



Ministry of Foreign Affairs



# Sustainability report 2024

Mission Sustainable - Walk our Talk

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## Mission Sustainable - Walk our Talk

### Climate action

We are reducing our emissions for scope 1, 2, and our business travel, with a clear goal in mind: a 40% emissions reduction by 2030 compared to 2022.

#### Actions in 2024

- New climate objective adopted
- Raised awareness of sustainable travel within BZ
- Improved quality of emissions data
- Central procurement of green electricity certificates for the missions
- Renewed CO<sub>2</sub> Performance Ladder Level 3 certification

#### Plans for 2025

- More frequent monitoring of data on flights taken by BZ staff
- Launch of the Economy Comfort pilot to encourage colleagues to fly less in business class.
- Investigate how sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) can contribute towards BZ's climate target

### Supply chain responsibility

BZ seeks to minimise the risks of breaches of human rights and international labour standards in our operational management and procurement.

#### Actions in 2024

- Established a living wage policy for externally contracted facilities services staff at the missions
- Drafted and finalised a policy direction on supply chain responsibility for the Housing and Real Estate Worldwide Department (DHF)
- Developed a risk survey for DHF project leaders
- Started developing a policy line on procurement of responsibly produced solar panels
- Inclusion of the International Social Conditions by BZ in a new tender for removal services

#### Plans for 2025

- Facilitate implementation of the living wage policy by developing support documents and monitoring progress
- Support DHF in applying supply chain responsibility to new real estate projects and in applying the new policy framework
- Continue developing policy on procurement of responsibly produced solar panels, and strive for central-government-wide collaboration on this issue

If you have any questions about sustainability, please email the Mission Sustainable team: [missionsustainable@minbuza.nl](mailto:missionsustainable@minbuza.nl)

Our work on sustainable operational management and policy implementation contributes principally to these SDGs:



Affordable and clean energy



Decent work and economic growth



Responsible consumption and production



Climate action

## Circular economy

We are working to become an organisation where products, components and raw materials are reused as much as possible.

### Actions in 2024

- Learned from circular pilot projects on real estate and office furniture (e.g. Addis Ababa, Beijing, Rome and Dublin)
- Informed and supported foreign missions on the topic of waste management through a community of practice
- Inspired and informed staff through knowledge sessions and sharing lessons learned

### Plans for 2025

- Continue working on a feasible international strategy on circularity in regard to operational management at and circular procurement by BZ
- Support missions in a more professional approach to sustainable and circular operational management, and encourage missions to share their solutions and ideas on waste management
- Start taking stock of the current situation at BZ with regard to circular ICT

## Building a sustainable organisational culture

Across the globe, our employees have a crucial role to play in making our operational management more sustainable, which is why we are working to build a sustainable organisational culture.

### Actions in 2024

- Helped missions more firmly embed sustainability in their organisation, with a focus on baseline measurements, sustainability teams and sustainability plans
- Organised courses, workshops and meetings and shared best practices with a view to inspiring and motivating colleagues at the missions and at departments in The Hague
- Offered financial support (Walk our Talk vouchers) for missions to locally contract external expertise to help them make operational management more sustainable. The Walk our Talk Awards put the spotlight on colleagues who contributed to sustainability through inspiring projects or initiatives
- Monitored progress and plans of embassies and departments with a view to active knowledge sharing and offering incentives

### Plans for 2025

- Offer missions training and practical tools for a more professional sustainable organisational culture
- Launch the Mission Sustainable toolkit, designed to help staff gradually move up the sustainability ladder
- Encourage connections between missions, so that they can inspire and help each other in tackling sustainability issues

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# Foreword

## A future-proof BZ: Mission Sustainable in 2024

Agreements have been made at central government level on boosting resilience and reducing emissions. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (BZ) is contributing to these goals by making its operational management fit for the future. Using Dutch embassies and consulates as a showcase for Dutch innovations is also a good business opportunity. After all, the missions represent the Netherlands abroad. In this way, we're not only contributing to a cleaner planet but also to our country's economy and international competitive position: showing the world that the Netherlands is working seriously to reduce carbon emissions, use water and raw materials wisely, and establish responsible supply chains.

Future-proofing operational management is a task for every part of our organisation, from the departments in The Hague to our 150 embassies worldwide. It's a collective effort that requires Dutch knowledge and skill. The Mission Sustainable programme was launched in 2021 to promote and support this transition. Since then, we've been advancing step by step, as we pursue the concrete goals we set for ourselves. Goals that are both ambitious and realistic. Goals that can't be achieved with technical solutions alone, but that require us to change the way we think and behave. We want future-proof thinking to increasingly permeate the collective choices BZ makes: from official travel and procurement to real estate management and our partnerships.

In this sustainability report, we look back on the initiatives taken and results achieved in 2024. Mission Sustainable focuses on three key themes: climate action, circular economy and supply chain responsibility. We describe the measures we've taken, the impact they've had, and the challenges that lie ahead. The report also includes interviews with a number of colleagues whose efforts have contributed to our sustainable mission.

*Mission Sustainable* continues to grow – not only as a programme, but as part of our DNA and our organisational culture. Together we are building a just world that is ready for the future.

**Carola van Rijnsoever**  
Deputy Secretary-General



# 1 About Mission Sustainable

Mission Sustainable is the sustainability programme of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Our aim with this programme is to contribute to the sustainability objectives that we are also urging companies, organisations and other governments to achieve. Our slogan is therefore ‘Walk our Talk’.

## Our objectives

Since the programme’s launch in 2021, we have acquired a wealth of knowledge and experience on how to make a difference. In recent years, sustainability has taken on an increasingly important role within the organisation, and in 2024, BZ has taken yet another step forward. Insights gained from studies and pilot projects have resulted in new policy frameworks and operating practices.

Mission Sustainable focuses on three key themes: climate action, circular economy and supply chain responsibility. These have been chosen because of the scope for material impact and because they play an important part in BZ policy. Each theme has a specific objective:

- 1. Climate action:** BZ is aiming for a 40% reduction in carbon emissions (scope 1, 2 and official travel) by 2030, compared to 2022.<sup>1</sup>
- 2. Circular economy:** BZ is developing a circular strategy for operational management, based on the results of pilot projects on circularity.
- 3. Supply chain responsibility:** BZ seeks to minimise the risks of breaches of human rights and international labour standards in our operational management and procurement.

Mission Sustainable also provides tailored support to missions in the case of location-specific opportunities and challenges, such as local water shortages, biodiversity loss or air pollution.

## The programme team

The Mission Sustainable programme team covers a wide range of expertise in areas such as data management, human rights, transport and mobility, and communication. The team is a driving force for sustainable action in the BZ organisation and work processes. The team works with policy departments to consolidate the link between BZ policy and the sustainability programme.

The Deputy Secretary-General holds ultimate responsibility for the programme. Progress is reported directly to the director of the Operational Management Branch (HDBV) and every six months to the Board of Deputy Directors-General. The annual sustainability report setting out our results is made available to the public.

## Sustainable Development Goals

The United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of 17 global goals to end poverty, inequality, injustice and climate change by 2030. They serve as an important compass for our ministry and form



the basis of our sustainability programme. In this way, we contribute to the Netherlands’ efforts to achieve the goals both at home and abroad.

Through our operational management and policy implementation, BZ contributes towards four SDGs in particular: clean and affordable energy (SDG 7), decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), responsible consumption and production (SDG 12) and climate action (SDG 13). The support we provide in the form of solutions to local challenges contributes to all of the SDGs. We also consider the potential effects on the achievement of other goals, such as inclusion, gender equality and sustainable water management. This is consistent with the interconnected approach that the SDGs advocate.

<sup>1</sup> See the chapter on climate action.

## 2 Climate action

BZ wants to reduce its impact on global warming. This is one of the core objectives of the Mission Sustainable programme, and the focus of many of our actions – including in 2024, when we formulated a new climate objective, put the spotlight on sustainable travel and actively supported missions in greening their energy consumption.

### New climate objective

In 2023, central government decided that carbon offsetting may no longer be included in the calculation of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions reduction. The decision, which applies to all parts of central government, was prompted by concern about the effects of offsetting. Mission Sustainable's original objective had been climate-neutral operational management by 2030, but that cannot be achieved without offsetting.

Despite introducing measures to significantly reduce BZ's carbon emissions, we will never be able to bring these emissions down to zero by 2030. Official travel, for instance, cannot be avoided. Nor will all our real estate worldwide be completely energy-neutral by 2030. That is why BZ formulated the following new climate objective in 2024, based on a well-founded analysis: to achieve a 40% reduction in total carbon emissions (scope 1, 2 and official travel) by 2030, compared to 2022<sup>2</sup>.

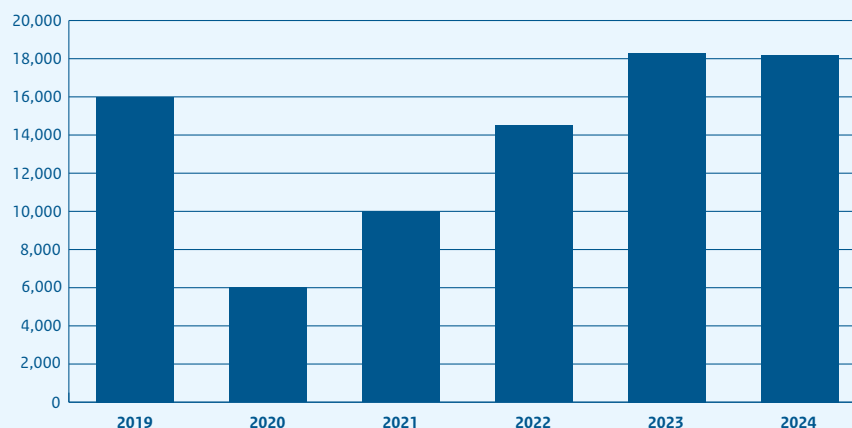
The analysis aimed to strike a good balance between commitment to sustainability and the global context in which BZ operates. Because of this global context,

BZ staff will still need to fly in the future, and a number of missions will continue to be wholly or partly dependent on diesel generators for their energy supply.



Business travel by train

Figure 2a: Carbon emissions from air travel by BZ staff (not including official travel by government aircraft and claimable trips) (tCO<sub>2</sub>)



<sup>2</sup>The ministry's carbon footprint is made up of three types of emissions, in accordance with level 3 of the CO<sub>2</sub> Performance Ladder: (1) Direct carbon emissions from burning fossil fuels (scope 1 emissions); (2) Indirect carbon emissions associated with purchased energy (scope 2 emissions); and (3) Indirect carbon emissions associated with official travel (part of scope 3 emissions). Scope 3 emissions are however not fully included. For instance, emissions associated with the procurement of goods and services and policy implementation are not included

## BZ's carbon footprint

The ministry's total carbon footprint in 2024 was around 13% smaller than in 2023. Our total emissions in 2024 were 33,831 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> (tCO<sub>2</sub>), compared to 38,692 tCO<sub>2</sub> in the previous year. Scope 1 emissions fell by 1%. With the increase in electric vehicles, fleet emissions have fallen – both in The Hague and at the missions. Total diesel consumption increased slightly, however. This is due to the use of diesel generators in certain countries, where power outages were more frequent in 2024. The biggest change in scope 1 emissions can be attributed to significantly reduced gas consumption in all our buildings in The Hague but especially at the missions.

BZ's main strategy for reducing scope 2 emissions is by making our real estate more sustainable. The recently completed renovation of the Brussels embassy is a good example of this. Besides reducing emissions through energy savings, BZ also wants to generate as much of our own electricity as possible and buy renewable energy certificates to cover the rest of our electricity needs. In some countries embassies buy these themselves, but since 2024 ministry headquarters has also been purchasing renewable energy certificates centrally, covering a large proportion of BZ's global energy consumption. While total electricity consumption remained roughly the same as in 2023, a larger share of the purchased electricity was renewable. This resulted in a more than 50% reduction in scope 2 emissions in 2024.

Two major developments can be reported with regard to scope 3 emissions. First, emissions from air travel fell by 1% compared to 2023 (not including flights with the government aircraft). While this is a significant reversal of the trend of growing emissions in previous years (see figure on page 7), emissions from air travel will have to fall

more sharply in the years ahead if we are to achieve our climate target.

The second important development in relation to 2023 is that emissions from flights with the government aircraft (when used by BZ) have been added to the carbon balance sheet. These were also added retrospectively to the ministry's carbon emissions for 2022 and 2023. The emissions from flights with the government aircraft in both years were comparable.

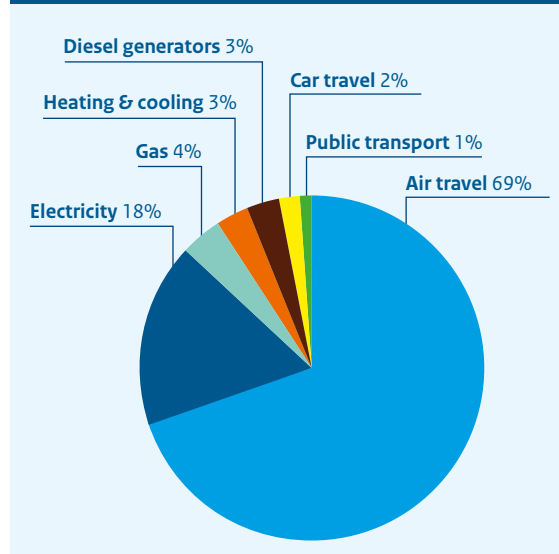
With the halving of scope 2 emissions and the addition of government aircraft emissions, our emissions from air travel (despite decreasing slightly overall) accounted for a bigger part of our carbon footprint: 69% in 2024 compared to 64% in 2023 (these figures include emissions from official travel with the government aircraft).

Finally, the BZ programme 'Travel Smart' was launched in 2024 (see text box on page 10). It is aimed at mainstreaming sustainable official travel among BZ staff.

## Data quality

In recent years BZ has invested a lot of time in improving the quality of data on sustainability and emissions. While a substantial quality improvement has been achieved compared to previous years, our dataset still contains some uncertainties. This is due in large part to the global context in which BZ operates. In some countries it is difficult to calculate emissions accurately, for instance because BZ staff use UN-organised flights, compounds are shared with other countries or energy suppliers do not keep accurate records.

Figure 2b: Ministry of Foreign Affairs carbon footprint in 2024



## Looking ahead to 2025

At the end of 2024, DHF set up a multidisciplinary sustainability team to take comprehensive action towards making our BZ real estate sustainable. In 2025 the team will help integrate sustainability into existing processes. BZ will also step up activities under the Travel Smart programme in order to further reduce emissions from air travel.

<sup>3</sup> Certificates guaranteeing that the stated amount of electricity has been produced from renewable sources. These certificates provide assurance of the origin of green energy, and are therefore known as Guarantees of Origin in the EU.

**Table 2c: Ministry of Foreign Affairs carbon footprint (tCO<sub>2</sub>)**

t CO <sub>2</sub>	2022	2023	2024
<b>Scope 1</b>	<b>3,743</b>	<b>2,985</b>	<b>2,952</b>
Car travel	520	509	568
Diesel generators	724	873	937
Gas	2,499	1,603	1,447
<b>Scope 2</b>	<b>9,434</b>	<b>10,548</b>	<b>6,975</b>
Electricity	8,602	9,835	5,922
Total purchased	-	10,668	13,515
Green purchased	-	(834)	(7,593)
Official travel by electric car	-	14	33
Heating & cooling	832	699	1,020
<b>Scope 3</b>	<b>20,755</b>	<b>25,159</b>	<b>23,904</b>
Car travel	92	118	120
Public transport	147	277	327
Air travel	20,516	24,764	23,458
BZ staff	16,657	20,759	20,596
Government aircraft*	3,859*	4,005*	2,862
<b>Total</b>	<b>33,932</b>	<b>38,692**</b>	<b>33,831</b>

**Table 2d: Breakdown of energy consumption**

	Unit	2022	2023	2024	Difference 2024 vs 2023
Real estate electricity use	MWh	27,155	28,741	28,616	-0.4%
Diesel	litres	208,525	251,807	270,248	7.3%
Gas	m <sup>3</sup>	1,198,464	770,822	677,996	-12%



Train Journey through Central Java

\* Added retrospectively to carbon footprint (in 2024)

\*\* Higher than reported in 2023 due to retrospective addition of travel with the government aircraft for BZ purposes

# Travel Smart

In 2024, as in the two previous years, official travel, particularly by air, was the biggest contributor to our carbon emissions. Sustainable travel is a challenge for an organisation that works in the international arena and whose staff are drawn to careers that involve travel as a matter of course. At the same time we're becoming more aware of the scope for smarter and environmentally friendlier travel choices, without it affecting the quality of our work.

In 2024 we conducted a BZ-wide campaign to raise awareness about sustainable travel and gain a better understanding of the associated opportunities and challenges. Among other things, we organised discussions with the 20 departments with the most air miles. We illustrated the enormous impact of flying on our carbon emissions and talked about the scope for making more sustainable travel choices. Thanks to these sessions, sustainable travel became a concrete theme for discussion within the organisation. And they also produced valuable starting points for further action.

Last year, we launched the Travel Smart campaign to reduce carbon emissions. Travel Smart challenges departments and missions to take a close look at their travel choices. Never flying might not be a realistic option, but flying less and organising trips differently can make official travel more sustainable. Already, colleagues are combining different visits during a trip abroad, travelling with smaller delegations, travelling economy class on long-haul flights and taking the train where possible to destinations within Europe. We improved the dataset on BZ travel and many departments and missions included sustainable travel in their annual plans. All these actions demonstrate the organisation's growing commitment to making the transition to sustainable travel.

Finally, preparations were made in 2024 for more targeted measures to be adopted in 2025. We made preparations for the Economy Comfort pilot project, which encourages staff to choose Economy Comfort for flights that last more than six hours (for which they are entitled to fly business class under the collective labour agreement). The project will run for one year. In return, they get extra legroom, access to the business lounge and a day for acclimatisation. We also started developing a dashboard to give departments and missions insight into the CO<sub>2</sub> impact of travel by plane and train. This will help them to take more targeted action towards reducing their carbon emissions.

In 2025 we will take our approach to the next level – from awareness to learning. We won't only talk about sustainable travel with staff but actively encourage them to change their travel behaviour by monitoring their travel choices, offering concrete guidance and sharing examples of good practices. Slowly but surely we will bring about a transition, so that sustainable travel becomes the norm. The aim to achieve the 40% reduction in carbon emissions by 2030 should not come about through less diplomacy but through smarter and more conscious choices about travel, with the lowest possible emissions.

## Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF)

BZ is taking various actions to make official travel more sustainable (see the text box on Travel Smart). The focus of these efforts is on making conscious choices, because this offers the greatest scope for both carbon reduction and cost savings. BZ can also reduce its climate impact by procuring biokerosene (Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF)).

Currently, central government buys SAF for all flights with KLM, Air France and Lufthansa. In 2024, this covered about 49% of BZ's total aviation emissions (excluding flights with the government aircraft). However, the actual environmental impact of SAF depends on several factors, and experts and airlines disagree on how SAF's impact should be quantified in carbon emission calculations. We therefore decided not to include the environmental impact of SAF purchased by BZ in the 2024 carbon footprint presented in this report.

As one of the largest buyers of SAF within central government, BZ will continue studying how SAF can contribute towards our climate objectives in 2025.

### 3 Circular operational management

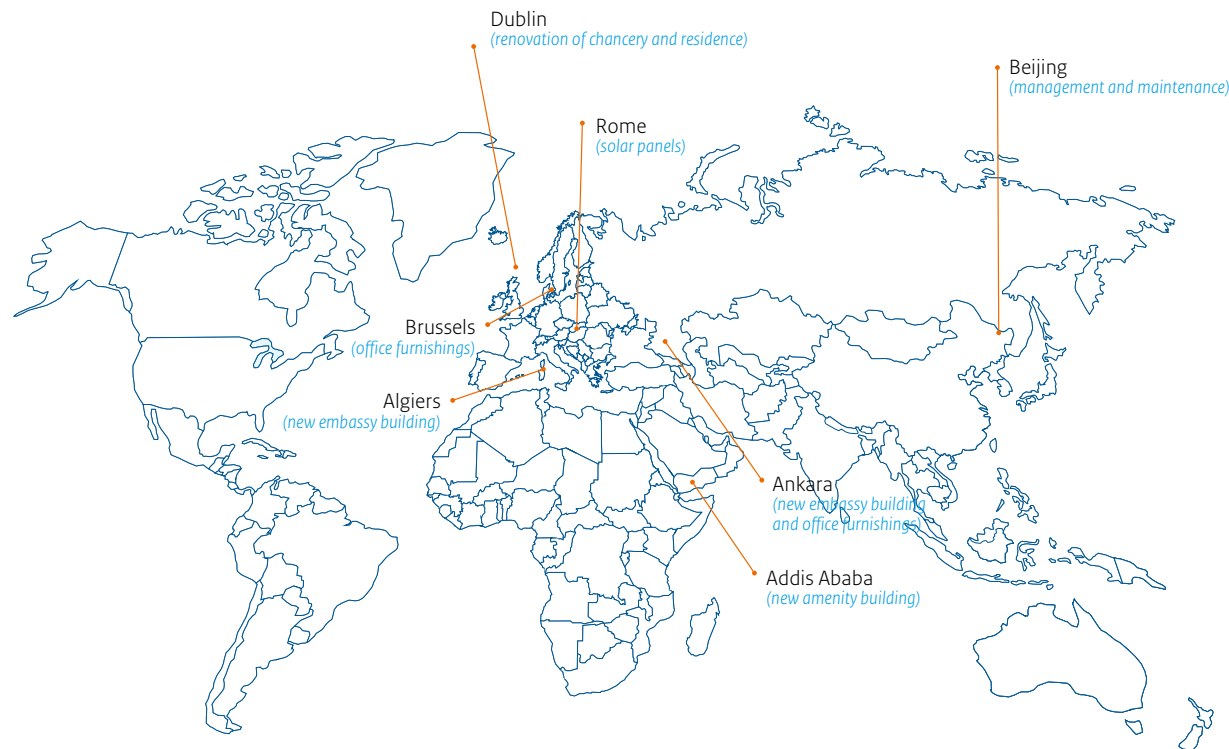
The traditional linear economy approach of ‘take, make, waste’ is not tenable. Supplies of critical raw materials are being depleted and the amount of waste produced keeps rising. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs therefore aims to close the materials loop with a fully circular operational management by 2050.

#### Raw materials have value

In a circular economy we use and reuse products, components and materials for as long as possible. It is important that we see used materials not as waste but as things that have value, and that we look more critically at whether we actually need new or virgin raw materials. Products can also be designed in a way that allows their components and materials to be reused in high-value applications in the future. This requires collaboration between parties across the production and supply chain.

Closing the loop helps keep critical raw materials available and affordable. There are other benefits too, such as lower carbon emissions, which helps combat climate change, a cleaner environment because fewer polluting materials are used, and a transparent chain because circularity requires knowing a product’s origin and how it was made. Thus the circularity objective contributes to BZ’s other two sustainable objectives: a 40% emissions reduction by 2030 and supply chain responsibility.

#### Circulaire pilots Directorate of Housing and Facilities (DHF)



## Circular pilot project in Addis Ababa

People in Ethiopia reuse everything. However, used materials are generally bought and sold on informal markets. In constructing the embassy's new amenity building (with changing rooms, sanitary facilities, storage space, a canteen and a small outdoor seating area) our guiding principle was always to strive for circularity, and to find out how BZ's stringent requirements can be matched with locally available products. For instance, we purchased used doors and windows that had been restored in specialised workshops. The bricks for the interior walls were also purchased locally and carefully sorted, and a lot of the furniture is circular too. The tables and chairs for the canteen came from another building on the premises, and were reusable after some cleaning and repairs. The same applied to the lockers in the changing rooms.

We always sought practical solutions while aiming for maximum circularity. The load-bearing structure presented a major challenge, as it had to meet BZ's strict requirements for durability and safety. So we used new concrete for the load-bearing structure and, in consultation with the local designer and contractor, recycled concrete for the other elements. This is already common practice in the Netherlands, but a real innovation in Ethiopia.

To maximise the project's circularity, a market survey was conducted at an early stage to find out what reused materials could be supplied by local parties – and what the local limitations were. Together with the procurement division we determined how the survey findings could be incorporated into the contract award. This meant we could refer to the proposed circular alternatives during the project's implementation. The local contractor also helped us draw up a building passport. This is a document that describes all the materials used in the building's construction and whether they are recyclable. In this way we're also facilitating future reuse.



### A learning approach

In the international context in which BZ operates, circularity is a complex issue to address. For example, how can we ensure that products are refurbished in a country where this is not really done? How can products or components be reused if the producer is located on the other side of the globe? How do we process waste in a country that has no system of separate waste collection? To answer all these questions and set out an effective strategy, we have been learning from eight pilot projects since 2023.

Most of the projects relate to real estate and office furnishings, aspects of missions' operational management that consume a large amount of raw materials and which ministry headquarters in The Hague can influence most directly. The pilots cover different stages in the life cycle (from design and production to management and use) and explore procurement processes – for closed-loop furniture, for instance – and ways of extending the useful life of a building's components or reusing them. In all these pilots and other circular activities, Mission Sustainable works closely with various departments within the ministry and market parties.


• New amenities building  
in Addis Ababa

## Sustainable ICT

In 2024 we initiated a number of actions to make our ICT more sustainable and highlight the role of circularity. During National Climate Week, for instance, we opened a repair café for BZ staff in The Hague to raise awareness about the environmental impact of ICT. We also wrote a manual for the missions on disposing of ICT equipment sustainably.

## Waste management working group

In 2024 Mission Sustainable and Holland Circular Hotspot started a community of practice (CoP) on waste management. Six sessions were organised for representatives of missions from different regions to discuss waste management challenges and opportunities. Missions mapped their own waste flows and the local options for collecting and sorting waste. A number of missions talked with suppliers in order to change their procurement or to ensure discarded materials are used again elsewhere. It became clear during these sessions that the situation is different in each country. This means customised solutions are required, at least in part, in order to take targeted measures. At the same time, missions can benefit from applying general circularity principles, such as those set out in the R ladder. The R ladder has 10 levels of circularity (R1 to R10) that describe circularity strategies. The levels are hierarchical, with R1 being the highest.

Waste sorting facility.  
Photographer: Freek van Eijk. 

## Waste management in Tbilisi

‘Until recently there was no waste management to speak of at our embassy. It’s not a topic anyone gives much thought to in Georgia. Here in Tbilisi for example, all waste is treated as general waste. After the Community of Practice we set straight to work. We went in search of companies that specialise in waste management and we found one: CENN. Now we have separate bins for plastic, cans and glass at the embassy and the official residence. They are emptied once a month by Eco-Taxi, which is part of the organisation Parki ar minda. I bring my own waste to the office now, so that it can be recycled. And I’m trying to convince my colleagues to do the same. So far they haven’t exactly leapt at the chance. To achieve that mental switch, I’ve been emphasising that we are an extension of the Netherlands, which means we should do things the way they are done in the Netherlands.’

### Ennio Zarone

*operational manager at the embassy in Tbilisi*



## New Embassy in Brussels

The sustainable renovation of the new Brussels embassy has been a lot of work, but the result is astounding – a real boost for staff at the embassy and for our ministry’s sustainability goals.

## Your Majesty, welcome to one of Belgium’s most sustainable buildings

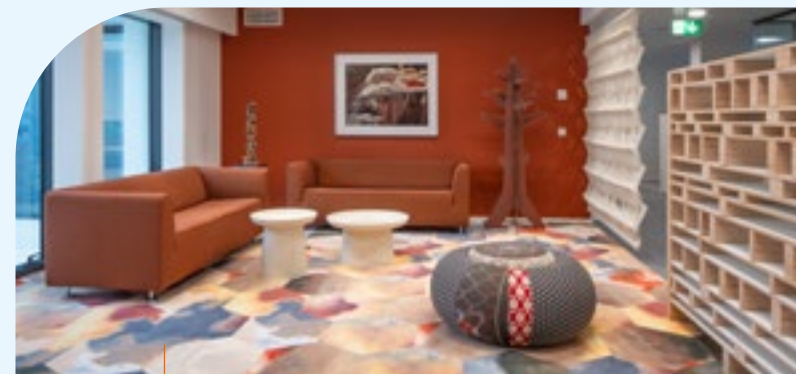
Four minutes. That’s how much time Nils van Merrienboer had to brief King Willem-Alexander, who was all ears, on the sustainable renovation of the Brussels embassy. Given the chance, the project manager at the Housing and Real Estate Worldwide Department (DHF) can talk about Trierstraat 31-35 for hours. About bamboo floors and sustainable hemp walls. About reusing shelves and bathroom tiles. About water storage in the basement and solar panels on the roof. Or about the BREEAM certificate, awarded on the basis of a 98% score (‘outstanding’) in a sustainability assessment. ‘We can definitely say it’s one of Belgium’s most sustainable buildings,’ Nils boasts.

When the Netherlands set out to find new premises in 2021, the ambition was to find and renovate a building so that it would be as sustainable as possible. ‘As the EU capital, Brussels is one of our most important missions,’ Nils says. ‘If the ministry says it attaches great importance to sustainability, we have to show that we mean it. Practise what we preach.’

When interior architect Sandra Klaasman was asked to investigate how sustainability and circularity could be incorporated into the project, she had to scratch her head when the scale of the contract became clear to her. ‘I asked myself how this could be done without compromising on quality. It was pretty difficult at first. But in the end it was fun to see how much could be achieved.’

### Refurbished workstations

In the time she was given to talk to the King, Sandra told him that she’d accomplished her mission. ‘All the workstations have been refurbished. Around 85% of the furniture has



◆ New Embassy in Brussels, designed by Axent Architects. Photographer: Jannes Linders.

been given a new lease of life. Some of it came from the old building, the rest came from DHF’s store of refurbished goods. Several staff members said they hadn’t noticed that the furniture isn’t all new.’

The energy-efficient ventilation, cooling, heating and lighting systems are just as discreet. A carefully designed lighting plan and LED lights ensure that every space is perfectly illuminated. The ventilation system constantly monitors the air quality in every room and increases the flow of fresh air when necessary.

### More comfort

All these measures don’t just drastically reduce the building’s carbon emissions, they also make for a more comfortable environment. Because, as Nils says, wellbeing is the ‘soft side of sustainability’. ‘The quality of lighting, air and acoustics has become much more important to people now.’

The embassy moved to Trierstraat at the end of 2024, marking the project’s completion. Sandra and Nils can apply the lessons learned to their next assignments. Nils isn’t sure whether he would opt for hemp walls again. Because one thing he learned about this material is: ‘It’s all but impossible to hang pictures on them.’

All in all, however, they’re enthusiastic about the final result. Sandra: ‘Refurbishing furniture is very time-consuming. Looking at the total project, the sustainable choices did make it more expensive. But there are so many great possibilities.’



*'If the ministry says it attaches great importance to sustainability, we have to show that we mean it. Practice what you preach.'*

### Other circular initiatives

The circular pilot projects aren't the only way we're expanding staff's knowledge on circular economy. Other activities included a lunchtime lecture on waste management and knowledge sessions on circular economy. These helped project leaders, procurement officers and advisers find out how to take account of the options for circularity in all stages of real estate management and maintenance.

The ministry, the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO), the business community, knowledge institutions and cultural organisations have all been working together on the Netherlands' participation at Expo 2025 Osaka. Notably, the Netherlands Pavilion will be built entirely according to circular principles. The materials used will be recorded in a digital building passport, so that they can be reused after Expo. The pavilion is also a showcase for state-of-the-art Dutch technologies for the energy transition.

### Looking ahead to 2025

We have received the results of the first pilots, which we used to start drafting an internationally feasible strategy for circular operational management at BZ in 2024. We will further develop the strategy in 2025, in accordance with the learning approach. The lessons learned in the DHF pilots will be implemented in real estate projects.

With regard to IT, we need a better picture of the situation at BZ and the impact and influence of IT on our circularity objectives. This will help us determine what actions can enhance the circularity and sustainability of our IT. We will continue these efforts in 2025.

## 4 Supply chain responsibility

Everyone has the right to fair and safe working conditions. This doesn't only concern our direct colleagues, but also the people employed by external contractors to work (indirectly) for BZ. We seek to minimise the risks of breaches of human rights and international labour standards in regard to operational management and procurement.

### Focus on policy development

Since 2022 we have been working hard on policy and processes aimed at preventing breaches of human rights and labour law in our supply chains. In these years we have dealt with several real-life cases. In 2024 the focus was on developing policy and plans of action – a workable approach for housing and facilities services and other parts of the organisation.

### Policy framework for a living wage

We have been working on a living wage policy for externally contracted facilities services staff at our missions abroad, such as security staff, cleaners and gardeners. A living wage is the amount an employee needs to support a decent standard of living for themselves and their family. This also has additional positive effects: employees don't need to work as many hours, they can afford a healthier lifestyle and can send their children to school. In short, a living wage is also a vital precondition for preventing labour abuses and breaches of human rights.

BZ decided to formally establish this principle in a new policy line which was approved in December 2024. The policy applies as of 1 March 2025 to new contracts with external providers for cleaning, security and garden maintenance services. For locations where there is a big difference between the current wage and the living wage, the move towards a living wage will be gradual, according to a realistic growth scenario. The policy line calls for aligning with the local context as much as possible and acknowledges the impact that a small commissioning body such as an embassy can have.

### Support for the living wage policy

In 2024, before the policy line was formally approved, we started developing support for staff who would be dealing with the policy, such as procurement advisers and operational managers. Most of this support can be concluded in 2025. The policy will be evaluated in 2026, one year after its entry into force.

### Actions by the Housing and Real Estate Worldwide Department (DHF)

- **Development of a framework and plan of action**

Supply chain responsibility is a key theme for DHF too. In 2024 DHF worked on policy guidelines for real estate projects and staff were asked to consider how supply chain responsibility could be used to reduce or eliminate risks in the department's work procedures. The policy aims to reintroduce this risk assessment in project management. Work on these processes will continue in 2025.

- **Solar panels**

Solar panels play an important role in achieving our climate targets and in making our properties worldwide more sustainable. However, BZ notes that there is an increased risk of human rights and labour law violations in the solar panel production chain. In 2024 the Central Government Real Estate Agency conducted a study into responsibly produced solar panels. After contacting the agency about this, BZ started exploring the scope in existing processes, contracts and procurement law for buying responsibly produced solar panels. Work on this will continue in 2025. BZ will also contribute to a central-government-wide exploratory study in 2025 that will inform policy concerning solar panels.



📍 [Bike ride in Khartoum](#)

### Other projects

Other issues relating to supply chain responsibility also arose in the course of 2024. For instance, we received feedback about possible concerns regarding working conditions at international removal companies that are also used by BZ. To address this, International Social Conditions will be included in the new contract award procedure for removals.

### Looking ahead to 2025

For 2025, the priority will be effectively implementing and monitoring the living wage policy, while providing the necessary support to the staff involved. New insights will help us improve on this issue where possible. Together with DHF we will continue our efforts to integrate supply chain responsibility into relevant processes. We will also contribute actively to the central government policy line on solar panels.

## Contracting checklist for embassies

How can you find out if your service providers treat their employees well? What are important points to keep in mind when signing a new contract and when contacting a service provider? The embassies in the Gulf States decided to develop a tool to help answer these kinds of questions. First they assessed the risks relating to human rights and labour standards among external service providers in the region. They also looked at local laws. Using this information, they developed a checklist to simplify the process of procuring external services while ensuring fair conditions. The checklist is also a useful tool for conversations about contract management with service providers. The embassies financed their study using their Walk our Talk voucher – a funding scheme carried out by Mission Sustainable to help embassies make their operational management more sustainable.

## 5 Building a sustainable organisational culture

Sustainability is a team effort. To integrate sustainability into our organisational culture, we need everyone to join in. That's why in 2024 we continued to actively engage staff from all parts of the organisation in our Mission Sustainable. Staff are becoming more aware and knowledgeable, and working together to turn BZ into a sustainable organisation.

The context in which different parts of the organisation operate varies, so sustainable solutions often need to be tailored to individual circumstances. Mission Sustainable facilitates this by sharing knowledge and linking up departments and missions. Collaboration generates enthusiasm and helps spread successful initiatives around the world. This is how we are working to build a sustainable organisational culture. A better world for people and nature. And an organisation that's fit for the future. Because a sustainable culture also supports better and more efficient ways of working.

### Inspiration and information

We encourage and inspire every mission and department through training sessions, meetings and events focused on sustainability. We also offer staff knowledge, inspiration and practical tools. We encourage embassies to learn from and inspire each other by sharing their best practices. In this way, we are building a culture where sustainability is an integral part of our daily work.



Team photo of the Embassy in Havana

## Professional approach

More and more embassies are actively working on sustainability. Mission Sustainable supports embassies in developing a more professional approach to this theme and consolidating sustainability in embassy operations. We do this by sharing knowledge, inspiring staff and where necessary guiding them in the right direction. As in 2023 we offered Walk our Talk vouchers to support missions' efforts to tackle sustainability issues in a more structured way. In this chapter we present a number of examples of how missions used the vouchers.

### Our focus is on three themes:

#### 1. Measuring is knowing

A baseline measurement tells missions where they can achieve significant impact and what activities have the highest emissions. This enables them to make clear choices and set priorities. They can then carry out periodic follow-up measurements to track progress towards their sustainable goals.

#### 2. A sustainability plan

After conducting a baseline measurement, missions can lay down clear choices and focus areas in a sustainability plan. This forms the basis for their sustainable efforts, as well as ensuring continuity. An annual evaluation of progress and activities helps keep sustainability policy on target.

#### 3. Sustainability teams

A growing number of missions have established sustainability teams, made up of staff members with different areas of expertise who jointly work to make operational management and policy more sustainable. The teams promote engagement, deliver concrete results and keep sustainability on the mission's agenda. The number of sustainability teams grew in 2024, as shown on the world map on page 20.

## Focus on ambitions

Sustainability measures within the ministry are monitored through the annual report and the annual plan cycle. Every year, missions and departments report on their progress and plans for the new year. This information allows us to actively share useful knowledge and offer targeted incentives, keeping the focus on ambitions and on promoting sustainable growth.



📍 Cookies baked for the Walk our Talk Awards in Jakarta

# Worldwide growth in the number of sustainability teams



## Sustainability teams worldwide

Sustainability teams are committed to making the mission’s operational management more sustainable. They foster awareness, ensure continuity and deliver concrete results.

ABJ <b>Nigeria</b>	BAN <b>Thailand</b>	DHA <b>Bangladesh</b>	KAA <b>South Africa</b>	MAN <b>Philippines</b>	PAR <b>France</b>	SAR <b>Bosnia and Herzegovina</b>	TEH <b>Iran</b>
ABU <b>United Arab Emirates</b>	BEL <b>Serbia</b>	DOH <b>Qatar</b>	KAI <b>Egypt</b>	MAP <b>Mozambique</b>	PEK <b>China</b>	TLV <b>Israel</b>	TOR <b>Canada</b>
ALG <b>Algeria</b>	BLN <b>Germany</b>	GEV <b>Switzerland</b>	KAM <b>Uganda</b>	MEX <b>Mexico</b>	PRE <b>South Africa</b>	SHA <b>China</b>	TUN <b>Tunisia</b>
AMM <b>Jordan</b>	BOG <b>Colombia</b>	GNZ <b>China</b>	KIG <b>Rwanda</b>	MIA <b>United States of America</b>	PRM <b>Suriname</b>	SIN <b>Singapore</b>	SJO <b>Costa Rica</b>
ANK <b>Turkey</b>	BTL <b>Slovakia</b>	HAR <b>Zimbabwe</b>	KUA <b>Malaysia</b>	MIL <b>Italy</b>	RAM <b>Palestinian Territories</b>	SJO <b>Costa Rica</b>	SKO <b>Macedonia</b>
ANT <b>Belgium</b>	CAR <b>Venezuela</b>	HAV <b>Cuba</b>	KWE <b>Kuwait</b>	MOS <b>Russia</b>	RIG <b>Latvia</b>	SOF <b>Bulgaria</b>	SKO <b>Macedonia</b>
AST <b>Kazakhstan</b>	DAK <b>Senegal</b>	HCM <b>Vietnam</b>	LAG <b>Nigeria</b>	MOS <b>Russia</b>	ROF <b>Italy</b>	STO <b>Sweden</b>	SOF <b>Bulgaria</b>
ATH <b>Greece</b>	DAR <b>Tanzania</b>	HON <b>China</b>	LIS <b>Portugal</b>	NYV <b>United States of America</b>	ROM <b>Italy</b>	STR <b>France</b>	STO <b>Sweden</b>
BAG <b>Iraq</b>	DBA <b>United Arab Emirates</b>	ISL <b>Pakistan</b>	LJU <b>Slovenia</b>	OSL <b>Norway</b>	SAO <b>Brazil</b>	TBL <b>Georgia</b>	STR <b>France</b>
BAK <b>Azerbaijan</b>	JAK <b>Indonesia</b>	IST <b>Turkey</b>	LUX <b>Luxembourg</b>	OUA <b>Burkina Faso</b>			TBL <b>Georgia</b>
			MAD <b>Spain</b>				TBL <b>Georgia</b>



• *Winners of the Next Step Award, Team Harare*

### Walk our Talk awards

The Walk our Talk awards have been granted annually since 2022 to missions, departments or individual staff members at BZ who have made an outstanding contribution towards the organisation's sustainability objectives. More than 40 nominations were received, illustrating the growing commitment to sustainability both in The Hague and at the missions.

The Next Step Award is granted to a team that is working actively to embed sustainability in the organisation – taking the 'Next Step' by inspiring and activating people and helping us meet our sustainability objectives. In 2024, this prize was awarded to the sustainability team at the Harare embassy for their detailed sustainability plan and clear focus on priority themes. After a long quest, the team succeeded in finding a company that would sort and recycle the embassy's waste. The team also encourages others to take action, such as in their video [Greening the Embassy](#).

The Travel Smart Award is about sustainable travel, in terms of both motivating others and practising what you preach. This prize was awarded to the Jakarta embassy. Indonesia is a very large country, so staff always try to combine appointments with different parties during a single visit to a region. The embassy periodically sets up pop-up embassies on a number of islands, so that Dutch nationals do not have to go all the way to Jakarta for consular services, like getting a new passport.



• *Winners of the Travel Smart Award, Team Jakarta*

### Electric vehicles in Mozambique

## 'We want to lead by example'

Wherever ambassador Elsbeth Akkerman takes her car in Mozambique, no matter how quietly, heads turn. The royal blue vehicle doesn't emit the usual growl of a petrol or diesel engine, just a soft electric hum. It's not something people in the bustling capital of Maputo are used to – not yet, in any case.

When the embassy got this car, staff decided to organise a themed event on electric transport, with the Minister of Transport as special guest. This resulted in the Netherlands and Mozambique starting a joint project to promote electric transport. It just goes to show what small steps can lead to. And it's what Elsbeth hopes to see. 'We want to lead by example when it comes to sustainability,' she says.

For her, it's also about social and economic sustainability; issues like gender equality and a living wage. This broad concept of sustainability plays a central role in almost everything the embassy does. Elsbeth and her colleagues believe that all of the embassy's activities should be aimed at creating a positive impact on the local environment and on future generations.

To build on their success, the embassy made use of the Walk Our Talk voucher scheme to carry out a baseline measurement in 2024. This report gave a clear picture of the embassy's carbon footprint, its efforts in the area of sustainability and scope for making sustainable choices. All the initiatives the embassy is now starting up resulted from the baseline measurement. Elsbeth: 'If our carbon footprint isn't lower in 2026, call me and hold me to account.'



• *Ambassador Elsbeth Akkerman*

## Creative initiatives in Bratislava

# From creative recipes to climate stories

Gabrielle Sancisi, head of mission in Bratislava, and the entire embassy team are committed to sustainability. And sometimes they come up with creative solutions.

When Gabriella took up her post in Bratislava in 2021, she was struck by the mission's strong concern for sustainability. Thinking back to Al Gore's documentary *An Inconvenient Truth*, she soon thought of a way to contribute. 'I'd seen it years before, but still remembered the closing credits,' she says. 'Instead of a long list of names, there were suggestions: little changes people can make to help combat climate change.'

### Taking up the challenge

These simple suggestions inspired Gabriella and the embassy team to make another change on top of the ones they'd already made, like opening windows instead of using the air conditioning, making more official visits by train instead of by car and turning down the thermostat in the winter. Now they decided to stop serving meat and fish at their events.

'We thought it might be a challenge, since meat dishes are so central to Slovakian cuisine,' says Gabriella. 'But it wasn't even that hard. Our chef deserves all the praise for this: instead of the usual vegetarian options like salads and cheese snacks, he actively sought out high-quality recipes that were original and creative. They're healthy dishes that look good, taste great and fill you up. People often say they don't even notice the absence of fish or meat.'



Waste tour in Bratislava. Photographer: OLO a.s.

## Lasting impact

The mission hopes that the measures it's taking will help reduce its carbon footprint, which was calculated in 2023. 'I also think it's important to have a lasting impact,' says Gabriella. 'That's why we communicate so much about what we're doing. In conversations, but also by posting signs explaining how a certain measure contributes to more sustainability.'

The embassy is a co-founder of Circular Slovakia, a local platform that brings together businesses, government bodies and knowledge institutions so they can learn from each other. 'We also looked for creative ways to spread the message. Together with the Dutch photojournalist Kadir van Lohuizen, we held a workshop for photographers in the region on how to tell climate stories. In other words, how to use photography to illustrate the effects of climate change in Central Europe,' says Gabriella. 'These depictions also help increase awareness in society at large.'

## A nomination for the team

Gabriella's work in the area of sustainability has earned her a nomination for the Walk our Talk awards. This prize is awarded to missions, departments or individual staff members at BZ who have made an outstanding contribution towards the organisation's sustainability objectives. But Gabriella says she couldn't have done it all on her own, so she's keen to share the nomination with the entire team, and especially with chef Rudy and local employees Lenka and Jana, who suggested a number of concrete ideas. She concludes: 'Don't give up just because you think what you're doing isn't going to make a difference. You can still make a difference through small actions.'

*Gabriella Sancisi is no longer ambassador to Slovakia. She was recently appointed director of the Protocol and Host Country Affairs Department.*

## Making an impact in Oslo

### Going to the shop to buy radiator reflector foil

'If everyone makes a small effort, we can have a big impact.' This way, Daphna Duits and her colleagues hope to make the embassy in Oslo increasingly sustainable. They are focusing on three areas: energy consumption, events and official travel.

Typical solutions include using real plates and cutlery instead of disposable ones and serving vegetarian food. A baseline measurement also showed that the old building used a lot of energy, so Daphna decided to buy radiator reflector foil that reflects the radiators' heat back into the room. 'It only cost a few kroner, so there was no reason not to try,' she laughs.

Norway is a large and sparsely populated country, and Dutch nationals sometimes have to travel very far if they need to visit the embassy. Several times a year, the embassy now tours the country with pop-up consular desks. 'So instead of 20 people making 20 trips, there's just us making one trip. It's also a way of bringing our services directly to the people.'

But Daphna emphasises that she's also doing it for herself. 'I really want the world to still be here when my children grow up. Also, we as a ministry have set ourselves the goal of reducing carbon emissions by 40% by 2030, so we all need to do a little more on this front.'



# About this report

This is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' third sustainability report. It describes the activities we undertook in 2024 that have contributed to our three sustainability objectives, as well as our collaborations with our stakeholders. The report also serves as a yardstick to measure our annual progress towards achieving our sustainability objectives. This report covers the ministry as a whole, including diplomatic missions abroad.

## Standards and guiding principles used

This report is structured around the three themes of Mission Sustainable: climate action, circular economy and supply chain responsibility.

We use the annual Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle of the CO<sub>2</sub> Performance Ladder and the sustainability report to monitor our progress and ensure that measures are implemented and adapted accordingly. Our carbon footprint is determined based on the requirements of the Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Protocol and the guidelines for quantifying and reporting GHG emissions and removals at organisation level (ISO 14064-1). In doing so, we adhere to the approach laid down in the CO<sub>2</sub> Performance Ladder Handbook version 3.1.

This footprint comprises all emissions in scope 1 and 2, plus 'official travel' which is an element of scope 3. Emissions have been calculated using the basic factors provided on CO<sub>2</sub>emissiefactoren.nl. For the energy consumption of mission buildings located abroad, we use each country's basic factors taken from

<https://www.carbondi.com/#electricity-factors/>. This is a different database than that used for last year's report, which also explains some of the differences in building emissions. BZ switched to this new database because it is more comprehensive and more transparent. Looking ahead, as part of our growth model we plan to draft our sustainability report using international reporting guidelines for sustainability information.

The missions themselves are responsible for providing accurate consumption data. This data is collected at one central point, checked for any major discrepancies and processed to produce a complete carbon footprint for the ministry as a whole. Air travel data is managed and collated centrally. If any consumption data is lacking, assumptions are made based on historical data and/or average values per m<sup>2</sup> gross floor area or per FTE. In 2024 we had to estimate energy consumption data for approximately 19% of missions, compared to 15% in 2023. BZ will continue exploring efficient means of improving the quality of the data we use.

## Continuous improvement

To ensure data reliability, both internal and external audits are carried out annually, and independent verification of the emissions inventory is done periodically. Over the next few years we will continue to improve our reporting in various ways, including by consistently following the Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle and fine-tuning our sustainability strategy. It will take time to fully integrate the process of collecting data from the missions into our activities, and we will be giving this matter ample attention in the years ahead.



VR Experience in The Hague

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