



Data-based service provision



DATA IN PUBLIC SERVICE PROVISION

Groningen (NL) has a high percentage of people coping with long-term poverty¹. The Municipality of Groningen has a wide range of measure to reduce these numbers. For instance people can apply for social welfare, income support measures and the food bank to help balancing their books.

Analysis by the Research, Information and Statistics Department (OIS, Onderzoek, Informatie & Statistiek) of the Municipality in combination with Statistics Netherlands (CBS, Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek) reveals, however, that not all of the people on low incomes apply for these facilities. This has prompted OIS and the Urban Data Centre (UDC) of CBS to develop a combined data monitor to compare datasets, to apply this information with the help of experts from the field, and to monitor the results. Aim is to improve support to these low-income families and to reduce overall poverty in the city of Groningen.

Relations to Workpackages

The effective use of combined data can lead to real insights. This use case paper sets out the implications for policymakers based on data comparison and how data can be translated into information.

Local partners

Research and Statistics Groningen
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¹ "Staat van de armoede gemeente Groningen," Onderzoek Informatie Statistiek Groningen, Urban Data Centre Regio Groningen, oktober 2018.

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Datasets are not accurate enough

OIS and CBS both use different methods to chart poverty in the city. However, neither methodology is comprehensive but they actually supplement each other well. For example, CBS measures poverty using annual income information from tax return forms. The result is that the UDC dataset only charts people with an annual income below the poverty line. The OIS poverty dataset measures households applying for municipal facilities for people on low incomes, such as social welfare and remission of municipal taxes. While people on low incomes can register for these poverty facilities at any time during the year, OIS analyses the requests for poverty facilities solely on a certain date and not the average over a year. As a result, the OIS dataset misses low-income households that do not make active use of poverty facilities as well as those who did not receive social welfare on that specific date but did so before or after.

Statistics Netherlands (CBS, Het Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek)

CBS is a national Dutch organization that conducts statistical research on various national issues. By providing reliable data, CBS facilitates discussions on social affairs in the Netherlands based on correct and relevant information. The Urban Data Centre (UDC) is a local branch of CBS that facilitates local collaboration with other organizations.

The UDC monitor

The research methods used by CBS and OIS are complimentary. By comparing and combining the two datasets, the recently developed UDC Monitor can use the resulting information to tackle poverty head on per target group. The combined dataset gives a neighbourhood specific picture of poverty developments in the city of Groningen. For example, comparing the two poverty datasets uncovers households on low incomes who have lived in poverty for less than a year as well as those who do not use any of the municipal facilities. The UDC Monitor aims at analysing poverty per household, but this is due to privacy reasons not yet possible. However, the Monitor is able to study poverty area specific or target group specific. Of the 15,900 households tallied by CBS as being on low incomes in Groningen, 5,400 are invisible to the municipality because they do not make use of any of the facilities available to them. On the other hand, there are 5,300 low-income families that do make use of the special facilities (and thus are known to the municipality) but did not drop below the minimum annual income. They are thus not known to the UDC dataset. This information combined with target group specific characteristics (such as age, gender, household composition or living area) provides the municipality with insights which can lead to better support and targeted information on available allowances to these target groups.

Research, Information and Statistics Groningen (OIS, Onderzoek, Informatie en Statistiek)

OIS is the Municipality of Groningen's research bureau. It provides policymakers with reliable research reports and data. In addition, OIS organizes various panels to chart the feelings and opinions of Groningen citizens regarding various social issues at play in the city.



The insights from the combined dataset

Combining the UDC dataset and the poverty dataset in the UDC Monitor reveals a number of interesting phenomena:

- How poverty is developing in the city of Groningen
- How many of the actual low income families (UDC dataset) are being reached by the income-support measures (poverty dataset)
- The differences (in characteristics) between low-income families traced by the UDC dataset and those that are spotted by the poverty dataset, etc.

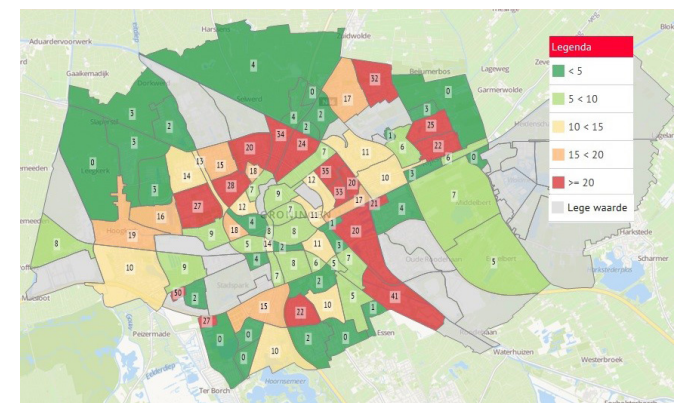
The Liveability and Safety Monitor

The combination of the poverty dataset, the UDC dataset and the active role of the Service Team has resulted in large target groups of people on low incomes who were not previously aware of all the poverty-relieving facilities. They are now being encouraged to make use of these facilities. The question now arises whether the living and housing circumstances of this group is also improving. A biennial study on the living conditions of inhabitants of the city with a focus on social support and social participation tackles this question.

By combining the two datasets, making use of the expertise of staff on the Service Team and monitoring the effects of having too little money through the Liveability and Safety Monitor, the Municipality of Groningen can tackle poverty in a very effective and targeted manner. So, data converted to information and insights, with the help of expertise from the field and good monitoring, leads to significant improvements in public service provision.

So what's next?

Comparing the UDC dataset and the poverty dataset in the UDC Monitor has led to very interesting insights. However, simply gathering insights will not result in less poverty. The Municipality of Groningen thus also uses the combined data to actively inform those target groups on low incomes revealed by the data about the poverty-relieving facilities available to them. In addition, the Service Team's expertise is also used to inform low-income families. The Service Team comprises people who are on low incomes, or used to be, who inform those currently on low incomes about the income-support measures. Research has revealed that low-income families who have been in touch with the Service Team apply for the facilities consistently more often than those who have not been approached by the Service Team. It has also emerged that people in the social network of those on low incomes who have been in touch with the Service Team are more likely to apply for poverty-relieving facilities. There is thus a spill-over effect from making use of the compared datasets and from the active approach by experts on the Service Team.



Percentage of use of social welfare facilities in Groningen 2017