Bearers of the safety net

The influence of social service organisations on the social rights of social assistance recipients in the Netherlands (1982-1998)

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I am not a client, a customer, nor a service user.
I am not a shirker, a scrounger, a beggar, nor a thief.
I am not a national insurance number, nor a blip on a screen.
I paid my dues, never a penny short, and was proud to do so.

I don’t tug the forelock, but look my neighbour in the eye.
I don’t accept or seek charity.
My name is Daniel Blake, I am a man, not a dog.
As such I demand my rights.
I demand you treat me with respect.

I, Daniel Blake, am a citizen, nothing more, nothing less.
Thank you.

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<td>Abw</td>
<td>Algemene bijstandswet</td>
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<tr>
<td>AOV</td>
<td>Algemeen Ouderen verbond</td>
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<tr>
<td>BMT</td>
<td>Wet boeten, maatregelen en terug- en invordering sociale zekerheid</td>
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<tr>
<td>BMW</td>
<td>Bijstandsmaatstappelijk werker</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>Centraal Bureau voor Statistiek</td>
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<tr>
<td>CRM</td>
<td>Ministerie van Cultuur Recreatie en Maatschappelijk Werk</td>
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<tr>
<td>CWI</td>
<td>Centrum voor Werk en Inkomen</td>
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<td>DIVOSA</td>
<td>Vereeniging van Directeuren voor Sociale Arbeid</td>
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<tr>
<td>hAbw</td>
<td>herinrichting Algemene Bijstandswet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IOAW</td>
<td>Wet inkomensvoorziening oudere en gedeeltelijk arbeidsongeschikte werkloze werknemers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISMO</td>
<td>Interdepartementale Stuurgroep Misbruik en Oneigenlijk gebruik</td>
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<tr>
<td>JWG</td>
<td>Jeugdwerk-garantiewet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L.A.S.D.</td>
<td>Landelijke Actiecomité Sociale Diensten</td>
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<tr>
<td>LVO</td>
<td>Landelijke Veranderingsorganisatie</td>
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<tr>
<td>nAbw</td>
<td>nieuwe Algemene Bijstandswet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RWW</td>
<td>Rijksgroepsregeling Werkloze Werknemers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SZW</td>
<td>Ministerie voor Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid</td>
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<tr>
<td>SWI</td>
<td>Samenwerkingsverband werk en inkomen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VNG</td>
<td>Vereniging van Nederlandse Gemeenten</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wiw</td>
<td>Wet inschakeling werkzoekenden</td>
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<td>WWV</td>
<td>Wet Werkloosheidsvoorziening</td>
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Introduction

Short introduction

During the first half of the 1990s, the issue of welfare fraud captivated the Dutch public debate. Following a number of research reports and several television reports on the behaviour of social assistance recipients, the image got hold that a substantial part of the social assistance population consisted of crafty and workshy people who remorselessly misused the social provisions originally intended for the weak in society.\(^1\) Central tenet of the surging debate was that the generous nature of the welfare system and the lenient control of benefit recipients had allowed for a so-called ‘benefit moral’ (Bijstandsmoraal) to develop among them. Instead of regarding social assistance as their last resort, a safety net, recipients tended to use it as a comfortable hammock. Politicians, therefore, increasingly advocated the net needed to be pulled tight again through intensified inspection and by activating recipients in order to bounce them back into society.

In the history of the welfare state, the so-called ‘moral panic’ of the early nineties is not considered an isolated phenomenon. Instead, it is placed within the larger historical narrative about the deteriorating societal position of benefit recipients during the past 35 years. According to this narrative, from the early 1980s, the Netherlands saw successive governments spanning the social safety net to such an extent, that the previously generous welfare state turned into a ‘workfare state’. Getting citizens to work was increasingly considered to be the main focus of the social security system.\(^2\)

While most studies supporting the conventional narrative on the Dutch welfare state focus on the ways in which formal legislation has changed through the years, this thesis departs from the conviction that social rights are actually defined by more factors than legislation alone. In addition to formal changes in legislation, citizens’ rights are also determined by the way in which these rights are distributed to them.

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through institutional channels and by the extent to which actors are willing to uphold these rights in the public domain. What is interesting about the history of social assistance recipients’ social rights is the fact that during the 1980s and 1990s, these two factors (the way rights were distributed and the way interests were represented) were both predominantly dependent on one key organisation: the municipal social service organisation (Sociale Dienst). Because of this key role, this thesis examines what influence Dutch social service organisations have had on the social rights of social assistance recipients between 1982 and 1998.

Before delving into the subject, a summarised account of the conventional historical narrative of the Dutch welfare state and its gradual transition into a ‘workfare state’ will be given. Considering the central topic of this thesis – the changing social rights of social assistance recipients – special attention will be paid to the specific trajectory of social assistance legislation. After this exposition, the historiographic debate on the subject, the central goal of this thesis, and the methodological approach of the project will be explained. This exposition will be closed off with a discussion of the source material and a short evaluation of the advantages and challenges it provides.

**The narrative of welfare state retrenchment**

**The end of romantic solidarity**

Between 1982 and 1998, the dominant political view on the right approach of social assistance recipients changed fundamentally. Prior to the 1980s, unemployment had been a rare phenomenon and was predominantly regarded as having a structural causal nature. Arguably, the prevailing societal conviction was that income should be valued over work and the needy should be treated with respect and on an equal basis. Following this conviction, in 1965 the Social Assistance Act (Algemene bijstandswet or Abw) was introduced, guaranteeing the means of subsistence to every Dutch citizen. Instead of having to rely on the solidarity of local communities or family, citizens could now claim assistance from the state on the basis of their inviolable social rights. As Esping-Andersen has described it, these social rights led to the so-called decommodification of Dutch citizens. This meant, citizens no longer had to rely on the market for their

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subsistence; with the introduction of social assistance, they were able to live independently outside of the market. The traditional charity-based welfare system of the previous era was thus gradually transformed into a modernised rights-based system with universal arrangements, high benefit levels, a concentration on income compensation, and few obligations. According to political scientists Vis, van Kersbergen, and Becker, during the 1970s, the Dutch welfare state could be defined by a strong paternalistic ideology which dictated that the strong should care for the weak.

The period of ‘romantic solidarity’, as Schuyt defined the seventies, would not last long, however. During the second half of the decade the economic situation began to deteriorate and long-term unemployment began to rise. When in 1982, the centre-right Lubbers government of the Christian Democratic CDA and the liberal VVD took office, 13 percent of the national labour force was unemployed and about the same percentage received disability benefits. Between 1980 and 1984, the number of social assistance recipients more than doubled, reaching around 540.000 (see table 1.1). This had serious implications for the character of social assistance. While initially, the social assistance population consisted mainly of divorced parents (mostly women), the provision was increasingly used by long-term unemployed who had exhausted their unemployment benefit entitlement. In addition, an increasing number of young unemployed joined the ranks as they lacked a work history to make them eligible for unemployment insurance.

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Driven by the pressures of the economic crisis and the growing dominance of supply-side economics, during the 1980s, the governments of CDA and VVD implemented severe cutbacks in social spending to balance government finance.\(^{14}\) Government members of these self-proclaimed ‘no-nonsense’ governments mainly substantiated their retrenchment politics with economic arguments about the adverse effects of the overtly generous welfare state and the need to reduce the eligibility requirements of provisions. However, they also increasingly employed moral arguments about the adverse influence the welfare state’s institutions had on the behaviour of citizens.\(^{15}\)

According to these politicians, solidarity had traditionally been a responsibility of the community. If a citizen needed assistance, he would have to look his neighbour in the eye. With the building of the generous welfare state, however, this shared responsibility had increasingly been outsourced to the impersonal and bureaucratic institutions of the state. Citizens no longer had to substantiate their claim for assistance to their fellow citizens. As a result, the generous welfare system had encouraged a consumerist attitude towards the state and developed an egocentric and calculating culture among social assistance recipients.\(^{16}\) Increasingly, government members began to criticise the growing lethargy among Dutch citizens and their tendency to evade their individual responsibilities by turning to the state. To combat the growing consumerist attitude among citizens they should be activated to find employment and access to the welfare state should be limited to those who were genuinely weak, the ‘real minima’ (*Echte minima*).\(^{17}\)

As the objective of both governmental parties was to reduce the alarmingly high financial deficit, the high interest rates, and the also worryingly high inflation, from 1983 onwards, the government, with state secretary Lou de Graaf as prime representative, began to roll out an austerity program aimed at retrenching the provisions of the welfare state. While presented as a revision of the social security system

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\(^{14}\) De Liagre Böhl, ‘Consensus en polarisatie’, 323.


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(the so-called Stelselherziening), the revision mainly consisted of a series of rather straightforward cuts. In the course of the 1980s, all workers’ insurance benefits were significantly lowered, the wages in the public sector were cut by 3 percent, and all social-security benefits were frozen almost the entire decade. Furthermore, the access to a whole series of provisions was limited or extra requirements were made, like obligating citizens to pay a personal contribution when using specific provisions.\textsuperscript{18}

The effects of the changing political climate on social assistance recipients were severe. During the 1980s, these consequences were mainly of a financial nature as the succeeding governments did not implement an active employment policy but focussed instead on restructuring the minimum income protection.\textsuperscript{19} For most of the decade benefits were not indexed and the benefit level, which had traditionally been linked to the minimum wage, was now disconnected. This led to a drastic decline in the real incomes of benefit recipients. Although a considerable group of citizens did receive a new yearly allowance intended for the ‘real minima’, this measure did not make up for the loss of purchasing power.\textsuperscript{20} In addition to these rather straightforward cuts, in 1985 the so-called ‘home sharers-norm’ was introduced, significantly lowering the benefits of recipients that live together.\textsuperscript{21}

In 1981, the first ‘activating’ measures were implemented with the aim of incentivising the young to enter the labour market. School leavers under the age of 21 were now restricted from access to the Abw until one and a half years after their graduation. In 1982 the age limit of the Abw was raised to 18 years as well, a measure especially affecting those outside of the school system.\textsuperscript{22} Another measure aimed at activation was implemented in 1985, when the distinct regulation for social assistance recipients with work prospects (\textit{Rijksgroepsregeling Werkloze Werknemers} or \textit{RWW}) was adjusted by adding explicit conditions concerning labour activation.\textsuperscript{23} For example, applicants were made to register at the employment office, and had to report on a monthly basis what they had done to find employment. The increasing focus on employment was stimulated by a symbolic but influential transition in the institutional framework of the


\textsuperscript{19} Vlek, \textit{Inactieven in actie}, 392-394; Rigter et al., \textit{Tussen sociale wil en werkelijkheid}, 372.

\textsuperscript{20} De Liagre Böhl, ‘Consensus en polarisatie’, 323; Rigter et al., \textit{Tussen sociale wil en werkelijkheid}, 373-374; Vlek, \textit{Inactieven in actie}, 392-394.

\textsuperscript{21} Rigter et al., \textit{Tussen sociale wil en werkelijkheid}, 374.


\textsuperscript{23} Onderzoekscommissie toepassing ABW, \textit{Het recht op bijstand, Naar een beheerst proces bij de toekenning van de bijstand} (The Hague 1993) 43.
Abw. While the implementation of social assistance policy had always been the responsibility of the Ministry for Culture, Recreation and Social Work (Ministerie van Cultuur Recreatie en Maatschappelijk Werk or CRM), following the new views on the welfare state, it was transferred in 1982 to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (Ministerie voor Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid or SZW). While the real incomes of social assistance recipients declined during the eighties, their number continued to rise as the eligibility criteria of other benefits were tightened.

Figure 1.1. Purchasing power development for social assistance recipients and employees (1980-2002)

Source: http://statline.cbs.nl

Placing work before income

Although initially, a large part of society resisted the downsizing of the welfare state under the leadership of the social democratic PvdA and the labour unions, this opposition rapidly lost power when the PvdA entered government in 1989. With the social democrats on board, the third Lubbers government again decided to detach the benefit level from the wages between 1992 and 1994. Instead of merely cutting

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24 Vlek, Inactieven in actie, 380.
26 Wielenga, Nederland in de twintigste eeuw, 291-293.
expenses, however, the government was increasingly concerned with the ‘inactive’ groups in society.\textsuperscript{28} This move towards activation was supported by a series of reports and television reports about increasing welfare fraud and the crafty and work-shy behaviour of social assistance recipients in particular.\textsuperscript{29} It was increasingly suggested that social assistance prevented labour market participation, rather than promoting it. As a consequence even a growing number of social-democrats, (within the ranks of the PvdA) began supporting restrictive and activating social assistance provisions.\textsuperscript{30} Following the turn of the social-democrats, the third Lubbers government began to experiment with activation programs for young social assistance recipients, the so-called Youth Work Guarantee Act (\textit{Jeugdwerk-garantiewet} or JWG).\textsuperscript{31} This turn is therefore often defined as the transition towards the activating welfare state, or ‘workfare state’, in which work was explicitly placed before income, a transition that was consolidated during the first government of PvdA, VVD, and D66, which held office between 1994 and 1998.\textsuperscript{32}

The period of this so-called ‘purple government’ (a combination of the liberal blue and the social-democratic red) can be defined by the strong political and social consensus on the approach of the welfare state.\textsuperscript{33} More emphatically than its predecessor, the new government presented itself as a government that focused on one thing: ‘work, work, work’.\textsuperscript{34} The most prominent expression of this mission was the introduction of 40,000 subsidised jobs, the so-called ‘Melkert-jobs’, which aimed to reintegrate long-term unemployed workers. Also, the number of people active in the job pools or the JWG was increased and taxes levied on low wages were lowered.\textsuperscript{35} Instead of the traditional redistributive substantiation of the welfare state’s institutions, with a focus on basic social rights, the new approach of the government avowedly placed employment above income and increasingly attached conditions to these rights.

\textsuperscript{29} Van Berkel, ‘The Local and Street-Level Production of Social Citizenship’, 201; Engbersen, \textit{Fatale Remedies}, 125; Vlek, \textit{Inactieven in actie}, 418-419.
\textsuperscript{30} Vlek, \textit{Inactieven in Actie}, 418-420.
\textsuperscript{33} Wielenga, \textit{Nederland in de twintigste eeuw}, 295.
The real consolidation of the new rationale was realised with the introduction of the new social assistance act (*nieuwe Bijstandswet* or nAbw), which was accepted in 1994 and came into force in 1996.\(^{36}\) Citizens were thus no longer decommodified as again, social rights were coupled with economic obligations.\(^{37}\) Considering the level of the benefits, the nAbw lowered entitlements for singles and single parents with 20 percent, although recipients could request an additional allowance at the discretion of the local social service organisation.\(^{38}\) With regard to the eligibility, the age limit was raised to 21 and people under the age of 27 who had finished their education received a reduced benefit as an incentive to seek work.\(^{39}\)

The most important part of the new social assistance act, however, was the tightening of entitlement rules. According to the nAbw, every applicant had to look for work and take part in reintegration programs. Furthermore, the concept ‘fitting labour’, which prescribed recipients had to accept jobs that matched their profile, was replaced by the much wider concept ‘acceptable labour’. According to this new definition, recipients had to accept all jobs that were considered to be acceptable, even if they were below their education or former job level.\(^{40}\) However, people could still be exempted at the discretion of the local social service agency if there was a legitimate medical or social reason. An important element of the new law was the expansion of the instruments available to officials to sanction uncooperative applicants and recipients. One year after the nAbw was introduced, the Unified Sanctioning Act (*Wet boeten, maatregelen en terug- en invordering sociale zekerheid* or BMT) formally obligated officials to use these instruments in case of misbehaviour by clients.\(^{41}\) In 1998, all reintegration provisions were bundled in the Act on the insertion of Job Seekers (*Wet inschakeling werkzoekenden* or Wiw), which also intensified the activation of long-term unemployed recipients.\(^{42}\)

While rhetorically, the governmental parties had been putting employment over income for some years, since the introduction of the nAbw the workfare paradigm replaced the traditional welfare rationale. Instead of landing in a safety net, with unconditional rights and few obligations, unemployed citizens would

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37 Terpstra, *Bijstandsmoraal in beweging*, 27.
now land on the trampoline of the workfare state, with conditional rights and corresponding obligations. From now on it was expected of citizens to try first to find a job and to accept all jobs offered to them before they could rightfully claim assistance.

**Historiographic debate: The long-term development of social citizenship**

**The nature of social citizenship**

The examination of the development of social assistance legislation clearly illustrates that the social rights of social assistance recipients have been significantly limited during the 1980s and 1990s. The collective of social rights granted to citizens is often defined as their social citizenship. This concept was introduced by T.H. Marshall in 1950 when he proposed to divide citizenship into three elements: a civil, a political, and a social element. The civil element of citizenship is composed of the right to individual freedom, the right to own property and to conclude contracts, and the right to justice. The political element of citizenship in turn, consists of the right to participate in the exercise of political power as a member of governing bodies or as an elector. The social element of citizenship, which will be at the centre of this thesis, covers ‘the whole range from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilised being according to the standards prevailing in the society.’

When using Marshall’s definition to study the changes in the social citizenship of Dutch citizens trying to claim social assistance, it seems clear that their social rights have been significantly reduced since the reversal of the political climate during the 1980s and 1990s. Most of the existing literature on the subject does indeed draw such a conclusion by approaching the subject from a political or legal philosophical perspective, or by concentrating on the changing moral and ideological assumptions underlying the rights granted through the institutions of the welfare state. Despite these contributions, the approach of social citizenship as defined by formal legislation is misleading. While formally establishing

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the social citizenship of citizens, rights as defined in legislation do not actually shape the social citizenship of those seeking to claim them. As Bryan Turner emphasised in his discussion of social citizenship, instead, the formulation and content of citizens’ rights only constitute one fundamental part of it. In addition, one’s social citizenship is determined by the specific social arrangements through which social rights are actually distributed to the members of society and by the collective of social forces that establish and uphold the rights of citizens.\textsuperscript{47} In order to truly understand developments in the social citizenship of people trying to invoke their right to social assistance, one has to look beyond the development of their formal rights and should also study the social arrangements distributing rights to citizens and the social forces defending these rights.

The social service organisation as a social arrangement

With regard to the distribution of social rights to people claiming their right to social assistance, the institution these citizens have always been dependent on was the municipal social service organisation. The social service organisation is an executive agency, of which the employees are municipal civil servants who have been mandated by the municipal authorities to take decisions on benefits.\textsuperscript{48} In their daily activities, the employees of the social service agency are bound to the rules and regulations prescribed to from the municipal level. Municipal policymakers, in turn, are bound to national legislation.

Although the officials of the social service organisation did not have a say in the formulation of the policies they were expected to implement, they were responsible for a wide array of tasks. The social service agency was responsible for paying benefits, assessing the eligibility of all applications for assistance, inspecting recipients on their circumstances, administering all the necessary data, and for offering additional assistance when necessary. During the 1980s and 1990s, they also increasingly supported clients in finding employment again. While not having an official say in the formulation of policy, because of their wide array of functions, the officials of the social service organisation in fact had a large influence on the materialisation of their clients’ social citizenship.

The significant influence of public officials was first brought to attention by Michael Lipsky in 1980. In his book Street-Level Bureaucracy, Lipsky claimed that the influence of what he dubbed ‘street-level bureaucrats’ was so important, they should be regarded as policymakers rather than mere policy


implementers. Given the crucial role of these relatively low-level officials, he argued more attention should be paid to the concerns, considerations, and convictions influencing their everyday decisions. As most public officials have a certain degree of discretion, the social citizenship of citizens depends on the characteristics of the individual street-level bureaucrat they have to deal with. Since the work of Lipsky, attention for the role of street-level officials has grown significantly, so to for the employees of the municipal social service organisation. In the Netherlands, the interest in policy implementation by these officials increased at the beginning of the 1990s, when rumours about the inefficacy of social assistance legislation took hold of the public debate.

Besides these contemporary studies, however, there has not yet been a comprehensive study of the rights distribution or policy implementation by social service organisations during the 1980s and 1990s. Although several studies of the 1980s and the larger amount of research reports of the 1990s provide us with some insight into the evolving social citizenship of recipients, their synchronic nature still only provides us with a series of snapshots. Only one diachronic research project is currently available which examines the workings of social service organisations over a longer period of time. In 1997, sociologist Jan Terpstra published his study of the changing culture within two municipal agencies between 1965 and 1990. The conclusions of Terpstra, which will be further discussed in the first chapter, have provided us with a much better insight into long-term developments of social citizenship in the Netherlands. However, the central topic of this thesis, the paradigm shift towards the activating welfare state, falls just outside of the scope of his research project. In addition, his study only describes the developments within two social service organisations, while there were hundreds throughout the country. An in-depth developmental study of the implementation of social assistance legislation during the 1980s and 1990s is still wanting.

The social service organisation as a social force

While an in-depth study of the distribution of social assistance rights does not yet exist, the other element of social citizenship distinguished by Turner – the social forces defending the social rights of citizens – has

50 Ibidem, 23.
51 Engbersen, Publieke bijstandsgeheimen; Onderzoekscommissie toepassing ABW, Het recht op bijstand; S. Boorsma et al., Een activerende bijstand? Een onderzoek naar besluitvorming over activering van cliënten door sociale diensten (The Hague 1994).
actually been studied in relation to social assistance. The most compressive study is sociologist Ruud Vlek’s dissertation, which examines the public representation of all welfare recipients during the 1980s and early 1990s. In this dissertation, which studies the interest representation of people fully dependent on some form of welfare (the so-called ‘inactives’), Vlek discerns four possible courses of action that were available to recipients for the protection of their interests before politics.\(^{53}\) Two of these options can be defined as forms of self-representation, while the other two were dependent on third parties.

The first form of self-representation has been the most common way of political action. It simply entails the political articulation of individual interests through interest-driven voting. Based on their personal interests, citizens may decide to vote exclusively for political parties favouring their interests as recipients of welfare. Although this option is essentially an individual form of action, it can turn into a social force when people of the same group collectively vote according to their perceived self-interest; so-called ‘block voting’. A prime example is the rise of the General Elderly Alliance (Algemeen Ouderen verbond or AOV) in 1994 after the CDA had proposed to cut the pensions. The CDA lost 20 seats in the lower house while the AOV gained six seats.

The second course of action, which is also a form of self-representation, is the possibility of organising as a group to collectively defend the interests of the group before politics. During the 1980s and 1990s, among welfare recipients in general, this form of self-organisation was often based on specific provisions, like the disability insurance movement (WAO-beweging), or on certain subcategories, like the organisation for women depending on social assistance (Vrouwen in de bijstand). With regard to recipients of social assistance as a group, some forms of self-organisation trying to represent the whole collective did occur during the 1980s and 1990s. However, a durable national interest group consistently acting as a social force in favour of recipients over the whole period, did not exist.\(^{54}\)

Besides forms of self-representation, Vlek discerns two alternative courses of action which are both forms of external representation. The first form is mandated representation of recipients’ interests by labour unions. As traditionally, unions exerted a large influence on the policy process in the Netherlands, this form of external representation formed an important course of action for recipients of social assistance as well. As a generous social security system strengthens the negotiating position of employed citizens, the


\(^{54}\) During the early 1980s, some local organisations, like the Bijstandsbond, actively represented the interests of social assistance recipients at the national level. During the second half of the decade the activities of these organisations however rapidly decreased. During the second half of the 1990s the representation of social assistance recipients was taken up again by Sjakuus, an organisation representing the interests of all welfare recipients. See for the story of the Bijstandsbond: Piet van der Lende, *Werklozen in actie. De geschiedenis van de Werklozen Belangen Vereniging Amsterdam, 1976-1992* (Amsterdam 1992)
labour unions had a direct interest in representing unemployed people as well. However, Vlek’s dissertation shows that, during the 1980s, labour unions increasingly neglected the interests of welfare recipients. More and more, they tended to limit their political role to the representation of their employed membership.\textsuperscript{55} As a result, for most of the 1980s and 1990s, the roughly 500.000 recipients of social assistance were mainly dependent on the fourth available course of action defined by Vlek: unmandated external representation. Following this form of ‘unmandated’ or ‘non-instructed’ political representation, third parties act as a social force without necessarily involving the group they are representing. With regard to social assistance recipients, ecclesiastical organisations for example constituted such a social force.

The most influential social force within the timeframe of this thesis, however, were the social service organisations. As there was no steadfast lobbying organisation for social assistance recipients, social service organisations emerged as an unusual, but important, social force in representing the interests of their clients. The representation, both in the public debate and in deliberations with governing bodies, was mostly taken care of by the association of directors of social service organisations (\textit{Vereeniging van Directeuren voor Sociale Arbeid} or DIVOSA); although at times, the lower officials of social service organisations actively sought to influence political decision-making as well. Because of its position as a representative for all social service organisations and its crucial role in the implementation of social assistance legislation, the association had the means to exert real influence on national politics. DIVOSA not only formed the link between recipients and national politics but also represented recipients as a group towards the rest of society. For their voice to be heard, recipients were almost completely dependent on the will, determination, and political clout of the directors that were united in DIVOSA.\textsuperscript{56} This crucial role of DIVOSA has not yet been studied in depth. Although Vlek devotes some pages to the role played by the association, an examination of the considerations, motives, and interests behind the politics of DIVOSA has not been made.

Research questions
It is remarkable that both the public representation as well as the actual distribution of the social rights were mainly shaped by one group of actors: the social service organisations. Despite this highly interesting situation, little is known about the history of these organisations. Considering this gap in our knowledge of how the social rights of hundreds of thousands of Dutch citizens actually took shape, this thesis sets out to examine which influence social service organisations have exerted on the social citizenship of Dutch social

\textsuperscript{55} Vlek, \textit{Inactieven in actie}, 455.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibidem.
assistance recipients during the 1980s and 1990s. This guiding question will be separated into two separate research questions which will focus on one of the two additional elements of social citizenship.

To resolve the lack of diachronic knowledge on the street-level distribution of social rights by social service organisations, the first part of this thesis sets out to examine how the implementation of social assistance legislation by social service organisations changed between 1982 and 1998. The second part of the thesis will focus on the role of DIVOSA and will examine how Dutch social service organisations, united in DIVOSA, represented the interests of social assistance recipients between 1982 and 1998. Taken together, both questions will provide us with a better understanding of the leading question of this thesis: How did Dutch social service organisations influence the social citizenship of social assistance recipients between 1982 and 1998?

**Theoretical framework**

**An inherent tension between centralisation and decentralisation**

The substantial influence municipal organisations have exerted on the implementation of policy in the Netherlands is a typical result of a classical issue in the general history of the welfare state. In his oration, historian Lex Heerma van Voss illustrates how politicians have always had to choose between organising the implementation of social security policies at a national or at a regional level. Furthermore, they had to decide whether to outsource the implementation of policy to social partners (Employers- and labour unions) or to organize the implementation through state institutions.\(^57\) With regard to the implementation of the Abw, for the most part, the second dilemma has always been decided in favour of state institutions. The tension between a centralised system with uniform rules, and a decentralised system with larger municipal autonomy, instead, has been a constantly recurring issue for policymakers.

From its incipience in 1965, the Abw formed the ‘last stronghold’ or ‘safety net’ of the social security system and was meant to support citizens ineligible for any other provision.\(^58\) Following from this specific position, the provision functioned according to the ‘individualisation-principle’ which required the form of assistance had to be tailored to the needs of each individual client. As it was stated in article one and two of the 1963 social assistance act:

\(^57\) Lex Heerma van Voss, *Wat is er Nederlands aan de Nederlandse sociale zekerheid?*, Oratie bij het aanvaarden van de leerstoel Geschiedenis van de Sociale Zekerheid (Utrecht 2015)

To every Dutchman who is in such circumstances, or threatens to get there, that he does not have the means to meet the necessary costs of living, assistance will be provided by the mayor and aldermen. The assistance will be tailored to the circumstances and possibilities of the person and family as well as to the demonstrated sense of personal responsibility for the provision of the means of subsistence. It aims to enable the person to be able to provide for himself (Translation by H.R.).

The act provided municipal authorities with a large amount of discretion to give substance to the individualisation-principle. Shortly after the introduction of the Abw, however, it began to show that while the decentralised style of implementation did indeed enable a personalised treatment matching the needs of individual citizens, it also led to arbitrariness and substantial inequity. As a result, national policymakers started to reinforce their grip on the implementation process by introduction all sorts of measures aimed at ensuring a more uniform system of implementation and equality of rights for all citizens.

This process in which decentralisation and centralisation succeed each other has been repeated several times since the introduction of the Abw and will most likely remain to occur as the tension between individualised care and equal treatment is inherent to every social security system. With every new government, the autonomy granted to municipalities and their social service agencies to devise their own policies is likely to change in accordance with the shifting national political agenda.

The core functions of the social service organisation

The amount of discretionary powers granted to social service organisations has a significant influence on their implementation of policy and the resulting distribution of social rights. In order to understand this distribution and the way it changed over time, it is important to appreciate that social service organisations have always had a diverse range of tasks they had to perform. According to Van der Veen, the job description of social service organisations is made up of five functions, of which the first three form the essence of the Abw.

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60 J.L.M. Schell, De Algemene bijstandswet (Deventer 1995) 22.
61 Zuurmond, De Infocratie, 140.
63 Zuurmond, De Infocratie, 140; Schell, De Algemene bijstandswet, 22.
Firstly, the social service agency is responsible for the *guaranteed income function*. This function entails the seemingly easy task of just paying benefits, in time, to citizens who have a right to it. The second task is the *social function*. In addition to material assistance through the monthly paid benefit, officials of the social service organisation are to be involved with the well-being of recipients and have to support them where needed. For example, by paying out special benefits for exceptional issues or by referring recipients to other supportive agencies. The third responsibility of the social service agency is the *reintegration function*. While recipients have a right to their benefit, the Abw has always required them to actively look for employment before making a claim to assistance. The reintegration function of the social service organisation instructs officials to support and encourage recipients in finding employment.

While the three ‘core functions’ of the Abw focus on the provision of services, the fourth function revolves around checking the legality of recipients’ claims to assistance. Following this *inspection function*, officials have to make sure benefits are only provided to those who genuinely need them. This task also entails implementing sanctions in case of misuse of benefits and possibly even denying people a benefit. While the first four functions are directly related to clients, the fifth is related to the administrative process within social service organisation. This *administrative function* entails the efficient registration and correct processing of all the relevant information about recipients. While seemingly self-evident, this task forms the prerequisite for the successful implementation of all other functions.\(^{64}\)

As was previously mentioned, part of the social function of the Abw, is tailoring benefits to the specific circumstances and needs of the individual recipient, the so-called individualisation-principle. As the aim of the social task is to protect recipients against social isolation, they can be offered all sorts of support, like debt counselling, remission of certain municipal taxes, complementary access to a sports club, re-education, and experience placements.\(^{65}\) While the social responsibilities of officials require empathy and trust in order to make a careful assessment of the needs of recipients, the reintegration function might at times be in conflict with this caring approach.\(^{66}\) As the Abw obligates recipients to take responsibility for their own situation, social service agencies are charged with the task of actively pushing recipients to reintegrate into the labour market. It is obvious there is a certain tension between the social and the reintegration function. Recipients might exaggerate their incapacity for work to be exempted from their

\(^{64}\) Romke van der Veen, *De sociale grenzen van beleid, Een onderzoek naar de uitvoering en effecten van het stelsel van sociale zekerheid* (Leiden 1990) 30.


\(^{66}\) Van der Veen, *De sociale grenzen van beleid*, 30.
labour obligations, while officials might dislike pressuring recipients as they also want to help them in their troubles.

Such tensions are even clearer when examining the relation between the inspection and social functions. Officials are required to verify the eligibility of every recipient or applicant by pre-examination and periodical re-examinations. They have to assess the accountability of applicants for their own situation and check for particular forms of fraud, like failing to report certain incomes or concealment of cohabitation. They also have to impose sanctions in case of obstinate behaviour, a lack of commitment to find employment, or misuse of benefits. Instead of requiring a relation of trust and an involved and caring attitude, the inspection function requires an impartial approach and a strict approach. Between the functions inherent tensions therefore prevail. Throughout the history of social assistance, social service organisations have always had to decide whether to favour one function over the other.\textsuperscript{67}

The changing distribution of social rights

In the implementation of social assistance legislation, the preference of officials for one of the five functions has varied over the years. Previous research has shown that this preference depended on a series of environmental factors. To understand the changing distribution of social rights, it is necessary to examine which factors and to retrace why officials decided to align certain elements of their work with legislative regulations while at the same time ignoring other aspects.

As was already mentioned, the discrepancy between legislative intent and the eventual implementation of social assistance policies in the Netherlands has been at the centre of several studies since the 1980s. Most of these studies were observational reports; a researcher observed the functioning of a social service organisation for several months, after which the examined officials were categorised on the basis of their policy implementation and the way they dealt with clients. An example of such a study is the observational report published by Knegt in 1986. Based on his observations, Knegt defined an official, a bureaucratic, and a political style of implementation and the motivations for these implementation styles.\textsuperscript{68}

Although the approach of the observational studies can be useful to understand the different practices within an organisation, Terpstra notes that the use of classifications is unsuitable for studying policy implementation processes through time. The main problem with existing models and categorisations, like the one devised by Knegt, is that they take little account of the distinctive temporal

\textsuperscript{67} Ibidem, 33.
\textsuperscript{68} Knegt, \textit{Regels en redelijkheid in de bijstandsverlening}, 163-164.
contextual factors influencing the behaviour of officials. The distinct historical context in which officials operated exerted a decisive influence on the everyday decisions they made. Although it is possible to analytically separate officials from their context as autonomous actors, in reality their eventual policy implementation was an amalgamation of contextual factors and individual decisions.\(^{69}\)

Especially for officials with much practical experience, their daily practice generally was an aggregation of ingrained habits, official routines, developed classifications of clients, and personal motivations or moral standards. As a result, the implementation or rights distribution observed today is for a large part the product of yesterday’s context. Typologies like the one by Knegt can therefore be reapplied to other research projects but will never fully correspond with historical reality, as they were themselves derived from a unique historical context. Following the conclusions of Terpstra, this thesis therefore will not use categorisations or models but a developmental perspective, interpreting policy implementation as part of a process that originated from an associated context.\(^{70}\) In addition examining the eventual policy implementation by officials, developments in their professional context will also be observed. This contextual approach entails what van Berkel has defined as the organisational and governance perspectives. It covers ‘the roles and responsibilities of actors involved in policymaking and policy implementation’ (governance) as well as the organisational conditions of social service organisations, like evolving caseloads, varying degrees of discretion provided to officials, and changing management styles (organisational).\(^{71}\)

By studying the evolving professional context of officials, the changing styles of implementation, and the shifting preference for one of the core functions of the social service organisation, the eventual changes in the effective distribution of social rights to citizens can be explained. To get a relatively comprehensive view of the general changes in the street-level treatments of recipients, the first research question will be answered by examining the series of observational research reports published during the 1980s and especially the 1990s. While each of these studies was conducted from a different perspective and focused on distinct research questions, all of them made observations on certain key contextual factors of the organisations they examined. By studying these observations as a whole, together with several newspaper articles, a comprehensive account will be given of the ways in which the social citizenship of social assistance recipients was shaped.

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\(^{69}\) Terpstra and Havinga, ‘Implementation Between Tradition and Management’, 97.

\(^{70}\) Terpstra, \textit{Bijstandsmoraal in beweging}, 328.

\(^{71}\) Van Berkel, ‘The Local and Street-Level Production of Social Citizenship’, 196.
The changing motivations of advocates

While the distribution of social rights and the resulting materialisation of social citizenship will be studied by focusing at the street level, the other constituting element of social citizenship – the social forces upholding the rights of citizens – will mostly be analysed by focusing on actors at the top of social service organisations. Naturally, directors of social service agencies have always exercised a major influence on the everyday functioning of their organisation and the treatment of recipients. However, this was not the only way they exercised influence. During the 1980s and 1990s, most directors were a member of the association of directors of the social service organisations, DIVOSA. As directors had a clear view on the proceedings at the street level, DIVOSA often took part in deliberations concerning both national and municipal policymaking and played an active role in the public debate. Following from this position, DIVOSA also had the potential to act as a social force upholding the rights of recipients.

Despite this potential, the function of DIVOSA members officially prohibited them to take up such a role as, essentially, they were nothing more than civil servants, subordinate and responsible to their political supervisors. While they were allowed to speak out for the interests of their clients, the directors first and foremost had to act in accordance with legislation and were expected to behave loyally to their political leadership, the policymakers in their municipality. While most interest groups and public advocates focus completely on their members’ interests and have the ability to use demonstrations or resistance as a means of political action, the everyday function of the DIVOSA members ruled out such a political positioning.

However, it is not unusual or even always undesirable, for civil servants to have strong beliefs about their respective fields of policy. In 2000, the Scientific Council for Governmental Policy (WRR) even concluded that to a significant extent ‘the insurance of the public cause can be reliant on the focus of civil servants on the public good.’ When policymakers go against the specific norms and values of their department or of agencies responsible for the implementing of policy, officials may voice their opposition to his or her ideas or even try to adjust the eventual implementation of policy. The extensive power civil servants have been able to exert on policymaking has often been reason to define them as ‘the fourth power’, operating alongside the trias politica distinguished by Montesquieu. Some authors even assert civil servants have had more influence than ministers or parliamentarians, an influence that only increased

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when policy matters got more complicated or when the number of involved actors increased. \textsuperscript{74} Despite the significant influence of Dutch civil servants, overall, they are said to have been relatively loyal to their political supervisors. \textsuperscript{75}

Another factor contributing to the ambivalent position of DIVOSA lay in its position as an external advocate. As was explained, the interest representation by DIVOSA was a form of non-instructed advocacy as social assistance recipients themselves did not have an active voice within the organisation. \textsuperscript{76} According to Vlek, this position as external representative meant that DIVOSA operated from what Köbben has defined as a ‘they-perspective’ instead of a ‘we-perspective’. \textsuperscript{77} While being the advocate of social assistance recipients, the members of DIVOSA did not identify with their clients in the sense that they felt part of their social group. While for recipients, the upholding of their social citizenship was about fundamental issues, like the provision of their means of subsistence or their recognition as equal members of society, the directors of the social service organisation, while often sympathising with these sentiments, did not essentially relate to them. Formally, the interests of the recipients were just one of the many responsibilities they had, like combatting fraud or efficiently running an organisation.

When examining the activities of advocates with a ‘they-perspective’, it is therefore important to assess what their personal motives were and what options were available to them in their decision to speak out for a social group they did not belong to. In addition to altruistic motives, they could have had other motivations. With regard to DIVOSA as an institutional actor and the directors of social service organisations as individual actors, these motivations could have been the preservation of organisational budgets in the face of looming cutbacks, improving the image of the profession or DIVOSA in the media, or obtaining public status as champion of the weak. Furthermore, the endeavour to promote one’s career or to strengthen the political position of DIVOSA could have been a reason to efficiently execute all new policy measures but such obedience could also follow from the sense of duty that a civil servant always needs to implement the policies prescribed to him or her; disregarding of personal opinions or emotions. \textsuperscript{78}

\textsuperscript{74} Bovens, \textit{De Vierde Macht Revisited}, 7; Klaartje Peters, \textit{De lokale staat. Rede zoals uitgesproken ter aanvaarding van de leerstoel Lokaal en regionaal bestuur aan de Faculteit der Maatschappij- en Cultuurwetenschappen} (Maastricht 2014) 9.
\textsuperscript{75} Bovens, \textit{De Vierde Macht Revisited}, 9.
\textsuperscript{76} Malcom Payne, \textit{Modern Social Work Theory}, 4\textsuperscript{th} edition (Oxford 2016) 299-301; Efforts to include clients in the decision-making processes of social service organisations and DIVOSA have been made during the 1980s and 1990s. Real participation in the management, however, has never been realised. For an in-depth examination see: Leni Jansen, \textit{Met enige deelneming; een studie naar de ontwikkelingen in en de effecten van cliëntenparticipatie bij DIVOSA, Gemeentelijke Sociale Diensten en elders in de periode 1982-1990} (Amsterdam 1991).
\textsuperscript{78} Vlek, \textit{Inactieven in actie}, 358.
To come to a satisfactory understanding of how DIVOSA has sought to represent the interests of social assistance recipients during the 1980s and 1990s, an extensive examination has been made of primary source material stored in the organisational archives of DIVOSA. As the intention of the second research question is to understand what caused possible changes in the power of social forces upholding the social citizenship of social assistance recipients, the focus will be on the minutes of the Central Management and the daily management of DIVOSA. As the projects concerning client participation have already been studied in detail by Leni Jansen, they will not be discussed in this thesis.

Source material

The results presented in this thesis are based on a wide diversity of sources, each having its own weaknesses and strengths. In addition to secondary literature, the sources used for this thesis entail newspapers, public and private correspondence of DIVOSA, policy reports and annual reports of DIVOSA, different forms of research reports, minutes of internal and external meetings of DIVOSA, and one interview with a former employee of the association.

To examine the changing policy implementation by social service organisations over the years, the first chapter is largely based on a series of research reports. While these reports have all been published by well-informed researchers, it is important to note that the actors commissioning the research projects can have a significant influence on the eventual product. While the scientific integrity of the researchers does not have to be compromised, these actors do decide on the guiding research questions and might stimulate researchers to pay special attention to specific aspects. In the selection and usage of the research reports, such contextual factors have been assessed and anticipated when possible.

Another important source has been the correspondence of DIVOSA members had with representatives of the association of Dutch municipalities (Vereniging van Nederlandse Gemeenten or VNG) and governmental representatives. Although part of this correspondence was private, it is most likely most of the letters have been written with caution and with political aims. Therefore, it is highly important to identify the position and possible motives of the writer. Furthermore, it is important to identify the motives and possible agenda of the receiving party as this influences the content of the correspondence as well.

In the policy and annual reports of DIVOSA, which have been used extensively for the second chapter, the management of the association summarised what had been the most important developments

79 Jansen, *Met enige deelneming.*
of the past year and the achievements of the association. Also, an agenda was drawn up for the coming period. While providing a window into the considerations of the management, the annual reports also clearly illustrate how it tried to present itself to the world. Very often, the purpose of the organisation and the priorities for the coming period are identified. Important when reading annual reports, however, is to identify the blind spots, the themes and issues that are not mentioned. By examining other sources like correspondence and minutes of the board, it can be examined which topics are left out of the annual reports. Finding such incongruences often provides the most valuable insights.

Highly valuable sources have been the minutes of the meetings of the Central and Daily management and the minutes of the meetings representatives of DIVOSA had with other organisations. As these minutes provide insight into the salient issues and give a summary of the discussion on a topic, they are a particularly interesting source. What should be realised when examining minutes, is the possible bias or agenda of the writer. As he or she might have a personal opinion on matters, the minutes might be biased in favour of this opinion. Another important point, is the fact that often, all actors in a meeting have to agree on the content of the minutes. Such consensus can mean that conflicts or discussions are left out of the minutes or are nuanced. For this thesis I have had the big advantage to have interviewed the person responsible for writing almost all the minutes available in the archive. In our conversation we have also discussed whether the minutes are a reliable representation of reality.

This interview represents the last source type that needs to be discussed in this section. For this thesis, I have only conducted one interview with Gerard Galema, an employee of the central bureau of DIVOSA who has been present at most of the board meetings and meetings with VNG during the 1980s and 1990s to write the minutes. This interview was a highly valuable source as it provided me with the possibility to assess whether my estimations and assumptions were right. As Galema knew most of the chairs of the association and has witnessed the way the association changed over the years, he provided me with a lot of important insights. Although an interview is one of the most valuable source types, it also carries a risk. Respondents can be biased and have often been influenced by societal changes themselves. Because of his participation in DIVOSA throughout the entire period of this research project, it is very likely Galema identified with the narrative developed within DIVOSA to support the changing course of the association. Therefore, I have only used the interview to corroborate facts or developments that can be retraced in the other sources or as a means to illustrate certain lines of thought.

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80 Gerard Galema (Employee of the central bureau of DIVOSA between 1978 and 2014), interview by the author (11 April 2017)
Chapter 1. The distribution of social rights

As was explained in the introduction, the observational and comparative studies of the 1980s and 1990s provide us with some valuable insights into the changing distribution of social rights by social service organisations. Despite their predominantly anecdotal nature, these reports contain valuable empirical data on the workings of agencies at specific moments in time. Also, there particular focus and research questions illustrate the dominant societal issues of the time. Considering the fragmented nature of the reports, this chapter examines them in chronological order. As parameters to assess the ways in which the distribution of social rights has changed over the years, the five functions of the social service organisation will be used. For each period discussed in this chapter, it will be examined how much attention, if any, was paid to the social, reintegration, inspection, guaranteed income, and administrative function by the social service agencies examined in the reports. In addition to summarizing the conclusions of the reports, the chapter will illustrate their societal context by using news articles and reports from journals. As today’s observations are often the result of yesterday’s context, the chapter opens with a short introduction on the 1970s.

During the decades examined in this thesis, the Netherlands counted between 400 and 600 municipal social service organisations, each with its own specific context, organisational culture, and methods. This diversity makes it virtually impossible to give an all-encompassing illustration of the changing proceedings of street-level officials. Therefore, this chapter does not pretend to provide such an account but will, however, illustrate how changes in the daily work of the average Dutch social service organisation affected the social citizenship of recipients of social assistance.

1.1. Providing services to autonomous clients

The professionalisation of the social service organisations

The conflict between the social function of the social service agency and its inspection tasks has been a constantly recurring issue in the history of the social service organisation. When the Abw was introduced in 1965, its social purpose was paramount and municipal authorities were provided with substantial freedom to work out their social responsibilities as they deemed fit. According to Terpstra, the average

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81 Boorsma et al., *Een activerende bijstand?*, 8.
82 Ibidem, 23.
83 Ibidem, 13-14.
social service organisation was relatively small, hierarchically structured, and often embedded within local society until the beginning of the 1970s. Although municipal authorities received broad discretion in formulating their own policies, the street-level officials of the social service agency received little decision-making powers. Decisions on the allocation of benefits were mostly made at the top of the organisation and were often concluded in accordance with the mayor and church authorities. As a result, the personal preferences of the director had a significant influence on the allocation of benefits and decisions were often based on the local reputation of applicants. While street-level officials had little discretion, they were able to visit recipients on a regular basis and often had a personal relationship with them due to the small number of recipients and informal procedures.\textsuperscript{84}

During the 1970s, this traditional charity-based welfare system gradually transformed into a modernised rights-based system with universal arrangements. Officials were instructed to treat recipients in a non-patronising and non-stigmatising manner and within social service organisations procedures were increasingly standardised to rule out arbitrariness.\textsuperscript{85} In 1974, a generally applicable formulation had been introduced for the ‘necessary costs of life’. Furthermore, the minimum amount of social assistance benefits was linked to the minimum wage.\textsuperscript{86} According to Terpstra, the conviction gradually got hold within social service organisations that the individualisation-principle, intended to provide adequate assistance fitting the needs of each individual recipient, actually paved the way for inequity and unequal treatment. Therefore, officials should no longer interfere with the personal life of recipients. Instead, they were to focus on ensuring the rights of citizens. Historians Ellie Smolenaars and Marjan Beijering describe how these citizens were now increasingly referred to as ‘clients’, who had a formal relationship with a service-providing organisation.\textsuperscript{87}

The transition from assisting needy citizens towards providing client-oriented services, entailed a shifting emphasis from the social towards the guaranteed income function. This change was stimulated by the increase of higher educated social workers and legally trained officials within social service organisations, who often lacked a personal relationship with recipients. The change towards such a passive ‘service providing’ approach led to a growing neglect of the inspection and reintegration function. Even the social function was increasingly compromised, as it was perceived to be in conflict with the self-
determination, privacy, and autonomy of citizens.\textsuperscript{88} This reticence was compensated to some extent, however, by a growing attention for psycho-social support.

With regard to officials’ job description, the professionalisation of the 1970s led to a clearer division of tasks within social service organisations. The backbone of the social service organisation was the social assistance social worker (\textit{Bijstandsmaatschappelijk werker} or BMW).\textsuperscript{89} BMW’s acted as contact officials and were responsible for gathering necessary information to assess the eligibility of applicants. They also had to notice additional needs of clients, like the need for debt counselling or additional forms of assistance. Whereas BMW’s actually had direct contact with clients, final decisions on eligibility for social assistance were made by so-called decisional officials (\textit{Beslissingsambtenaren}). For their assessment, these officials relied predominantly on the data provided by BMW’s. The first municipal inspection officials, often defined as social detectives (sociale resercheurs) were also assigned during these years.\textsuperscript{90} However, following the societal aversion against the inspection of citizens, they lacked the means to effectively investigate the eligibility of recipients. Their appointment was also often resisted by other officials who feared they had to become the enemies of their clients.\textsuperscript{91}

1.2. 1982 – 1989: ‘Benefit factories’

The minimum job description

During the second half of the 1970s, much like the rest of the world, the Dutch economy was confronted with a severe crisis, causing the number of social assistance recipients to increase dramatically. This crisis was worsened by the second oil crisis which hit the country in 1979. While previously, divorced single parents formed the bulk of the social assistance population, the protracted economic downturn added a growing number of long-term unemployed who had exhausted their right to unemployment benefits, elderly unemployed, and young people who entered the provision immediately after graduating from school.\textsuperscript{92} Despite the rising numbers of structurally inactive citizens, their inability to find employment was

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{88} Terpstra, \textit{Bijstandsмораal in beweging}, 304; Smolenaars and Beijering, \textit{Gevaarlijk & Talentvol}, 47.
  \item \textsuperscript{90} It is important to note that the illustrated division of labour differed by social service agency. Especially between small towns and the larger cities, large difference existed in the way the organisations were structured.
  \item \textsuperscript{91} ‘Protest personeel sociale diensten’, \textit{De Telegraaf}, 10 November 1980.
\end{itemize}
widely recognised. Therefore, many of them were exempted from the obligation to find employment. For these recipients, the social service agency predominantly functioned as a ‘benefit factory’, whose sole function was to provide them with their entitled income.\textsuperscript{93}

The rising number of applications led to a substantially increased workload within social service organisations and most of them had expand their staff significantly.\textsuperscript{94} Hiring additional staff, however, was also stimulated by the extension of the job description of social service organisations. At the end of the 1970s, the Ministry of Culture, Recreation, and Societal Work (CRM) together with the association of municipalities (VNG) and DIVOSA accepted a ‘minimum job description’ for social service organisations, derived from a series of research reports by the University of Tilburg (the so-called IVA-reports).\textsuperscript{95} Based on the recommendations of these reports – which were presented before the full effect of the crises became evident – it was decided social service organisations should not only focus on their guaranteed income function. Instead, they had to look after their clients and assess whether clients were dealing with psycho-social issues. They also had to inform other welfare organisations, gather information on the situation of disadvantaged societal groups, and had to stimulate or initiate projects aimed at improving this situation.\textsuperscript{96} Compared to the core functions of the social service organisation as defined in the introduction, it is striking to see that the inspection and reintegration function were completely left out of the minimum job description. Formally, at the beginning of the 1980s, providing high-standard services to citizens was still paramount.

\textbf{One organisational goal}

Notwithstanding the lack of attention for the inspection and reintegration function, social service organisations were still struggling even to meet their minimum job description. While mainly caused by the growing number of applications, this inability was exacerbated by the cuts implemented in the budgets of agencies.\textsuperscript{97} According to a 1981 evaluative report, studying the implementation of the job description, most organisations encountered a serious lack of (well-educated) personnel. This especially applied to larger municipalities with more than 100.000 inhabitants, which were responsible for more than half of the country’s client population. Another explanation for the inability to meet the official requirements was the

\textsuperscript{93} Smolenaars and Beijering, \textit{Gevaarlijk & Talentvol}, 49-50; Terpstra, \textit{Bijstandsmoraal in beweging}, 85.
\textsuperscript{94} Andriessen, Kraaijmes, and Bekkers, \textit{Vervolgonderzoek gemeentelijke sociale diensten}, 161.
\textsuperscript{95} K. Asselberghs et al., \textit{Gemeentelijke sociale diensten: omgeving en werkwijze. Vergelijking van de werkwijze van drie noordelijke sociale diensten} (Groningen 1988) 19-20.
\textsuperscript{96} Directie Bijstandszaaken, \textit{Ontwikkelingen rondom de gemeentelijke sociale dienstverlening} (The Hague 1981) 7.
\textsuperscript{97} Asselberghs et al., \textit{Gemeentelijke sociale diensten}, 21.
increasing complexity of national social assistance legislation. According to one of the authors of the evaluation, this intricacy as well as the growing diversity among clients limited the ability of social service agencies to be closely involved with every recipient.

The issues distinguished in the evaluative report were confirmed in a 1982 follow-up report, comparing the implementation process within six social service organisations. However, some additional shortcomings were observed in the daily functioning of officials. Especially the functioning of BMW’s and their communication seemed to be inadequate:

Organisationally speaking, it is striking to see that in a lot of cases BMW’s are operating in an individualistic fashion. The provided professional autonomy (within legal boundaries) has spread to the individual level (instead of the team-level), [...]. Mutual professional control through substantive professional counselling and case consultations is usually limited to organisational matters. As a result, the control on the functioning [of BMW’s] is primarily of a quantitative and legalistic nature.

The report also concluded there was ‘little performance’ with regard to gathering information on clients to implement the social function. A more positive conclusion, was that an increasing number of social service organisations were increasingly emphasizing their reintegration function. While absent in the minimum job description, several organisations were setting up projects for younger unemployed and activities stimulating the personal development of clients. However, these projects were mainly interpreted as part of the social function as a distinct reintegration function was not yet recognised.

The follow-up report of 1982 was presented while the economic crisis reached its high point and street-level officials had to focus all their energy on the flow of incoming applications. The involved social function envisioned at the end of the seventies was increasingly superseded by a bureaucratic style of work that revolved around the administrative and guaranteed income function. Recipients’ personal issues, like housing problems and mounting debts or the living conditions of children and the increasing social isolation of some recipients, were largely omitted.

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98 Ibidem, 8-9.
100 Andriessen, Kraaijmes, and Bekkers, Vervolgonderzoek gemeentelijke sociale diensten, 165.
101 Ibidem.
102 Ibidem, 166.
103 Asselberghs et al., Gemeentelijke sociale diensten, 21.
In a 1985 research report, for which officials of 40 social service organisations were interviewed, most correspondents lamented their high work load. Of the BMW’s, 70 percent complained about their high work pressure, while 60 percent of the administrative officials experienced a severe lack of time.\textsuperscript{105} The correspondents also raised awareness for lacking administrative resources (39 percent), leading to an excess of manual labour and a growing pressure on the administrative and guaranteed income function. Furthermore, a significant number of officials – especially BMW’s – complained they did not have the necessary experience to fulfil their job description. As a result of all these issues, the number of emergency procedures to repair mistakes in the implementation process had grown significantly.\textsuperscript{106}

According to Terpstra, the pressure to process all incoming applications had risen to such an extent, that BMW’s were often forbidden to visit clients at home. In 1985, a BMW explained he never visited clients anymore as the time he invested in clients had to be compensated by his colleagues. In his eyes, the social service organisation no longer was a ‘social’ service but had instead turned into a benefit factory.\textsuperscript{107} Terpstra confirms this development. Social service organisations invested all their energy in one central organisational goal: ‘production’.\textsuperscript{108} To ensure a high production, standardised application forms were introduced and norms were set prescribing the time officials were allowed to spend on processing applications and re-examining granted applications. Following the increasing workload, the discretion of officials was severely limited.\textsuperscript{109}

While one would expect the work of the social service agency to become relatively one-sided as a result of the focus on the guaranteed income function, the flow of new regulations and adjustments of policy implemented by national policymakers increasingly complicated the daily implementation of policies. The most controversial and complicated measure was the home sharers-norm introduced in 1985. Intended to make a significant cut in welfare expanses, the home sharers-norm dictated the benefits of recipients sharing a home were to be substantially lowered as they shared parts of their housing costs. While presented as a smart and justifiable measure, the norm presented officials with a major challenge as all recipients now had to be checked on their living situation. A reporter of Elsevier noted how ‘changes in

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{1} Dutch Social Assistance, 90; Arjen Edzes, \textit{Werk en bijstand. Arbeidsmarktstrategieën van gemeenten} (Maastricht 2010) 93.
\bibitem{2} KMG, GSD-en vergelijkenderwijs, 42.
\bibitem{3} Ibidem, 41-50.
\bibitem{5} Terpstra, \textit{Bijstandsmoraal in beweging}, 85.
\end{thebibliography}
provisions and the amount of benefits [were] heaping up’. ‘The busybodies from the Hague’ did not seem to take any account of the ‘actual feasibility of policies, the rapid expansion of inspection tasks, and administrative hassle’ within social service organisations.\textsuperscript{110} As a director of a social service organisation concluded, the government threw ‘a new pile of sand into the gears of the social service organisation’ with the introduction of the home sharers-norm.\textsuperscript{111}

In addition to administrative objections, a large number of street-level officials was fundamentally opposed to inspecting recipients on their living situation. While some officials simply decided to resign because of their new inspection tasks,\textsuperscript{112} others petitioned the government to allow for conscientious objectors.\textsuperscript{113} While the norm also led to outright political protests and strikes (See chapter 2.2), most officials resisted the norm by thwarting the implementation process. Newspapers started reporting on officials directing their clients to protest organisations or so-called ‘evasion markets’, where clients received instructions on possible ways to evade the norm.\textsuperscript{114}

Other officials started giving ‘full information’ to their clients by pointing out in detail how the norm could be avoided.\textsuperscript{115} Some agencies even distributed leaflets containing all sorts of tips on ‘possible evasion opportunities’ at their counter.\textsuperscript{116} In an interview, an official in The Hague openly explained how he advised clients to just put a disconnected sink somewhere in their room to avoid the norm, as according to him ‘nowhere in the law does it say the thing actually has to work’.\textsuperscript{117}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{111} Wim Brummelman, ‘Kijk hoe de duiven in haviken zijn veranderd’, \textit{Elsevier}, 23 June 1984.
\item \textsuperscript{112} Lok, ‘Ambtenaren sociale dienst in gewetensnood’.
\item \textsuperscript{114} ‘Protest ambtenaren sociale dienst tegen woningdeldersregeling’, \textit{Leidsch Dagblad}, 22 May 1985.
\item \textsuperscript{115} ‘Ontduikingstips voordeurdelers vaak frauduleus’, \textit{NRC Handelsblad}, 7 May 1985.
\item \textsuperscript{116} Brummelman and Goosen, ‘De sociale chaos’.
\item \textsuperscript{117} Marcella van der Wiel, ‘Ambtenaren wijzen voordeurdelers op achterdeurtjes, “We kunnen mensen met uitkering niet nog méér afpakken”’, \textit{De Telegraaf}, 2 May 1985.
\end{itemize}
Despite the broad societal resistance to the governmental approach of social assistance, during the second half of the 1980s, the focus of social service agencies gradually began to change.\textsuperscript{118} This change was stimulated by the increasing influence of state consultants (Rijksconsulenten), ministerial agents inspecting social service agencies on their compliance with national legislation. In 1982, special state consultants had been introduced by state secretary De Graaf for social assistance legislation. Especially after the home sharers-norm had been introduced in 1985, these consultants travelled the country to inspect and sanction social service agencies if their implementation of policy was considered deficient.\textsuperscript{119} In 1985, twelve municipalities were sanctioned on their failing implementation process.\textsuperscript{120} The following years, state secretary De Graaf continuously pushed his state consultants to be extra tough on lenient social service agencies.\textsuperscript{121}

The number of social assistance recipients nevertheless continued to rise and production remained paramount during the second half of 1980s. Over the years, however, social service organisations gradually began to reemphasize their core functions. Initiated by government, reorientation interviews were introduced and services like debt counselling were reinstated.\textsuperscript{122} In 1989, job pools were introduced, which were intended to provide unemployed workers with the possibility to gain work experience within public organisations. In 1991, the JWG took effect (See introduction), ensuring every young person under the age of 23 a temporary part-time job or training place.\textsuperscript{123}

Despite the changed vocabulary and the renewed attention for the ‘outflow-side’ of social assistance, Terpstra does note, however, that the actual focus of the social service organisations remained unchanged. Street-level officials were still predominantly focusing on their strict production- and efficiency norms.\textsuperscript{124} While this emphasis seemed to follow predominantly from the rising number of clients, it also seemed to follow from the growing dominance of a new rationale within public organisations, dubbed ‘new managerialism’. This rationale, in turn, was introduced by a category of officials previously unknown to social service agencies: managers. One of the core tenets of new managerialism was to manage public organisations like any other market organisation. According to Terpstra and Havinga, a new jargon,

\begin{itemize}
  \item Smolenaars and Beijering, Gevaarlijk & Talentvol, 52-53; Asselberghs et al., Gemeentelijke sociale diensten, 21,
  \item Toirkens, ‘De Graaf: voordeurregeling uitvoeren’.
  \item “Strafkorting” voor twaalf gemeenten, NRC Handelsblad, 14 August 1985.
  \item ‘Harde aanpak gemeenten die fraude soepel benaderen’, Nederlands dagblad: gereformeerd dagblad, 12 April 1989.
  \item Terpstra, Bijstandsmoraal in beweging, 86.
  \item Smolenaars and Beijering, Gevaarlijk & Talentvol, 52-53; Van Gerven, ‘Activating social policy and the preventive approach for the unemployed in the Netherlands’, 18.
  \item Terpstra, Bijstandsmoraal in beweging, 86-87.
\end{itemize}
comprising of words like ‘incentive structure’, ‘business plan’, ‘market’, and defining benefits as ‘products’ began to permeate social service agencies during the second half of the 1980s. This jargon would become even more dominant during the 1990s with the transition towards activation and conditional rights. Following the new managerialist rationale, efficiency and the reduction of the financial costs involved with providing social assistance were at the centre of attention. The reduction of the autonomy and discretion of street-level officials that could be observed within social service organisations during the 1980s, was also in line with the new managerialist rationale. The previously large discretion was – not always ill-founded – considered to be unproductive and harming of the organisational efficiency.125

For most of the 1980s, social service organisations were struggling even to fulfil their guaranteed income function. Although this lack of time and resources could have had serious consequences for the social citizenship of recipients and applicants for assistance, officials were often willing to bend the implementation process to help their clients. As social scientists Asselberghs et al. observed in 1988, social service organisations still sought to use ‘the narrow margins of the social assistance act’ in favour of recipients.126 It is impossible, however, to clearly assess whether the treatment of every individual client occurred in compliance with his or her social rights. Nevertheless, in the light of the overall lack of attention for both the inspection and reintegration function, and considering the urge of most BMW’s to invest most of their time in the social function, it seems safe to say that during the 1980s, the social citizenship of recipients’ was safeguarded by the social arrangements distributing their social rights.

1.3. 1990 – 1995: The moral panic

During the early nineties, several research projects and news reports were published that discussed the failing implementation process within social service organisations. Among the first was the 1990 book by sociologist Godfried Engbersen in which he provided an account of the proceedings within a social service agency in Rotterdam.127 Bearing the telling title Public Social Assistance Secrets (Publieke Bijstandsgeheimen), the report described how officials actively went against applicable social assistance regulations. Instead of applying the rules, officials pragmatically negotiated with clients about their

125 Van der Aa, Activeringswerk in uitvoering, 28; Terpstra and Havinga, ‘Implementation Between Tradition and Management’, 110.
126 Asselberghs et al., Gemeentelijke sociale diensten, 21.
127 Engbersen, Publieke Bijstandsgeheimen.
obligations. With regard to the reintegration function, Engbersen observed how the efforts made to reintegrate recipients were mainly dedicated to recipients with some prospects on the labour market. The ‘hopeless cases’ were still largely left alone. This selectivity of officials followed from a variety of reasons, like struggling with an excessive case load, freely interpreting an ambiguous ruleset, using their relatively large discretion, or simply preferring working with motivated clients over having to deal with obstinate ones. In the eyes of Engbersen, the inspection function was the most neglected. Following his observations, he drew the conclusion that officials of the agency operated within a ‘bureaucratic reality’. The process of inspection, mainly consisted of a ten-minute biannual audit which merely entailed a screening of several documents. Any serious investigations or home visits were omitted.

The persistent lack of attention for the reintegration and inspection function was confirmed by a growing number of news releases. In 1990, for example, it turned out 86,000 people receiving a benefit were not registered as unemployed at the Central Bureau for Statistics (CBS). Although the director of the CBS did admit his estimations could be a little off, the numbers were ‘far too big to be explained by a statistical error’. In 1991, another research report was presented by state consultants (Rijksconsulenten). Entrusted with the task of auditing social service agencies, the governmental officials further substantiated the increasing rumours about the failing inspection policies. According to them, most municipal agencies failed to impose sanctions according to the existing national directives. Recipients obstinately refusing to show up at their reorientation interview, for example, often were not even sanctioned for their non-compliance.

When in 1992, the social service agency in Groningen published a research report on the extent of benefit fraud within its own municipality, the problems already exposed by Engbersen two years before, suddenly caused national uproar. According to the report, the home sharers-norm was highly sensitive to fraud as there were too many forms of cohabitation available to register. Couples were able to save large amounts of money if they were simply willing to lie about the nature of their relationship. Following the growing distress, in 1993 two research committees were instituted to investigate the implementation of social assistance policies: the so-called commission Van der Zwan, instituted by the Ministry of Social

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128 Ibidem, 240.
129 Ibidem, 238.
130 Ibidem, 174-175.
131 Annemieke Smit, ‘86.000 gevallen is geen statistische fout’, NRC Handelsblad, 8 February 1990.
Affairs, and the sub-commission Social Assistance or commission Doelman-Pel, which was commissioned by the lower house.\textsuperscript{134}

The so-called ‘moral panic’ mentioned in the introduction was predominantly caused by the report of the commission Van der Zwan. The conclusions of the commission were devastating.\textsuperscript{135} Based on observations within 28 social service organisations, the evaluation report castigated the agencies for their failing administrative organisation and overall lack of formal procedures.

The commission confirmed the observation of Engbersen that officials operated in a kind of bureaucratic reality. Most examined organisations used a counter or consultation room-model in which the decision-making process relied entirely on contact officials (the previous BMW’s). These officials met with clients, inspected provided documents, and advised on the approval or continuation of the benefit. The advisory report provided by contact officials often was the only document on which decisional officials based their eventual approval or rejection of an application. Very often, decisional officials did not even bother to look at the original documents provided by applicants.\textsuperscript{136}

In addition to failing processes, the inspection function of social service organisations was largely based on informal agreements. Most organisations did not have clear inspection procedures or sanction policies. As a result, the commission reported that 36 percent of the agencies did not know the actual income of their recipients, 66 percent never visited applicants at home, and 11 percent even performed their biannual re-examinations without actually seeing their clients.\textsuperscript{137} As the majority of procedures within the agencies did not meet formal legislative requirements, the commission concluded that ‘the norm was lost’. A huge gap existed between legislative intent and reality. The implementation process of social assistance was considered to be ‘out of control’.\textsuperscript{138} In an interview discussing his conclusions, Van der Zwan explicitly emphasised the responsibility of officials for the current situation as he did not only blame recipients

But the officials of the social service agency as well. A client knows exactly that the social service organisation not only lacks information on his situation but also the policies to inspect the files

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\begin{small}
\textsuperscript{134} ‘Tweede kamer; Doelman-Pel (CDA) leidt kameronderzoek bijstandsfraude’, \textit{Algemeen Nederlands Persbureau}, 24 March 1993.

\textsuperscript{135} Engbersen, \textit{Fatale Remedies}, 142.

\textsuperscript{136} Onderzoekscommissie toepassing ABW, \textit{Het recht op bijstand}, 77.

\textsuperscript{137} Ibidem, 77-79.

\textsuperscript{138} Ibidem, 1.
\end{small}
\end{flushright}
actually provided. He or she also knows the contact officials are too lenient when assessing applications or when checking for changes in the circumstances of a client.  

The reports of the early 1990s, clearly show how most social service organisations still neglected both their inspection and reintegration function. According to Van der Veen, who interviewed local officials in a major city in 1990, the majority of frontline workers did indeed prefer their social tasks over the functions. Officials broadly agreed on trusting instead of mistrusting recipients.  

The public outcry over the extent of welfare fraud caused a change within social service organisations as they began to tighten their inspection procedures. Again, this change was enforced by the increasing activity of state consultants. Shortly after the two commissions presented their conclusions, the number of municipalities fined by consultants for their failing implementation doubled to a total of 66 in 1993. An example of the ways in which agencies sought to tighten their inspection was the increased effort to link information systems of social service organisations to the systems of other institutions as a means to check the data provided by clients. Another example is the introduction of the ‘squeaking system’. Following this system, officials put the payment of benefits on hold if they noted irregularities in the files of clients. The assumption of the system was that clients with a rightful claim to assistance would start ‘squeaking’ once they would notice their bank account remained empty. Naturally, frauds would refrain from such protests. Such reforms in the implementation process, however, had a major effect on the social citizenship of recipients.  

In addition to introducing new systems, agencies altered the supervision of their officials. Following the new managerialist rationale, officials were increasingly reviewed on their compliance with specific targets or performance indicators, stimulating them to boost the ‘outflow’ of clients. The staff of social service agencies changed as well. While during the 1980s, most employees had been trained at a social academy, the director of DIVOSA’s central bureau, P. Lemmen, observed in 1994 that the average director

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140 Van der Veen, De sociale grenzen van beleid, 35.  
of a social service agency now often had been an accountant or manager in the business sector. Contact officials were often only educated as administrative employees.\textsuperscript{144}

This had a significant impact on the sentiment within social service organisations. Following the reports of the early nineties, however, the mood among ‘older’ officials also began to change. In 1995, the director of the organisation in Rotterdam noted, for example, that the reports had prompted his organisation to be permeated by suspicion against clients. Increasingly, officials approached all clients as potential frauds.\textsuperscript{145} Following the commotion of the early nineties, social service agencies and their officials were set on restoring the public image of their profession. A telling example of this urge is a remark by an official in \textit{NRC Handelsblad} when the report of the commission Van der Zwan was mentioned: ‘We will no longer accept the reproach of being a bunch of losers who do nothing but wasting money. We are now on top of things, from the moment someone applies for a benefit. If only we have the smallest hunch something is not right, we alert the social detectives.’\textsuperscript{146}

This warning proved to be justified as newspapers began to report of a growing number of fraudsters getting caught by social detectives.\textsuperscript{147} Within a few years, the tight defensive line officials had been able to form through their influence on the implementation process began to disintegrate. As poverty researcher Oude Engberink observed in 1994, the citizenship of social assistance recipients was heavily pressured:

\begin{quote}
While the entire society is talking about active citizenship, recipients are deprived of theirs. Not only because benefits are too low to realize a decent citizenship but also because the personal life of recipients is increasingly intruded upon. This intrusion not only takes the form of checking their bank statements every year but social services also increasingly determine how recipients should live their lives: what education they should follow, what jobs they apply for, what volunteer work they should do. It is all in direct contradiction to the values that apply to the rest of society: personal responsibility, self-realisation, self-esteem.\textsuperscript{148}
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{144}{De Rijk, ‘Echt alleen het piepsysteem van de bijstandswet’}.
\footnotetext{145}{Huib Goudriaan, ‘De botte bijl van de bijstand’, \textit{Trouw}, 9 September, 1995.}
\footnotetext{146}{Lien Heyting, ‘Wie niet werkt zal weinig eten’, \textit{NRC Handelsblad. Zaterdags bijvoegsel}, 12 February 1994.}
\footnotetext{148}{De Rijk, ‘Echt alleen het piepsysteem van de bijstandswet’}.
\end{footnotes}
1.4. 1996 and after: ‘Customer consultants’ and ‘product mixes’

Realising the central objective: work

The ideology of ‘active citizenship’ lamented by Oude Engberink lied at the heart of the new social assistance act (nAbw) that was introduced in 1996. Driven by the conviction that not dependency but passivity was the biggest threat to the well-being of recipients, their activation and the utilisation of their talents was increasingly emphasised.\(^{149}\) The reintegration function thereby superseded the other two ‘core functions’.\(^{150}\) Simultaneously with the nAbw, social service agencies began to use a phase-system to ensure the efficient application of activation instruments. Based on their distance the labour market, recipients were categorised into one of the four phases; phase 1 being the most likely to reintegrate and phase 4 being incapable of finding a job. The phase 4 clients, however, were not to be left alone. As inactivity was considered to be unacceptable, new measures were introduced to effectuate the ‘social activation’ of these recipients. Agencies began to introduce premiums for phase 4 clients doing volunteer work or following a training.\(^{151}\) Social service agencies also received increased discretionary powers to activate recipients. The nAbw expanded the individualisation-principle, enabling agencies to lower or increase the amount of each benefit. As the previous Abw had been criticised for its rigidity, the new act allowed agencies to use the amount of the benefit as an instrument to encourage recipients to find employment. While the interfering elements in the work of social service agencies had been renounced for their paternalistic nature during the 1970s, with the introduction of the nAbw they were formally reinstated.

After the nAbw had been introduced, social service organisations increasingly emphasised their reintegration function. This was clearly illustrated in the 1999 evaluation report of the nAbw for which 50 agencies had been examined. In compliance with the act, none of the organisations formally relieved specific groups from the obligation to find employment anymore – with the exception of groups exempted by national legislation.\(^{152}\) All agencies had also formulated policies to actually guide recipients towards employment. With the nAbw, activation had not only become the main objective of the social service

\(^{149}\) Smolenaars and Beijering, *Gevaarlijk & Talentvol*, 55-58.

\(^{150}\) Bos, Crum and Van der Werf, *De hoofdfuncties van de Algemene bijstandswet*, 4.


\(^{152}\) Ibidem, iv.
agency, it was also regarded as the essence of the social function. A respondent of a social service agency noted that the social function now entailed ‘equipping people so that they could provide for themselves’.\(^\text{153}\)

In addition to activation and reintegration, the nAbw also resolved the lack of sanction policies. Every organisation examined in the 1999 evaluation report had formulated policies to sanction obstinate recipients.\(^\text{154}\) Formally, the act caused a shift in the organisational goals of social service organisations. Instead of a mere focus on the guaranteed income function and some additional attention to their social responsibilities, the inspection and reintegration function were now deemed equally, if not more, important.\(^\text{155}\) Four years after the nAbw had been introduced, a team chef of a local agency proudly stated that ‘the social service train’ now only had one direction: work.\(^\text{156}\)

For the officials of the social service organisation, the introduction of the nAbw meant a significant transformation of their professional context. As the act allowed municipalities to decide on the organisation of their own agencies, the organisational makeup of local agencies differed by municipality. According to Bos, Crum, and van der Werf, who studied the organisational makeup of 14 organisations in 1999, most agencies had instituted a distinct ‘intake department’, were contact officials handled new applications for assistance. In the organisation of the post-intake process, two different trends could however be observed. According to the first trend, contact officials (the former BMWs) were made responsibility for the social, reintegration, and inspection function. They were allowed to decide for each individual client which of the three functions should receive additional emphasis. If agencies had outsourced the activation of their clients to a commercial organisation, they also had responsibility for contact with the activation agency.

Instead of integrating the core functions, organisations following the second trend focused on separating them. For each of the functions, clients had to deal with a separate department of the organisation. The main argument in favour of separation was the increasingly specialised knowledge needed for the efficient implementation of policy (see table 1.2). A second reason, was to alleviate the tensions between the three functions as officials only had to concern themselves with one function.\(^\text{157}\) Reintegration officials, for example, no longer had to bother with the other issues of clients but could focus just getting their client to work.

\(^{153}\) Bos, Crum and Van der Werf, De hoofdfuncties van de Algemene bijstandswet, 4.

\(^{154}\) Engelen, Bunt and Samson, Activeringsinstrumenten in de bijstandswet, vii.

\(^{155}\) Ibidem, i.

\(^{156}\) Aukje van Roessel, ‘Sociale dienst is trein met één reisdoel: werk’, De Volkskrant, 7 October 2000.

\(^{157}\) Bos, Crum and Van der Werf, De hoofdfuncties van de Algemene bijstandswet, 9.
Table 1.2. The main activities of social services per client by core function after the introduction of the nAbw (1996)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social function</th>
<th>Reintegration function</th>
<th>Inspection function</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Provide individualized benefits</td>
<td>- Draft process plans</td>
<td>- Tighten inspection ‘at the gate’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Implement the municipal supplement and discount policy</td>
<td>- Impose or exempt from labour obligations</td>
<td>- Tighten inspection and re-examination processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Implement social activation policies (phase 4)</td>
<td>- Define ‘suitable work’</td>
<td>- Impose sanctions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Provide additional assistance</td>
<td>- Implement the municipal incentive policy</td>
<td>- Stricter recovery of benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Impose sanctions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Cooperate with reintegration agencies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Customer consultants

For officials, their organisational context was not the only aspect that changed as the policy shift embodied in the nAbw also fundamentally changed their job description. While most officials were specialised in legal affairs or administrative tasks, they were now expected to take on the inspection and reintegration function as well. Instead of administrators, they were to become ‘coaches’ or ‘consultants’, who would guide their ‘customers’ towards employment by offering them the right ‘product mix’.\(^{158}\) This product mix would be summarised in an individual process plan, stipulating the intended trajectory of recipients towards integration.\(^{159}\)

As each municipal agency was allowed to formulate its own policies within the legislative framework, job descriptions of officials and their amount of discretion varied widely by municipality. A 1999 research report noted how two thirds of the examined organisations had formulated formal directives instructing officials when to exempt recipients from the labour obligation. The other organisations, however, allowed officials to decide at their own discretion.\(^{160}\) Bos, Crum, and van der Werf in contrast, noted that 13 of the 14 agencies they examined allowed for a relatively large discretion at street level as

\(^{158}\) See for example: Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, De gemeente als klantmanager. Handleiding voor gemeenten die op zoek zijn naar een passende vorm van klantmanagement (The Hague 2002).

\(^{159}\) Engelen, Bunt and Samson, Activeringsinstrumenten in de bijstandswet, vi.

\(^{160}\) Ibidem, iv.
the management wanted to encourage their contact officials, now dubbed ‘consultants’, to utilize their discretion.\textsuperscript{161}

Shortly after the nAbw had been introduced, it turned out larger discretionary powers were increasingly needed. From 1996 onwards, the number of social assistance recipients began to decline at an unprecedented pace. Although the new activation measures and the subsidised jobs contributed to this decline, according to organisational sociologist Arjen Edzes, it was mainly caused by the economic boom of the late nineties.\textsuperscript{162} The economy even improved to such an extent that the number of available job openings began to exceed the number of social assistance recipients. However, a large group of citizens remained dependent on the provision. According to Bos, Crum, and van der Werf, about half of this remaining population existed of phase 4 clients and often struggled with multiple problems that required different forms of assistance.\textsuperscript{163}

\textbf{Constantly behind}

Despite the organisational transformation, newly devised policies, and the rapid decline in the number of recipients, the street-level implementation of the social assistance act still did not fit seamlessly with its legislative intent. The evaluation report of the new act reported that 42 percent of all clients was formally exempted from his or her labour obligations (see table 1.3) and 25 percent was de facto exempted as they had not been re-examined in time.\textsuperscript{164} Although most organisations had been positive about the effects of the individual process plans, only 40 percent of the 2000 examined dossiers mentioned some form of plan. Moreover, the clients most in need of such a plan, the phase 4 clients, were mostly left aside as most plans focused on the second and third phase.\textsuperscript{165} The premiums and incentives available for the ‘social activation’ of phase 4 clients were hardly ever used.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{161} Bos, Crum and Van der Werf, \textit{De hoofdfuncties van de Algemene bijstandswet}, 12-13.
\textsuperscript{162} Edzes, \textit{Werk en bijstand}, 202.
\textsuperscript{163} Bos, Crum and Van der Werf, \textit{De hoofdfuncties van de Algemene bijstandswet}, 10-11.
\textsuperscript{164} Engelen, Bunt and Samson, \textit{Activeringsinstrumenten in de bijstandswet}, v.
\textsuperscript{165} Engelen, Bunt and Samson, \textit{Activeringsinstrumenten in de bijstandswet}, vi.
\end{flushright}
Table 1.3. Percentage of clients having labour obligations, formal exemptions, and de facto exemptions (1999)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Labour obligations</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active labour obligation</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal full exemption</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De facto exemption</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status unknown</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Just as in the 1980s, the main explanation for the failing implementation was the work pressure. While the nAbw had added a large number of responsibilities to the daily work of officials, the budgets of their organisations had been cut. Right after the nAbw took force it turned out numerous social service organisations were struggling with their new tasks.\(^{166}\) Especially new inspection policies caused a sharp increase in the work pressure of the average official. In 1997, a news reporter witnessed how contact officials had to deal with 15 recipients an hour. According to the reporter, within this particular organisation about half of the street-level staff had been on sick-leave following the introduction of the new act.\(^{167}\) Similar observations were made within other organisations throughout the country.\(^{168}\) While the nAbw had been introduced to simplify the implementation process, it seemed to have mainly complicated matters. A contact official who had experienced working within eight different organisations described a similar situation within each one of them:

> You’re constantly behind, while also constantly trying to be constructive and helpful. The outflow side, the work of guiding people towards employment, is mostly omitted. That is a total sham. There simply isn’t any time. A process plan requires about 70 hours from intake to discharge. You never have that time available. It’s all about marginal efficiency.\(^{169}\)

\(^{166}\) Peter van den Berg, ‘Prikkelende bijstand: werken of verhuizen’, *De Volkskrant*, 25 May 1996.
\(^{167}\) Peter van den Berg, ‘Poortwachters van de bijstand’, *De Volkskrant*, 15 February 1997.
\(^{169}\) Van den Berg, ‘Poortwachters van de bijstand’.
The high work pressure was exacerbated by mounting problems with the computers systems of social service agencies. During the early 1990s, municipalities had invested heavily in the development of new systems to simplify the administrative process of social service agencies. It turned out in 1996, however, these systems often only detracted from the work of officials. In an interview, P. Lemmen, director of DIVOSA’s central bureau, noted that 43 percent of all social service agencies had initiated emergency procedures as a result of automation issues. Some agencies were even paying benefits in cash again.170

The effects of the nAbw on the distribution of social rights was severe. Shortly after the act was introduced, awareness was raised for the widely divergent policy implementation by municipality. The most striking effect was the increasing divergence between municipalities in the amount of the benefits. While the act prescribed clear norms to define the amount, newspapers began to report on recipients moving between municipalities to get a higher benefit – so-called ‘social assistance-hopping’. Stories were even published on people living only a few kilometres apart in similar circumstances, but with benefits that differed by 190 guilders a month.171

The strictness of inspection policies also differed significantly by municipality. While the 1999 evaluation report noted that formally, all organisations used a sanction policy, it observed large differences in the extent to which sanctions were actually imposed. While some organisations had only imposed sanctions on 4 percent of their recipients, others sanctioned 22 percent.172 Reviewing the implementation process of the nAbw, three years after it had been introduced, the evaluation report concluded most municipalities were still in a transitional phase.173 As a result, however, the social citizenship of the average recipient seemed to be widely divergent by municipality.

Chapter 2. The upholding of social rights

The previous chapter illustrated how social service organisations shaped the social citizenship of their clients through their direct influence on the distribution of social rights. Despite this influence, officials of social service organisations were still obligated to implement the policies prescribed to them from the

172 Engelen, Bunt and Samson, Activeringsinstrumenten in de bijstandswet, 48.
173 Ibidem, xiii.
2.1. DIVOSA, organisation and functions

The association of Directors of Governmental Bodies for Social Labour (Vereeniging van Directeuren voor Sociale Arbeid or DIVOSA) was founded in 1934 with the goal of supporting members of the association in political level, whether they agreed with them or not. Nevertheless, social service agencies did have some means to influence the policymaking process. Especially the association of directors of social service organisations, DIVOSA, had a position in the political domain that enabled social service agencies to act as a social force. This chapter will therefore examine how Dutch social service organisations, united in DIVOSA, have represented the interests of social assistance recipients between 1982 and 1998.

As was explained in the introduction, DIVOSA was the prime representative of social assistance recipients during these years. Following from this position, the association would act as an advocate of recipient’s interests. However, the extent to which DIVOSA was willing or able to take this position as a social force upholding the social citizenship of recipients differed significantly throughout the sixteen years examined in this thesis. To come to a good understanding of the motivations behind the public and political interference of DIVOSA, this chapter will illustrate how the association developed as an organisation throughout the 1980s and 1990s and how it sought to obtain its place in the public domain and the policymaking process.

While DIVOSA sometimes acted as an advocate of recipients, its main task was the representation of its members, the social service agencies. However, also in its representation of the agencies the association could still act as a social force for recipients. In consultations with policymakers or in its communications with the members, the DIVOSA management could emphasise functions that favoured recipients, like the social function, while omitting other functions, like the inspection of reintegration function. This chapter will therefore also examine, how – if at all – DIVOSA dealt with the functions of the social service organisation as described in the introduction. The chapter has been divided into several subheadings based on specific periods in the history of the association. Each of these headings will discuss particular political developments during that time, the general course of the association, and the ways in which DIVOSA represented the interests of recipients. Additionally, each subheading will examine how DIVOSA approached the functions of the social service organisation. However, as throughout the timeframe of this thesis, the association has been involved with a large number of issues, not all issues can be discussed in detail. Before delving into the story of DIVOSA during the 1980s and 1990s, the character and organisational makeup of the association will first be discussed.
their effort to provide income, labour, and care to disadvantaged members of society. While initially established as a private affair, over the years the association developed into a full-fledged subsidised ‘semi-governmental’ representative body for its membership, which mainly consisted of directors of social service organisations.174 DIVOSA was not the only municipal association. As an association for civil servants, it had to operate alongside the association of Dutch municipalities, the VNG, which represented municipal policymakers. According to Gerard Galema, a former employee of DIVOSA who took the minutes of most deliberations with the VNG during the 1980s and 1990s, the relation between DIVOSA and the VNG was always tense:

Essentially, it has always been a continuous battle between DIVOSA and the VNG. The VNG sees itself as the representative of all municipalities and therefore also of municipal officials. They did not like it all that a club like DIVOSA had to give its opinion on everything.175

In a 1984 article, social scientist Leni Jansen also defined the relation between the VNG and DIVOSA as a love-hate relationship as the VNG did not recognize the important role of DIVOSA as governmental advisor.176

Despite the continuous tension between the two associations, both of them still had to work together to ensure a proper implementation of policy at the municipal level. To keep the peace, they traditionally followed the (informal) agreement that the VNG would mainly concern itself with issues related to policymaking, while DIVOSA would limit itself to the implementation part.177 Nevertheless, the friction between the two associations has always been present. As Galema explained: ‘When voicing your opinion on the implementation of social security policies, oftentimes, you are likely to say things that touch upon the field of policymaking.’178

175 Gerard Galema (Employee of the central bureau of DIVOSA between 1978 and 2014), interview by the author (11 April 2017).
178 Gerard Galema (Employee of the central bureau of DIVOSA between 1978 and 2014), interview by the author (11 April 2017).
Organisationally, DIVOSA was set up along two lines, a geographical line and a functional line. Geographically, a large number of local groups, so-called ‘circles’, together constituted the provincial departments of DIVOSA. Each of the provincial departments (eleven in 1992) delegated a member to the Central Management. This management board was responsible for stipulating the general course of the association and consisted of the provincial delegates, a chair, a secretary, a treasurer, and four ‘quality seats’ representing social service organisations in small (less than 15,000 inhabitants) and large (more than 100,000 inhabitants) municipalities. The members of the Central Management also directed the daily management, which consisted of six members and was responsible for the everyday functioning of DIVOSA and coordinating the central commissions. The four central commissions formed the core of the association. They provided information and arguments to lobby policymakers with, had the ability to institute working groups that worked on specific sub-themes, and were allowed to inform or advice the members on certain policy matters. Communication with third parties, however, always ‘went through the sieve’ of the Central Management.\(^{179}\)

Important to keep in mind while reading this chapter, is the fact that the management boards, the commissions, the working groups, and the membership of the association predominantly existed of directors of social service organisations. Only the employees of the central bureau, who supported the association as a whole and filled the secretariats of the central commissions, were not necessarily active at the top of social service agencies. A second important aspect about DIVOSA as an organisation, was that it formed a collective body of individuals. As a result, the course of the association was heavily dependent on the motivations and goals of its members. According to the former central bureau director A.C. van Vliet, who wrote down his memories in 1992 of leading the central bureau for 25 years, this particularly applied to the chairman of the association. He or she was responsible for the formulation of long- and short-term policy and represented DIVOSA in the media. He also chaired the Central Management, the daily management, and the biannual Members’ Meeting. Lastly, he was responsible for the periodic contact with the VNG and the Directorate General of SZW. Following this leading position, the personal drive, motives, and worldview of the chair were of major influence on the course of the association.\(^{180}\) Another important factor was the time available to the chair. Up until 2002, the chair of the association still had to combine his or her function with the job of leading a social service organisation. According to Galema, the director


was often dependent on the goodwill of municipal policymakers for the time he or she was allowed to spend on representing the association.\footnote{Gerard Galema (Employee of the central bureau of DIVOSA between 1978 and 2014), interview by the author (11 April 2017)}

Table 2.1. List of DIVOSA chairs (1980-1999)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Chair</th>
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<th>Chair</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>O. Scheepbouwer</td>
<td>1993-1994</td>
<td>P. van Dijk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>W.F.S. Kolen</td>
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\section*{2.2. 1980 – 1984: The politicisation of DIVOSA}

Client centeredness and administrative responsibility

Just as local social service organisations changed in reaction to developments in society, DIVOSA had to adapt as well. When due to the rising unemployment during the 1970s, social service agencies began to assume a central position in Dutch society, accordingly, the association sought to enhance its public profile. Urged by the growing voice of both the clients and lower officials of social service organisations, DIVOSA increasingly entered the public debate.\footnote{Jansen, ‘Balanceren tussen rentmeesterschap en het primaat van de hulpvrager’, 37.} According to van Vliet, the director of DIVOSA’s central bureau, the appointment of a new chair in 1976 formed a turning point in this respect. From that moment on, the association started actively lobbying policymakers to improve the service provision to citizens. An example of such early lobbying activities is the resistance of DIVOSA against the intended disconnection of the minimum wage and benefit levels by the van Agt government.\footnote{DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Folder: DIVOSA Verenigingszaken, A.C. van Vliet, \textit{Van potlood tot PC-Netwerk. 25 Jaren Centraal Bureau DIVOSA} (Eindhoven 1992) 28-29.}

In addition to stepping up its lobbying activities, DIVOSA began to pursue a more independent course in relation to the VNG. Originally, in line with the informal agreement between the two associations, DIVOSA did not contact national policymakers directly. Instead, it only voiced its viewpoints through the VNG. However, the directors of social service organisations increasingly experienced their interests to not
always fit seamlessly with the aims of municipal policymakers. They therefore sought to more actively convey their own perspective on policy. Following this growing assertiveness, already in 1971, the two associations agreed DIVOSA would be allowed to publicly voice its distinct ‘executive perspective’. The VNG remained responsible for the ‘policy perspective’ and the associations agreed always to try to align their viewpoints as much as possible.\textsuperscript{184}

When in 1980, J. Boender was appointed as DIVOSA chair, the association stepped up its public activities. Under his ‘spontaneous and robust’ leadership,\textsuperscript{185} it was decided the course of the association should be determined by two guiding principles: client centeredness and administrative/political responsibility.\textsuperscript{186} This focus on the clients followed in part from the IVA-reports of the late 1970s (See chapter 1.2). Reflecting on the results of the reports, DIVOSA increasingly rethought its purpose as an association as well as the position social services organisations held in society. An important point of discussion was the question who were to be considered as clients; only people who received a benefit, or all the ‘minima’ in general?\textsuperscript{187} Under the chairmanship of Boender, DIVOSA clearly decided in favour of the second option as it increasingly began to stand up for all the minima (people living on a minimum income).

Although the advocacy of clients had not been endorsed yet, in 1981 the association proclaimed in a letter to SZW that it bore an important responsibility for the representation of its clients’ interests.\textsuperscript{188} Another example is the letter to future prime-minister Lubbers just after he won the elections of 1981: ‘In the interest of a rough 400.000 people relying on social assistance’, DIVOSA called on Lubbers and his colleague Jan de Koning to refrain from ‘a further attack on the social minima, which would mostly affect the weakest groups in society’.\textsuperscript{189}

According to Jansen, who wrote a short article on the history of DIVOSA in 1984, during the early 1980s, more and more directors of social service organisations felt they could no longer match their social function with governmental policies. Jansen witnessed how ‘A growing resentment against the

\textsuperscript{184} DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Folder: Overleg Divosa/VNG 1982-1994, No. 710509, Relatie VNG/Divosa, June 1971; Gerard Galema (Employee of the central bureau of DIVOSA between 1978 and 2014), interview by the author (11 April 2017)
\textsuperscript{186} DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Annual report 1980 (August 1981) 10; DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Folder: DIVOSA Najaars-ledenverg., No. 1-95, Verslag van de najaarsledenvergadering van D.I.V.O.S.A., 20 November 1980.
\textsuperscript{187} DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Annual report 1980 (August 1981) 10.
\textsuperscript{188} DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Folder: Divosa_reacties, 1979-1996. No. 810999, Staatssecretaris SZ: reorganisatie sociale zekerheid, 1 September 1981.
\textsuperscript{189} DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Folder: Divosa_reacties, 1979-1996, No. 810879, Informateur: aantasting sociale minima, 30 June 1981.
bureaucratic mania and governmental austerity measures is showing ever more clearly within the association.\textsuperscript{190} The bureaucratic mania and the governmental austerity measures were clear references to the economic reform agenda of the CDA-VVD government that had taken office in 1982 (See introduction).

The increasing politicisation of DIVOSA as a reaction to the austere political environment can be retraced in the letters it sent to parliament and the ministry. All letters demonstrate how serious the association took its self-ordained advocacy of social assistance recipients and the minima, as the majority of letters contained some form of protest against the governmental austerity agenda. DIVOSA resisted the lowering of the yearly benefit raise,\textsuperscript{191} protested against the freezing of the minimum wage and the cancelation of the indexation,\textsuperscript{192} castigated the ‘completely arbitrary’ measure to deny unemployed young people a WWV-benefit (\textit{Wet Werkloosheidsvoorziening} or Unemployment Provision Act),\textsuperscript{193} protested against a new mandatory personal contribution for elderly people living in nursing homes,\textsuperscript{194} and resisted a new personal contribution for legal counselling.\textsuperscript{195} In addition to the letters, meetings were organised with representatives of political parties. Consciously trying to represent the viewpoint of its clients, the Central Management pleaded the political representatives always to focus on improving the quality of the service provision to citizens.\textsuperscript{196}

\textsuperscript{190} Jansen, ‘Balanceren tussen rentmeesterschap en het primaat van de hulpvrager’, 36.
\textsuperscript{192} DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Folder: Divosa_reacties, 1979-1996. No. 821335, Minister SZW: bevriezing minimumloon en uitkeringen, 30 november 1982; DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Annual report 1982 (August 1983) 16-17.
\textsuperscript{193} The \textit{Wet Werkloosheidsvoorziening} or WWV was an unemployment benefit for people not meeting the requirements for the normal unemployment benefit, the WW. These people often were young people without a history of employment and self-employed people; DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Folder: Divosa_reacties, 1979-1996. No. 830211, Staatssecretaris SZW: WWV-uitkering 23-minners, 24 February, 1983
\textsuperscript{195} DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Folder: Divosa_reacties, 1979-1996. No. 830925, Minister SZW: wijziging wet rechtsbijstand, 2 September 1983.
The Scheepbouwer year

The potential influence the chair of DIVOSA could have on the association showed under the leadership of O. Scheepbouwer in 1984. Although some members already voiced their concerns about a too critical approach of governmental policies, the new chair was set on representing the interests of social assistance recipients more emphatically.¹⁹⁷ In a speech to his predecessor Boender at the 1983 Members’ Meeting, Scheepbouwer illustrated his vision on the course of DIVOSA:

In my opinion, DIVOSA should respond to present and future social developments and should devise a strategy for this response. In addition, the association should act as an advocate of benefit recipients, for which close relations are important with the aforementioned agencies [The VNG, national policymakers, the media, and members of parliament]. Perhaps, this requires a more political stance from our association, although no party politics. [...] I would like to emphasize however, that this is not a new vision. You [Boender] and your predecessor have already sown the seeds and many times there has been harvested; I merely use other fertilizers.¹⁹⁸

What these fertilizers consisted of became clear the following year. The number of letters sent out by DIVOSA rose quickly as the association increasingly voiced its criticism of governmental policies.

Although Scheepbouwer had assured the association would maintain its neutrality, the management did at times seem to prefer the advocacy of their clients’ interests over their responsibility for a well-running policy implementation process. When, for example, a member of the management inquired whether the ministry should be alerted about recurring signals about the circumvention of ministerial policies at the street level, the management concluded this was not a responsibility of DIVOSA. While the association consisted of civil servants whose prime responsibility was to ensure an effective implementation of policy, the DIVOSA management clearly did not consider this responsibility to be paramount.¹⁹⁹

The partiality of DIVOSA showed even more at a Central Management meeting that was also attended by the chair of the VNG as a joint response on the social security revision of De Graaf would be drafted. In

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¹⁹⁷ DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Folder: DIVOSA Najaars-ledenverg., No. 3-1367, Verslag van de najaarsledenvergadering van DIVOSA, 24 November 1983.
¹⁹⁸ DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Folder: DIVOSA Najaars-ledenverg., No. 3-1255, Concept-toespraak afscheid verenigingsvoorzitter.
preparation of the meeting, a draft response had been worked out calculation the effects of the revision on the minima. As it turned out, several management members objected to the calculations; not because they were wrong, but because they ‘were not in the interests of benefit recipients’. Instead of a technical response based on calculations, the members suggested DIVOSA could better ‘condemn the way the government is treating recipients’. Only one DIVOSA attendee protested against the suggestion. If, he argued, ‘such an advice is issued, the concept of client centeredness, which is so important to DIVOSA, will turn into client manipulation.’ The objector therefore noted that he would distance himself from such an advice in every contact he would have with third parties. The management nevertheless decided to put out a response that focussed on the political course of the government as ‘the evasion of responsibilities, by both government and parliament, for the citizens of this country should be criticised.’ The chair of the VNG did note, however, that his association would abstain from supporting such a stance. After the VNG rejected another draft response some weeks later, both associations decided to express their views separately.

The eventual letter sent to De Graaf, which was picked up by most national newspapers, contained a frontal attack on the government. According to DIVOSA, the government did not intend to reform the system but only lowered the amounts of benefits, limited the duration of benefits, and restricted the access to provisions. Thereby, governmental parties denied the non-working part of society its rightful share of the societal product. Moreover, an artificial division was created in society between a privileged employed group and those without a job. According to DIVOSA, such a system, widely experienced as unjust, would lead to a deviation of norms and values among citizens. As a result, policymakers should not be surprised if large societal groups would turn their back on society. DIVOSA concluded with the observation that it seemed ‘as if the objective of the government is to drive all

unemployed citizens back to a minimum income level. In relation to this objective, it is not surprising to see that political parties are mainly debating the minimum amount of money a person is able to live off, rather than discussing the issue of distributive justice.\textsuperscript{207}

The letter clearly shows how far DIVOSA was willing to go in its opposition to the government. Within the daily management, however, people started to raise awareness that the advocacy of the minima created some issues for DIVOSA in the field of policymaking. As the association was supposed to objectively inform the government on the effectiveness of its policies and the improvement of the implementation process, the daily management feared that the politicisation of the association detracted from its credibility as an advisor. In a meeting of the daily management, it was therefore suggested to find an alternative way of protecting the interests of clients. DIVOSA could, for example, start focussing on informing street-level officials about the consequences of their everyday policy implementation and leave the advocacy of social assistance recipients to others. While this approach would help DIVOSA to restore its position as a reliable governmental partner, a member noted that it could also be a good way of serving the interests of recipients. In his opinion, it was doubtful whether clients even wanted social service organisations to represent their interests in the first place, ‘rather than just properly implementing formulated policy’.\textsuperscript{208}

The concerns voiced within the daily management were no anomaly. As the year went by, an increasing number of members began to complain about the effects of DIVOSA’s politicisation. At the preparation of the Members’ Meeting late 1984, it was noted members increasingly accused the DIVOSA management of neglecting actual policy matters relative to the attention it paid to societal developments.\textsuperscript{209} The management nevertheless continued its public advocacy of recipients and the minima. Although refraining from official declarations of support to demonstrations and protests of societal groups, DIVOSA clearly demonstrated its political affiliation with opponents of governmental policy. One such demonstration was the decision to organize a joint lunch at the 50-year anniversary of DIVOSA with a large group of protesters rallying against the home sharers-norm.\textsuperscript{210}

Looking back at his first and only year as DIVOSA chair at the Members’ Meeting late 1984, Scheepbouwer concluded it should be considered as the ‘year of “social-political” profiling’. In contradiction to some

\textsuperscript{207} Ibidem.

\textsuperscript{208} DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Folder: Agenda’s en notulen DB en HB 1983/1984, Besluitenlijst van de vergadering van het dagelijks bestuur van DIVOSA, 4 April 1984.

\textsuperscript{209} DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Folder: Agenda’s en notulen DB en HB 1983/1984, Besluitenlijst van de vergadering van het dagelijks bestuur van DIVOSA, 19 September 1984.

complaints within the association, he noted that ‘this profiling was not some spontaneous idea or an effort to boost the public image of the management, but – in the opinion of everyone – a “must”, given the current societal developments.’\textsuperscript{211} Scheepbouwer did recognize the public appearance of DIVOSA had some downsides as he observed the association increasingly ran the risk of getting involved in party politics. Still, despite such adverse effects, the policy of the Central Management was inevitable as it followed directly from the minimum job description that was formulated in the IVA-reports of the late 1970s. According to this job description (See chapter 1.2), signalling structural problems among clients was a core task of the social service organisation. Scheepbouwer therefore concluded DIVOSA had rightly changed its focus from an association emphasising the implementation of policy, to an association which, when there is reason to do so, chooses a social-political course, as an instrument directly derived from the job description! In short: a civil servant hornet in the fur of policymakers! The decision to pursue this policy is based on the knowledge that clients are currently unable to represent their own interests. This policy is justly expected of our association, by clients but also by officials of the social service organisation.\textsuperscript{212}

While Scheepbouwer decided to meet this expectation, at the Members’ Meeting, several DIVOSA members voiced their frustration with the public role of the association. One of the provincial delegations strongly objected to the growing politicisation as he noted to be increasingly approached by municipal policymakers questioning the position of DIVOSA. Could the association still be considered as a neutral, a-political association of civil servants? In the eyes of the delegate, the Central Management had to ‘put more effort into preventing every appearance of political engagement’ as otherwise, DIVOSA would increasingly be surpassed by policymakers.\textsuperscript{213} Scheepbouwer nevertheless reemphasised the task of the association was to pick up signals from society:

Every time new policies are prepared at the political level, DIVOSA will inform government and parliament about the effects these policies will have on clients. This means the policy of the association is aimed at answering the following two questions, emphatically in the following order:

\textsuperscript{211} DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Folder: DIVOSA Najaars-ledenverg., No. 4-3388, Bijlage I.
\textsuperscript{212} Ibidem.
\textsuperscript{213} DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Folder: DIVOSA Najaars-ledenverg., No. 4-1033, Najaarsledenvergadering “DIVOSA” op donderdag, 29 november 1984 in het Jaarbeurs-congrescentrum te Utrecht.
One, what does intended or formulated policy mean for clients? Two, what does the implementation of such policies mean for the social service organisations?\footnote{Scheepbouwer did insist, however, the social-political course of DIVOSA did not mean the association would pick sides in the political arena. It mainly entailed ‘signalling the consequences of several measures for the lowest paid people in society, in a neutral way, so no political party can distance itself because of political preferences with regard to the given signals.’\footnote{The association is no action group and will never be seduced into civil or administrative disobedience [...]. This does not in any way fit the IVA-job description.\footnote{This also explained why DIVOSA refrained from giving official declarations of support to protest organisations or the labour unions.\footnote{Such declarations did not fit the signalling function.}}\footnote{After Scheepbouwer had reassured the association would not be tempted to openly obstruct governmental policies, all members gave their support to the course of the association.\footnote{It was still decided later on in the year to exchange the term ‘social-political stance’ for the more neutral ‘social signalling stance’ in order to prevent future misunderstandings.}}\footnote{Unsurprisingly, the headstrong approach of DIVOSA during the early 1980s had increasingly frustrated third parties. Especially the VNG had become highly irritated by the politicisation of DIVOSA. Within the DIVOSA management it was noted that these ‘fundamental irritations’ with the VNG were mainly caused by miscommunications, due to the fact that they only had two or three meetings a year.\footnote{It was also noted, though, that the VNG had a very different approach to matters at hand than DIVOSA. Instead of acting on behalf of citizens, the VNG mainly acted from a financial perspective. Furthermore, they seemed to be mainly concerned with upholding their autonomy in relation to the government.}}\footnote{The VNG did indeed have increasing conflicts with national policymakers as they felt the government increasingly diverted the...}}
costs of their austerity program to the municipal level while municipalities were already encountering rising financial shortages as a result of the growing social assistance population.\footnote{222 ‘De financiële verhouding tussen twee overheden wordt steeds slechter. Het rijk wentelt bezuinigingen op gemeenten af’, \textit{NRC Handelsblad}, 8 November 1983.}

To resolve the tensions between DIVOSA and the VNG, the division of tasks was brought up at a meeting in 1983. The VNG mainly accused DIVOSA of violating the agreements of the 1970s as it interfered in the formulation and content of policy. The representatives of DIVOSA, however, declared they were had no choice as they were bound to the wishes of their members. Considering the societal circumstances and the profound effects of the governmental austerity program, they also considered it essential for DIVOSA to take on a more political stance.\footnote{223 DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Folder: ‘Overleg Divosa/VNG 1982-1994’, No. 831021, Verslag overleg 15/9/1983, 15 September 1983.} For the time being, the friction between the two associations remained to exist.

\textbf{Subversive officials}

As was mentioned in the previous chapter, the directors were not the only actors within social service organisations taking on a political stance. During the early 1980s, the lower ranks of the social service organisations actively started representing the interests of their clients as well. In 1980, the National Action Group of Social Service Officials (\textit{Landelijke Actiecomité Sociale Diensten} or L.A.S.D.) was instituted and began to raise awareness for the personnel shortage and rising work pressure within social service organisations.\footnote{224 DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Annual report 1980 (August 1981) 19.} The L.A.S.D. also increasingly spoke out against what they thought to be the deteriorating service provision to clients of the social service agency.\footnote{225 DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Annual report 1983 (August 1984) 11; Vlek, \textit{Inactieven in actie}, 368.} In relation to DIVOSA, the action committee continuously pressured the association to take up responsibility for their clients as well. In 1984, for example, the founder of the action group noted in an interview that he often felt:

DIVOSA agrees more with the governmental parties than with clients of the social service organisation. [...] Within social service agencies, I can see a development in the direction of more inspections, harsher work methods, and an increase in hierarchical structures. I think that is exactly the opposite of what you should do. I think this attitude is mainly based on the fact that DIVOSA is manipulated into playing along with governmental games. As a result, however, it is
forgotten that the directors of the social service organisations have a clear responsibility to their clients and not only to the system.\textsuperscript{226}

The resistance of the L.A.S.D. would not stay within the confines of the social service organisations or DIVOSA. While in 1983, officials had gone on strike to demonstrate against cuts in their wages,\textsuperscript{227} two years later, hundreds of officials decided to demonstrate against the infringement of their clients’ social rights as a result of the home sharers-norm. In addition to thwarting the implementation process (See chapter 1.2), officials of the social service agencies now truly formed a social force protecting their clients. Two reporters of Elsevier even signalled

a beginning of anarchy at the desks of governmental agencies; the laws of government no longer hold power but the laws of the jungle. […] The foot soldiers – the officials at the counter of social service agency that are bent over the forms – no longer put up with it anymore. BMW’s are meant to provide assistance but have been degraded to harbingers of misfortune. You can’t enforce a culture change through legislation. They refuse to be the “messengers of the state secretary telling the weakest in society they are to become much weaker.”\textsuperscript{228}

The strong solidarity of officials with their clients was not unidirectional. Instead, social assistance recipients actively supported ‘their’ officials and often expressed their loyalty. In 1983 for example, when the government intended to cut the wages of officials with 3.5 percent, benefit recipients actively supported demonstrations of officials. In an address to the demonstrating officials in The Hague, a representative of an interest group for unemployed people declared that as he knew the officials were defending the interests of clients, they were behind them in their actions.\textsuperscript{229} Despite such declarations of support, according to Vlek, there also was widespread scepticism among interest groups about the true nature of social service agencies as they were still often regarded as the ‘loyal water carriers’ of the government and ‘institutions of oppression and control’.\textsuperscript{230}

\textsuperscript{227} ‘Ambtenaren proberen chaos te veroorzaken’, Nederlands dagblad: gereformeerd dagblad, 4 November 1983.
\textsuperscript{228} Brummelman and Goosen, ‘De sociale chaos’.
\textsuperscript{229} Joop Scheerman, ”Maak van alle straatjes één groot plein”, Uitkeringsgerechtigden willen samen optrekken met ambtenaren’, De waarheid, 5 November 1983.
\textsuperscript{230} Vlek, Inactieven in actie, 369.
For DIVOSA, the actions of the street level officials presented a major conflict of loyalty. Most directors of the social service agencies agreed with the criticism of their personnel about the foolishness an unfeasibility of most governmental regulations. Just as their staff, they were increasingly frustrated with the stiff-necked refusal of the government to seriously consider the situation of social service organisations or their clients. However, the DIVOSA management realised it simply could not publicly support strikes or protests. A democracy would not be able to function if civil servants refused to implement democratically formulated policies. While sympathising with the criticism of the protesting officials, DIVOSA therefore decided to refrain from official support. Director of the central bureau Van Vliet explained to the press that ‘directors of social service organisations have other responsibilities than their staff but essentially, we do agree with all people who oppose the norm. We are currently at a slippery slope but thank God we still live in a democracy, where laws simply need to be implemented.’

**The functions: The desired job description of the social service organisation**

While the most outspoken way of representing the interests of clients was to stick up for them in the public debate, the other option available to the members of DIVOSA was to focus their attention on functions that favoured their clients the most. As was explained in the previous chapter, based on the series of IVA-reports a minimum job description had been accepted for the social service organisation (See chapter 1.2). While laying substantial emphasis on the social function, the job description mostly omitted the reintegration and inspection function. Furthermore, the social function was defined very broadly. In addition to offering both material and non-material assistance, it also covered gathering information on disadvantaged societal

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groups and stimulating or initiating projects aimed at the improvement of their situation. According to Asselberghs et al., the support of DIVOSA and CRM for the minimum job description led to acceptance of these tasks by most social service organisations throughout the country.233

However, when in 1982 the CDA-VVD government took office, ministerial support was withdrawn. Crucial in this regard, was the decision of the government to relocate the ministerial department for social assistance affairs from CRM to SZW. While CRM had endorsed the IVA-job description and emphasised welfare and social support, SZW focused on stimulating reintegration and limiting the amount of recipients. Naturally, DIVOSA opposed the move to SZW as it feared the social function would be neglected in favour of the inspection function. In addition, the association considered the move to SZW to be in conflict with the exceptional position the Abw held within the larger social security system. As social assistance functioned as the safety net of the system, the provision revolved around individualisation and required social service agencies to tailor assistance to the needs of clients. With the transferral to SZW, the provision seemed to be viewed as just another unemployment provision which could be managed from the national level. In a letter to minister of Social Affairs, De Koning, DIVOSA pleaded to make sure the ‘special character of the Abw’ would be maintained.234

Notwithstanding these concerns, the burgeoning economic crisis and the new ‘no-nonsense’ policy rationale of the CDA-VVD governments increasingly pushed social service organisations to cast off the IVA-job description and focus on the ‘outflow’ of recipients. DIVOSA refused and continued to voice its support for the job description and a focus on providing psycho-social care. In his last speech as chair at the 1983 Members’ Meeting, Boender lamented state secretary De Graaf for his hypocrisy in vocally supporting the job description but refusing to provide the necessary means.235 The mission of DIVOSA to uphold its broad social function and the position of BMW’s as social workers, however, seemed to be an uphill battle. In 1984, the new Ministry of Welfare, Public Health, and Culture (Welzijn, Volksgezondheid en Cultuur or WVC) did not even mention the social service organisation on its list of welfare institutions anymore. Nevertheless

233 Asselberghs et al., Gemeentelijke sociale diensten, 20.
in its contacts with policymakers DIVOSA continued to defend the social service organisation as an important link in the chain of welfare institutions and consistently made the plea to recognize the BMW as prime actor in the field of social work.236 In 1983, the function of BMW was symbolically carried to the grave at L.A.S.D. demonstration as De Graaf had ‘dug the social assistance grave’.237

The focus on the social function clearly shows in the press releases and letters to policymakers the association sent out. As has been explained, DIVOSA always first assessed the effects policies might have on people with a minimum wage. Effects on the functioning of social service agencies came second. Following this prioritisation, a lot of energy was invested in upholding or introducing provisions for the minima. The association tried to develop debt counselling,238 paid special attention to supporting ethnic minorities,239 invested in a system to register immaterial needs of clients,240 and lobbied to include funeral costs in the additional social assistance package.241 It also resisted the obligated contribution for medicines,242 legal counselling,243 and living in nursing homes,244 and invested in research projects that would provide better information about the needs of clients and the minima. By far the most influential of such research projects was the report Minima zonder marge (Minima without margins) in which the deteriorating financial position of the minima was illustrated.245

While DIVOSA sought to uphold the societal position of the social service agency, the rising number of clients, the cuts in municipal budgets, and the continuous stream of new policy measures increasingly

238 DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Annual report 1981 (August 1982) 16.
239 Ibidem, 16.
240 Ibidem, 17.
244 DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Annual report 1983 (August 1984) 16.
forced the association to focus on the administrative and guaranteed income function. Especially the series of governmental cuts and regulations strained the already limited capacities of social service agencies, struggling to adjust their organisation to all incoming measures while already bending over backwards just to register all incoming applications. While DIVOSA criticised most governmental plans on principle grounds, its criticism was always accompanied by complaints about the incredibly high work pressure within social service organisations.

An example was the protest against the 1983 decision to restrict the access to the WWV for people under 23. While the association noted in a letter to De Graaf it objected to the measure for reasons of principle, it also observed that ‘while social service organisations can hardly keep their head above water as a result of the continuous work pressure, they are now supposed to make tens of thousands of changes to existing unemployment benefits on a very short term.’ Another example was the fierce criticism of the home sharers-norm. The moral arguments of DIVOSA were often accompanied by serious concerns about a huge increase in workload as all social assistance files would have to be manually re-examined.

In addition to the growing work pressure, another administrative concern was the increasing confusion among clients and officials as a result of the continuously changing social security system. When in 1983, DIVOSA director Van Vliet was interviewed about the growing aggressiveness at the counter of social service agencies, he noted that while deploring the aggressiveness, DIVOSA did understand the growing frustrations among clients: ‘People do not understand the cuts in their benefits anymore. The speed of the measures is way too high and people no longer know what they are up to.’ Also, new measures were often communicated far too late to be implemented correctly. According to Van Vliet, officials often had to read in the paper what the new social assistance policies were going to be. When, for example, the government had decided that starting 1 February 1983, all recipients of social assistance had to make a financial contribution for the payment of their medicines, social service organisations had not yet been informed on the implementation of the measure on February 23rd.

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249 DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Annual report 1982 (August 1983) 14-15.
Witnessing these developments, in 1983, DIVOSA chair Boender concluded that the everyday work of social service organisations was becoming increasingly problematic: ‘On the one hand we are confronted with a decreasing or limited growth of our staff, while on the other hand we have to deal with a growing (financial) demand for assistance.’ According to the departing chairman, in the coming years, social service organisations would have to make ends meet by implementing reorganisations, automating their organisations, and introducing time-saving work methods. Such reforms were already stimulated to some degree by DIVOSA. The professionalisation of officials, for instance, was encouraged by developing educational programs and increasingly, the automation of administrative processes was stimulated as well.

While DIVOSA spent most of its time on the social, administrative, and guaranteed income function, in the course of the 1980s, the inspection function began to receive increasing attention. While in 1981, the ministry still approved of loosening inspection policies to alleviate the high work pressure, in the following years, governmental concerns about welfare fraud and the misuse of benefits began to grow. Increasingly, DIVOSA was pushed to pay attention to combatting fraud as well. However, the DIVOSA management was hesitant to discuss welfare fraud as there was very little information on the actual extent of the problem. The management feared a growing emphasis on fraud would lead to growing prejudice against social assistance recipients.

In 1983, it was nevertheless decided to institute a new working group ‘fraud’ with the national council for social detectives to discuss the issue. DIVOSA also joined several other fraud commissions. The VNG refused to take part in these national platforms as it feared such national bodies would lead to centralisation and reducing municipal discretion. Although the DIVOSA management shared these concerns, it concluded SZW would develop stricter inspection policies anyway, disregarding the

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252 DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Folder: DIVOSA Najaars-ledenverg., No. 3-1283 (2), Najaars-ledenvergadering, 24 November 1983.
253 Ibidem.
254 DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Annual report 1982 (August 1983) 11.
257 DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Annual report 1983 (August 1984) 18.
cooperation of the municipal associations. Therefore, it decided to ‘catch the riding train’ while it still could.258

In 1984, welfare fraud began to attract public attention and was increasingly discussed within DIVOSA as well. Nevertheless, the association remained divided on the subject and repeatedly decided to let municipalities decide on their own inspection policies. Although partly caused by the inability to reach consensus on the subject, this reticence was mainly caused by the continued concerns about the increasing centralisation. If DIVOSA was to advise certain policies to its members, the management feared the ministry would use these recommendations as a guideline.259 Such a concern seemed to be justified, as in 1984, the daily management repeatedly discussed the increasing pressure exerted on social service agencies by state consultants to increase their re-examinations of clients. Given the already high work pressure, the management noted this expansion of inspection policies had to detract from the social function.260 However, DIVOSA had no power over the state consultants.

The function least emphasised during the 1980s was the reintegration function. For most of these years, reintegration wasn’t even perceived to be a core function of the social service organisation at all. Although in 1982, several municipal organisations had begun to develop reorientation projects and activities for recipients, with the transition to SZW these initiatives were mostly abandoned.261 The tenets of ‘social activation’ and ‘work before income’, clearly had not yet been endorsed by the ministry.

After 1982, reintegration policies remained underexposed for over a year, only to turn up again in February 1984. The motivation to get involved was the increasing ministerial interference with the labour policies of municipalities. The DIVOSA management decided to voice their support to the VNG in formulating their own policies.262 Later that year, reintegration policies started to gain attention as the ministry planned to introduce an obligation to apply for jobs applicable to all clients of the social service organisation. Although DIVOSA did recognize the duty of all recipients to try to re-enter the labour market, it opposed the obligation as the term ‘obligation’ was too restrictive and did not cover the legislative

258 DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Folder: Agenda’s en notulen DB en HB 1983/1984, Besluitenlijst van de vergadering van het dagelijks bestuur van DIVOSA, 29 June 1983.
259 DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Folder: Agenda’s en notulen DB en HB 1983/1984, Besluitenlijst van de vergadering van het dagelijks bestuur van DIVOSA, 5 December 1984.
261 DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Annual report 1982 (August 1983) 13-14.
262 DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Folder: Agenda’s en notulen DB en HB 1983/1984, Besluitenlijst van de vergadering van het hoofdbestuur van DIVOSA, 14 February 1984.
content.\textsuperscript{263} The following year, the association showed more cooperation. In a meeting with the Director General of SZW, DIVOSA still raised objections to the obligation but only proposed to relieve certain categories of unemployed people to prevent unnecessary psychological pressure on clients who were clearly unable to find employment. The proposal was nevertheless rejected by the Director General.\textsuperscript{264}

2.3. 1985 – 1988: Normalisation and constructive criticism

Restoring relations amidst centralisation

After Scheepbouwer resigned as chairman at the end of 1984, DIVOSA immediately altered its tone. This change of attitude followed, to some extent, from the convictions of the interim chair for 1985, J. Maasdam, director of the social service agency of Amsterdam. While Maasdam was a social democrat, he strongly opposed the politicisation of DIVOSA.\textsuperscript{265} In his speech at the Members’ Meeting, he questioned the effectiveness of this political stance and concluded that it had not really ‘led to any visible results’.\textsuperscript{266} In addition, the interim chair argued it was fundamentally ‘wrong for an official organisation [the social service organisation] to claim the task of advocating the interests of its clients. Above all, an official organisation should implement governmental policies’.\textsuperscript{267} According to Galema, the former employee of DIVOSA, Maasdam responded to a widespread sentiment within the association that the antagonism of Scheepbouwer was not tenable in the long run:

Not everyone was too happy with the way DIVOSA sought to be politically involved. Naturally, among the members there were people with different political backgrounds. During the years of Scheepbouwer it was mainly about the showdown with Lou de Graaf [the State Secretary of Social Affairs and Employment] as he was the one that was blamed for everything. This focus was not

\textsuperscript{265} DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Folder: DIVOSA Verenigingszaken, A.C. van Vliet, Van potlood tot PC-Netwerk. 25 Jaren Centraal Bureau DIVOSA (Eindhoven 1992) 33.
\textsuperscript{266} DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Folder: DIVOSA Najaars-ledenverg., No. 5-3330, Toespraak door de heer Maasdam, waarnemend voorzitter, 28 November 1985.
\textsuperscript{267} Ibidem.
appreciated by everyone. Therefore, when Scheepbouwer resigned, the new chair tried to return to the middle again.  

Although Maasdam’s plea to focus on the proper implementation of policy again did not come out of thin air, as a substantial part of the membership opposed the political course of the association, it does seem to be heavily influenced by external developments. Some weeks before the Members’ Meeting was held, state secretary De Graaf announced a significant change in ministerial policy regarding DIVOSA. To the astonishment of the management of the association, De Graaf had decided that the yearly state subsidy granted to the association would be lowered by 100,000 guilders in 1986. As the association had already been struggling with its finances for some years, De Graaf’s decision confronted the Central Management with a serious lack of resources. To the members, the management concluded DIVOSA definitively had been pushed into ‘an underdog position’.

In order to find a way to ‘cope with these calamitous developments’, the management asked its members to think of possibilities to reorganise the association's finances, which would be discussed at the 1985 Members’ Meeting at which Maasdam held his plea. At the same meeting, the members agreed upon a moderate raise of the contributions to resolve the immediate lack of resources and to await future developments before deciding on a further restructuring. The following year, as the decision of the state secretary seemed to be definitive, it was decided to raise membership fees again.

Although there is no hard evidence connecting the cut in the subsidy of DIVOSA to its politicisation during previous years, the management saw it as a clear message from the state secretary. As the Central Management had not received any explanation, it asked the Director General of SZW in a meeting whether the cut was related to the policies of the association. The ministerial representative, however, emphasised the cut was not related to the functioning of DIVOSA. However, it was noted that ‘it is often wondered whether DIVOSA is currently performing more activities than those it was originally subsidised for, namely,

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268 Gerard Galema (Employee of the central bureau of DIVOSA between 1978 and 2014), interview by the author (11 April 2017)
269 See for instance: DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Folder: Agenda’s en notulen DB en HB 1983/1984, Besluitenlijst van de vergadering van het dagelijks bestuur van DIVOSA, 29 June 1983.
270 DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Folder: DIVOSA Najaars-ledenverg., No. 5-3330, Toespraak door de heer Maasdam, waarnemend voorzitter, 28 November 1985; DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Annual report 1984 (August 1985) 64.
271 DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Folder: DIVOSA Najaars-ledenverg., No. 5-1201.3, Voorstel contributieverhoging, 28 November 1985.
272 DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Folder: DIVOSA Najaars-ledenverg., 6-1345, Besluitenlijst van de najaarsledenvergadering van DIVOSA, 26 November 1986.
to contribute to improving the implementation process.'\textsuperscript{273} For DIVOSA, this last suggestion was a clear signal. In a letter to the state secretary the management concluded it saw the cut ‘as a negative premium on our work’.\textsuperscript{274}

The Central Management was not alone in its conclusion that the cutback was directly related to their meddlesome attitude towards the government. Several members of DIVOSA were also convinced the political activities of the association were harming its own interests. At the 1985 Members’ Meeting, the provincial representative of the province of Guelders (\textit{Gelderland}) summarised that ‘a lot of members get the impression that the totality of comments DIVOSA sent to the government did not really have an effect.’\textsuperscript{275} He urged the management to focus on the advisory function DIVOSA was supposed to have, rather than investing time and energy in writing letters to policymakers and the press.

A governmental commissioner, invited to speak at the meeting, confirmed that the ministerial departments did not really appreciate DIVOSA’s criticism. He warned the members that the signalling politics of DIVOSA would be a ‘constant battle’.\textsuperscript{276} This battle would only be more difficult if these signals would not be supported at the local political level. This last remark was a clear reference to the tensions that had sparked between DIVOSA and the VNG. During the previous year, the association of municipalities had increasingly distanced itself from the unruly association of directors. Maasdam’s plea for moderation, hence, was clearly connected to the pressures exerted on DIVOSA from the outside.

While being more moderate than Scheepbouwer, his eventual successor as chair, M.H.J. Naus, did not follow interim chairman Maasdam in his plea for a fundamental change in the policies of DIVOSA. Although the departure of Scheepbouwer led to a moderation, DIVOSA continued raising awareness for the situation of its clients and citizens living on a minimum income. Under ‘bonhomie’ Naus,\textsuperscript{277} who led the association until 1988, DIVOSA maintained its focus on ‘signalling any undesirable or unjust effects of legislation’.\textsuperscript{278}

Throughout the second half of the eighties, all the annual reports mentioned the central tenet of DIVOSA

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{273} DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Folder: Overleg DIVOSA_Rijk, 1983-1990, No. 851229, Verslag overleg Divoba/SZW, 6 November 1985.
\item \textsuperscript{274} DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Folder: Divosa_reacties, 1979-1996. No. 851257, TK-commissie SZW: korting subsidie Divoba, 14 November 1985.
\item \textsuperscript{275} DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Folder: DIVOSA Najaars-ledenverg., No. 5-1333, Verslag van de najaarsledenvergadering van DIVOSA, 28 November 1985.
\item \textsuperscript{276} ibidem.
\item \textsuperscript{277} DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Folder: DIVOSA Verenigingszaken, A.C. van Vliet, \textit{Van potlood tot PC-Network. 25 Jaren Centraal Bureau DIVOSA} (Eindhoven 1992) 35.
\item \textsuperscript{278} DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Folder: DIVOSA Najaars-ledenverg., No. 6-3136, Inleiding van de verenigingsvoorzitter DIVOSA op de najaarsledenvergadering, 26 November 1986.
\end{itemize}
to always primarily focus on assessing the effects of governmental policies on ‘recipients of a benefit and others who have to make ends meet on a minimum income’. The effects of legislation on both the implementation process and the social service organisations themselves continued to come second. Still, despite this continuing focus, the proposal to focus on the implementation process and providing support to the members, i.e. social service directors, repeatedly recurred. At a meeting of the daily management the idea was even brought up by an attendee to return to the old situation where DIVOSA would only voice its ideas through the VNG. However, such an idea remained a bridge too far.

Nevertheless, under the chairmanship of Naus, the association took a much more moderate course than in previous years. In an interview following the Members’ Meeting of 1986, when he had been chair for almost a year, Naus stated he felt the association should act much more pragmatically:

Much more, we should act on the basis of knowledge, facts and principles, rather than communicating from an antagonistic attitude; because then emotions start to play a role and that should never happen. [...] I will never fail [...] as a result of principles, for I always want to keep my eye on the objectives and not get carried away by all sorts of emotions or pressure from the outside.

The pragmatism proposed by Naus especially concerned the deliberations with the VNG and the ministerial departments as he felt communications with both levels of governance could be significantly improved: ‘If possible, I want to reach agreement on the essential policy issues. If that is not possible, we at least know of each other how we feel.’

At the time of the interview, Naus’ rationale had already been put into practice as the association had begun to rebuild relations with the VNG and the ministry. Considering the relation with VNG, in 1986 both municipal associations buried the hatchet and put out a line of conduct for the future. Galema summarised the agreement entitled that the VNG would deal with ‘policy and the money’, and DIVOSA would focus on the implementation. While the VNG accepted a more political role of DIVOSA, both parties

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279 DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Annual report 1986 (September 1987) 19; DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Annual report 1987 (September 1988) 20-21.
281 DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Folder: DIVOSA Najaars-ledenverg., No. 6-3358, DIVOSA Najaarsledenvergadering, 26 November 1986.
282 Ibidem.
283 Gerard Galema (Employee of the central bureau of DIVOSA between 1978 and 2014), interview by the author (11 April 2017)
did agree on intensifying the mutual feedback to prevent future frustrations with each other’s public expressions. In the following years, the attitude of DIVOSA towards the VNG was significantly more moderate in comparison with previous years. When at a meeting of the Central Management in 1988, the contact with the VNG was brought up, the only comment was that the relationship with the municipal authorities was good.

Restoring relations with the VNG was of relatively great importance to DIVOSA as both municipal associations increasingly needed each other to withstand the pressure of the department of SZW. Increasingly, state secretary De Graaf was trying to get a grip on municipal policies as he felt most municipalities were too generous in the formulation of social policies and most social service organisations were far too lenient. According to his view, the executive agencies continuously dodged their responsibility to properly inspect and sanction their clients when necessary.

There were several ways in which De Graaf tried to strengthen his grip on municipal organisations. One approach was to grant subsidies for specific projects that concerned inspection policies. In the course of 1987, the management of DIVOSA noticed a gradual increase in the number of such targeted subsidies. It was recognised rather quickly, however, that accepting such subsidies aimed at strengthening specific functions of the social service organisation was ‘the wrong way to go, as in such a way, the state will be able to strengthen its grip on municipal policy.’ The second instrument used by De Graaf to exert more influence on municipal policymaking were the state consultants (See chapter 1.2). From the moment the social assistance consultants were introduced, DIVOSA criticised their activities and the tendency to control municipalities on their policies. However, it had little means to actually resist their growing activity. The third and already mentioned strategy used by De Graaf – although never recognised as such – was to cut the subsidies of DIVOSA. Even after the subsidy of DIVOSA had been shrunk in 1985, another cut kept looming and kept on influencing the decisions of the Central Management.

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While the centralising tendencies of the state secretariat undermined the representative role of DIVOSA, they did lead to the improvement of relations with the VNG. During the second half of the eighties, the management often decided to support the association of municipalities even when the opinion of the VNG did not exactly match the viewpoint of DIVOSA. While contacts with the VNG were improved, the relationship with the ministry and the state secretariat remained sour. In addition to the centralising tendencies of De Graaf, the austere mind-set of the government and its condescending way of referring to unemployed people continued to agonize the members of DIVOSA. Therefore, the association continued its opposition to the policy rationale of the government and repeatedly raised awareness for the fact that most measures had a disproportionate effect on people at the bottom of the social-economic ladder. Examples are the comments about the ‘disastrous effect’ of the system revision on the situation of elderly people dependent on a special unemployment benefit (*Wet inkomensvoorziening ouder en gedeeltelijk arbeidsongeschikte werknemers* or IOAW) or the repeated criticism on the new personal contribution for retirement homes. In 1987, a follow-up report on the influential report *Minima zonder Marge* was also presented. Just as the first edition, the report raised awareness for the deteriorating financial situation of the minima.

From the side of the government, naturally, the continued criticism by DIVOSA was not well received. Nevertheless, gradually, the strained relations between DIVOSA and the government were eased to some extent as after 1986 the wide societal unrest surrounding the home sharers-norm and the revision of the social security system was resolved as well. While DIVOSA kept on criticising the revision, including oral explanations at hearings in both chambers of parliament, the association had no option but to accept the final outcome and shift its attention to supporting its members to implement all the introduced measures correctly.

In cooperation with SZW, information programs were developed to instruct social service organisations about the upcoming changes in their daily work and leaflets were printed to inform citizens about the changes in their social rights. DIVOSA also joined deliberations with SZW and the VNG.

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292 DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Annual report 1986 (September 1987) 14-15.
about a possible revision of the Abw in the coming years. The association nevertheless remained hesitant to commit itself. The Central Management continuously feared being tricked into accepting an impairment of the Abw’s special position within the social security system. Reacting to the growing concerns among the members about the changing character of the provision, in 1988, the association even organised a special Members’ Meeting to discuss whether the Abw was losing its unique position.²⁹³

During the last year of the CDA-VVD government, the moderation of DIVOSA’s public profile continued. Especially when Naus had to give up his chairmanship as a result of a grave illness, the Central Management seemed to take things a bit more easily. While in 1984, under the chairmanship of Scheepbouwer, DIVOSA had sent out 19 letters to policymakers, parliamentary commissions, and the press on a wide range of topics, in 1988 and in 1989 only two letters were sent each year of which two were private letters to the ministry.²⁹⁴

The functions: Hesitant cooperation

Under the chairmanship of Naus, DIVOSA continued its support of the minimum job description as defined in the IVA-reports. Despite this seeming tenacity, the realisation began to take hold within the management that the effort to uphold the job description would be futile if the state secretary would continue to withhold the necessary money.²⁹⁵ Instead of abandoning their effort, the management decided to continue lobbying for the acception of the job description as ‘an inevitable task for municipal social service organisations derived from the societal demand for the assistance offered by the social service agency’.²⁹⁶ In a 1985 periodical meeting with the VNG, DIVOSA substantiated its continuing support for the job description. While most social task were now neglected because of the high work pressure, they could be picked up again when times would get better.²⁹⁷

²⁹³ DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Annual report 1988 (September 1989) 15-16.
²⁹⁴ DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Annual report 1988 (September 1989) 19; DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Annual report 1989 (September 1990) 20.
However, disagreement began to show within DIVOSA a month later at the Members’ Meeting. In the same speech in which he criticised the political course of DIVOSA, interim chair Maasdam called on the members to abandon the minimum job description:

I do know that there are differing convictions within our association about the possibility of guidance and personal contact between officials and their clients. (...) Still people, we cannot deny that the goals of the IVA-reports have not been realised. We are even further away than before. (...) Personally, I believe we should put the realisation of the IVA-norms with regard to social work on hold.\footnote{DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Folder: DIVOSA Najaars-ledenverg., No. S-3330, Toespraak door de heer Maasdam, waarnemend voorzitter, 28 November 1985.}

Maasdam was not alone in its criticism as in the annual report of 1985 it was noted that the growing client population and increasingly complex provisions had caused a reorientation among social service organisations on their job description. Nevertheless, DIVOSA continued to resist such a reorientation and emphasised the job description should be a ‘benchmark for the approach and organisation of the social service organisation.’\footnote{DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Annual report 1985 (August 1986) 16.}

The persistence with regard to the social function, however, seemed to be an uphill battle as the high work pressure within social service organisations and the unwillingness of the government to make a serious investment in its development ruled out any large-scale initiatives. DIVOSA nevertheless tried to remember policymakers of the social role social service agencies could have. In 1987, for example, a letter was sent to the minister of WVC to remind him of the central role the BMW had in offering immaterial assistance to citizens.\footnote{DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Folder: Divosa_reacties, 1979-1996. No. 871213, Minister WVC: Commissie Dekker, 19 October 1987.} Following from the focus on defending the social function, DIVOSA invested a lot of energy in upholding or introducing provisions for the minima. The association, for instance, criticised the breakdown of a special provision for artists (\textit{Beeldende Kunstenaaars Regeling}),\footnote{DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Folder: Divosa_reacties, 1979-1996. No. 851085, Staatssecretaris SZW: regeling beeldende kunstenaaars, 2 October 1985.} raised awareness for the administrative troubles of students receiving social assistance,\footnote{DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Minute book: Dagelijks Bestuur/Hoofdbestuur 1987/1988, Besluitenlijst van de vergadering van het hoofdbestuur van DIVOSA, 19 November 1987; DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Folder: Divosa_reacties, 1979-1996. No. 870827, Minister O&W: problemen WSF, 15 July.} lobbied to maintain a seizure-free rate of...
90 percent of the minimum income in case of debts, and opposed a proposal to no longer reimburse dental care, medicines, and physiotherapy as part of standard health insurance.

Despite the continuous focus on the social tasks of social service organisations, in the course of the eighties another function was increasingly catching the limelight: the inspection function. For DIVOSA, this function continued to be a difficult subject. The minutes of the Central Management show how, repeatedly, the members of the management struggled with the formulation of a clear viewpoint on both inspection and sanction policies. In 1985, several management members even still maintained that neither the department of social detectives nor the investigative function itself were part of the job description of social service organisations.

While in previous years, DIVOSA had managed to hold off the subject of fraud by contending there was a lack of knowledge on the subject, both the public debate and the increasing pressure from the government now pushed the association to formulate a clear viewpoint on the matter. Late in 1985, the Central Management managed to reach a decision by majority vote on setting up investigative departments within social service agencies which would be provided with enlarged investigative powers. It also agreed on sending a first set of guidelines to its members on the possible ways to formulate inspection policies. Any further than this viewpoint and the provision of information, the management was not willing to go as it was convinced a further commitment would harm the interests of social assistance recipients.

In a letter to the Interdepartmental Steering Committee investigating Misuse and Fraud (Interdepartementale Stuurgroep Misbruik en Oneigenlijk gebruik or ISMO) commissioned by the government, DIVOSA illustrated its viewpoint. Although the association endorsed the viewpoint of the State Secretary ‘that fraud, be it major or little, needs to be combated’, it did not really want to pay more attention to controlling clients. Instead, it was emphasised fraud and misuse were mainly caused by the complexity of existing legislation. DIVOSA therefore made the plea to deregulate social assistance and leave the formulation of inspection policies to the municipal authorities. The call for more municipal autonomy

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in formulating policy was a constant factor in the public communications of DIVOA, an appeal that was consistently supported by the VNG. When De Graaf, for instance, urged both municipal associations to use all their additional financial resources on combatting fraud, they refused to answer the call as they considered themselves to be autonomous in devising their own policies.\textsuperscript{308} The focus on upholding municipal discretion seemed to be the most successful way of obstructing the increasing activities of SZW in the field of inspection policies. However, despite the effectiveness of the argument, it did encourage the state secretary to hold the municipal authorities accountable for possible deficiencies in their inspection policies.

While DIVOSA mostly used its call on municipal autonomy as an argument against the governmental focus on the inspection function of the social service agency, the main motivation for the objection still was the observation that ‘as a result of recent regulations [...] the welfare character of the work done by the municipal social service organisation is coming under increasing pressure; it has to make way for performing all kinds of inspections’.\textsuperscript{309} In the meetings of both management boards, this observation was cause for serious concerns as it was feared the growing focus on municipal inspection and fraud policies would detract from the social image of the social service organisation.\textsuperscript{310} Repeatedly, it was noted that the prioritisation of SZW, with its emphasis on inspection policies, would cause the social service organisation to get a bad name among citizens and recipients.\textsuperscript{311}

Another argument used by DIVOSA to obstruct new regulations with regard to the inspection function, was the appeal to the privacy of clients. One occasion in which this line of argument was used, was the plan to equate unmarried recipients that lived together with married recipients. For this measure to be effective, the social service agency would have to introduce new control mechanisms to monitor recipients in their public manifestation as a couple and to assess whether relationships of recipients were durable. In the eyes of DIVOSA, this would be a serious violation of recipients’ privacy.\textsuperscript{312}

\textsuperscript{308} DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Minute book: Dagelijks Bestuur/Hoofdbestuur 1985/1986, Besluitenlijst van de vergadering van het dagelijks bestuur van DIVOSA, 18 December 1985.
\textsuperscript{309} Ibidem.
\textsuperscript{310} DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Minute book: Dagelijks Bestuur/Hoofdbestuur 1985/1986, Besluitenlijst van de vergadering van het hoofdbestuur van DIVOSA, 12 November 1985.
\textsuperscript{311} DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Minute book: Dagelijks Bestuur/Hoofdbestuur 1985/1986, Besluitenlijst van de vergadering van het dagelijks bestuur van DIVOSA, 18 December 1985.
While the management of DIVOSA was ambivalent with regard to the formulation of inspection policies, there was more consensus when it came to sanctioning clients. Although the association deemed imposing sanctions in case of misuse to be important, the focus should be somewhere else to prevent the stigmatisation of clients. Just as De Graaf pushed for stricter inspection policies, however, he also began to criticize social service organisations on their failing sanction policies.\footnote{DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Annual report 1985 (August 1986) 15.} The Central Management nevertheless persisted in its opposition against the increased focus on sanctioning and refused to send out communications to its members on the subject. Just as with the inspection policies, the management was concerned such communications would be used by state consultants as a strict norm and ‘could only turn out badly for social assistance recipients.’\footnote{DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Minute book: Dagelijks Bestuur/Hoofdbestuur 1987/1988, Besluitenlijst van de vergadering van het hoofdbestuur van DIVOSA, 19 February 1987.}

As DIVOSA was supported in its resistance by the VNG, they managed for some time to block the introduction of a central sanction policy.\footnote{DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Folder: Overleg Divosa/VNG 1982-1994, No. 870317, Agenda overleg 26/3/1987, 19 March 1987; DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Annual report 1987 (September 1988) 14-15.} In the summer of 1987, a sanction manual was nevertheless distributed by the ministry to all municipalities prescribing to them what sanctions should be imposed per situation. VNG and DIVOSA had no choice but to accept the ministerial stance ‘under protest’ as they feared the Ministry would exclude them from future deliberations if they resisted any further.\footnote{DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Folder: Overleg Divosa/VNG 1982-1994, No. 870351, Verslag overleg 15/9/1987, 15 September 1987; DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Annual report 1987 (September 1988) 15; DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Minute book: Dagelijks Bestuur/Hoofdbestuur 1987/1988, Besluitenlijst van de vergadering van het dagelijks bestuur van DIVOSA, 18 August 1987.} Their hope that the manual would not be used as a strict guideline quickly turned out to be futile. Almost directly after the distribution, state consultants started inspecting municipalities on their compliance with the instructions.\footnote{DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Folder: Overleg Divosa/VNG 1982-1994, No.880711, Verslag overleg 7/6/1988, 7 June 1988.}

Among the members of the daily management the publishing of the manual was deplored. They had to agree with chairman Naus in his contention, however, that a much stricter manual would have been distributed had DIVOSA abstained from cooperating with SZW.\footnote{DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Minute book: Dagelijks Bestuur/Hoofdbestuur 1987/1988, Besluitenlijst van de vergadering van het hoofdbestuur van DIVOSA, 18 August 1987.} In a meeting of the Central Management, however, it was still noted that a lot of members considered the approach of Naus to have been much too pragmatic. Sanctioning clients was considered to be a ‘matter of principle’.\footnote{DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Minute book: Dagelijks Bestuur/Hoofdbestuur 1987/1988, Besluitenlijst van de vergadering van het hoofdbestuur van DIVOSA, 27 August 1987.} Among the members, every decision in the field of sanction policies continued to be viewed with suspicion.
As was already illustrated in the first chapter, the reintegration function of the social service organisation was increasingly emphasised during the second half the 1980s. In 1987, DIVOSA and VNG joined deliberations with the regional labour bureaus, which responded to SZW, to improve the reintegration process. In the same year, the first projects involving reorientation talks with long-term unemployed people were started. With regard to the reorientation talks, DIVOSA’s position was ambivalent. Although the association did support the efforts to stimulate recipients in finding employment again, it often claimed the government approached the subject in fundamentally wrong manner. Instead of actually creating jobs, the government seemed to focus mainly on disciplining recipients and lowering the amount of the benefits. As a result, the government was turning ‘social security into social insecurity for a lot of benefit recipients’. In the eyes of DIVOSA, more money should simply be spent on creating jobs. Looking back on the first rounds of reintegration talks in 1989, the management did indeed reach the conclusion that not enough resources had been made available to really simulate the reintegration of clients. The actual results of the talks were considered to be disappointing. 

While the approach of reintegration policies was criticised, DIVOSA also opposed the framing of the reintegration projects by national policymakers. Repeatedly, the association warned against framing the reorientation talks as a punitive measure, not only because this would harm the intention of the reorientation talks, but also because it detracted from the social image of the social service organisation. In his speech at the Members’ Meeting late 1987, Naus further articulated this view:

I clearly object to the goals pursued by the minister with the reorientation talks, being: a clean-up of the social assistance population and an intensification of the sanctions policy. Although I could live with the first element, the second goal is unacceptable.

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322 Ibidem.
324 DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Folder: Divosa_reacties, 1979-1996. No. 881129, Minister SZW: heroriënteringsgesprekken, 16 September 1988,
325 DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Folder: DIVOSA Najaars-ledenverg., No. 87-3182, Opening najaarsledenvergadering DIVOSA, 26 November 1987.

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Notwithstanding his objections, Naus did announce in the same speech that DIVOSA would start cooperating more closely with the regional labour bureaus to stimulate reintegration. Also, the BMW’s (the contact officials of the social service agency) were to pay more attention to the reintegration of their clients in the coming years. Furthermore, a congress was organised in 1988 to exchange experiences with reintegration projects and to stimulate cooperation between the labour bureaus and social service agencies.\(^\text{326}\)

The association nevertheless continued to refuse pushing groups they deemed unfit for labour to reintegrate. When the government planned to obligate single mothers to find employment, DIVOSA contended this would fundamentally affect the individual freedom of mothers to decide on the upbringing of their children. In addition, DIVOSA did not see many opportunities for 40-year-old unemployed mothers on the labour market and thought it senseless to push them into a reintegration process.\(^\text{327}\)

While the social, inspection, and reintegration function of the social service agencies attracted most attention, throughout the second half of the eighties most municipalities continued struggling with their administrative function. Just as during the first half of the decade, such problems mainly followed from the tendency of the government to implement new regulations while having little eye for the administrative aspect. In addition to troubles with new regulations, many DIVOSA members feared they would have to reduce their workforce as a result of the system revision. As the last parts of the revision would only be implemented in 1987, DIVOSA repeatedly tried to get assurances from the VNG and SZW they would not have to cut back on staff.\(^\text{328}\) To support its members in getting a somewhat clearer picture of the coming years, an instruction was sent to all social service organisations how they could calculate the staffing and financial consequences of the system revision for their own organisation.\(^\text{329}\)

Another subject with regard to the administrative function was the automation of social service agencies, which began to receive increasing attention during these years. The topic formed the perfect opportunity for DIVOSA to prove its value to the members. In 1986, the yearly congress was dedicated to automation and every year a market was organised by DIVOSA where members could explore possibilities to automate, new management strategies, and possible ways of developing information systems.\(^\text{330}\)

\(^{326}\) DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Annual report 1988 (September 1989) 18.
\(^{329}\) DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Annual report 1987 (September 1988) 16-17.
\(^{330}\) DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Annual report 1986 (September 1987) 12.
2.4. 1989 – 1993: Weathering the storm

In 1989, the new CDA-PvdA government presented a policy agenda focussed on the ‘social renewal’ of executive agencies and ‘social activation’ of (long-term) unemployed people. In addition, the new social democratic state secretary Elske Ter Veld planned to replace the ‘old’ social assistance act of 1965 with a new modernised act. An essential element of this new act would be an increased emphasis on the reintegration function of the Abw by introducing ‘activating’ policies.331 The upcoming revision of the Abw was the central topic for DIVOSA throughout the early nineties. Before discussing the contribution DIVOSA made to the exact content of the new act, the course of events during these tumultuous years will first be illustrated. Thereafter, it will be examined how the management of DIVOSA sought to profile the association in the public debate and what influence national and municipal policymakers exerted on the course of the association. Lastly, the way DIVOSA dealt with the different functions will be discussed.

The media storm

Already at an early stage of the preparations for the new social assistance act, defined as the hAbw (herziening Algemene bijstandswet), DIVOSA and the VNG were asked by SZW to join deliberations. The members of the management had strong doubts, however, whether to enter into such deliberation. Given previous experiences with the department of SZW, it was feared that close involvement in the policymaking process would compromise DIVOSA at a very early stage.332 While refraining from any serious commitments towards SZW, DIVOSA did maintain close contacts with the VNG to match their viewpoints on the new act.

It turned out rather quickly this close cooperation was necessary. At first sight, Ter Veld seemed like a potential ally for DIVOSA. She had been a strong opponent of the austerity politics of the 1980s, had participated in demonstrations against the home sharers-norm, and – according to Vlek – had even promised to cancel the norm if the PvdA would enter government.333 From the moment she took office, however, Ter Veld tried to get a strong grip on the municipal policy process by intensifying the centralising tendencies that had already been present under De Graaf. Even more than her predecessor, she used the state consultants as instruments to discipline municipalities with and she often publicly rebuked municipal

331 ‘Ter Veld in ontwerp voor nieuwe Bijstandswet; Bijstandsgerechtigde moet sneller werk nemen’, NRC Handelsblad, 6 September 1990.
associations for their failing policies. While on the one hand, Ter Veld and other representatives of SZW emphasised they would heed to the years-long call for more municipal discretion and a simplification of social assistance legislation, simultaneously, however, they kept on pushing for increased control over the municipal policy process.

An important means to take control of the municipalities and their executive agencies was the municipal policy plan. By demanding that all municipal organisations provide a clear policy plan which could be checked on its validity by state consultants, Ter Veld gradually managed to limit municipal discretion. In deliberations with the VNG and DIVOSA, it was explained that this discretion would only be restored again, if approved policy plans could be provided. The DIVOSA management received the promises of the State Secretary with scepticism as the members saw the state consultants becoming more and more repressive within their own organisations, disregarding the offered cooperation. At management meetings, directors repeatedly noted there was hardly any room left for municipalities to devise their own policies. When DIVOSA was asked in 1992 to provide feedback on a draft for the hAbw, the association mainly focussed on the lack of municipal discretion:

The hAbw does indeed pretend to realize clear and concise legislation with a lot of decentralisation and deregulation, but lingers in the actual elaboration of these intentions. The legislator gives municipalities a larger responsibility for the individual recipient but does not provide the necessary regulatory and financial means.

Not all the blame was put on Ter Veld as the DIVOSA management felt the centralising tendencies were mainly caused by increasing parliamentary pressures on Ter Veld and the department of SZW to cut their budget as well as by the steady stream of bad press on social service organisations.

From the early 1990s, increasingly, rumours were circulating about excessive welfare fraud. A prime example was the earlier mentioned report about the 86.000 ‘missing’ unemployed persons receiving

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334 ‘Ter Veld in ontwerp voor nieuwe Bijstandswet’.
a benefit but being untraceable in the labour bureaus’ systems (See chapter 1.3). The initial response of the DIVOSA management to most rumours was to simply deny their validity. While for years, the association had been warning social service organisations lacked the means to effectively fulfil all inspection tasks, the chair of DIVOSA responded to the CBS-report that the inspection policies of agencies were adequate.

While seemingly contradictive, the defensive attitude of DIVOSA appears to have been authentic. At management meetings, members repeatedly complained about the in their eyes unjustified vilification of social service agencies. Especially with regard to the inspection of clients, the management felt social service organisations were disproportionately criticised. In 1991, for example, it was noted the department of SZW consistently struck ‘a much more negative tone when talking about municipalities then about other executive agencies.’ A tone that was sincerely deplored as the DIVOSA management felt both government and parliament perpetually based their opinions on the wrong information. Most of Ter Veld’s plans for the hAbw were considered to be ‘ad-hoc policies’, following from pressures exerted by parliament, which in turn, based its opinions on incomplete information as well. The sense of disproportionality was shared by the VNG. Nevertheless, the two associations decided in 1991 to try to resolve the criticism on their inspection policies by more effectively utilising the ‘PR-function’ of their fraud policies. The DIVOSA management also announced 18 large municipalities would start deliberations on improving the image of social service organisations at the political level.

However, this endeavour was doomed to fail as during the following years a stream of critical research reports seriously strained the PR-capabilities of social service agencies. In 1992, the social service agency of Groningen published its research report on welfare fraud (See chapter 1.3). As the DIVOSA management had not been informed about the painful conclusions of the report, the media storm that followed its presentation took the management by surprise. Moreover, the management was overwhelmed by the series of double-faced distressed responses by national politicians in the media. While for years, DIVOSA had been raising awareness for the fact that the intricate web of social assistance regulations hampered

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339 Smit, ‘86.000 gevallen is geen statistische fout’.
341 Ibidem.
the ability to sufficiently inspect recipients, suddenly, politicians were now ‘trying to outdo each other in uttering their concern and advocating powerful measures’.\(^{345}\)

In an interview, the director of the social service agency in The Hague, S. van Driel, responded bewildered to the parliamentary outcry. Van Driel, who was also running for national chair of the PvdA, openly expressed his anger about the parliamentary short-sightedness and hypocrisy:

> Coming January, numerous new regulations will take effect in the social assistance act. But nobody talks about that. In about three weeks, there are 26 different forms of cohabitation for people under the age of 27. Don’t we know, this stimulates fraud?\(^{346}\)

Instead of focusing on simplifying legislation, parliamentarians began to plead for more home-visits by social detective and a suspension of benefits if recipients would deny access to their homes. Van Driel responded infuriated to the idea: ‘What are they doing! This demonstrates a view of human nature that frightens me. They are tumbling over each other, trying to outdo each other in harshness.’\(^{347}\)

Despite its frustrations about the level of hypocrisy, the DIVOSA management concluded it should change its public relations strategy if the association was to weather the media storm. It was repeatedly proposed within the management to ‘choose the offensive’ on controversial issues by emphasising the fact that DIVOSA had been calling for measures for years. Such an approach of stirring up the public debate was rejected, however, as it was considered to be harming the interests of recipients. It would only focus more attention on the issues of fraud and misuse.\(^{348}\) Therefore, while the publicity storm ensued, DIVOSA maintained a low profile.

For the government, the worrying conclusions of the Groningen-report meant that Ter Veld had to put her plans for the hAbw on hold until the true extent of countrywide welfare fraud was studied. It was decided to await the conclusions of the two research commissions led by Doelman-Pel and Van der Zwan. Ter Veld did not intend to wait that long and before the results could be presented, she already submitted new proposals for the revision of the social assistance act. The new proposals were much more far-reaching than previous plans. Presented as a simplification of legislation in order to combat fraud, the plans of the


\(^{347}\) Ibidem.

state secretary entailed a budget cut of 440 million guilders. This cut would mainly be realised by lowering the benefits of single mothers and people between the age of 21 and 27 by 20 percent. Furthermore, Ter Veld intended to exclude people under the age of 21 entirely from social assistance. Another measure was to reverse the burden of proof for cohabitation, which meant that recipients would only receive a premium on top of a minimum benefit (50 percent of the minimum wage) if they were able to prove they actually lived alone. 349

DIVOSA responded indignantly. In a letter to the parliamentary commission of SZW, it stated the management had been ‘completely surprised’ by the new plans: ‘We also do not understand the timing, just now that two research projects on the implementation of the Abw have just been commissioned. […] It cannot be expected of us to have a definitive opinion that is also supported by all our members within a few days.’ 350 DIVOSA was not alone in its frustrations on the unpredictability of Ter Veld as even within own party – the PvdA – people were surprised by the gravity of the new measures. 351 Following the frustrations on Ter Veld’s communication and the objections to the harsh measures, the state secretary was forced to resign in June. 352

The successor of Ter Veld, Jacques Wallage, immediately started working on new proposals for the revision of the social assistance act (called the nAbw from now on), with the ambition of finishing his first proposal within two months. In order to succeed, Wallage realised he had to improve relations with the VNG. He therefore indicated to be open to new proposals for the act, with the precondition, however, that he had to respect the original mission statement of the government. Early September 1993, Wallage and the VNG, supported by representatives of DIVOSA, signed the so-called social assistance agreement (Bijstandsakkoord), which would be used as a framework for the coming act. 353

When in the same month, the commission Van der Zwan presented its conclusions, the agreement immediately came under heavy pressure. Even more than the Groningen-report, the conclusions of the commission Van der Zwan unleashed a media storm, filling the papers with stories about the shocking proceedings within social service organisations. At the national political level, the results of the commission were used to plead for stricter rules in order to finally tackle the far too lenient policies of social service

agencies. Had the political climate already been highly critical of the social service agencies, with the report of Van der Zwan, it completely turned against them. A reporter aptly described the situation as he noted:

The hunting season for social assistance recipients has opened. After years of deafness and being blind, politicians in The Hague finally begin to fire at the misuse of social provisions. The munition that has been loaded by the commission Van der Zwan sounds like thunder at a clear sky.\(^{354}\)

DIVOSA’s defence did not really convince. Again, it focused on the validity of the results. In addition, the association tried to shift the blame by raising awareness of the fact that the state consultants had not signalled any shortcomings in the implementation process as well. In the end, they were responsible for keeping an eye on the implementation process.\(^ {355}\)

Following the commotion surrounding the report, Wallage increasingly began to infringe on the discretion he had promised the VNG in the social assistance agreement. In December, he presented his updated plans for the social assistance act which had adopted some elements of the criticism in the research reports. In the new proposals of Wallage, most elements of the social assistance agreement were maintained; like the reversal of burden of proof, the abolition of social assistance for people up to 21 years, the extra emphasis on combatting fraud, and a budget cut of 380 million guilders. These were all elements that had been copied from the initial plans of Ter Veld as only the reduction of benefits for people under 27 had been removed.\(^ {356}\) It was also decided that municipalities were to pay for a larger share of the costs for social assistance as it was presumed this would stimulate them to take responsibility for running their social service agencies efficiently, or as Wallage phrased it: ‘stricter at the gate and more active at the exit’.\(^ {357}\) For the VNG and DIVOSA, the most important adjustment to the social assistance agreement, however, was the decision to no longer allow the municipal agencies to grant additional premiums completely at their own discretion.\(^ {358}\) Instead, they would have to follow national guidelines.

The plans for the nAbw are rightly defined by Vlek as the ‘centralistic decentralisation of the Abw’.\(^ {359}\) Although municipalities did receive more discretion, they also had to cut 380 million guilders and had to follow all sorts of guidelines on which they were checked by state consultants. While presented as

\(^{356}\) ‘Akkoord Wallage en VNG; Bijstand voor alleenstaande gaat omlaag’, NRC Handelsblad, 3 September 1993;
\(^{357}\) ‘Geen lagere bijstandsuitkering voor “echte” alleenstaanden’, Algemeen Nederlands Persbureau, 30 November 1993.
\(^{358}\) ‘Kristallisatiepunt’, NRC Handelsblad, 2 December 1993.
\(^{359}\) Vlek, Inactieven in actie, 383.
an effort to enhance discretion at the municipal level, the government continued to strengthen their control on the municipal policy process.

For DIVOSA, this last decision meant the new act would not be any better than the old Abw. The association had already criticised the original agreement as it entailed a large cut in social assistance budgets and did not really resolve existing problems with the multitude of cohabitation forms. The only positive aspect had been the substantial discretion for municipal authorities. Now that this element was removed, the DIVOSA management did not see any benefit in supporting the new act anymore. Instead, it began to advocate a ‘framework act’, only defining the borders of social assistance legislation. Within these borders, municipal authorities should be allowed to decide on the allocation of benefits at their own discretion. In addition to their own proposals, the management decided to start lobbying the VNG to reject the new plans of the state secretary as well.

Despite the opposition of the VNG and DIVOSA the nAbw was accepted by parliament late in 1994. In its annual report, the management stated that although not every viewpoint of DIVOSA had been accepted, the association had ‘sufficiently safeguarded the implementation process. However, concrete results were not listed.

**Trying to be constructive**

As was illustrated in the previous section, the social service organisations were at the centre of both the public and political debate during the early nineties. For DIVOSA, this meant that every decision the association made triggered some reaction from policymakers or the press. The association entered the new decade with a new chairman: J.W.M. Hoppenbrouwers. Van Vliet characterised Hoppenbrouwers as a ‘jovial man’, not only in character but also in his views on the profile of DIVOSA. In the opinion of the newly elected chair, good cooperation with the VNG and SZW should be paramount for the association. During his chairmanship, Hoppenbrouwers would pursue this central tenet to such an extent that he was often dubbed ‘the champion of cooperation’. Under his chairmanship, DIVOSA sought to present itself

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360 ‘Ernstige twijfels over nieuwe Bijstandswet’, *NRC Handelsblad*, 3 September 1993.
363 DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Annual report 1994, November 1995, 3.
emphatically as a reliable and constructive partner to cooperate with. Especially the relationship with the VNG was strengthened. Instead of responding to every societal development or new governmental measure, DIVOSA now first tried to find consensus with the municipal representatives. Furthermore, in the joint deliberations with the department of SZW, DIVOSA presented itself as ‘the advisor to the VNG’ and not as an interest organisation for social service agencies.365

The constructive attitude of DIVOSA and its return to the ‘traditional’ focus of the association was greatly appreciated by the VNG. At the 1992 DIVOSA congress, the chair of the VNG was pleased to conclude that the relationship with DIVOSA was good as he noted that the ‘administrative responsibility of municipalities is splendidly supported by your organisation.’366 While debates at the municipal level had been excessively ideological in previous years, VNG-director Kerckhaert now witnessed they were ‘supplemented with pragmatic discussions on outflow policies, sanction policies, and combatting fraud, aimed at realising the most efficient operation of municipal organisations.’367 After listing a number of examples of the well-running cooperation between the VNG and the social service agencies, he concluded social service agencies had finally started to approach their clients differently:

The realisation that granting benefits needs to be accompanied by obligations, that misuse needs to be combated, and that outflow should be stimulated – including an effective sanctions policy – really no longer has to be taught to officials. That a balanced and pragmatic approach is necessary to keep our social security system viable is finally recognized at the municipal level as well.368

DIVOSA also sought to re-establish the relationship with national policymakers. As was already illustrated, however, the relationship with the government did not really improve. A continuous point of frustration in cooperating with SZW, was that despite their clear intention to be constructive, the DIVOSA management felt it was not taken seriously. The management repeatedly discussed whether the contributions of DIVOSA actually had any impact on the preparatory process of the hAbw. There was a growing sentiment that the compliant attitude of DIVOSA was misused by SZW to enforce its own agenda. At one point, the daily management even commissioned their chairman Hoppenbrouwers to ask the Secretary General of SZW

367 Ibidem.
368 Ibidem.
whether the contributions of DIVOSA were actually taken under consideration.\textsuperscript{369} Within the daily management, discouraged members suggested DIVOSA should stop its futile efforts to strengthen connections with third parties and should just focus again on providing services to its members.\textsuperscript{370} Despite persistent doubts, the management nevertheless maintained its constructive attitude as it hoped it would eventually prove worthwhile.

At a 1992 management meeting the difficult position of DIVOSA was clearly illustrated. In a discussion, it was stated that on the one hand, DIVOSA had an important responsibility in providing feedback on legislation and it felt such comments were appreciated by parliament. On the other hand, however, it was noted such criticism was not appreciated by leading officials within SZW. This presented the management with a serious issue as ‘DIVOSA needs the officials of SZW to take care of specific issues but also needs the other channels for those issues that cannot be arranged with SZW.’\textsuperscript{371} The management did realize, however, that given the public image of the social service organisations – which kept on deteriorating due to persistent rumours about failing inspection policies – DIVOSA lacked the goodwill to bypass SZW.\textsuperscript{372}

While the relationship with SZW worsened, in 1992 similar experiences were increasingly reported about contacts with the VNG. Representatives of DIVOSA noted that they were often confronted with ‘fixed viewpoints, without being able to influence the position of the VNG’.\textsuperscript{373} While at the start of deliberations on the hAbw, DIVOSA had already experienced it was ignored by VNG when giving its opinion on more fundamental topics,\textsuperscript{374} the VNG now blocked the contribution of DIVOSA on other issues as well.\textsuperscript{375}

The division between the municipal associations seemed to be primarily caused by the escalating ‘administrative conflict’ between the VNG and SZW. While DIVOSA kept on emphasising cooperation and a constructive approach in relation to the ministry, the municipal representatives actively sought the

\textsuperscript{369} DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Minute book: Dagelijks Bestuur/Hoofdbestuur 1989/1990, Besluitenlijst van de vergadering van het dagelijks bestuur van DIVOSA, 22 March 1990.
\textsuperscript{372} Ibidem.
confrontation with SZW and threatened to cancel all deliberations concerning the new act if the ministry did not give any warranties on municipal autonomy. Ter Veld, however, demanded the municipal authorities to support her plans to devise new inspection and sanctioning policies. In a meeting with the VNG and DIVOSA, she even threatened to resign if she did not get the desired support. The VNG, however, stated it would continue its opposition as long as it did not get any assurances on maintaining its discretionary privileges.

Within the Central Management of DIVOSA, the approach of the VNG was not appreciated as there was some sympathy for the position of SZW which was considered to be under increasing pressure from parliament. It was therefore decided not to mingle in this conflict and focus on the executive part of the hAbw-plans. According to Galema, the former employee of the central bureau, DIVOSA’s neutral position was cause for frustration within the VNG as it expected the municipal agencies to be loyal.

With the resignation of Hoppenbrouwers late 1992, it turned out similar sentiments had been brewing among the ranks of DIVOSA as well. At the first management meeting under interim chair P. van Dijk, it was immediately brought up that ‘SZW is using the association [DIVOSA] to push through her plans at the municipal level. It might very well be the case this is caused by the dependent attitude of DIVOSA in relation to SZW.’ Instead of just trying to implement the policies dictated by the national level, the critics of Hoppenbrouwers’ policies proposed the association should regain its position as a serious partner: ‘At the executive level, it is experienced the goals of the government are not realised because the implementation process is frustrated by all associated legislation. If DIVOSA would present some creative ideas in this field, she can be a serious interlocutor for politicians.’

Under van Dijk, the management took the initiative and agreed to set up a strategic debate with the members and to rethink the relationship with the VNG and SZW. May 1992, it was boldly stated at a management meeting that ‘for too long, DIVOSA as an association of executive agencies has been standing at the side-line simply because the VNG selects its interlocutors in her deliberations with the government

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378 Gerard Galema (Employee of the central bureau of DIVOSA between 1978 and 2014), interview by the author (11 April 2017)
380 Ibidem.
and SZW. Therefore, it was decided to start lobbying the VNG to let DIVOSA join deliberations again. In July, SZW was approached to set up a new periodical meeting while the management also intended to increase contacts with other organisations like the labour bureaus.

Although under Van Dijk, the management tried to regain its position in deliberations, the dissatisfaction among the members about the passivity of DIVOSA in the public debate had not yet dissolved. When the commission Van der Zwan presented its crushing conclusions, attendees at a meeting of the Central Management voiced their discontent with the policies of the association. They especially wondered why the daily management had not prepared a response to the conclusions of the commission beforehand while it was clear the conclusions would be critical. As a result of this lack of preparation they observed that:

The social service organisation has been damaged and DIVOSA has not sufficiently distanced itself from the conclusions. There should have been a sharp response that the core of all executive troubles lies in laws and regulations. Now, the members and their employees have experienced too little support from DIVOSA.

Furthermore, it was noted that despite the efforts to get more involved in policymaking, DIVOSA had exercised scarcely any influence on the drafting of the nAbw. Again, it was emphasised that a serious rethinking of DIVOSA’s strategy was needed. This sentiment was supported by letters from several provincial departments in which members complained about DIVOSA’s inactivity in relation to the nAbw. Despite such criticisms, the association continued to avoid publicly debating the conclusions of the commission Van der Zwan as it feared politicization of the subject.

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385 Ibidem.
Not that much honour anymore

While under Hoppenbrouwers, DIVOSA focused on maintaining good relationships with the VNG and SZW, the active representation of recipients’ interests seemed to have disappeared from the minds of the DIVOSA management. Throughout the 1980s, DIVOSA first and foremost assessed the effects governmental policies would have on ‘recipients of a benefit and others who have to make ends meet on a minimum income’. From 1989 onwards, however, the active representation of recipients’ suddenly was not mentioned anymore.

An indication that it was a conscious decision to abandon the advocacy of recipients, is a small remark recorded in the minutes of the management meeting in May 1991. DIVOSA was approached by representatives of the Council for Child Protection (Raad voor de Kinderbescherming) to help them out with the collection of child support as the Ministry of Justice no longer considered this a responsibility of the government. The DIVOSA management, for whom Hoppenbrouwers most likely did the talking, dismissed the request as they did not consider this a task for social service agencies. Although in itself, this refusal was not very exceptional or even unreasonable, the explanation provided by the management is crucial. As it was explained to the representatives of the child protection agencies, ‘Nowadays, DIVOSA has a much more business-like approach, which means we now assume people should assert their own rights as much as possible.’ With this one sentence, Hoppenbrouwers clearly illustrated the way DIVOSA conceived of its relation with recipients and the minima. DIVOSA no longer felt it should be a ‘link’ between recipients and society nor did it regard recipients’ interests as paramount anymore. Instead, clients were deemed to be able to take care of their own affairs.

While during the early 1990s, DIVOSA’s course was repeatedly questioned, it was never suggested within the management to invest more time in advocating the rights of clients or the minima. When in 1993, Ter Veld intended to deny everyone under the age of 21 the right to social assistance, the management consciously decided to focus on the ‘possible unfeasibility of the regulations’ and not on the plain fact that thousands of citizens would lose part of their social rights. Although initially, DIVOSA did call on the state secretary to prevent a ‘drastic decline of the benefit level’ and to keep social assistance available for those

387 DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Annual report 1986 (September 1987) 19; DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Annual report 1987 (September 1988) 20-21.
young people who could not be accommodated by the JWG, in the official response to the plans of Wallage May 1994, the interests of recipients were not even mentioned anymore. According to Galema, DIVOSA did at times still try to voice its objections in deliberations with the ministry: ‘but then you are told “this is what parliament wants”. Well, then we were finished.’

In an article published in 1994, Oude Engberink, one of the authors of the 1982 report Minima zonder marge, observed how ‘About ten years ago, social services were among the main advocates of benefit recipients. Nowadays, you can only hear social service organisations talk about the feasibility of legislation and the lack of discretion.’ In the same article, central bureau director Lemmen confirmed the observation of Oude Engberink as he noted: ‘We [DIVOSA] found out that sticking up for recipients cannot be combined with our main task, implementing the law. You can say for five to ten years that things should be different, but the cuts will still be implemented.’ When Lemmen was asked if he though there still was any director left that stood up for the interests of recipients, he answered nobody really crossed his mind.

It is remarkable to see how the decision to cast off the advocacy of recipients occurred almost simultaneously with the inauguration of the CDA-PvdA government. As has been described in the introduction, the participation of the PvdA in government marked a turning point in the history of the Dutch welfare state. From 1989 onwards, a new consensus was reached on the conclusion that the welfare state had been too generous and the approach of unemployed people had been too lenient. In a 1993 interview, Jan de Boer, who had been a prominent member of DIVOSA as director of the social service agency in Leeuwarden, described the growing societal consensus right after the VNG and Wallage had signed their social assistance agreement. While the benefits were lowered to 50 percent of the minimum wage, De Boer observed how every influential actor seemed to agree with the austerity program, the PvdA, the VNG, and even DIVOSA. He cynically noted that DIVOSA itself, ‘when the association still cared about poverty and pauperisation’, had repeatedly demonstrated that people should not be living on the social minimum for a long time. Nevertheless, it now seemed to be content with an agreement that was to change social assistance from a right into a favour. ‘Apparently all the happy members of this giant alliance think this is

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392 Gerard Galema (Employee of the central bureau of DIVOSA between 1978 and 2014), interview by the author (11 April 2017)
393 De Rijk, ‘Echt alleen het piepsysteem van de bijstandswet’.
right.’\textsuperscript{395} De Boer concluded that ‘as a former member of the Central Management of DIVOSA I experience more than vicarious shame and as a member of the governmental party PvdA I am embarrassed by the party bosses who are getting more and more estranged from their natural supporters: the poor side of the Netherlands.’\textsuperscript{396}

The consensus observed by De Boer has been confirmed by former minister of Social Affairs and Employment Bert de Vries. In his 2005 book, De Vries concludes that during these years, the public limelight shifted toward the middle groups: ‘Not because the number of weak people in society had decreased but because they increasingly had to compete for political attention with the middle classes’.\textsuperscript{397} According to De Vries, it must have played a role that at the beginning of the 1990s, ‘after a long period of austerity politics, the sentiment had been growing that there really was not that much honour in defending the weak anymore’\textsuperscript{398}

Financial affairs

Just as the moderation of the late 1980s was heavily influenced by the governmental decision to cut subsidy of DIVOSA, the association’s more ‘business-like’ approach of the early 1990s seems to have been influenced by financial considerations as well. In 1991, a new cut loomed once again and was often discussed within the management. The most direct consequence of this threat, was the effort by the Central Management to hedge the association against the ministerial fickleness. The most effective way was to raise both the membership fee and the entrance fees for congresses and meetings. Furthermore, it was suggested to ‘limit the activities of the association to providing the most necessary things for the members.’\textsuperscript{399} In addition to a focus on providing assistance to the members, which was now considered to be DIVOSA’s core task, the management concluded that ‘the main reason DIVOSA is granted a subsidy, is its value to the department [SZW]’.\textsuperscript{400} Therefore, it was suggested to emphasise the contributions DIVOSA made to the work of the ministry. Although it is clear, financial interests pushed the management to narrow down their activities to providing services to the members, financial troubles did not stop the association from representing social assistance recipients during the early eighties. Although the looming budget cuts

\textsuperscript{395} Ibidem.
\textsuperscript{396} Ibidem.
\textsuperscript{397} Bert de Vries, \textit{Overmoed en onbehagen. Het hervormingskabinet-Balkenende II} (Amsterdam 2015) 15.
\textsuperscript{398} Ibidem.
in the subsidy of the association were an important factor in the motivation for a more ‘business-like’ approach, the personal views of the management, the large societal consensus, and the pressures of the public debate definitively played just as big a role.

The functions: Towards an outflow organisation

While DIVOSA saw the revision of the Abw as an opportunity to finally encourage a fundamental rethinking of the position of social assistance in the broader social security system, it invested most of its energy in upholding its public image and maintaining its position in the policy cycle. Notwithstanding the high pressure on DIVOSA, the association did actively contribute to developing initiatives in relation to the different functions of the social service organisation. While throughout the 1980s, DIVOSA had continuously supported a minimum job description which laid a large emphasis on the social function, under Hoppenbrouwers the job description disappeared from the agenda. Instead, the guiding principle for DIVOSA during the early nineties seemed to be the upholding of municipal discretion. Repeatedly, DIVOSA criticised national policymakers on their ‘mania for rules’ and ‘centralising tendencies’.401 Whatever function of the social service association was discussed during these years, DIVOSA always returned to its plea for less and simpler rules and more discretion at the street level.402 As the association summarised in a joint ‘ten-point memorandum’ it presented with the VNG, ‘policymakers in The Hague usually have two limitations. They are running behind the facts and they always try to capture everything in enforceable rules.’403

Although DIVOSA focused on municipal discretion in the media, naturally, it did try to participate in devising new policies relating to the functions. Of the functions, the inspection function received by far the most attention in the public debate. Just as in previous years, the members of the DIVOSA management continued to struggle with the pressure of SZW to realize stricter policies, harsher penalties, and more inspections. In management meetings it was noted how all these extra efforts in the field of inspection seriously detracted from the other functions. Furthermore, it was repeatedly wondered why it was so important to be so much tougher on welfare fraud than on other forms of fraud. However, the

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402 Examples are the debates about the definition of ‘fitting labour’ and the continuous debate about the burgeoning welfare fraud during these years.
management did realize DIVOSA would not be able to stop developments or even to propose adjustments of proposed policies. Since there was broad political consensus social service agencies should increase their inspections, DIVOSA should follow this consensus. As a result of this insight, the association increasingly cooperated in developing more effective inspection policies.

An example of this changed attitude, was the willingness of DIVOSA to distribute manuals for the development of sanction policies among the members. Although the DIVOSA management still did not wholeheartedly support such directives as it feared state consultants would use them to discipline social service agencies, it did invest in their development. In 1993, for example, directives were sent on new possibilities to more effectively control whether young people requesting social assistance were also receiving student funding.

The cooperative approach in improving sanction policies also showed during a conflict the VNG had with Ter Veld about her plans to increase supervision on social service agencies. DIVOSA deliberately decided not to follow the VNG in its opposition to the state secretary. Instead, it only vocally supported the protest against centralisation but willingly cooperated with SZW. DIVOSA’s earlier opposition against a focus on fraud as it would stigmatize recipients had largely dissolved. Of the four reports DIVOSA published in 1992, three revolved around devising a more effective inspection policy.

Besides inspection policies, during these years, sanction policies increasingly caught the limelight. In 1992, the DIVOSA management already noted that municipalities should make a cost-benefit analysis on the effectiveness of specific sanction policies. Following its own assessment, it concluded they could best focus on recovering unduly paid benefits as imposing more sanctions would only raise work pressures while it would not really pay out financially.

The assessment of DIVOSA corresponded with the ministerial decision to obligate all agencies to implement recovery policies. However, this obligation created a large challenge for a lot of agencies as they did not have the necessary resources. While the measure was postponed several times, in 1993 it took

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405 DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Annual report 1991 (September 1992) 13-14.
408 Ibidem, 19.
force. Shortly after its introduction, it turned out a lot of municipalities were not living up to the new regulation and the press increasingly reported on the failing sanction policies of social service agencies. Following the growing public attention for the issue, the state secretary stimulated his state consultants to inspect and discipline social service agencies. Although DIVOSA protested against the arbitrariness of the consultants and the undermining effect financial sanctions had on the daily work of social service agencies, the number of fined agencies doubled to a total of 66 in 1993.

While the inspection function attracted most attention in the public debate, one of the most discussed topics within DIVOSA itself was the reintegration function. Especially the cooperation with the regional labour bureaus was a much-discussed topic. Considering the focus of this thesis, however, the history of this cooperation will not be examined. Instead, DIVOSA’s approach of the reintegration function will be discussed.

The CDA-PvdA government intended to stimulate the ‘social activation’ of all welfare recipients. Within DIVOSA, this new policy rationale was received with scepticism as the management expected old policies would just be continued under a new name. This scepticism was encouraged by the fact that social service organisations had been calling for years that the reintegration of recipients needed much more attention than it had received during the 1980s. Notwithstanding its critical side notes, DIVOSA did support the increasing awareness that unemployed citizens needed to be able to participate in society.

The way the association approached the reintegration function did change significantly. While DIVOSA had encouraged activation and reintegration projects during the 1980s as being one of the functions of the social service agency, under Hoppenbrouwers, the association openly endorsed a complete focus on employment. In his 1992 speech at the DIVOSA congress, Hoppenbrouwers announced that the social service organisation ‘should transform from a benefit office to an outflow office’. All other functions needed to be in service of the reintegration of recipients. The intention to transform social service

agencies into outflow offices was taken seriously. With regard to the job pools, for example, DIVOSA made a real effort to hit the ground running. Contacts were made with regional labour bureaus and an infrastructure was devised to instruct the members and stimulate them to share experiences.\footnote{DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Minute book: Dagelijks Bestuur/Hoofdbestuur 1989/1990, Besluitenlijst van de vergadering van het Hoofdbestuur van DIVOSA, 22 March 1990.}

Despite the effort, within the management awareness was raised for the fact that a substantial part of long-term unemployed clients would be unwilling to cooperate in their reintegration and mainly ‘regarded their benefit as a basic income’.\footnote{DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Minute book: Dagelijks Bestuur/Hoofdbestuur 1989/1990, Besluitenlijst van de vergadering van het Hoofdbestuur van DIVOSA, 17 January 1990.} The management nevertheless decided there were enough willing clients who should be helped first. Agencies should focus their activities on recipients ‘that had not resigned to their unemployment’.\footnote{Ibidem.}

Just one year later, however, this approach of focusing on eager clients already began to change. At a management meeting it was suggested that social service agencies should get rid of the reputation that clients did ‘not have to fear the social service agency’ if they refused to make an effort to find employment again.\footnote{DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Minute book: Dagelijks Bestuur/Hoofdbestuur 1991/1992, Besluitenlijst van de vergadering van het Hoofdbestuur van DIVOSA, 23 January 1991.} This remark followed on a discussion of the cooperation with the labour bureaus and SZW who were continuously blaming DIVOSA and social service agencies for their failing reintegration policies.\footnote{Ibidem.} The effort to improve the image of the social service agency would be futile as in the course of 1992 the first research reports were published on the proceedings within social service organisations. As a result, in the following years the reintegration function was snowed under by all the attention for the inspection function. At a meeting of the daily management, it was noted that the feasibility of all the intended reintegration projects was increasingly questioned as the necessary financial resources were not provided by the ministry. Furthermore, the increasing pressure SZW exerted on municipalities to improve their inspection policies hampered other initiatives in the field of reintegration.\footnote{DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Minute book: Dagelijks Bestuur/Hoofdbestuur 1991/1992, Besluitenlijst van de vergadering van het dagelijks bestuur van DIVOSA, 22 October 1992.}

DIVOSA nevertheless continued to raise awareness for the fact that a substantial group of social assistance recipients would never be able to reintegrate. For this group, a distinct approach needed to be devised to prevent their exclusion from society. At the 1993 congress, DIVOSA chair van Dijk noted that the only options to help these clients were ‘a subsidised job, an obligated act of reciprocation in return for
receiving a benefit or just leaving these people alone. This last option was not taken seriously, however, as the association continued its plea for the social activation of recipients. DIVOSA even worked out a strategy to profile the social service agencies as the ‘actor on the labour market for hard to integrate people’.

The inspection and reintegration functions attracted most attention during the early 1990s. Within social service agencies, however, the administrative function received almost as much. As DIVOSA increasingly focused on improving the implementation process, the management engaged in a series of initiatives aimed at strengthening the administrative processes within social service organisations. Until the early 1990s, welfare institutions had not yet linked their systems nor did they exchange data on a large scale as computers were still relatively rare. In 1991, the DIVOSA management still noted that while most social service organisations had their own automated system, the makeup of these systems differed per organisation. Collectively, in turn, the systems used by the social service organisations differed completely from the ones used by other welfare institutions.

Therefore, DIVOSA made a serious effort to stimulate automation by taking part in all sorts of projects and research groups. The most important initiative was the introduction of the Sofi-number in 1992, a personal insurance number for every client. This number could be used to link the data all governmental agencies had on a particular client. Within the DIVOSA management it was wondered whether DIVOSA had to consider the widely shared wish of clients to protect their privacy and their personal information. However, DIVOSA wholeheartedly supported the governmental urge to use the Sofi-number as an instrument to inspect clients more effectively and actively started cooperating with SZW to find the best opportunities of linking information systems. At the 1992 congress, chairman Hoppenbrouwers emphasised the possibilities of the Sofi-number to stimulate the outflow of recipients. DIVOSA also

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422 ‘Zeker 158.000 mensen komen nooit meer uit de bijstand’, Trouw, 28 May 1993.
425 DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Annual report 1990 (September 1991) 13.
started informing the members on possibilities to exchange information with other institutions to inspect clients more effectively. In 1993, for example, the members were informed on the possibility to exchange information with tax authorities.\textsuperscript{428}

While for years, DIVOSA had focused on the social function of the social service organisation as it was regarded to be the most favourable for recipients, during the early 1990s, it was largely neglected. The lack of interest particularly showed in 1991, when it was debated whether the municipal minima-funds should be maintained. These funds offered social service organisations the possibility to provide all sorts of additional support to citizens, like debt counselling or membership of a sports club. In the opinion of the DIVOSA management such matters did not belong to their responsibility, however, as the association only voiced its opinion on the implementation of policy. Policymaking was considered a responsibility of municipal authorities.\textsuperscript{429}

Although the social function seemed to be increasingly overlooked, in its criticism on the plans for the hAbw, DIVOSA did raise some awareness for the social tasks of social service agencies. At the management meeting where the response was prepared, it was emphasised the ‘social function of the Abw should be expressed far more clearly’ in the plans for the hAbw. As SZW seemed to focus on the outflow of recipients, the management concluded there was ‘insufficient recognition of the fact that not all recipients will be able to gain a place in the labour market and that a different policy should be devised for these people.’\textsuperscript{430} Although DIVOSA did emphasise the social function, it only substantiated it with the statement that municipalities could have a ‘directional function’ in using the range of offered services as effectively as possible.\textsuperscript{431} Hence, it did not really define a clear role for the social service agencies.

The lack of initiative with regard to the social function showed at the 1993 congress. During a debate, it was observed that social service organisations were mainly concerned with providing benefits, and with reintegrating and inspecting recipients. As a result, the social function had increasingly been

pushed aside. Despite this observation, a journalist noted that DIVOSA still did not have a clear view on how it wanted to fulfil the social function.\(^{432}\)

Despite the neglect of the social function, DIVOSA did invest some energy in looking out for clients. In 1993, for example, the association protested against excluding asylum seekers from social assistance.\(^{433}\) Also, the management decided to play an active role in deliberations for a new act for handicapped people. In the minutes of the management it is clear, however, that this decision was mainly motivated by financial reasons. The daily management thought it to be beneficial for the association if DIVOSA would ‘profile’ itself more emphatically in relation to handicapped people. In this way, the association would be able to attract additional financial resources. It also assumed the members would ‘get more satisfaction from their membership’ if DIVOSA would do something to improve the service provision to handicapped clients.\(^{434}\)

2.5. 1994 – 1998: Earning a position in the market

A product oriented association

The year 1994 presents a turning point, both in the history of the Dutch welfare state as in the history of DIVOSA. In this year, a new government of PvdA, VVD, and D66 presented itself with the central slogan ‘work, work, work’. The most prominent expression of this mission was the introduction of 40,000 subsidised jobs, the so-called ‘Melkert-jobs’. Also, the number of people active in the job pools or youth work schemes was increased and taxes levied on low wages were lowered.\(^{435}\) For DIVOSA, the year 1994 also represented a juncture. Finally, after four years of preparation and contention, the nAbw had been accepted by parliament. The association now had to gear up for the introduction of the new act in 1996.

Over the past year, however, the position of DIVOSA as a major player in consultations with policymakers had become increasingly uncertain. In addition to the damaged reputation of the association following the 1993 reports, this uncertainty was mainly caused by the decision of SZW to institute a new National Transitional Organisation (Landelijke Veranderingsorganisatie or LVO). Given the soured relations between the ministry, the VNG, and DIVOSA, who were said to ‘only still harass each other from their fox

\(^{432}\) ‘Harde kern bijstand is onvermijdelijk’, Trouw, 28 May 1993.
holes’, the LVO was to mediate between the three parties and to ensure a smooth implementation of the nAbw.\textsuperscript{436}

As the implementation of policy had traditionally been the responsibility of DIVOSA, the management viewed the LVO as a serious threat to the association. This concern seemed to be legitimate as the LVO immediately proposed to introduce a new branch organisation for social service agencies independent from DIVOSA. Moreover, the LVO was said to generate a lot of bad press about DIVOSA while the members of the DIVOSA management repeatedly complained the LVO did not respond to their messages.\textsuperscript{437} The growing insecurity within DIVOSA shows clearly in the minutes of the periodic meeting DIVOSA had with the VNG. When representatives of DIVOSA mentioned that the association had instituted a working group to redefine the purpose of DIVOSA, they rushed to emphasize that this did not mean the association would give up its place in the consultative bodies.\textsuperscript{438}

The mentioned working group was a direct response to the institution of the LVO and was to rethink the purpose, core functions, and public profile of both DIVOSA and the social service organisations.\textsuperscript{439} The conclusions of the working group were presented and accepted by the members late 1994 and were used to authorise the transformation of the association. In the annual report over 1994, published in November 1995, the core tasks of social service agencies were defined as ‘protecting the income and stimulating the independence of people relying on governmental support’.\textsuperscript{440} Income protection was considered to be the absolute foundation of the social service agency while the task of stimulating independence should be realised in cooperation with third parties. The job description had significant consequences for the course of DIVOSA. According to the management, the association should focus its energy on building an infrastructure to stimulate cooperation between the members. The primary tasks of DIVOSA should be to instruct members on business management and to facilitate contacts between members enabling them to ‘shape and protect the societal safety net’.\textsuperscript{441}

\textsuperscript{439} DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Folder: Toekomst GSD, Besluitenlijst van de vergadering van werkgroep “profieleren GSD-en Divosa”, No. 94-385, 13 June 1994; DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Annual report 1994 (November 1995) 7.
\textsuperscript{440} DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Annual report 1994 (November 1995) 5.
\textsuperscript{441} Ibidem, 7.
While publicly endorsed in the annual report, the decision on the new purpose of DIVOSA had been taken a few months before. At a meeting in September, the Central Management made the definitive decision to transform the association into a service-providing organisation. The ‘business-plan’ of DIVOSA was to gradually replace the subsidies it received from the state by expanding its commercial activities, for instance, by selling products to its members. When one of the attendees at the meeting pointed out this implied that ‘the thing which has generated most publicity for the association in the recent past will be phased out’, the majority of the board decided that ‘exerting political influence does not belong to our tasks’. As the DIVOSA management endorsed the new commercial focus of the association, the advocacy of social assistance recipients definitively belonged to the past.

While the annual report of the association mentioned the crushing reports of 1993 and the institution of the LVO as motivations for the reconsideration of DIVOSA’s purpose, another important factor was omitted. As it turns out in the minutes of both the working group and the Central Management, a very important factor was the ministerial decision to fundamentally alter the subsidy granted to DIVOSA. Instead of an ‘institutional subsidy’, granted without assessment of the actual activities of the association, in 1994 the ministry decided to switch to an ‘activities subsidy’, a grant that was dependent on ‘DIVOSA’s contribution to the realisation of the core tasks of SZW’. Anticipating the consequences of this decision, the working group and the Central Management decided at the beginning of 1995 to focus on what they thought was the core function of DIVOSA: the provision of services and support to members. To ensure the viability of the association, it was decided to start charging members for the use of DIVOSA’s products, to cancel planned research projects, and to focus on expanding commercial activities. Once again, the financial pressures exerted by the ministry caused DIVOSA to change its policies.

The new rationale was rolled out under the leadership of a newly appointed chair, G. Rombout. According to Lemmen, director of the central bureau, the main reason Rombout had been asked as chair was his expertise in streamlining policy processes within social service organisations. Considering this focus, he

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seemed like the ideal person to guide DIVOSA through its transformation. In an interview, Rombout explained he especially liked the ‘management side’ of running a social service organisation. ‘Naturally, I do have some affinity with it of course. I have to. My main goal is to keep some parts of the welfare state intact, even though it is becoming increasingly difficult.’447 Despite this intention, Rombout clearly did not intend to mingle in policymaking: ‘ Seriously, DIVOSA should not discuss politics. We do, however, need to join in deliberations. Showing what the issues are. Indicating that there will be a group of people for whom there is absolutely no job.’448

Discussing his first year as chair in the 1995 annual report, Rombout explained the course of DIVOSA for the following years as he emphasised the ‘service-function for the members needs to be paramount, which means that the association is going to operate in a product-oriented fashion.’449 Rombout further illustrated what this new product orientation would entail. In cooperation with SZW and the VNG a coordinated range of services and products would be developed in which DIVOSA would focus on providing assistance in the implementation of policy.450 Rombout did not forget to commemorate that the increased activities of the association had been facilitated by an additional subsidy granted by the ministry.451

Within the management of DIVOSA it was increasingly realised, however, that the financial dependency of SZW should be resolved. At the Members’ Meeting of 1996 a new business plan was presented which planned to cover all expenses for the representation of social service agencies by incoming membership fees. Rombout announced that ‘in this way, the association can become financially independent and will be able to pursue taking its own position in relation to the VNG and SZW.’452 At the Members’ Meeting the following year, however, the new chair L. Rijs-Neeft had to conclude that this distinct position had not really been realised. In her speech she concluded that ‘at the strategic level and in deliberations on the implementation process, DIVOSA plays a side role; in these fields the government sees the VNG as its interlocutor and DIVOSA as an advisor, at the most.’453

448 Ibidem.
449 DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Annual report 1995 (November 1996) 7.
450 Ibidem, 3.
451 Ibidem.
452 Divosa_Ledenverg. No. 96-1037, Verslag van de huishoudelijke vergadering van Divosa, 28 November 1996.
Earning a position on the market

DIVOSA’s reemphasis on supporting the members turned out to be necessary. The eventual introduction of the nAbw did not bring peace to social service organisations. Instead, from 1996 onwards, municipal agencies were confronted with an ‘almost continuous stream of changes in regulations and legislation’. 454 At the centre of these reforms was the governmental urge to put work before income by integrating all organisations active in the domain of work and income. The first step towards this integration was taken in 1995, one year after the government of VVD, PvdA, and D66 had taken office. Social service organisations were increasingly expected to take part in the so-called ‘Work and Income Partnership’ (Samenwerkingsverband werk en inkomen or SWI). 455 The idea behind the SWI-project was the development of Centres for Work and Income (Centra voor Werk en Inkomen or CWI’s), where labour provision, benefit provision, guidance to education, and services like debt counselling, medical advice, and day-care for children were bundled. According to social scientist Van Oorschot, the CWI’s were intended as a form of institutional integration to overcome the ineffectiveness of ‘the administrative differentiation’ between all organisations in the field of reintegration and unemployment. 456

Although at first, the SWI was of a voluntary nature, in 1997 SZW took charge and obligated organisations to cooperate. Simultaneously with this top-down reform, the government decided to privatize the labour provision. According to Van Gestel, De Beer, and Van der Meer, who wrote a book on the welfare state reforms of the 1990s, these decisions caused total chaos during the second half of the 1990s as the government poured out one reform after another while paying little attention to the actual implementation on the ground. In a final attempt to resolve the chaos, at the turn of the century the governmental decided to institute the CWI’s as completely new institutions independent of social service organisation and the privatised labour organisations. The CWI’s were to be responsible for the intake and activation of all citizens claiming an unemployment benefit or social assistance. 457

Although a large part of the reforms of the late 1990s falls outside of the scope of this thesis, the sustained rumours about the coming reorganisations caused great uncertainty among the directors of social service organisations on the future position their organisation was to have within the new system. This uncertainty can be retraced, for instance, in the deliberations DIVOSA had with the VNG. In 1997, director of the central

455 Van Gestel, De Beer and Van der Meer, Het hervormingsmoeras van de verzorgingsstaat, 90.
457 Van Gestel, De Beer and Van der Meer, Het hervormingsmoeras van de verzorgingsstaat, 91-92.
bureau Lemmen emphasised in such a meeting that ‘there is still a lot of discussion within DIVOSA about what exactly is coming at us.’

Amidst this uncertainty, DIVOSA tried to take up leadership and announced it would more emphatically represent its members’ interests. To the members it was emphasised their fate was in their own hands. Whether the rapid developments presented a threat or an opportunity depended upon their ability to reposition themselves, as ‘all parties needed to earn their position in the market’. To support the members in this endeavour, DIVOSA’s service-function and the product-oriented approach were further facilitated by a restructuring of the association. According to DIVOSA’s new structure (see table 2.2), the management boards were replaced by one ‘compact and effective’ board. The eleven provincial departments were replaced by four regions. The central commissions were also abolished and replaced by two advisory commissions, focused on ‘Business management’ and ‘Policy issues’.

Table 2.2. Schematic illustration of the organisational restructuring of DIVOSA’s in 1997

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Old situation</th>
<th>New situation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Members’ meeting</td>
<td>Members’ meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Management (22 members)</td>
<td>Board (Min. 7 members)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Management (Max. 7 members)</td>
<td>Regions (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provincial departments</td>
<td>Circles (54)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circles (54)</td>
<td>Advisory commissions (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Commissions (4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


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458 DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Samenwerking SZ, Verslag van de vergadering van de Commissie Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, 27 March 1997.
459 DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Folder: Toekomst GSD, Positioneringsdiscussie, No. 98-737, 15 October 1998.
While after 1994, DIVOSA seemed to have forgotten about the interest representation of clients, in 1997, the association made a plea to raise the benefit levels with five percent. In an interview, Rombout explained that ‘The benefit levels have been lagging behind the wage increases for years. That was necessary, we all understood that. Now, things are getting better in the Netherlands. Now, benefits can catch up with what they could not get in previous years.’462 The proposal of DIVOSA fell on barren ground, however, as Melkert feared a raising of the benefit level would discourage recipients to find employment.463 Rombout agreed with the perspective of the minister: ‘It is a dilemma. Money plays a role for all people, also for recipients looking for a job. [...] I am just signalling the current minimum is too low.’464 This emphasis on merely signalling what was happening at the street level was also used in the preparations for the nAbw. Before the new act would be introduced, the Central Management already foresaw the substantial inequity that would follow on its introduction (See chapter 1.4). However, it was decided that ‘DIVOSA should not make the mistake of combatting inequality; the national government has knowingly decided to accept possible differences between municipalities and will also undo their decision if they have to.’465

At times, the interests of social assistance recipients were nevertheless reemphasised. While under the chairmanship of Rijs-Neeft, DIVOSA clearly focused on supporting social service agencies in maintaining their traditional position in ‘the chain of work and income’, in her preface to the 1998 annual report, she emphasised ‘the interest of the customer should be paramount to the social service agency, and not the institutional interests’.466 Notwithstanding this intention, on the next page she reported that ‘for most of the year, the position of the municipal social service organisation in the new implementation structure of work and income has required all our attention’.467 When examining the input of Rijs-Neeft in deliberations with the VNG, it does indeed show that the interests of social service agencies were prioritised over the interests of recipients.468

464 ‘Sociale dienst wil uitkeringen fors verhogen’.
467 Ibidem, 8.
468 DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Samenwerking SZ, Verslag van de vergadering van de Commissie Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, 12 Juni 1997.
The functions: Profiling the association

As the main governmental mission was to stimulate the labour market, the reintegration function was one of the most hotly debated topics during this period. DIVOSA agreed wholeheartedly with the governmental agenda and sent out a press release in which it endorsed the view that the ‘traditional “benefit-oriented” organisation needs to transform into an “outflow-oriented” organisation.’ However, DIVOSA did emphasise not every unemployed worker would be able to find employment again. The association therefore proposed the categorisation of clients and to develop specific reintegration instruments for each category (See chapter 1.4). In addition, DIVOSA made a plea to introduce targets to ensure the outflow of social assistance recipients.

Several months later, DIVOSA lobbied again for the intensification of the reintegration function. In a letter to SZW, the association raised awareness for the fact that a substantial part of the social assistance population would never find a job again. While in the previous decade, this conclusion led DIVOSA to argue these people should be left alone, the association now lobbied the government to provide more instruments to activate them:

It is important to acknowledge the fact that full employment during the coming decade is a utopia; not all jobseekers can be guided to a regular job. For large groups of unemployed that are very difficult to reintegrate, alternatives need to be developed. At the same time, this calls for greater recognition of the social function additional work, work experience placements, and voluntary work while maintaining a benefit can have.

The emphasis on long-term unemployed workers followed from the decision several years earlier, to emphatically profile DIVOSA as the main actor in the field of hard to integrate clients (See chapter 2.4). Gradually, this strategy turned out to have effect. Social scientists Nederland, Stavenuiter, and Swinnen even conclude DIVOSA managed to ‘put the issue of long-term unemployment [...] on the agenda.’ The proposed categorisation of clients, was also introduced during these years and social service agencies were

470 Ibidem.
472 Trudi Nederland, Monique Stavenuiter, and Hugo Swinnen, Van inkomensondersteuning tot Wmo. Twintig jaar armoedebeleid in Nederland (Utrecht 2011) 14.
tasked with the activation the phase 4 clients. While previously, this had been a responsibility of the labour bureaus, the social service agencies gradually managed to push them out of the ‘market’. In the 1997 annual report, DIVOSA proudly stated that with regard to the new CWI’s ‘everywhere, social service organisations have played an important role in their development.’ With the 1998 introduction of the Wiw social service agencies were provided with additional instruments to further develop their reintegration function. In the 1998 program, Rijs-Neeft reemphasised social service organisations would ‘start profiling themselves’ in the field of reintegration as she announced that the central theme for the year would be ‘work’.

While DIVOSA had endorsed the need for effective inspection and sanction policies, the inspection function remained controversial. Striking about DIVOSA’s complaints, however, is their focus on the administrative effects of new inspection policies. An example is the response of a DIVOSA management member – the later chairman J. Hazebroek – to the 1996 Unified Sanctioning Act. As the act required officials to gather additional data on clients and to sanction them in case of irregularities, Hazebroek raised awareness for the fact that the implementation of the act would be ineffective: ‘First, a consultant must try to obtain as much information as possible but if he finds out something is wrong he suddenly has to put on a police cap.’ Instead of pointing out the conflict between the social and inspection function, Hazebroek focused on the conflict between the inspection and the administrative function. In addition, he noted that the new act would be unprofitable as most recipients of social assistance were broke. Claiming money from them would not generate a lot of governmental revenue as ‘you cannot pluck a bald chicken’. The fundamental question of whether a government should claim money from people who have none was not addressed.

DIVOSA’s increasing neglect of recipients’ interests in favour of its inspection function is also illustrated by another example. In 1997, a research report was presented in which social service organisations were accused of violating the privacy of thousands of clients. In the past year, the authors of the report had received multiple complaints of recipients about the intrusiveness of social service agencies. While in previous years, DIVOSA had fundamentally opposed strict inspection policies as they harmed the privacy of recipients, it now largely ignored the subject as the report was not even discussed by the

476 DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Annual report 1996 (November 1997) 3.
478 Ibidem.
management. Central bureau director Lemmen did respond to the accusations. Asked about the report, he denied the validity of the report. Instead of showing concern, he emphasised the collection of extensive information was necessary for agencies to effectively fulfil their inspection function.479

After 1994, the administrative function began to gain attention as it turned out social service agencies were increasingly struggling with their computer systems (See chapter 1.4). In March 1995, the DIVOSA management had already noted that the nAbw would present some serious issues to social service agencies as their systems were not ready for the implementation of the new act.480 In 1996, a DIVOSA research report showed how almost every social service organisation struggled with its automation system. In an interview, central bureau director Lemmen raised awareness for the huge administrative troubles (See chapter 1.4) as he warned agencies hardly had any time left to combat fraud or stimulate the reintegration of clients.481 As the implementation of the nAbw continued to be inadequate, early 1997, a task force was instituted by SZW, DIVOSA, the VNG, and the LVO. Municipalities struggling with the management of their implementation process could apply for assistance of the task force. About a hundred municipalities signed up.482

While during the early 1990s, the social function of social service agencies had been snowed under by all the attention for the reintegration and inspection function, DIVOSA gradually began to reemphasize the function. Late 1994, for example, the association raised awareness for the growing debt issues among lower income groups and requested the government to introduce new instruments to resolve the problems.483 In the following years, DIVOSA instituted a working group to investigate the issue and in 1997 a manual was distributed among the members on setting up debt counselling.484

Debt counselling was not a subject of interest. Increasingly, DIVOSA began to plead for the introduction of a comprehensive approach to poverty. Early 1996, the association sent out a letter to parliament in which it emphasised that the Abw, ‘which was introduced in 1965 to prevent people from

482 DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Samenwerking SZ, Verslag van de vergadering van de Commissie Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, 27 March 1997.
484 DIVOSA Archives (Located at the AOU), Annual report 1996 (November 1997) 12.
falling into poverty, no longer works as a general social safety net.485 Instead, municipal minima-funds and all sorts of specific regulations were necessary to ‘fill the gaps’.486 DIVOSA therefore proposed to set up a coherent approach focusing on four different perspectives: stimulating reintegration, providing income support, limiting expenses of people living on a minimum income, and stimulating the usage of housing benefits and additional assistance.487 In 1997, four DIVOSA conferences were organised to promote the use of additional assistance by social service agencies.488 While DIVOSA had cast off its advocacy of recipients during the nineties, it did increase its focus on the social function again.

While DIVOSA no longer represented recipients, one group was actively defended by the association during the second half of the 1990s. Following the governmental plans to remove the right to social assistance for undocumented immigrants through the so-called Connection Act (Koppelingswet), DIVOSA publicly opposed the measure and pleaded for a transitional arrangement as ‘thousands of people would get into large trouble’.489 Although the transitional arrangement was realised for some recipients, it showed in the following months that DIVOSA did not really resist the measure on principal grounds. When the first proposal for the Connection Act was rejected by court as it did not correspond with European legislation, DIVOSA director Lemmen deplored the news as social service organisations had invested a lot of time in preparing the act and street-level officials had already conducted the emotional bad news conversations.490 Later pleas of DIVOSA to postpone the Connection Act, which was eventually introduced in 1998, were all based on administrative arguments.491

Conclusion

486 Ibidem.
487 Ibidem.
The social arrangements distributing social rights

The distribution of social rights by social service organisation has changed remarkably between 1982 and 1998. While numerous factors contributed to this change, two trends can be discerned in the way the everyday policy implementation by social service agencies developed.

The first trend is a gradual decline in discretion afforded to individual street-level officials as well as to social service agencies as a whole. Initially, both officials and their agencies received relatively large discretion to properly apply the individualisation-principle of the Abw. However, in the course of the 1980s the overall trust in their integrity and sound judgment rapidly decreased as it appeared officials mostly used their discretion in favour of recipients. As every government between 1982 and 1996 sought to reduce the social rights of citizens and limit the access to the welfare state, social service agencies were increasingly forced to reduce the discretion of their officials.

Closely related to this trend of diminishing trust and increasing control is the trend that can be observed in the organisational purpose of social service agencies. In 1982, the central purpose of social service agencies was to provide both material and immaterial assistance to the disadvantaged members of society. In the course of the 1980s and especially the 1990s, their job description was fundamentally altered. In 1998, social service agencies had turned into outflow offices which were expected to push their clients back into the labour market. In line with the new social assistance act, the social service organisation put work before income and only had one organisational goal: work.

Naturally, these trends were not thought out by the officials of social service organisations themselves. In 1982, at the beginning of the timeframe of this thesis, most social service agencies had endorsed a job description which focused almost entirely on providing extensive social support. Street-level officials were to become antennas for other welfare organisations and were encouraged to initiate new social initiatives aimed at the alleviation of disadvantaged groups. The job description nevertheless turned out to be an illusion. Since the late 1970s, the number of social assistance recipients rose dramatically, forcing social service agencies to turn into mere ‘benefit factories’. The rising pressure on agencies was further increased by the continuous flow of incoming governmental regulations, altering the increasingly intricate legislative framework of the Abw. Due to the prolonged crisis, the client population also became increasingly diverse and therefore the required forms of assistance.

Nevertheless, most officials continued to support a full focus on their social responsibilities and disliked inspecting or activating their clients. While the government increasingly pushed for intensified
inspection of clients, many street-level officials obstinately refused to inspect or sanction recipients. They even began to thwart the implementation of new measures that would reduce the social rights of their clients and often tended to bend the rules in their favour. Overall, during the eighties the social arrangements distributing social rights to citizens seemed to operate in favour of recipients’ social citizenship. This changed fundamentally during the early 1990s. Following the devastating conclusions of a number of research reports exposing the failing inspection policies of social service organisations, agencies began to tighten their inspection. The most important effect of the reports, however, was the influence the revealed scandals had on the sentiment among street-level officials. The public outcry over their work not only caused officials to actively pursue the improvement of their public image by more emphatically inspecting clients, it also caused them to distrust their clients more. While previously, officials were often willing to bend the rules a little to enlarge the rights of recipients, they now increasingly followed the rules prescribed to them.

The increasingly restrictive approach of clients was stimulated by two other factors. Firstly, a new worldview gained dominance within social service agencies: New Managerialism. Following this new rationale, the conviction got hold that organisations should be tightly managed through a focus on control, accountability, and measurement. Professional discretion and autonomy were considered to be unproductive. Increasingly, managers from the business sector were appointed as directors of social service agencies and staff-members were often only trained as administrative employees. In line with the managerialist rationale, officials began to be reviewed on their compliance with production targets and performance indicators. The second factor stimulating the increasing strictness of social service agencies, was the increasing control of the government over the organisation through their state consultants. Following the commotion on the failing operation of social service agencies, the consultants intensified their controls and showed a growing tendency to discipline agencies on their failing compliance with governmental policies. The individualisation-principle of the Abw was increasingly compromised. As a result, the overall focus of social service organisations shifted from providing assistance towards inspecting clients and stimulating them to reintegrate into the labour market. The primary aim of street-level officials had to be the boosting of the ‘outflow’ of clients.

The new approach of recipients was consolidated by the nAbw. The new act encouraged social service agencies to put work before income and increased their powers to activate their clients. Recipients were categorised into phases to facilitate the application of fitting activation instruments. Officials were to become consultants, offering the right ‘product mix’ to their ‘customers’. While most social service
agencies devised new policies in the field of reintegration and inspection, the actual implementation of the new act turned out to differ significantly by municipality. The amount of discretion granted to officials, for example, varied widely by municipality. Some agencies deliberately resolved the tensions between the three core functions by instituting separate departments while others left it to their contact officials to decide for themselves which function should be emphasised. As a result, not only the harshness of inspection and sanction policies began to differ significantly but the amount of granted benefits was also widely divergent. The social citizenship of recipients was increasingly dependent on the particular municipality they lived in and the official they met at the counter of the social service agency.

While overall, the ‘work before income’ rationale had been endorsed within social service agencies, the sharp increase in workload following from the complicated legislation, all the new inspection tasks, and the mounting issues with automation systems impeded a full focus on reintegration. Just as during the early 1980s, the reintegration, inspection, and social functions were often pushed aside by administrative hassle. While organisational troubles seem to have been ever-present within social service agencies, the sentiment and organisational convictions had changed fundamentally.

The social forces upholding social rights

While social service agencies exercised significant influence through their position as social arrangements, they also managed to exerted influence as a social force acting in favour of their clients’ social rights. This role was mostly fulfilled by DIVOSA, the association for directors of social service agencies.

The social forces upholding the social citizenship of recipients changed dramatically between 1982 and 1998, both in strength and character. Again, two trends can be discerned. Firstly, there has been a continuous effort by successive Dutch governments to rule out criticism on their welfare policies. As DIVOSA acted as the main advocate of social assistance recipients, signalling any undesired effects of legislation to the public and political level, the government actively sought to compel DIVOSA to abandon its advocacy. By lowering and fundamentally altering the subsidies to the association and by excluding DIVOSA from deliberations, even if it voiced legitimate concerns about legislation, the government tried to turn the association into a yes-man. While it makes sense for national policymakers to demand obedience from civil servants, the conscious effort of successive Dutch governments during the 1980s and 1990 to cut off uncomfortable criticism on their policies appears to have impaired rather than improved the distribution of social rights to citizens.
The second trend goes hand in hand with the first illustrated trend and is the most far-reaching and remarkable development during the 16 years examined for this thesis. Within these years, a society-wide transition occurred from broad support for assisting the weaker members of society towards a general inclination to discipline them. The history of DIVOSA clearly illustrates how within a limited number of years, the societal climate surrounding the welfare state fundamentally shifted at the expense of social assistance recipients. Even the representatives of social service agencies, whose purpose was to look after the weak in society, wholeheartedly endorsed the new societal consensus that work should come before income and that the right to social assistance had to be earned.

In 1982, this societal consensus was still a distant future as social service agencies increasingly began to oppose governmental policies. Following the deteriorating economic situation in the Netherlands and the rising number of social assistance recipients, the societal role of social service organisations gained importance. Urged by their clients and the increasingly outspoken lower officials of their agencies, the members pushed DIVOSA to enter the public debate in an effort to defend both its members’ as their clients’ interests. Moreover, the association increasingly took up the advocacy of the lowest income groups in general as it was felt national policymakers did not take serious account of the circumstances these ‘minima’ lived in. Emphatically, DIVOSA tried to establish a link between the disadvantaged groups in society and the public sphere. In addition, the association consciously focused on the social function of the social service agency while omitting responsibilities in the field of inspection. Activating and reintegrating recipients was not yet considered a distinct responsibility of the social service agencies.

From the start DIVOSA’s position as an external advocate caused friction. As the association fulfilled an important role as advisor to policymakers, it had to find a balance between acting as an advocate and behaving like a reliable consultant. Moreover, the DIVOSA members were civil servants, obligated to implement the policies prescribed to them. Continuously, doubts therefore were voiced within DIVOSA about the legitimacy of the association’s increasing politicisation as both municipal and governmental authorities repeatedly warned the association not to overplay its advocacy.

When the CDA-VVD government embarked on its mission of driving back the welfare state, the politicisation of DIVOSA nevertheless accelerated. Many members felt they could no longer match their social responsibilities with the policies they were to implement. It clearly showed the government did not intend to reform the social security system but solely aimed to lower the amounts of benefits, limit their duration, and restrict the access to the provisions of the welfare state. As a result, the DIVOSA management
felt it had no other option than to publicly oppose the governmental ‘no-nonsense’ approach. While DIVOSA increasingly tended towards civil disobedience, it clearly did so from the intention of protecting the public good. It sincerely felt the Dutch government knowingly neglected the interests of large parts of society. In addition to DIVOSA’s advocacy, the representative role of social service agencies was boosted by the activism of the street-level officials of social service agencies. In opposition to the austere governmental policies, they took to the streets in an effort to uphold the social rights of their clients. During the first half of the 1980s, the social service agencies truly acted as a social force upholding the rights of social assistance recipients.

The position as external advocate did began to take its toll during the second half of the 1980s. While the social service agencies seemed to have a strong negotiating position as they controlled the implementation of policy, DIVOSA’s dependency on state subsidies and its limited autonomy as an association of civil servants formed a fundamental weakness. The VNG and especially the government diligently sought to push DIVOSA back into its role of an association of obedient civil servants. Following the protests against the home sharers-norm, the subsidy of the association was cut and increasingly, the government bypassed DIVOSA in their formulation of policies.

As DIVOSA felt its institutional position was weakening while its activist policies did not really produce visible results, it decided to lower its voice in the public debate. Gradually, the strained relations with policymakers were eased which was also facilitated by a moderation of the societal discourse after the revision of the social security system had been finished. Notwithstanding the moderation, the association continued to signal undesirable or unjust effects of legislation on social assistance recipients and others who had to make ends meet on a minimum income. DIVOSA also continued its advocacy for a broad task description for social service agencies with substantial emphasis on the social function of the Abw. Despite growing pressures from the side of the government, the association still tried to resist the introduction of new inspection policies. Not only because of the possible stigmatising effect of increased inspection but also because DIVOSA rightly felt such policies would be used by the ministry to increase its control of municipal policy implementation.

The tensions inherent to DIVOSA’s position as external advocate returned even more strongly when the CDA-PvdA government took office in 1989 with the intention to reform the social assistance act. While naturally, DIVOSA sought to play an active role in the preparations of the new act, the association was increasingly compromised by the stream of critical reports on the extent of misuse and fraud by social
assistance recipients. Before the research reports were even presented, the social service agencies were already the usual governmental target to castigate. While vocally supporting increased discretionary powers for municipal agencies, national policymakers mainly kept on trying to increase their control over the municipal policy process. The already precarious position of DIVOSA in the public debate rapidly deteriorated when in the course of 1992 and 1993 two research commissions exposed the burgeoning welfare fraud within social service agencies. While DIVOSA had been calling for years that the intricate web of social assistance regulations hampered the ability to sufficiently inspect recipients, policymakers used the commotion to push through a further centralisation of social assistance legislation. As every public remark by DIVOSA triggered some reaction from policymakers or the press the influence the association was able to exert on the new social assistance act was close to nil.

This lack of influence also followed directly from the strategy defined by the DIVOSA management. After the public outcry, it had consciously decided to withdraw from the public debate. While at the street level, officials tried to restore their public image by recovering the balance between the five functions, at the top, the directors of social service agencies increasingly got entangled in institutional conflicts. As the management felt the position of DIVOSA as an institutional player was increasingly compromised, it began to focus on presenting the association as a reliable and constructive partner to cooperate with. This emphasis on cooperation and constructiveness even entailed DIVOSA emphatically presented itself as an advisor to the VNG rather than as an interest organisation for social service agencies. The advocacy of social assistance recipients and the minima was completely cast off. Increasingly, DIVOSA was pushed back in a position of guiding the policy implementation process. As a result, both the clients of social service agencies and the minima in general lost their seat at the table of national policymakers. The constructive approach of DIVOSA also entailed it abandoned its resistance to inspecting recipients and the association fully endorsed the governmental intention to transform social service agencies into ‘outflow offices’. Instead of focus on the social function, the reintegration of recipients now became paramount. However, DIVOSA continued to raise awareness for unemployed workers that would not be able to reintegrate. The association did not intend to leave them be but repeatedly called on the government to provide social service agencies with more instruments to activate the long-term unemployed. In line with the new spirit of the age, DIVOSA deemed inactivity to be unacceptable.

Although the institutional struggle of DIVOSA played a big role in its decision to abandon the advocacy of recipients, the management did wholeheartedly support the neglect of recipients’ interests. As the director
of the central bureau concluded, DIVOSA simply found out sticking up for recipients was not effective. It is remarkable to see how the decision to stop the interest representation of recipients went hand in hand with the inauguration of the new CDA-PvdA government. Clearly, a new societal consensus had developed on the need for a more austere welfare state and DIVOSA willingly decided to adhere to it. ‘There just was not that much honour in defending the weak anymore’. 492

After 1996, DIVOSA took the final step and completely transformed into a ‘service-providing’ association which focused entirely on providing – or selling – services to its members. These members did actually need the support as the position of social service agencies in the social security system became increasingly uncertain. New institutions were thought up as the whole system of executive agencies was reconsidered. Despite the growing need for support among the members, yet again, the decision to rethink the course of DIVOSA was mainly caused by institutional interests and again, the governmental decision to alter the subsidies of the association played a significant role. While the government used a new institution – the LVO – to pressure DIVOSA into proving its worth to policymakers, it also decided DIVOSA’s subsidy would henceforth be calculated on the basis of its contribution to the governmental policy agenda. Criticizing governmental policy or even signalling undesired effects was now actively discouraged. As a result, DIVOSA got rid of all its unprofitable activities and focussed entirely on promoting the association to the members and the members to society. Although DIVOSA continued to call for new policies to improve the circumstances of disadvantaged groups every now and then, its role as advocate of recipients definitively belonged to the past.

Appreciating civil servants

The history of the social service organisation is strongly embedded in the general history of Dutch society. Changes in the social, economic, and political climate had a strong impact on the everyday work of the people of the social service agency. What this thesis has aimed to illustrate, is that these people were no passive bystanders or mere implementers of policy. Instead, both the officials at the street level as well as

492 De Vries, Overmoed en onbehagen, 15.
the directors at the top of social service agencies actively shaped the contours of the welfare state. As bearers of the social safety net, their decisions to slacken it or pull it tight had a major influence on the lives of hundreds of thousands of Dutch citizens throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

What this thesis has shown, is that the ability of officials to decide by client how tight the net should be pulled has been severely limited over the years as national policymakers sought to enforce unconditional loyalty from the side of officials. Yet social service agencies were not the only executive agencies that had to deal with the fickleness of the national political level. During the 1980s and 1990s, all executive agencies officials had to adopt to the increasingly dominant rationale of the activating welfare state. It would be well worth to study how these officials experienced this transition. While a broadening of the subject appears to be highly interesting, during my research project it was often suggested by people in the field to study the impact the new social assistance act of 2004 has had on the everyday work of the social service agency. As this reform was presented by the government as an effort to increase municipal discretion, it would be highly interesting to examine whether street-level officials actually experienced this increased discretion in their daily work.

The fact that such official discretion can be an important means to protect the weakest groups in society against adverse effects of legislation has clearly been illustrated in this thesis. Instead of desiring obedient social arrangements loyally executing every policy devised at the national level, policymakers should recognise the value the officials making up these social arrangements can have. Through their expertise and contact with their clients, street-level officials have the ability to tailor provisions to the needs and possibilities of each individual client. As the quote at the beginning of this thesis demonstrated, people invoking their right to social assistance are not mere ‘customers’ or ‘blips on a screen’. They are citizens who want to be recognised as such, they desire to be treated with respect. Street-level officials should be encouraged to respond to this desire, not punished.
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