

Country profile 2026: Netherlands

Introduction

According to the [Digital Decade 2025: Country reports](#), the Netherlands maintains its position as a global leader in digital innovation, underpinned by a mature tech ecosystem that includes 32 unicorns as of early 2025. The nation's digital economy is robust, with 80.8% of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) achieving at least a basic level of digital intensity, significantly surpassing the EU average. While the ICT sector contributes 5.3% to the national gross value added, challenges remain, particularly a persistent adoption gap between SMEs and large corporations in advanced technologies such as AI and cloud computing, as well as a declining trend in the proportion of female ICT specialists. Infrastructure is a key strength, with Very High-Capacity Network (VHCN) coverage reaching 98.4% and overall 5G coverage at 97.4%, providing a high-performance foundation for growth. Human capital is equally strong; 70.4% of the population possesses at least basic digital skills, and ICT specialists represent 7% of the total workforce, both well above EU benchmarks.

According to the [State of the Digital Decade Eurobarometer 2025](#), public sentiment is high, with 79% of citizens stating that digitalisation simplifies daily life. However, there is a near-universal demand for increased protection of minors online and stronger action against disinformation. The government has implemented comprehensive policies, including the 2022-2028 Dutch Cybersecurity Strategy, a 2024 package to counter disinformation, and specific guides on AI Regulation to align businesses with the EU AI Act.

BIK policies

Policy frameworks

Policy frameworks describe the overarching goals that shape policies for a better internet for kids.

	High	Medium	Low	Not present
Policy priority		X		
Integrated policy		X		
Influence of the BIK+ strategy		X		
Recognition of children's rights	X			

Table 1: Policy frameworks - Netherlands

- **This topic is an important and emerging policy priority** partially covered in national/regional laws, regulations and policies.
- **There are separate, dedicated policies which address the topic of children and the digital environment (protection, empowerment, and participation).**
- **The BIK+ strategy is an important influence on policy development** on children and the digital environment.
- **National/regional policies and policy documents** explicitly recognise children's rights in the digital environment.

Key developments and policy frameworks

Numerous instruments are in development to protect children online and to ensure that children's rights are respected throughout the entire life cycle of online products and services:

- **Gamewijzer** (Game Guide): a game ratings guide is currently under development that will explain in an accessible way which deceptive design techniques are present in particular games, for the benefit of parents, children and carers.

- **A Children's Rights Impact Assessment:** This instrument helps identify risks to children's rights.
- **Code for Children's Rights online**, which has recently been updated. The Code contains principles and guidelines to protect and promote children's rights in the digital domain. It provides a framework for developers to promote responsible design for children throughout the development process. It is recommended to apply the Code iteratively, consulting the tool at every stage of development.
- **Children's Rights quality mark.** This instrument is currently being developed. The mark will provide the user with insight into the risks of a digital service by means of a label, for example, the question of whether a service contains an addictive design.
- In 2022, the **Youth Council on Digitalisation** was established. This council advises the Minister for Digitalisation on the policy concerning children and digitalisation.
- The **Netherlands Youth Institute (NJI)** has developed a media education toolbox (containing fact sheets for professionals and teachers, as well as tip sheets for parents. In partnership with young people themselves and organisations such as the youth mental health organisation MIND Us and the Dutch Media Literacy Network, it promotes media literacy, digital skills and striking a balance between digital and other activities.

The Children's Rights Impact Assessment and Code for Children's Rights online – among other legislation – specifically focuses on **children's rights** as recognised in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Policy design

Policy design asks whether evidence and research support BIK-related policies and whether systems are in place for monitoring and evaluating those policies.

	High	Medium	Low	Not present
Regular data collection		X		
Data on risks, harms, well-being		X		
Information systems		X		
National research fund			X	
Monitoring and evaluation	X			

Table 2: Policy design - Netherlands

- **Quantitative data on some aspects of children’s digital activity is collected regularly as part of broader surveys.**
- **Some but not all aspects of children’s experiences of risks,** harms and digital well-being are included in regular surveys.
- **Information is regularly gathered to inform policies on children and the digital environment.** However, this relies primarily on third-party sources, and there are limited opportunities to commission new data on children's digital activity.
- **There are occasional special initiatives** to gather evidence about children and the digital environment.
- **Policies undergo systematic and regular monitoring** and evaluation to assess the effectiveness of actions in different contexts (for instance, to take account of new technologies or emergent risks).

Key national research studies

There is no systematic country-level data collection on this topic; however, various data collection, analysis, and research activities are carried out by other parties that relate to this topic. For example:

- The **Netherlands Statistics Office (CBS)** collects annual data on ICT use by children and young people (including internet, social media, and screen time) as part of broader statistical surveys.

- The in-depth study [Iene Miene Media](#) is conducted annually among parents of children aged 0 to 6 and is coordinated by Netwerk Mediawijsheid. The [Media Use Monitor](#) for children aged 7 to 12 is also produced by [Netwerk Mediawijsheid](#).
- The [Digitalisation Monitor for Primary and Secondary Education \(MYRA\)](#) focuses on digitalisation in compulsory education. MYRA is a collaboration between Kennisnet, the PO-Raad and the VO-raad. The research was designed and carried out by the Kohnstamm Institute and covers digitalisation, privacy, ICT use, digital skills and media literacy in education.
- The research centre, [Centre for Research on Children, Adolescents and the Media \(CcaM\)](#), is particularly active in identifying and studying the effects of media on children.
- The Dutch Media Authority ([Commissariaat voor de Media](#)) publishes an annual [Media Monitor](#).
- HBSC (Health Behaviour in School-aged Children) is a large-scale, international study on the health and well-being of school-aged children, which includes (digital) bullying. In [HBSC-Netherlands](#), the Trimbos Institute collaborates with Utrecht University and the Netherlands Institute for Social Research.
- The [Expert Centre on Digitalisation and Well-being](#) of the Trimbos Institute publishes data and statistics on digital media use.
- The national study [Sex under the age of 25 \(Seks onder de 25\)](#) is conducted every five years to monitor trends and developments in the health and lifestyles of young people. The study is carried out by Soa Aids Nederland and Rutgers on behalf of the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport and the
- [National Institute for Public Health and the Environment \(RIVM\)](#), in collaboration with municipal health services (GGDs) throughout the Netherlands and Statistics Netherlands (CBS). It also measures relational and sexual behaviour and experiences that take place online.

- The National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings and Sexual Violence against Children also publishes extensive data and analyses on online forms of sexual exploitation and abuse.

Currently, no specific national research fund or research programme supported by the Dutch government is available. However, we are setting up a national Expertise Centre that will eventually map the effects of digitalisation on people's well-being (primarily vulnerable groups, such as children).

Policy governance

Policy governance examines how policies are coordinated at the governmental level, whether other implementation bodies are involved in their delivery and coordination.

	High	Medium	Low	Not present
Lead ministry for policy development			X	
National coordination body		X		
National action plan or strategy		X		

Table 3: Policy governance - Netherlands

- **The lead ministry, public agency, or regulatory authority operates on an informal, ad hoc basis,** depending on the requirements at any given time.
- **Coordination occurs across relevant departments and stakeholders through more informal arrangements.**
- **One or more programmes of action is/are underway** supporting children's online safety and participation in the digital environment. However, these lack accountabilities, such as defined timelines, assigned responsibilities or key performance indicators (KPIs).

As responsibility for children's online safety and digital activity is divided across several ministries, it may differ by topic. However, the Minister for Digitalisation (part of the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations) is

coordinating the national digitalisation policy, including children's online safety and digital activity policy.

The broader Dutch strategy for digitalisation, coordinated by the Minister for Digitalisation, is set out in the [Value-Driven Digitalisation Work agenda](#). The policy, specifically aimed at children's rights and digitalisation, is communicated to the Parliament through Parliamentary letters. The parliamentary letter "[Children's rights and digitalisation](#)" presents the relevant national initiatives to protect children online. Updates are regularly sent to the Parliament.

Stakeholder involvement

Stakeholder involvement enquires how different stakeholders can participate in policy development.

	High	Medium	Low	Not present
Stakeholder forum		X		
Public consultation on BIK topics			X	
Youth involvement in policy		X		

Table 4: Stakeholder involvement - Netherlands

- **Stakeholders are involved through various existing groups or platforms** across different government branches. While opportunities for engagement exist, they are not centrally coordinated, and stakeholder participation may vary in consistency or influence.
- **Public consultation occurs**, but it is irregular, infrequent, or limited in scope.
- **Children are listened to directly in the policy development process** but are not formally involved in decision-making.

Stakeholder mechanisms

- Stakeholders are regularly invited to contribute to policy deliberation and development regarding children and the digital environment. However,

no designated multi-stakeholder forum or other formal mechanism exists in this regard.

- When new legislation is being introduced, public consultation will take place. The public is not generally consulted on new policies that are not laid down in legislation, such as policy instruments (soft law). However, the youth council on digitalisation is regularly consulted during policy development on protecting children's rights online.
- In September 2023, the Netherlands established a [Youth Council on Digitalisation](#) in partnership with UNICEF. Children aged 11-17 are advising the Minister for Digitalisation on digital technologies they encounter in their daily lives. The outcomes of the youth council sessions are input for national policy on the protection of children in the digital world.

BIK+ actions

Pillar 1 – Safe digital experiences

Actions to promote a safe, age-appropriate digital environment that respects children’s best interests.

	In place	In development	Other activity	Not present
Content rating systems for online/video games	X			
DSC measures protection of minors	X			
DSC-SIC working relationship	X			
Definition of harmful online content			X	
Complaints handling mechanism		X		
Intimate image abuse laws	X			
Cyberbullying laws				X
Age verification requirements		X		
Digital wallet for minors		X		
EU harmonised age verification		X		
Laws on online marketing		X		
Protecting mental health and well-being				X

Table 5: Safe digital experiences - Netherlands

Implementing EU laws

- The [Code for Children’s Rights](#) helps developers and designers focus on children's rights when developing digital services. The Code consists of ten principles, each accompanied by practical examples for

implementation. The principles are not, in themselves, legally enforceable, but are based on law and regulations (such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989), which are indeed legally binding.

- The [Digital Services Coordinator \(DSC\)](#) in the Netherlands (Authority for Consumers & Markets – ACM) has been fully active since the beginning of 2025. In July 2025, the DSC designated [Offlimits](#) as the first trusted flagger under the DSA.
- The DSC has maintained close contact with the SIC since their appointment.

Addressing online harms

- Definitions of harmful audiovisual content are not specified by law. However, the Minister of Education, Culture and Science has designated an organisation to draft rules for the classification of audiovisual content ([NICAM](#) has been appointed to do so). The Media Act only specifies the categories that should be included in those rules but provides no definition. Furthermore, since 1 January 2024, the use of personal data for harassment purposes - also known as doxing is criminalised in the Netherlands.
- The organisation designated by the Minister is organised in a way of 'conditioned self-regulation'. The media service provider must classify its content in accordance with NICAM rules. [NICAM](#) develops the classification mechanism and trains the 'classifiers'. Broadcasters must join [NICAM](#) to broadcast potentially harmful content.
- In the audiovisual domain, children (or their parents) can file a complaint with [NICAM](#) if they consider the NICAM classification inadequate. A formal complaint can also be filed with the Dutch Media Authority if the media service provider fails to comply with the law.

Age assurance

- In the Netherlands, a preliminary framework has been developed to help developers and providers of online services and products choose the right age assessment method. There is no one-size-fits-all method for

age verification. The selection of an appropriate age assessment method depends on the characteristics of an online service or product. This framework is designed to help assess which age assessment method is appropriate, considering robustness, privacy, safety and accessibility.

Supporting digital well-being

- There is a code of conduct for Influencer marketing from the self-regulatory organisation for advertising in the Netherlands (SRC): [Advertising Code for Social Media & Influencer Marketing](#) (RSM) or Stichting Reclame Code. Although this code itself is non-statutory, registration with the SRC is a statutory obligation for certain influencers with large followings who are active on major social media platforms, as stated in the [Dutch Media Law](#) (Mediawet). The code could, in theory, also be enforced under the law on unfair trade (Wet Oneerlijke Handelspraktijken), but in practice, such cases are often handled by the SRC.

Pillar 2 – Digital empowerment

	In place	In development	Other activity	Not present
Teaching online safety		X		
Digital skills training				X
Policies on digital use in schools	X			
Adequate teacher training			X	
Non-formal online safety education	X			
Critical media literacy	X			
Creative digital skills	X			
Supports for parents	X			

Table 6: Digital empowerment - Netherlands

Digital empowerment in formal education

- There is a [guideline for schools](#) to ban phones from classrooms. Schools also have an obligation to create a safe learning environment for pupils. This means that when cyberbullying affects school safety, schools have an obligation to respond. [Stichting School en Veiligheid](#) offers information and advice on how schools can respond to cyberbullying.

Digital empowerment and lifelong learning

- The [Media Literacy Network](#) has an extensive programme to strengthen media literacy among all Dutch people and is supported by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science for this purpose. The programme pays extra attention to young people (through education) and the vulnerable (through, for example, healthcare and welfare institutions).
- To better equip parents and children to deal well with digital products and services, we are currently setting up a multi-year public communication. This communication should begin in the autumn of this year and address various risks to children when using online services. This communication will be aimed at children and their parents/carers.
- More than 1,000 partners are affiliated with the Media Literacy Network. The Media Literacy Network has developed the so-called [MediaDiamant](#) for parents. This is a tool for parents to have the right conversation with their child about media use. Enjoying the possibilities, preventing risks, guiding your child, knowing which content is suitable and maintaining a healthy balance are important topics. The [MediaDiamant](#) is for parents with children aged 0 to 18 years and has been developed by experts and scientists.

Pillar 3 – Active participation, respecting children’s rights

	In place	In development	Other activity	Not present
Promoting civic engagement	X			
Promoting children's rights	X			
Child-friendly policy documents		X		
Addressing digital inequalities		X		
Positive digital content		X		

Table 7: Active participation, respecting rights - Netherlands

BIK+ index 2026: Netherlands

The BIK+ index has been developed to provide an aggregated at-a-glance overview of the levels of implementation across the two dimensions, BIK policies and BIK+ actions, in the Netherlands compared to the EU27+2 average. Values are shown in per cent.

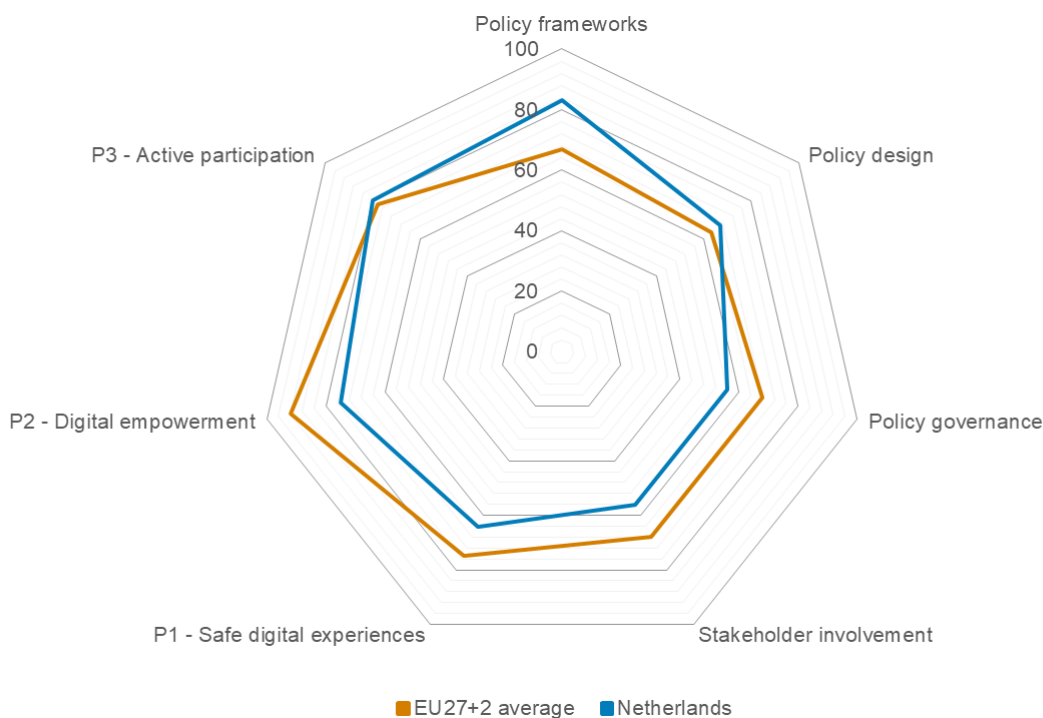


Figure 1: BIK+ index 2026: Netherlands - EU27+2 average comparison