

Letter of 20 February 2025 from the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development to the House of Representatives on International Development

The government is once again prioritising the interests of the Netherlands, including those within its Foreign Trade and Development portfolio.¹ This shift is in keeping with changing global power dynamics. We will be doing things differently from now on.

Firstly, in line with the framework coalition agreement, we will structurally reduce spending on international development by €2.4 billion, starting in 2027. Without this retrenchment, the subbudget for international development, within the overall budget for Foreign Trade and Development, would grow to €6.1 billion by 2029. In line with the framework coalition agreement, the budget will stand at €3.8 billion in 2029.² In real terms, this means that spending on international development will fall from 0.62% of the Netherlands' gross national income in 2024 to 0.44% in 2029.³

We will also make policy more relevant to Dutch taxpayers by explicitly linking international development to the interests of the Netherlands.

It is also important to remain realistic. The Netherlands is a country with broad shoulders and an outstanding international reputation, but we cannot solve all of the world's problems through international development. Moreover, international development in its current form has lost its focus and is too fragmented to be fully effective.⁴

The government is therefore making clear choices. Our activities will focus on three Dutch interests: trade and the economy, security and stability, and migration. We will promote these interests through programmes and diplomatic efforts in areas in which the Netherlands excels: water management, food security and health.

In other words, we will apply our strengths to achieve objectives that we consider important. We will do this in a limited number of countries, mainly in the vicinity of Europe. These are countries in which we carry weight and make a difference.

In time, we will phase out projects aimed at gender equality, vocational and higher education and sports and culture. We will also scale down efforts on climate, civil society and multilateral cooperation, while honouring existing contracts.

Naturally, we will continue to provide humanitarian aid to people in crisis situations. Humanitarian aid will remain an important element of Dutch foreign policy, and a substantial budget will be allocated to it.⁵

In short, we will focus more on our interests and on themes that support these interests. In doing so, we will explicitly seek out opportunities for cooperation that benefit both the Netherlands and the recipient country. Our aim is to contribute to more prosperity, more stability and less migration in the regions where the Netherlands is active, since those are the places where we can make a meaningful difference through international development.

This means we will be supporting the countries and people who are most in need of help while also investing in our own country.

¹ This letter to parliament describes the government's plans for international development. A separate letter to parliament on the Netherlands' trade policy will be published in the spring of 2025.

² A full summary of the budget is provided in the appendix.

³ See the policy document on the Homogeneous Budget for International Cooperation for 2025 and the central government budget for 2025.

⁴ [OECD Development Co-operation Peer Reviews: Netherlands 2023](#).

⁵ The government will elaborate on this in further detail in early 2025 in a letter to parliament on humanitarian aid.

Structure of this letter

In drafting this policy letter, we held targeted consultations with businesses, knowledge institutions, experts, young people and civil society organisations in the Netherlands and several partner countries. The text was also agreed with the other ministries involved.

This letter is structured as follows:

- **Section 1** concerns our commitment to serving Dutch interests: doing what's good for the Netherlands.
- **Section 2** concerns work on our core themes: doing what the Netherlands does best.
- **Section 3** concerns our ongoing humanitarian aid work: doing what is needed.
- **Section 4** describes the Netherlands' approach.
- **Section 5** sets out how the retrenchment has been structured and what choices have been made.

Appendix:

- Package of cutbacks to Foreign Trade and Development in the period from 2026 to 2030

1. Doing what's good for the Netherlands

The Netherlands will continue working to promote socioeconomic development in low- and middle-income countries. We will also help people in crisis situations. These objectives are in line with the Sustainable Development Goals.⁶ However, we will change the way we approach these tasks. We will take a more goal-oriented approach, focusing on areas that align with Dutch interests *and* on the needs of the countries we work with. Our own interests will be the point of departure in this regard: trade and the economy, security and stability, and migration.

1.1 Trade and the economy

The Netherlands is pre-eminently a trading nation. More than one-third of the income that underpins our prosperity is generated by the international activities of the Dutch business community. We want that to continue, and preferably increase. But this will require investment in growth markets, such as in Africa, a continent whose labour force is young and increasingly well educated, and which is rich in valuable natural resources.⁷

By strengthening the links between international development, trade and investment, we can use international development to strengthen our earning potential. This is a win-win solution, as it enables us to create opportunities for our businesses while contributing to economic growth and employment in low- and middle-income countries.

Here too, the government has chosen to sharpen its focus: we seek to enable our partner countries to become our trading partners. To that end, we will invest – where possible together with Dutch businesses – in improving legislation, strengthening local businesses, upgrading infrastructure, removing obstacles to trade and training workers.

We will also continue working to improve access to financial services, for example through the Dutch development bank FMO and through Invest International, which focuses mainly on Dutch businesses. With an eye to enhancing security of supply, we will also invest in sustainable energy. Where it will increase our impact or influence, we will work with international financial institutions and other organisations such as the United Nations, the World Bank and the EU.

Building on existing relationships

We will continue to build on our existing relationships with countries, but increasingly shift the focus to how these relationships can benefit us. This may lead to a shift of emphasis in our work in these countries.

Supporting businesses

In consultation with Dutch businesses, we will develop a strategy that strengthens cooperation, makes our instruments more effective and efficient, and eliminates unnecessary administrative burdens.⁸

We will work more closely with Dutch businesses to stimulate innovation and help find solutions to local problems. In this way, we can help businesses reinforce their market position in emerging markets. This combination of international development and trade will create additional opportunities for Dutch businesses (particularly SMEs) in 'combination countries'.⁹ We will work with other ministries, such as the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Food Security and Nature, on projects involving food security.

⁶ See [Government programme of the Schoof government](#) (September 2024, in Dutch).

⁷ [Africa Strategy 2023-2032](#), appendix to Parliamentary Paper 29 237, no. 183.

⁸ Consultations on trade interests illustrated the added value of dialogue with a wide range of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), large businesses and representatives, as these clarify the various prospects, opportunities and interests that international development represents for Dutch companies.

⁹ The 14 countries where the Netherlands combines international development and trade: Bangladesh, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Morocco, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Ukraine and Vietnam.

Tying international development and trade

To improve Dutch companies' positioning vis-à-vis international business opportunities, we will look at adding innovative options to the Development Related Infrastructure Investment Vehicle (DRIVE).¹⁰ Other countries are also exploring opportunities in this area; the Netherlands cannot afford to be naive in this respect.

This may entail adding elements of tying, creating a form of international development in which Dutch companies are involved in launching projects or developing infrastructure that also benefits the Netherlands' trade interests. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)¹¹ offers scope for this, and we will make better use of it in the interests of our own economy.

Another possibility is to offer concessional loans¹² that can be used to finance transactions with Dutch companies in full. A more tailor-made approach will enable us to respond more quickly and effectively to local opportunities for Dutch businesses.

Strengthening marketing chains

We will strengthen marketing chains linking local businesses to Dutch ones. This includes promoting clean and fair trade.¹³ In low- and middle-income countries we will help businesses and public authorities meet criteria set out in European rules for responsible business conduct, such as legislation on this subject and regulations on deforestation-free production and employment law. In this way, we can help Dutch businesses find stable suppliers for their marketing chains. This policy is in line with the support that companies in the Netherlands receive for compliance with legislation on responsible business conduct.¹⁴

Mobilising extra funds

We aim to mobilise extra funds to roll out our agenda of international development, trade and investment. We will do this by taking a more organised approach to obtaining funds from the European Commission to scale up Dutch initiatives (EU delegated cooperation).¹⁵ We will also involve businesses more effectively in EU Global Gateway initiatives¹⁶ and work to unlock more private financing.

Example: creating opportunities in East African horticulture

Together with Dutch investors, producers, suppliers and logistics companies, we are working to promote the production of horticultural crops in East Africa. We work in cooperation with local organisations to help make production cheaper, quicker and more future-proof. This brings opportunities for our companies *and* it generates jobs and income in countries in the region, for example in Kenya. Our implementing partners and knowledge institutions contribute to these efforts. We also work with the European Union in the framework of the Global Gateway strategy, engaging our financial and diplomatic resources to strengthen marketing chains between Africa and Europe.

1.2 Security and stability

Tensions, conflicts and wars cause instability. We feel the effects of this in the Netherlands, for instance when it disrupts trade, opens doors for dangerous radical groups or criminals, or prompts

¹⁰ The Development Related Infrastructure Investment Vehicle (DRIVE) is an instrument that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs uses to facilitate investment in infrastructure projects.

¹¹ The OECD is a forum in which 38 countries discuss, study and coordinate social and economic policy.

¹² 'Soft' loans with more favourable terms than those offered in the general marketplace.

¹³ [Toekomst samenwerking met maatschappelijke organisaties in ontwikkelingshulp](#) ('The Future of Partnerships with Civil Society Organisations in Developing Countries'), Parliamentary Paper 36600-XVII, no. 13.

¹⁴ A letter to parliament on trade in the spring of 2025 will provide further details of this.

¹⁵ Response to motion 36 550, no. 16, introduced by MP Roel Kamminga.

¹⁶ The Global Gateway strategy is an EU initiative aimed at connecting international development, trade and diplomacy efforts worldwide and investing in major projects in the digital, energy, transport, health and education sectors.

people to seek asylum here. International development can be an effective way to address these problems. Countries where people are able to provide for themselves, where opportunities exist for young people, and where the economy and the government function as they should are usually stable. And that is good for the Netherlands too.¹⁷

Through international development, the government is making a targeted investment in our own security. This is in line with the advice of the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB), the independent evaluation service of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The IOB has observed that programming and political and diplomatic efforts must be implemented coherently in order to be effective. We must also take account of the sensitivities and dynamics of conflicts (i.e. we must work in a conflict-sensitive way).¹⁸

We will focus our contributions on three of Europe's neighbouring regions. Significantly, these regions are the locus of 80% of the world's conflicts and of many of the transit routes along which drugs and migrants enter Europe:

- West Africa
- the Horn of Africa
- the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

In these regions the Netherlands works to combat people smuggling, illegal trade and recruitment by terrorist groups.

In these same regions we help ensure fairer access to basic necessities such as food and water, which in turn supports socioeconomic development, helps prevent conflict and relieves human suffering.

We also help strengthen local police forces and justice systems so that people have better access to justice. All of these efforts are helping to break negative spirals of lawlessness, crime and violence against civilians, reducing the likelihood of people having to flee their homelands. These efforts also help ease the way for those who have fled to return home safely. We do this work jointly with European partners and relevant Dutch ministries (Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Justice and Security¹⁹).

In line with the government programme, the Netherlands will continue to provide undiminished political, military, financial and moral support to Ukraine. In addition to contributions via international financial institutions, these efforts also involve Dutch businesses, for example. The Netherlands is helping to repair critical infrastructure, such as energy and water supplies, and the healthcare system. We are also providing humanitarian aid.

Phasing out activities outside of neighbouring regions

To make the best use of our scarce resources, activities outside of Europe's neighbouring regions will be phased out. For instance, we will end our regional programme in the Great Lakes region of Africa. We will also make a critical evaluation of our efforts inside Europe's neighbouring regions, remaining active only where our work has clear added value and can promote Dutch interests.

Example: strengthening communities in the Sahel

Stability and security in West Africa, and the Sahel region in particular, is also in the Netherlands' best interests. Instability in the Sahel could pose a risk to the Netherlands, for example because of the potential for terrorism and irregular migration. We also have economic interests in this region, primarily in the West African coastal states. Because of this, the Netherlands will continue its

¹⁷ During security consultations, experts underlined the importance of maintaining a long-term presence and dialogue, as there is a direct relationship between building trust and creating stability.

¹⁸ Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (2023), ['Inconvenient Realities- An evaluation of Dutch contributions to stability, security and rule of law in fragile and conflict-affected contexts'](#), appendix to Parliamentary Paper 31 787, no. 16.

¹⁹ See: Ministry of Justice and Security (2024), [Halftjaarbrief georganiseerde, ondermijnende criminaliteit](#) ('Semiannual letter on organised subversive crime'), Parliamentary Paper 29 911, no. 454.

activities in the Sahel at various levels. We will work closely with countries in the region, including the West African coastal states and international partners including EU countries, the US and the UN.

We will do our best to support communities in the Sahel, for instance through initiatives that give people access to food and clean water. We will help ensure basic healthcare for women and girls. This will help restore people's confidence in their local authorities, and this in turn will help resolve local conflicts. We will engage in critical dialogue with central government in these countries to ensure there is scope for our programmes in areas where emergency aid, peacebuilding and development intersect. We will deploy Dutch knowledge and expertise to achieve this, underpinned with financial support from the EU and international organisations. And we will make good use of the lessons of the past.²⁰

1.3 Migration

Around the world, conflict, instability, poverty and mass youth unemployment are encouraging migration movements. The Netherlands is feeling the effects of this, as more migrants arrive and asylum requests increase. To address this issue, the government will focus more on reception in the region and migration cooperation with the countries concerned.

Reception in the region

We help host communities and refugees build lives in reception countries. These efforts are a continuation of the successful PROSPECTS Partnership, an international project conceived by the Netherlands that aims to improve the prospects of refugees and host communities in reception countries.²¹ The PROSPECTS Partnership helps give people access to basic services and provides protection, education and work.

We will also apply Dutch expertise in the areas of food security and water management, for instance in projects that help farmers grow more food crops or that improve drinking water infrastructure. This not only gives people more hope for the future, but also makes it less likely that they will have to make the dangerous journey to Europe.

Refugees weigh various factors when deciding whether to migrate away from their region. They are more likely to remain in a host country if they see opportunities to build a life there. This approach also helps foster security and stability, which also helps reduce migrant numbers.

The government's efforts on reception in the region are focused on the Horn of Africa, the Middle East, Moldova (due to the war in Ukraine) and the Afghanistan region.

Migration cooperation

The Netherlands actively seeks to cooperate with countries of origin and transit countries, particularly in Europe's neighbouring regions:

- West Africa (the Sahel region in particular)
- the Horn of Africa
- the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

By doing so, we aim to encourage people to return home, prevent irregular migration and offer protection to migrants. We do this through our continuing participation in COMPASS,²² our strategic partnership with the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Flexibility is key in this. The focus may shift across countries over the years, for example as migration routes change.

²⁰ IOB (2023), [Inconvenient Realities – An evaluation of Dutch contributions to stability, security and rule of law in fragile and conflict-affected contexts](#).

²¹ PROSPECTS is a cooperative effort by the Netherlands and UNHCR, UNICEF, ILO, the World Bank and the International Finance Corporation.

²² COMPASS is a strategic partnership between the Dutch government and the IOM that focuses on 14 countries.

The government will link international development more clearly to its agreements with countries on other issues. We will do this through equal partnerships with countries of origin and transit.²³

The priority is mutual interests: within our partnerships we aim, in addition to agreements on migration, to make agreements on trade, international development and applying Dutch expertise to the areas of food security, water management and health. We also aim to make agreements on combating irregular migration, human trafficking and people smuggling, and helping migrants return home and reintegrate. These are important topics in the broad-based dialogue that the Netherlands conducts with Morocco, for example. This approach will enable us to build long-term relationships with countries of origin and transit.

We will also contribute actively to broad EU partnerships with countries such as Tunisia and Türkiye. Addressing migration is an element of those partnerships.

The Netherlands' efforts in this regard are coordinated by the interministerial International Migration Task Force, which is headed by the Ministry of Asylum and Migration and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Example: supporting voluntary return

Both bilaterally and in the EU, the Netherlands plays a leading role in developing innovative solutions to counter migration. A study of more intensive cooperation with Uganda is in line with this ambition.

The Netherlands aims to respond to calls from governments in reception countries, which want to encourage other sustainable solutions to displacement alongside reception in the region. To this end, in the coming years we will be mapping out other options for voluntary return and financing voluntary return where possible. Syria is a good example of this. Through this approach, we can offer people future prospects in their country of origin, and ensure reception countries remain willing to receive refugees.

2. Doing what the Netherlands does best

The Netherlands is a global leader in food security, water management and health. These policy themes are important not only for low- and middle-income countries, but also for the Netherlands itself. Many countries are eager to work with us on these issues, and that brings major opportunities for our business sector.

With that in mind, this government is making a conscious decision to focus on the Netherlands' interests with regard to trade and the economy, security and stability, and migration. We will also focus on policy themes that serve these interests: food security, water management and health.²⁴

2.1 Water management

The Netherlands is a world leader in water management and technology in areas such as drinking water, coastal protection and water purification. With both droughts and flooding increasing in more and more parts of the world, the Netherlands believes it has a unique opportunity here, as well as a responsibility.

Sufficient and secure supplies of safe water are a prerequisite for stable societies, resilient communities and economic growth, and they contribute to global food security and health. Sound

²³ Consultations with experts on migration confirm the relevance of this.

²⁴ Progress of undertaking TZ202501-003, 20 November 2024, to inform the House further about Dutch efforts on water and food security.

water policy, smart water management and access to water and sanitary facilities can also help prevent conflicts and reduce migration.

With this in mind, this government will assign a higher priority to water management.

Applying Dutch expertise

We will involve parties from across the Dutch water sector in projects and contract award procedures. By encouraging cooperation and innovation, we can both increase our earning capacity and boost stability and opportunities in low- and middle-income countries.²⁵ We support countries in developing national water strategies and future-proof water management.²⁶

More active water diplomacy

We will apply Dutch expertise on water more actively, through water diplomacy, trade missions and our mission network, working in close cooperation with other ministries. Here too, we will make optimal use of the knowledge and expertise of Dutch companies, knowledge institutions and other organisations, and of local knowledge in the countries we work with.

Attracting private financing

We will put more effort into attracting private financing. To achieve greater impact and enable upscaling, we will align our programmes with the investment practices of Dutch and international financial institutions.

Increasing disaster preparedness

The Netherlands will step up efforts to improve disaster preparedness around the world, for instance by helping countries take preventive measures against flooding and drought. The Netherlands has extensive expertise in this area, and this too can help prevent migration and instability.

2.2 Food security

Food security is a growing problem. Drought, flooding, conflicts and a growing global population are pushing up food prices locally and around the world. People in some regions lack access to sufficient healthy and nutritious food.

The Netherlands has outstanding expertise in boosting food production and combating malnutrition. Our agri-food sector is known internationally for its 'Dutch Diamond' approach, which entails cooperation between businesses, knowledge institutions, civil society organisations and government. Our businesses have knowledge and innovations that low- and middle-income countries often lack, in areas such as precision agriculture, seed enhancement and soil fertility.²⁷

Boosting local food production

The Netherlands helps countries boost local food production and improve producers' and consumers' access to local food markets. The Netherlands also helps address malnutrition by making healthy, affordable food available to poor consumers. Two ways we do this are through UNICEF and the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), an international food organisation that works with businesses and other organisations. In this way, we are contributing to economic development and stability.

Linking investment to broader programmes

In order to visibly support Dutch interests, investments must have a broad impact and offer leverage for upscaling. Therefore, we will no longer run our own stand-alone projects, but instead link investments to wider regional programmes such as those run by the World Bank, the African Development Bank, the International Fund for Agricultural Development and fellow EU member

²⁵ This was discussed during a roundtable meeting between representatives of the Dutch water sector in the Netherlands Water Partnership.

²⁶ In line with IOB evaluation (2024) '[Synergy in development: Coherence of Dutch policy and effects on food security, water and climate in developing countries](#)'.

²⁷ In consultations on food security, companies explained that they need the cooperation of NGOs, knowledge institutions and government for their work in these markets.

states (through Team Europe initiatives).²⁸ We will scale up public-private programmes through which Dutch companies contribute to local development of sustainable food economies.²⁹

Improving land rights

Finally, the Netherlands will take an active approach to food diplomacy to improve agricultural and food policy in low- and middle-income countries. This could entail clarifying land rights, improving seed policy and implementing national food strategies, for example. We will do this in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Food Security and Nature.

Applying Dutch knowledge and expertise in this way will improve our trade opportunities, help counter migration and contribute to global stability in both the short and the long term.

2.3 Health

Healthy people are better able to participate in society. And when they have access to good healthcare, they are less likely to leave their country. Access to healthcare also helps reduce inequality for women and girls. It gives them more options and enables them to play a more autonomous role in society. This in turn can help prevent conflicts and create more resilient societies.

Combating the spread of infectious diseases is another major focus. The COVID-19 pandemic showed how much damage these can cause. Tropical diseases such as malaria and dengue are also becoming more widespread, and could eventually pose a threat to the Netherlands as well.

With this in mind, the Netherlands continues working to improve public health around the world. We do so on the basis of our Global Health Strategy and in cooperation with the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport.³⁰

Better healthcare for women and girls

Better healthcare means more stability, more trade and better prospects for the future. High-quality healthcare services for women, girls and vulnerable groups are particularly important in this regard. For that reason, we will focus more on innovation as a means of improving access to healthcare and eliminating barriers. The Netherlands has considerable knowledge and experience in this area.³¹

The Netherlands also works to reduce maternal and child mortality, for instance through vaccination programmes and information campaigns. In addition, we use Dutch innovations to provide healthcare assistance to people in remote areas, helping to detect disease and identify pregnancy risks, among other things.

The Netherlands also works with civil society organisations and international partners on programmes relating to sexual and reproductive health and rights. These programmes help women give birth safely and give them access to birth control and safe abortion. All of this helps prevent more serious health problems. Thanks to these programmes women are able to visit health clinics and receive healthcare, and diseases are detected at an early stage, reducing the likelihood of pandemics.³²

Basic healthcare in Southern countries

Public-private partnerships, for example the Dutch Global Health Hub, can help align available Dutch healthcare expertise more precisely with demand in the Global South. We are also working

²⁸ In line with IOB evaluation (2024) '[Synergy in development: Coherence of Dutch policy and effects on food security, water and climate in developing countries](#)'.

²⁹ In response to the motion introduced by MP Mustafa Amhaouch (Parliamentary Paper 33 625 no. 350).

³⁰ In response to undertaking TZ202410-080 [Dutch Global Health Strategy 2023-2030: 'Working Together for Health Worldwide'](#)

³¹ This emerged during consultations with representatives of the healthcare sector.

³² Response to motion 36 180, no. 111, introduced by MP Roel Kamminga, fulfilling motion 36 180, no. 107, introduced by MP Sarah Dobbe et al.

to improve Dutch healthcare businesses' access to existing instruments for investment and export, working in consultation with the sector to remove obstacles and provide additional financing where needed.

3. Doing what is needed: humanitarian aid

In 2024, hundreds of millions of people around the globe were affected by natural disasters, war and other violence. The suffering in Ukraine, the Middle East and Sudan has been especially striking, but people in countless other countries also face severe hardship. The Netherlands will continue to help them. Even though we are reducing our spending, we will continue contributing actively to the international humanitarian aid system.

Support for humanitarian organisations

To help people in need, the Netherlands will continue to support humanitarian aid organisations. Our financial support takes the form of multiannual, flexible contributions to the United Nations, the Red Cross Movement and the Dutch Relief Alliance. We also prioritise work that strengthens local aid organisations so they can respond to crisis situations quickly and effectively.

Keeping humanitarian personnel safe

The Netherlands will continue its unflagging efforts to keep humanitarian personnel safe. In 2024, 378 aid workers were killed in the course of their work – twice as many as the ten-year average. This needs to stop. The government will therefore continue to promote the Dutch-sponsored UN Security Council resolution 2730 on the safety and security of UN and humanitarian personnel. The Netherlands will also invest in training for humanitarian personnel to ensure they are prepared for high-risk situations.

You will shortly receive the annual letter to parliament on humanitarian aid and diplomacy, which will provide a summary of financial and diplomatic efforts for 2025.

4. The Netherlands' approach

The Netherlands is a reliable partner in the international arena, and that will not change. We stand behind our commitments. Even though we need to reduce spending, we will honour the agreements we make. At the same time, this government aims to sharpen our focus: we will be working on fewer themes, with the organisations that are most effective in those areas.

1. Fulfilling international obligations

In our programmes, we will continue to meet our legal obligations and comply with binding international agreements and treaties.

2. Careful transfer

When we end specific activities, we will do so responsibly, making use of lessons learned. We will ensure that a clear exit strategy is built into each new activity.

3. Cooperation with other countries

As a trading nation we benefit from having a strong international position. So as much as possible, we will maintain our relations with countries through international development. However, we will change the way we collaborate on some issues. This may impact our embassies and consulates.

With regard to security and stability, we will focus primarily on countries that are important to the Netherlands. Instead of running programmes in 22 countries, we will concentrate them in three of Europe's neighbouring regions:

- West Africa (the Sahel region in particular)
- the Horn of Africa

- the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

The emphasis in these regions will be on security, combating migration and providing assistance with basic services.

In stable low- and middle-income countries, including the combination countries, we will work through the Dutch missions to promote trade and investment opportunities that enhance the Netherlands' earning capacity. This will also benefit local economies.

Our aim is to develop relationships that benefit everyone: the Netherlands and the countries we work with. As much as possible, we will take a 'locally-led approach' (working with local organisations).³³ We will invest more in an equal dialogue with local authorities and other parties in those countries. This is in line with the Dutch Africa Strategy. Given the emphasis on mutual interests, the policy proposed in this letter will bolster that strategy and enable us to better align our efforts with local demand, and with activities that are already under way. This is more effective than deciding what is most useful for a country from a vantage point outside it.³⁴ We will implement the Africa Strategy's action agenda in accordance with the principles set out in this policy letter on international development.³⁵

4. Working with local and Dutch organisations

The government will work more with local development organisations and other local bodies rather than with international NGOs. Research by the OECD and the UK's Overseas Development Institute has shown that locally-led projects work better and are better aligned to the needs of local people.³⁶

In the current approach set out in the policy framework 'Strengthening Civil Society', government development funding is distributed via large, complex partnerships of NGOs. This is bureaucratic and not always efficient, and we will no longer work in this way.

Civil society organisations can play an important role in effective development assistance. With that in mind, we will continue to work with these organisations when doing so serves the interests of the Netherlands, or when cooperation contributes to the core themes of our policy. We will also develop a more efficient cooperative framework vis-à-vis civil society organisations. The cornerstones of this approach are set out in the letter to parliament of 11 November 2024.³⁷ Areas of cooperation are:

- Combating the HIV/AIDS epidemic
- Preventing harmful practices such as FGM
- Encouraging women's entrepreneurship
- Promoting clean and fair trade
- Combating violence against women and supporting defenders of women's rights
- Women, peace and security³⁸
- Protecting and promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms for everyone
- Encouraging Dutch private initiatives

This cooperative framework will be elaborated further in 2025. The House will be informed about it in the spring of 2025. In January 2025, the House of Representatives was informed about the

³³ For a working definition of this, see OECD-DAC (2024), '[Pathways Towards Effective Locally Led Development Co-operation](#)'

³⁴ See OECD-DAC (2024) '[Guidance on Scaling Development Outcomes](#)'.

³⁵ In response to the motion by MP Derk Boswijk, 36 600V, no. 30.

³⁶ [OECD Development Co-operation Peer Reviews: Netherlands 2023](#), and [ODI \(2024\), 'Why Aren't we There Yet? Understanding and Addressing Donor Barriers to Localisation in Climate Adaptation'](#).

³⁷ See [Toekomst samenwerking met maatschappelijke organisaties in ontwikkelingshulp](#), Parliamentary Paper 36 600-XVII-13, no. 13.

³⁸ In response to the motion introduced by MP Derk Boswijk et al., 36 600-XVII, no. 27.

follow-up to motions adopted and arrangements agreed concerning future cooperation with civil society organisations and global healthcare.³⁹

5. Support for small-scale Dutch private initiatives

People in the Netherlands are deeply invested in developing countries. The government will examine where it can support such engagement on the part of the Dutch public. We aim to ensure that their views are incorporated where possible in the development and implementation of policy, particularly when it comes to water, food and health.⁴⁰

6. Policy coherence

The government will continue to focus on policy coherence for development, which means ensuring that national and development policies are aligned and do not have unintended adverse effects on other countries. Should such effects occur, we will do our best to minimise them.

7. Cooperation with international organisations

Transnational problems require international cooperation, such as agreements on trade and migration, and on mobilising international capital for low- and middle-income countries.

Working with international organisations provides a way to advance our interests and themes. We will start by deciding what we want to achieve, and then determine which organisation will be the best partner.

We will continue our financial contributions to development banks and UN organisations, which can have more impact than individual countries thanks to their scale and expertise. We will also take a more critical look at our voluntary additional contributions to the UN. Another factor to consider is how much influence the Netherlands will be able to exert on international organisations (such as the United Nations and the World Bank) as a result of its contributions. We will continue to support international organisations that need to be able to respond quickly in the event of a disaster or crisis.

At present, Dutch companies annually secure tenders worth approximately €550 million from the UN and about €150 million from development banks. The government seeks to encourage further growth in this area.

In the European Union too, we will work together to exert more influence and increase the effectiveness of our international development. This is in addition to the efforts of the European Commission, which invests in international development, also on behalf of the Netherlands.

8. International Development as a leverage

Where we can provide added value, we will use our funding as leverage on programmes run by the EU, international organisations and development banks. We will do this in part by taking an ambitious approach to EU delegated cooperation.⁴¹ When Global Gateway projects offer opportunities for Dutch companies, we will make the best possible use of them.

On the core themes of food security, water management and health, the Netherlands will join forces with multilateral organisations, particularly international financial institutions. We will deploy our expertise and financial resources in order to mobilise larger funds.

We will work with pension funds and other financing bodies that recognise opportunities to invest in infrastructure, jobs and energy supplies in low- and middle-income countries. In this way we can unlock private financing for development and create opportunities for businesses. The Dutch ILX Fund is a good example of how a small government contribution enables pension funds to

³⁹ See [Toekomst samenwerking met maatschappelijke organisaties in ontwikkelingshulp](#), Parliamentary Paper 36 600-XVII-55.

⁴⁰ See the government's response to the advisory letter by the Advisory Council on International Affairs (AIV), 'Inextricably Linked: The SDGs in the Netherlands and the Rest of the World' (2024).

⁴¹ Delegated cooperation is a means of channelling EU funding to programmes run jointly by member states and the European Commission.

invest billions in countries where we invest in international development. This will enable us to achieve development gains even with a smaller budget.

9. *Effect-based management*

From the start, we will seek to ensure that our programmes can be evaluated and measured. When objectives are clear, it becomes possible to evaluate whether policy is useful, efficient and effective and make mid-course adjustments where necessary.

Realism is key: achieving development results is a long-term undertaking that comes with risks, especially in fragile states. We weigh these risks carefully. We will take a more data-driven approach, with an emphasis on activities that have demonstrated their effectiveness. A focus on women, girls and vulnerable groups is an important factor in making a programme effective.

We will learn from evaluations, and use what we learn to adjust our programmes or phase them out responsibly. We are currently developing a new accountability system, and will incorporate the proposed improvements that we have received from the Permanent Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Trade and Development.⁴² We expect this to lead to a new approach that will make results clearer, enable proper accountability and reduce unnecessary red tape, both in policymaking and implementation.

5. Retrenchment and choices

The framework coalition agreement and the government programme provide for a considerable reduction of the budget for official development assistance (ODA), amounting to a structural reduction of €2.4 billion, nearly a third of the total budget, starting in 2027. The agreements also state that no more than 10% of the budget for international development will be allocated to the reception of asylum seekers in their first year in the Netherlands.

The government will approach this retrenchment with due care, making clear choices concerning the allocation of limited resources. As set out in the government programme, our policy will focus more explicitly on what is truly important for the Netherlands: our interests concerning trade and the economy, security and stability, and migration. We will focus on the policy themes that support these interests: food security, water management and health in the countries where we are active. Crucially, we will continue to provide humanitarian aid where it is needed.

The government aims to do this as follows.

- Within the available budget, additional funds will be allocated for security and stability, migration, food security and water management.
- As much as possible, the already considerable budgets for trade, health and humanitarian aid will remain unaffected by the decisions that are ultimately taken on the retrenchment.

The following areas will no longer constitute separate objectives, and their budgets will be phased out once all current contractual obligations have been fulfilled. Examples of what the Netherlands will no longer do:

- **Women's rights and gender equality** Reduction of financial support for political participation by women, UN Women and the Leading from the South programme, which focuses on local women's organisations.
- **Vocational and higher education** Cancellation of the multiannual programme for vocational and higher education in Africa, including the study grant programme.
- **Sports, culture and development** No further support for initiatives to promote development and partnerships through sport, art and culture.

⁴² Permanent Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Trade and Development, decision list for meeting of 26 September 2024.

Budgets for the following policy themes will be reduced, and opportunities for new contractual obligations concerning them will be limited. Examples of where spending will be reduced:

- **Climate** No further funding for small-scale renewable energy projects. Exit from regional climate funds.
- **Civil society** On the basis of the policy framework, no further funding for climate, food security and water. No further lobbying in the Netherlands or at international level, for example in the UN.
- **Multilateral cooperation** Significant reduction (around 50%) of Dutch annual core contributions to UNICEF and UNDP. In addition, the programme for the placement of Junior Professional Officers at the UN will be halved (to about 20 people).

The Netherlands will continue to contribute its share of international climate finance. We will do this primarily by ensuring that our funding for water management and food security is also applied to countering the negative effects of climate change. Where possible, we will augment this funding through private investment and through cooperation with Dutch companies. However, a focus on climate-related activities must not cause the Netherlands to miss out on opportunities for trade and international development. We will also continue to contribute to the main international climate change funds as set out in subarticle 2.3 on climate change.

Funds will remain available for a new framework for civil society, although this will be significantly less than under previous governments. With regard to the budget article on multilateral cooperation, core contributions (formerly referred to as general voluntary contributions) to UN programmes will be reduced. However, financing for UN organisations will remain possible on the basis of the interests and policy themes concerned, and as far as is needed to render our policy more effective, for example when UN organisations can add leverage to our policies.

Working within the EU, the Netherlands will nevertheless continue contributing to topics for which it is phasing out its own national budgets.

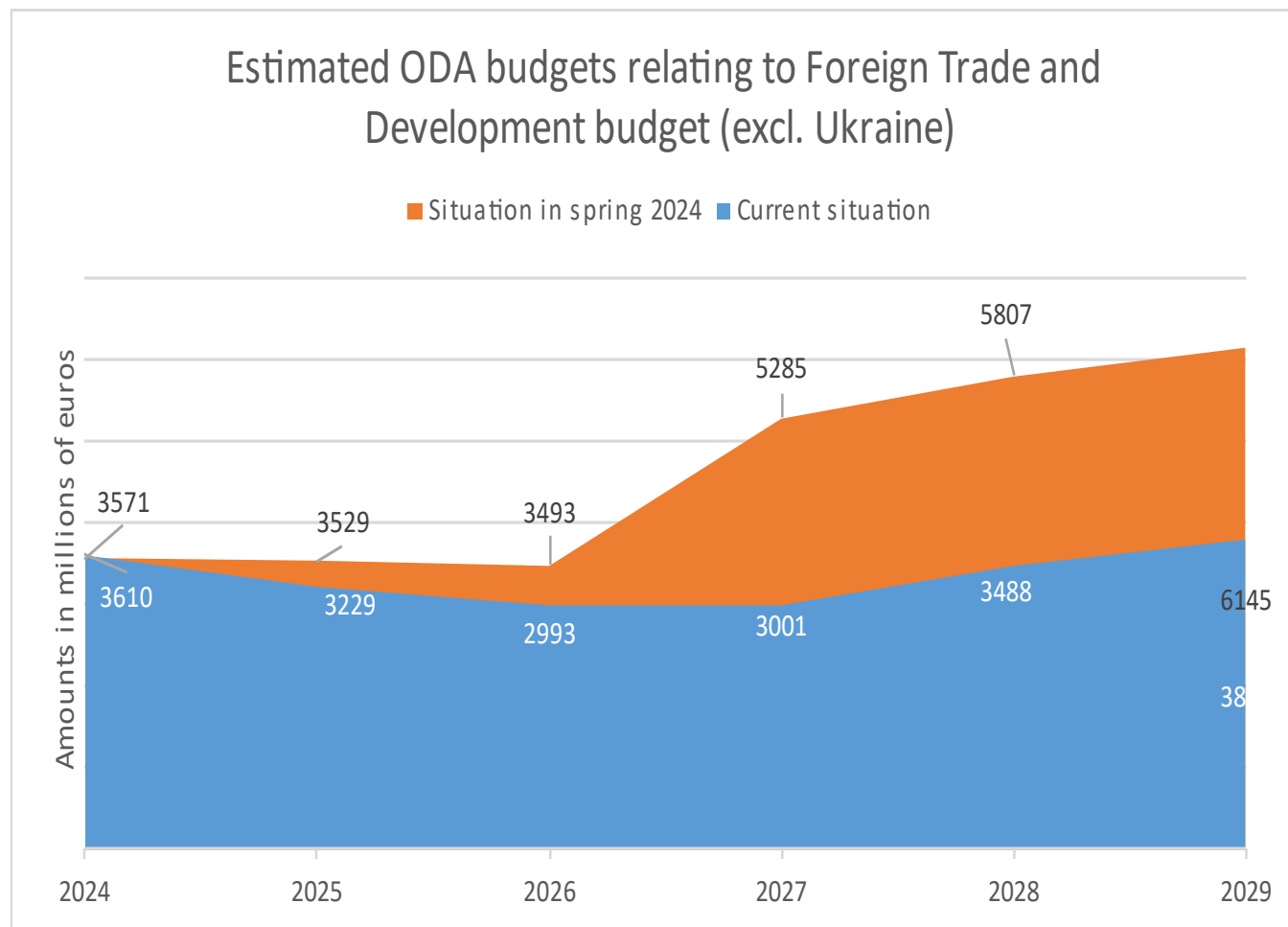
In other words, the aim of the planned retrenchment is not merely to cut back on international development investments, but to make it better. The interests of the Netherlands will take precedence, and Dutch expertise will play a central role. The government anticipates that this focus will make international development more useful and more effective.

Appendix: Budget retrenchment package for Foreign Trade and Development in the period from 2026 to 2030

Effects of spending cuts set out in framework coalition agreement

Under the terms of the framework coalition agreement, the budget for international development will be reduced by €2.4 billion annually starting in 2027. The greatest reduction will be made to the subbudget for Foreign Trade and Development, since it is the largest element of the ODA budget. The rest of this €2.4 billion reduction will affect ODA subbudgets in other areas, including the subbudget for Foreign Affairs.

The figure illustrates the effects of the retrenchment on international development falling under the budget for Foreign Trade and Development. Without this retrenchment, the subbudget for international development, as an element of the budget for Foreign Trade and Development, would grow to approximately €6.1 billion by 2029 (the budget horizon at the time the framework coalition agreement was drawn up). In line with the framework coalition agreement, the budget is now set to stand at €3.8 billion in 2029.



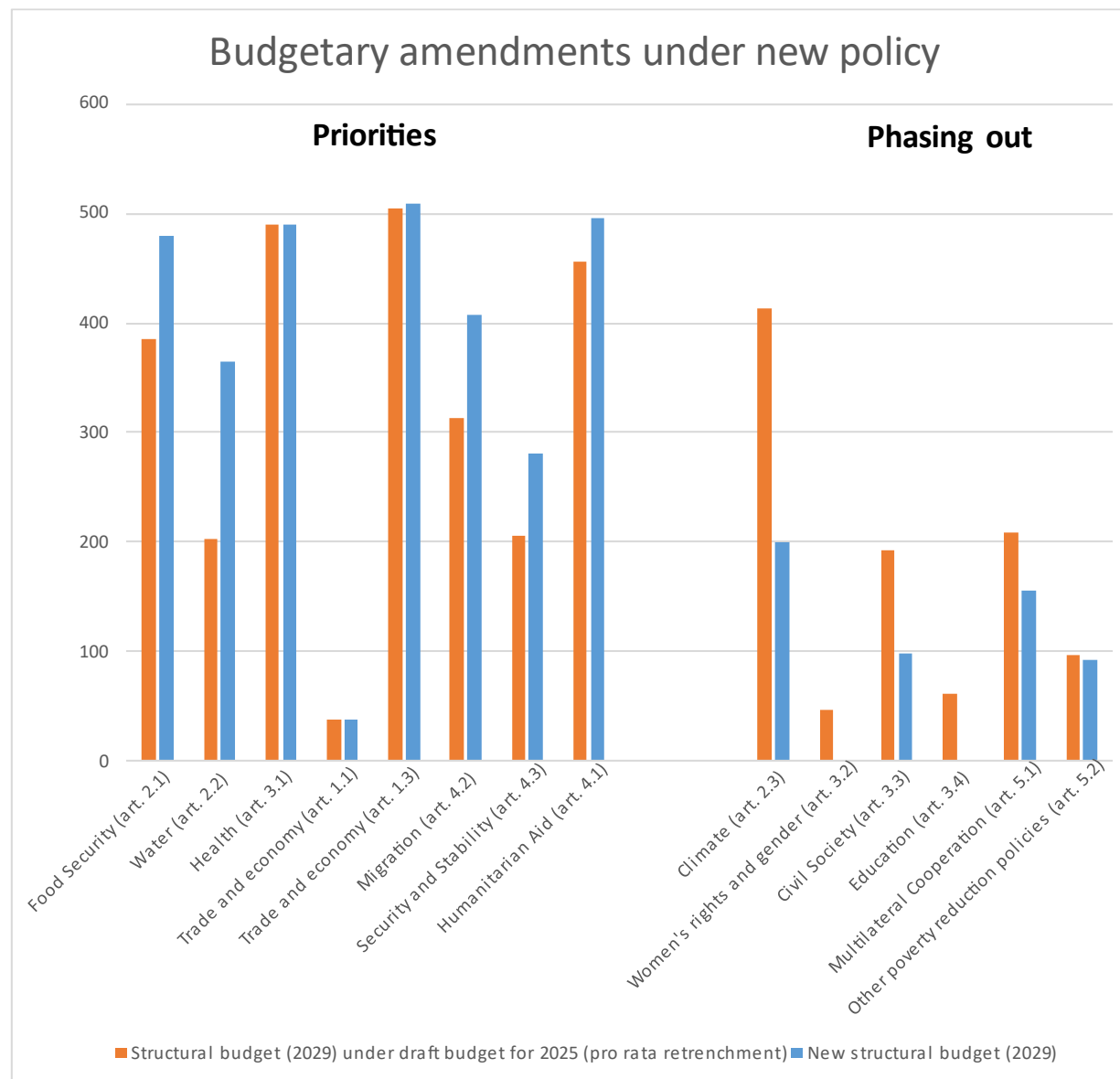
Adjusted budgets in line with new policy priorities

Budget reductions for international development for 2026 and beyond have for now been applied proportionately across the various policy articles, as set out in the draft budget for Foreign Trade and Development 2025 (pro-rata retrenchment).

Adjustments will be made to bring the subbudgets into line with the new policy priorities for international development. This means that, compared with the draft budget (pro-rata retrenchment), more funds will be allocated to the policy areas of trade and the economy, security and stability, and migration, and to the policy themes food security, water, health and humanitarian assistance. Budgets for other policy articles will be phased out. The new structural budgets per policy article at the end of the multiannual budget period (budget horizon) are shown in the figure. The new budgets will be presented to the House of Representatives in the first supplementary budget for Foreign Trade and Development for 2025.

Development of the budget for Foreign Trade and Development

The table below shows the multiannual subbudgets in the budget for Foreign Trade and Development. For each year, the first column shows the amount stated in the first supplementary budget of 2024 (Parliamentary Paper 36 550 XVII). For the draft budget for 2025 (Parliamentary Paper 36 600 XVII), reductions on international development for 2026 and beyond, as set out in the framework coalition agreement, are applied proportionately to the various subbudgets. This is the current status of the subbudgets in the budget for Foreign Trade and Development. For 2027 and beyond,



subarticle 5.4 reserves a buffer to accommodate fluctuations throughout the year, such as first-year reception costs for asylum seekers. In the draft budget for 2025, nearly all of this budget is being used to partially absorb the cuts laid out in the framework coalition agreement. Under the framework coalition agreement, no more than 10% of the ODA budget from 2027 on will be allocated to first-year reception of asylum seekers from DAC countries. To provide a safety margin, the difference between the current allocation and the maximum allocation will remain in the buffer.

The third column shows the new annual budgets after details of the cuts are definitive. The cuts will be reallocated in line with the new policy priorities. This means that budgets relating to the interests of trade and the economy, security and stability, and migration, and the policy themes food security, water, health and humanitarian assistance will be higher than those shown in the draft budget for 2025 (the pro-rata retrenchment). The new budgets are provisional and subject to spring budgetary decisions and parliamentary approval. The table shows the following:

- Previous budget: the situation prior to the cuts set out in the framework coalition agreement (amounts in the first supplementary budget for 2024).
- Current situation: the current pro-rata distribution of cuts as set out in the framework coalition agreement (amounts in the draft budget for 2025).
- New budget: the new budgets, adjusted in line with the new policy priorities.

(x € million)	2026			2027			2028			2029			2030		
	Former budget	Current	New budget	Former budget	Current	New budget	Former budget	Current	New budget	Former budget	Current	New budget	Former budget	Current	New budget
1. Sustainable economic development, trade and investment	614	539	544	709	544	550	709	596	601	711	638	643	-	638	643
1.1 Sustainable trade systems	38	33	33	41	34	34	41	36	36	41	38	38	-	38	38
1.2 Dutch trade (non ODA)	97	97	97	95	95	95	95	95	95	95	95	95	-	95	95
1.3 Aid and trade**	479	409	414	573	415	420	573	465	470	575	505	510	-	505	510
2. Sustainable development, food security, water and climate	1.003	852	876	1.144	827	860	1.144	927	964	1.142	1.001	1.044	-	1.001	1.044
2.1 Food security	413	326	379	439	318	382	439	356	438	439	385	480	-	385	480
2.2 Water	209	165	254	232	167	277	232	188	326	232	203	364	-	203	364
2.3 Climate	381	360	243	473	342	200	473	383	200	471	413	200	-	413	200
3. Social development	739	642	526	900	651	506	900	729	552	900	789	588	-	789	588
3.1 Global health; sexual and reproductive health and rights	438	404	404	559	405	405	559	453	453	559	490	490	-	490	490
3.2 Women's rights and gender	46	37	2	52	38	1	52	42	0	52	46	0	-	46	0
3.3 Civil society	193	153	119	219	158	100	219	177	99	219	192	98	-	192	98
3.4 Education	61	48	1	70	50	0	70	56	0	70	61	0	-	61	0
4. Peace, security and sustainable development	989	842	958	1.112	804	948	1.112	901	1.082	1.112	975	1.185	-	975	1.185
4.1 Humanitarian aid	520	411	433	520	376	403	520	421	456	520	456	496	-	456	496
4.2 Aid and migration**	338	267	319	357	258	323	357	289	371	357	313	408	-	313	408
4.3 Aid and security**	131	164	205	235	170	221	235	190	255	235	206	281	-	206	281
5. Multilateral cooperation and other efforts	276	245	215	351	266	260	350	284	411	348	305	462	-	305	462
5.1 Multilateral cooperation	217	245	144	238	173	139	238	194	150	236	208	156	-	208	156
5.2 Other poverty-reduction policy	60	73	71	113	93	91	112	89	87	112	97	93	-	97	93
5.3 Ukraine*	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	0	0
5.4 Buffer	0	-1	-1	1.194	30	30	1.716	173	174	2.056	213	213	-	213	213
Total	3.621	3.119	3.119	5.410	3.123	3.123	5.932	3.610	3.610	6.269	3.922	3.922	-	3.922	3.922

* Dutch support for Ukraine is not paid from the budget for Foreign Trade and Development but from general public funds.

** In the draft budget for 2026, the names of subarticles 1.3, 4.2 and 4.3 will be changed to reflect the interests of the new Foreign Trade and Development policy priorities.