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## Labor market analysis Curaçao

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## MANAGEMENT SAMENVATTING

Deze analyse van de arbeidsmarkt van Curaçao is hoofdzakelijk opgesteld aan de hand van bestaande rapportages en artikels. Daarnaast zijn verschillende stakeholders gehoord over hun zienswijze op ontwikkelingen in het onderwijs en op de arbeidsmarkt van Curaçao, en over de aansluiting tussen beide. Door het gebrek aan cijfermatige data, met name over de vraagkant van de arbeidsmarkt, is dankbaar gebruik gemaakt van de informatie die tijdens gesprekken met stakeholders is verkregen.

Uit de analyse van de ontwikkelingen in het onderwijs blijkt dat de aanbevelingen die in het rapport *'Nulmeting van het Curaçaose onderwijsbestel'* zijn voorgedragen, vrijwel integraal opgenomen zijn in de hervormingsplannen van het Ministerie van Onderwijs, Wetenschap, Cultuur en Sport (OWCS). In het herstelprogramma *'Programma Mehorashon di Enseñansa 2023-2028'* zijn zowel de lopende projecten ter hervorming van het onderwijs als nieuw op te starten initiatieven meegenomen.

De analyse van de arbeidsmarktontwikkelingen op Curaçao is gebaseerd op recente arbeidsmarkt-onderzoeken van het CBS, en de eerste bevindingen uit de census 2023 (september 2023-februari-2024). In 2023 bedroeg de arbeidsparticipatiegraad op Curaçao 50,2%. Ruim driekwart van de beroepsbevolking heeft een hoogst afgeronde opleiding op middelbaar onderwijsniveau of lager.

Zowel de werkloosheid (7%) als de jeugdwerkloosheid (15%) zijn in 2023 gedaald vergeleken met tijdens de vorige census (2011). Met name de leeftijdsgroep 15-19 kampt echter nog met relatief hoge werkloosheid (21,5%). Er is nog geen NEET-indicator (not in employment, education, or training) voor 2023 gepubliceerd. In 2020 is een NEET-indicator berekend tussen 17% en 23%.

De Curaçaose bevolking ontgroent en vergrijst al jaren. Dit heeft zijn weerslag op zowel het onderwijs als de arbeidsmarkt. De omvang van de leeftijdsgroep 5-19 jaar liet in 2023 een daling zien van 22,3% vergeleken met 2011. Het aantal vijftenzestigplussers bedroeg gedurende 2023 bijna een kwart van de totale bevolking. Daarnaast werden er 40,3 zestigplussers per 100 personen in de leeftijdsgroep 15-64 jaar geteld. De bruto participatiegraad onder de vijftenzestigplussers was 11,2%.

De analyse van de aansluiting tussen het onderwijs en de arbeidsmarkt laat zien dat de 'mismatch' dusdanig is dat in de sectoren met de hoogste arbeidstekorten er vaak ook sprake is van hoge werkloosheid. Alle gehoorde stakeholders zijn bereid om te helpen om tot oplossingen te komen. Hiervoor geven ze aan dat het voornaamste is dat de overheid een weldoordachte meerjarige visie en strategisch plan voor het eiland ontwikkelt, en ervoor zorgt dat alle neuzen in dezelfde richting wijzen.

Veel stakeholders vrezen dat zonder een alom gedragen visie en strategie, er weinig structurele verbeteringen plaats zullen vinden. Het zorgdragen hiervoor is dan ook een van de voornaamste aanbevelingen die in deze analyse zijn gedaan. Een andere belangrijke aanbeveling is het promoten van programma's waardoor de kracht voortvloeiende uit de meertaligheid en het multiculturalisme van de Curaçaose jeugd optimaal kan worden benut.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This analysis of Curaçao's labor market was primarily drafted based on existing reports and articles. The views expressed by several stakeholders regarding Curaçao's education and labor market –and the connection between these two– also contributed largely to this analysis. Due to the lack of numerical data, especially on the demand side of the labor market, the discussions with stakeholders proved crucial in obtaining insight and information.

An examination of developments in Curaçao's education system shows that the recommendations presented in the report '*Nulmeting van het Curaçaose onderwijsbestel*' were included almost in their entirety in the reform plans of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports (OWCS). The OWCS's '*Programma Mehorashon di Enseñansa 2023-2028*' incorporates both ongoing projects and new initiatives, aimed at reforming Curaçao's education system.

The review of Curaçao's labor market developments presented in this report draws from labor force surveys conducted by the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), and from preliminary data from the 2023 census (September 2023-February 2024). In 2023, the labor participation rate registered at 50.2%. More than three quarters of Curaçao's population aged 15+ have completed a mid-level education or lower.

In 2023, both the unemployment rate (7%) and the youth unemployment rate (15%) registered a drop compared to the last. The NEET indicator (not in employment, education, or training) has yet to be published for 2023. In 2020, Curaçao's NEET indicator ranged between 17% and 23%.

The Curaçao population has been experiencing dejuvenating and aging for years, affecting both the country's education system and its labor market. The size of the population cohort aged 5-19 decreased by 22.3% in 2023, compared to 2011. The number of people over 65 years of age peaked at almost a quarter of the total population during 2023. Meanwhile, the old age dependency ratio registered at 40.3. In 2023, the gross participation rate among those over sixty-five years of age was 11.2%.

The analysis of the connection between the education system and the labor market shows that the 'mismatch' is such that the sectors with high unemployment rates often also face high labor shortages. All the stakeholders that contributed to this analysis expressed their willingness to help find solutions to the mismatch. They indicate that to close existing gaps, the Curaçao government needs to develop a well-thought-out multiannual vision and strategic plan, and ensure that all involved are fully committed.

Many stakeholders fear that without a widely supported vision and strategy, few of the much-needed structural improvements will take place. Therefore, ensuring a clear multiannual vision and strategy is one of the main recommendations made in this report. Another important recommendation is to promote programs and initiatives that allow for the optimal utilization of the strength and potential inherent to the multilingualism and multiculturalism of Curaçao's youth.

## PREFACE & QUOTES

In July 2024, a first version of this labor market analysis was issued, based on the information that was available then. In subsequent weeks, more information became available, mainly as a result of new publications by the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) Curaçao, based on data from the Census 2023.

A few additional consultations with stakeholders also contributed to valuable new insights. Given the relevance of the additional material obtained, certain sections in this analysis were adjusted to reflect this information.

The information contained in this analysis was incorporated in a **Joint Labor Market Summary of Aruba, Curaçao, Sint Maarten, and the Caribbean Netherlands**, which was finalized in October 2024. The Joint Labor Market Summary includes three quotes from Curaçao’s labor market analysis. These quotes and the pages on which they can be found in this document are shown below.

A heartfelt thanks goes to everyone who contributed one way or another to this labor market analysis.

Eager Eye Advisory



“The educational system has to incorporate the skills that will be needed in the future, as soon as possible. Failure to do so will only lead to a bigger mismatch between the education system and the labor market.”

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CUR: “The low pay, unattractive benefits, and dismal professional growth prospects offered in certain private sector branches and jobs are also thought to play a role in students avoiding them, despite the shortages on the labor market.”

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“Not developing skills that are considered crucial on the labor market, may lead to many (relative) disadvantages for the NEET youth –people aged 15-29 not in employment, education, or training– later on in life. Reducing the number of NEET youth is therefore crucial, not only for the young, but also for their country’s economic growth prospects.”  
(CUR, page 12)

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## I. INTRODUCTION

This labor market analysis (LMA)<sup>1</sup> was commissioned by the Strategic Education Alliance (SEA) to the University of Curaçao (UoC) in late 2023. The SEA is a collaborative program among public and educational entities across all four countries comprising the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The SEA's objective is to optimize the educational success of Dutch Caribbean students.

Underlying the SEA and its objective –as it relates to Curaçao– are the bilateral agreements made between the Netherlands and Curaçao in April 2023. These agreements are geared towards increasing Curaçao's financial, economic, and governmental resilience, through collaborative efforts that are based on ownership, equality, and common principles. One of the main reform goals set for the field of education is *'the realization of a good connection between Curaçao's education system and its labor market.'*<sup>2</sup>

Against this background, the education inspectorate of Curaçao and the education inspectorate of the Netherlands joined forces in October 2021 to conduct a baseline measurement of Curaçao's educational system. Their final report, which contains several recommendations and potential solutions, was published in February 2023. Several of the findings in this report remain valid to date.

This labor market analysis was requested by the SEA as a means to obtain more insight into not only the developments in Curaçao's education system and labor market, but also into the connection between them. The objective of the LMA was formulated as follows: *'To conduct an analysis of existing research, in order to outline the current and future needs of Curaçao's labor market, as well as its connection with the education system.'*<sup>3</sup>

The analysis presented in this report captures a large part of the existing information on Curaçao's education system and labor market, without the presumption of being an all-exhaustive summary. On the one hand, there is a vast number of reports and articles on both topics. On the other hand, there are serious limitations to the quality, verifiability, reproducibility, and accessibility of relevant numerical data on both topics. Moreover, several reports on these topics have not been published regularly since before the COVID pandemic, thus creating another obstacle to data access.

One main takeaway from both the literature review and the consultations held with several stakeholders is that the willingness to improve Curaçao's education system (and its connection with the labor market) is enormous. Given this abundance of willingness, attaining the desired improvements in Curaçao's education system and its connection with the labor market is more than a possibility, it is an obligation to Curaçao's youth. If everyone involved fully commits to the success of the reforms at hand, this obligation to Curaçao's youth will be met without a doubt!

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<sup>1</sup> In Dutch: arbeidsmarktanalyse (AMA).

<sup>2</sup> Landspakket Curaçao Uitvoeringsagenda | april - 31 augustus 2024.

<sup>3</sup> Plan van aanpak Arbeidsmarktanalyse (October 2023, January 2024).

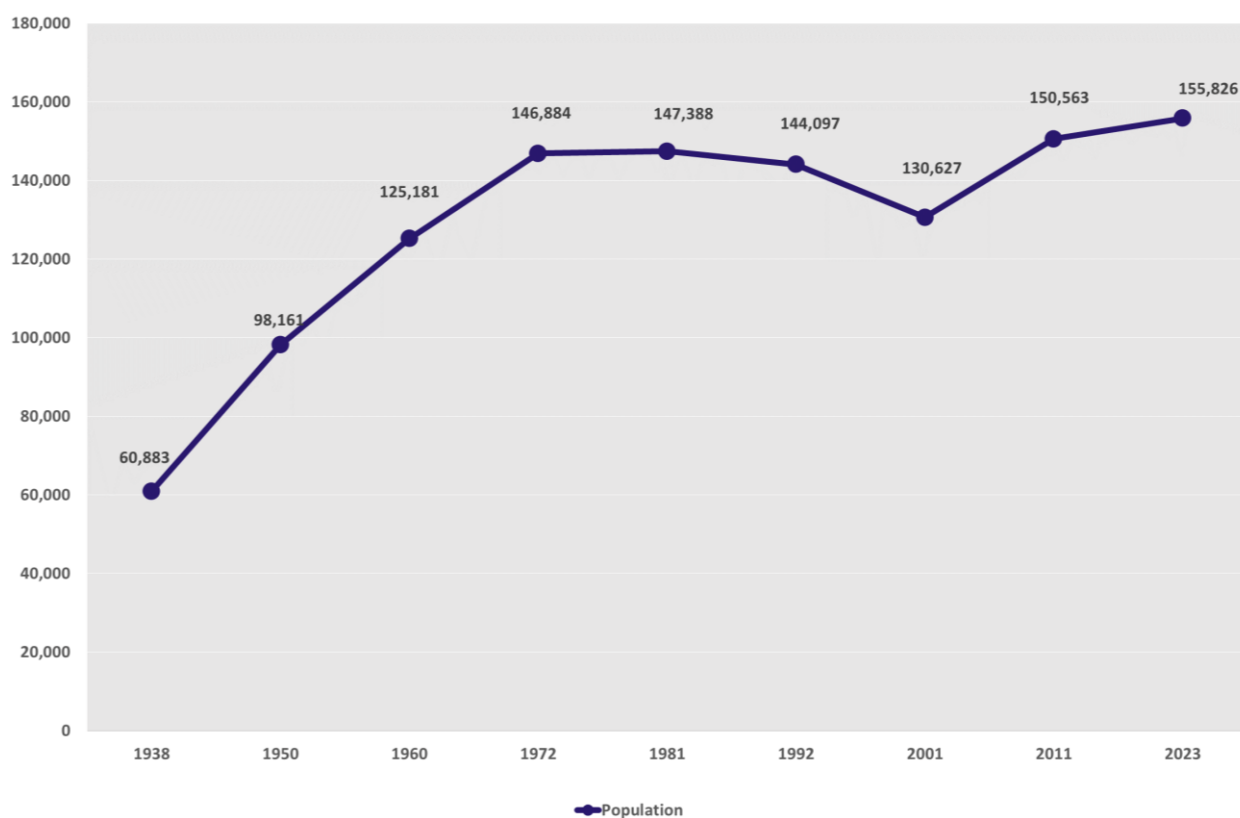
## II. DEMOGRAPHIC DEVELOPMENTS

### II.I Demographic developments up to 2023

A review of historical demographic developments in Curaçao reveals that over the years, population growth has been largely influenced by migration. After the opening of the Shell refinery in 1918, Curaçao saw a large influx of workers, not only from the region, but also from the Netherlands (De Bruijn en Groot, 2014). By 1960, the population of Curaçao had more than doubled in size, relative to the 1930s (CBS, 2022).

Over the course of the next several years, the population of Curaçao continued to grow steadily, reaching almost 147,000 in 1972 (CBS, 2024). Up until 1981, the number of people remained relatively stable. However, the number of people living on the island started to decline thereafter, in part due to a lengthy period of economic downturn. During this time, government tax and other income dropped sharply, largely as a result of the collapse of Venezuelan tourism following the Bolivar's devaluation, Shell ending its refining activities in Curaçao, and the downturn in activities in the once blooming international financial sector on the island. Meanwhile, the government's annual outlays on wages and salaries in particular, grew steadily, causing public debt to deteriorate at a fast pace (Commissie Schuldenproblematiek, 2003).

**Figure I Population 1938-2023**



Sources: CBS Historical Series Population Curaçao 1900-2022; CBS Census 2023.

As the Curaçao government struggled to implement reforms to curb its spending and increase revenues, the island experienced a wave of emigration throughout the 1980s, up until the beginning of the 1990s (De Bruijn en Groot, 2014). In the 1998-2001 period another emigration wave followed (CBS/Ter Bals, 2015). This second wave was largely ascribable to the vast number of contractionary fiscal measures implemented by the Curaçao government from the mid 1990s, in close collaboration with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). These measures were aimed at breaking the debt accumulation cycle the government was caught in. (Commissie Schuldenproblematiek, 2003).

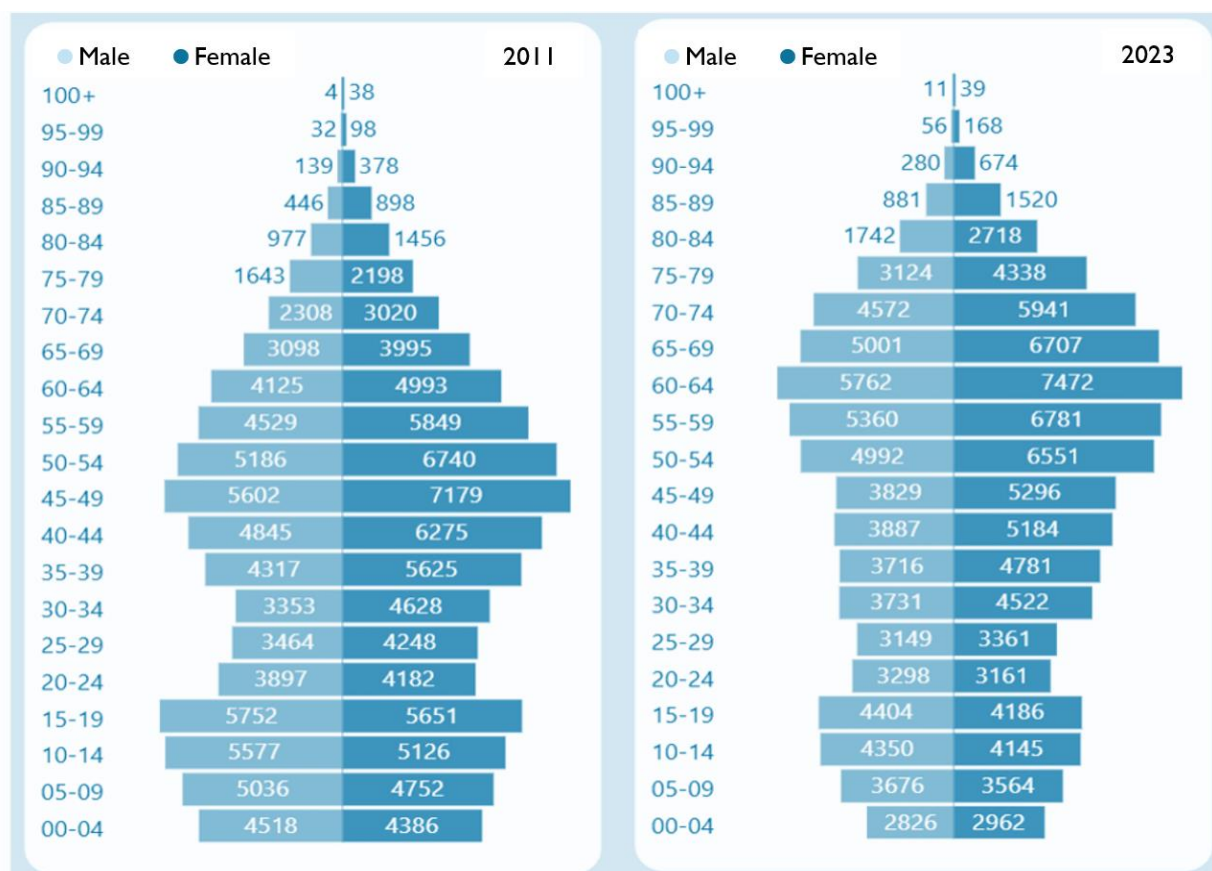
As a result of the uptick in emigration, Curaçao's population registered approximately 130,000 in 2001 (CBS, 2022). By the mid-2000s, however, the tide had turned, as the population exhibited rapid growth again, especially in the period 2005-2008 (CBS/Ter Bals, 2015). In 2010, Curaçao became an autonomous country within the Dutch Kingdom, following the disbandment of the Netherlands Antilles (CBCS, 2011). In the meantime, Curaçao's population continued to grow, reaching slightly more than 150,000 by 2011, as revealed by the census that was held that year (CBS, 2024).

During the first half of the 2010s, the number of Curaçao's inhabitants expanded due to positive net migration. Meanwhile, the population's natural growth rate continued to decelerate. The census held on Curaçao in the period September 2023-February 2024 revealed that total population had grown to 155,826, as a result of positive net migration (CBS, 2024). This number not only entails a 3.5% growth relative to 2011, but it is also Curaçao's largest population size registered so far.

The 2023 census data also made it clear that the population of Curaçao experienced further ageing (increase in the share of older people (aged 65+), and dejuvenating (decline in the share of younger people (aged 0-14), since 2011 (CBS, 2015). A few noteworthy developments in Curaçao's population are as follows:

- The share of people aged 65+ has almost doubled: from **13.8%** in 2011, to **24.7%** in 2023.
- The share of people aged 0-14 declined from **19.5%** in 2011, to **14.1%** in 2023.
- The average age of the population increased from **20.3** years in 2011, to **45.9** years in 2023.
- The number of men per 100 women dropped from **84.3** 2011, to **82** in 2023.

Figure 2 shows a comparison of Curaçao's population pyramid in 2011 and 2023. The narrowing of the bottom parts of the 2023 pyramid indicates that younger groups of the population are smaller in size compared to 2011. The only younger group that expanded in 2023 compared to 2011, is the male group aged 30-34. Meanwhile, the older age groups (aged 55+) have all expanded compared to 2011, reflected by the wider top half of the pyramid in 2023. The wider right side on both pyramids reflects the larger number of women, relative to the number of men.

**Figure 2 Population pyramid census 2011 - 2023**

Source: CBS Census 2023.

## II.II Implications for Curaçao's education system

Population data published by the Curaçao Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) shows that the drop in the relative size of the younger groups in Curaçao's population has been ongoing for years. This trend has several implications, among others, for the island's education system. After all, children start attending school from the age of 4<sup>4</sup> in Curaçao (CBS/De Witt Hamer, 2015).

In the following paragraphs, the effects of the declining number of school-aged children (aged 5-19)<sup>5</sup> on Curaçao's education system are analyzed, based on the CBS's Population Projections 2015-2050 (CBS/Ter Bals, 2015) (CBS/De Witt Hamer, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> School attendance is mandatory on Curaçao for children aged 4-18, unless they have attained at least one of the predetermined secondary level diplomas that grant exoneration before the age of 18.

<sup>5</sup> The 5-19 age group is used to allow for alignment with international statistical benchmarks.

Five different projection variants were set up in these two publications to predict the number of school-aged children in the population. These variants are based on different combinations of fertility, life expectancy (mortality), and migration (immigration and emigration) assumptions. The five projection variants are:

- I. Standard migration
- II. Constant fertility
- III. High immigration
- IV. Emigration wave
- V. Zero migration

All the variants, except for the Constant fertility variant, are based on the “medium fertility” assumption, which is characterized by declining fertility, and an increase in the average age of first-time mothers. The medium fertility is in line with globally declining fertility trends. As the name implies, the Constant fertility variant assumes that in the 2015-2050 period, fertility will remain the same as it was in 2010-2014. All five variants assume increased life expectancy for both women and men (“normal mortality”) (CBS/Ter Bals, 2015).

Another difference among the five variants relates to migration. In the High immigration variant, a high positive net migration similar to what was registered in Curaçao in 2005-2008 is assumed. By contrast, in the Emigration wave variant, negative net migration is assumed, similar to what was registered in Curaçao in the 1998-2001 period. Meanwhile, in the Zero migration variant, no migration is assumed. However, this variant is not considered realistic, given the noted effect of migration on Curaçao’s population over the years (CBS/Ter Bals, 2015).

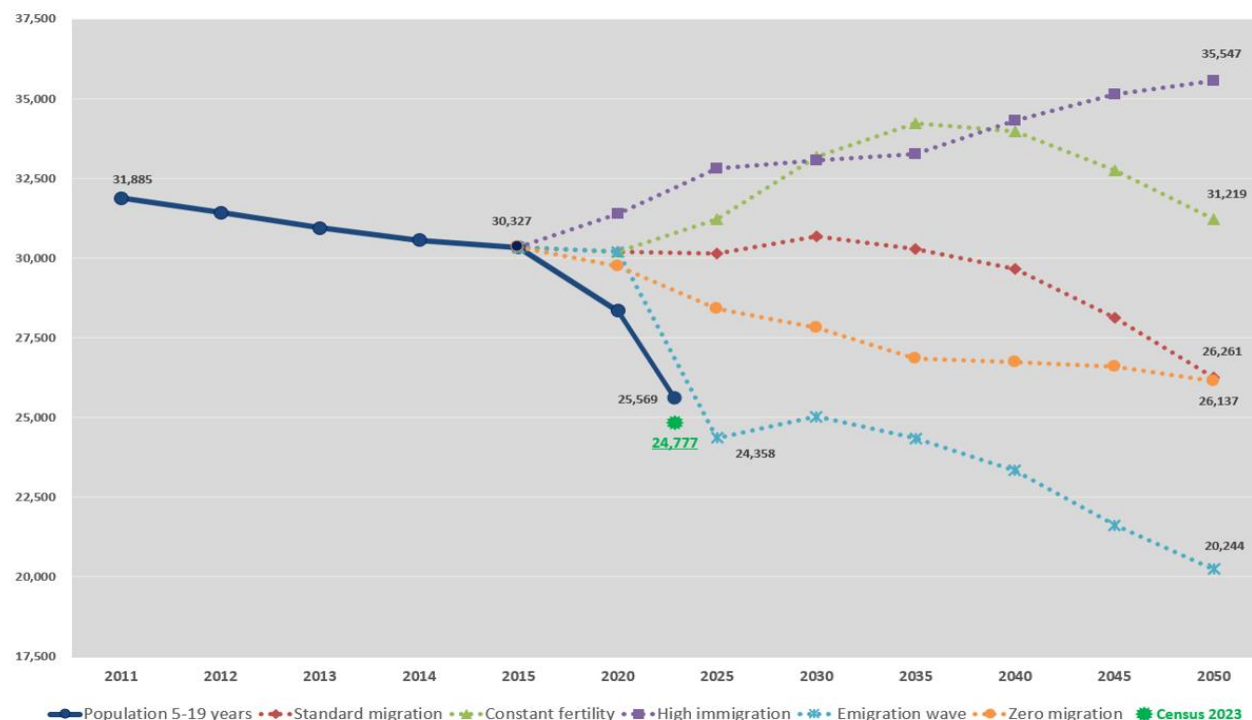
Figure 3 allows for a side-by-side comparison of the estimated and actual development of the cohort aged 5-19 in the period 2011-2023, as well as the projections made for the period up to 2050 (using five-year intervals). The dark blue line on the left in Figure 3 shows the actual size of the cohort as registered during the 2011 census (31,885). Subsequently, the estimates made by the CBS for 2012 up to 2023 (25,569) are shown.

CBS’s estimates for the 2012-2023 period are based on the birth, death, and migration records of the civil registry at the beginning of each year. The Figure also shows the *actual* size of the cohort aged 5-19 in September 2023, as measured during the census ([24,777](#)) (CBS, 2024). This number indicates that the number of children aged 5-19 shrank by 22.3% in the period 2011-2023.

The dotted lines in Figure 3 show the expected size of the age 5-19 cohort, as calculated in each of the five variants for the period 2015-2050. The projected sizes of the cohort aged 5-19 in 2050, and their respective change compared to 2015 are as follows:

I.	Standard migration:	<b>26,261</b>	(-17.6%)
II.	Constant fertility:	<b>31,219</b>	(-2.1%)
III.	High immigration:	<b>35,547</b>	(+11.5%)
IV.	Emigration wave:	<b>20,244</b>	(-36.5%)
V.	Zero migration:	<b>26,137</b>	(-18.0%)

**Figure 3 Developments population cohort aged 5-19 in 2011-2050**



Sources: CBS Population Projections 2015-2050; CBS Census 2023.

Noteworthy is that the size of the cohort aged 5-19 measured during the 2023 census (24,777) is smaller than both the CBS's estimates made for the 2012-2023 period, and the five projection variants. Even the least positive of the variants, the Emigration wave variant, did not fully predict the sharp fall registered in this youth cohort (-22.3%).

If the current declining trend continues, by 2050, the size of the age 5-19 cohort will most likely be even smaller than projected in all the five variants. Therefore, this cohort, and hence, the number of children that will be attending school by 2050, could decline even more than predicted in the Emigration variant (-36.5%).

### III. LABOR MARKET DEVELOPMENTS

During the labor force surveys conducted by the CBS in 2020 and in 2022-2023, a significant amount of data was collected about developments on the supply side of Curaçao's labor market. Unfortunately, the CBS does not collect data on the demand side of the labor market. The last demand-side survey of the labor market was conducted in 2006.

The Ministry of Social Affairs, Labor, and Wellbeing (SOAW), also collects data on different vacancies on the island. However, SOAW's database does not currently provide a comprehensive view of the demand side of the labor market.

Given the relevance of complete, accurate, timely, and readily available labor market data for the effective formulation, implementation, and evaluation of labor policy, as well as for proper public financial management, labor market research, and other purposes, the lack of integral labor market data needs to urgently be addressed.

#### III.1 Labor market key figures

During the 2023 census, CBS collected data from the population about different topics, among which the labor market. As the labor market key figures in Table I show, the number of employed people aged 15+ increased in 2023 compared to earlier years, while the number of unemployed people aged 15+ registered a drop.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, the net labor participation rate dropped from 53.6 in 2011 to 50.2% in 2023, revealing that a smaller share of the population aged 15+ is working. Meanwhile, the number of economically not active<sup>7</sup> individuals in the population aged 15+ peaked at 61,488 (46%) in 2023, reflecting the rise in the share of the population aged 65+, of which the large majority is retired.

The share of the population aged 15+ that is not economically active also includes those aged 15-24, of which a large share is still studying. Overall, 36.7% of the group aged 15-24 partake in the labor force. This percentage includes those still following an education. A breakdown of the population aged 25+ reveals that 52.8% are employed, 3.5% are unemployed, and 43.7% are economically not active.

A closer look at the older age groups in the population aged 15+ reveals that 11% of those aged 65+ work. By contrast, 55% of those aged 60-64 are employed. The old age dependency ratio, defined as the number of elderly people (aged 65+) per 100 people of working age (15-64 years), equaled 40.3 in 2023. This ratio is in line with the noted rise in the share of people aged 65+ in the population: from 13.8% in 2011, to 24.7% in 2023.

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<sup>6</sup> The analysis of the population age 15+ aligns with international statistical benchmarks. However, in Curaçao, juveniles are allowed to work from the age of 16. School attendance is mandatory for children aged 4-18, unless they have attained at least one of the predetermined secondary level diplomas that grant exoneration before the age of 18.

<sup>7</sup> All persons of 15 years and older who during the measurement period, neither had a job or owed a business, nor were actively seeking work.

**Table I Labor market key figures 2011-2023**

	#2011	2014	2017	2020	2022	#2023	Sparklines
<b>Population 15+ years</b>							
Employed population (I)	64,914	59,295	62,834	57,050	66,722	67,246	
Unemployed population (II)	7,123	8,555	10,313	13,442	10,035	5,045	
Labor Force (III=I+II)	72,037	67,850	73,147	70,492	76,757	72,291	
Economically not active population (IV)	49,072	55,871	54,911	54,562	47,479	61,488	
Population (V=III+IV)	121,168	123,721	128,058	125,054	124,236	133,823	
Labor force participation rate (=III/V)	59.5%	54.8%	57.1%	56.4%	61.8%	54.0%	
Net labor participation rate (=I/V)	53.6%	47.9%	49.1%	45.6%	53.7%	50.2%	
Unemployment rate (=II/III)	9.9%	12.6%	14.1%	19.1%	13.1%	7.0%	
<b>Population 15-24 years</b>							
Employed population (I)	5,939	3,181	3,815	2,902	4,792	4,786	
Unemployed population (II)	1,771	1,578	1,858	2,119	2,032	842	
Labor Force (III=I+II)	7,710	4,759	5,673	5,021	6,824	5,628	
Economically not active population (IV)	11,760	14,290	13,093	11,658	8,356	9,723	
Population (V=III+IV)	19,482	19,049	18,807	16,680	15,219	15,351	
Labor force participation rate (=III/V)	39.6%	25.0%	30.2%	30.1%	44.8%	36.7%	
Net labor participation rate (=I/V)	30.5%	16.7%	20.3%	17.4%	31.5%	31.2%	
Youth unemployment rate (=II/III)	23.0%	33.2%	32.8%	42.2%	29.8%	15.0%	
NEET indicator	15.6%	-	-	17-23%	-	-	
<b>Population 65+ years</b>							
Employed population (I)	1,791	1,734	2,400	1,935	3,100	4,034	
Unemployed population (II)	104	39	125	351	382	271	
Labor Force (III=I+II)	1,895	1,773	2,525	2,286	3,482	4,305	
Economically not active population (IV)	18,824	20,991	22,425	25,903	27,194	34,113	
Population (V=III+IV)	20,728	22,764	24,950	28,190	30,786	38,418	
Labor force participation rate (=III/V)	9.1%	7.8%	10.1%	8.1%	11.3%	11.2%	
Net labor participation rate (=I/V)	8.6%	7.6%	9.6%	6.9%	10.1%	10.5%	
Old-age unemployment rate (=II/III)	5.5%	2.2%	5.0%	15.4%	11.0%	6.3%	

#2011 and #2023 : Census years. All other years: Labor force surveys.  
Sources: CBS Census 2011, Census 2023, Labor force surveys 2020 and 2022/2023.

In 2023, the unemployment rate fell to 7.0%, the lowest measurement registered in over a decade. Youth unemployment (age range 15-24) also dropped sharply, reaching 15%. During the 2022 labor force survey, youth unemployment was estimated at 29.8%.

A breakdown of the youth unemployment rate registered in 2023 by the underlying age groups, reveals that unemployment among those aged 15-19, and those aged 20-24, was 21.5%, and 12.2%, respectively. Therefore, the group aged 15-19, in particular, still faces relatively high unemployment. Important to note though, is that in Curaçao, juveniles are only allowed to work once they have reached the age of 16. Therefore, the unemployment rate registered for this age category relates to those aged 16-19.<sup>8</sup>

Since youth unemployment numbers may be influenced by the large number of young people who are still studying, the NEET indicator (not in employment, education, or training) is often used to analyze labor market developments related to the young. The term NEET refers to young people (aged 15-24, or 15-29)<sup>9</sup> who are disengaged from work, education, as well as training.

For OECD<sup>10</sup> countries, the reduction of the number of NEET youth is a common target.<sup>11</sup> This is because the NEET status is associated with a higher chance of having a low education level, and weak information-processing skills, for example, poor literacy and numeracy (UNESCO, 2017).

Not developing skills that are considered crucial on the labor market may lead to many (relative) disadvantages for the NEET youth later in life. Reducing the number of NEET youth is therefore crucial, not only for their own future, but also for their country's economic growth prospects.

As Table I reveals, Curaçao's NEET indicator registered at 15.6% in 2011, and ranged between 17% and 23% in 2020. The 2023 NEET indicator is yet unknown.

### **III.II Developments in selected sectors and functions**

The CBS's labor force survey of 2020, as well as research by the Ministry of Economic affairs and the Curaçao Tourist Board (MEO, CTB, 2018) reveal that several sectors and job functions have been facing ongoing labor shortages. These sectors include, among others, hospitality, construction, education, and health care. Contrastingly, the 2020 labor force survey revealed that unemployment in both the hospitality sector and the construction sector was relatively high.

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<sup>8</sup> Juveniles are allowed to work from the age of 16. However, school attendance is mandatory for children aged 4-18, unless they have attained at least one of the predetermined secondary level diplomas that grant exoneration before the age of 18.

<sup>9</sup> CBS Curaçao calculates the NEET-indicator for the youth aged 15-24.

<sup>10</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

<sup>11</sup> Sustainable Development Goal 4, Target 4.4.

As Table 2 shows, overall unemployment in 2020 was highest in the hospitality sector (17.0%), and the construction sector (8.6%). Youth unemployment was also highest in these sectors (22.1%, and 9.5% respectively). Nonetheless, employers in these sectors have reportedly been struggling with ongoing labor supply shortages.

A review of the job functions with the highest unemployment also reveals several overlaps. For example, 9.8% of the unemployed working-age population were looking for work as construction workers. For the youth, this amounted to 12.3%. Also noteworthy is that those looking to work as sanitary workers, or looking for unschooled work, seem to have more difficulty finding work (16.6% overall, and 17.4% youth).

**Table 2 Top five sectors and functions by unemployment type**

Name sectors / functions	Unemployment type	%
1. Accommodation and food service activities	Overall	17.0%
2. Construction		8.6%
3. Wholesale and retail trade: repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles		6.4%
4. Administrative and support service activities		5.9%
5. Human health and social work		5.7%
<i>I. Accommodation and food service activities</i>	Youth	22.1%
<i>II. Construction</i>		9.5%
<i>III. Wholesale and retail trade: repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles</i>		9.2%
<i>IV. Other service activities</i>		4.7%
<i>V. Financial and insurance services inclusive FISIM</i>		3.9%
1. Sanitary workers and processors, other unschooled work	Overall	16.6%
2. Construction workers (excl. electricians)		9.8%
3. Personal services worker		9.4%
4. Residential helpers and cleaners		7.2%
5. Salespeople		6.0%
<i>I. Sanitary workers and processors, other unschooled work</i>	Youth	17.4%
<i>II. Construction workers (excl. electricians)</i>		12.3%
<i>III. Personal services workers</i>		10.5%
<i>IV. Salespeople</i>		7.6%
<i>V. Administrative and inventory workers</i>		6.4%

Source: CBS Labor force survey 2020.

## IV. DEVELOPMENTS IN EDUCATION

### IV.I Selected initiatives and course of action in the field of education

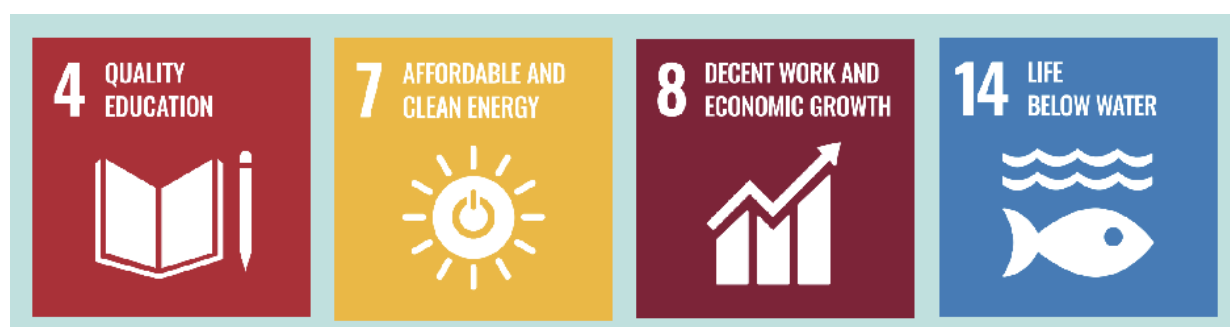
Over the years, the Curaçao government has undertaken several initiatives and courses of action to improve and modernize the education system. This section will briefly zoom in on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) prioritized by the Curaçao government, in particular SDG 4, which relates to education. Subsequently, an overview is presented of a few initiatives and courses of action that have been undertaken by different other stakeholders, aimed at improving Curaçao's education system, and promoting its alignment with the world of work. Lastly, the Raad van Onderwijs en Arbeidsmarkt (ROA), Curaçao's Council for Education and Labor Market, is discussed.

#### *Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*

In 2015, the government of Curaçao committed itself to implementing the seventeen SDGs set by the United Nations (UN) in 2015. As stated in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by the UN, the SDGs are a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future (UN, 2015). The SDGs comprise several goals, targets, and indicators to be incorporated in national agendas and development plans.

The Curaçao government opted to focus primarily on four SDGs: Quality education (# 4), Affordable and Clean Energy (# 7), Decent Work and Economic Growth (# 8), and Life Below Water (# 14).

**Figure 4 Curaçao's prioritized SDGs**



Sources: Regeerprogramma Curaçao 2022-2025; United Nations SDG Guidelines 2023.

All seventeen SDGs were laid down in Curaçao's National Development Plan 2015-2030. Moreover, in 2018, the government approved 'A Roadmap for SDG Implementation in Curaçao', which was set up with the aid of the UN (UNDP, 2018). The four prioritized SDGs also form part of the Curaçao Government Program 2022-2025. This program contains three specific goals that were set for the education system as a whole:

- I. Sustainable improvement of the quality of education.
- II. An accessible educational system that meets all modern requirements.
- III. An efficient cost system that guarantees payable education for the population.

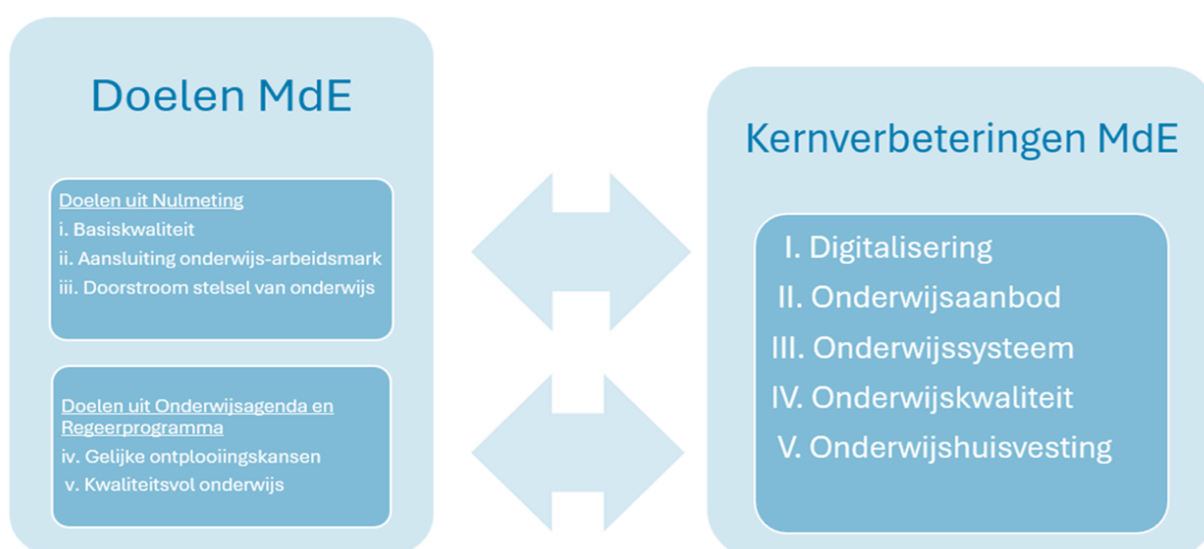
#### *Nulmeting van het Onderwijsbestel & Programma Mehorashon di Enseñansa*

In 2021, the education inspectorates of Curaçao and The Netherlands joined forces to carry out a baseline measurement of Curaçao's education system. The final version of this report (Nulmeting van het Onderwijsbestel) was published in February 2023. This report sums up the strengths of the education system, as well as several foreseen challenges and risks. Also included in the report are thirteen recommendations along with potential solutions to reform Curaçao's education system.

Based on the recommendations in the baseline measurement report, and a few additional topics, the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports (OWCS) set up a comprehensive program aimed at improving education in its entirety: Programma Mehorashon di Enseñansa 2023-2028 (MdE). The MdE was published in December 2023. It incorporates both new and existing improvement projects and initiatives, whether already in progress or still in a planning phase.

Figure 5 provides an overview of the objectives and core improvement areas included in the MdE. As shown in the Figure, the five goals of the MdE coincide with the three original objectives of the baseline measurement report, and includes two additional objectives, derived from the OWCS's Onderwijsagenda 2018-2022, and the Curaçao Government Program 2022-2025.

**Figure 5 Overview Programma Mehorashon di Enseñansa (MdE) 2023-2028**



Source: Programma Mehorashon di Enseñansa 2023-2028.

Based on the MdE's objectives, five core improvements were identified, each of which corresponds with several projects to be implemented in the 2023-2028 period. The improvement of the education-labor force connection is included in core improvement IV. Onderwijskwaliteit.

A Program Management Organization (PMO) will be in charge of the daily coordination, monitoring, and management of the MdE, as well as overseeing the program budget and project planning activities. As of mid-June 2024, no PMO had been assigned to manage the MdE. There are several projects in the MDE that are scheduled to be completed no later than the end of 2024. Table 3 provides an overview of these projects.

**Table 3 MdE projects to be finalized in 2024**

Project name	Core improvements
I. Digitalization (Digitalisering)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Student monitoring system</li> <li>2. Microsoft 365</li> <li>3. Devices for OWCS ministry</li> <li>4. Data Analytics Center</li> <li>5. Promoting expertise schools and OWCS ministry (digital literacy)</li> </ol>
II. Educational Offering (Onderwijsaanbod)	-
III. Educational system (Onderwijssysteem)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Financial and personal self-management Dienst Openbare Scholen (DOS)</li> <li>2. National Ordinance Educational Supervision (LOT), School safety planning, Higher education.</li> <li>3. Increase the attractiveness of teacher occupation (including legal status and provisions)</li> <li>4. Operationalization Educational Council</li> </ol>
IV. Quality of education (Onderwijskwaliteit)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Language policy schools</li> <li>2. Expansion comprehensive school concept</li> <li>3. Implementation school development plans</li> <li>4. Professional development teaching staff</li> <li>5. Promotion connection pre-schooling programs and primary education curriculum</li> </ol>
V. Educational locations (Onderwijshuisvesting)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sustainable locations/accommodation planning schools</li> </ol>

Source: Programma Mehorashon di Enseñansa 2023-2028.

### *Kibrahacha*

Kibrahacha is a collaboration that was established in 2019, among sixteen teacher training institutions and (primary) schools in Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao. Kibrahacha's overarching goal is to strengthen education on the islands through continuously developing and safeguarding the best possible curriculum, and to train the Caribbean teacher of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Kibrahacha, 2024).

The need for the Caribbean teacher of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is underscored by the ongoing severe shortage of teachers in primary and secondary education on the islands, and by the fact that many newcomers on the islands do not speak Dutch or the native language. Through the offering of, among other things, training, upgrading, and other programs and courses, Kibrahacha is focusing on bringing about solutions for the islands, while paying ample attention to the Caribbean context and multilingualism. Kibrahacha commissioned a Manpower Planning for the education system of all three islands.<sup>12</sup> The official results have not been published yet.

### *Ban sembra awe pa kosechá mayan*

In 2019, the Curaçao Chamber of Commerce (the Chamber) published a position paper containing a structural transformation plan, aimed at reviving the Curaçao economy and attaining a higher sustainable level of welfare for all inhabitants. The title of this paper is 'Ban sembra awe pa kosechá mayan' (Let's sow today, so we can reap tomorrow) (KVK, 2019).

According to the Chamber, the lack of vision and effective policy in Curaçao led the economy to become aged, unproductive, and distanced from the world economy, while facing dwindling investments, and high unemployment rates. The Chamber stressed the need for a major revision of Curaçao's course, by investing in people and productivity, to guarantee a healthy economy that is connected to the world, and that can provide a decent level of welfare for every inhabitant.

In light of current efforts to improve the education-labor market connection in Curaçao, the Chamber reaffirmed its belief in the need for structural economic transformation, in which the alignment of the education system with the labor market plays a crucial role. Lastly, the Chamber stressed the importance of switching to an education system that is (primarily) based on English, given the language's global relevance and predominance in business, and life in general.

### *Manifest Inclusive Labor Market*

In 2023, the Social & Economic Council Curaçao (SER), the International Labour Organization Caribbean (ILO Caribbean), Human Rights Defense Curaçao (HRDC), and the University of Curaçao

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<sup>12</sup> Plan van aanpak Arbeidsmarktanalyse (October 2023, January 2024)

(UoC) set up a joint manifest, aimed at the realization of an inclusive labor market in Curaçao (SER/ ILO/ HRDC/ UoC, 2023).

Together, the four organizations formed a solid theoretical and practical base for the formulation of policies and guidelines that contribute to the strengthening of Curaçao's labor market, and increase its effectiveness. One of proposals included in the manifest is the evaluation and revision of higher and technical vocational education, aimed at the improved aligning thereof with the labor market.

Given the constantly evolving demands of the labor market, the four organizations deem it crucial to invest in inclusive education that stays on top of labor market developments. They also emphasize the importance of lifelong learning, as this contributes positively to a dynamic and flexible labor force.

Other proposed intervention include the installment of a digital vacancy matching system, the promotion of qualified migration that meets the needs of the labor market, the facilitation of entrepreneurship for locals and migrants alike, and the promotion of equal rights for women, including those with a migrant background.

The manifest calls for multidisciplinary dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders, as this is considered an invaluable instrument for realizing an inclusive labor market, in which the complexities that arise from Curaçao's varied demographical, socioeconomic, and cultural background, are viewed as strengths that should be tapped into to realize sustainable welfare and wellbeing for all (SER/ ILO/ HRDC/ UoC, 2023).

#### *Raad van Onderwijs en Arbeidsmarkt (ROA)*

The Raad van Onderwijs en Arbeidsmarkt (ROA), Curaçao's Council for Education and Labor Market, was instated in October 2019. The ROA plays an important role in improving the education-labor market connection in Curaçao.

The ROA provides advice to the OWCS Minister, and through him also to other ministers, regarding developments in education and on the local labor market.<sup>13</sup> The ROA's tasks include, among other things, advising the OWCS Minister concerning which courses to recognize, and which competencies, final terms, and curriculum requirements to stipulate for secondary vocational courses, and specialization courses.

During the last three years, the ROA has been revising the final terms and curriculum requirements of the secondary vocational courses (which had last been revised in 2003). For this purpose, the ROA has been working closely with several public policy departments, subject matter specialists, and trade and industry representatives. The revision procedure is depicted in Figure 6.

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<sup>13</sup>Landsbesluit Raad van Onderwijs en Arbeidsmarkt (P.B. 2019, no. 20).

**Figure 6 Procedure for revising secondary vocational courses**



Source: Raad van Onderwijs en Arbeidsmarkt (ROA) / Ministerie OWCS.

One of the crucial aspects the ROA has been focusing on is making the description and contents of programs and courses not only up to date, but also relevant and attractive. The outdated descriptions of certain studies and programs often led to many students not choosing them.

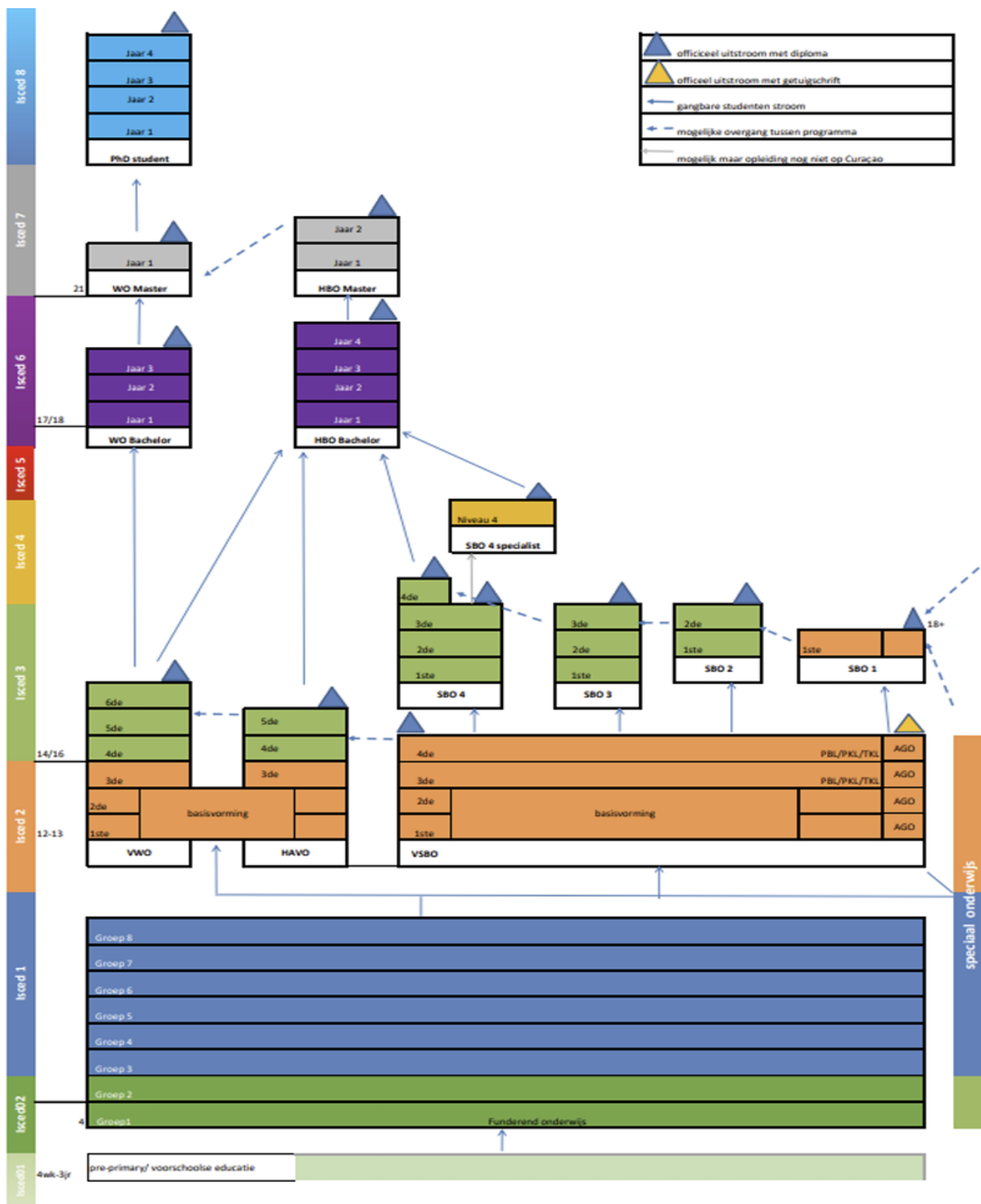
The census 2023 data revealed that in several studies and programs in the technical/industry/construction field and the IT field, boys are overrepresented (up to 88%). Meanwhile, girls are often overrepresented (up to 89%) in studies in the educational field, and in the field of human health and welfare (CBS, 2024). Making the necessary adjustments in the description and contents of programs and courses is helpful to create a more gender-balanced educational landscape.

According to the ROA, Curaçao has almost 90 recognized secondary vocational courses, with approximately 40,000 competency terms. So far, the ROA has updated the terms of more than half of the secondary vocational studies, and is progressing steadily with the remainder, with the aim of realizing a seamless education-labor market connection (OWCS, Stand per 1 december 2023, 2023).

## IV.II Educational path

Curaçao's educational system is largely based on the Netherlands' educational system. Both systems consist of different educational levels, from primary school to post-graduate education. The flowchart in Figure 7 shows the different educational paths that students can follow in the Curaçao education system, taking both their learning abilities, and interests into account.

Figure 7 Flowchart educational system Curaçao



For any given student, entry to the labor market cannot take place before they are 16 years old, because juveniles are only allowed to work from the age of 16. However, school attendance remains compulsory up until the age of 18, unless the juvenile has attained one of the predetermined secondary level diplomas that grants exoneration from attending school: a VSBO TKL, VSBO PKL, HAVO, or VWO diploma, or an equivalent diploma.<sup>14</sup> This setup was designed to motivate students to continue studying until they have obtained at least one diploma, before joining the labor market.

Once a student obtains their first diploma, they can opt to continue studying full-time, start working full-time, or combine study with work. Data from the 2023 census data reveals that the education participation rate of both male and female juveniles drops after the age of 16 (CBS, 2024). Still, the large majority of juveniles opt to continue their studies, whether they combine this with a job or not (CBS, 2021).

#### **IV.III Selected educational and other characteristics**

This section discusses a few educational and other characteristics of Curaçao's population and labor force. CBS Curaçao reports on the population's educational levels and fields according to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED). The most commonly used ISCED levels to report on Curaçao's population education can also be categorized in overall levels (CBS, 2021), namely:

Low level: ISCED 02, ISCED 1, ISCED 2 (general), ISCED 2 (vocational)  
 Mid-level: ISCED 3 (general), ISCED 3 (vocational), ISCED 4 & 5<sup>15</sup>  
 High level: ISCED 6, ISCED 7, ISCED 8.

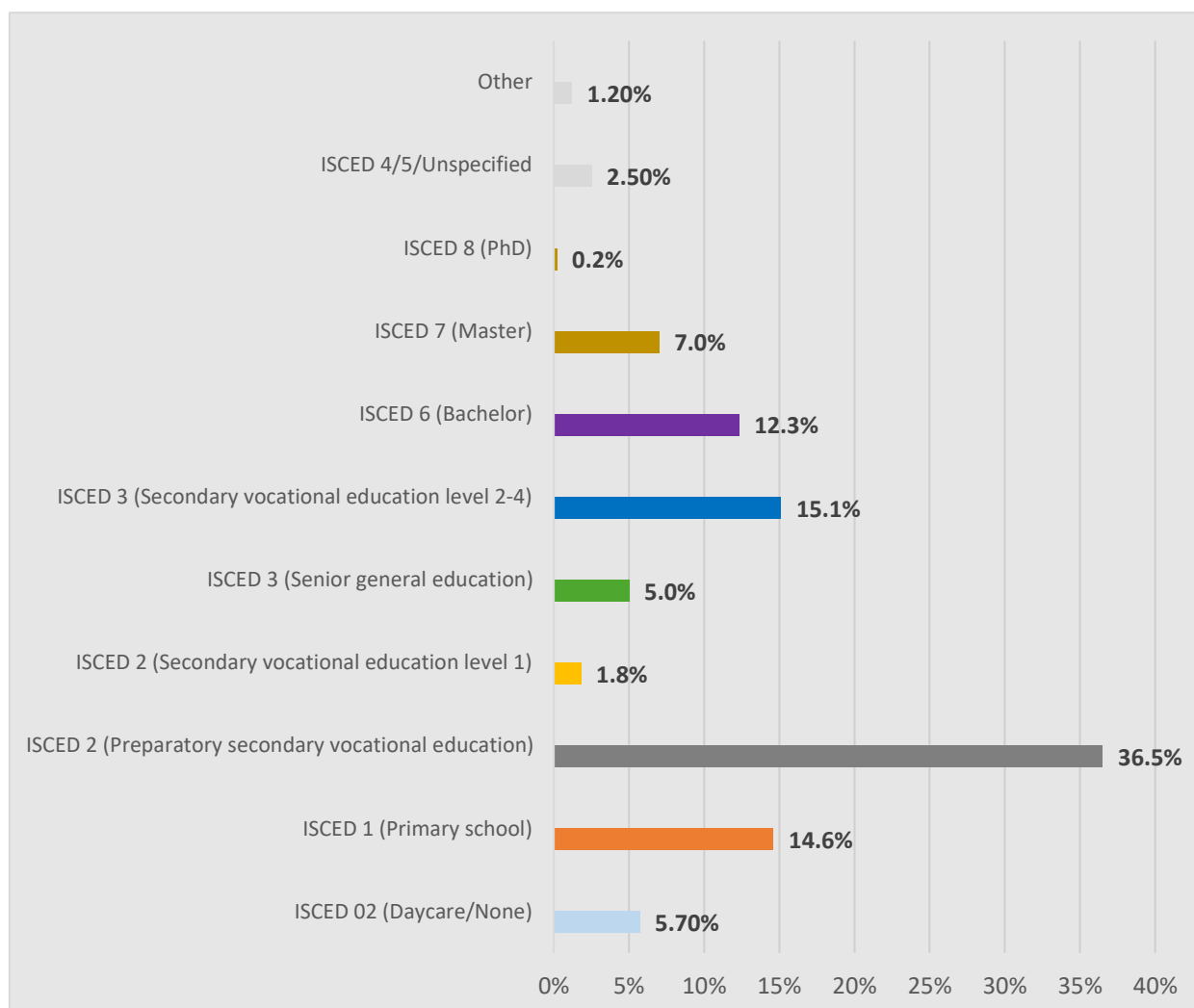
The 2023 census data reveals that the highest attained educational level of Curaçao's population aged 15+ is very diverse. As Figure 8 shows, 58.7% of the population aged 15+ that is not following day-time education has a highest educational level that can be categorized as 'low': ISCED 02 (5.7%), ISCED 1 (14.6%), and ISCED 2 (38.4%).

Meanwhile, 20.1% and 19.5%, has a mid-level education (ISCED 3) and a high-level education (ISCED 6-8), respectively (highest completed level). Overall, more than three quarters of the population aged 15+ not following day-time education finished an upper secondary education (ISCED 3-level) or lower.

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<sup>14</sup> Subject to approval by the Minister of Education.

<sup>15</sup> According to the Labor force survey 2020, ISCED 4 and ISCED 5 did not exist on Curaçao (yet).

**Figure 8 Population 15+ not following education by highest completed education level**

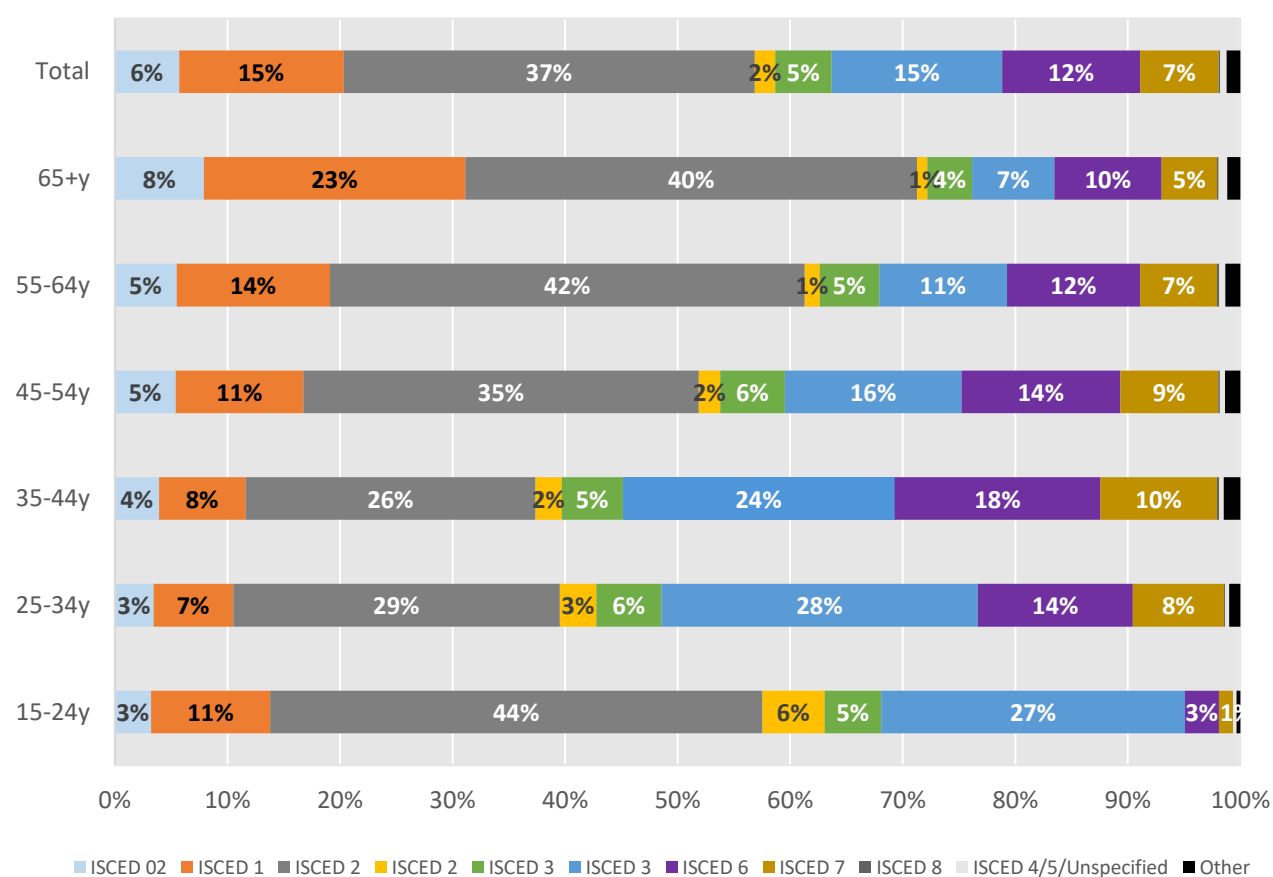
Source: CBS Census 2023.

A breakdown of Curaçao's population aged 15+ not following day-time education by age and by highest completed education level shows that the group aged 35-44 has the highest share of individuals with a higher education diploma (ISCED 6-8). By contrast, the youth aged 15-24 has the lowest overall level of education, followed by the population aged 65+ (See Figure 9).

The youth can be considered a special group in this context, given that some opt to take a break from school after obtaining their (first) diploma, for example, to work and earn some money. Meanwhile, others in this age group indicated that they are planning to move abroad to continue their studies (CBS, 2024).

The census data revealed that the population aged 65+ comprises the larger part of those without any education (ISCED 02), and of those who have only completed primary education (ISCED 1). Many in this age group also have a highest completed education level that corresponds with ISCED 2. Since education was not compulsory before 1992, a significant share of the population aged 65+ may not have had many opportunities to educate themselves (further) when they were younger. This was especially the case for women (CBS, 2024) (CBS, 2024).

**Figure 9** Population 15+ not following day-time education by age & highest completed education level

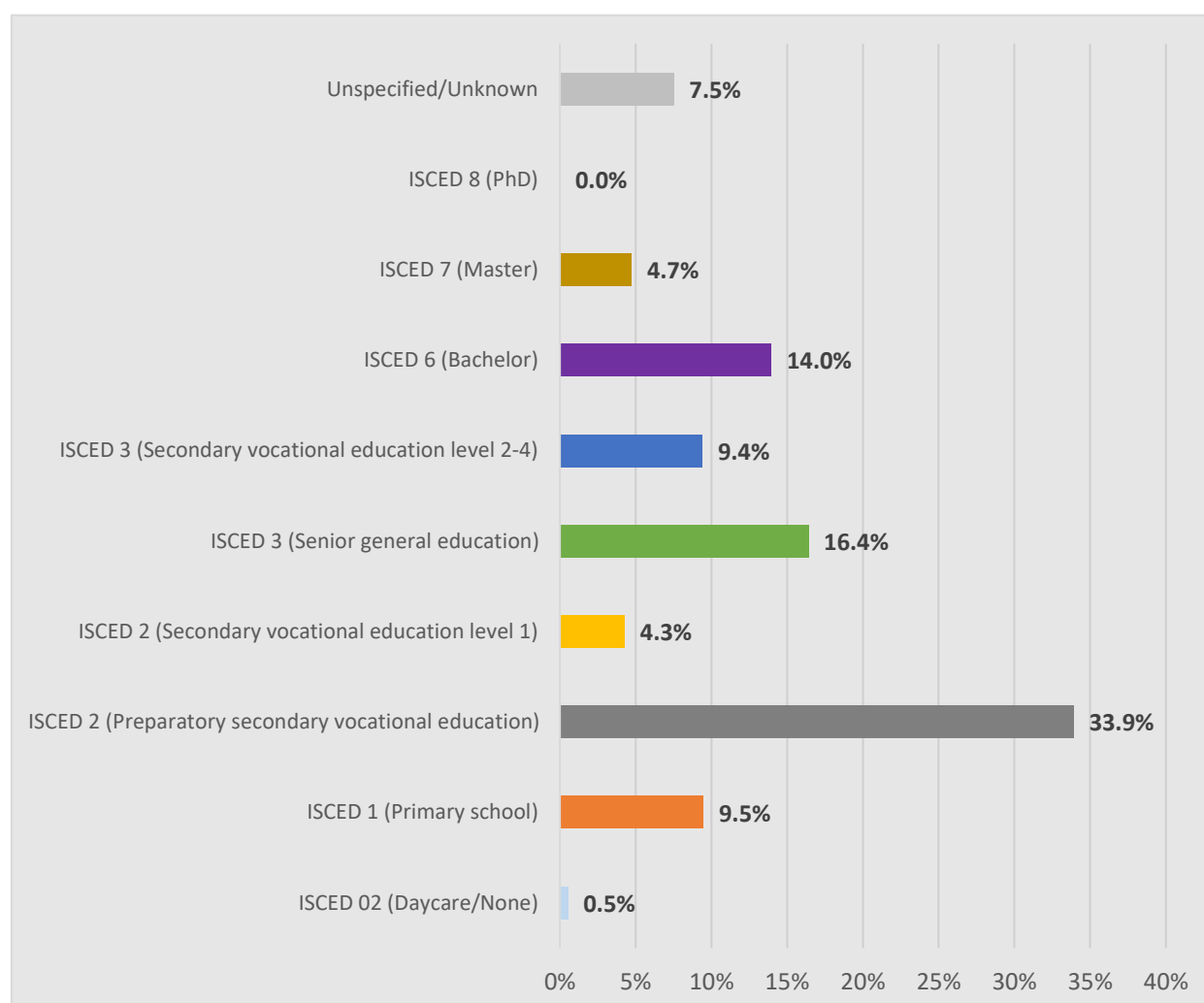


Source: CBS Census 2023.

Data collected by the CBS during the 2020 labor force survey reveals that a large part of the unemployed population aged 15+ completed either a general/basic education (29%), or an education in the technical/industrial/construction field (21%). Given the reported labor shortages in the construction section, in particular, the latter unemployment rate points to a mismatch between the educational background and skills of the unemployed, and the demands of the labor market.

An analysis of the unemployed population aged 15+ (including those who are still attending school) by highest completed education level, shows that 33.9% finished a preparatory secondary vocational education level (ISCED 2). The second largest group among of the unemployed aged 15+ (16.4%) completed a senior general education (ISCED 3), as shown in Figure 10. Meanwhile, 14% of the unemployed has attained a bachelor's degree (ISCED 6). These percentages refer to the highest finished educational level.

**Figure 10 Unemployed population aged 15+ by highest completed education level**

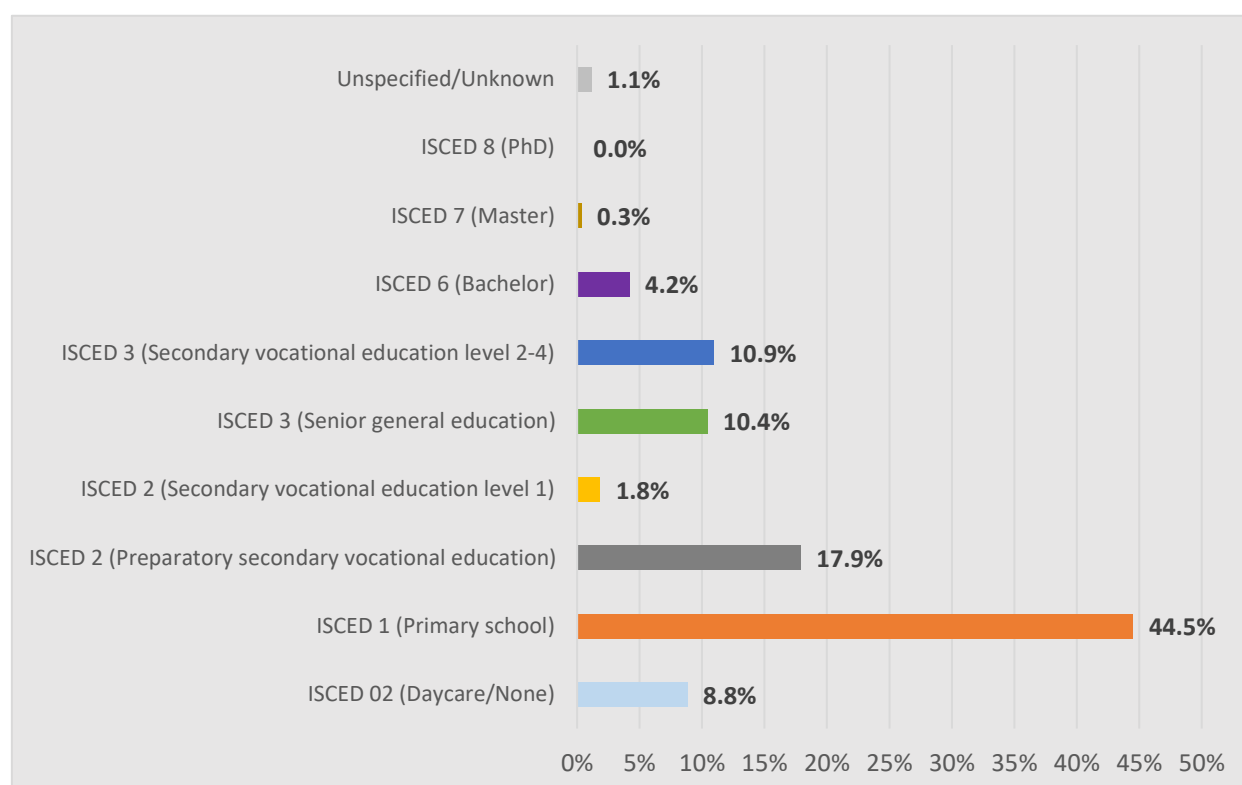


Source: CBS Labor force survey 2020.

Further analysis of the unemployed whose highest completed education is at the ISCED 2-level shows that those aged 55-64 form the largest group (25.4%). One possible explanation for this is that the population cohort aged 55-64 may not have had many opportunities to educate themselves (further) during their youth, similar to the population aged 65+ (CBS, 2024).

However, the group aged 25-34, comprised 20.7% of the unemployed with an ISCED 2-level education as their highest finished education. The majority of this group was born after school attendance became compulsory in 1992 for children aged 4-18. Therefore, the relatively high unemployment among those aged 25-34 might reflect different underlying causes. One of the possible causes might be that joining the labor market after completing only a preparatory secondary (vocational) education does not commonly reflect high employability. After all, the main objective of this level of education is to prepare students to continue with an upper secondary (vocational) education (ISCED 3-level).

**Figure 11 Population attending day-time school by education level**



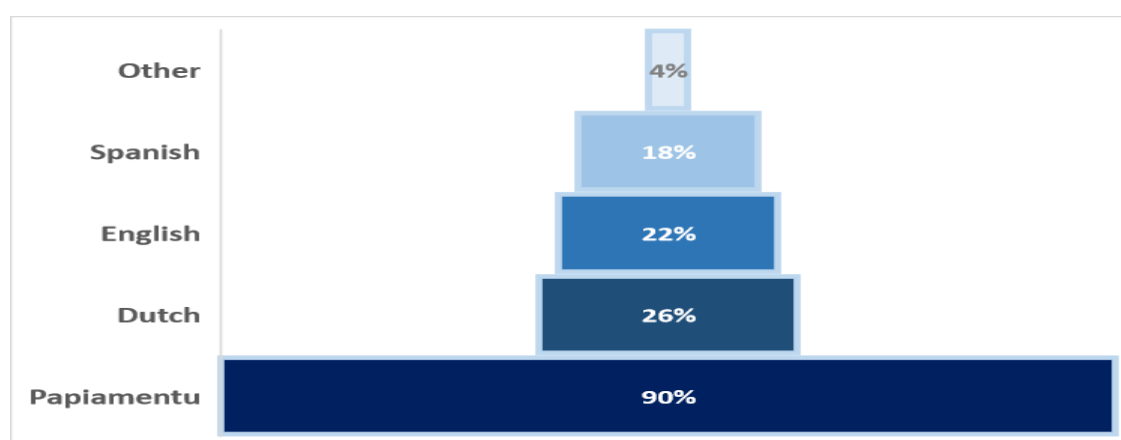
Source: CBS Census 2023.

A breakdown of Curaçao's population by level of education reveals that the largest group attending day-time school is in primary school (44.5%), followed by the group following preparatory secondary vocational education (17.9%). Meanwhile, more than one fifth of the population is following an ISCED-3 level education. As shown in Figure 11, less than 5% of those following education during daytime are studying for a Bachelor, Master, or PhD degree.

A breakdown of the languages spoken on Curaçao shows that the majority of the population speaks several languages, of which Papiamentu is most frequently spoken. A ranking of the languages by frequency of being spoken at home is as follows:

First: Papiamentu (78%) – Spanish (8.4%) – Dutch (7.9%) – English (3.8%)  
 Second: Dutch (11.6%) – English (10.8%) – Papiamentu (9.9%) – Spanish (5.9%)  
 Third: English (7.5%) – Dutch (6.9%) – Spanish (3.7%) – Papiamentu (2.0%).

**Figure 12 Population by language most spoken at home (no specific order)**



Source: CBS Census 2023.

Based on these rankings, Papiamentu is spoken at home by 90% of the population, followed by Dutch (26%), English (22%), and Spanish (18%). These percentages do not reflect the specific order in which the languages are spoken at home, but show the total share of the respondents that speak these languages (See Figure 12). The percentages are indicative of the multilingualism and multiculturalism in Curaçao's society.

## V. GAP ANALYSIS EDUCATION-LABOR MARKET

The factors contributing to the existing gap between Curaçao's education and its labor market are diverse. Figure 13 provides an overview of the main factors that have been identified so far. These factors will be discussed in the following sections, followed by considerations on how to improve the connection between education and the labor market.

As indicated in Figure 13, youth unemployment registered at 15% in 2023, while the NEET indicator ranged between 17-23% in 2020. The NEET provides an indication of how well the education system and the labor market are connected. Curaçao's 2020 NEET indicates that at least 17% of the youth was not economically productive in that year, nor were they actively working on improving their skills, knowledge, or economic status.

However, not developing crucial skills that are needed in the labor market (and life in general), may lead to many (relative) disadvantages for the NEET youth later on in life. Reducing the number of NEET youth on Curaçao is therefore crucial, not only for the young, but also for the country's economic growth prospects. No NEET-indicator has been published for 2023 yet.

### V.I Causes of the gap

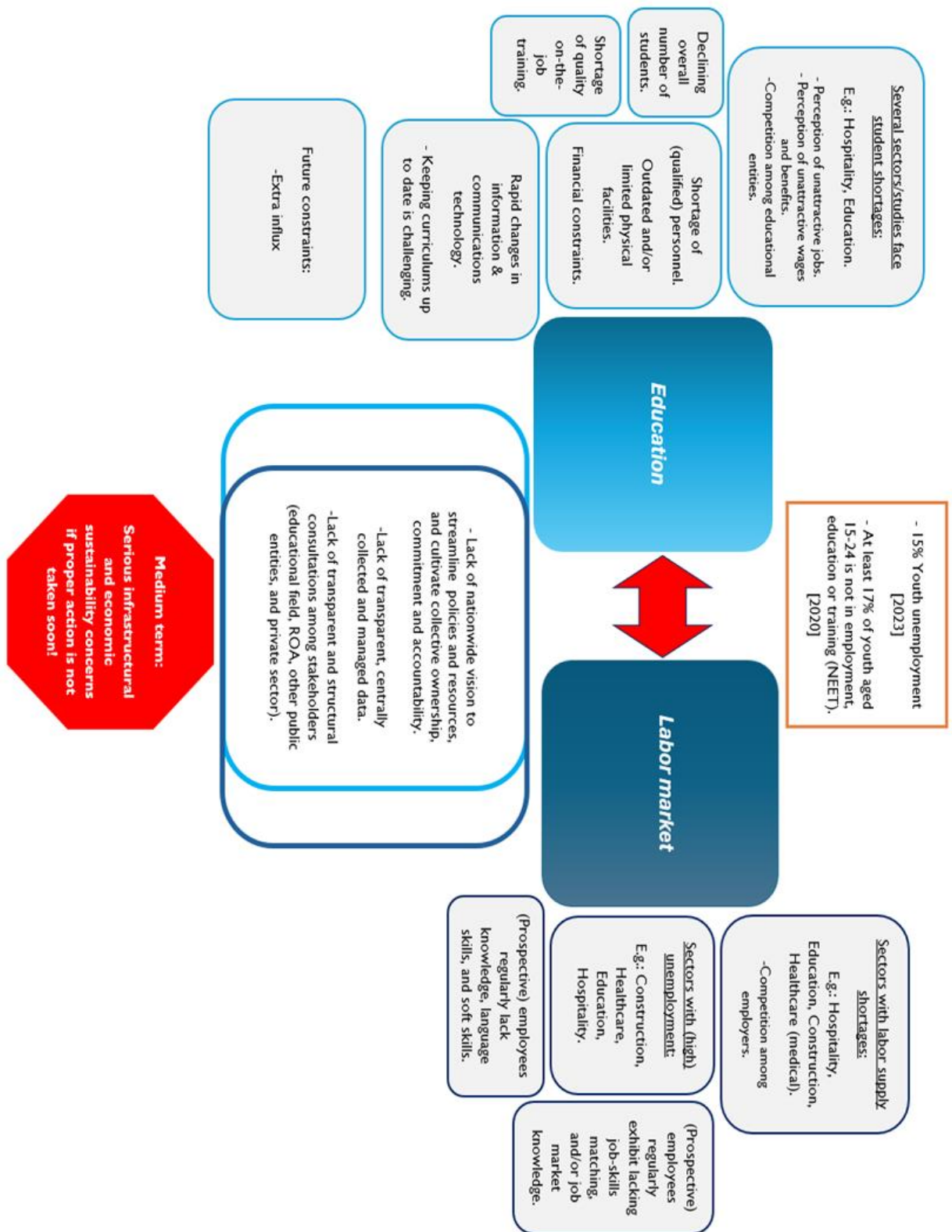
There are many causes of the existing gap between Curaçao's education and its labor market. Stakeholders in the educational field often cite constraints related to personnel, physical facilities, and equipment, as well as structural financial bottlenecks. These constraints pose significant daily challenges for many that are working in education, and often makes it difficult to keep up with the needs of the labor market.

One commonly mentioned argument for the suboptimal education-labor market connection is that employers in the private sector are often unwilling to invest in students/prospective workers through the supply of sufficient high-added-value on-the job training. As a result, students frequently do not get a chance to properly explore the world of work before they join the labor market.

The low pay, unattractive benefits, and dismal professional growth prospects offered in certain private sector branches and jobs are also thought to play a role in students avoiding them, despite the shortages on the labor market. The fact that many jobs in the hospitality industry, for example, pay the minimum wage, or close to the minimum wage, is thought to discourage many students (and/or their parents) from pursuing related studies or careers.

Employers and other stakeholders outside the educational field, on the other hand, often cite the lack of skills-matching guidance offered to students during their education, which would help students to choose study programs and jobs that better suit their specific talents and skills.

**Figure 13 Education-labor market connection**



Source: Baseline measurement report, CBS Labor force survey 2020, Census 2023, and discussions with stakeholders.

According to employers, (prospective) employees often also lack market orientation, which leads to suboptimal career choices and work performance. The knowledge, language skills and soft skills of (prospective) employees are also mentioned as areas that require improvement.

A point of view that recurs often is that neither the Raad van Onderwijs en Arbeidsmarkt (ROA) nor the work that it is doing, are visible or tangible enough to others. Several stakeholders have indicated that they were excited and optimistic when the ROA was first instated, but that since then, not much seems to be happening at ROA's end. As a result, some stakeholders have expressed their desire to have a different ROA put in place: a ROA that can operate (fairly) independently, without political interference or pressures, to tangibly improve the connection between the Curaçao's education and its labor market.

The viewpoint of the ROA in this respect is that it is limited by its mandate. Pursuant to the current legislation, the ROA provides advice to the OWCS Minister, and through him also to other ministers, regarding developments in education and on the local labor market.<sup>16</sup> ROA works closely with several public policy departments, subject matter specialists, and trade and industry representatives, to accomplish its goals. Although more than half of final term revisions have been completed so far, these results are not widely known. Installing a full-fledged ROA (similar to ROA-CN<sup>17</sup>) will require legislative changes, plus additional resources (finances and personnel).

## **V.II The education-labor market connection: now and in the future**

Several stakeholders indicate that the gap between Curaçao's education and its labor market is not new. Over the years, there have been several initiatives, working groups, commissions, programs, and projects aimed at improving this connection. However, few structural improvements have been achieved so far.

The same sectors that are facing labor shortages now, were reportedly already facing those before the COVID period. Moreover, these labor shortages are expected to only increase in the medium term, that is, in the next 5 years (2025-2030). The rationale behind this expectation is the Curaçao government's focus on tourism as the main economic growth driver. The last several years, with the refinery remaining closed, tourism has developed into the main economic activity, prompting the government to focus even more on this sector.

However, if touristic activities on the island continue to expand, this is expected to exacerbate the excess demand for labor in the hospitality sector in the medium term. The same can be expected in

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<sup>16</sup> Landsbesluit Raad van Onderwijs en Arbeidsmarkt (P.B. 2019, no. 20).

<sup>17</sup> Raad Onderwijs Arbeidsmarkt Caribisch Nederland (ROA CN) is the Council for Education and Labor Market of the Caribbean Netherlands (Bonaire, Sint Eustatius, and Saba).

the construction sector, as a result of the construction of several hotels. Moreover, since many workers in both sectors will be hired from abroad, it is expected that the influx of people will create additional challenges because of extra demand for the limited resources on the island.

Some examples of the challenges expected in the next few years include rising housing demand, extra demand for utilities (e.g., electricity), longer waiting times for health care treatments, more traffic on the roads, and extra demand for education facilities. In other words, the expected growth in tourism in the next few years will require the existing infrastructure on the island to “grow” accordingly. Failure to plan and effectuate the needed infrastructural expansion could have detrimental consequences for the island, which would in the end also hamper tourism.

### **V.III Additional concerns**

Besides the considerations related to tourism growth, stakeholders expressed other concerns that are either directly or indirectly related to the education-labor market connection.

Technological innovations, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), and the increased use of robots/machines or other technologies to replace human workers, are expected to create new challenges in the world of work in the near future. The expectation is that digital skills will be required even in jobs that currently do not require those skills (the future of work). Given these expectations, the educational system must incorporate the skills that will be needed in the future, as soon as possible. Failure to do so will only lead to a bigger mismatch between the education system and the labor market.

One concern expressed by the Chamber of Commerce is that not enough emphasis is placed on providing English-based education. Given the current technological and other developments in the world, the Chamber thinks it is imperative that students are taught in English from a young age. This will improve their chances of success in the future.

The Chamber underscored that research has shown that students from the Dutch Caribbean islands are more successful when they pursue English-based higher education, compared to Dutch-based education. Therefore, the emphasis in Curaçao’s education should be placed on English, rather than Dutch, as is currently the case. After all, English is spoken worldwide, in contrast to Dutch.

Most of the stakeholders that were consulted indicate that the suboptimal connection between Curaçao’s education system and its labor market is due to a lack of vision and leadership within the government. Many feel that those in charge of drafting strategies, and making and/or executing policies, often focus on short-term goals, and/or projects that benefit only some parts of the population.

Against this background, many stakeholders feel that to effectively and efficiently improve Curaçao’s education, the government must start by defining a clear vision and strategy for a multi-annual period,

and work on getting as many as possible on board with the chosen path. Without a targeted and united approach, many fear there will be no lasting improvements to the education system, the labor market, nor their connection.

Given the brain drain Curaçao has been experiencing for years now, due to students remaining abroad once they finish their studies, several stakeholders proposed increasing the attractiveness of staying on the island. One common proposal to accomplish this is the refurbishing and modernizing of the campus of the University of Curaçao. By converting the campus into a modern and attractive complex with state-of-the-art facilities and amenities, more students will opt to stay in Curaçao instead of going abroad. What is more, a modern complex will also serve to attract students from the region to come study in Curaçao.

## VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

The willingness expressed by stakeholders to contribute to the improvement of the connection between education and the labor market on Curaçao is vast, as this is seen as beneficial not only for the youth, but for the country as a whole.

The importance of creating a good connection between Curaçao's education system and its labor market cannot be overstated. Research has shown that education and skills development remain crucial in promoting employment, and addressing poverty and social exclusion, both within and outside work. In general, people with lower levels of educational attainment are less likely to be in employment or to take part in adult learning (European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, 2023).

An extensive literature review on the importance of the human capital accumulation for economic growth shows that several authors have found significant effects of education on overall economic growth and human prosperity (Osiobe, 2019).

As the world-of-work prepares to face the challenges posed by technological advances and climate change, it is increasingly crucial that the younger generation, but also other population groups, are granted opportunities and are motivated to master the skills that will allow them to thrive, both in daily life, and on the labor market.

In the specific case of Curaçao's multilingual students, research has shown that they perform significantly better in educational programs conducted in English, compared to those given in Dutch (AD, 2021). This point was also stressed upon by the Chamber of Commerce, a big proponent of English-based education becoming the focal point on the island.

However, as noted in the baseline measurement report, the strengths and opportunities created by the local youth's multilingualism and their multicultural upbringing barely get considered when education-related or labor market-related policies and interventions are designed. As such, the strength and potential inherent to the multilingualism and multiculturalism of Curaçao's youth do not get optimally utilized.

All these considerations lead to the following recommendations to improve the education-labor market connection:

1. The Curaçao government should define a clear vision and strategy for a multi-annual period, and work on getting as many stakeholders as possible on board. The International Monetary Fund (IMF)'s Public Financial Framework may be used to kick-start this process.

2. Install regular consultative rounds between stakeholders, both public and private, including ROA, employers, parents, and (ex)students that wish to participate.
3. Install a centrally operated and managed data collecting system, which allows for easy data sharing – not only for the education system, but for as many other public services and institutions as possible.
4. Accelerate the effective implementation of the Programma Mehorashon di Enseñansa, and create widespread commitment and accountability by promoting the program as a nationwide mission that everyone should to be onboard with, given its many current and future benefits for all.
5. Facilitate more research by the CBS, by the ministries, and other institutions. This will benefit policymaking, execution, and evaluation. Without proper data and analysis, timely and effective fiscal policy often becomes ad hoc, more challenging, and cost inefficient.
6. Set up programs and initiatives that tap into the Curaçao students' multilingualism and their multicultural upbringing, and help them realize their potential.
7. Set up life-long learning programs and initiatives that tap into the skills, potential and experience of Curaçao's population, especially the (somewhat) elderly, who are becoming the largest part of the population due to ageing. The older generation possesses valuable knowledge and experience that may be used to train the youth, to the mutual benefit of both groups, and the benefit of Curaçao.
8. Convert the campus of the University of Curaçao into a modern and attractive complex with state-of-the art facilities and amenities, to attract both local and foreign students.

## VII. CONCLUSION

The objective behind this labor market analysis is to contribute to the realization of a good connection between Curaçao's education system and its labor market. Especially for a small open economy like Curaçao's, the challenges that lie ahead are many.

Current and future developments in, for example, AI and other technologies, Curaçao's demography (ageing, dejuvenating, and migration), infrastructural and environmental stresses (due to e.g., improperly managed tourism and other economic activities), will result in challenges that call for timely and effective planning and management.

At the same time, these challenges may also form steppingstones, leading to new opportunities. Firstly, the challenges ahead create the perfect breeding ground for creating a widely shared vision and strategy that allows for constructive cooperation and collaboration.

Secondly, technological changes, including AI, also bring along opportunities to enhance human work and intellect, as such creating possibilities to increase overall productivity, and augment welfare. Lastly, infrastructural, and environmental interventions may lead to upgrades that make the island more resilient to, for example, global warming and climate change.

Against this background, a good connection between education and the labor market matters greatly, to capacitate both the youth and other groups of society to prepare themselves so that they can thrive, and contribute positively to Curaçao's development, in as many areas as possible. A solid education-labor market connection is beneficial to all, both now and in the future.

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## APPENDIX

### Overview schools in Curaçao

Education level	Name
Secondary education	VSBO Juan Pablo Duarte VSBO Juan Pablo Duarte AGO Geertruida G.E.Kroonschool Gouv. Laufferschool Skol Avansá Amador Nita VSO-ZMLK Marieta Alberto SGO J. Ferrandi SGO Goslinga Basisvorming Kolegio Hoben Positivo Kolegio Erasmo VSBO St. Jozef Ancilla Domini VSBO Maria College VSBO St. Paulus Pierre Laufferschool Ignatius College Joseph Civilis Triniteit College Middelbare Technische School Instituto pa Formashon den Enfermeria (IFE) New Song College Albert Schweitzer Parera Marnix Cas Cora Marnix Rio Canario Maria Immaculata Lyseum Radulphus Kolegio Alejandro Paula Dr. Albert Schweitzer HAVO-VWO  Nilda Pinto SBO / Alejo J. Colin Valerian Frater Aurelio SBO Eligia Martir SBO Maris Stella SBO College of the Dutch Caribbean (CDC) Opleidingen & Trainingen Curaçao (OTC) Alliance Center for Education (ACE) Vivente SBO
Higher education	University of Curaçao (UoC) University of the Dutch Caribbean (UDC) Instituto pa Formashon den Enfermeria (IFE) Intercontinental University of the Caribbean (ICUC)
Private schools (combo)	Curaçao American Preparatory School International School of Curaçao Pipita Basisschool Klein College H.J.A. Schroederschool SKAIH Miguel Pourier Academy Muchanan Balente / Hoben Balente College Curaçao Advanced International Secondary School Vespucci College

Source: Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports; own research.