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RESEARCH REPORT

DATA COLLECTION FOR BASELINE AND FUTURE MONITORING.

CHILD-FRIENDLY CITY PROJECT

YOUTH PERSPECTIVES ON GROWING UP IN SINT MAARTEN

JULY 3RD, 2026

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Abstract

This youth-led mixed-methods baseline study examined how children and youth in Sint Maarten experience growing up and living on the island, using the Child-Friendly Cities framework as a practical reference point. The study combined a quantitative survey with qualitative focus groups. Two age-appropriate survey versions were developed: one for children aged 8–12 and one for youth aged 13 and older. A total of 269 primary school students and 300 secondary school students participated. Five focus group discussions were also conducted. Ten trained youth volunteers contributed to several stages of the project, including survey administration and focus group facilitation.

Overall, the results show that many children and youth report positive access to basic support, school resources, internet, devices, and trusted adults. However, experiences were more mixed in relation to equal treatment, youth participation, healthy living, school transportation, leisure opportunities, community conditions, and safety. Younger children tended to focus more on issues close to their daily lives, such as safety, family support, school, places to play, and road conditions. Older youth more often connected their concerns to broader social and economic issues, including climate and environment, poverty, mobility, education, employment, independence, and future opportunities.

The focus groups added context by showing how these issues are connected in practice. Safety was discussed across schools, school buses, neighbourhoods, public spaces, and online. Participation was linked not only to the availability of platforms but also to awareness, trust, and visible follow-up when youth share their views. Healthy living and addiction prevention were connected to access, enforcement, adult role models, stress, and the wider environment in which young people grow up.

The findings identify several priority areas raised by children and youth themselves: safety, being heard and taken seriously, equal treatment and fair access to opportunities, healthy living and addiction prevention, leisure and cultural opportunities, cleaner and safer communities, and broader support for well-being and future opportunities. Together, the results provide a useful baseline for understanding child- and youth-friendliness in Sint Maarten and for guiding future policy dialogue and monitoring.

Research design support, youth research training, methodological guidance, data analysis, and reporting were provided by:

Bart van der Meijden
van der Meijden Graphics & Consultancy

WHAT YOUTH SAY ABOUT GROWING UP IN SINT MAARTEN

CHILD FRIENDLY CITY RESEARCH PROJECT

JULY 2026

569 Total survey respondents

269 Primary School respondents

300 Secondary School respondents

10 Youth volunteers helped adapt the existing CFC survey to the local Sint Maarten context and supported the data collection and focus groups

This infographic provides a simplified summary of the findings.

P = results from Primary school | S = results from Secondary school | No symbol = results of entire group (P & S together)



01 EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

- **40%** *See bullying around them*
- **60%** *Think LGBTQ+ people are not / not really accepted*
- **41% P & 29% S** *Say everyone is treated equally*

02 PARTICIPATION

LOW CONNECTION WITH GOVERNMENT

- 19% P *Think they have a say in goernment decisions*
- 28% P *Receive guidance / feedback from government*
- 25% P *Feel they can share their ideas*
- 29% P *Know they can file a complaint*



03 DEVELOPMENT

- **73% P & 55% S** *Experience positive support from inside or outside the family*
- **45% P & 69% S** *Think there is not enough attention to health & addiction risks*

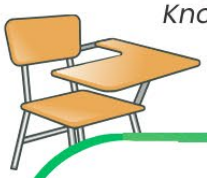
04 HOME

- **90%** *Have the right conditions for school work*
- **23%** *Have not gone on holiday / off-island in last 2 years*



05 SCHOOL

- **42% P & 64% S** *Know youths that skip school very often*
- **62% P & 40% S** *Think their school is safe*
- ***50%*** *use the school bus (and **50%** of them like it)*





06 LEISURE

- **47% P & 28% S** *Do cultural activities*
- **79% P & 49% S** *Do sports*
- **60% P & 39% S** *Enough places to hang out / play*
- **71% P & 44% S** *Enough to read in school library*





07 COMMUNITY

- **56% P & 80% S** *Think there are enough trees*
- **48% P & 82% S** *Think the roads are safe*
- **65%** *Think there is a lot of trash in their streets and ponds*



08 SAFETY

- **70% P & 65% S** *Know what to do, who to go to in case of a crime, or thought about what is legal / illegal*
- **45%** *Do not feel safe on the street or bus*
- **89%** *Never came into contact with the police*



Introduction

1.1 Background

The Government of Sint Maarten, through the Department of Youth, has expressed the ambition to strengthen its understanding of how children and youth experience growing up in Sint Maarten. In this context, the Child-Friendly Cities framework was selected as a practical reference point to help assess how children experience life on the island. At this stage, the project is not primarily aimed at formal UNICEF recognition, but rather at using the framework as a tool for local reflection and policy support.

The Child-Friendly Cities approach is rooted in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and provides governments with a practical framework to assess whether children can grow up safely, in good health, and with equal opportunities, while also ensuring that their voices are taken seriously. For Sint Maarten, this offers a useful starting point for examining child-friendliness broadly and for looking beyond individual programs toward the wider environment in which children grow up.

1.2 Objective

The main objective of this study is to gather reliable information on how children and youth experience growing up and living in Sint Maarten across the framework's main themes. A second objective is to establish a baseline that may be used for future monitoring, allowing the government and stakeholders to track trends and assess whether policy efforts are leading to improvement. In addition to describing the current situation, the study also seeks to identify priorities for improvement through focus groups, which are used to deepen the interpretation of the survey findings and to gather children's and youths' views on what should be improved and how.

1.3 Approach

This study used a mixed-methods approach to develop a baseline understanding of how children and youth experience growing up and living in Sint Maarten. A quantitative survey was used to collect broad input from a large group of respondents, while qualitative focus groups were used to better understand the survey findings and identify priorities for improvement.

A key feature of the project was the active involvement of youth volunteers. After completing a series of research training workshops, ten youth volunteers contributed to several stages of the project, including survey administration and focus group facilitation. This helped ensure that the study was not only about children and youth, but also meaningfully informed by young people themselves.

Methods

2.1 Project Design

The project followed a youth-led mixed-methods baseline design. Two age-appropriate versions of the questionnaire were developed: one for children aged 8–12 and one for youth aged 13 and older, covering a total age range of 8–24 years. Data collection took place mainly through schools.

The original plan was for youth volunteers to collect data primarily within their own schools. In practice, the final approach became more flexible, depending on which schools could participate and what type of support was needed. As a result, data collection was carried out through a combination of youth volunteer efforts and support from the Department of Youth and the research consultant.

2.2 Youth Research Training

A total of ten youth volunteers, aged 15 to 19, participated in the research training component of this project. They were recruited by the Department of Youth and represented a mix of secondary and tertiary educational institutions on Sint Maarten.

The training consisted of four workshops. The first three, held on January 31, February 5, and February 7, 2026, introduced the volunteers to the basics of social research, including research purpose, qualitative and quantitative methods, ethics, bias, sampling, and fair and consistent data collection. The volunteers were also introduced to the CFC survey and asked to reflect on whether the wording and content were clear and suitable for the Sint Maarten context.

A fourth workshop, held on April 15, 2026, prepared the volunteers for the qualitative phase of the project. This session focused on the purpose and structure of focus groups and the skills needed to facilitate them in a neutral, structured manner, including moderation, note-taking, group dynamics, open questioning, and thematic reporting.

Together, these workshops prepared the volunteers for their role in both the survey phase and the qualitative follow-up.

2.3 Survey Development

The project team used the existing framework as a starting point and adapted it to better fit the Sint Maarten context while retaining the original tool's overall structure and intent. The aim was to ensure that the questions were understandable, relevant, and age-appropriate.

Before the workshop phase began, the survey design benefited from external consultation. Feedback and practical recommendations were received from Ms. Monica Smith, Policy Officer Youth, Sport and Social Support on Sint Eustatius, who had prior experience with implementing a similar survey.

During the first workshop, the youth volunteers reviewed the questionnaire together and discussed which questions were relevant for Sint Maarten and where wording adjustments were

needed. Most adaptations focused on simplifying language, improving local relevance, and making the wording more suitable for the intended age groups. Afterward, the Department of Youth and the research consultant conducted a final review and made additional refinements where needed.

The final survey consisted of two versions: one for primary school children and one for secondary school youth and older. The overall structure remained largely the same across both versions, with largely consistent response scales. The main difference was that the participation section was omitted from the older version, as many of these themes had already been covered in the earlier Youth Engagement Survey and would otherwise have duplicated existing data.

The final questionnaire was largely closed-ended but also included two open-ended questions at the end, allowing respondents to identify issues they felt the government should pay more attention to and to add any final comments in their own words.

2.4 Data Collection

Target Group
The study aimed to collect data from children and youth on the Dutch side of Sint Maarten. In practice, data collection focused mainly on students attending school, as many of the survey questions relate directly to school, learning, and other daily environments relevant to this group. The survey was conducted in English and targeted children and youth aged 8 to 24, with no further exclusions in principle.

Data Collection Procedure
Data collection began after the third training workshop and continued through the survey and focus group phases until approximately the end of May 2026. Survey administration took place primarily in schools across different educational levels and age groups. A total of 8 schools participated in the project. The surveys were usually completed in classroom settings, often in computer rooms or other supervised school environments, using computers, tablets, or mobile phones.

Most of the data collection was carried out by the youth volunteers. In a smaller number of cases, this was supported or conducted by the Department of Youth and the research consultant, depending on what was most practical for the schools involved.

Participation was voluntary at all times. Schools were informed in advance and provided with the relevant consent forms and supporting information. They then coordinated communication with parents and guardians and facilitated the consent process. During survey administration, anonymity and confidentiality were explained to participants, and teachers remained present during the sessions.

Instruments
The survey was administered digitally through SurveyMonkey, using the same platform across all locations.

For the qualitative component, a separate focus group protocol was developed during the youth volunteer training process. This included both facilitation guidance and instructions for reporting the focus group results afterward.

2.5 Analysis

The survey data were exported from SurveyMonkey and analyzed primarily using descriptive methods. Frequencies, percentages, and averages were used to summarize the results and provide an overview of how children and youth experience different aspects of life on Sint Maarten.

Where relevant, comparisons were made between the two main age groups represented by the survey versions, namely primary school children and secondary school youth. Although some additional demographic information was collected, such as age and neighbourhood, these variables were not used extensively in the analysis. In particular, the neighbourhood data were considered too broad to support meaningful subgroup comparisons.

Percentages were calculated based on all valid responses to each question, including "I'm not sure," "Not applicable," and "Not comfortable with this question." These categories were included because they provide relevant information about respondents' awareness, experience, or ability to answer certain topics. Therefore, positive response percentages should be interpreted as the share of all respondents who answered the question, not only of those who gave a clear yes/no response.

The middle response category is presented as "Sometimes / Maybe / Not Really." Although these response options are not identical in meaning, they were grouped because they all represent answers that are neither clearly positive nor clearly negative. This category should therefore be interpreted as a mixed or uncertain response category, rather than as one single type of response.

The two survey versions were analyzed separately, but because they largely covered the same themes, the results are presented side by side by topic. This allows for comparison between the younger and older groups while keeping the report focused on the main themes.

The open-ended survey responses were reviewed and grouped into recurring themes, which were then summarized in the report. The focus group data were also analyzed thematically and used to add context to the survey findings by helping explain why certain patterns appear in the data. In addition, the focus groups provide youth-generated ideas and recommendations on how identified issues could be improved.

Only sufficiently completed survey responses were included in the analysis. Surveys with less than 20% completion were excluded from the final dataset. A total of 92 responses were removed for this reason, including 56 from the primary school survey and 36 from the secondary school survey.

Results

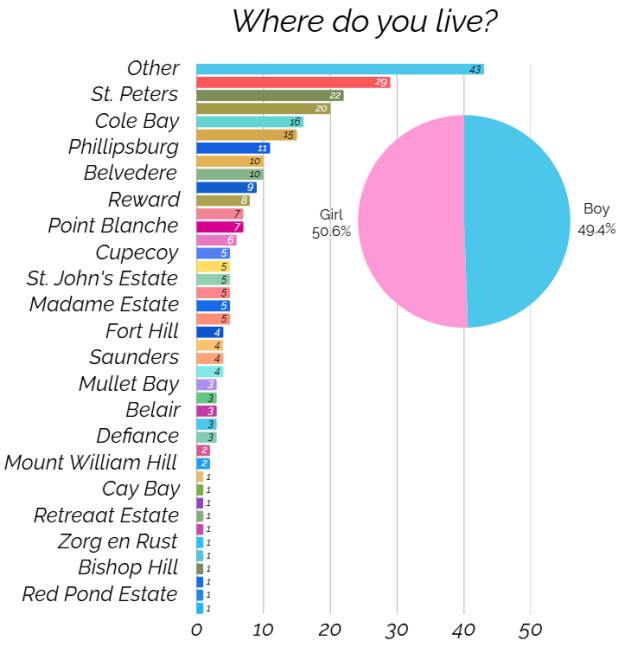
3.1.1 Demographics – primary school

A total of 269 young people participated in the CFC primary school survey. The sample consisted of 133 boys and 136 girls. The average age of the participants of the primary school group was 10.26 (SD 1.74).

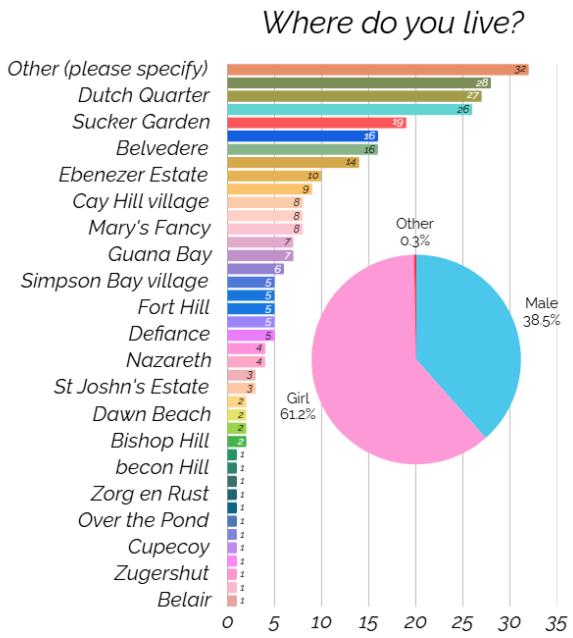
3.1.2 Demographics – secondary school

A total of 300 young people participated in the CFC secondary school survey. The sample consisted of 115 boys, 183 girls, and 2 respondents who selected ''Other''. The average age of the participants of the secondary school group was 15.59 (SD 2.53).

Primary school

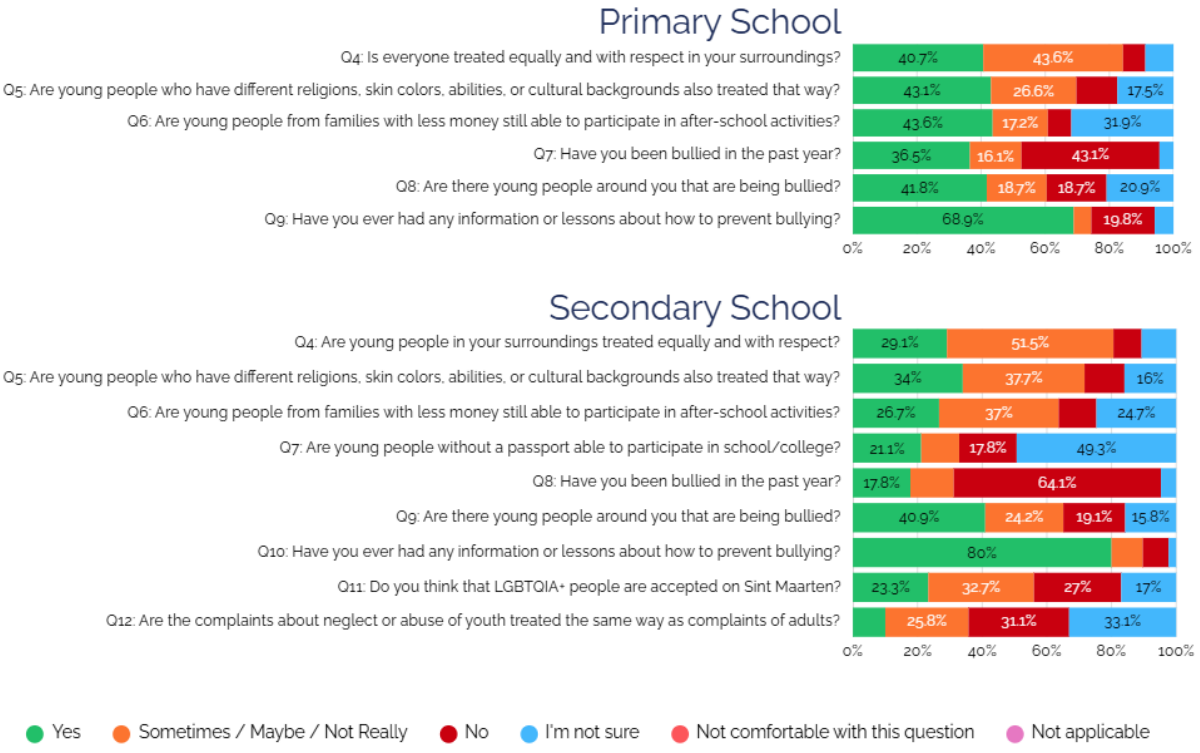


Secondary school



3.2.1 Equal opportunity

This category looks at whether children and young people feel that everyone in Sint Maarten is treated equally, respectfully, and fairly, regardless of background, religion, skin colour, ability, culture, family income, or other personal circumstances. It also explores whether young people experience or witness bullying, discrimination, or exclusion, and whether they receive enough information and support to help prevent these issues.



Key findings

Responses to equal treatment are mixed. Many respondents are positive, but *"Sometimes"* and *"I'm not sure"* are also common, especially on whether different groups are treated equally. For participation without a passport, almost half selected ''I'm not sure''.

Most respondents do not report being bullied themselves, but awareness of bullying around them is higher. Many respondents indicated they received information or lessons about bullying prevention.

Notable differences between primary & secondary school

Primary school students are more positive about equal treatment and respect. Secondary school students more often select *"Sometimes"* or *"I'm not sure."*

For bullying, both groups show a similar pattern, although secondary school students report slightly more awareness of bullying around them.

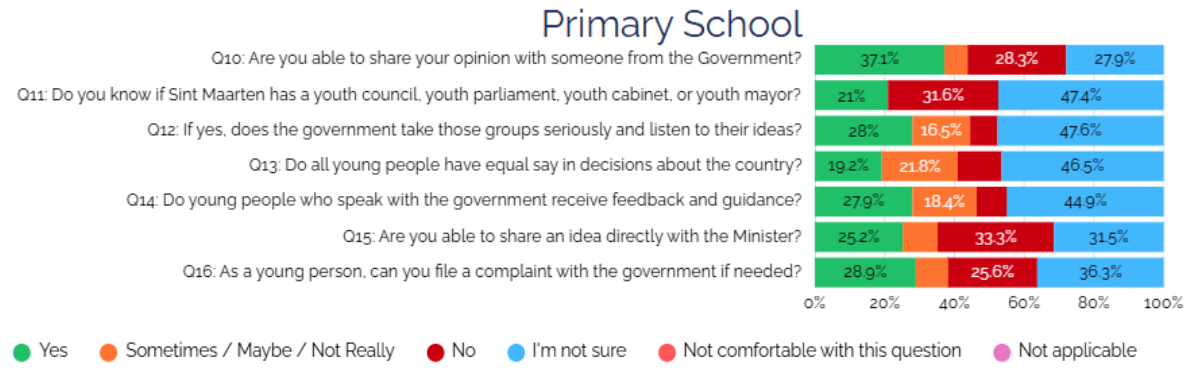
Focus group information

The focus groups add nuance to the survey findings by showing that bullying is not always experienced as direct or obvious. Younger participants mainly described bullying as name-calling, hitting, peer pressure, and online comments, while older participants more often pointed to teasing, jokes, sharing personal information, or comments about appearance that may be dismissed as "just joking" but can still be hurtful. This suggests that prevention efforts should not only focus on clear cases of bullying, but also on helping students and adults recognize more subtle forms of exclusion and disrespect.

Some older participants also linked equal opportunity to access and belonging. They described examples where documentation, travel requirements, or unequal support for different sports and activities can limit young people's ability to participate fully. Although this was not raised across all groups, it highlights that equal treatment is not only about social interactions, but also about whether young people have fair access to opportunities.

3.2.2 Participation

This category focuses on whether children and young people feel they have opportunities to share their opinions with government and decision-makers. It explores whether youth are aware of existing participation structures, whether they feel these structures are taken seriously, and whether young people receive feedback, guidance, or follow-up when they contribute their ideas.



Key findings

Responses show mixed experiences with youth participation. Many primary school respondents are unsure about formal youth participation structures, such as a youth council or youth parliament. Responses are also mixed on whether young people can share ideas directly with the government, receive feedback, or file complaints when needed.

Notable differences with older youth

Since the secondary school CFC survey did not include this category, the comparison is made with the 2025 Youth Engagement Study by the Department of Youth, which focused on older youth in Sint Maarten. The pattern is broadly similar: formal participation channels are not very visible, and feedback or follow-up after youth input is not consistently clear. In that study, youth

reported being asked for input mostly by peers and parents, while government engagement was lowest among the listed groups. Awareness of existing youth participation platforms was also limited.

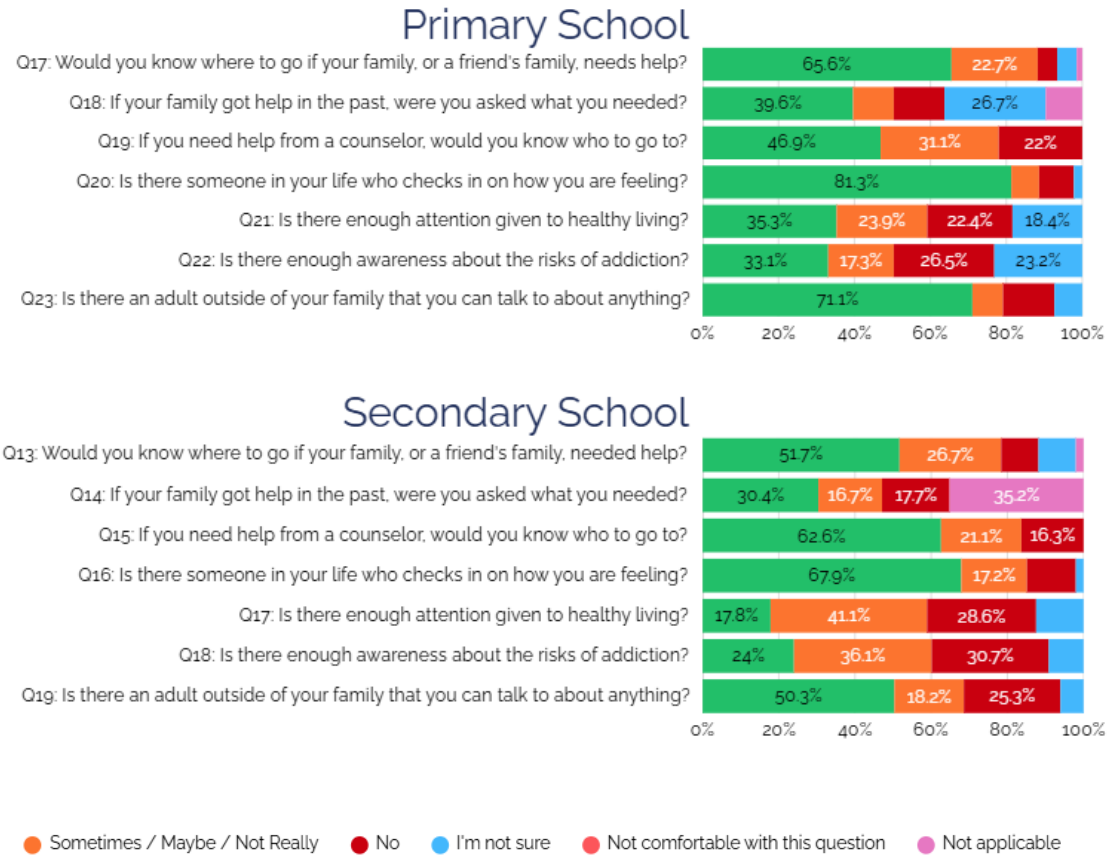
Focus group information

The focus groups confirmed that formal youth participation structures are not very visible to many young people. Participants were generally more familiar with sports, school-based activities, or clubs than with platforms where youth can share opinions or influence decisions, such as youth councils or youth service organizations. This suggests that participation opportunities may exist, but are not always clearly recognized as spaces for youth voice or decision-making.

The discussions also showed that participation depends strongly on whether young people feel taken seriously. Some participants explained that when youth are asked for input but do not see adults listen, respond, or follow up, they may become less motivated to speak up again. This adds context to the survey findings by showing that meaningful participation requires more than creating opportunities; it also requires clear communication, trust, and visible follow-up after young people share their views.

3.2.3 Development

This category looks at whether children and young people have the support they need to grow up healthy and safe. It explores whether they know where to go when they or their family need help, whether young people are included in conversations about the support they receive, and whether they have trusted adults they can talk to when they feel sad, stressed, or worried. It also looks at access to counseling, attention to healthy living, and awareness of risks such as smoking, alcohol, drugs, gambling, and excessive gaming.



Key findings

The items on personal support show a mostly positive pattern. Many respondents indicate that they know where to go for help, have someone who checks in on how they are feeling, or have an adult outside their family they can talk to.

The answers are more mixed for support received by the family, especially whether young people were asked what they needed. Healthy living and addiction awareness also show a more divided response pattern, with “Sometimes,” “Not really/No,” and “I’m not sure” appearing more often.

Notable differences between primary & secondary school

Primary school students are more positive about knowing where to go for family support and having an adult outside the family to talk to. Secondary school students are more positive about knowing where to go for counseling.

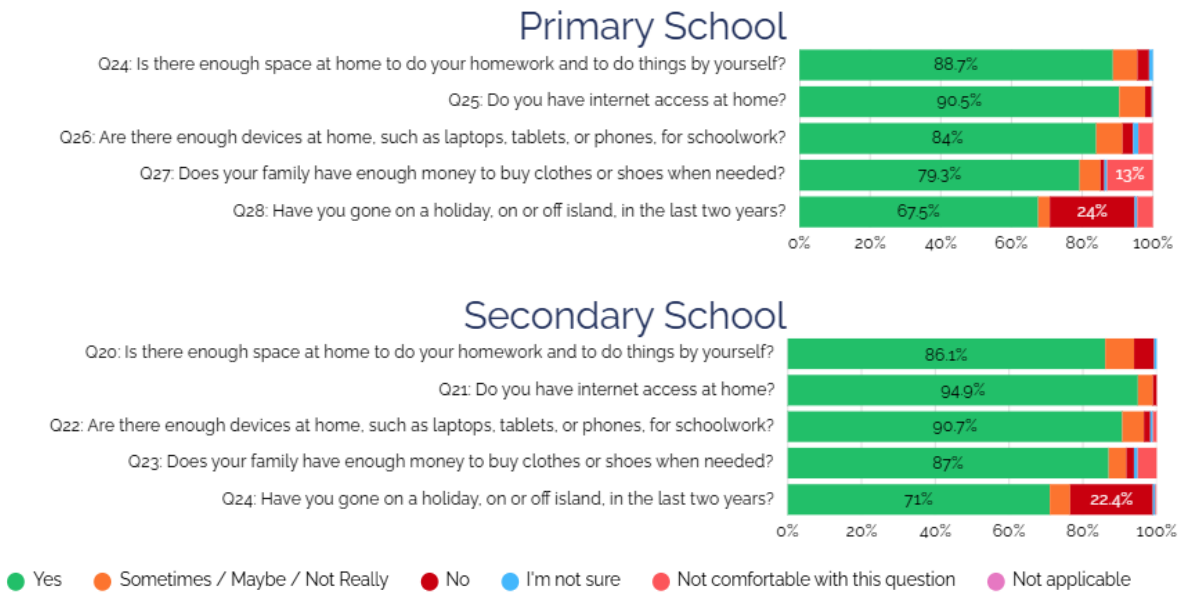
The clearest difference is in healthy living: secondary school students are less positive and more often select “Not really” or “No” on whether Sint Maarten gives enough attention to healthy living and addiction awareness.

Focus group information
The focus groups primarily provided context for the mixed responses regarding healthy living and addiction awareness. Across different age groups, participants described alcohol, drugs, vaping, gambling, gaming, and phone use as risks that young people are aware of, but not always sufficiently protected from. They pointed especially to easy access, weak enforcement of age limits, exposure through adults or family members, and the visibility of alcohol, gambling, and substance use in the wider community.

The discussions also showed that prevention is not only about providing information but also about the environment in which young people grow up. Some older participants linked substance use to stress, school pressure, and coping, while younger participants emphasized the role of adults setting the right example. This suggests that healthy living and addiction prevention should combine education with stronger adult responsibility, clearer rules, and more accessible support for young people who are already exposed to these risks.

3.2.4 Home

This category explores whether children and young people have the basic conditions at home that support their development and school life. This includes having enough space to do homework, access to the internet and devices, and whether families can afford essential needs such as clothing and shoes.



Key findings
This category is mostly positive. Most respondents indicate that they have space to do homework, internet access, and enough devices for schoolwork. Responses about clothes and shoes are also mostly positive, though at the primary school, 13% indicated they were not

comfortable with that question, which may indicate sensitivity around the question and should be interpreted with caution.

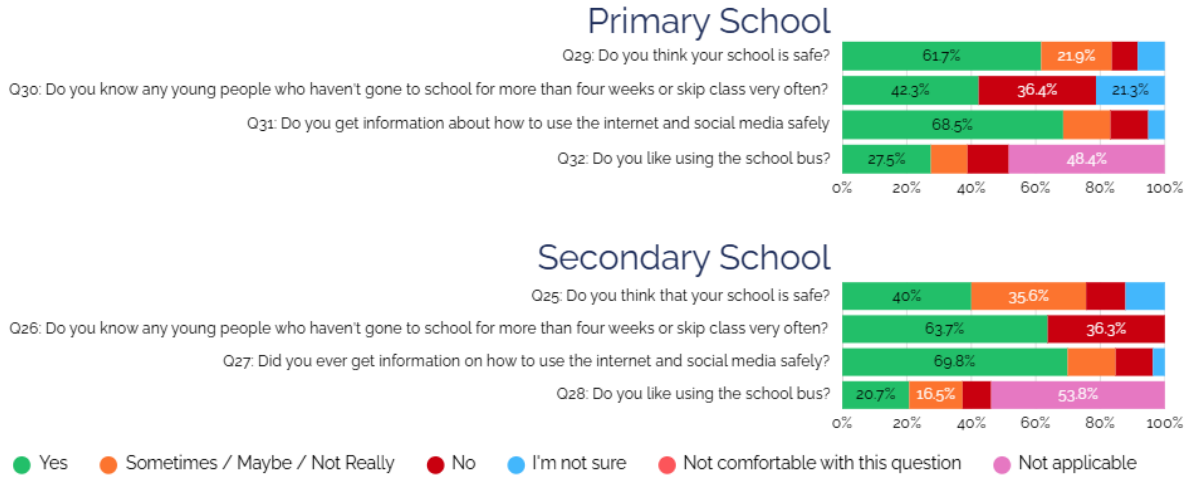
The holiday question stands out from the other home items, with more mixed answers and more respondents selecting “No” or non-response options.

Notable differences between primary & secondary school
There are no major differences between the two groups. Secondary school students are slightly more positive about internet access and devices, but the overall response pattern is broadly similar for primary and secondary school students.

Focus group information
The home category was not discussed in detail during the focus groups. As a result, the focus groups do not add substantial additional context to the survey findings for this category.

3.2.5 School

This category focuses on children’s and young people’s experiences with school safety, attendance, digital safety, and school transportation. It helps identify whether schools feel like safe and supportive environments, whether students are aware of others missing school, and whether they receive enough guidance on using the internet and social media safely.



Key findings
School safety shows a mostly positive pattern, though not all respondents report positive responses. Internet and social media safety education also shows a relatively positive pattern across both groups.

The questions about school attendance and school bus use are more mixed. A noticeable group indicates that they know young people who often miss school or skip class. Roughly half of the students indicate using the school bus, and half of the group that uses the school bus indicate that they like using the school bus.

Notable differences between primary & secondary school

Primary school students are more positive about school safety, while secondary school students more often select “Not really” or “I’m not sure.”

Secondary school students also more often indicate that they know young people who miss school or skip class often. For internet/social media safety and school bus use, there are no major differences between the two groups.

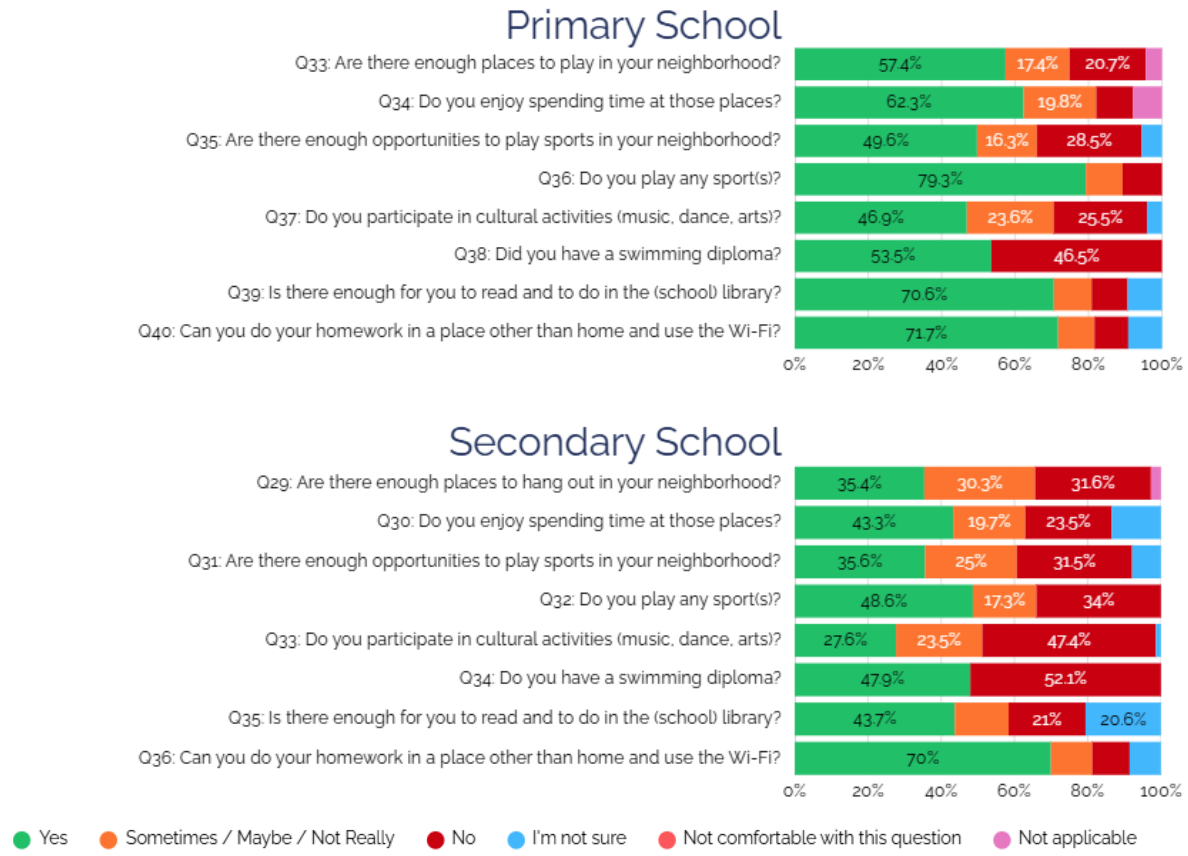
Focus group information

Participants explained that feeling safe at school is not only about the school building itself, but also about what happens between students, whether outsiders can enter the school grounds, and whether security and school staff respond effectively when problems occur. Some students also linked school safety to trust: they are more likely to feel safe when they believe adults will take reports seriously and act on them.

The discussions also helped explain the mixed views on school bus use. Concerns were mainly related to fights, bullying, older and younger students sharing the same bus, and uncertainty about who is allowed on the bus. This suggests that improving school transportation is not only about availability, but also about supervision, clear rules, and students’ sense of safety while traveling to and from school.

3.2.6 Leisure

This category looks at whether children and young people have enough opportunities to play, relax, hang out, participate in sports, and take part in cultural activities such as music, dance, and arts. It also explores whether they have access to libraries, homework spaces, Wi-Fi, and safe places to spend their free time.



Key findings

Responses in this category are mixed. Sports participation shows a more positive pattern than cultural activities. Places to play or hang out show a more divided pattern: respondents do not all answer positively about the availability or enjoyment of these spaces. Library access also stands out, with some respondents indicating that there is not enough to read or do, or that their school lacks a library. Roughly half of the respondents indicate having a swimming diploma.

Notable differences between primary & secondary school

Primary school students are generally more positive about places to play, cultural activities, library access, but most notably about playing sports.

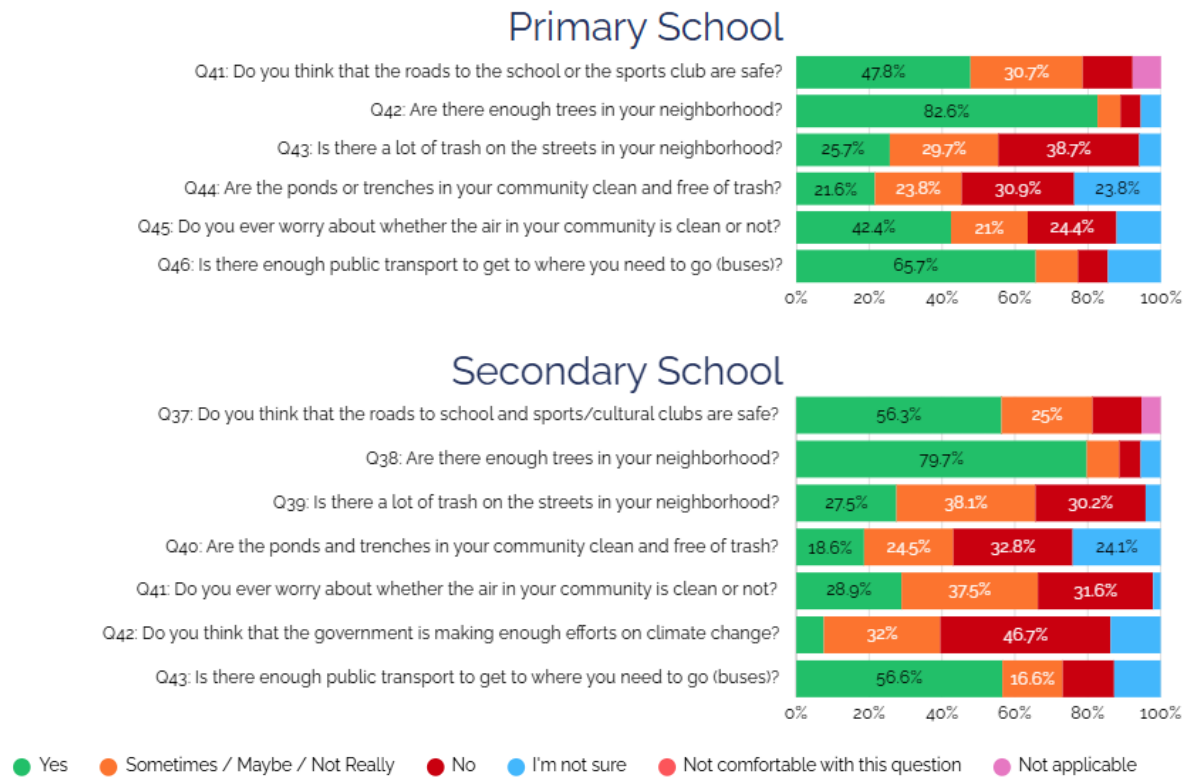
Secondary school students are less positive about places to hang out and cultural participation. The difference is clearest for cultural activities, where secondary school students more often indicate that they do not participate.

Focus group information
Sports were mentioned more easily and more often than cultural activities, suggesting that sports activities are more visible or more commonly accessed than music, arts, dance, or other cultural options. Some participants also indicated that certain activities are available mainly through school, which may limit access for youth who are not connected to those specific programs.

The discussions also showed that young people would like safer, more accessible, and varied places to spend their free time. In addition to sports and cultural activities, participants mentioned the need for more structured opportunities, such as swimming lessons, clubs, and safe spaces where youth can go after school. This suggests that leisure is not only about having activities available, but also about making them visible, accessible, and attractive to different groups of young people.

3.2.7 Community

This category examines how children and young people experience their neighbourhood and wider community. It includes road safety, public transport, trees, trash, clean ponds and trenches, air quality, and, for older students, whether they feel the government is doing enough to address climate and environmental issues.



Key findings

Responses are mixed across this category. Road safety, public transport, and the number of trees in the neighbourhood show more positive patterns than the environmental cleanliness items. Trash on the streets, ponds/trenches, and air quality stand out as items with more divided responses. These questions show more “Not really,” “No,” and “I’m not sure” responses than several other community items.

Notable differences between primary & secondary school

There are no major differences between the groups on trash, trees, ponds/trenches, or public transport. Secondary school students are somewhat less positive about air quality and road safety. They also respond less positively to the question about whether the government is doing enough for the climate and the environment.

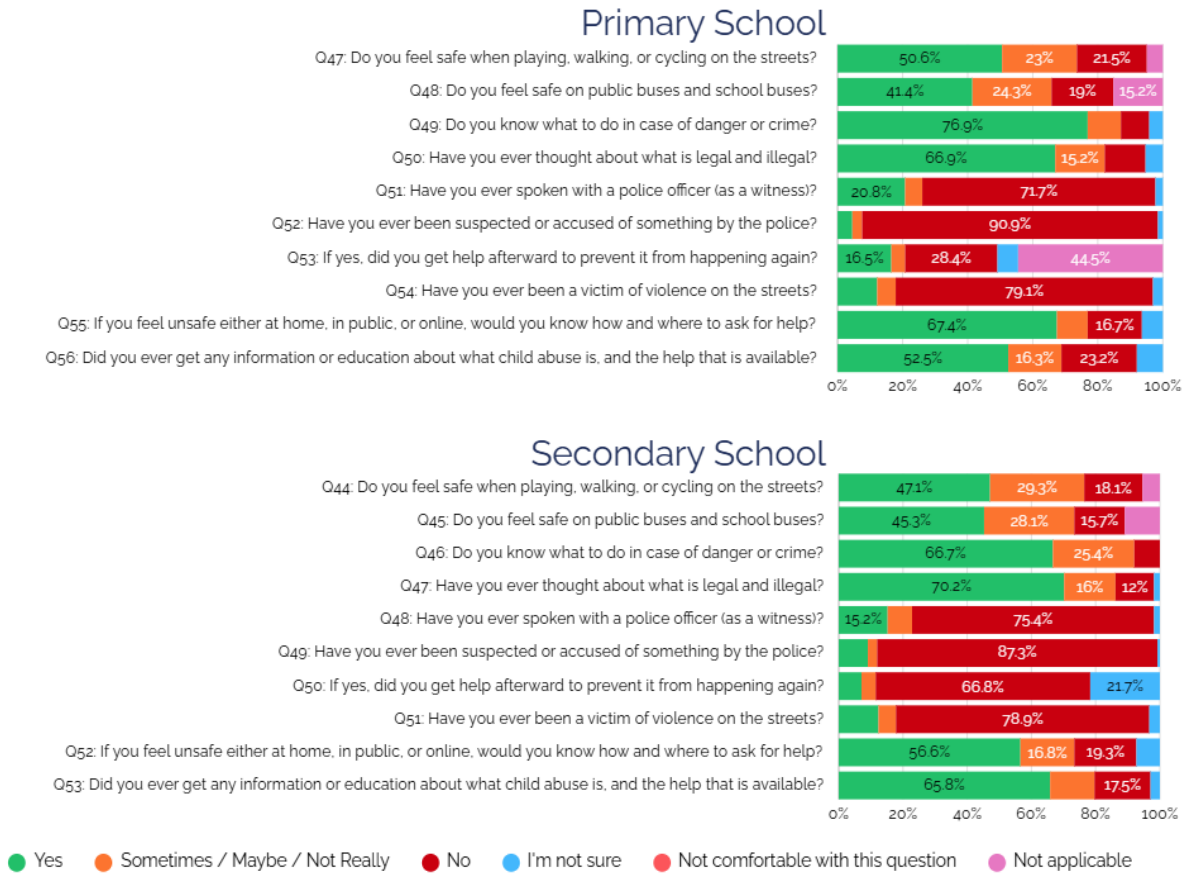
Focus group information

Participants described trash as a visible issue in several neighbourhoods, mentioning overflowing bins, irregular garbage collection, dumping of large items, stray dogs, bad smells, and possible health risks. Suggested improvements included clearer garbage collection schedules, more bins, better enforcement, and more public awareness.

The discussions also showed that community conditions affect young people’s daily sense of safety and mobility. Participants mentioned potholes, unsafe roads, limited sidewalks, and unsafe behaviour in public areas as concerns. This suggests that community improvements are not only environmental but also connected to whether children and youth can move around safely and comfortably in their neighbourhoods.

3.2.8 Safety

This category focuses on whether children and young people feel safe in public spaces, on the streets, on buses, online, and in situations involving danger or crime. It also explores their awareness of legal and illegal behaviour, experiences with police, violence, abuse, and whether they know where to ask for help when they feel unsafe.



Key findings

Responses are mostly positive on knowing what to do in case of danger or crime, understanding what is legal or illegal, and knowing where to ask for help when feeling unsafe. Information about child abuse and available help is known to the majority, but not by all.

Feelings of safety in public spaces and on buses are more mixed. Experiences involving police or street violence show that roughly 10% of all respondents indicated having been suspected or accused of something by the police, and roughly 20% indicated having been a victim of violence in the streets.

Notable differences between primary & secondary school

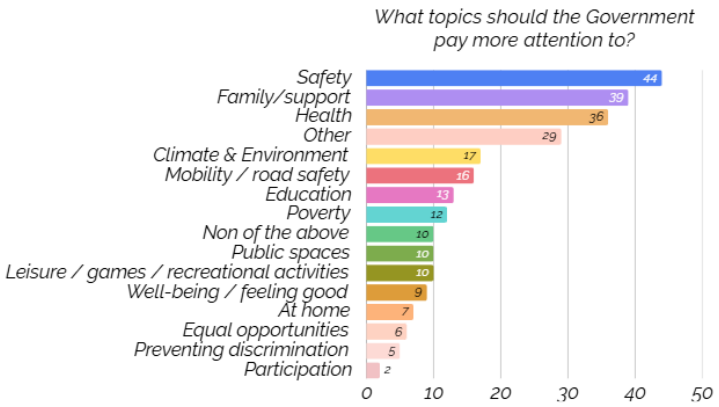
Primary and secondary school students show broadly similar patterns for feeling safe in public spaces and on buses. Secondary school students appear more positive about knowing what to do in case of danger or crime and understanding what is legal or illegal.

Focus group information
The focus groups added important context to the safety findings by showing that safety is experienced across several settings at once: school, school buses, neighbourhoods, public spaces, and online. Participants linked feeling unsafe to fights, bullying, threats, weapons or prohibited items, unsafe behaviour in neighbourhoods, and uncertainty about whether adults will respond effectively when concerns are reported.

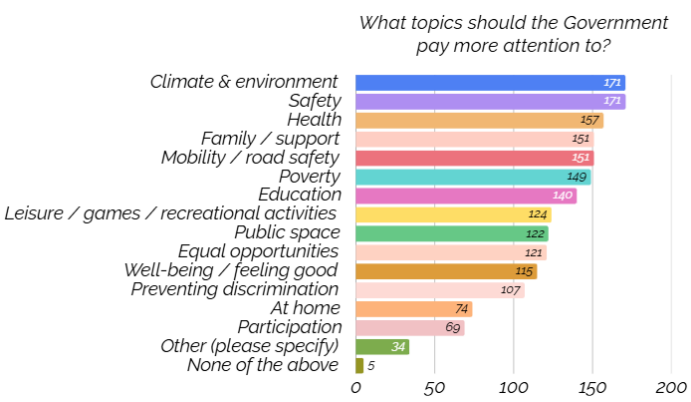
The discussions also showed that young people's sense of safety depends strongly on supervision, enforcement, and trust in adults. Students suggested clearer rules, better supervision on school buses, stronger school security, more consistent adult follow-up, and better control over who can access school grounds or buses. This suggests that improving safety requires not only informing young people where to get help, but also making sure that schools, transport systems, and community spaces feel reliably protected in practice.

Priority topics identified by respondents
Q54: What topics from the list below do you think the government should pay more attention to?

Primary school



Secondary school



The primary school results show that students most often selected themes related to their immediate safety, well-being, and support system. Safety, Health, and Family/support appear among the key priorities, suggesting that younger children mainly focus on issues that directly affect their daily lives at home, in school, and in their community. These results should be interpreted as a general indication of priority areas, especially because primary school students appear to have been able to select only one answer.

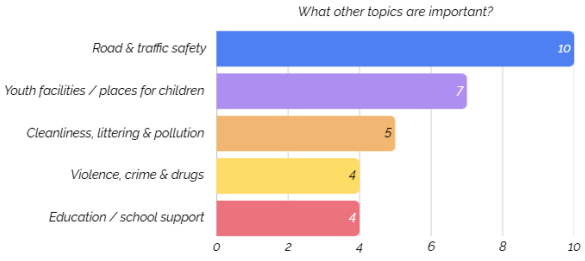
The secondary school results show a broader spread of concerns. Climate & environment and Safety were selected most often, followed closely by Health, Family/support, Mobility/road safety, Poverty, and Education. Because secondary school students could select multiple answers, the numbers are much higher and cannot be compared directly with the primary school frequencies. However, the results suggest that older youth identify several interconnected areas affecting their daily lives, well-being, and future opportunities, with a particular emphasis on Climate & environment, Mobility/road safety, Poverty, and Education.

Due to a difference in the survey setup, the results should be compared with caution. Primary school students appear to have been able to select only one answer, while secondary school

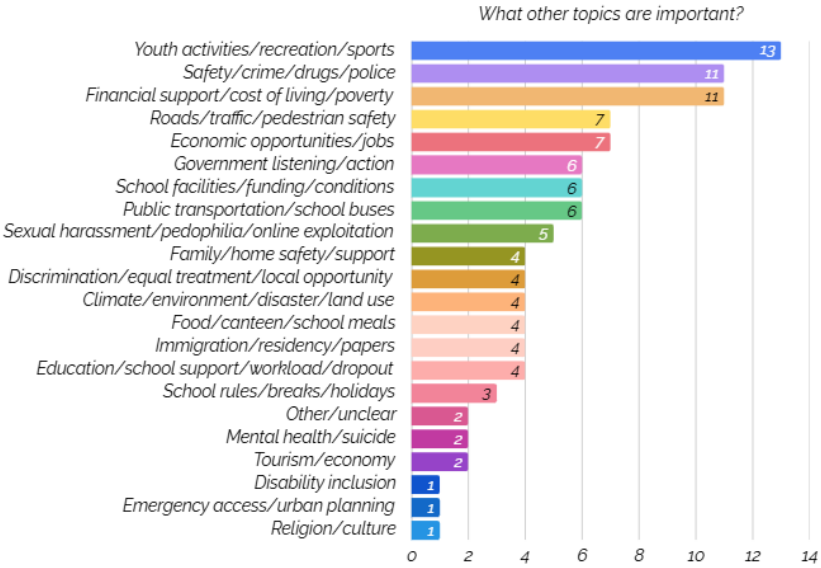
students could select multiple answers. Therefore, the findings are best interpreted as priority themes within each group, rather than as a direct comparison of frequencies.

Q55: Is there anything else we haven't asked you about that the government should know?

Primary School



Secondary School:



In the primary school responses, the most common open answers focused on roads and traffic safety, places and activities for children, cleanliness/pollution, safety/crime/drugs, and education support. These answers were generally concrete and linked to students' direct surroundings.

Secondary school students mentioned a broader range of topics, especially youth activities and sports, safety/crime/drugs, financial support and poverty, roads and transport, jobs and economic opportunities, and government action. Compared with primary school students, their answers more often connected concerns to wider social and economic issues, future opportunities, and independence.

Conclusion

The results show that children and youth in Sint Maarten identify both positive aspects of their living environment and areas that need further attention. Many respondents report access to basic support, school resources, internet, devices, and trusted adults. At the same time, experiences are more mixed around equal treatment, participation, healthy living, school transportation, leisure opportunities, community conditions, and safety.

A clear pattern is that younger children focus more on issues close to their daily lives, such as safety, family support, school, places to play, and road conditions. Older youth more often connect their concerns to broader social issues, including climate and environment, poverty, mobility, education, future opportunities, and whether youth are taken seriously by adults and decision-makers. Both groups identify safety, health, support, and opportunities for young people as important priorities.

The focus groups added important context by showing how these issues are connected in practice. Safety is not only about knowing where to ask for help, but also about feeling protected at school, on the bus, online, and in neighbourhoods. Participation is not only about having platforms available, but also about awareness, trust, and visible follow-up after youth share their views. Healthy living and addiction prevention are not only about information but also about access, enforcement, adult role models, and the broader environment in which young people grow up.

Overall, the findings suggest that improving child- and youth-friendliness in Sint Maarten requires both practical and structural action. Practical improvements include safer school transportation, cleaner neighbourhoods, better roads and sidewalks, more visible leisure opportunities, and stronger supervision in schools and public spaces. Structural improvements include stronger youth participation, fairer access to opportunities, clearer follow-up after youth input, and broader attention to poverty, health, safety, and environmental conditions.

The findings show that children and youth have clear views on the issues affecting their daily lives and future opportunities, and that their perspectives can provide valuable guidance for policy and action.

Limitations

Although the survey reached a wide variety of schools and a strong number of respondents, the final sample was slightly smaller than originally intended. The target was approximately 370-400 respondents per group; the final sample comprised 269 primary school students and 300 secondary school students. This slightly reduces statistical precision, but the sample still provides a solid baseline.

Data collection took place mainly through schools. This was the most practical way to reach a large and diverse group of children and youth, but it means that young people outside the school system, absent during data collection, or harder to reach, may be underrepresented.

The primary and secondary school surveys were slightly adapted to fit the age and context of each group. Most differences were related to wording, age-appropriateness, or relevance. However, regarding the question of which topics the government should pay more attention to, the primary school survey appears to have allowed only one answer, whereas the secondary school survey allowed multiple answers. These results should therefore be interpreted as priority themes within each group, rather than as a direct comparison of frequencies.

Five focus groups were conducted: two with primary school students, two with secondary school students, and one with tertiary education students. This provided useful additional context across age groups, but the focus group findings should be read as examples and explanations of survey patterns, not as representative results on their own.

Priority areas identified by children and youth

1. Safety in schools, transport, public spaces, and neighbourhoods

Safety was raised across several settings: schools, school buses, streets, neighbourhoods, public spaces, and online. Concerns included bullying, fights, threats, weapons or prohibited items, unsafe behaviour in public areas, and uncertainty about whether adults respond when issues are reported. Young people also pointed to clearer rules, stronger supervision, better school security, and safer school transportation.

2. Being heard and taken seriously

Many young people were not familiar with formal participation structures such as youth councils or youth platforms. The focus groups also showed that participation depends on trust: when youth share input but do not see follow-up, they may be less likely to speak up again. Young people, therefore, emphasized the need for clearer communication, more visible opportunities for participation, and feedback on how their input is used.

3. Equal treatment and fair access to opportunities

Children and youth described bullying, exclusion, and unequal access to opportunities as important concerns. Bullying included both direct forms, such as name-calling, hitting, and online comments, and more subtle forms, such as teasing, jokes, sharing personal information, or comments about appearance. Some older youth also mentioned barriers linked to documentation, travel requirements, and unequal support for different sports or activities.

4. Healthy living and addiction prevention

Alcohol, drugs, vaping, gambling, gaming, and phone use were identified as visible risks in young people's environment. Participants pointed to easy access, weak age-limit enforcement, exposure through adults or family members, and stress or school pressure as contributing factors. They highlighted the need for stronger education, better adult examples, clearer rules, and more accessible support.

5. Leisure, sports, culture, and safe places to spend free time

Young people asked for more visible, accessible, and varied ways to spend their free time. Sports were mentioned more often than cultural activities, while music, arts, dance, swimming lessons, clubs, and safe hangout spaces were also raised. Affordability, transportation, visibility, and access beyond school-based programs were recurring points.

6. Cleaner, safer, and more accessible communities

Community concerns included trash, irregular garbage collection, overflowing bins, dumping of large items, stray dogs, bad smells, potholes, unsafe roads, limited sidewalks, and public transport issues. These were linked not only to cleanliness, but also to daily safety, mobility, and comfort in neighbourhoods.

7. Support for health, well-being, and future opportunities

Younger children focused more on immediate support systems, such as family, school, safety, and places to play. Older youth more often connected their concerns to poverty, education, mobility, employment, independence, and long-term opportunities. This points to the importance of both direct support for children and broader social and economic conditions that affect youth development.