



SUMMARIZED STATUS REPORT

**POVERTY, SOCIAL
EXCLUSION AND
HUMAN RIGHTS IN
THE CARIBBEAN
NETHERLANDS**

NETHERLANDS

**INSTITUTE FOR
HUMAN RIGHTS**

Introduction

You are reading a summary of the fifth annual status report 'Human rights in the Netherlands' by the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights. The theme is 'poverty'. This brochure is specifically about the Caribbean Netherlands: Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba.

Why this brochure?

In the Caribbean Netherlands, many people and families are living in poverty. Human rights have come under pressure, including the rights to housing, education, health and full participation in society.

This brochure provides building blocks for developing a vision on fighting poverty for governments, aid organisations and other involved parties. The Institute is convinced that cooperation between these entities is crucial to cultivating such a vision.

In various chapters, you will read about topics like employment, education and housing. At the end, you will find a conclusion and recommendations.

The information in this brochure is based on several research reports by, among others, the Spies Commission, The Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP), UNICEF and the Education Inspectorate.

More information

Would you like to read the full report or do you have any questions? Please contact the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights
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The right to an adequate standard of living

The Netherlands has adopted a great many human rights treaties. Most of these also apply to the Caribbean Netherlands. In many areas, there are differences in legislation between the European part of the Netherlands and the Caribbean Netherlands.

With regard to this, the government often refers to the legislative clause in the Dutch Constitution that allows differentiation due to the islands' special circumstances. However, the principle of equality in article 1 of the Dutch Constitution only allows a distinction to be made (for example when it comes to social provisions) if it is clear that situations are different or that there is objective justification for the distinction. The Dutch government must work as quickly and effectively as possible towards full realization of the social-economic rights from the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). The Netherlands must see to it that the rights are available, acceptable, of good quality and accessible. With maximum utilization of its means and without discrimination.

In the Universal Declaration of Human rights, the right to an adequate standard of living is described as follows:

'Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.'

This right has been further elaborated in human rights treaties such as the ICESCR. This basis of social security is an important aspect of human dignity.



1. Poverty in the Caribbean Netherlands

On 10 October 2010, Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba were transformed into 'public bodies' within the Netherlands. Since then, the islands are referred to as the Caribbean Netherlands. Various reports have shown that many people on all three islands still live in poverty.



Causes that are often mentioned are:

- The transfer from the Antilles guilder to the American dollar and the corresponding price increase.
- The new tax system after October 2010.
- The lack of awareness about income-related support measures.

1.1 What is the Dutch government doing?

The Dutch government has acknowledged the poverty problem on the islands.

In short, this is the state of affairs:

- As of 1 January 2016, child benefits have been introduced of 40 USD on Bonaire and 42 USD on St. Eustatius and Saba, per child per month.

- In October 2016, the Ministry for Social Affairs and Employment (SZW) has made 1 million euro available to relieve poverty that specifically affects children.
- No standards for the provision level have been set for employment, income and social security. Nor has a subsistence level been established.
- The welfare standard ('onderstand') has been set on the basis of the statutory minimum wage. However, the State Secretary of SZW has ordered an investigation into how a social minimum could be set on the basis of benchmarks for subsistence.

2. Employment

Unemployment rates in the Caribbean Netherlands are relatively low, but many of the people who work only earn the minimum wage. This is often too little to afford the basic necessities. This is why many people need to work multiple jobs. Since the statutory reform in 2010, many people have found that their financial situation has worsened.

2.1 Vulnerable groups

Groups with a high risk of living in poverty include:

- Elderly people, and particularly single pensioners living on the State Pension (AOV).
- Those who are unable to work due to sickness or disability.
- Disabled people.
- (Single) mothers.

In the case of people with an incapacity to do their work, there is currently hardly any review of whether a person could carry out another type of work. For disabled people, it is hard to find jobs; there is a lack of social work facilities and not all public bodies have a policy for recruiting these people themselves.

2.2 Small-scale islands

The labour market is very small. Improving the effectiveness of the labour market and expanding opportunities for local workers are serious challenges for the Government and the islands.

Areas of concern:

- Inadequate cooperation between the State and public bodies means that opportunities for the local population to find suitable work are not fulfilled.
- The State issues many employment permits to foreign workers.
- Regulations allow employers to be asked to provide training for local workers in return for employment permits. However, this option has so far not been used by the State.
- There is a need for more highly educated employees, but 'island children' often do not return after their studies in the European Netherlands or the United States.
- There is often a gap between supply and demand.

2.3 Equal treatment

The differentiation between the European and Caribbean Netherlands can lead to unequal treatment:

- Legislation and regulations in the Caribbean Netherlands are often less favourable. For example with regard to employment and children (maternity and paternity leave, child benefits).
- The State and the islands are making insufficient use of opportunities for locals within the labour market.
- It is hard to get by on the low rate of benefits and the minimum wage.
- There is insufficient attention for vulnerable groups.

3. Education

Good education is necessary to be able to escape poverty. Since 2010, the level of education has improved significantly. Thanks in part to the Education Agendas for the Caribbean Netherlands, most schools and institutions have achieved basic quality.

Areas of concern:

- The questionable quality of secondary education, secondary vocational education and practical education.
- The inadequate collaboration between schools and parties involved in health, youth, childcare and the labour market.
- The inadequate connection between education and the labour market.
- The high number of pupils with deficiencies and with mental health or physical limitations, for whom it is also unclear whether there is adequate support at secondary education level.
- Learning results that are lower than in the European Netherlands, particularly when it comes to reading and writing.
- The struggle to enforce mandatory education.
- The lack of modern learning resources and the bad condition of many school buildings.
- The limited availability of potential work experience placements/internships.



4. Health

People who live in poverty often have a bad health. 27% of people in the Caribbean Netherlands suffer from serious weight problems due to unhealthy eating habits and lifestyles. As a result of the introduction of public health insurance and investments, the quality of healthcare in the Caribbean Netherlands has drastically improved since 2010. Still, breaking the negative spiral of poverty and bad health will require structural, preventive measures..

Areas of concern:

- Insufficient efficiency and customisation.
- Steep costs and too much bureaucracy.
- Vulnerable groups such as children, teenage mothers, people with a disability and the elderly, for whom policy is as yet insufficiently developed.
- Insufficiently developed provisions in long term care, care for the elderly and care for people with a disability.
- The lack of information for determining measurable objectives, needed for improving health care and policy.
- Child abuse is a common problem. This is closely related to the poverty issue. Initiatives to diminish violence against children are taking shape (e.g. through the creation of the Children's Rights Task Force and - on Bonaire - a children's hotline), but there is still much room for improvement and there is no legislative backing.



5. Housing

On Bonaire, there is a clear division between luxury residences, often populated by European Dutch people, and run-down homes in the outlying neighbourhoods. On all three islands, many people lack the necessary funds to afford housing of a decent standard.

For vulnerable groups, such as people with a disability and the elderly, there are insufficient housing facilities.

Poor quality housing is a distressing aspect of poverty. The central government and public bodies must take this into account and invest in good quality, affordable housing.



6. Conclusion

Many people in the Caribbean Netherlands have difficulties making ends meet. No minimum subsistence level has yet been calculated for the three islands. Work is no guarantee of an income that is sufficient to meet basic needs. In addition, it is very difficult to find work in the small and complex labour market, particularly for certain groups such as people with a disability. The quality of education has improved in recent years, but continues to require attention. For example, the nature and quality of education does not match well with employers' demands. Many people living in poverty in the Caribbean Netherlands have health problems. Obesity is a common issue. Few preventive measures have been taken to counter this so far. It has also been found that there is a link between the large number of people living in poverty and the widespread occurrence of violence against children. Many people on the islands do not have the means to obtain good housing. Insufficient suitable accommodation is available for people with a disability. In addition, many homes are in a poor condition. .

7. Recommendations

1. Calculate the social security level on the basis of the local costs of living.
2. Address the consequences of youth poverty in an integrated way, and ensure that the parties involved work together better.
3. Take structural preventive measures in order to break the negative spiral of poverty and poor health.
4. Invest in good and affordable housing.

