

Justice and deservingness in the Dutch social assistance system from an ‘Other’ perspective

Experiences and perceptions of status holders receiving social assistance and people and organisations working with them

Abstract. Contributing to scarce literature on migrants’ justice and deservingness perceptions, this study explores how status holders receiving social assistance and people and organisations working with them experience and perceive justice and deservingness in the current Dutch social assistance system. Taking a qualitative, bottom-up approach, data is collected from 12 in-depth interviews. The findings show status holders justify their *self*-deservingness based on their specific *needs* as refugees and their contributions to society (*reciprocity*). Their experiences illustrate the recognition-redistribution dilemma: while calling for a recognition of and *differential* treatment based on their vulnerable position, they also consider the Dutch social assistance system just, because the same rules apply to everyone *equally*. When evaluating *others*’ deservingness, *control* and *attitude* are important: status holders regard sick people with no control over their needs most deserving and recipients with bad attitudes towards reciprocation least deserving. They mention advantages of fulfilling mandatory counter achievements (e.g. volunteer work, language courses, labour market preparation trainings), which they consider just contributions to society in exchange for receiving benefits. However, municipalities’ activation is considered too ‘pushy’, not sufficiently taking into account individual and personal situations, experiences, skills, and desires. Additionally, decentralization of responsibilities to municipalities is argued to cause unjust inequalities, i.e. differential treatment based on geographical location, particularly affecting status holders, who are assigned to social housing in a certain municipality and experience limited mobility. The findings implicate that to achieve justice, policy should focus on equal capabilities instead of resources, taking status holders’ background into account.

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Introduction

Welfare states are social institutions striving for justice and fair benefit distributions among citizens. However, ‘justice’ means something different to everyone. For welfare states to remain sustainable, support from claimants and contributors is crucial (Reeskens & Van Oorschot, 2015). Therefore, knowing how people perceive justice, what distribution they consider fair, and which groups they perceive *deserve* welfare benefits is important. Deservingness perceptions are researched extensively among *native* welfare state citizens, who often consider immigrants least deserving of all welfare target groups (Van Oorschot, 2006, 2008). “Majority Europeans’ idea of immigrants is one of eager welfare claimants who benefit more than they contribute” (Van der Waal, De Koster & Van Oorschot in Reeskens & Van Oorschot, 2015, p.2). This view corresponds with the welfare magnet hypothesis, stating generous welfare states with high benefit levels attract migrants (Borjas, 1999). This idea is not always proven, but resonates among both natives and migrants, many of whom say *they* have come to the Netherlands to work, but are afraid *others* are attracted by the welfare state (Kremer, 2016a).

Immigrants often have temporary contracts with low job security, leading to a quicker job loss and overrepresentation in social welfare benefits (Zorlu, 2011). Table 1 shows the number of social assistance recipients with a migration background in the Netherlands, March 2019.

Table 1

Number of social assistance recipients in the Netherlands, March 2019

Total	Migration background: Dutch	Migration background: western	Migration background: non-western
483 000	175 000	49 500	259 000

Source: CBS (Central Bureau of Statistics), 2019

Status holders are one of the most vulnerable groups to injustice. Their high use of social assistance and low degree of labour market participation challenge Dutch citizens’ national solidarity (Kremer, 2016b; Zorlu, 2011). Dutch municipalities are currently short of money to finance social assistance benefits due to the growing number of recipients resulting from large refugee flows in 2015 and 2016 (NOS, 2017). Furthermore, municipalities differ in their degree of attention paid to discrimination issues and extra measures to help non-western migrants find jobs (Wittebrood & Andriessen, 2014). Whereas immigrants are more likely to enter welfare

programs, the amount of money available for active labour market policies to help them find jobs has decreased due to necessary cutbacks to repair budget deficits (Zorlu, 2011).

The Dutch welfare state's central aim has shifted from welfare to workfare; from income protection to active labour market participation (Delsen, 2012; Yerkes & Van der Veen, 2011). This change is part of a broader social policy development noted as the shift towards a 'social investment state', focusing on investing in human capital to increase labour market participation (Hemerijck, 2017; Yerkes & Van der Veen, 2011). Social investment states aim "to move beyond redistributive, consumption-based social welfare centred on benefits and rights, to one that, through investment in human capital, enhances people's capacity to participate" (Perkins, Nelms & Smyth, 2004, p.3). This move is consistent with Sen's capabilities approach (CA), analysing welfare and conceptualising justice in terms of equal capabilities: justice is achieved when people are equally capable of converting resources into outcomes (Sherraden in Perkins, Smyth & Nelms, 2004). In the current Dutch social assistance system and re-integration policy, individual responsibility and self-reliance are strongly emphasized, also for status holders. The Participation Act 2015, substituting three previous acts (Act Work and Social Assistance, Act social provisions, and Act work and labour) (Staten Generaal, 2013-2014), aims to guide recipients into employment or voluntary work. Emphasizing reciprocity, its underlying principle is that social assistance recipients should contribute to society and participate according to their abilities in exchange for receiving their benefit. Specifically, this entails fulfilling a 'counter achievement', which for status holders often includes language courses and civic integration examinations in addition to voluntary work and labour market preparation trainings. Critics argue important values, such as solidarity and fairness, have been sacrificed in exchange for increased 'citizen responsibility' (Eriksen, 2018).

With the Participation Act, financial responsibilities for welfare benefits as well as implementation of counter achievements are decentralized to municipalities, which is often argued to cause inequalities between recipients in different municipalities showing diverse levels of strictness (NOS, 2018; RTL, 2015). Research shows workfare volunteering is appreciated when it gives people positive freedom to fulfil meaningful activities, help others, and develop new skills (Kampen & Tonkens, 2018). Furthermore, the way caseworkers request recipients to do volunteer work matters: when people are approached impersonally and bureaucratic, they feel disempowered and deprived of freedom, showing the importance of personalised activation in which clients' personal histories are taken into account (Kampen & Tonkens, 2018).

Research exploring migrants' justice and deservingness perceptions is relatively scarce compared to research focused on natives' views. Furthermore, deservingness research often takes a top-down quantitative approach applying the CARIN deservingness criteria (Control, Attitude, Reciprocity, Identity, Need) to surveys or vignettes (Laenen, Rossetti & Van Oorschot, 2019). This study contributes to the literature by taking a bottom-up qualitative approach in exploring status holders' experiences and perceptions of justice and deservingness in the Dutch social assistance system. The research question is: *How do status holders receiving social assistance and people and organisations working with them experience and perceive justice and deservingness in the current Dutch social assistance system?* Status holders are defined as asylum seekers whose requests have been granted and who have received (legal) residence status (CBS, 2019). When they become status holder, they get the right to social assistance, are assigned to social housing, and often receive a loan to furnish their apartment.

Following this introduction is a theoretical framework combining theories on justice, deservingness, and the welfare state, followed by an overview of empirical studies on migrants' perceptions of deservingness. Then the study's methods and findings are described respectively. Lastly, a discussion is provided, containing critical reflections on the study's limitations, a summary of the findings, and their theoretical and policy-related implications.

Justice, deservingness, and the welfare state

Aiming for fair distributions of benefits among citizens, welfare states are social institutions holding justice as their first virtue, based on principles of equal opportunity, equitable distribution of welfare, and public responsibility for vulnerable groups in society (Rawls, 2009). Social justice principles define "how the good and bad things in life should be distributed among the members of a human society" (Miller, 1999, p.1), providing a way of assigning rights and duties in basic societal institutions (Rawls, 2009). How people perceive justice depends on their social justice principles (Miller in Sachweh, 2016). Different principles are used when determining if a situation is (un)just (Miller, 1999). The *need* principle focuses on providing resources based on citizens' need: those with greater needs, receive more resources. The *merit* principle focuses on distributing resources based on contributions and performances: people who contribute more, benefit more. The *equality* principle emphasizes equal social rights for all citizens, independent of individual characteristics or socioeconomic position. Walzer (in Miller & Walzer, 1995) argues each good has its own distribution criterion, thus people apply different justice principles in different spheres of justice, e.g. education, the labour market, or the welfare state. People's sense of justice might also be derived from the culture of the group

to which they belong (Miller in Osipovič, 2015). People with a migration background might endorse different justice principles than native Dutch, pointing to this study's relevance. Since welfare states depend on support of claimants and contributors, it is crucial to explore how status holders, of whom more and more are receiving social assistance in the Netherlands, perceive justice.

Ideas about and principles of justice are closely related to deservingness criteria people apply to social welfare distribution. "Perceived deservingness is a key factor that determines whether an outcome or treatment is perceived as fair" (Skitka, 2009, p.101). Five "CARIN" criteria are often used to operationalize deservingness (Van Oorschot, 1998; Van Oorschot, Roosma, Meuleman & Reeskens, 2017). The first criterion, *control* over neediness, means people are perceived less deserving when they are considered to be personally responsible for their neediness. The second criterion is *attitude*: needy people are regarded more deserving if they are likeable, compliant, and conforming to our standards. Third, *reciprocity*: people are perceived more deserving if they contributed to 'our' group before or are expected to contribute in the future, which is closely related to the aforementioned *merit* principle. The fourth criterion is *identity*: needy people who are closer to 'us' are considered more deserving. The fifth, *need*, is similar to the justice principle of *need*: people with greater perceived need are regarded more deserving (Van Oorschot et al., 2017). Some scholars argue for the existence of a universal deservingness rank order based on the CARIN-model, where immigrants are perceived least deserving due to their bad scores on *identity*, *reciprocity*, and *control* (Van Oorschot & Roosma in Van Oorschot et al., 2017). Other researchers critically question this universal deservingness hierarchy (e.g. Laenen & Meuleman in Van Oorschot et al., 2017). They find a universal discord between people considering all needy groups equally deserving due to greater sensitivity to the *equality* principle, and people making distinctions between groups, more sensitive to the *merit* principle (Laenen, 2015). Additionally, whether certain groups are perceived deserving is likely to vary geographically and temporally, e.g. when unemployment is high people might attribute it to causes outside individuals' control and regard the unemployed more deserving of their benefit than in times of low unemployment (Larsen, 2006, in Laenen & Meuleman in Van Oorschot et al., 2017). Lastly, Jørgensen and Thomsen (2016) argue the hierarchy is based on a highly simplified understanding of the category 'immigrants', whereas in practice different migration motives exist and there is no such thing as 'immigrants' per se.

Whereas Miller and Van Oorschot conceptualize social justice and deservingness in the distributive paradigm, focusing on a just (re)distribution of resources (Lister, 2008), Fraser conceptualizes justice differently. She criticizes the division between *redistributive* claims,

seeking a just distribution of resources and goods, and claims for *recognition* of cultural difference, meaning people are not required to assimilate to the majority's dominant cultural norms in order to receive equal respect (Fraser, 1999; Robeyns, 2003). Fraser argues for a social justice framework encompassing redistribution *and* recognition and evaluating social arrangements and institutions based on the extent to which they make *equality of participation* in society possible (Fraser, 1995; Robeyns, 2003). Some groups, '*bivalent collectivities*', suffer from both socio-economic maldistribution and cultural misrecognition (Fraser, 1995). The injustice they face, arises in the economic *and* cultural sphere at once. In the welfare state, migrants can be regarded a bivalent collectivity. Two concerns are central (Kymlicka & Banting, 2011). First, a trade-off between heterogeneity and redistribution. Ethnic diversity hardens sustaining redistributive social policies, since generating feelings of national solidarity and trust across ethnic lines is hard. Second, a trade-off between recognition and redistribution. Multiculturalism policies, intended to recognize or accommodate migrants, tend to further undermine national solidarity and trust, making it harder to sustain politics of economic redistribution. Problematically, recognition and redistribution seem to have contradictory aims: whereas recognition promotes *group differentiation*, calling for a recognition of migrants' specific need of welfare benefits due to their backgrounds and characteristics, redistribution tends to promote *equal* treatment (De Zwart & Poppelaars, 2007; Fraser, 1995).

In social investment states, a shift emerges from redistribution to equality of opportunities as centralized in Sen's capabilities approach (CA) (Benda, Fenger, Koster & Van der Veen, 2017; Morel, Palier, & Palme in Sachweh, 2016; Robeyns, 2011; Sherraden in Perkins, Smyth & Nelms, 2004). Sen regards a resources-based justice approach such as Miller's limited because people have different needs and require different levels or types of resources to achieve the same outcomes, and resources are not the only determinant of people's capabilities (Burchardt & Hick, 2016). The CA emphasizes that assessments of well-being and judgements about equality and justice should focus on people's *effective opportunities* to lead the lives they have reason to value (Robeyns, 2003, 2006, 2011). Justice is achieved when people are equally capable of converting resources into outcomes (*achieved functionings*). Crucial is the difference between means (resources) and ends (functionings) of well-being (Robeyns, 2011). Capabilities differ due to *personal* (e.g. ethnicity), *social* (e.g. social norms, discriminatory practices), and *environmental* (e.g. geographical location) factors '*converting*' resources into capabilities (Comim, 2001; Robeyns, 2011). An equal amount of primary goods can lead to different outcomes between individuals as both resources and cultural sources of injustice influence an individual's capabilities (Robeyns, 2003). Instead of focusing solely on

a just *redistribution* of resources, Sen includes *recognition* by paying attention to human heterogeneity and conversion factors (Comim, 2001; Robeyns, 2003, 2004, 2011). Within emerging social investment states and welfare-to-workfare policy shifts, individual responsibilities are becoming increasingly important, causing new ‘social investment risks’ to arise, as not all groups are equally capable of taking citizen responsibility (Benda et al., 2017). For example, migrants’ social network might be smaller than that of native Dutch, and social groups differ in their familiarity with social services (Van Dijk, 2012). The CA allows alternative measures of well-being and a view of social participation and justice in terms of equal capabilities, guiding us to a more just society. Combining theoretical perspectives of Miller, Van Oorschot, Fraser, and Sen, this study compensates for their individual pitfalls and introduces a broad, interdisciplinary, theory-guided exploration of how status holders receiving social assistance and people and organisations working with them experience the Dutch social assistance system. It explores what justice principles and deservingness criteria they endorse and to what extent redistribution, recognition, and equality of capabilities are emphasized in their understandings of justice.

Migrants’ perceptions of deservingness

Empirical research on migrants and the welfare state contains a great deal of quantitative survey or vignette studies investigating deservingness perceptions. Striking is the almost solely focus on perceptions held by *native* welfare state citizens (e.g. Kootstra, 2016; Baumberg, 2014, Dwyer, 2000, Reeskens & Van Oorschot, 2013, in Osipovič, 2015; Reeskens & Van der Meer, 2019; Van Oorschot, 2006, 2008), who often consider immigrants least deserving of all welfare recipients due to bad scores on the *identity*, *reciprocity*, and *control* criteria (Van Oorschot, 2006, 2008; Van Oorschot & Roosma in Van Oorschot et al., 2017). Foreign origin is among the three most important conditions for reduced solidarity, after labour market reintegration behaviour and culpability for unemployment, and immigrants’ favourable attitudes do not close their deservingness gap with natives (Reeskens & Van der Meer, 2019).

Compared to studies on *natives’* deservingness perceptions, research exploring *migrants’* perceptions of (the criteria for) deservingness is scarce. Furthermore, existing studies on migrants’ views are mostly focused on labour migrants. For example, Kremer’s (2016a) qualitative research explores what different types of labour migrants think about the Dutch welfare state and giving social rights to immigrants. Her study shows many labour migrants favour ‘earned citizenship’, believing people should not be entitled to welfare state rights immediately upon arrival in their host country. This conditional view of welfare, linked to the

merit principle and *reciprocity* criterion, is revealed in more studies (Dench et al., 2006; Dwyer, 2000; Timonen & Doyle, 2009; Willen, 2012, in Osipovič, 2015). Two studies suggest migrants do not want to contribute much because of their low self-interest, thinking they do not use social security that much (Heitmueller, 2005; Claus & Claus, 2010, in Kremer, 2016a). This reflects an endorsement of the *merit* principle, emphasizing that what people receive should fit their contributions and vice versa. Additionally, a recent qualitative study in Finland shows Estonian labour migrants underline the link between work and deservingness of welfare benefits, describing themselves as deserving and claiming this places them on the same footing as native Finns (Alho & Sippola, 2018). Furthermore, they distinguish themselves from other, in their opinion ‘non-deserving’ migrants who are not contributing to the welfare state. This disapproval of other migrants’ relationship with the welfare state was also found in a study exploring migrant workers’ conceptualisation of social protection and their relationship with the Irish welfare state (Timonen & Doyle, 2009). Research on how migrants conceptualise their deservingness of welfare benefits and social housing has also been done in the UK, among people with a Polish background. The same strong preference for conditionality of welfare, based on contributions through work, tax payments, or compliance with the law, was applied both to in-group and out-group members (Osipovič, 2015).

As opposed to aforementioned *merit*-based claims, *needs*-based claims are usually regarded problematic (Osipovič, 2015). Migrants are generally not in favour of ‘charitable hand-outs’ based on needs (Dench et al., 2006; Dwyer, 2000, in Osipovič, 2015). Such attitudes are described as a “fundamental desire to participate in the generalized relations of reciprocity that define social personhood and inclusion within a broader moral community” (Willen, 2012, p.819, in Osipovič, 2015). Need is regarded problematic because of its subjective nature and its tendency to undermine the importance of contribution (Osipovič, 2015). Again, conditionality, merit, and reciprocity are emphasized. However, it is wise to remain critical about these findings. It could be possible that endorsements of merit and reciprocity are stronger amongst labour migrants, whose migration motive is different from that of e.g. refugees. This study therefore contributes to the literature on migrants’ deservingness perceptions by focusing not on labour migrants, but on status holders (refugees) instead.

Methods

Whereas there are many quantitative studies focused on natives' perspective, and a few studies focused on labour migrants' views, qualitative research on status holders' perceptions of justice and deservingness in welfare states is scarce. This study's nature is to explore experiences and perceptions of justice and deservingness in the Dutch social assistance system, as perceived by status holders receiving social assistance and people and organisations working with them. An explorative qualitative methodology, providing detailed understandings of meanings and attitudes, is therefore appropriate. Specifically, semi-structured in-depth interviews are conducted. Due to little previous research on this topic, a pure deductive design using only *a priori* codes from literature for data analysis is inappropriate. Instead, this study combines a deductive qualitative design with an inductive *Grounded Theory* approach (Bowen, 2006). *Sensitizing concepts* from the literature, e.g. Miller's (1999) principles of social justice, Van Oorschot's (1998; 2017) CARIN-criteria, Fraser's (1995; 1999) conception of redistribution and recognition, and the capabilities approach (Robeyns, 2011) form a lens through which to interpret data, allowing relevant information to be noticed. Sensitizing concepts are used as starting point to create themes for a topic list and formulate related interview questions (Appendix A). For example, recognition is operationalized into questions about how status holders are viewed in the Netherlands and to what extent they feel treated differently in their interactions with people at social services. Questions related to redistribution and deservingness are e.g. whether participants feel they deserve to receive benefits, who should (not) be entitled to social assistance, why these groups in particular, and what kind of distribution of resources is just. One topic list was used for all social assistance recipients, whereas a general topic list for people and organisations working with them was adapted to their backgrounds and professions. Overall, the interview guides cover the same themes. To avoid new insights going unnoticed, *emerging* and *Invivo* codes following from interviews are included in the analysis. Interview data is recorded, transcribed, and analysed using a constant comparative method (Bowen, 2006) with the aid of NVivo. Open, axial and selective coding are used (Boeije, 2012), meaning data is first divided into fragments, which are compared and grouped into categories labelled with a code. Then categories and subcategories are related and data is reassembled to increase coherence. Lastly, connections between categories are sought.

The research question is explored through in-depth interviews with 6 status holders receiving social assistance and 6 people working with them fulfilling different roles at organisations varying in size (Appendix B). This allows a complete picture of justice-related

issues for status holders in the Dutch system, as professionals might view problems more from a policy perspective and are able to compare status holders' particular position with that of native recipients. Data is partly collected in cooperation with researchers from ETHOS subproject 'Justice as a lived experience', aimed at highlighting tensions in European ideals of justice and fairness from the perspective of groups who experience or are vulnerable to injustice. Most participants are recruited through the researchers' social networks either directly or by snowball sampling, and approached via e-mail, telephone, or face-to-face. NGO's are approached via e-mail. Interviews, conducted at various locations (i.e. participants' homes, organisations' and social services' office spaces, and public spaces e.g. a library or café), lasted approximately 1,5 hours.

Participants were informed in advance via an informational letter about the study's topic and aim and what they could expect regarding the interview's duration. It was emphasized that participation in the study was voluntary, participants were allowed to withdraw from the interview at any moment, and they were granted opportunity to refuse answering questions they did not want to answer. Participants were requested permission to record the interview. Transcripts of these recordings were processed keeping participants anonymous and unrecognizable: names were replaced by aliases, and other personal information which could possibly identify participants was removed. Participants were given opportunity to read their transcript. Informed consent was obtained through a form signed by participant and interviewer in advance. Data was processed and stored according to Utrecht University's data storage and archiving procedures. Since data is partly collected for both this study and ETHOS, their findings logically overlap at some points. Moreover, both projects' authors intentionally discussed their results and analyses at various points during the process to increase reliability of their findings.

Findings

This section discusses the findings, answering the research question: '*How do status holders receiving social assistance and people and organisations working with them experience and perceive justice and deservingness in the current Dutch social assistance system?*'. Background information on status holders' social assistance experience is provided. Then findings are described following the most important patterns from the interviews. First, status holders' deservingness perceptions are described: they justify their self-deservingness based on *need* and *reciprocity*, while evaluating others' deservingness based on *control* and *attitude*. The

identity criterion was not found; being born Dutch does not matter for deservingness. Second, perceptions of justice in the Dutch policy context are described, focusing on status holders' position. Counter achievements are regarded just contributions to society in exchange for receiving assistance, but municipalities are criticized for bringing them as punishments instead of emphasizing advantages. Decentralization is either argued to cause unjust inequalities and limited mobility for status holders, or considered logical, allowing municipalities to create tailored local policies. Last, some other issues showing status holders' limited capabilities are described.

Social assistance experience

The status holders are a single mom with three children, a mom with husband and three children, two university students, and two middle-aged singles (Appendix B). They receive social assistance because of their status holder background, and for one participant also due to her single motherhood. At data collection, they had been receiving social assistance for an average of 2,75 years (ranging from 2 to 4,5 years). Applying for social assistance was considered easy: organisations like Vluchtelingenwerk arranged this, and status holders often have contact with only one, specific client manager. In the Netherlands, asylum seekers receive social assistance as a start-up capital after they have been recognized as refugee and received status. They are then assigned to social housing, often receiving a loan to furnish their apartment. Several status holders in this study contrast their past as asylum seeker with their current situation: receiving assistance makes them feel part of the country, supported by the state, and respected as a human being, contrary to feelings of fear and stress they experienced during their asylum period. In return for their benefits, they perform various counter achievements, i.e. volunteer work, language courses, civic integration examinations, job application trainings, and labour market preparation courses.

Deservingness perceptions

Perceived (self-)deservingness of status holders and cognitive justice

Almost all status holders consider themselves deserving of their benefit, which could be due to their refugee background. In their explanations, different deservingness criteria and justice principles emerge. Many justify their benefit receipt based on their personal *need* (Miller, 1999; Van Oorschot et al., 2017) of social assistance. They emphasize this need is the result of their vulnerable position as refugees, being '*handicapped in various ways*', as articulated by Cheena. Contrary to native recipients, refugees have no work history in the country and need time and

energy to learn the Dutch language, process any trauma's related to their flight histories, and get to know the system and how everything works in the Netherlands.

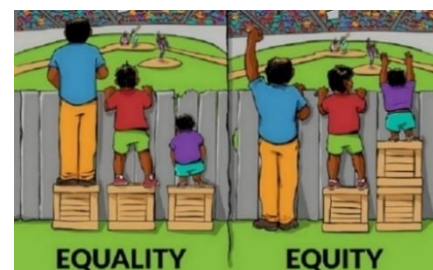
"It's fair that we receive money, because in the beginning it's hard to find work (...) In a way I felt I deserved it, because when you come to a new country everything is new for you, you don't know where you want to start. So this could help us in the beginning." (Ahmed)

Theoretically, calls for a recognition (Fraser, 1999) of migrants' specific needs for welfare benefits due to their backgrounds and characteristics (De Zwart & Poppelaars, 2007) can be observed in participants' explanations. For example, when talking about how her social assistance stopped because she got a student grant, which is lower than the social assistance benefit, Layla explains:

"I was a bit disappointed, because I felt like my situation is different. I am not a normal Dutch guy or girl who maybe saved money in her life, and worked (...) This is the vulnerability: I am a refugee and now I am getting into student grant and I was treated as any Dutch person, but I am not."

Related to this misrecognition of refugees' special needs is the following picture Layla presented on her phone during the interview, illustrating a definition of justice that corresponds with Sen's capabilities approach and his critique on Miller, i.e. people have different needs and require different levels or types of resources to achieve the same outcomes (Burchardt & Hick, 2016).

"This picture is what I was talking about the whole time with you. This is for me justice. Everybody is equal, but according to their needs." (Layla)



It is considered important that individuals receive the amount of resources they need to achieve equal outcomes. Equal capabilities instead of resources are thus emphasized. Status holders express a desire to be considered and treated as individuals with their own personal situations and needs. Professionals working with them also attach value and importance to this. In their policy advice, they emphasize the importance of individual considerations, looking at the people behind benefits, and seeing how rules and laws play out in practice. All in all, there is a

fundamental desire for a consideration of individual situations and recognition of migrants' specific needs, calling for a *differential* treatment.

However, when participants are asked to define 'justice', they show a strong endorsement of the *equality* principle (Miller, 1999), clearly emphasizing equal treatment and rights for everyone. Whereas also other matters are regarded important, e.g. giving people dignity and freedom of opinion, not taking abuse of the welfare state, respecting each other, allowing vulnerability, treating people honest, and being reliable, *equality* is most strongly emphasized. Status holders consider the Dutch system just, because it does not differentiate between people with certain backgrounds or religions and rules are the same for everyone. This endorsement of *equality* is at odds with their aforementioned desire for a *differential* treatment based on recognition of their needs, revealing the redistribution-recognition dilemma in status holders' experiences: they need to both claim and deny their specificity as migrants (De Zwart & Poppelaars, 2007; Fraser, 1995). On the one hand they consider it just to be treated *equally*, but on the other hand they want to be treated *differently*, according to their specific situation and needs as refugees.

Besides their needs, they also justify their benefit based on their (future) contributions to society, showing an endorsement of *reciprocity* (Van Oorschot et al., 2017) and *merit* (Miller, 1999).

"I think I am going to get a job soon, but it's a matter of time and I am in a very sensitive stage in my life. I am moving from being vulnerable and dependent to being professional and a hard worker. (...) I feel like, because I am doing all my best, to get the best job and to be the best citizen, I also deserve some support." (Layla)

Related to such contributions, most status holders emphasize they do not want and should not be able to receive social assistance endlessly. They consider status holders' right to social assistance good and necessary, since they need a start capital to build a new life in a new country, but social assistance is really regarded a temporary solution for people who cannot arrange their own income for a limited time period. Both status holders and people working with them agree that social assistance should contribute to status holders' integration.

"I think in a way it is good that it helps us to start up, but it's not something we should be focusing on all the time like this is where I should stay. I should always look at the bigger picture. Where do I want to be? What life do I want for myself? If you have this focus for yourself, it can push

you to go and work and also contribute to the society for other people that come after you.”
(Namazzi)

This quote illustrates status holders’ will and drive to actively contribute to society, described by all participating recipients and many of the people working with them, who generally evaluate status holders as ‘really motivated to do something’. This corresponds with previous research showing migrants are generally not in favour of ‘charitable hand-outs’ based on needs, but rather emphasize the importance of contribution (Dench et al., 2006; Dwyer, 2000, in Osipovič, 2015). Contributions are often delivered through an obligatory counter achievement described in more detail below. Besides mandatory return activities, many status holders make their own additional efforts to integrate into society, e.g. working extra hours in volunteer jobs, jointly maintaining a vegetable garden with other status holders and neighbours, organising extra opportunities to learn and practice Dutch, or speaking at seminars. This eagerness to contribute might be related to migrants’ position and background, as the following quote implies.

“They will always say: ‘What do the immigrants bring for us? What are they contributing to society? Are they only receiving from us and not giving us anything?’ So I always have the mindset that I want to make a difference and contribute to the society.” (Namazzi)

Having no work history in the country, combined with a drive to overcome experienced stigma and prejudices about migrants on social assistance (e.g. the welfare magnet premise) could make migrants more in favour of reciprocating.

Perceived deservingness of other status holders and other groups

Besides their self-deservingness, status holders were asked to reflect on the deservingness of other status holders and other groups. They consider other status holders and sick or disabled people who cannot work most deserving. When asked to explain why, the *control* criterion often comes to the fore. Participants emphasize a sickness or handicap happens to people outside of their control: sick or disabled people cannot help it they were born a certain way or became ill or handicapped due to an accident.

“Today you are here, you are healthy, you get money, but tomorrow you can become sick, the money you have you don’t have nothing anymore, everything is gone (...) Always think of yourself:

what if these things happened to me? It happened to this man, maybe it can happen to me.”
(Alexis)

Recipients are considered deserving of social assistance when they have no control over their neediness, i.e. they did not do anything to become needy and cannot do anything to overcome their need. Sick people's deservingness is emphasized even more in a few status holders' policy advice: they argue for additional monetary support for ill social assistance recipients to cover high health costs, which are often impossible to pay out of their benefit. When status holders are asked to explain whom they consider *non-deserving* and why, welfare recipients' *attitude* (Van Oorschot et al., 2017) to reciprocate seems to be an important criterion.

“People have a lot of excuses: ‘I have stress, I cannot clean the tables’. People are now taking advantage of social assistance and not being honest. Those people should not receive social assistance. Their mentality is not good.” (Cheena)

Moreover, when talking about recipients' non-deservingness, several status holders make contradictions between their own attitude, the aforementioned great willingness to work and contribute to society, and bad attitudes of others whom they consider non-deserving. The following quote illustrates the perceived deservingness of sick people described earlier *and* the perceived non-deservingness of recipients with bad attitudes.

“Look, maybe you get sick, bad things can happen, and then you need to sit at home, you get a benefit. But some people are lazy, they don't want to work, and just sit at home... I am not that kind of people.” (Alexis)

Additionally, some participants make explicit contradictions between their own and other *status holders'* attitudes. They describe their urge to motivate other status holders on social assistance to take the chances they are given and contribute to society instead of sitting at home on the couch doing nothing. Such contradictions made by status holders in a way align with Alho and Sippola's (2018) findings in Finland and Timonen and Doyle's (2009) in Ireland, which showed how labour migrants distinguish themselves from other, 'non-deserving' migrants whose attitude they disapprove of. This study shows not only labour migrants, but also status holders make such distinctions.

Justice in Dutch policy context: status holders' position

Counter achievement

Most status holders consider the Dutch welfare state just. However, when going into detail on some specific policy measures and recent changes, their perceptions of justice are less straightforward. The majority is positive about the counter achievement introduced in the Netherlands as part of the Participation Act. Status holders' counter achievements often include language courses and civic integration examinations in addition to voluntary work and labour market preparation trainings. They consider such 'return activities' a just contribution to society in exchange for receiving social assistance, showing an endorsement of the *merit* principle and *reciprocity* criterion. Moreover, both status holders and people working with them mention various benefits of fulfilling counter achievements, e.g. being able to learn and practice the Dutch language and building experience and a network.

"All those things are good things for us, because they help us to talk, to have communication with people, to have a network, to know so many people who can help you in different ways. It's very important for me." (Alexis)

"I see the language requirement really as a gift in that sense, and also all other trajectories the municipality offers. Yes, it's fantastic: people can develop themselves through language training. You can think: I have to go to language training, or you can think: I will benefit from it." (David, activation coach Rotterdam)

Such positive evaluations of the counter achievement as a way to contribute to society while developing skills and working towards integration correspond with previous research showing workfare volunteering is appreciated when it gives people positive freedom (Kampen & Tonkens, 2018). For status holders, 'integration' has a double meaning, both economic and social-cultural: they are required to integrate into the labour market *and* into a new culture.

"Even if you get to go to work and for example you don't know English, then how are you going to communicate with the people, how are you going to work with them? So you have to learn it." (Namazzi)

Participants see the necessity of fulfilling return activities which contribute to their economic and social-cultural integration. However, they are not always amused with how municipalities act, bringing the counter achievement as a punishment instead of emphasizing its advantages.

As described earlier, status holders are generally really motivated to reciprocate, contribute to society, actively work, and earn their own money, but experience a stigma about migrants on social assistance that they are not willing to work. This stigma is also experienced in their contact with social services, as the following quote illustrates.

“When someone tells me ‘You have to do this’... Yes, I would love to go to work soon! But right now I am following a course about how to integrate into and approach the Dutch labour market. So when they tell me ‘You have to do this’, I would say it’s a little bit like pushing too hard.”
(Namazzi)

Several status holders receiving social assistance experience similar situations: while trying really hard to integrate by learning the language and attending labour market trainings, they are often also expected to look for a job or do volunteer work several days a week. Aside from the fact that learning the Dutch language asks a lot of their brain, finding a job is often complicated precisely because of that language barrier, since many jobs require applicants to speak Dutch. Participants often talk about this language barrier and how this is one of the big differences between status holders and Dutch recipients, again calling for recognition of their specific position and additional needs. Besides the pushy character of municipalities experienced by several interviewees, others also feel municipalities are not fitting the right job to the right person, forcing people to do any job available regardless of their work experience and background.

“Municipalities just try to push people to work, which is not bad, but the problem is that they just want them to work in any kind of a job, regardless of their background. (...) I had a friend and he was a journalist in Syria, and he is not young, he is in his late thirties so he has a lot of experience, and they wanted him to work in a fish factory. You’re just destroying this person! You are just, you know, deleting what he has done. Unfortunately. You can help people to work, of course, but not like this, you know? This does not help!” (Layla)

The findings show the importance of fitting jobs to clients’ skills and wishes, increasing their capabilities to achieve what they want to achieve (Robeyns, 2011). This corresponds with previous research revealing the importance of personalised activation (Kampen & Tonkens, 2018). Additionally, several participants think there is a need of creating more employment opportunities and investing more in people. Status holders are willing to work, but there are too little suitable opportunities.

“Most status holders are really motivated. I even think sometimes more is needed for them in order to do what we ask. People want to work, but there is no work. People want to do volunteer work, but actually there are not enough places which fit their person, or there is not enough guidance on the work floor. You only learn it if you do volunteer work somewhere where people also invest in you. People want to practice the language, but they can only go to language school three mornings a week, and after three years their money runs out and they have to look for places where they can still practice Dutch.” (Eva, project manager)

Furthermore, a few participants also mention the lack of attention for cases where participation is not (always) possible and the little understanding for refugees’ background stories, again pointing to the importance of recognitive justice, calling for a special treatment based on recipients’ migration background (De Zwart & Poppelaars, 2007; Fraser, 1995).

Decentralization

Related to the counter achievement, another development in the Dutch system is the decentralization of state responsibilities to municipalities. The majority of interviewees shed light on unjust inequalities arising due to differences in municipal policies regarding the implementation of the counter achievement or the sanctions imposed when people refuse to fulfil their obligations. This again shows the importance attached to *equality* (Miller, 1999). An often cited example, also covered in Dutch media, is the contrast between Amsterdam’s ‘carrot’ approach, focusing on people’s capabilities by assigning them to programs that fit their backgrounds and aspirations, and Rotterdam’s ‘stick’ approach, forcing recipients to do low skilled work such as picking litter on the streets.

“Decentralization causes legal inequality (...) People in Rotterdam have to pick up litter as counter achievement for receiving a benefit, whereas in Amsterdam they don’t have to do that or they get paid for it.” (Piet, spokesman Bijstandsbond Amsterdam)

Unjust, unequal treatments between people living in different municipalities are especially problematic for status holders, who are assigned to social housing and distributed throughout different municipalities in the Netherlands without any say in where they will live. Additionally, moving to a different municipality is rather difficult for them.

“With the current system, moving is just not possible, because they are tied to the municipality where they settled first (...) Every municipality has different rules, how much money they get when they arrive, how much they need to pay back. In this municipality, they get money to furnish their house, but that’s actually a debt they build up. It’s a loan. If they move, they have to pay it back, because they don’t live here anymore. The next municipality will say: ‘this is a voluntary rehousing’, so they don’t get money to furnish that other house.” (Thea, social counsellor)

Whereas most participants are negative about decentralization, others consider differences in municipal policies logical and even effective. They for example justify Rotterdam’s stricter treatment based on its big number of social assistance recipients who are ‘no really willing to work’, arguing local policies are adjusted to recipients’ attitudes. Additionally, they explain differences might be caused by regional characteristics.

“There are good sides to it [decentralization]. I think municipalities have a good idea of what is needed. I mean, there are differences in the Netherlands where you live what the costs are (...) To a certain extent I think you can let municipalities decide what they consider good or what kind of jobs are available in the neighborhood. So, I don’t really have much trouble with things not being the same everywhere. I also see each region has its own problems and opportunities. I don’t really mind one municipality being more active in that than another.” (Jens, lawyer)

Here, decentralization is regarded to contribute to increased recognition of local recipients’ needs. Furthermore, some participants mention differences are a consequence of local politics, e.g. Rotterdam is more right-wing, whereas Amsterdam and Utrecht are more left-wing. Whereas Rotterdam is often cited for its strictness, an activation coach working there emphasizes that people’s capabilities and limitations are taken into account. Despite Rotterdam’s committal policy focused on reciprocity, his job is not to compulsively ‘bully job seekers’, but to help them develop and guide them towards participation. This illustrates the relationship between social investment and the capabilities approach (Benda, Fenger, Koster & Van der Veen, 2017; Morel, Palier, & Palme in Sachweh, 2016; Robeyns, 2011; Sherraden in Perkins, Smyth & Nelms, 2004).

Limited capabilities

Participants also mention other issues showing status holders’ limited capabilities. First, their communication with and understanding of client managers or contact persons is limited by the language barrier: recipients are often required to speak Dutch and translators are hardly

provided. Most status holders need to bring acquaintances with them to translate. Second, several recipients explain their benefit does not cover their costs (e.g. medical expenses) and social assistance makes them feel dependent, controls their movement, or limits their freedom. Their low budget does not allow them to do everything they want (visiting a museum, going out for dinner with friends), and they experience controlled movement, not being allowed to leave the country for more than 28 days and needing to inform municipalities about their whereabouts. Status holders' capabilities to achieve what they want to achieve seem to be limited (Robeyns, 2011).

Discussion

Contributing to scarce research on migrants' justice and deservingness perceptions, 6 status holders receiving social assistance and 6 people or organisations working with them (Appendix B) are interviewed in-depth, exploring their experiences and perceptions of justice and deservingness in the Dutch social assistance system. This study takes a qualitative, bottom-up approach, a relevant addition to existing quantitative deservingness studies which apply the CARIN-criteria (Control, Attitude, Reciprocity, Identity, Need) (Van Oorschot, 1998) top-down (Laenen et al., 2019). The findings show status holders endorse the *need* and *reciprocity* criteria, arguing they deserve social assistance as a start capital because (1) their vulnerable position as refugees justifies their need of social assistance and (2) they are contributing to society by fulfilling a counter achievement or will contribute in the future through paid work. This corresponds with research showing migrants' conditional view of welfare and their endorsement of *merit* and *reciprocity* (Alho & Sippola, 2018; Dench et al., 2006; Dwyer, 2000; Timonen & Doyle, 2009; Willen, 2012, in Osipovič, 2015), but does not match studies stating migrants believe people should not be entitled to welfare rights immediately upon arrival (Kremer, 2016a) nor research concluding migrants regard *needs*-based claims problematic (Osipovič, 2015). However, as previous studies focused on labour migrants, the *needs*-based claims found in this study might be characteristic for status holders. The findings illustrate a paradoxical contradiction which Fraser (1995) labelled 'the recognition-redistribution dilemma' (De Zwart & Poppelaars, 2007). On the one hand, status holders endorse the principle of *equality* (Miller, 1999), considering the Dutch social assistance system just because the same rules are applied to everyone. On the other hand, they want to be treated differently and receive recognition (Fraser, 1995, 1999; Robeyns, 2003) for their vulnerable position as newcomers who need time to learn the language and integrate into society, requiring different levels or

types of resources to achieve the same outcomes as natives, as centralized in Sen's capabilities approach (Burchardt & Hick, 2016).

Different deservingness criteria are employed when status holders evaluate their *own* deservingness versus that of *other* status holders or other groups. Whereas judgments of self-deservingness are based on *need* and *reciprocity*, perceptions of others' deservingness are based on *control* and *attitude*. This could potentially be explained by a difference between experiences and perceptions, but more research is needed to confirm this. The findings do show social assistance is considered a temporary solution and the counter achievement a means for status holders to help them integrate into the labour market. Only people without control over or responsibility for their needs and who have no work potential, e.g. the sick and disabled, are considered deserving of *long-term* social assistance. Recipients *with* work potential are expected to show good attitudes towards reciprocation and, in status holders' case, to work on their economic and social integration. Interesting is the relationship between *reciprocity* justifying *deservingness*, and recipients' bad *attitude* as an argument for *non-deservingness*: reciprocating equals a good attitude, whereas not willing to reciprocate equals a bad attitude. This calls for a critique on Van Oorschot's (1998) CARIN-model, which makes a theoretical distinction between reciprocity and attitude. This study shows that, in the Dutch counter achievement context, the two are analytically closely related and it makes more sense to combine them as one criterion: 'attitude towards reciprocation'. This potentially implicates deservingness criteria are context-sensitive and linked to country-specific policies.

Within the welfare-to-workfare policy shift and emerging social investment state, individual responsibility and self-reliance are increasingly emphasized. Dutch policy focus has shifted towards activating people to participation, either through paid work or by fulfilling mandatory counter achievements (e.g. volunteer work, language courses, labour market preparation trainings). This study shows status holders consider counter achievements just contributions to society in exchange for receiving benefits and mention several advantages of fulfilling them. However, they do critique how municipalities act, i.e. being too pushy in their activation and forgetting to devote attention to individuals and their personal experiences, skills, desires, and capabilities. Reciprocity seems important, but contributions must fit status holders' skills and benefit their personal development and economic and social-cultural integration. In other words, their capabilities should be enhanced, which might require differential treatments to achieve justice. Furthermore, unjust inequalities are experienced by status holders due to decentralization of responsibilities to municipalities, causing differential treatment based on geographical location and limiting mobility, again revealing the importance of *equality*. Only

few participants argue decentralization leads to more effective, tailored local policies fitting recipients' attitudes, regional characteristics, and local politics, and contributing to recognition of local recipients' needs.

The focus on a specific context, the Dutch social assistance system, and selection of participants with diverging characteristics, possibly limits the study's generalizability. However, since Dutch policy developments are similar to those in other European countries, the findings are still relevant within a broader context of social investment states. Besides, the study's aim was to increase understanding of experiences and perceptions. Purposefully selecting participants with different backgrounds and positions contributed to a complete picture, producing richer data and allowing the findings to also show how professionals in the field perceive status holders' position in the Dutch system, which differs at some points from status holders' own perspective. Focusing on both recipients' perspective and that of people and organisations working with them gives policy makers important insights on how to create a more just social assistance system. A second limitation relates to the population's vulnerability. Status holders receiving social assistance are hard to reach due to well-meaning professionals and organisations serving as gatekeepers (Riese, 2018; Sutton, Erlen, Glad & Siminoff, 2003). Most participants are recruited via the researcher's social network, which could cause more biased results. However, it did increase trust and rapport, which turned out to be crucial. To mitigate possible biases, the researcher took notes on her expectations, opinions, feelings, and ideas, to remain reflexive on her positionality as a well-off, young, Dutch student lacking experience with social assistance (Baarda et al., 2005; Boeije, 2012). Moreover, she cooperated with experienced researchers from ETHOS during data collection, allowing researcher triangulation. A third limitation is the relatively small number of participants, caused by limited access to the field and vulnerable population, and miscommunication in the internship organisation about sharing data. A fourth limitation is that, whereas focused on status holders' perspective, some findings could still also apply to Dutch social assistance recipients. Future research should point out whether this is the case and how exactly status holders' perceptions differ from that of native social assistance recipients.

A theoretical implication of the study is its critique on the CARIN-model (Van Oorschot, 1998), showing deservingness criteria might be context-sensitive and linked to specific policy trajectories, e.g. attitude and reciprocity are important and interrelated in the Dutch counter achievement context. Furthermore, an analytical distinction is made between evaluations of self-deservingness versus others' deservingness, showing different criteria are applied when talking from own experience versus when making perceptions of others'

deservingness. Additional qualitative research is recommended to confirm this difference and explore whether it counts for everybody or only status holders. A policy-related implication is that social services are recommended to fit counter achievements and job opportunities to recipients' skills, experiences, and interests in order to effectively activate them by increasing their motivation and capabilities. Additionally, from recipients' perspective, municipalities should work together more often and adjust local policies to one another to increase equal treatment across the country. However, some professionals consider municipal differences logical, arguing for effectiveness of adjusting policy to local recipients' attitudes and regional characteristics. More research is required to explain these differing views.

All in all, this study produced new insights regarding justice and deservingness perceptions of status holders, who justify their self-deservingness based on their *reciprocity* and *need*, calling for cognitive justice and equal capabilities. It shows the importance of *control* and *attitude* when evaluating deservingness of others, and a tight analytical connection between *attitude* and *reciprocity* in the Dutch context.

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Appendix A: Topic lists / Interview guides

Note: As described under 'Methods', the interview guides were tailored to participants' backgrounds and positions. However, to increase readability and usability, this appendix contains two general interview guides: one for social assistance recipients with a migration background, and one for people or organisations working with them. The interview guides cover both questions designed in cooperation with researchers from the ETHOS project and additional questions designed by this study's author for the purpose of this article only.

Social assistance recipients with a migration background

Introduction

- Thank the participant for participating in the study
- Shortly summarize the aim of the study
- Discuss the informed consent letter and issues (make agreement about anonymity and recording)

Experience with receiving social assistance

- Since when do you receive social assistance?
- Why do you receive social assistance?
- Do you have another income, besides your social assistance benefit?
- How do you experience the way client managers deal and communicate with you? Are you satisfied about that?
- Do people around you, in your environment or social network, know that you receive social assistance? How do they think about that? What kind of responses do you get from people when you tell them that you receive social assistance? What do you think of those responses?
- Have your experiences with social assistance changed throughout the years? What changes have you experienced in particular? (related to rules or regulations, contact with client managers).
- What are the most important changes for you since the implementation of the Participation Act?

Mobility/Migration

At this moment, an important and rather big part of the social assistance population come from abroad, especially refugees.

- What do you think about that? Do you think status holders should have the right to receive social assistance?
- How did you like it that, as a status holder, you had the right to social assistance?
- Was it easy for you to request social assistance? Can you tell me something about that?
- The Dutch government has proposed to give status holders 'living allowance' instead of a social assistance benefit in the first two years after settlement in the municipality. The municipality itself then arranges everything else, such as housing and insurance. What do you think of this idea?
- Do you have any experience with requesting social assistance in a different city or country? If so, were those different experiences compared to your experience now? How different were they? In what sense were they different?
- It is quite difficult for social assistance recipients to move to a different municipality. What do you think about that?
- How does receiving social assistance influence the way you spend your time?

- How does receiving social assistance influence how you look at yourself and the way you behave?

Rights and duties - Social security and protection

Counter achievement & Decentralization

In the Participation Act, the law that regulates social assistance, participation in society (voluntary work, language courses, training) is mandatory.

- What do you think of that ‘counter achievement’?
- What does it mean to you?
- Do you also fulfil such a counter achievement? If so, what do you do?
- What are the sanctions in your municipality if people don’t comply to their obligations?
- Is that different here compared to other cities, for example Amsterdam, Utrecht, Rotterdam or The Hague?
- What is your opinion about those obligations and sanctions?
- What do you think of the differences in the way the law is being applied?

Deservingness

- In your experience, how does it feel to receive social assistance?
- Do you consider it fair/just that you receive social assistance? Why or why not? To what extent do you feel you deserve to receive social assistance?
- When do you consider it fair/just that someone receives a social assistance benefit? What demands/requirements would you make?
- Who should have the right to social assistance? Why these groups/people in particular?
- Are there any groups or people who receive social assistance unjustified? Who are those people and why should they not receive social assistance in your opinion?

Recognition

- To what extent do you feel treated differently in your contact with the UWV (Employment Insurance Company), the social services or the municipality?
- In your experience, how are people with a migration background viewed in the Netherlands? Are they treated differently compared to people who were born here and have lived here their whole lives?
- How do you feel diversity is being handled in the Netherlands?

Justice and the Dutch welfare state

- What do you think of the way resources and services are divided/distributed in the Netherlands?
- What are the most important positive and negative developments the last couple of years when we are talking about a fair/just distribution in social security/protection?
- What groups of people are most vulnerable to injustice at the moment? What creates/causes that vulnerability?
- How would you define ‘justice’? What does ‘justice’ mean to you? What matters are important?
- How just do you consider the Dutch welfare state if you look at it with your own definition of justice?
- How would a just welfare state look like in your eyes?
- Would a just welfare state need criteria for deservingness, so criteria that determine whether someone should or should not deserve a benefit? Why or why not?

- To what extent should a just welfare state make mobility within and across national borders possible?

Work and unemployment & capabilities

- How are unemployed people viewed in the Netherlands in your experience?
- How do you look at work and unemployment? What does work mean to you?
- What do you think of the possibilities in the Netherlands to get a job?
- Can you tell me something about your own experiences with looking for a job?
- What do you think is necessary for you to get a job more easily? What would you need?
- To what extent do you feel that you can achieve what you want to achieve in life? (Do what you want to do, be who you want to be).
- What factors influence your ability to achieve what you want to achieve? How does your ethnicity play a role in this? In what way does the Dutch policy approach affect your capabilities to achieve what you want to achieve?

Policy recommendations

- What can daily problems or obstacles that you, as a social assistance recipient, experience, teach us about justice in general?
- What would your advice be for politics, social services and municipalities to create a more just social assistance policy?
- If you would aim for a just welfare state such as the one you described earlier, what would be needed to achieve that goal? What would you recommend/advise?

People or organisations working with the target group

Introduction

- Thank the participant for participating in the study
- Shortly summarize the aim of the study
- Discuss the informed consent letter and issues (make agreement about anonymity and recording)

Experience

- Can you tell me something about your role/position (in this organisation)?
- What was your motivation to do this job? Did your expectations about your job/role/function/position come true?
- In what way do you come into contact with social assistance recipients with a migration background through your work?
- To what extent do you have to deal with the Participation Act that regulates social assistance?
- In your experience, what is the most important change in social assistance due to the implementation of the Participation Act if you compare it with the Work and Social Assistance Act?
- What components/parts of the Participation Act do you consider an improvement compared to the Work and Social Assistance Act?
- What components/parts of the Participation Act do you consider a deterioration compared to the Work and Social Assistance Act?
- What are the hardest parts of the Participation Act to carry out / which you deal with in your work?

- Does it matter to you (or the organization) who receives social assistance or why someone receives it, if you think of single moms, bankrupt entrepreneurs, migrants, refugees, or people with a handicap? Are there groups that are harder to guide/work with than others?
- Has the discretionary space client managers have to make decisions of judgments been limited or expanded since the financial crisis?

Mobility/Migration

At this point, an important part of the social assistance population comes from abroad, particularly refugees.

- Is that a point of discussion within your work/organisation? If so, what are the most important subjects/points of discussion?
- What do you think about the fact that status holders have a right to social assistance?
- Do they need to do something in return? If so, what?
- *If applicable*: What are for you the most important differences in guiding status holders and mobile EU-workers on the one hand and people who were born in the Netherlands on the other hand?
- How do you deal with people who don't speak the Dutch language well enough and don't understand the rules and procedures?
- Is there ever a translator involved? / Is the organisation/Are you/Are the social services obliged to provide a translator? (If not, why not? If so, does that happen?)
- What do you think of that personally and how do you discuss things with someone who does not speak Dutch well?

It seems to be quite difficult for people on social assistance to move to a different municipality.

- Do you have any experience with that? What kind of problems do social assistance recipients you work with run into?
- Has that (moving) become more difficult the last couple of years or has it always been the same?
- What rules do you run into when guiding people who are or want to be mobile?
- What kind of rules or contacts are helpful in such situations?
- The government has proposed to give status holders living allowance the first two years after settlement, instead of social assistance. The municipality then arranges everything else like housing and insurance. What do you think about that/this idea?

Rights and duties – Security and protection

Counter achievement & Decentralisation

In the Participation Act, participation in society (volunteer work, language courses, training) is mandatory.

- How does that work out in your municipality? How is it implemented here?
- What does that mean for your work as a [role of the participant]? (e.g. for the activation coach: How do you guide people to participation and how do your clients deal with that?)
- What are the sanctions if people don't fulfil their obligations?
- Is that different here compared to other big cities, such as Utrecht, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, or the Hague?
- What do you think of the idea of a counter achievement? What do you think of those obligations and sanctions?

I understand that the obligation to participate is interpreted differently in different municipalities in the Netherlands, for example in Amsterdam (carrot) and Rotterdam (stick).

- What do you think of the differences with which the law is applied (especially from the perspective of social assistance recipients/status holders receiving social assistance)?

Deservingness

- Do some groups/people deserve social assistance more than others according to you? / Do you personally think that some people have more right to social assistance than others? If so, what people do you think of? Who should have the right to social assistance if it were up to you?
- Why these groups/people in particular?
- When do you consider it just that someone receives social assistance? What demands/requirements would you make?
- Are there groups of people who receive social assistance unjustified according to you? Who are they and why should they not receive social assistance?

Recognition

- To what extent are social assistance recipients with a migration background treated differently compared to people with a Dutch background? Do you have any experience with that?
- In your experience, how are people with a migration background viewed in the Netherlands?
- How do you feel diversity is being handled in the Netherlands?

Justice and the national state

- What do you think of the way resources and facilities are distributed in the Netherlands?
- Did the decentralization of social assistance work out well according to you? Why do you think that?
- What are the most important positive and negative developments in social security the last couple of years (regarding a just distribution)?
- What groups of people are now most vulnerable to injustice? What creates that vulnerability?
- How would you define 'justice'? What does it mean to you? What matters are important?
- How just do you consider the Dutch welfare state if you look at it with your own definition of justice?
- What would a just welfare state look like in your eyes?
- Would a just welfare state need criteria for deservingness, so criteria that determine whether someone should or should not deserve a benefit? Why or why not?
- To what extent should a just welfare state make mobility within and across national borders possible?

Work and unemployment & capabilities

- How are unemployed people viewed in the Netherlands in your experience?
- How do you look at work and unemployment? What does work mean to you?
- What does work mean to people with a migration background? Have you had experience with social assistance recipients with a migration background that found a job? Can you tell me something about that?
- What do you think of the possibilities for migrants in the Netherlands to get a job?
- What do you think is necessary for this group to get a job more easily?
- What factors influence their ability to achieve what they want to achieve? How does their ethnicity play a role in this? In what way does the Dutch policy approach affect their capabilities to achieve what they want to achieve?

Policy advice / recommendations

- What can daily problems or obstacles that social assistance recipients face teach us about justice in general?
- What would you advise politics or the social services to create a more just social assistance policy, if you need to be realistic?
- And if you can be unrealistic, if you would strive for a just welfare state as the one you described earlier, what would be needed to achieve that goal? What would you recommend?

Appendix B: Participant characteristics

Table 2 shows the characteristics of the participants. As age is only relevant for the social assistance recipients, the ages of the people working with them are not mentioned.

Table 2

Characteristics of participants

Alias	Category/Characteristics	Age	Gender	Background
Piet	Spokesman at Bijstandsbond Amsterdam, an NGO representing social assistance recipients	-	Male	Dutch
Roro	Social assistance recipient, temporary asylum status, husband and three children	39	Female	Syrian
Layla	Social assistance recipient, temporary asylum status, University student	26	Female	Syrian
Cheena	Social assistance recipient, permanent refugee status	50	Female	Pakistan
Alexis	Social assistance recipient, temporary asylum status	46	Male	African
Eva	Project manager at small NGO committed to integrating refugees	-	Female	Dutch
Katrien	Financial coach at social organisation in small city	-	Female	Dutch
David	Activation coach at taskforce Rotterdam	-	Male	Dutch
Namazzi	Social assistance recipient, temporary asylum status, single mom with three children	34	Female	Uganda
Thea	Social counsellor at Vluchtelingenwerk	-	Female	Dutch
Ahmed	Social assistance recipient, temporary asylum status, student	20	Male	Syrian
Jens	Lawyer, specialized in social assistance cases	-	Male	Dutch

Appendix C: Structured code tree

Name	Files	References
Activation to work	12	45
Activating is good, but to help people, not as a punishment. Jobs should fit people's skills, experiences, and backgrounds	2	6
Counter achievement	0	0
Benefits of counter achievement (learning Dutch language, growing social network, keeping skills up to date, uitstroom)	7	11
Content of counter achievement (volunteerwork, training, language courses, mantelzorg)	10	20
Taking opportunities and chances	2	2
Knowing their district is important for activation coaches	1	1
Need of creating employment opportunities AND investing in people	3	6
Gap between people's skills and jobs available	1	3
Participation Act is a wrong name	1	1
Resistance against counter achievement (medical complaints or aggressive, manipulative behavior)	2	4
Too little attention for cases where participation is not (always) possible	2	6
Will to actively work, contribute, and earn money	12	33
Cultural differences AND Influence of cultural background on startposition or motivation	5	8
Importance of work	6	7
Wanting to learn the language by talking with others	1	1
Applying for social assistance	0	0
Easy to apply for social assistance. Help from Vluchtelingenwerk or other organisations	6	11
Not easy to apply for social assistance	2	2
Asylum procedure VS being statusholder and receiving social assistance	3	6
Feelings while being on social assistance	0	0
Feeling like a stranger OR feeling different	1	2
Lack of independence (OR feeling of shame)	2	4
Not feeling alive	1	1
Perceived support from system AND feeling financially secure	4	11
Social assistance controls movement AND limits freedom	2	3
Stress	3	4
You start to feel part of the country when you start receiving social assistance	1	1
Treated as victim and case by NGO's	1	1
Basic principles of social assistance system have remained the same and are unworkable	1	5
Benefit needed to start-up (but not for always)	7	15
Need (deservingness criterion)	3	10
Bigger case load due to refugee crisis	0	0
Bijstandsbond versus Social services security	2	2
Changes since Participation Act	0	0
Co-resident rule (is an absurdity)	3	5
Discretionary space	0	0
Discretionary space bigger in Special Assistance (Bijzondere Bijstand)	1	1
Increased inequality between municipalities because of discretionary space	1	1
Discretionary space smaller (but still there is space)	1	1
Tighter control and heavier sanctions	1	7
Heavier sanctions due to stigma that people want to stay on social assistance	1	1
Heavy, often unjustified sanctions	1	2
Increased citizen responsibility for own re-integration	1	1
Consider individual situations (maatwerk)	6	20
Weighing options to see if trajectories are efficient and profitable	1	5
Contact between clients and people working with them (e.g. activation coach, client manager, contact person municipality)	0	0
Clients' fear to be cut by social services	1	1
Communication	0	0
Communicating in Dutch at the social services	1	1

Language barrier	2	2
Miscommunication	1	1
Translator OR other forms of communication with people who don't speak Dutch well	4	5
Importance of empathy	1	1
Negative contact UWV	1	2
Negative experience with contact person	2	2
Personal and intensive contact between activation coach and client	1	4
Positive experience with contact person at municipality	6	11
Cooperation between Taskforce and other organisations essential for citizens	1	1
Decentralization AND Differences between municipalities	0	0
Amsterdam vs Rotterdam	5	13
Decentralization causes inequalities OR insecurity and unclarity about rights OR discrimination OR pushes people to move ('shoppen')	9	18
Decentralization logical and justified by government. Municipalities can choose and adapt own policy to local recipients.	3	4
Trust in municipalities and their policy	2	2
Decentralization positive (local policies clearer and faster, more adjusted to local problems and attitudes of recipients, bigger influence of local politics)	4	5
Municipalities are not executing the counter achievement	1	1
Sanctions	7	12
Defensive measures taken by Bijstandsbond	1	1
Definitions of justice	0	0
Equality principle (equal treatment and rights for everyone AND justice as equality or equity)	11	25
Negative about equal treatment (related to recognition of refugees' specific needs)	1	2
Justice as dignity	1	1
Justice as freedom to give your opinion	1	1
Justice as not taking abuse of the welfare state	1	1
Justice as respecting each other and being allowing vulnerability	2	2
Justice as treating people honest and being reliable	1	1
Justice defined as capabilities to achieve what you want to achieve	1	1
Merit principle (justice as giving people what they work for; lower taxes)	1	5
Deservingness & CARIN	0	0
Adult, healthy people must work	5	8
Attitude (deservingness criterion)	0	0
Non-deserving people have bad mentality or attitude	8	15
Control (deservingness criterion)	2	2
Deservingness criteria needed	1	1
Inequality caused by deservingness criteria for social assistance	1	1
Need (deservingness criterion) (see also recognition of refugees' vulnerable position)	4	11
No deservingness hierarchy	6	7
Non-deserving people (car or holiday example)	2	2
Perceived self-deservingness OR Receiving benefit considered just	5	6
Reciprocity (deservingness criterion)	5	5
Sick or disabled people and people who cannot work most deserving	11	22
Single moms as deserving group	1	1
Social assistance as safety net for people who cannot provide for themselves or their own livelihood	1	1
Developments welfare state (positive and negative)	0	0
A lot of things are basically well arranged in NL	1	2
Elderly houses runned by volunteers but that could have been paid jobs. Flexwork leads to less pension building.	1	1
Income inequality very high in NL	2	3
Minimum income for everyone would be a good idea	1	1
No positive developments in social security	2	2
Sacrificed solidarity	1	1
Social assistance recipients should receive more money	1	1

State controls people with rules and taxes	1	2
Things are more expensive and we need to pay higher taxes now	1	1
Unjust cutbacks in the re-integration industry	1	1
Different groups of migrants or refugees	1	1
Different groups of social assistance recipients	1	1
Difficult to talk about reason for coming to the Netherlands (taking refuge from war)	1	1
Division between regular service organisations and those concerned with political refugees	1	1
EU social assistance system ideas	5	5
Evaluations of the amount of the social assistance benefit	0	0
(annoyingly) Low income AND high debts	5	11
Amount enough	2	3
It's all about planning and budgetting	1	2
People need to learn contentment and to be satisfied with what they get	1	1
Expectation that people work	1	1
Extreme right thinking in politics is scary	1	1
Factors important for getting a job	0	0
Education important for getting job	2	4
Knowing the system important to get job	1	1
Network connection important for finding job	1	1
Non-response when applying for job	1	1
Role of ethnicity in finding job	2	2
Financial coaching mostly needed for recipients who are in a transition phase	1	1
Health and wellbeing	0	0
Bad health as limitation to work	1	7
Health care should be better	2	2
Health costs high OR problems paying health costs	5	7
Homeless people	1	1
How long receiving social assistance	6	6
Illegal employment	1	1
Impracticable measures	2	2
Inequality, vulnerability, and injustice will always exist	2	3
Injustice in court	3	4
Language	0	0
Language barrier limits job opportunities	7	12
Language does not have to be a barrier to find work	1	2
Language requirement	3	7
Not always necessary, e.g. if English is good. People can participate in different ways.	1	1
They should differentiate based on age for language learning	1	1
Legal support	5	8
Attachment-exempt threshold (beslagvrije voet) & people not knowing about it	1	1
Difficult for lawyers that they cannot change the law	1	1
Just a few people with legal insurance	1	1
Less legal support	1	1
Less money for legal support. Own contributions increased.	1	1
Majority of people asking for legal support are migrants	1	1
Mostly middle-aged people who use legal support	1	1
Living allowance	0	0
Living allowance bad because no equal treatment	1	1
Living allowance is same as benefit but framed differently (political joke)	4	4
Living allowance only where needed e.g. refugees	1	2
Living allowance would be good and force people to work	1	1
Living allowance would control people too much AND limits own responsibility	5	6
Living allowance would rest your mind AND decrease debts	6	9
Many coloured people OR refugees receive social assistance	1	1
Moving AND mobility AND vacation	10	24
Housing segregation	3	3

Moving to other municipality difficult due to debts, e.g. related to loans for furniture	1	1
No experience with applying for social assistance in other city or country	4	4
Not knowing OR understanding the rules and system	9	28
Obeying and respecting the municipality	2	5
Policy advice	0	0
Higher taxes needed for just welfare state. More money for care and infrastructure.	1	1
Illegal people should have social assistance	1	1
Increased security needed	1	1
Look at people who are controlling the system	1	1
Money should go to basic social sectors, which are education, health, military	1	2
Policy needs to learn from people	2	2
Political participation	7	7
Reason for being on social assistance	7	8
Recognition	0	0
Refugees as vulnerable group (Recognition for their situation)	8	22
Little understanding for background stories of refugees who receive social assistance	1	1
Negative about fact that refugees need so much help	1	1
Status holders should have right to social assistance	7	8
Responses from neighborhood	6	9
'We pay for your benefit via taxes'	2	3
Stigma AND Prejudices about migrants OR social assistance recipients in general	5	8
Time investment	0	0
No influence on time investment	1	1
Influence on time investment	1	1
Vulnerable groups	7	12
Single moms OR dads as vulnerable group	6	6
Too little investment in vulnerable groups with fewer opportunities	2	2
Motivation to help vulnerable groups	1	2
Older OR self-employed people more vulnerable	1	1
People with lack of knowledge about regulations	1	1
People between 18 and 21 most vulnerable, because they receive less	1	1