

The BRC on the BES islands

Survey statistics and an in-depth study of culture coaches

Nina Derix & Denise Smit

Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba (the BES islands) have been participating in the 'Community Sports and Culture Scheme' (Brede Regeling Combinatiefuncties, BRC) since 2023. In this factsheet we explain which BRC officers were present on the islands and how they were deployed in 2024 and 2025 and we clarify the results of an in-depth study into culture coaches on the BES islands.

We outline the situation on the basis of data which policy officers on the three BES islands provided in response to our survey questionnaire. This survey is an annual event which we have also been using on the BES islands since 2023. It is the same questionnaire as sent out to municipalities in the European Netherlands (Gómez Berns et al., 2025). The survey's reference date is 31 December 2024. We supplement the figures with information from three interviews with the culture coaches from Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba. We conducted these interviews in the second half of 2025.

In this fact sheet we discuss Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba as a single entity because we are surveying them within the framework of the BRC as the BES islands. Having said that, the three islands each have their own cultural, historical and social context. The experiences of culture coaches and the way they perform their duties also differs per island and we explain these differences in the text wherever that is relevant.

9

BRC officials were working on the BES islands in 2024

5

culture coaches were working on the BES islands in 2024

Deployment and financing

We used the survey questionnaire to gather information on the deployment of BRC officers and the funding arrangements.

More culture coaches on the BES islands

In total the number of BRC officials (community sports coaches and culture coaches) employed on the BES islands amounted to 9 fte in 2024 (table 1). The corresponding number in 2023 was 5 fte.

The number of culture coaches on the BES islands has increased from one in 2023 to five in 2024 (Gómez Berns & Van Stam, 2024). The number of community sports coaches has stayed the same.

It is worth noting that the number of FTEs and the number of people are the same. This means that the officials on the BES islands are all employed on a full-time basis and Central Government reimburses all the associated costs.

Table 1
Number of fte and people employed as BRC officials on the de BES islands in 2024*
(in figures)

	Fte	People
Bonaire		
Community sports coach	1	1
Culture coach	2	2
St. Eustatius		
Community sports coach	2	2
Culture coach	2	2
Saba		
Community sports coach	1	1
Culture coach	1	1

Source: Mulier Institute, Community Sports and Culture Scheme Survey (*Monitor Brede Regeling Combinatiefuncties*) 2024.

*The BRC scheme contains descriptions of six job profiles. Not all of these are represented on the BES islands.

Culture coaches: duties and goals

Multifaceted role of culture coaches

Culture coaches on the BES islands fulfil a broad and multifaceted role within the field of culture. The interviews reveal that their work consists of a combination of implementation, coordination, development and support.

One junior and one senior culture coach is present on St. Eustatius. The work of the junior culture coach focuses primarily on organising activities and events. One key example of this are the heritage lessons at schools which are designed to teach children about the island's history and culture.

The senior culture coach is more involved with policy, cooperation and development and supports, for example, organisations with project development, subsidy applications and policy recommendations.

On Bonaire the emphasis is on, among other things, strengthening the cultural infrastructure (for example workshops and ateliers where residents can actively participate in cultural activities) and on highlighting the importance of art and culture within society. Culture coaches support cultural organisations

on the island, develop programmes and encourage cooperation between schools, artists and the community. This role is comparable with the role fulfilled by the culture coach on Saba.

Culture as a social connector

The goals of the culture coaches on the BES islands include improving cultural participation and developing the cultural sector. The goal of culture coaches is to make culture accessible to the community, to shine a light on the importance of art and heritage and to contribute to a more robust cultural basis on the islands.

One important element of this is involving children and young people in culture, for example via culture education at schools and afterschool activities. At the same time, the culture coaches are trying to reach as many residents as possible, for example through community activities and events.

Culture coaches: domains

Connection with cultural organisations and primary education

The survey shows that culture coaches on the three BES islands connect with a variety of domains. On all three of the islands, they collaborate with organisations that offer art or cultural activities (such as amateur associations, cultural centres, libraries and museums) and primary education institutions (table 2).

Widespread cooperation with organisations

It is clear from the interviews that culture coaches on the BES islands organise heritage lessons, workshops and other forms of cultural education at schools.

They also collaborate regularly with civil society organisations and venues in the neighbourhood, in which context they often play an initiating and coordinating role. A culture coach may work together with a youth centre to arrange cooking lessons for teenagers, for example. They will then organise and promote the activity, while the youth centre will take responsibility for implementation and for providing the location.

Table 2
Domains and sectors which the culture coaches on the BES islands connected with in 2024
(in figures, n=3)

Domain/sector	Number
Organisations offering art or cultural activities	3
Primary education	3
Secondary education	2
Well-being	2
Neighbourhood	2
Health/care	1
Senior secondary vocational education	1
Special (primary) education	1
Childcare	1
Business community	1
Other	1

Source: Mulier Institute, Community Sports and Culture Scheme Survey (Monitor Brede Regeling Combinatiefuncties) 2024.

Culture coaches: target groups

General focus on children and adults

The interviews show that, due to the limited size of the islands (particularly Saba and St. Eustatius) all residents fall within the culture coaches' target group. Their goal is therefore to bring together people with various cultural backgrounds and this is reflected in the survey. The culture coaches focus on children, young people, young adults and adults on all three BES islands (table 3). They also focus on elderly people on two of the islands. In addition, the culture coaches on one island organised activities which were not intended for a single specific age group.

Limited focus on specific target groups

Culture coaches on the BES islands focus on a small number of specific target groups. This includes, for example, people with a disability, people with a low income or unemployed people/jobseekers. On two islands their focus is local residents and on one island on people with a low income or a low socio-economic position.

Table 3
Age groups which the culture coaches on the BES islands focused on in 2024

(in figures, n=3)

Age group	Number
Children (4-12 years old)	3
Young people (12-18 years old)	3
Young adults (18-24 years old)	3
Adults (24-65 years old)	3
The elderly (65+)	2
No specific target group	1

Bron: Mulier Institute, Community Sports and Culture Scheme Survey (*Monitor Brede Regeling Combinatiefuncties*) 2024.

Culture coaches: impact, opportunities and challenges

Impact: a stronger cultural basis

The impact of the culture coaches on the BES islands is evident both in specific activities and in the development of the cultural sector:

- They set up new cultural activities and programmes, such as the heritage lessons at schools on St. Eustatius, dance and musical activities on Saba, as well as spoken word workshops, for example, podcasts and 3D printing on Bonaire.
- They help to strengthen cooperation within the cultural sector. Schools, cultural organisations, artists and neighbourhood initiatives are better connected and collaborate more frequently on activities and projects.
- They are working to create a more robust cultural infrastructure. Relevant examples include the development of a 'maker space' on Bonaire and the setting up of the database of cultural actors. The fact that many of the culture coach positions are still relatively new, means the impact of their work is still ongoing and not always entirely evident.

Opportunities: improve scope and cooperation

The culture coaches on the BES islands are aware of various opportunities in the field of scope and cooperation. It is, for instance, possible to reach more people by lowering barriers to culture, for example for young people or groups

that are less likely to participate in cultural activities. They also regard cooperation between organisations, schools and cultural providers as an important opportunity to continue strengthening cultural education and the cultural infrastructure.

Challenges: limited capacity, resources and visibility

Due to having limited capacity, resources and visibility, it is sometimes tricky for the culture coaches to fully achieve their goals. They often must fulfil a variety of roles at the same time – from organiser and programmer to connect and advisor – as a result of which the amount of time they have available is limited. At the same time, setting up long-term initiatives, cultural education and cooperation within the cultural sector takes a lot of time, commitment and support.

The fact that the position of culture coach on the BES islands is still relatively new, means it is sometimes tricky for the cultural coaches to be sufficiently visible and supported within the community. In discussions with their partners and residents, culture coaches have noticed that it is not always clear to people what they exactly do and what kind of impact they can have on the community.

Sources

- Gómez Berns, A., Bronkhorst, P., Wessels, W., & Van Stam, W. (2025). Community Sports and Culture Scheme Survey (Monitor Brede Regeling Combinatiefuncties) 2024. The Mulier Institute.
- Gómez Berns, A., & Van Stam, W. (2024). The BRC on the BES islands: survey statistics and an in-depth study of the culture coach on Bonaire (De BRC op de BES-eilanden: monitoringscijfers en een verdiepend onderzoek naar de buurtsportcoach van Bonaire) [Factsheet 2024/45]. The Mulier Institute.





Contact

Nina Derix

n.derix@mulierinstituut.nl

Denise Smit

d.smit@mulierinstituut.nl

July 2026