentioned Transitions

Respondents were first asked to name up to five societal transitions that they felt had the greatest impact on their lives. This open-ended approach was chosen to capture the transitions that naturally come to mind, without influencing responses through predefined examples. The answers were coded by two independent raters, with any disagreements resolved by a third rater from the lead research team.

Table 1 presents an overview of the coded responses. The most frequently mentioned transitions concerned general *political changes and challenges* within Dutch society. This category included references to ongoing political debates such as reforms in healthcare and pension systems or changes in education. *Climate change and sustainability*, along with *economic changes and inflation*, were also commonly cited. Other frequently mentioned topics included *digitalization* (e.g., AI, remote work) and *international conflicts* (e.g., wars, trade tensions).

Table 1: Frequencies of Free-Text Transitions

Code	Label	n	%
9	Political changes and challenges	1,349	27.5
1	Climate change and sustainability	1,340	27.3
10	Economic changes and Inflation	1,326	27.0
2	Digitalization	980	20.0
5	International conflicts	558	11.4
7	Changes in social structure	467	9.5
4	Demographic changes	285	5.8
6	Lack of space	266	5.4
8	Changes in political values and attitudes	240	4.9
3	Diversity and inclusion	51	1.0
11	Pandemic	30	0.6
99	Individual transitions	683	13.9
100	Unclear	495	10.1
N/A	Unknown	978	19.9

Note. As respondents were able to enter up to 5 transitions, percentages can exceed 100%.

Less commonly reported transitions included changes in social structure (e.g., *individualization, secularization*), *demographic changes* (e.g., migration, population aging), *lack of space* (e.g., housing prices), and *changes in political values and attitudes* (e.g., the rise of right-wing sentiments in society). Transitions related to *diversity and inclusion*, as well as the *COVID-19 pandemic*, were rarely mentioned.

Additionally, 13.9% of respondents described *individual transitions*, referring to personal life changes such as retirement or becoming a parent. Finally, a substantial number of entries were marked as unclear if they did not fit any category, or as unknown if respondents explicitly chose not to provide a response (e.g., “nvt,” “geen”).

These findings suggest that many respondents primarily associate societal change with current *political debates*, likely influenced by media coverage at the time of data collection (December 2024). *Climate change* and *digitalization* also emerged as transitions with a tangible impact on daily life, highlighting the need for careful policy attention. Notably, over a quarter of respondents mentioned *economic challenges and inflation*, reflecting the visible effects of price fluctuations and labor market shifts in recent years. In contrast, transitions that are often central in political discourse such as *demographic change* (e.g., migration) or efforts toward

greater *diversity and inclusion*, were mentioned far less frequently. This contrast underscores the importance of understanding which transitions resonate most directly with people’s lived experiences.

4.2 Most Impactful Pre-defined Transitions

Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which a set of six predefined societal transitions affected their lives, using an 11-point Likert-type scale. Figure 1 and Table 2 show that the transitions with the highest perceived impact at the end of 2024 were (1) *international conflicts* ($M = 4.79, SD = 2.79$) and *digitalization* ($M = 4.75, SD = 2.73$), followed by (2) *demographic change* ($M = 4.55, SD = 2.66$), *climate change* ($M = 4.53, SD = 2.62$), and *housing shortage* ($M = 4.52, SD = 3.01$), and (3) *transition to a more diverse and inclusive society* ($M = 3.45, SD = 2.74$). Practically, mean scores around 4.5 to 4.8 on a 0–10 scale indicate that residents perceive these transitions as having a moderate impact on their lives. A score near 3.5 suggests a lower, but still tangible, influence.

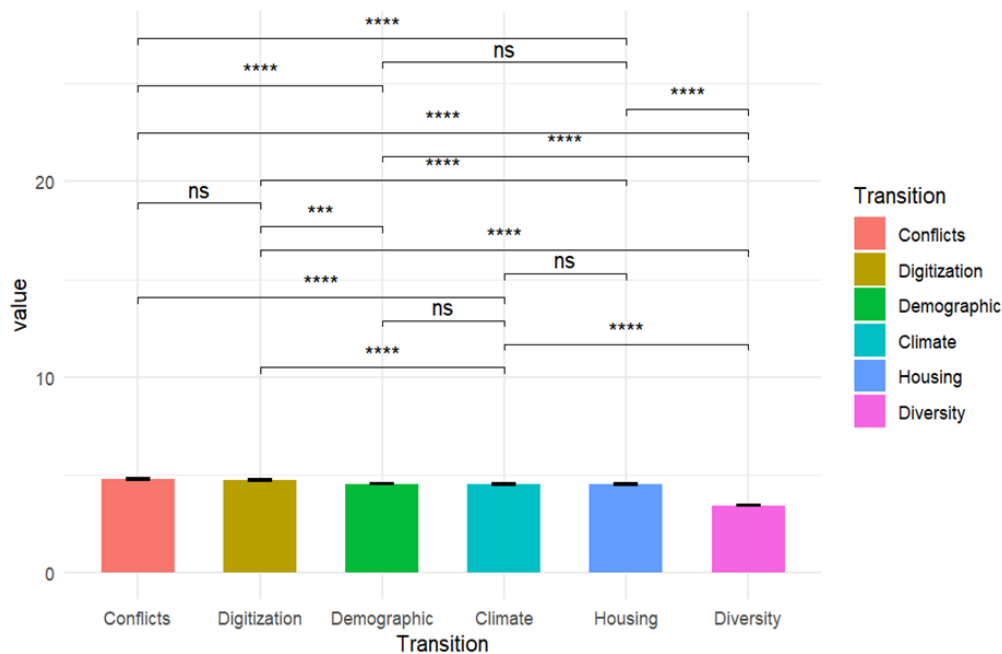


Figure 1: Mean Scores and Significant Differences in Impact Ratings

4.3 Difference Between Global and Local Transitions

Table 2: Intercorrelations Between Impact Ratings

	Climate	Digitalization	Diversity	Demographic	Conflicts	Housing
Climate	1.00	0.53	0.46	0.49	0.55	0.40
Digitalization	0.53	1.00	0.50	0.52	0.48	0.44
Diversity	0.46	0.50	1.00	0.54	0.50	0.48
Demographic	0.49	0.52	0.54	1.00	0.61	0.57
Conflicts	0.55	0.48	0.50	0.61	1.00	0.53
Housing	0.40	0.44	0.48	0.57	0.53	1.00

There were no significant differences between the top two transitions, indicating that *international conflicts* and *digitalization* were rated as equally impactful. The same applied to the second group transitions, *demographic change*, *climate change* and *housing shortage*, which did not differ significantly from one another but were rated as more impactful than the transition to a more *diverse and inclusive society*.

The correlations among these transitions indicate the presence of a positive manifold. A positive manifold refers to a pattern of consistently high positive intercorrelations in perceived impact ratings. Correlation coefficients range from $r = .40$ for the association between *housing shortage* and *climate change*, to $r = .61$ for the association between *international conflict* and *demographic change* (see Table 2). In general, respondents who reported being strongly affected by one transition also tend to report being affected by others. This pattern is further supported by the emergence of a common underlying factor, as shown in the exploratory factor analysis (see Table 3 for factor loadings).

Table 3: Principle Axis Factoring of Impact Ratings

<i>Please indicate the extent to which the following societal transitions influence you today</i>	Loading
Demographic changes	.78
International conflict	.76
Diversity and inclusion	.69
Digitalization	.69
Scarce space	.66
Climate change and sustainability	.67

Note. Principle Axis Factoring was used and one factor extracted based on the Eigenvalue > 1 rule.

The underlying assumption of the factor analysis model is that the covariance among the impact ratings is explained by a common underlying factor that “causes” the scores on the ratings (Borsboom et al., 2004). An alternative approach to modeling intercorrelations is psychometric network modeling (Epskamp et al., 2018). In this approach, indicators are assumed to “cause” each other (see Figure 2) and the thickness of the lines represents the strength of the partial correlation between two variables (i.e., their correlation after controlling for all other variables in the network).

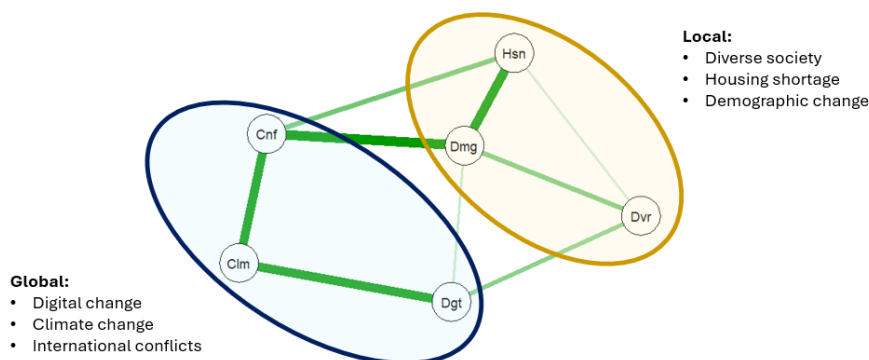


Figure 2: Psychometric Network Model of Impact Ratings⁸

The psychometric network analysis suggests the presence of two clusters of transitions. Specifically, *demographic change*, *housing shortage*, and the *transition to a more diverse and inclusive*

⁸For more information on psychometric network analysis: Epskamp, S., Borsboom, D., & Fried, E. I. (2018). Estimating psychological networks and their accuracy: A tutorial paper. *Behavior research methods*, 50, 195-212.

society form one cluster since their ratings are all inter-connected in the partial correlation network. Similarly, *climate change*, *international conflict*, and *digitalization* form another cluster. *Demographic change* appears to function as a “bridge” variable connecting the two clusters and is the most central indicator in the network.

Based on the results from the psychometric network analysis, we conducted confirmatory factor analyses (CFA). Specifically, we compared the fit of a one-factor model to a two-factor model, where indicators of *local transitions* load on a separate factor than indicators of *global transitions* (see Figure 3). Theoretically, the perceptions of *local transitions* differ from those associated with *global transitions* because they require different forms of management (e.g., national vs. international strategies and policies), and their impact may be felt differently in daily life (e.g., through media reports vs. personal observations).

The CFA results indicate that the correlated two-factor model fits the data better than the one-factor model as indicated by a significant chi-square difference ($\Delta\chi^2 = 57.40$, $\Delta df = 1$, $p < .001$). However, both fit the data well in a relative sense, as indicated by their Cooperative Fit Indices (CFI = .98 and .97, respectively) and their Tucker-Lewis Indices (TLI = .96 for both). The correlation between the *local transitions* and *global transitions* factor was $r = .94$, which suggests that respondents who feel more impacted by local transitions also tend to feel more impacted by *global transitions*. What is noteworthy is that while the two-factor model is more complex, it had a lower Bayesian Information Criterion (Two-factor BIC = 131400 vs. One-factor BIC = 131534). Since the BIC balances model fit and model complexity, we selected the two-factor model with the smaller BIC. The effect is large since BIC differences > 10 are strong evidence for superior model fit (Raftery, 1995).

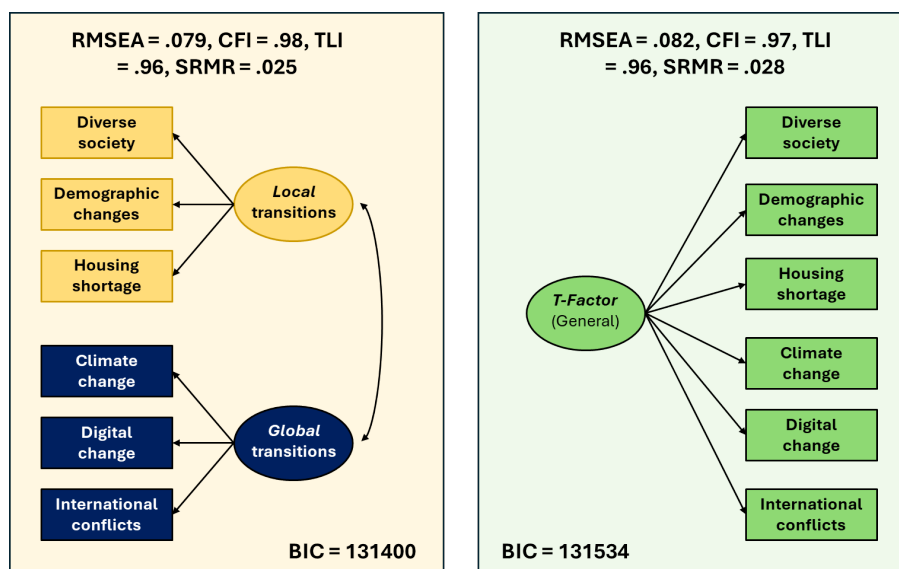


Figure 3: CFA Model Comparison of One-Factor and Two-Factor Models

Note. Residuals were omitted from the Figure for simplicity but were modelled to be uncorrelated.

To explore the predictors of the latent factors (*global vs local transitions*), we conducted correlation (Table 4) and regression analyses (Table 5) using a range of demographic indicators. The results reveal several notable patterns. Respondents with higher levels of education tend to perceive a greater impact of both local and global transitions. Similarly, respondents living in more urbanized environments report stronger perceived impacts across both types of transitions. Age also plays a role, with younger respondents reporting greater perceived impact from local transitions, although no significant age differences were found for global transitions. Lastly, gender appears relevant in the context of global transitions, as men report higher perceived

impact, whereas no gender differences emerged for local transitions.

Table 4: Correlations with Latent Factors

<i>Correlation with latent societal transition factors</i>	global transitions factor		local transitions factor	
	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i> -value	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i> -value
Age	-0.01	0.647	-0.13	0.000
Income	0.05	0.006	0.04	0.023
Number of children	-0.02	0.369	0.02	0.168
Urbanization level (1 to 5)	0.09	0.000	0.14	0.000
Male (vs. other gender)	0.08	0.000	0.00	0.933
Living with partner	0.01	0.463	-0.02	0.305
Married	0.02	0.172	-0.06	0.001
Retired	0.04	0.041	-0.06	0.001
Self-employed	0.00	0.925	0.00	0.898
Employed	-0.02	0.396	0.02	0.172
Education level (1 to 5)	0.20	0.000	0.13	0.000

Note. Correlates that we explore in detail in Section V are highlighted in bold font.

Table 5: Regressions on Latent Factors

<i>Regressions on latent transitions factor</i>	global transitions factor		local transitions factor	
	<i>B</i>	<i>p</i> -value	<i>B</i>	<i>p</i> -value
Age	-0.05	0.065	-0.15	0.000
Income	0.04	0.053	0.03	0.075
Number of children	0.00	0.855	-0.01	0.655
Urbanization level (1 to 5)	0.09	0.000	0.12	0.000
Male (vs. other gender)	0.07	0.000	0.01	0.546
Living with partner	-0.02	0.474	0.00	0.892
Married	0.04	0.091	-0.01	0.819
Retired	0.04	0.203	0.01	0.707
Self-employed	-0.03	0.089	-0.03	0.130
Employed	-0.09	0.000	-0.08	0.000
Education level (1 to 5)	0.20	0.000	0.12	0.000

Note. Correlates that we explore in detail in Section V are highlighted in bold font.

To assess the relative importance of the various predictors on the latent factors, we conducted a dominance analysis (Table 6). The results suggest that the 11 demographic variables collectively explained only 5% of the variance in perceived impact ratings. Among these, education level emerged as the most important predictor, accounting for an average of 44% of the explained variance across both latent factors. Urbanization level followed, contributing 23% to the explained variance, while age explained 29%, primarily in relation to the local transitions factor.

Table 6: Dominance Analysis⁹

Dominance analysis	DV: global transitions sum score		DV: local transitions sum score	
	Avg <i>B</i> coeff.	% contrib.	Avg <i>B</i> coeff.	% contrib.
Age	0.00121	3%	0.0123	29%
Income	0.00146	3%	0.0008	2%
Number of children	0.00011	0%	0.0006	1%
Urbanization level (1 to 5)	0.00599	13%	0.0138	33%
Male (vs. other gender)	0.00373	8%	0.0000	0%
Living with partner	0.00012	0%	0.0003	1%
Married	0.00036	1%	0.0015	4%
Retired	0.00092	2%	0.0016	4%
Self-employed	0.00024	1%	0.0002	0%
Employed	0.00168	4%	0.0017	4%
Education level (1 to 5)	0.03168	67%	0.0093	22%

Note. Correlates that we explore in detail in Section V are highlighted in bold font.

In sum, we first examined which societal transitions residents rated as most impactful. *International conflicts* and *digitalization* received the highest perceived impact ratings, followed by *climate change*, *demographic change*, and *housing shortages*, which were rated moderately high. The transition toward a more *diverse and inclusive society* was perceived as least impactful among the transitions evaluated. Next, we investigated the latent structure underlying these ratings and identified two meaningful sub-dimensions: *local transitions* (housing shortage, demographic change, and increasing societal diversity and inclusion) and *global transitions* (climate change, digitization, and international conflicts). Finally, we examined the extent to which demographic variables explain differences in perceptions of these two sub-dimensions. Demographic variables accounted for only approximately 5% of the total variation in perceived societal impacts.

In the next section, we analyze the distinct effects of four demographic factors (age, gender, education, and urbanization) on each of the six predefined societal transitions. This approach allows us to uncover underlying heterogeneity in how different groups experience each specific transition, rather than focusing solely on the two latent sub-dimensions of those transitions.

⁹More information on dominance analysis method: Budescu, D. V., & Azen, R. (2004). Beyond global measures of relative importance: Some insights from dominance analysis. *Organizational Research Methods*, 7(3), 341-350.

V. SUBGROUP DIFFERENCES

5.1 Age Groups

There were pronounced age differences in the perceived impact of different societal transitions. Figure 4 depicts mean values by age group with 95%-Confidence Intervals. The most pronounced age trends were visible for the perceived impact of *digitalization*, *diversity*, and *lack of space*. Adolescents and younger adults felt most impacted from these transitions compared to older age groups.

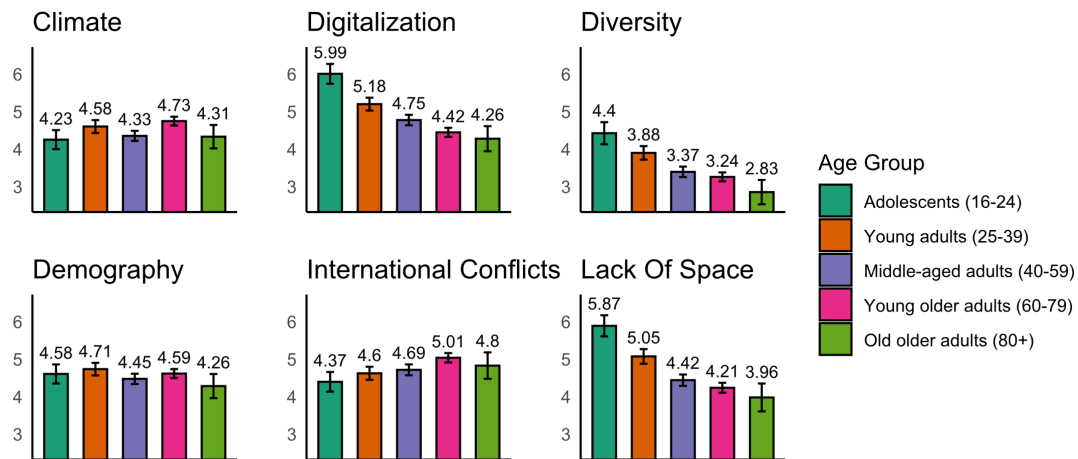


Figure 4: Average perceived impact ratings of different societal transitions by age groups

Note. Bars present 95%-Confidence Intervals

Linear regression analyses (see Table 7) showed that the age-related patterns for *digitalization* and *lack of space* are best described by quadratic terms, with a steeper decline from younger to middle-aged adults and a more gradual decline from middle-aged to older adults. The impact of *diversity* followed a linear pattern, with successive older generations reporting progressively less impact. Older generations generally perceived more impact from the rise in *international conflicts* compared to their younger counterparts, and this age pattern was best captured by a linear trend. Finally, no clear age-related patterns emerged for the perceived impact of climate change and demographic changes.

Table 7: Linear and quadratic regression model predicting the perceived impact of different societal transitions using age

	Climate	Digitalization	Diversity	Demography	Int. Conflicts	Lack of Space
Linear Model						
(Intercept)	4.31***	6.05***	4.56***	4.71***	4.26***	5.89***
Age	0.04	-0.24***	-0.2***	-0.03	0.10***	-0.25***
Quadratic Model						
(Intercept)	4.33***	6.94***	5.04***	4.71***	4.08***	7.17***
Age	0.03	-0.63***	-0.42***	-0.03	0.18	-0.82***
Age ²	0.00	0.04**	0.02	0.00	-0.01	0.05***

Note. Age has been divided by 10. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

5.2 Gender Differences

Gender differences in the perceived impact of societal transitions were limited in both number and magnitude. Men reported slightly higher perceived impact than women for *digitalization* and *international conflicts*. As shown in Figure 5, the difference was most pronounced for international conflicts, although still modest. Notably, effect sizes (Cohen's *d*) ranged from negligible (for digitalization) to small (for international conflicts).

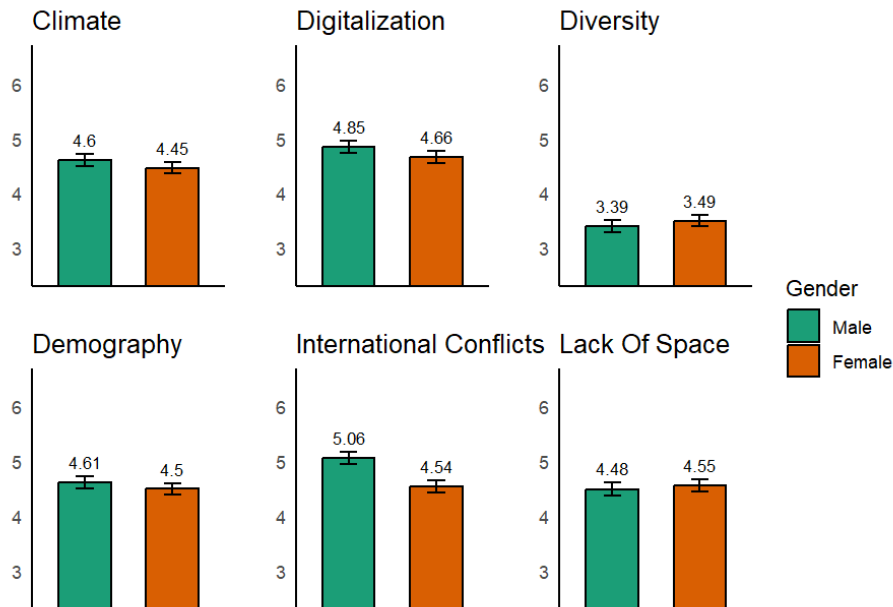


Figure 5: Average perceived impact ratings of different societal transitions by gender

Note. Bars present 95%-confidence intervals

5.3 Education Levels

There were pronounced education-related differences in the perceived impact of various societal transitions. Figure 6 depicts mean values by education group with 95% confidence intervals. Overall, individuals with higher levels of education consistently rated these transitions as more impactful than those with lower educational attainment.

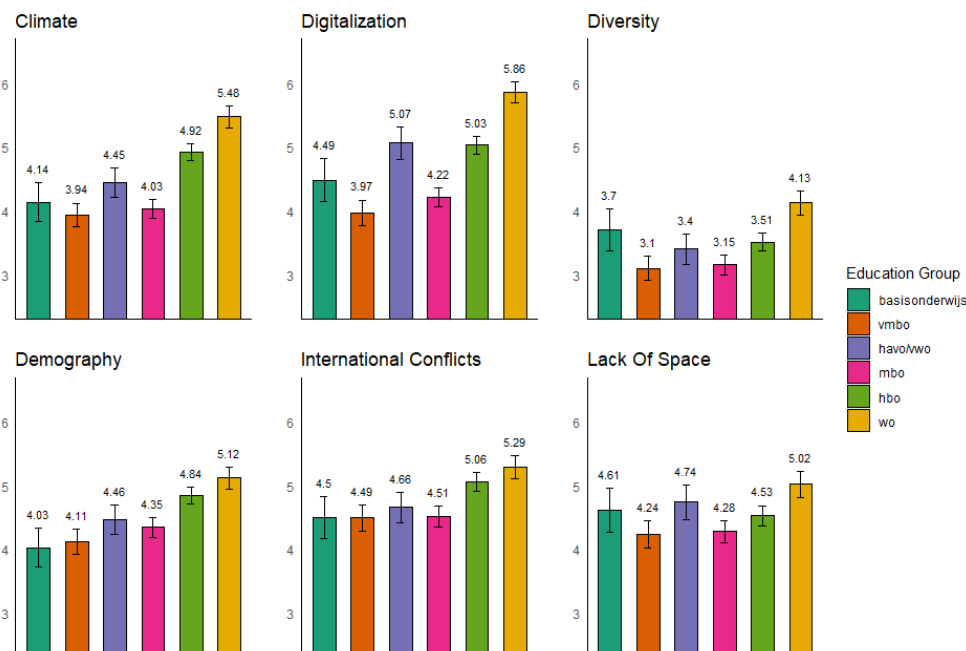


Figure 6: Average perceived impact ratings of different societal transitions by education

Note. Bars present 95%-Confidence Intervals

Linear regression analyses (see Table 8) showed that the education-related patterns for *all transitions* are best described using quadratic terms. Specifically, there is a clear U-shaped relationship between educational attainment and the perceived impact for *climate*, *digitalization*, *diversity*, and *lack of space*. Overall, the findings suggest that the link between education and perceived impact is not strictly linear but dips at mid-levels of education before rising again at the highest levels.

Table 8: Linear and quadratic regression model predicting the perceived impact of different societal transitions using education

	Climate	Digitalization	Diversity	Demography	Int. Conflicts	Lack of Space
Linear Model						
(Intercept)	3.3***	3.49***	2.9***	3.64***	4.08***	4.13***
Education	0.31***	0.32***	0.14***	0.23***	0.18***	0.1***
Quadratic Model						
(Intercept)	4.62***	4.97***	4.22***	4.08***	4.75***	4.96***
Education	-0.56***	-0.66***	-0.73***	-0.06	-0.27.	-0.45**
Education ²	0.12***	0.13***	0.12***	0.04*	0.06**	0.07***

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

5.4 Urbanization Levels

Perceptions of the impact of societal transitions varied by individuals' level of urbanization. Figure 7 shows the mean values by urbanization level with 95% confidence intervals. Overall, individuals living in more urban environments perceived greater impact across all transitions compared to those in less urban areas.

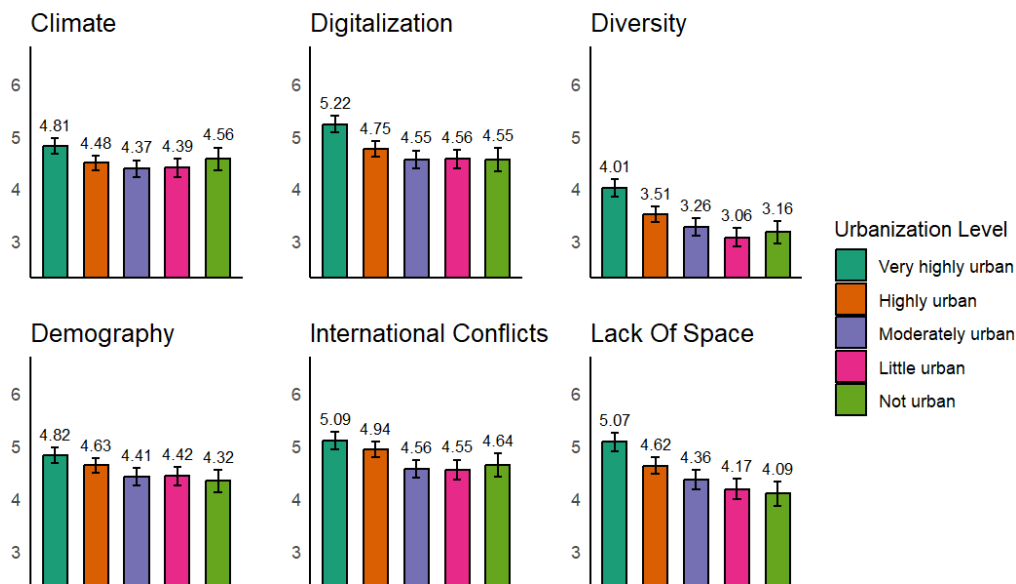


Figure 7: Average perceived impact ratings of different societal transitions by urbanization level

Note. Bars present 95%-confidence intervals.

Linear regression analyses including a quadratic term (see Table 9) and visual inspection of Figure 7 suggest a U-shaped pattern for *climate change*: individuals in both very highly urban (1) and non-urban (5) environments reported greater perceived impact than those in moderately urban areas. For *digitalization*, *diversity*, and *lack of space*, the results indicate a steeper decline in perceived impact from very highly urban (1) to highly urban (2), with smaller differences beyond that point. For *international conflicts*, perceived impact declined most sharply from highly urban (2) to moderately urban (3). In contrast, the perceived impact of *demographic changes* followed a linear trend, with lower impact ratings as urbanization decreased, indicating that individuals in less urban areas perceived less impact.

Table 9: Linear and quadratic regression model predicting the perceived impact of different societal transitions using urbanization level

	Climate	Digitalization	Diversity	Demographic	Int. Conflicts	Lack of Space
Linear Model						
(Intercept)	4.72***	5.20***	4.07***	4.89***	5.18***	5.20***
Urbanization level	-0.07*	-0.17***	-0.23***	-0.12***	-0.15***	-0.25***
Quadratic Model						
(Intercept)	5.26***	5.77***	4.67***	5.09***	5.56***	5.60***
Urbanization level	-0.54***	-0.66***	-0.75***	-0.30*	-0.47**	-0.60***
Urbanization level ²	0.08***	0.09***	0.09***	0.03	0.06*	0.06*

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

VI. CONCLUSION

This study provides new insights into how Dutch residents perceive and experience the societal transitions currently reshaping their daily lives. Through a combination of open-ended responses and responses to predefined transitions from nearly 5,000 respondents, we uncovered both the transitions that spontaneously come to mind and those that resonate the most when explicitly presented.

Three broad findings emerge from this research. First, residents most often associate societal transitions with immediate political challenges, economic pressures, and climate concerns. In contrast, diversity and inclusion, despite high policy and media visibility, was rated as the least impactful predefined transition.

Second, perceptions are structured along two meaningful latent dimensions: *local* transitions (housing, demographics, diversity) and *global* transitions (climate, digitalization, international conflicts). While conceptually distinct, the high correlation between these factors suggests that residents who feel strongly affected by one tend to feel affected by the other as well. This underscores the importance of differentiating between changes requiring national versus international management. Such a distinction has direct implications for how policies are designed, communicated, and implemented.

Third, and perhaps most surprisingly, demographic characteristics explain only ~5% of the variation in perceived impact across the two latent dimensions. However, specific patterns emerged when analyzing the impact of demographics for each of the individual transitions. Young adults reported stronger effects from digitalization and housing shortages with effects declining into middle age, while older generations were more concerned about international conflicts, and each successive older generation reported less impact from diversity and inclusion initiatives. Gender differences were minimal, with men reporting only slightly higher impact for digitalization and international conflicts. The most educated residents reported stronger perceived impacts across all transitions, while climate change, digitalization, diversity and inclusion, and lack of space followed a U-shaped pattern, with both the lowest- and highest-educated residents perceiving greater impact than those in the middle. Urban residents consistently perceived stronger impacts across all transitions, though climate change uniquely affected both highly urban and rural residents (U-shape), while digitalization, diversity and inclusion, and housing showed declines from very urban to moderately urban areas, and demographic changes decreased linearly with urbanization level.

The implications for policymakers are multifold. First, the findings reveal a significant perception-reality gap: political emphasis on migration misaligns with residents' primary concerns about economic and geopolitical stability. Second, the minimal role of demographics, explaining only about 5% of the variation, suggests that societal transitions affect residents more uniformly than general discourse assumes, challenging narratives of a deeply divided society. Third, policymakers should clearly distinguish between locally and globally managed transitions when developing and communicating policies. A consequence of conflating local and global drivers in public communication is that it may contribute to citizen confusion or misplaced attribution of blame. To address this, communicators could tailor their messaging: frame local transitions in terms of personal relevance and immediate consequences, while presenting global transitions through broader narratives that emphasize resilience, interdependence, and the Netherlands' strategic positioning in a changing world.

Moving forward, this research underscores the need for nuanced, evidence-based approaches to managing societal transitions. Rather than assuming that demographic groups hold predictably different views, policymakers should recognize that perceptions of change are more universally shared than often believed. This means that effective strategies will rely less on targeting narrow demographic segments and more on addressing shared priorities across the population. Success in navigating these transitions will require closing the gap between political

discourse and Dutch residents' lived experiences, ensuring that policy responses align with the transitions that residents actually perceive as most pressing in their daily lives. Achieving this alignment can help build public trust, improve policy implementation, and strengthen societal resilience in the face of ongoing change.

VII. APPENDIX

7.1 Coding of Freely Mentioned Transitions

Introduction

In December 2024, we collected data from approximately 5,000 individuals through the LISS panel on the subjective impact of societal transitions. As the first part of this questionnaire, respondents were asked to list the societal transitions that currently have a significant impact on their personal lives: *“Welke veranderingen hebben op dit moment een grote invloed op uw persoonlijke leven? U kunt meerdere veranderingen noemen.”* Respondents provided open-ended, free-text responses, which we are now looking to systematically categorize. That’s where your help is essential.

Your Task

Your role is to read each individual’s response and assign it to the most appropriate code from a predefined list of categories that represent different societal transitions. Enter your code in the column labeled “Code”. If a response doesn’t fit any existing category, please leave it unclassified or note that it may require a new code.

How Coding Works

Each row in your file contains one response, sometimes with a pre-filled code based on automated classification of the first 100 responses. Please review the pre-assigned code carefully and adjust it if necessary. If you change a code, briefly explain your reasoning in the ‘notes’ column.

Important Guidelines

- One response, one code: Even if a response mentions multiple topics, assign the code that best captures its main theme.
- Use your judgment: If a response is vague or ambiguous, do your best to choose the closest fitting code. If it’s unclear or doesn’t belong anywhere, use code 100 (unclear) and briefly explain in the notes.
- Be consistent: Try to apply the same logic across responses, especially when coding borderline or overlapping cases.
- Be brief but clear: If you leave notes, aim to be concise but specific enough to help us understand your thought process.
- Don’t worry about spelling/grammar in the responses — just focus on their meaning.
- Feel free to adjust the width of the columns, so you can easier read the entries

Technical Notes

- Each of you received your own Excel file with just the responses assigned to you.
- The last column (notes) is there for you to leave comments, corrections, or uncertainties.
- Save your file regularly and keep a backup, just in case.

Thank You

Your work will contribute directly to a research project on how people experience large-scale societal change. Accurate and thoughtful coding is essential for making sense of these data — we really appreciate your time and care in doing this well.

Codes

Code	Category	Description	Examples from study team	Examples from the Data
1	Klimaatverandering en duurzame ontwikkeling	Topics related to climate change and sustainable development	Hernieuwbare energie, verlies biodiversiteit, klimaatgerelateerde natuurrampen	Klimaat, Duurzaamheid, Milieu, Klimaatverandering
2	Digitalisering	Technological developments and impacts, including AI and social media	Gebruik van AI, gebruik van social networks	AI, wat gaat het al doen?, de technologie gaat mij te snel, Opkomst Kunstmatige Intelligentie, Veranderingen in technologie, Digitalisering, Social media, Technologie, Thuiswerken
3	Diversiteit en inclusie	Inclusion and diversity (gender, sexuality, etc.)	Inclusie geslacht, acceptatie LHBTQ+	(None in first 100 entries)
4	Demografische veranderingen	Demographic shifts such as aging, immigration, birthrates	Vergrijzing, immigratie, afnemende geboortecijfers, arbeidskrachten tekort	Immigratie, Vergrijzing
5	Internationale conflicten	Conflicts and tensions between countries	Handel, diplomatie, oorlogen	Oorlog in Oekraïne, Buitenlands beleid
6	Ruimtegebrek	Issues related to urbanization and housing shortages	Verstedelijking, gebrek aan huisvesting	Huizenmarkt
7	Changes in social structure	Shifts in societal norms, individualism, subcultures		Individualisme, 'Bubbels', Omgang
8	Changes in political values and attitudes	Shifts in political ideology or sentiment		De opkomst van extreem rechts, Verrechtsing Maatschappij

Code	Category	Description	Examples from study team	Examples from the Data
9	Political changes and challenges	Political issues, reforms, and governance		Nieuwe pensioenregeling, Regering, de politiek is geen politiek meer, Onderwijs, Nieuw pensioensysteem, Hogere zorgkosten, Politiek, Marktwerving in de zorg, Politieke situatie, Pensioen
10	Economic changes/Inflation	Economic developments and inflation-related issues		Economie, Boodschappen, Benzine, alles wordt duurder, Inflatie, Toegenomen inflatie, Financiële
11	Pandemic	COVID-19 or other pandemic-related topics		Covid-19 pandemie
Other codes – indicating no societal transition				
99	Individual transitions	Life stage changes, personal milestones, or health		Mijn eigen leeftijd, Gezondheid, Ontslag, verhuizing buitenland, wonen andere stad, nieuwe baan, Werken, Alzheimer schoonmoeder, Studiefinanciering gestopt, Kinderen klaar met studeren
100	Onduidelijk	Unclear or vague entries		Ondividuen, Lokale en globale gebeurtenissen
N/A	Not applicable	Empty, “geen”, or “nvt” entries		geen, nvt