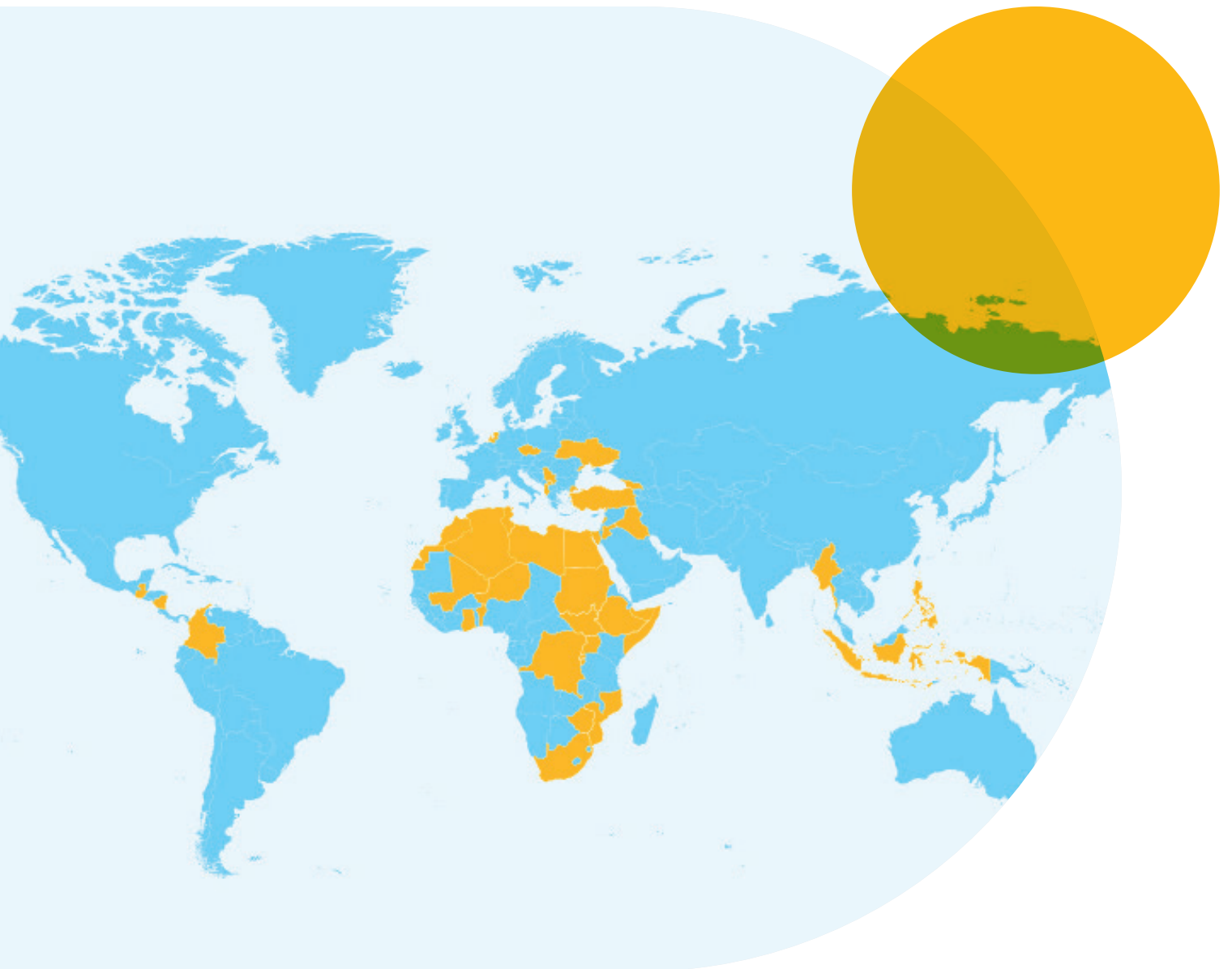




## VNG & COVID-19 measures

March 2020



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# VNG & COVID-19 measures

## Situation in The Netherlands

- Currently 6412 confirmed cases, 356 deaths (25 March). Testing is only done in groups at risk, and only for people with symptoms.
- We are now in an 'intelligent lock-down'. People can still go outside but are encouraged to do this as little as possible. Everybody needs to stay at a distance of 1,5 meters, schools are closed, restaurants and cafes are closed, no official gatherings of people until the 1st of June. Everybody who can is encouraged to work from home.

## The association as linking pin to manage the fall out from the Corona crisis

As the country comes to a standstill all sorts of questions are addressed to our association to manage the effects from the Corona crisis. Central government and private sector ask the VNG to play a role in reaching all 355 municipalities with measures.

Some of the topics discussed with central government and other stakeholders in the previous week:

- *Financial Support for freelancers and small businesses* (the VNG and the Ministry of Social Affairs are working on a regulation which should give freelancers a) a minimum income for the next three months; and/or b) a loan for company capital. The central government is providing the budget for these measures; municipalities will implement the regulation)
- *Emergency law for digital decision-making* (the VNG and the Ministry of Interior Affairs are working on an emergency law which will make it possible for municipal councils to meet and take decisions digitally. For now, this is not allowed. The new law should allow for maximum flexibility for municipalities)
- *Continuation of payments to care providers (youthcare, general care, elderly care)* active in municipalities (Dutch municipalities contract certain agencies themselves, for longer periods. Some of these organisations cannot perform their usual tasks at the moment. VNG and the Ministry of Public Health agreed on measures to deal with this. This way the sector can continue to pay wages and keep their organisation even though they cannot provide care due to the 'intelligent lock down'.
- *Emergency day care for children* (to be organised by municipalities).

The VNG is assisting municipalities with questions on how to implement emergency day care for families with adults working in essential roles in the Netherlands (eg Health care, vital government roles, transport, cleaning and food sectors).

- *Longer opening hours for supermarkets*

In response to a question by the food sector to the VNG we have provided municipalities with an emergency decree to be able to arrange for more *food supplies*.

- *Consequences for the cultural sector* (following a meeting between the cultural sector, the Ministry and municipalities, which led to the creation of a taskforce with the Minister, the association of provinces, the VNG, the 4 biggest cities and the sector).
- *A high-level meeting between VNG and the central government on financial relations* next week (online) will now also include the topic of financial effects of the Corona crisis on municipalities.
- *Advice to municipalities on how to support the private sector*

The VNG has provided municipalities with advice on how to support the private sector by postponing taxes, reducing tax rates and waiving certain fees for businesses.

Many umbrella organisations (e.g. sport unions, hotels and restaurants, entrepreneurs) are reaching out to the VNG, asking to address issues together. Our stance is to cooperate where possible, e.g. by disseminating information to our members etc.

## Contact with other important stakeholders

The VNG is actively contributing to two multi-stakeholder platforms:

- *The national operational Corona team*. This team is part of the national crisis organisation and supports the public administration/government by collaborating and implementing the national Corona approach (short-run and long-run). The national operational Corona team makes that everyone acts together on the same approach.
- *Administrative continuity steering group (Ministry of Interior Affairs + VNG + national operational Corona team)* Objective: quick decision-making regarding administrative continuity.

## Communication with members of VNG

- From the start of the crisis, the VNG has received numerous questions of members.
- VNG has set up a webpage about Corona: <https://vng.nl/rubrieken/onderwerpen/coronavirus>  
This website publishes the questions from municipalities (and answers from VNG to those questions), news from municipalities, good practices from municipalities and a link to the Corona forum for municipalities, which was launched last week. It also lists all other relevant websites (e.g. from the central government, from the institute for public health etc.)
- The Corona forum/online community now has 1500 members.

## Linking to the international community

- In the good practices list on the dedicated website you will also find links to the Metropolis & Eurocities COVID-19 websites.
- VNG International will share any good practices from other cities with the VNG, to be published on the website.

- VNG International colleagues are in touch with associations and individual municipalities all around the world through the ongoing development cooperation programmes. We are seeing if we can adjust some of our projects/activities, to include COVID-19 awareness raising activities etc.
- As VNG International manages the secretariat of UCLG's Capacity and Institution Building it will explore ways to facilitate COVID-19 exchange between practitioners working at local governments and their associations on local government development cooperation -how are colleagues adjusting their international programmes? What can be coordinated and what should be done jointly?

## VNG in times of COVID-19

- All staff members are working from home since 16 March. The VNG building has been closed since 18 March.
- A crisis team is in place. This is led by the deputy director of the VNG, Pieter Jeroense. The crisis team meets on a daily basis (online) and communicates with all staff members after each meeting. We also receive an online video update from the deputy director every Tuesday morning– staff can ask questions through a chat box.
- All content related matters are discussed by the (policy) directors on a daily basis as well.

## Internal governance/decision-making processes

- No physical board meetings & committee meetings until 1 June.  
Alternative work methodology: most issues are taken care of through consultations in writing. If board/committee members feel that they need to actively discuss matters, short online meetings can be organised. The secretariats of the committees and the support staff to the board will make sure that agendas, supporting documents and reports are send out within the same time limits as is usually the case.
- The annual general assembly meeting is planned for the 10th of June. The VNG staff is exploring alternatives for a physical meeting. We might replace the physical meeting by consultations in writing. The board of the VNG will decide on this on 23 April.

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