

education in the caribbean netherlands

part c: background information

onderwijsraad

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guide

This is Part C of the publication *Education in the Caribbean Netherlands*. It describes the structure of the education system in the Caribbean Netherlands, briefly sketching the location and society of the islands, the education system, the governance structures and the applicable laws and regulations. It presents factual background information based on the available data up to 1 December 2025. *Part C: Background information* will be a help when reading Parts A and B of the publication. However, the individual parts can also be read separately from each other, as standalone publications.

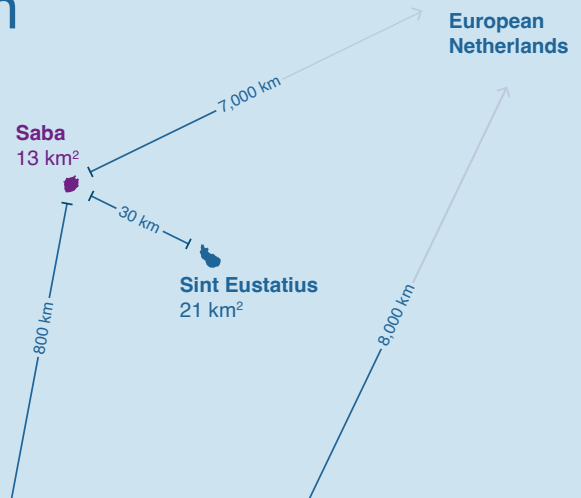
Chapter 1 describes the educational governance by the national government through policy, funding, supervision and legislation and regulation. It explains the origins of this governance and describes the present-day situation.

This is followed by individual chapters for each island. Chapters 2 (Bonaire), 3 (Saba) and 4 (Sint Eustatius) outline the situation on each island, describing their unique characteristics, such as the population profile, location and languages spoken. These chapters also present an overview of the education provision and programmes on each island.



Education in the Caribbean Netherlands

Background information



Bonaire
Leeward Island



26,552 inhabitants*
official languages:
Papiamentu and Dutch

language of instruction:
Papiamentu (year groups 1 and 2) and Dutch (year group 3 and up)

Dutch curriculum

9 primary schools:
2,236 pupils**

1 school for secondary and vocational education:
2,459 pupils and students**

no universities of applied sciences

a branch of the University of Curaçao

Saba
Windward Island



2,158 inhabitants*
official languages:
English and Dutch

language of instruction:
English

partly Caribbean curriculum (CXC)

1 primary school:
159 pupils**

1 school for secondary and vocational education:
109 pupils and students**

no universities of applied sciences

private American university medical school:
125-150 students**

Sint Eustatius
Windward Island



3,270 inhabitants*
official languages:
English and Dutch

language of instruction:
English

partly Caribbean curriculum (CXC)

4 primary schools:
328 pupils**

1 school for secondary and vocational education:
236 pupils and students**

no universities of applied sciences or academic universities



* as at 1 January 2025
** in October 2025

chapter one

Educational governance in the Caribbean Netherlands

This chapter describes how the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science governs education in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius, which stakeholders are involved and how this governance has evolved.

The Caribbean islands of Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius have been part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands since 10 October 2010, bringing education on the islands under the umbrella of the Dutch education system.¹ The education system consists on the one hand of the different educational categories, such as primary and secondary education and the various types of school and education programmes, the transitions between them and the laws and regulations governing them. On the other hand, it comprises the organisations which provide education and the administrative sphere in which they operate, consisting of government authorities, implementing bodies, administrative and support organisations within and outside education, and the links between them.

Publicly funded educational organisations in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius receive funding direct from the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) in The Hague. Specific Caribbean-Dutch educational legislation applies on the islands alongside some parts of Dutch legislation. The Ministry of OCW governs education in the Caribbean Netherlands through funding, legislation and other policy instruments. This chapter describes how and in what context this takes place. It starts with a brief history of educational governance in the Caribbean Netherlands, starting from the colonial period, via the former Netherlands Antilles up to and including the constitutional changes on 10 October 2010 (henceforth: 10-10-10). It then turns to the stakeholders involved in education on the islands. Finally, the chapter devotes attention to the specific forms of governance and the instruments used to implement them in the Caribbean Netherlands.

1.1 History of governance and education

The fact that part of the education system in the Caribbean Netherlands is organised and governed from The Hague, almost 8,000 kilometres away, is rooted in colonial history. The following section traces the constitutional relationships between Bonaire, Saba, Sint Eustatius and the European part of the Netherlands from the colonial era, via the period of the former Netherlands Antilles, up to and including the current constitutional situation.

Colonial history shapes present-day constitutional relationships

Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius have been part of the colonial history of what is today the Netherlands since the 17th century. In the period 1630-1640 forces from the Dutch provinces of Holland and Zeeland wrested control of the islands from Spain and England. The islands became part of the colonial territories of the Dutch Republic in the Caribbean. The colonists introduced slavery on all three islands, with the Dutch West India company playing a major role. Sint Eustatius was an important trading centre in the 18th century. Enslaved people were exploited and bought and sold there for two centuries. In Bonaire, enslaved people and their progeny were forced to work in the salt mines. Saba, with its mountainous landscape, had no plantations. Instead, enslaved people worked in smaller groups in domestic households and small-scale farms owned by colonists, or else at sea.

The Netherlands officially abolished slavery in 1863.² Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius were then confronted with widespread poverty, limited economic opportunities and disadvantage. The population had little influence over the islands' governance: control was in the hands of the government in the Netherlands. The

¹ Dutch education legislation has applied to educational organisations since 1 January 2011.

² Many enslaved people subsequently had to spend 10 years working on the plantations under state supervision. As a result, for many people, slavery in the former Kingdom only truly ended in 1873.

influence of the colonial period can still be felt on the islands today, for example in the socio-economic disparities, the cultural relationships, the position of the different languages and the perceived degree of equality and scope for autonomy between the islands and the other countries within the Kingdom.

Education in the colonial period

It was only at the beginning of the 19th century that the Dutch government first turned its attention to education in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius. However, education was mainly reserved for the children of European colonists, Protestants and Jews. From 1857, children of enslaved people also received education, though for a maximum of two hours per day and under poor conditions. The lessons were very basic (reading, writing, religion), and their main purpose was to maintain the existing order, not to offer equal development opportunities to all pupils on the islands. At that time, schoolchildren in the (European) Netherlands were already receiving full-time education.³ There were also wide differences between the islands. The first state school opened in Bonaire in 1848, but schools were only established in Saba and Sint Eustatius in 1899 and 1905, respectively.⁴

Education in the first half of the 20th century

Education on the islands was still limited in the first half of the 20th century, in terms of both provision and quality. Education was mainly left to the Catholic Mission, and therefore cost the government little.⁵ Dutch was made the official language of instruction by law in 1936, and this was also a condition for eligibility for government funding.⁶ This move was prompted by the growing number of people moving from the Netherlands to settle on the islands, and was intended primarily to make it easier for these Dutch-speaking children to transfer to further education in the Netherlands later. Pupils in Bonaire were for example punished severely if they spoke Papiamentu in or around the school. Teaching in Saba and Sint Eustatius was in Dutch, whereas the everyday language of the population was English. As these pupils were denied the ability to learn in their habitual language, their educational achievement lagged a long way behind their peers whose first language was Dutch.

Formation of Netherlands Antilles offered islands greater autonomy

Until 1954, the islands of Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, Saba, Sint Eustatius and Sint Maarten were governed as Dutch colonies. From the end of that year, the Netherlands Antilles became a country within the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius (together with Curaçao, Aruba and Sint Maarten) were part of this new country and acquired greater autonomy. The Netherlands Antilles, together with Suriname and the European Netherlands, made up the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The government of the Netherlands Antilles, including the education ministry, was based in Willemstad, in Curaçao. The national government and the island governments shared the governance of schools.

3 Boekholt & De Booy, 1987.
4 Dalhuisen, Donk, Hoeffte & Steegh, 2009.
5 Groenewoud, 2015.
6 Van Hulst, 2002.

Education in the Netherlands Antilles (1954-2010)

Primary education in the Netherlands Antilles consisted of nursery education for four and five year-olds (referred to as the ‘first cycle’), followed by six years of primary education (second cycle). The third cycle, intended for children aged from 12 to 15 years, never got off the ground. Secondary education in the (former) Netherlands Antilles largely followed the structure of the Dutch secondary education system, with preparatory secondary vocational education (VSBO), senior general secondary education (HAVO) and pre-university education (VWO). Saba was the exception deciding in the mid-1990s to align with the Caribbean education system (‘CXC education’).⁷

The island governments in the Netherlands Antilles had a great deal of influence over education. The education ministry in Curaçao devised the policy, oversaw education and distributed the funding among the island governments, which then used it to pay staff costs. Schools also had to negotiate with the island government for all major outgoings on material expenses. The mandatory social education was delivered on behalf of the governing body by project agencies on each island. This was mandatory for young people aged between 16 and 24 years who had left school without a qualification.

Run-up to 10-10-10 constitutional changes: debate on best configuration

Initially, the collaboration between the islands in the Netherlands Antilles ran smoothly.⁸ However, unrest began to grow from 1969, partly due to administrative problems, financial difficulties and growing inequality between the Netherlands and the Netherlands Antilles. In response, between 1970 and 1990 the Dutch government attempted to transform the Netherlands Antilles into an independent state. However, the Antillean government would not agree to this due to fears of instability and economic problems. Aruba did receive ‘separate status’ owing to unrest regarding the dominance of Curaçao within the Netherlands Antilles. Aruba became an independent country within the Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1986.

The discontent on the other islands grew after 1990; in response to this, referenda on their political status were held on the islands between 2000 and 2005. Residents of Sint Maarten and Curaçao voted for a comparable status to Aruba, while in Bonaire and Saba the islanders opted for a direct link with the Netherlands, even though it was not entirely clear how this would work in practice. Sint Eustatius was the only island where a majority voted for continuation of the Netherlands Antilles. However, the outcome of the referenda on the other islands meant this was no longer a possibility, and in 2006 it was decided that the constitutional entity of the Netherlands Antilles would be abolished in the near future. Ultimately, Sint Eustatius also voted in favour of a direct link with the European part of the Netherlands. The choice was for a partial integration model rather than an association model.⁹ This meant that Dutch legislation and administrative structures were applied on the islands, but with scope for differences in legislation. Assigning the islands the status of public entities (special municipalities) within the Netherlands meant the island governments became decentralised governments within the Netherlands.

⁷ Education in Saba and Sint Eustatius is given in English. As a result, secondary and vocational schools on these islands have adopted the English-language CXC programme of the Caribbean Examination Council.
⁸ The text in this subsection is based on: Oostindie & Veenendaal, 2022; Van Rijn, 2019; Rogier, 2018.
⁹ See also: Spies, Soons, Thodé, Verhey & Weekers, 2015.

Precisely how the chosen model would work out in practice was still unclear. Only broad-brush arrangements were made regarding the desired level of provision on the islands, but the ultimate form that would take was largely left open. The administrators in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius agreed with the State Secretary for the Interior and Kingdom Relations that the aim would be to establish ‘a level of provision that was acceptable within the Netherlands’, but without any further detail as to what that would mean in practice.

Education in the run-up to 10-10-10

Given the very divergent educational situations in the then Netherlands Antilles, and the unequal distribution between the islands, implementing a national Antillean education policy was challenging.¹⁰ Educational standards in the Netherlands Antilles fell further and further behind: an initial survey of education in the Netherlands Antilles in 1969 showed that more than 25% of primary school pupils had to repeat a year, and that fewer than a quarter progressed through primary school on schedule. The comparable figures in the European Netherlands were 7.4% and 66%.¹¹ In 1985, half of all young people in the Netherlands Antilles aged between 15 and 24 years had no secondary school diploma.

Following the decision in 2006 to create a direct link between Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius and the Netherlands, at the request of the Ministry of OCW the Dutch Inspectorate of Education inspected all schools and educational facilities in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius in 2008. This led to the publication of a highly critical report and prompted major changes in education on the islands after the constitutional changes of 10-10-10.¹²

10-10-10: new constitutional relationship

On 10 October 2010 (10-10-10) The Netherlands Antilles officially ceased to exist as a country. Since then, the Kingdom of the Netherlands has consisted of four independent countries: Aruba, Curaçao, the Netherlands and Sint Maarten. Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius are a fully fledged part of the country of the Netherlands.¹³ The Island Councils have been assigned the status of public entities in the Netherlands, and they are governed by the Dutch Constitution.

Education continued to be a matter for each of the individual countries, rather than for the Kingdom as a whole.¹⁴ Since then, the Dutch Minister of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) has been responsible for education in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius. The other three countries (Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten) each have their own education minister. The countries of the Kingdom can collaborate on education or decide jointly that a particular educational topic is a matter for the Kingdom.¹⁵ There is an annual ministerial consultation between the four countries, in which the education ministers of each country in the Kingdom come together. The Dutch Minister of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) also represents Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius at these meetings. Various organisations, institutions and people are involved in the organisation and implementation of education in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius. These are discussed below.

¹⁰ Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2008

¹¹ Spies et al., 2015.

¹² Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2008.

¹³ Article 132a of the Constitution.

¹⁴ Article 3, para 1 in conjunction with Article 41, para 1 Statute.

¹⁵ Article 3, para 2 Statute.

1.2 Stakeholders in education

Figure 1 shows how education is organised in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius. The stakeholders are arranged by category: educational organisations (green); national government agencies (blue); agencies of the public entities and civil-society organisations on the islands (pink); and other stakeholders (yellow).

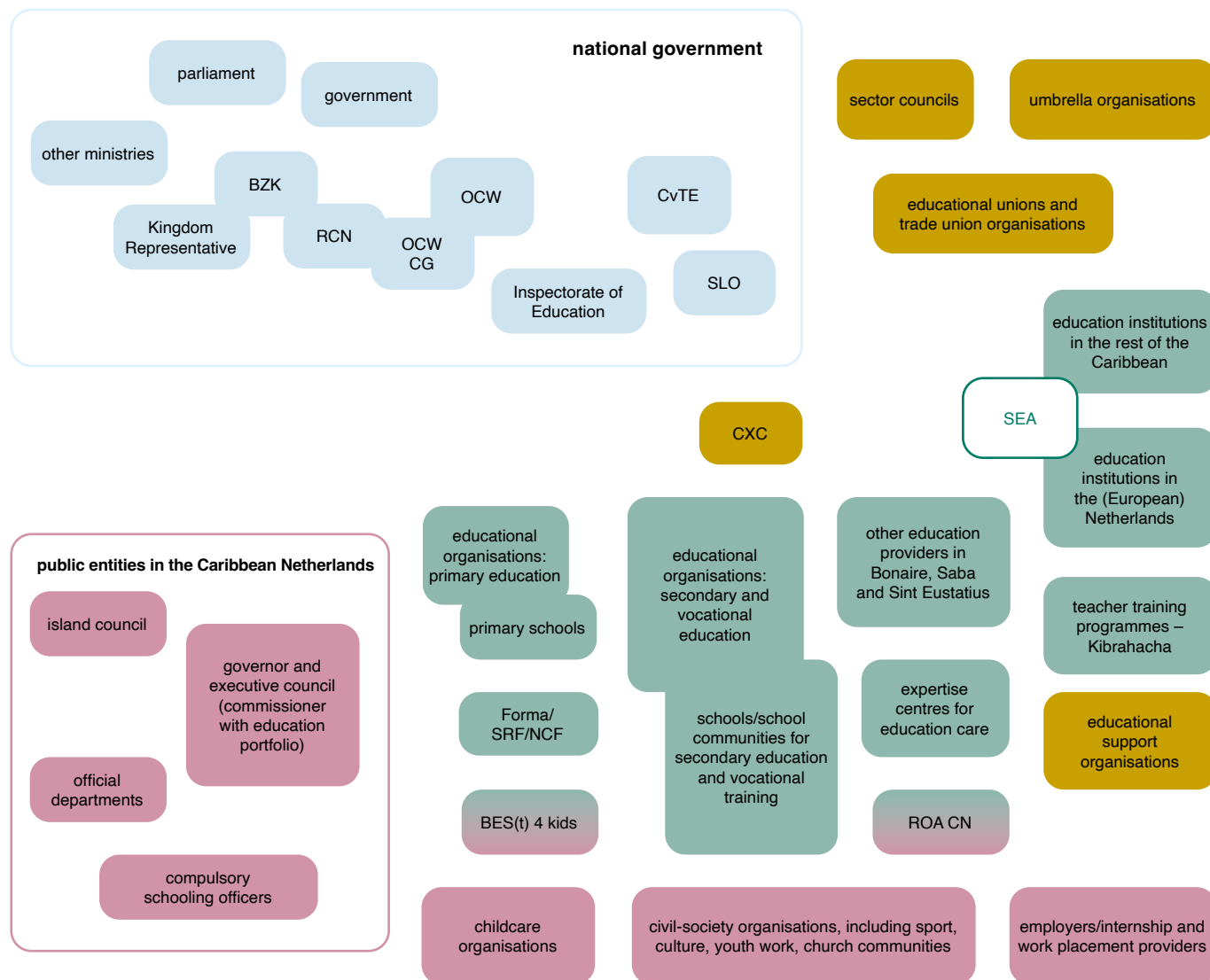


Figure 1: Principal stakeholders in education in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius

National government

Education ministers have equal responsibility for education in the Caribbean and European Netherlands

Education ministers in The Hague are responsible for education policy in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius, where the Ministry Education, Culture and Science (OCW) fulfils virtually the same role as in the mainland Netherlands.¹⁶ The Ministry funds schools directly. The Minister of OCW also has political responsibility for the Inspectorate of Education. All OCW policy departments, as well as departments such as Legislation and Legal Affairs, have responsibilities in the Caribbean Netherlands, as does the Education Executive Agency (DUO). The policy departments are responsible for the education policy that falls within their remit. The International Policy department plays a coordinating role for the Caribbean part of the Kingdom, i.e. the Caribbean Netherlands and the other countries forming part of the Kingdom.

A number of independent educational advisory bodies, such as the Education Council, also have tasks relating to education in the Caribbean Netherlands. They advise the government, education ministers and parliament on education policy, both on commission and on their own initiative. They may also have specific legal requirements to issue advice for the Caribbean Netherlands.¹⁷

Other ministries involved in education in the Caribbean Netherlands

As well as the Ministry of OCW, other ministries are also involved with policy and public provision around education. For example, the ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (SZW) is responsible for childcare in relation to schools. The Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport (VWS) is involved with school sports, youth policy and youth care. Other ministries come into the picture when legislation and regulations falling within their remit impinge on education, for example building regulations emanating from the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations (BZK) or rules around immigration from the Ministry of Justice and Security.

BES(t) 4 kids: Collaboration between ministries and public entities

BES(t) 4 kids is a collaboration between the Ministries of SZW, OCW, VWS and the Inspectorate of Education on the one hand, and the public entities Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius on the other. This collaboration is aimed at improving the quality and accessibility of childcare and out-of-school care for children in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius (collectively the BES islands). The Childcare (BES) Act came into force on 1 January 2026,¹⁸ setting out the basic rules regarding access, funding and quality for childcare centres and host families in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius. Each island administration can flesh out the frameworks provided by the Act by adding additional rules or emphasis in an Island Childcare Regulation.

Interior Ministry leads structural consultation between ministries

The Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations (BZK) plays a coordinating role in safeguarding the cohesion of government policy for the Caribbean Netherlands and good governance in the public entities.¹⁹ This ministry is responsible for enforcing the Public Entities (BES) Act (WolBES) and the BES Public Entities (Funding) Act (FinBES).

¹⁶ The transitional arrangement for educational buildings is an exception.

¹⁷ Article 2, para 3 Wet op de Onderwijsraad.

¹⁸ Kamerstukken II, 2023/2024, 36306, nr. 140.

¹⁹ Article 211 WolBES.

The Minister of BZK may not intrude on the responsibility of line ministers, though the latter must liaise with the Minister of BZK regarding proposed policy and measures which impinge on government policy vis-à-vis the public entities. The Ministry of BZK leads government-wide structural consultations between the different ministries, and ministries maintain mutual contacts for each policy portfolio. Which ministry takes the lead here depends on the portfolio in question.

National Office for the Caribbean Netherlands (RCN) and ministerial outposts on the islands

The National Office for the Caribbean Netherlands (RCN) supports the 'outposts' of government ministries in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius.²⁰ The outpost for the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) in the Caribbean is OCW CG, which falls under the aegis of the Ministry of OCW. OCW CG has its headquarters in Bonaire and a few years ago opened a small outpost in Sint Eustatius. An OCW CG official has also been stationed in Saba since 1 January 2026; before that time, there was no permanent representative of OCW CG on Saba.

OCW CG represents the Ministry on the islands.²¹ It is the first point of contact for people on the islands and keeps OCW staff in The Hague informed regarding island-specific matters. On its foundation, the main task of OCW CG was to offer assistance to all parties involved in the implementation of the Education Agenda for the Caribbean Netherlands. Today, OCW CG also plays a more substantive role, making proposals for the development or adjustment of education policy in the Caribbean Netherlands, for example. OCW CG also has the following responsibilities:

- Implementation of the OCW policy, and laws and regulations;
- Coordination/monitoring/management of the implementation of the educational buildings master plans;
- Implementation of the BES Student Finance Act (Wet Studiefinanciering BES), on behalf of DUO (Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs; Education Executive Agency);
- Performance of the duties on behalf of the Dutch Media Authority (Commissariaat voor de Media);
- Performance of logistical tasks on behalf of the Dutch Board of Examinations (College voor Examens) (storing examination papers when they arrive on the island and distributing them whilst safeguarding confidentiality).

Kingdom Representative: the 'eyes and ears' of ministers

The Kingdom Representative works on all three islands and has an office in Bonaire. The Kingdom Representative acts as the 'eyes and ears' of government ministers in the Netherlands, overseeing island governance and security on the islands. There is some debate about the position of the Kingdom Representative, because their task is not precisely defined and they are seen on the islands as mainly representing the interests of the European Netherlands.²² The Council of State recommended scrapping the role and placing the supervisory tasks with the Governor and the Minister of BZK.²³ In early 2025 the State Secretary for BZK expressed a preference for retaining the role of Kingdom Representative, but with a number of changes.²⁴

²⁰ <https://www.rijksdienstcn.com/over-de-rijksdienst-caribisch-nederland>

²¹ Rijksdienst Caribisch Nederland, undated.

²² Raad van State, 2019.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Rijksoverheid, 2025.

*Inspectorate of Education: same task with slightly different framework*²⁵

The Inspectorate of Education has supervised publicly funded education in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius since 2010.²⁶ Its supervisory duties cover primary and secondary education, secondary vocational training and higher education, in accordance with the Education Inspection Act (Wet op het onderwijstoezicht) and the applicable sector legislation. In principle, a special team of inspectors for the Caribbean Netherlands carries out a quality inspection of schools and other education establishments in the Caribbean Netherlands. Other inspectors may also be brought in if their expertise is needed, for example for specific investigations into aspects such as financial propriety. As a minimum, inspections involve classroom visits, document analysis and discussions with school heads, internal supervisors (primary schools) and care team staff (secondary schools), pupils or students and teachers. In primary education, inspectors also always talk to parents, while in vocational education discussions are held with the examinations committee, examiners and practical placement providers. Since 2024, regular inspections are also held at management level, involving as a minimum the day-to-day management, supervisory staff and school council. In preparing for an inspection, the Inspectorate reviews any alerts that have come in. If necessary, the Inspectorate can issue mandatory remedial advice or carry out a follow-up inspection or specific investigation.

At the end of the 2023-2024 school year, the only primary school in Saba failed to meet basic quality standards. One primary school in Bonaire and two in Sint Eustatius met the required basic standard, following a long period of inadequate quality. In 2023-2024, the secondary schools and vocational schools in Saba and Bonaire also met the basic quality standard, but the school in Saba failed to meet the standard the following year. The secondary and vocational school in Sint Eustatius also fell short of the basic quality standard in 2024. As well as school inspections, the Inspectorate also carried out inspections of the management of educational organisations running primary schools and secondary and vocational schools. This was the first such regular inspection in Bonaire and Sint Eustatius. In Saba, the Inspectorate carried out a specific investigation of the educational organisation for the secondary and vocational school, following reports of risks in management conduct. The Inspectorate noted major challenges with internal supervision and focus on educational quality in virtually all educational organisations on the three islands. In Saba, the Inspectorate also found shortcomings in quality assurance in the foundation responsible for secondary and vocational education and in safeguarding and the educational process in the primary education foundation.²⁷

²⁵ The Inspectorate is formally an agency of the national government. To aid legibility, the Inspectorate is treated as a separate entity here.

²⁶ This section is based on: Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2021.

²⁷ Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2025a.

Examples of different frameworks for Inspectorate of Education for the Caribbean Netherlands

Although supervision in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius is organised in the same way as in the Netherlands, it is implemented differently. Differences in the sector legislation work through into the supervision, which means there are also differences in the supervisory frameworks. For example, the stipulation that a report in which the Inspectorate of Education records the opinion ‘very weak’ counts as a decision within the meaning of the General Administrative Law Act (*Algemene wet bestuursrecht*) contains no reference to the BES education laws. The Inspectorate therefore cannot issue such an opinion for schools in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius, because there is no legislative basis for doing so.²⁸ The Inspectorate also does not express an opinion on educational outcomes, because Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius do not currently have a test to establish outcomes objectively. Inspectors do discuss the educational outcomes when carrying out school inspections.

As well as supervising schools, the Inspectorate of Education also supervises specific education-related provisions. The Inspectorate carries out inspections every two years of adult education providers and programmes for unemployed young people in Bonaire and Sint Eustatius. In Saba, the Inspectorate carries out progress interviews because of the small number of young people in ‘Social Opportunity Programmes’ (*sociale kanstrajecten*). The Inspectorate examines whether these programmes meet basic quality standards, applying the evaluation framework used for secondary vocational training (MBO). If the Inspectorate identifies shortcomings, the follow-up supervision is aligned with the applicable legislation (*Wet sociale kanstrajecten jongeren BES*). The Inspectorate also supervises the expertise centres for education care, and since 2011 has carried out inspections to determine whether the care plan for each island meets the statutory requirements. The plan is also tested against substantive criteria as described in the policy document on basic quality of care in the Caribbean Netherlands.²⁹

As it does in the Netherlands, the Inspectorate updates the inspection framework for the Caribbean Netherlands in August each year to take account of new legislation. The Inspectorate will start using a new inspection framework in 2027, which will also apply in the Caribbean Netherlands. An entirely new framework will be developed for supervision of the expertise centres for education care, and will apply from August 2027.

Implementing bodies involved in education in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius

The National Expertise Centre for Curriculum Development (SLO), is involved in drafting, developing and validating national educational goals such as core objectives, learning goals, exam programmes, reference levels and continuous learning pathways, working with schools to develop examples which it tries out in practice. SLO promotes knowledge and expertise around curriculum development and publishes evaluations and advice on subject-specific and general curriculum development, including in the Caribbean Netherlands. SLO is charged by the Ministry of OCW with revising the core objectives for Dutch, English and arithmetic/mathematics in Saba and Sint Eustatius.³⁰ In Bonaire, SLO is working on core objectives for Papiamentu, Dutch and arithmetic/mathematics. The Ministry of OCW also commissioned SLO in 2024 to carry out a phased update of the core objectives for other subject areas in the Caribbean Netherlands.

²⁸ Article 10a WPO has no equivalent in the WPO BES. Article 2.94 WVO 2020 has been disapplied for the Caribbean Netherlands.

²⁹ Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2011.

³⁰ Article 2 Wet subsidiëring landelijke onderwijsondersteunende activiteiten 2013; <https://www.slo.nl/thema/meer/caribisch-nederland/>

The Board of Tests and Examinations (CvTE) performs the same tasks for the Caribbean Netherlands as for the European part of the Netherlands, plus an additional task.³¹ CvTE is responsible for the central examinations for secondary schools and for the national examinations, It accredits the transfer test for primary education in Bonaire, sets the quality standard for this test each year and standardises it. In addition, CvTE accredits pupil monitoring systems for primary schools throughout the Caribbean Netherlands. So far, only one system has been developed, which is valid for a period of ten years. CvTE also acts as an observer on the administering of CXC examinations³² in Saba and Sint Eustatius, and verifies that the procedures meet Dutch standards. It currently also has the task of studying how the examination in Dutch can be adapted for Bonaire.

Cito,³³ the Dutch examination assessment and testing agency, develops centralised exams. The Board of Tests and Examinations Act requires CvTE to draw up an annual working programme for this to describe the activities of Cito.³⁴

Island governments in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius

A (decentralised) government governs each island, with the status of a ‘public entity’, which are equivalent to municipalities in the Netherlands.³⁵ The organisational structure of the public entities and their relationship with the Kingdom are enshrined in law (Wet openbare lichamen Bonaire, Sint Eustatius en Saba (WoLBES)) and the Wet financiën openbare lichamen Bonaire, Sint Eustatius en Saba (FinBES)). These laws also incorporate a number of general tasks. Additional statutory tasks are set out in specific legislation, for example on education. The WoLBES and FinBES laws are modelled on the Dutch Municipalities Act and the Financial Relations Act. At the time of writing, the laws governing the public entities (WoLBES and FinBES) were being revised.³⁶

The organisational model for a public entity and a municipality or province is virtually identical (see Table 1). Public entities have three principal components: the Island Council, the Governor and the Executive Council, consisting of the Governor and Commissioners. Together, these form the government of the island. Statutory educational tasks lie with the Island Council or Executive Council. The Island Council represents the islanders, who elect its members. The Council adopts Island Regulations and the budget of the public entity, appoints and dismisses Commissioners and oversees the Executive Council. The Council also has a number of other, specific tasks. The Executive Council is responsible for the day-to-day governance of the public entity and implements decisions made by the Island Council. The Governor chairs the Island Council and is a member and chair of the Executive Council. As an autonomous administrative entity, the Governor also has a number of powers, mainly to do with maintaining public order, promoting administrative integrity and ensuring good cooperation with other authorities. The government appoints and dismisses the Governor. The Executive Council and the Governor are accountable to the Island Council.

³¹ Wet College voor toetsen en examens; <https://www.cvte.nl/onderwerpen/toetsen-primair-onderwijs/caribisch-nederland/>

³² CXC education is discussed in more depth in section 1.3.

³³ <https://cito.nl/>

³⁴ Article 8 Wet College voor toetsen en examens.

³⁵ In 2010 the creation of the public entities was based on Article 134 of the Constitution. Since 2017, a special clause has been included in Article 132a of the Constitution.

³⁶ <https://www.internetconsultatie.nl/herzieningswet/b1>

Public entity Caribbean Netherlands	Province Netherlands (Europe)	Municipality Netherlands (Europe)
Island Council	Provincial Council	Municipal Council
Executive Council	Provincial Executive	Municipal Executive
Governor	King's Commissioner	Mayor
Commissioner	Member of Provincial Executive	Alderman
Island Secretary	Provincial Secretary	Municipal Secretary
Island Clerk	Provincial Council Clerk	Council Clerk

Table 1: Comparison of public entities: Caribbean Netherlands, province and municipality

Public entity: educational tasks comparable to municipalities

As decentralised authorities, the public entities of Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius play a limited role in education. The duties mainly involve creating enabling conditions, not school management or staffing, teaching content, didactics, pedagogics or any other aspects pertaining to what happens within schools. Their statutory duties are virtually identical to those of municipalities in the European part of the Netherlands. Their main educational duties relate to enforcing compulsory school attendance, the qualification requirement, educational buildings, pupil transport and adult education. The ability to flesh out their own education policy is also roughly the same as for municipalities. But there are also differences. The costs of pupil transport are not reimbursed on request: the public entity ensures that pupils who have no other way to get to school are taken to and collected from school, with free school buses running on the islands. There is also no statutory requirement for an educational disadvantage policy. On the other hand, they have a number of tasks which do not apply for municipalities in the European Netherlands, such as the duty to provide food and clothing to pupils who would otherwise not reasonably be able to attend school; the Executive Council's role in youth social opportunity programmes; and setting the salaries and bonuses for educational staff by Island Decree.³⁷ Both the Island Council and the Executive Council have statutory duties under the education laws, as do public entity civil servants charged with enforcing compulsory school attendance. The Executive Council has overall responsibility for the education policy managed by an individual Commissioner.

The public entities are also responsible for ensuring the presence, continuity and character of public education. Like municipalities in the European part of the Netherlands, they may maintain public (state) schools, in which case they are responsible for the management. In practice, however, the public schools on all islands are independent, though the Island Council is linked to the public education foundations, reflecting their responsibility for public education.³⁸ The law assigns a role to the Island Council in the event of a change to a foundation's constitution, appointment and dismissal of board members or members of the supervisory board and adopting the budget and annual accounts. The precise role is set out in the foundation's constitution. The law also covers the eventuality that a public school board neglects its duties. In such cases, the Island Council can take measures, just like a municipal council in the Netherlands.³⁹

³⁷ Article 5, para 1 and Article 37 WPO BES.

³⁸ This must be a foundation for public education; a foundation established (jointly) by the Island Council with the sole object of providing public education.

³⁹ Article 22, para 9 WPO BES; Article 1.2 and 3.9 WVO 2020.

School boards: same organisation and responsibilities as in the European Netherlands

Each island has several active educational foundations. There is one foundation per island for secondary and vocational education.⁴⁰ Bonaire and Sint Eustatius have several foundations for primary education, while Saba has one. The school boards differ in several ways. Some are staffed by paid professionals, while others work with volunteers. As in the Netherlands, school boards in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius have a high degree of autonomy, with the national government leaving many tasks and decisions to them. This ‘functional decentralisation’ means that school boards decide independently on many aspects, such as school organisation, curriculum development, financial and staffing policy, the school’s pedagogical approach and the teaching methods and materials used in lessons.

This autonomy stems from the freedom of education as enshrined in the Dutch Constitution, which allows private education organisations to establish schools and request funding from the national government. Within the limits of the law, private education providers (special education) are also free to determine the direction and configuration of the education they provide. Bonaire has both public primary and secondary schools. Sint Eustatius has one public primary school; the secondary and vocational school in Saba is public. Some of the foundations running special schools have links to a church community which corresponds with the direction of their school or schools.

Other organisations involved with education in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius

A number of other organisations are involved with education in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius.

Implementing bodies for youth social opportunity programmes

These implementing bodies provide social opportunity programmes for young people who are no longer able to follow mainstream education and have too little education or experience to get a job. These programmes, which give them an opportunity to complete their education, include Forma in Bonaire, the Saba Reach Foundation and the New Challenges Foundation in Sint Eustatius.

Expertise centres for education care

Each island has a statutory care structure, including an expertise centre for education care.⁴¹ Bonaire has an Expertise Centre for Education and Care (Expertisecenter Onderwijs en Zorg, EOZ), while Saba has an Expertise Center Education Care (EC2) and Sint Eustatius an Expertise Centre Education care (ECE).

Schools are responsible for providing primary care to pupils, and involve the parents in this. If extra help is needed, schools can refer to specialist care through the expertise centre. The expertise centres work with professionals such as psychologists, remedial educationalists and school social workers, and also bring in external experts when necessary. Each island operates a partnership for educational support between schools, the expertise centre and the implementing body for youth social opportunity programmes (SKJs). They make joint agreements on education provision, which are laid down in an annual care plan.

⁴⁰ Bonaire also has a non-funded vocational education provider. See chapter 2.

⁴¹ For a detailed description see the chapter on inclusive education in Part B: *Featured themes in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius*. See also Middelbeek, Van der Vegt & Sligte, 2020.

Council of Education and Labor Market for the Caribbean Netherlands

The Council of Education and Labor Market for the Caribbean Netherlands (Raad Onderwijs Arbeidsmarkt Caribisch Nederland - ROA CN) is a Caribbean expertise centre which brings together vocational training and the labour markets on the different islands.⁴² ROA CN performs tasks for the Minister of OCW, such as accrediting and supporting companies offering internships and on-the-job training for students on vocational training programmes. ROA CN also advises the minister on the labour market-relevance and effectiveness of courses that education organisations wish to offer. ROA CN also helps foster collaboration between vocational education and the business community. The Minister of OCW installed ROA CN and provides grants. ROA CN has a board comprising representatives of employer organisations, employee organisations and schools.

Educational support organisations and umbrella organisations

The Dutch education system includes a wide array of educational support and umbrella organisations, mostly located in the Netherlands in Europe. The educational organisations in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius are only partially affiliated to them. The school boards are members of the sector organisations for primary and secondary education, the Association of Primary Schools in the Netherlands (PO-Raad) and its equivalent for secondary schools, the VO-raad. There are also organisations such as the Special Education Sector Organisation (GO) and the association of vocational education and training colleges (MBO Raad), to which education establishments on the islands are not affiliated. The islands have sporadic contact with trade union organisations, as well as with umbrella organisations from the same denomination, such as VOS/ABB for public and generally accessible schools and Verus for Catholic and Christian schools. Local (education) trade unions are active in Bonaire and Sint Eustatius, but not in Saba.

Contacts with education establishments and support organisations outside the Caribbean Netherlands

Educational organisations in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius have ties to educational institutions in the Netherlands in Europe, in countries forming part of the Kingdom – Curaçao, Aruba and Sint Maarten – and in neighbouring islands, such as Barbados. Kibrahacha, for example, is a network of teacher training programmes operating across the islands, and there is also a Strategic Education Alliance, a network for educational collaboration across all the countries within the Kingdom (see textbox below).

Kibrahacha

Kibrahacha is a partnership between teacher training institutions in Aruba and Curaçao (including the location in Bonaire) and primary and secondary schools in Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao. The partnership is funded by the Ministry of OCW. Students receive practical training under the ‘Training Together’ (Samen Opleiden) concept. The aim is to turn out teachers who are well equipped to work in the Caribbean region and to improve the connection between schools and the labour market.⁴³ Saba, Sint Eustatius and Sint Maarten are not affiliated to Kibrahacha.⁴⁴ Initially, school boards in Sint Maarten participated, but withdrew from the partnership early on because they felt there was too little connection. Saba and Sint Eustatius have no teacher training colleges and are therefore unable to join Kibrahacha. It was recently agreed to study whether there is a need to instigate a training system in the Windward Islands based on the Training Together concept.

Strategic Education Alliance (SEA)

The SEA is a Kingdom-wide partnership between governments and education institutes on the Caribbean islands and in the Netherlands in Europe. The aim is to improve the study outcomes for Caribbean students, with a focus on effective support in the transition to further education. SEA connects governments, education institutes, students and parents and develops initiatives such as the Kingdom grant – financial support for study or internships within the Kingdom – and the Caribbean Academic Foundation Year (CAFY), a 10 to 12-month programme focusing on personal development and improving study and language skills.⁴⁵

Educational organisations in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius also use the services of support organisations and providers in the Netherlands in Europe and elsewhere in the Caribbean region. Examples include administration offices and training institutes such as the Instituto Pedagógico Arubano. Education providers from elsewhere are also active on the islands, such as the University of Curaçao and a Canadian holding company under whose aegis the Saba University School of Medicine falls.

1.3 CXC education in Saba and Sint Eustatius

Teaching in Saba and Sint Eustatius is in English. Partly because of this, secondary and vocational schools on these islands have based their English-language teaching programmes on the syllabuses and examinations developed by the Caribbean Examination Council (CXC), except for practical training.⁴⁶ CXC develops exams for secondary and post-secondary students in Caribbean countries. CXC graduates can go on to continue their studies in the Caribbean region, the United States and Canada as well as the Netherlands.

⁴³ <https://kibrahacha.org/>

⁴⁴ Saba and Sint Eustatius do have a separate programme to train educational support workers as teachers.

⁴⁵ <https://strategiceducationalalliance.org/>

⁴⁶ Since the 2019/2020 school year, Sint Eustatius has used CVQ (a vocational education variant that is comparable with secondary vocational training (MBO) and CSEC (which can lead to an equivalent to a HAVO diploma). Saba has used the CXC curricula for almost 30 years. On the introduction and Saba in the mid-1990s, see Mommers, 2014, 113-128.

Dutch language levels in CXC education in Saba and Sint Eustatius

Secondary and vocational schools in Saba and Sint Eustatius use the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) for Dutch. The CEFR divides language skills into six levels: A1 (Beginner); A2 (Elementary); B1 (Intermediate); B2 (Upper Intermediate); C1 (Advanced); and C2 (Proficiency). Students at vocational schools can study Dutch at level A2 (CVQ), while those in academic programmes can study Dutch at level B1 (CSEC). To obtain a school diploma affording direct access to further education in the Netherlands in Europe, pupils must pass a more in-depth exam in Dutch and attain at least level B1 (CVQ) or B2 (CSEC and CAPE).

1.4 Education policy and legislation

When the Netherlands Antilles was transformed to create the new constitutional structure, much of Dutch education legislation came into force in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius. The article on education in the Constitution applies in full for the three islands. Human rights treaties to which the Kingdom is a signatory also apply, and among other things include the right to education. Although Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius are part of the Netherlands, the laws and regulations governing education are not identical; Dutch education legislation is not always a good fit for the circumstances on the islands. The Constitution allows the legislator discretion, for example by stating that certain rules do not apply for the Caribbean Netherlands or by creating specific rules.⁵⁰ This enables rules to be tailored specifically for the islands. Moreover, the rules do not have to be the same for all three islands; for example, the core objectives for language teaching in primary schools are different in Bonaire from Saba and Sint Eustatius,⁵¹ owing to the different curricula taught on the islands.

Structure of education legislation for Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius

Education legislation has a layered structure. At the top are the laws, which are made by the government and both Houses of Parliament. If the law allows the government to formulate more precise rules, this is done by means of an Order in Council (AMvB). A law or Order in Council can also allow the Minister of OCW to make further rules; this is done by Ministerial Order. If a law, decree or order only applies for the Caribbean Netherlands, it contains the designation 'BES' in the title, or the name of the island to which it relates.

There are special BES education laws which only apply for Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius. A few sector laws have been converted to modified variants for the Caribbean Netherlands: the Primary Education (BES) Act (WPO BES), the Adult and Vocational Education (BES) Act (WEB BES), the Youth Social Opportunity Programmes (BES) Act (Wet SKJ BES),⁵² the Compulsory Education (BES) Act and the Student Finance (BES) Act.⁵³ These laws only apply in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius. There was previously also a Secondary Education (BES) Act, but this was absorbed into the Secondary Education Act 2020 (WVO 2020), which applies for the whole Kingdom. The Act contains a separate chapter (11) with specific rules

⁵⁰ Article 132a, para 4 of the Constitution: "For these public entities, rules may be laid down and other specific measures may be taken in view of special circumstances that fundamentally distinguish these public entities from the European part of the Netherlands."

⁵¹ Annex to the key outcomes decree WPO BES.

⁵² Work is under way to integrate the WEB BES and the Wet SKJ BES into the Adult and Vocational Education Act.

⁵³ The Dutch Senate adopted the Childcare (BES) Act on 21 May 2024. This Act is also relevant for pre-school education.

for the Caribbean Netherlands. This chapter states that some provisions from other chapters of the law do not apply or apply in modified form in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius. In principle, the WVO 2020 applies for all three islands. However, some parts of it do not apply for secondary and vocational schools in Saba and Sint Eustatius; as these schools use the CXC curricula, they are designated in the Act as schools providing a different form of secondary education.

Other laws also apply across the whole Kingdom and thus also for the Caribbean Netherlands, for example the Higher Education and Research Act,⁵⁴ the National Education Support Activities (Subsidies) Act (which among other things covers the Netherlands Institute for Curriculum Development (SLO) and Nuffic), the Education Inspection Act (governing the Inspectorate of Education), the Board of Tests and Examinations Act and the Education Council Act.

The sector legislation for special (secondary) education, the Expertise Centres Act, does not apply for the Caribbean Netherlands, and no special variant has been created. As a result, there are no schools for special education in the Caribbean Netherlands.

Special arrangements also apply for the Caribbean Netherlands in lower-level regulations, i.e. Orders in Council and Ministerial Orders, for example the Core Objectives (WPO BES) Decree, the Teaching Competence Standards (BES) Decree and the Teaching Competence Declaration (BES) Decree. The Saba Comprehensive School and Gwendoline van Puttenschool BES Decree is also an Order in Council. Some Orders in Council covering the whole country also apply in the Caribbean Netherlands, such as the implementing decree for the WVO 2020. Ministerial Orders specifically covering the Caribbean Netherlands include the Compulsory Education (BES) Order and the Student Finance (BES) Order.

Legislative differences between Caribbean and European Netherlands

The BES Education laws largely have the same design and content as their counterparts for the European Netherlands, though there are some internal differences. This is possible because of decisions taken in 2010-2011 to modify the content of certain provisions rather than adopting them wholesale. Additionally, some BES laws were not included in legislative changes implemented after 2011. Where the BES laws were included in such changes, the new legislation for the BES islands has not yet always come into force.

Key legislative differences

Key areas where rules from sector legislation for the European Netherlands or the whole country do not apply in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius or where special rules have been created for the islands:

- *Arrangements for education and care or support*: the arrangements for appropriate education on the islands are less comprehensive, with each island having its own care structure and care plan;
- *Language of instruction and languages taught*: primary education is taught in Dutch and Papiamentu (Bonaire) or English (Saba and Sint Eustatius). In Bonaire, as well as Dutch and English, schools must also teach Papiamentu, and Spanish may also be taught in primary schools on all three islands;⁵⁵
- *Educational disadvantage policy*: consultation between educational organisations and the island government on educational disadvantage is not mandatory; in the European Netherlands, this is the statutory basis for the local Education Agendas of educational organisations, local authorities and any other partners;
- *(No) 'very weak education' rating*: there is currently no legal definition of what constitutes 'very weak education' in the event of below-par learning outcomes;
- *School council*: the setup is simpler, with far fewer rights assigned to the school council;
- *Staff policy and legal position of teaching staff*: modified competence standards apply, and for terms of employment alignment is sought with the Central and Local Government Personnel (BES) Act. The exception are salaries and bonuses and education-specific measures, for which education institutes make their own arrangements in the form of terms of employment contracts which are laid down in an Island Decree;
- *School planning (primary and secondary education) and training programme planning (vocational education)*: among other things, secondary schools do not have an obligation to formulate a regional educational provision plan, and the WEB BES relies on ministerial accreditation of programmes;
- *Organisation of secondary vocational training*: there is no distinction between different types of institution, and no statutory arrangement for the administration of institutions;
- *Qualification structure for secondary vocational training*: the arrangement is less comprehensive and aligns with the qualification structure applying in the European Netherlands, with the minister determining the training areas for the islands;
- *Linkage between vocational training and employers*: the islands have a Council of Education and Labor Market Caribbean Netherlands (ROA CN) instead of the Foundation for Cooperation on Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market (SBB) in the European Netherlands;
- *Compulsory schooling*: compulsory registration begins after a child reaches the age of four; there is no option for exemption for children with an itinerant life, but an exemption does apply for departure from a public entity. Border officials are also authorised to check compliance with the compulsory schooling requirement.

Legislative development: from legislative conservatism to 'comply or explain'

From 2010 to 2019 The national government worked on the principle of legislative conservatism. This means that European Dutch legislation and regulations were not applied in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius unless there were good reasons for doing so. The agreement was to be conservative in applying new legislation to the three islands. The idea around 2010 was that Dutch legislation could not be

suddenly implemented in full on the islands, because this would be unworkable for those affected on the islands. It was felt that it would be better to align with the existing applicable law. As a result, many of the Antillean national regulations were converted to BES laws. The content remained the same, but formally they became Dutch legislation. Another advantage of this approach was that the law on the islands would remain aligned with the legal systems in the region. That was important among other things for trade between Bonaire and Curaçao and between Saba, Sint Eustatius and Sint Maarten, as well as for people who commuted from one island to another for work.

Since 2019, legislative conservatism has made way for the principle of comply or explain.⁵⁶ This means that all European Dutch regulations apply in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius, unless there are reasons for not doing so, in which case a customised approach is used. The applicable law for the European Netherlands and the Caribbean Netherlands had begun to diverge more and more. Amendments to European Dutch laws were not implemented on the islands, and it was also felt that greater harmonisation would contribute to a more equal level of provision. That in turn would mean that policy for the European Netherlands would have to be implemented in the Caribbean Netherlands, unless differences could be justified.

From the start, however, educational legislation formed an exception to the principle of legislative conservatism. The European Dutch education laws for primary and secondary education and secondary vocational training were converted from the start into BES variants. Moreover, from 2010, when laws were amended, consideration was also given to whether the BES laws also needed to be amended. The comply or explain principle has served as the starting point in educational legislation since 2010, though with partially different sector laws.

A consequence of the decision to develop BES variants of some sector laws is that legislative amendments always had to be implemented in the BES variants as well, with a review to see whether a BES law needed to be amended and whether this could be done in the same way as with the European Netherlands variant. The Ministry of OCW accordingly partly abandoned the idea of separate BES education laws. The tendency now is to integrate legislation for the Caribbean Netherlands into the laws applying for the whole country and to incorporate any deviations and specific rules where necessary. For secondary education, the WVO BES has now been integrated in the WVO 2020, and a bill is being drafted to integrate the WEB BES in the Adult and Vocational Education Act (WEB). This also includes a statutory rule on school dropout. The Youth Social Opportunity Programmes (BES) Act will then be repealed. At the time of writing, this bill still had to be tabled in Parliament.

The need to draw a distinction in the regulations because of the circumstances in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius still exists. It may be necessary for example because they are islands, because of the great distance from the European Netherlands and between the three islands, because of their small scale, because of differences in climate or because the island society and economy have different needs. Differences in public support, cultural differences and the ties with other Caribbean countries may also be reasons for deviation.

1.5 Funding of education

Good education has to be funded. Funding from the Ministry of OCW is the main source of income for educational organisations. On top of that they receive funding from other government ministries, the public entities, parents or students or civil-society organisations which support schools. However, those funds flows are much smaller than the funding from the Ministry of OCW. Funding is also a key way for the national government to exert influence on education.

There are two major funding streams from the Ministry to educational organisations in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius. First there is the basic lump-sum funding. In principle, once a school becomes eligible for this funding, that eligibility lasts for the life of the school. As the name suggests, the Ministry commits the funding in a single lump sum. The management of the educational organisation is free to distribute the money across expenditure items such as staff costs, training, building maintenance and teaching materials. The government does not decide what proportion is spent on each individual item.

Second, there is a funding stream comprising individual and temporary grants. These grants must be used for a specific purpose. Educational organisations apply for these grants separately, though sometimes the Ministry of OCW uses a system of automatic award to reduce the amount of red tape. Research commissioned by the Ministry shows the present two-stream funding system is inadequate to cover the actual costs.

Study: funding of education in Caribbean Netherlands inadequate⁵⁷

The Ministry of OCW commissioned a study in 2025 on whether schools in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius were receiving sufficient funding to deliver good education. The study found that the present funding is insufficient to cover the actual costs; in 2023, for example, the combined shortfall was 12.2 million US dollars (or 4.9 million if temporary grants are taken into account). According to the study report, these shortfalls, plus rising costs and the temporary nature of the grants, jeopardise the quality and continuity of education.

Primary education funding structure

As in the European Netherlands, the annual amount of the basic funding for primary education in the Caribbean Netherlands is made up of a fixed amount per school (the fixed base) and an amount based on the number of registered pupils. The amounts are set by the Minister. The law states that these amounts must meet the reasonable needs of a school operating under normal circumstances.⁵⁸ The amounts in the Caribbean Netherlands differ from those in the European Netherlands; they are higher and are in US dollars. The total amount is also calculated differently. Educational organisations in Saba and Sint Eustatius first receive extra funding due to the high cost of living: prices on these islands are higher on average than in the European Netherlands. If an island has only one primary school, like Saba, it receives extra funding because of its isolation, which makes collaboration with other schools difficult. There is also extra funding for pupils with specific educational needs. As there are no special needs schools on these islands, these pupils attend a mainstream school. Bonaire receives this extra funding for one school, which has

⁵⁷ Economisch Bureau Amsterdam, 2025.

⁵⁸ Article 100 WPO BES.

been assigned this specific task in the island care plan. In Sint Eustatius the extra funding goes to all primary schools. These forms of additional funding do not exist in the European Netherlands. Conversely, there are some forms of additional funding or supplements in the European Netherlands which do not apply for schools in the Caribbean Netherlands, for example additional funding for educational disadvantage policy, grants for transitional classes, provisions under the Temporary Newcomers (Provisions) Act and the secondary school heads grant scheme (Schoolleidersbeurs-VO).

Secondary education funding structure

Funding of secondary education works in the same way as for primary education, though in principle the funding rules as set out in the Secondary Education Act 2020 (WVO 2020) are applied, which means there is no overall specific arrangement for the Caribbean Netherlands. The funding for secondary schools in the Caribbean Netherlands consists of an amount per school and an amount per pupil, with a distinction sometimes being made depending on school type, school year, learning pathway or school profile. The details are set out in the WVO 2020 Implementing Decree. For schools in Saba and Sint Eustatius, the amount per pupil varies between the different CXC programmes and practical training programmes (see section 1.3). The Implementing Decree provides for supplementary funding for all three islands to cover care for pupils with specific educational needs. The Gwendoline van Puttenschool in Sint Eustatius and the Saba Comprehensive School also receive extra funding because of the higher wage costs and cost of living, as well as the higher examination costs on these islands. The educational organisations also receive a supplementary amount for these schools to compensate for their isolation and small size.

The WVO 2020 Implementing Decree also assigns a supplementary amount per school for small-scale labour market-related secondary vocational training programmes.

1.6 Education Agendas for the Caribbean Netherlands

In addition to legislation and funding, the Ministry of OCW uses information and consultation in its governance of education in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius. At the heart of this are the Education Agendas and education platforms where those agendas are agreed and where their implementation is discussed.

Education Agendas: content and working methods

The Education Agendas for the Caribbean Netherlands comprise policy agreements aimed at improving education in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius. The agendas describe shared goals and priorities, with details of what is specifically needed to achieve each ambition. The agendas also describe milestones and who is involved and who is responsible for results. The agendas are intended for all parties engaged in delivering good education on the islands.

The agendas are a joint product of the educational organisations, expertise centres for education care, the public entities Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius and the Ministry of OCW. They are periodically renewed; at present, work is under way to implement the third Education Agenda. Initially there was one agenda for all three islands, but in the discussion rounds for the third agenda it was decided to create a separate agenda for each island.

Each island has an education platform in which all partners on that island work together to develop the agendas. The platform members meet three times a year. A number of milestones are monitored by an external, independent agency, paid for by the Ministry of OCW. These are milestones with a strong research component or for which all partners value an opinion from an independent party. A number of studies are underway, including on terms of employment and an evaluation of specialist provision.

First Education Agenda

The first Education Agenda was created in 2011.⁵⁹ The ambition was to raise education in the Caribbean Netherlands to an acceptable standard according to Dutch criteria, by 2016. Based on the agenda, each school in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius drew up its own education improvement plan. They received support from school coaches from the PO-Raad and the VO-raad, paid for by the Ministry. In these plans, the schools described how they intended to improve the quality of their education. They discussed progress in achieving these plans twice a year with the Inspectorate of Education, which monitored developments during the term of the first agenda.

The first Education Agenda drew little distinction between the three islands. A general approach was chosen which applied for all islands. Implementing the Education Agenda was the responsibility of the schools, supported by the ministry. Educational administrators and school heads translated the ambitions into the school education improvement plans. Within those plans, each school drew up its own Education Agenda, building on the quality improvements already achieved, based on the specific situation of that school (micro-level Education Agenda). Where possible and desirable, this was done in liaison with the Ministry of OCW, the public entity and other stakeholders. Teachers, pupils and parents could also be brought in to help achieve the identified ambitions. The first Education Agenda set five priorities: (1) better quality; (2) strengthening the quality of teachers, school heads and school boards; (3) customised education care; (4) appealing vocational education; and (5) meeting the enabling conditions.

Second Education Agenda

The second Education Agenda was drawn up in 2016,⁶⁰ following an evaluation of the first Agenda. It covered the period from 2017 to 2020. The general section of the Agenda set out the ambitions and envisaged results for all the islands. The schools and public entity of each island then determined which activities they would carry out in order to achieve those results. The Agenda also stated who was responsible and accountable for implementing each activity. The two most important objectives in this Education Agenda were that (a) pupils in the Caribbean Netherlands should be receiving education of adequate quality in 2020; and (b) the educational outcomes would have been demonstrably improved.

As in the first Education Agenda, priorities were set: (1) promoting managerial skills, professionalism and continuity; (2) healthy financial management, a balanced administration and multi-year financial policy; (3) more effective language teaching; (4) further improving the education care structure; (5) education that aligned with further education and the jobs market; and (6) improved enabling conditions in the form of accommodation, compulsory schooling, legislation, terms of employment and (integral) cooperation.

⁵⁹ Rijksdienst Caribisch Nederland, 2017a.

⁶⁰ Rijksdienst Caribisch Nederland, 2017b.

Third Education Agendas

In the third round, separate Agendas were developed for the first time for Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius, to ensure they were better aligned with the different educational developments on each island. The Education Agendas for Bonaire and Saba were signed in July 2023,⁶¹ the Agenda for Sint Eustatius six months later, in January 2024. The Agendas cover the period from the 2023-2024 school year to 2026-2027.

The three Education Agendas set the same priorities: (1) teaching staff; (2) managerial skills and educational leadership; (3) multilingualism; (4) educational buildings; (5) transition to further education; (6) enabling conditions. An additional priority was added to the Agenda for Sint Eustatius: (7) education care.

2

chapter
two
bonaire

2.1 Island-specific context

Bonaire (Boneiru in Papiamentu) lies approximately 80 km east of Curaçao, 70 km north of mainland Venezuela, over 800 km from Saba and Sint Eustatius and almost 8,000 km from The Hague. Bonaire covers an area of 288 km²; its capital is Kralendijk. The other location where schools are established is Rincon. The currency is the US dollar; the official languages are Dutch and Papiamentu.

Population profile

On 1 January 2025 Bonaire had 26,552 inhabitants, 6% more than a year earlier.⁶² The population grew by almost 70% between 2011 and 2024. This was due primarily to a positive net migration balance, though the birth rate in Bonaire also exceeds the death rate almost every year. More people now live in Bonaire who were born elsewhere than were born on the island. Most people were born in the European Netherlands, Colombia, Curaçao and the Dominican Republic.

Year	Population on 1 January	Births	Deaths	Settled	Departed
2011	15.679	181	109	1544	851
2015	18.905	160	102	1271	832
2020	20.915	228	111	1422	703
2024	25.133	231	149	2220	1000

Table 2: Population figures for Bonaire

In the 2024-2025 school year the number of primary school pupils stood at 2,236, or around 8.4% of the island population. Secondary and vocational education together had 2,459 pupils,⁶³ around 9.3% of the total population.

Religion

In 2021, 85% of residents of Bonaire were members of a church or a faith community, an increase of 5% compared with the previous year. 60% of those who belong to a church or faith community identified as Roman Catholic.⁶⁴

Economy

The working labour force in Bonaire grew by 1,800 in 2024 (+14%) to 14,700.⁶⁵ That means 73.8% of all 15-75 year-olds in Bonaire were in employment. In 2024, 10,200 people who were not born in Bonaire worked there, 1,500 more than in 2022.

Of this total, 20% were born in Curaçao and 15% in the European Netherlands. Three out of ten working people were born in Bonaire. They are relatively often employed in public administration and government services, in health care and welfare services and in construction and commerce. Compared with those born in Bonaire, immigrants are relatively often employed in the construction and hospitality industries.

The most important economic sectors are tourism, government, retail and fishing. The doubling of the employment rate in commerce and hospitality between 2011 and 2021 is striking.

⁶² CBS, 2022a; CBS, 2025c.

⁶³ CBS 2025a.

⁶⁴ CBS, 2023.

⁶⁵ CBS, 2025b.

The average annual salary of employees in Bonaire was 27,000 US dollars in 2022.⁶⁶ At that time, 20% of the population were living below the poverty line.⁶⁷ Although the guaranteed minimum income has been increased since 2024, the same percentage of the population still say they have difficulty making ends meet. In addition, 25% of children in Bonaire were at risk of poverty.⁶⁸

Language

Virtually all Bonerians (91.4%) speak more than one language.⁶⁹ The most widely spoken languages are Papiamentu (spoken by 88% of the population), English (77%), Dutch (77%) and Spanish (76%). Papiamentu is the dominant first language, spoken by 62% compared with 6% English, 15% Dutch and 15% Spanish.⁷⁰

Transport

There is no public transport system on the island, though there are 'bus taxis' which can be booked. Bonaire has an airport and a freight terminal. There is currently no ferry service to Aruba or Curaçao; flying is the only way to travel to and from those islands. A flight to Curaçao takes 25 minutes, while Aruba is 45 minutes away. There are daily direct flights between Bonaire and the European Netherlands; the flight time to Amsterdam is over nine hours. Travelling to Saba or Sint Eustatius requires a stopover in both Curaçao and Sint Maarten.

⁶⁶ Commissie Sociaal Minimum Caribisch Nederland, 2023.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ CBS, 2024.

⁶⁹ CBS, 2022b.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

2.2 Education sector and programme

Table 3 summarises the education sector in Bonaire.

Competent authority	School	School type	Denomination	No. pupils on 1 Oct. 2025
Stichting Openbaar Onderwijs Bonaire (OOB)	Kolegio Rayo di Solo	primary school	public	354
	Kolegio Strea Briante	primary school for pupils with support needs	public	68
Stichting Birgen Maria Onderwijs (until 14 July 2023 Roman Catholic school board)	Kolegio Kristu Bon Wardador	primary school	Roman Catholic	450
	Skol Amplio Papa Cornès	primary school	Roman Catholic	395
	Kolegio San Bernardo	primary school	Roman Catholic	332
	Kolegio San Luis Bertrán	primary school	Roman Catholic	153
Stichting Leren is Leuk	De Pelikaan	primary school	general-special	399
Stichting Ieder kind een Talent	Het Koraal	primary school	general-special	85
Stichting Neutraal Bijzonder Onderwijs Bonaire	Aquamarin (niet-bekostigd)	primary school	private	144
Stichting Scholengemeenschap Bonaire	Liseo Boneriano	MAVO/HAVO/VWO	public	1528
	VMBO Bonaire	VMBO (basic/advanced)		
	SLP Bonaire	special needs school (secondary cluster 3 & 4, practical training, Rebound/'On de rails')		
	MBO Bonaire	MBO (Construction/ infrastructure, Economy & Administration, Hospitality & Tourism, ICT, Technology & Process industry, Safety & Sport, Care & Welfare)		931

Table 3: Overview of education sector in Bonaire

Primary education

Bonaire has nine primary schools. Eight of them are government-funded, one of which is a special needs school, plus a private school. Children attend primary school between the ages of 4 and 12. During the first two years, pupils are taught in Papiamentu, with Dutch as a 'strong' foreign language. This means that Dutch is taught as a subject, using NVT (Dutch as a foreign language) teaching methods. Dutch is a strong foreign language at these schools because it is important for pupils. From year group 3 onwards, pupils are taught exclusively in Dutch. As well as the subjects that are taught in the European Netherlands, pupils are also taught Papiamentu. At the end of year group 8, pupils are required to take a final test to assess their knowledge and skills in Papiamentu, Dutch as a foreign language and arithmetic.

Secondary education and secondary vocational training

After completing primary education, pupils go on to the only school community in Bonaire offering both secondary education and vocational training, Scholengemeenschap Bonaire (SGB).⁷¹ Secondary school pupils work towards the central Dutch examinations.⁷² The SGB consists of four independently functioning units. The Liseo Boneriano unit teaches junior and senior general secondary education (MAVO/HAVO) and pre-university education (VWO). There are also units for preparatory secondary vocational education (VMBO) and for special needs pupils (practical training, special secondary education and Rebound). The language of instruction in secondary education is Dutch, with Papiamentu as an important but optional subject.

Junior and senior general secondary (MAVO/HAVO) and pre-university education (VWO) (Liseo Boneriano unit)

From the second year onwards, pupils at the Liseo Boneriano unit are split into separate classes for MAVO, HAVO or VWO. From the third year, MAVO pupils choose from three routes: Technology, Care & Welfare and Economy. This matches the system in the European Netherlands, except there is no 'Green' option in Bonaire. Pupils in the HAVO and VWO streams specialise from year four. Some subjects that are taught in the European Netherlands are not offered in Bonaire, for example French and German. On the other hand, Spanish and Papiamentu are taught as standard in Bonaire as modern foreign languages.

Preparatory secondary vocational education (VMBO unit)

Year 3 and 4 pupils in the VMBO unit follow a basic or advanced vocational pathway. The mixed learning pathway is not taught in Bonaire. The VMBO unit offers two learning routes: Technology and People & Services. The Technology route comprises Construction, Living & Interior, Production, Installation & Energy, and Mobility & Transport. The People & Services route incorporates Care & Welfare, Hospitality, Baking and Recreation, and Economy & Enterprise. Pupils can thus choose from six of the ten routes offered in the European Netherlands.⁷³

Special needs (Special Needs unit)

The Special Needs unit (SLP) has around 300 pupils and offers practical training, entry-level programmes and a form of special secondary education (VSO). This unit also has a rebound programme for pupils whose behavioural problems mean they are not able to attend their own school (separate class), as well as an international transitional class (ISK) for pupils who do not speak either Papiamentu or Dutch.

There is no legislation formally underpinning the provision of special education in Bonaire. Given the growing need, however, a form of special secondary education (VSO) is offered within the school community without a specific legal framework. This comprises a 'cluster 3' facility for pupils with an intellectual impairment, physical disability or chronic illness or an IQ below 70. The teaching content is based on the key outcomes as introduced in special secondary education in the European Netherlands on 1 August 2013. The SLP unit also offers customised teaching in cluster 4 for pupils temporarily residing in the Caribbean Netherlands Correctional Facility.

⁷¹ <https://sgbonaire.com/index.php?lang=en>

⁷² Rijksdienst Caribisch Nederland, 2017.

⁷³ The other four routes identified in the Secondary Education Act 2020 are Media, Design and ICT, Maritime and Technology, Green, Services and Products. These are also not offered by many equivalent schools in the European Netherlands.

Pupils in practical training in the SLP unit develop skills in an individual portfolio. They can choose from four routes: Trade & Commerce, Care & Welfare, Technology and Services.

Secondary vocational training (MBO unit)

The MBO unit offers vocational programmes at levels 2, 3 and 4, in the form of a school-based learning pathway (BOL), a work-based learning pathway (BBL) or a combination of the two. The Care & Welfare route also involves short 'lifelong development' (LLO) programmes. Almost all programmes are taught in Dutch; four BBL and one LLO programme are taught in Papiamentu.

Other vocational training providers in Bonaire

Fundashon Mariadal Academy (FM Academy)

The FM Academy is a training academy for the Mariadal hospital and provides vocational education, training and education for healthcare. The Academy receives lump sum funding that is paid to the hospital by the Ministry of Health, Welfare & Sport (VWS).⁷⁴ A partnership with Instituto pa Formashon den Enfermeria (IFE) enables students to be trained in Bonaire to Carer Level 3 and Nurse Level 4. In 2011 the FM Academy entered into a close collaboration with the then ROC-Top training centre in the Netherlands, now ROC Amsterdam. FM Academy's level 3 and 4 training courses are based on the ROC-Top training course plan.

Forma

Fundashon Forma (Forma) provides publicly funded education to adults who for some reason had no opportunity to follow education or whose circumstances meant they found it difficult to complete their education.⁷⁵ Forma also offers private courses for working adults looking to further their development. Forma students can follow private or publicly funded entry level courses (MBO level 1 in partnership with the SGB MBO unit) or a social opportunity programme (SKJ). The latter will disappear following integration into the Adult and Vocational Education Act (WEB).

Higher education

There are no higher education institutes in Bonaire, though there is a branch of the University of Curaçao (UoC) on the island. Since 2006 the University has offered a teacher training programme in basic education (LOFO) in Bonaire and Curaçao, with financial support from the Ministry of OCW. This programme is assessed every six years by the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO). Although there is no formal accreditation, the NVAO does issue an opinion on the programme.

UoC students can also follow hybrid teacher training programme or study law. For other higher education programmes, students have to leave the island.

Childcare

There are 27 daycare facilities in Bonaire for children aged up to four years.⁷⁶ Of the 960 children in this age group, 74% attend daycare centres. There are also 34 out-of-school care facilities and four host family facilities. Of the 2,344 children aged between 4 and 12, 55% attend out-of-school care; Only 0.4% use host family daycare (aged up to 12 years). Several childcare providers operate several childcare facilities or also offer out of school care. As a public entity, Bonaire works closely with the MBO unit at the SGB school community to train teaching staff in accordance with the quality standards set in the Island Regulation.

There are also integrated child centres (IKCs) in Bonaire, in which different organisations such as primary school, childcare centre and nursery school are combined.

3

chapter
three
saba

3.1 Island-specific context

With an area of 13 km², Saba is the smallest island in the Caribbean Netherlands. It lies in the archipelago to the east of Hispaniola and Puerto Rico, roughly 30 km from Sint Eustatius and 50 km from Sint Maarten; other nearby islands include the Virgin Islands and Saint Kitts and Nevis. The island is over 800 km from Bonaire and nearly 7,000 km from The Hague.

Saba has just over 2,000 inhabitants, spread over a number of settlements. The capital is The Bottom. The island is on the dormant Mount Scenery volcano (870 m), the highest point in the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The currency used is the US dollar, and the official language is English.

Population profile

On 1 January 2025, Saba had 2,158 residents,⁷⁷ 5% more than a year earlier. The vast majority of the population were not born in Saba, partly attributable to the students and staff of the Medical School. The population profile is constantly changing, with relatively high migration flows in both directions; as a result, around 10-12% of the population changes each year.

Year	Population on 1 January	Births	Deaths	Settled	Departed
2011	1797	7	17	264	410
2015	1811	17	9	210	336
2020	1933	11	16	157	137
2024	2060	12	11	109	217

Table 4: Population figures for Saba

Saba has a relatively high proportion of single-person households and cohabitants without children. Roughly 60% of residents have Dutch nationality. Around a quarter were born in Saba. Much of the population thus consists of immigrants. The largest group are from Sint Maarten (15.7%), followed by the United States (10%).⁷⁸ The latter includes students at the Medical School.

On 1 October 2025 there were 159 children in primary school and 103 in secondary and vocational education.⁷⁹

Religion

In 2021 80% of Saba residents belonged to a church or faith community, with around half of these being members of the Roman Catholic Church.⁸⁰

Economy

Saba's largest economic sector is tourism,⁸¹ especially ecotourism, diving and walking. The government (departments of the national government and the public entity together) is the biggest employer, employing around 220 civil servants.

⁷⁷ CBS, 2022a; CBS, 2025b.

⁷⁸ CBS, 2020

⁷⁹ CBS 2025a.

⁸⁰ CBS, 2023.

⁸¹ Commissie Sociaal Minimum Caribisch Nederland, 2023.

In 2024, 67.2% of the population aged between 15 and 75 years were in work; a total of 1,100 people were in employment, 90 more than in 2022. Of the working labour force, 29% were born on the island, compared with 31% in 2022. Almost half of Sabans (45%) were employed in public administration and government services in 2024. Compared with native Sabans, immigrants are fairly often employed in the construction sector, commerce, hospitality and education.⁸²

The modal income in Saba was around 23,800 US dollars in 2022, roughly 60-70 percent of the average income in the European Netherlands, and the highest in the Caribbean Netherlands.⁸³ A quarter of the Saban population were living below the poverty line in 2022.⁸⁴ Although the threshold has been raised since 2024, a quarter of children in Saba are still at risk of poverty.⁸⁵

Language

Saba's official language is English. It is the most widely spoken language in everyday life, and more than 90% of the population have English as their first language.⁸⁶ Roughly 6% have Dutch as their first language.

Transport

Saba has one principal road, around 10 km in length. There is no public transport on the island, though there are bus stops and there is a very sporadic bus service. Hitching lifts is very common.

Saba has an airport and a seaport. There is a ferry service to and from Sint Eustatius (journey time just over an hour) and from there on to Sint Maarten (total journey time three hours). The only flights from Saba go to Sint Maarten. Travelling to other destinations, or travelling to Saba from other places, always requires a stopover in Sint Maarten. Journeys to Bonaire also require a stop in Curaçao.

3.2 Education sector and programme

English is the language of instruction throughout education. Under the applicable legislation, all teaching in Saba may be in English.⁸⁷ Dutch is a strong foreign language on the island, because it is important for pupils. Schools decide for themselves how the subject is structured and taught.

Table 5 summarises the educational organisations and institutions in Saba.

⁸² Rijksdienst Caribisch Nederland, 2025.

⁸³ CBS, 2024.

⁸⁴ Commissie Sociaal Minimum Caribisch Nederland, 2023.

⁸⁵ CBS, 2024.

⁸⁶ CBS, 2022b.

⁸⁷ Article 12, para 7 WPO BES; Article 2.11 WVO 2020; Article 6 Besluit SCS GvP.

Competent authority	School	Type of education	Denomination	No. of pupils on 1 Oct. 2025
Stichting Katholiek Onderwijs SABA (SKOSaba)	Sacred Heart School	primary	Roman Catholic	159
Saba Educational Foundation (SEF)	Saba Comprehensive School	secondary and vocational	public	109 (including 14 CVQ)
Global University Systems Canada	Saba University School of Medicine	higher	private	125-150

Table 5: Overview of education sector in Saba

Primary education

The Sacred Heart School (SHS) is the only primary school in Saba. It was founded in 1905. For a long time, there were two primary schools on the island, but since 1986 there has been just one. The SHS is a Catholic school, associated with the Diocese of Willemstad. Teaching at the SHS currently adheres very closely to the Dutch principles and rules for the content of the teaching programme, but in English.⁸⁸ As in the European Netherlands, the curriculum at the SHS is configured within the framework of these rules, though with minor differences: for example, the teaching may also incorporate Spanish (rather than French or German as in the European Netherlands). The core objectives are also different; those for language instruction also apply for English, while those for ‘personal and social development’ are adapted to the Caribbean context, and include things like ‘principles of the constitution of the Caribbean Netherlands’, ‘basic topography of the Caribbean region’, ‘history of the Caribbean region’ and ‘cultural heritage of the Caribbean region’.

Secondary and vocational education

The Saba Comprehensive School (SCS) provides secondary education and vocational training. In contrast to the European Netherlands, the CXC programmes are used in secondary education (see also section 1.3).

The SCS Started in 1976 as a Dutch-language technical school with two classes: junior general secondary education (MAVO) and junior vocational education (LBO), the predecessor of the present-day preparatory secondary vocational education (VMBO). At that time, students had to go to Sint Maarten to continue their secondary education and obtain a diploma. In 1988 and 1990, respectively, years 3 and 4 were added and the SCS became a fully fledged secondary school. English was introduced as the language of instruction in the early 1990s and the school began using the CXC education system.

Today, the SCS offers three education streams: practical training (PrO), vocational training (CVQ) and academic education (CSEC), with English as the language of instruction and Dutch as a strong foreign language.

Youth social opportunity programmes

The Saba Reach Foundation (SRF) is a non-profit organisation which serves to facilitate sustainable employment and participation opportunities for (young) adult residents of Saba with a distance to the labour market. The SRF provides adult education and social opportunity programmes (the Youth Opportunity Path).⁸⁹ The Replay Programme is aimed at young people aged between 12 and 18 years with attachment difficulties which can affect their educational achievement. The Programme helps youngsters develop emotional, social and team-building skills. It is aimed at preventing school dropout or enabling young people who have already dropped out to obtain the basic qualification. The public entity subsidises the Programme using funding from the national government.⁹⁰

Higher education

Saba has a private higher education institute, the Saba University School of Medicine (SUSOM). It is owned by a private limited company, which itself forms part of a holding company, Global University Systems Canada, together with two other medical schools and a training institute for veterinary medicine on other Caribbean islands. In 2018 the NVAO issued an accreditation for the Masters' degree in Medicine. The design and content of the teaching programme corresponds with the medical programmes in the United States and Canada, where the majority of students come from.

Agreements have been made (in 2022) with the University of Sint Maarten for teacher training. There is also a programme to enable teaching assistants to become fully qualified.

Childcare

The island has both preschool and out-of-school childcare facilities. There is a nursery for children aged up to four years. 92% of children aged up to four years attend daycare. There are two providers of after-school activities: one for children of primary school age and one for pupils aged between 4 and 18 years. There is a wide range of activities on offer, for which school buses are used. Finally, 42% of children aged 4-12 years use out-of-school childcare.

⁸⁹ The intention is to repeal the Youth Social Opportunity Programmes (BES) Act and to introduce the same policy on school dropout as in the European Netherlands.

⁹⁰ <https://www.sabareach.org/#>

chapter
four.
sint
eustatius

4.1 Island-specific context

Facts and figures

Sint Eustatius (referred to as Statia by the local population) lies in an archipelago to the east of Hispaniola and Puerto Rico; it is roughly 30 km from Saba, just over 60 km from Sint Maarten, with the Virgin Islands and Saint Kitts and Nevis among the other neighbouring islands. The island is just over 800 km from Bonaire and almost 7,000 km from The Hague. It covers an area of 21 km² and its capital is Oranjestad. The currency is the US dollar and the official language is English. The dormant volcano known as The Quill is a striking feature of Sint Eustatius and is depicted on the flag.

Population profile

On 1 January 2025, Sint Eustatius had 3,270 inhabitants.⁹¹ The population shrank by 11% between 2011 and 2024, partly due to an ageing population and youth migration. Young people leave the island for further education and often do not return because of the limited availability of work on the island compared with the opportunities elsewhere. A third of the population have lived on the island since birth. In 2020, almost 80% had Dutch nationality, just over 16% had US nationality, and almost 6% held the nationality of the Dominican Republic.

Year	Population on 1 January	Births	Deaths	Settled	Departed
2011	3611	33	13	298	188
2015	3877	36	11	172	876
2020	3139	50	16	119	150
2024	3204	40	21	172	134

Table 6: Population figures for Sint Eustatius

In the 2024-2025 school year, there were 311 primary school pupils in Sint Eustatius⁹² and 235 pupils in secondary and vocational education.

Religion

In 2021, 78% of inhabitants of Sint Eustatius belonged to a church or faith community. The figure in 2017 was 85%. There are three religious groups on the island, of almost equal size: Methodists (25%), Roman Catholics (23%) and Seventh-day Adventists (19%). 22% of the population are not members of a church or faith community.⁹³

Economy

In 2024, 1,800 people in Sint Eustatius were in employment, a drop of 3% compared with 2022. This took the labour participation rate from 72.9% to 71.4%, though that is still on a par with the European Netherlands. 37% of those in work were born on the island, compared with 40% in 2022. They were employed mainly in public administration and government services and in education and industry. In addition to Statian natives, a relatively high proportion of working people were born in the Dominican Republic (14%). Compared with born-and-bred Stadians, immigrants are relatively often employed in construction.

⁹¹ CBS, 2022a.

⁹² CBS, 2025a.

⁹³ CBS, 2023.

The government (national government and public entity) is the biggest employer in Sint Eustatius.⁹⁴ The biggest private employer is the oil storage terminal owned by the investment company Prostar Capital (formerly NuStar). The second largest economic sector is tourism, especially diving tourism.

The modal income in Sint Eustatius was around 21,200 US dollars in 2022, the lowest in the Caribbean Netherlands.⁹⁵ In 2022, a third of the population were living below the poverty line.⁹⁶ Although the threshold has been raised since 2024, a third of children in Sint Eustatius are still at risk of poverty. These are the highest poverty rates in the Netherlands.⁹⁷

Languages

More than 52% of the population speak more than one language.⁹⁸ The most widely spoken first languages are English (81.2% of the population), Spanish (12.8%), Dutch (3.6%) and Papiamentu (1.3%).

Transport

Sint Eustatius does not have a public transport system, though there are pre-bookable buses. Travel to and from Sint Eustatius is possible by aircraft or ferry. There is no direct connection with the European Netherlands; that necessitates changing in Sint Maarten, a 20-minute flight or three-hour boat trip away, partly because the boat first stops in Saba. Travelling to Aruba, Bonaire or Curaçao also requires a change in Sint Maarten, with trips to Bonaire requiring a stop in Curaçao.

4.2 Education sector and programmes

English is the language of instruction throughout education. Under the applicable legislation, all teaching in Sint Eustatius may be entirely in English,⁹⁹ though schools must also offer Dutch as a subject. Dutch is taught as a foreign language. It is up to schools how the subject is structured and taught. Table 7 summarises all the educational organisations and institutions in Sint Eustatius.

Competent authority	School	School type	Denomination	No. of pupils on 1 Oct. 2025
Foundation for Promotion of Catholic Education on St. Eustatius	Golden Rock School	primary school	Roman Catholic	77
Governor de Graaff School Foundation	Governor de Graaff School	primary school	public	41
North Caribbean Conference (SDA) / Berkel's Education Foundation	Lynch Plantation SDA Primary School	primary school	Seventh Day Adventists	89
Bethel Methodist Foundation for Education	Bethel Methodist School	primary school	Methodists	120
Stichting tot bevordering voortgezet onderwijs op St. Eustatius	Gwendoline van Puttenschool	secondary and vocational education	general-special	236

Table 7: Overview of education sector in Sint Eustatius

⁹⁴ Commissie Sociaal Minimum Caribisch Nederland, 2023.

⁹⁵ CBS, 2024.

⁹⁶ Commissie Sociaal Minimum Caribisch Nederland, 2023.

⁹⁷ CBS, 2024.

⁹⁸ CBS, 2022b.

⁹⁹ Article 12, para 7 WPO BES; Article 2.11 WVO 2020; Article 6 Besluit SCS GvP.

Primary education

Sint Eustatius has four primary schools. Three have a religious foundation, and there is one public school. The teaching is in English. Pupils are aged between 4 and 12 years in year groups 1 to 8.

Primary education in Sint Eustatius adheres very closely to the Dutch principles and rules as regards teaching programme content (Article 12 of WPO BES), but in English. As in the European Netherlands, the competent authority configures the curriculum within the framework of these rules, though with minor differences: for example, the teaching may include Spanish language (rather than French or German as in the European Netherlands). The core objectives are also different; those for language also apply for English, while those for 'personal and social development' are adapted to the Caribbean context, and include things like 'principles of the constitution of the Caribbean Netherlands', 'basic topography of the Caribbean region', 'history of the Caribbean region' and 'cultural heritage of the Caribbean'. Finally, Dutch has the status of strong foreign language at these schools because it is important for pupils. Schools decide for themselves how the subject is structured and taught.

Secondary education and vocational training

Sint Eustatius has had a school providing secondary and vocational education since the 1970s: the Gwendoline van Puttenschool (GvP). Prior to that, pupils had to leave the island to follow secondary education, generally in Curaçao.

Since 2015, the GvP has followed the CXC curricula (see section 1.3). The switch to CXC education followed the transition to English as the language of instruction and the desire to align the teaching more closely with the Caribbean context.

Today, the GvP offers three programmes: practical training (PrO), vocational training (CVQ) and the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate programme (CSEC). English is the language of instruction and the school offers Dutch as a strong foreign language. In the first years, the GvP works with diverse groups. Beyond the choice between practical training, academic and vocational education, there is no external differentiation by level. There are no pre-university or secondary vocational training programmes in Sint Eustatius.

Higher education

There is no higher education provision on Sint Eustatius.

Youth Social Opportunity Programmes (SKJ)

The New Challenges Foundation (NCF) offers an opportunity to young people who are not able to follow mainstream education and who have insufficient training or experience to get a job to complete an SKJ programme. The Ministry of OCW is planning to withdraw these programmes and apply the school dropout policy which applies in the European Netherlands to the Caribbean Netherlands as well.

Childcare

There are five daycare centres in Sint Eustatius for children aged up to 4 years. Of the 161 children in this age group, 56% attend one of these facilities. Two of the facilities offer only early stimulation care, provided in the mornings for children aged 3 years to prepare them for primary school. For older children (between 4 and 12 years) there are four facilities offering out-of-school care, one of which is exclusively for girls. There is no host family care provision in Sint Eustatius. There are 348 children aged between 4 and 12 years, 48% of whom make use of school care.

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information

In *Education in the Caribbean Netherlands*, the Education Council presents a broad analysis of how the Dutch education system functions in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius.

The publication consists of three parts:

Part A: Conclusions and recommendations

Part B: Featured themes in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius

Part C: Background information

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Good education for everyone: that is the goal which the Education Council of the Netherlands is committed to helping achieve. For more than a hundred years the Council has been advising successive governments, parliaments as well as local authorities on education policy and legislation. It provides this advice both on commission and on its own initiative. The Council's work culminates in evidence-based studies and advisory reports focused on offering solutions for the long term. They deal with all aspects of the education system, from pre-school provision right through to post-university education and lifelong learning and development.

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