



Den Haag

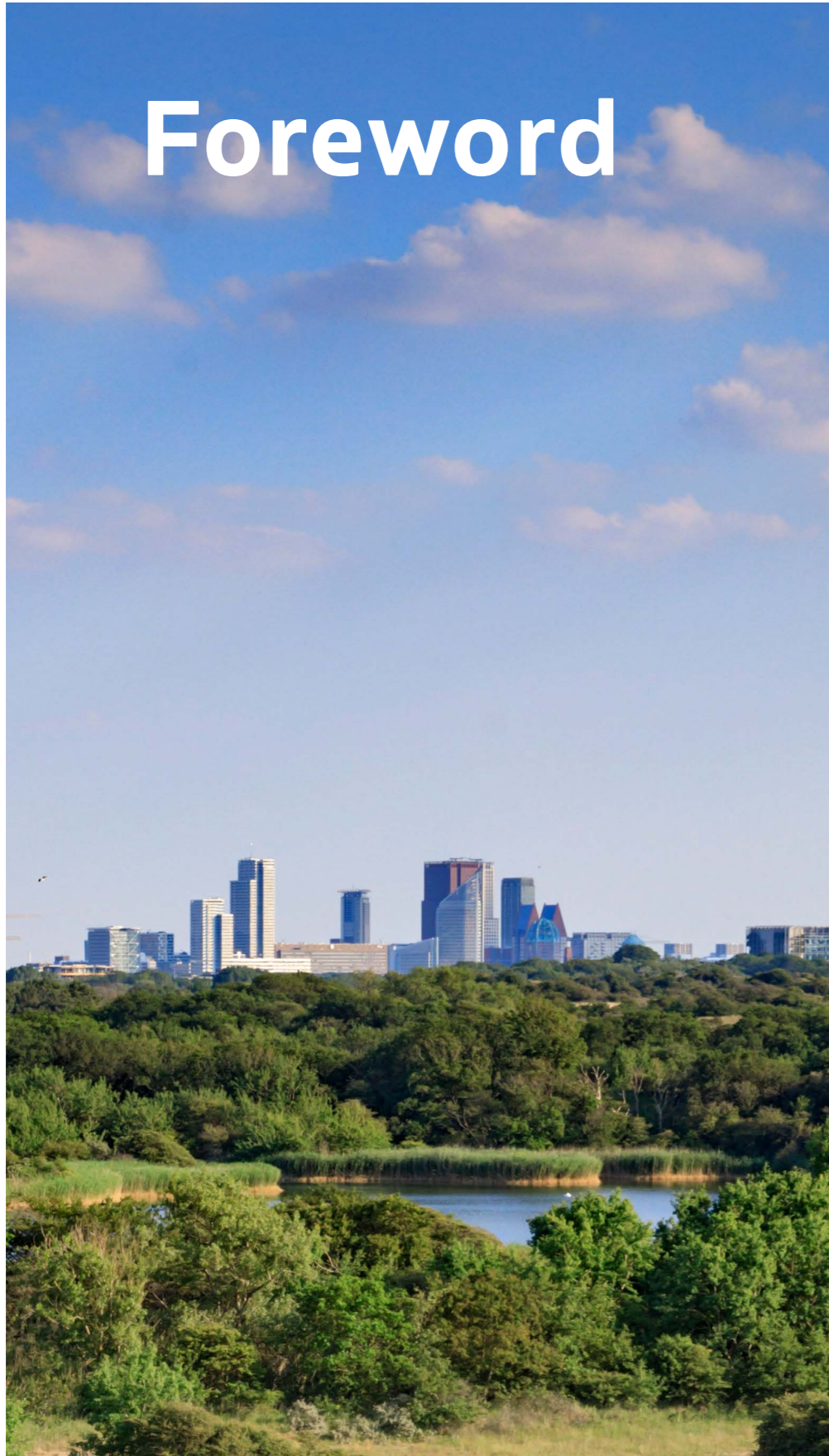
Policy Framework for International Affairs 2025 - 2035

The Hague, city of peace and justice

Fostering international cooperation in a city
open to the world



Foreword



The Hague is a hub for the global rules-based legal order, recognised worldwide as the international city of peace and justice. Here, at the centre of a network of powerful international relationships, tens of thousands of people work together every day to create a more peaceful and just world. Over the decades, we have built a thriving, prosperous city, where people live in an atmosphere of peace, freedom and security, with a vision of a sustainable future. We resolutely advocate for the international rule of law and the human rights it protects.

Current geopolitical turbulence has put the international rule of law under threat, and we must bolster our courage and determination. Beliefs we have long assumed to be self-evident are being challenged, and many international developments have a direct impact on our city, from the effects of climate change on our neighbourhoods to the consequences of conflicts elsewhere for our residents. The Hague is committed to tackling these issues, but we are often dependent on collaboration with others for solutions, in the European Union or beyond. In this context we work closely with cities in other countries.

For the first time in history, more than half the world's population lives in cities, a proportion that will only continue to grow. Cities have thus become the places where global challenges first emerge. This means they can also act as hothouses for innovation, places where talented people can work on imaginative solutions. A stronger role for cities in global decision-making on urgent challenges is therefore essential. This is why The Hague has joined international city networks, enabling us to represent our city's interests on the world stage and join forces for maximum impact.

The Hague's standing as the international city of peace and justice is by its nature significant for people around the world. We offer a safe haven to all who wish to work for peace and justice, and we are proud to broadcast that message, which is now more pressing than ever.

Mariëlle Vavier

Deputy Mayor for Poverty, Inclusion, Public Health and International Affairs

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The Hague is closely interconnected with the wider world, and our local challenges are often influenced by developments elsewhere. By engaging with other countries, we are better able to respond to these dynamics. As the international city of peace and justice, The Hague occupies a unique position.

Over the past 25 years, the municipality's international efforts have led to the establishment of dozens of international institutions and hundreds of related organisations, making The Hague a global hub for peace and justice. This has led to the development of extensive expertise, economic activity and innovation in this field. It has strengthened our global reputation and contributed to a resilient economic infrastructure. As a result, The Hague exerts a relatively strong influence in the international arena for a city of its size.

Our starting position is therefore strong, but in a rapidly changing world, standing still means falling behind. We therefore work to strengthen our role as the international city of peace and justice, building on our historical legacy and the strategic efforts of the past 25 years. We aim to act as a reliable host city for those working to advance peace and justice. To this end, we foster the climate for international investment, economic activity, organisations and conferences, and we work to strengthen the city's resilience.

In parallel, as a city we seek to take on a leading role internationally in the field of peace and justice by promoting this theme in our international relations, by facilitating initiatives that contribute to the protection and advancement of the international rule of law and human rights, and by strengthening public support for, and civic pride in, our international policy through public diplomacy.

We thus set the direction for the municipality's international activities without constraining them. Our international policy supports these efforts and connects the city and the municipal organisation in a shared endeavour to advance international cooperation in a city open to the world.

Objectives

- 1. Ensure The Hague is recognised internationally as a reliable host city for those working to advance peace and justice**
 - a. Enhance the investment climate and operating environment for international organisations.
 - b. Stimulate international conferences, organisations and economic activity.
 - c. Strengthen the city's resilience.
- 2. Reaffirm The Hague's leading international role in the field of peace and justice**
 - a. Promote peace and justice in our international relations.
 - b. Facilitate initiatives that contribute to the international legal order and human rights.
 - c. Foster civic pride in The Hague's international profile and increase public engagement through public diplomacy.



Part I

Why The Hague engages internationally

The rationale for the municipality's international cooperation

The international city of peace and justice

The world around us is changing rapidly, and in The Hague we increasingly face the consequences of rising geopolitical tensions. A new world order is emerging, shaped by multiple centres of power that are frequently at odds with one another. International cooperation can no longer be taken for granted. According to the Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR, 2024), this has direct implications for our prosperity, freedom and security; global developments are felt at local level. The Hague is closely connected to the rest of the world, both economically and socially. As the Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael observes (Houtkamp, 2024), for the municipality to govern effectively at local level it has therefore become essential to maintain a strong understanding of geopolitical developments.

The more stable, democratic, free and secure the wider world is, the better it is for us in The Hague. This depends on a strong international rule of law, grounded in shared agreements and rules between states, and on respect for democracy and human rights worldwide. Many of these international agreements and legal frameworks affect the way we address local challenges in The Hague, whether directly or through national legislation. It is estimated that European legislation and regulation influences around 75% of local and regional policy. Decisions taken by countries within the European Union, the United Nations, or other multilateral forums such as the G20 on issues such as climate justice, international security or free trade often have direct or indirect consequences for our residents. At the same time, international cooperation and the exchange of knowledge and experience between cities worldwide enable us to address our own challenges more effectively. International engagement therefore delivers tangible benefits.

In this regard, The Hague enjoys a unique starting position thanks to the many international institutions that are based here. Although our city has been hosting international conferences and organisations for more than 125 years to promote the international rules-based legal order, for much of that time this was not underpinned by a targeted policy. It was only after the end of the Cold War, with the renewed international drive towards a strong liberal international legal order, that the municipality committed to hosting newly founded international courts, tribunals and organisations such as the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY),

the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the International Criminal Court (ICC). These sustained efforts over the past 25 years have led to the establishment of a large number of international institutions and related organisations in The Hague. Our city has thus become a hub of international peace and justice, and this has become essential to its identity. We provide a sanctuary for those who wish to work towards a peaceful, just and secure world. To this end, international organisations work closely with academia, research institutes and the business community. However, space in The Hague is limited, and pressure on the housing market and on our public services is increasing. Our approach to managing the continuing growth in the number of organisations is therefore included in this policy framework. We are selective in the organisations we seek to attract, and we work closely with municipalities in the region to support their establishment.

As a local government, we do not conduct our own foreign policy, but we engage at international level in order to strengthen our position within international networks and reinforce our ecosystem of peace and justice. This framework sets out how we stimulate, facilitate and coordinate our international activities, building on our historical tradition and on the strategic approach developed over the past 25 years.

International mission

The Hague contributes to the protection and advancement of the international rule of law, which has been inseparably linked to the city for centuries and enables our residents to build a prosperous and sustainable future in peace, freedom and security.

International vision

The Hague is recognised worldwide as the international city of peace and justice. We provide a safe haven for professionals and organisations working to advance peace and justice, in particular by promoting the rule of law and democratic values, climate justice, humanitarian action and human rights, and a safe and resilient society. Our city also plays a leading international role in advocating for these principles.

International objectives

Objective 1:

Ensure The Hague is recognised internationally as a reliable host city for those working to advance peace and justice

The Hague already offers a strong operating environment for international companies and organisations, but in a rapidly changing world, maintaining our position requires continuous development. Geopolitical developments are placing increasing pressure on the international rule of law. To remain an attractive and reliable host city, we aim to strengthen the climate for international organisations, and stimulate international conferences, organisations and economic activity, specifically in support of the rules-based legal order and democratic values, climate justice, humanitarian action and human rights, and security and resilience. We will continue to develop our city's resilience and ability to respond effectively to global challenges, and safeguard the quality of our engagement across borders to ensure we are well prepared for the future.

Objective 2:

Reaffirm The Hague's leading international role in the field of peace and justice

The Hague has a unique reputation as the international city of peace and justice. This enables us to exert influence through city diplomacy on international agreements that affect us locally. We do so in particular through participation in international city networks and by facilitating initiatives that contribute to the international rule of law, including human rights. To strengthen public support for our international policy, through public diplomacy we aim to foster civic pride and increase residents' engagement.

Historical perspective The Hague as the international city of peace and justice

The Hague has been engaged internationally since its earliest origins. Indeed, diplomatic activity lay at the foundation of the city itself, and has continued to deliver peace, security and prosperity for its residents over the centuries. The Dutch parliamentary complex, the Binnenhof, was built in the late Middle Ages by the counts of Holland as a castle beside a small lake among the dunes –today the Hofvijver, or 'Court Pond'. The Binnenhof served as the administrative centre of the County of Holland and as a place where envoys from across Europe were received to negotiate alliances and treaties. Diplomats and representatives of other regions and countries soon settled around the Binnenhof, attracting artisans, merchants and officials in their wake. The Hague's economic, social and cultural development was therefore closely tied to its reputation as a diplomatic centre and to the activity that flowed from it. The counts preferred to retain direct control over the governance of The Hague rather than grant its inhabitants municipal rights. As a result, the city was not permitted to build defensive walls. The freedom and security of its residents therefore depended not on fortifications, but on the alliances and treaties forged through diplomatic activity. It remains today, both literally and figuratively, a city without walls.

The Hague has long been committed to advancing international agreements, given that these have supported the city's economic, social and cultural development while also underpinning the freedom and security of its residents. The system of agreements aimed at maintaining international peace and security is referred to as the international legal order, and is based on international law. International law itself is also closely associated with The Hague: famous residents such as the jurists Hugo de Groot (1583 – 1645) and Tobias Asser (1838 – 1913) were among the pioneers of this academic discipline, and it was influenced by the work of the philosopher Spinoza (1632 – 1677), who also lived in the city. This close and enduring connection between The Hague and the international rule of law has given the city a strong global reputation as the international city of peace and justice. It has also contributed to the development of a fertile environment for international organisations and conferences that embody and advance this rules-based legal order.

Of particular historical significance are the Hague Conference on Private International Law (1893 – present) and the Hague Peace Conferences (1899 and 1907), which led to the establishment of the first international court in the world dedicated to the peaceful settlement of disputes: the Permanent Court of Arbitration, for which the Peace Palace was opened in 1913. After the First World War, the creation of the League of Nations brought the decision to seat the newly established Permanent Court of International Justice in the Peace Palace as the world's principal judicial body. After the Second World War, the United Nations also chose to locate its newly established International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the Peace Palace. The city soon came to be known as the legal capital of the world. At the end of the 20th century, the international community therefore chose to establish the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague (1993), followed by the International Criminal Court in 2002. In addition to judicial institutions, The Hague has long hosted organisations responsible for safeguarding international security, including the European agencies Europol and Eurojust, as well as a NATO agency. The city also hosts a growing number of United Nations agencies.

The municipality's current international activities are part of this centuries-old tradition. As in the past, these efforts are aimed at enabling The Hague to flourish economically, socially and culturally, and at ensuring that its residents can live together in freedom and security. This enduring commitment to the international rule of law forms the foundation of The Hague's identity today.



Part II How The Hague engages internationally

Guiding principles for the municipality's international approach

Principles

1 The profile of the international city of peace and justice is central

The Hague has a well-established reputation as the city of peace and justice. This provides a foundation of trust for partners around the world and a clear point of reference for effective international engagement. We therefore ensure that this profile remains central to our international activities, and we guard against it becoming diluted by unnecessary additions or weakened by misuse.

2 Our approach to international engagement connects the city.

We bring together residents, businesses, academia, research institutes, think tanks, civil society organisations and public authorities in a locally rooted network with international relevance. By actively building connections with partners across the world we strengthen our ability to address societal challenges.

3 Our international policy supports our local objectives

Our international policy links local priorities with global developments, expands our access to international knowledge, experience and funding, and supports collaboration between local and international actors.

4 The international policy framework provides a strategic compass without being restrictive

It helps us stay on course in times of geopolitical turbulence, while providing direction and coherence for the municipality's international engagement and leaving room for initiative and innovation. It is an open framework, not a blueprint.

Principle 1:

The profile of peace and justice is central

The Hague's profile as the city of peace and justice is rooted in a long-standing commitment to the international rule of law on the part of both the municipality and its residents. In recognition of this, the motto Vrede en Recht (peace and justice) was formally added to the city's coat of arms by Royal Decree in 2012. These efforts can be traced back to Article 90 of the Constitution of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, which commits the state to promoting the international rule of law. This rules-based legal order is embodied in organisations established jointly by states to address global challenges that cannot be resolved by countries acting alone, for example in the field of peace and security. The Hague occupies a distinctive position within this international legal order, and within the Netherlands' foreign policy, owing to its long historical relationship with international law and its subsequent development as a host city for global organisations. As a result, this profile has become inseparable from the fabric of the city and remains central to our cross-border engagement.

Peace and justice, however, cannot be taken for granted. They require more than international institutions alone, and depend on active protection and promotion through societal engagement, both in The Hague and world-wide. For this reason, our international policy is oriented towards fostering connections.

Principle 2

Our approach to international engagement connects the city

The Hague has developed historically as a city without walls, both literally and figuratively. It is in our nature to collaborate across local, regional, national and international levels to represent the interests of our residents as effectively as possible. We work closely with the more than 500 international organisations that are based here, including diplomatic missions, intergovernmental organisations and international NGOs, and in particular with The Hague Humanity Hub, The Hague Security Delta, The Hague & Partners and the Economic Board The Hague. Fostering innovation by encouraging cross-sector collaboration, we pursue a mission-driven economic policy based on three profiles: Justice & Governance, Impact Economy, and Security. These profiles all fall under the overarching profile of peace and justice.

Cooperation with academic and research institutions is also central to our international engagement, including with The Hague University of Applied Sciences, Inholland University of Applied Sciences, Hotelschool The Hague, University of the Arts The Hague, Leiden University, TU Delft, the International Institute of Social Studies and the Asser Institute, as well as with Hague-based international think tanks the Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael and The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies.

At regional level, we work closely with neighbouring municipalities and other regional partners, such as the economic development agency InnovationQuarter. As a public authority, we also cooperate with the provincial government, and with central government, which is responsible for foreign policy. Key partners in this regard include the Central Government Real Estate Agency, as well as the ministries of Foreign Affairs, Justice and Security, Defence, and Economic Affairs.

We also forge a connection between our residents and our international policy. We make international issues part of the public conversation in everyday life in the city – on the streets, in classrooms and in community centres. Through public diplomacy, education, dialogue and exchange, we engage residents with international developments and bring them into contact with one another, strengthening understanding and pride.

Collaboration is an essential element in shaping and delivering our international policy. The municipality acts as coordinator, promoting the quality of interaction among partners. Where necessary, we implement our international policy ourselves; where possible, we work with partners by connecting, facilitating and guiding. We also draw on input from residents and businesses, and organise inclusive and accessible activities to enable public participation.

Principle 3:

Our international policy supports our local objectives

According to an analysis by the World Economic Forum (2024), the most significant threats we face are not only geopolitical in nature, but also ecological, technological, societal and economic. To counter these threats effectively, we seek to build on the societal momentum and initiatives present within the city. We have identified five thematic areas in which The Hague has developed a distinctive position, or has the potential to do so, and we aim to facilitate and support initiatives in these areas.

Theme 1:

Rule of law and democratic values

A strong international legal order depends on robust democracies at all levels worldwide. For centuries, The Hague has been the administrative centre of the Netherlands and, as the international city of peace and justice, it also serves as a diplomatic hub, in which a unique concentration of knowledge and expertise in diplomacy and good governance has developed. The diplomats, lawyers and public administrators of tomorrow are trained here, while today's experts come together to exchange knowledge and drive innovation. In The Hague, international courts and tribunals develop

and apply international law. By promoting the importance of good governance, international law and diplomacy, The Hague strengthens the international rules-based legal order and contributes to the stability of societies and states around the world.

Theme 2:

Climate justice

The most significant long-term threats the world faces are ecological in nature. The Hague therefore takes a proactive approach, both to developing a climate-just and sustainable city and to fostering international cooperation and knowledge exchange to support a fair global transition to sustainability. The Hague was the setting for the first landmark ruling of the International Court of Justice on the obligations of states to protect their citizens from the adverse effects of climate change, a judgment that emerged from a broader societal movement for climate justice. The Hague Humanity Hub brings together actors in this field in a climate justice community. As a frontrunner within the European Union, The Hague is also part of an alliance of 100 climate-neutral and smart cities, working together to accelerate and support a fair transition to sustainability.

Theme 3:

Humanitarian action and human rights

Human rights are an integral part of the international legal order, safeguarding human dignity worldwide and establishing legal obligations for states. Humanitarian action complements this through practical assistance in crisis situations, often where states are failing or absent. Where human rights are violated, humanitarian assistance is often required. In The Hague, a closely connected community is emerging in which hundreds of experts work together on humanitarian issues, united by a shared commitment to safeguarding human rights. Research institutions such as The Hague Humanitarian Studies Centre work closely with humanitarian organisations and United Nations agencies to develop innovative approaches to strengthening humanitarian assistance worldwide.

Theme 4:

Security

Peace and justice without security are fragile. Security is essential to the effective functioning of democratic and rule-of-law institutions. At the same time, security without peace and justice can lead to repression, exclusion and the erosion of human dignity. Security, peace and justice are therefore mutually reinforcing, and it is this balance that makes The Hague a distinctive and credible actor on the global stage. With the Security Delta at its core, The Hague is home to Europe's largest security cluster. In our city, hundreds of companies, public authorities, research institutions, and other organisations work together on innovative digital security solutions, and on the development of normative and ethical frameworks for their application. In this way, we contribute to the economic development of the city and region while strengthening international security.

Theme 5:

Resilient society

In an increasingly complex and unpredictable world, there is growing recognition that resilience – the capacity of people, organisations and institutions to adapt under pressure, uphold core values and continue to function – is of critical importance. It forms an overarching dimension across the other themes. The Hague is working to strengthen local resilience and the adaptive capacity of the city and its municipal organisation, ensuring it remains robust in the face of geopolitical, ecological, technological, societal and economic challenges. Where possible, we connect local practice with international networks and partnerships. The Hague demonstrates that peace and justice are not only achieved through international agreements, but are also built within resilient societies.

Principle 4:

The international policy framework provides a strategic compass without being restrictive

Our international policy applies throughout the municipal organisation: it is closely integrated with other policy areas that have an international dimension. At the same time, it does not replace existing policies. Rather, this framework creates coherence by connecting existing areas of policy and placing them in an international context. This helps us interpret global developments, seize opportunities for the city, and position The Hague strategically on the international stage.

The framework serves as a guiding compass that indicates how local policy can contribute to our international ambitions and, conversely, how international cooperation can support our local priorities. This enables us to pursue a consistent and forward-looking international course.

The Hague's [European Strategy](#) plays an important role in this regard.* Current geopolitical developments are driving a far-reaching intensification of European cooperation, creating new opportunities for The Hague within the European Union. The European Strategy positions The Hague as the international city of peace and justice within the EU in order to advance the city's interests. It also improves our access to knowledge and funding in three priority areas of the European policy agenda that align with The Hague's interests: sustainability, digitalisation, and a future-proof economy. This international policy framework sets the overall direction, which the European Strategy then follows within the context of seeking opportunities for EU cooperation.

The [Environment and Planning Vision](#) sets out the long-term spatial development perspective for The Hague until 2050, explicitly positioning the city with a strong international profile. The presence of international organisations is identified as a core strength and defining feature. The vision also recognises that this places specific demands on spatial planning, including secure and appropriately prestigious working environments, good connectivity, and high-quality amenities.

The [Economic Vision 2030+](#) also takes The Hague's profile as the international city of peace and justice as a guiding principle for the city's economic development. Within this framework, the municipality works to ensure The Hague remains an attractive city for residents, visitors and businesses, with a resilient economic structure,

an excellent business climate, and sufficient space for economic activity in high-quality working environments. The way in which we promote international investment, trade and market expansion is set out in more detail in the document [Implementation of the International Economic Policy of the Municipality of The Hague](#).

The [Hague Education Agenda](#) contributes to strengthening this profile by fostering collaboration with international primary and secondary education and by strengthening newcomer education within mainstream schools. It also emphasises the importance of engaging higher education and research with The Hague's profile as the international city of peace and justice.

The Hague has long been a diverse and welcoming city. At the same time, we recognise that not all our residents enjoy the same starting position to participate fully in society. Our [Inclusive Society Policy Document](#) sets out how, based on shared values and by promoting dialogue, we work to strengthen awareness, knowledge development and social connection within the city in the field of inclusive societies, with a focus on equal opportunities, diversity and human rights. To ensure that our commitment to the international rule of law and human rights is credible, we also work to uphold these principles in our own city.

The [Hague Cultural Vision 2033](#) highlights the influence of the city's rich history as the international city of peace and justice on the development of its arts and culture sector. The city's cultural diversity and the presence of numerous international organisations also make it culturally distinctive in an international context. The Hague's arts and culture sector plays a key role internationally, not only through artists and educational institutions of world standing, but also through a strong cultural offer at local level. The internationalisation of our arts and culture thus contributes to an inclusive and resilient society with an attractive environment for international staff, organisations and businesses, while offering opportunities to strengthen The Hague's international profile through cultural diplomacy.

Freedom of the press, independent journalism and the free exchange of information in our city are essential to our credibility as the international city of peace and justice. We therefore regard the protection of freedom of expression as an integral part of our international policy. Through our [Media Policy](#), we work to strengthen a diverse and independent media landscape, both locally and in cooperation with international media organisations. To remain resilient in the context of digitalisation and increasing hybrid and cyber threats, The Hague has also developed a dedicated [Digital Security Agenda](#), aimed at strengthening the city's digital security.

* The documents linked to in this policy framework are available in Dutch only.



Part III The Hague's international activities

Priorities for our international efforts

Having outlined the purpose and necessity of an international policy for the municipality, and the way in which we pursue it, in this section we set out the priorities of our international efforts in concrete terms. We describe the challenges and opportunities we aim to address to enable The Hague to flourish as the international city of peace and justice, in close connection with the rest of the world and with due regard for our residents.

Objective 1:

Ensure The Hague is recognised internationally as a reliable host city for those working to advance peace and justice

Sub-objective 1a:

Enhance the investment climate and operating environment for international organisations

Realising our ambition to be a reliable host city begins with creating an attractive operating environment for international organisations. This requires sustained effort, particularly as spatial challenges in our city are becoming increasingly complex and the world around us is constantly changing.

Our actions

We invest in making key areas of the city greener, safer and more liveable, including the International Zone and the Central Innovation District.

The abundance of international organisations in our city contributes to the development of an innovative ecosystem that collaborates worldwide in support of peace and justice, while also strengthening The Hague's economy. At the same time, it places increasing demands on the city's limited space, and planning decisions must therefore be taken with care.

The International Zone in The Hague is home to the largest concentration of international organisations in the Netherlands. The [Area Vision for the International Zone](#) has been developed to strengthen this position. The zone comprises the sub-areas of the World Forum, Peace Palace and Plein 1813, the International Criminal Court and its surroundings, and the International Boulevard. Each of these sub-areas has its own distinct identity, character and profile.

International organisations often have exacting requirements for their premises; modern buildings, robust security and a prestigious appearance are essential. In some cases, these requirements are governed by guidelines issued by the United Nations or the European Union; in others, they require a tailored approach. Agencies operating in the field of security typically have particularly stringent requirements, which cannot be accommodated in all parts of the city's built environment. The challenge is to meet the increased security requirements of international organisations without compromising the liveability of the surrounding areas.

Joint research by the municipality and central government shows that the World Forum area can be developed to accommodate both existing and new international organisations, with adequate security provisions and an improved living environment. This is a spatial challenge that calls for an active, results-oriented role on the part of the municipality, and for close cooperation with regional, national and international authorities. However, international organisations are located not only in the International Zone, but also in the Central Innovation District, between the railway stations Den Haag Centraal, Laan van NOI and Hollands Spoor. This area serves as an economic engine for the city, and its proximity to academic and research institutions creates a fertile environment for collaboration and knowledge exchange, driving innovation in the field of peace and justice.

We work with regional partners to ensure sufficient housing, good healthcare, high-quality education and other essential services

We are working to provide a varied housing supply that reflects The Hague's international role. Our [Housing Vision](#) therefore focuses on providing accommodation for both local and international residents. Moreover, our efforts to create an attractive international business environment extend beyond our municipal boundaries, and we work with regional partners to address spatial challenges related to the provision of adequate housing, healthcare, education and other essential services for organisations and their staff.

In collaboration with central government, we are developing a portfolio strategy that addresses both the arrival of new international organisations and the accommodation needs of those already based in the city. Given the limited space and the need to balance security and quality of life, this calls for an integrated approach at both municipal and regional level. We will therefore increasingly approach this task as a single, coherent whole.

Attract international talent

Labour shortages in the Netherlands, driven in part by an ageing population, make it necessary for international organisations and businesses in The Hague to recruit from other countries for specialist roles. They do so primarily due to their cross-border focus, involvement in international treaties, or operation in sectors where global collaboration is needed to address societal challenges. Such organisations therefore need to attract highly skilled migrants with diverse backgrounds and skills. This is more than just an economic necessity. International talent not only helps to address labour shortages, but also enriches our society and strengthens the city's capacity for innovation. It offers an opportunity to position The Hague as an inclusive and globally connected city.

To this end, the municipality works with partners at regional and national level, including other public authorities, businesses, and academic and research institutions. As many other European countries face similarly tight labour markets and even more pronounced ageing populations, we focus our recruitment efforts primarily beyond Europe. By welcoming talent from all over the world, we increase our city's resilience and strengthen our contribution to building a peaceful and just global society in which people can build a prosperous and sustainable future in freedom and security.

We strengthen international knowledge development and education

In a constantly changing world, knowledge is key to ensuring our city is resilient. The Hague is therefore developing its position in the world as a leading centre of knowledge, where education, research and international collaboration converge. The city offers a broad and expanding range of higher education and applied research, focused on themes closely aligned with The Hague's priority themes: the rule of law and democratic values, climate justice, humanitarian action and human rights, security, and a resilient society.

Higher education institutions in The Hague play a crucial role in developing new insights and solutions to societal challenges. Through close collaboration with universities and think tanks, we promote innovation, co-creation and knowledge exchange. We support them in renewing and adapting their programmes so that education and research better meet societal and economic needs, and we bring researchers into contact with businesses and organisations to accelerate practical application of scientific knowledge. We create space for experimentation, for example through living labs, and we support the development of a strong campus structure. Together, these efforts create links between researchers, students, businesses and international organisations, and with the city.

International organisations and businesses depend on talent from around the world. To attract and retain employees from other countries, it is essential to offer them access to good education for their children. We therefore work with education partners to provide a range of high-quality international and newcomer education in the area of The Hague, Delft and Leiden. Through The Hague International Centre, we provide targeted information on education options for international families. The Hague is thus developing as a city in which knowledge grows, talent feels at home, and education contributes to a just and sustainable future.

The Hague International Centre

The Hague is a city in which international employees and students feel welcome from the outset. People from around the world meet here, forming an inclusive international community. The city offers a wide range of international amenities, from English-language education and accessible healthcare to a vibrant network of associations and cultural initiatives. Although many of these are not provided by the municipality itself, The Hague performs strongly in its connecting role and welcoming approach to service provision.

Through The Hague International Centre, we provide a clear and accessible one-stop shop where international employees and students can receive prompt, personalised support. At the centre, they can complete formalities and obtain advice on living, working and studying in The Hague and the wider region. More than merely an information centre, it is a place where people can feel at home and make connections, and where the international community works together to create a just, safe and inclusive city.

We are committed to transport connectivity with direct international rail connections

International connectivity is crucial to The Hague's position as the international city of peace and justice. Direct rail links with European cities facilitate cross-border cooperation, enhance the investment climate and operating environment for international organisations, and support the knowledge economy and tourism. They also provide a sustainable alternative to short-haul flights. For international organisations and businesses, connectivity is often a key factor in decisions on where to locate. Unfortunately, the lack of a direct rail link to Brussels in recent years has a tangible impact on The Hague as the seat of government, and also on its international organisations, academic and research institutions, businesses and residents. We cooperate with businesses and societal partners to advocate at national level and within the European Union for improved international transport connectivity and new international rail connections.

In the coming years, the number of residents, jobs and visitors in The Hague and the wider region is expected to grow significantly. This will lead to increased mobility, both within the city and to and from international destinations. The [Public Transport Scale-Up Programme for The Hague and the region](#) is our response to this growth in mobility. Through this programme, we are investing in a future-proof, sustainable and high-quality public transport network that connects The Hague with the region and the wider world through three corridors. One of these, the 'Koningscorridor', running from Scheveningen on the coast to Den Haag Centraal station and then inland to the neighbouring cities of Zoetermeer and Delft, is particularly important for the operating environment of international organisations, as it connects the International Zone with the city centre and its main stations. The public transport scale-up will ensure that our key economic locations remain well connected.

Sub-objective 1b:

Stimulate international economic activity, organisations and conferences

A strong international business environment is shaped not only by physical factors, but also by the broader setting in which people and organisations are able to thrive. It requires an open and welcoming approach from a reliable government, active networks, and a well-developed ecosystem that enables collaboration, with scope for innovation and sustainable growth.

Our actions

We broaden and deepen our strategic relationships with international partners

In the past, our contact with international organisations already based in The Hague was largely reactive and maintained through traditional account management. However, we are now making a deliberate shift from maintaining relationships to strengthening and leveraging them in a more targeted way. We are also expanding our focus beyond existing partners in the city to include relevant actors at national and international level.

This enables us to build lasting, reciprocal relationships with partners that align with The Hague's profile and ambitions as the international city of peace and justice. By making deliberate choices about whom we work with and on which themes, we increase our visibility, influence and effectiveness. We are thus shifting from facilitation to positioning – from maintaining what already exists to shaping what The Hague seeks to be: a reliable host city for those working to advance peace and justice, with a leading international role.

We facilitate meetings and programmes on peace and justice

We contribute to the development and delivery of programmes and events for professionals working in the field of peace and justice, with particular focus on our five key themes: the rule of law and democratic values, climate justice, humanitarian action and human rights, security, and a resilient society. We focus on programming that deepens and strengthens the peace and justice ecosystem in the city. This includes international conferences, workshops, lectures and other events that create space for exchange, knowledge-sharing and collaboration. Our key partner in this area is The Hague Humanity Hub, which provides a platform for innovation and connection within the field.

At the same time, we support initiatives by civil society organisations that align with our programming. Our aim is to ensure that The Hague is a dynamic hub with a high level of international activity, not only as a host for major conferences, but also as fertile ground for new ideas.

We attract international organisations and conferences that add value

Attracting international organisations is no longer an end in itself for The Hague, but a means of adding value to the peace and justice ecosystem. Our approach is targeted: we prioritise quality over quantity, and only consider organisations and conferences that contribute to our profile as the international city of peace and justice. Even where an organisation aligns with our profile, it is not always possible to accommodate it within The Hague. We therefore work closely with regional partners to ensure that international organisations are established in locations where they can operate most effectively.

Our strategic relationship management enables us to take an active role in local, national and international networks. This allows us to identify opportunities at an early stage that align with our ambitions. We bring parties together, stimulate collaboration, and enable forms of interaction that might not otherwise occur.

We support international organisations and conferences that contribute to peace and justice, with particular attention to the rule of law and democratic values, climate justice, humanitarian action and human rights, security, and a resilient society. In this regard we work closely with central government, which leads on recruitment processes for intergovernmental organisations.

Sub-objective 1c:

Strengthen the city's resilience

The Hague has a unique concentration of international institutions working in the field of peace and justice, and this brings both responsibilities and vulnerabilities. In response to a global rise in threats ranging from climate change to geopolitical instability and cyber attacks, our city needs to be well prepared, and able to recover quickly from disruption. Societal resilience is essential if we are to remain a reliable host for those working to advance peace and justice in turbulent times.

Our actions

We strengthen our knowledge base and preparedness

To strengthen our knowledge base and build our preparedness, we identify, analyse and monitor international trends, risks and threats. Through international networks such as the Resilient Cities Network, the Strong Cities Network and Eurocities, we share knowledge and experience to ensure that The Hague is prepared for a wide range of physical and societal challenges. In the coming years, the regional focus of our international efforts to strengthen resilience will be on promoting knowledge sharing and developing partnerships with European partner cities.

We work to strengthen the city's digital security

The city's international character increases its exposure to digital threats. The presence of international organisations, embassies, higher education institutions and companies is an asset for the city, but it also makes us more vulnerable. According to the National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism (2024), The Hague is a target for cyber attacks by both criminal and state actors.

Risks are increasing as a result of technological developments such as artificial intelligence (AI), quantum technology and the ever-growing dependence on digital infrastructure.

To address these challenges, we are implementing the integrated [Digital Security Agenda for The Hague](#). This focuses on strengthening the digital resilience of critical processes and organisations that define the city's unique risk profile. The municipality plays an informal, enabling role: we bring parties together, encourage collaboration, and ensure that knowledge, information and experience are proactively shared.

We work closely with central government, academic and research institutions, businesses and civil society organisations. Together, we are building a digital ecosystem in which security, innovation and trust are central. We promote public-private collaboration, support initiatives that strengthen cyber resilience, and attract international organisations that bring expertise and capacity in this field.

We are thus working to ensure that The Hague remains not only physically, but also digitally, a safe and reliable host city for those working to advance peace and justice.

Objective 2:

Reaffirm The Hague's leading international role in the field of peace and justice

Sub-objective 2a:

Promote peace and justice in our international relations

At a time when global challenges are increasingly felt at local level, cities have become indispensable actors on the international stage. City diplomacy (also referred to as subnational diplomacy) is a necessary complement to traditional diplomacy. Cities are best placed to respond to the needs of their residents and to translate international ambitions into concrete action.

As a result of the decentralisation of national responsibilities and the growing interconnection between international and European agendas and local policy, municipalities are increasingly responsible for implementing global and national agreements. This includes areas such as climate adaptation, migration, digital security and social cohesion. It is precisely in these areas that cities are able to respond quickly, tailor solutions to local needs, and develop innovative approaches that reflect the lived experience of residents. We therefore seek to use our international position to bridge the gap between local issues and global challenges. By working with other cities, international organisations and civil society partners, we contribute to advancing peace and justice.

This is directly relevant to our residents. International cooperation enables us to share solutions to local challenges more effectively, from digital security to climate adaptation. By learning from other cities and working together on shared problems, we can make The Hague more future-proof. City diplomacy is therefore not only an international ambition, but a local necessity.

Our actions

We intensify our city diplomacy through international networks

The Hague builds on its leading international role in city diplomacy, which was established in 2008 at the first global conference on the topic, held at the Peace Palace. We are now taking active steps to expand this role. We are increasing our participation in international city networks and using these platforms in a targeted way to share knowledge, experience and innovative solutions that contribute to The Hague's policy priorities.

We build strategic alliances with other cities that host international organisations, such as Geneva, Vienna and Brussels, enabling us to learn and act jointly on global issues.

Within the European Union, our European Strategy guides our diplomatic engagement, for example in the Eurocities network, while within the United Nations, through the Forum of Mayors, we work to strengthen the voice of cities in multilateral decision-making.

Via the Netherlands Association of Municipalities (VNG), The Hague is a member of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), the global association of local and regional governments. The city also participates in the Urban 20 (U20), a platform for discussion among cities in G20 countries. Through these memberships, we contribute to the global discourse on the role of cities in fostering peace and justice. We thus increase our influence on global policy-making, and position The Hague as a leading city in the field of peace and justice.

The Hague Charter on Municipal Peace

The global association United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) represents over 70% of the world's population, and in 2025, Mayor of The Hague Jan van Zanen served as its president on behalf of the Netherlands Association of Municipalities (VNG). We used this unique position to bring The Hague's values and solutions to international attention. In cooperation with VNG International, we developed the Hague Charter on Municipal Peace, enabling municipalities worldwide to continue learning from one another on local conflict resolution and the promotion of inclusion. The charter was endorsed by UCLG and serves as a source of inspiration for local authorities worldwide working towards peaceful societies. In 2025, the city of Recife in Brazil translated the charter into its own local policy – a concrete example of how The Hague's city diplomacy is able to generate impact on a global scale.

We make targeted use of international meeting opportunities

Whether participating in international conferences or hosting foreign delegations, The Hague approaches international meetings as a strategic instrument to strengthen its position as the international city of peace and justice and to deliver concrete contributions to local priorities. Such occasions offer the opportunity to share knowledge, deepen partnerships and make our ambitions known through clear and professional positioning aligned with our strategic objectives in the interests of our residents. Official visits to other countries are always carefully assessed for relevance, impact and sustainability – wherever possible we travel by train. We also take into account central government's strategic travel agenda, ensuring that our efforts are aligned with and reinforce broader national interests. Incoming visits are likewise prepared in a targeted way and connected to relevant partners within our ecosystem of international organisations, academic and research institutions, and civil society initiatives. We pay close attention to cultural context and follow considered protocol – elements that make a key difference in international settings.

Special Envoy for the International City of Peace and Justice

The Special Envoy for the International City of Peace and Justice plays a connecting and strategic role in The Hague's international efforts. As an official representative of the municipality, the envoy operates within relevant local, national and international networks and partnerships, with the aim of establishing relevant contacts, promoting knowledge exchange and identifying opportunities that contribute to The Hague's policy objectives. The envoy strengthens existing relationships and builds new connections with cities, international organisations and civil society partners. By maintaining an active presence in international forums and events, the envoy contributes to promoting The Hague's profile as the international city of peace and justice, while ensuring that global developments and innovations are translated into local policy without delay. The envoy also identifies opportunities for targeted investment in The Hague, ranging from international cooperation projects to the establishment of organisations and partnerships with research institutions aligned with our strategic themes. By connecting partners, accelerating initiatives and translating international opportunities into local impact, the envoy plays a key role in delivering our strategic ambitions in the field of city diplomacy.

Sub-objective 2b:

Facilitate initiatives that contribute to the international legal order and human rights

As the international city of Peace and Justice, The Hague has a strong reputation in the field of the international rule of law, democratic values and human rights. Central government affirms these values as the foundation of Dutch foreign policy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023). At the same time, the Advisory Council on International Affairs warns that civic space – the environment within which people and groups are able to organise, speak out and exert influence – is shrinking (AIV, 2025). Without civic space, human rights cannot be guaranteed, and without human rights, peace and justice are no more than empty concepts.

Human rights are non-negotiable and constitute the fundamental basis of a peaceful and just society. It is therefore essential that we strive to protect them, not by setting ambitions beyond our scale, but by remaining true to what we stand for. By supporting initiatives that strengthen the international legal order and human rights, we not only give substance to our reputation as a city, but also assume responsibility – as global circumstances demand with increasing urgency.

Our actions

We facilitate and support international peace conferences

The peace movement has long been a driving force behind the pursuit of a peaceful and just world. In The Hague,

at the end of the 19th century, two international peace conferences – known as the Hague Peace Conferences – were attended not only by government representatives, but also by citizens, thinkers and civil society organisations who believed in the possibility of building peace. That tradition continues today: the peace movement now comprises a broad network of individuals and initiatives committed to dialogue, conflict prevention, human rights and social justice, both locally and internationally.

As a municipality, we strengthen this position by creating space for peace initiatives, ranging from small-scale civic dialogues to international mediation processes. We facilitate, connect and create visibility by making venues available, supporting civil society partners, attracting relevant networks and promoting our role as a host city.

We are thus positioning The Hague ever more clearly as a centre for mediation and peace negotiations – not as a neutral backdrop, but as a leading city that advances the international rules-based legal order. In doing so, we build on our history while helping to shape the future.

We offer protection to human rights defenders worldwide

The Hague is a sanctuary for human rights defenders who face pressure in their own countries. Through the Shelter City programme, we offer them temporary accommodation, respite and the possibility to continue their work. They have the opportunity to take part in training, share experiences and build new connections with like-minded peers. The Hague was the world's first Shelter City, an initiative that grew out of local civic engagement and has since been replicated in cities around the world. As a municipality, we continue to support and promote this programme, not only by making facilities available but also by working with civil society partners and international networks.

We promote and renew The Hague's peace prizes

The Hague has a long-standing tradition of peace prizes that recognise individuals and organisations for their commitment to peace and justice. Closely linked to the city's profile are prizes such as the Carnegie Wateler Peace Prize, the Youth Carnegie Peace Prize and the International Children's Peace Prize.

These prizes are more than symbolic: they recognise individuals and organisations whose work often goes unnoticed and who inspire others to work towards a peaceful society. They are also a strategic instrument for attracting international networks, providing a platform for innovative initiatives and strengthening The Hague's profile.

At the same time, peace prizes can be leveraged locally to stimulate civic engagement, for example through education, youth participation or collaboration with civil society organisations. We prioritise peace prizes that align with The Hague's profile as the international city of peace and justice; demonstrate clear societal value; are innovative in form, target group or theme at both local and international level; contribute to structural rather than one-off change; and encourage collaboration with relevant partners in The Hague and beyond. We thus ensure that peace prizes connect international ambitions with local opportunities.

Sub-objective 2c:

Foster civic pride in The Hague's international profile and increase public engagement through public diplomacy

For many residents, The Hague's international character can feel removed from their everyday lives – something that takes place in conference centres, embassies and institutions they have little to do with. Some even experience the international presence as a source of pressure on the city, bringing higher housing costs, closed buildings, and a sense of exclusion. Public diplomacy is the instrument we use to narrow that distance and open up a conversation about what internationalisation means for The Hague.

Public diplomacy encompasses the full range of activities we use to engage residents with The Hague's international character. It is a form of diplomacy that is not directed at states or institutions, but at people, with the aim of building understanding, trust and engagement between the city and its residents.

In The Hague, public diplomacy means projecting the city's international profile into the places where people come together: the street, the classroom, the community centre, the theatre. We open up international themes for public discussion, and create opportunities for encounter, dialogue and collaboration between local and international communities. This may include open days at international organisations, educational programmes on peace and justice, cultural exchanges, or conversations about global developments that are felt at the local level.

Our public diplomacy helps to narrow the distance between residents and international organisations, between different communities in the city, and between The Hague and the wider world. It strengthens a sense of connection, ownership and pride. Our aim is that everyone should feel part of the city's international profile – not as a spectator, but as an active participant.

Our actions

We bring international themes closer to residents

In cooperation with international organisations, academia, research institutes and civil society partners, we organise public activities that make international themes accessible to residents. Through the Just Peace platform, we support initiatives such as open days, debates, lectures and cultural events. We place a strong emphasis on education and youth participation, while also focusing on target groups who do not necessarily feel a connection with the city's international profile. Digital tools and local media help us reach a broad and diverse audience.

We support dialogue and debate on international developments in the city

The Hague is home to residents of more than 180 nationalities. International developments, from wars and

human rights violations to the climate crisis, often have a direct impact on the city through its many diaspora and other cultural and religious communities. For many residents, these events are not distant or abstract, but part of their personal reality. At the same time, the city is home to a wide range of perspectives on international issues, which can at times be at odds with one another.

We therefore actively create space for initiatives from within the city that express solidarity with events elsewhere in the world and encourage dialogue between communities, based on the conviction that debate and dialogue contribute to the city's inclusivity and resilience. We support initiatives that emerge from society itself, and connect with existing networks such as Spreeek, a platform for debate in which cultural institutions, civil society organisations and academic and research institutions work together to foster dialogue on peace and justice.

Where possible, we align these efforts with The Hague's five thematic priorities: the rule of law and democratic values, climate justice, human rights and humanitarian action, security, and a resilient society. We ensure that these initiatives are accessible to a broad public and take place across different neighbourhoods in order to engage residents throughout the city in international policy.

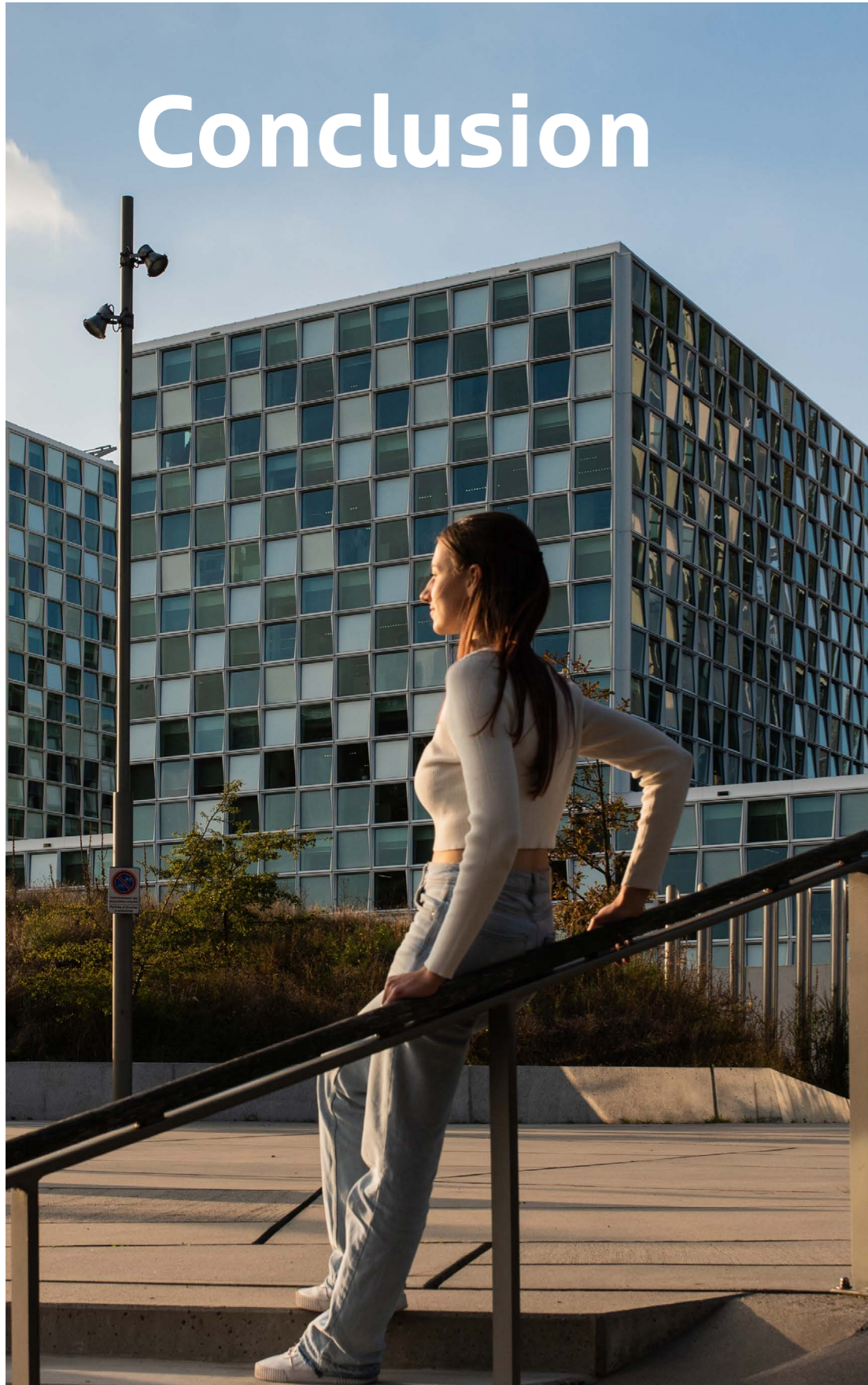
We bridge the gap between international and local communities

The Hague is a city in which international and local communities exist side by side, but do not necessarily meet. For many residents, international life in The Hague can feel like a separate world of inward-looking institutions, non-Dutch-speaking networks and abstract themes. At the same time, international residents may struggle to connect with life in the city. Language barriers, unfamiliarity with local customs and limited access to networks can make it hard to feel at home.

Public diplomacy helps to bridge this divide and to ensure that The Hague's international profile resonates more widely throughout the city. Drawing on experience from earlier initiatives, we are investing more in contact, understanding and cooperation between international and local residents.

We therefore encourage and support efforts that focus on meaningful exchange and interaction. These include joint neighbourhood projects, sports and cultural activities in which international and local residents can get to know one another, and school programmes that bring together children and parents from different backgrounds. We work with local associations, international organisations and community groups to build these connections – not as one-off initiatives, but as an integral part of life in The Hague. This contributes to a city that is both locally rooted and internationally connected.

Conclusion



From ambition to action

The Hague has for centuries had a strongly international identity. This has developed over time and is firmly rooted in society, but in the light of current developments it requires renewed attention and a clear strategic direction.

International issues such as migration, climate, security and human rights have a direct impact on our city. At the same time, the international presence in The Hague offers opportunities for knowledge sharing, economic development, social innovation and cooperation among cities. It is therefore both appropriate and necessary for The Hague not only to maintain its international profile, but also to draw on it for the benefit of the city and its residents.

This policy framework sets out a coherent and forward-looking approach structured around two main objectives: to strengthen The Hague locally as a reliable host city for those working on peace and justice, and to reinforce its position internationally as a leading city in peace and justice. Each objective is divided into three sub-objectives, which together ensure a broad and balanced policy approach – from international positioning and cooperation on global challenges to visibility, engagement and connection with local communities. Part III sets out our approach to delivering this in practice through programmes, partnerships and projects that are sustainable, inclusive, connective and focused on shared ownership, in line with the principles of this framework.

The framework is not an endpoint, but a starting point for a strengthened international course for The Hague in times of geopolitical turbulence. It builds on what is already in place, creates space for new forms of cooperation and contributes to a future in which international cooperation in our open city is visible, tangible and meaningful for everyone who calls The Hague home.

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At a glance

1. Foundations

1.a. Policy framework

- I. The international policy framework functions as the overarching context for municipality-wide international policy.
- II. It provides direction, connects policy domains and strengthens coherence between local and international ambitions.
- III. It serves as a strategic compass that makes the international dimension of existing policy visible and purposeful.

1.b. Rationale

- I. International cooperation is essential for addressing local societal challenges.
- II. The international dimension is embedded across policy areas such as the economy, security, sustainability, education and inclusive communities.
- III. Without a strategic international policy, there is a risk of fragmentation, loss of position and missed opportunities for the city and the region.

1.c. Current urgency

- I. International developments such as geopolitical tensions, ecological crises, technological threats, economic pressures and global societal challenges have a direct impact on The Hague.
- II. The international legal order is under pressure, while these developments are increasing the need for international cooperation.
- III. The international presence in The Hague offers opportunities, but requires strategic maintenance and strengthening.

1.d. Historical context and positioning

- I. The Hague has a unique, historically developed position as the international city of peace and justice.
- II. This role is the result of decades of institutional development, diplomatic tradition and targeted international cooperation by the municipality.
- III. The Hague is a host city for international organisations, conferences and networks that contribute to peace and justice worldwide.

2. Strategic framework

2.a. Mission

- I. The Hague contributes to protecting and promoting the international rules-based legal order.
- II. The international legal order has been intrinsically linked to the city for centuries.
- III. This legal order enables our residents to build a prosperous and sustainable future in peace, freedom and security.

2.b. Vision

- I. The Hague is recognised worldwide as the international city of peace and justice.
- II. In The Hague, we provide a safe haven for those working for peace and justice, in particular by promoting the rule of law and democratic values, climate justice, humanitarian action and human rights, and a safe and resilient society.
- III. Our city also plays a leading role globally in advancing these principles.

2.c. International objectives

- I. Ensure The Hague is recognised internationally as a reliable host city for those working to advance peace and justice.
 - (1) Enhance the investment climate and operating environment for international organisations
 - (2) Stimulate international conferences, organisations and economic activity
 - (3) Strengthen the city's resilience.
- II. Reaffirm The Hague's leading international role in the field of peace and justice.
 - (4) Promote peace and justice in our international relations.
 - (5) Facilitate initiatives that contribute to the international legal order and human rights.
 - (6) Foster civic pride in The Hague's international profile and increase public engagement through public diplomacy.

At a glance

3. Principles of international policy

- 3.a. The profile of The Hague as the international city of peace and justice is central.
- 3.b. The way we engage internationally strengthens connections within the city.
- 3.c. Our international policy supports other domains of municipal government.
- 3.d. The international policy framework provides a strategic compass without being restrictive.

4. Thematic focus areas

- 4.a. The rule of law and democratic values
- 4.b. Climate justice
- 4.c. Humanitarian action and human rights
- 4.d. Security
- 4.e. Resilient society

5. Roles of the municipality

- 5.a. The municipality acts with legitimacy by setting clear frameworks and ensuring that the necessary foundations are in place.
- 5.b. The municipality delivers effectively by stimulating and implementing action where necessary.
- 5.c. The municipality builds and works through networks, coordinating and collaborating where appropriate.
- 5.d. The municipality acts responsively by facilitating and supporting initiatives wherever possible.

6. Partnerships

- 6.a. The municipality works with civil society partners, the business community, academic and research institutions, public authorities and international networks.
- 6.b. Efforts focus on fostering interaction and connections within the international ecosystem.
- 6.c. The municipality recognises the strength of international communities and acts responsively where possible, delivers where necessary and networks where appropriate.

7. Monitoring and accountability

- 7.a. The municipality reports annually on tactical objectives, activities undertaken and results achieved.
- 7.b. We adjust our strategy in response to geopolitical, economic and societal developments.

