

## The Netherlands

**Commitment and experience in delivering coherent policies for development abroad can provide lessons for applying a PCSD lens to domestic policies.** The 2017-2021 Dutch Coalition Agreement *Confidence in the Future*, which has a strong focus on sustainability, proposes policies and actions that are in substance strongly aligned with the SDGs. Moreover, it stresses the importance of coherence both internally and externally. Regarding international commitments, the [policy note on foreign trade and development co-operation](#) takes the SDGs explicitly as the guiding framework. The national action plan on policy coherence for development, originating from 2016 and [revised in 2018](#), includes goals, policy action and indicators linked to the SDGs focusing on five priority areas with a strong emphasis on means of implementation (SDG 17) and sustainability/greening of international policy: combatting tax evasion and avoidance, development-friendly trade agreements, development-friendly investment regime; increasing sustainability of production and trade, and combatting climate change. This issues-based approach helps to identify synergies and trade-offs, and to monitor the coherence of policies. The adoption of the 2030 Agenda renewed attention to policy coherence including persistent challenges. To this end, the Netherlands engaged in discussions to concretise the concept and co-financed a discussion paper.<sup>1</sup>

**Policy coherence is ensured by the Council of Ministers, while SDG implementation is co-ordinated by the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation.** As the executive council of the Dutch government, the Council of Ministers initiates laws and policies and is in a position to take into account transboundary and inter-generational interests as well as to achieve a balanced approach to the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. Led by the prime minister and including the deputy prime minister, it meets every week to debate proposed decisions. In a further effort to increase effectiveness and enhance policy coherence, particularly between economic affairs and climate and aid, trade and foreign affairs, two ministers notably have cross-cutting mandates: the Minister of Economic Affairs and Climate Policy and the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation. Responsibility for SDG implementation is assigned to all relevant ministers in accordance with their existing responsibilities. This provides a sound basis on which to proceed. This approach does require clear co-ordination and assessment of policy proposals in order to avoid conflicts or overlaps.

**Whole-of-society engagement and expertise contribute to effective monitoring processes.** Statistics Netherlands (CBS) identifies actors and data sources for SDG monitoring in *Measuring the SDGs: An Initial Picture for the Netherlands*. The report's second edition, published in March 2018, acknowledges possible difficulties to quantify SDG 17.14. Two additional annual reports to parliament exist: one on SDG implementation and the other on policy coherence for development. A multi-stakeholder online platform, the SDG Charter and its SDG Gateway, links companies, civil society, knowledge institutes and philanthropists who wish to partner for the SDGs. In addition, many municipalities give visibility to local initiatives online and encourage the participation by society, as illustrated by best practices in the country's 2017 VNR. The same is true for youth involvement.

**Table 3.12. Institutional mechanisms for PCSD in the Netherlands**

Building Block	The Netherlands
Political commitment	The 2017-2021 Dutch Coalition Agreement <i>Confidence in the Future</i> has a strong focus on sustainability and proposes policies and actions that are in substance strongly aligned with the SDGs. Moreover, it stresses the importance of coherence both internally and externally. The national action plan on policy coherence for development, originating from 2016 and revised in 2018, includes goals, policy action and indicators linked to the SDGs focusing on five priority areas with a strong emphasis on means of implementation (SDG 17) and sustainability/greening of international policy: combatting tax evasion and avoidance, development-friendly trade agreements, development-friendly investment regime; increasing sustainability of production and trade, and combatting climate change.
Policy integration	Ministers are responsible for implementing the SDGs within their respective policy areas. Focal points for SDG implementation exist at each ministry. Notably two ministers with cross-cutting mandates support coherence across policy domains: the Minister of Economic Affairs and Climate Change and the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation.
Intergenerational timeframe	The VNR states that previously agreed policy and allocation decisions might be reconsidered in case of a new coalition agreement.
Policy effects	Government future plans generally contain a trend analysis. Transboundary effects on (developing) countries are included in the Dutch PCD Action Plan on Policy Coherence for Development, which links the country's five priority themes to the SDGs. Further action is taken if necessary to avoid/reduce unintended effects.
Co-ordination	SDG implementation by ministries is overseen by the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation and supported by a special SDG coordinator. The coordinator chairs regular meetings of the interministerial working group of ministerial SDG focal points including a representative of municipalities to discuss progress on SDG implementation. Arbitration, if necessary, takes place at a higher policy level (Director General level) and ultimately within the Council of Ministers. In addition, since 2015 a project group of thematic experts led by the PCD focal point for the Bureau for International Cooperation at the Directorate General for International Cooperation co-ordinates international policy coherence work. This group sets the agenda, proposes objectives and guides discussions with respective ministries. The mandate of the SDG coordinator includes stakeholders, who also report to parliament in a joint and differentiated manner.
Local involvement	A representative of Dutch local authorities (VNG International: the International Cooperation Agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities) is present at the meetings of the interministerial working group of SDG focal points. Decentralised government bodies (municipalities, provinces and water authorities) have written their own chapter in the first SDG report to parliament. A separate statistical report on the SDG performance of all 388 municipalities will be included in the future.
Stakeholder Participation	An SDG Charter was established by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs – a growing multi-stakeholder platform of over 130 Dutch companies, civil society, knowledge institutes and philanthropists who wish to contribute to the SDGs in partnership. A recently launched SDG Gateway forms an online community of active stakeholders across sectors enabling collaboration.
Monitoring and reporting	The annual SDG report to parliament (before Accountability Day) and the annual PCD report to parliament serve as reporting mechanisms. Netherlands Statistics (CBS) monitored the Dutch starting position in November 2016. In March 2018 it published its second measurement with wider data coverage (50% of the UN indicators), which provides a cross-European comparison and an overview of progress to date. The website <a href="http://www.sdg-nederland.nl">www.sdg-nederland.nl</a> informs the public about the SDGs, ongoing initiatives and ideas on how everyone can actively contribute.

**Box 3.10. The introduction of an ‘SDG test’: coherent assessment of policies early on in the policy process**

The Minister for Foreign Trade and Development, in response to a request from Parliament, communicated to Parliament that an ‘SDG test’ will be introduced by adjusting and expanding the existing framework for policy assessment. Such an instrument, carried out by policy makers working for different ministries, contributes to enhancing policy coherence early on in the policy process by allowing for an ex ante assessment of whether new proposals are in line with the SDGs.

*“The Dutch Cabinet will bring the ‘Integraal Afwegingskader’ (IAK) [explanatory note: integral assessment framework for new policy, laws and regulations], where necessary, in line with the SDG-ambitions. This will be done by making the effects of new policy, law and regulation proposals on reaching the SDGs a visible element of the IAK. In the IAK extra attention will therefore be demanded for effects of proposals on the SDGs. Next to this the Cabinet extends the IAK with two topics that are currently insufficiently addressed and where the Netherlands has to deliver a policy effort. To this end, the IAK will be supplemented with the compulsory quality check ‘effects on gender equality’ by the Ministry for Education, Culture and Science and with the quality check ‘effects on developing countries’, by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Also, the Cabinet wants to stimulate further the use of the IAK by policy makers. The Ministry of Justice and Safety will further work out these decisions in coordination with the other Ministries. In doing so, disproportionate increases in bureaucratic burden should be avoided. Source: [letter accompanying second SDG report to Parliament](#).*

Source: OECD (2018), "Country profiles: Institutional mechanisms for policy coherence", in *Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development 2018: Towards Sustainable and Resilient Societies*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264301061-6-en>.

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<sup>i</sup> For the discussion paper displaying the Dutch approach to PCD see: Mackie, J., M. Ronceray and E. Spierings. *Policy Coherence & the 2030 Agenda: Building on the PCD experience*. Maastricht: ECDPM, 2017.