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Executive Council

The State Secretary of the Interior and Kingdom Relations
Mr. E. van Marum
Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations
Postbus 20011 2500 EA Den Haag
CC: [REDACTED]

Your number (letter):

Your letter of:

Our number: **371/2025**

Subject: Reaction to 'Focused Growth' report

Saba, October 22, 2025

Dear Mr. van Marum,

It is with great interest that the Executive Council of the Public Entity Saba (PES) received the report 'Focused Growth' by the State Committee Demographic Developments. The Executive Council recognizes that Saba's population is changing and growing, which impacts the physical environment, public services, Saba's culture, and the economy. In a small community like Saba, small demographic changes can have major impacts on the quality of life on the island.

This response has been informed by the engagement between the working groups of Public Entity Saba and the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations (BZK) in preparation of the Cabinet Response. It sets out the views of the Executive Council towards expected demographic development on the island, how this influences current and future policy development, and the challenges associated with trends in demographic growth.

Population scenarios

The report sets out three scenarios for 2050 based on an existing population of 2,060 in 2024:

- A. A low-migration variant in the hypothetical situation that the Saba University School of Medicine (SUSOM) closes resulting in a population decline to 1,500;
- B. The middle variant where the population will follow existing patterns to grow to 2,400;
- C. A high-migration variant where the local economy develops further resulting in growth to 3,700.

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Even though recent CBS projections have lowered the expected population growth from 2,400 to 2,300 in 2050, the reality is that Saba's population is already growing faster than projected. At the start of 2025, census data registered 2,158 people on Saba (a 5% increase since 2024).

Hence, either the middle growth scenario (B) or the high-growth scenario (C) is most likely to take place, with preference for moderate population growth as the island's infrastructure and services capacity may not be able to absorb significant population growth.

The high-migration scenario (C) is less preferable as there are doubts that the island has the capacity to house this many people, whilst also preserving the qualities that make Saba special. As population growth is mostly due to migration and not birth rate, this scenario implies a significant change in the culture on the island with the local population being outnumbered, which is not desirable.

Demographic developments only tell part of the story on Saba. The planned new harbor is expected to attract new investment in the tourism sector. On Saba, the planned harbor and new tourism facilities will significantly shape capacity needs, as both residents and visitors determine the total demand on infrastructure, space and services.

Measures in place and ongoing (short term response)

Public Entity Saba is already taking steps to prepare the island for a growing and changing population through various local initiatives and policies. The following policies and plans are at different stages of development and implementation. The status of each is detailed in the description provided.

Economy:

- A Tourism Masterplan has been developed that sets out a vision for high-end ecotourism.
- Development of a Strategic Economic Plan starts in 2025. This economic strategy will be aligned with the spatial development plan and will provide key directions for sectoral growth of the labor market and associated required demand of migrant workers. The Strategic Economic Plan is also about developing local talent and attracting/holding onto foreign talent.
- Structures that contribute to the cost of living, such as regional trade barriers and regional connectivity (physical and digital) need to be addressed.

Health, well-being and social cohesion:

- A Climate Plan is in development to adapt the island to climate change.
- The strategic document 'Public Health on Saba: Our Journey Towards a Healthier Tomorrow 2023-2026' includes objectives for promoting health, including immunization, nutrition, healthy lifestyle, infectious diseases, non-communicable diseases, mental health, sports and play.
- The Community Development and Culture Policy Plan (2025-2028) focuses on promoting the well-being of all Saban residents, and includes objectives regarding Social Support, Domestic Safety, Youth Development, Education, and Culture.

- A Culture Policy is implemented that sets out how Saba's culture is preserved, enhanced and celebrated.

Housing and spatial planning:

- A Spatial Development Plan is being prepared that will set out a strategy for how the island will develop whilst preserving the cultural and natural heritage and benefiting the local community. The plan aims to provide a framework to guide infrastructure, housing and commercial investment whilst keeping within the island's boundaries.
- Signed a Letter of Intent with the Ministry of BZK/VRO and local housing partners to build around 50 affordable homes by 2030. Efforts are being made to introduce regulations and a rental housing committee to encourage affordable rental houses. Data on housing need is required to progress a housing vision and determine the type of homes needed.
- Nature Environment and Policy Plan enters a new phase with uncertainty around available funding at the local level, limiting the possibility to manage impacts of growth and development on the environment.
- The Monuments Ordinance is being implemented by the listing of historic buildings to preserve them for future generations under increasing development pressure on the scarce land.

Additional steps needed (medium- and long-term response)

To further prepare for a changing and growing population we recognize the need to take additional steps with support from the national government.

Migration:

- The Strategic Economic Plan will lay out what economic sectors and opportunities will contribute to Saba's long-term vision of well-being. A migration policy will be based on the economic strategy to align expected labor market demand. In line with recommendations of Bonaire and Statia, Saba may explore options to adapt immigration criteria to better fit the direction of economic growth. Specific regulations could enable focused growth of the economy, labor market, and population, while maintaining social cohesion.
- Foster social cohesion by encouraging people with historic or cultural connection to the islands to (re-)settle on Saba. While youth up to 30 years old is a primary target group, other groups can be encouraged such as older professionals with ties to the island.

Health, well-being and social cohesion:

- Continuous investment in healthy lifestyle promotion, including sports for all ages and opportunities to play for youth.
- To support growing and aging populations, quality basic healthcare services have to be offered on the island. Since Saba's population size will remain small even in the high-growth scenario, it is

imperative to invest in good referral mechanisms, connectivity, and regional cooperation for medical care.

Housing and spatial planning:

- Saba's long-term vision for focused growth requires an integrated approach, where a physical environment can encourage people to live healthy lifestyles and balance community, agricultural, commercial and natural land use. Preservation of monuments and heritage contributes to sense of belonging among island population. Affordable homes may encourage Saban diaspora to return and contribute to maintaining the Saban identity.

Throughout the planned approach, quality data and continuous monitoring is needed to understand how changes in population and economy affect long-term living environment on Saba. Data availability on economy and industries is limited, leading to an incomplete or inaccurate picture. Disaggregated data of the different groups in the community, including university students and seasonal residents, would help shape realistic policies and programs. Accurate and up-to-date data is essential to effectively prepare for focused growth and future demographic changes, ensuring that development contributes to the overall well-being and prosperity of Saba's residents.

In addition, co-ordination between ministries in European Netherlands can be improved to ensure policies related to demographic development are considered in an integrated way. Integrated service delivery for our community is required for Saba, taking into account the size of the island, its population, and the capacity of its local government organization.

Conclusion

Public Entity recognizes that changes to the population of Saba are happening and that this impacts the physical environment, public services and the economy. The Focused Growth report by the State Committee Demographic Development is a starting point, providing the opportunity for an integrated vision for the island's future, steered by improved data insights and strengthened collaboration across departments – with the goal of developing effective policies and being able to manage future demographic developments. The Executive Council of the Public Entity Saba looks forward to continuing to work together with the relevant ministries and government agencies to plan for and monitor demographic changes on Saba.

Sincerely yours,

The Executive Council of the Public Entity Saba

The Island Secretary

The Island Governor

