

SURINAME

POVERTY AND EQUITY ASSESSMENT

July 2024



WORLD BANK GROUP



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CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	8
Foreword	9
Nederlandse samenvatting	10
Executive Summary	14
1. Macroeconomic Background: From Sluggish Growth to Crisis to Recovery...to an Oil Boom?	18
2. Poverty and Inequality	23
3. What Characterizes Poverty and Inequality in Suriname?	28
3.1 Disadvantaged Groups	29
3.2 Overlapping Deprivations	32
3.3 Disparities in Access to Productive Assets	36
4. Human Capital	38
5. Labor Market Outcomes	45
6. Opportunities for Further Poverty Reduction through Improved Social Assistance	56
7. Reflections on the Implications of the Expected Oil and Gas Boom for Poverty and Inequality	63
8. Policy Recommendations	66
9. References	73

BOXES

Box 1. A Note on Poverty Lines.	24
Box 2. Suriname: Historical and Demographic Background.	30
Box 3. The Human Opportunities Index.	42
Box 4. Suriname's New Social Program to Enhance Purchasing Power.	60

FIGURES

Figure 1. Suriname's Long-term Growth Has Been Sluggish and Volatile	19
Figure 2. Suriname's GDP Per Capita Did Not Bounce Back Quickly After the 2020 Crisis, 2018–2022	20
Figure 3. Suriname Is Showing Signs of Recovery	22
Figure 4. Suriname: Poor Health and Education Are Major Drivers of Multidimensional Poverty	26
Figure 5. Suriname: Poverty and Inequality Commensurate with the Country's Level of Economic Development	28
Figure 6. Suriname: Poverty Rates Higher in the Interior of the Country	31
Figure 7. Suriname: Poverty Rates Differ by Ethnic Group	31
Figure 8. Suriname: Poverty Rates Increase Rapidly with Household Size	31
Figure 9. Suriname: Overlap Between Poor Health, Poor Education, High Dependency Ratios, and Monetary Poverty	35
Figure 10. Suriname: The Poor Face Disparities in Access to Bank Accounts and the Internet	37
Figure 11. Suriname's Education Expenditure Is Comparable to that of Other Countries	39
Figure 12. In International Comparisons, Suriname Stands Out for Poor Education Outcomes	40
Figure 13. Suriname: Women Outperform Men in Education Outcomes	41
Figure 14. Suriname: Low Education Intersects with Historical Geographic and Ethnic Inequality as Evidenced by the Share of the Population that Completed Secondary Education	42
Figure 15. Suriname Does Not Stand Out in Core Labor Market Indicators	46
Figure 16. Suriname: Strong Disparities in Labor Market Outcomes of Women and Men	47
Figure 17. Suriname: Gender Disparities in Labor Market Outcomes at All Levels of Educational Attainment	48
Figure 18. Suriname: High Rates of Early Marriage and Adolescent Fertility Contribute to Gender Disparities in Labor Market Outcomes	49
Figure 19. Suriname: Causes of Skill Shortages according to Firms	50
Figure 20. Suriname: Hourly Wages Differ by Region.	51

Figure 21. Suriname: Earnings of Workers from Disadvantaged Groups More Likely to Be Below the Minimum Wage	52
Figure 22. Suriname: A Clear Association Between Informality and Earnings	53
Figure 23. Suriname: Returns to Education Are Comparatively Low	54
Figure 24. Suriname: Mismatch in Labor Supply and Demand, 2017–2023	54
Figure 25. Of Suriname’s Four Main Programs, the Old Age Pension Represents the Bulk of Social Assistance Expenditure, 2017–2023	54
Figure 26. Suriname: The Old Age Pension Has the Strongest Impact of All Social Programs on Poverty.	59
Figure 27. Suriname: Historically Disadvantaged Groups Not Especially Well Covered by the Main Social Assistance Programs	62
Figure 28. Suriname: The Oil and Gas Boom Could in Theory Have a Pronounced Impact on Poverty Rates (In percent, based on the World Bank’s US\$6.85 poverty line)	64

TABLES

Table 1. Suriname: Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Poor	29
Table 2. Suriname: Overlap Between Monetary and Multidimensional Poverty.	33
Table 3. Suriname: The Poor Have Less Access to Assets.	36
Table 4. Suriname: Poor Education Outcomes Are Associated with Poverty.	44
Table 5. Suriname’s Main Social Assistance Programs Are Moderately Progressive.	61
Table 6. Foundational Education Policy Recommendations for Suriname.	68
Table 7. Policy Priorities for Vocational Training in Suriname.	69
Table 8. Policy Priorities to Enhance Gender Equality & Women’s Labor Market Outcomes in Suriname.	70
Table 9. Policy Recommendations to Improving Suriname’s Social Assistance System.	71
Table 10. Policy Recommendations to Improving Data Availability in Suriname’s Statistical System.	72

ACRONYMS

AKB	General Child Allowance (Algemene Kinderbijslag)
AOV	General Old Age Provision Fund (Algemene Ouderdomsvoorziening)
EFF	Extended Fund Facility
FBMMEB	Financial Support to Persons with Disabilities (Financiële Bijstand voor mensen met een beperking)
FBZWHH	Financial Support for Poor Households (Financiële Bijstand voor zwakke huishoudens)
GBS	General Bureau of Statistics
GDP	Gross domestic product
HOI	Human Opportunities Index
ICT	Information and communications technology
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KKV	Social Program to Enhance Purchasing Power (Koopkracht Versterking)
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MIS	Management Information System
NEET	Not in employment, education or training
OECD	Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation

PPP	Purchasing power parity
SLC	Suriname Survey of Living Conditions
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UN DESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This Poverty and Equity Assessment was prepared jointly by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the World Bank. The work was implemented under the guidance of Anton Edmunds (Manager of the Caribbean Country Department), Adriana la Valley (Representative in Suriname), and David Rosenblatt (Regional Economic Advisor for the Caribbean) from the IDB and Lilia Burunciuc (Country Director), Oscar Calvo-Gonzalez (Regional Director, Equitable Growth, Finance, and Institutions), Diletta Doretti (Resident Representative), Luis-Felipe Lopez-Calva (Director, Poverty and Equity Global Practice), and Carlos Rodriguez-Castelan (Practice Manager, Poverty and Equity Global Practice) from the World Bank.

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The team gratefully acknowledges opportunities to present initial drafts of the work to, among others, Suriname's Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Labor, Poverty Committee, and State Council. The team is also grateful for feedback and inputs received at a presentation of initial findings in Suriname to a diverse group of stakeholders and from the following IDB and World Bank colleagues: Gustavo Javier Canavire Bacarreza, Maria Davalos, Jozef Draaisma, Samuel Freije-Rodriguez, Carolina Freire, Ian Ho-A-Shu, Cynthia Hobbs, Jeetendra Khadan, Hugo Ñopo Aguilar, Pedro Olinto, Yevgeniya Savchenko, and Dhiraj Sharma. The team tried to address helpful observations and questions received. David Einhorn provided outstanding professional editing services. Any remaining errors are those solely of the team.

FOREWORD

This Poverty and Equity Assessment aims to inform efforts to reduce poverty and inequality at what could be an important turning point for Suriname. The assessment was written as Suriname was gradually emerging from a severe macro-fiscal crisis. After the implementation of stringent reforms, the economy is now showing signs of recovery and Suriname is turning attention to longer-term priorities.

The assessment draws heavily on a new Survey of Living Conditions (SLC) carried out in 2022 to describe patterns of poverty and inequality (IDB 2022). An initiative of the Inter-American Development Bank, the 2022 SLC was conducted during the 2022 calendar year and covered about 2,500 households and 7,500 persons. The survey is nationally representative and provides a representative image of poverty and inequality in the country.

Based on the 2022 SLC and other data sources, the Poverty and Equity Assessment addresses some critical data gaps. Despite the dedication of many professionals and institutions in Suriname to data and evidence, until recently there were few reliable data sources to assess poverty and inequality after the economic crisis that started in 2020. In fact, the 2022 SLC has allowed for the generation of the first internationally comparable poverty and inequality statistics for Suriname since 1999. These international comparisons feature prominently in this assessment.

Three more detailed background studies are being published as a compendium to this report. The first is a detailed diagnostic of poverty and inequality in Suriname (Annex 1). The second is an analysis of labor market challenges and opportunities (Annex 2). The third is a diagnostic of Suriname's main social assistance programs (Annex 3). The present Poverty and Equity Assessment brings the core findings of these studies together.

The analysis provides insight into the characteristics of poverty and inequality in Suriname and opportunities to address them. The picture that emerges is one of human capital deficiencies at the heart of poverty and inequality and historical inequities still driving patterns of poverty and inequality. However, the current situation also represents a significant opportunity to reduce poverty and inequality through improvements in education outcomes, better connection of labor supply and demand, increased access to economic opportunities for women, and improvements in social assistance. It is our hope that this assessment will contribute to Suriname seizing these opportunities.

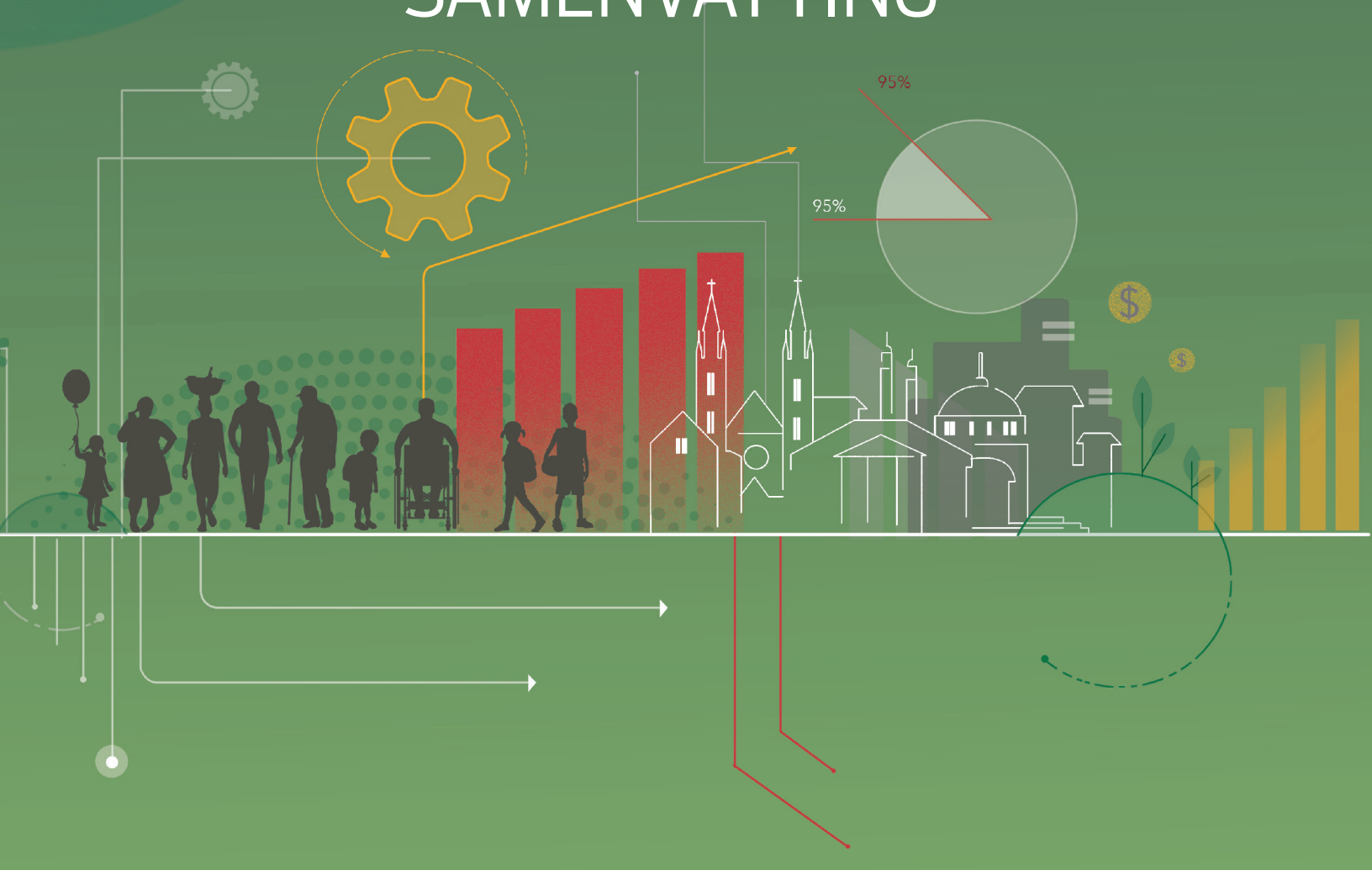


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NEDERLANDSE SAMENVATTING



Na decennia van trage en volatiele economische groei kwam Suriname in 2020 in een diepe economische crisis terecht, waarbij het Bruto Binnenlands Product (BBP) per hoofd van de bevolking met meer dan 17 procent zakte in reële termen. Deze crisis werd veroorzaakt door een daling van de wereldwijde grondstoffenprijzen en slecht economisch beheer, en werd verergerd door de COVID-19-crisis. Sinds de invoering van strenge hervormingen vertoont de economie tekenen van herstel. Suriname richt zich nu op de middellange termijn, wanneer inkomsten uit offshore olie- en gaswinning verwacht worden. Velen hopen dat deze inkomsten bij zullen bijdragen aan verhoogde welvaart. Een gedegen voorbereiding is echter vereist om te profiteren van deze potentiële verhoogde Staatsinkomsten.

In 2022 was het armoedecijfer van Suriname 17,5 procent, gemeten tegen de armoedegrens van US\$6,85 per dag van de Wereldbank voor landen met een hoger middeninkomen (uitgedrukt in de koopkrachtpariteit van 2017). Dit armoedecijfer is vergelijkbaar met dat van andere landen met een soortgelijk BBP per hoofd van de bevolking. Ongeveer 1,1 procent van de bevolking leefde onder de internationale extreme armoedegrens van US\$2,15 per dag.

Tekorten in menselijk kapitaal zijn belangrijke determinanten van armoede en ongelijkheid in Suriname. Het aanpakken hiervan is cruciaal om de levensstandaard te verbeteren. Met name een laag opleidingsniveau lijkt zowel een oorzaak als een gevolg van armoede te zijn. Hoewel Surinames' uitgaven aan onderwijs in lijn zijn met die van andere landen met een hoger middeninkomen, zijn bepaalde onderwijsindicatoren van Suriname vergelijkbaar met die van aanzienlijk armere landen. Zo is het percentage leerlingen dat het lager middelbaar onderwijs afrondt in Suriname vergelijkbaar met dat van landen met een lager middeninkomen zoals Djibouti en Senegal en zelfs met lage-inkomenslanden zoals Mozambique.

Deze tekortkomingen in menselijk kapitaal, en armoede en ongelijkheid in het algemeen, zijn verweven met etnische en geografische ongelijkheid die hun wortels hebben in de geschiedenis van koloniale overheersing en slavernij in Suriname. Meer dan één op de vier Surinamers in het binnenland leeft onder de armoedegrens voor landen met een hoger middeninkomen (US\$6,85 per dag), vergeleken met ongeveer één op de zes op landelijk niveau.

Naast andere beperkingen voor economische groei worden tekortkomingen in vaardigheden van werknemers door ondernemingen uit de private sector aangehaald als een aanzienlijke belemmering voor hun bedrijfsvoering. Tekorten aan vaardigheden hebben betrekking op zowel fundamentele vaardigheden die worden verkregen op voortgezet onderwijs op Junioren en Senioren niveau, als met de technische, sociale en beroepsvaardigheden. Deze tekorten aan vaardigheden resulteren in een mismatch tussen vraag en aanbod op de arbeidsmarkt, met een overschot aan laaggeschoolde werknemers en een tekort aan hooggeschoolde werknemers.

Naast verschillen in opleidingsniveau, kenmerkt armoede in Suriname zich niet alleen door slechtere toegang tot materiele zaken, maar ook tot diensten zoals ziektekostenverzekeringen, bancaire diensten, en het internet. Gezien het belang van financiële inclusie en digitale technologie in de moderne economie, vermindert dit de mogelijkheid van de armen om op een productieve manier deel te zijn van de samenleving.

Suriname mist kansen om tekorten aan vaardigheden tegen te gaan, groei te bevorderen en armoede te verminderen door de relatief sterke onderwijsprestaties van vrouwen niet optimaal te benutten. Vrouwen presteren aanzienlijk beter dan mannen op school. Uit de statistieken blijkt dat ongeveer 15 procent van de vrouwen het hoger onderwijs voltooit, vergeleken met slechts 6 procent van de mannen. Deze goede leerprestaties vertalen zich echter niet in sterke arbeidsmarkt resultaten. Een van de redenen lijkt te zijn dat het aangaan van relaties en het krijgen van kinderen op jonge leeftijd de transitie naar de arbeidsmarkt belemmert.

Suriname legde na de economische crisis veel nadruk op het sociale bijstandstelsel om armoede tegen te gaan. Toch zijn verdere verbeteringen in het huidige systeem van sociale zekerheid nodig om armoede en ongelijkheid aan te pakken. Huidige programma's, waarvan de meeste zich richten op specifieke demografische groepen targeten. Deze programma's ondersteunen de ouderen effectief, maar ondersteunen steunen een significant deel van de armen en historisch gemarginaliseerde groepen niet adequaat. Het kinderbijslagprogramma heeft een uitgebreide dekking, maar de uitkeringen die het biedt zijn bescheiden, en huishoudens met kinderen hebben nog steeds een aanzienlijk hoger armoedecijfer dan huishoudens zonder kinderen (ongeveer 22 versus 8 procent). Dit laatste is belangrijk omdat kinderarmoede vaak resulteert in slechte uitkomsten in het onderwijs met lange termijn gevolgen op de arbeidsmarkt.

Toekomstige olie- en gasinkomsten kunnen resulteren in meer werkgelegenheid en economische activiteit en dus bijdragen aan het verlichten van armoede en ongelijkheid. Aanvullende fiscale ruimte voor armoedebeleid zal echter mogelijk niet direct beschikbaar zijn. Bovendien kan de impact van de olie- en gasinkomsten tegenvallen op de langere termijn, bijvoorbeeld doordat exploitatie van offshore olie vooral kapitaalintensief en niet arbeidsintensief is, doordat arbeidskrachten mogelijk niet kunnen profiteren van nieuwe economische kansen door een gebrek aan vaardigheden, en door veel voorkomende problemen bij de vondst van nieuwe grondstoffen zoals "Dutch disease" en "resource curse" (beschreven in dit rapport). Een gedegen voorbereiding is van dringend belang om toekomstige olie- en gasinkomsten zodanig te gebruiken en te investeren dat rechtvaardige en duurzame groei gestimuleerd wordt.

Om het economisch herstel van Suriname voort te zetten, blijft een focus op monetaire en fiscale discipline van essentieel. Dienovereenkomstig richt de regering zich momenteel op een primair overschot van de centrale overheid, wat betekent dat de fiscale ruimte voor hervormingen om de hierboven geschetste uitdagingen aan te pakken op korte termijn beperkt zal zijn. Zelfs in dit scenario zijn er echter een aantal mogelijkheden voor beleid om armoede terug te dringen. Om een basis te leggen voor verbeteringen in het onderwijs, is de ontwikkeling van effectieve systemen voor het management van het onderwijs om de resultaten van (beroeps)opleidingen te volgen van belang. Suriname zou zich ook kunnen onderzoeken wat de belangrijkste oorzaken zijn van vroegtijdig schoolverlaten en wat de belangrijkste belemmeringen zijn voor het voltooien van hoger onderwijs. Aanpassing van wetten die de arbeidsmarktparticipatie van vrouwen niet effectief ondersteunen zou ook kunnen helpen om de sterke schoolprestaties van meisjes en vrouwen beter te benutten.

Ondanks de huidige beperkte fiscale ruimte zijn de uitgaven aan sociale bijstand om de armsten en meest kwetsbaren te helpen aanzienlijk. Suriname heeft recentelijk de bedragen die worden uitgekeerd door enkele van de langlopende sociale bijstandsprogramma's verhoogd. Het heeft ook een groot

nieuw programma geïnitieerd dat gericht is op de armsten en zwakke huishoudens, met als doel om de impact van economische hervormingen te compenseren. Hervormingen voor efficiënte en effectieve implementatie van deze sociale bijstandsprogramma's zijn echter noodzakelijk. Denk hierbij aan het herzien van programmadoelstellingen, ervoor zorgen dat de meest behoeftige groepen kunnen deelnemen, het oplossen van uitdagingen in de implementatie van sociale bijstandsprogramma's, en het verbeteren van de samenhang tussen programma's.

Op de middellange termijn, wanneer groei en olie- en gasinkomsten naar verwachting zullen bijdragen aan meer fiscale ruimte, zou Suriname diepgaandere beleidshervormingen kunnen overwegen om armoede en ongelijkheid aan te pakken. Het voeren van een integraal beleid via een armoede autoriteit of systeem zou hierbij goed aansluiten. Het verbeteren van resultaten in fundamenteel onderwijs zal systemen en beleid vereisen om schooluitval aan te pakken, de effectieve inzet van leraren zelfs in moeilijk bereikbare gebieden te bevorderen, schoolfaciliteiten aan te passen aan de behoeften van studenten met een beperking, er voor te zorgen dat beroepsopleidingen en hoger onderwijs aansluiten op de eisen van de arbeidsmarkt, en trainingsmogelijkheden te verbeteren voor groepen die momenteel slechte toegang hebben tot de arbeidsmarkt. De invoering van gezinsvriendelijke beleidsmaatregelen zal cruciaal zijn om verbeteringen in de arbeidsparticipatie van vrouwen te bereiken. Een modern raamwerk voor sociale zekerheid, gemoderniseerde digitale betalingssystemen, en de ontwikkeling van een sociaal register zijn essentieel om armoede aan te pakken onder degenen die niet kunnen werken.

Tot slot zou voortdurende investering in het statistische systeem en institutionele regelingen die de productie van armoedestatistieken verzorgen, bijdragen aan een focus op armoede en ongelijkheid in beleid.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



After decades of sluggish and volatile economic growth, Suriname entered a deep economic crisis in 2020 during which GDP per capita declined by more than 17 percent in real terms. This crisis was driven by a slump in global commodity prices and poor economic management, and exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis. Since the implementation of stringent reforms, the economy has shown signs of recovery, and Suriname is now focusing on the medium term, when offshore oil revenues are expected to materialize. Many hope that these revenues will be a game changer for enhanced prosperity. However, urgent preparation is required for Suriname to capitalize on this potential windfall.

In 2022, Suriname's poverty rate was 17.5 percent when measured against the World Bank's upper-middle-income poverty line of US\$6.85 (2017 purchasing power parity). This poverty rate is similar to that of other countries with comparable GDP per capita. About 1.1 percent of the population lived below the international extreme poverty line of US\$2.15 per day.

Human capital deficiencies are important determinants of poverty and inequality in Suriname. Addressing them is crucial to enhance living standards. Low educational attainment, in particular, appears to be both a driver and a result of poverty. Although Suriname's expenditure on education is in line with that of other upper-middle-income countries, some of Suriname's education indicators are comparable to those of markedly poorer countries. For instance, Suriname's lower secondary completion rate is similar to that of lower-middle-income countries such as Djibouti and Senegal and even low-income countries such as Mozambique.

These human capital deficiencies, and poverty and inequality more generally, intersect with patterns of ethnic and geographic inequality that have their roots in Suriname's history of colonial rule and slavery. More than one in four Surinamese in the interior of the country lives below the upper-middle-income line, compared to about one in six at the national level.

Human capital deficiencies contribute to a skill shortage that, in addition to broader constraints to economic growth and doing business, is referenced by enterprises as a significant impediment to their operations. Skill shortages relate both to foundational skills obtained in primary and secondary school, and technical and soft skills. These skill shortages result in a mismatch in labor demand and supply, with over-supply of low-skill workers and under-supply of high-skill workers.

In addition to differences in education, the poor face significant disparities in both tangible and intangible assets. This holds not only for ownership of physical assets, but also for access to services such as health insurance, as well as to markets through bank accounts and the Internet. Considering the importance of financial inclusion and digital access in the modern economy, it is not hard to see how this further reduces the ability of the poor to participate productively in society.

Suriname is missing out on opportunities to mitigate skill shortages, enhance growth, and reduce poverty by not capitalizing on women's comparatively strong education performance. Women substantially outperform men in school, with a tertiary education completion rate of about 15 percent compared to only about 6 percent for men. However, this strong educational performance has not translated into strong labor market outcomes. Part of the reason appears to be that school-to-work transitions are hampered by early entry into relationships and early pregnancies.

While Suriname placed significant emphasis on social assistance to address poverty in the aftermath of the economic crisis, improvements in the functioning of the social assistance system are needed to address poverty and inequality. Current programs, most of which are target specific demographic groups, effectively support the elderly but do not adequately support a significant part of the poor and historically marginalized groups. A child allowance program has extensive coverage, but the transfers it provides are modest, and households with children still face a markedly higher poverty rate than households without children (about 22 vs. 8 percent). The latter group is important because child poverty is linked to the human capital deficiencies referenced above.

Although oil revenues could contribute to alleviating poverty and inequality through more employment and economic activity, additional fiscal resources to cover unmet basic needs may not be immediately available. Furthermore, the risks of Dutch disease and the “resource curse,” the fact that offshore oil exploitation is capital- rather than labor-intensive, and skills shortages that may keep Suriname’s labor force from benefitting from new economic opportunities could all contribute to disappointment down the line. Broad preparations to adequately absorb future oil revenues and funnel them to assets and investments that drive equitable and sustainable growth are an urgent priority.

For Suriname to continue its economic recovery, a focus on monetary and fiscal discipline remains key. Accordingly, the government currently targets a primary central government surplus, which implies that fiscal space for reforms to address the challenges outlined above will be limited in the short term. Yet, there are policy opportunities even in a fiscally constrained environment. To lay the foundation for improvements in education outcomes and skill formation, Suriname could begin the development of effective education management information systems as well as systems to track the outcomes of its vocational training programs. Suriname could also focus on understanding the main drivers of early school dropout and the main barriers to completing tertiary education. A short-term effort to enhance laws that do not effectively support women’s labor market participation could help to close skill gaps.

Within its restricted fiscal space, Suriname is prioritizing significant social assistance spending to assist the poorest and most vulnerable. Indeed, Suriname has both increased the value of long-standing social transfer programs and initiated a major new program targeted at the poorest to offset the impact of painful economic reforms. However, a focus on efficient and effective implementation of these social assistance programs is also needed, including reviewing program targeting, ensuring that the groups most in need are included, resolving challenges in the entire delivery chain, and enhancing linkages between programs.

In the medium term, when growth and oil revenues are expected to contribute to enhanced fiscal space, Suriname could consider bolder policy reforms to address poverty and inequality. Enhancing outcomes in foundational education outcomes will require systems to address school dropout issues, implement policies to promote the effective deployment of teachers even in hard-to-reach areas, build school facilities that consider the needs of students with disabilities, improve linkages of vocational training and tertiary education with the demands of the labor market, and enhance training opportunities for groups that stand to gain the most. The adoption of family-friendly policies will be key to achieving

improvements in women's labor force participation. A modern social protection framework, modernized digital delivery systems, and development of a social registry are key to address poverty among those who cannot work.

Finally, continued investment in the statistical system and institutional arrangements governing the production of poverty statistics would contribute to a focus on poverty and inequality in policy.

1. MACROECONOMIC BACKGROUND: FROM SLUGGISH GROWTH TO CRISIS TO RECOVERY...TO AN OIL BOOM?



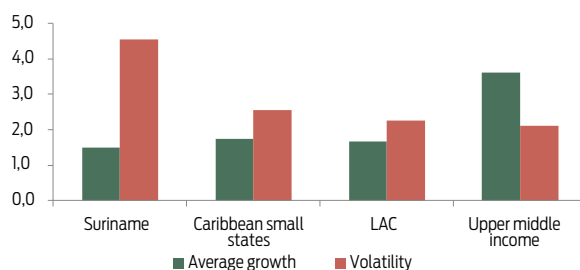
Before the macro-fiscal crisis of the early 2020s, Suriname had experienced decades of sluggish economic growth and high volatility, as shown in Figure 1.

Panel A of Figure 1 shows that, from 1960 to 2019, Suriname’s average real GDP per capita growth rate of about 1.5 percent was below that of other small Caribbean states, the Latin America and Caribbean region, and other upper-middle-income countries. In contrast, the volatility of Suriname’s GDP per capita (measured as the standard deviation of growth) was high, reflecting a rocky growth trajectory. This volatility has been the result both of high commodity dependence (previously on bauxite, now on gold and oil) and weak institutions. Panel B of Figure 1 shows just how strong the impact of a seemingly small difference in average annual GDP growth can be. In 1960, Suriname’s GDP per capita was above that of other small Caribbean states, the Latin America and Caribbean region, and other upper-middle-income countries. By 2019, Suriname’s GDP per capita was well below that of other small Caribbean states, while it was roughly on par with that of the entire Latin America and Caribbean region and other upper-middle-income countries.

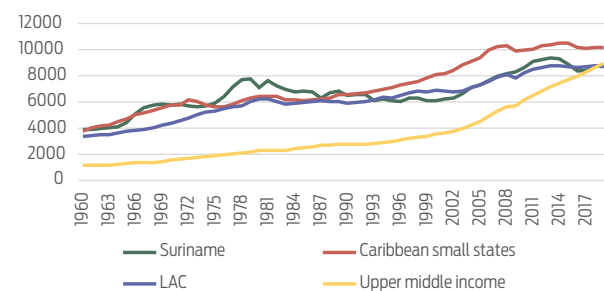


FIGURE 1. SURINAME’S LONG-TERM GROWTH HAS BEEN SLUGGISH AND VOLATILE

A. GDP Per Capita Annual Growth and Volatility (Percent)



B. GDP Per Capita (Constant 2015 U.S. dollars)



Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators.

Note: Averages refer to the period from 1960 to 2019. LAC: Latin America and the Caribbean.

Suriname’s high dependence on natural resources continues to be a key aspect of the economy.

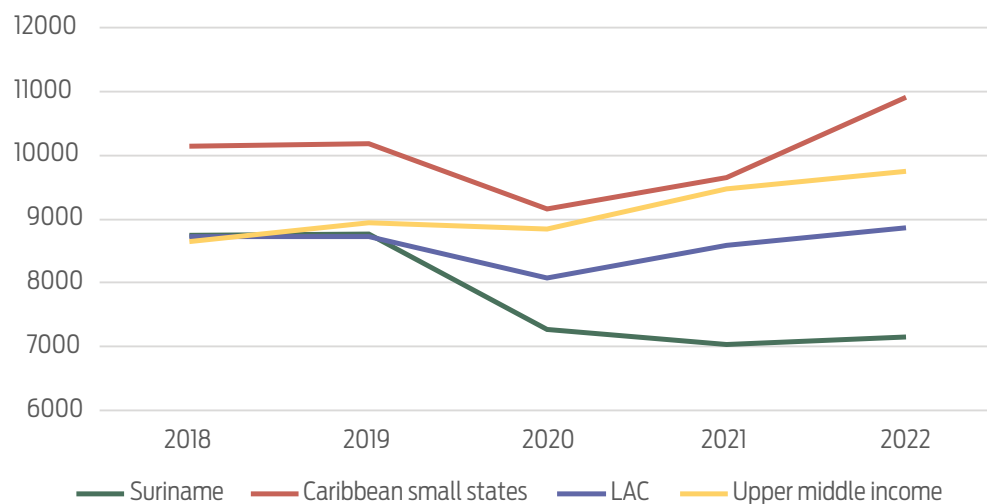
Gold mining and oil extraction, along with milling and refining operations, account for some 30 percent of GDP value added, but annual growth rates have varied with fluctuations in commodity prices and production levels. Similarly, agriculture, forestry, and fishery generate on average some 10 percent of value added, but price fluctuations plus adverse weather events have resulted in persistent declines in the share of agriculture value added since 2015. In contrast, the services sector expanded from about 56 percent to 63 percent of GDP value added between 2015 and 2022. However, services have tended to be more concentrated in low-productivity activities such as trade, transport, and

hospitality services, rather than high-productivity sectors such as financial, insurance, and professional business services.

Due to deep underlying challenges, Suriname did not recover quickly from the macroeconomic crisis that started in the early in the 2020s. The macro-fiscal aspect of the crisis was the result of a decline in commodity prices and a buildup of imbalances over years of economic mismanagement, combined with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The crisis of 2020 followed another recent economic crisis in 2015, during which GDP per capita declined by nearly 8 percent and Suriname experienced severe economic output losses. In 2020, GDP per capita declined by nearly 17 percent in real terms and general gross government debt peaked at nearly 150 percent of GDP. In 2021, already high inflation increased to over 50 percent after the introduction of a floating exchange rate and rising global commodity prices. Interest paid on public debt increased rapidly, to over 5 percent of GDP annually. In contrast with the other Caribbean small states and the broader Latin America and Caribbean region, Suriname’s economy did not bounce back quickly after 2020. Indeed, as confirmed in Figure 2, Suriname’s GDP per capita was on par with that of the average for Latin America and the Caribbean and other upper-middle-income countries before the start of the pandemic. Suriname’s 2020 decline in GDP per capita, however, was markedly steeper than that of other Caribbean small states and the rest of Latin America and the Caribbean. And while GDP per capita in the Caribbean small states and the rest of Latin America and the Caribbean had more than recovered by 2022, this was not the case for Suriname. The reason is that Suriname’s economic contraction was driven not only by the COVID-19 pandemic, but also by a more complex combination of underlying economic challenges that had been building up for years.



FIGURE 2. SURINAME’S GDP PER CAPITA DID NOT BOUNCE BACK QUICKLY AFTER THE 2020 COVID-19 CRISIS, 2018–2022 (CONSTANT 2015 U.S. DOLLARS)



Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators.
Note: LAC: Latin America and the Caribbean.

At the height of the economic turmoil, the impact on the Surinamese population was profound. The National Accounts indicate that from 2019 to 2021, the gross value added of most economic sectors declined strongly. In four sectors it declined by more than 30 percent in real terms: construction and education both declined by 38 percent, mining and quarrying by 36 percent, and public administration by 32 percent. In accommodation and food services, value added declined by 76 percent.¹ Indeed, over 90 percent of the workforce was employed in sectors that would experience a generally dramatic decline in value added during the crisis years.² Accordingly, a phone survey in August 2020 found household income losses driven by declining employment, business closures, and lower remittances (Garavito, Beuermann, and Khadan 2021). Moreover, the survey data show that these effects were not distributed equally across Suriname’s population, but were more pronounced among the lowest pre-pandemic income groups, indicating that poorer households are less able to cope with shocks.

To improve the macroeconomic situation and put the country back on a path of fiscal sustainability, the government launched an economic recovery program in 2020 (Republic of Suriname 2021a). After the 2020 elections, the newly elected government first implemented a crisis program for nine months, mainly consisting of debt restructuring and social support to buffer the initial impact of the COVID-19 crisis. Subsequently, the government began implementing a comprehensive macroeconomic stabilization reform program to address debt sustainability, improve monetary and exchange rate policies, promote financial sector stability, and strengthen economic governance. Due to the country’s vulnerable economic situation and the limited resources available to finance regular programs or external debt payments, the program entailed restructuring of official and external debt (Republic of Suriname 2021b),³ with support from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) under an Extended Fund Facility (EFF) arrangement (IMF 2021).

There are now signs of economic recovery. Public debt, which spiked at nearly 150 percent of GDP in 2020 because of declining GDP and exchange rate devaluation, declined to 92 percent of GDP in 2023 (panel A of Figure 3). Inflation, which had fluctuated around 50 percent year-over-year, came down to 27 percent by January of 2024, the lowest since the start of the economic crisis in early 2020.

1 See Suriname Bureau of Statistics, <https://statistics-suriname.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/NRsheet-2023-base-year-2015-FINAL-1-september-2023-secured.pdf> (accessed June 1, 2024).

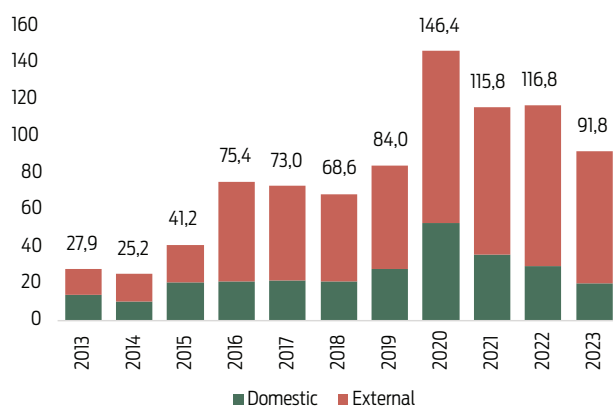
2 Suriname has not published labor force statistics since 2019. The latest information on the distribution of workers across sectors is available for 2017 (General Bureau of Statistics 2018). At the time, only about 7.5 percent of workers were employed in financial activities or other services, the only two sectors that did not experience a decline in value added over the pandemic.

3 <https://gov.sr/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/financieel-jaarplan-2022.pdf>

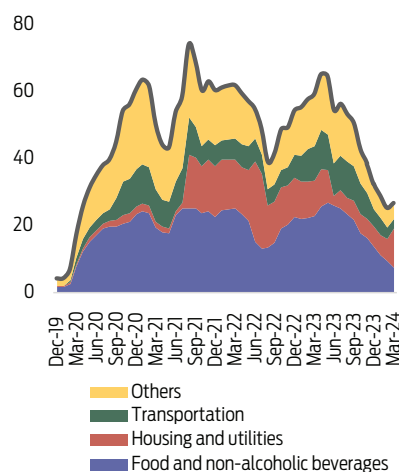


FIGURE 3. SURINAME'S ECONOMY IS SHOWING SIGNS OF RECOVERY (PERCENT)

A. Public Debt as a Share of GDP



B. CPI (percentage change, y.o.y.)



Sources: International Monetary Fund, World Economic Outlook (October 2023); and Suriname General Bureau of Statistics (February 2024).

Expected large-scale investments in the oil and gas sector could positively, and possibly dramatically, change the macroeconomic outlook. TotalEnergies announced plans to invest US\$9 billion in Block 58 to extract around 700 million barrels of oil. And this is only one of multiple investments that could materialize in Block 58 alone. The revenues could promote higher growth and improve fiscal and external balances within the period of commercial exploitation of the natural resources. However, there is also the risk that the investments might further expose existing macroeconomic vulnerabilities, namely Suriname's dependence on commodities. Moreover, as will be explained in Section 7, oil revenues do not guarantee reductions in poverty and inequality.

Suriname's Multi-Annual Development Plan sets out a long-term vision of a just society in which values of justice, inclusiveness, freedom, and sustainability are fulfilled (Republic of Suriname 2021c). The plan emphasizes a need to accompany newfound oil wealth with enhanced room for private sector development and an economic focus on added value rather than extraction. If Suriname is to achieve this vision, urgent preparation is needed to ensure that oil revenues are managed prudently and translate into meaningful progress.

2. POVERTY AND INEQUALITY



Calculations based on the new Survey of Living Conditions (SLC) indicate that in 2022, after several years of economic hardship, about 17.5 percent of Suriname’s population lived in poverty. That is, the total daily value of their consumption was below the World Bank’s poverty line for upper-middle-income countries of US\$6.85 (2017 purchasing power parity – PPP). If the national poverty line established by Suriname’s Poverty Committee in 2023 (Sobhie & Kisoensingh, 2023) were applied instead, the share of the population living in poverty would be 17.6 percent (Box 1). Extreme poverty, defined as daily consumption below the US\$2.15 line, was relatively uncommon. About 1.1 percent of the population could be classified as extremely poor. A substantial part of the population (38.7 percent) was not poor, according to the World Bank’s poverty definitions, but lived below US\$14 a day and could thus be considered “vulnerable” to falling into poverty.⁴ The remaining 43.9 percent of the population could be considered middle class and up.

BOX 1. A NOTE ON POVERTY LINES

For this Poverty and Equity Assessment, poverty rates are calculated by comparing the value of household and individual consumption to what are referred to as poverty lines. These calculations are based on a new SLC carried out in 2022 (IDB 2022). When the value of a person’s consumption falls below the poverty line, this person is classified as poor. The estimated poverty rate depends on the poverty line applied; if the poverty line is ambitious (high), a larger share of the population will be classified as poor.

This report shows results both for the poverty lines applied globally by the World Bank and by Suriname’s Poverty Committee. The World Bank uses three poverty lines for international comparisons. These poverty lines respectively approximate the average national poverty lines applied by poor countries, lower-middle-income countries, and upper-middle income countries. For more discussion see Jolliffe et al. (2022).

Suriname’s Multidisciplinary Poverty Committee, established in 2016, proposed a national poverty measurement method and poverty line, which was updated in 2023 (Sobhie and Kisoensingh 2023). The national poverty line was determined based on a basic needs approach, applying the food-energy intake method. It relied on the 2013/2014 national household budget survey (the government-mandated data source for establishing the poverty line) and consumer price index data collected by Suriname’s General Bureau of Statistics. The national poverty line reflects the cost of acquiring a minimum food basket and basic non-food expenditure (at a 60/40 ratio). An equivalence scale was applied to determine the total national poverty line at the household level. Annex 1 provides more background. Box Table 1.1 displays the values of the different poverty lines.

⁴ See World Bank (2023a) for further discussion of how the threshold of US\$14 was established.

BOX TABLE 1.1. SURINAME: POVERTY LINES (DAILY 2017 PURCHASING POWER PARITY U.S. DOLLARS)

A. World Bank Poverty lines					
Extreme	US\$2.15				
Lower-middle-income	US\$3.65				
Upper-middle-income	US\$6.85				

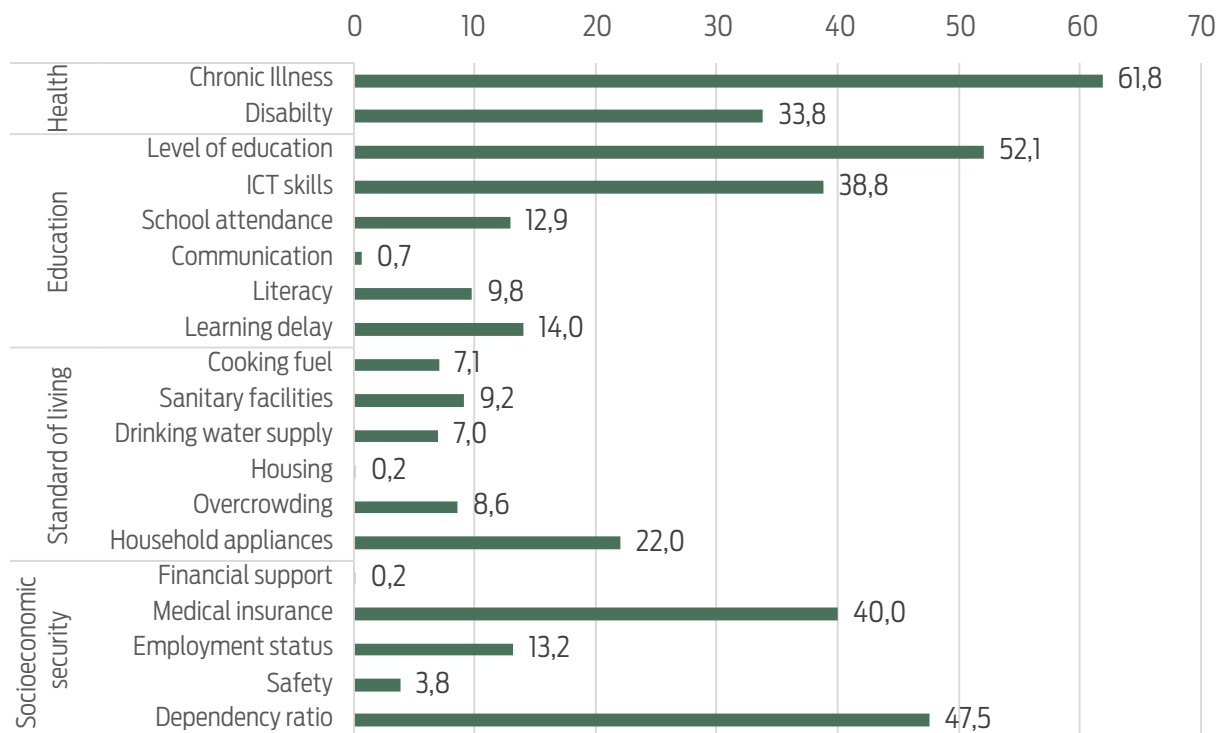
B. National Poverty Lines by Household Size and Composition in 2022					
Number of Adults	Number of Children				
	0	1	2	3	4+
1	US\$13.38	US\$9.47	US\$7.91	US\$7.02	US\$6.42
2	US\$10.58	US\$8.58	US\$7.48	US\$6.77	US\$6.25
3	US\$9.22	US\$7.93	US\$7.10	US\$6.52	US\$6.08
4+	US\$8.36	US\$7.43	US\$6.78	US\$6.29	US\$5.91

Source: Sobhie and Kisoensingh (2023)

Multidimensional poverty analysis highlights the importance of health and education deprivations in Suriname. Multidimensional poverty analysis maps out broader deprivation beyond low consumption. Suriname’s Multidisciplinary Poverty Committee recently proposed a Multidimensional Poverty Index for Suriname that covers four domains: health, education, standard of living, and socioeconomic security using Census 2012 and MICS 2018 data. An effort to mimic this index based on the 2022 Suriname Survey of Living Conditions (SLC) finds that about 46 percent of Surinamese are multidimensionally poor. This share markedly exceeds the monetary poverty rate, which signals that a broader view is important to understand poverty in Suriname. As shown in Figure 4, poor health and education outcomes are especially important drivers of multidimensional poverty. In total, 62 percent of all households have a chronically ill member and 34 percent a member with a disability. In over half of the households (52 percent), the head did not complete lower secondary education. And in nearly four out of 10 households at least one member does not use the Internet.



FIGURE 4. SURINAME: POOR HEALTH AND EDUCATION ARE MAJOR DRIVERS OF MULTIDIMENSIONAL POVERTY (PERCENT)



Source: Poverty assessment team based on the 2022 Suriname Survey of Living Conditions (IDB 2022).

Note: The figure shows the share of the population living in households considered deprived on each of the indicators that are part of the Multidimensional Poverty Index. Multidimensional poverty is measured in accordance with the methodology proposed by Sobhie and Kisoensingh (2023). Table 2 provides more detail on the definitions of the indicators in the Multidimensional Poverty Index. ICT: information and communications technology.

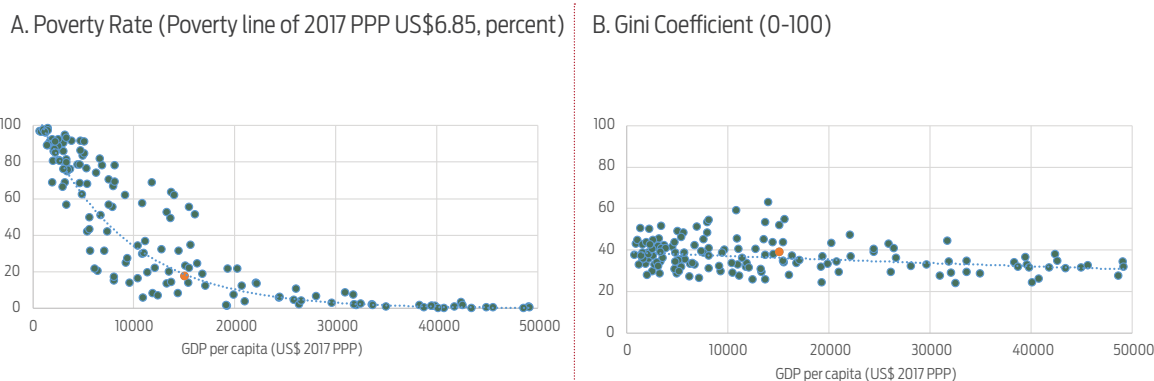
Despite a paucity of comparable data sources, there appears to be a downward trend in poverty over time in Suriname, though tracking changes in poverty and inequality and analyzing the main drivers of these changes is challenging. A lack of comparable data sources hampers longitudinal analysis. However, a few pieces of evidence point to a long-term declining trend in poverty rates. First, in 1999 the World Bank estimated the poverty rates in urban areas to be 44.5 percent using the US\$6.85 poverty line and 18.4 percent using the US\$2.15 poverty line. As these estimates are for urban areas only (which cannot be directly identified in the 2022 SLC) and are based on a different data source, they are not directly comparable to the estimates presented in this report. However, most of Suriname's population lives in urban areas, so the estimates do suggest that poverty decreased substantially over the past quarter of a century. Second, UNICEF collected Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) data in 2006, 2010, and 2018. There are differences between the MICS and the 2022 SLC that prevent the construction of identical multidimensional poverty measures for both instruments. Yet, these data also suggest that most elements of multidimensional poverty decreased over time (Annex 1).

Suriname's Gini coefficient is about 39, while its Palma ratio is 1.7. The Gini coefficient is one of the most widely used indicators of inequality,⁵ and a Gini coefficient above 40 is generally considered to represent high inequality. At 39.2, Suriname's Gini coefficient lies a little below this threshold. On the other frequently used measure of inequality, the Palma ratio, Suriname's ratio is 1.7, meaning that the value of the consumption of the richest 10 percent of the population is 1.7 times that of the poorest 40 percent of the population.

Suriname's poverty and inequality in 2022 were commensurate with its level of economic development. This can be inferred from a comparison of poverty and inequality statistics for Suriname to those of other countries, shown in Figure 5. To avoid comparing apples to oranges, countries are sorted by level of economic development (GDP per capita) on the horizontal axis. The vertical axis of panel A shows the share of people consuming (or earning) less than the World Bank's upper-middle income line of US\$6.85 (2017, PPP). A dotted regression line indicates the approximate level of poverty expected given a country's GDP per capita. Panel B of Figure 5 has a similar setup to panel A but shows the Gini coefficient on the vertical axis. These metrics for Suriname align with those of other countries with comparable GDP per capita in the region, such as Brazil, Grenada, and St. Lucia.⁶



FIGURE 5. SURINAME: POVERTY AND INEQUALITY COMMENSURATE WITH THE COUNTRY'S LEVEL OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



Source: Latest poverty rates, Gini coefficients, and corresponding PPP-adjusted GDP per capita are from the World Bank's World Development Indicators. For Suriname, the source is the poverty assessment team based on the 2022 Suriname Survey of Living Conditions (IDB 2022).

Note: PPP: purchasing power parity.

- 5 The coefficient ranges from zero to 100. A Gini coefficient of zero represents the scenario of complete equality, in which everyone's consumption is identical. A Gini coefficient of 100 represents the scenario of complete inequality, in which one person consumes everything.
- 6 These comparisons combine countries that measure poverty and the Gini coefficient based on income and consumption. Restricting the comparisons to countries that use measurements based on consumption (similar to Suriname) does not substantially alter the date or the conclusions drawn from it. Moreover, these comparisons are restricted to countries with a GDP per capita below US\$50,000 (2017 PPP), but again this restriction does not alter the conclusions.

3. WHAT CHARACTERIZES POVERTY AND INEQUALITY IN SURINAME?



3.1 DISADVANTAGED GROUPS

Important variations in poverty can be seen by geographic area and population group in Suriname. A disproportionate share of the poor population lives in the interior of the country. This can be inferred from Table 1, which examines how the socio-demographic characteristics of the poor differ from the vulnerable and those in the middle class and up. The table shows that only about 9 percent of the population lives in the interior of the country. Yet, about 14 percent of the population living below the World Bank's US\$6.85 poverty line lives in this part of the country.



TABLE 1. SURINAME: SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE POOR (PERCENT)

	Poor (<US\$6.85)	Vulnerable (US\$6.85-US\$14)	Middle Class and Up (>US\$14)	Total Population
Region				
Greater Paramaribo	67.7	68.5	73.2	70.4
Rest of the coastal region	18.3	20.2	21.5	20.5
Interior	14.0	11.3	5.2	9.1
Ethnicity				
Creole	10.6	13.5	18.3	15.1
Hindustani	27.9	27.2	27.4	27.4
Maroon	40.2	22.2	13.1	21.3
Indigenous	4.2	2.5	1.9	2.5
Javanese	8.7	16.1	19.2	16.2
Mixed	8.4	17.9	18.7	16.6
Other	0.0	0.6	1.4	0.9
Household size (number of household members)	5.3	4.3	3.1	3.8
Gender of household head				
Female	46.2	34.1	35.3	36.7
Male	53.8	65.9	64.7	63.3
Age				
0-5	15.6	9.1	7.7	9.6
6-11	16.0	12.5	7.7	11.0
12-14	7.8	6.2	4.4	5.7
15-17	7.1	6.2	4.5	5.6
18-24	11.7	12.9	10.4	11.6
25-59	34.3	42.9	49.5	44.3
60+	7.4	10.2	15.7	12.1

Source: Poverty assessment team based on the 2022 Suriname Survey of Living Conditions (IDB 2022).

Note: Great Paramaribo consists of the capital Paramaribo and some urban parts of the district Wanica. The rest of the coastal region consist of the districts: Wanica (remaining part), Para, Saramacca, Commewijne, Nickerie and Coroni. The interior consists of the districts Marowijne, Brokopondo and Sipaliwini

Moreover, the Maroon and indigenous population are overrepresented among the poor, (see Box 2). They respectively make up about 21 and 2.5 percent of the population, but about 40 and 4.2 percent of the poor. The poor further tend to live in larger households, with more than 5 members on average, while vulnerable and middle-class (and up) households have 4.3 and 3.1 members on average. Children make up a large share of the poor. In contrast, working-age adults (25 to 60 years old) and the elderly (60+) make up a large share of the vulnerable and the middle class and up. Household headed by women make up about 46 percent of the poor, but only about 37 percent of the total population. The remainder of this subsection explores this sociodemographic variation in poverty rates in more detail.

BOX 2. SURINAME: HISTORICAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND

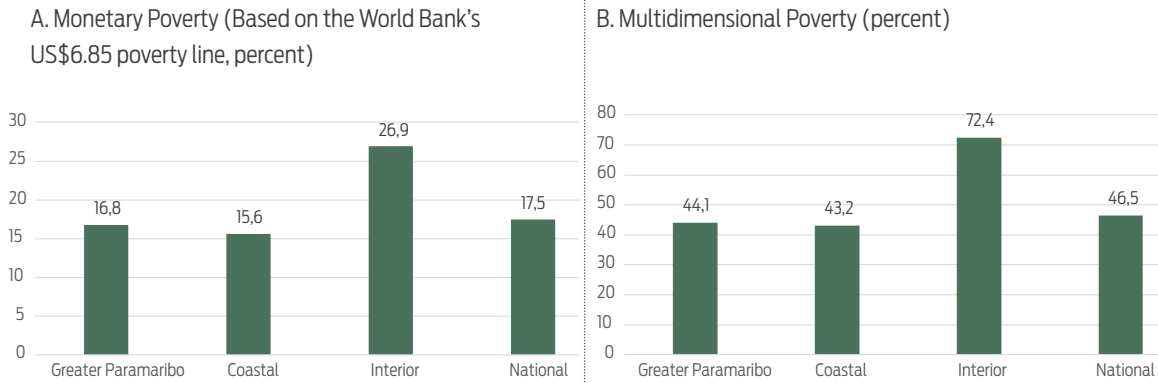
A remnant of its colonial history, Suriname is home to a wide range of ethnic groups, none of which constitute a majority. Starting in the 17th century, the Dutch ran Suriname as a plantation colony, relying heavily on enslaved people from Africa. After slavery was formally abolished in 1873, indentured laborers from China, India, and Indonesia were relied on for labor. According to the 2012 census, Suriname's main ethnic groups were Hindustani's (27 percent), Maroons (22 percent), Creoles (16 percent), Javanese (14 percent), mixed (13 percent), indigenous (4 percent), and Chinese (1.5 percent). The areas of the country where these groups reside have been influenced by Suriname's history of slavery and indentured labor. In particular, Maroons, the descendants of runaway enslaved people, live predominantly in the country's interior. This population group, as well as Suriname's indigenous population, has historically been marginalized, and the implications are still visible in Suriname's poverty data today. More than 50% of the population in the coastal districts Saramacca, Nickerie and Commewijne are Hindustani's. The districts Coroni and Para have a majority of Creoles. The urban region with the districts Paramaribo and Wanica, home to about 67% of the total population, have a more equal distribution by ethnicity.

Suriname's demographic profile is changing, according to the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2022). As a result of its population structure and increased longevity, the share of the elderly population (65+) is increasing, and this growth is projected to continue beyond the end of the century. In contrast, the share of children (up to age 14) is falling because of declining fertility rates. These changes are important because there are substantial differences in poverty rates (and access to social assistance) by age group as discussed in this study.

Poverty rates are markedly higher in the interior of the country. As can be inferred from Figure 6, this holds both for monetary poverty (panel A) and multidimensional poverty (panel B). In the interior of the country, an estimated 27 percent of the population lives below the World Bank's upper-middle income poverty line of US\$6.85 (2017 PPP), and 72 percent lived in multidimensional poverty. In contrast, monetary and multidimensional poverty rates are lower (and fairly similar) in the Greater Paramaribo region and the other coastal areas of the country at about 17 and 43 percent, respectively.



FIGURE 6. SURINAME: POVERTY RATES HIGHER IN THE INTERIOR OF THE COUNTRY

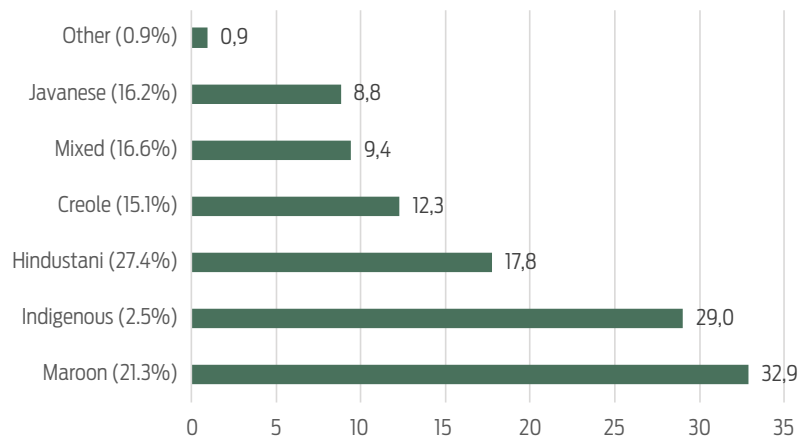


Source: Poverty assessment team based on the 2022 Suriname Survey of Living Conditions (IDB 2022).

Poverty rates are also well above the national average of 17.5 percent among the Maroons and the indigenous. As shown in Figure 7, nearly a third of the Maroon population can be classified as poor (living under the US\$6.85 poverty line). Among the indigenous population, the poverty rate is 29 percent. The picture in terms of geographic and ethnic variation in poverty rates is not much different if one considers multidimensional poverty instead of monetary poverty. For multidimensional poverty, the interior is over-represented and poverty rates are above the national average for the Maroon and indigenous populations. The only difference is that the multidimensional poverty rate is also above average for the Hindustani population.



FIGURE 7. SURINAME: POVERTY RATES DIFFER BY ETHNIC GROUP (BASED ON THE WORLD BANK'S US\$6.85 POVERTY LINE, PERCENT)

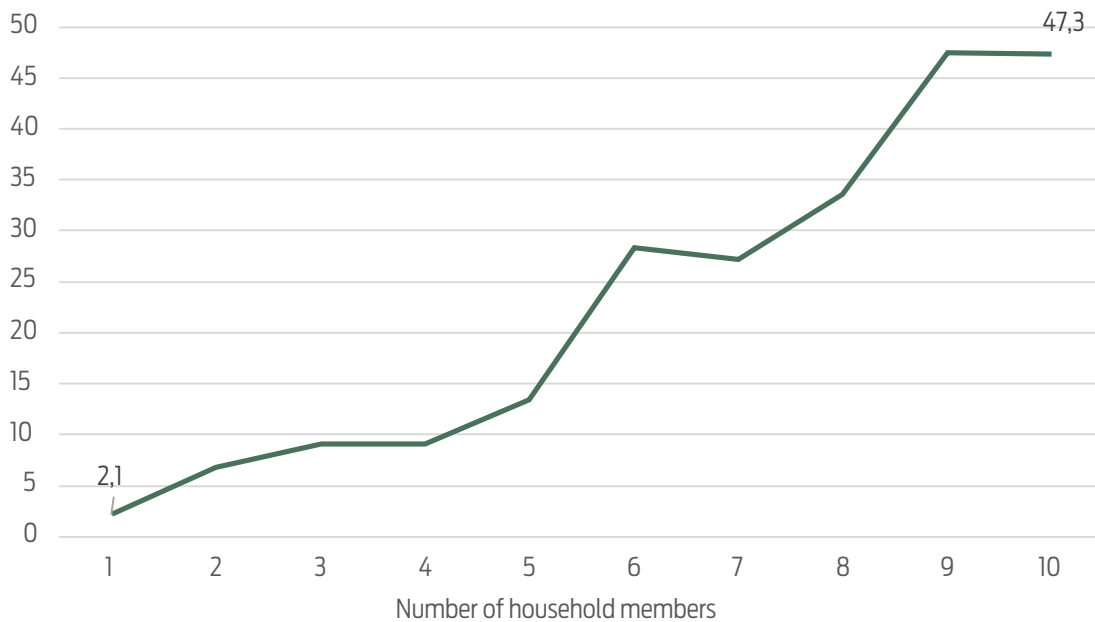


Source: Poverty assessment team based on the 2022 Suriname Survey of Living Conditions (IDB 2022).
 Note: Share of the population of each ethnic group is shown in parentheses.

Finally, poverty rates tend to be higher in large households and households with many children. Households with children are markedly more likely to be poor than households without children to begin with. The respective poverty rates in these two groups are 22.3 and 8 percent, and the difference between the two is thus more than 14 percentage points. Moreover, as shown in Figure 8, poverty rates increase rapidly with household size. In the smallest households with only one member, the poverty rate is about 2 percent. Of the large households with 10 or more members, typically many of them children, nearly half can be classified as poor.



FIGURE 8. SURINAME: POVERTY RATES INCREASE RAPIDLY WITH HOUSEHOLD SIZE (IN PERCENT, BASED ON THE WORLD BANK'S US\$6.85 POVERTY LINE, PERCENT)



Source: Poverty assessment team based on the 2022 Suriname Survey of Living Conditions (IDB 2022).

3.2 OVERLAPPING DEPRIVATIONS

Nearly 9 percent of Surinamese can be classified as chronic poor, meaning that they are poor in both monetary and multidimensional terms. To be precise, 11.5 percent of the population lives below the US\$6.85 poverty line and could be classified as multidimensionally poor. Those referred to as the structural poor, who live in multidimensional but not in monetary poverty, represent about a third of the population (34 percent). Another 6 percent of the population is transient poor, that is, poor in monetary but not multidimensionally terms. Table 2 further examines the overlap between monetary poverty and the (indicators of) the multidimensional poverty index. A clear correlation can be observed

between monetary poverty and most of the indicators in the Multidimensional Poverty Index. For instance, monetary poor households are more likely to have a chronically ill member, or a member with a disability. They are less likely to have a head who completed junior secondary education, have all children in school, have good sanitary facilities, or have health insurance, while they are more likely to live in an overcrowded home.



TABLE 2. SURINAME: OVERLAP BETWEEN MONETARY AND MULTIDIMENSIONAL POVERTY (PERCENT)

		Poor (<US\$6.85)	Vulnerable (US\$6.85-US\$14)	Middle Class and up (>US\$14)	Total Population
Multidimensionally poor		65.9	51.0	34.8	46.5
Health					
Chronic illness	At least one member of the household has a chronic illness	67.7	61.7	59.6	61.8
Disability	At least one member of the household has a disability	37.1	32.4	33.8	33.8
Education					
Level of education	Head of household did not complete lower secondary education	63.8	58.5	41.8	52.1
Information and communications technology skills	At least one person in the household does not use the Internet at all	59.3	44.2	25.8	38.8
School attendance	Not all children of school age in the household are attending school	20.6	13.7	9.2	12.9
Communication	Household does not have any communication device	1.1	0.7	0.4	0.7
Literacy	At least one person unable to read/write in the household	21.3	11.7	3.5	9.8
Learning delay	Household has at least one person who has a school delay	26.4	15.6	7.7	14.0

Standard of living					
Cooking fuel	The household does not have access to quality cooking fuel sources	16.1	7.7	2.9	7.1
Sanitary facilities	The household does not have access to improved sanitary conditions	21.2	9.2	4.3	9.2
Drinking water supply	The household does not have access to quality drinking water facilities nearby	13.3	6.9	4.5	7.0
Housing	The house has a roof made of inadequate materials	0.4	0.2	0.0	0.2
Overcrowding	Household members share a bedroom with more than three people	20.5	8.8	3.7	8.6
Household appliances	Household does not own half of a list of appliances	40.7	17.3	9.3	17.4
Socioeconomic security					
Financial	Income from transfers is the main source of income	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.2
Insurance	Not all members of the household have health insurance	61.1	44.8	27.3	40.0
Employment	No member of the household has a job	19.4	9.4	14.1	13.2
Safety	At least one member of the household was a victim of a crime	2.4	4.9	3.5	3.8
Dependency	Households with more than three members/working-age members	49.7	53.2	41.6	47.5

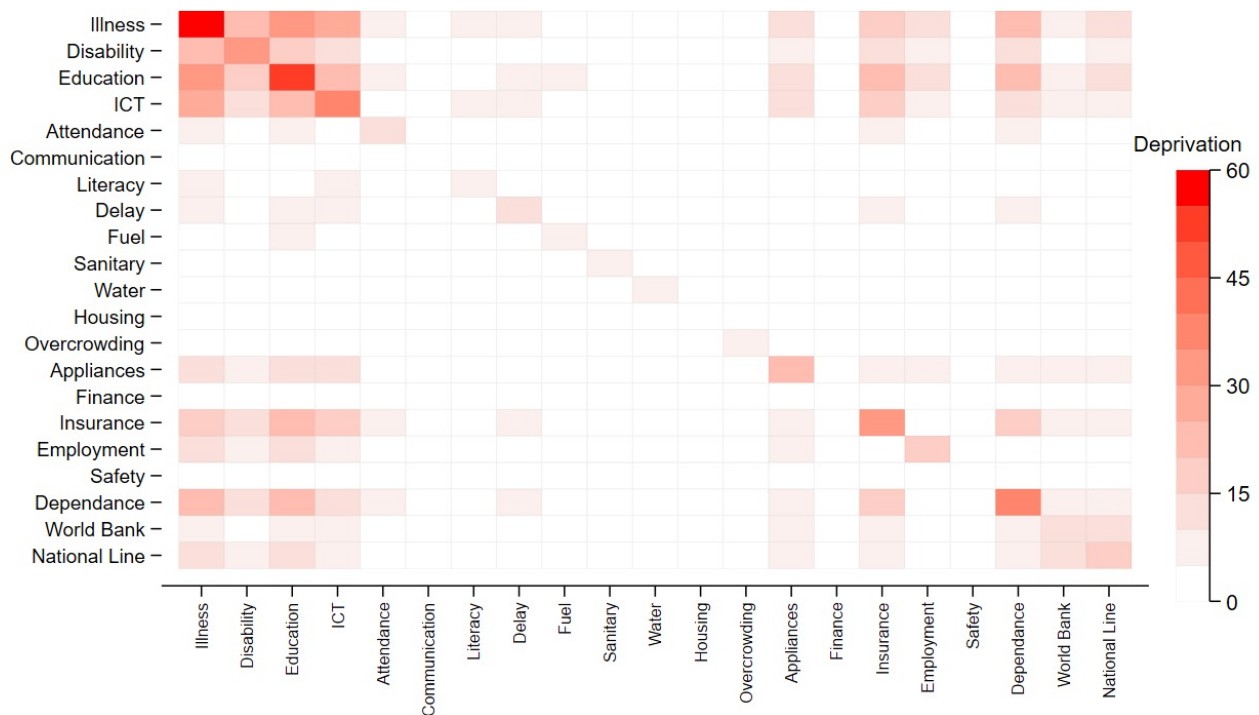
Source: Poverty assessment team based on the 2022 Suriname Survey of Living Conditions (IDB 2022).

There is also notable clustering and overlap between some of the indicators of multidimensional poverty: poor health, poor education, and high dependency ratios. The overlap can be inferred from a “heat map” displayed in Figure 9. Cells in this map appear darker if the share of households suffering from both the deprivation on the vertical and horizontal axis is higher. There is a cluster of darker cells in the top left corner, indicating a relatively high share of households that are deprived in terms of a combination of ill household members, members with a disability,

heads with low education, and members with few information and communications technology (ICT) skills. These four elements thus appear to be interlinked. Likewise, there are clusters of darker cells in the bottom left and top right corner, indicating overlap and linkages between the aforementioned deprivations and monetary poverty.



FIGURE 9. SURINAME: OVERLAP BETWEEN POOR HEALTH, POOR EDUCATION, HIGH DEPENDENCY RATIOS, AND MONETARY POVERTY (PERCENT)



Source: Poverty assessment team based on the 2022 Suriname Survey of Living Conditions (IDB 2022).
 Note: Figure shows the correlation between indicators that are part of the Multidimensional Poverty Index. Each cell shows the share of the population living in households considered deprived on the two relevant categories. The last two indicators are the poverty rate at US\$6.85 purchasing power parity per day (World Bank) and the national poverty rate (National Line). ICT: information and communications technology.

What is the cause of the overlap between human capital deprivation and monetary poverty?

The linkages can be numerous. Causal effects may run, for instance, from poor education to poor labor market outcomes, which in turn limit income generation and thus contribute to poverty. Vice-versa, poverty may have an impact on learning outcomes, as poor children grow up in environments that are less conducive to attending and learning in school. Moreover, there may be linkages at the macro level, with a poorly educated workforce hampering economic development and growth. In fact, as this Poverty and Equity Assessment describes, Suriname appears to find itself in an equilibrium in which all these factors are at play. The poorest Surinamese exhibit lower education outcomes. Those with lower education have worse prospects in the labor market. And employers mention skill shortages as one of the important obstacles they face in running their operations.

3.3 DISPARITIES IN ACCESS TO PRODUCTIVE ASSETS

Significant disparities in both tangible and intangible assets hamper the participation of the poor in society and the economy. This holds for dwelling characteristics and ownership of physical assets, which may be intuitive considering poorer households' lower purchasing power. For instance, as shown in Table 3, poorer households are less likely to own their dwelling or a car. But it also holds for labor market outcomes, as the poor are less likely to be in the labor force and, conditional on being in the labor force, more likely to be unemployed. And it holds for access to bank accounts and the Internet. To visualize just how steep the difference can be, panel A in Figure 10 shows the share of the population with access to a bank account, and panel B shows the share with access to the Internet. In both panels, the horizontal axis shows consumption deciles. In decile 1, which represents the poorest 10 percent of the population, approximately 29 percent of all individuals have access to a bank account. In the richest decile, the share is 71 percent. Likewise, in the poorest decile, a little over 60 percent have access to the Internet. In the richest decile, this share is 85 percent. Considering the importance of financial inclusion and digital access in the modern economy, it is not difficult to see that this lack of access to services further reduces the ability of the poor to generate income and participate productively in society.



TABLE 3. SURINAME: THE POOR HAVE LESS ACCESS TO ASSETS (PERCENT)

	Poor (<US\$6.85)	Vulnerable (US\$6.85-US\$14)	Middle Class and up (>US\$14)	Total Population
Dwelling				
Not owned by household	42.1	38.2	31.9	35.3
Low-quality material	5.5	4.5	3.9	4.3
No access to electricity	1.1	0.1	0.2	0.3
Physical assets				
Cellphone	96.7	96.3	97.2	96.9
TV	69.9	80.6	86.6	82.6
Cable TV	0.2	2.7	9.8	6.2
Car	35.0	59.5	72.1	63.3
Owns less than half of list of appliances	49.9	25.9	16.5	23.8
Adult labor market outcomes				
Labor force participation	52.2	65.1	70.4	65.5
Unemployed	15.6	9.3	4.1	7.5
Sector (Employed)				
Agriculture	10.1	6.7	5.2	6.3
Mining	1.7	5.0	3.2	3.7
Manufacturing	8.5	7.7	6.2	7.0
Construction	14.1	9.8	5.7	8.1

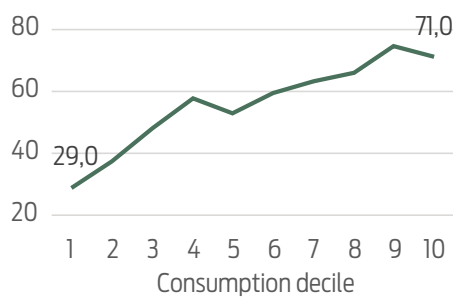
Retail	4.0	6.7	6.1	6.1
Hospitality	7.0	4.6	5.6	5.4
Public administration	2.6	5.6	7.4	6.2
Education and health	9.3	15.0	18.3	16.1
Households as employer	4.3	2.5	2.7	2.8
Administrative services	9.2	12.5	17.4	14.7
Transportation	4.3	5.8	7.7	6.6
Utilities	1.9	4.3	2.4	3.0
Other	23.0	13.9	12.3	14.0
Access to markets				
Bank account	53.1	70.3	80.9	73.9
Phone	96.8	97.0	98.2	97.6
Internet	57.8	69.3	79.5	73.4

Source: Poverty assessment team based on the 2022 Suriname Survey of Living Conditions (IDB 2022).

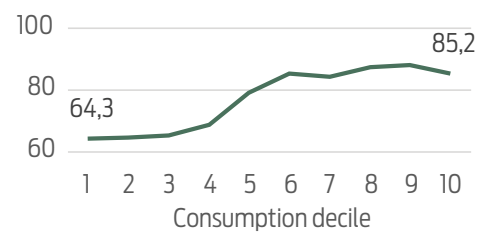


FIGURE 10. SURINAME: THE POOR FACE DISPARITIES IN ACCESS TO BANK ACCOUNTS AND THE INTERNET (PERCENT)

A. Has bank account



B. Has internet access



Source: Poverty assessment team based on the 2022 Suriname Survey of Living Conditions (IDB 2022).

To provide further insight into poverty and inequality in Suriname, the following sections focus on human capital, labor markets, and social protection. A focus on these topics is paramount to understanding poverty and inequality in Suriname. An analysis of labor markets and social assistance is of critical importance to understand households' main income sources, which ultimately determine poverty and inequality. And an understanding of deficiencies in human capital outcomes, in turn, is critical to understand some of the most important challenges for Suriname's workers. Of course, there are other aspects that matter for poverty reduction, some of which lie outside the scope of this Poverty and Equity Assessment. The final section of this report describes additional areas of analysis that could be considered for follow-up research.

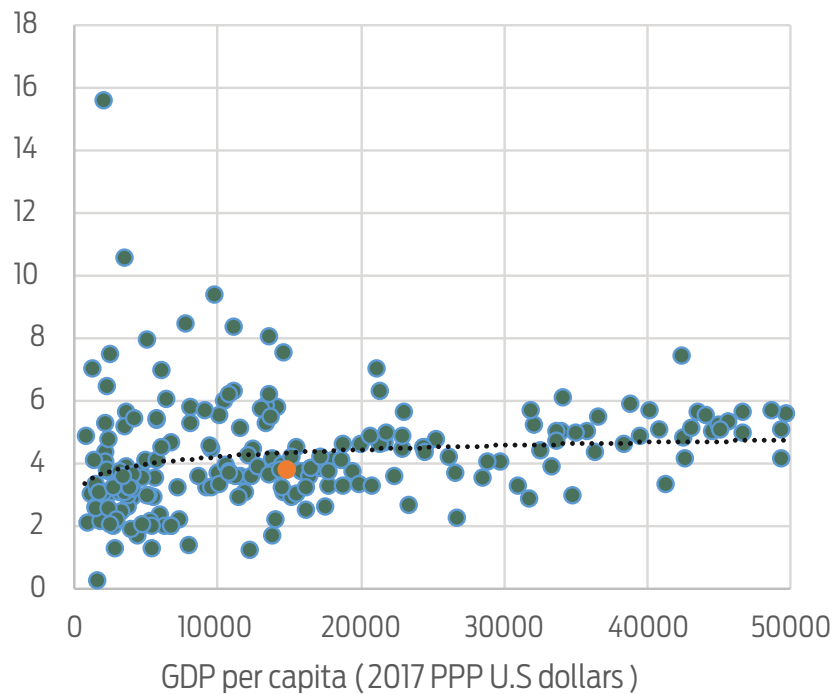
4. HUMAN CAPITAL



Although Suriname's expenditure on education is not out of line with that of other countries, its education outcomes compare poorly. Figure 11 shows that, in 2021, Suriname spent approximately 3.8 percent of GDP on education. This figure was comparable to that of other countries. Yet in international comparisons, Suriname stands out negatively in terms of education outcomes. For instance, as shown in panel A of Figure 12, Suriname's lower secondary school completion rate is on par with countries with a markedly lower GDP per capita, such as Djibouti, Senegal, and Mozambique. The situation is no better when examining enrollment in tertiary education (panel B of Figure 12), which compares to that of markedly poorer countries such as Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Lesotho, and Zimbabwe. As this section and the next will discuss, these poor education outcomes and associated skill shortages are important determinants of poverty and inequality in Suriname.



FIGURE 11. SURINAME'S EDUCATION EXPENDITURE IS COMPARABLE TO THAT OF OTHER COUNTRIES (PERCENT OF GDP)

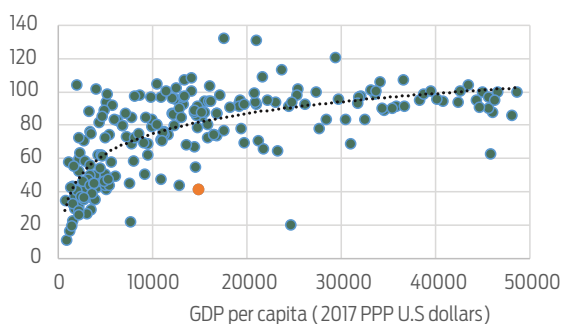


*Source: Latest data on education expenditure and corresponding GDP per capita adjusted for purchasing power parity (PPP) from the World Bank's World Development Indicators database based on UNESCO Institute for Statistics data.
Note: Comparison restricted to countries with a GDP per capita of US\$50,000 or less.*

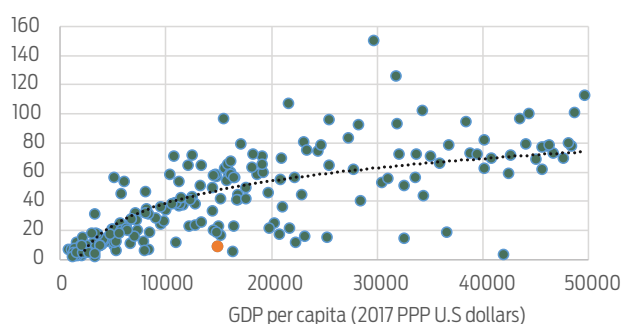


FIGURE 12. IN INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS, SURINAME STANDS OUT FOR POOR EDUCATION OUTCOMES (PERCENT)

A. Lower secondary completion rate, total
(Percent of relevant age group)



B. School enrollment, tertiary (Gross, in percent)



Source: Latest education statistics and corresponding GDP per capita adjusted for purchasing power parity (PPP) from the World Bank's World Development Indicators database based on UNESCO Institute for Statistics data.
Note: Comparison restricted to countries with a GDP per capita of US\$50,000 or less.

High dropout rates and limited learning in school are important challenges in Suriname. The literacy rate among boys and girls ages 15–24 is 99 percent, compared to 95 percent of the population age 15 and older.⁷ However, prior UNICEF research shows that dropout rates are high across all secondary school grades, especially after the final grade.⁸ Almost half of the children who complete secondary school do not continue to postsecondary education. In addition, concerns exist about students' skills acquisition. Findings from UNICEF indicate that by Grade 6 only 42 and 63 percent of children have the numeracy and reading skills, respectively, that they should have acquired by Grade 3. Moreover, challenges in learning among children with disabilities were noted, with school facilities generally not being prepared to accommodate children with physical difficulties.

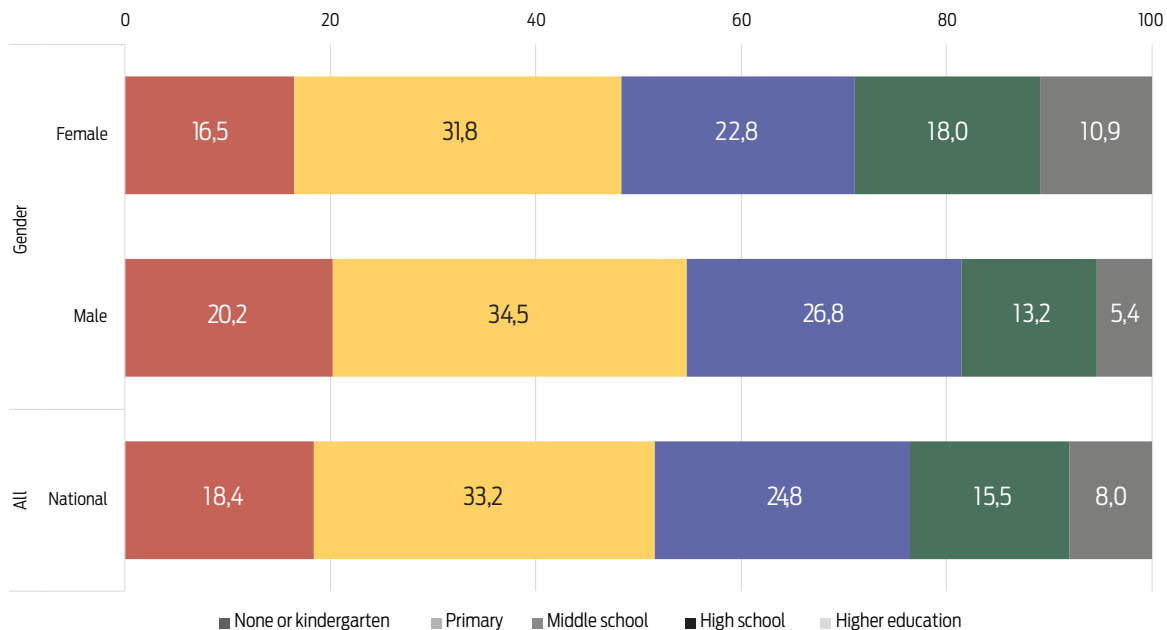
Women's education outcomes are markedly stronger than those of men at all levels. As in many other countries in the region, there is a "reverse gender gap" in education outcomes, with women outperforming men in education outcomes by a sizable margin (UNESCO 2020). Figure 13 shows the education levels completed by women and men. The differences are clear at the extremes of the distribution. About 20 percent of men have not completed any education, while among women this share is 16.5 percent. Vice-versa, about 11 percent of women have completed tertiary education, while among men this share is only 5.4 percent.

7 See the World Bank's EdStats (Education Statistics) data portal, available at <https://datatopics.worldbank.org/education/> (accessed June, 2024).

8 This paragraph is based on UNICEF (2019).



FIGURE 13. SURINAME: WOMEN OUTPERFORM MEN IN EDUCATION OUTCOMES (HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION COMPLETED BY ADULTS, PERCENT)



Source: Poverty assessment team based on the 2022 Suriname Survey of Living Conditions (IDB 2022).
 Note: Highest level of education completed by women and men ages 15 and older.

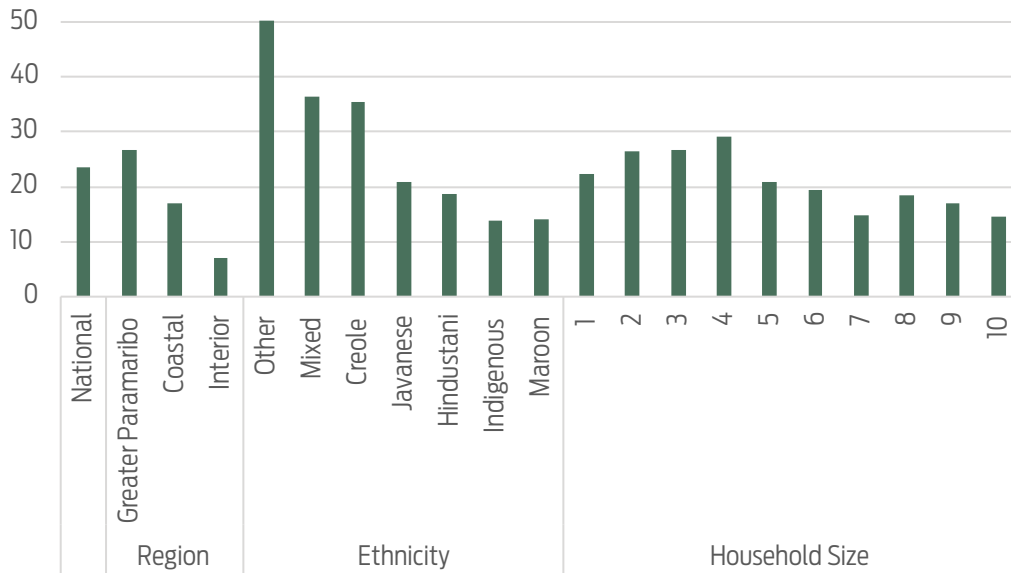
It can be challenging to ensure a high quality of education for all students across varied ethnic, cultural, and language backgrounds.

For instance, despite Dutch being the official language of the country and the primary language of instruction, approximately 30 different languages are spoken in Suriname. This can create language barriers and affect learning outcomes for students who do not speak Dutch as their first language. In addition, it is sometimes difficult to find teachers willing to work in the country’s interior due to accessibility issues and the distance from urban centers, complicating the delivery of quality education (UNESCO 2020). Indeed, poor education outcomes intersect with historical ethnic and geographic inequality. Figure 14 examines level of education completed by geographic area of the country and by ethnic group. The share of adults who completed secondary education is lower in the interior (7 percent) and among indigenous Surinamese and Maroons (both around 14 percent) than among other groups. Interestingly, household size and education have an inverted U-shaped relationship. The reason appears to be that many of the smallest households (with one or two members) tend to be made up of elderly members (who grew up when education opportunities were more limited). Larger households tend to be the ones with many children from less-advantaged socioeconomic backgrounds.

The Human Opportunities Index provides further detail on disparities in access to education and other services, as shown in Box 3.



FIGURE 14. SURINAME: LOW EDUCATION INTERSECTS WITH HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHIC AND ETHNIC INEQUALITY AS EVIDENCED BY THE SHARE OF THE POPULATION THAT COMPLETED SECONDARY EDUCATION (PERCENT)



Source: Poverty assessment team based on the 2022 Suriname Survey of Living Conditions (IDB 2022).
Note: Highest level of education completed by women and men ages 15 and older.

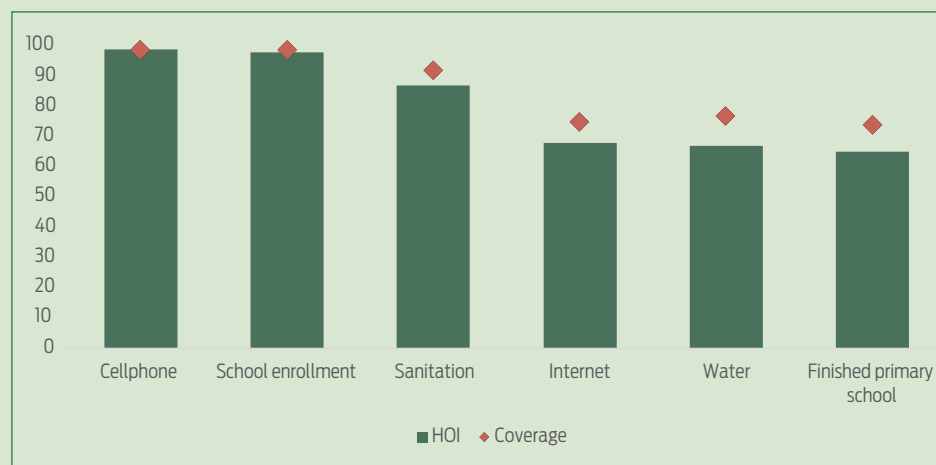
BOX 3. THE HUMAN OPPORTUNITIES INDEX

The Human Opportunities Index (HOI) provides further insight into disparities in access to education and other services. As described by the World Bank’s LAC Equity Lab, the HOI “measures how individual circumstances (i.e., characteristics such as place of residence, gender, and education of the household head that should not determine access to basic goods and services) can affect a child’s access to basic opportunities such as water, education, electricity, and sanitation.” These services, in turn, may affect children’s development and opportunities later in life. Following Paes de Barros et al. (2008), the index can be used to compare actual coverage of these services against coverage corrected for inequalities in individual circumstances.

In the case of Suriname, as shown in Box Figure 3.1, the index highlights inequities especially in terms of access to the Internet, water, and primary school completion. The actual coverage for each of these, shown as diamonds, equals about 75 percent. However, the picture is less optimistic after correcting for inequities in access by geographic area, gender of the child, years of education of the head of household, gender of the household head,

whether the household has both parents, number of children in the household, and the value of household consumption. On the three indicators (access to the Internet, water, and primary school completion), Suriname also compares poorly to much of the rest of Latin America and the Caribbean both in terms of actual coverage and HOI. Of the countries for which recent data are available, only Paraguay, Jamaica, and Bolivia have lower HOI scores. For water and primary school completion, in particular, Suriname’s HOI score is about 10 percentage points below the actual coverage rate, pointing to a negative role of individual circumstances in accessing basic services.

BOX FIGURE 3.1. SURINAME’S HUMAN OPPORTUNITIES INDEX (HOI) SCORES



Source: World Bank LAC Equity Lab based on the 2022 Suriname Survey of Living Conditions (IDB 2022).

Note: Household circumstances include the gender of the child and head of household, the educational level of the head of household, the presence of both parents in the household, the number of children under 17 years in the household, household income or consumption and place of residence (Great Paramaribo region, other coastal areas, and the interior). HOI focuses on 7 opportunities grouped into three dimensions. 1. Education: The indicator “School Enrollment” (10-14 years) measures whether young people have equitable access to education and the indicator “Finished Primary School” (12-16 years) refers to whether a young person completed their basic education. 2. Dwelling (youth 16 and under): The “Electricity” indicator measures the household’s access to electricity, the “Water” indicator considers whether the household has running water inside the dwelling or the yard, finally, the “Sanitation” indicator measures whether a household has a flush toilet on the dwelling or the yard. 3. Information and communication technologies (youth 16 and under): The indicators “Internet” and “Cellphone” measure whether a household has access to internet and cellphones, respectively.

Poverty and poor education outcomes are associated. Moreover, education is an important element in the intergenerational transmission of poverty. There is a clear correlation between highest level of education completed and poverty, as shown in Table 4. More than two fifths of the poor (42 percent) live with a head of household who did not complete any education. In middle-class or richer households, this share is only 17.5 percent. Virtually none of the poor live with a household head who has completed tertiary education, whereas 10 percent of the middle class live with a household head who has completed higher education. Moreover, children in poor households are more likely to be

out of school. This holds for different age groups, from young children ages zero to 5 to young adults ages 18 to 24.⁹ In other words, education deprivations start early in life and are more prevalent among the poor, indicating that education is at the root of intergenerational transmission of poverty.



TABLE 4. SURINAME: POOR EDUCATION OUTCOMES ARE ASSOCIATED WITH POVERTY (PERCENT)

	Poor (<US\$6.85)	Vulnerable (US\$6.85-US\$14)	Middle Class and up (>US\$14)	Total Population
Highest level of education completed				
Head of household				
None	42.4	22.0	17.5	23.2
Primary	34.6	42.4	27.5	34.4
Middle school	14.0	24.6	29.0	24.9
High school	8.8	8.6	15.3	11.6
Higher education	0.2	2.5	10.8	5.8
Female				
None	32.4	18.3	10.6	16.5
Primary	39.7	35.2	27.1	31.8
Middle school	15.2	23.8	24.1	22.8
High school	12.3	17.2	20.3	18.0
Higher education	0.3	5.5	17.8	10.9
Male				
None	40.4	19.9	15.7	20.2
Primary	34.2	39.9	30.4	34.5
Middle school	17.0	26.2	29.5	26.8
High school	8.3	11.5	15.6	13.2
Higher education	0.0	2.5	8.8	5.4
School attendance by age group				
0-5	28.5	31.3	33.3	31.2
6-11	93.8	99.2	98.4	97.5
12-14	92.3	98.1	99.8	97.4
15-17	91.9	91.1	92.8	91.9
18-24	33.4	48.2	55.9	48.8

Source: Poverty assessment team based on 2022 Suriname Survey of Living Conditions (IDB 2022).

Note: Table shows distribution of population within income group across different categories given by education of the head of household and education of 15+ years old individuals. It also shows school attendance rates by age brackets between 0 and 24 years old.

⁹ Related, UNICEF (2019) found that 6 percent of children in the country engage in child labor, which is typically an indication of poverty. This share is higher among boys (8 percent) than girls (5 percent) and markedly higher in the rural interior, at 19 percent.

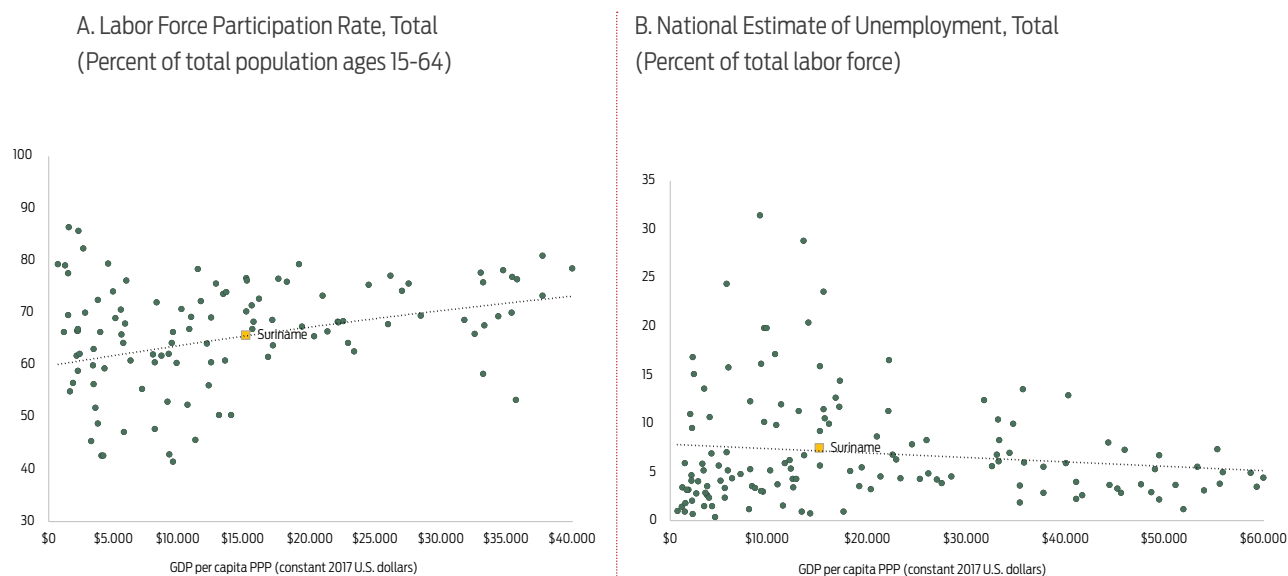
5. LABOR MARKET OUTCOMES



By 2022, as Suriname was past the deepest part of the economic crisis, core labor market outcomes were in line with expectations. However, the poor were both significantly less likely to participate in the labor market and significantly more likely to be unemployed. Figure 15 shows that both Suriname’s overall labor force participation and unemployment rates were aligned with what would be expected in terms of global comparisons. The same holds for many other key indicators not displayed here. These include, for instance, the shares of wage workers, workers in vulnerable employment, youth not in employment, education or training (NEET), the part-time employed, and the self-employed. In fact, on some of these indicators Suriname compared relatively positively to peers with a similar level of GDP per capita. Nonetheless, as shown in Table 3, when decomposing overall statistics, the poor show significantly lower rates of labor force participation (52.0 percent) relative to the middle class (69.8 percent). Similarly, conditional on participating in the labor force, the poor are significantly more likely to be unemployed (12.1 percent) when compared to the middle class (5.5 percent).



FIGURE 15. SURINAME DOES NOT STAND OUT IN CORE LABOR MARKET INDICATORS (PERCENT)



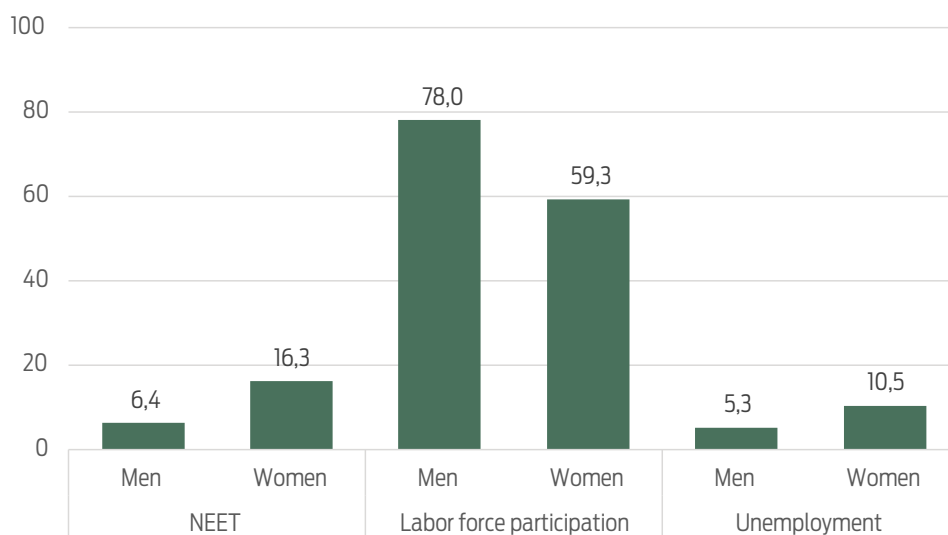
Source: Latest labor force participation and unemployment rates and corresponding GDP per capita adjusted for purchasing power parity (PPP) from the World Bank’s World Development Indicators. For Suriname: Poverty assessment team based on the 2022 Suriname Survey of Living Conditions (IDB 2022).

Moreover, women’s labor market outcomes compare poorly to those of men, despite women’s stronger education outcomes. In fact, women are worse off than men on virtually all the main labor market outcomes (Figure 16). These disparities are visible at an early age. On average, 11 percent of youths ages 16 to 25 are not in employment, education, or training (NEET). However, the share of those who are NEET is markedly higher among females (16.3 percent) than males (6.4

percent). Differences are no less pronounced among many other core outcomes related to labor market participation. The share of women in the labor force is 54.5 percent for women vs. 76.7 percent for men. And, even within those in the labor force, the unemployment rate is markedly higher for women (10.5 percent) than for men (5.3 percent).



FIGURE 16. SURINAME: GENDER DISPARITIES IN THE LABOR MARKET OUTCOMES OF WOMEN AND MEN (PERCENT)

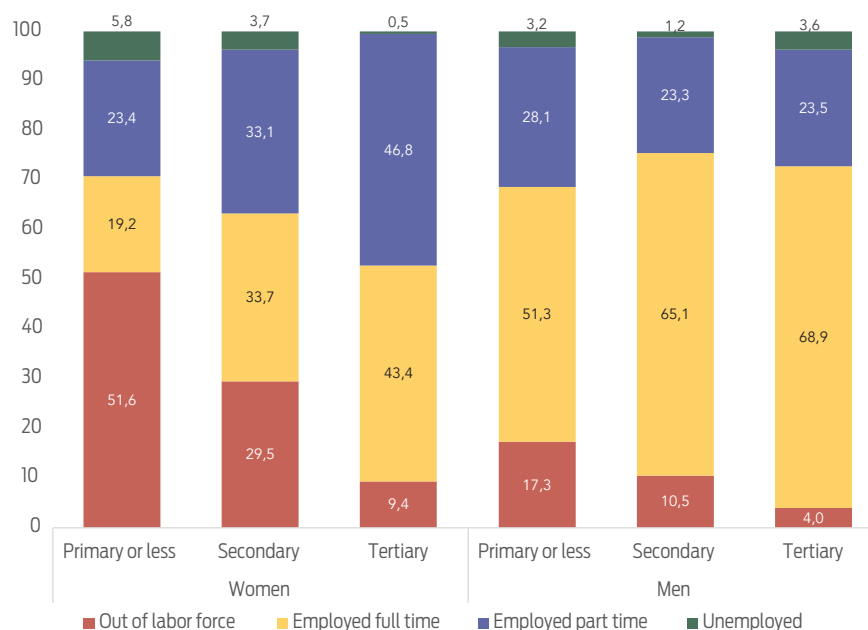


Source: Poverty assessment team based on the 2022 Suriname Survey of Living Conditions (IDB 2022).
 Note: Labor force participation is the ratio of economically active to working-age population. Unemployment indicates the ratio of the unemployed to the economically active population. NEET: not in education, employment, or training.

The relatively low labor market attachment of women can be observed across all educational levels. Figure 17 shows that, although the differences are more pronounced at lower levels of education, women are significantly more likely to be out of the labor force at all levels of educational attainment. While 52 percent of women with primary education or less are out of the labor force, only 17 percent of men with the same educational attainment are out of the labor force. Among persons with secondary education, 30 percent of women are out of the labor force compared to 10 percent of men. Even among tertiary-educated individuals, 9 percent of are out of the labor force, more than double the 4 percent of men. Moreover, among those who are employed, women are significantly less likely to work on a full-time basis, and this also holds for all levels of educational attainment. For example, among tertiary-educated persons, 43 percent of women are employed on a full-time basis and 47 percent work part-time. In contrast, 69 percent of men with tertiary education work full-time and only 23 percent work part-time.



FIGURE 17. SURINAME: GENDER DISPARITIES IN LABOR MARKET OUTCOMES AT ALL LEVELS OF EDUCATION ATTAINMENT (PERCENT)



Source: Poverty assessment team based on the 2022 Suriname Survey of Living Conditions (IDB 2022).

High levels of early marriage and adolescent fertility contribute to women’s poor labor market outcomes.¹⁰ Of course, the reasons behind gaps in the labor market outcomes of women and men are complex and multifaceted. Research in many countries around the world indicates that one important explanation tends to be that the school-to-work transition can be more challenging for women (World Bank, undated). Indeed, the pronounced gender difference in the share of NEET youth indicates that the school-to-work transition is challenging for young women in Suriname. The literature on school-to-work transitions points to teenage pregnancy and early marriage as important barriers to a successful school-to-work transition. And in both outcomes, Suriname does not compare favorably. Panel A of Figure 18 shows that Suriname is an outlier in terms of early marriage rates. According to the 2018 UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), 36 percent of women ages 20 to 24 had been married by the age of 18, a rate comparable to that of Mauritania, Nicaragua, and the Sudan.¹¹ Panel B shows that, although Suriname is not a clear outlier, adolescent fertility rates are nonetheless substantial. Gender norms tend to be an important driver of high levels of early marriage and adolescent fertility and contribute to an environment where women are perceived as mothers and caregivers, but not as income earners. Indeed, according to the 2022 SLC, women often mention that they are out of the labor force because of caregiving duties. For men, this is rarely the case.

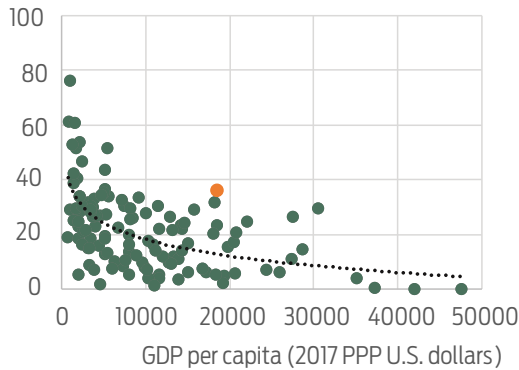
¹⁰ UNFPA (2023), estimated the socio-economic opportunity cost of adolescent pregnancy and early motherhood to be 1.6% of the GDP.

¹¹ The category married includes those who or engaged in a long-term relationship as per common law, in a traditional marriage, or living (apart) together.

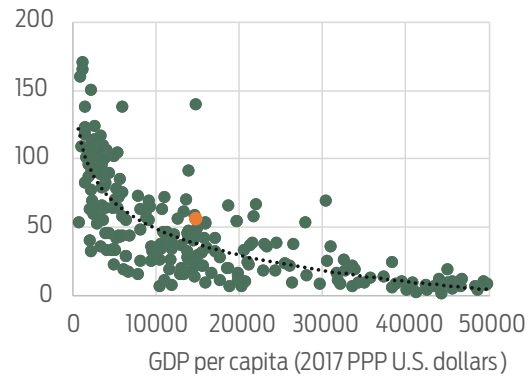


FIGURE 18. SURINAME: HIGH RATES OF EARLY MARRIAGE AND ADOLESCENT FERTILITY CONTRIBUTE TO GENDER DISPARITIES IN LABOR MARKET OUTCOMES

A. Women First Married by Age 18
(Percent of women ages 20-24)



B. Adolescent Fertility Rate
(Births per 1,000 women ages 15-19)



Source: World Bank Gender Data Portal, based on the 2018 UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey for Suriname (panel A) and UN Population Division data (panel B).
Note: PPP: purchasing power parity.

The human capital deficiencies that are at the heart of poverty and inequality in Suriname are also an important obstacle for private sector growth. Over 55 percent of firms mention an inadequately educated and trained workforce as an obstacle to their operations. Among larger, more mature firms, this share increases to 90 percent. When asked about the causes of skill shortages (Figure 19), nearly half of all firms mention that the quality of education and training offered by local educational institutions is a very important or even critical factor behind the country's skill shortage problem. This is followed labor protection laws and regulations, and the lack of necessary personal, soft skills (training) offered by local institutions.



FIGURE 19. SURINAME: CAUSES OF SKILL SHORTAGES ACCORDING TO FIRMS (PERCENT)



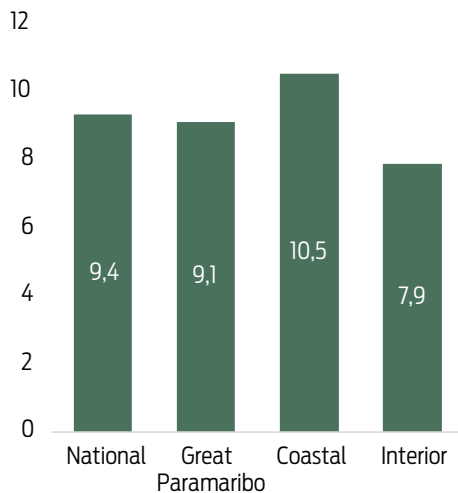
Source: Poverty assessment team based on the 2020 Innovation, Firm Performance and Gender Survey conducted by Compete Caribbean (2020).

Real hourly wages are lower in the interior (where the poor are concentrated), while labor market returns to education imply a growing gap unfavorable to the lower-educated poor that reinforces inequalities. While the average hourly wage stands at 2017 PPP US\$9.40 nationally, the interior has a noticeably lower figure of 2017 PPP US\$7.90 (Figure 20 panel A). This coincides with the relatively higher concentration of poverty in the interior and the associated lower levels of human capital there. Relatedly, as 37 percent of the poor have not completed primary school and 28 percent have only completed primary education, labor market returns to education would relegate the poor further. Panel B of Figure 20 shows that the return for completing high school is about 86 percent (relative to no education or incomplete primary). As only 5 percent of the poor have completed high school (with none completing tertiary education), this implies that most of the poor will see their earnings fall significantly behind the higher educated (mostly non-poor) population.

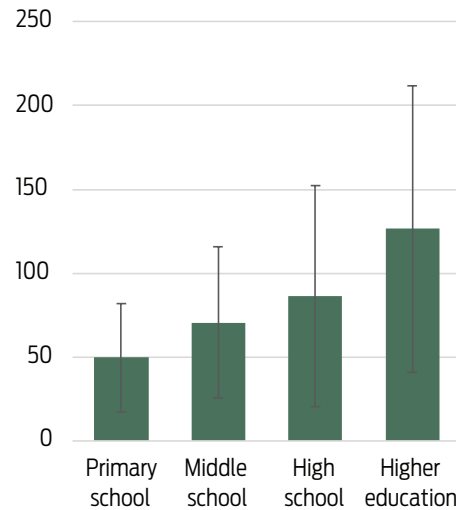


FIGURE 20. SURINAME: HOURLY WAGES DIFFER BY REGION

A. Hourly Wages by Region (2017 PPP U.S. dollars)



B. Returns to Education (Percent)



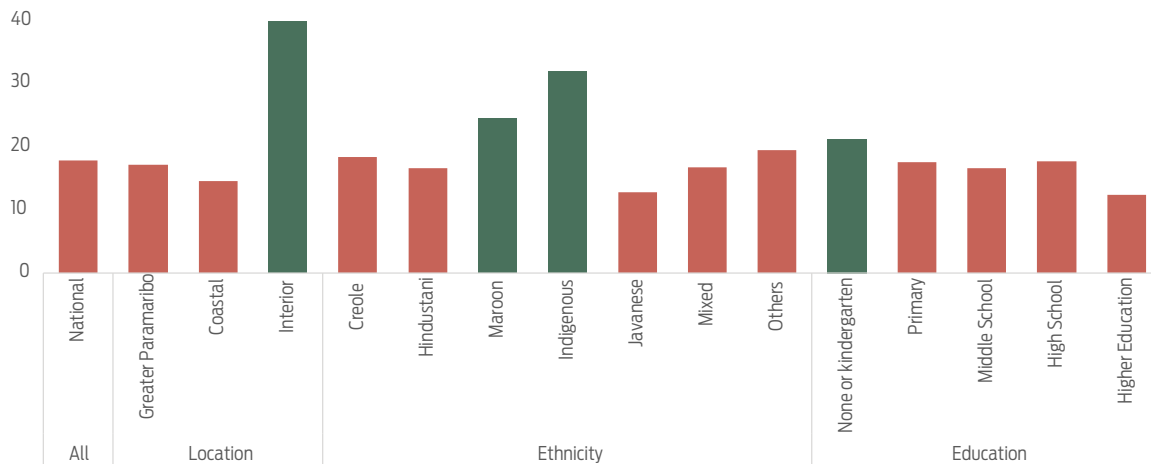
Source: Poverty assessment team based on the 2022 Suriname Survey of Living Conditions (IDB 2022). Note: In panel B, returns to education are calculated with respect to the omitted category of none or incomplete primary education from Mincer regressions controlling for gender, age, geographic area, and labor market experience (95 percent confidence intervals presented along with the point estimates). Note: PPP: purchasing power parity.

The percentage of workers whose wages are below the minimum wage is higher in the interior, among indigenous and maroon populations, and among those with no formal education. Overall, 18 percent of people who reported income in 2022 earned an average wage below the minimum wage threshold set by the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Youth Affairs (Figure 21).¹² The proportion of individuals earning below the minimum wage is considerably higher in the interior, at 39.8 percent. The same holds among Maroon and indigenous workers (24.4 and 31.9 percent, respectively). Also, Figure 21 shows how the proportion of individuals earning below the minimum wage decreases with education. Indeed, 21.2 percent of individuals with no education or kindergarten earn below the minimum wage, compared to 12.4 percent among those with higher education.

¹² The minimum hourly wage was recently set at SRD49.12 by the Ministry of Labor. In 2022, the figure was SRD20, which is equivalent to US\$1.30 (2017 PPP) and which was used for the calculations in Figure 21. See <https://www.sris.sr/Beschikking-Minimum-uurloon-2022.pdf> for the official release of the 2022 minimum wage (accessed June 1, 2024).



FIGURE 21. SURINAME: EARNINGS OF WORKERS FROM DISADVANTAGED GROUPS MORE LIKELY TO BE BELOW THE MINIMUM WAGE (PERCENT)



Source: Poverty assessment team based on the 2022 Suriname Survey of Living Conditions (IDB 2022).

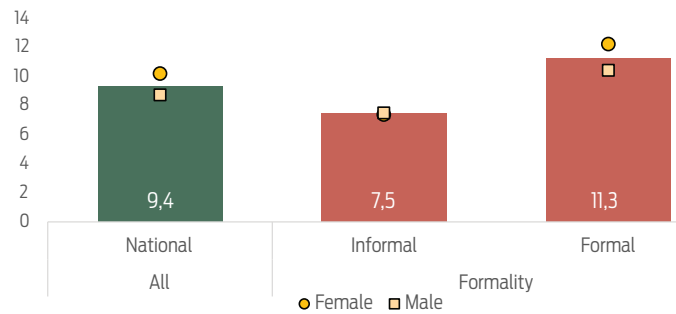
Informality negatively affects earnings and is related to a higher probability of earning below the minimum wage.

About 53 percent of Surinamese workers can be classified as working in the informal sector (i.e., without access to employment benefits such as a pension or retirement fund, medical insurance, and maternity and paid sick leave). The share is higher among men (59 percent) than women (44 percent). On average, formal Surinamese workers have a wage premium of US\$3.80 (2017 PPP) over their informal counterparts (Figure 22). Formal workers earn, on average, US\$11.30 per hour, well above the national average (US\$9.40) and the average of informal workers (US\$7.50). For women, despite their lower labor force participation conditional on working, average wages are higher among female workers and their formality wage gap is higher. Formally employed women earn US\$12.20 on average, 65 percent more than their informal counterparts (US\$7.40). The implied earning benefits derived from formal work are also noticeable in terms of the percentage of individuals whose earnings are below the minimum wage. While the national share of individuals earning below the minimum wage is 17.8 percent (Figure 22, panel B), this proportion increases to 24.1 percent among informal workers and is only 11.2 percent for formal workers.

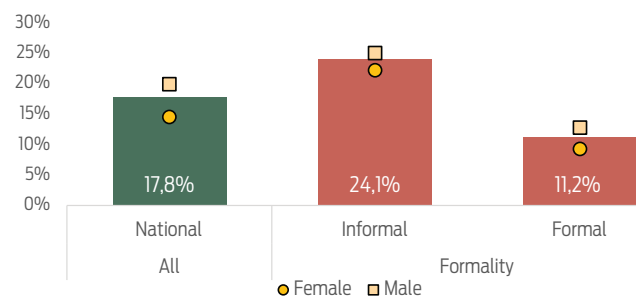


FIGURE 22. SURINAME: A CLEAR ASSOCIATION BETWEEN INFORMALITY AND EARNINGS

A. Average Wages (2017 PPP U.S. dollars)



B. Persons Earning Below Minimum Wage (Percent)



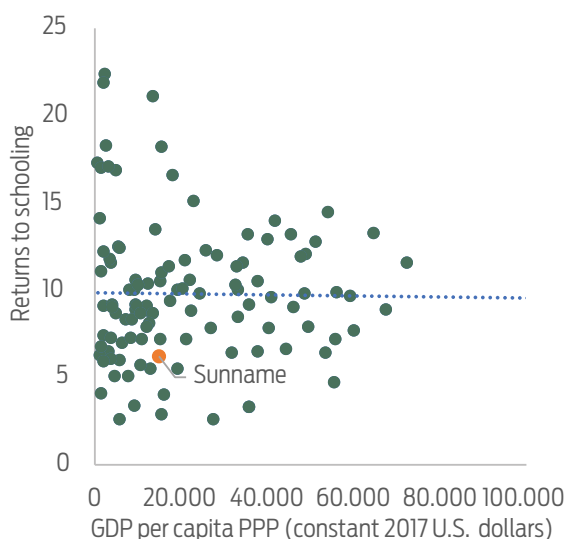
Source: Poverty assessment team based on the 2022 Suriname Survey of Living Conditions (IDB 2022).
 Note: Informality is represented by individuals who have no access to employment benefits, including a pension or retirement fund, medical insurance, and maternity and paid sick leave. PPP: purchasing power parity.

In addition to the gap in labor market returns unfavorable to the less educated and poorest individuals, the increase in wages due to an increase in one year of schooling is relatively low. Indeed, the country’s overall returns to an additional year of education are on the lower side of the distribution among countries with comparable development. On average, each additional year of schooling raises wages by 6.2 percent in Suriname, which is similar to what Montenegro and Patrinos (2022) estimate for Nicaragua, Yemen, and Guinea. Figure 23 shows the relationship between returns to schooling and GDP per capita (panel A) and labor force participation rates (panel B). Suriname’s returns to education are thus lower than what would be expected for its level of income and labor force participation. Nonetheless, as was shown in Figure 20 (panel B), when estimating differential returns across educational levels, obtaining a tertiary education degree raises earnings by about 41 percent with respect to a high school degree (i.e., an average return of about 10 percent for each additional year of tertiary education).

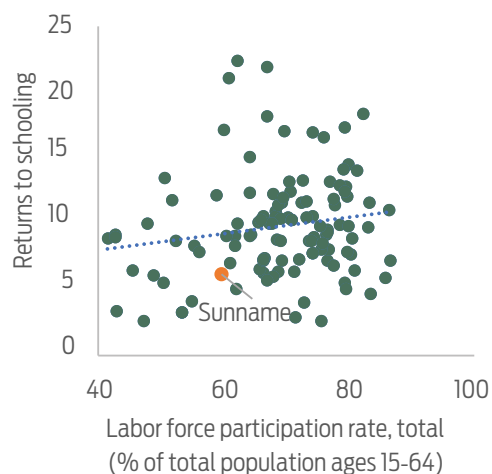


FIGURE 23. SURINAME: RETURNS TO EDUCATION ARE COMPARATIVELY LOW (PERCENT)

A. Returns to schooling (percent) plotted against GDP per Capita (Constant 2017 PPP U.S. dollars)



B. Returns to schooling (percent) plotted against labor force participation rate



Source: Poverty assessment team based on Montenegro and Patrinos (2022) for the rest of the world and on the 2022 Suriname Survey of Living Conditions (IDB 2022) for Suriname.

Note: Returns to education for Suriname were calculated by a standard Mincer equation where earnings (natural log of hourly wages) were regressed on years of schooling (continuous variable), labor market potential experience, and experience-squared. PPP: purchasing power parity.

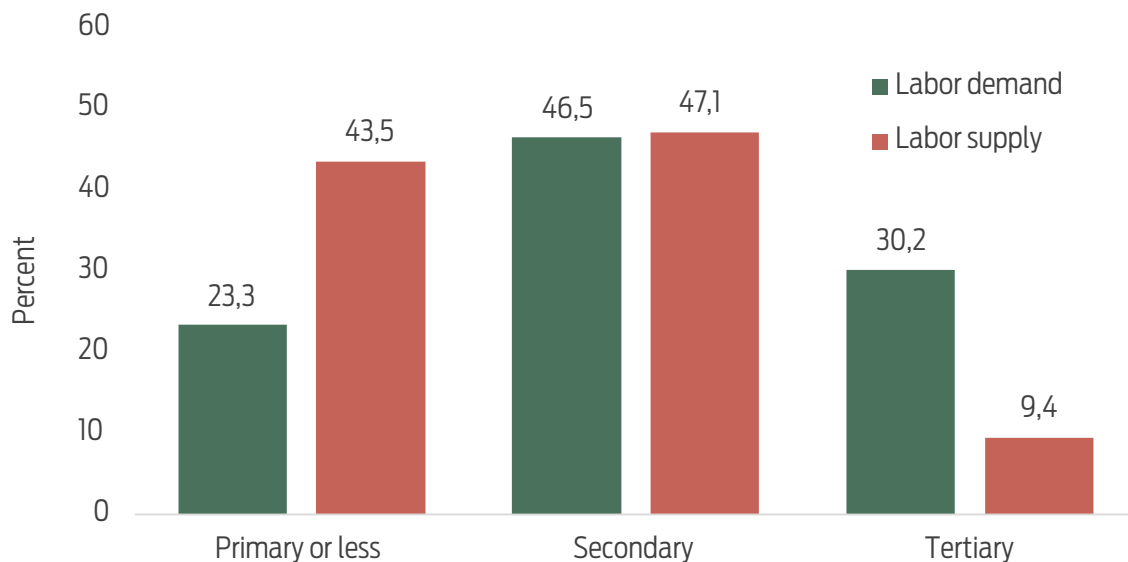
The lack of adequately trained workers translates into a mismatch between labor demand and supply that exacerbates the labor market outcomes of the poor. Firm-level data from the 2014 Productivity, Technology and Innovation in the Caribbean Survey give an indication of the distribution of minimum educational levels that firms in Suriname require when hiring workers (labor demand). This labor demand is represented by the firms' required level of education for both filled positions and the vacancies for all different job types.¹³ On the other hand, the distribution of the workforce by educational levels can be calculated based on the 2022 SLC (labor supply). The resulting distributions of both labor supply and demand, displayed in Figure 24, show that there is an oversupply of workers with lower levels of education (primary or less) and an undersupply of workers with tertiary education. While 23 percent of positions in the private sector demand workers with primary education or less (mostly driven by the demand for craft and related trade workers and elementary occupations),

¹³ Job types included in the survey are managers, professionals, technicians and associate professionals, clerical support workers, service and sales workers, skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers, craft and related trades workers, plant and machine operators, and elementary occupations.

over 43 percent of the Surinamese labor force has primary education as its highest educational attainment. Labor supply and demand for secondary-educated persons is largely balanced. However, workers with tertiary education are in low supply. The labor market demand for persons with either vocational training or a university degree is 30 percent, and strongly exceeds the 9.4 percent of the labor force that meets this educational attainment criterion. As none of the poor reach tertiary education, their labor supply characterized by low levels of human capital is more than what the labor market demands. This explains their lower labor force participation, higher unemployment, and lower wages. Therefore, enhanced opportunities to access quality education among the poor are greatly needed to break the intergenerational transmission of poverty and reduce structural inequalities.



FIGURE 24. SURINAME: MISMATCH IN LABOR SUPPLY AND DEMAND (PERCENT)



Source: Labor Demand: 2014 Productivity, Technology and Innovation in the Caribbean Survey (Compete Caribbean 2014).
 Labor Supply: Suriname 2022 Survey of Living Conditions (IDB 2022).

6. OPPORTUNITIES FOR FURTHER POVERTY REDUCTION THROUGH IMPROVED SOCIAL ASSISTANCE



Reducing disparities in economic opportunities, complemented by an effective social assistance system, are critical to reduce poverty. As is clear from the previous discussion, inclusive growth is of first-order importance for poverty reduction in Suriname. Achieving such inclusive growth requires improvements in education and skill formation, enhanced economic inclusion of disadvantaged groups, better opportunities for the poor to participate in the modern economy, and reduced gender disparities in labor market outcomes. In addition, well-functioning social assistance is a key priority to address chronic poverty and protect those at risk of falling into poverty due to aggregate shocks such as oil price fluctuations, changing commodity prices, pandemics, and natural disasters.

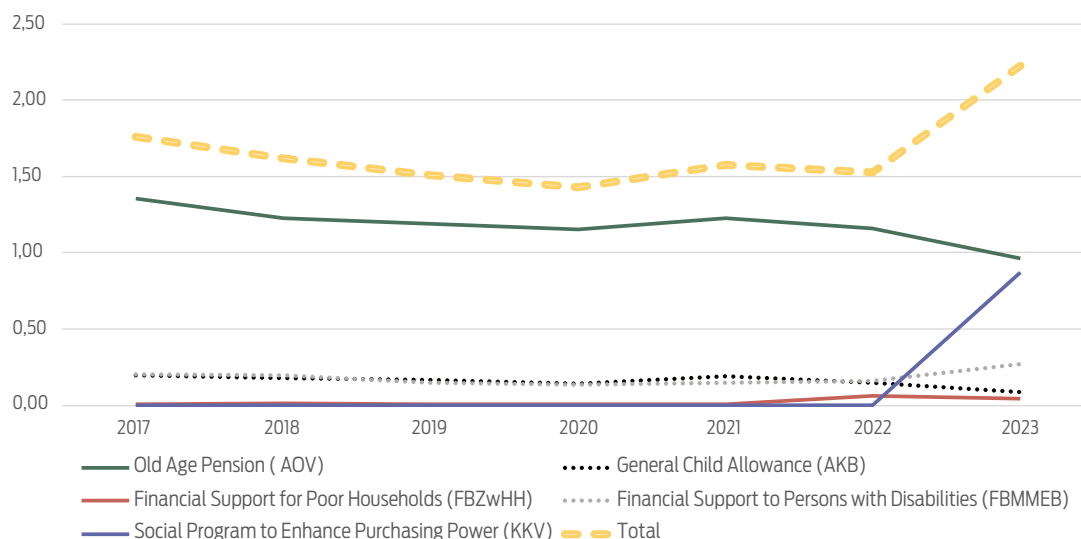
Social assistance became an increasing priority for Suriname as it entered a challenging process of economic readjustment in 2020. Several stringent structural economic reform measures were implemented, including a move to a floating exchange rate and reductions in subsidies on basic needs and services (such as electricity, fuel, basic foods, and health services). To help offset these effects, Suriname implemented specific measures to provide social support for poor and vulnerable households and set ambitious social assistance spending targets. These efforts are ongoing as the government develops, updates, and modernizes its social protection system and initiates new programs.

Four unconditional and mostly categorically targeted cash transfer programs form the backbone of Suriname's social assistance system. The two largest programs are the General Old Age Provision Fund (*Algemene Ouderdomsvoorziening*, or *AOV in Dutch*) and the General Child Allowance (*Algemene Kinderbijslag* - AKB). The other two programs are Financial Support for Poor Households (*Financiële Bijstand voor zwakke huishoudens* - FBZWHH) and the Financial Support to Persons with Disabilities (*Financiële Bijstand voor mensen met een beperking* - FBMMEB). Except for the FBZWHH, these programs all follow what are called categorical targeting approaches – that is, they target beneficiaries based on observed demographic characteristics.

Suriname's total social assistance spending on these four programs equaled approximately 1.5 percent of GDP in 2022 (Figure 25). AOV is the most prominent of the four programs. In 2022, it reached approximately 90 percent of Suriname's population ages 60 and older and provided sizable transfers (value equal to 45 percent of the World Bank's upper-middle-income poverty line of 2017 PPP US\$6.85). Total expenditure on the program equaled about 1.2 percent of GDP (Figure 25). Spending on the other three programs is about an order of magnitude smaller. The AKB also has a high number of beneficiaries (all households with children under the age of 18 are eligible), but in 2022 the value of its transfers equaled only about 5 percent of the international upper-middle-income poverty line. The other two programs provide benefits of a magnitude similar to that of the AOV, but cover only a smaller minority of the population. In 2023, a new program was initiated, the Social Program to Enhance Purchasing Power (*Koopkracht Versterking* - KKV), a significant but temporary social assistance program providing substantial transfers to the elderly (ages 60+) and workers with a monthly wage lower than SRD6,000 (Box 4).



FIGURE 25. OF SURINAME'S FOUR MAIN PROGRAMS, THE OLD AGE PENSION REPRESENTS THE BULK OF SOCIAL ASSISTANCE EXPENDITURE, 2017–2023 (PERCENT)



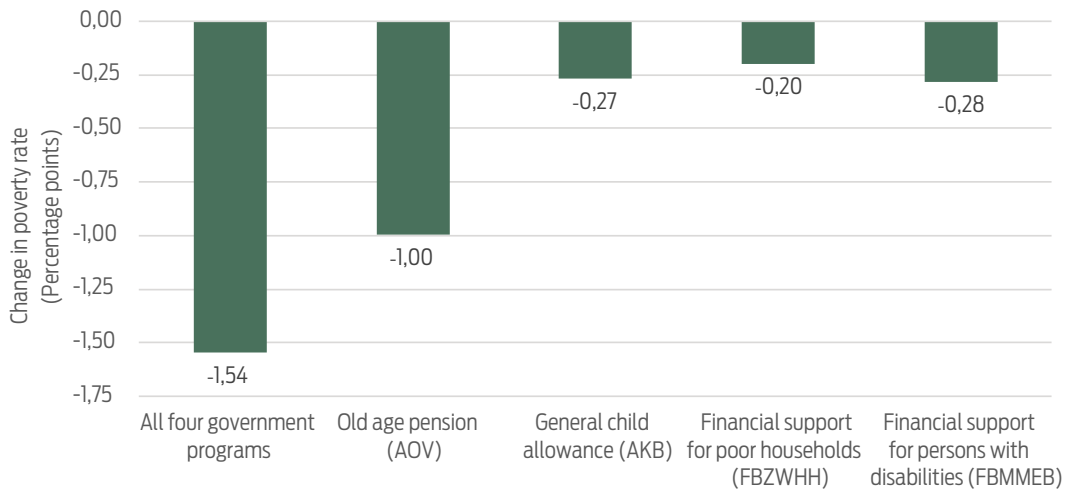
Source: Expenditure data for Suriname provided by the Ministry of Social Affairs.

Suriname's expenditure on social assistance is now above average when compared internationally. Comparisons based on the Atlas of Social Protection Indicators of Resilience and Equity (ASPIRE) indicate that public spending on social assistance equaled 1.68 percent of GDP in Latin America and the Caribbean, 1.47 percent of GDP in the Caribbean, and 1.42 percent of GDP globally. By this measure, Suriname's expenditure on the main programs alone already exceeded the average of all these regions in 2024, while expenditure on social assistance was set to increase more (Tesliuc, Paffhausen, and Avila, 2023).

Of Suriname's four main social assistance programs, the AOV has the biggest impact on poverty. Annex 3 of this report shows a range of simulations to examine the impact of the four main social assistance programs on poverty and explains how these are carried out. According to these simulations, in 2022, the four programs jointly reduced poverty by about 1.5 percentage points (Figure 26). In other words, the poverty rate would have been about 19 percent instead of 17.5 percent without these programs. In line with its expenditure, the AOV is estimated to have the highest impact of the four programs, resulting in a reduction in poverty of about 1 percentage point. The impact of the other programs is modest.



FIGURE 26. SURINAME: THE OLD AGE PENSION HAS THE STRONGEST IMPACT ON POVERTY OF ALL SOCIAL PROGRAMS (BASED ON THE WORLD BANK'S 2017 PPP US\$6.85 POVERTY LINE (PERCENTAGE POINTS))



Source: Poverty assessment team based on the 2022 Suriname Survey of Living Conditions (IDB 2022).
 Note: Each bar shows the difference between the actual poverty rate (2017 PPP US\$6.85 poverty line) and the counterfactual poverty rate (in percentage points) if beneficiary households did not receive social assistance programs. PPP: purchasing power parity.

Because of the categorical targeting of the main programs, the coverage of Suriname's social assistance programs is only moderately progressive. As shown in Table 5, about 55 percent of poor households receive benefits under at least one of the main social assistance programs. At the top of the consumption distribution, this share is about 44 percent. In other words, Suriname's main social assistance programs miss a sizable portion (about 45 percent) of the poor. Clearly, Suriname's mainly categorically targeted social assistance programs are insufficient to reach all the population in need. Moreover, the average per capita value of transfers received at the bottom of the income distribution (conditional on participating in the programs) is still well below the international upper-middle-income poverty line (which translates to about 2017 PPP US\$208 in monthly terms). And there is significant variation in the extent to which the individual programs are progressive. If anything, the targeting of the AOV old age pension, Suriname's most important permanent social assistance program, is regressive. Its coverage is lower among the poor than among the vulnerable and the middle class. The coverage of the AKB child allowance, in contrast, is markedly more progressive. But the transfers provided through the program are insufficient to make much of a dent in poverty. Enhanced child allowance transfers would be beneficial, as they would simultaneously be pro-poor and help to address some of the challenges underlying poor education outcomes.

BOX 4. SURINAME'S NEW SOCIAL PROGRAM TO ENHANCE PURCHASING POWER

Suriname's new Social Program to Enhance Purchasing Power (Koopkracht Versterking - KKV) may serve as a learning opportunity for the long-term strengthening of Suriname's social assistance system. The program was rolled out quickly at the start of 2023, and its design has since evolved rapidly. By March 2024, approximately 123,000 applicants were receiving a monthly transfer of SRD1,800 under the program. In the absence of a social registry, a significant program registration effort had to be set up in a short period of time, drawing in part on income statements to determine eligibility. Payments are made through ATM cards that do not require access to a bank account. Although the program is temporary in nature, its end date has been shifting. A thorough assessment of the program is likely to lead to significant lessons for future poverty-targeted social assistance initiatives, related for example to inclusion and exclusion errors and challenges related to payment procedures.

Estimating the impacts of the KKV is challenging. One reason is that it was implemented after the 2022 Survey of Living Conditions data collection process was completed, so beneficiaries are not observed in the data. Under the assumption that the program effectively reaches the elderly and the poorest workers in the country, and under the *ceteris paribus* assumption of no other changes in the economy, the impact could be as strong as reducing poverty by nearly 7 percentage points. However, it is important to keep in mind that this program is temporary and some uncertainties surround its implementation.

While a reduction in poverty of 7 percentage points may be substantial, calculations presented in Annex 3 of the main report suggest that the impact of a program of this magnitude could be markedly more substantial. In 2017 PPP U.S. dollars, the value of the transfers provided by the program equal about US\$3.32 per day, nearly half (48 percent) of the international upper-middle-income poverty line. If the program were to reach the 123,000 poorest Surinamese (26 percent of them children), it would result in a dramatic reduction in poverty of 13.7 percentage points against the upper-middle-income poverty line. There would be no remaining poverty at more extreme poverty lines. However, because the program provides blanket coverage to the elderly, 58 percent of the beneficiaries of the program are in fact not poor. The latter stymies the impact of the program and translates into a reduced impact on poverty.

Suriname's social assistance system was not designed to cope with shocks. As shown in Table 5, households commonly experience economic shocks. About two-thirds of all households experienced an economic shock in the 12 months before they participated in the 2022 SLC, with negative implications for their purchasing power. And while poor households were affected by economic shocks more often than other groups, exposure to shocks was high among all groups of households, poor or not. Yet, Suriname does not currently have a major permanent social assistance program that protects households from shocks. Development of shock responsive social assistance will become an increasingly important challenge as climate change increases the prevalence of economic shocks.


TABLE 5. SURINAME'S MAIN SOCIAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS ARE MODERATELY PROGRESSIVE

	Poor (<US\$6.85)	Vulnerable (US\$6.85-US\$14)	Middle Class and Up (>US\$14)	Total Population
Social assistance (percent)				
Participation: Lives in household with at least one member receiving:				
Any of the four main programs	55.0%	53.1%	44.2%	49.5%
Old age pension (AOV)	26.7%	28.5%	34.0%	30.6%
Child allowance (AKB)	31.2%	24.6%	10.9%	19.7%
Financial support for poor households (FBZWHH)	3.2%	0.9%	0.7%	1.2%
Persons with disabilities benefits (FBMMEB)	9.1%	4.2%	3.0%	4.5%
Per capita benefits conditional on household participation (PPP U.S. dollars, monthly)				
Any of the four main programs	20.31	24.89	38.28	29.24
Old age pension (AOV)	26.77	36.01	45.41	39.18
Child allowance (AKB)	7.08	5.85	5.25	6.04
Financial support for poor households (FB-ZWHH)	9.54	38.43	24.39	21.65
Persons with disabilities benefits (FBMMEB)	16.76	27.29	24.08	22.69
Shocks (percent)				
Economic shock	78.1%	70.8%	61.2%	66.5%
Health shock	24.2%	19.0%	18.6%	19.4%
Conflict shock	1.3%	2.4%	3.2%	2.7%
Theft	4.7%	9.0%	8.2%	8.1%

Source: Poverty assessment team based on the 2022 Suriname Survey of Living Conditions (IDB 2022).

Moreover, historically disadvantaged groups are not especially well covered by the main social assistance programs. If anything, the coverage of the programs is lower in the interior of the country than in other regions, according to the 2022 SLC (Figure 27, panel A). While about half of the population in the Greater Paramaribo Region and the other coastal areas receive at least one social assistance benefit (even if indirectly through another household member), this share is only about a third in the interior of the country. The average per capita value of transfers received in the interior is comparable to that in other parts of the country (Figure 27, panel B). Indigenous Surinamese appear to participate relatively frequently in the main social protection programs (Figure 27, panel A). However, Surinamese of Maroon background, a large share of whom live in the interior of the country, benefit from the main programs at rates that are among the lowest of all ethnic groups. Moreover, as the General Child Allowance (AKB) is the most common social assistance benefit they receive, the average per capita transfer value of social assistance received by indigenous and Maroon Surinamese is low compared to many other population groups (Figure 27, panel B).

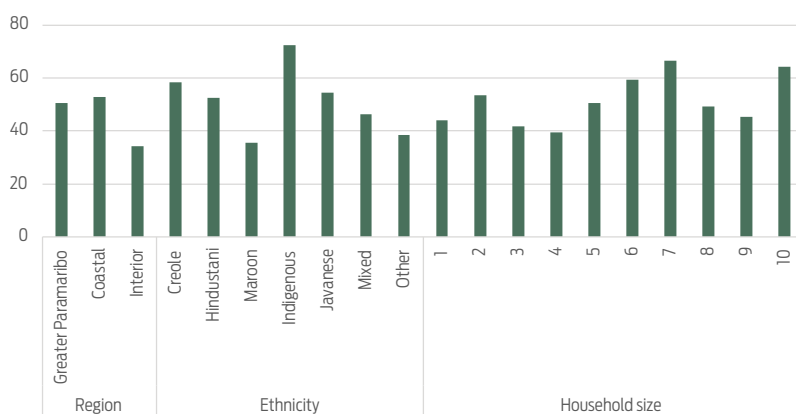
Bigger households are less generously covered by the main social assistance programs, despite the fact that large households are more likely to be poor than smaller households.

On average, large households are more likely to benefit from the main social assistance programs. About 44 percent of single-person households benefit from a social assistance program vs. about 64 percent of people in households with 10 persons or more. However, as larger households tend to benefit primarily from the AKB, they need to share transfers over more members, and the number of children for which AKB benefits can be received is capped at four, so the per capita value of social transfers drops rapidly with household size. In one-person households, the value is over 2017 PPP US\$100 per month. In households with 10 persons or more the per capita monthly value is only about US\$10.

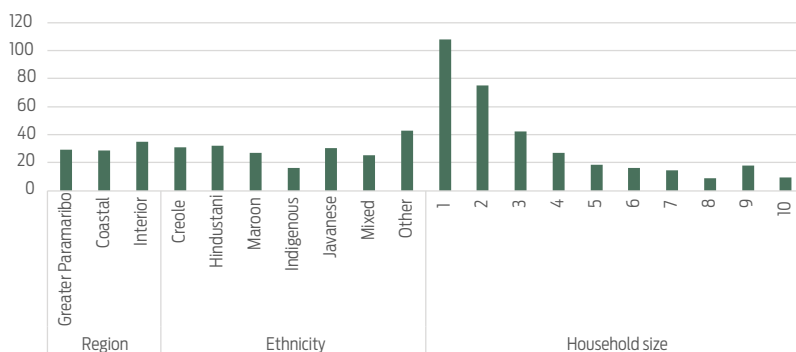


FIGURE 27. SURINAME: HISTORICALLY DISADVANTAGED GROUPS ARE NOT ESPECIALLY WELL COVERED BY THE MAIN SOCIAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

A. Share of the Population In Households Receiving at Least One Social Assistance Benefit (Percent)



B. Average Per Capita Monthly Social Assistance Receipt (2017 PPP U.S. dollars)



Source: Poverty assessment team based on the 2022 Suriname Survey of Living Conditions (IDB 2022).
 Note: Panel B is average for individuals in households with at least one member enrolled in one of the four main government programs. PPP: purchasing power parity.
 Note: Figure A shows the percentage of population living in households with at least one member enrolled in a social assistance program. Figure B shows the average monthly per capita social assistance receipt for individuals living in households with at least one member enrolled in any government program.

7. REFLECTIONS ON THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE EXPECTED OIL AND GAS BOOM FOR POVERTY AND INEQUALITY

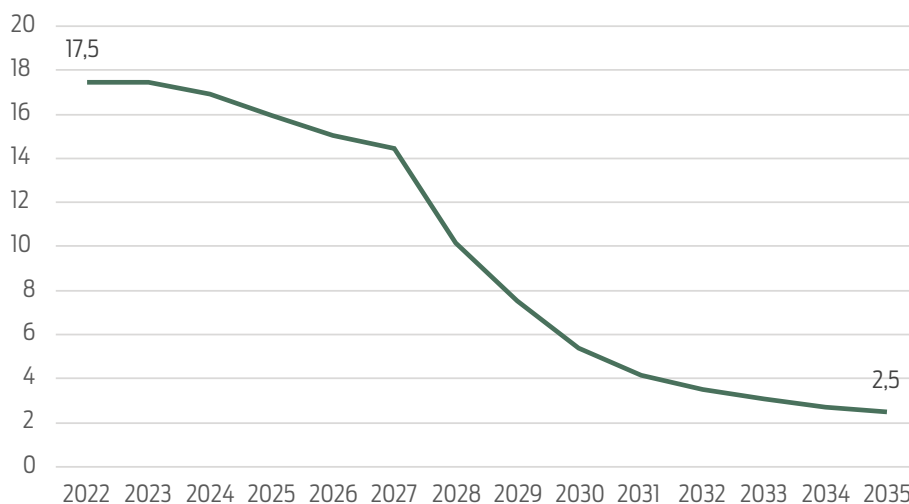


Suriname has high expectations of the potential of the impending oil and gas boom to improve overall living standards and reduce poverty. Indeed, taken at face value the prospects are enticing. At the time of this writing, TotalEnergies was expected to sanction off the first oil project in what is known as Block 58 at the end of 2024. If this timeline is met, the first oil revenues could materialize as early as 2028. The royalties of this project alone are expected to amount to US\$200 million on an annual basis (about 6 percent of current GDP). And indeed, this is only one of multiple potentially viable offshore oil projects off the coast of Suriname.

Macro-economic growth projections provide insight into how strong the potential impact of the oil and gas boom on poverty might be. Figure 28 takes the economic growth projections of the IMF in its latest review of the EFF (IMF 2024) as a starting point. These projections, which the IMF emphasizes are “subject to a lot of uncertainty”, suggest that annual growth in GDP per capita could jump to over 20 percent in the years from 2028 to 2030 after which it will gradually taper off. Simulations in Figure 28 illustrates that this growth could in theory contribute to rapid poverty reduction. These simulations are based on two strong assumptions. First, the so-called passthrough rate from GDP growth to poverty is 0.7 (i.e. every percentage point of GDP growth translates into a 0.7 percentage point increase in household consumption). Second, the impact of economic growth is distribution neutral (i.e. growth in consumption is identical in the bottom and top of the consumption distribution). Under these assumptions, poverty measured against the World Bank’s US\$6.85 poverty line would drop to below 3 percent ten years from now.



FIGURE 28. SURINAME: THE OIL AND GAS BOOM COULD IN THEORY HAVE A PRONOUNCED IMPACT ON POVERTY RATES (IN PERCENT, BASED ON THE WORLD BANK’S US\$6.85 POVERTY LINE)



Yet, poverty and inequality reduction as a result of future oil revenues should not be taken as a given. First, there is still uncertainty about the broader viability of Suriname’s offshore oil and gas fields. Final investment decisions have been postponed by the major firms exploring oil and gas in Suriname’s offshore oil fields for years. A reason for this is the technical difficulty and hence comparatively high cost of offshore oil exploitation in Suriname’s part of the Guyana basin, making the oil fields viable only against relatively high expected future oil prices. Downward pressure on oil prices when the world gradually moves away from hydrocarbons could further reduce the attractiveness of Suriname’s oil fields.

But even if Suriname’s offshore oil and gas exploitation comes on stream at scale, economic growth might not be pro-poor. The direct impact of the development of the oil and gas sector on job opportunities may be limited. As discussed in Section 4, mining and oil already represent close to 30 percent of GDP and 90 percent of Suriname’s exports. But they employ only a small minority of the population. And the ratio of revenue to the share of workers may become more skewed. The reason is that the offshore oil and gas industry is especially capital- and knowledge-intensive and demands mainly high skilled workers. Considering the skill shortages discussed throughout this report, much of the expertise required to operate offshore oil projects may have to be imported from abroad. Likewise, the opportunity for local content policies to create high-quality job opportunities through backward and forward linkages between the petroleum industry and other sectors (notably manufacturing of heavy equipment and legal and financial services) may be hampered by skill shortages. Spin off in other sectors (transport, hospitality, and food services) may have relatively low value added. Moreover, it is not yet clear if the refinement process will take place in Suriname or if the crude oil will be shipped to a foreign refinery. The expected spin off will be lower if the refinement will not take place in Suriname.

Dutch disease could have further implications for job opportunities and purchasing power. Natural resource discoveries have in many countries been documented to make other exporting segments of the domestic economy less competitive due to an increase in the real exchange rate following the inflow of foreign currency (Ebramhimzadeh 2023). Importantly, in the case of Suriname, this means that a sector intensive in capital and foreign knowledge displaces other exporting sectors that may be more intensive in local labor. Indeed, experience from around the world and numerous studies highlight the risk of poor economic growth after the discovery of natural resources (often referred to as a “resource curse”).

Then there is the question of how the influx of oil wealth will be managed by a fragile democracy. Risks are numerous. Underdeveloped auditing bodies and rudimentary public financial management systems contribute to vulnerability in the stewardship of public finances. As described in a recent World Bank study, “Converting oil revenues into assets that support sustainable and equitable growth will require public spending and investment without overwhelming the absorption capacity of the domestic economy, prudent fiscal policy, and the saving of some of the resource wealth in foreign financial assets” (World Bank 2023c, p. 8) Significant and rapid improvements in governance and institutions in Suriname are required to address these vulnerabilities.

Finally, dependence on oil could potentially expose Suriname to significant economic shocks. Commodity price shocks have in the past had significant implications for Suriname’s macroeconomic development. In fact, the 2020 economic crisis was the result of a longer-term buildup of macroeconomic imbalances partly driven by declining commodity prices. And dependence on oil too could go hand-in-hand with significant volatility. Indeed, after major oil discoveries other countries have struggled with the challenges outlined in this section. Ghana is a case in point. Its GDP growth peaked with the start of commercial oil production in 2011. However, subsequent GDP growth was below expectation and more volatile, and poverty reduction was disappointing (World Bank 2021). Guyana is a few years ahead of Suriname in its scale up of oil production. While lack of recent data on poverty and equity inhibits an assessment of poverty reduction in Guyana, for a large part of the population primary sectors of agriculture, forestry, and fishing remain important for income generation (World Bank 2024a).

8. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS



- **Maintain the commitment to macro-fiscal stability and preparation for the absorption for potential oil revenues as a first priority.**

Now that its economy shows signs of recovery, Suriname will have to maintain its commitment to sound macro-fiscal principles to reduce volatility and return to a longer-term path of economic growth. Moreover, Suriname will have to prepare rapidly for the potential for substantial revenues from offshore oil exploitation. This preparation will need to include measures related to the management of oil revenues (related to sovereign wealth management and fiscal rules), with the aim to convert them into assets and investments that support equitable and sustainable economic growth. For private sector enterprises to benefit, it is critical to address the backlog in adopting crucial legislation, the high cost of doing business, the dominance of state-owned enterprises, and the lack of access to finance. A sense of political urgency is needed. Suriname faces significant challenges in governance and institutions that affect government capacity, effectiveness, and accountability. Addressing these weaknesses ahead of the oil windfall is paramount.¹⁴

A commitment to sound macro-fiscal principles implies that fiscal space for short-term reforms is limited. At the time of this writing, the government of Suriname is aiming for a primary surplus equal to 2.7 percent of GDP.¹⁵ Achieving this surplus requires continued efforts to increase revenue while curbing expenditure. Key measures being implemented to increase revenue include efforts to expedite implementation of an expanded value-added tax and reforms to newly introduced fuel taxes. Measures to curb expenditure include keeping the wage bill constant by raising real public sector wages while stopping pay to unregistered civil servants and continuing to phase out energy subsidies. As a result of this commitment to a primary surplus, the fiscal space for reforms in other sectors is limited in the short term. In the medium term, economic growth and revenues from offshore oil exploration are expected to improve Suriname's fiscal position. The royalties of the first project expected to be sanctioned off at the end of 2024 alone are expected to equal about a fifth of Suriname's 2023 government revenue on an annual basis. Hence, opportunities for more ambitious reforms may materialize in the medium term. With this in mind, this section reflects on policy priorities, separating comparatively low-cost, short-term policy options for the next two years from longer-term, more fundamental reforms and programs.

- **Make education and skill development a high priority.**

Education and skill development are integral to addressing poverty and inequality in Suriname. The country's education system does not appear to provide good value for money. Although Suriname's expenditure on education is not out of line with that of other countries, its education outcomes compare poorly. Moreover, the poor and historically marginalized groups have significantly worse education outcomes. Poor education and low skills are associated with substantially worse labor market outcomes. On the other side of that equation, skill shortages are listed by enterprises as an important barrier to their operations. Moreover, an urgent focus on skill development is key for Suriname's population to build on the economic opportunities that newfound oil wealth may offer. Improvements in educational outcomes start with foundational, primary, and secondary education,

¹⁴ See World Bank (2023c) for a detailed discussion of these governance and institutional challenges.

¹⁵ This paragraph is based on the fifth review of the IMF's Extended Fund Facility (IMF 2024).

and should include interventions to address obstacles at the governance level. While this Poverty and Equity Assessment was not designed specifically to provide policy recommendations related to education, based on prior analytics, detailed dialogue with stakeholders in country, and lessons from other countries, Table 6 provides a few suggestions for Suriname's education policy.



TABLE 6. FOUNDATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SURINAME

Short Term	Medium Term
Education system management: Carry out consultations to garner recommendations to improve the management of schools and enhance the existing education strategy.	Establish an Education Management Information System to consolidate school-level data, including but not limited to enrollment, attendance, completion rates, and academic performance.
School dropout: Carry out a dedicated study to better understand the core drivers of early school dropout issues and under-performance of boys in school.	Implement an early warning system and other interventions to identify and address school dropout issues. ¹
Teachers: Develop a teacher mapping and accounting system to elucidate the number of teachers, where they work, etc.	Develop a National Teacher Policy to promote the efficient and equitable deployment of qualified teachers across the country, including (i) selection and certification of teachers, and (ii) incentive structures to encourage deployment in hard-to-reach areas (OECD 2006, Chapter 2).
Disabilities: Commit to considering the needs of students with physical and intellectual disabilities and include mitigating measures in school construction/rehabilitation activities.	Develop and revise a School Facilities Policy that considers the needs of students with disabilities and includes key standards for inclusion in school rehabilitation/ construction activities. ²
Tertiary education: Identify the supply- and demand-side barriers that limit people from starting and completing tertiary education.	Review the tertiary education curriculum, with a focus on ensuring the inclusion of skills required by employers.
¹ With an early warning system pilot program in Guatemala, the dropout rate in transition from primary to secondary school was reduced by 4 percent among schools assigned to the program, and by 9 percent among program compliers (Haimovich, Vazquez and Adelman, 2021). See also Alegría, Avitable, and Chumpitaz Torres (2023).	
² See suggestions for disability considerations in school infrastructure in World Bank (forthcoming).	

- **In addition to strengthening foundational skills, support vocational training and broader active labor market policies.**

Vocational training is critical to address some of the observed skill shortages in the short term, including those related to ICT skills (identified as a contributor to multidimensional poverty and an impediment to labor market outcomes in this Poverty and Equity Assessment and its compendia). There is a need for an overarching focus on national vocational training policies that govern the sector to ensure that they promote efficient governance, clarify the mandates of involved entities, install coordination mechanisms, promote engagement with the private sector, outline standards and certification, include a sustainable financing structure for the sector, promote the use of modern technology, and promote gender balance. Table 7 outlines more detailed priorities to improve vocational training. This focus on vocational training can be complemented with a broader

agenda of active labor market policies to support job seekers and employers through employment services such as job search support, job counseling, job placement, and recruitment and selection.



TABLE 7. POLICY PRIORITIES FOR VOCATIONAL TRAINING IN SURINAME

Short Term	Medium Term
<p>Monitoring: Implement a registry and monitoring system to track attendance, graduation, and labor market outcomes throughout the training process.</p>	<p>Establish a Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Management Information System (MIS) and a digital platform linked to the MIS to provide information on training opportunities and policy dialogue and communication campaigns to promote a favorable view of TVET and its importance in promulgating relevant skills (World Bank 2023b).</p> <p>Build on monitoring and evaluation systems to assess the effectiveness of each training program measured by indicators of employability, and make necessary adjustments.</p>
<p>Entry barriers: Reduce entry barriers to training such as opportunity costs (e.g., loss of wages), financial constraints for course fees and materials, transportation expenses, childcare, and domestic obligations.</p>	<p>Enhance targeting mechanisms to boost participation in training programs among groups that stand to benefit the most, including women not in the workforce and Maroon and indigenous populations (World Bank 2023b).</p>
<p>Link training with demand: Generate a system in which potential employers and training institutions collaborate to increase productive employment.</p>	<p>Analyze barriers to higher educational attainment and review tertiary education curricula and apprenticeship opportunities to benefit both employers and job seekers.</p>

- **Put a special focus on the interior of the country and historically marginalized groups in order to support efforts to address skill shortages and enhance employability.**

Those living in the interior of the country, indigenous peoples, and the Maroon have markedly lower educational attainment, are less likely to participate in the labor force, and face higher rates of unemployment compared to non-indigenous and non-Maroon groups. Moreover, when they are employed, they have lower access to social security and lower wages. Altering this situation and improving alternative livelihood opportunities in the interior is intrinsically important, and it can also be part of a strategy to limit deforestation. Artisanal gold mining is currently a key source of income in the interior, with often devastating effects for Suriname’s pristine forests and the broader environment. Offering alternative routes to income generation, ideally linked with forest conservation, could help offset this trend.

- **Make a deliberate effort to address poor labor market outcomes of women.**

Considering the comparatively strong education performance of women, Suriname’s poor labor market outcomes are a missed opportunity to address skill shortages, economic growth, and poverty reduction. The World Bank’s flagship Women, Business, and the Law 2024 publication

highlights Suriname's strong performance on laws related to women's decisions to work and women's property and inheritance. On these outcomes, Suriname gets a perfect score (World Bank 2024b). However, there are also domains where there is room for enhanced legal equality between women and men. Table 8 shows these domains as short-term priorities and also discusses family-friendly policies and affordable alternative care services as a medium-term priority. However, it should be noted that in addition to these practical changes, a broader shift in gender norms may be needed to achieve substantial progress towards gender equality in (economic) outcomes. Table 8 provides some reflections on this.



TABLE 8. POLICY PRIORITIES TO ENHANCE GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S LABOR MARKET OUTCOMES IN SURINAME

Short Term	Medium Term
<p>Female labor force participation: Enhance laws affecting women's decisions to work, laws affecting women's pay, constraints related to marriage, laws affecting women's work after having children, and constraints on women starting and running a business.</p>	<p>Adopt family-friendly policies and enhance access to affordable care services to support the transition from school to work, especially for females (ILO 2018).</p>
	<p>Prioritize efforts that address the multiple and complex constraints (including social norms) that contribute to child marriage and teenage pregnancy.</p>
	<p>Although beyond the remit of this assessment, there is evidence that gender-based violence stifles women's participation in society and productive activities and requires urgent short and medium-term action (Joseph, Pemberton, and Phillip 2019).</p>

- **Improve Suriname's social assistance system, which could have a direct and tangible impact on poverty and inequality.**

The analysis presented in this Poverty and Equity Assessment shows that Suriname's main social assistance programs currently do not effectively reach all the poor or the groups that have been historically marginalized. One notable group is households with children. Poverty rates in these households tend to be markedly higher than in households without children. Although Suriname's General Child Allowance Program (AKB) has extensive coverage, it does not universally cover all households with children and its benefits are insufficient to address child poverty. Altering this situation is critical because child poverty has been documented in many contexts to have a detrimental impact on human capital outcomes that are so central to poverty in Suriname. Similarly, the currently programs do not appear to adequately reach the interior of the country and certain ethnic groups.

- **Improve the delivery systems of Suriname's social assistance programs and linkages between these programs in order to help reduce poverty.**

An assessment of the aspects of program delivery that affect coverage in the interior and of disadvantaged groups is a priority. Investing in these improvements is also important preparation for possible future oil revenues, which are likely to result in a need for significant, efficient, and effective wealth transfers. Table 9 provides more detail on each of these aspects. To avoid exclusion of poor

households, it is worth examining the development of a permanent means-targeted program. The assessment will have to build on the lessons learned (in terms of both successes and limitations) during the roll-out of the temporary Social Program to Enhance Purchasing Power (KKV). The advantage of reduced exclusion errors will have to be weighed against several downsides, such as the cost and complexity of administering a means-targeted program.



TABLE 9. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE SURINAME'S SOCIAL ASSISTANCE SYSTEM

Short Term	Medium Term
Delivery: Develop and implement an adequate and predictable approach to determine transfer amounts of individual programs and correct for inflation.	Modernize social protection delivery systems, with a focus on inclusion of vulnerable groups and the interior.
Rules: Begin formulating and drafting operational rules and procedures for all social protection programs.	Define and enforce exit procedures.
Linkages: Identify linkages between social protection measures and complementary interventions to support households suffering multiple deprivations.	Integrate the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems of all programs into one central system to monitor and coordinate the targeting of all programs. Building on the integrated M&E system, create a social registry.
Coverage and adequacy: Assess the coverage of social support to households with children in order to reduce child poverty and poverty among vulnerable groups. Consider a substantial increase in transfer amounts provided through the Child Allowance Program (AKB).	Update the social protection policy framework and draw on the social registry to complement current programs targeted to key vulnerable groups.
Sustainability: Provide clarity on the envisioned evolution of the Social Program to Enhance Purchasing Power (KKV) to avoid both risks associated with continuing and discontinuing the program.	Assess the sustainability of the General Old Age Provision Fund (AOV) under an aging population profile.

- **Support efforts to enhance data and evidence, which are key to inform efforts to address poverty and inequality**

Timely statistics are especially relevant during times of rapid change. Suriname's General Bureau of Statistics continues to perform admirably, despite significant financial challenges. Nonetheless, Suriname faces significant limitations in the regular production of survey data, administrative data, and social statistics, among other efforts (World Bank 2023c). These data gaps hamper the design of targeted policies to reach the poorest and address the factors underlying poverty. The World Bank recently implemented an assessment of Suriname's statistical system and developed an action plan to improve it (World Bank 2023d). Table 10 summarizes key findings of this action plan. Beyond addressing these data limitations, Suriname would benefit from further detailed reviews of public expenditure and human capital, among other areas, to inform policy. Moreover, while the aim of this assessment is to provide a comprehensive report on poverty in Suriname, there are other areas of analysis that could provide further insight, such as the impact of climate change and the fiscal system on poverty and inequality.



TABLE 10. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE DATA AVAILABILITY IN SURINAME'S STATISTICAL SYSTEM

Short Term	Medium Term
Data quality: Adopt best practices related to data documentation, data anonymization, and sampling frameworks. Promote the use of administrative data.	Develop a quality framework for data production and dissemination. Pilot new approaches to enhance survey reliability. Adopt the Data Documentation Initiative standard and a microdata documentation plan, and develop a National Data Archive catalogue.
National accounts: Test approaches to compile quarterly GDP figures, at least through the production approach.	Consider approaches to improve the system of National Accounts, including a new base year.
Institutional development: Develop a strategic plan and implement an organizational assessment of the General Bureau of Statistics (GBS).	Develop regulations linked to the 2002 Statistical Act. Set up sectoral statistical committees, including on vital statistics and environmental statistics.
Technical improvement: Equip the GBS with a dedicated information technology team.	Develop a new GBS webpage with interactive and automatically generated reports and invest in more complex information technology systems that are able to handle additional and more complex operations

- **Make long-term institutional arrangements governing the production of poverty statistics to support a continued focus on poverty and inequality in policy.**

During implementation of the macroeconomic recovery plan in 2021, Suriname's Ministry of Labor, Employment Opportunity and Youth Affairs re-installed the National Poverty Committee with the aim to measure and study poverty. The committee developed the monetary and multidimensional poverty measures discussed in this assessment (Sobhie and Kisoensingh 2023). The monetary poverty line developed by the committee is also used in policy dialogue, for instance in relation to determining the minimum wage. The approach shows that a committee dedicated to poverty measurement and diagnostics can play a significant role in the development of poverty alleviation policies. Hence, formalization and institutionalization of an authority tasked with assessment and monitoring of poverty and inequality following the best practices of other countries in the region is recommended.

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