

Fourth Dutch National SDG Report

Sustainable Development in the Netherlands



May 2020

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A. JOINT INTRODUCTION

Drafted jointly by central government, the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG) representing local and regional government and acting on behalf of the Association of Provincial Authorities (IPO) and the Dutch water authorities, the Confederation of Netherlands Industry and Employers (VNO-NCW), the Royal Association MKB-Nederland and Global Compact Network Netherlands representing the business community and the financial sector, Partos representing civil society, NWO-WOTRO Science for Global Development representing the knowledge institutions, the National Youth Council (NJR) representing youth organisations, and the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights.

Publication of an SDG report in the middle of the current coronavirus pandemic may lead the reader to question its relevance. After all, in a crisis like this, our focus is on the here and now: the rest can come later. Yet we – the joint authors of this report – believe that precisely in times like these it is important to share the report with members of parliament and the general public. Whatever the outcome, the current crisis will have a great impact – both positive and negative – on whether the Netherlands stays on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. Nonetheless, it is useful to look back on the policies and activities of a wide range of stakeholders who work every day to achieve the goals. The closer we come to achieving the SDGs, the faster we will be able to recover from current and future crises.

The past year has again seen more focus on the SDGs and greater efforts to achieve them. Many organisations scaled up or stepped up existing activities; others discovered the SDG agenda for the first time and acted on it with great enthusiasm. All this activity is in line with the major transitions now ahead for the Netherlands and the rest of the world. The need to change course is becoming clear to more and more people. We have now entered the 2020s, the UN Decade of Action to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals. The SDGs form an attractive, universally comprehensible plan for a sustainable and inclusive society.

This path of action is becoming increasingly important to people and organisations who seek impact – not only out of altruism, but also to ensure a secure future. The concept of well-being, used in the Netherlands to look beyond economic growth, is closely in line with the SDG agenda. This concept implies attention for prosperity and well-being, not only in the here and now, but also in the future and for people in other parts of the world. The SDGs provide a practical action plan, presenting an overarching framework to which both large and small-scale actions can contribute. Statistics Netherlands' integration of the annual SDG assessment with its Monitor of Well-being clearly shows how closely achievement of the SDGs is connected to well-being.

It is time to push forward. The UN has concluded that much still needs to be done if the SDGs are to be achieved in ten years' time and that in some major areas, environment and equality in particular, the worldwide trends are not favourable. For this reason,

UN Secretary-General António Guterres has called on all 193 member states to step up their efforts, both nationally and through international cooperation, to achieve the SDGs at global level.

The Netherlands has also committed to this. The SDGs are the overarching framework at European level. The European Commission has put the SDGs at the core of its six priorities: 1) a European Green Deal; 2) a Europe fit for the digital age; 3) an economy that works for people; 4) a stronger Europe in the world; 5) promoting our European way of life; and 6) a new push for European democracy. The SDGs thus serve as the guiding principle for the Commission's work in every sector, both within the Union and beyond. This also provides a new incentive for the Netherlands to move forward with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In this part, we will first examine where the Netherlands stands in 2019 in terms of achieving the SDGs, according to various comparative reports. We will then highlight a number of especially noteworthy initiatives launched in the past year that have brought us closer to the achievement of the goals. Finally, we will identify the opportunities and challenges that will lead to a successful Decade of Action and Delivery.

1. Performance of The Netherlands relative to other countries

Studies are regularly conducted on how the Netherlands is measuring up in terms of achieving the SDGs. These studies use measurements that compare the Netherlands with other countries in order to monitor progress. Statistics Netherlands, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the EU and the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) and Bertelsmann Stiftung are among the organisations that publish SDG measurements. To guarantee comparability, the internationally agreed UN indicators form the basis for these measurements. However, the indicators used by organisations may differ, depending on the availability, reliability and comparability of data. Indicators may have been adapted to make them more relevant to a given situation. Statistics Netherlands' national measurements are more applicable to the Netherlands than global measurements are, while measurements at EU and OECD level are somewhere in between. For this reason, conclusions about the Netherlands may differ somewhat from report to report. However, the reports complement each other well, and together give a reliable picture of the Netherlands' performance on achieving the SDGs. A short overview of these reports' findings is given below.

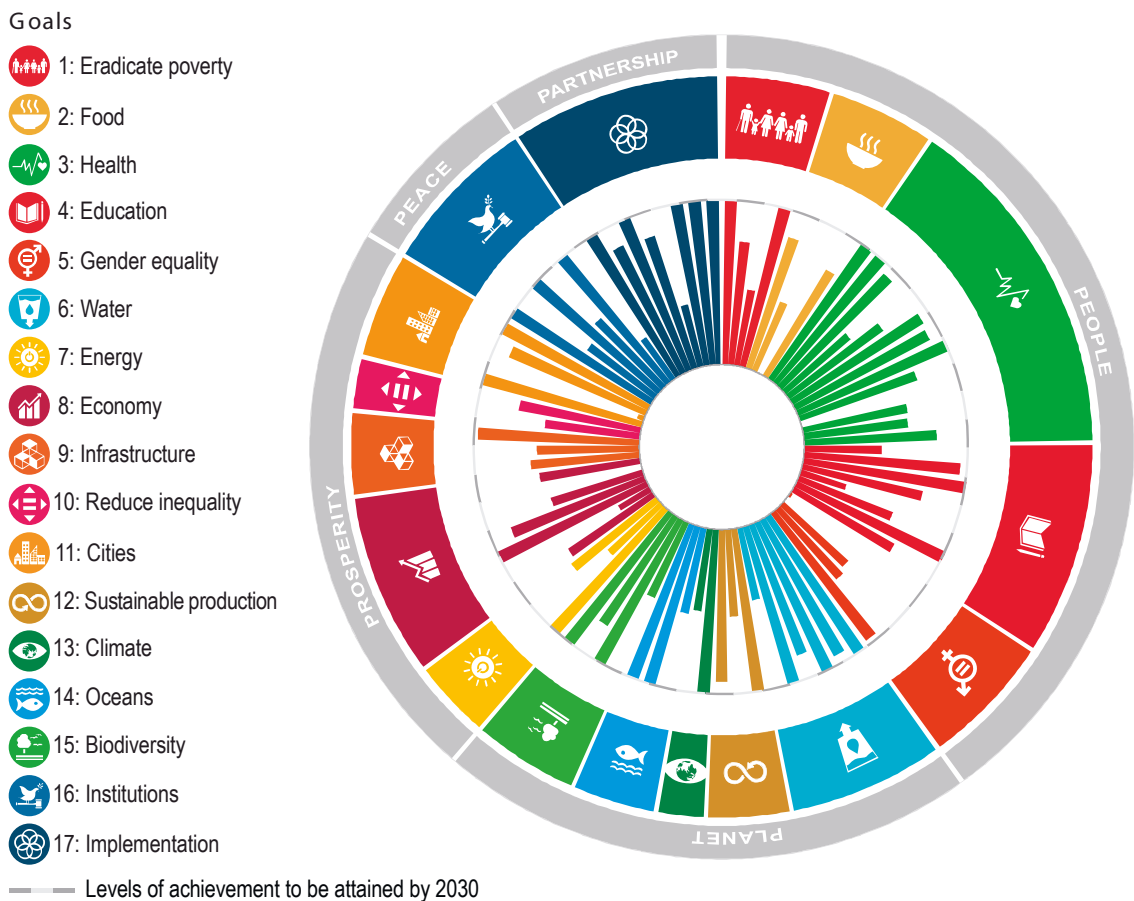
1.1 Statistics Netherlands: 2020 Monitor of Well-being & the SDGs

Publication of Statistics Netherlands' annual Monitor of Well-being & the Sustainable Development Goals coincides with the publication of this SDG report. The 2020 Monitor contains the most recent figures on trends in the Netherlands and the Netherlands' position

in Europe in relation to the SDGs. Statistics Netherlands supplemented the UN indicators with indicators specifically applicable to the Netherlands (SDG+ indicators). The Netherlands still leads the European field on the following goals and targets: no poverty (SDG 1); industry, innovation and infrastructure: knowledge and innovation (SDG 9); reduced inequalities: social cohesion and inequality (SDG 10); peace, justice and strong institutions: institutions (SDG 16); and partnerships for the goals (SDG 17). Statistics Netherlands identifies positive developments on the rising net employment-to-population ratio for both women and men, median disposable income and individual consumption (at the interface of SDG 1, SDG 5 and SDG 8). According to the 2020 Monitor, however, the Netherlands continues to lag behind in organic farming (SDG 2), healthy life expectancy for women (SDGs 3 and 5), the proportion of women in management positions (SDG 5), climate action (SDG 13), life below water (SDG 14) and life on land (SDG 15). Though there has been a strong increase in installed capacity for the production of renewable energy (SDG 7), the Netherlands still ranks last in the EU in this field and is so far failing to catch up with other member states.

1.2 OECD: Measuring Distance to the SDG Targets

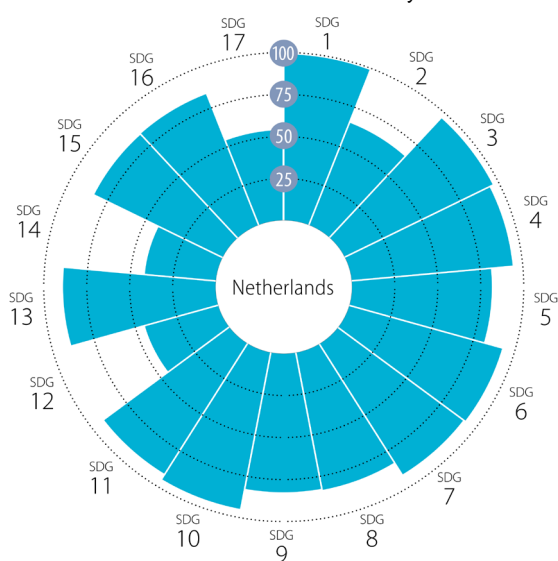
As last year's SDG report pointed out, the OECD's biennial report 'Measuring Distance to the SDG Targets', published in May 2019, examines how far each member state is from achieving individual SDG targets. Statistics Netherlands was involved in the development of the report, which uses both UN and OECD indicators. According to the OECD, the Netherlands has already achieved 26 of the 104 targets measured and is well on the way towards achieving many others. The OECD's findings largely agree with those of Statistics Netherlands. The Netherlands scores well on lifelong learning (SDG 4) and has the lowest percentage of material consumption per unit of GDP (SDGs 8 and 12) and the highest number of people connected to public sewage treatment (SDG 6). The distance to a number of the other targets is still considerable, however. For example, tobacco consumption is still high in the Netherlands, and intensive land use places a heavy burden on the environment.



OECD (2019), [Measuring Distance to the SDG Targets 2019: An Assessment of Where OECD Countries Stand](#), OECD Publishing, Paris.

1.3 SDSN and Bertelsmann: Sustainable Development Report 2019

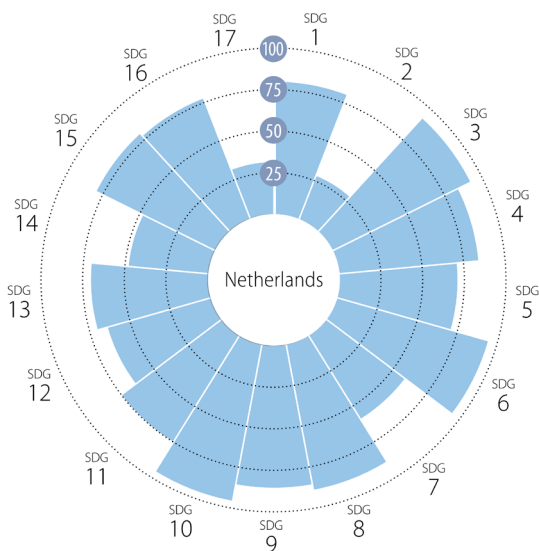
Each year, the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) and the Bertelsmann Stiftung publish the Sustainable Development Report, with the SDG Index and Dashboards. This report gives countries scores on various indicators, the average being the overall score for the SDG in question. Scores range from 0 (worst) to 100 (best). A score of 100 is the best possible score, and means that a country is on schedule to achieve the SDG. According to the 2019 report, which examined the performance of 162 countries, the Netherlands achieved an index score of 80.4, moving up two places in the world rankings for the second year in a row, from 11th to 9th. However, this does not mean that the Netherlands performed better on the SDGs than the year before, because the indicators and methodology have been revised. The report gives the Netherlands a score of 100 for SDG 1. That means that with its current policies, the Netherlands will succeed in eliminating poverty by 2030. The Netherlands also scored well on SDGs 3, 4, 10 and 11. Furthermore, many positive trends can be identified on SDG 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure) and SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions), including the number of patent applications filed and scientific and technical journal articles (SDG 9), and freedom of the press and the proportion of the population who feel safe walking alone at night (SDG 16). The greatest challenges for the Netherlands are SDG 2, due for example to the increasing prevalence of obesity, SDG 12 due to high consumption, SDG 14 due to pollution of the sea and overexploitation of fish stocks and SDG 17 due to a low score on financial transparency and tax havens; this concerns in particular target 17.14 on policy coherence, which calls on countries to reduce their negative footprint elsewhere in the world – due to low scores on financial secrecy and tax havens.



Bertelsmann Stiftung and SDSN, 'Sustainable Development Report: Transformations to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals', Pica Publishing Ltd, 2019.

1.4 SDSN and IEEP: Europe Sustainable Development Report 2019

Besides the world rankings, SDSN also publishes the Europe Sustainable Development Report, complete with a European SDG Index, in collaboration with the Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP). The data set for the European report is more thorough and more accurate than the data available for the worldwide report. The two reports also use different indicators, so that the Netherlands occupies a different position in the European report than in the worldwide report. In the European report, the Netherlands comes seventh with an index score of 71.8. According to this report, the Netherlands is on track to achieve both SDG 1 (as is the case in the worldwide report) and SDG 9 by 2030. In the worldwide report, the Netherlands had a lower score for SDG 9 because different indicators were used, including an indicator for the number of women in science and technology, on which the Netherlands scores badly. The Netherlands also made progress on SDGs 4, 6, 8 and 10. According to the Europe report, the planet goals form the main challenges for the Netherlands, and scores for SDGs 2 and 17 are low as well. The Netherlands' score on SDG 2 is lower than in the worldwide report because the Europe report also uses nitrogen emissions as an indicator.



IEEP and SDSN, 'Europe Sustainable Development Report: Towards a Strategy for Achieving the SDGs in the EU', Pica Publishing Ltd, 2019.

1.5 Conclusion

Despite the use of indicators that differ to some extent, the reports present a fairly consistent view of the Netherlands' performance – high scores for eradicating poverty and for social cohesion, a strong position on infrastructure and knowledge, high quality healthcare and education, and confidence in institutions. The Netherlands also does well on water management and has the lowest score in Europe for material consumption. However, it performs less well on elements of the following SDGs: SDG 5

on gender equality (in particular, the score for the number of women in management positions lowers the overall score); SDG 2: food security (in particular, scores for obesity and nitrogen emissions lower the overall score); SDGs 14 and 15: biodiversity on land and below the water; and SDGs 7 and 13: access to affordable, sustainable energy and climate action.

The most interesting differences between the reports are in the scores for SDG 17. According to Statistics Netherlands and the OECD, the Netherlands is a leader in forging partnerships to achieve the goals. The SDSN, on the other hand, foresees enormous challenges in meeting this goal. This is because the SDSN uses different indicators than Statistics Netherlands to monitor progress towards SDG 17. Statistics Netherlands looks, for example, at the relative size of money transfers and development aid and total imports from low-income countries, on which the Netherlands scores high. The SDSN also takes tax regulations into consideration. For the record, in its report, Statistics Netherlands also indicates that the Netherlands needs to do much more to reduce its negative footprint elsewhere in the world, but puts this comment under the well-being heading 'Elsewhere' instead of under SDG 17.

The Netherlands achieves relatively high scores in many fields, but this does not mean that it can rest on its laurels. It has achieved only 26 of the 169 targets, while it trails behind the Scandinavian countries and several other European countries in the rankings. There are also some hidden facts and figures behind the total picture. For example, according to the Statistics Netherlands Monitor, inequality is also a rising trend in the Netherlands, and despite a high score for SDG 1, a considerable proportion of children grow up in poverty (more than 9%, although the trend is downward). The trend on SDG 5 is positive, though progress towards achieving gender equality is too slow. Finally, though trends in relation to SDG 13 (climate action) are positive, the Netherlands still has a way to go.

2. New initiatives in the past year

In the past year as earlier, many new initiatives were launched to achieve the SDGs. Many focused explicitly on the SDGs. Others did not refer to them directly, but adopted an approach that can be characterised as an SDG approach: a focus on clear, SDG-relevant goals, an overarching, coherent vision and cooperation between various stakeholders.

- [SDG Nederland](#) wrote an [open letter](#) asking the government to draft a national plan both to achieve the SDGs in the Netherlands and to make the most positive and least negative possible contribution to achieving the SDGs abroad. SDG Nederland also asked the government to take

the SDGs as the basis for the growth agenda and the sovereign wealth fund and expressed its willingness to work with the government to achieve this. SDG Nederland (formerly the SDG Charter) comprises a diverse and expanding network of businesses, civil society organisations, financial institutions, knowledge and educational institutions, youth organisations, local and regional authorities and members of the public. They have formed [alliances](#) focusing on the SDGs, and make plans that are drawn together in the [SDG Routekaart](#) (SDG Roadmap). The SDGs will not be achieved unless, in addition to private and public sector organisations, members of the public (in the role of consumer, employee, parent and so on) also take part. Many people are already taking individual action to achieve the SDGs. SDG Nederland seeks them out through [the SDG stedentrip](#) (SDG city tour), tells their [stories](#), and connects them to the SDG agenda and other members of the network. The result is a broad movement contributing to the SDGs, with public and private organisations and members of the public able to find, inspire and strengthen each other. Examples of new initiatives from various sectors can be found in parts C to H.

- The number of local authorities taking part in the [Municipal Global Goals Campaign](#) to achieve the SDGs grew in 2019 and is still growing. Now 25% of Dutch municipalities have joined the campaign. They are carrying out numerous innovative activities to engage both members of the public and schools with the SDGs and use the goals as the basis for local policies. The three winners of the 2019 Association of Netherlands Municipalities Global Goals Award provide some good examples. In the municipality of Goirle, the local executive's implementation programme is based on the SDGs in a way that clearly links local plans to global goals for local residents. The municipality of Deventer succeeded in connecting every stakeholder in the town with the SDGs; and the municipality of Oss used the SDGs to strengthen international cooperation with a twin town in China.
- In October 2019, the Social and Economic Council (SER) published a report on linking the SDGs to international corporate social responsibility (ICSR). In its report ['Kansen pakken en risico's beheersen'](#) ('Seizing opportunities and managing risks') the SER points out that ICSR and the SDGs strengthen each other and advises government and businesses to closely link the two agendas. A government response to the report is currently under preparation. Global Compact Network Netherlands organised a special [workshop](#) on this subject for businesses.
- The significance of sustainability and the SDGs is also increasingly recognised in the financial sector. In 2019,

for example, the Nederlandsche Bank published a [report](#) on sustainability goals and threats to sustainability in the sector, and launched a new [CSR vision](#) for 2019 to 2025. The SDGs form the framework for these two documents.

- The government has decided to adopt in full the recommendations made by the SER in its advisory report '[Diversity in the boardroom: time to accelerate](#)'. This means that women must make up at least 30% of the membership of the supervisory boards of Dutch listed companies. This mandatory quota for women on supervisory boards will help the Netherlands improve its position on SDG 5 (women in leadership positions). All major companies ($\pm 5,000$ businesses in total) are required to set ambitious targets for both senior and middle management, to draft an action plan, and to be transparent in all their actions. Measures for the public and semi-public sector will be developed in line with those for the private sector. Given the range and diversity of organisations in the public and semi-public sector, one-size-fits-all measures are not feasible. Before the summer of 2020, the government will inform the House of Representatives of progress on the mandatory quota, how the transparency requirement is taking shape, and the approach to, design of and schedule for the public and semi-public sector programme.
- The report published last year by the Advisory Council on International Affairs (AIV) titled '[Sustainable Development Goals and Human Rights: an Indivisible Bond](#)' states that pursuit of the SDGs goes hand in hand with the realisation of human rights, in particular those rights that need to be achieved partly through socioeconomic development. Conversely, human rights are crucial to ensure that everyone can benefit equally from sustainable development and that no one is left behind. The advisory report provides practical guidance on linking these two agendas, in particular in relation to SDGs 1, 10, 13 and 16.
- In October 2019, the new government-wide procurement strategy ([Inkopen met Impact](#)) was launched. With this strategy, the government seeks to use its purchasing power to help solve social problems and speed up related transitions.
- Working with businesses active abroad, a new [brand strategy](#) was developed for the Netherlands. In late 2019 foreign trade and development cooperation minister Sigrid Kaag and economic affairs minister Eric Wiebes launched the new strategy, which focuses on solving global challenges together, with the SDGs as the guiding principles. Dutch companies' inclusive and sustainable approach to doing business makes the Netherlands an attractive partner for countries working on the challenges involved in achieving the SDGs.

3. Opportunities and challenges for the future

The above initiatives show that broad social cooperation on the SDGs, focusing on major and minor transitions, developed apace in the past year. This presents ample opportunity for a stronger commitment to the SDGs. Challenges do, however, remain.

3.1 Coherent approach

The previous report referred to the need for knowledge development. The strength of the SDGs is their cohesion. At the same time, this presents a challenge, because it calls for defragmentation, decompartmentalisation and a genuine willingness to tackle issues together. There is a need for more knowledge, and for models and good examples. We are seeing an increasing number of fine examples at local level – like municipalities that base their implementation programmes or their budgets on the SDGs and organise themselves accordingly. Many initiatives with an area-based approach are also showing how the SDGs can be tackled coherently, for example by combining biodiversity-friendly land management, organic farming, water management, sustainable production and local consumption (SDGs 2, 6, 12, 15 and 16). The challenge for the coming period is to upscale good examples and to make the positive crosscutting links between the goals more visible. This report seeks to make a start.

3.2 Measuring impact

Measuring impact is also a challenge. There is a growing need among organisations to show in clear, measurable terms what various initiatives contribute to achieving the SDGs. Monitoring not only provides clarity on what each organisation contributes, but also helps them to internalise the SDGs. Interest in the SDGs is still growing in the private sector, but measuring and reporting on impact remains a challenge. There are some social initiatives that focus on making impact visible, such as the 'Social Exchange Index' [MAEX](#). The government has now launched a study to identify which measurement methods are available, how they differ from or supplement each other, and where gaps remain.

3.3 Innovations in partnerships and financing

Partnerships are central to achieving the SDGs. The major Dutch agreements of the past few years show the importance of a multi-stakeholder approach to large, complex issues. Many initiatives find new ways of working together, with local or national government authorities, citizens' initiatives, NGOs, businesses and financiers joining forces to tackle social challenges using innovative methods, often in specific areas. Complex challenges call for innovative, out-of-the-box thinking. In this way the Netherlands continues to be an innovator in the field of partnerships. New forms of partnership encourage new forms of funding,

partly due to the increasing commitment of the financial sector to sustainable investment. Partners share the responsibility for tackling complex social challenges, where possible at local level. The government is also investing, for example in the Green Deal approach, which was launched in 2011. With this interactive approach, the government seeks to create space for innovative, sustainable civil society initiatives by removing obstacles in legislation, creating new markets, providing reliable information and ensuring the most promising partnerships. By reaching clear agreements, partners can work on tangible results, with each party taking its own responsibility. There are now, for example, City Deals (see B) and Health Deals like the Green Deal on Sustainable Healthcare (see box).

The challenge in the period to come will be to upscale successful partnership models and thus speed up progress towards achieving the goals. It is essential to continue learning from each other and from other countries. Our partnership-based efforts in developing countries can provide inspiration for how we in the Netherlands can tackle our various challenges, and vice versa.

Green Deal on Sustainable Healthcare

The healthcare sector is contending with the effects of climate change on health. At the same time, the sector itself also has an impact on the environment and contributes to climate change. It is one of the polluters. In the Green Deal on Sustainable Healthcare, healthcare institutions, government authorities and businesses have set out agreements that will ensure that healthcare will benefit people, planet and prosperity in the long term and not cause more pollution or to health problems. The first Green Deal on Sustainable Healthcare in the Netherlands, dating from 2015, initiated a broad movement and prompted a growing number of healthcare institutions, professionals and patients, government authorities and suppliers of products and services to commit to making the sector more sustainable.

In 2018 a new Green Deal on Sustainable Healthcare for a Healthy Future was launched. It focuses on four key themes to speed up efforts to make the sector more sustainable, by:

- reducing the sector's CO₂ emissions
- promoting circular practices
- reducing concentrations of pharmaceutical residues in surface water and groundwater
- creating a healthy living and working environment both within and outside healthcare institutions.

B. CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

Every year, central government reports on the policies it has pursued to move towards achievement of the SDGs. Given the breadth of the agenda, each report looks at the subject from a different angle. This year, the report focuses on subjects where the various SDGs converge, i.e. crosscutting themes. This shows how various central government bodies work together as one to seek answers to complex challenges.

The 17 SDGs are inextricably interlinked. Looking at the goals in relation to one another reveals opportunities for synergy and for removing barriers. The SDGs form a comprehensive framework for integrated cross-sector analyses and synergy. The framework also enables engagement of all relevant actors in the policy process, both internal actors (local government) and non-governmental stakeholders, the private sector and civil society in particular. To show how this works in practice, we will highlight three crosscutting themes in this part of the SDG report.

The first is the future of work and lifelong development. The labour market is changing due to digitalisation, globalisation, increasing demand for flexibility and an ageing workforce. These trends influence the type and quality of work, required skills and competences and the training system. It is also crucial that every type of education and work be accessible to all. This crosscutting theme touches on SDGs 4, 5, 8 and 10 in particular.

The second crosscutting theme is sustainable transport and mobility. By approaching this subject broadly from the angle of sustainability, we link it not only to achieving the climate goals, but also to health, physical living environment, equality, impact on the labour market, infrastructure, innovation and earning capacity. The transport of both goods and people must not only be green by 2030 but also affordable and accessible to all. This crosscutting theme touches on SDGs 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 13 in particular.

The city is central to the third crosscutting theme, just as it is central to SDG 11. Cities change and grow as their populations increase, and as they make the transition to a circular economy and continually adapt, for example to the consequences of climate change. Cities are also places where many other SDGs converge at local level. This crosscutting theme describes how, comprehensively and with all due care, central government will facilitate vibrant, sustainable cities by 2030.

Finally, this section gives an overview of both recent and older policies that make a major contribution to achieving the SDGs. As requested in the [motion submitted by MP Kirsten van den Hul](#) on 28 November 2019, when presenting

new policies the government intends to show how they contribute to specific SDGs, where relevant.

1. Lifelong learning and the future of work

The labour market is changing due to trends like digitalisation, globalisation, increasing demand for flexibility and an ageing workforce. These trends influence the type and quality of work, required skills and competences and the education system. At the same time, it is crucial that every type of education and work be accessible to all, looking at for example SDGs 4, 5, 8 and 10.

The education system will have to respond to and prepare for changing labour market demands (new skills) by developing new forms of education, while workers and jobseekers will need to develop and update their knowledge and skills throughout their lives. SDG 4.4 explicitly urges countries to substantially enhance the technical and vocational skills of both young people and adults by 2030. SDG 8.2 calls for a focus on technological upgrading and innovation and is thus closely linked to SDG 4.4.

The Dutch government sees it as government's task to ensure that the school curriculum is always aligned to the needs of society, the labour market and the education sector itself. This calls for regular reflection on the national curriculum. In 2019, in the framework of curriculum revision in primary and secondary education, teams of school leaders and teachers published proposals for areas of learning and skills, including digital literacy as a new area of learning.¹ The government considered these proposals in December 2019 and described how they could be fleshed out in educational objectives.² A decision on further steps towards curriculum revision is planned for 2020, after consultation with the House of Representatives.

Encouraging people to take responsibility for their own lifelong learning is central to the approach set out by the government in its [letter](#) of 27 September 2018 to the House of Representatives. Qualifications are becoming outdated faster, while people are retiring at a later age. Timely investment is therefore needed in training, informal learning and sustainable employability. Many employees

¹ <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/toekomst-onderwijs/toekomstgericht-curriculum> (in Dutch).

² <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/toekomst-onderwijs/documenten/kamerstukken/2019/12/09/kabinetsreactie-op-adviezen-voor-verbetering-van-het-curriculum-voor-het-primair-en-voortgezet-onderwijs> (in Dutch).

and employers now wait too long before taking action, but they need to look ahead rather than wait until a problem is obvious before trying to fix it. A broad, shared approach is needed to create a positive learning environment. The government is working with the social partners, training and development funds, industry bodies, educational institutions, municipal and provincial authorities, implementing organisations, regional initiatives and other parties in the field to achieve this. The Social and Economic Council has been asked to act as driver of a movement from the bottom up and to help forge links between regional, sectoral and national initiatives.³

Some people are unable to manage their own lifelong learning. The government therefore seeks to ensure better support for workers, unemployed and employers in meeting their learning and development needs. A good regional support structure is essential. To this end, pilot projects with learning and employment helpdesks are currently under way in three labour market regions (Friesland, Twente and Rijnmond). These helpdesks are run collaboratively by educational institutions, businesses and government authorities (municipalities and the Employment Insurance Agency). They have expertise on training, competence tests, functional illiteracy, adult education programmes, structured vocational pathways, grants, and setting up recruitment, employment and training programmes.

To help people manage their own lifelong learning, the government is encouraging private sector parties to provide individual training and employment budgets. Tax treatment of these budgets is being clarified, and areas for improvement identified.⁴ The government has also launched the ‘[STAP-budget](#)’ (a special budget to improve people’s position on the job market). This is a public version of the individual learning budget⁵ and is, in principle, available to anyone wanting to move forward with their own development or career. This scheme is expected to enter into force on 1 January 2022.

To encourage SMEs to do more to promote lifelong learning, the government has set up the SME learning and development grant scheme ([SLIM](#)) for businesses and joint ventures.⁶ SLIM, which will enter into force in 2020, is closely in

line with SDG 8.3, which explicitly encourages SMEs to take part in the transitions. The top sectors’ learning communities also play a role in enabling businesses and educational institutions to apply innovations, and ensuring that people are adequately trained and equipped to do so.

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science is working on more [flexible educational offerings](#) for adults. The Ministry has also explored the feasibility of an online overview of training opportunities enabling individuals to see what is available to them at any given time, in terms of both training and budget. The government will publish its response to the study in 2020.

To ensure that everyone can keep up, the government has launched [Tel mee met Taal](#) (2020-2024), the new, interministerial action programme on literacy (which includes the [Educatie voor Vrouwen met Ambitie](#) (Education for Women with Ambition) project⁷). With this programme, the government seeks to give an extra boost to efforts to promote basic literacy, numeracy and digital skills. Digital inclusion is one of the core values of the [Digital Government Agenda](#). These actions are directly related to SDG 4.6, which is aimed at tackling functional illiteracy and innumeracy, and also contribute to SDG 10 (reducing inequalities) and SDG 5 (promoting gender equality).

There have been considerable changes to labour market policies in the past few years. The new Balanced Labour Market Act (WAB) marked a major step towards a stable, well-functioning labour market. In order to restore the balance on the labour market, the government is also working on measures relating to the self-employed. For example, it has reduced tax differences between working people by gradually phasing out the self-employed person’s tax deduction, while the recent agreement on pensions requires self-employed persons to take out incapacity insurance. To clarify the status of labour relationships, the government also intends to introduce a self-employment declaration for self-employed persons in the top segment of the labour market and an online tool to help establish the status of the labour relationship on a case-by-case basis. It also intends to introduce a minimum hourly rate to protect self-employed persons at the bottom end of the labour market.

The government also set up an independent committee which recently submitted recommendations on aligning labour regulations with the labour market of the future. A government response to this report will be published at a later date.

³ In late 2019, the Social and Economic Council sent a [report](#) to the House of Representatives on its activities to date.

⁴ See the [letter](#) of 3 June 2019 and the [letter](#) of 11 November 2019, with [list](#) of areas for improvement in the annex (in Dutch).

⁵ See for the draft scheme, the [letter](#) of 20 September 2019 and the amended scheme resulting from the feasibility test in the letter to the House of Representatives of 11 November 2019 (in Dutch).

⁶ The main outlines of the draft grant scheme were included in a [letter](#) sent to the House of Representatives on 11 November 2019 (in Dutch).

⁷ Education for Women with Ambition (EVA) is a national strategy to motivate women with poor basic skills to do courses or seek voluntary work.

To ensure an inclusive society, the entire population needs to be taken on board in these developments, with everyone having the space, support and motivation needed to invest in their own personal development. Leaving no one behind is a basic principle underpinning the SDGs. A campaign will therefore be launched to foster a positive learning environment. Pilot projects have now been set up to provide practical training for those for whom acquiring a basic qualification is a step too far. It is essential for everyone to participate in society, independently, safely and in good health, despite and also thanks to digitalisation, for example. In all these activities, the focus is on young people and achieving gender equality on the labour market, in line with SDG 5 and, specifically, SDG 8.6 which aims to substantially reduce the number of unemployed youth.

In the Netherlands, the majority of women work part-time. This is a major determinant of gender inequality on the labour market. The government commissioned an Interministerial Policy Review to examine the causes of this situation and identify policy options. The Interministerial Policy Review of part-time work ([IBO Deeltijdwerk](#)), with the government's response, was sent to the House of Representatives on 29 April 2020.

2. Sustainable mobility

Several SDGs converge on the aim of sustainable mobility. This theme impacts not only on climate, the energy transition and sustainable urbanisation, but also on safety, health, equality (access to sustainable mobility), the labour market and earning power. By taking the climate goals as our starting point, we have an opportunity to achieve positive effects on these other goals too.

The definitive National Climate Agreement was published on 28 June 2019.⁸ This agreement sets out how the Netherlands will achieve its goal of reducing CO₂ emissions by 49% compared to 1990 levels. The government is thus

⁸ The mobility provisions of the Climate Agreement have now been endorsed by the Nederlandse Vereniging voor Duurzame Energie (NVDE) (Dutch sustainable energy association), the Royal Dutch Touring Club (ANWB), the transport trade association BOVAG, the RAI Vereniging (cycle and automobile association) and the association of Dutch vehicle leasing companies VNA, the Dutch Association for Transport and Logistics Netherlands (TLN) and Evofenedex, Formule E-team (FET), Vereniging Elektrische Rijders (VER) (association of drivers of electric vehicles), the Dutch Cyclists Union, the Dutch Railways (NS) and OV-NL (public transport Netherlands), the Association of Provincial Authorities (IPO) and the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG), Natuur & Milieu, the construction industry body Bouwend Nederland, the Confederation of Netherlands Industry and Employers VNO-NCW, the Transforming Travel coalition and the Dutch Association for Sustainable Biofuels (NVDB).

taking a major step towards stepping up Dutch efforts to achieve SDG 13 (climate). The Climate Agreement contains more than 140 provisions on mobility and transport.

The Climate Agreement substantially boosts the transition to new kinds of mobility, with agreements on making both goods and passenger transport more sustainable. These agreements fall under four themes: (1) sustainable renewable energy carriers in transport, (2) electric transport, (3) sustainability in logistics and (4) sustainability of personal mobility. A communication on progress with the agreements was issued in early April 2020.⁹ In 2019, tax and financial measures were introduced to encourage electric transport,¹⁰ use of E10 fuel became mandatory,¹¹ a grant scheme was introduced to promote use of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) in the road haulage sector,¹² agreement was reached on delivery of the Climate Agreement in the Multiyear Infrastructure, Spatial Planning and Transport Programme¹³ and central government joined the Transforming Travel (Anders Reizen) coalition.¹⁴ Use of leased bicycles was also simplified.

2.1 Sustainable renewable energy carriers in transport

Central to the greening of the transport sector is using more sustainable energy for all modes of road, air and water transport. Apart from changing patterns of behaviour in our personal mobility that should lead to fewer kilometres travelled, more car-sharing, and more use of bicycles and public transport, a transition is needed to zero use of fossil fuels in transport. This will not only help achieve SDG 13, but is also expected to have positive effects on health, biodiversity and the living environment, in cities in particular (SDGs 3, 11 and 15).

In the strategy for the sustainability of the various transport modes, electrification is the main priority, and use of sustainable, renewable fuels is a means to achieve rapid reduction of emissions. Electrification of passenger and short-distance transport is expected to speed up quickly in the coming years, so that large-scale use of biomass, and the

⁹ https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/brieven_regering/detail?id=2020Zo6960&did=2020D14848.

¹⁰ <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/belastingplan/belastingplanstukken>.

¹¹ <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2019/06/27/nahang-wijziging-activiteitenbesluit-milieubeheer-en-besluit-brandstoffen-luchtverontreiniging-etc>.

¹² <https://www.rvo.nl/subsidie-en-financieringswijzer/ing-brandstofregeling>.

¹³ <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/rapporten/2019/09/17/bijlage-1-mirt-overzicht-2020>.

¹⁴ <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/actueel/nieuws/2019/10/01/rijksoverheid-tekent-voor-halvering-co2-uitstoot-in-eigen-mobiliteit>.

threat it poses to land use and biodiversity, can be avoided. The sustainability of renewable fuels is secured by Directive (EU) 2018/2001 on the promotion of the use of sustainable energy from renewable sources. At the same time, action is being taken to explore more safeguards for fuel sustainability.¹⁵ A sustainability framework is currently being drawn up for the use of biomass. Finally the Climate Agreement affirms current practice to avoid using biofuels produced from palm or soya oil in the Netherlands.

2.2 Electric transport

Know-how on and the technology for electric transport are available in abundance in the Netherlands. We lead the field in electric vehicle charging infrastructure and in the development of emission-free public transport buses. The challenge is to continue moving ahead with the development of a smart grid for electric vehicles, with interoperability, improved battery technology to enable fast charging and reliable information provision. Connecting the car to the energy system is a major precondition for a successful and broad transition. Other countries can learn from our knowledge of charging infrastructure, so that they can also move forward. It is also essential that Europe-wide standards be developed.

Central government's aim is for all new cars sold on the Dutch market to be zero-emission by 2030. The European CO₂ emission performance standards are the main international regulatory instrument in road transport, but they are not strict enough for us to achieve our national goals by 2030. There will be scope to tighten up the European standards from 2023. In the interim, the Netherlands will harmonise informal measures with other European frontrunners, and join forces with them in urging stricter standards. Policy also focuses on the availability and affordability of vehicles. A favourable tax climate is a major precondition for the success of this transition. For this reason, various tax and financial incentive measures have been announced which should ultimately bring electric cars within everyone's reach.

2.3 Sustainability of goods transport and logistics

Logistics is a cornerstone of the Dutch economy and Dutch society. At the same time, logistics operations are a major source of CO₂ and other emissions. So the logistics sector will also need to make the transition to zero-emission transport. This will be achieved in the first place by introducing medium-sized low-emission zones in 30 to 40 larger towns, and with zero-emission construction vehicles and mobile machinery, circular, climate-neutral civil and hydraulic engineering works, improvements to logistic efficiency and a Green Deal for inland waterway transport.

The Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management works with the private sector, knowledge institutions and other government authorities to carry out the transition to coherent, sustainable and efficient goods transport and logistics. The Goods Transport Agenda sets out priority policy themes and interventions for multimodal and integrated goods transport at urban, national and international-corridor level. In addition, as announced in the coalition agreement, a bill introducing road pricing for heavy goods vehicles was published online in the summer of 2019, with a view to submission to the House of Representatives in 2020. The revenue will be used for innovation and sustainability in the transport sector, contributing to the achievement of SDG 9 (infrastructure and innovation).

2.4 Making personal mobility more sustainable

The government's goal for 2030 is to achieve a reduction of eight billion kilometres in work-related journeys by car. It wants to see more people using public transport or travelling by bicycle or on foot. The aim is active mobility, with the focus on alternative forms of transport. This will contribute directly to more sustainable cities (SDG 11) and prevent carbon emissions. Cycling, in combination with public transport, plays an invaluable role in the transition to healthy, accessible and liveable cities. The Netherlands is already a global frontrunner in journeys by bicycle.

Four new employers joined the network of cycling ambassadors in 2019, which encourages commuters to cycle to work. To this end, the [Kies de Fiets](#) campaign was launched in 2019. The second stage of the [Tour de Force](#) – a broad coalition combining government authorities, market parties, civil society organisations and knowledge institutions to promote cycling policy – was presented in June 2019. With regard to public transport, agreements have been reached with employers to encourage employees to avoid peak hour travel, facilitate growth in passenger numbers and enable more efficient use of public transport infrastructure and material. The outlines of a vision for the future of public transport was sent to the House of Representatives in February 2019. This is now being fleshed out in collaboration with the sector and with local, provincial and regional authorities.

We are also working on Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS). The drastic change in behaviour needed in cities can be achieved in part through use of ITS – smart traffic control installations, for example, or traffic lights that give cyclists priority when it is raining. Intelligent technologies can thus provide cyclists and pedestrians with more protection, enhancing road safety. Mobility as a Service (MaaS) will soon provide comprehensive access to all forms of transport. Before the summer of 2020 seven pilot projects will be

¹⁵ Directive (EU) 2018/2001; see article 29.

launched to test the first MaaS apps. These apps will enable travellers to plan, book and pay for transport of all kinds, including public transport, cycling, shared cars and taxis. Data will be collected, using methods that comply with privacy rules, to enable analysis of travel behaviour and gain more knowledge of customer needs. MaaS will thus be at the basis of a major transition from infrastructure-driven to data-driven (i.e. demand-driven) transport policy.

2.5 Specific sustainability measures for rail transport, aviation and shipping

International railways

For international travel, too, emission of harmful substances is primarily determined by choice of transport mode. For shorter distances, international trains are a reliable, sustainable alternative to both cars and planes. Where planes only provide a connection between the points of departure and arrival, international trains also meet demand for transport to places along the way. The Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management is therefore committed to improving international travel by train in the broadest sense, not only as a substitute for aviation. However, maintaining, optimising and realising international connections is a complex affair. Agreements must be reached with foreign transport operators and infrastructure managers, and adjustments made to the European rail infrastructure. Differences in railway technology, timetables and legislation need to be resolved first, while ticketing and information provision must be optimised across Europe. The Netherlands cannot do this alone; both national and international cooperation are needed. The government is therefore working towards strong European partnerships so that, together with like-minded member states, we can improve international passenger transport by rail. The Netherlands recently presented a position paper on this subject to the European Commission, with the aim of giving international rail transport priority in fleshing out the European Green Deal.

Sustainable aviation

On 27 March 2019, a letter was sent to the House of Representatives setting out climate policy for aviation¹⁶ (Parliamentary Papers 31936, no. 585), accompanied by the draft agreement drawn up by the Sustainable Aviation Platform. Together, these two documents provide a comprehensive overview of climate goals for 2030, 2050 and 2070 for both domestic and international aviation and of the measures on which the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management will focus in partnership with parties in the industry and knowledge institutions. In 2019, the parties participating in the Platform took some major steps

towards encouraging the use of sustainable fuels and speeding up technological innovation, for example in the field of hybrid electric propulsion. The [Ontwerp Actieprogramma Hybride Elektrisch Vliegen \(AHEV\)](#) (Draft Action Programme on Hybrid Electric Propulsion) was sent to the House of Representatives on 5 March 2020. Action to stimulate the use and production of sustainable biofuels – biokerosene and synthetic kerosene, for example – mainly focuses on EU policy on the mandatory blending of fossil fuels with biofuels. The House of Representatives was informed of this by letter of 3 March 2020 (Parliamentary Papers 31936, no. 726). If the introduction of mandatory EU measures cannot be effected in time, the Netherlands will aim to make blending mandatory at national level as of 2023. The State Secretary for Finance has informed the House about the flight tax on several occasions, for example through the bill on the subject, the follow-up report and the policy document following up on the report. The Civil Aviation Policy Memorandum will set the direction to be taken in implementing climate policy for aviation.

Sustainable shipping

The Green Deal for maritime and inland shipping and ports was signed by a total of 42 parties on 11 June 2019, marking the start of a long-term transition to climate-neutral, emission-free shipping. The Green Deal sets out agreements between government and business on action towards more sustainable shipping. Work started on fleshing out the deal immediately after it was signed, with plans for ships with emission-free engines, a sustainability label for inland waterway ships and greater use of sustainable energy carriers.

Government and the sector plan to undertake dozens of activities. Activities with a predominant role for government include the establishment of a European sustainability fund for inland shipping, sustainable tenders for work on infrastructure, and the Government Shipping Company and Royal Netherlands Navy as launch customers. At international level, the Netherlands is advocating introduction of a worldwide fuel charge for shipping. The maritime sector plans to encourage purchase of clean engines, use of more environmentally-friendly blended fuels, the development of sustainable solutions and a blue label for zero-emission shipping.

The Green Deal sets out ambitious environmental targets for both maritime and inland shipping, and for reducing CO₂ emissions and emissions of other harmful substances including sulphur oxides, nitrogen oxides and particulates. Parties in inland shipping have set the goal of reducing CO₂ emissions by at least 20% by 2024. The goal for other harmful emissions is a 10% reduction. The goal for 2050 is for inland shipping to be virtually emission-free and climate neutral. Parties in the maritime shipping sector have agreed

¹⁶ Parliamentary Papers, House of Representatives, 2018/19, 31936, no. 585.

to reduce average CO₂ emissions per tonne kilometre by 20% by 2024, with an absolute reduction of 70% by 2050. This is more ambitious than the targets agreed by the International Maritime Organization in early 2018.

2.6 Conclusion

Mobility is clearly an area of rapid developments in the Netherlands and Europe. The SDGs help us focus on safety, accessibility and affordability and highlight the positive effects of sustainable mobility on our quality of life. Many activities are contributing to innovation and sustainable infrastructure. Cooperation with other stakeholders and between ministries is of crucial importance.

3. Sustainable cities

Cities are central to SDG 11, and at the same time the place where other SDGs converge at local level. All kinds of trends and developments have an impact on our urban living environment. Cities change and grow as their populations increase, as they make the transition to a circular economy and as they adapt to climate change. Urban space both above and below ground is a scarce commodity. This applies particularly to space within environmental norms. All in all, the situation calls for careful, comprehensive planning, as the SDG agenda envisages. This section describes how central government facilitates this, thus doing its bit to ensure resilient and sustainable cities by 2030.

3.1 Environment and Planning Act

The Environment and Planning Act ([Omgevingswet](#)) was adopted and published in 2016. It was due to enter into force on 1 January 2021, but in the wake of the coronavirus crisis this has been postponed. The government will try to announce a new date by the end of May 2020. The challenges are huge, and call for a coherent approach. The system set out in the new Environment and Planning Act is an excellent example of how regulations on building, spatial planning, water infrastructure, listed buildings, mining and nature can be brought together. Legislation on various themes has been integrated even further, reflecting the connectedness of the physical environment, for example in cities, where numerous activities, challenges and interests converge. The goals of the Environment and Planning Act are meant to balance protection and use of the physical environment. These can be summed up in the phrase 'space for development, safeguards for quality'.

3.2 National Environment and Planning Strategy

In the run-up to the entry into force of the Environment and Planning Act, the government planned to publish a National Environment and Planning Strategy ([Nationale Omgevingsvisie](#), NOVI) in the spring of 2020. Strong and healthy cities and regions is one of this strategy's priorities.

Cities and conurbations in particular need new locations for living and working. In smaller centres and rural areas, by contrast, the main issues are transformation and demolition of homes. The government prefers development within existing city boundaries, maintaining the open spaces between urban areas. This calls for optimum harmonisation of and investment in mobility. In this framework, the sustainable urbanisation ladder is a good example of an instrument that is aimed at efficient use of space. With this instrument, the competent authority is required to give reasons for planning permission for new urban development. At the same time, the government seeks to improve the liveability and climate resilience of our cities, towns and villages. They will need to be made more sustainable and have better air quality, sufficient green space and clean water, and enough public amenities for exercise (cycling, walking, sports and play), leisure and socialising. That also implies that they will have to be fully accessible to all. In the Climate Agreement, the government included provisions on the sustainability of the built environment, with the aim of meeting the climate goals set out in the Paris Agreement. The government will seek to further enhance the quality and safety of the living environment. This means that, before deciding on new locations for urban development, there must be a clear idea of the conditions that need to be met to safeguard the quality and safety of the living environment (e.g. restrictions on nitrogen emissions) and the extra measures needed to achieve this for the given locations. This will safeguard public health in cities and conurbations. By adopting a balanced approach the Netherlands will contribute to as many SDGs as possible.

Opportunities and challenges differ both locally and regionally. Central government has various instruments to support local and regional development in the areas identified in SDG 11. The Environmental Agendas are an instrument for the safe, inclusive, resilient and sustainable development of the Netherlands' physical environment. They connect the National Environment and Planning Strategy with provincial and municipal environmental strategies and objectives, taking on board all aspects of the physical environment and combining them in a joint area-based approach.

3.3 Retail agenda

Trends like demographic ageing, technological developments and changing consumer preferences are putting shopping areas under pressure, and an increasing number of shop units are now unoccupied. Cities face a complex challenge in safeguarding the liveability of our centre cities, and keeping them attractive for both visitors and local residents. In the physical sense, it is important to keep the remaining shopping area compact, and to find new purposes for buildings that are standing empty. With the

retail agenda, government aims to support this transition. This agenda is a partnership between municipal and provincial authorities, central government and the relevant market parties. It aims to strengthen both enterprise in and the liveability of centre cities and towns.

3.4 City Deals

City Deals are administrative instruments which aim to strengthen innovation at city level. Cities, private and public parties and central government work together within these deals on a voluntary theme- and project-based approach to develop solutions for urban issues. Themes include urban transformation, climate adaptation, the energy transition, social agreements and data infrastructure (see box).

The City Deal on shared electric mobility in urban development is a three-year programme in which the Ministries of Infrastructure & Water Management and the Interior & Kingdom Relations, the province of South Holland, some ten cities and private-sector parties will gain experience of electric car sharing in combination with solar energy generated by private homes. This knowledge will then be shared so that innovations can be used for other building projects in the Netherlands.

The Deal involves more than 5,000 new homes and 200 shared electric cars. Car sharing will reduce the need for parking places, making the homes more affordable. The energy for the cars will be generated by solar panels. In some projects, the cars – when stationary – will be linked to a smart grid, so that their batteries can be used to store surplus electricity for later use. This Deal contributes to SDGs 3, 7, 9 and 11 and is also a good example of an innovative partnership (SDG 17).

3.5 Housing

The government has taken various measures to ensure that by about 2030 everyone in the Netherlands will have access to adequate, safe and affordable housing (SDG 11.1). For example, around €2 billion has been freed up for new housing projects and to reduce charges for housing associations building affordable new housing. This has had an influence on the availability and affordability of homes. Using various measures targeting middle-income earners, the government aims to improve the availability and affordability of suitable rentals. The government also seeks to improve the position of starters on the housing market and give the municipal authorities and housing associations scope to support specific target groups, e.g. through the municipal housing bye-law or use of scope for free allocation of housing under the Housing Act. The government is also encouraging construction of affordable homes for sale and rent through agreements on housing ('Woondeals').

The government has also taken or plans to take measures to ensure affordable housing in the Caribbean Netherlands (Bonaire, St Eustatius and Saba). These efforts contribute not only to SDG 11, but also to SDG 10.

3.6 Safety

Safety – both physical and social, touching on SDG 16 – is also a major consideration in meeting the sustainable urbanisation challenge. The design of buildings and public spaces has a major impact on liveability and crime in the cities. A recent Social Reassessment of living space sets out measures to improve safety in both construction and the living environment. These include safety requirements for houses and a safety impact report to accompany municipal environment and planning strategies.

3.7 International policy

At international level too, the Netherlands (at central, regional and local level) is strongly committed to sustainable urbanisation and plays a prominent role in the Urban Agenda for the EU (UAEU), established in 2016 by the Pact of Amsterdam. The UAEU contributes to territorial cohesion within the EU, and has been identified by the European Commission as a key implementation tool for the SDGs, for example through the action plans for Thematic Partnerships. More than 260 cities, regions, national governments, European Commission Directorates-General and other stakeholders work within these partnerships on Europe-wide economic and ecological themes including poverty, housing, mobility, digitalisation, climate adaptation, energy transition, innovative tendering and air quality. The UAEU is a successful administrative innovation to which the Netherlands will continue to be committed in the years to come. The main principles underpinning sustainable urban development in Europe will be reviewed and reaffirmed during the German Presidency of the EU in late 2020. A reference to the SDGs will be included in an updated version of the Leipzig Charter on sustainable cities.

3.8 Knowledge

We must continue to respond to urban problems and stay ahead of them. In the Connecting Sustainable Cities ([VerDuS](#)) initiative, researchers work with experts on the ground on issues at the interface between urbanisation, spatial planning, housing, accessibility, the economy and governance. Connecting Sustainable Cities is an initiative of the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO), Platform31 and the ministries of the Interior & Kingdom Relations, Infrastructure & Water Management, and Economic Affairs & Climate Policy. It has a combined focus on SDGs 9 (research and innovation), 11 and 17 (partnerships).

3.9 Crosscutting approach

Pressure on scarce space will only increase in the years ahead. With the SDGs in mind, an effective balance can be

struck between protection and use. This applies to decisions at local level, and most certainly to cohesion at central level. In this period of transition it is particularly important to identify the requirements to be met by sustainable cities. For SDG 11, this means that the city must be safe, inclusive, healthy and sustainable. At the same time, this requires looking at adaptation to climate change, in which water management plays a major role (SDG 6) as well as how we should organise sustainable energy supplies in cities where demand for energy is high (SDG 7). Cities have impact on the local environment, while the consequences of climate change are felt directly in cities (SDG 13). We need smart solutions to keep our cities liveable and accessible (SDG 9). For inclusion in line with SDG 11.1 and 11.2 it is essential to adopt an intersectional approach so that the interests of, for example, women and vulnerable populations are taken into consideration (SDGs 5 and 10).

In the Netherlands, pressure on the physical environment is so great that interests may clash. We need to make combinations that create win-win situations. An orientation towards sustainable urban development based on the SDGs, and in particular a crosscutting approach, supports this policy. Even where smart combinations are not always feasible, the SDGs can help us gain a clear vision of the effects on other goals.

4. Relevance of existing policy to the SDGs

In last year's report, we pointed out that policy on transitions – in response to the major social issues of our time – is often made on the basis of a comprehensive approach, thus bringing achievement of several SDGs within reach. The overview below shows which major policy initiatives fall within this category and which SDGs they target. Our intention is to make this explicit in new policy documents, in accordance with the motion submitted by MP Kirsten van den Hul ([motie Van den Hul](#)).

Policy document (year)	Objective	Partners	Relevance to SDGs
Urban Agenda for the EU (Agenda Stad / Europese Agenda Stad) (from 2015)	Promote sustainable development, innovation, liveability and economic growth in the Dutch and European urban network through City Deals and European partnerships.	Cities, central government, European institutions, umbrella organisations, experts, businesses and civil society partners.	Focus on sustainable cities (SDG 11) and innovation (SDG 9). City Deals and European partnerships contribute to various SDGs, e.g. the climate adaptation partnership to SDG 13 and the City Deal on tackling organised crime to SDG 16.
Central government-wide circular economy programme (Rijksbreed Programma Circulaire Economie) (2016)	Halve the use of primary raw materials by 2030 compared to 2016 levels and achieve a fully circular economy by 2050.	Central government in consultation with the private sector, local government and social partners.	Focus on reusing raw materials (SDG 12), with relevance to climate (SDG 13).
Raw Materials Agreement (Grondstoffenakkoord) (2017)	To speed up the transition to the circular economy.	Central government with the private sector (both individual companies and sector-wide), local, provincial and regional government, social partners and NGOs.	The Raw Materials Agreement focuses on the following themes: 1. Biomass and food; 2. Plastics; 3. Manufacturing industry; 4. Construction; 5. Consumer goods. Touches on the circular economy (SDG 12), infrastructure and innovation (SDG 9), climate (SDG 13) and biodiversity (SDG 15).
Revised action plan on policy coherence for development (Herzien Actieplan Beleidscoherentie voor ontwikkeling) (2018)	Coherent policy on Dutch contribution to achieving the SDGs in developing countries.	Interministerial and civil society partners.	All SDGs in the context of developing countries and cooperation (SDG 17). For results in 2019, see the recently published annual report .
National agreement on preventing smoking, overweight and alcohol abuse (Nationaal Preventieakkoord) (2018)	A smoke-free generation by 2040, reduce overweight to 1995 levels and a sharp reduction in alcohol abuse.	Civil society organisations, the private sector, patients' organisations, care providers, health insurers, municipal authorities, funds, sports clubs and organisations and government.	Focus on health (SDG 3) and positive effects in areas such as: vulnerable families and individuals, unemployment and debt, and healthy nutrition (SDGs 1, 2 and 8).
Circular agriculture (Kringlooplandbouw) (2018)	Transition to circular agriculture by 2030: limit waste flows and emissions of harmful substances and use raw materials and products efficiently.	Government authorities, private sector, civil society organisations and knowledge institutions.	Focus on strengthening the economy (SDG 8) and food production (SDG 2), with relevance for climate (SDG 13), life on land and biodiversity (SDG 15).
Revised National Technology Pact (Het vernieuwde Techniepact) (2018)	Tackle shortages of qualified technical personnel and shortfalls in technical skills to meet social challenges such as digitalisation and the energy and climate transitions.	Central government, regions, private sector, education sector and all relevant trade associations.	The pact contributes to SDGs 4, 7, 8, 13 and 17.
Dutch Digitalisation Strategy (Nederlandse Digitaliseringsstrategie, NDS) (2018)	Grasp economic and social opportunities presented by digitalisation, ensure digital skills for education and work so that everyone can take part in the digital transition. Work towards digital trust to safeguard fundamental rights like protection of privacy, self-determination, fair competition and good governance.	Ministries and partner authorities, private sector, knowledge institutions and civil society organisations.	This objective touches mainly on SDGs 3, 4, 8 and 9. We are now exploring whether and how digitalisation and the strategy can contribute to sustainability (SDGs 7, 11 and 12).
Regional Deals (Regio Deals) (2018)	Strengthen broad-based prosperity in the regions through a joint approach to social challenges specific to a given region and directly relate to residents' day-to-day lives.	Central government, regional authorities, businesses and civil society organisations.	Touches on SDG 2 (nutrition and farming), SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), SDG 10 (reducing inequality, social cohesion and stability), SDG 11 (sustainable cities), SDG 12 (sustainable production) and SDG 15 (biodiversity).

National Climate Agreement (Klimaatakkoord) (2019)	Reduce CO ₂ emissions by 49% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels.	Government authorities, private sector and civil society organisations.	Focus on climate (SDG 13), but also contributes to access to sustainable and affordable energy (SDG 7).
International Water Ambition (Nederlandse Internationale Waterambitie) (2019)	Water security and flood safety worldwide.	Central government, knowledge institutions, private sector, NGOs and international partners.	Focus on access to clean water and sanitation (SDG 6), but also contributes to all planet-focused goals, cities (SDG 11) and closer integration of water management into climate processes (SDG 13).
Long-term growth strategy for the Netherlands (Groei strategie voor Nederland op de lange termijn) (2019)	Strengthen long-term sustainable earning power.	Central government. Experts, stakeholders and civil society partners involved in fleshing out the strategy.	Focus on longer-term economic growth (SDG 8) with relevance for knowledge and innovation (SDGs 4 and 9), climate and energy (SDGs 7 and 13).
Integrated nitrogen strategy (Aanpak Stikstof) (from 2019)	Ensure that nitrogen is no longer an obstacle for either nature goals or economic development because there is a robust, credible package of measures with long-term safeguards for the strategy, which is being implemented by ministries and other government authorities.	Central government, Association of Provincial Authorities, (IPO), Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG) and the Dutch Water Authorities (UWV). Intensive contact with civil society partners.	Touches on longer-term economic growth (SDG 8), industry, innovation and infrastructure (SDG 9), sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11), responsible consumption and production (SDG 12), climate action (SDG 13) and life on land/biodiversity (SDG 15).
National Environment and Planning Strategy (Nationale omgevingsvisie) (planning 2020)	A long-term strategy for the future and the development of the Netherlands' living environment.	Central government in consultation with other government authorities and civil society partners.	Touches on agriculture (SDG 2), drinking water supplies (SDG 6), energy (SDG 7), infrastructure (SDG 9), cities (SDG 11), circular economy (SDG 12), climate action (SDG 13) and biodiversity/life on land (SDG 15).
Strengthening Biodiversity (Programma Versterken Biodiversiteit) (2020)	Strengthening Biodiversity is an interministerial programme to identify and deliver follow-up steps for a social and economic transformation leading to restoration of biodiversity. The Netherlands' ecological footprint will be reduced by half by 2050 and the goals of the Birds and Habitats Directives will have been achieved in full.	Various central government ministries and the Delta Plan for Biodiversity Recovery.	Focus on life on land and below water (SDG 14 and 15), forging partnerships to achieve the goals (SDG 17). Also touches on health and well-being (SDG 3), sustainable energy, economy and cities (SDGs 7, 8 and 11), climate action (SDG 13) and industry, infrastructure and innovation (SDG 9).
Clean Air Agreement (Schone Lucht Akkoord) (2020)	36 municipalities, 9 provinces and central government share the ambition to improve air quality permanently and achieve at least a 50% health benefit by 2030.	Central government in consultation with other government authorities (municipalities and provinces).	Focus on health and well-being (SDG 3), but also contributes to sustainable cities (SDG 11) and climate (SDG 13).

C. LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENT

Drafted by and under the auspices of the three local and regional government umbrella organisations: the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG), the Association of Provincial Authorities (IPO) and the Dutch Water Authorities (UWV)

1. The SDGs in local and regional government

A growing number of local and regional authorities have become aware of the SDGs and are working on achieving them. In 2019, another 25 municipalities joined the Municipal Global Goals Campaign ([Gemeenten4GlobalGoals](#)) of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG), bringing the total to 87. Apart from goals in themselves, the SDGs are increasingly being regarded at municipal level as an instrument for integrated action or for assessing policy coherence. The municipality of Rheden, for example, refers to the SDGs in every policy document and [proposal](#). Several municipalities – Oisterwijk, Gilze en Rijen and Goirle – linked the SDGs to their budgets, sustainability plans or executive agendas. Leeuwarden, Súdwest-Fryslân, Dongen and Smallerland use the SDGs as a frame of reference for their strategy on spatial planning and the environment, drafted as part of a [VNG-praktijkproef](#) (VNG pilot). The members of the Utrecht municipal council issued a [manifesto](#) declaring themselves Global Goals Ambassadors. The municipality of Oss has committed to the SDGs for international economic partnerships, under the heading ‘from more to better growth’. Municipalities are increasingly regarding the SDGs as an agenda that links people locally. In [Deventer](#), for example, the municipality, residents, businesses and civil society organisations are working together to achieve the goals. Municipalities are also increasingly keen to provide transparency on their performance on the SDGs, as a basis for policy choices. VNG plans to set a standard for this.

There is also widespread interest in the SDGs among the provincial authorities, although not often made explicit. However, in 2019 the province of Zeeland started presenting all its procurement on the basis of the SDGs, and it is now developing its action plan for socially responsible procurement ([Actieplan MVI](#)) with the SDGs as its basic principles. Flevoland is developing an environment and sustainability monitor on the basis of the SDGs. The Brabant Development Agency (BOM), which promotes economic development in the province of North Brabant, [reports](#) on the basis of the SDGs. The Province of North Brabant also uses results-based funding for social entrepreneurs, with [criteria](#) based on the SDGs. Friesland has declared itself the first Global Goals Province.

Many regional water authority activities contribute to achieving the SDGs. [Brabantse Delta](#), Delfland and Vallei en Veluwe have adopted the SDGs as a framework for policy on circular economy and sustainability. Waternet (acting for the Amstel, Gooi en Vecht water authority and the municipality of Amsterdam) use the SDGs as a framework for [research and innovation policy](#). The water authorities

work together in the [Blue Deal](#) programme to support other countries in achieving SDG 6. The programme aims to give 20 million people all over the world access to sufficient, clean drinking water.

2. Cooperation between different tiers of government

An inclusive, sustainable society can only be achieved with close cooperation between the various tiers of government. The [Interbestuurlijk Programma](#) (IBP) (Inter-authority Programme) is a key instrument, with local, water, provincial and central authorities working together as equal partners to address social challenges such as climate, debt and future-proof housing. In 2019 too, the main focus was on tackling social challenges at regional level, where they can best be addressed and where integrated approaches can produce added value for society. This focus on synergy is very much in the spirit of the SDGs, though not explicitly linked to them. Inter-authority cooperation has put the link between healthcare and safety at neighbourhood level high on the agenda: for example, further integrated cooperation between youth care services, municipalities and police services regarding people with mental health problems. Clear examples of inter-authority partnerships include the debt strategy and the [Vitaal Platteland](#) (Revitalising the Countryside) programme. Though the aim is a comprehensive approach, compartmentalisation at all levels of government remains a problem. There is a tendency to return to familiar methods of working when political tensions arise. Nonetheless, there is a great willingness to think out of the box and consult with partners, which is a positive signal.

3. An equal, inclusive society

Poverty and debt, and the affordability of care and youth care in particular, were still high on the local government agenda in 2019. An increasing number of people in the Netherlands is applying for debt counselling. Municipalities and their partners are increasingly successful in a comprehensive approach to poverty and debt, though access to and the quality of services still need improvement. However, to prevent and tackle the problem of persistent debt, it is necessary for municipalities, central government and other partners to join forces in order to improve income provision as well as the benefits and allowances system. More children are growing up in poverty, and an increasing number of young people are seeking help from youth care services. Municipalities, central government and other partners are working together to improve youth care services within the [Zorg voor de Jeugd programme](#), and seeking comprehensive solutions for vulnerable young people aged 16 to 27 confronted by problems relating to debts, unemployment, housing and education through [Aanpak 16-27](#). At the same time, elderly people who are living independently for longer put extra pressure on services. [Eén tegen eenzaamheid](#) (‘United Against Loneliness’)

is an initiative launched by municipalities and central government to tackle the problem of loneliness at an early stage. In light of the recently announced revision of the legal aid system, it is essential for people to maintain equal access to legal protection, with attention to the need for individuals and government to reach an equitable solution.

Though municipalities are able to carry out their tasks in the social domain, the preconditions for achieving the social SDGs are often lacking. This is due to both the serious financial deficits of many municipalities and the fact that self-reliance cannot be taken for granted. The [evaluation](#) after five years of the Participation Act shows that the 'leave no one behind principle' is at odds with the incentive for municipalities to help jobless people find work as quickly as possible. The incentive leads to a situation where those who need little counselling are helped faster than inhabitants who need intensive, more focused counselling. Though municipalities are aware of this problem, they lack the financial resources to tackle it.

In 2019, the provincial authorities stepped up their efforts to create sustainable jobs within the provincial organisations, providing employment for people with a disability or other obstacle to finding work. They also committed to creating jobs for people in other target groups, such as refugees with a residence permit and long-term unemployed people who have little prospect of finding work themselves but do not fall under the jobs quota. In this respect, the provincial authorities lead the field both within government and parts of the private sector.

In creating jobs for people with little prospect of finding work themselves, municipalities, water- and provincial authorities are showing increasing interest in the [Social Return on Investment](#) (SROI) method, which measures the social and economic value of investments and makes them visible. The provincial authorities and water authorities made an extra commitment to this in 2019; the decentralised authorities in Overijssel and Gelderland agreed to apply [uniform rules](#) for SROI.

For the water authorities, exemptions from payment of all or part of the water authority tax for people on minimum incomes was a major social theme in 2019. The past few years have seen a rise in the number of applications for exemptions from water authority tax, and consequently a rise in the amount of tax for which exemptions were granted.

To promote local inclusion, in 2019, 47 municipalities were promoting accessibility for disabled people through the [Iedereen Doet Mee!](#) programme. In addition, 54 Rainbow cities and 12 Rainbow provinces were actively developing policy for acceptance of LHBTI people. Delfland water

authority is a member of Workplace Pride, an international platform for LHBTI inclusion at work.

4. Healthy living environment and nature

Surpluses of nitrogen and their impact on biodiversity were a major theme in 2019. Over-use of fertilisers and acidification are leading to the loss of characteristic flora and fauna. For this reason, a provincial biodiversity recovery programme has been drafted. Much depends on whether the agriculture sector can make the transition to viable, nature-inclusive farming. For local and provincial authorities, termination of the integrated nitrogen strategy (Programmatiese Aanpak Stikstof) after it had been assessed as inadequate meant that building projects were put on hold. Consultations are now being held at national level to find a solution.

In 2019, the groundwork was done for the Clean Air Agreement ([Schone Lucht Akkoord](#)) between central government and 46 municipalities and provinces. The aim is to achieve a 50% reduction by 2030 in health problems caused by air pollution.

To protect water quality, the Dutch Water Authorities drafted a [position paper](#) setting out their commitment to enforcing the European Water Framework Directive and harmonising it better with other legislation that determines the quality of our surface and ground water. Measures to deal with the problem of fertilisers and pesticides in particular were regarded as essential. In 2019, the water authorities launched the Innovation Programme on Micropollutants ([Innovatieprogramma Microverontreinigingen](#)) under which water treatment plants devote extra attention to removing pharmaceutical residues from drinking water.

5. Energy, climate and the circular economy

In 2019, local and provincial government drew up their strategies on spatial planning and the environment. These call for a coherent approach to both environmental challenges, also connected to tasks in the social domain. The energy transition, housing, climate adaptation, innovations in transport systems, accessibility and the circular economy are all part of this approach.

In 2019, the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG), the Association of Provincial Authorities (IPO) and the Dutch Water Authorities (UWV) successfully joined forces in supporting the National Climate Agreement. The aim of the agreement is to achieve a 49% reduction in

CO₂ emissions by 2030 compared to 1990 levels. The water authorities committed to being energy-neutral by 2025. The [Nationaal Programma RES](#) (national programme for regional energy strategies), launched in 2019, forms the linking pin between the Climate Agreement and the regions. The regional energy strategies enable local and provincial authorities to identify the measures and infrastructure needed to achieve the climate goals. Not only spatial planning but also social measures may be needed. It is essential to find out how residents who bear the brunt of the transition can also experience financial benefits, since the support of local residents is an important goal of the regional energy strategies. The [Programma Aardgasvrije Wijken](#) (gas-free neighbourhoods programme) enables municipalities to work towards a low-carbon built environment by carrying out trials and devising strategies for the transition to low-carbon heating systems. The water authorities are [well on their way](#) to achieving their climate and energy goals for 2020, e.g. through the annual water authority climate monitor (Klimaatmonitor Waterschappen), which forms the basis for ongoing implementation of the Climate Agreement. With the [Green Deal Aquathermie](#) (Green Deal on aqua thermal energy), 40 organisations including UVW, VNG and various provinces set out their intention to use ground and surface water as sources of renewable energy for heating and cooling systems, thus contributing to a gas-free built environment.

At the current rate of energy conservation, however, the climate goals will not be achieved. Far greater reductions in CO₂ emissions are needed. In 2019, VNG, IPO and UVW carried out pilot projects with internal carbon pricing, in which harmful emissions were expressed in terms of cost, thus effectively lowering the cost of investing in low-carbon solutions. The local and provincial authorities will follow up this programme in 2020.

The local and provincial authorities are working on climate adaptation with the central government water management body Rijkswaterstaat and carrying out climate stress tests to determine vulnerability to extreme weather events. Though spatial planning measures may seem feasible, unexpected weather events can complicate matters, for example in the low-lying province of Friesland which is particularly vulnerable to flooding. This holds true for more and more municipalities where problems relate not only to water management, but also to spatial planning.

Finally, the local and provincial authorities are increasingly focused on the transition to a circular economy. The UVW, VNG and IPO contributed to the national Circular Economy Implementation Programme, which was adopted in 2019. Cooperation at regional level is essential for this transition. Many [initiatives](#) to that end were launched in 2019, including the development of [centres for circular industry](#)

where municipalities bring together various initiatives to encourage reuse of materials.

The water authorities are forging ahead with the [Duurzaam GWW](#) (sustainable civil and hydraulic engineering) programme in which industry is encouraged to use fewer primary raw materials that have a negative impact on the environment. Through their involvement in the [Taskforce Herijking Afvalstoffen](#) (task force assessing legislative obstacles to a circular economy), the water authorities in 2019 explored waste water as a source of sustainable energy and valuable raw materials. Two water authorities won water innovation prizes in 2019: Vallei en Veluwe for a new water treatment concept which produces clean water that can offset freshwater shortages and which enables raw materials to be extracted from wastewater without negatively affecting the living environment. The Rijn en IJssel water authority also won an award for its raw materials plant that produces clean water and a smart, biodegradable coating material. UVW has set up workshops to facilitate water authorities' efforts on the circular economy.

D. THE PRIVATE SECTOR AND FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Drafted by and under the auspices of Global Compact Network Netherlands, the Confederation of Netherlands Industry and Employers (VNO-NCW) and the Royal Association MKB-Nederland

Various studies show that an increasing number of businesses are making a conscious effort to address the SDGs, including a [PwC study](#) showing that 93% of the businesses surveyed – the majority of them listed companies – referred to the SDGs in their annual reports. Of the companies examined in [the United Nations Global Compact progress report](#), 81% reported on activities specifically related to the SDGs, while a growing number of CEOs have expressed a personal commitment to them.

The [Transparency Benchmark](#), from the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate, shows that 75% to 86% of the organisations that refer to the SDGs in their annual reports also incorporate them in their company strategies, goals or policies.

However, with just ten years to go, there is a growing awareness that current actions need upscaling and that aims need to be more ambitious. Too little progress has been made in crucial areas such as climate change and tackling inequality of women, young people and workers. Businesses are often willing, but find it difficult to give the SDGs a place in their organisation. The PwC study shows that only a third of the businesses in the survey had chosen SDG targets in their strategies and that only 13% had formulated quantitative goals for achieving them. In its advisory report ‘[Seizing Opportunities and Managing Risks](#)’ ([Kansen pakken en risico's beheersen](#)), the Social and Economic Council (SER) concludes that businesses are more inclined to base their action plans on the international guidelines for responsible business conduct (also referred to as international corporate social responsibility, or ICSR) than on the SDGs, and have not yet managed to properly connect the two. The SDGs point ICSR policy in the right direction, and, conversely, ICSR delivers the SDGs.

In order to investigate the sustainability of the Dutch private sector, MVO Nederland (CSR Netherlands) has introduced the [Nieuwe Economie Index](#) (New Economy Index, NEX), which measures the percentage of the Dutch economy that is circular, climate-neutral and inclusive. It has calculated that a NEX of 20% is necessary by 2025 to reach a turning point after which sustainable development of the economy will steadily gain momentum. In 2020, this percentage was 12.1%. As a [Eurostat](#) study also shows, Dutch businesses perform well on inclusion (SDG 10) and the circular economy (SDG 12), but have a long way to go on renewable energy (SDG 7).

1. Public-private partnerships and inspiring examples

In terms of policy, major steps forward have been taken towards achieving the SDGs both in the Netherlands (e.g. the National Climate Agreement and the National Prevention Pact) and at European level (e.g. the European Green Deal). Public-private cooperation and partnerships (SDG 17) help increase the social impact of policy. For example, a more [mission-driven innovation policy](#) has taken shape. Ten voluntary agreements on ICSR have been concluded. According to the progress reports, they provide useful tools for businesses to tackle abuses and contribute to the SDGs together with NGOs, government authorities and trade unions.

In the past year, the government entered into Green Deals with various stakeholders, setting out agreements and specific project plans. They include the Green Deals on [Circular festivals](#), [Shipping](#), [Inland shipping & ports](#), [Aqua thermal energy](#) and [Nature-inclusive agriculture & green education](#). New parties also joined existing deals, so that they gained more mass (e.g. the Green Deal on [Sustainable Healthcare](#)). Various private sector organisations also work on achieving the SDGs, including [SDG Nederland](#) (SDG Netherlands), [CSR Netherlands](#), [Global Compact Network Netherlands](#), [Groene Groeiers Netwerk](#) (the Green Growth Network) and the [Dutch Sustainable Growth Coalition \(DSGC\)](#). The following are examples of tangible initiatives:

Economic and ecological SDGs

- In early 2019, the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management, CSR Netherlands, the Confederation of Netherlands Industry and Employers (VNO-NCW) and the Royal Association MKB-Nederland set up the Circular Economy Accelerator ([Versnellingshuis voor de circulaire economie](#)) to fast-forward action on SDG 12. The Dutch Circular Textile Valley project was launched as a model breakthrough project.
- The [Logistics Alliance](#) is working on the transition to low-emission and zero-emission transport (SDGs 9 and 11).
- In an [SDG publication](#), the horticulture and propagation materials top sector showed how the horticulture sector is working on innovative technologies and products in the areas of nutrition, energy and climate (SDGs 2, 7, 12, 13 and 15).
- CSR Netherlands set up the [Tasty Waste](#) platform in which entrepreneurs work together to reduce food waste (SDG 12).
- A comparable network exists for the [healthcare sector](#) (SDG 3) and the food industry (Dutch Alliance for Sustainable Food, or [Alliantie Verduurzaming Voedsel](#)) (SDG 12).

- Parties to the [betonakkoord](#) have agreed to work together on making concrete production and processing more sustainable (SDGs 9, 12 and 13).
- CSR Netherlands facilitates the sustainability of Dutch drinking water suppliers under the banner of '[Blauwe Netten](#)' (blue networks) (SDG 6).
- In the [sector innovation plan for sustainable packaging](#) supermarkets work together to reduce packaging and introduce more recyclable packaging (SDG 12).
- The [Clean Shipping project](#) (using cooking oil as fuel) and the Corporate Biofuels programme were set up within the Dutch Sustainable Growth Coalition (DSGC) (SDGs 7 and 13).
- In 2019, VNO-NCW's Green Growth network launched a major [matchmaking programme](#) to address challenges related to nitrogen (SDG 13).
- New projects are underway within [NL Works](#) focusing on international marketing of Dutch solutions for SDG challenges.
- The Dutch Banking Association launched a pilot project with an [Advisory Panel on Responsible Banking](#) focusing on, for example, best practices in safeguarding human rights (SDG 10).

2. Challenges and opportunities

Coherence between CSR and the SDGs

As the SER pointed out, more coherence between CSR at national and international level and the SDGs would generate more opportunities. Businesses and institutions are increasingly taking action to reduce their ecological and social footprint and increase their positive impact. For businesses, this calls for a different mindset, since they need to have a complete overview of both negative and positive impacts and incorporate this into their business strategies.

A comprehensive approach to impact

Increasingly, businesses seek social returns. This makes a comprehensive approach to the SDGs important to prevent cherry picking. Businesses find measuring social impact difficult, since it calls for insight into results that cannot be measured quantitatively. Businesses often have to search for the method of measuring impact that best suits their organisation. There are numerous initiatives, like the 'Social Exchange Index' [MAEX](#) which was launched this year.

Reporting

The 2019 Transparency Benchmark reveals a number of trends in the field of reporting. Non-financial targets are now being included more frequently in general, integrated business strategies. An issue calling for attention is the need for full transparency on supply chain responsibility. There is a growing need for verification of non-financial information, to assess whether it is both relevant and complete and to prevent greenwashing. An inspiring example of inclusion of the SDGs in reports was provided this year by the Dutch bank ABN AMRO, with its [Integrated Profit & Loss account](#).

Stakeholder engagement

According to the [Maatschappelijke Impact Monitor](#) (Social Impact Monitor), at least eight out of ten people in the Netherlands believe that businesses should focus as best they can on people, society and the environment. Stakeholder engagement is crucial (see VNO-NCW's [Brugproject](#) (bridging project)) to enable a business's impact to be taken into consideration and make complicated problems more transparent.

Social SDGs

- The [Safety Delta Nederland](#) was launched to provide innovative, safe solutions in the use of harmful substances (SDG 3).
- The Labour Foundation has started work on updating the checklist on equal pay for men and women (SDG 5) ([Je verdiende loon!](#)).
- In 2019, the market sector again more than succeeded in achieving the targets for helping [people with a disability](#) to find a job (SDG 10).
- In 2019, [Perspectief op werk](#) (Prospect of work) was launched, in which local businesses and municipalities devise plans to help recipients of social assistance into work (SDGs 1 and 8).
- In its advisory report 'Diversity in the Boardroom: Time for Acceleration', the SER put forward recommendations including a 30% quota for women on the supervisory boards of listed companies (SDG 5).
- The Dutch private sector organised in VNO-NCW and the Royal Association MKB-Nederland has worked with partners Netherlands-African Business Council (NABC), Dutch development bank FMO, the Dutch Employers Cooperation Council (DECP) and the Netherlands Senior Experts Programme (PUM) to devise an [Africa Strategy](#) focusing on sustainable economic development (SDG 8) through closer cooperation between the Dutch and African private sectors (SDG 8).
- [PUM](#) implemented programmes geared to sustainable supply chains in, for example, agriculture and livestock farming (SDG 8).
- True Price, Soil&More, EY (promoting trust in capital markets) and CSR Netherlands joined forces in the Futureproof Coffee Collective to develop a model and a pilot project in Colombia to measure the actual costs of [coffee](#) (SDGs 1 and 8).

Role of financial institutions and investors

Non-financial indicators are increasingly important in the decision-making processes of both investors and financial institutions. [Accountants](#) have a major role to play. Financial institutions are working together on sustainability within the [DNB Sustainable Finance Platform](#). The Dutch financial sector has committed to reporting on the climate impact of both finance and investment from 2020.

Role of young professionals

Within the private sector, young professionals are seen as playing a major role in the SDG agenda, since they are the decision-makers of the future. Global Compact Network Netherlands upscaled its existing [Young Professionals Programme](#) in 2019. SDG-based networks for young professionals include [Dutchtainables](#), which connects young people working for Dutch multinationals, and [lange Krachtenbundelaars](#), an open network for young professionals who contribute to sustainable social transitions.

E. CIVIL SOCIETY

Drawn up by and under the auspices of Partos

The Netherlands has an active, highly diverse civil society, committed in many ways to achieving the SDGs. Thirty-five of these organisations contributed to this section of the SDG report. Views were collected through a questionnaire distributed by [Partos](#) (the sector organisation for development cooperation) among members and non-members that are active in civil society.

The year 2020 marks the start of the Decade of Action and Delivery, a crucial period for achieving the SDGs by 2030. Partos regards the Dutch government as a frontrunner in engaging with civil society and monitoring progress towards the SDGs. However, the Netherlands' current level of commitment is not sufficient to achieve the goals by 2030. This means that political parties, the private sector, civil society actors and members of the public will need to take a critical look at their actions. Awareness of the SDGs is still low in the Netherlands and civil society expects the government to make a greater effort to change this, to come up with a clear vision and to take vigorous action to achieve the SDGs.

On 6 November 2019, several umbrella organisations¹⁷ sent an [open letter](#) to several ministers calling on the government to formulate a long-term strategy for sustainable economic growth. The time of growth for growth's sake has passed. Healthy growth means making choices. The need for sustainability sets limits on certain types of growth, but presents opportunities for growth of another kind. The Dutch government must set the right example by taking the SDGs as the guiding principles in formulating each ministry's policy. The amended integrated impact assessment framework for policy and legislation must be applied thoroughly and consistently to all new policy, legislation and regulations. Ministries must communicate transparently about the action they take to achieve the SDGs. The national government must call on the private sector to follow suit. These efforts to raise awareness of the SDGs will provide the support needed for political players to take decisive action.

1. Civil society and the SDGs

Answers to the questionnaire came from a variety of organisations, 42.9% of which are active in the field of development cooperation, 9.4% in sustainability, another

9.4% in human rights, and 6.3% in nature and the environment. We also received responses from a women's organisation, a coalition of children's rights organisations, several network organisations, a trade union, a cultural institution and a capital fund. These organisations are active at both international (60%) and national (40%) level. The large number of development organisations among the respondents is partly due to the fact that they form Partos' own base.

Cluster	SDGs	2020: % of organisations active in cluster
People	1 to 5	35.6 %
Planet	6, 12 to 15	26.9 %
Prosperity	7 to 11	20.0 %
Peace	16	40.6 %
Partnerships	17	53.1 %

As in 2018 and 2019, Partnerships for the goals (SDG 17) is again the most popular SDG among civil society parties, with 53.1% of the respondents saying that they were working to achieve it. More than 40% of the organisations focus on SDGs 1, 5 and 16. Less popular (< 20%) are SDGs 7, 9, 11 and 14. The table above divides work on the SDGs into the same clusters as in previous years; this is also used by organisations like the OECD.

54.3% of the organisations indicated that they have stepped up their commitment to achieving the SDGs since last year. The other 45.7% said that their level of commitment remained the same. The main form of commitment is implementing projects to promote sustainable development (both in the Netherlands and elsewhere). Other fields on which these organisations focus include information and awareness (75%), advocacy (69%) and policy influencing and fundraising (41%).

It is again striking that relatively few respondents are active in efforts aimed at the planet SDGs and prosperity SDGs. It is possible that organisations active on these themes mainly focus on other – binding – international agreements like the Paris Agreement, rather than on the voluntary SDGs. However this does not mean civil society organisations are inactive on themes such as biodiversity and climate change. On the contrary, they are highly active in these areas.

¹⁷ National Youth Council, Global Compact Netherlands, IUCN Netherlands, CSR Netherlands, Partos, the SDG Alliances and SDG Netherlands.

2. Inspiring examples

Civil society organisations contribute in various tangible ways to achieving the 2030 Agenda, not only by implementing projects, but also by acting as watchdogs. Some examples are given briefly below.

[Edukans](#) promotes exchanges and mutual learning between Dutch students, teachers and school heads and their counterparts in developing countries. Together they address subjects relating to SDGs 4, 5 and 8. By working with colleagues in a different culture on educational quality and professional development of teachers and school heads, an intensive, reciprocal learning process develops.

[Stichting Present](#) is expanding its activities in the Netherlands. A good example is the Social Gardening project in Utrecht, aimed at supporting people confronted with poverty, poor health or social isolation. Through this project, Stichting Present brings local residents and volunteers together to work on urban greening, contributing not only to sustainable cities (SDG 11), but also to reducing poverty (SDG 1) and improving people's physical and mental health (SDG 3).

[Both ENDS](#) focuses on trade agreements, like the agreement between the EU and Indonesia and between the EU and Canada (CETA). The discussion on CETA became part of a heated debate in 2019, as approval by the Dutch parliament was required. Working with human rights organisations, women's organisations and environmental organisations from nearly fifty countries in Asia, Africa and South America in particular, Both ENDS drew attention to the fact that CETA sets standards that will prevent poorer countries from achieving the 2030 Agenda. The trade agreement has negative consequences for various SDGs, including SDGs 2, 10, 13, 16 and 17. For this reason, they have [called on](#) the House of Representatives not to approve it.

3. The Dutch commitment

Civil society actors were also asked to rate their own and other actors' commitment to the SDGs. The table below presents the scores (on a scale from 0 to 10) for 2018, 2019 and 2020. This year's scores were higher than last year's. They show that civil society is particularly critical of action by government and the private sector on the SDGs, although scores have risen slightly over the years.

Actor	2018	2019	2020
Own organisation	8,5	8,1	8,1
Civil society	6,0	7,2	6,3
Government	4,9	5,2	5,6
Private sector	4,0	4,4	4,9
Knowledge institutions	5,8	6,3	6,4

4. Current situation

According to the respondents, the achievement of various SDGs in the Netherlands is in jeopardy. Civil society parties are particularly concerned about SDGs 5, 7, 10, 12, 13 and 15. These outcomes are in line with last year's results. Action on these SDGs is thus urgently in need of improvement.

Civil society's concerns are confirmed by the outcome of Statistics Netherlands' 2020 Monitor of Well-being & Sustainable Development Goals. This report confirms the Netherlands' poor performance compared to other EU member states on SDGs 7, 13, 14 and 15. Despite a considerable expansion of capacity in renewable energy generation, Dutch greenhouse gas emissions continue to be higher than those of other EU countries (SDG 13). Ecosystems (SDG 15) are also under high pressure in the Netherlands.

A transition to a new economy is sorely needed. We will only be successful if everyone participates on an equal footing. A focus on gender equality and solidarity is thus essential. The majority of Dutch civil society organisations believe that an initial step is to collect more specific information. More gender-specific data would help give insight into the main problem areas. Data broken down by age group are also needed to better address goals relating to youth – through policy on poverty and debt, for example, and timely, equal access to healthcare and youth healthcare services.

Civil society parties clearly indicate that too little progress is currently being made to achieve the SDGs by 2030. That means the government is falling short in fulfilling tasks such as setting frameworks, setting goals, monitoring, taking or delegating responsibility and connecting parties. There is still no national implementation strategy for the SDGs, and the urgency of the SDGs has still not been brought home to the public. It is essential for the Netherlands to set goals for the remaining ten years, with a particular focus on the SDGs on which, according to the Monitor of Well-being & SDGs, it lags behind. This strategy should apply to the whole of central government, in order to promote coherence between the various policy fields.

Another suggestion would be for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to hand over responsibility for coordinating efforts on the SDGs to a ministry with a more comprehensive mandate, like the Ministry of Finance or the Ministry of General Affairs.

Developing countries face even greater challenges in achieving the SDGs by 2030. Organisations are doubtful that this is feasible within ten years. The actions of both businesses and governments form an obstacle to many positive changes. Nonetheless, the organisations have not given up hope, and are committed to raising the ODA budget to at least 0.7% of gross national income, ensuring policy coherence for development and raising awareness among politicians, for example. According to civil society actors, achievement of many SDGs is under threat, but there are a few that stand out. Gender equality (SDG 5) is a good example: all over the world, women's rights and gender equality are under pressure from conservative governments, among other factors. Income inequality (SDG 10) between countries has diminished in the past few years, but within countries it has grown. We still have a long way to go in promoting peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16), given corruption, theft and tax avoidance. The money involved could be put to far better use, to reduce poverty, for example, or enable children to attend school. Unfortunately, there is still a world to be won before achievement of the SDGs is a viable prospect in developing countries.

Civil society organisations regard international corporate social responsibility (ICSR) as an essential component in bringing the SDGs within reach internationally. The [Social and Economic Council's advisory report](#) on coherence between ICSR and the SDGs marks a step forward, but more is needed to effect permanent change, particularly in working conditions and the relationship of global supply chains to nature and the environment in. In addition to existing, voluntary measures, this could be achieved by drafting basic legislation on ICSR. Clear communication on this subject with Dutch consumers is also seen as part of the solution.

Looking back on the past year, the bottom line has not changed. The Netherlands needs to take an honest look at itself. Our taxation system facilitates tax avoidance, trade agreements threaten the quality of life and physical environment of local populations in developing countries, and our global footprint is still huge. Policy coherence for development is crucial. Individuals, governments and businesses all play a major role in achieving the SDGs, both in the Netherlands and elsewhere.

F. KNOWLEDGE INSTITUTIONS

Drawn up by and under the auspices of NWO-WOTRO Science for Global Development

In the past year, educational and research institutions again contributed in various ways to enhancing knowledge development on achievement of the SDGs, and to enabling access to this knowledge. For the first time, this year's report presents results not only in higher professional education and the universities but also in secondary vocational education.

1. Secondary vocational education and training (MBO)

As the main educators of our workforce, schools for secondary vocational education and training (MBO) play an indispensable role in achieving the SDGs by 2030. Increasingly the SDGs are an important framework for MBO institutions, in their capacity not only as educators but also as organisations.

Since 2019, the circular economy has been included as a standard element in the occupational profiles drawn up by the MBO sector and the private sector for the various courses. The same applies to the energy transition and climate adaptation. In this way, MBO courses increasingly include lessons on aspects of sustainable development and the SDGs. The SDGs are guiding principles in determining capacity not only for occupations, but also for citizenship. Young people learn how, as citizens, they can address issues like sustainability and achieving the SDGs in their living environment.

Sharing knowledge and information between schools and support for schools are major factors in safeguarding the SDGs' place in MBO. Vocational education takes the Whole School Approach to the SDGs. Schools can use this policy instrument, which also has a ranking system, as the basis for policy on sustainability or to monitor progress.

Following the example of higher education, the SustainaBul award for sustainability was awarded in the MBO sector for the first time in 2019. First, second and third places were awarded to the Koning Willem I College, Wellantcollege and Friesland College respectively. The *Leren voor Morgen* (Learning for the Future) website contains more information on [SustainaBul MBO](#) and provides an overview of [current initiatives](#) relating to the SDGs in MBO. In the framework of knowledge sharing, *Kennispunt MBO Burgerschap* (MBO Citizenship Knowledge Centre) will be holding a national event on the SDGs for MBO teachers on 9 October

2020. The Regional Training Centres' Facilities Services Partnership will play a major role in organising it.

In 2020, the Secondary Vocational Education Council plans to anchor the SDGs on a more permanent basis in MBO, and will therefore sign the SDG Charter on behalf of MBO schools.

2. Universities of applied sciences

The universities of applied sciences (Hogescholen or HBO institutions) are real SDG pioneers, and took on the challenge in highly creative ways at a very early stage. They continued their efforts in 2019, and further upscaled many existing initiatives. HBO institutions established the HBO SDG Coalition in 2018, a partnership between all 36 government-funded HBO institutions in the Netherlands. On 9 May 2019 the chair of the Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (Vereniging Hogescholen) signed the SDG Charter on behalf of all HBO institutions, affirming their ambition to ensure that the nearly 500,000 HBO students in the Netherlands are SDG-competent. The HBO SDG Coalition focuses on developing good practices in education and on teachers' professional development.

In a forthcoming issue of the higher education journal *TH&MA Hoger Onderwijs* (2020-2), the sector will outline the wide range of ways in which the SDGs have been taken on board in various curricula, in institution-wide projects or in practical research. Examples include the [Green Ambassadors Programme](#) at Hanze University of Applied Sciences, research into SDG competences at Van Hall Larenstein University of Applied Sciences, and the SDG learning communities at Leiden University of Applied Sciences. Lastly, Fontys, Avans, Hanze and Saxion Universities of Applied Sciences, in cooperation with [Duurzaambedrijfsleven](#) (Sustainable business partnership) launched [SDGs on Stage](#) on 9 May 2019. This is an online databank especially developed for HBO students, businesses and civil society organisations to match students seeking SDG-related work experience placements and projects with companies seeking students. It now offers more than 40 placements and projects.

The SDGs in education and research are also central to the strategic HBO Agenda for 2019 to 2023 ([Professionals voor morgen](#)). Universities of applied sciences and their centres of expertise are well equipped to contribute to approaches to these issues through practical research.

3. Research Universities

In the past year, the research universities have also taken steps to give the SDGs a more prominent place in education, research and operational management. In 2019, the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU) and VU University Amsterdam launched an [SDG Dashboard](#) to make academic publications on the SDGs both clear and accessible. The dashboard also clarifies the connection between science and policy by highlighting extracts from publications cited in policy documents. In this way it provides starting points for strengthening this connection in the future. Using this data, several universities examining their researchers' contribution to the SDGs. The SDG Dashboard has also led to new initiatives. For example, Maastricht University works with publishers and libraries to survey SDG-relevant academic articles and books. To demonstrate the significance of the SDGs and of the research under way in all related areas, each month from the autumn of 2019 to May 2020 the Dutch universities will highlight their specific commitment to each of the SDGs in [online magazines](#).

In choosing strategic themes, universities respond to the societal challenges anchored in the SDGs. Their focus is on interdisciplinary research, in line with the SDGs' crosscutting themes. Within the strategic theme [Pathways to Sustainability](#), researchers at Utrecht University are working on all aspects of a sustainable future. Scholars at the University of Amsterdam are working in the research platform [A Sustainable Future](#) on a sustainable economy, society and planet. They are also using their expertise to advise on social issues – [diversity at senior levels in businesses and organisations](#), for example.

Universities address the SDGs both within and outside the curriculum. For example, the interdisciplinary [Radboud Centre for Sustainability Challenges](#) was set up in 2019 to promote cooperation in research and education in the field of sustainability at Radboud University Nijmegen. This resulted in a new course on the Sustainable Development Goals, which started in February 2020. In the autumn of 2019, the University of Twente introduced the extra-curricular Transdisciplinary Master-Insert Programme on [Shaping Responsible Futures](#) that gives students the opportunity to work together on solutions to complex social challenges.

The universities are also working to achieve the SDGs within their organisation, for example by reducing CO₂ emissions. Through the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU), the universities drafted the first roadmap under the [Climate Agreement](#). This roadmap was fleshed out in early 2020 with scenarios for 2030 and 2050. For some time now,

the universities have been taking part in the national multiyear agreements on energy conservation and have already reduced their energy consumption. In the decades to come, the universities want to seriously step up their efforts to ensure that their campuses are carbon-neutral by 2050 at the latest.

4. National research initiatives

The [25 routes](#) set out in the National Research Agenda overlap with the SDGs. Many of the approved projects have the potential to contribute to achieving the SDGs, though this is not yet explicit. Several theme-based research programmes have been developed in cooperation with the ministries on subjects like biodiversity, ecology, food systems and poverty. A programme has been developed jointly with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with an explicit link to the SDGs, enabling research into the interaction between the SDGs and the consequences for policy interventions in developing countries.

In the [Knowledge and Innovation Covenant \(KIC\) 2020-2023](#) (Voluntary agreement on knowledge and innovation), businesses, knowledge parties and government authorities affirm their commitment to the major innovation themes of the coming years. Under the KIC, they make a joint investment in innovation, linked to the government's mission-driven top sectors and innovation policy. Cooperation focuses on four broad social themes, which also partially overlap with the 17 SDGs. These are 'Energy Transition and Sustainability', 'Agriculture, Water and Food', 'Health and Care' and 'Security'. The first calls for project proposals on these themes are planned for 2020.

The Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) is trying to use the knowledge within Dutch academia to develop knowledge on the SDGs. In Europe in particular, KNAW proactively contributes to the recommendations issued by institutions like the European Academies Science Advisory Council (EASAC) and the European Commission's Scientific Advice Mechanism (SAM). In 2019, KNAW and the International Science Council (ISC) organised a meeting on science's contribution to the SDGs. ISC, a global coalition that brings together more than 140 scientific organisations, identified the 2030 Agenda as the focus of its activities for the coming years.

G. YOUTH

Drafted by and under the auspices of the National Youth Council

This section was written by the National Youth Council (NJR) from the perspective of Dutch young people. It is based on consultations with various national youth organisations and the Dutch youth representatives. There are nearly four million people in the 12-to-30 age group in the Netherlands, many of them formally represented by NJR member organisations. The focus of this year's contribution is the future of education and work and young people's position. This shows that the 17 SDGs are not separate but form a coherent whole. By investing in young people and their future prospects, we will also be moving forward towards achieving all the goals.

What does the future hold for me? This is a question young people often ask themselves. It relates to issues like choice of study, relationships, interesting work and a place to live, but also to the future of the planet. These issues are relevant to young people not only in the Netherlands, but also in the rest of the world. The current generation of young people faces huge challenges. Society is calling for radical transitions in the economy, transport and the production of energy and food, for which the SDGs present a clear agenda. These transitions will require commitment, creativity and leadership from young people, and cooperation between generations.

1. The current generation is under mounting pressure

The core message of the SDGs is Leave No One Behind. On average, the Netherlands scores well on many points, but a closer look shows that some groups in society are doing better than others. Young people often have a weaker position than their parents and grandparents. It is essential for young people to be well-equipped to participate in society, and thus also in the labour market. This will enable them to meet the major challenges that await them.

Society currently leans very heavily on the commitment and flexibility of young people. Because of a student loan system that leads to a heavy burden of debt (SDG 4), a poor position on the housing market (SDG 11.1), increasing pressure to perform, temporary contracts (SDG 8.6/8B) and increasingly unequal opportunities (SDG 10), young people are under pressure. In its survey 'High Expectations: Young People's Opportunities and Obstacles in 2019' ([Hoge Verwachtingen](#)), the Social and Economic Council's youth platform identifies the long-term effects of a range of measures on the current young generation. In September 2019, [Coalitie-Y](#) – a

coalition of youth organisations – represented many young people in a manifesto presented to Prime Minister Mark Rutte calling for improvements to the position of young people in the Netherlands. A majority of the House of Representatives voted in favour of screening policy for impact on young people. An instrument is currently being developed. With the [#NietMijnSchuld](#) ('Not My Fault'/'Not My Debt') campaign, students are calling for abolition of the student loan system. In foreign policy, the new [Youth at Heart](#) strategy puts the focus on young people, education and employment.

Recommendations to the government on ways of improving young people's future prospects include:

- Review the student loan system, reintroduce the basic grant, and compensate students who currently suffer the negative consequences of the loan system.
- Enhance young people's financial independence, and devote more attention to the transition from childhood to adulthood.
- Ensure sufficient student accommodation and homes for first-time buyers/tenants, both in urban areas and elsewhere.
- Provide greater job stability, and reduce the gap between permanent and flexible contracts.
- Work towards a fair, simple and balanced pension system.

2. More differences among young people

We are seeing inequality not only between generations, but also among young people themselves: inequalities in position, opportunities, and the ability for their voices to be heard (SDG 10.2). Society today makes stiff demands on most young people, but these are even greater for those groups that are more vulnerable. According to the Social and Economic Council's survey, 'There is a growing social divide between young people with access to more or to fewer opportunities. Those who have the right connections are more likely to find interesting work, to get help in coping with financial setbacks, and to have an easier time combining work and care duties. Anyone who does not have access to such "social capital" in their own circle will have a much harder time – despite any diplomas they may have obtained.' Prejudice and discrimination on grounds of gender, origin, sexual preference or convictions affect a young person's prospects. The same holds for the place where a young person grows up, psychological problems, a disability or chronic ailment. These factors in combination lead to even more deprivation.

Recommendations to the government on ways of improving young people's future prospects include:

- Provide high-quality work experience placements for all young people and explore ways of preventing discrimination in hiring, such as anonymous applications.
- Support youth organisations financially, thus creating a strong, accessible basis for young people to develop through extracurricular activities like voluntary work or participation in leadership bodies.

3. It starts with development

The Netherlands has a high quality education system (SDG 4). However, schools do not only impart knowledge, but help pupils find out who they are and what they are capable of. It is therefore essential to anchor personal development and citizenship in education. Several youth organisations supplied input for the site curriculum.nu on the educational system of tomorrow, to ensure that pupils have a say in the review of the primary and secondary school curriculum. The review also reflected the need for closer alignment between education and social challenges (SDG 4.7). For example, young people learn very little about climate change at school, so they have to find out about this subject themselves (SDGs 12.8 and 13.3). In sex education lessons at school, pupils would like to see a greater focus on interaction and communication, both online and offline, in a relationship and during sex (SDG 3.7 and [Gewoon het taboe eraf halen](#), a study of sex education and young people's needs).

Recommendations to the government on improving education and development include:

- At school focus more sharply on social and emotional skills, personal development, citizenship and media literacy.
- Ensure that young people have more access to opportunities for study and self-development, during and after they have completed their education.
- Modernise sex education to meet young people's needs, taking sexual and gender diversity as basic principles.
- Invest in education, so that teachers have more opportunity to help all their pupils develop.

4. Pressure on young people leads to stress

The increasing pressure on the current generation of young people affects their mental health (SDG 3.4). Young people feel stressed and under pressure to perform. They face financial insecurity, through student debt for example, and are seriously concerned about the consequences of

climate change. What is more, it is difficult for young people to find treatment for mental problems. They do not all have access to mental health services, and it is precisely the young people with the most complex problems who are left untreated. Waiting lists are long, and the mental health services lack sufficient capacity for specialist care. At the same time, we can see that mental health problems are still stigmatised, not only in society as a whole but also by care workers and young people themselves. This affects the degree to which young people can develop and whether, in combination with school and work, they can concern themselves with social impact and participation.

Recommendations to the government on improving young people's mental health include:

- Bring the subject of young people's mental health into the open, break through the taboos on depression, stress and other mental problems, and give young people the scope and means to cope with these problems themselves.
- Take action to reduce waiting lists within the youth mental health services, and give young people a say in their own treatment.

5. Working for a clean, liveable planet

Young people are increasingly concerned about environmental issues and the consequences of climate change (SDG 13 in particular, and also SDGs 6, 7, 11, 12, 14 and 15) and are voicing these concerns. This theme in particular shows that we cannot solve the problems on our own, and that international cooperation is needed. Climate change is pre-eminently an issue on which young people's voices are rightly being heard. There have been some major developments. In October 2019, foreign trade and development minister Sigrid Kaag, acting in her capacity as chair of the [NDC Partnership](#), promised the youth representatives that she would add a youth strategy to every Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) to the Paris Agreement (SDG 13), on which the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is now working. Ms Kaag is also working through the [We Are Tomorrow Global Partnership](#) (an initiative of the Youth Climate Movement ([Jonge Klimaatbeweging](#))) to enable youth organisations in the Global South to develop their own vision of a sustainable future. The Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality is working with the NJR on establishing a youth representative for biodiversity and food, a new role that will give young people a stronger voice in international decision-making. Finally, within the Regional Energy Strategies to implement the National Climate Agreement, Jong RES, a partnership between the [Klimaat- en Energiekoepel](#) (young professionals' climate and energy umbrella organisation) and the Youth Climate Movement, is advocating young people's participation.

Climate change is a huge challenge, and all these initiatives are urgently needed.

Recommendations to the government on a clean, liveable planet include:

- Screen the growth agenda and investment fund for compliance with the Sustainable Development Goals, thus guaranteeing a sustainable, liveable future for future generations.
- Through the UN General Assembly, request an advisory opinion from the International Criminal Court for advice on the rights of future generations.
- Make climate measures accessible and take everyone on board.

Recommendations to the government on improving global monitoring of progress on the SDGs include:

- Ensure that the UN's [High Level Political Forum](#) is once more a platform for raising the level of ambition and reaching new agreements.
- Make the system for international accountability (now through the [Voluntary National Reviews](#)) more binding.

6. Having a say is essential

Invest in our generation. Ensure that we learn at school the knowledge and skills needed for us to cope with our changing future. Enable us to set out on life's journey unburdened by student debt, and leave no one behind. In this way, we will be able to make a full commitment and meet the challenges of the future. Given the current composition of the population, young people are underrepresented in the political arena. Create more space for young people's voices.

Recommendations to the government on giving young people more say include:

- Give young people a systematic, meaningful role in national and international decision-making on themes that affect them directly, like education and climate change, structured through an inclusive process.
- Give youth organisations a seat at the negotiating table when forming a new government.
- Lower the voting age to 16 and incorporate this into social studies and citizenship lessons.
- Enshrine the existence and significance of youth organisations in legislation.
- Use simple language. This is the only way to involve a larger part of society in discussion of social issues.

7. In conclusion, a critical comment

At this time, not a single country is on track to achieve the SDGs by 2030. The Netherlands is no exception. Young people all over the world are rightly concerned about their future. It is clear that we will not achieve the goals if countries decide for themselves how and when they will report on them, and if we disregard the impact of and our responsibility for our patterns of consumption.

H. HUMAN RIGHTS, with a focus on gender equality

Drafted by and under the auspices of the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights

In this contribution, the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights (the Institute) first examines the relationship between the SDGs and human rights after which the progress made in the Netherlands towards achieving gender equality (SDG 5) will be assessed. Equality between men and women warrants extra attention because several reports show that the Netherlands could do better in this area.

1. The SDGs and human rights

Achieving the SDGs and sustainable development goes hand in hand with respect for human rights. For example, the right to education cannot be achieved without a developed education system (SDG 4). Conversely, human rights create the conditions needed for development. For example, the right to freedom of expression is a condition for the development of inclusive, representative institutions (SDG 16). An assessment published by the [Danish Institute for Human Rights](#) also shows a close connection between human rights and the SDGs: of the 169 SDG targets, 90% are related to human rights.

At the request of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, the Advisory Council on International Affairs (AIV) published an advisory report last year with the - highly revealing - title 'Sustainable Development Goals and Human Rights: an Indivisible Bond' ([Duurzame ontwikkeling en mensenrechten: een noodzakelijk verband](#)). Apart from describing the significance of the bond between the SDGs and human rights, the AIV concludes that this link is not only relevant to international policy but also needs to be realized nationally. This includes, as the AIV explicitly points out, the Dutch Caribbean islands of Bonaire, St Eustatius and Saba. National human rights institutions like the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights ([College voor de Rechten van de Mens](#)) play an important role in overseeing implementation of the SDGs by carrying out research, for example about [pregnancy discrimination](#) (SDG 5.1), or advising the government on the [position of people with a disability](#) since a young age (SDGs 8.5 and 10.2).

2. Gender equality (SDG 5)

SDG 5 concerns the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. This year's national Monitor of Well-being & SDGs presents mixed conclusions

on SDG 5. Though the Netherlands is moving towards the goal, it is doubtful whether it will achieve gender equality by 2030. The Netherlands also achieves far lower scores than other EU countries on a number of indicators, as confirmed in various other reports. According to the [Global Gender Gap Report](#), published each year by the World Economic Forum, the Netherlands dropped to the 38th place (out of 153) in the 2019 rankings for equality between men and women – a drop of 11 places compared to 2018. This result can partly be attributed to the fact that the Netherlands has never had a woman prime minister and has relatively few women members of parliament. However, the report also concludes that gender inequality still exists on the labour market, with, for example, the number of women in senior positions in the Netherlands significantly lower than in other developed countries. There is also room for improvement in action to stop violence against women, as shown in the [Baseline Evaluation Report Netherlands](#) published by the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) in early 2020. The following paragraphs examine these last two persistent problems in more depth: gender inequality on the labour market and violence against women.

3. Gender equality and the labour market

Ensuring women's full and effective participation, equal rights and access to economic resources and equal opportunities to leadership are enshrined in SDG 5.5 and 5.a. According to the OECD report [Part-time and Partly Equal](#), women occupy only around a quarter of all management positions in the Netherlands, and for every 580 euros earned by a woman, a man will earn around 1000 euros, i.e. nearly double. In this regard, the Netherlands scores far below the average for developed OECD countries.

According to the OECD, the main reason for these differences is the exceptionally large number of women in the Netherlands who work part-time: almost 60% of women in employment.¹⁸ This is around three times higher than in other developed countries. Because women generally work fewer hours than men, their income and career progression is generally lower. The relatively large number of women working part-time also leads to an uneven distribution of unpaid domestic tasks such as childcare. Women in the Netherlands averagely spend 225 minutes a day on unpaid work in the household. For men, the average is 145 minutes a day.

¹⁸ The OECD defines part-time work as a job of less than 30 hours a week.

Moreover, in a comparable job and with comparable experience, women are paid less per hour than their male colleagues. This was the conclusion reached by the Institute in a publication on [unequal pay in the Netherlands](#). The study looked at differences in salary between men and women working in hospitals, higher professional education institutions (*hoger beroepsonderwijs*) and insurance companies. In all three sectors, men were paid more than women, while no objective reason – e.g. work experience – could be given to justify this. Many women also experience pregnancy discrimination. According to the Institute's 2016 publication on pregnancy discrimination ([Is het nu beter bevallen?](#)), 43% of working women or women job seekers who had recently given birth faced negative reactions to their pregnancy at work. In response, the government drafted the [Actieplan Zwangerschapsdiscriminatie](#) (Action plan on pregnancy discrimination). The Institute will continue to monitor the situation and will publish the results of a new study of pregnancy discrimination in the Netherlands in 2020.

One of the measures proposed by the OECD to achieve a more equitable distribution of work and care tasks between men and women is to expand paternity leave. This is in line with SDG 5.4 on promotion of shared responsibility within the household and family. The new Supplementary Partner Leave Act (*Wet Invoering Extra Geboorteverlof*, WIEG) is a step in the right direction. Since 2019, partners had been entitled to five instead of two days' paid leave on the birth of a child. From 1 July 2020, partners will also be entitled to five weeks' additional leave, at 70% of their normal salary. Because fathers will spend more time with their new-born babies in a period essential for determining the division of domestic tasks, it is likely that they will take more responsibility for care tasks than would otherwise be the case. This will allow women to work more hours and build a career. Partner leave also helps prevent pregnancy discrimination, because it enables new mothers to resume work sooner. However, the question is whether the Act will prove sufficient to encourage enough men to take responsibility for more household tasks. In line with the recommendations put forward in the [online consultations](#) preparatory to enactment of the Supplementary Partner Leave Act, the Institute would again urge that supplementary measures be taken to ensure that partners actually take this expanded leave. The effects of the Act should be closely monitored.

Last year, in an effort to increase the low proportion of women in senior management positions, the House of Representatives approved the introduction of a [women's quota](#) for large companies. Now women must hold at least 30% of the seats on the supervisory boards of listed companies. Large companies are also required to draft a plan, with targets, to ensure more women are appointed to

senior and middle management positions. With these measures, the government responded to the recommendations put forward in the Dutch Social and Economic Council's advisory report. According to this report, companies were moving too slowly towards gender diversity in management; gender inequality in senior and middle management remains persistently high. The quota's contribution to more gender equality must be monitored closely, in particular given the Social and Economic Council's analysis of the situation in other countries, where quotas seem to have no effect on the position of women in jobs beneath management level.

4. Violence against women

Violence against women (SDG 5.2) is still a major problem in the Netherlands. In 2019, the Research and Documentation Centre (WODC) published an extensive report titled [Prevalentie van huiselijk geweld en kindermishandeling](#) (Prevalence of domestic violence and child abuse) which concludes that at least 27,000 men and 97,000 women are regularly confronted with physical or sexual violence in their own homes.

The Netherlands has ratified the Istanbul Convention in 2015. In this Convention, the Netherlands and 33 other states parties committed themselves to taking action to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence. In early 2020, the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), the international body responsible for monitoring this convention, published a [Baseline Evaluation Report](#) assessing the Dutch government's compliance with the convention. While expressing appreciation for the government's commitment to combating violence against women and the measures it has taken, GREVIO identifies some areas for improvement. A major concern for GREVIO is the government's gender-neutral approach to this issue, and the group urges the government to adjust its approach. Policy on domestic violence should be gender-sensitive to ensure sufficient attention is provided to the structural causes of violence against women.

The current national programme against domestic violence and child abuse ([Geweld Hoort Nergens Thuis](#)) was launched in 2018. The Institute values this programme and the initiatives to deliver it. However, as it explains in its [written contribution](#) to GREVIO, the programme does not include systematic action to prevent violence against women. In the Netherlands, the municipal authorities bear primary responsibility for preventing and combating domestic violence, enabling a customised approach in each region. However, this carries the risk that assistance and support for

women differs from region to region. The government should explore whether oversight at local level is sufficient, and take the necessary measures if this is not the case.

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is a serious form of violence against women. SDG 5.3 and article 38 of the Istanbul Convention call on governments to prevent, combat and criminalise FGM. A 2019 [prevalence study](#) concludes that an estimated 4,190 girls between the ages of 0 and 19, with origins in countries where FGM is practised but living in the Netherlands, run the risk of undergoing FGM in the next twenty years. GREVIO values the Netherlands' commitment to preventing FGM, but points to a lack of clarity about whether the measures taken are actually reducing its incidence. The new 2020 [Actieagenda Schadelijke Praktijken](#) (Action Agenda on Harmful Practices) contains measures that will be taken to prevent practices like FGM, including an accessible reporting system for victims.

5. The Netherlands can do better

The Institute concludes that the Dutch government has taken steps to achieve gender equality (SDG 5), but that the Netherlands lags behind other developed countries in several areas, like number of women in management positions. Labour market discrimination and violence against women are persistent problems. The effectiveness of the measures taken in both the European and Caribbean parts of the Netherlands should be monitored very closely in order to make progress towards achievement of SDG 5. The Institute also has a role to play in this, and has therefore chosen gender equality (together with digitalisation) as its strategic priority for the 2020-2023 period.

