

*DISABILITY, ACCESS TO FOOD  
AND THE UN CRPD:  
NAVIGATING A RIGHTS-BASED EQUALITY  
DISCOURSE IN THE NETHERLANDS*

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# Using access to food as a way to examine disability equality in a developed country

- The Netherlands is a developed nation that has signed many international human rights agreements. In 2016, the Netherlands ratified the UN CRPD.
- However, the Netherlands has historically been resistant to change based on human rights discourses within its own borders.
- When it comes to people with disabilities, a system of segregated provision exists, with higher rates of institutionalisation and special education than in most other Western European countries. There is an assumption that disabled people are in need of social welfare support and charity provision, and that these will solve any problems they may have.
- **Access to food** is a key social and economic right. We set out to examine whether people with disabilities have equal access to food in the Netherlands as a way of examining the state of disability (in)equality.

# Our research process

- In 2016, we evaluated the Week van de Toegankelijkheid ('Accessibility Week') for the NGO Ieder(in) (funded by Revalidatiefonds).
- The theme of the WvdT was accessibility of eating establishments in the Netherlands.
- We began with literature research, which we broadened to cover general access to food issues.
- We conducted a total of 41 interviews with disabled people, leaders of DPOs, food system researchers, food-related service providers, and policymakers.
- We also attended WvdT events, including meetings, conferences, and visits to food establishments.

3 t/m 8 oktober 2016

# Aan tafel!

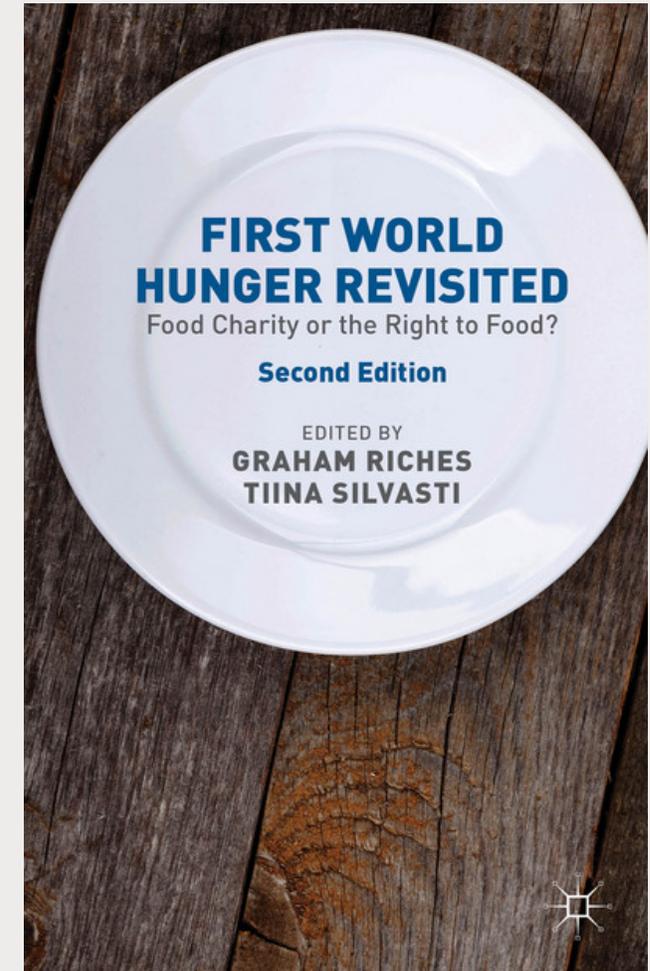


# Literature research

We looked at research on:

- The legal and policy environment in the Netherlands regarding food establishments, including the building code
- Access to food issues for people with a disability, including physical access
- Barriers to access to food
- Food issues in institutional care and supported living
- The influence of food on disablement
- Disability and food poverty, including food bank use and 'food deserts'

Manon Kuipers (VU BSc Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek) also helped with the literature research as part of her degree programme.



# Interviews

For leder(in), the key questions were:

- What makes a café or restaurant (in)accessible?
- What can a café or restaurant do to be as accessible as possible?

We also asked people to describe their ideal café or restaurant, and asked them about their positive and negative experiences as a way of learning about barriers and facilitating factors to access to food.



# Further issues regarding access to food

We explored additional issues while conducting interviews for Ieder(in), including:

- Economic barriers to accessing food
- The experiences of disabled people with food banks in the Netherlands
- The ability of disabled people to make food choices (especially in supported living and institutional care)
- With service providers, policymakers and researchers, the legal and policy environment regarding physical, social and economic access to food issues



# Results

The results of our programme evaluation are available separately.

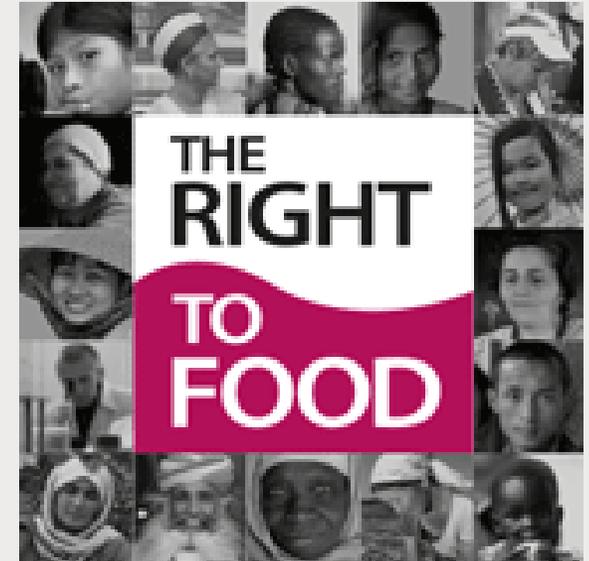
As regards access to food for people in the Netherlands, we found that there are definitely issues regarding access to food for disabled people in the Netherlands, including:

- Physical access barriers in some food establishments (cafés, grocery stores, etc.)
- Feeling (un)welcome in some food establishments
- Being treated differently/less favourably in some food establishments
- Lack of control over food choices for those using food banks or in supported living/institutional care
- Lack of reliable data about the experiences of disabled people, especially regarding food bank users

Disabled people also reported many positive experiences, and told us what made a positive difference for them.

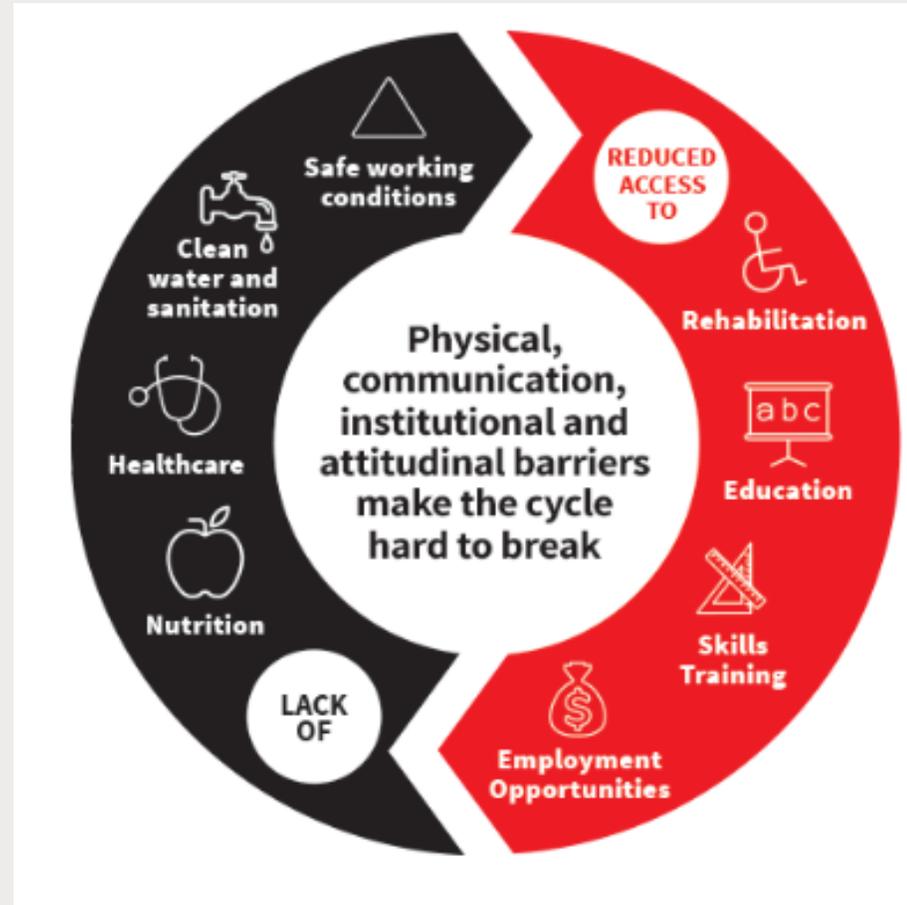
# The right to food and the UN CRPD

- The right to food is an example of a social and economic right that disabled people may not access on an equal basis with non-disabled people.
- According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), access to adequate and culturally appropriate food is an indispensable right for all people.
- The right to food is also mentioned directly in many other UN human rights agreements, and is indirectly supported by Article 4(1) and other sections of the European Social Charter.
- The UN CRPD mandates equal access to social and economic rights for disabled people.



# Access to food and disability in the Netherlands

- Everywhere in the world, there is an intersection between disability and poverty. Unequal access to adequate food is a key link in this chain.
- In the developed world, this can be seen in greater use of food banks by disabled people, greater likelihood of living in areas with poor food provision ('food deserts'), and the combination of low income and poor accessibility leading to food poverty.
- In the Netherlands, we found a lack of data regarding all these areas. Food banks, for example, collect some demographic data about clients, but do not collect data about disability.
- We frequently encountered an official assumption that everything is fine, and the welfare system or charity is solving any problems. However, we know this is not the case in comparable developed countries (UK, US, Canada, etc.) that do collect data.
- We also know that in the Netherlands a high proportion of disabled people live in supported living or institutional care, and that there is restriction of food choices, and health inequalities.



# Summary

- Access to food and eating experiences is an activity of daily life where people with disabilities often experience barriers. This is also true in the Netherlands.
- To address these barriers, the UN CRPD and the human rights approach can be a useful tool.
- In the Netherlands, this will require dedicated work to ensure that it is incorporated into all applicable aspects of national law and public policy—for example, the building code and requirements for data collection—before it can begin to make a difference in practice.
- Data collection (for example, by food banks and disability researchers) is needed to understand the scope of the problem.