

Kingdom of the Netherlands

United Nations High-Level  
Political Forum on Sustainable  
Development 2022

# Voluntary National Review on the Sustainable Development Goals



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# Opening statement

In 2017 the Kingdom of the Netherlands presented its first Voluntary National Review (VNR) to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF). This was a joint effort, involving government authorities and civil society stakeholders from the four countries of the Kingdom (Aruba, Curaçao, the Netherlands and Sint Maarten). The collaborative nature of the review was underscored at the presentation, which was given by the prime minister of Curaçao and the responsible minister from the Netherlands, with a youth representative speaking on behalf of the civil society stakeholders.

In the years since then, collaboration between the countries of the Kingdom in relation to the SDGs has deepened and widened, as their joint approach to the Kingdom's elected membership of the UN Security Council in 2018 clearly showed. Working with other states, the Kingdom put climate change and water stress on the agenda as possible drivers of conflict. We stressed that investing in the SDGs is the ultimate conflict prevention agenda.

The SDGs as a connecting force inspired us to produce this second VNR. Our four countries worked closely together over the course of a year to draft the reports, and again learned much from each other. The added value brought by partnerships in achieving the goals is also clearly evident in our partnership within the Kingdom. The examples and experience we have shared will help us step up our efforts to achieve the SDGs in the coming years.

We recognise that our scope to achieve the goals differs. Our starting positions are different, as are the challenges that require priority. At the same time, some challenges – such as climate change and inequality – are equally urgent for all four of us. We therefore explore these topics together in the first chapter (Introduction) of this VNR.

The first VNR presented by the Kingdom in 2017 provided a baseline. Since then, successive governments in each of the countries have introduced policies to address the main SDG challenges. Now, five years on, we look back on the results we have achieved. To this end, we consulted stakeholders from all sectors of society, asking them to identify both the main challenges and opportunities to step up action in the coming years.

We are confident about the coming eight years. We have taken firm action to achieve the goals for 2030. The COVID-19 pandemic has, however, left its mark on the countries of the Kingdom. For the Caribbean part, the social, financial and economic impact has been particularly severe. But by supporting each other, we have managed to come through this difficult period, and we are now working to make the Kingdom more resilient. Civil society stakeholders are closely involved in this process. We therefore have a strong basis on which to move forward with the next stage of this agenda, and to achieve the SDGs by 2030.

**Evelyna Wever-Croes**

Prime Minister of Aruba

**Gilmar Simon Pisas**

Prime Minister of Curaçao

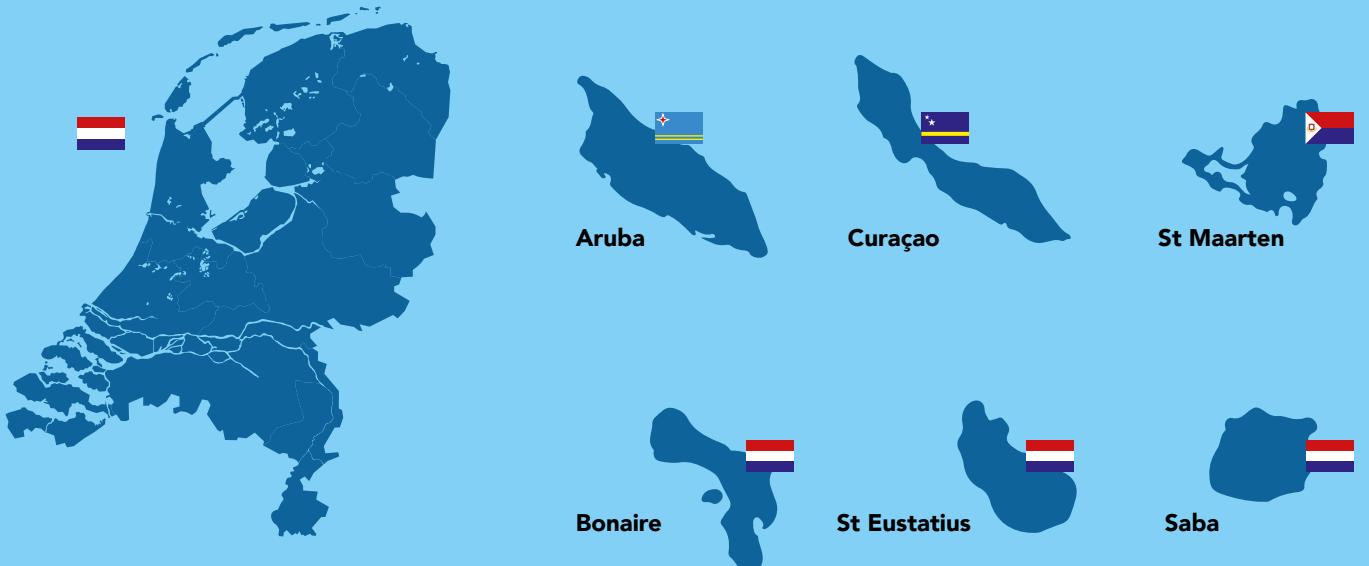
**Silveria Elfrieda Jacobs**

Prime Minister of Sint Maarten

**Liesje Schreinemacher**

Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of the Netherlands

## The four countries of the Kingdom of the Netherlands



- 1 Aruba
- 2 Curaçao
- 3 Bonaire
- 4 St Maarten
- 5 Saba
- 6 St Eustatius
- 7 The Netherlands



# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Partnership for the SDGs

The Kingdom of the Netherlands comprises four autonomous countries: Aruba, Curaçao, Sint Maarten and the Netherlands. Within the Kingdom, countries are encouraged to collaborate, but each country is responsible for its own affairs. The 2010 Charter for the Kingdom of the Netherlands established relations between the countries, drawing a distinction between Kingdom responsibilities (including foreign policy) and autonomous powers (in most policy areas, including international cooperation in these areas). Implementation of the SDGs is organised at national level, and thus differs from country to country. As a country within the Kingdom, the Netherlands also includes the three Caribbean islands of Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius, each with a special status modelled on that of a Dutch municipality. The Kingdom is represented in the UN as a single member state and the four countries have therefore worked closely together in presenting this VNR.

In 2015, the countries of the Kingdom adopted the SDGs as the framework for both national and international policy. The 17 goals are our compass for achieving future-proof economies, resilient societies and people's wellbeing. In the past two years, the COVID-19 pandemic made us more keenly aware of the importance of resilience. The SDGs form the basis for this.

This VNR explores opportunities and challenges in all parts of the Kingdom. Each country is at a different stage in achieving the SDGs, and they diverge in terms of capacity, mechanisms and procedures for integrating the 17 goals into national policy. At the same time, the challenges implicit to the SDGs touch us all. In this VNR we will therefore first look back on a number of joint successes and challenges, before focusing on the situation in each specific country. Given the exceptional composition of the Kingdom, a separate chapter will be devoted to the challenges confronting the Caribbean parts of the Kingdom, as small islands.

### The significance of measuring and reporting

Monitoring the progress we have made towards achieving the SDGs, and reporting on and sharing our experiences will help us steer and step up our efforts in the eight years remaining to 2030. National statistical institutes play a major role in monitoring. Each of the countries of the Kingdom has its own statistical institute, and they work closely together.

In 2016, Statistics Netherlands (CBS) was the first to present a baseline study, covering 33% of the indicators. The institute has measured the Netherlands' progress towards the SDGs each year since then, with coverage increasing to 50% of the official UN indicators, or 71% if we count coverage of targets reached. In 2019, SDG measurement was merged with the annual Monitor of Wellbeing, producing an additional 13% coverage through proxy indicators. The Netherlands was the first country in the world to integrate these two monitors. The measurements are complementary: the SDG indicators present aspects of wellbeing in more detail, while the wellbeing indicators give more insight into the differences between groups, countries and generations. It therefore highlights important underlying principles of the SDG agenda, such as Leaving No One Behind and future-readiness. In 2021, a resilience dashboard for shocks and stress was added to the Monitor to examine the resilience of households and systems to crises. The monitoring of wellbeing & SDGs is not confined to the national level. Working with local and provincial government authorities and the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality, Statistics Netherlands has set up regional monitors. A decision was taken recently to develop a Monitor for the Caribbean Netherlands (Bonaire, St Eustatius and Saba, hereafter referred to as BES islands).



Dutch National SDG Coordinator Sandra Pellegrrom (middle) during the presentation of the National SDG Report and the Monitor of Wellbeing and SDGs, 18 May 2022 (photo: Roos Trommelen)

The autonomous Caribbean countries (Curaçao, Aruba and Sint Maarten, hereafter referred to as CAS) work with the BES islands in the Dutch Caribbean Statistical System. Work programmes have been set up each year from 2017 incorporating the SDGs.

Curaçao has made progress in measuring the SDG indicators. In May 2016, the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) Curaçao could measure no more than 16% of the applicable indicators. Currently, 28% of the indicators are available for six of the priority SDGs, while coverage is expected to rise to 48% after the 2022 census. In 2017, Aruba set up an interministerial SDG-Indicator Working Group (IWG) to support CBS Aruba, by developing data to measure SDG indicators. The IWG has now been able to measure 67 SDG indicators. Measuring SDG indicators on nature and governance remains a challenge, however. In Sint Maarten data are chiefly collected separately by the various ministries, making integrated data management difficult. A peer review, assisted by CBS Netherlands, was executed in April 2022. The independence and quality of the methods for producing statistics will be assessed. The aim is to explore whether more use can be made of statistical information and data for policy development and decision-making, and to make recommendations for a future-proof national statistical system.



Handover of the manifest for a Sustainable Coalition Agreement to political leaders, coordinated by SDG Nederland and partners, 8 July 2022 (photo: Roos Trommelen)

### Stakeholder involvement

The SDG agenda cannot be achieved without a concerted effort from government authorities, civil society, businesses and other actors. The connecting force of the SDGs helps organisations work together across themes and sectors. Partnerships are of major importance to the Kingdom. In the Netherlands, an SDG

movement had already emerged before the 17 goals were adopted by the UN. The platform organisation SDG Nederland, set up in 2013 as SDG Charter, now has over 1,200 member organisations, including many umbrella organisations representing subnational authorities, the business community, youth, knowledge institutions and educational institutions. Many more organisations are working actively to achieve the SDGs. The consultations held for this VNR also presented an opportunity to engage with organisations that had been less aware of the SDGs up to then.

The government of Sint Maarten welcomes all support in implementing the SDGs, so partnerships are important. By means of national dialogues, the government of Sint Maarten engaged with all levels of the population to set out the direction of the country's development. A national vision was formulated, giving priority to joint goals, and thus the SDGs. The government subsequently invested in a process to raise awareness of the SDGs, and of the major role to be played by the private sector, non-profit organisations and members of the public in achieving them. A large-scale public awareness campaign was rolled out, with a prominent place for youth.

Aruba has been active in the past few years in engaging with NGOs, academic institutions and the private sector. Sessions have been organised with various organisations to raise awareness of the SDGs and to provide support for efforts to achieve them in the relevant sectors. This greater familiarity and engagement with the SDGs proved to be highly productive in drafting the VNR.

Prior to adoption of the SDGs, Curaçao had committed to engaging with a wide range of stakeholders within the process leading to its National Development Plan. The National SDG Commission facilitates three platforms, for People, Planet and Prosperity, bringing together government authorities and stakeholders from the private sector, academia and civil society and youth organisations. To prepare for this VNR, sessions were organised through each platform to engage with stakeholders, giving the Commission an understanding of the areas in which society is working on the SDGs. The Commission now intends to establish a long-term relationship with these stakeholders through the three platforms.

Bonaire has linked the SDGs to its governance programme for the 2019-2023 period. Various initiatives have also been launched on the island to focus attention on the SDGs. Utility company Water en Energie Bedrijf Bonaire has included the SDGs in its annual plan. A climate roundtable will also be organised to strengthen sustainability and climate adaptation in the community. The challenge is to maintain the focus on the SDGs, given the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Progress to date

The four countries of the Kingdom share the same overarching ambition but they differ widely in terms of location, size, population and economic opportunities. As a result, the countries have different priorities within the SDG agenda. Capacity also varies from country to country. Support from the Netherlands through the Country Packages presents a sound basis for strengthening the islands' capacity to deliver the SDGs.

Activities to achieve the SDGs within the Netherlands were set out in the Plan of Action that was shared with Parliament in 2016. This was evaluated in 2021 to establish progress to date. In this evaluation, Statistics Netherlands identified data trends and reaffirmed that the environmental goals are the main challenge for the Netherlands. The Netherlands is a prosperous country, and prosperity is widely shared. However, there are some groups that fall persistently behind – mainly people with a lower level of education and from a non-Western migration background. A major challenge is to use natural resources without harming the prospects of future generations. Negative spillover to other countries also poses a challenge. The Netherlands' commitment to ensuring the sustainability of both its national economy and international value chains may significantly reduce these effects. The coalition agreement presented early this year by the new government envisages a transition to a sustainable economy and a society where people have equal opportunities and look out for each other. This will form a sound basis for the final sprint that will be needed in the coming years.

In Aruba, the SDGs have been adopted as core principles in every coalition agreement concluded since 2015. The country has some major challenges to contend with and in 2017 received technical support in integrating the 2030 Agenda from a UN MAPS mission. This resulted in a roadmap for SDG

implementation. The recommendations it contains formed the basis for the Aruba National Strategic Plan 2030.

Sint Maarten has incorporated the SDGs into the national context by linking them to the national priorities formulated in the joint vision on sustainable development. In order to generate public support, the population had a say in prioritising the SDGs.

Since 2015, successive governments of Curaçao have adopted the SDGs as a long-term compass for the future. The current government, which took office in June 2021, included the SDGs in its coalition agreement. The implementation strategy was set out in the 2016 National Development Plan Curaçao (NDPC) and affirmed in the 2018 Roadmap for SDG implementation in Curaçao. Implementation has got off the ground since the appointment of the National SDG Commission in early 2020. The Roadmap serves as the basis for integration of the SDGs into new and existing activities, based on the local context. The dissemination of knowledge of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs within the government and society remains a focus point. Despite promising initiatives within the private sector, knowledge institutions, NGOs and schools, a smart but effective approach using limited financial resources has still to be found. Small Island Developing States can also learn a lot from each other in this regard.

## 1.2 Challenges shared by the countries of the Kingdom

Though countries' rates of progress differ, there are some challenges that affect them all. Not only the COVID-19 pandemic, but climate change, inequality and the transition to a circular economy have significant consequences for the entire Kingdom.

### COVID-19 pandemic: consequences and recovery

Thanks to its solid position, the Netherlands was able to offset many of the immediate consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic for healthcare, the economy and jobs. But the effects on education, young people and small businesses were particularly severe and the full effects are not likely to become visible until further into the future. The new government intends to invest in education, socioeconomic security and equal opportunities in order to strengthen resilience in the long term. The countries of

the European Union have agreed to work together to tackle the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, earmarking €750 billion to help member states bear the costs of the crisis.

The COVID-19 pandemic has hit the three Caribbean countries of the Kingdom harder, with shrinking economies, rising unemployment and an increasing burden of debt. To strengthen the resilience of these countries' economies and societies, Country Packages have been set up within the Kingdom containing programmes to strengthen governance and ensure sound government finances and social cohesion, with the aim of supporting both the economy and society, strengthening crisis preparedness and creating new opportunities for both people and businesses.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on health, society and the economy led to serious disruption in Aruba. After the first cases were diagnosed in March 2020, the national scenario for pandemics was activated. The pandemic put huge pressure on healthcare facilities, capacity and staff. A single hospital with just six IC beds proved hopelessly inadequate to cope with the sudden increase in patients. In February 2021, the vaccination campaign was launched with the highest priority. By January 2022, 72% of Aruba's population had been vaccinated. Due to the country's dependence on tourism, the pandemic had huge implications for the economy. The government therefore provided support for SMEs and vulnerable groups, and this has had an impact on its budget. From 2020, Aruba has been receiving support from the Netherlands in the form of loans linked to economic, financial, social and institutional reforms to make Aruba more resilient.

In Curaçao, the COVID-19 crisis began on 13 March 2020 when the first cases were diagnosed. Initially, a lockdown and entry ban prevented the disease from spreading too rapidly. However, when economic considerations led to the resumption of tourism infections peaked for the first time. Curaçao has now experienced four peaks, with some 30,000 infections in a population of around 160,000. By 19 January 2022, a total of 206 COVID-19 deaths had been recorded. Curaçao introduced various restrictions and protective measures to prevent infection. It also provided financial support for vulnerable groups – people who had lost their jobs, entrepreneurs, undocumented migrants and people on benefits – and economic sectors affected by the

measures. Working with local NGOs, the government also organised emergency aid and food aid for people whose livelihoods were threatened by the measures. The government also launched a vaccination campaign, working with the Netherlands to ensure vaccines and staff were available. Special schemes were set up to give undocumented migrants access to the vaccination programme. The government also invested in expansion of hospital care in order to cope with peaks in infections. Here too, the Netherlands provided support in the form of equipment and human resources. Despite the measures, the pandemic has had a severe impact on Curaçao, in three areas in particular. First, the economy has shrunk, resulting in job losses and business closures. At the same time, there has been a rise in new business activity, while digitalisation of services has boosted various sectors. Second, the social impact is evident in, for example, increased domestic violence and school drop-out rates. Direct emergency aid and support was needed to help families and groups whose livelihoods were seriously threatened by the crisis. Third, the impact on healthcare has manifested itself in delayed treatment for non-COVID patients and delayed recovery from COVID-19 among some people. At the same time, demand for mental health services increased. A transformative approach has been adopted to recover from the crisis, in line with the agreements reached with the Netherlands in the framework of the Country Package. This means that in addition to direct support and aid, the country will improve working methods and encourage data-driven approaches.

At the start of the pandemic in 2020, Sint Maarten activated the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) in an attempt to keep COVID-19 under control. Sint Maarten recorded a total of 9,629 infections and 86 deaths up to and including the first three months of 2022. The lockdown has had an impact on the economy. Various measures were introduced to prevent unemployment, bankruptcies and poverty wherever possible. With the support of several NGOs and financial support from the Netherlands, the government was able to distribute food packages and provide school lunches. Various initiatives were also launched that later received government support. Finally, in the framework of Leave No One Behind, and with the support of the Netherlands, the government set up the Sint Maarten Stimulus and Relief Plan (SSRP), which aimed to prevent businesses from going bankrupt, and to safeguard employees' incomes.

At international level, the Netherlands contributes to ensuring vaccines are accessible to all through the World Health Organization's COVAX initiative and Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator (ACT-A). Since the availability of vaccines is no longer the main problem, the Netherlands is now investing heavily in country readiness, i.e. helping countries prepare for effective vaccine delivery, and strengthening healthcare systems. In line with the coalition agreement, the government is planning to present a Dutch Global Health Strategy in the third quarter of 2022.

### Climate change

Climate changes poses a considerable threat to the Kingdom, given the Netherlands' low-lying topography and the geographical location of the CAS and BES islands. Therefore, next to mitigation, it is essential to invest in climate adaptation.

Aruba expects more frequent hurricanes in the region. Rising seawater temperatures are leading to longer periods of algal growth, which has a negative impact on water quality, fisheries and the health of coral reefs. Given the island's dependence on coastal and maritime ecosystem services, these threats will have serious consequences for people's livelihoods.

Apart from the consequences of extreme weather events and algal bloom, Curaçao is also exposed to drought and the impact of rough seas due to climate change. In order to make itself more resilient to these threats, Curaçao has established a new government department for risk management and disaster policy. The island's risk profile has been charted, and the government has worked systematically on management plans to address the consequences. In this framework, the existing warning system for weather events has migrated to a wider warning system based on impact of technological and natural disasters. Curaçao is also developing initiatives to protect the coral reefs from the consequences of climate change. It is also working on integrated water management, encouraging food production on the island and gaining more knowledge and expertise in order to develop answers to climate-related challenges.

Sint Maarten is primarily focused on addressing the consequences of climate change and reducing carbon emissions. It is working on various measures and projects to mitigate the effects of

climate change. These measures include establishing a Disaster Management Office and a comprehensive disaster management policy, the main feature of which will be a strategy to address the financial consequences of natural disasters. Sint Maarten's utility companies are located in the low-lying coastal area. For this reason, they have started working on a joint plan to develop a stable, sustainable and renewable energy supply for the country, which will also reduce its ecological footprint. A public-private partnership has been set up to achieve this transition to clean, resilient and affordable energy generation.

The Netherlands is located in a delta and faces considerable challenges in terms of climate adaptation. Various national measures have been taken, including more action on coastal management and solutions based on nature, like the Room for the River programme.

Apart from adaptation, climate mitigation is crucial for the Kingdom, which has therefore called on the international community to show more ambition in this regard. For the Netherlands, the European agreements, in particular those contained in the Fit for 55 package, form the framework for national action to prevent climate change. The Netherlands has adopted ambitious national climate plans. To ensure climate neutrality by 2050 at the latest, we have tightened the goal for reducing carbon emissions set out in the Climate Act to at least 55% by 2030. The government has made a hard commitment to this goal and will take additional steps to achieve it if necessary. To this end, the coalition partners agreed to focus policy on greater reductions, amounting to approximately 60% fewer carbon emissions in 2030. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions is the greatest challenge for the Netherlands, but the Caribbean countries of the Kingdom are working towards a responsible energy transition as well.

### Towards a circular economy by 2050

The ambition to achieve a circular economy by 2050 will make a major contribution in terms of mitigating climate change. Other SDG goals and targets will also benefit: circularity ensures sustainable patterns of consumption and production (SDG 12) and more efficient use of water and energy (SDGs 6 and 7).

In the Netherlands, both the former and current government prioritised efforts to achieve a circular economy by 2050. The

government-wide 2050 Circular Economy Programme sets out the ambitions and outlines. Working with stakeholders, the government has fleshed this programme out into an implementation programme with five transition agendas for key sectors. To ensure full circularity by 2050, the aim is to halve the use of primary raw materials by 2030. Policy links the circular economy to efforts to achieve circular agriculture and a sustainable food system, in view not only of SDG 2 but also of SDG 3 (health) and SDGs 14 and 15 (protecting diversity and nature).

Curaçao is engaged in developing a circular economy model. Since it is a small island developing state, implementation will pose specific challenges. While the domestic markets for recycled waste and new products are both too small, there are some small-scale, innovative and creative initiatives working on circularity on the island. The Curaçao Doughnut Economy, a partnership between the Ministry of Economic Development, the municipality of Amsterdam (the Amsterdam City Doughnut) and the University of Curaçao (UoC) represents a significant step towards a more integrated approach. Awareness workshops have been organised in neighbourhoods to chart existing initiatives that contribute to the doughnut economy. This has led to an action plan, with nine recommendations for the minister. A think tank also meets once a month to discuss a specific theme with guest speakers. Meeting the demand for data to support these activities is a challenge.

The Aruban 2050 Circular Economy strategy focuses on needs that go beyond waste management. Aruba is integrating the principles of the circular economy by optimising use of natural resources. Effectiveness and efficiency are being improved using innovative and ecologically responsible methods. And members of the public are being made more aware of their impact in terms of waste.

Sint Maarten has set up a large-scale campaign under the banner 'Reduce, reuse, recycle and recover energy and residual waste', an element of which is the introduction of a ban on single-use plastic. The legislative procedure laying down this ban is currently underway. Another major initiative has been launched in the energy sector, i.e. the partnership with GridMarket and the Island Resilience Partnership (IRP).

### Leave No One Behind

In the past five years, the world has increasingly recognised that inequality manifests itself in many different forms. In the Kingdom too, there is a persistent need to tackle inequality and to foster inclusive societies. The social safety net is by no means the same throughout the Kingdom. The countries themselves are largely responsible for making their own choices through legislation and regulations, and for allocating the varying levels of funding at their disposal for this purpose. At the same time, each of the four countries is strongly committed to preventing inequality and ensuring that everyone can participate in society.

Many people in Aruba are financially vulnerable because they have no financial buffers. Aruba has an extensive social protection system, in line with the residual welfare model, with some services delivered directly by government. However, the majority of social services for vulnerable groups are provided by volunteer organisations which are largely funded through government grants. Aruba has introduced universal healthcare, with free access to good-quality primary healthcare services. However, the population is ageing, increasing healthcare costs and the burden on social services. Aruba has opted for a holistic approach to health and welfare, focused on social, cultural, environmental and economic determinants of health and on existing barriers to health, with a view to ensuring that everyone can improve their health and wellbeing.

Under Curaçao's social welfare system, residents have access to good-quality care services. The wellbeing of socially disadvantaged groups is inextricably linked to this. Curaçao's social security system comprises social services, benefits and a care system. Since the system is under considerable financial pressure, the Country Package focuses on reform. Everyone in Curaçao is entitled to an old age pension, based on the principle of solidarity. Gay marriage is not officially recognised in Curaçao, despite a judgment given by the Court of First Instance stating that anyone refusing to marry a same-sex couple is committing an act of discrimination. A bill recognising gay marriages has been before parliament since 2018. Incorporation of international human rights agreements in national legislation is often delayed in Curaçao because the introduction of measures to implement them puts extra pressure on available financial and human resources.

Though from an international and European perspective there is little inequality in the Netherlands, prosperity is not shared equally. Some groups persistently benefit less. The main determinant is level of education. Robust action is being taken to ensure equal opportunities in education through the newly-formed Equal Opportunities Alliance. A migration background also affects people's opportunities to share in the country's prosperity. Discrimination is a persistent problem. For this reason, a National Antidiscrimination and Antiracism Coordinator was appointed in 2021 to advise the government on more effective measures to tackle this problem.

### The voice of youth

With increasing recognition of the importance of inclusion, opportunities are growing for diverse groups to participate in decision-making. It is an extremely positive development that in the past year young people have had a seat at the table when major decisions are being taken. In the Netherlands, the new government has agreed to introduce a generational assessment and – in response to calls from young people – to appoint a Climate Authority.



Dutch UN youth representatives handing over the SDG Roadmap to the then minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, Tom de Brujin, 15 September 2021.

There has been a similar movement in Aruba and the youth parliament now gives the parliament of Aruba recommendations on relevant topics. The Aruban SDG Commission has launched the SDG Young Voices initiative to raise awareness and increase knowledge of the SDGs among young people. In Curaçao a National SDG Youth Programme has been set up to give young people a central platform from which they can contribute to

Agenda 2030. The programme focuses on engaging with young people through the three pillars of Ambassadorship, Advocacy and Action. The aim is to mobilise young people, as crucial drivers of change, to promote the SDGs. Youth organisations play a major role in implementing, monitoring and revising the agenda and urging governments to take action. Sint Maarten concentrates on generating support for the SDGs, with a prominent role for young people. One of the objectives is to include the SDGs in the curriculum. Children have also been creatively involved in publicising the SDGs.

### Coherence in policy

The strength of the SDG agenda lies in the coherence between the various goals and targets. The SDGs are therefore more relevant than ever to the Kingdom in its efforts to meet the major challenges described above. The goals can strengthen each other, but it is a matter of using limited resources strategically. All four countries recognise the need to ensure coherence and cross-pollination between the goals. In the Netherlands, SDG screening was added to the Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) in 2019. All new policy must now be screened against the various SDGs, for effects on gender equality, developing countries and the environment, among other things. Partly at the request of parliament, the government is currently working on more effective application of this instrument.

## 1.3 The Kingdom in the world

As small countries with open economies, the four countries of the Kingdom keenly support international cooperation and multilateralism. The major challenges of our times call for partnership and solidarity. An example is the Kingdom's commitment to climate adaptation. More than half of the Netherlands' international climate financing goes to adaptation, particularly in low-income countries, and we are encouraging other donors to earmark more funds for this purpose. The Netherlands also took the initiative to launch the Global Commission on Adaptation and set up the Global Centre on Adaptation. In 2021 it hosted the successful Climate Adaptation Summit. Innovative finance is another way in which the Kingdom contributes to rapid achievement of the SDGs. With a view to the long-term perspective, young people's opinions are also of essential importance. In 2021, the Minister for Foreign Trade

and Development Cooperation therefore set up the Youth Advisory Council to give young people from the Netherlands and its partner countries a voice at the policy table.

Due to its status as an independent country, its geographical location in the Caribbean and shared Caribbean culture, Curaçao sets great store by partnerships in the region and with other SIDS. Given the position of Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten within the Kingdom, they are associate members of ECLAC and in this capacity attend its meetings on the SDGs. Within the UN structure, they fall under the Multi-Country Office in Trinidad and Tobago. Curaçao takes part in the civil-service level consultations in the framework of the SAMOA Pathway Targets & Indicators Workshop and the UN Multi-country Sustainable Development Framework (MSDF). The various UNGA side events organised in 2017, 2018 and 2019 presented opportunities for political participation and networking activities. Curaçao is a member of the UNESCO SDG-E2030 Regional Steering Committee for Latin America and the Caribbean. IOM and UNHCR help undocumented migrants on Curaçao and also run projects for the local population, providing food packages, protection against gender-based violence, shelters, educational activities, healthcare and so on.

Curaçao and Aruba also receive grants from the European Development Fund (EDF) to implement projects linked to the SDGs. In Aruba, the funds were used to establish a sustainable faculty at the University of Aruba. In the 2013-2021 period, more than €11 million was made available for improvements to the infrastructure in various neighbourhoods in Curaçao. Funds from the 11<sup>th</sup> EDF will be used for resilient communities. The country is also involved in the Hawaii Green Growth Local2030 Hub through participation and knowledge-sharing at political and civil-service level. Because of their small size, Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten have too little capacity and too few funds to take part in every area and in every major partnership. Due to their responsibilities as independent countries, the knowledge existing within international organisations and networks is of great value to them. However, maintaining these networks and complying with international agreements places too heavy a burden on the civil service.

During the entire SDG process, Aruba worked through various partnerships. The UN system and various regional bodies provided crucial technical assistance, contributing to the development of Aruba's strategies and policies. Technical assistance and training enabled Aruba to build local knowledge on incorporating the sustainable development framework into planning and policy processes, which it actively shared with policy-makers from other SIDS. The government of Aruba, UNDP, and the Kingdom of the Netherlands have established a Centre of Excellence for the Sustainable Development of SIDS in Aruba. The centre uses best practices to provide a platform for innovation and resilience in small, insular developing countries. South-South cooperation enables these countries to share knowledge of sustainable practices in areas like energy, public-private partnerships (PPPs), water management, the environment and tourism.

The SDGs can only be achieved if we work together within the Kingdom, in our regional partnerships and worldwide through the multilateral institutions. The fact that all 193 UN member states signed up to the SDGs in 2015 bears witness to the capacity of the world community to act at crucial moments. With just eight years to go to 2030, now is the time to exploit this capacity. The Kingdom of the Netherlands stands ready to join in the final sprint.

# 2 Challenges of Small Islands

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## 2.1 Introduction

As associate members of ECLAC Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten are recognised as Caribbean Small Island Developing States (SIDS). They have many vulnerabilities in common with other SIDS, such as their small size, limited usable space, heavy economic dependence on international markets and imports (including food), high transport costs, lack of economic diversification and vulnerability to climate change and biodiversity loss. Bonaire, Saba and St Eustatius are not SIDS as they are part of the Netherlands, though each with its own local government, analogous to that of a municipality. However, many of the challenges in this chapter also pertain to them.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated and further revealed structural vulnerabilities in Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten. It is crucial to 'build back better' in order to anticipate future disasters and shocks and reduce their threat to people and communities. Climate change threatens our existence and way of life. In the face of these multifaceted and interlinked challenges, the transition from 'business as usual' to building resilience to future shocks is urgent. Despite underfunded institutions, it is necessary to carry out reforms and focus on partnerships where this is opportune, both within the Kingdom and at regional and international level. The transformational agenda offered by the SDG framework can foster an integrated approach, with a focus on policy coherence and a long-term perspective. Such an approach considers the economic, social and environmental dimensions of the much-needed structural change and can help countries build back better and stronger. Since April 2020 the Netherlands has provided liquidity support to Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten to soften the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the islands' populations, businesses and jobs. This support is conditional on the countries implementing administrative reforms and strengthening their public finances and economic resilience. To this end, the Netherlands agreed Country Packages (*Landspakketten*) with each of the three Caribbean countries. An independent Caribbean Agency for Reform and Development (COHO) is to be established to assist the countries in implementing the intended reforms.

Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten all endorse and participate in the UN Multi-country Sustainable Development Framework (MSDF), whose priorities are closely linked to their own national

priorities. The most pressing challenges and priorities identified are resilient economic growth and inclusion, in addition to strengthening climate change readiness and protecting biodiverse ecosystems. Digitalisation can play an important part in enhancing capability to address these challenges. In this chapter we will highlight the islands' response to these priority issues.

## 2.2 Economic resilience and shared prosperity

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, slow economic growth or even economic retraction plagued Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten. Developing economic resilience is therefore paramount, but it is also a challenge for all three island states.

Economic diversification is an important means of enhancing resilience, but also a challenge due to the limitations of small islands. Curaçao is exploring ways to strengthen the creative industries, the port/maritime sector, IT-based activities (with a view to further digitalisation) and agriculture (adopting new methods and technologies geared to the island's dry climate). Technological cooperation and partnerships are key instruments for achieving innovation in these fields. Aruba is likewise developing several promising sectors, including e-logistics, agriculture and the creative industries. Sint Maarten's economic recovery plan 'A path to economic recovery and sustainable growth' aims to create an enabling environment for businesses through diversification, innovation, promoting micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), and developing telecom and other services. Sint Maarten also encourages entrepreneurship by young people through business-friendly regulations and Qredits microfinancing (loans of up to \$25,000) for SMEs. All future economic development needs to meet standards of sustainability and resilience. Resilience will be embedded in all dimensions of Sint Maarten's sustainable development, providing a common overarching framework for systematic integration of risk reduction and crisis management.

### Sustainable tourism

The strong reliance on tourism is an important vulnerability for Small Island Tourism Economies (SITES), as became apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic. In Aruba, the number of tourists fell by 68% in 2020 and GDP by an estimated 23%

relative to 2019. The measures taken by governments to contain the spread of the virus have taken a heavy toll on livelihoods and lives across the Caribbean; the economies of many small Caribbean islands contracted by at least 10% in 2020. Although governments acted swiftly to contain the spread of COVID-19, there was an unavoidable trade-off between saving lives and protecting livelihoods.

While the Caribbean islands are working to recover from the impacts of the pandemic, the climate crisis is adding significantly to present and future vulnerabilities in terms of lives and tourism-dependent livelihoods. On all the islands, coastal zones and island ecosystems – both terrestrial and marine – have degraded significantly in the last decades, due to a combination of climate change, natural disasters, tourism growth, overconsumption and the uncontrolled construction of coastal infrastructures.

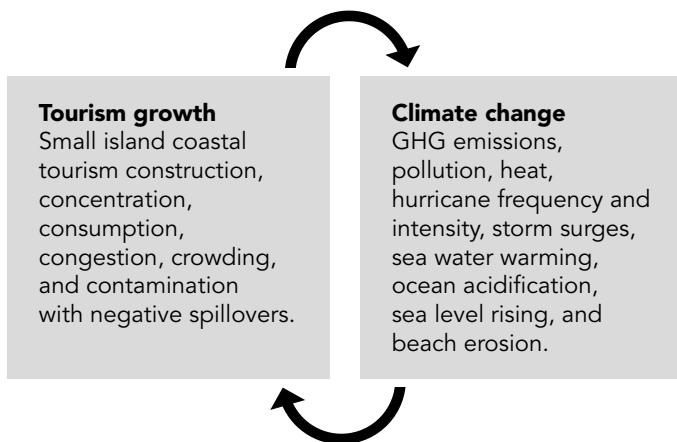
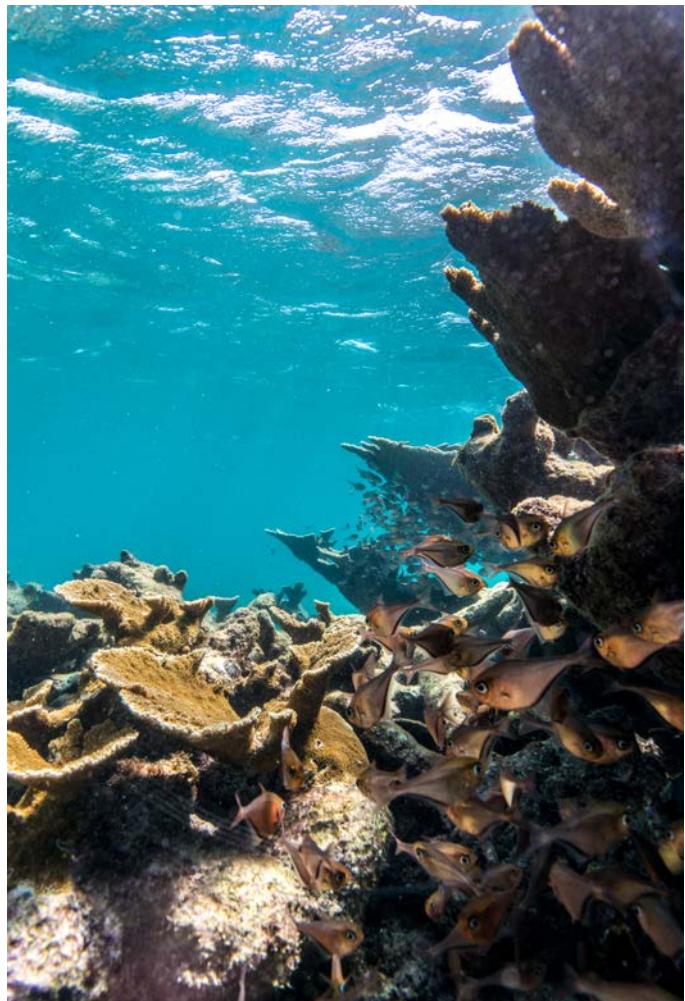


Figure 2.1. Symbiotic relationship between tourism growth and climate change in SITES (Peterson, 2020)

Sustainable development of tourism creates scope for achieving SDG 8 (sustainable economic growth and full and productive employment). The tourism industry can both benefit from and contribute to climate action (SDG 13). Climate-adaptive development is a precondition for future-proof investment while at the same time contributing to climate mitigation. Circularity (SDG 12) offers opportunities for growth and innovation while also contributing to climate mitigation. In line with SDGs 13 and 8, national tourism policies should take account of resilience and adaptive capacity to environmental disasters, and integrate climate action measures. Conserving biodiversity and marine



life (SDGs 14 and 15) and safeguarding reliable and renewable energy services (SDG 7) are likewise vital for sustainable tourism in the long term, and need to be achieved in unison. A comprehensive policy approach is a precondition for success, but also a challenge due to limited institutional capacity, short-term economic needs and lack of economies of scale, knowledge and financing mechanisms to steer the economy in a different direction.

Tourism is Aruba's main economic sector, accounting directly and indirectly for more than 80% of GDP. Even before the COVID-19 crisis, the country was aware of its vulnerability to shocks, which led to the Destination Development Plan (DDP) in 2017. The aim is to make Aruba an innovative and sustainable destination for the benefit of the whole of society. One of the measures taken to this end is the expansion of protected and conservation areas. The national park, covering almost 18% of the island, has been enlarged to include additional coastal wetland areas that are important for the island's biodiversity. By decree, four different areas were jointly designated as Marine Protected Areas, carrying the name of Aruba Parke Marino, the first park of this kind on the island. A challenge that is still outstanding is the integration of sustainable, circular and climate-proof practices into the tourism sector. Aruba's Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort, a pioneer in sustainable tourism, has become

the Caribbean's first and, so far, only hotel to achieve carbon-neutral certification. In 2020 it was awarded the prestigious UN Global Climate Action Award in the category Climate Neutral Now – the first hotel ever to receive this award.

With regard to Curaçao, tourism directly and indirectly supports approximately one-third of its economy. A Destination Management Plan is being drafted that will build on the Strategic Tourism Master Plan 2015-2020. As the main attractions are the island's natural capital and culture, reform of the tourism sector so that these assets are protected in the long term is key. Stakeholders agree on the need for coherence between developing tourism and sustainability. Therefore, in addition to financial and economic considerations, environmental and social impact assessments will inform decisions. Curaçao has engaged in strategic partnerships to build a strong knowledge base and institutional capacity, and improve the competitiveness of the tourism sector. Partnerships have been sought with bodies including UNESCO, the Caribbean Tourism Organization, the International Trade Centre (ITC) and the Government of Colombia. Colombia is a frontrunner in the area of sustainable tourism in Latin America. Its Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism has offered to collaborate in a Sustainable Tourism initiative with Curaçao's Ministry of Economic Development. Curaçao is also part of the South-South cooperation programme on sustainable tourism in the Caribbean.

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and hurricanes Irma and Maria have underscored the need for economic diversity, including sustainable tourism, for Sint Maarten. To this end, Sint Maarten joined the EU-funded Caribbean Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) Resilience, Sustainable Energy and Marine Biodiversity Programme (RESEMBID),<sup>1</sup> in particular its regional project: Advancing Collaboration as a Strategy for Building Tourism Crisis Resilience. The project seeks to overcome the barriers to expediting economic reactivation through tourism.

<sup>1</sup> The Caribbean Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) Resilience, Sustainable Energy and Marine Biodiversity Programme (RESEMBID) is funded by the European Union. It was launched on 1 January 2019 and has a duration of 58 months. The Programme supports the sustainable development efforts of the 12 Caribbean OCTs, namely: Anguilla, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Montserrat, Turks and Caicos Islands, Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, Saba, St Eustatius, Sint Maarten and St Barthélemy.



All six Caribbean islands of the Kingdom are participating in RESEMBID. The government of Sint Maarten and Princess Juliana International Airport (PJIA) are also working jointly to promote Sint Maarten in the US, Canada and the Caribbean region, to increase the number of airlines serving Sint Maarten and increase stayovers. These efforts are supported by deploying a common marketing strategy with airlines, agents and local content creators.

Seizing the opportunities that sustainable tourism offers will require a shift in values and good governance. While certain institutions and tourism policies may have been successful in the past, they are likely to be ineffective in dealing with current challenges. Fostering small island tourism resilience and sustainability thus requires structural reforms and systemic transformation, encompassing a mix of policy considerations and measures across public, private and social domains.

## 2.3 Resilience to climate change and disaster preparedness

Climate change poses an existential threat to Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten, as well as Bonaire, Saba and St Eustatius. The IPCC's sixth assessment report gives an overview of the future facing the islands: a changing climate in which the number of extreme weather events will become much more frequent.

These changes are already noticeable on the islands today. Their populations and infrastructure are concentrated in coastal zones, so that sea-level rise and natural disasters will have significant and profound effects on livelihoods and the economy. Besides the effects of climate change, Sint Maarten is also at risk



Population and infrastructure are concentrated in coastal zones

of earthquakes. Furthermore, hurricanes, rough seas causing destruction of coastal infrastructure, rising temperatures and droughts are exacerbating existing economic, institutional, environmental and social vulnerabilities. Each island holds the policy key to its destiny. What is urgently required is a stronger focus on climate change adaptation and transitioning, and engaging the population and other stakeholders in these efforts. Bonaire has initiated a climate roundtable in order to develop measures in partnership with stakeholders.

### **Disaster preparedness**

In September 2017, Sint Maarten was devastated by the category 5 hurricane Irma, followed by hurricane Maria, which together caused an estimated \$2.7 billion in damage. The government of Sint Maarten had to implement a disaster risk management programme to enhance not only emergency response, recovery and reconstruction, but to strengthen the overall disaster risk management system. This demands not only ongoing commitment from stakeholders, but also high-level prioritisation of disaster risk management, including management of limited capacity and resources. To this end, the government of Sint Maarten is currently developing a National Disaster Risk Management Strategy aimed at prevention and mitigation, as well as management of residual risks, contributing to greater resilience and less disaster-related damage in the future. The new strategy also includes the establishment of a dedicated Disaster Management Office, which will not only incorporate disaster management into the daily work of government but will also promote the alignment of different domains in regard to climate change. The office will ensure

institutional memory as well as net-centric information management. Another part of the strategy is a disaster risk financing mechanism. Natural disasters can cause millions or even billions of dollars of damage, straining national budgets and burdening a country for many years. The disaster financing mechanism will have a tiered approach, with several instruments to cover the financial needs at different phases of disaster management, from mitigation to recovery and reconstruction. Under the strategy Sint Maarten is also preparing an early warning system for hurricanes and will establish a centre of excellence that will offer crisis management training at different levels. The centre will function as a net-centric information management platform and enable solid regional knowledge exchange.

In Aruba extreme weather events have become more frequent over the years. Historical data show that temperatures on the island are rising more rapidly than before, with an adverse impact on economic development. Likewise, sea level rise and flood risk scenario modelling indicates that residential neighbourhoods, port infrastructure and tourism districts will be hit hardest, with at least 40% of the population being directly exposed and displaced. Aruba's disaster management system is aligned with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the SDGs. Aruba has worked on enhancing disaster preparedness through more effective response, recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction.

The government of Curaçao set up the Directorate of Risk Management and Disaster Policy in 2014 to guarantee the protection and safety of the population. In 2017, a risk profile of Curaçao was carried out, and formed the basis for policy. It included an assessment of the type and size of risks, and their probability and relevance. The National Ordinance on Disaster Management was adopted on 1 October 2021 and addresses disaster and crisis prevention, risk management and mitigation, especially in the preparatory phase. The approach is based on internationally agreed principles of Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), such as the five steps of the safety chain approach: proaction, prevention (risk management), preparation, repression and aftercare (crisis management). Use of a quality assurance model guarantees accountability and continuous improvement, and makes performance visible. Different stakeholders, including the board and the crisis management

organisation, and practical experience (best practices) provide input for the quality assurance model, thus helping shape policy.

Within the Kingdom regional coordination mechanisms are in place that are activated during a crisis in order to ensure a swift response. The lessons learned during the joint response in the aftermath of the 2017 hurricanes have further improved the preparation for such scenarios. The deployment of the joint coastguard organisation, that in 2017 maintained an air bridge from Curaçao for evacuations and relief supplies, is an example of this. Private initiatives also played a role in the aftermath of the hurricanes, such as sending relief supplies and taking care of evacuated children.

## 2.4 Equality and wellbeing

Despite a relatively high GDP in the context of the Caribbean region, all six islands face significant inequalities and vulnerabilities in terms of the wellbeing of the population. The negative impact of the COVID crisis on public health and employment again underscored the need to strengthen resilience through economic diversification and increasing the capacity of healthcare systems – the latter also with a view to the impact of climate change on public health. Since April 2020 Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten have received liquidity support from the Netherlands to limit the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic for the population, businesses and employment. The liquidity loans were provided on condition that the countries accelerate the pace of institutional and administrative reforms to strengthen their economic and social resilience.

Poverty reduction (SDG 1) is still a challenge for all three countries. Sint Maarten has not yet established the poverty line, thwarting any attempt to measure poverty. The minimum wage in Sint Maarten is ANG 8.83 per hour, which is often used as a benchmark. However, considering the high cost of living a distinction needs to be made between the minimum wage and a living wage. On this matter, the government of Sint Maarten has requested advice from the Social Economic Council (SER). In Aruba, 8.3% of the population lived on less than \$21.70<sup>2</sup> a day (International Poverty Line for high income countries) in 2019, despite a flourishing economy. Of all households in Curaçao,

25.1% had incomes below the poverty line in 2011.<sup>3</sup> The unemployed, the elderly, people with disabilities and migrants are most likely to live in poverty, with only a slight difference between men and women. In terms of multidimensional poverty (i.e. income, health, education), at least 36% of households on Curaçao are considered to be financially fragile and economically vulnerable.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, food production on the islands is extremely low, which means that food security is a concern. This is exacerbated by the impacts of climate change. An additional challenge for the islands is their ageing populations. Bonaire has set up a programme to encourage graduates with Caribbean roots to return to the island. This programme will be extended to the other islands.

Inequality is compounded for specific groups. The harmful effects of the pandemic on key industries and the reduction in employment opportunities have exacerbated existing inequities, with youth, women and immigrants experiencing the greatest job losses. Although 21% of parliamentarians in Curaçao were women in 2021, gender equality is a pertinent issue; the same is true for the other islands. This poses major challenges to the building of inclusive societies through evidence-based planning. In the case of Aruba, many of these challenges have been addressed in the Social Crisis Plan (2018), a comprehensive programme developed through a collaborative effort by the government and NGOs, but its impact still needs to be measured. In Curaçao the government has developed and implemented the Urgency Programme ('Urgentieprogramma'), an action plan investigating ways of tackling poverty effectively at neighbourhood level. The aim was to develop a model based on experiences in three neighbourhoods, which can also be used in other neighbourhoods. This is a comprehensive programme encompassing multiple policy areas, including the economy, education, work and health. Problems and solutions are looked at from different perspectives and connections are made, based on the assumption that a solution arrived at jointly has added value.

Sint Maarten is addressing inequalities in relation to wellbeing through a long-term holistic approach. In response to the

<sup>3</sup> 2011 is the most recent census for Curaçao, the next will take place in 2022.

<sup>4</sup> 2018: National MPI/Pov. Risk Report Curaçao.

COVID-19 crisis, the government of Sint Maarten provided temporary financial support to businesses, to help them overcome the crisis in the absence of formal unemployment insurance. Sint Maarten has only limited social assistance and anti-poverty measures in place to cushion the impact of unemployment and reduced incomes on low-income households. People who suffered a loss of income or whose earnings were below minimum wage received direct food support through a programme for all the islands, financed by the Netherlands.

The government of Sint Maarten developed the National Vision through an inclusive approach in the form of national dialogues, with the aim of improving quality of life for all. Sint Maarten is strongly committed to reducing inequalities by 'reaching those farthest behind first', in line with the pledge of the 2030 Agenda to leave no one behind. The National Vision for the sustainable development of Sint Maarten supports an integrated approach to the SDGs. For instance, it proposes the development of universal, affordable national health insurance (SDG 3), a fairer distribution of wealth through tax reform (SDG 1), economic diversification to create more jobs (SDG 8), the development of a social security system (SDG 1) and a review of Sint Maarten's education system with a view to improving its quality (SDG 4) and relevance to current and future labour market trends (SDG 9).

To address these challenges in a structural manner, the countries have invested in various initiatives, including education and lifelong learning. The Country Packages support these efforts. Digital literacy and digitalisation are important instruments in building capacity and resilience.

## 2.5 Digitalisation of public services

Small island states cannot take advantage of economies of scale and their limited financial resources require creative solutions. Within these constraints, digitalisation offers important opportunities for strengthening economic resilience and transparency, which also supports disaster preparedness. However, digitalisation is a paradox: it can make public services more inclusive and affordable and enable economic growth and diversification, yet digitalisation is also expensive and digital inclusion is a concern. The use of off-the-shelf software is not always possible, due to specific rules and regulations. Tax filing software, for instance, must be tailored to national tax systems.

Digitalisation is a common thread in all the Country Packages, and is seen as a means of achieving economic reform, improving education and taxation, controlling expenditure and creating an efficient public sector. Personal data protection legislation applicable to all countries in the Kingdom is currently being drafted and is an important precondition for further digitalisation.

Stakeholders also see digitalisation as key to achieving Curaçao's development priorities. According to a 2021 UNDP digital readiness assessment, Curaçao has a good starting position for further digitalisation. The Smart Nation Curaçao Platform is tasked with implementing, in phases, a long-term vision and integral strategic plan aimed at making Willemstad a Smart City and Curaçao a Smart Nation. The Smart Nation movement is fast becoming an integral part of the country's strategy to achieve sustainable development across multiple areas and improve overall efficiency and quality of life.

Like Curaçao, Sint Maarten is actively working to digitalise certain public services in order to enhance accessibility and efficiency for both civil servants and members of the public. Currently, several high-demand services are already available online, and online payment is possible too. Other public offices will start offering services digitally in the near future. This will support effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The Sint Maarten Digital Government Transformation Project is currently being implemented with support from the World Bank and aims to enhance the delivery of and access to public services for private individuals and businesses, and make the digital infrastructure and government systems more resilient. The project is guided by whole-of-government frameworks and policies relating to enterprise architecture, cybersecurity, and data sharing and privacy. The project has three main components: (1) strengthen the policy and institutional environment, (2) build digital platforms to enable service delivery, and (3) improve user-centred public services.

Aruba adopted an innovation and digital transformation strategy in 2018, which includes an eGovernment programme. Significant progress has been made, notably the activation of the eGovernment Road Map 2020-2025, improved interoperability between government departments through the UXP platform, the launch of the National Digital Agenda and the Digital ID strategy. In 2022 the focus will be on this last strategy, which will



result in a new digital identification system that can be used not only as a secure personal identifier but that will enable new digital services and new collaborations with the private sector, in particular financial service providers. In 2022, work will also start on the eGovernment legislative framework to provide a firm foundation for the government's initiatives and processes in this area.

Inclusive digital development is crucial; all groups in society should have access to digital services and be able to enjoy the financial benefits of the digital economy. Digital skills should play an important role in education, for children as well as adults (lifelong learning). A digital economy also requires a workforce with advanced digital skills. Many students go abroad for their studies but few of them return. The government of Curaçao is taking steps to reverse this trend, including exploring longer-term IT-focused talent development schemes in the education system as well as in the private sector. Cross-sectoral collaboration is a central pillar of the Future of Work strategy.

## 2.6 Partnerships

In view of capacity constraints, partnerships are indispensable in order for the Caribbean part of the Kingdom to address the challenges discussed. Partnerships within the Kingdom play a key role. The Dutch government and the governments of Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten recently renewed their agreement on the Country Packages. The partnerships within the Kingdom offer opportunities and enable achievement of shared goals.

As overseas countries and territories (OCTs) of the Kingdom, all six islands are also eligible for EU support. Businesses often have branches on different islands within the Kingdom as well as within the Caribbean, through which knowledge and capacity are exchanged. The University of Curaçao offers both remote and classroom-based learning in Bonaire, Aruba and Sint Maarten. The different partnerships ensure that the islands have access to regional experts on region-specific challenges. The islands also share their knowledge with the other countries in the region and with SIDS worldwide via the Local2030 network. Cooperation and knowledge exchange on climate-related issues are particularly vital for the three countries. Curaçao and Aruba are closely involved in the activities of the UNESCO Intergovernmental Oceanic Commission (IOC), in particular the Ocean Decade. The Ocean Decade includes programmes in which scientists work together to gain more knowledge and develop solutions to problems such as the massive arrival of sargassum, experienced by Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten. The Meteorological Department of Curaçao works closely with other meteorological services in the region in the framework of the Caribbean Climate Outlook Forum (CariCOF). Supported by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), CariCOF plays a key role in the development of seasonal climate forecasts and interpreting data. The management of hurricanes for the region is also discussed annually in the WMO Hurricane Committee, whereby actions are agreed for the next hurricane season. Through the EU cooperation programme, Sint Maarten is currently constructing a meteorological radar to be used by both the Dutch and French sides of the island alongside their respective national systems. Sint Maarten recently became a member of the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA) and the Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility (CCRIF), while the Kingdom signed a Memorandum of Understanding with CDEMA.<sup>5</sup>

## 2.7 The way forward

As small islands, the Caribbean part of the Kingdom faces a host of interconnected challenges that are exacerbated by the impact of climate change. The way forward is to build economic

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cdem.org/news-centre/press-releases/1925-cdema-signs-memorandum-of-understanding-with-the-government-of-the-kingdom-of-the-netherlands>.

resilience, strengthen equality of opportunity and the capacities of the population, and invest in climate adaptation, disaster risk reduction and disaster preparedness. Sustainable tourism presents economically resilient opportunities and economic diversification can be achieved through digitalisation, for example. To this end, the islands can enter into partnerships with each other, but certainly also with other countries.

Inclusive digital development is crucial to both use and benefit from the opportunities arising from digitalisation, but will require additional efforts in the form of investment in education and lifelong learning. Governments do not have to do this alone; the islands' business communities can also play a role. By far the most urgent problem is the need to invest in climate adaptation and disaster preparedness in a manner that includes the entire population. To be able to make the necessary changes, access to finance will remain imperative.

As the challenges and vulnerabilities are strongly interlinked, so the solutions must be crosscutting. This is in line with the 2030 Agenda with its interconnected SDGs, based on the idea that sustainable development requires an integrated approach. Policies and government investment need to focus on solutions for the long term, and include investment in governance and institutional capacities.

Like most young developing countries, Curaçao, Aruba and Sint Maarten are still finding their place in the international playing field and are still strengthening their public bodies in order to become stable, democratic nations with a strong identity and economy. Currently the three countries do not have sufficient resources and public funds to respond to the impacts of a crisis, nor to invest sufficiently in the implementation of the SDGs. Partnerships for the goals and external development financing are required to ensure full recovery from external shocks like the pandemic, to build back better after the crisis, and ultimately achieve resilience and sustainability. International, regional and national cooperation therefore focuses on finance, technology and capacity building, as well as policy coherence and institutional strengthening. Access to external development financing for the three Caribbean countries is limited, however, due to the way the Kingdom is structured.

The bonds within the Kingdom, both between the four countries and between the Netherlands in the Caribbean (Bonaire, St Eustatius and Saba) and the Netherlands in Europe are longstanding. Yet, as the present Kingdom structure only dates back to 2010, relations are still developing and will require special attention in the coming years. In this process the inhabitants of the islands and their interests, as reflected in the SDGs, should take centre stage.

# 3 The Netherlands

## 3.1 Introduction

Since the adoption of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Netherlands has made significant progress towards achieving them, both at home and abroad. Dutch efforts at national and international levels are often closely linked to the EU's internal and external policy agenda. Successive governments have addressed the major challenges reflected in the SDGs. Public interest in the goals has grown exponentially, too, with companies and other organisations in all sectors increasingly using them as a compass. The ambitions of the present Dutch government and different stakeholders to transition to sustainable and inclusive models are gradually converging. At the same time, the challenges are immense. Key questions include: how do we translate ambitions on paper into real change? How do we strengthen policy coherence so as to create synergies? How can cooperation and partnerships help to scale up and accelerate the process?

As we near the halfway point to the SDG deadline, this report examines where the Netherlands stands in 2022. Monitoring and learning have a significant role to play in the 2030 Agenda, which is why in this VNR we not only look back on our successes but also point out the difficulties. Opinions sometimes differ on what exactly these challenges are. This helps keep all parties involved focused – including the government – and allows us to learn from each other. Opportunities and best practices can be a source of inspiration for all. Useful examples are therefore highlighted throughout this report.

Every year, on Accountability Day, two reports are submitted to parliament: the Monitor of Wellbeing & the SDGs published by Statistics Netherlands (CBS) and the national SDG report entitled 'Sustainable Development in the Netherlands'. A particular feature of the latter is that it is drawn up collectively by all sectors of society. Issues that present major challenges for the Netherlands according to the Monitor, such as climate, biodiversity, circular agriculture, and circular production and consumption, are high on the policy agenda (SDGs 13, 14, 15, 2 and 12). In addition, recognition has grown across society of the challenges relating to equal opportunities, equal treatment, wellbeing, housing and socioeconomic security (SDGs 5, 10, 4, 3, 11 and 1). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has, more than ever before, highlighted the importance of building up economic and social resilience. Although the Netherlands,

being well placed to achieve the SDGs, has been able to mitigate some of the negative impact of the pandemic, the effort demanded much of society and businesses. Support packages have helped reduce the adverse effects on employment, health and poverty in particular, but the crisis has also highlighted inequalities, for example in education and opportunities. The effects of the crisis have hit young people particularly badly and may also have repercussions for them in the future. The new government therefore remains committed to supporting a sustainable and inclusive post-pandemic recovery.

## Coalition agreement

Successive governments have invested in priorities that are closely linked to the SDG challenges most important to the Netherlands. The previous government (2017-2021) initiated transitions in the areas of climate and energy, circular agriculture and achieving a fully circular economy by 2050. The government that took office in January 2022 will build on this. The new coalition agreement 'Looking out for each other, looking ahead to the future' aims to accelerate the transition to a sustainable economy and create a more robust society based on equality of opportunity and caring for each other. These are central tenets of the 2030 Agenda. This ambitious commitment and the associated funding provide an ideal springboard for achieving the SDGs. The introduction of a 'generational impact assessment' means that the interests of young people and future generations will be taken into account when developing policy, thus giving them a permanent seat at the table. We are therefore well set up for the final sprint towards 2030.



Handover of the manifest for a Sustainable Coalition Agreement to politician and then minister of Foreign Affairs, Sigrid Kaag, 8 July 2021 (photo: Roos Trommelen)

## A growing movement

Society at large has been strongly committed to the SDGs from the outset. Since the previous VNR was presented in 2017, support for the SDGs has grown and taken firm root. It began with a relatively small group of parties that were involved in the negotiations on the post-2015 development agenda, but now the goals are evident in many areas of life. Dutch companies and civil society organisations set up the SDG Charter Network as early as 2013, which later became the platform organisation SDG Nederland. The SDG movement is large and growing, and is full of energy and innovative ideas. It has more than 1,200 member organisations, including many sector and umbrella organisations. Many more organisations are using the SDGs as a compass, including multinationals, SMEs, family businesses and social enterprises. Knowledge and educational institutions use the SDGs in teaching, in research and in fieldwork, and as operational management guidelines. For example, every year, secondary vocational schools and higher education institutions (HBOs and universities) compete for the SustainaBUL Award, presented to the most sustainable educational institutions in the Netherlands. Research into the goals is also on the rise, focusing on both the Dutch and the global situation. The SDGs have clearly been widely embraced across all sections of society.



Young 'SDG Voices' talking with local SDG ambassador in Delft during SDG Action Day on 25 September 2021

Culture and creativity play a key role in raising awareness of societal challenges and creating the right conditions for societal transitions. The new coalition agreement acknowledges the

importance of involving the creative industries in addressing these challenges. Interest in sustainability in the cultural and creative sectors is also growing year on year. SDG activities are increasingly associated with artistic and cultural projects, and the SDGs are more and more often used as guiding principles in the cultural sector, with a strong focus on diversity and inclusion, driven by the government and by the creative sectors themselves. The involvement of society at large is vital when building a culture of peace, global citizenship and sustainable development, which are preconditions for the necessary societal changes (SDG 4.7). Education is instrumental in this. The Netherlands is therefore updating the primary and secondary education curriculum to include sustainability and citizenship.

## Flag campaign

On 25 September, SDG Action Day, local and provincial authorities, businesses, higher education institutions, NGOs, ministries, Dutch embassies worldwide and other organisations raise the SDG flag and share the flag-raising events on social media using the hashtag #togetherfortheSDGs. This successful initiative of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG), UN Global Compact Network Netherlands, SDG Nederland and central government attracted more than 800 participating organisations in 2021.

The unifying force of the SDGs has resulted in closer cooperation between organisations, helped by SDG Alliances ('SDG-Alliancies') which are affiliated with SDG Nederland. Each Alliance brings together organisations with different members and areas of expertise to focus on specific SDGs, and together the Alliances ensure synergies. Certain goals are interdependent and can only truly be achieved by pooling efforts. For instance, the Alliances focused on the 'social' goals (SDGs 1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10 and 16) are working towards a common agenda on inclusion and equal opportunities. Another example is the network of 'SDG Houses' that has been set up. Initiated by the first SDG House, the Royal Tropical Institute in Amsterdam, it now links SDG Houses in many iconic locations across the country that provide space to learn about and work on the SDGs. Society at large is also increasingly seeking synergies between the goals, as demonstrated by the Fair Climate Agenda ('Eerlijke Klimaatagenda', in Dutch) drawn up by a coalition of

environmental organisations, the Netherlands' Trade Union Confederation (FNV) and other civil society organisations. The agenda combines such issues as climate action, decent work, nature restoration, housing and health. Several movements advocating transition to a sustainable economy have joined forces in the 'Sustainable Breakthrough' (Duurzame Doorbraak) group. Another important development is that many stakeholders in society and the business community have called for a sustainable post-pandemic recovery. During the negotiations for a new coalition agreement, many organisations called on the negotiating parties to put the SDG's more firmly on the agenda. SDG Nederland coordinated the campaign for a sustainable coalition agreement, which was supported by more than 2,100 organisations.

## Young people

Young people have successfully gained a place at the table for several important decision-making processes, such as on coronavirus policy. They also gave input for the negotiations for a new coalition and for COP26 in Glasgow, where they had talks with Prime Minister Mark Rutte. The number of ministries with youth advisory bodies is also on the rise, in the wake of the Social and Economic Council (SER) setting up a youth platform. This is helped by the fact that young people's concerns about their future, about climate change and about their mental health are now being recognised. The appointment of a Minister for Climate and Energy Policy and a State Secretary for Youth in the newly formed government are significant successes for the youth lobby. Despite these achievements, it is still a challenge to ensure that having a place at the table also means that young people have a say in decisions and receive feedback on how their input has been used. Young people are deeply concerned that they and future generations will suffer the consequences of current policies on global warming, demographic ageing and so on. 2022 is the European Year of Youth, providing the perfect opportunity to address these concerns. Collaboration between young people from different countries leads to joint initiatives, such as the campaign to seek an Advisory Opinion from the International Court of Justice, which involved Dutch UN youth representatives and their partners from small island states and elsewhere. In its Youth at Heart strategy, the

Netherlands places young people at the centre of development cooperation policy. The recently launched Youth Advisory Committee is facilitating dialogue and cooperation between young people from development cooperation partner countries and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation seeks advice from young people through this committee, and committee members can also offer advice on their own initiative.



'SDG Voice' speaking at the Youth Summit 'NL Maakt Impact', 20-22 May 2022 (Photo: Till Brüggeman)

## Voluntary Subnational and Local Reviews

There are many good examples of an integrated approach at local and regional levels because the challenges often converge on the physical space (SDG 11). Area-specific projects tackle objectives in the areas of climate, heritage and nature in combination with social goals such as housing development and a healthy and attractive environment. The municipality of Súdwest Fryslân, for instance, created an SDG compass so that it can make more informed decisions about its various spatial planning goals. This earned it a place among the winners of the Global Goals Municipality of the Year awards. The 2030 Agenda is a catalyst for local action, as illustrated by the many events organised throughout the Netherlands to mark SDG Action Day on 25 September 2021. Provincial and regional authorities are also embracing the goals. The province of Zeeland has drafted guidelines on socially responsible procurement in line with the SDGs and the province of Drenthe proclaimed itself 'SDG Province' in 2021. No fewer than 119 local authorities (over one-third of all municipalities in the Netherlands) have claimed the

title of Global Goals Municipality (as of May 2022). The value of the SDGs for local policy is underscored by the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG). It urged local politicians to use the SDGs in their new coalition agreements, negotiated after the local elections in March 2022. The energy that subnational authorities are investing in the SDGs is reflected in the Voluntary Subnational Review (VSR) conducted by the VNG, the Dutch Water Authorities and the Association of Provincial Authorities (IPO). Amsterdam City Council will draft a local version of the voluntary SDG report (Voluntary Local Review) this year.



Hoisting of the SDG-flag in the city of Den Bosch on SDG Action Day 25 Sept. 2021

### The role of the private sector

Businesses recognise that they can make a positive contribution to a future-proof economy and resilient society. The main business networks have joined the SDG movement in order to share information about implementing, monitoring and reporting on the SDGs. Responsible business conduct (RBC) is increasingly the norm. In 2019, at the government's request, the Social and Economic Council of the Netherlands (SER) issued an advisory report on how the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises can reinforce the SDGs, and vice versa. It recommends that companies take the OECD Guidelines as a starting point for their policy on RBC, and enhance their own positive impact using the SDGs.

Businesses wish to contribute to prosperity in the Netherlands, according to the employers' associations VNO-NCW (Confederation of Netherlands Industry and Employers) and

MKB-Nederland in their new strategy 'Agenda NL 2030: Doing Business to Create Broad Welfare' (2021). One of the ways they do this is by using the SDGs as guiding principles in their value chains. The Global Compact Network Netherlands aims to scale up private-sector impact and speed up achievement of the SDG agenda. To this end, it offers participating companies the SDG Ambition Accelerator.

Despite the evident enthusiasm, much remains to be done. The umbrella organisation of social and impact-driven enterprises, MVO Nederland, launched a New Economy Index (NEx) in 2020 to measure where we are in the transition towards a sustainable, inclusive economy. In 2022 the index is at 15.4%, but MVO Nederland believes this is not enough to reach the tipping point within the specified time.<sup>6</sup> A survey conducted by VNO-NCW and UN Global Compact Netherlands has shown that the coronavirus pandemic has not had any adverse effect on the SDG efforts of many businesses, and 66% of the respondents even said that they wished to do more to achieve the SDGs in the years ahead. The pandemic has, however, increased the risk of a widening gap between large companies – which have continued to work on sustainability – and smaller companies, which have not been able to do as much because of the economic crisis. Recovery measures that use the SDGs as a guiding compass can help businesses press ahead with their sustainability agenda. That was the message of the Green Recovery Statement submitted to the government in June 2020 by the eight multinationals in the Dutch Sustainable Growth Coalition, together with 250 other companies.

In the financial sector, interest in two types of investment is growing: sustainable investment, partly due to the EU Taxonomy Regulation, and impact investment. Various parties are developing expertise and standards to facilitate this. The SDG Impact Assessment Working Group of De Nederlandsche Bank (DNB, the Dutch central bank) has drafted guidance for investors on measuring the impact of their investments on the SDGs. The

<sup>6</sup> The NEx was developed by MVO Nederland to measure the sustainability of the private sector. The target is to reach 20% by 2025, and eventually 100%. When it was launched in 2020, the index was at 12.1%. It is based on the average score on seven themes: new wealth (the pursuit of positive social impact on a par with financial growth), real prices, transparent value chains, inclusive business, green energy, biodiversity and circular economy.

Netherlands Advisory Board on Impact Investing (NAB) encourages impact investors to look more broadly at all the SDGs, which together cover a broad spectrum of sustainability topics. Two major pension funds, APG and PGGM, set up a platform in 2019 to make SDG-related investments more accessible to institutional investors.



UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed steps into the SDG bus during her visit to the Netherlands, November 2018.

### **3.2 Current situation and evaluation**

In September 2015 the Netherlands made a commitment to achieve all 17 SDGs by 2030 at the latest. The following year, the government began putting together a Plan of Action for national implementation of the SDGs, establishing a statistical benchmark and reviewing current policy. A pragmatic approach was adopted, in which SDG governance is organised on the basis of existing responsibilities and institutions. The Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation coordinates the international efforts of the Netherlands on the SDGs and additionally has a role in coordinating the national implementation of the SDGs. The minister is assisted in the latter task by a high-level national SDG coordinator and an interministerial working group.

This approach was evaluated in 2021, reviewing where the Netherlands stood in relation to the goals after five years, what additional policy had been pursued in the past few years and how effectively implementation of the SDGs is being managed in the Netherlands. The following five aspects were considered in this regard: (1) political commitment, (2) division of responsibilities, (3) accountability, (4) efforts to increase public awareness and involvement, and (5) policy monitoring and evaluation. The evaluation found that society is putting pressure on central government to adopt an SDG strategy. It was positive about accountability via the annual national SDG report and the Monitor of Wellbeing & the SDGs, both of which are debated in parliament. The way new policy is assessed in light of the SDGs could, however, be improved by monitoring use of the existing SDG assessment tool. The evaluation made a number of recommendations aimed at stepping up overall efforts to achieve the SDGs, managing implementation more effectively, improving policy coherence and preventing compartmentalisation. In its response, the previous government stated that the SDGs could be made even more visible in policy, and recognised the benefit of having a common sustainability language. The SDG assessment creates scope for enhancing policy design and coherence. The recommendation to integrate the concept of wellbeing and SDGs into the policy and budget cycle is in line with the discussion on this subject between the government and the House of Representatives. With regard to efforts to increase awareness and involvement, the evaluation found that social stakeholders, especially young people, are generally positive about the support they receive to work on the SDGs. The role of SDG Nederland is particularly valued. It channels efforts, acts as a catalyst and facilitates networking. Finally, on the subject of monitoring and evaluation, the report recommended translating the SDGs into specific, national policy goals to make assessment even more effective.

### **SDG assessment (RIA)**

An important long-term success achieved by civil society is that the SDG assessment has been included in the Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA). The SDG assessment was introduced in 2019 at parliament's request and requires new policy to be appraised in light of the SDGs. Specific assessment tools were added to cover SDG themes not yet

covered in the RIA, in particular, the effects on developing countries and gender equality. Assessing the future effects of government policy in the Netherlands and elsewhere on different SDG's will result in more coherent and more effective policy. The quality and timing of the assessment is important, however, and this is neither adequate nor transparent enough at the moment. Ways of enhancing the implementation of the SDG assessment are being investigated in the context of the revision of the Regulatory Impact Assessment.

### Data collection

There has also been progress with data collection since the previous VNR in 2017. Statistics Netherlands (CBS) carried out a baseline survey in 2016 based on the UN indicators, with data available for around a third of these. Data is now available for half of the official UN indicators (71% if the indicators already achieved are included), and there are good alternative indicators for a further 13%. Each year, at the government's request, CBS further refines the indicators, which helps clarify the progress made and the challenges remaining. Since 2019, at parliament's request, the annual SDG assessment and the Monitor of Wellbeing have been incorporated into one publication. The indicators of both frameworks overlap and complement each other. The SDGs make it possible to quantify wellbeing and provide more detailed insight into certain aspects of it. Conversely, the focus of the wellbeing measurement is on the 'here and now', 'later' and 'elsewhere', which helps us understand the consequences of our current wellbeing for future generations and for people elsewhere in the world, thus clarifying underlying principles of the SDG agenda, such as 'Leave No One Behind' and future-readiness.

CBS publishes the Monitor of Wellbeing & the SDGs as input for the annual accountability debate between the government and parliament. The measurement of the Netherlands' SDG performance is also presented in the annual SDSN/Bertelsmann Sustainable Development Report and the SDSN/IEEP Europe Sustainable Development Report, as well as the OECD Measuring Distance to the SDG Targets reports. In March 2021 the NGO coalition SDG Spotlight Nederland published a shadow report that critically assessed Dutch policy aimed at SDGs 10 and 15. Transparency International NL compiled a shadow report on SDG 16 in 2020.

CBS has also been publishing the Regional Monitor of Wellbeing since 2020, documenting wellbeing in municipalities, provinces and COROP regions (NUTS 3). Using 42 indicators, the Monitor provides a broad, diverse picture of the current situation and the development of wellbeing in the Netherlands at regional level. The Caribbean Netherlands will also be included as from 2022. However, because of the small scale of the islands and low implementation capacity, data is available for only a limited number of indicators; 72 indicators on 16 policy themes will therefore be monitored.

### What is the Netherlands' position according to the figures?

The figures included in the VNR come from the 2021 Monitor of Wellbeing & the SDGs, the latest measurement available when this report was written. We see high scores, in particular, for SDG 4 (education), SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 9 (sustainable industrialisation component), SDG 11 (living environment component) and SDG 17 (partnerships). At least half of the indicators for these SDGs show a positive trend. For SDGs 2, 6 and 8, we see many positive trends and few negative trends. The goals on which the Netherlands does not score well are SDG 15 (life on land), SDG 11 (housing component) and SDG 9 (infrastructure and transport components). Notably, the trends for SDGs 7 and 13 have been largely positive for the past few years, partly due to an increased share of renewable energy in the energy mix, a downward trend in the total energy consumption of the economy and lower carbon emissions from domestic traffic and transport. The same goes for SDG 5. This does not mean that we have achieved these goals. Much remains to be done on each of them. For SDG 5 (gender equality), for instance, there is still a noticeable difference between the economic independence of women (63.8%) and men (81.1%), although the figure for both is rising; the male/female pay differential is still significant, but has fallen to 13.7%. With regard to SDG 1 (no poverty), the Netherlands ranks first in Europe and will be able to achieve this goal by 2030. Another favourable development is the declining proportion of children living below the low-income threshold. The number of households living below the poverty line for more than four years has also fallen slightly (3.1% in 2020), but the number of homeless people has risen in recent years.

Generally speaking, the Netherlands is a prosperous country and has continued to thrive during the coronavirus pandemic. Not all sections of society benefit equally, however. In particular, educational attainment and migration background determine the extent to which people share in the nation's wellbeing and prosperity. A mixed picture is emerging of what lies ahead too, because our current prosperity comes partly at the expense of our future natural capital, which will adversely affect future generations. Our footprint in other countries is also cause for concern: despite the positive impact of trade with developing countries, ODA (official development assistance) and transfers, there are significant spillover effects, such as a negative environmental footprint abroad.

In 2021 the government asked CBS to examine what progress the Netherlands had made after implementing the SDGs for five years. This evaluation broadly confirmed the findings of the annual Monitor. The CBS evaluation also provided an overview of implemented policy. Nearly all the SDGs are covered by policy, though policy does not always cover all the targets, or sometimes addresses them indirectly. Furthermore, the cultural dimension of sustainable development has not yet been explicitly incorporated into suitable targets and indicators, making measurement more difficult. Research will be carried out to see how this can be implemented. CBS also observed that policy could more often include measurable policy goals. The Netherlands has many policies for the goals that are more challenging for us, particularly the 'environmental goals' (SDGs 7, 12, 13, 14 and 15). These goals generally fall under several ministries, but the different policies do inform each other. For instance, the aim for policies with regard to climate neutrality, circularity, energy, water management, transport, the environment and a sustainable agri-food system (SDGs 2, 6, 7, 9, 12 and 13) is that they reinforce each other. The picture as regards the other SDGs is varied. With a few exceptions (e.g. equal opportunities policy, foreign trade and development cooperation policy and the National Environmental Policy Framework), the SDGs are not explicitly mentioned in policy. CBS suggests that if the SDG targets are clearly translated into ministerial policy goals, they will be more measurable.

The overview of how things stand in the Netherlands according to SDSN/Bertelsmann's global ranking and the Europe Sustainable Development Report is also broadly consistent with

the observations in the Monitor, with any differences mainly attributable to differences in the datasets used.<sup>7</sup> The Netherlands has a high place in the international rankings, coming 11th globally and 13th in Europe. However, it scores poorly in the Spillover Index (ranked 159th), which means that reducing the country's negative spillover effects will pose a significant challenge (see also 3.3.6). The Netherlands ranks sixth in the Leave-No-One-Behind Index of the Europe Sustainable Development Report.

SDGs and human rights are closely intertwined. The Advisory Council on International Affairs advised the government in 2019 to reinforce the link between human rights and the SDG agenda, and the government has pledged to act on this. The Netherlands also gives weight to the recommendations of UN human rights bodies and rapporteurs, such as the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, which called on the Netherlands in spring 2022 to strengthen measures for the protection of children's rights, notably in the areas of mental health services, the digital environment, climate change and equal opportunities.<sup>8</sup> In 2021 the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) stressed the importance of equal economic support for all constituent countries of the Kingdom during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Committee also advised initiating studies into the negative impact of climate change on people living in the Caribbean part of the Kingdom.<sup>9</sup>

The aforementioned reports and evaluation give an overall picture of how things stand at the moment. The next section (3.3) will take an in-depth look at progress on the SDGs in recent years and review progress on the basis of six major challenges ('entry points'). The focus of section 3.3 is on the European part of the Netherlands, with the situation in the Caribbean Netherlands (the islands of Bonaire, St Eustatius and Saba) discussed in section 3.4.

<sup>7</sup> The differences in scores between the CBS report and the SDSN reports are due to the use of different indicators: SDSN uses only globally agreed indicators, while CBS adapts these, where relevant, to the Dutch context. Another significant difference is that CBS monitors whether there has been progress towards a goal rather than whether the Netherlands will achieve that goal by 2030, which is what the SDSN report scores reflect.

<sup>8</sup> CRC/C/NLD/CO/5-6.

<sup>9</sup> CERD/C/NLD/CO/22-24.

### **3.3 Progress on the SDGs reviewed on the basis of six entry points**

To prepare for the VNR, six SDG dialogues were organised for the purpose of obtaining input from stakeholders, including representatives from all tiers of government, civil society organisations, the private sector, young people, educational institutions and the research community. As part of this exercise, the Netherlands' implementation of the SDGs was viewed through the lens of six systemic challenges ('entry points').

The SDGs concern the economy, society, wellbeing, human rights, security and participation. Both the strength and the challenge of the agenda lie in the interlinkages between the goals. While the importance of a comprehensive approach is universally acknowledged, it is not easy to put this into practice. The UN Global Sustainable Development Report (2019) recommends focusing on a number of systemic challenges, defined as entry points, which encompass several SDGs and largely correspond to the Netherlands' current priorities. The stakeholder dialogues therefore covered six overarching entry points for the Netherlands, addressing the most relevant SDGs in relation to each other. This made it possible to consult a large number of stakeholders and consider different viewpoints, resulting in critical, open and constructive dialogues. The many useful insights gained – and seeing things from each other's perspective – provide a sound basis for the years ahead. The following summaries of these dialogues also include stakeholders' viewpoints.

#### **Entry point 1: Circular agriculture, biodiversity and the food system**

The transition to circular agriculture (SDG 2) in the Netherlands is closely linked to the protection and restoration of nature and biodiversity (SDGs 14 and 15) and ensuring a sustainable and healthy food system for all (SDGs 2, 3 and 12). According to Statistics Netherlands (CBS), the Netherlands scores well on SDG 2, with good access to nutrition and high agricultural productivity. In terms of sustainability, CBS finds that the area under organic production has increased, but is still small compared with other European countries. Food waste and antibiotics use in agriculture are falling. The main challenge is excess nitrogen deposition in the environment, which is also high compared with the rest of Europe. This leads directly to the poor score for SDG 15, the achievement of which poses a major

challenge to the Netherlands. More generally, erosion of natural capital is endangering future prosperity. Insufficient data was available for SDG 14, but CBS warns of a deterioration in biodiversity. In the area of health and nutrition, the rise in obesity is cause for concern.

In the Netherlands, no one needs to go hungry and there is a wide choice of relatively cheap foodstuffs (SDG 2). The downside of this is that the emphasis on high production at low cost has placed tremendous pressure on biodiversity and the environment, particularly given the Netherlands' small surface area. The Netherlands therefore lags behind the rest of Europe in terms of biodiversity values and trends, both in water and on land (SDGs 14 and 15). It is generally acknowledged that the agricultural production system in its present form (worldwide and in the Netherlands) will be untenable in the future. Our planet can no longer sustain the burden of current production methods and consumer behaviour. This has led to an ambitious policy to promote circular agriculture. This also encompasses sustainable management of agricultural soils and sustainable crop protection, reducing leaching of nitrates and other harmful substances from farmland, and a new forestry strategy. Nutrition policy is aimed at prevention, healthy choices and a healthy food environment, for example with the National Prevention Agreement and public awareness instruments such as the five food groups and Nutri-score product labels. While policy aimed at making the agri-food system more sustainable is lauded as a success, its implementation is challenging. On the other hand, there have been some positive results in the area of nature development. To achieve the European nature restoration goals, natural areas will need to be substantially expanded and nature conservation must strive to ensure that the natural environment throughout the country meets basic quality criteria.

SDG 14 warrants special attention. There is little information about this goal in the statistics, but steps have been taken in recent years to introduce a more integrated policy. For instance, the North Sea Agreement (2021) includes agreements between the Dutch government and stakeholders on striking a better balance between the various activities taking place in the North Sea up to 2030 and beyond. Making the seafood industry more sustainable is one of the priorities of European fisheries policy.

## Challenges and opportunities

One key challenge is to link efforts on conservation and agriculture objectives more effectively by adopting new revenue models and raising awareness about the interdependence of these two systems. At current market prices, more sustainable food production is insufficiently profitable for many farmers. A revenue model is needed that is profitable for both the agricultural sector and the natural environment, while also ensuring that healthy food in sufficient quantities remains affordable for all. Land stewardship by farmers has immense benefits for society. Since remuneration for these services is not yet obtained through product prices, the government will need to continue or introduce grant schemes to safeguard provision of these public goods.

In the current situation, measures for circular agriculture, the natural environment, climate and other goals are at times at odds with each other. A more coherent focus on the goals in combination (giving equal consideration to the three Ps of sustainability: people, planet and prosperity) is an important avenue to explore. It would be helpful to centre on values such as good public and environmental health, the quality of the living environment, a fair income for farmers, affordable food and greater priority for regional and local markets.

The coronavirus pandemic has increased awareness of the importance of prevention and a healthy lifestyle. Instruments such as the Nutri-score label and the Healthy Choice ('Kies ik Gezond?') nutrition app help consumers make healthy, sustainable choices. Responsibility for healthy food also lies with suppliers, however, as the food environment does not always encourage people to make healthy choices. Stakeholders believe the government could be more proactive here, for example by introducing rules on the salt, sugar and saturated fat content of foods, on marketing unhealthy products, or on deterring establishments selling unhealthy foods from operating in the vicinity of schools. Foods that are less processed are both healthier and more sustainable. There are also opportunities to take practical measures at EU level, for instance through agreements on labelling and a European food choice logo as part of the Farm to Fork strategy. Moreover, it is important to reach young people, e.g. by educating them more about nutritious, sustainable food and routinely serving healthy meals and snacks in schools and sports club canteens.

Reducing consumption of animal protein is seen as one of the possible solutions to global challenges such as climate change, declining biodiversity and food security. The national protein strategy is a first step in the right direction. Honest messages about the negative impact of a high meat and dairy intake can increase people's intrinsic motivation to change their diet. Scaling up innovations such as lab-grown meat and tackling food waste also offer scope.

The agri-food transition calls for a change in behaviour by all parties: farmers, farm advisers and suppliers, retailers, banks, food processing companies and consumers. The government can support this transition by setting regulatory frameworks, because clarity helps businesses in the long term. Agreements with and between a broad range of social actors can play an important role in addressing 'how' questions and the Netherlands has a great deal of positive experience with this instrument. Stakeholders do, however, feel that such agreements should be made more inclusive by involving more diverse types of farms and more diverse groups, such as young people and women. If European resources from the Common Agricultural Policy were to be used more in line with the European Green Deal, the Farm to Fork strategy and the Biodiversity strategy, this would be an important step forward for SDGs 2 and 15.

## Entry point 2: Wellbeing

Many things contribute to people's wellbeing: good physical and mental health (SDG 3), safe, healthy and green surroundings with access to suitable, affordable housing (SDG 11) and opportunities for lifelong learning (SDG 4). Wellbeing also contributes to the resilience of individuals and communities. Compared with the situation in other countries, Dutch healthcare (SDG 3) is well organised and perceived health is high. Obesity is increasing, however. The global pandemic has also put additional pressure on the health system and has had a negative effect on healthy life expectancy. Looking at public health from a wider perspective, the Netherlands is facing three key challenges: the health inequalities between people with high and low socioeconomic status; the increase in mental health problems due to the pandemic; and new health risks as a result of climate change. In terms of lifelong learning (SDG 4), the Netherlands is doing well internationally, but there are sections of society that are being left behind. With regard to the physical environment and communities (SDGs 3 and 11), there are

challenges in the areas of suitable, affordable housing and climate adaptation. The vast majority of people are happy with their housing and where they live. The physical environment is under threat, however, which also affects the wellbeing of individuals. Environmental pollution may be decreasing, but it still causes illness and premature death.

Prevention, healthy lifestyles and a healthy living environment are increasingly addressed in policy, such as in the Environment and Planning Act and in the new National Environmental Programme that is being developed. Coherence between the different goals is also embedded in policy. In healthcare, much has been done to provide the right care, in the right place. There is more recognition of the importance of mental health, although taboos still exist. There have been concerted efforts to ensure that people can pursue lifelong personal development, with measures designed to support employees in planning and managing their development, to encourage employers and the social partners to provide more flexible forms of training and education for adults, and to promote a learning culture. The literacy programme 'Tel mee met Taal' (2020-2024) tackles functional illiteracy and provides funding for training basic skills on the work floor. There are also challenges, however, particularly when it comes to implementing policy. In theory, delegating social support and care for young people and vulnerable groups to municipalities could result in more tailored services. In practice, this has not yet been achieved. There has been a decline in mental health services in recent years, while demand has risen. One positive trend is that young people and other target groups are more involved in health policy and there is greater scope for citizens' initiatives. There are also more physical activity programmes for young people and vulnerable groups. A good example is the Life Goals Foundation, an organisation that helps vulnerable people, such as the homeless, teenage mothers and addicts, to get their lives back on track through sport. In September 2021 the organisation hosted the European Life Goals Games in Utrecht as part of the European Week of Sport. Teams from across Europe attended the tournament in a celebration of their resilience. Participation in cultural activities and creativity also has positive effects, as demonstrated for example in local experiments with 'Kunst op recept', an arts-centred initiative for people with recurrent psychosocial problems.

## Challenges and opportunities

Prevention is at the heart of policy, but to be able to direct efforts effectively, it must be defined more clearly, with tangible goals. It is also important to determine where responsibility lies for investing in prevention in different sectors. Policy is placing greater emphasis on healthy lifestyles, but legislation and financial incentives do not yet reflect this: the healthcare sector earns more by treating sick people than by preventing illness in healthy people, and health insurers are less inclined to reimburse preventive care. This could change if positive health outcomes were the guiding principle. Reducing health inequalities between different groups also calls for a targeted approach.

Young people's mental health burden is growing as a result of pressure to achieve and uncertain future prospects. Providing early interventions in their own setting and giving them space for taking things a bit easier from time to time could prevent a great deal of distress. Education is strongly focused on cognitive learning and not so much on providing an 'outlet'. Music lessons, swimming lessons, sport and homework supervision at all primary and secondary schools can help pupils develop coping skills. The mental healthcare sector is still beset with many organisational difficulties, especially long waiting lists and providing patients with the treatment that is most suitable in their specific situation.

Suitable employment is a key factor in wellbeing, but for vulnerable young people and adults it is a challenge finding work. Opportunities for ongoing personal development, reskilling and upskilling reduce unemployment and promote everyone's wellbeing, but people in these groups benefit especially. An appropriate education system that welcomes diversity and inclusion promotes this and may also reduce the dropout rate. Cooperation between all relevant stakeholders is crucial. One success story here is the partnership between municipalities, employers, schools and trade unions in the Noord-Holland Noord region to achieve a strong and inclusive labour market.

Easy access to a clean, healthy and green living environment with space to exercise and meet people has major benefits for physical and mental wellbeing. Biodiversity and climate measures reinforce each other and contribute to better health. Urban green space also enhances resilience to climate change and helps reduce air pollution. By creating more cycle paths and

green corridors, municipalities link infrastructure and transport with nature and health. Working with residents to make neighbourhoods greener helps enhance social cohesion. Here again, the question arises as to who is responsible for creating added value for society and what incentives exist. In practice, integrated environment and planning strategies clash with legal frameworks that limit municipalities as to what social and environmental conditions they can set land developers. The many claims on the limited space available call for regulatory impact assessment, and the SDGs could be useful in this respect. This requires us to see expenditure on nature as an investment towards many social and other policy goals rather than as a cost. To ensure that the natural environment is taken into account in decision-making, it is important to elaborate the positive effects of green spaces in existing measuring systems and legally safeguard both the rights of nature and the right to nature.

### **Entry point 3: A circular inclusive economy and use of raw materials**

The Netherlands' commitment to responsible consumption and production (SDG 12) is reflected in the policy aim to be a fully circular economy by 2050. The target for 2030 is to halve the use of primary abiotic raw materials. The circular transition helps meet four major challenges facing the Netherlands: climate change (SDG 13), environmental pollution (SDGs 6 and 11), biodiversity loss (SDGs 14 and 15) and prevention of raw material depletion and energy supply security risks (SDG 12). The proviso is that the circular economy must be inclusive and innovative and must create decent jobs (SDGs 10, 9 and 8).

The Dutch economy is characterised by highly efficient use of inputs and good waste management. The raw material footprint has been stable since 2019, after falling in previous years, but the amount of land needed for total domestic consumption (land footprint) is high, at 2.5 times the area of the Netherlands. The per capita quantity of municipal waste is decreasing and recycling is increasing. Levels of industrial and commercial waste are stable, and the recycling rate is also rising, with around three-quarters of this type of waste being recycled or reused. In recent years, the circular economy has been placed high on the political and policy agenda with the 2016 government-wide programme for a circular Dutch economy by 2050 ('Nederland Circulair in 2050') and the five transition agendas set out in the national Raw Materials Agreement (2017). The associated

circular economy implementation programme (2019-2023) includes grants schemes and a delegated approach. Developing this ambitious policy together with relevant stakeholders is an important success story of the past few years. Other specific successes include the introduction of a legal obligation for builders to improve the environmental performance of new-builds through their choice of inputs, the introduction of a deposit on small plastic bottles, and various voluntary agreements with sectors and stakeholders such as the Plastic Pact NL, the European Plastics Pact, Denim Deal and the Circular and Fair ICT Pact. In the private sector, the circular transition has led to increased demand for relevant knowledge and highly-skilled staff.



Green building at the Floriade Expo 2022 in Almere where the SDG's are a cross-cutting theme

### **Challenges and opportunities**

To accelerate the transition to a circular economy, market incentives for circular solutions need to be made more attractive than those for linear solutions. Circular solutions are currently often expensive because of the high labour costs and the low cost of some raw materials like virgin plastic. As a result, circular product design is still not always prioritised. Commercial funding for circular projects and business models is still limited as a result of the emphasis on the risks involved. To address this issue, the Dutch financial sector drew up a circular finance roadmap in early 2022. The aim is that, by 2030, circularity should be an integral part of how finance applications are assessed and should directly inform investment decisions. Another challenge is to properly measure the progress made

towards circularity goals, a matter on which the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency published a report in 2021.<sup>10</sup> Lastly, the Netherlands promotes international cooperation in order to advance the circular economy, for example by supporting the OECD in developing metrics, indicators and new business models and identifying trade-offs.

Circular activities are often still limited to recycling and focus too little on retaining material value, for example by 'upcycling'. The R ladder describes different circularity strategies, with Refuse, Rethink, Reduce, Reuse and Repair at the top, and Recycle and Recover at the bottom. The aim is to operate as high up the ladder as possible. Often, the focus is on technical solutions, such as reducing material inputs per unit of product. Yet the circular transition also involves process changes (operational management and production process) and important behavioural aspects.

Change at the beginning of the chain is needed, for example by introducing packaging legislation and incentives for sustainable consumption. For both the circular and the energy transition, there should be clear rules on reparability and service life. Ensuring that government instruments consistently promote circularity will also be a challenge. Initiatives to market raw materials recovered from waste water, for example, meet with legal and pricing barriers. Public authorities can also play an important part through procurement and tendering: circular procurement is a policy ambition, but not an obligation. Circularities as one of the contract award criteria can become more embedded if public authorities look more closely at the total cost of ownership, which also includes social value and additional costs over the entire period of use. A key tool for accelerating the transition is to tighten up criteria, definitions and measuring systems, and many parties around the world are already working on this.

It is important that a transition take into account all sections of the population and businesses, not least to gain broad support. Having the right knowledge and skills is another challenge, certainly for some small and medium-sized companies. One success is the increased number of relevant courses and subjects

taught in professional and vocational education. However, upskilling strategies for workers, people returning to employment and newcomers are also needed, as are partnerships between educational institutions and companies at local and regional level. In the interests of ensuring equal opportunities, it is important to start teaching children about the circular economy in primary school, which also calls for a joint approach from government, the business sector and education. An inclusive circular transition means ensuring that everyone can participate and take steps, including fiscal measures, to prevent sustainable consumption being more expensive. There are also potential opportunities in circular models, e.g. switching from buying goods to leasing them.

Investments in the circular economy, climate, biodiversity and sustainable water management (SDGs 6, 12, 13 and 15) can have multiplier effects, but an integrated approach to several transitions without negatively affecting other transitions is not yet the norm. Moreover, whereas in the case of climate policy, international carbon accounting rules disregard savings in indirect carbon, circularity, by definition, requires the entire value chain to be considered. We therefore need to improve our understanding of how different transition strategies influence each other, including possible trade-offs between them. The feedback loop between monitoring and implementation management must also be improved. It is not enough for producers to focus on their own business operations; the direct and indirect effects in the whole chain from raw materials through to end user should also be taken into account in the goals and measuring systems.

#### **Entry point 4: A fair climate and energy transition, climate adaptation and water**

In the past six years, the Netherlands has invested a great deal of effort in SDG 13 and in implementing the Paris Agreement. The ongoing climate and energy transition (SDGs 13 and 7) focuses on switching to a sustainable energy supply and a carbon-neutral economy. In addition, the government combines climate adaptation efforts with sustainable water management (SDG 6), sustainable economic growth and decent work (SDG 8), the circular economy (SDG 12), nature and biodiversity (SDG 15), and conservation and sustainable use of oceans and seas (SDG 14). Reducing inequality (SDG 10) is crucial to ensure a fair transition in which everyone can participate.

Access to energy is excellent in the Netherlands. The recent rise in energy prices is cause for concern, but the government has announced it will provide compensation for the higher utility bills, especially for lowest-income households. It is not possible to provide compensation to everyone, however. The government is therefore stepping up its efforts to make homes and industry more sustainable so as to lower the cost of energy and accelerate the green energy transition. The conflict in Ukraine has only made the need for action more urgent. The trends in relation to SDG 7 are positive: the energy intensity of the Dutch economy is decreasing and the share of renewable energy in final energy consumption is increasing. The Netherlands does still lag behind in the EU, however. Positive results can also be reported for SDG 13, with greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in 2020 being 24.5% lower than in 1990. This is partly due to the sharp decline in road and air traffic during the COVID lockdowns, but mainly due to the halving of methane and nitrous oxide emissions since 1990. CO<sub>2</sub> reduction is accelerating: carbon emissions were 14% lower in 2020 than in 1990, while in 2019 emissions were only 6% lower than in 1990. Per capita GHG emissions are also showing a downward trend. This is positive, but emissions are persistently high compared with other EU member states. If we look at the total GHG intensity of the Dutch economy, we can see that it is declining, as is our GHG footprint (the measure of total consumption-based GHG emissions), which was down 8.2% in 2020 compared with the previous year. The Netherlands aims to be a leader in the fight against global warming. To this end it contributes its share to European climate goals and will pursue at least 55% emissions reduction by 2030, compared with 1990. In line with the coalition agreement, new policies will strive for a 60% emissions reduction by 2030, thus ensuring that the new target of 55%, to be laid down in the Climate Act, will be achieved. The Netherlands must be climate-neutral by 2050. With regard to water management, the Netherlands extracts relatively large quantities of surface water, partly because it has many industrial facilities with high cooling water requirements. However, per capita extraction is levelling off to some extent because energy companies use less and less water for cooling purposes. In addition, the water efficiency of individuals and businesses is high. Water quality is excellent, but is at risk due to leaching of phosphorus, nitrogen and substances such as pharmaceutical residues. Water stress is improving, falling by 5% to 15.4% between 2013 and 2018.

Other indicators to evaluate the sustainability of water use suggest, however, that the Netherlands is not on track to meet the targets.

Awareness of the challenges posed by climate change has permeated all parts of society in recent years. It has become clear, partly as a result of court rulings, that human rights are central to the issue of climate change. The government's plan to introduce a generational impact assessment is consistent with this. In the financial sector, the work of DNB's Sustainable Finance Platform has helped to better define and clarify climate risks. Businesses are committing to concrete reduction targets. In sector-specific negotiations ('climate tables') between the government, sector representatives and other stakeholders on how the Netherlands is to achieve its national commitments under the Paris Agreement, sector-specific and overall reduction goals were agreed. These were set down in the National Climate Agreement and enshrined in law in the ensuing Climate Act (2019). In line with EU agreements, the Netherlands is aiming for a 55% reduction by 2030. By 2050, electricity generation must be fully carbon-neutral, and carbon emissions reduced by 95% compared with 1990. Policy has been drafted for certain specific sectors – electricity, transport, industry, the built environment, agriculture and land use, healthcare, finance and public procurement – setting out their individual contributions to the climate goals. An integrated knowledge and innovation agenda has been drawn up by sectors across the entire innovation chain to help accelerate the transition. The new government sees the climate and energy transition as one of its top priorities and has announced a €35 billion Climate Fund to support this transition in the Netherlands over the coming years. There has also been some success in linking climate ambitions with other policies, notably on sustainable agriculture, environment and planning, circularity and public procurement. At COP26, many countries including the Netherlands signed a pledge to stop public financing of fossil fuel projects abroad. There is also greater awareness that not only is a technical energy transition needed, but also a social transition.

The impact of climate change poses major challenges for the Netherlands in terms of sea level rise, freshwater supply, drought and flooding. The last two problems have become more frequent in recent years. In response, climate adaptation plans aimed at integrated water management and coastal protection

have been stepped up. Central government and the provincial and water authorities are working together to secure an adequate supply of fresh water even in dry years. Flood prevention is traditionally well organised in the Netherlands; the flipside of this success is that members of the public are not very aware of water-related risks. The government has invested in nature-based solutions in recent years, such as the Room for the River programme. The Delta Plan on Spatial Adaptation is a good example of a long-term programme with a broad and inclusive approach. The establishment of the Global Center on Adaptation underscores the Netherlands' ambition to work with international partners and share knowledge on this topic.

The use of the North Sea brings other challenges. A great deal of space is needed for offshore wind turbines, but Dutch policy on the North Sea also pursues other objectives, such as reducing pollution, restoring biodiversity and making fisheries sustainable. These can be addressed in a coherent approach, as demonstrated by The Rich North Sea programme ('De Rijke Noordzee'), which combines the building of new wind farms with biodiversity restoration of the seabed in wind farm zones. It is acknowledged that more needs to be done, however. A long-term national strategy with good indicators is required in order to protect vital marine ecosystems.

Water quality (SDG 6) in the Netherlands is improving, but it will be a tough task to meet the requirements of the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD). The recent river basin management plans under this Directive will help make real progress towards better water quality in the years ahead. The government is also working to achieve a transition in agriculture, giving priority not only to the problem of nitrogen pollution but also to the WFD goals, biodiversity and climate change.

### Challenges and opportunities

Considerable progress has been made launching the climate and energy transition, but it is a huge task and efforts will have to be significantly stepped up over the next few years. Stakeholders want to see a correlation between the activities undertaken in different sectors, more central coordination and initiatives to promote creativity. Deploying various government instruments consistently and coherently to achieve the climate goals also continues to be a challenge. A number of stakeholders encourage the government to do more in terms of carbon

pricing and setting standards, as this would go a long way towards changing the behaviour of businesses and members of the public. They also feel the 'polluter pays' principle could be applied more strictly to taxation, thus contributing to the climate transition. It is essential to increase support for climate measures, for instance by clearly communicating the gravity of the situation. Education has a key role to play, too. It is equally important for companies to be transparent about and accountable for their actions.

The risks facing the Dutch soil and water ecosystem are diverse and increasing. More and more often, short-term and long-term interests conflict, such as choosing whether to reinforce dikes to address immediate threats or create space for water in order to serve longer term goals. In the long term, land with a higher risk of flooding must only be used in a way that is appropriate. At the moment, however, due to the housing shortage there is a risk of homes being built in areas that may prove to be unfit for this in the longer term. Taking climate adaptation into consideration in decision-making processes helps avoid these kinds of lock-ins and encourages climate-robust land use.

The erosion of certainties demands a different way of thinking and designing. Accepting that not everything can be engineered can increase mental resilience. Municipalities are already working on risk dialogues and agendas for climate adaptation, but more action will be needed longer term. Resistance to change is understandable and concerns should be heard, but at the same time it can stand in the way of promising solutions. Decision-making can be improved in various ways to deal with this, e.g. by increasing transparency about trade-offs, compensating directly injured parties, being honest about the urgency of the situation and combining all this with a positive vision of the future, where the benefits for all concerned are made clear.

If climate neutrality is to be achieved, clearer standards are required. Civil society stakeholders point out that steps must be taken to prevent businesses focusing on carbon offsetting instead of reducing their own carbon emissions, as this does not help us achieve the Paris Agreement goals. To prevent greenwashing, the government could set standards defining 'net zero' and other claims, so that frontrunners are not disadvantaged. Another challenge is to increase global

transparency regarding where emissions occur and to whom they can be attributed. Besides maintaining the nationally determined contributions under the Paris Agreement, we need to generate fewer greenhouse gases for our level of consumption. The government is in favour of businesses focusing on reducing their own emissions, and is striving for transparency about the origin of emissions and how companies deal with them. In the financial sector, too, the benefits for society should be at the heart of any investment decisions.

The biggest challenge is ensuring a fair transition, both now and for future generations. This relates to, for example, timely action to help employees find alternative employment (in the green sector) where necessary, and training people accordingly; fair distribution of negative income effects, supporting people in vulnerable groups in particular; and giving citizens and employees a say in decision-making. To gain public confidence, it is important for citizens to be able to contribute ideas about how to achieve a fair distribution of costs and benefits. The substantial climate-related resources must also be used to support vulnerable groups during the transition. In addition, international cooperation will be a key factor in ensuring that the shift to a climate-neutral economy brings opportunities and benefits for all countries.

The SDGs and the climate goals are matters of common interest. Existing legislation and regulations must be amended and market incentives provided in order to remove any barriers to the transition. Social innovation helps organise our production and consumption differently, rather than simply optimising existing models. The government can set a good example by consistently applying the existing SDG assessment and the proposed generational impact assessment to appraise new policy. This will also help give more weight to health, nature and the interests of future generations when decisions are made. Formulating an overarching vision that brings together the major challenges could provide a reference point. This will require ministries and policy research institutes to place the SDGs front and centre, reserving an important role for SDG 10 (reduced inequality).

### **Entry point 5: Inclusive society, equal opportunities and open government**

The Netherlands wants to be an inclusive society with equal opportunities for all. Protecting human rights is a key underlying

principle of the SDG agenda and underpins the Dutch Constitution. In recent years there has been a significant increase in awareness in the Netherlands that deprivation and poverty have many facets that interact with each other. It is not just a question of reducing poverty (SDG 1) and inequality (SDGs 10 and 5); educational opportunities (SDG 4), access to the labour market (SDG 8), and participation and access to justice (SDG 16) are equally important to achieve an inclusive society and equal opportunities.

The Netherlands ranks high on reducing poverty, holding the top spot in Europe, and also performs well internationally in reducing inequality (SDG 10) thanks to low income disparity and a high level of social cohesion and civic participation. In the new Leave-No-One-Behind (LNOB) Index in the Europe Sustainable Development Report, the Netherlands ranks sixth out of 31 European countries. However, wealth (as opposed to income) inequality is high in the Netherlands, compared to other European countries. People trust each other and the government, but in recent years they have been spending less time with family and friends or doing voluntary work. In contrast to these generally good scores, some groups structurally benefit less from the nation's prosperity, often because of cumulative negative effects. Educational attainment and migration background are the main determining factors, but gender and age also play a part. Women still have a lower share of prosperity than men, despite having an equal or higher level of education. Although the number of families living in long-term poverty is falling (to 3.1% in 2020), the poverty gap is widening. Homelessness also increased in recent years, but has now levelled off. As regards discrimination and exclusion, almost 9% of the population regard themselves as belonging to a discriminated group. According to research by the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights, people with a non-Western migration background, in particular, have experienced discriminatory treatment when applying for jobs or looking for accommodation.

As a result of the coronavirus pandemic, socioeconomic inequality in the Netherlands is more perceptible and has deepened. There is a growing awareness – now officially recognised – that institutional racism is a serious societal problem. The child benefits scandal, where thousands of parents were wrongly accused of making fraudulent benefit claims and were ordered to repay the allowances they had received,

highlighted this only too clearly and undermined confidence in the government. Action is needed on many fronts to combat social exclusion. Inequality of opportunity is a multi-layered problem because the people affected are vulnerable in many areas, including health, education, housing, employment and social security, and in the media and the political arena.

Education is a crucial factor determining the opportunities that people have. Research has shown that inequality of opportunity in education has increased significantly since 2009, but targeted policy efforts have now halted this trend. The quality of education is often lower in deprived neighbourhoods, with a less varied range of facilities available. Policy has been put in place specifically to improve educational equity, for which a collaborative effort by all relevant stakeholders is essential. This collaboration is taking place within the Equal Opportunities Alliance, an initiative of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. The Netherlands also has challenges in terms of gender equality. Although most statistical indicators are showing improvement in recent years, due to the growing employment rate among women and the narrowing gender pay gap, there is still a disparity between women and men when it comes to employment rate, wages, economic and financial independence, and the ratio of women in executive posts. Equal opportunities policy focuses on equality in the labour market, social safety, equal treatment and gender diversity.

There have been successes in the past few years, such as the fact that government policy now recognises that equity requires an unequal approach. The recent appointment of a National Coordinator against Discrimination and Racism and a Minister for Poverty Policy illustrates this point and will help the Netherlands address the challenges in the years ahead. Bills have been introduced to combat discrimination and sexual offences. The mandatory quota of women on boards of directors that was adopted in 2021 will have a positive effect on the number of women in leadership positions; central government has committed to appointing at least 45% of senior civil service jobs to women. Greater participation by young people and other target groups in decision-making has many positive effects, while the Open Government Act is improving transparency of and accessibility to public administration. The ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has been translated into robust policy that aims to make society

more accessible on every level to people with disabilities (in particular, through the Jobs and Jobs Quota (Work Disabled Persons) Act and the Participation Act). Another positive development is that vulnerable groups, including LGBTI people, are more confident about being themselves. In addition, greater priority is being given to enhancing socioeconomic security. This is reflected in the greater scope for municipalities to adapt social assistance to individual needs, in the stronger focus of housing policy on people on low incomes, and in the intended introduction of a basic grant in the student finance scheme. The Balanced Labour Market Act improves the legal status and employment conditions of payroll employees, and gives standby workers more security as regards work and income.

## Equal Opportunities Alliance

Promoting equality of opportunity is a complex issue and hence a broad societal challenge. In addition to taking policy measures designed to improve equal opportunities, the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science therefore launched the Equal Opportunities Alliance ('Gelijke Kansen Alliantie', GKA) in 2016, in which it works with schools, civil society organisations and more than a hundred municipalities to promote equality of opportunity in education. The ministry provides knowledge, data, research and financial resources through the GKA to existing or new local initiatives aimed at improving the three main social environments of children and young people: school, home and the community. Individuals and organisations within the networks are able to tackle their own local challenges and thus contribute to equal opportunities. This network approach enables the GKA to gather information about what works and why, so that effective interventions can be scaled up. And so that a given teacher at a given school in a given area can make a difference to a given pupil.

### Challenges and opportunities

Efforts to tackle inequality of opportunity are gaining significant momentum. The challenge in the years ahead will be to achieve change in the field. A key requirement in this regard is to make it easier for public bodies to take the human dimension into account where necessary. A number of issues demand special attention and, at the same time, present opportunities.

To improve socioeconomic security, more needs to be done to identify the most vulnerable groups, such as homeless people. While Dutch organisations that work with homeless people know who they are at micro level, there is no accurate overview of this group at macro level or in statistics. Access to work and income are essential, but if mental health is neglected, the solutions proposed are often unsustainable. The focus should be on people's individual needs and on the network around them. This also requires scope for a customised approach. It is vital that people are better informed about their rights and access to legal aid, especially those in vulnerable groups. Labour market measures are needed to improve the situation of the working poor, migrant workers and people with flexible contracts.

Combining out-of-school efforts with measures to achieve equal opportunities in education (SDGs 4, 10 and 11) can transform schools into places where people can develop their talents and acquire 21st century skills. To this end, links need to be forged between schools, civil society organisations and businesses so that pupils can apply their knowledge in the real world. The new Dutch government plans to make childcare for children under 4 free of charge, not only to enable women to increase their hours of paid employment, but also to bring together children from all social groups and give them all a good start in life. To ensure true equality of opportunity, stakeholders indicate that out-of-school care for children aged 4 to 12 should also be provided free of charge at school, and comprise sports and cultural and musical activities. Recognition of the value of unpaid work, including informal care, childcare, community work and participating in a green neighbourhood scheme, also enhances inclusion. The new government intends to review the minimum income standard every four years to ascertain whether it is still sufficient to meet living costs and participate in society.

Inequality has grown on the labour market, partly because of the growing number of people, especially young people and migrant workers, on flexible contracts. Women in part-time, lower-status jobs are also more vulnerable. Young people with a migration background experience discrimination when trying to find a work placement, leading to school dropout and inequality of opportunity. The new government is committed to changing this situation over the next few years. Shortages on the labour market will lead to better employment conditions, which can be

consolidated through the government's policy choices. Stakeholders underline the importance of a living minimum wage, contractual security and a certain degree of autonomy for employees. The healthcare and technology sectors both have labour shortages. It would be good to see a better gender balance in these sectors, also with a view to eliminating the pay gap. Digitalisation brings opportunities.

Gender and other forms of inequality have an adverse effect on economic productivity and on society as a whole. Because of this, it is important to continue investing in ways that help address inequality (as the SDGs and wellbeing policy do) as part of the post-pandemic recovery. Education, too, needs to do more to address gender inequality, discrimination and LGBTI issues. Different groups are now better represented in the media, in government and in politics, but there is plenty of room for improvement. One particular concern is that equal treatment legislation does not apply equally to European and Caribbean Dutch citizens; people from the Caribbean part of the Kingdom should have greater involvement.

For the past few decades, government services have often been designed to prevent misuse, based on the assumption of distrust. This has also been asylees' experience. To ensure better services for vulnerable groups, we have to listen to what they really need. More inclusive structures and procedures are required, including in participatory decision-making processes. Increased polarisation in society and politics is cause for concern. During the COVID-19 pandemic, contact between administrators and the general public changed, which may help in finding new ways forward.

### **Entry point 6: Global responsibility and policy coherence for development**

The SDGs are an integrated agenda. The Netherlands is striving to combine its efforts to achieve the SDGs at home with support for SDG actions in other countries. It is also seeking policy coherence for the SDGs at EU level, in line with the European Commission's ambition that the SDGs and the Paris Agreement should continue to guide the EU's internal and external work.

The Netherlands makes a significant contribution to achievement of the SDGs in other countries through aid, trade and investment (SDG 17), with responsible business conduct (RBC) (SDG 12)

high on the agenda. At the same time, we have to acknowledge that our negative environmental footprint abroad is large. As a result of our raw material- and energy-intensive economy and our consumption patterns, we are putting considerable pressure on natural resources and land use beyond our borders. A number of stakeholders criticise Dutch tax policy. Initiatives to make the Dutch economy more sustainable and enhance RBC will help reduce this footprint. There is an action plan on policy coherence with specific measures to further reduce spillover effects, which will help us meet SDGs 17, 12, 10 and 2, both at home and abroad. Strengthening multilateral cooperation in tackling major global challenges is important for all 17 SDGs.

According to Statistics Netherlands (CBS), the Netherlands scores average to good on SDG 17, although only a limited number of the targets are measured. We are also one of the few countries in the world to measure the effect of our prosperity on other nations' prosperity. CBS does so by examining income flows (trade and aid) and the use that the Netherlands makes of other countries' natural capital (the environment and resources), paying particular attention to the impact on least developed countries (LDCs), as recommended in the 1987 Brundtland Report. Trade and aid show a stable to positive trend. The volume of trade with LDCs is relatively high, with imports from Asia and the Latin American and Caribbean region rising and those from Africa maintaining a stable level. The trend in ODA is steady: in 2020 the Netherlands spent 0.59% of its GNI (€4.5bn) on assistance, earning it fifth place in the European rankings. Transfers have risen and are relatively high compared with other European countries. The picture regarding raw materials and environmental footprint (SDG 12) is mixed. The Netherlands' carbon footprint (SDG 13) – the total greenhouse gas emissions caused by Dutch consumption – fell by 8.2% in 2020 compared with 2019. There was a significant decline in imports of fossil fuel from LDCs, and in those of non-metallic minerals, which reduced our environmental footprint. Total imports of fossil energy sources increased, however. The Netherlands imported more biomass, which puts pressure on the natural resources of countries in other parts of the world. In both the global SDSN/Bertelsmann ranking and its European equivalent, the Netherlands scores poorly on spillover effects, coming 159th out of 165 countries and 31st out of 31 countries, respectively.

Successive governments have focused on a coherent approach to development cooperation and trade. Private-sector involvement can be a driver for sustainable economic and social development. The Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs recently investigated the effectiveness of such involvement; the resulting report and the government's response to it were subsequently submitted to the House of Representatives.<sup>11</sup> Cooperation with foreign trade and development cooperation partner countries focuses, among other things, on providing support to address the climate-food-water nexus, promote gender equality and women's rights, and give the most vulnerable groups and young people a stronger voice (see also 3.5). Building partnerships with NGOs and businesses plays an important role here. One way of promoting sustainable, responsible trade and investment is by encouraging Dutch firms to direct their activities towards achieving the SDGs. They are also expected to operate according to the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises. The new coalition agreement states that the Netherlands will continue to advocate EU legislation on RBC, and will introduce national legislation that takes account of a level playing field with neighbouring countries and the implementation of possible EU legislation. The European Commission published an RBC legislative proposal on 23 February 2022. The Dutch policy mix will be supplemented with measures to promote compliance with legislation and the application of due diligence, i.e. including conditions on RBC in contract awards and grant awards for businesses, a new RBC support office, financial incentives and sectoral cooperation.

At EU level, the Netherlands is also aiming for development-friendly trade agreements and a development-friendly investment regime, of which policy discretion is an important aspect. Under the auspices of the OECD, the Netherlands helps develop indicators to measure the SDG quality of direct foreign investments.

To enhance the Netherlands' positive impact on and reduce our footprint in other countries, policy coherence for sustainable development is crucial. The action plan on policy coherence focuses on five areas where the Netherlands can make a

<sup>11</sup> Parliamentary Paper 2022Z05526.

difference in helping developing countries achieve the SDGs: development-friendly trade agreements, a development-friendly investment regime, sustainable production and trade, preventing tax avoidance and evasion, and combating climate change. The action plan contains goals, input and indicators linked to the SDGs, and progress is reported annually to parliament. Progress has been made on the tax avoidance front, for instance, with a conditional withholding tax levied on outgoing flows of interest and royalties to low-tax jurisdictions. This is designed to prevent the Netherlands being used to channel funds to tax havens. The Netherlands and Germany have also signed a declaration on continuing their cooperation on the matter of living wages for people in developing countries. The action plan on policy coherence will be reviewed in 2022. One major result was the introduction of an SDG assessment for new policy, with a specific obligation to consider the impact on developing countries. Its use, however, needs to be strengthened.

Both the government and the private sector have stepped up their ambitions regarding sustainability, the SDGs and RBC. Voluntary RBC agreements in a number of sectors have provided the necessary push to tackle human rights violations and damage to ecosystems in value chains. Accountability has improved, with a growing number of companies and organisations issuing sustainability reports and linking their strategy or operations to the SDGs. The government is asking companies to be transparent about their RBC policy and activities. Based on a survey known as the Transparency Benchmark, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Policy provides insight into how the largest companies in the Netherlands report on their responsible business conduct. The Netherlands also helped set up the World Benchmarking Alliance (WBA), which aims to encourage sustainable business practices and measure companies' contribution to the SDGs. The WBA seeks to be a corporate accountability mechanism, motivating businesses to perform by turning sustainability into a competitive race to the top. It has developed several benchmarks, e.g. for the seed industry (Access to Seeds), the seafood industry (Seafood Stewardship Index) and agriculture (Food and Agriculture Benchmark).

## Challenges and opportunities

Despite the successes, the trade commitments and the Netherlands' considerable ODA contributions, there are some serious challenges ahead. Evaluations suggest that the voluntary agreement approach reaches just 1.6% of businesses in high-risk sectors. Only large firms are required to report on their RBC,<sup>12</sup> with half performing poorly in the Transparency Benchmark survey. In light of that, the government welcomes the European Commission's legislative proposal for a Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD), published on 23 February 2022. This is a huge step towards EU legislation on the subject. To accelerate the major transitions, we also need to improve policy coherence and further reduce our footprint in other countries. In this regard we must overcome various difficulties, but these challenges also present opportunities.

Raising awareness is the first important step towards changing people's behaviour. Consumers and businesses still know very little about the spillover effects of our production and consumption. Although value chains are gradually becoming more sustainable and the economy more efficient, overall use of natural resources is still not declining. The transition to renewable energy sources in the Netherlands has led to increased imports of metals and biomass, which has an adverse impact on the environment and possibly also on human rights elsewhere in the world (as a result of mining and deforestation). To increase awareness, stakeholders believe it is important to be transparent about spillover effects, for example through true pricing. An open, public debate about reducing consumption and refraining from certain behaviour is not easy, but is also an important step. Supporting conscious consumerism and preventing waste, especially food waste, are preconditions for reducing our environmental footprint.

Some stakeholders emphasise that global trade and financial flows should be based on equal relationships. It is important for local communities in developing countries to be directly

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<sup>12</sup> According to the EU's Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive, the reporting requirement applies to all large credit institutions and insurance companies, all large undertakings and all listed companies (except micro-listed companies). The Directive defines a large undertaking as an entity that meets two of the following three criteria: balance sheet assets greater than €20 million, a net turnover of more than €40 million and more than 250 employees.

involved when companies perform due diligence in the interests of better protecting local livelihoods, boosting ecological resilience and stimulating local economies. With this in mind, the Netherlands is investing in, for example, grassroots organisations in developing countries (see also 3.5).

There are lessons to be learned from the COVID pandemic about the challenges of taking a coherent approach to global public goods, in this case health. Three key ways in which the Netherlands contributes to global public goods are by assessing the impact of domestic policy and financial flows on other countries (policy coherence), undertaking development cooperation, and strengthening global governance through multilateral channels. This last point is essential in a global crisis, as the effectiveness of international cooperation also affects outcomes in the Netherlands. Over the next few years, the Netherlands wants to work with other countries on ways to take more concerted action to tackle worldwide challenges and future crises. A Global Health Strategy is being developed to strengthen the Dutch approach to health challenges across the world.

The transition to a low-carbon, circular economy could contribute significantly to reducing our negative spillover. Linking Dutch efforts to develop a circular economy more effectively to international trade and investment would create opportunities. To achieve this, it is important to look for business models that promote circularity and reduce carbon intensity in the Netherlands, while also creating opportunities in other countries, especially low-income countries. The different sectors involved do, however, need to have a better understanding of the risks and opportunities. Dutch businesses could contribute to the development of a low-carbon, circular economy in low- and middle-income countries, for example by providing expertise and technology, redesigning production chains and investing in local processes.

### **3.4 Sustainable development in the Caribbean Netherlands**

This section examines efforts to achieve the SDGs in the Caribbean part of the Netherlands – the islands of Bonaire, St Eustatius and Saba (BES) – focusing on the social, economic, ecological and human rights aspects of sustainable development.

#### **Poverty reduction and safety**

In 2019, to underscore its commitment to improving the livelihoods of the inhabitants of the Caribbean Netherlands, the previous government set a benchmark for a minimum income standard. The aim is to lower the cost of living and raise incomes so that everyone living there can provide for themselves.

The current government's main goal for the Caribbean Netherlands is to improve the standard of living and reduce poverty. During its term in office, the government will work towards the minimum income standard benchmark, taking a step-by-step approach jointly with the islands' public bodies to enable them to carry out their tasks more effectively. Raising the statutory minimum wage (and the benefits linked to it) and lowering the cost of living is not enough, however: the social security system also needs to be fit for purpose. The government is reserving a structural budget of €30 million to achieve its aforementioned aim.

To improve incomes on the BES islands, the statutory minimum wage and basic benefits were increased by 10% (including inflation) on 1 January 2022. Child benefit has also been raised to USD 89 per child per month. The government will submit a bill on childcare in the Caribbean Netherlands to the House this year, aimed at creating a system of safe, high-quality, affordable childcare. In addition, temporary COVID measures have reduced the costs to consumers of telecom, energy and drinking water, while the public bodies have received extra funds to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on vulnerable people. The government will look at the extent to which the €30 million funding allocated under the coalition agreement can be used to make these grants structural. Central government has taken over responsibility for grants to landlords in the social housing sector, giving the public bodies more financial scope to develop policies that will lead to a reduction in housing costs. More social housing will also be built. This policy contributes to the achievement of SDGs 1, 8, 10 and 11.

Major projects completed in the past few years in the Caribbean Netherlands in the field of security and justice (SDG 16) include the introduction of juvenile criminal law and the entry into force of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Fund Act and the robbery prevention scheme. With the introduction of juvenile criminal law, schemes are now in place enabling out-of-court settlement

of offences and specific youth penalties with clear pedagogical aims. This is in line with international children's rights. Victims of violent offences in Bonaire, St Eustatius and Saba who have suffered serious physical or mental harm may now claim compensation from the Criminal Injuries Compensation Fund in the form of a one-off allowance. This allowance serves as recognition of the wrong that has been done to them, and helps restore their confidence. Under the robbery prevention scheme, grants are awarded to enable home or business owners who have been the victims of robbery to take preventive measures. The scheme contributes to victims' feelings of safety and helps prevent recurrent victimisation.

The new government devotes a great deal of attention to the Caribbean Netherlands. Besides allocating €30 million on a structural basis, it will strive to ensure that Bonaire, Saba and St Eustatius are equal parts of the Netherlands by strengthening the labour market, tackling poverty and investing in the economy.

### Nature and the environment

The aim of the Caribbean Netherlands policy plan for nature and the environment 2020-2030 (NMBP) is to conserve, protect and sustainably use the islands' considerable natural wealth. A healthy natural environment contributes to the islands' economic development. The plan has four central objectives: 1) healthy, resilient coral reefs, 2) restoration and conservation of unique habitats and species, 3) sustainable use of land and water for the development of the local economy, and 4) creating the conditions necessary to enable nature conservation policy to achieve sustainable results. Central government is providing the framework, but implementation will largely take place under the responsibility of the public bodies.

To implement the NMBP, a one-off sum of €35 million has been set aside in the coalition agreement. Based on the NMBP, implementation agendas will be drafted for each island, setting out the strategy and framework within which they can set to work, in collaboration with central government. The NMBP contributes to the achievement of SDGs 6, 13, 14 and 15.

Implementation of the NMBP commenced in 2020, focusing particularly on protection of the coral reefs, for example by preventing erosion by removing stray livestock from public lands (as an indication, there are some 35,000 goats and 2,000

donkeys roaming around Bonaire). Initiatives have also been launched to put livestock farming and fisheries on a more professional footing and to encourage local food production.

### Human rights

Most international human rights agreements apply equally to the European and Caribbean parts of the Netherlands. In 2019, the government agreed that future human rights agreements entered into by the Kingdom will apply to both the European and the Caribbean parts of the Kingdom. However, given the essential differences between the Caribbean and European Netherlands, for example geographical location and economic and social circumstances (article 132a, paragraph 4 of the Constitution), scope has been left open for differences between the two parts of the Netherlands in implementing human rights agreements. The 2020 National Action Plan on Human Rights contains various actions to promote human rights in the Caribbean Netherlands, such as setting up a job centre in Bonaire, building extra social housing in Bonaire, St Eustatius and Saba, and cleaning up the personal records database of St Eustatius. The government is also working hard to implement the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.

### Wellbeing statistics

2021 saw the publication of 'Trends in the Caribbean Netherlands 2021',<sup>13</sup> which provides an overview of the key economic and social statistics on Bonaire, St Eustatius and Saba. The report pays special attention to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly on tourism on the islands, and the financial support given to local businesses. A Monitor of Wellbeing is also being developed for the Caribbean Netherlands,<sup>14</sup> using economic, social and ecological indicators – in this case, 72 indicators on 16 policy themes. The Monitor will be published for the first time in 2022.

<sup>13</sup> Statistics Netherlands (CBS) (2021), Trends in the Caribbean Netherlands 2021 ([link](#)).

<sup>14</sup> Letter to parliament about Statistics Netherlands' Monitor of Wellbeing in the Caribbean Netherlands ([link](#)).

### **3.5 International cooperation to achieve the SDGs**

The 2030 Agenda is a task for all nations. The Kingdom's international cooperation efforts are therefore just as important as our national implementation of the goals. The SDGs underpin Dutch foreign trade and development cooperation policy, and serve as an important compass for foreign policy in general.

#### **Multilateral strengthening of an integrated approach**

During its membership of the UN Security Council in 2018, the Kingdom highlighted the importance of the SDGs as the ultimate conflict prevention agenda, by helping to put poverty, climate change, human rights violations and water stress on the agenda as the root causes of conflict between and within countries. The Security Council subsequently adopted Resolution 2417, condemning the starving of civilians as a method of warfare – as well as the unlawful denial of humanitarian access to civilian populations.

Through long-term predictable, unearmarked funding to UN development agencies, the Netherlands is contributing to a more effective UN development system and thus supporting the implementation of the SDGs at global and country level. The Kingdom is also working in human rights forums to promote the SDGs, as human rights and the SDGs are linked and mutually reinforce each other. For instance, we spearheaded the resolution to end child marriage<sup>15</sup> and the resolution on violence against women (together with France).<sup>16</sup> This means that the Netherlands has been able to put important issues on the agenda, including at the 2018 UN General Assembly, where we took a pioneering role in tabling the first resolution on sexual harassment, as part of broader efforts to prevent and eliminate violence against women.

#### **Support for the most vulnerable people so that no one is left behind**

To achieve the SDGs, specific support is required for the most vulnerable people and to ensure that everyone is reached ('Leave No One Behind'). This is only possible if these groups are given a stronger voice and can help shape policy to deliver the SDGs. COVID-19 has curbed civil society in many parts of the world. For years, the Netherlands has been investing in building grassroots

organisations in the poorest countries as a key part of effective policy, accountability and transparency. As a world leader in this area, we recently renewed the Power of Voices programme thus reaffirming our commitment. Four grant instruments aimed at strengthening civil society were set up in 2021, with a duration of five years and a budget of more than €1.2 billion. These are Power of Voices, Power of Women, the SRHR Partnership Fund and Women, Peace and Security. Under these programmes local NGOs and Dutch civil society organisations team up to work on capacity building projects designed to achieve the SDGs.



Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, Liesje Schreinemacher during her visit to Kenya, April 2022 (photo Luuk Toormans)

The Netherlands contributed to the international pandemic response by providing support packages to prevent the spread of infection, delivering humanitarian aid and reducing the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic. UN organisations, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and multilateral development banks played a crucial role in mitigating the economic crisis in developing countries.

As a major humanitarian donor, the Netherlands offers assistance and future prospects to communities affected by natural or man-made disasters, including conflicts. The funding provided is largely unearmarked to enable the UN or civil society organisations to respond quickly and effectively in emergencies. Boosting resilience and building self-reliance are key policy components. Since 2017, the Netherlands has emphasised the need for mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) during and after conflicts.

<sup>15</sup> UN Resolution: Child, early and forced marriage () .

<sup>16</sup> UN Resolution: Violence against women (document).

Young people deserve to be heard and to have a voice in decisions that affect their future. In 2020, the Netherlands therefore launched its Youth at Heart strategy that invests in the socioeconomic prospects of youth in developing countries. The focus is on meaningful participation so that young people are 'at the table, not on the menu'. The strategy connects young people in the Netherlands and in partner countries, creating a worldwide network in which they can support each other. A Youth Advisory Committee has been formed with representatives from both groups, which gives the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation both solicited and unsolicited advice on trade and development policy. The Netherlands also has a special Youth Ambassador for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), Gender Equality and Bodily Autonomy, who influences Dutch SRHR policy and champions meaningful international youth participation.

Access to justice is one of the most important ways to safeguard citizens' rights and equal opportunities, which is a basic prerequisite for achieving the SDGs. Building on its role as one of the co-chairs of the International Task Force on Justice and The Hague Declaration on Equal Access to Justice for All by 2030, the Netherlands has set up a Justice Action Coalition, comprising 15 countries and international organisations, which serves as a platform to promote SDG 16.3. The Netherlands has also supported efforts in partner countries to improve access to justice, specifically for disadvantaged groups such as refugees and displaced persons, prisoners, victims of gross human rights violations, women, young people and children.

Achieving SDG 5 (gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls) is an important priority for the Netherlands. We therefore champion gender equality, SRHR and the rights of LGBTIQ+ people, for example by developing an international coalition of likeminded countries. In 2017, the Netherlands co-founded SheDecides, which has grown into a global platform for freedom of choice and SRHR. The Netherlands also launched the SDG 5 Fund in 2021, which has a budget of more than €500 million, making it one of the world's biggest gender-dedicated funds. In the past 12 months, several likeminded countries have expressed interest in setting up a similar fund. The Netherlands will continue to call attention to the SDG 5 Fund over the coming year. At the Generation Equality Forum, held to mark the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for

Action, the Netherlands, Canada and Malawi launched the action coalition on Feminist Movements and Leadership and the Global Alliance for Sustainable Feminist Movements. The Dutch government is also making a significant contribution towards SDG 3 by funding UN and NGO programmes for better sexual and reproductive health and rights, including HIV/AIDS. Improving health systems is another key objective.

Under the third National Action Plan for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (NAP1325), the Netherlands funded programmes run by civil society organisations in the areas of Women, Peace and Security. The fourth NAP1325 came into effect in 2021.

### **Digitalisation for sustainable development**

With the Digital Agenda for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation (2019), the Netherlands is seeking to prevent digitalisation from worsening existing inequalities. The agenda focuses on young people, women, marginalised groups and people in rural areas. The Netherlands is a vocal advocate of the freedom of expression, both online and offline. People should be able to express their opinions, take part in political and social debate, and access secure, uncensored information (SDG 16). Inclusive e-learning and digital skills will be instrumental in this (SDG 4) and in countering the effects of disinformation. Through programmes aimed at skills and jobs, the Netherlands is helping to expand young people's opportunities in the digital economy (SDGs 8 and 9), for example in Jordan, where 1,500 young people participated in IT skills training. Under the Strategic Partnership with UNCTAD, the eTrade for Women scheme is supporting female tech entrepreneurs in 17 Asian and African countries by providing them with advice and expertise.

The Digital Agenda aims to take advantage of the opportunities that digitalisation offers developing countries in terms of economic development. One example is the Orange Corners Innovation Fund, which is supporting 126 entrepreneurs in five developing countries by providing them with early-stage funding to develop innovative products or services (SDG 9), including in the digital sector. Digital economy also plays a growing role in programmes designed to create economic opportunities for refugees, displaced persons and host communities (SDG 8).

## **Coherent approach to the climate-food-water nexus**

The Netherlands supports developing countries and partnerships in order to help combat climate change and its effects worldwide. We were one of the sponsors of the NDC Partnership, initiated the Global Commission on Adaptation and set up the Global Centre for Adaptation, and also hosted the successful Climate Adaptation Summit in 2021. The Netherlands' contribution to climate finance for developing countries has increased to €1.3 billion, made up of equal parts of public and private funding. The Netherlands allocates more than half of its climate finance to adaptation. Globally, this is only a quarter, leading the UN Secretary-General to call for a 50/50 balance between adaptation and mitigation at the Climate Adaptation Summit. The Glasgow Climate Pact aims to double funding for adaptation by 2025. Together with Tajikistan, the Netherlands will co-host the UN 2023 Water Conference.

The Netherlands is helping partner countries build capacity in order to address climate change, water scarcity and food security (SDGs 13, 6 and 2) in tandem. One concrete objective is for 8 million hectares of farmland to be managed sustainably by 2030. Moreover, the Netherlands has helped many countries in Africa, Asia and the Middle East to improve water management and ensure sustainable access to clean drinking water and sanitation. The Netherlands has also supported organisations involved in managing transboundary rivers and optimising the use of water in agriculture.

## **Innovative finance and partnerships**

Small businesses and people living in poverty will be able to invest if they have access to financial services, thereby helping to create decent jobs and sustainable economic growth (SDG 8). To reach disadvantaged groups, the Netherlands is supporting the development of an innovative range of new or improved financial products and services, including digital solutions. Over nine million businesses and individuals have benefited from financial services provided under Dutch-funded programmes, and some 25 new financial products have been introduced. The Dutch development bank FMO is a world leader in the fields of social development and sustainability. Its MASSIF programme, for example, has provided financial services to 5.7 million businesses in the past year. The One Acre Fund, a non-profit social enterprise, has issued loans to 1.3 million smallholders, the Health Insurance Fund has provided 700,000 households with

health insurance and the Global Index Insurance Facility has facilitated access to climate insurance for 600,000 farmers.

The Netherlands is committed to ensuring sustainable economic development in low- and lower-middle-income countries by improving the local business climate, enhancing entrepreneurship and promoting productivity and innovation. In 2021, for instance, we supported more than 264,000 jobs and 16,700 business plans, and helped improve the working conditions of nearly 2.8 million agricultural and factory workers. To spotlight the problem of child labour, we organised a major conference in 2020 called Taking Next Steps.<sup>17</sup> In 2021, the Netherlands was the first EU member state to become a Pathfinder Country of the ILO's Alliance 8.7 – the global multi-stakeholder platform for eradicating child labour (SDG 8.7).<sup>18</sup>

The business sector can make a significant contribution to achieving the SDGs. A growing number of Dutch companies are embracing the SDGs as a sustainability compass. The government encourages them to actively solve global challenges together when trading with foreign partners. With this in mind, it organises trade missions, mainly for SMEs, focusing on challenges in SDG-relevant sectors. Instruments such as the Sustainable Enterprise and Food Security Facility and the SDG Partnership Facility support Dutch companies involved in private sector development in emerging markets, thus utilising the strength of trade and industry to achieve the SDGs. In recent years, the Netherlands has also set up multi-stakeholder initiatives to make international value chains more sustainable. Examples include the Clothing and Textile Agreement and the Dutch Initiative for Sustainable Cocoa (DISCO). In 2015 the Netherlands launched the Amsterdam Declarations Partnership. Over the next few years, the government will lobby for greener trade instruments in line with the Paris and Glasgow agreements.

The government is endeavouring to bring public and private investment in line with the SDGs, for example via trade diplomacy and agreements with companies and investors, as well as through Dutch legislation and public funding. Since public funding can be an important catalyst for mobilising private capital, the government is seeking to develop investable

<sup>17</sup> Taking Next Steps – Ending child labour by 2025.

<sup>18</sup> ALLIANCE 8.7 (alliance87.org).

projects and mitigate risk, as this will drive private-sector investment. Safeguards in trade and investment agreements to prevent human rights violations, inequality and damage to ecosystems help promote policy coherence. One example is the recent EU initiative on deforestation-free products.

The Netherlands reports on the results of its development cooperation activities on the Development Aid Portal,<sup>19</sup> linking the SDGs to the main countries and themes supported. There is also a special SDG page with policy and results per SDG. Besides information on results, the portal provides current open data about all ODA activities and the foreign trade and development cooperation budget.

### **3.6 Lessons learned and the way forward**

The Netherlands is well placed to achieve the SDGs. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the country has demonstrated resilience in most areas, although the long-term effects have yet to be seen. The pandemic has, however, revealed the vulnerability of systems and societies to external shocks. We know that we face major challenges in the form of climate change, biodiversity loss, increasing pressure on raw materials, water and soil, and the risk that inequality poses to our society. Building a future-proof society and economy is therefore a matter of urgency.

Since the SDGs were adopted, ambitious policies have been put in place to transition to a climate-neutral economy and energy system, sustainable circular agriculture and a circular economy. The Netherlands has also pursued its efforts to build an inclusive and just society with equal opportunities for all. In healthcare, employment and education, the focus is on preemptive support and achieving greater inclusion. The government is also reviewing its own procedures, striving for more transparency and accessibility. Within partnerships, we are working to promote responsible business conduct in international supply chains, and progress has been made in reducing a number of negative spillover effects. All this provides a sound basis for the government to press ahead with the sustainability transition and step up efforts to make equal opportunities a reality.

<sup>19</sup> [www.nlontwikkelingssamenwerking.nl/en](http://www.nlontwikkelingssamenwerking.nl/en).

Major tasks like these are not straightforward. Greater ambitions, increased awareness and best practices have not yet led to change on a broad scale, at the speed required. The challenge in the next few years will be to do more, and to do it faster and better. Stakeholders consulted for this VNR therefore sometimes expressed criticism, but also gave many useful suggestions to speed up the process. The lessons learned and experience gained will prepare us well for the years ahead. The main recommendations to emerge from the stakeholder dialogues are as follows.

- The stakeholders asked the government to adopt a more proactive role and provide clear frameworks. Businesses also noted that explicit agreements and a general long-term goal are prerequisites for acceleration, as well as clarifying – and, if necessary, setting clear rules for – who is responsible for what.
- The second important point is to make sustainability profitable by giving insight into actual costs (true pricing) and giving priority to social goals (value creation). Only then will there be effective incentives to make circular products and services cheaper than their linear counterparts, for example, or to make preventive healthcare a more financially attractive option than curative care.
- It is also important to set concrete interim and final goals, comprising targets and clear indicators, and to have reliable baseline data for monitoring progress and, where necessary, stepping up efforts. The SDGs provide a good reference point when setting national objectives for the tasks ahead.
- Greater coherence between policies and instruments could prevent a situation where efforts in different policy areas sometimes counteract each other. Assessing policy in light of the SDGs is a good start. The challenge is to ensure there is no trade-off between coherence and speed.
- There are plenty of excellent examples of an integrated approach, such as programmes that link education and the labour market. Invest in scaling up this kind of approach.
- Encourage and support partnerships and ensure that obstacles are eliminated. Good examples include the City Deals and the Region Deals, where central government already plays a facilitating role. Here, too, it is important to consider how appropriate approaches can be scaled up and used long term.
- A wide range of actors in society have energy, enthusiasm, knowledge and resolve in abundance. There is a great need

for knowledge sharing and collaboration. Responding to this need and engaging these actors, for instance through ongoing stakeholder dialogues, can enhance the government's own efforts. Involving stakeholders in formulating and implementing policy yields valuable insights and creates a climate of cooperation. It is important that this process be as inclusive as possible.

- Honest messages about things that need to change are essential to raise awareness even further and garner broader public support. It is difficult for everyone to change their behaviour, but that awkward conversation is necessary to be able to make the transition to a sustainable society.
- Greater interaction between efforts at home and abroad is vital to prevent negative spillover effects and create opportunities for low-income countries. By considering the opportunities sector by sector, national measures to promote circularity, for example, could go hand in hand with trade and investment in the Global South.

These challenges and lessons are not unique to the Netherlands. Many of them are in evidence across the Kingdom, despite the very different situations encountered. All countries are facing a massive task, but the SDGs offer us a shared vision of the future. The Netherlands will continue to work towards achieving these goals in partnership with others, both at home and abroad.

# 4 Aruba

## 4.1 SDG Policy enabling environment

The Government of Aruba embraced the United Nations 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) from the outset. The global shift in development towards sustainability, aimed at transforming economies and societies, while protecting the planet, is in line with the objectives of the Aruban government. All government accords since 2015 have incorporated the SDGs with the aim of enhancing the quality of life for all citizens and ensuring that no one is left behind.

In late 2015 the government set up a team tasked with starting the implementation of the SDGs, which was formally institutionalized in early 2017 as the SDG Aruba National Commission with a corresponding Indicator Working Group, a technocratic body that coordinated the preliminary work on mainstreaming, awareness raising, policy support and data gathering. In mid-2017 the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the

Caribbean (ECLAC), on the request of the government of Aruba, conducted a joint UN MAPS (mainstreaming, acceleration, and policy support) mission.

An Aruba SDG implementation Roadmap was developed through a consultative process with stakeholders and a feedback and validation consultation workshops provided feedback on the first draft, with the report "A Roadmap for SDG Implementation in Aruba" being finalized and presented in December 2017. The MAPS process introduced the SDGs to the wider community and kick-started the engagement, implementation and awareness with ministries and government departments, parliament, oversight and audit bodies, civil society organizations, the private sector, academia, youth groups, and the media. The report inter alia recommended that the SDG Aruba National Commission, strengthen the gaps in the institutional coordination mechanism towards achieving improved policy coordination, strengthening partnerships for SDG implementation, better policy integration, and more effective implementation.

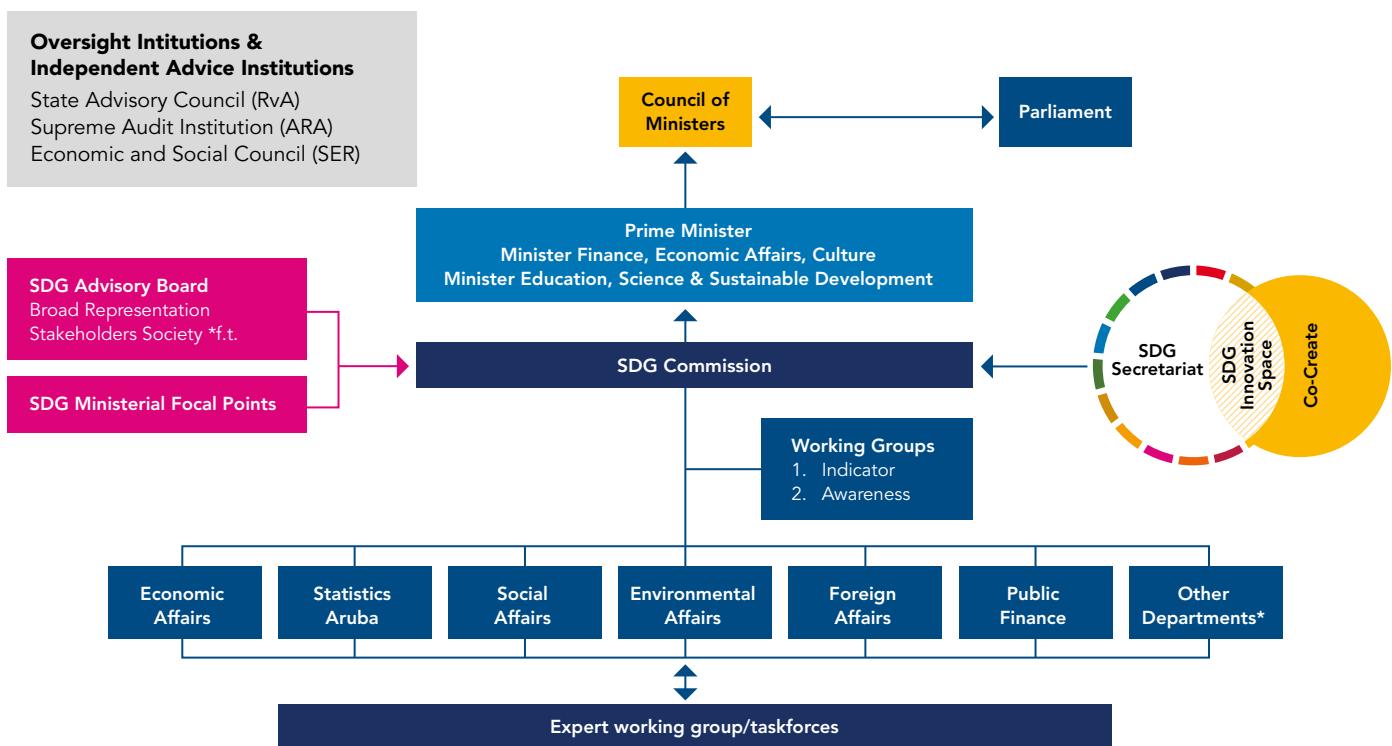


Figure 4.1. Institutional Framework for Aruba (2017-2021)\*

\* With the adoption of the legislation ministerial institutionalization (LIM 2018-2021) on the responsibilities and accountability of the ministers, shared responsibility of the SDGs between three ministers; the Prime-Minister; providing general government policy coherence, the Minister of Finance, Economic Affairs and Culture; coordinating SDG implementation and the Minister of Education, Science and Sustainable Development; developing sustainable development policy.

The SDG Aruba National Commission was reinstalled in 2018 with a higher-level Ministerial and broader representation of government departments along the 5 P's (People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnerships)<sup>20</sup>. Expanding on its previous decree, the Commission is mandated by the Government of Aruba to coordinate and give strategic direction to drive the SDG implementation process in Aruba and adheres to the UNDP proposed MAPS approach to execute its mandate.

The SDG commission focused on integrating the economic, environmental, and social dimensions of sustainable development to improve policy coherence and implementation across the board. By convening in a structured manner, it stimulated the alignment of the SDGs in a complementary manner to government objectives. The roadmap also presented outcomes of thematic areas, or accelerators which can catalyze sustainable development in Aruba, respectively. For Aruba the following 9 accelerators across the 5 Pillars were adopted.

Going from planning to action, the Indicator Working Group (IWG) was also re-instituted to stimulate informed and results-based policy making. In 2018, the process of developing the National Strategic Plan (NSP) 2020-2022 "Nos Plan, Nos Futuro" using the 9 accelerators as the basis to develop the national development plan for Aruba and for national planning to be done differently. The NSP 2020-2022 is Aruba's medium-term plan, with a long-term vision for 2030, and is one of the most important mechanisms for the implementation of the SDGs in Aruba. The nine accelerators from the Aruba "Roadmap for SDG Implementation" became the nine programs the NSP.

Using a participatory approach, Expert Working Groups (ExWGs), appointed by ministerial decrees, were instituted to draw on the expertise of the government departments, the private sector, NGOs, and academia to put forward a comprehensive NSP. The UNDP SDG Accelerator and Bottleneck Assessment (ABA) tool was intended to be used as a methodology to develop the NSP however it was dropped due to time and capacity constraints. Various additional public



Figure 4.2: Nine accelerators\* across the pillars covering social, environmental, and economic dimensions.

\* People: Quality of Life and Wellbeing, Youth Empowerment  
Planet: Natural Resource Management

Prosperity: Entrepreneurship & Enabled Business Environment, Energy Efficiency & Energy Diversification, Sustainable Tourism  
Peace: Strengthen Institutional Quality and Capacity, National Statistical System

Partnerships: Aruba as a Model for Sustainable Development.

surveys, planning and alignment exercises were conducted to foster coherence in the 9 accelerator programs of the NSP. A major hurdle was the assessment of the necessary financing of the policy actions, which also made linking the required information for monitoring purposes of the NSP difficult. A tool was developed which provides details of the proposed action with costing including the implementation description for each new or ongoing activity.

The main purpose of the IWG is to lead and coordinate the process of monitoring and evaluation of the SDGs and address relevant issues regarding data availability for the SDGs. To deal with the lack of a strong National Statistical System (NSS), a different approach was chosen to inform decision making and monitoring. The IWG focuses on assessing data availability and needs of different resources and the compilation and development of data for the SDG indicators, and the localization of SDG indicators to reflect the national context. As the technical capacity increased, several localized feasibility studies, bottlenecks and needs assessments of SDG-indicator were conducted as the first phase of a national SDG framework, such as the SDG Indicator Assessment (AMIGA) and the Comprehensive Indicator Framework Aruba (SDG CIFRA).

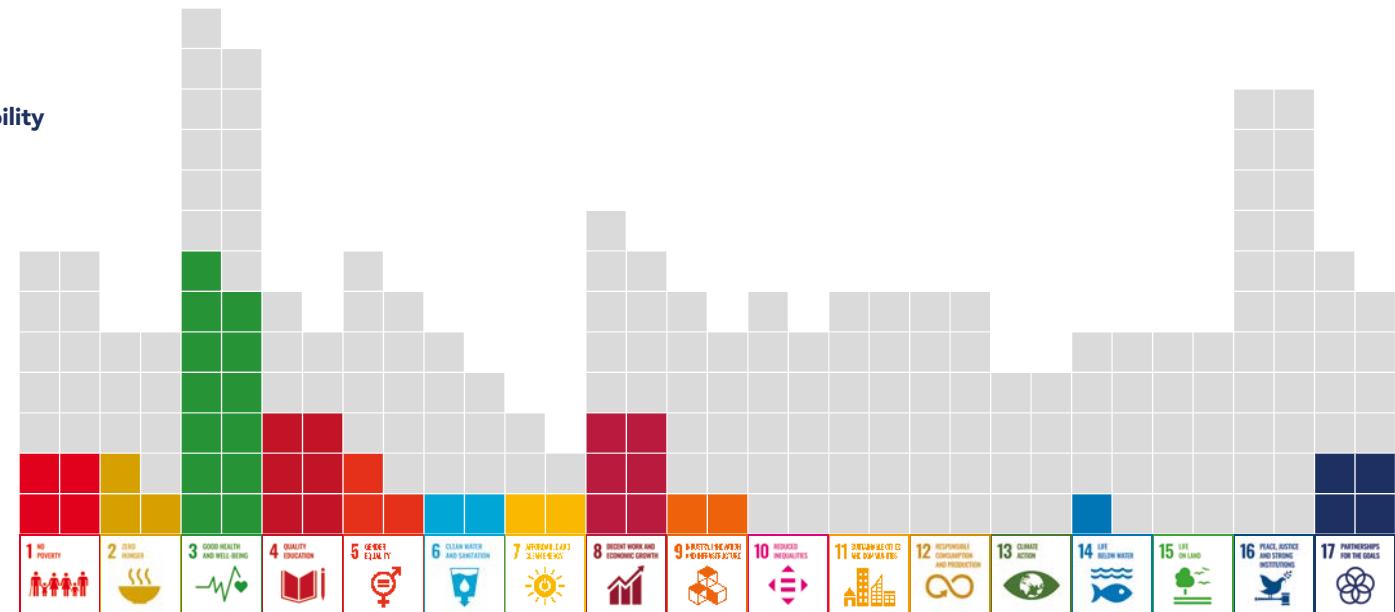
<sup>20</sup> The government departments represented in the SDG Aruba National Commission are: The departments include those of Social Affairs (DSZ), Nature & Environment (DNM), Economic Affairs, Commerce and Industry (DEZHI), Finance (DirFin), Foreign Affairs (DBB) and the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS).

Figure 4.3: Overview of update of availability of SDG indicators in Aruba\*

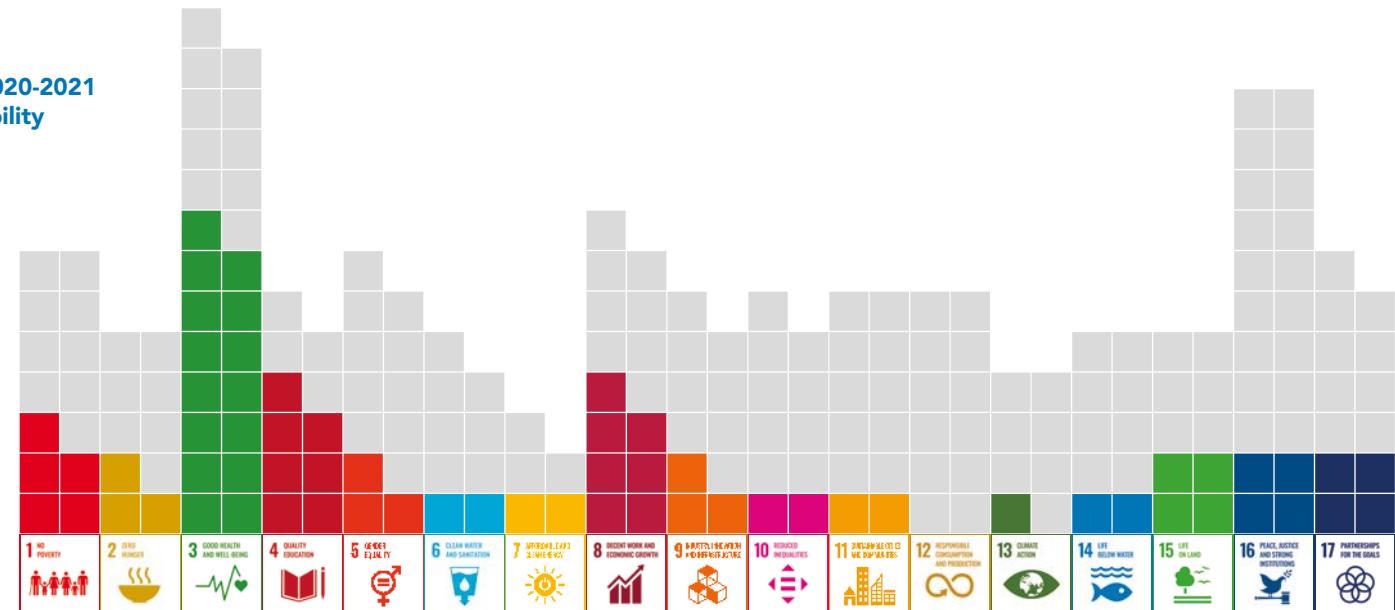
Aruba baseline indicator availability in 2018  
Aruba baselines indicator availability in 2021

\* The blocks in the figure represent the Global SDG-Indicator Framework (one block is one indicator). In some cases, one Global SDG-indicator was produced and/or localized with one or more indicators. Furthermore, indicators calculated in the baseline 2018 which did not comply with the measurement reference point used for the SDG Indicators 2021 report, were not included in the updated figure.

### SDG-IWG Baseline 2018 Indicator availability



### SDG-IWG New baseline 2020-2021 Indicator availability



A baseline measurement of SDG indicators conducted in 2018, showed that 46 indicators could be calculated. During the follow up report on SDG measurements of 2021, a total of 67 indicators could be produced. The challenge remains to address the data gaps on gender segregation, the environmental, as well as peace and justice related SDGs.

Oversight institutions conducted SDG assessments and incorporated these in their reports. In 2018, the Supreme Audit Institution of Aruba (ARA), assessed the preparedness for implementation of Sustainable Development Goals in Aruba and recognized that the government had clear intentions to implement the SDGs, and recommended that a proper foundation be laid for the realization of the SDGs, specifically in terms of mandates, definition of responsibilities and processes development of monitoring system, funding of SDGs and strengthen data collection. The ARA continuous to integrate a sustainable development approach in its reporting.

The Social and Economic Council (SER) of Aruba advises the government and parliament on social and economic policy. The adoption of the SDGs in the role of the Council and the incorporation of sustainable development in its advisory work and reports (available on their website) contributes to the whole of government approach.

On a national level the Parliament of Aruba established an SDG Parliamentary Committee starting in 2018, in line with this, the SDG Commission reported to the Parliament on progress of the SDG implementation. On the Kingdom level, the parliament of Aruba is part of the Inter Parliamentary Kingdom Conference (IPKO), which is a consultative body between all the four (4) Parliaments of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. In 2018, IPKO decided to structure their work to the SDGs. The progress of SDG implementation in Aruba together with parliamentarians of Curaçao, the Netherlands and St. Maarten is reported on during the IPKO.

In line with the MAPS based approach, to raise public awareness on the 2030 Agenda and ensure that the principles and goals of sustainable development found in the 2030 Agenda are fully integrated into national and sub-national policy formulation, planning and budgetary processes, the SDG commission instituted an SDG Awareness Working Group (AWG), comprised



SDG public service announcements displayed in the local theater.

of departments from the government, private sector, NGOs, and academia. From the outset the commission conducted a series of roadshows targeting higher Councils of State, ministries and government departments, academia, civil society, community-based organizations as well as private sector interest groups. The commission together with the AWG developed an SDG communication strategy that facilitates ongoing engagement in promoting and advancing the implementation of SDGs in the country. The SDGs were translated into Papiamento, an [SDG website](#) was developed focusing on local initiatives, posters placed on bus stops throughout the island, and videos featuring local stories on the SDGs. The videos are featured on the SDG Aruba website, are shared on social media, and run at the local cinemas and on national television.

## 4.2 Progress on the goals

With the technical support of the UNDP and ECLAC through a MAPS mission, a series of catalyst-based measures to accelerate the progress of goals and targets were developed. These considered the integrated nature of the agenda 2030, the specific national context, including the lack of institutional capacity with the need to improve the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development to guarantee a balanced development. These catalytic measures, 'accelerators,' which in the NSP have been converted into 9 programs (see figure 2) and delineated according the 5 pillars of the Agenda 2030, are an important vehicle to implement and monitor and evaluate progress of the SDGs.

The VNR process was built upon the lessons learned and evaluation of the first Kingdom wide VNR of 2017. The four autonomous countries within the Kingdom started their preparations in mid-2021, drafting a shared concept note on the objectives of the second VNR, the format and outline of the report, which then allowed each country to continue with their national consultation sessions. For Aruba, the UN guidelines were localized to the national context and planning, and preparations were made for island wide in-person consultation

sessions to be organized. Yet despite the surge of COVID-19 infections, a contingency plan was activated which allowed for virtual sessions to be conducted, with the public and private sector and CSOs. The further communication and dissemination of the VNR report will be shared in an increased interactive manner to stimulate active participation in the wider community. There is a need for the VNR to be followed by concrete action and collaboration that further drives SDG implementation.

PEOPLE		2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
1	Total population (End-of-year)A	108.651	109.164	109.241	107.932	107.457
2	Mid-year populationA	108.735	108.908	109.202	108.586	107.695
3	% Born in Aruba/Netherlands Antilles (up to 1985)B	66,2	65,7	65,4	65,4	65,0
4	Total dependency ratioA	47,3	48,0	49,0	49,7	50,4
5	Child dependency ratioA	27,4	27,2	27,0	25,5	25,0
6	Old-age dependency ratioA	19,9	20,8	22,0	24,2	25,4
7	Crude birth rate (births per 1,000)A	11,5	10,8	10,8	9,7	9,4
8	Crude death rate (deaths per 1,000)A	6,6	6,7	6,1	6,8	9,0
9	Population 65+ years (as a % of total population)A	13,5	14,1	14,7	16,1	16,9

Source: A: Central Bureau of Statistics and Population Registry Office; B: Population Registry Office

ECONOMY		2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
1	GDP at market prices (in million \$)C	3.092	3.202	3.349	2.574	2.933
2	GDP per capita at market prices (in \$)C	28.436	29.401	30.668	23.705	27.234
3	Labour participation rate (in %)D	63,4	61,0	65,1	55,3	
4	Unemployment rate (in %)D	8,9	7,3	5,1	8,6	
5	Female-to-male unemployment ratioD	93,7	97,7	97,5	86,2	
6	Youth (15-24) unemployment rate (in %)D	19,4	16,2	16,0	25,9	
7	Trade deficit (in million \$)	-71.578	47.403			
8	Trade (as a % of GDP)C	143,8	148,4			
10	Consumer inflation (Period average 24 months)E	-1,0	3,6	3,9	-1,3	0,7

Source: C: 2015-2018: Central Bureau of Statistics, 2019-2021: Department of Economic Affairs, Commerce and Industry; D: 2015: Department of Labour and Research, 2016-2019: Department of Labour and Research, Central Bureau of Statistics and Central Bank of Aruba, 2020: Central Bureau of Statistics; E: Central Bureau of Statistics

ECONOMY		2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
1	Total of nature protected area (as a % of total land area)F	20,9	20,9	20,9	24,3	
2	Coverage of protected areas in relation to marine areas (in %)F	0,0	0,0	0,21	0,21	
3	Access to basic water services (% of population)G				98,8	
4	Access to basic sanitation services (% of population)G				99,8	

Source: F: Directorate of Nature and Environment; G: Central Bureau of Statistics

Table 4.1. Aruba Key Indicator Country Overview

## People (SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5)

SDG	Target	
SDG 1	Target 1.1: By 2030, eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, currently measured as people living on less than \$1.90 a day. Data: 2010 and 2019	Steady low
SDG 1	Target 1.5: By 2030, build the resilience of the poor and those in vulnerable situations and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to climate-related extreme events and other economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters. Data: 2004, 2016, 2019, and 2020	Decreasing trend before COVID-19
SDG 2	No data trend availability	
SDG 3	Target 3.1: By 2030, reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100,000 live births. Data: 2000 - 2020  Target 3.2: By 2030, end preventable deaths of newborns and children under 5 years of age, with all countries aiming to reduce neonatal mortality to at least as low as 12 per 1,000 live births and under-5 mortality to at least as low as 25 per 1,000 live births. Data: 2000 - 2020	Steady low trend & well regulated
	Target 3.3: By 2030, end the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and neglected tropical diseases and combat hepatitis, water-borne diseases and other communicable diseases. Data: 2000 - 2020	Decreasing trend
	Target 3.4: By 2030, reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and well-being. Data: 2000 - 2020	Fluctuating trend
	Target 3.6: By 2020, halve the number of global deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents. Data: 2000 - 2020	Decreasing trend
	Target 3.7: By 2030, ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programmes. Data: 2000 - 2020	Decreasing trend
	Target 3.9: By 2030, substantially reduce the number of deaths and illnesses from hazardous chemicals and air, water and soil pollution and contamination. Data: 2000 - 2020	Steady low trend
SDG 4	Target 4.1: By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes. Data: 2008/2009 – 2017/2018	Fluctuating trend
	Target 4.2: By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education Data: 2008/2009 – 2017/2018	Steady high trend
	Target 4.3: By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational, and tertiary education, including university. Data: 2000, 2010, and 2020	Steady high trend
	Target 4.4: By 2030, increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship. Data: 2017 and 2019	Increasing trend
	Target 4.5: By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations. Data: 2008/2009 – 2017/2018	Stable trend
	Target 4.6: By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy. Data: 2000 and 2010	Steady high trend
	Target 4.c: By 2030, increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing States. Data: 2008/2009 – 2017/2018	Steady high trend
SDG 5	Target 5.5: Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life. Data: 2001, 2005, 2009, 2013 and 2017	Increasing trend

Trend Table 1. Aruba SDG Indicator trends in the social dimension

The Quality-of-Life accelerator and NSP program encapsulates various aspects and attributes of our social, health, economic, and environmental conditions. A strong focus of this accelerator is on increasing the standard of living and educational attainment while improving our mental and physical, health, particularly for the most marginalized within society. Even though Aruba does not have a national definition of what constitutes poverty, a multi-dimensional approach to poverty is being considered, which is not limited to lack of income. In 2019, 8.3% of the population lived on less than \$21.70<sup>21</sup> with the proportion of persons living on less than \$21.70 a day was highest amongst unemployed persons (23.6%).

Aruba adheres to the human rights-based policy approach and has made efforts to not leave anyone behind. During the COVID-19 pandemic an expansion of temporary social protection schemes for both business and the employed was developed through a strong collaborating effort by the government of Aruba and NGOs. Persons who (temporarily) lost their job because of COVID-19, received monthly financial assistance. In total, between April 2020 and October 2021, 12,246 persons received this financial assistance, worth 75.6 million Aruban Florins. In addition, financial assistance was provided to businesses in the form of a salary subsidy, for those that could not afford to fully compensate their employees. Between May 2020 and October 2021, an average of 1,345 employers received this salary subsidy, on behalf of an average of 16,500 employees. Due to the impact of COVID-19 on the whole of society, including the income of households was severely affected and in 2020, 23% of households reported not being able to make ends meet and pay for all their expenses. With support of the Government of the Netherlands, assistance programs were established, including a food-voucher program in 2020 for the most vulnerable, with 7,820 persons receiving assistance, which was continued in 2021 by the Government of Aruba through the local food bank with 6,201 heads of households receiving assistance.

Aruba's demographics, the Population and Housing Census that was conducted in 2020 indicated a rapid aging of the population of Aruba, the elderly (persons 65 years and older) currently

represents 16.9% of the total population, while children up to 14 years of age represent 16.6%. The rapid aging presents challenges for the provision for adequate healthcare and support for the elderly as well as for the sustainability of current pension schemes. The old-age dependency ratio currently stands at 25.4. The relatively high prevalence of NCDs in the elderly population contribute to the higher prevalence of disability in the elderly. Given the demographic shifts of the population, the government of Aruba has dedicated special attention to address the needs of the elderly.

Lifting both the living standards and the empowerment of women and girls are central to and has a catalytic effect on achieving the SDGs. Data and gender statistics are critical to building policies and programs that enhances women and men's social and economic resilience, for Aruba certain data points are lacking. Maintaining a gender lens means among other things that data must be collected across institutions and sectors, for a thorough understanding of the situation of women and girls, compared to men and boys, without this policy risks being gender-blind and at best, ignoring, and at worst, potentially worsening the circumstances. With the support of UN-Women MCO office for the Caribbean, the first national gender policy of Aruba was developed, focusing on four strategic areas; overcoming structural barriers to gender equality, increase decent work opportunities, enhancing access to justice and gender sensitive health care.

Aruba's healthcare sector is facing a significant challenge due to the high indices of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) and is posing a burden on the health and universal healthcare insurance system. A general health survey conducted in 2016/2017, indicated that 79% of persons 20 years and older are overweight or obese. Additionally, data from the General Health Insurance of Aruba in 2020 indicated that about one of every three (36.5%) of Aruba's patient suffered from at least one chronic health condition.

In line with this, a National Multi-sectoral Action Plan for the prevention and control of NCDs has been developed to address the prevention and control of NCDs over the period 2020-2030, aligned with various international WHO and regional bodies, such as the PAHO and CARICOM frameworks on NCDs.

<sup>21</sup> International Poverty Line for High Income Countries; males 8.0%, female 8.6%

Various health educational and promotion programs have been rolled out focusing on different target audiences ranging from the 'Healthy School' project for primary school age children with the objective to teach skills and attitudes to promote a healthy lifestyle and a healthy living environment, a dedicated program 'E Solo Project' for obese children, to programs for adult patients living with diabetes and to deal with self-management and a health education program "Healthy lifestyle is your Medicine" which uses a digital platform to educate the audience about healthy lifestyle habits has been developed. Through funding of PAHO it was possible to carry out some of the projects of the NCD action plan.

Advances have been made to strengthen and integrate mental health and social and emotional wellbeing at all levels. An independent provider of mental health care has been founded through a partnership between the government, the implementing body of the universal healthcare system, the national hospital and practicing psychiatrists with the goal to close at least part of the existing gap between supply and demand. This public psychiatric institution has been delivering a more integral and coordinated mental health care by delivering community-based treatment and support, doubling its total capacity by increasing its children and youth psychiatric services' capacity, in addition to an increase in the polyclinic services for adults and starting with outreach multidisciplinary teams for highly complex psychiatric clients. An objective is to develop a mental health care pathway including addiction, through a collaboration between care and service providers in the fields of psychiatry and addiction, streamlining their care and service delivery processes. Notwithstanding, the demand still significantly surpasses the existing supply.

The **youth empowerment** accelerator focuses on having an equal opportunity and resiliency needed for the youth to succeed. It considers that Aruba's youth can serve as a change agent for our society, their perspective will be the push needed for a sustainable and inclusive development of our communities. Hence, a strong focus is on education. This was however greatly challenged with the COVID-19 Pandemic. Government, school boards and schools adjusted very quickly to the COVID crisis. During the total lockdown plans were devised to adjust to the situation, with schools adopting different approaches to continue offering education, varying from in person, hybrid or



Aruba youth participating in advocacy and awareness SDG Young Voices program.

completely online. The government conducted various surveys among different school levels to assess digital access of students and schools in order determine constraints in providing digital education, which is imperative to build more resilient societies.

Participation in education is nearly 100% where children and youth between 4 and 17 years of age are concerned. In young adults 18 years and over, the participation rate in education shows a decline, especially in males. Between the ages of 18 and 24 years, 42.0% of males and 51.8% of females attend school, females staying longer in school than males. The National Education Policy (PEN 2030) used SDG 4 as its starting base and states that education is considered an essential means to promote tolerance, national identity, social and economic advancement. The UNESCO Aruba Secretariat has been mainstreaming the UNESCO Associated Schools Network (ASPnet) since June 2021. For a school, being member of the ASPnet means, in addition to the regular curriculum, putting more emphasis on the relevant SDGs, global citizenship, education in the context of sustainability and of course building peace in the mind of children and young people. To ensure equal access to education, most Aruban schools are government-funded up to the higher education level.

Youth unemployment is relatively high, when compared to unemployment in the adult population. There was a decline from 19.4% in 2017 to 16.0% in 2019. Concerted effort was made to identify topics that contribute to youth unemployment, amongst others, the disconnect between educational outcome

and the needs of the local labor market. In addition, more attention was given to the inclusion of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills in classrooms. However, in 2020 (during the pandemic), the youth unemployment rate rose again to 25.9%. Quality issues related to teaching capacity, learning and facilities are still prevalent.

To strengthen the safety of youth and children, the Social Crisis Plan program (2018-2021) seeks to strengthen the child protection system across sectors. With key advancements being made in reducing waiting lists across the system, introduction of a national child safety code legislation, providing training and certification of professionals in the sector, and a better monitoring system to foster the health and wellbeing of all children of Aruba.

## Planet (SDGs 6, 12, 13, 14 and 15)

SDG	Target	
SDG 6	No data trend availability	
SDG 12	No data trend availability	
SDG 13	Target 13.1: Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries. Data: 2004 and 2016	Decrease
SDG 14	Target 14.3: Minimize and address the impacts of ocean acidification, including through enhanced scientific cooperation at all levels. Data: 2015 - 2018  Target 14.5: By 2020, conserve at least 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, consistent with national and international law and based on the best available scientific information. Data: 2010 - 2020	Steady high  Increase
SDG 15	Target 15.1: By 2020, ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services, in particular forests, wetlands, mountains, and drylands, in line with obligations under international agreements. Data: 2000 and 2020	Increase

Trend Table 4.2. Aruba SDG Indicator trends in the environmental dimension

The purpose of the accelerator is to lead the turn around and mitigate the adverse effects of developmental activities on the environment, coordinated and integrated natural resource management focusing on policies and processes to be put in place and reviewed and addressing areas of potential tradeoffs.

The government works with different stakeholders (governmental, non-governmental, private sector) to implement the planet pillar including forging collaborations for data production. Its policy plans 'Towards a Balanced Future 2018-2021' was developed through multi-stakeholder sessions. For its next policy cycle, collaborations will need to focus on financing, technology, data sharing, capacity building and expanding its partnership modalities to further align interests and resources to support implementation. Having an integrated approach towards nature and environmental protection considering the interlinkages with health and wellbeing as well

as economic development as imperative to build a resilient future.

Structured actions on waste management remain necessary. Importing a large share of all products, has a compounding effect on waste production. In 2015, Aruba amended legislation to ban free distribution of single use plastic bags. A new law was introduced in 2019 including a ban on all importation, production and provision for purchase of single use plastics, styrofoam as well as sunblock containing oxybenzone that is harmful to coral reefs. The common linear solid waste landfilling policy has been challenged by the in 2019 Circular Economy 2050 vision. Current commercial recycling and governmental landfilling activities will be readdressed to become circular. As a small island developing state Aruba will search for bending the linear economy by closing resources cycles like water, compostable, construction waste, cooking oil and plastics on the island.



Marine and nature areas of Aruba

Aruba's pathway to circularity relies heavily on community-based recycling, private sector and social entrepreneurial initiatives that recycle material such as construction waste, plastic and cooking oil.

In its conservation efforts, Aruba realized a list of native protected species, 16 plus significant key biodiversity areas, important bird areas, mangrove and tropical dry shrub areas,

protected wetlands (RAMSAR convention) as well as the development of a marine park in the territorial waters of Aruba. In doing so, Aruba increased its percentage of Marine Protected Area to 0.207% and increased the percentage of total nature protected area of the terrestrial and inland water conserved and effectively managed, from 20.9%, to the 24.3% by 2020. With increased urbanization putting pressure on the environment, the Build with Nature policy was introduced to mitigate green areas in urban built areas. The goal is to reduce temperatures in urban built areas, creating space for water collection and sustainable energy production, protect national vulnerable species, and preserve ecological corridors and food for wildlife.

Regarding climate resilience, climate vulnerable areas have been identified with most tourism infrastructure, health care infrastructure and both low and high value residential areas located in coastal zones. Further, structured actions on climate change remain necessary, including, legislative action to ratify the UNFCCC. More is needed to diminish Aruba's greenhouse gas emissions, including climate adaptation measures, building permeable roads and rainwater catchment systems in residential areas, and open access to information on climate change and state of the environment. To further climate proof the island, youth engagement and solution activities have been organized addressing issues on deforestation and on food & climate action.

## Prosperity (SDGs 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11)

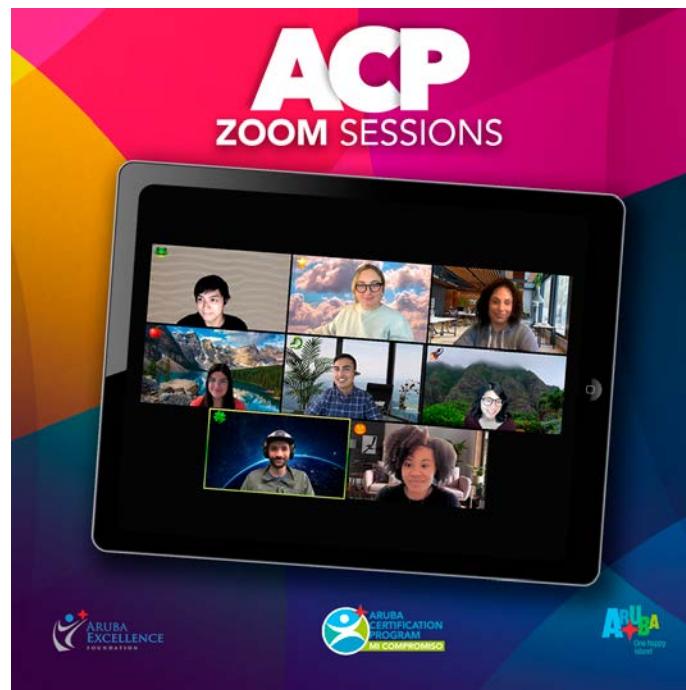
SDG	Target	
SDG 7	No data trend availability	
SDG 8	<p>Target 8.1: Sustain per capita economic growth in accordance with national circumstances and, in particular, at least 7 per cent gross domestic product growth per annum in the least developed countries. Data: 2010 - 2018</p> <p>Target 8.2: Achieve higher levels of economic productivity through diversification, technological upgrading and innovation, including through a focus on high value added and labor-intensive sectors. Data: 2010 - 2018</p> <p>Target 8.3 Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services. Data: 2007, 2015, 2016 - 2018</p> <p>Target 8.5 By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, equal pay for work of equal value. Data: 2000, 2007, 2010, 2016 - 2020</p> <p>Target 8.6 Substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training. Data: 2000, 2007, 2010, 2015 - 2019</p>	<p>Fluctuating trend</p> <p>Increasing trend</p> <p>Decreasing trend</p> <p>Fluctuating trend</p> <p>Decreasing trend</p>
SDG 8	Target 8.9: By 2030, devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products. Data: 2013 - 2018	Steady trend

SDG	Target	
SDG 9	Target 9.2.1: Promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and, by 2030, significantly raise industry's share of employment and gross domestic product, in line with national circumstances, and double its share in least developed countries. Data: 2010 - 2018	Decreasing trend
SDG 10	Target 10.2: By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status. Data: 2000, and 2019	Decrease
SDG 11	Target 11.5: By 2030, significantly reduce the number of deaths and the number of people affected and substantially decrease the direct economic losses relative to global gross domestic product caused by disasters, including water-related disasters, with a focus on protecting the poor and people in vulnerable situations. Data: 2004, 2016, 2019, and 2020	Decreasing trend before COVID-19
SDG 12	No data trend availability	

Trend Table 4.3. Aruba SDG Indicator trends in the economic dimension

The Economy of Aruba has seen moderate growth in the last decade. The premise of the accelerator activities focused on fostering new business growth by helping businesses and entrepreneurs take advantage of all the available emerging opportunities and to help them innovate. Policy efforts are concentrated on stimulating the business and investment climate. Aruba aspires toward a new economic model which is sustainable, inclusive, smart and resilient. Circular economy is an essential model to realize this. The first phase of fiscal reform to stimulate entrepreneurship has been introduced, with the introduction of a Competition Law, and to increase the ease of doing business the digital infrastructure is being enhanced. As for creating labor market incentives, in line with the principle of leaving no one behind, a strong focus is on creating opportunities for the most marginalized groups, including those with disabilities on the labor market.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on the economy of Aruba. The main factor being the slowdown in tourism. Aruba's economy is strongly dependent on international tourism as its main economic activity and income, with more than 80 percent of GDP generated directly and indirectly from tourism services. In 2019, nearly 13 million tourists visited the island and the GDP stood at 3,349 million US\$. The impact of the pandemic showed that the number of tourists dropped with 68% and the GDP with an estimated 23% relative to 2019. As a result, macroeconomic indicators dropped significantly: exports and imports of goods and services, private investment and private and public consumption. According to estimations made by means of the macro-economic model developed by the Government, the Aruban economy experienced a nominal GDP contraction of 24.7 percent in 2020 compared to 2019 followed by a growth of 13.6 percent in 2021 compared to 2020.



Aruba Tourism Authority rolling out various sustainable tourism projects. Picture credit Aruba Tourism Authority

The sustainable tourism accelerator acknowledges that tourism has been and currently is Aruba's largest industry and number one economic pillar and the need to focus on sustainable tourism, to mitigate its impact. The footprint of tourism, a greener Aruba, and the economic model go hand in hand. Aruba strives for a balanced tourism development, while maintaining its leading position in the market. The Aruba Tourism Authority (ATA), '*Destination Development Plan – Cu Mira pa Futuro* (With a View to the Future)' focuses on sustainable development, protecting natural resources, our culture while stimulating economic growth. Highlighting our assets while protecting and providing for visitors during their stay without encroaching on Aruba's resources continuous to be challenging.

The ATA promotes lowering the footprint of tourism on the flora and fauna of the Island through promotional videos used in the various hotels, in addition to vouching for low-impact adventure models through programs such as *My Promise* and *Aruba Signature Experience*. Through different engagement activities it attempts to inspire and facilitate behavioral change and collective action for sustainable development in Aruba. By educating our community to gain a deeper understanding of Aruba's history, culture, and all facts related to the destination through the Aruba Certification Program for tourist service providers. It has also launched a community awareness program called '*Ban Serio*' (Let's Get Serious) about how each action has an impact. With a focus on the following themes: environment, hospitality, culture, and security.

The energy efficiency accelerator focuses on a fast and cost-effective way to reduce expenses, on reducing greenhouse gases, creating jobs, improving public health, lowering energy cost, and improving the reality and overall growing energy demand. The transition to a more sustainable energy future is critical to lowering the import of fossil fuels. Aruba has a sole water and electricity provider with around 95% of the population having water and electricity access, due to high costs of water and energy prices this is not 100% despite payment arrangements possibilities. Renewable energy sources, such as wind and solar, generate around 18% of the total energy production. The Government is committed to localizing the principles of the UNFCCC, which is reflected in its National Energy Policy. Reducing and mitigating carbon emissions through an increase of renewable energy mix, increase in the

use of electric vehicles and by stimulating energy efficiency in homes and industry. To realize these ambitions, access to finance and funding for major infrastructural projects towards this end is imperative.



Renewable Energy, wind and solar, infrastructure in Aruba.

## Peace (SDG 16)

SDG	Target	
SDG 16	Target 16.1: Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere. Data: 2000 - 2020	Fluctuating trend
	Target 16.5: Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms. Data: 2018 - 2020	Increasing trend

Trend Table 4. Aruba SDG Indicator trends in the peace and security dimension

Aruba is a vibrant democracy, with active political participation, active civil society organizations, free media and fundamental rights, which are laid down in the constitution. Maintaining a vibrant democracy, requires public trust in government institutions. The digital transformation of government services, innovation and the strengthening of the capacity and performance of government institutions is also aimed to foster transparency and accountability.

Aruba stands to gain in institutional efficiency and institutional capacity through digitalization of its government services. The Government through a public private partnership is currently implementing a national innovation strategy of Aruba with an ambitious and comprehensive digitalization of the government program, where digital government services will be accessible 24/7. The eGovernment objective is to create a new dynamic and transparent relation between the government and its citizens: a cycle that will become simpler, more inclusive, and more productive across all segments of society.

Continued efforts are needed in upholding democracy, good governance, and human rights. Advancements have been made to strengthen these aspects by instituting a Bureau of Integrity (BIA), a central coordination point within the Government that addresses integrity violation issues. A renewed Corporate Governance Code has been formulated for State Owned Enterprises (SEO) and legislation has been proposed, drafted or enacted such as the legislation on financing of political parties, and the establishment of an Ombudsman. In December 2021, the National Ordinance Integrity of Ministers was enacted. Strengthening partners in the judicial and social sectors, a formal collaborative initiative the 'Veiligheidshuis' (Safety House) targeting families with multiple and complex problems. The objective is to prevent and mitigate recidivism, serious social nuisance, and crime.

Aruba's demographic constellation consists of persons from over 130 different countries and 98 different nationalities residing in Aruba with 37% of the population being foreign-born. Documented migrants have equal access to work, health care, education, and housing. Children with a maternal language other than the two official languages of Aruba, Dutch or Papiamento, are offered a language program to facilitate the integration in the educational system of Aruba.

Aruba experienced a sudden influx of undocumented migrants, due to the ongoing political, human rights and socio-economic developments in Venezuela. Undocumented migrants are susceptible to trafficking and exploitation, the Coordination Center on Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Aruba educates the community with training and awareness campaigns, assist trafficking victims to receive and provide information. The influx poses pressure on the social welfare system, labor market as well as on the educational and healthcare systems compounding the structural challenges faced by Aruba as a Small Island Development State. Undocumented migrant children and youth have access to education and Aruba requested and received financial and technical support from the Netherlands to this end. Both UNHCR and IOM have in country presence in Aruba due to the increased influx of migrants. Launching various projects to strengthen the immigration chain, secure the borders, as well developing and launching an awareness campaign targeting human trafficking called 'Habri Bo Wowo' (Open Your Eyes). The COVID-19 vaccination program is accessible to all persons on the island regardless of their document or undocumented status.

The data needs and priorities are a necessity for sustainable evidence-based decision-making and policymaking. Aruba lacks a robust and coordinated national statistical system which results in a limited results-based monitoring capacity. Collaboration and cooperation between data producing entities



Human trafficking and smuggling awareness campaign.

are crucial to increase the timely and relevant production of official statistics, fostering a data culture, improving data literacy at all levels of society, and addressing disinformation. To build institutional capacity, a segment of the SDG capacity building project was dedicated to data production, analysis, and dissemination on both basic and advanced level statistics. A

## Partnerships (SDG 17)

Numerous Partnership development and engagement activities have been held to spur and incentivize SDG alignment and implementation through collaborative efforts, and various UN agencies and organizations have partnered with Aruba in its endeavor to implement the SDGs and Agenda 2030 throughout the reporting period. The assistance has been framed through the regional cooperation agreement the UN Multi-Country Sustainable Development Framework 2017-2021 for the Caribbean Region. As Aruba has no official in country UN office the collaborations are coordinated through the Multi-Country Office in Trinidad and Tobago.

The Government of Aruba invited UNDESA to review its national strategic plan in 2020. These peer reviews have great value and can yield concrete impact which is able to assist advance progress on sustainable development. The recommendations were incorporated into the design of the current NSP. The UN Statistical Division has aided Aruba by sharing frameworks for assessment of indicator availability and calculation of statistical capacity. These have been used for the feasibility study and needs assessment. Both UNHCR and IOM have in country

commission has been instituted with the aim of strengthening the NSS, which will result in structural changes to transform policy cycle sustainably. An implementation plan has been produced as a first step towards this end.

The Central Bureau of Statistics Aruba (CBS Aruba), after careful deliberation and scenario building conducted the Census 2020, in a multi-mode, and adapting its method due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In the preparations for the Census 2020, additional questions were included that provide relevant information for several SDG indicators thereby enabling the production and measurement of additional indicators. The multi-mode method, started with an online Census questionnaire, a team of trained Census personnel provided assistance, via a telephone line that was free of charge, to anyone who had difficulties completing the Census questionnaire online to conduct it via the telephone. Persons and households that did not complete the Census 2020 through any of these methods were interviewed face-to-face, while maintaining strict health measures in place.

presence in Aruba due to the increased influx of migrants from Venezuela. Aruba participates in the regional UNEP Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW) program. The Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO (IOC), hosting several activities and is an active partner on the theme of sustainable ocean economy. Aruba is developing the promotion ocean literacy through educational system by investigation activities and citizen science programs. Aruba continues to consult with its partners and international organizations to find durable solutions and which are in line with Aruba's international obligations.

Aruba and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)<sup>22</sup> have been collaborating through their Directorate for Public Governance on enhancing Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (PCSD). This engagement has involved various activities such as side-events during the UN General Assembly, to workshops on the importance of policy coherence during the recovery of the

<sup>22</sup> Aruba is not a member of the OECD

pandemic for SIDS. In addition, a working paper on 'Civil service capacities in the SDG era' was produced with the OECD and based on the SDG capacity building program of Aruba. The analysis provides the major capacity areas that can support a shift from siloed policy making to more integrated approaches. Currently, OECD and Aruba developed a project to pilot the PCSD methodology of the OECD in SIDS, however, due to funding restrictions the project has not yet been initiated.

Aruba is an overseas country & territory (OCT) of the European Union (EU). Within the EU OCT Aruba participates in different programs to strengthen scientific education (SISSTEM), conserve marine biodiversity, working together on climate resilience projects, sustainable energy projects, and early warning systems.

Within the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the six Caribbean islands have formalized partnership agreements on the topic of disaster risk, nature conservancy through the nature alliance, a data collaboration to foster statistical collaboration and to provide technical assistance to each other.

Aruba is also active in south-south/north-south/triangular cooperation in various fields sharing its lessons learned or knowledge with other or learning from their experience. Aruba engaged with Jamaica to learn from Jamaica's experience with SDG implementation, in turn Aruba shared its institutional framework and integration modality experience with Trinidad & Tobago and Belize and at various conferences.

The SDGs Commission has been active in engaging local stakeholders in society, including individuals, families and communities, interest organizations, and religious institutions, civil society, academia, the media, voluntary associations, the private sector, industry, parliament and higher councils of state in support of and to spur on their agency to actively contribute and drive SDG implementation from their respective field of work. A program called the SDG Young Voices was initiated by the Commission where youth have been selected to create awareness and stimulate engagement among their peers. The young voices receive training to fulfill their roles and have engaged in community activities, including with other youth organizations and collaborates with the Youth Parliament on a project 'Voices of Change' to stimulate debate among primary school children on topics addressing SDGs.

## 4.3 Means of implementation

### Financing

The implementation of the SDG requires vast financial resources, the Aruba Roadmap for SDG implementation identified the following financing sources: domestic resource mobilization through re-aligning expenditure and delivering existing financial resources more effectively and efficiently. In the budgetary note to all government departments issued in 2020, the Minister of Finance stated the requirement to align the policy objectives to the SDGs until 2022.

The national strategic plan provides the main direct and tangible financing mechanism for the SDGs implementation in Aruba in this reporting period. However, adjustments had to be made as drastically fewer public revenues were expected due to COVID-19. An NSP-COVID note was produced at the end of April 2020 to allocate the limited public funds to reactivate the economy or generate financial benefit for the island. The criteria were based on a three-track approach of the UNDP Policy for Post Conflict Employment Creation, Income Generation and Reintegration (2009.) Resulting in a one-off allocation of AWG 4.1 million in 2020.

The following projects were initially earmarked for financing through the NSP investment resources.

Although funds were allocated for the NSP-projects it was still difficult to make optimized use of the resources available due to several aspects in addition to the focus on COVID-19, e.g. competing programs, lack of available human capacity, and technical expertise, which play a role in the process of the financing of projects. No evaluation has yet been done regarding the use of the NSP investment resources of the 2020 Government Budget. Due to the ongoing financial and economic crisis of the island, the Government's budget of 2021 had fewer funds available to allocate specifically for the NSP-projects. No comprehensive information is available on the budget allocated to sectoral plans linked to the SDGs.

NSP program	Project Name	Project Budgets in Aruban Florin	Responsible entity
Quality of Life and Wellbeing	Strengthen institutions providing care to children and teens with mental health problems, including institutions that focus on addiction and long-term psychiatric conditions	AWG. 150,000.00 (US\$ 83,333.33)	Department of Public Health
Quality of Life and Wellbeing	Develop new courses that meet the needs of the labor market	AWG. 1,200,000.00 (US\$ 666,666.66)	Department of Education
Quality of Life and Wellbeing	Capacity enhancement of all instructors/teachers in the education system	AWG. 800,000.00 (US\$ 444,444.44)	Department of Education
Youth Empowerment	Implement a more efficient data collecting system (EMIS)	AWG. 150,000.00 (US\$ 83,333.33)	Department of Education
Natural Resource Management	Awareness campaign on Community-Based Recycling	AWG. 25,000.00 (US\$ 13,888.88)	Department of Nature and Environment
Natural Resource Management	Enhance water quality monitoring program	AWG. 75,000.00 (US\$ 41,666.66)	Department of Nature and Environment
Natural Resource Management	Beach Ecology	AWG. 100,000.00 (US\$ 55,555.55)	Department of Nature and Environment
Energy Efficiency and Energy Diversification	Perform Energy Audits on households selected by Department of Social Affairs	AWG. 100,000.00 (US\$ 55,555.55)	Advisor on Energy Affairs Ministry of Energy
Strengthening Institutional Quality and Capacity	Capacity Building and IT system Department of Legislation and Legal Affairs	AWG. 1,000,000.00 (US\$ 555,555.55)	Department of Legislation & Legal Affairs
Aruba as a Model for Sustainable Development	National Awareness Campaign SDGs	AWG. 100,000.00 (US\$ 55,555.55)	Chair SDG Commission
<b>Total</b>		<b>AWG. 3,700,000.00 (US\$ 2,055,555.55)</b>	

Table 4.2. Projects initially earmarked for financing through the NSP mechanism. Source: Government of Aruba

Aruba has attempted to make an estimated costing of the financial requirement of SDG implementation by 2030, yet this has not been possible. This illustrates the need for further targeted financial and specialized technical assistance and expertise support is required to make these necessary projections.

While most FDI goes to tourism, construction and real estate, data is not disaggregated at the micro level, making it unclear how foreign direct investment and local private investment contribute to innovative projects that promote sustainability. Challenges arise to further mobilize private capital through financial instruments in this direction.

Since 2020 Aruba received support from the Government of the Netherlands to mitigate the negative impacts of the COVID-19. Interest free loans to build back stronger are contingent on structural reforms in the economy, labor market, fiscal regime, and public sector, as also mentioned in the "Landspakket". Program areas form building blocks to support the recovery

efforts and buoy the economy. Advancing socio-economic resilience will also require greater policy coherence and a long-term sustainable perspective, which consider the economic, social, and environmental dimensions intrinsic to the SDGs.

### Capacity Building

Investments in education and training programs to develop human and institutional capacities are imperative to support the implementation of the SDGs, especially in a small island state lacking the necessary institutional knowledge and capacity. In 2018, the SDG Aruba Commission received a one-off allocation of residual funds of the Development Fund of Aruba (now defunct) totaling 375,000. - Aruban Florin (Awg) (approx. 211,800,- USD). These funds were dispersed to projects focusing on the areas of the public awareness campaign, the Aruba SDG data dashboard, and the development of a capacity-building program for Civil Servants and NGOs.

After a careful procedure, ICON Institute Gbh, a German organization was selected to conduct an analysis, develop a



Civil Servants participating in the capacity building course.

tailor-made training program following a gap assessment, and provide training to Aruban civil servants and NGOs. Since the SDGs are based on a results-oriented management system, these courses ranged from general management competencies to more advanced statistical knowledge to build general policy-as well as SDG-specific knowledge to help lead Aruba to a more sustainable island through the SDGs.

Aruban civil servants, in addition, regularly participate in training provided by the UN system and its agencies, such as those by UNPAN, UNDESA, and ECLAC.

#### **4.4 Best practices, initiatives from society**

##### **SDG 4 – University of Aruba: innovative and open-minded**

As higher education plays a pivotal role in achieving the SDGs. The University of Aruba aims to nurture the next generation of innovators, educators, researchers and leaders that will be able to solve and address these pressing challenges and integrates the SDGs and sustainability aspects within the educational curricula of its various faculties. The University of Aruba also established the SISSTEM (Sustainable Island Solutions through Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics), a bachelor, master's and PhD program with a focus on sustainable development in Small Island Developing States, which aims to find sustainable island solutions for the future through multi and inter-disciplinary approaches. It will embody sustainability

policies on an academic level, while also empowering a regional workforce with the skills and capacity to make these policies a reality. SISSTEM is funded by the European Union, the establishment of the faculty is being implemented by the UNDP (infrastructure) and the academic program through a partnership between the University of Aruba and KU Leuven. The University of Aruba hopes to integrate the Center of Excellence for Sustainable Development of SIDS (COE) into this program.



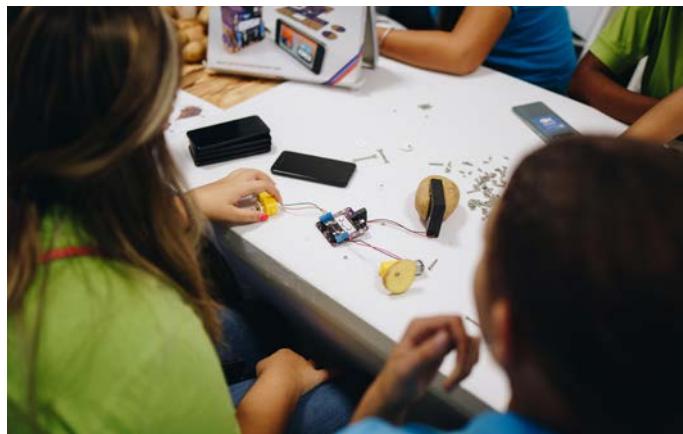
Students engaging with technical lab equipment at the SISSTEM program. Picture credit University of Aruba

##### **SDG 5 – Futura Aruba's SDG Innovation Lab - Supernova: Experimental Pop-Up Studio for Girls and Women**

Harnessing the meaning of SDG 5, achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls, Supernova aims to empower more young women and girls by developing their skills as current and next-generation of purpose-driven innovators. In this context, Futura developed a project 'Stem the Gap!', with the aim of contributing to reducing the gender gap that exists in the STEM fields educational attainment by sparking an interest in STEM among girls and encouraging them to pursue a path in STEM education. A program addressing self-

image, based on 'Self-Love' was developed focusing on innovating as human beings to be able to be accepted and be empowered.

## Supernova EXPERIMENTAL STUDIO



Empowering girls and women in Aruba. Picture credit Futura

### **SDG 8.9 - Bucuti and Tara Beach Resort, Achieving Carbon Neutral Certification**

The Bucuti & Tara Resort, located in Aruba, is a pioneer in the field of introducing sustainability in the tourism sector and has become the Caribbean's first – and still the only – hotel to achieve carbon neutral certification. Proving that a memorable vacation experience and sustainability can be mutually inclusive it was awarded the prestigious UNFCCC- Global United Nations 2020 Climate Neutral Now Award for its efforts and was the first hotel globally to receive this award. Conscientiously striving to

become a responsible steward of the environment, installing solar panel system, decreasing its waste stream by banning single use plastics and styrofoam before the legislation, there are elements of cost savings, Bucuti does not view sustainability or being net zero as a cost-cutting measure, rather, it is truly protecting the planet, minimizes Bucuti's impact on the world, mitigates global warming and preserves Aruba's pristine nature. This is a success story of a small company that has achieved environmental preservation that is highly scalable for even large business.



The Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort the Caribbean's first hotel to achieve carbon neutral certification. Picture credit Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort

### **SDG 9 - Aruba's Queen Beatrix International Airport Flying High Destination Sustainability**

The Aruba Airport Authority (AAA) is advancing the efforts already made by the aviation sector by incorporating a policy of integral management of its Greenhouse Gas emissions. Currently part of the 1st level of certification of the Airport Carbon Accreditation Program, Aruba's Queen Beatrix International Airport underlines its commitment and responsibility regarding environmentally sustainable actions, becoming a reference airport in South America and the Caribbean, not only for the quality of its services but also for the



Aruba Airport Authority multi-use car and solar park and giving back to the community. Picture credit Aruba Airport Authority

various actions implemented in favor of the fight against climate change. Additionally, as part of the Environment & Sustainable Airport Community goal, the 'Wings of Hope' community program based on five of the SDGs is making a positive impact in the Aruban community.

## SDG 14 - ScubbleBubbles - Youth Organization Restoring Coral and Healthy Marine Life

The ScubbleBubbles Foundation is a youth organization creating more local youth active involvement in coral restoration and conservation, reef surveys and fish population research. Starting off as a scuba youth club, soon after viewing the state of the coral, realization sunk of the need for an active coral restoration and preservation of ocean assets organization in Aruba. Currently, with two coral nurseries that grows six different coral structure, the empowered youth volunteers, are planting corals, doing underwater clean-ups at popular beaches and give presentations to other kids creating a generation of environmentalists, conservationists and create more knowledge about marine life.



Reef care and conservation methods underwater. Picture credit ScubbleBubbles Foundation

## **SDG 15 - From National Park Foundation to Nature Conservation Paving a Sustainable Path**

The Fundacion Nacional Parke Arikok (FPNA – Foundation National Park Arikok) is changing from a park management organization to an ecosystem and biodiversity-based nature conservation and management organization. The decision to shift from park management to conservation management has been because of the increased pressure on nature. Decreasing the impact of visitors on nature protected areas at the same time increasing the experience to its visitors, spotlighting species conservation projects for the Aruba burrowing, restoring Aruban wetlands and the marine protected areas, and biotic research on seagrasses, mangroves, and corals. Working



Conservation both nature on land and in the water. Picture credit  
Fundacion National Parke Arikok

towards international certification for sustainability and creating a local credential, the visitor center build infrastructure is equipped with a rain harvesting systems, solar panels, LED lighting. The FPNA works with the SDGs and is a champion to Aruba's sustainable development efforts through leadership excellence in the integrated and inclusive conservation of Aruba's natural and cultural heritage.

## **SDG 17 - Center of Excellence for the Sustainable Development of SIDS**

UNDP supported the establishment of the Centre of Excellence (COE) for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (SIDS), an initiative of the Government of Aruba, the Kingdom of The Netherlands, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Based in Aruba, the COE served all SIDS worldwide, offering a platform for South-South Cooperation between SIDS, as they addressed their common sustainable development challenges, in addition to facilitating the exchange of knowledge and experience. It aimed to strengthen the resilience and capacity of SIDS around the world, on issues such as innovation, renewable energy, climate resilience, public-private partnerships, water management, tourism, environment, and public health. Its initiatives included online courses on renewable energy (in cooperation with Hamburg University), the development of an online repository of knowledge on the SDGs in SIDS, and in-country technical assistance to selected SIDS, including Antigua, Jamaica, the Seychelles and Vanuatu that it carried out in collaboration with the Dutch Scientific Organization TNO. By offering a platform for island-to-island cooperation, Aruba was involved in building bridges between islands of knowledge.



Sharing sustainable island solutions through the Centre of Excellence.

## **4.5 Lessons learned, emerging challenges for the future**

Aruba is one of the early implementers of the SDGs and among the first ten countries globally to receive a MAPS mission to develop an SDG implementation roadmap, which was able to set up a robust institutional framework with a centralized SDG commission mandated to provide strategic direction and implement the SDGs in Aruba. Forming a solid foundation together with its subsidiary bodies, working groups, government departments and engagement strategy with local stakeholders, it has been paving the way for the implementation the SDGs in Aruba.

Despite many efforts, the global COVID-19 pandemic has set us back in achieving the SDGs and served to further highlight our vulnerabilities and emerging challenges to build a more resilient future. In fact, the advent of pandemic has resulted in a negative growth rate in 2020. The economy is not expected to fully recover until 2025.

The biggest lesson learnt in the process has been the strong emphasis and success on the development of many policies and plans and less on joint program implementation, resource mobilization and access to finance, which has challenged operationalization, coherence and effective implementation of policies and plans. This was exacerbated during COVID-19 as Aruba strives to recover from the pandemic with limited human and financial capital to benefit a better life for all in the Aruban community.

In this context, a continued challenge remains the development of a National Statistical System and production of remaining SDG indicators and a results framework for monitoring and evaluation of policy, which is imperative for informed decision and policy making and timely monitoring & evaluation of policies and plans. Policy coherence will also serve to create more effective planning and implementation.

The protracted COVID-19 pandemic, and allocation of financial resources to mitigate the negative economic impact especially on vulnerable groups, has further reduced financial resources necessary to build a more resilient future. As government budgets are insufficient to cover the required investments and the levels of private sector investment and FDI have been low,

reducing future non-sustainable expenditures, and delivering existing financial resources more effectively and efficiently is essential. This will require, developing new (international) partnership modalities that can advance private capital mobilization and FDI, targeted especially in innovative projects that promote sustainability.

For this we will need to strengthen the transformative impact of the policy enabling environment requiring an integrative approach, and a rethink on inclusive and strengthened governance mechanisms. Significant investments, both human, financial and technological for targeted capacity building for a strengthened institutional capacity. Access to technology and finance to invest in transformative changes to change our economic model and diversify our economy and attracting investments to mitigate and adapt to climate change. Without this, realizing the needed change and results offered through SDG implementation remains difficult to measure whether efforts have resulted in the desired impact in society. Aruba may be at cross-roads but achieving progress will take time, as much remains to be done.

## **4.6 Conclusion and next steps**

With determination, Aruba started its 2030 agenda by pinpointing nine accelerators. After five years some areas have accelerated, some have stagnated, and some are at a point where the development gains could be lost as shown in the data trend. The COVID-19 caused a setback and the pandemic made it clear that 'business as usual' is not an option. Aruba's COVID recovery plan "Repositioning Our Sails", has been aligned with the SDGs, also containing the collective aspirations and actions towards sustainable development. The next NSP medium-term plan for the period 2023-2026 will focus on integrating the national reform programs. As the NSP has been developed based on the 5 SDG pillars, the SDG approach and focus on the economic, social and environmental dimensions, will help align initiatives and foster policy coherence for stronger impact.

The five-year efforts in this report made it clear that Aruba is committed and should continue to be committed, and that sustainable development must be a sustained and dedicated whole of society effort. The reality is that this is a time of increasingly interconnected global challenges, such as climate

change, pandemics, rising inequalities and digital transformation, concerted effort and multi-sectoral collaboration at the local and international level is imperative. This can be addressed most effectively by strengthened multilateralism, reinforced democracy and improved public governance, with mutually reinforcing actions that facilitate assessing impact at the local level. For Small Island States such as ours, this needs to be accompanied by sustainable financing options that are relevant

in the context of our multi-dimensional vulnerabilities and need to have high value with low ecological impact. Inertia will be too costly, environmentally, socially and ultimately economically. Impact counts at the local level. To fortify community engagement and make sure to leave no one behind, additional emphasis will be made to further transform and reinforce commitments into actions for an improved wellbeing for its citizen.

# 5 Curaçao

## 5.1 Introduction

In 2016 Curaçao adopted its National Development Plan (NDPC) and was one of the first countries to link the SDGs to its national development plan. The plan was developed using a very broad stakeholder engagement process, and came about after the country became an independent country within the Kingdom of the Netherlands on October 10, 2010. Nation building has been, therefore, an integral part of the NDPC. The NDPC, titled 'Building on strengths', has five themes that are linked to four SDGs (see figure 5.1).



Figure 5.1: NDP priorities embedded in the SDG's

Curaçao started its journey towards localizing the 2030 Agenda in 2018 with a MAPS (Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support) mission led by UNDP in which the alignment of our NDPC and other policy documents to the SDGs were analyzed and priorities were fine-tuned through a participatory approach. From this analysis emerged a Roadmap where accelerators and drivers were identified that would fast-track the achievement of the SDGs. In the Roadmap SDG 1 No Poverty and SDG 3 Good Health and Wellbeing were explicitly added to Curaçao's Priority SDG's. Curaçao has deliberately chosen to focus on deploying its limited human and financial resources where it is needed most, hence using these six SDGs as means to achieve the other 11 sustainable goals. With the Roadmap, Curaçao has thus clearly mapped out the vision for these priority SDGs, which

local actions it must take to tackle effective SDG implementation in a timely manner, and which bottlenecks hinder such implementation. Official data is also explicitly reported on the six priority SDGs and will be expanded in the future to include data on the local performance indicators. A dashboard is being developed to be able to monitor and communicate progress on achieving the SDGs with the community, the indicators will make the progress more quantifiable and easier to review periodically, also by peers. Periodical reviews will make it easier to adjust where necessary and hence making the process of achieving the SDGs more transparent to the community.

Another important outcome of the Roadmap is that an organizational structure has now been established within the government with a strong link to society. In this structure, the integrality of the agenda clearly emerges by having all government ministries work together and a clear responsibility for the Statistical Commission, led by our Central Bureau for Statistics (CBS-Curaçao) (see section 3.1). The link to society is materialized through Roundtable sessions, the annual SDG Action Week, and information sessions at schools and special events.

The collaboration between the government ministries has resulted in the 2017-2021 Government Program and its associated budgets being linked to the SDGs in 2019. The Result Based Management (RBM) method offered support for linking the SDGs and hence making SDGs finance in Curaçao more concrete and transparent. This process gave a good first impression on how much of the government spending can be attributed to which sustainable goal. The new government program that will be implemented in March 2022 will also be linked to the SDGs as well as our government budget 2023.

### Methodology

As in 2017, the elaboration of this VNR report has once again ensured a further strengthening of the structure in government and especially the link to society. This was done by explicitly involving stakeholders (companies, NGOs and representatives from different social groups) in the review and using their stories and data in this report. In our 'spotlights' you can find the outcomes of our stakeholder engagement sessions, in which NGOs, private sector and academia were invited to give a two-minute-pitch in which they elaborated on their project(s) and how it contributes to the SDGs.

The Social Economic Council (SER) has independently reviewed this report and helped to produce an objective report that shows where Curaçao has important steps to take in the coming period. A lecturer at the Faculty of Social and Behavioral Sciences of the University of Curaçao [insert footnote: G. Marcano] has independently reviewed this report to give feedback on where Curaçao has important steps to take in the coming period.

Governmental information in the entry points used in the next section to evaluate on the SDGs is linked to our official data on SDG-indicators delivered by our Statistical commission on SDGs. As this data is not always available we do give an indication on the course of the development of the related SDG-target, based on other relevant data available through official data providers or our own qualitative analysis of progress in policy-making and execution. We use ( $\uparrow$ ) for progress, ( $\rightarrow$ ) for stagnation and ( $\downarrow$ ) for decline in the SDG. Not all supporting data and other information can be included in this report, therefore we will provide a more extensive digital overview of our data and our progress in a voluntary local review (VLR) on our [www.curacao2030.cw](http://www.curacao2030.cw) website.

For this voluntary review we choose to report based on the entry points as presented in the Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR). These entry points are:



Figure 5.2: Overview of the Six Entry points from the GSDR-report.

These entry points make it possible to inform the global community on our progress, while making the information more accessible to our community. We use the entry points to see what we have achieved in recent years in the context of the

major challenges we have for the future, although we do not currently have all the data to substantiate our progress made in achieving the SDG targets. Figure 5.3 gives an overview on how our local accelerators as defined in our Roadmap are linked to the SDGs and these entry points.





Figure 5.3: Overview of how the GSDR entry points (left column) are linked to Curaçao's local accelerators (middle column) and the SDGs (right column)

## 5.2 Human capabilities and well-being

Curaçao has taken several steps towards the promotion of human well-being and capabilities of its citizens. The focus in this area is to ensure equal access to quality education, for our citizens must be enabled to take ownership of their lives and live together in harmony. Education is also crucial to combat poverty in all its forms and increase the resilience of those living in poverty and those that are most susceptible to fall into poverty. The well-being of our society furthermore entails that our citizens have a healthy lifestyle, are protected against health risks and live, work and recreate in an environment that promotes good health.

### Improved education

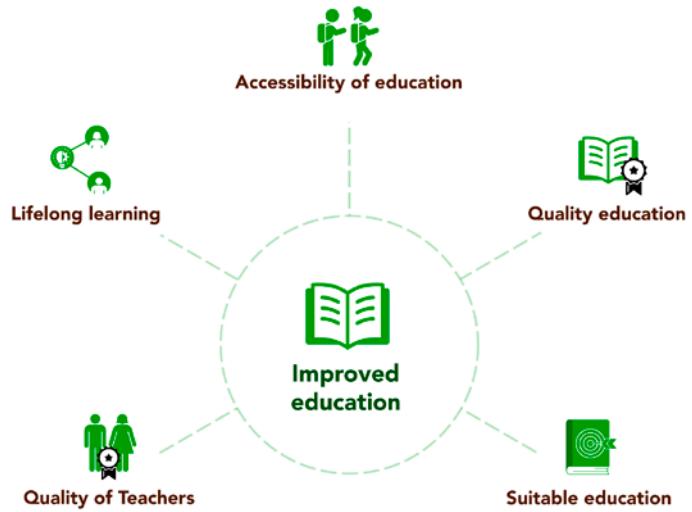


Figure 5.4: Outcomes for the accelerator improved education.

In Curaçao we see formal and informal education as important foundations for our society, with a special focus on the development, social security and well-being of our citizens in general, therefore leading to the broadening of prosperity in Curaçao. High quality education is actively being promoted, which contributes to active citizenship, broad social participation, social inclusion and opportunities for citizens to participate actively in the labor market. To achieve this vision the Government of Curaçao is working towards achieving five outcomes. These outcomes are shown in figure 5.4.

## Data at a glance

SDG Target	4.1.2	4.3.1	4.4.1
Official SDG indicator			Proportion of youth and adults with information and communications technology (ICT) skills → 43.37% (2017)
Other National Data	% of positive exam results lower and part of upper secondary education →	Total number of students per education level →	

Table 5.1: GOAL 4 Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

## Measures and development since last VNR

In 2020 the "Curaçao education agenda" was conceptualized as a framework within which agreements are laid down that will be concretized (2020-2022) and implemented. The main goals of the Agenda are to realize high-quality education within a safe and functional learning environment with sufficient available resources through collaboration. This Agenda furthermore seeks to increase quality through effective alignment between the educational curriculum and the modern demands of society and in particular the labor market and to enforce a sense of responsibility for solving contemporary local and global issues (global citizenship). It also seeks to make and keep education accessible for everyone, while controlling the spending on education. Policy guidelines on f.e. vulnerable groups, school safety, distance learning and language within our education have been finalized and executed in recent years within this agenda.

In the Country Package Curaçao ('Landspakket') preliminary steps have been taken towards the realization of structural reforms and investments to build higher resilience and enhance the educational system. In order to do this an expert group of the four countries within the Kingdom (Aruba, Curaçao, the Netherlands, and St. Maarten) will carry out an assessment of the entire educational system of Aruba, Curaçao, and St. Maarten. 30 Million Euro has been bookmarked by the government of the Netherlands to tackle deferred maintenance of educational housing in Curaçao.

## Reduced Poverty



Figure 5.5: Outcomes for the accelerator reduced poverty.

'Family and youth', as well as 'work and social development' play a central role within the social development domain of Curacao. The aim is to provide an inclusive design for various forms of social care, including care for the elderly, care for the disabled and people who are in a social-financial disadvantaged position. To achieve this vision the Government of Curaçao is working towards achieving 9 outcomes. These outcomes are shown in figure 5.5.

## Data at a glance

SDG Target	1.2.1	1.5.1	1.5.3	1.5.4	1.a.2	10.1
Official SDG indicator		Number of deaths, missing persons and directly affected persons attributed to disasters per 100,000 population ↑ 0.67 (2010)			Proportion of total government spending on essential services (education, health and social protection) ↓ 27.4 (2018)	
Other National Data	Census Houdseholds below poverty line ↓ 25.1% (2010)		National disaster risk reduction strategies in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction ↑	Risk profile established and special bureau dedicated to disaster risk management ↑	Gini 0.42 ↓	

Table 5.2: GOAL 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere, GOAL 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries

### Measures and development since last VNR

Several policies and related projects have been initiated to reduce poverty and to empower vulnerable groups, the youth and families. One such policy is the data driven 'Curaçao Social Development Agenda' (2019), where different projects are strategically implemented in the three focus areas 'people', 'neighborhood' and 'work'. Based on the concept of 'neighborhood development' Curaçao established the so called "Kasnan di bario" (neighborhood houses), which function as service points of the relevant ministry and are located in the different districts of Curaçao. This makes the service more easily accessible and close to the clients. Especially at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, when there were direct economic consequences on the labor market, this neighborhood approach turned out to be extremely valuable and effective.

Remarkably, COVID-19 also marked the beginning of a much-needed reform of our welfare system and the labor market. To this end the government must consult with its social partners on how to effectively prepare workers for available and new jobs taking the changing dynamics of the local labor market into account. In close cooperation with the Development Bank a project has been started to develop a highly skilled, knowledgeable, and motivated labor force that will attract Direct Foreign Investment in specific sectors of the economy.

Furthermore the ministry in charge of labor affairs has formed partnerships with different NGOs and private companies to stimulate the entrepreneurial mindset (self-employment/job creation) among the unemployed, especially the youth. These included successful pilots like "Youth BIZ Startup" (by Fundashon Negoshi Pikiña) and "Mikro Fiansa" (micro financing by Korpodeko). These types of collaborations are set to be continued in the near future.

When it comes to the sense of safety of its citizens and domestic violence, Curaçao has prioritized the implementation of the "Plan Nashonal Kontra Abuzu di Mucha, Violensia Domestiko i Relashonal" (National plan against child abuse and domestic violence). Four ministries worked together with relevant stakeholders of the civil society to emphasize the safety of citizens, empowering victims of domestic violence and abuse, and raising awareness on the consequences of violence and abuse within the communities. A local Children's Rights Platform was set up in 2018 to promote collaboration between governmental and non-governmental organizations working for children. Projects on sexual education, on breaking the cycle of violence, and intensive family counseling services are executed or are still ongoing. Another initiative in this area was the completion and presentation of an assessment report of the feasibility to establish a sheltering framework for seriously

threatened victims of domestic violence between the islands in the Dutch Kingdom in December 2021. This report offers directives and recommendations to sections of the Dutch island governments, non-profit organizations, and working groups that address domestic violence on their respective islands. The implementation of these recommendations will start in 2022.

Other interventions in this area that were established or improved were the targeted detection of domestic violence by setting up a police unit to tackle domestic violence and abuse specifically, and revising the Public Prosecution Services, legislation for the issuance of restraining orders, and treatment of perpetrators by restorative justice activities and offender-aid in prison. At the moment much attention is given to the introduction of a "Reporting Code Domestic Violence and Child Abuse" and its legal framework.

## Healthy Population



Figure 5.6: Outcomes for the accelerator healthy population.

Curaçao has been working since 2017 towards the transformation of the current healthcare system into a new system in which the citizen and his needs are central, while care is organized and offered in an accessible, professional, chain-related and cost-effective manner. The transformational process is based on the "Integrated Health Services Delivery Network" model (IHSDN) developed by the World Health Organization/ the Pan American Health Organization (WHO/PAHO). To achieve this vision, the Government of Curaçao is working towards achieving 2 outcomes. These outcomes are shown in figure 5.6.

## Data at glance

SDG Target	3.1.2	3.2.1 / 2	3.3.1 / 2	3.4.2	3.5.2	3.6
Official SDG indicator	Proportion of births attended by skilled health personal → 100% (2017)	Under 5 mortality rate / Neonatal mortality rate → 10.3/8.4 (2017)	Number of new HIV infections per 1,000 uninfected population / Tuberculosis incidence per 100,000 population → 0.5/ 0.056 (2017)	Suicide mortality rate (per 100,000 population) ↑ 6.2 (2017)	Alcohol per capita consumption (aged 18 years and older) within a calendar year in liters of pure alcohol ↑ 5.2 (2017)	Death rate due to road traffic injuries (per 100,000 population) → 7.0 (2020)
Other National Data						

Table 5.3: GOAL 3 Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

## Measures and development since last VNR

Curaçao implemented various projects and trajectories to reform the healthcare model and protection of the environment. These reforms also include the reform of governance and strategy, organization and management and financial allocation and incentives. The program "Traha huntu pa un Korsou Salú 2025" - Working together for a Healthy Curaçao 2025, introduced a working method based on transparency, communication, harnessing the power, future-proof and program funding. When it comes to the prevention of non-communicable diseases, Curaçao introduced its "National Multisectoral Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases" (NCD MAP). NCD MAP addresses Curaçao's four leading NCDs (i.e. cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease), the five shared risk factors (i.e. tobacco use, the harmful use of alcohol, unhealthy diet, physical inactivity and air pollution), as well as the underlying determinants. Mental Health is an important condition to consider when addressing NCDs and is covered by a specific plan covering the period 2019-2022. More is elaborated in the VLR.

## Improve sense of Safety for family & youth



Figure 5.7: Outcomes for the accelerator empowered youth.

An improved sense of safety for our families and especially our youth is seen as an integral part of Curaçao in 2030. The focus in this area is to increase the opportunities and possibilities of children and young persons in Curaçao, and to equip families

with the tools to be able to provide the necessary care for their children. Curaçao also focuses on improving the resilience of our youth so that they become reluctant to a life of crime. To achieve this vision the Government of Curaçao is working towards achieving 5 outcomes. These outcomes are shown in figure 5.7.

## Data at glance

SDG Target	16.5.1	16.6.1
Official SDG indicator	Proportion of persons who had at least one contact with a public official and who paid a bribe to a public official, or were asked for a bribe by those public → 0.67 (2010)	Primary government expenditures as a proportion of original approved budget → 27.4% (2018)
Other National Data		

Table 5.4: GOAL 16 Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

## Measures and development since last VNR

Curaçao developed a Strategic Policy plan in 2017, focused on youth protection and combating and preventing youth crime, resocialization, and law enforcement and public order and security. Curaçao is merging and allocating a central reporting point for its organizations working with minors, youth, and victims which will finalize and be fully operational in 2023. Reorganizing the legal duties of these organizations improved the service delivery to the aforementioned group and improved the cooperation between these organizations.

The organizations working with minors, youth, and victims give training or have other activities focused on the group that they target. These organizations held different campaigns focused on prevention these last 4 years like "Sende Sende", an awareness campaign focusing on alcohol, drugs and sexual themes among the youth, and the weekly radio program "Hustisia, Seguridad i Abo", where issues of the entire judicial chain are being discussed. There is furthermore a Restorative Justice working group which is performing the awareness campaign in schools "Legumai beef, por otro" ("never mind quarrel you can choose differently"). Restorative Justice is a new approach to offender training. This approach has been

implemented in some cases in Curaçao and has been very successful. On moral issues different initiatives have taken place, as the signage of a protocol between the Ministry of Justice, the Police force and the Public Prosecutor's office, a project to upgrade the Moral Unit to be better enabled to accommodate the reporting of sexual offences on minors and female victims that are not minors and adoption of an instruction ("Instructie Zeden") that provides a framework and rules for the criminal law approach to moral cases as referred to in our Criminal Code.

Curaçao is also working on several legislative upgrades that are necessary to improve the safety of our youth and families, like a national ordinance to make the registration of both parents of a child compulsory.

### Youth and human Trafficking

In the criminal code of Curaçao, trafficking is punishable and special attention is paid at the airport to children passing through accompanied by adults. The Guardianship Protocol, which applies to the Kingdom, provides that strict conditions must be met if a child is to leave the country. In the last years there have been no events of human trafficking of children registered.

Curaçao recently launched an awareness campaign on trafficking in persons on the internet<sup>1</sup>, television and radio amongst others. A budget has been made available for the next three years although resource allocation is currently extremely difficult.

Several training sessions on human trafficking were given in these last years. The training took place in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The content of the training was focused on recognizing human trafficking. The need for training of our officials is continual and we appreciate the different training that are offered both through NGOs as through the Dutch and US Government.

### Article 3 ECHR

Curaçao is not a party to the Refugee Convention. Instead, protection of refugees is materialized through art 3 of The European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). This leads for adults as well as for children to situations that are juridical

complicated, as the responsibility of the Kingdom and Curaçao as a country in this matter are under discussion.

### Collaboration with science and academia

The National University of Curaçao, Dr. Moises da Costa Gomes, is an important cooperation partner for aspects of human capabilities and well-being. It concerns studies to map out the gaps between the Convention on the Rights of the Child and local legislation, and research on child abuse and domestic violence involving children between the ages of 12-18 in general and as a direct consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Successes

Approximately 8.000 persons requested some kind of welfare assistance from the government after losing their jobs due to the COVID-19 pandemic (see also section 3 on our COVID-response). The government responded with budgetary assistance, food vouchers and food packages for different vulnerable groups, including undocumented persons. The Red Cross together with the local Foodbank organization also distributed food packages and food vouchers. There are furthermore several initiatives from the Government and private stakeholders to facilitate training and retraining of workers.

### Challenges and solutions

In general joining up policies and establishing a structural and positive collaboration between government and stakeholders and making sure all actors are involved, remains a challenge. Solutions lie in a robust whole of society approach, enhancing trust and cooperation between government and society, and by fostering open dialogue and recognition of the benefits of stakeholders' involvements and initiatives.

Curaçao is aware of the fact that job creation on a desirable scale is a complex and long process. The economy of the island has to grow significantly and is in urgent need of diversification in order to create relatively well paid jobs in preferably new and innovative sectors. The government cannot do this on its own. The structural bureaucratic red tape has to be removed, labor market reform is needed and more investments have to be made in (re)training of the local workforces.

The number of unemployed persons during COVID-19 period is believed to be most likely larger than 8.000, however these

<sup>1</sup> [www.humantraffickingpreventioncuracao.com](http://www.humantraffickingpreventioncuracao.com)

persons did not request any form of government assistance, implying that a large number of people are working in the informal sector. Regrettably there is little data available as to the degree of informality or the size of the informal sector in Curaçao. It is nevertheless widely believed that in some specific sectors a large group of informal workers is active. This is a challenge from the point of view of labor market reform.

Structural promotion of health is needed for Curaçao's citizens if we want to achieve a fundamental behavioral change. This requires major efforts from all concerned and this asks for

## Spotlights

### Curaçao's Autism Aid Therapy Center



Autism Aid Foundation started an Early Intensive ABA Therapy Center in Curaçao in 2019, to elevate knowledge of autism in Curaçao for parents, teachers and caregivers and to give professional guidance to parents, schools and other organizations. The ability to provide services from an early age and help children with Autism become more independent and functioning within the society is extremely important not just for the child and his/her family, but for society as a whole. Increased independence and functioning, means the child can become a contributing adult, instead of someone who their family and the country have to take care of. Autism Aid Foundation strives to become the Autism center of Curaçao and the Caribbean.

coordinated and inter-ministerial policy making (Health in All Policies). Taking into account the delicate state of the government's budget these last few years, policy makers must (continue to) combine their forces to (re)allocate current financial resources and identify new and innovative financing strategies to ensure financing of the health goals.

The safety of our citizens, especially our youth, is very important. However, all the organizations in the judiciary chain have the same challenge, which is budgetary constraints. Capacity development was also signaled as a challenge for these organizations.

### Curaçao Phoenix Foundation



Curaçao Phoenix Foundation provides training, coaching and workshops to empower and bring transformation in individuals through personal development and effective communication and life skills. Phoenix also aims to reach the community by observing its needs and developing methods, strategies and activities with the purpose of prevention, using an eclectic, holistic and eye-to-eye approach. Curaçao Phoenix Foundation consists of a team of Senior Trainers, Peer-to-Peer Trainers. From 2009 until now Phoenix has trained almost yearly in more than 25 high schools, more than 10 youth institutions and foundations and more than 20 youth projects. Phoenix have been providing training on "train the trainer" level; training teachers, youth educators and sport coaches and also worked with juvenile delinquents, poor communities and universities. On the other hand, They have trained business teams and leaders and certified more than 500 participants in their coaching- and training programs.

## 5.3 Sustainable and just economies



Figure 5.8: Outcomes for the accelerator inclusive, sustainable economic growth.

### Data at a glance

SDG Target	8.3.1	8.5.1	8.5.2	8.6.1	8.9	8.10.2
Official SDG indicator	Proportion of informal employment in non agriculture employment ↓ 39.8 (2017)	Average hourly earnings of employees ↓ 6.85 (2017)	Unemployment rate ↓ 19.1 (2020)	Proportion of youth not in education, employment or training ↓ 19% (2020)	Tourism direct GDP as a proportion of total GDP ↑ 43.62 (2017)	Proportion of adults (18+) with an account at a bank → 84% (2020)
<hr/>						
Other National Data						

Table 5.5: GOAL 8 Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

### Measures and development since last VNR

#### Structural Reform & Government Support

Curaçao has been persistently working on improving its investment climate and developing an enabling environment to facilitate and attract foreign direct investment (FDI). To this end Curaçao has several institutions and organizations that are key to support and facilitate the development of the investment climate, FDI and financing in the Free Zones and Industrial Parks

Curaçao is emphatically working on achieving a strongly diversified, sustainable and resilient economy. Its focus is to create priority sectors in the field of Tourism, educational services, ICT services, port and maritime services, financial services, creative industries and fisheries. To achieve this vision the Government of Curaçao is working towards achieving 5 outcomes. These outcomes are shown in figure 5.8.

located in Curaçao, in the Tourism Sector, and facilitates financing and access to capital markets worldwide. Additionally, the local banks and institutional investors can finance large and small projects. The Curaçao Chamber of Commerce and the respective Government entities facilitate local and international investors, while E-Government for business has been set as a priority for the Government. Furthermore the issuing of permits for the catering industry will be addressed in the short term (6 months to 1 year). Another initiative of the government to

stimulate a more sustainable and resilient economic growth is to establish a so-called 'Underwriting fund' which will address collateral issues for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and attract seed funds.

To improve the business climate on the island, several actions have been proposed, in close cooperation with the Government of the Netherlands. In addition to red tape reduction and lowering the cost of doing business, there are several other economic reform measures in the Country Package Curaçao ('Landspakket' see section 3.1 and 4.5) that will be implemented in the short and midterm, to make the economy of the island more sustainable and resilient.

### **Sectoral Growth**

Curaçao has put promoting SMEs high on its priority list, as a means to accelerate economic growth and promote economic diversification, as well as creating jobs and income earning opportunities for its citizens. For this purpose, the Government developed and approved a SMEs policy. The policy follows seven basic principles to promote entrepreneurship and SMEs, it improves the business environment, designs rules according to a "think-small first approach", makes public administration responsive to SME needs, facilitates SME participation in public procurement and SME access to finance, promotes skills, and supports SME internationalization.

SMEs in Curaçao are also being supported via an organizational and online platform ([www.MiNegosh.org/My Business](http://www.MiNegosh.org/My Business)) with various tools and instruments. "Mi Negoshi" is currently fulfilling the role of a small business development center. Curaçao has started an initiative in this framework for the local SMEs to get access to the incentives provided by Rijksdienst voor Ondernemend Nederland (RVO), and is currently exploring the possibility of funding the Curaçao Development Institute (CDI) to carry out this task.

### **Government Investments**

To support the national institutional capacities Curaçao has developed the "EU-desk" (European Union Desk). The overall objective of the EU-Desk Curaçao is to create awareness about market access possibilities to the European Union (EU) and to make more effective use of the availability of EU-funding such as non-EDF or Horizontal programs, but also assist and increase

the participation of Curaçao in the Union programs or non-EDF programs for which Curaçao is eligible. Curaçao is also assessing other sources of funding besides the EU. Through the Central Bank of Curaçao and St. Maarten (CBGS) an inclusive finance trajectory has been put in place to ensure everybody has equal access to the financial infrastructure (bank account) in Curaçao.

### **Increase Exports**

Curaçao has developed several strategic plans to guide us towards long term sustainable economic development. Curaçao developed a Strategic Trade Development Roadmap (STDR) that serves as a guideline for the National Export Strategy (NES). The National Export Strategy will serve as a driver in increasing the competitiveness of Curaçao's companies and also eliminating red tape for investors, creating a friendlier and competitive investment climate by lowering the cost of doing business. The sectors that are included within the National Export Strategy are ICT, Educational Services, Creative Industries, International Financial Services, Port and Maritime Services, and Tourism. Support strategies that will facilitate the transition to sustainable economic growth, are strengthening our data infrastructure and creating better access to information, better positioned trade and investment promotion, and skills and entrepreneurship development. Other sectors not included as focus sectors will also benefit from the National Export Strategy. Curaçao is also positioning itself as a test bed for new technologies (e.g. green, blue and smart technologies), and is working towards building an innovation sector supported by students and start-ups.

In addition, members of the Word Trade Organization (WTO) have agreed in 2020 to establish a working party for the accession of Curaçao to the WTO. This will open the opportunity for the island to directly participate in the global trade dialogue and seek mutual economic progress by connecting to other trading partners, especially in the Caribbean region, based on a transparent set of multilateral and plurilateral trading and other commercial rules, administered on the basis of equality.

### **Blue & Circular economy**

Curaçao launched in 2020 a policy guideline of Circular economy and established the Curaçao Doughnut Economy Task Force (CDE) and Project Bureau Circular Economy (PCE) to move to a sustainable economy with less pollution and sustainable use of

our natural resources to generate sustainable initiatives. This initiative aims to inspire the community to think about the future of our island but also to support an integrated agenda of circular initiatives for economic prosperity. Curaçao is the first island that will use the doughnut economy model as a basic principle for sustainable economic prosperity.

Curaçao is focusing on positioning itself as a blue technology hub for the Region while also serving as a “living lab” for the blue economy. Other sub-sectors being explored in the blue economy are Food Security, Blue Energy, Blue Tourism and Maritime & Port Services.

### **Successes**

There is experience with mobilization of funds in Curaçao. There is however a lack of coherent and active search for funds. As part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands a majority of the international funding programs are not accessible to Curaçao. By joining the WTO as an independent member and as a small and vulnerable economy and also by being recognized as a SIDS by the UN, we will be categorized appropriately and therefore become eligible for more financial support other than those we currently have access to.

The tourism and hospitality sector have seen substantial growth in the last couple of years with the establishment of several new hotels.

### **Challenges and solutions**

Curaçao is at a critical crossroads in its development. Two of the three major economic pillars namely – oil refining and financial services – are in decline for subsequent years. Consequently, economic performance has seen an accelerated negative growth since 2018, and per capita income is decreasing. Economic sectors such as professional services and tourism, meanwhile, lack the ability to compensate for the gap that was left behind due to the decline of the aforementioned economic pillars. Curaçao's institutional capacity is limited. In addition, the Covid-19 pandemic also caused further weakening of the economic activities in 2019 causing a 19% decrease in GDP.

As a Small Island Development State (SIDS), Curaçao still needs to establish a consistent and integrated approach to address the priority areas. There is a need to establish a consistent and

coordinated involvement of stakeholders from civil society, business organizations and the Government. Furthermore, we must create and disseminate mechanisms, programs and projects to create a Sustainable Mindset within the community and formulate and implement a Plan of Action for the critical and urgent priority areas.

### **Spotlights**

#### **Local 2030 Island Network**



The Local2030 Islands Network brings together a diverse set of island nations, states, and communities from all regions of the world - islands tied together by their shared island experience, cultures, strengths and challenges. The Network aims to promote island solutions and leadership based on shared island experiences and perspectives.

#### **Kolektivo**



This neighborhood food forest is unique in Curaçao in terms of size and social participation. A syntrophic forest of 5,000 m<sup>2</sup> was set up with and by the neighborhood, where everyone is welcome to work, learn, harvest and be together. The philosophy is that of natural abundance, as nature provides if we follow its principles. Socializing in this tradition reaps the same abundance! This has also been done in Scharloo. <http://www.samymama.nl/nl/projecten/>.

## 5.4 Food systems and nutrition patterns



Figure 5.9: Outcomes for the accelerator environmental sustainability. The topic of "Food systems" is part of the environmental awareness outcome.

The Government of Curaçao is working towards achieving five outcomes to achieve environmental sustainability. These outcomes are shown in figure 5.9. The topic of food systems is part of the environmental awareness outcome.

According to data from CBS-Curaçao, 65.9% of adults are overweight or have obesity. Further, adult obesity accounts for 29.4%<sup>2</sup> of the local population. The sugar intake is about 48% among youngsters between 18 and 24 years old who take soft drinks almost daily.<sup>3</sup> Curaçao's nutrition transition of the last 50 years, as a result of the 'westernization' of diets, is caused by both the consumers themselves and the actors that control what they consume through the food supplied by import. The nutrition intake seems to have changed to increased high-fat foods and sweeteners and a decline in cereals and vegetable fibers. Combined with the low activity lifestyles of the majority of the population of Curaçao, these changes are associated with rising rates of overweight (obesity) and diet-related chronic diseases (Hawkes, 2006; CARICOM, 2010). Western-oriented foods are higher in demand, and the gap between domestic

<sup>2</sup> Volksgezondheid Instituut Curacao, 2017 <https://koninkrijk.nu/2021/06/04/import-en-export-curacao-fors-gedaald/>

<sup>3</sup> Volksgezondheid Instituut Curacao, 2017

production and consumption rises. This leads again to higher import dependency and a weaker competitive position on the global food market (Walters and Jones, 2006)<sup>4</sup>.

### Data at a glance

SDG Target	2.c	3.4.1	3.4.1	3.4.1	3.4.1
Official SDG indicator		Cancer 2.29 (2017)	Diabetes 0.31 (2017)	Cardio-vascular disease 3.49 (2017)	Chronic respiratory disease 0.54 (2017)
Other National Data					

Table 6: GOAL 2 End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture, GOAL 3 Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

### Measures and Progress/developments since last VNR

The emergence of local producers that cultivate organically or use permaculture has notably increased during the COVID -19 pandemic, which fostered community-based networks supporting urban farming. Domestic fishing is part of Curaçao's heritage, and local fisheries are still present in small amounts. Strong initiatives nationwide to increase food systems resilience, promote local production, purchasing, and consumption, as well as contribute to workforce development and a renewed connection to land, culture, and community still prevail.

Curaçao has established an agricultural policy 2013 - 2018. This policy was renewed in 2018, and focuses on replacing imported food by locally produced food<sup>5</sup> with an estimate of 5% each year establishing whilst implementing a phytosanitary legislation, and strengthening the service at the Executive Department of the Agriculture and Husbandry.

There is a serious local food production in Curaçao. The Hidden Green Movement is a photo documentary about the local food production in Curaçao. Its aim is to bring the farmer closer to the consumer by sharing knowledge and raising more awareness about local food. The Hidden Green Movement shines a light on the work and life of different farmers (kunukero's). The project

<sup>4</sup> Food Security on Curaçao: An Interdisciplinary Food Systems Approach on Vulnerability and the Impact of Tourism. (2018).

<sup>5</sup> Agriculture, livestock and fishery products

provides information about which products are produced and where the products are sold.

### **Successes**

Several programs originated from the cooperation with the Colombian University La Guajira in Rio Hacha, Colombia, which focuses on the program Kultivo Sin Suelo. Furthermore, there were a series of programs implemented such as pilot projects like "Proeftuin Permaculture", "Agrikultura Sin Suela", "Lombrikultura" and the production of mulch for soil enrichment. Some courses were provided to local farmers about Syntropic Farming<sup>6</sup>.

Curaçao developed an awareness and educational program called "Kunukito di kas i bario" ("Community and home farm") for the promotion of sustainable food systems. The main focus of the "Kunukito di kas i bario program" is promoting home farming and healthy nutrition at home, similar to the "from farm to table" concept. This program aims to introduce a healthy lifestyle to prevent chronic and non-communicable diseases, with the focus on advancing human health to a higher level. This vision creates a wellness society with a proactive approach from the Government, care providers, and companies that promotes the quality of life and optimizes physical and mental health. Furthermore, the Government has developed an agricultural program to make local food production one of the economical pillars of the island and so enhance local food security.

### **Challenges and solutions**

Curaçao must strengthen and expand its public policies to promote the consumption of healthy foods. Adopting healthy eating habits not only means promoting changes in food consumption; it requires a change in public policies to create sustainable and nutrition-sensitive food systems that can provide an adequate supply of healthy food for all. A profound and radical change in the current food systems is needed to ensure its sustainability and ability to provide nutritious and accessible food for all, preserving ecosystems through more efficient and sustainable use of land and natural resources and better techniques for food production, storage, and processing<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> "Kuenta di mi tera eBook by Alvin Daal - 9789464431377 ...."  
<https://www.kobo.com/us/en/ebook/kuenta-di-mi-tera>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.fao.org/americas/publicaciones-audio-video/panorama/2016/en/>

More data needs to be generated on the domestic food production, which may be attributed to Curaçao's competitive disadvantages such as food imports, high local labor, water and utility costs, competing uses of agricultural land, housing, and infrastructure<sup>8</sup>. The carbon footprint of Curacao's food consumption is also currently being assessed. From February – May 2022, a project takes place with the aim to measure the carbon footprint of Curacao's food consumption. This thesis project is carried out within the SISSTEM project of the University of Aruba: Sustainable Island Solutions through Science, Technology and Engineering<sup>9</sup>.

### **Spotlights**

#### **Food Forest**



This neighborhood food forest is unique in Curaçao in terms of size and social participation. A syntrophic forest of 5,000 m<sup>2</sup> was set up with and by the neighborhood, where everyone is welcome to work, learn, harvest and be together. The philosophy is that of natural abundance, as nature provides if we follow its principles. Socializing in this tradition reaps the same abundance! This has also been done in Scharloo. <http://www.samyama.nl/nl/projecten/>.

<sup>8</sup> <https://koninkrijk.nu/2021/06/04/import-en-export-curaçao-fors-gedaald/>

<sup>9</sup> The supervisors of this project are Amber van Veghel and Prof. Annemie Geeraerd, both part of the 'Sustainability in the Agri-Food chain Group' (BIOSYST department, KU Leuven). Amber van Veghel is the daily supervisor and is also a PhD Candidate within SISSTEM, on the research topic 'The environmental impact of the food consumption of islands'. The research is carried out by four bachelor students at KU Leuven, who write their bachelor thesis together: Emma Couwet, Yarno van Hee, Seppe van Hoof, Julie Tombeur.

### Urban Farming in Seri' Otrobanda




**2 ZERO HUNGER**



**3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING**



**8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH**



**15 LIFE ON LAND**



Höfinan Ser'i Otrobanda is an assembly of various urban community gardens (höfi) in the neighborhood of Ser'i Otrobanda in Curacao. The organization started with almost no resources. They plant healthy and affordable vegetables and fruit for the neighbors within the neighborhood that were struggling during the pandemic. These gardens have provided in the basic need of healthy food, handing out over 700 harvest packages, with the trickle down effect of social cohesiveness and sense of belonging, while creating training and job opportunities for all ages and a small scale neighborhood economy where excess produce is being sold to hotels in the neighborhood and people outside the neighborhood to create a revenue stream that is again invested in the maintenance of the garden and its keepers.

<https://www.facebook.com/seriotrobandacuracao/>

### Dushi Challenge Kòrsou




**2 ZERO HUNGER**



**3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING**



**8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH**



**15 LIFE ON LAND**



Dushi Challenge Kòrsou encouraged the community of Curaçao to grow their own sweet potatoes. Dushi Challenge Kòrsou organized the distribution of sweet potato cuttings together with a group of volunteers among residents of Curacao. Through social media, the community received information from Dushi Challenge Kòrsou on how to grow and care for their sweet potato plant in order for it to produce as many delicious sweet potatoes as possible. Dushi Challenge Kòrsou does not only aim to improve the issue of food security in Curacao, step by step, they also want to make the community more aware of where our food comes from, and most importantly that growing your own food can be easy and fun! The team behind Dushi Challenge Kòrsou might initiate future challenges to encourage people to plant more different fruits and vegetables at home. <https://www.facebook.com/DushiChallenge>.

## 5.5 Energy decarbonization with universal access



Figure 5.10 a and b: Energy decarbonization is part of the environmental sustainability accelerator and is related to “renewable energy and sustainable energy use” outcome. It is also related to climate action and specifically “reduced carbon footprint”

Curaçao is working on its energy transition through the implementation of the National Energy Policy. This policy was developed in close collaboration with stakeholders. The topic of energy decarbonization is part of the “renewable energy and sustainable energy use” outcome, shown in figure 5.10. Wind, solar, blue energy, alternative sustainable fuels such as biofuels, hydrogen and LNG/CNG and other sources such as waste to value are the areas on which Curaçao will be focusing. Further attention will also be given to energy efficiency and the demand side management.

## Data at a glance

SDG Target	7.1.1	7.2.1	7.a.1	7.b.1
Official SDG indicator	Proportion of population with access to electricity ↑ 98.7% (2011)	Renewable energy share in the total final energy consumption ↑ 29.2% (2017)		
Other National Data			Contacts and projects with international organizations in support of clean energy research and development and renewable energy production, ↑	Installed renewable energy-generating capacity ↑ 403 Watts per capita (2018)

Table 5.7: GOAL 7 Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

### Measures and Progress/developments since last VNR

At the end of 2017, Curaçao expanded its wind capacity with an additional 16.5 MW, and launched a project on solar energy (3 MW) in 2018, to supply five schools with solar energy. This project will be expanded to include more schools and sporting facilities. Curaçao has also taken further efforts to expand Ocean Water Assisted Cooling (OWAC) and Sea Water Air Conditioning (SWAC) projects. The Curaçao based companies Omega Engineering Curaçao (OWAC) and the Zakito District Cooling Consortium (ZDCC) are both offering innovative and convenient cooling technology that can reduce energy consumption, and thus energy costs through OWAC and/or SWAC. At this moment, there is already one OWAC installation operational for more than five years and other OWAC and SWAC projects are in the process of development.

Recognizing the potential to generate spin-offs of OWAC and SWAC, the Government of Curaçao sets up a platform that works on facilitating the development of seawater industries and deepwater industries. Curaçao is also developing a "Living Lab" on the west side of the refinery. This site will function as a testbed for new renewable technology for energy production and is part of the transition of the refinery towards renewable energy. Potential projects currently being considered are the construction of a 30 MW solar plant, research to convert Sargassum (sea algae) to value and/or energy, a pilot project with e-busses for electric public transport, and the production of Hydrogen ( $H_2$ ). Research was done to identify the best available and successful energy conservation programs and practices in the world that might be practical to implement in Curaçao. The

results of this study are still pending to be worked into executable programs for Curaçao.

Several steps were taken to reinforce the institutional framework in Curaçao to effectuate the energy transition. On the legislative front a new draft energy law has been written and is now in the process of approval by Parliament. Different activities have been undertaken to set up an energy office within the government to monitor and guide the energy transition. The official establishment of this office will take place after the introduction of the new energy law. In the meantime, the government has set up an energy working group to carry out the necessary work until the energy office is established upon approval of the new energy law.

### Successes

The development of the national energy policy can be considered a success in the area of decarbonization and universal access. The National Energy Policy was adopted and approved in March 2018. This policy is now the blueprint and is considered as the guideline on how Curaçao will organize and manage its energy transition. The policy covers energy reliability, security, quality, conservation, sustainability, affordability and other related issues. The goals of this policy are to make the energy supply more sustainable, and lower the island's dependency on petroleum imports. The National Energy Policy has 3 focus areas, i.e. increase the production of renewable energy to 50% by 2035, optimize the national energy consumption, and put in place institutions, rules and instruments to facilitate the energy transition.

Furthermore, we have seen an increased interest in the use of OWAC and SWAC technology by many local hotels and other Caribbean islands. Our local companies can hence export this technology and increase their revenue.

### Challenges and solutions

Curaçao held a Go-Program workshop to identify the areas that need attention within the energy transition. The demand side and awareness aspects still need to be addressed, while the enabling environment requires attention. Other challenges encountered in the implementation of the energy transition are human resources to push forward this transition and the necessary financial resources to finance this transition.

### Spotlights

#### Green University



The University of Curaçao (UoC) wants to become more environmentally friendly in the coming years. The UoC is committed to investing in sustainable energy facilities and cost-saving measures in the fields of energy use, water, and communication, both for educational purposes and for general business operations to reduce costs. We have initiatives on energy efficiency, and renewable energy (Green Lab), waste, and awareness and education programs. In the academic year 2023 - 2024 the Faculty of Engineering will introduce a new study program, Bachelor of Science in Sustainable Technology and Engineering.

The university strives to contribute to the sustainable development of the society by training future professionals with sufficient sustainable and modern technological knowledge and skills.

## 5.6 Urban and peri-urban developments



Figure 5.11: Outcomes related to the accelerator sustainable cities and communities.

Urban and peri-urban developments in Curaçao encompass the efforts being made to transform urban Curaçao while maintaining its authentic and cultural characteristics that made Willemstad a World heritage site for 25 years, this year. The communities in Curaçao and the inner city should experience an increased livability that fulfills their needs and positively impacts their life, while the built environment is more resilient to the impacts of climate change. To achieve this vision the Government of Curacao is working towards achieving 6 outcomes. These outcomes are shown in figure 5.11.

## Data at a glance

SDG Target	9.1.2*	11.1	11.2	11.5.1**
Official SDG indicator	Number of passengers incl. visitors ↑ 246,627 (2020)			Number of deaths, missing persons and directly affected persons attributed to disasters per 100,000 population ↑ 0.67 (2010)
Other National Data	Housing shortage ↑*** (2008), Affordability percentage of budget related to housing ↓**** (2016)	Housing shortage ↑*** (2008), Affordability percentage of budget related to housing ↓**** (2016)	Quality of public transport ↓ 6.4 out of 10 (2017)	

\* Number of passenger incl visitors

\*\* Number of deaths, missing persons and directly affected persons attributed to disasters per 100,000 population

\*\*\* Affordability

\*\*\*\* Availability

Table 5.8: GOAL 9 Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation, GOAL 11 Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

### Measures and development since last VNR

Curaçao localized the New Urban Agenda with the technical assistance of the United Office for Project Services (UNOPS). Two visioning workshops were held for the Willemstad area, the whole of Curaçao and the rural area of Band'abou and were evaluated and validated with stakeholders. The vision was further elaborated during a planning charrette where experts developed concrete solutions (transformational projects) that function as a model for other areas of Curaçao. The next step is to incorporate the conservation of our monumental heritage in the city center, and implement the transformational projects.

Curaçao is historically a place where all ethnicities and cultural backgrounds come together and live in harmony, while influencing and enriching each other's culture. The focus of Curaçao has been in developing cultural awareness and active cultural participation of our communities, notwithstanding their diverse cultural identity. Much of our intangible heritage has been documented by the Curaçao National Commission for UNESCO and an intangible cultural heritage commission is currently being developed. Another cultural area of importance to Curaçao is the city of Willemstad itself, where 743 buildings have been granted the status of monument. This phenomenal built heritage is being preserved by different entities on the

island. The current heritage policy is being revised to include underwater heritage and making a cultural impact assessment compulsory when building in known heritage sites.

### Accessibility and mobility

For Curaçao's transport, accessibility and mobility policy with a vision to reach any specific hub in the transport system within 30 minutes is being developed. Stakeholder consultations in public transport were held in 2016 as well as a satisfaction survey within the user community. An interconnected network of seven transport hubs in a fishbone structure strategically located in urban centers with higher density of population and services will be created.

### Affordable housing

For the last couple of years, we have seen a growth in the demand for affordable housing and an increase in illegally occupied land. To help low-income families, the Government of Curaçao facilitates public housing for vulnerable families through its public housing foundation, the ground lease of land parcels for families to build their own houses and subsidies on public housing. Both programs are coping with extended delays in issuance. To remedy this issue, both lists have been updated to better reflect the current status, while the subsidy program is currently under review.

## Collaboration with science and academia

The Government of Curaçao developed an Evidence-based Infrastructure tool (EBI) together with the University of Oxford and the United Nations Office for Project Services. This tool shows the linkages between infrastructure development in different sectors (water, energy, solid waste and waste water) and can aid in identifying the vulnerable infrastructures when it comes to hazards, as well as the impact of growth in one sector on the other sectors.

## Successes

Curaçao has been rather successful in forming international and local partnerships when it comes to moving the urban and peri-urban developments. Partnerships like the collaboration with the UNOPS, the University of Oxford and our Local University of Curaçao, have led to access to knowledge as well as renowned international and national expertise being available. A small victory that has been furthermore achieved in terms of accessibility and leaving no one behind is the concept of shared streets and incorporation of areas where disabled persons are better able to traffic in the downtown area in their wheelchairs.

## Challenges and solutions

Organizational challenges leading to stagnation of the implementation and hence hamper the achievement of the localized goals are the lack of human resources to push forward policy development, interventions and actions in this area, the lack of financial resources to finance the implementation, political sensitivity of policy themes and oftentimes a slow decision-making process.

Curaçao also faces different challenges in finding suitable solutions for the user rights and accessibility to our coasts for all, making Curaçao more accessible for disabled persons by providing access to government buildings, buildings in general and other locations, and finding suitable solutions for affordable housing, and illegal occupation of land.

Curaçao hopes to find countries that are working on similar issues through the Island local 2030 hub to create a support base for donor funds and hence also solve the financial challenges.

## Spotlights

### Management Plan Klein Curaçao



The Government of Curaçao is implementing a management plan for its key " Klein Curaçao. This Key is very popular among visitors and locals for recreational purposes and is frequently visited by a large number of persons. This management plan will focus on the preservation of the biodiversity on this key and counteract the challenges faced due to illegal occupation and access to certain parts of this key, as well as retrofitting the light tower on this key that has the designation of a monument, and hence is a colonial heritage.

### Kaya Kaya street party



This initiative works on community building by uniting the bario, cultivating street culture and improving the image & environmental awareness. Ser'i Otrobanda is a part of the inner city that has been severely affected by decline and a sense of insecurity. During the preparation phase of the festival, the residents, students from the Faculty of Technical Sciences of the University of Curaçao, and the foundation members renovate and beautify the area where the festival will be held with street art and social architectural interventions to enhance the cultural identity of the area and make it more livable. When finished the festival will be held, bringing people from outside the community who come to dance, eat and have a good time, while immersing themselves in culture and arts and contributing to the neighborhood economy.

## Urbanismo Social



'Urbanismo Sosial' is a project set up by Tridimenciudad Medellin and the Faculty of Technical Sciences of the University of Curaçao Moises da Costa Gomez. It is furthermore executed in close collaboration with Universidad Nacional, Institución Universitaria Pascua Bravo and EDU (Empresa de Desarrollo Urbano) in Medellin.

The students from Curaçao work together with students from Medellín on a real intervention in one of the bario's suburbs (Villatina, Sol de Oriente) of Medellín. They do a social architectural 'design-built' intervention to show that a small impulse can cause a (big) change in mentality and eventually a large (area) change can be set in motion. This project has been mimicked in the bario's of Curaçao where the students contribute with these small social architectural interventions in the different marginalized barrios of Curaçao.

## Krea 2069



KREA 2069 is a multidisciplinary collective of young engineers from Curaçao sharing a common passion for creating a better built environment. Their goal is to discuss ideas, new ways of thinking, and to remind others that building and sometimes rebuilding offer us new opportunities to tackle social, economic, and technical challenges. They do this by using the method of storytelling and graphic illustrations to convey their message and take the reader into their future world.

[www.krea2069.com](http://www.krea2069.com)

## 5.7 Global Environmental Commons



Figure 5.12 a and b: Outcomes related to the accelerators climate action and environmental sustainability.

To safeguard its natural resources, the Government of Curaçao is working towards achieving 7 outcomes in 2 accelerators. These outcomes are shown in figure 5.12.

## Measures and development since last VNR

### Sustainable Waste Management

SDG Target	11.6.1	12.4	12.5
Official SDG indicator			
Other National Data	Proportion of municipal solid waste collected and managed in controlled facilities ↓ 187.244 (2021)	Hazardous waste treatment not available →	Tons of material recycled ↑ 61.854 (2021)

Table 5.9: GOAL 11 Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable, GOALS 12 Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

At this present time, the waste disposal on Curaçao, has since increased, and it is projected that Curaçao's now only legal landfill (Malpais) for solid waste disposal, will reach its maximum capacity within the next 10 to 15 years. In Curaçao, almost all solid waste is landfilled, only a small part is still recycled. Currently, approximately 170,000 tons/year of solid waste are generated in Curaçao. Most of this solid waste is disposed of in the Malpais Landfill, and is managed by Selikor NV, a government-owned waste management company. A smaller amount of solid waste is dumped illegally at different spots on the island. On a small island such as Curaçao, where land is limited, long-term reliance on landfilling as a disposal method for solid wastes is unsustainable. With regards to this, Curaçao

is presently deriving little value from waste. Therefore, the Government of Curaçao is aiming to reach a circular economy as indicated above. Curaçao is currently in an early stage of this development and with a proposed project called "From waste to value" will be able to make a clear step forward within the outlined strategy. Nationally, it can be concluded that the collected municipal solid waste managed and controlled has increased. The amount of total waste collected per capita per day is 3.3 kg. For the year 2020, this is almost 1200 kg/capita, which is very high, and three times compared to the amount in Latin America and the Caribbean<sup>10</sup>. The recycling rate seems to have increased.

### Sustainable Water Management and Wastewater

SDG Target	6.1.1	6.3.1	6.4.2	6.5.1	6.6.1
Official SDG indicator					
Other National Data	Percentage of households connected to the distribution net ↑ 98,8% (2011)	Portion of wastewater flows safely treated ↑ 16% (2017)	Number of households with wells ↓ 8,9% (2011)	Degree of IWRM implementation based on UNEP survey ↓ 32% (2017)	Percentage of Wetland area nominated as Ramsar area under the RAMSAR convention → 62.1% (2021)

Table 5.10: GOAL 6 Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

<sup>10</sup> Curaçao-Environmental-Statistics-Compendium-2020. (2022). The Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) of Curaçao. <https://www.cbs.cw/curacao-environmental-compendium-statistics-2020> - page 48 - Data from 2020

With respect to water management, the Government of Curaçao has installed a commission for integrated water resource management, tasked with the development of an integrated water management policy and as solicited and unsolicited advisor to the ministers responsible for water management. The commission has completed a baseline study based on the indicators of SDG 6, elaborated an integrated water management policy, and is currently having stakeholders' consultations with respect to the proposed policy interventions. The priorities identified in the SAMOA pathway for water-use efficiency, capacity building, and wastewater treatment are all part of the proposed interventions.

Since the last VNR, comprehensive attention has been placed on the proper management of wastewater. The percentage for treated wastewater is at 16% while the percentage for the whole world is already at 59%<sup>11</sup>. The UNOPS<sup>12</sup> conducted a rapid review of the wastewater problem in Curaçao based on the situation at Shut<sup>13</sup>. The main purpose of this rapid assessment was to create a broad insight into the general management of industrial wastewater on the island and take into consideration the public interest that is served by the Government of Curaçao. This was done by evaluating the industrial wastewater management situation on the island of Curaçao, and then better define the specific issues occurring at Shut disposal point. This is to understand how it is integrated and could be treated within the overall management of wastewater. The Rapid Assessment proposed an overview of short-, mid-and long-term strategies to be implemented by the Government of Curaçao. Looking forward, the overall wastewater treatment plants and networks should be upgraded for regular operation; optimal collection and disposal system for households and industrial wastewater should be established in urban and rural areas, while a nationwide system for monitoring water pollution should be established. Nature-based and smart solutions should also be considered in this case.

<sup>11</sup> Draft Policy Plan, De toekomst van Water, Girigori de Flores, P.CIWC, 2020, This information can be retrieved from the following website: [https://www.publicpolicycuracao.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Beleidsplan\\_water\\_v07.pdf](https://www.publicpolicycuracao.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Beleidsplan_water_v07.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> United Nations Offices for Project Services

<sup>13</sup> The Shut is a site on the north coast, east of the Curaçao airport where the vacuum trucks discharge the waste water.

## Climate Action

SDG Target	13.1	13.2	13.b
Official SDG indicator			
Other National Data	DRR strategies Available ↑	GHG's (CO2 and CH4) ↓ 2307.8 ktons (2020)	Promote mechanisms for raising capacity for effective climate change planning No efforts ↓

Table 5.11: GOAL 13 Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

The Government of Curaçao established a Climate Change Committee Curaçao (C-4). C-4 is enhancing the education and awareness-raising on adaptation to climate change, its impact reduction, early warning and improving human and institutional capabilities. C-4 conducted a Climate Change Policy Assessment and gained useful insight on the bottlenecks that were hampering the development and implementation of a national climate change policy by the government and other institutions. The encountered bottlenecks were: the need to increase the knowledge on the possible impacts of climate change at a national level, which makes it impossible to develop and use a science-based planning and decision-making in developing and implementing policy, and capacity development on climate change impact for the different organizations on the island. There is furthermore a need for guidance on the implementation of adaptation strategies and assistance in overcoming various policy hurdles. Other bottlenecks were a lack of economic resources, institutional capacity, and policy tools. On the other hand, it has been observed that there are many planning mechanisms in the governmental organizations that deal with the different aspects of climate change, including roadmaps, risk profiles, the SDGs, and also our national development plan. To overcome these bottlenecks a strategic plan has been drafted outlining the main priorities for climate change policy development in Curaçao, and a mechanism was developed to guide the process in overcoming these bottlenecks. One such mechanism is the development of a Climate Change Panel, consisting of stakeholders from the government, private sector, non-governmental organizations and academia that will be in charge of developing policy interventions that are suitable for Curaçao for the identified priority areas.

## Successes

### Sustainable Ocean Management

SDG Target	14.5.1	14.a.1	14.c.1
Official SDG indicator			
Other National Data	Percentage of coastal and marine areas conserved through national and international law ↑ 13,8% (2020)	Research reports conducted in the Blue Halo Program → 6 (2021)	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea Ratified →

Table 5.12: GOAL 14 Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

In February 2015, the Government of Curaçao and the Waitt Institute signed a Memorandum of Understanding that launched the Blue Halo Curaçao program, which is a comprehensive ocean and coastal management project to develop and implement solutions for sustainable ocean management. The Blue Halo Curaçao focuses on creating policy in a 5-year period on marine spatial planning, sanctuary zones, and fisheries regulations. Through this partnership, Curaçao established the inter-ministerial "Blue Ribbon Committee" (2017) and adopted the policy plan "Recommendations for a Sustainable Ocean Policy" (2018). An Addendum to the initial Memorandum of Understanding, signed in October 2018, set out to protect 30% of Curaçao's waters through near-shore and offshore marine sanctuaries, necessary regulatory frameworks, and new fisheries laws. The policy is based on scientific, social, and economic data, and engages stakeholders and the people of Curaçao. The Blue Halo Program mainly focuses on the ecological part of this policy domain. Through this partnership, extensive research, planning, and legal development has been reached to establish Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), resulting in the nomination of Klein Curaçao as a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance in July 2018, approval and legal establishment of Curaçao's Underwater Park in September 2018 by the Council of Ministers after more than thirty years, approval of a network of six nearshore Fish Reproductive Zones in 2019 and the notitia to create an offshore marine sanctuary. It is noteworthy to mention

also that this also resulted in an approved Management Plan for Klein Curaçao, which presented strategies to protect the site's natural resources while allowing the sustainable use of this area for visitors and local residents of Curaçao.

### Challenges and solutions

The protection of terrestrial species, as signaled during our rapid integrated assessment of the alignment with the SDGs, still needs improvement. The Nature Policy Plan will serve as a guiding policy document to establish the strategies and targets to strengthen the protection of terrestrial and underwater species. Building on this legacy of stewardship and natural resource management for the underwater species, Curaçao has ambitious 2030 goals to protect 30% of proprietary waters, to establish marine-offshore sanctuary and fish reproduction zones as marine management areas. Another noticeable aspect that requires improvement is the estimation of the magnitude of all types of pollution, for instance, the volumes of discharged sewage, soil pollution, etc. Particular attention needs to be paid to safely treat unusable and hazardous wastes. The legislation program, which is underway, is extensively elaborated in the VLR.

### Spotlights

#### Climate Change Sint Willibrordus



EU-Proposal\* to introduce eduScrum via a virtual exchange approach as didactical agile methodology in the field of education in combination with climate change content. Local partnership will be made with youth organization GreenKidz. Small projects with community involvement on tourism and climate change in the projected Midden Curaçao Biosphere Reserve be through UNESCO's Man and Biosphere Program.

\* Germany, Spain, Russia, Czech Republic, Portugal, South Africa

## From Waste to Value



This initiative aims to contribute to improving solid waste management in Curaçao while strengthening both the economic and social resilience of its people by first conducting a thorough detailed waste characterization study, which will then enable the implementation of new business models and greater community involvement in converting waste into value and contribute to a circular economy. A waste policy management plan will be drafted through this project.

## From Hofi Chiki



The mission of Hofi Chikí is to plant Tiny Forests in order to educate, enhance biodiversity, counteract heat stress in urban areas and improve air quality. By planting Tiny Forests (near schools), young people can connect with their very own slice of nature. Tiny forests have an educational function and allow children to experience nature up close. A Tiny Forest stimulates children's curiosity and gives them the opportunity to discover and learn about nature in their own living environment. Tiny Forests also contribute to the local biodiversity: A Tiny Forest consists of many different types of indigenous trees and plants. These trees in turn attract insects and birds, who fertilize the flowers and eat the fruit thereby spreading seeds over a wider area.

<https://www.facebook.com/HofiChiki>

## 5.8 The Way Forward

Looking back on this VNR period, Curaçao can conclude that important steps have been taken in working on the SDGs and certainly on the deployment of the SDGs within the local context. The used entry points provide important information for the steps to be taken in the future and which topics Curaçao as a whole should give priority to. The only way to achieve the SDGs and local goals is to embrace inclusive processes with all stakeholders. Civil society can certainly play a stronger role in increasing support for the SDGs. There are already organizations that make their own contribution to this. However, it is the government's task to provide a facilitating environment for civil society to further strengthen itself. The planned dashboard can be helpful in this process by stimulating data exchange between government and civil society and thereby stimulating a broad monitoring and evaluation system. This also implicitly meets goal 17. Government furthermore can use this dashboard to strengthen evidence-based policy making, monitoring and evaluation of our policies and the role that data should play in this. This evaluation moment was certainly an eye-opener and gave useful insights on the way forward.

# 6 Sint Maarten

## 6.1 Development context

Sint Maarten is a Small Island Developing State (SIDS) located in the Leeward Islands Group in the northeast Caribbean Sea. Sint Maarten shares its Northern border with the French overseas collectivity of Saint Martin, and these uniquely make up the smallest landmass in the world (Sint Maarten: 34 km<sup>2</sup> and Saint-Martin 54.4 km<sup>2</sup>). There are no physical borders, and people are free to move between both sides of the islands.

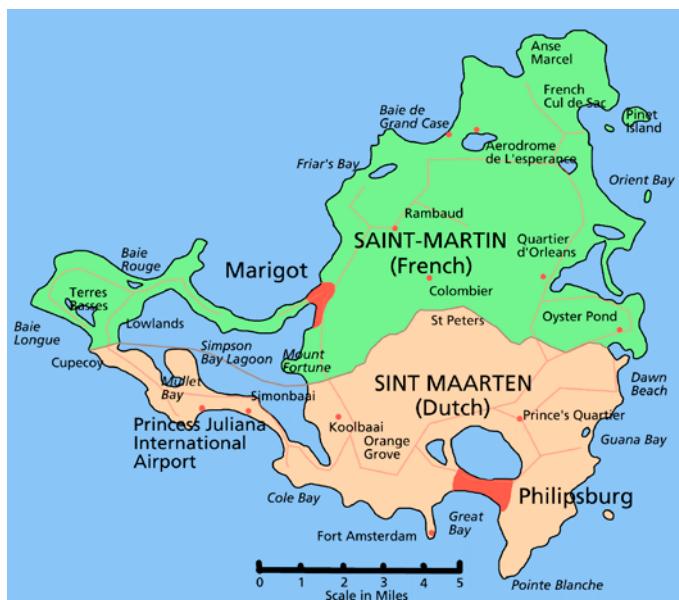


Figure 6.1: map of Sint Maarten illustrating the division between the Dutch and French side of the island.

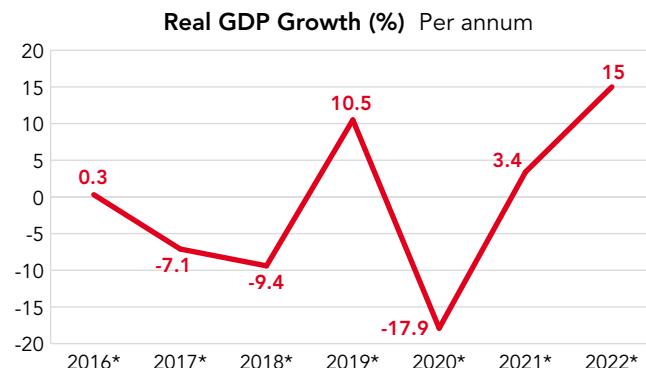
Sint Maarten is well known for having one of the busiest modern international airports and the largest cruise terminals in the Caribbean. Both ports are located on the Dutch side of the island and serve as a gateway to Europe, the United States and the movement of people and goods to the Leeward Islands. However, Sint Maarten is particularly susceptible to external shocks such as climate-related disasters (hurricanes), intensified by the effects of global climate change.

With the change in its constitutional status on October 10, 2010, Sint Maarten became an autonomous country within the Kingdom of the Netherlands. This new constitutional status signifies administrative changes in governing the affairs of the country. Sint Maarten transitioned (or progressed) to a self-governing country within the Kingdom for all internal matters with the exception of Defence and Foreign Affairs, which

remained the sole authority of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Though the new constitutional status allowed for self-determination within diverse areas, it is not without significant challenges. As part of the Kingdom, international funding possibilities are limited. As a result, Sint Maarten is often overlooked and disadvantaged by potential international investors/ funding organizations.

### Impact of Hurricanes Irma and Maria

In September 2017, Sint Maarten was struck by hurricanes Irma and Maria. The cumulative damage of the two hurricanes was estimated as close to 17.9 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on the Dutch side. The airport, bridges, houses, public buildings, hotels, businesses, and roads sustained significant damage. Sint Maarten's economy is heavily dependent on tourism, so the damage sustained threatened the industry's recovery.



Note: \*amounts are forecasted and not actuals

Source: Department of Statistics, Department of ETT, Central Bank of Curacao & St. Maarten

Figure 6.2

According to the National Recovery Resilience Plan (NRRP, 2018), the estimated damages and losses caused by the 2017 hurricanes amounted to \$2.7 billion (\$1.4 billion and \$1.3 billion, respectively). The ECLAC DaLa report (2018) of hurricane Irma, mirrored by the NRRP, highlighted priority areas for recovery and reconstruction, such as education and infrastructure. In the immediate response and recovery process, emergency relief and assistance were considered vital.

In 2018, the National Recovery Program Bureau (NRPB) was established. The NRPB became responsible for the preparation,



Flamboyant picture

coordination, execution, and evaluation of the projects financed through the Sint Maarten Trust Fund, managed by the World Bank (WB). The implementation of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan's Early Recovery Projects (within the build back better approach) included disaster risk management (DRM) projects, professional training and skills development (notably in the hospitality sector); infrastructure works in the hospital and airport, home, school and roof repairs, as well as the removal of damaged wrecks.

### Impact Covid-19

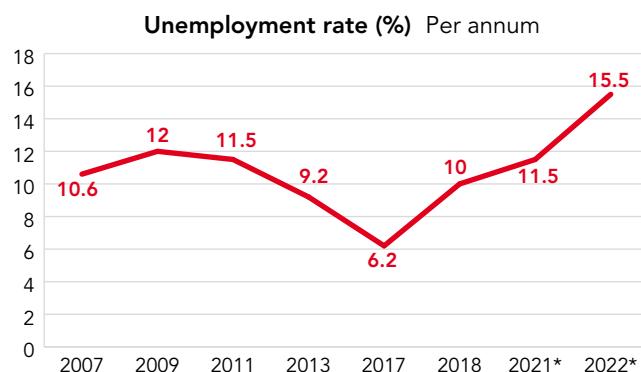
While still recovering from two devastating hurricanes in 2017, Sint Maarten has since 2020 been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic affected Sint Maarten's public health and socio-economic resilience. To illustrate, the pandemic forced companies to close completely. This was further exacerbated by a temporary halt on all major tourism-related activities. As a result, business owners were more focused on ways to sustain their businesses. This also affected the employment sector, which was imminent due to the bleak outlook of the socio-economic situation on St. Maarten and worldwide.

Further, the global shortages and supply chain issues led to an increase in inflation. The main categories of the Consumer Price Index (CPI) that has been affected by this are food, health,



Build Back Better / NRPB

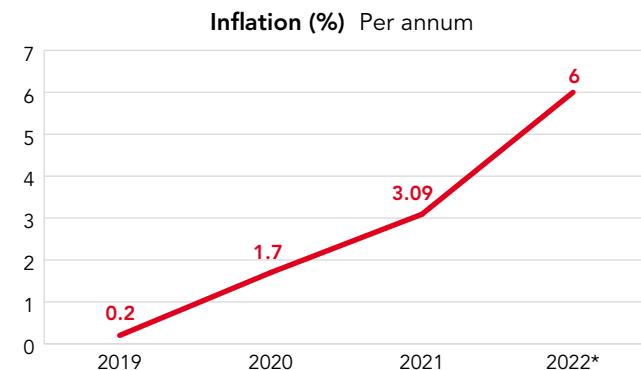
transportation, utilities, and housing affecting all households in Sint Maarten and mostly the most vulnerable.



Note: \*amounts are forecasted and not actuals

Source: Department of Statistics, Department of ETT, Central Bank of Curacao & St. Maarten

Figure 63



Note: \*amounts are forecasted and not actuals

Source: Department of Statistics, Department of ETT, Central Bank of Curacao & St. Maarten

Figure 4



NRPB

### Challenges SDG implementation

Recurring disasters like hurricanes challenge the implementation of the SDG's. It is challenging to allocate limited available resources towards sustainable development and planning. Furthermore, it is not possible to apply for Official Development Assistance because Sint Maarten is considered a "high-income country" because of its relatively high GDP per Capita.

In addition, Sint Maarten is facing capacity issues and challenges in effectively organizing institutions to ensure an integrated implementation of the s. The interlinkages between SDGs and policy interdependencies challenge the government organization and decision-making processes. Therefore, the government of Sint Maarten strengthened an integral way of

working by establishing inter-ministerial platforms for policy development, management, monitoring, and decision-making. Internally the participation and collaboration have been enhanced across ministries. This manner of working has been established to improve interlinkages and create shared ownership as it relates to program and/or project development, policy coherence, efficiency, and effectiveness.

Despite financial and capacity constraints, great collaboration with key stakeholders such as the Sint Maarten Development Fund (SMDF), the National Recovery Program Bureau (NRPB), as well as access to funding and technical assistance via the Netherlands, the United Nations the European Union (Resembid) and other funding agencies, make significant achievements still possible.

### Building a Nation while Leaving No One Behind

In addressing the pledge to "leave no one behind, build as a nation, become resilient and self-reliant", Sint Maarten opted for an all-inclusive process leading towards a sustainable future and to be better equipped to respond to a crisis. Based on a baseline report outlining Sint Maarten's challenges and focus on development, a two-phased approach was taken toward sustainable development:

1. To formulate a broadly shared vision for the country by means of an all-inclusive national dialogue, which in turn;
2. Provides the foundation and guide towards the development of a national plan.

### The objectives for this approach:

- A National Development Vision and Plan will analyze Sint Maarten's objectives and priorities in relation to its sectors in response to well-identified national needs. It will propose and justify an overall plan in which everyone's role can be seen in context.
- A well-researched and reasoned policy document is of immense value to Sint Maarten in allocating its scarce resources. It references the scope and timetable of projects to the resources available as well as the benefits, which will accrue. It enables realistic and achievable decisions to be made.
- The private sector needs a stable and sympathetic environment to invest securely and profitably. A national plan provides the evidence to make positive decisions.

- As a developing country, a national plan meets the need of the international development banks and donor organizations to make loans or to provide technical assistance to selected national projects with a clear understanding of the benefits, and the assurance of government's commitment. Without it, a project has a little sense of purpose. Our national plan also enables these organizations to avoid wasteful overlap and competition by coordinating their respective programs.
- Finally, the government who sees fundamentally, what must be done to secure its prosperity, can act purposefully through strategic decisions, which determine the course of events for the future.

A coherent people-centered approach to development was chosen for this trajectory, noting the importance of social integration as the key to creating a sustainable society for all. This approach actively supports the 2030 global agenda, eradicating poverty and generating productive employment. A 'Nation for all' is a goal whereby all individuals with their rights and responsibilities get an active role to play in the functioning of the government and society they live in. Nation building for Sint Maarten meant, primarily: social inclusion. Social inclusion is a process by which efforts are made to ensure that equal opportunity is provided. These individuals and focused groups that participate in society by providing feedback during the national visionary and planning processes.

Social inclusion is the structuring of Sint Maarten's society to reach individuals, representatives, or groups. This participatory process included stakeholders' analysis, communication campaigns, interviews, community, and online dialogues.



Photo 4: Government Administration Building

Hence, the slogan that was chosen (together with stakeholders) for the program:

#### **"GROWING STRONGER TOGETHER"**

The established shared National Vision outlines the priority goals, including aligned SDGs for the country. The National Vision is as follows:

*"Sint Maarten as the Caribbean Business and Education hub, where everyone can be provided with the full range of opportunities needed to obtain and sustain an enhanced quality of life".*

The aim of the National Vision is to transform Sint Maarten into three themes, namely:

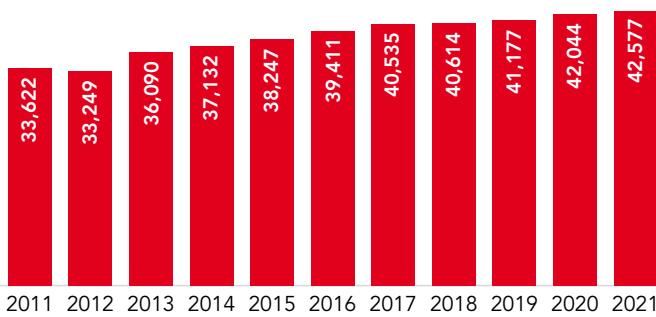
- A compassionate and united Sint Maarten, which aligns with SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 10.
- A strong and resilient Economy, reflecting SDGs 1, 7, 8, 9, 11, 13, and 14. And,
- A safe and secured, decisive and independent nation. This aim corresponds with SDGs 13, 16, and 17.

## 6.2 National Development Theme A: A compassionate and united Sint Maarten

### SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 10

#### Introduction

Sint Maarten's demographic profile indicates an aging population, high youth unemployment, relatively low labour productivity, and limited access to skilled work opportunities. Existing social protection frameworks require reform to become sustainable and eliminate fiscal risk. Especially health insurance needs greater coverage. Social housing is under pressure to provide affordable accommodation for low and middle-income earners. The education system needs to adapt to modern technology and teaching methods and courses more aligned with future market needs. Core government institutions, notably justice and education, require substantial investment in human resource development and infrastructure. Youth development is an overarching development issue. Overall, accurate social and human development statistical information in critical areas such as population, defining poverty, and identifying wealth distribution is lacking, resulting in misinformation and poor strategic planning.



Note: The Population Census was last conducted in April 2011. The tables below provide an estimate of population numbers as per 2014 to 2021.  
Source: Department of Statistics, The Department of Civil Registry.

#### SDG 1 and 2 Poverty and Hunger

Although Sint Maarten's critical data is absent to determine the extent of poverty issues, the 2017 and 2020 disasters have exposed the existence of pockets of poverty on the island. As a direct response to vulnerable groups, several NGOs and the Government of Sint Maarten distributed food packages during and after the hurricanes and COVID pandemic lockdown for support. These vulnerable groups have been identified after the disasters as follows:

- Unemployed and underemployed, especially youth;
- Single-parent households, especially single female-headed households;
- The elderly;
- People living with disabilities/ special needs groups;
- Victims of gender-based violence, domestic violence, and abuse;
- People with various forms of addiction;
- Undocumented migrants and refugees.

The resilience of vulnerable groups to cope with disasters is low due to their lack of financial buffers and social safety nets. To reduce the effect that these disasters have on children, and the youth, a school food program was introduced, which has been running since 2017. Around 4,000 primary school children are provided with one or two meals a day (breakfast and lunch), served at schools and free of charge.

Several stakeholders in Sint Maarten support this public-private partnership program. With food demand being generally more significant than supply in times of a disaster, the actual challenge lies in logistics development in the food aid supply chain network. With issues pertaining to capacity and limited resources, the government is working on a more sustainable plan. The latter further ties into having a robust agriculture

Vital Statistics	Jan 2014	Jan 2015	Jan 2016	Jan 2017	Jan 2018	Jan 2019	Jan 2020	Jan 2021
Population (estimates)	37,132	38,247	39,411	40,535	40,614	41,177	42,044	42,577
Births	532	500	458	363	412	398	423	
Deaths	169	197	160	172	165	194	233	
Natural Increase	363	303	298	191	247	204	190	
Immigrants	1,575	1,541	1,648	964	1,273	1,379	868	
Emigrants	824	681	822	1,078	957	716	525	
Net migration	751	860	826	-114	316	663	343	
<b>Total Growth</b>	<b>1,115</b>	<b>1,164</b>	<b>1,125</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>563</b>	<b>867</b>	<b>533</b>	

Figure 6.5

policy to fuel the food supply in Sint Maarten in a consistent manner. The governments' government believes that the integration of agriculture into the country's broader developmental objectives will provide needed sustainable economic growth, food security for the country's growing population and contribute to resilience in the future.

#### Achievements and ongoing priorities:

- Given the issues with food security, exposure to natural disasters, and economic fallout, the government is collaborating with the UNDP for the development of a National Food Bank (NFB) to ensure a reliable and robust food supply chain for vulnerable groups as well as support in providing mass care to vulnerable groups.
- In 2020, a policy framework has been presented as a blueprint for the advancement of agriculture in Sint Maarten to secure and strengthen food security and contribute to the economic development of the island.
- Social Economic Needs Assessment (SENA) was conducted in March 2022 to gather data on various social and economic conditions. The statistical information collected will be used for evidence-based planning and development of policies in Sint Maarten.

#### SDG 3 - Good Health and Well-Being

Sint Maarten is a partner of the Pan American Health Organization, the World Health Organization, and the Caribbean Public Health Agency in improving healthcare policies and services. The strategic ambition is to provide quality access to health care facilities and health coverage, and promote generally healthy lifestyles and mentally healthy people who can fully exercise their human rights in a stigma-free society. Furthermore, the policy focus is to secure access to basic care, improve healthcare, promote mental health wellbeing, and provide accessible professional mental health care.



Construction of the hospital

#### Achievements and prioritized activities

- In 2021 a "Dutch Caribbean Hospital Alliance" was established as a cooperative association between the medical institutions in the islands Curacao, Aruba, St. Maarten, Bonaire, Saba, and St. Eustatius. This alliance will enhance collaboration between the hospitals to improve the quality and continuity of care provided to the residents of the Caribbean part of the Kingdom.
- A national health insurance is being implemented to increase the insured population to more than 90% of St. Maarten residents. This is estimated to be implemented in 2023.
- Ongoing structural community strengthening (educational and awareness) projects geared towards prevention and building resilience.
- Structural health promotion and disease prevention measures.

#### SDG 4 Quality education

From 2015, several initiatives have been taken by St. Maarten to safeguard access to quality education at the Primary, Secondary, Advanced Vocational Education, and Higher Education levels. In 2015, a new policy for the funding of education was introduced that introduced a transparent system that obtained its legal basis in 2019. From Primary to Secondary Education in St. Maarten, basic education is, in principle, free for all. The subsidy framework was expanded to include personnel costs for teachers, educational assistants, and specialists that are needed to support students and the delivery of education. It was also expanded to make provision of funding to facilitate in-service training, and the provision of funds for maintenance of educational materials and buildings was decentralized. Funds are budgeted annually to enable all schools to be adequately maintained. In addition, in 2017, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth, and Sport established the Higher Education Policy, which defined the strategic direction for the further development of Higher Education in St. Maarten. The policy detailed the basic quality standards that would be required and strategies to enhance access for all persons who meet the required standards and are desirous of pursuing Higher Education and highlighted the need for Higher Education Programs to be developed in tandem with the local labor market needs. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education also started the process developing the Special Needs Policy. Significant steps have been made toward establishing a framework that will be used to meet the needs of students with Special Educational Needs throughout the education system.



Photo 6: School children St. Dominics school

To make the different policies regarding education coherent and improve the quality of education, Sint Maarten has started reviewing the education system. In April 2021, the education system was screened based on research questions related to the core functions of education: qualification, socialization and allocation, and the conditions to enable these core functions. Desk research was conducted, discussions (on location) were held with stakeholders and policymakers, and schools were visited to interview school boards, teachers, and pupils/students were observed during lessons. An interim report was delivered in the first quarter of 2022. The final report, with recommendations on improving the basic quality of education, the connection between education and the labor market, and the flow between education systems between Sint Maarten and the Netherlands, is expected in September 2022.

## **SDG 5 and 10 Gender Equality and Reduced inequalities**

The government of Sint Maarten is currently doing a peer-review on statistics. Absent in the ministry's strategic planning are indicators like, for instance, Gender. In the near future, the strategic policy will reflect different indicators to safeguard and, if necessary, improve the status of vulnerable groups such as the elderly, women, and girls by taking into account not only the differential roles but also the relationship and balance between groups and the institutional structures that support them.

### **Achievements and prioritized activities:**

- 1<sup>st</sup> quarter 2022 Peer review statistical department to improve results- and evidence-based decision-making, transparency, and reporting;

## 6.3 National Development Theme B: A strong and resilient Economy

### SDGs 1, 7, 8, 11 and 13

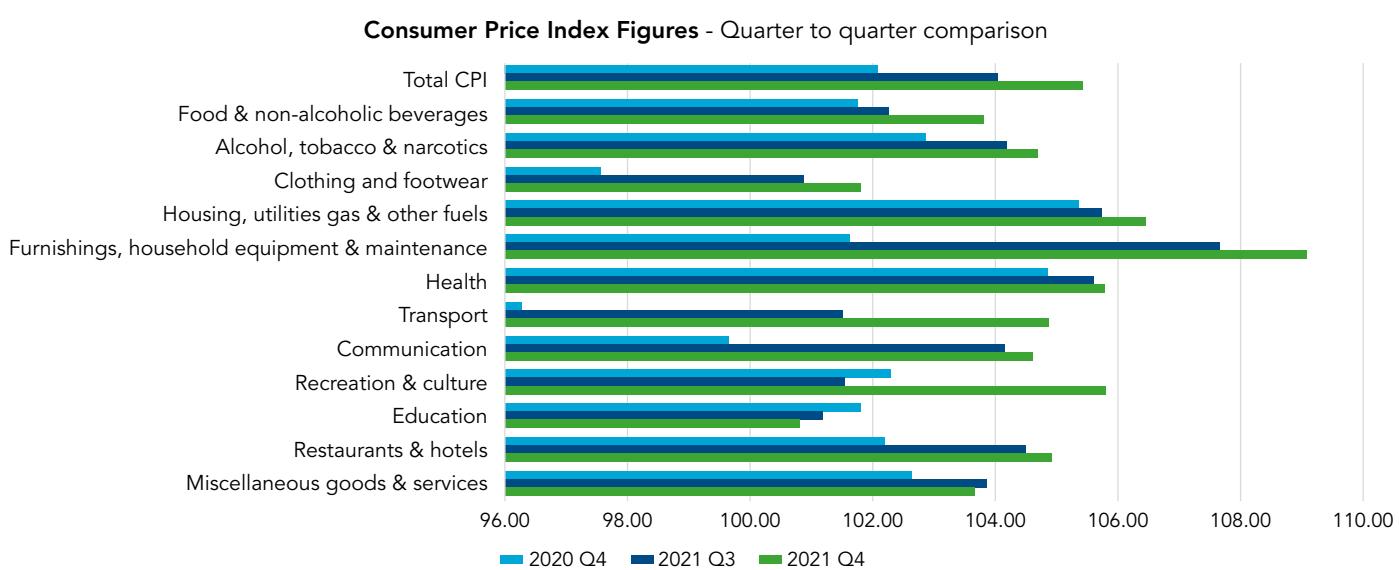
Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017 had a devastating impact on Sint Maarten's already fragile economy. Through rebuilding and recovery efforts, Sint Maarten's growth in 2019 was just rebounding to 5% when the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Businesses

had to close, causing heavy income and job losses. The global border closures and travel restrictions due to COVID-19 further affected the tourism sector. The economy contracted by an estimated 17.9% in 2020, with major impacts on fiscal revenues. Alongside there has been an increase in the cost of living due to the rise in prices for goods and services that the citizens need to sustain basic needs sustain themselves– food, housing, energy, healthcare, and taxes.

Expenditure Category	2018 weights	Index 2020 Quarter 4	Index 2021 Quarter 3	Index 2021 Quarter 4	Quarter-to-Quarter % Change Q3 2021 to Q4 2021	Year-on-Year % Change (inflation) Q4 2020 to Q4 2021
Food and non-alcoholic beverages	7.2%	101.79	102.32	103.75	1.39%	1.93%
Alcoholic beverages, tobacco and narcotics	0.4%	102.85	104.15	104.76	0.59%	1.86%
Clothing and footwear	4.8%	97.38	100.89	101.77	0.87%	4.51%
Housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels	36.1%	105.26	105.74	106.44	0.66%	1.12%
Furnishings, household equipment and routine household maintenance	6.5%	101.53	107.60	109.02	1.32%	7.38%
Health	1.9%	104.87	105.57	105.78	0.20%	0.86%
Transport	14.6%	96.21	101.38	104.83	3.40%	8.96%
Communication	6.0%	99.58	104.08	104.65	0.55%	5.10%
Recreation and culture	4.6%	102.20	101.39	105.78	4.33%	3.50%
Education	2.6%	101.83	101.14	100.75	-0.38%	-1.06%
Restaurants and hotels	2.0%	102.20	104.52	105.04	0.49%	2.77%
Miscellaneous goods and services	13.4%	102.74	103.85	103.65	-0.20%	0.88%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>102.09</b>	<b>104.04</b>	<b>105.25</b>	<b>1.16%</b>	<b>3.09%</b>
<b>Base Year 2018=100</b>						

Source: Department of Statistics, <http://stats.sintmaartengov.org>

Figure 6.6: Consumer price index figures, Quarterly percentage change and inflation rate for the 12 major expenditure categories for 2021 Quarter 4



Source: Department of Statistics, <http://stats.sintmaartengov.org>

Figure 6.7

Therefore, the economy of Sint Maarten is required to be solid and diversified to provide a broad range of services and employment opportunities and become resilient against external shocks. Fiscal reform, labour market reforms, investments in social safety nets, as well as investments in the tourism sector and other sectors, are essential for a more robust, and resilient economy. However, economic growth should not have a negative impact on Sint Maarten's environment. Sint Maarten has, therefore, also prioritized a transfer to renewable energy resources and lowering forms of pollution.

#### Economic desired outcome by 2024



Figure 6.8

#### Direct response after Covid-19 Pandemic

In a direct response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the government took quick action and implemented financial support measures to reduce the impact on vulnerable groups and households. With no formal unemployment insurance and only limited social assistance and anti-poverty measures, a scenario model was used to define the impact of Covid-19 on Sint Maarten's unemployment. This model projected unemployment at 5000 persons within three months. To avoid this, the government provided income- and unemployment support. ANG 1150 was disbursed to persons who became unemployed due to COVID-19 to reduce mass lay-offs.

2021	Income support	Unemployment support
Amount applications	638 applied – 583 received	938 applied – 683 received

Table 6.1

The type of applicants were sole proprietors, public transportation (taxis and bus operators), and public vendors.

#### Structural Protection of vulnerable groups:

To provide the people in Sint Maarten with more capacity for resilience after economic shock when affected by the serious economic downturn, Sint Maarten is currently working towards an unemployment fund and Social Registry. The project aimed to provide Sint Maarten with a social security system that has appropriate incentives for employment (activation function) and an adequate social safety net.

#### SDGs 1, 8 and 11

INTRO: financial control. Social safety nets and Labour reforms

#### Achievements and prioritized activities:

- Research has been conducted on the social security system to develop and implement concrete policy recommendations for the short and long term. This project will be viewed in combination with a reform of the labour market and implementing an Integrated Social Registry System.
- A tax reform program started in 2021 with the objective to create a robust system that contributes to a (more) fair distribution of income, stimulating the economy and enhancing the controllability of tax authorities.
- For the Labour market reform, an integrated analysis of the current labour market policy, legislation, and regulations will be conducted in 2022. This analysis will serve to update and modernize the labour market policy. The research will look at the conditions of employment and unemployment.

#### SDGs 7, 8 and 13

#### Economic growth, building resilience while protecting the environment

Sint Maarten's focus is to diversify its economy. Still, it will also continue to further develop its tourism product by promoting sustainable tourism to create jobs and to promote local cultural and art products ('Made in SXM'), a shared cultural identity, diversity, and tolerance. The positive results of Sint Maarten's promotion efforts are noticeable in the 2021 Tourism Statistics:



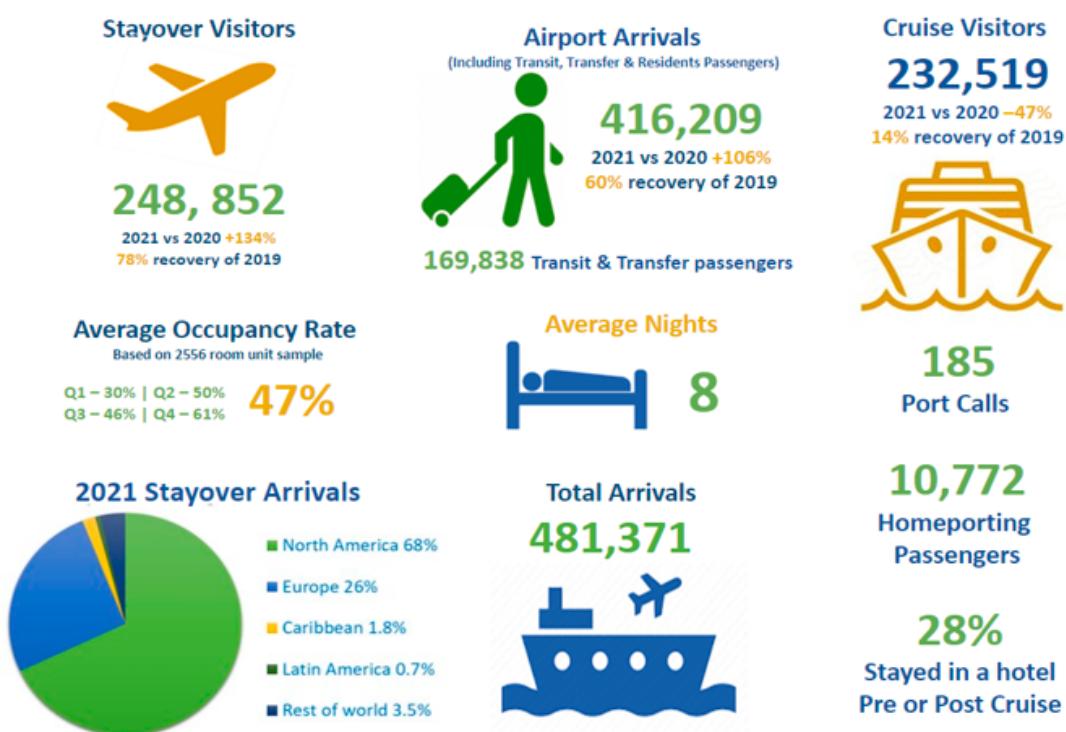
Cruise terminal

Sint Maarten is strengthening legislation to enhance employment opportunities, improve relations between employers and employees, and support access to financial services. This support is to stimulate economic growth, and business development, innovation, SME promotion, and the further strengthening of Telecommunication services, which are priority areas to create a more enabling and resilient environment for the business sector.

### Achievements and prioritized activities:

- In collaboration with the local utility company, the streetlights in Sint Maarten have been replaced by led lights to reduce CO2 emissions, as they will require less energy to illuminate.
- In 2021, an agreement was made with Grid-Market to create a sustainable energy roadmap for Sint Maarten. This roadmap will fulfill the role of an update to – and implementation plan for Sint Maarten's Energy Policy.
- Sustainable tourism is being implemented by means of a Tourism Masterplan.
- Although tourism still accounts for the majority of Sint Maarten's economy, small-dedicated groups of local artisans and entrepreneurs are slowly rising and changing the economy. "Structural Made in SXM" markets are organized where local products are sold.
- Implementation of economic, fiscal, monetary, and administrative reforms.
- Small Medium Enterprises are seen as the engine of economic growth and are stimulated by incentives and policies.
- Young entrepreneurs are reinforced with business-friendly regulations, and easier access to funding.

### Tourism Statistics 2021

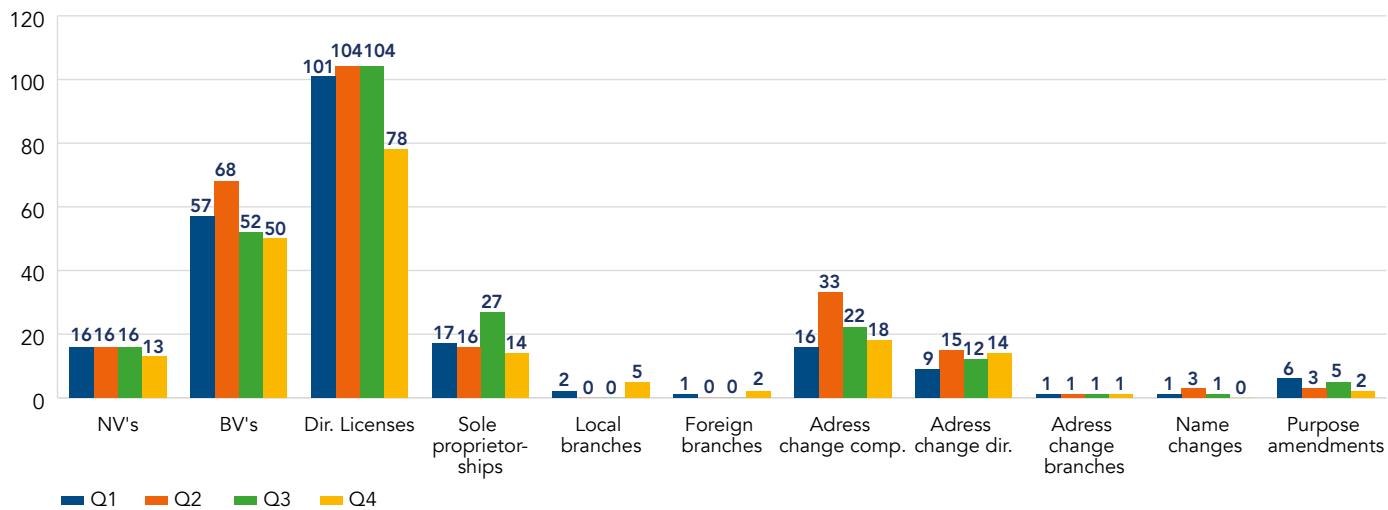


Source: Immigration Department, Princess Juliana International Airport Department of Statistics, Port St. Maarten, Department of Statistics, St. Maarten Tourism Bureau

- Economic upgrading will be combined with social upgrading for sustainability – a social security system is being developed.
- In 2021, research was conducted on the investment climate

in Sint Maarten, to stimulate investments that are essential to diversify the economy. Recommendations are implemented from 2022.

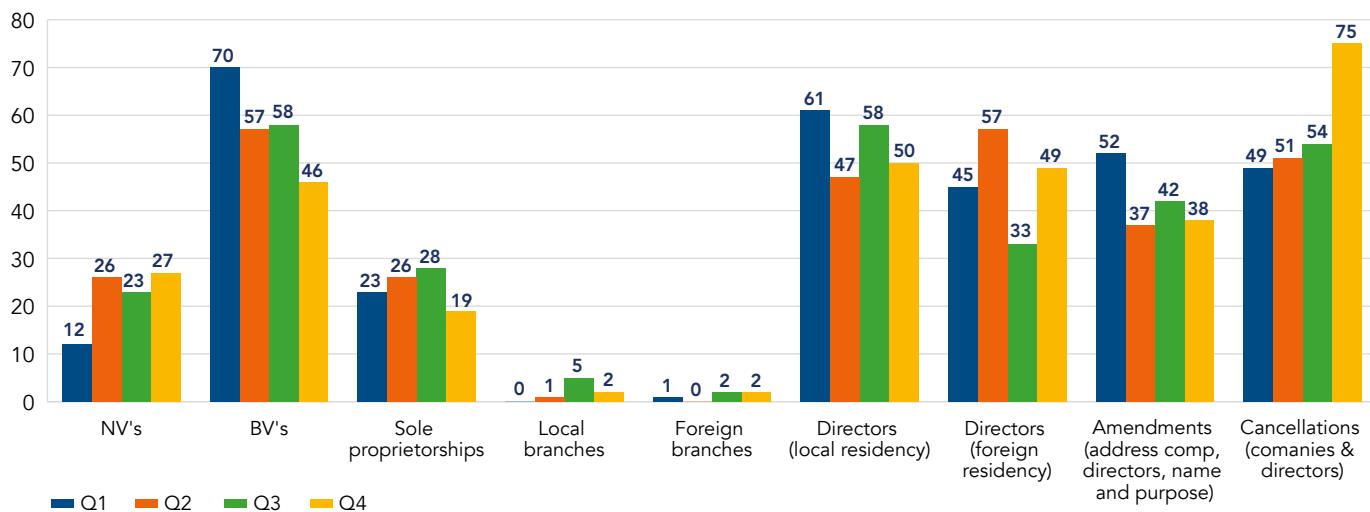
**Economic Licenses Issued - 2021 per quarter**



Note: Total includes request for cancellations, excludes Directors (local residency & Director (foreign residency))  
Source: Department of Economic Licenses

Figure 6.10

**Economic Licenses Requests Received - 2021 per quarter**



Note: Total includes request for cancellations, excludes Directors (local residency & Director (foreign residency))  
Source: Department of Economic Licenses

Figure 6.11

## **SDG 11 Sustainable cities and communities**

The strategic ambition is on improving community governance and communications and the development of orderly urban spatial structures with the objective of building resilience.

### **Achievements and prioritized activities:**

- Sustainable Solid Waste Management Strategy: Reduce, reuse, recycle, recover energy and dispose of residual waste.
- In line with the Disaster Risk Strategy, Sint Maarten is setting up an Early warning system with the necessary framework and alerting protocols.
- Training and awareness programs are ongoing to strengthen community councils and other community organizations to ensure they operate in a manner that will benefit their communities as strategic service organizations to deliver services.
- In 2020, a project to create a greener and more resilient island was launched by the Netherlands Red Cross in collaboration with the Nature Foundation St. Maarten. The Project "Re-greening SXM" aims to restore and build environmental resilience. The Re-greening SXM Project is part of the Disaster Risk Reduction Project. The project will focus on ensuring ways in which community environments will be better adapted to withstand future hazards and natural disasters.

## **SDG 13 and 14 Climate Action and Life Below Water**

Sint Maarten's current carbon emission compared to countries that are more prominent can be regarded as negligible in a global sense. Mitigation efforts will not have the same desired impacts. Therefore, Sint Maarten's primary focus is on adaptation instead. One focus is the transition to affordable and clean energy to increase the resilience and adaptive capacity of the people of Sint Maarten. The current high cost of energy is unsustainable and affecting many households.

- Sint Maarten's Nature Policy Plan 2021-2025.
- A climate change report is being finalized with regard to the nature policy plan 2021-2015. The policy objectives related to Climate Change call for ongoing and enhanced collection of localized climate data, the incorporation of expected climate change impacts into planning and decision-making as well as harnessing of nature as a tool for adapting to climate change.

- The government of Sint Maarten financially supports the Nature Foundation in order to significantly reduce marine pollution and sustainably manage and protect the island's marine and coastal ecosystems.
- Man of War Shoal Marine Park is the most valuable ecological and economic marine habitat of Sint Maarten.
- Marine Bio-diversity project.

## **6.4 National Development Theme C: A safe and secured, decisive and independent nation**

### **SDGs 13, 16 and 17**

Sint Maarten is determined to move away from the status of vulnerable SIDS to a safe, secure, decisive self-sustainable nation. One of the key aspects of strengthening itself to become self-sustainable is building resilience while investing in long-term sustainable development. Sint Maarten is, however, not eligible for official development assistance, as Sint Maarten is classified as a high-income country. As stated before, Sint Maarten's status within the Kingdom makes it challenging to access international markets. Partnerships for the goals (SDG 17) make it possible for Sint Maarten to recover, build back better, and develop in a sustainable manner. The main collaboration agreements Sint Maarten has are within the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the World Bank, the European Union, and several UN organizations like UNICEF, UNDP, ILO, UNESCO, and WHO/PAHO. Through these partnerships, investments focus on our sustainable economic growth, as prioritized in Sint Maarten's National Vision.

### **SDG 13 Climate action**

Sint Maarten has prioritized economic growth while protecting the environment and preserving its natural heritage and resources through an Environmental Policy Plan. There are policy initiatives on sustainable spatial planning, environmental protection, nature conservation, building and construction quality, and the provision of safe physical infrastructure. Sint Maarten furthermore continues to invest heavily in disaster management.

### Achievements and prioritized activities:

- A draft Climate Change Report supported by Nature Policy Plan Sint Maarten 2021-2025.
- Disaster Risk Management Strategy that consists of a disaster risk financing structure, a Centre of Excellence, Disaster Risk Vision, and updated laws and policies.
- Disaster risk management policy and shared Vision.
- Sustainable Solid Waste Management Strategy: Reduce, reuse, recycle, recover energy and dispose of residual waste.
- In 2021 the law on the ban of single-use plastic bags was passed.
- Working towards a Spatial Development Strategy that aims to provide an overview of the bigger picture regarding spatial development and the correlation between the country's economic, environmental, and social development for the next ten years. The Strategy focuses on sustainable development by enhancing the resilience of the country's resilience, protecting our environment and natural resources, and enhancing the quality of life for citizens. This will form the base for more concrete legislation and policies.

### SDG 16 Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

Sint Maarten is focused on strengthening her institutions by improving their effectiveness, efficiency, and quality. Progress had been made in the police force and Court of Guardianship. Furthermore, the region's police forces have established good working relations, and several cross-border agreements are in place. The National Security Strategy addresses issues relating to immigration, border protection, and the prevention of human, drugs, and arms trafficking.

The country is currently improving its governance and promoting public accountability.

### Achievements and prioritized activities:

- The government has strengthened the integral collaboration and structures to operationalize and effected government through improved coordination and communication.
- The government is improving its statistics to strengthen governments' capacities and capabilities to work effectively as a stable, accountable and transparent system.
- Results-based management has been introduced, with a monitoring and evaluation system.
- An E-government system is being built. Financial processes and services are being enhanced through ICT to provide efficient public services to citizens and empower the public.



Photo 8: Police force



Photo 9: Courthouse

