



Answering
tomorrow's
challenges
today

Guadeloupe

**Study on living conditions and
access to selected basic needs in
the EU outermost regions**

REQUEST FOR SERVICES 005 Under Framework contract
2020CE160AT013

1.0 Key economic and social structure of the region

- **Specificities of the region:** Guadeloupe is an archipelago made up of seven islands located in the Caribbean and is a French overseas department and region, with a Regional Council and a Departmental Council. The region is divided into two districts (Basse-Terre and Pointe-à-Pitre), 40 cantons and 32 municipalities. Its landscape is characterised by diverse relief and geological features, which pose both advantages and challenges. On the one hand, Guadeloupe has a strong potential for renewable energies and tourism - home to the largest airport in the French outermost regions - and hosts a rich environment and biodiversity. On the other hand, the exposure to natural disasters, like earthquakes, volcanic eruptions or cyclones (e.g., hurricane Tammy in October 2023) makes the region particularly vulnerable. Guadeloupe features a tropical climate, with a dry season from mid-February to mid-August and



Figure 1. Guadeloupe map. Source: DG REGIO

and a rainy season from mid-August to mid-February. Guadeloupe is characterised by an ageing and decreasing population. In 2021, Guadeloupeans aged 60 and over and represented 29.2% of the population, compared to 20.3% 10 years earlier¹. Moreover, between 2010 and 2020, the proportion of the population aged 15-49 decreased from 46% to 39%. This decline in the population of young adults, especially young women, is significantly affecting generational renewal leading to a downward population trend². In 2021, the number of births was estimated at 4,345,333 fewer than the previous year³. Around 34% of the population lives below the national poverty line⁴, compared to around 21.6% of the EU population at risk of poverty or exclusion⁵. Nevertheless, Guadeloupe's GDP experienced a modest recovery in 2021, following a significant decline in 2020 due to the COVID-19 crisis, reaching 8.9 billion euro, which represents a 1.9% increase⁶.

- **Water and sanitation** and **Adequate housing** have been defined as the **key basic needs** to be analysed in Guadeloupe. **Key facts and figures** are summarised below:

- **Key Area 1 "Water and sanitation":** Overall, the estimated number of inhabitants supplied increased⁷. However, around a quarter of the population does not have continuous access to drinking water, due to frequent service cuts. In addition, 60% of the drinking water is lost before it reaches the consumers⁸. Moreover, only four out of 10 Guadeloupeans live in an area connected to a public sewerage system⁹. This can entail both health and environmental risks.
- **Key Area 2 "Adequate housing":** Access to adequate housing has been improving. The number of over-occupied homes has been decreasing since 2019 and there has been a decline in the proportion of wooden houses, makeshift dwellings, and traditional huts. However, Guadeloupe is in the top 3 most expensive French outermost regions in terms of rental prices¹⁰. Since 2021, Guadeloupe has faced rising costs of building materials due to shortages of certain materials and rising prices for sea freight¹¹.

2.0 Water and sanitation

2.1 Access to drinking water and sanitation in Guadeloupe

2.1.1 Conditions in place to meet the needs and main factors constraining access

Conditions in place

- Guadeloupe enjoys a variety of water sources, including regular rainfall (especially in Basse-Terre), rivers and groundwater. However, the irregular spatial pattern of rainfall and the variation of relief lead to a diversified hydrography and differentiated access to water and sanitation in different parts of the archipelago¹².
- The estimated **number of inhabitants supplied** increased from 327,720¹³ to 395,497 inhabitants between 2014 and 2020¹⁴, which represents 95.84% of Guadeloupe's approximate total population, estimated at 412,682 inhabitants in 2020¹⁵. Notably, 2015 was the year with the lowest number of inhabitants supplied at 235,439¹⁶. This might be partially explained by the fact that data for this indicator may not have been registered and/or reported by relevant institutions¹⁷. Regarding **water consumption**, the average consumption per customer decreased from 2014 (135.17 m³) to 2020 (129.38 m³), with 2017 as the year with the highest average consumption (140.28 m³ per customer¹⁸). Nevertheless, the domestic volume

accounted for per inhabitant served increased from 2014 (68.02 m³) to 2020 (75.72 m³¹⁹). There is still a significant difference between the volume distributed and the volume consumed (only 40% of the treated and distributed water was consumed by the population in 2020)²⁰. This could be explained by the existence of leaks in the distribution networks; the obsolescence of some meters; and clandestine tapping into the network²¹.

- ▶ When it comes to **affordability**, in Guadeloupe the price²² of m³ for 120 m³ increased from 2014 (2.52 €/m³) to 2020 (3.25 €/m³)²³. According to the Water Observatory of Guadeloupe, the average price was 3.43 €/m³ in 2021; whereas the national average stood at 2.11 €/m³. This increase in price can be attributed to the costs of the works carried out, including the renewal of production and distribution facilities, and securing the water supply. There is also a considerable disparity in the price throughout the archipelago²⁴. Moreover, the rate of **unpaid water bills** from the previous year increased from 2014 (17.20%) to 2020 (25.63%)^{25 26}. This can be attributed not only to the high number of low-income households who are not able to pay the bills (34% of the population is living below the national poverty line)²⁷, but also a negative response to the unequal and discontinuous service, which creates financial difficulties for water operators and aggravates the maintenance/renewal deficit^{28 29}.
- ▶ The current conditions in place in Guadeloupe show that the evolution of **water quality** followed a positive trend. The percentage of sanitary compliance of distributed water samples with microbiological quality limits³⁰ increased between 2014 (97.39%) and 2020 (98.61%)³¹. The percentage of compliance with physicochemical quality limits³² and protection of water resources also increased, from 92.71% (2014) to 94.36% (2020)³³ and from 39.73% (2014) to 55.54% (2020) respectively³⁴.
- ▶ In terms of **water infrastructure**, the percentage of annual average renewal of drinking water networks slightly increased from 2014 (0.50%) to 2020 (1.01%)³⁵, with additional efforts to map and repair leaks, regulate pressure in the water distribution networks and improve metering³⁶. However, unscheduled service interruptions³⁷ occurred more frequently in 2020 (2.78%)³⁸ than in 2014 (2.70%)³⁹.
- ▶ From an **administrative** standpoint, in line with law n°2021-513 of April 2021, a **Mixed Water Management and Sanitation Union**⁴⁰ was established, assuming all public service responsibilities for drinking water and sanitation across Guadeloupe (except for the island of Marie-Galante). This new entity consolidated all the pre-existing structures spread across the region, and improved the governance of public services by facilitating the sharing of water and financial resources.

Creation of a Mixed Water Management and Sanitation Union

In September 2021, a new single water management structure was created. With the financial support of the regional government the Joint association for water and wastewater management in Guadeloupe (SMGEAG) took over from the local water and sanitation companies (it had an initial investment capacity of 170 million euro for its first three years). This new structure has received financial support from the State, including a 50 million euro loan from the French Development Agency (AFD) and the *Caisse des Dépôts*. This management structure brings together the five agglomeration communities (Cap Excellence, Grand Sud Caraïbe, Nord Grande-Terre, La Riviera du Levant and Nord Basse-Terre), the Region and the Department. To support this operation, the State will provide 3.2 million euro and 1.2 million euro in project management assistance via the Outremer 5.0 fund⁴¹.

- ▶ As of 2016, the **Action Plan for Drinking Water and Wastewater services** (known as Plan Eau DOM) provides the key **policy framework** for water action in the French outermost regions, as it supports local authorities in improving drinking water and sanitation services, in particular by strengthening their technical and financial capabilities. In addition, the key strategic framework for water management, the **Master Plan for Water Development and Management** (SDAGE)⁴² Guadeloupe-Saint-Martin was approved in 2022. The French Recovery and Resilience Plan (2021-2026), known as 'France Relance', focuses on strengthening the resilience of the drinking water supply and on speeding up the Plan Eau DOM, as water leaks in the networks are such that basic drinking water needs are no longer covered⁴³.
- ▶ At the level of relevant **programmes and investments**, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) Programme for Guadeloupe 2021-2027 includes a specific objective aimed at favouring access to water and sustainable water management⁴⁴ with a planned amount of 80 million euro. This objective was already significantly supported by Guadeloupe's ERDF 2014-2020 Operational Programme, where one of the main priorities was to protect and enhance the environment and cultural heritage, in particular by intervening at the level of basic infrastructures for water, sanitation and waste management. The programme allocated 6 million euro to water management and conservation of drinking water

(including river basin management, water supply, specific measures for climate change, monitoring systems, pricing systems and leakage reduction) ⁴⁵.

- ▶ At **national level**, French regions have access to subsidies and loans from the French Development Agency and the Deposit and Consignment Fund for producing drinking water⁴⁶. The French government has made funding available in the context of the Plan Eau DOM and the Convergence and Transformation contracts^{47 48} and provided unprecedented financial support in the form of investment grants, totalling 90 million euro to local authorities between 2014 and 2020⁴⁹. In January 2018, the Government and local authorities joined forces by launching an investment plan worth 71 million euro⁵⁰. The French Recovery and Resilience Plan (RRP)⁵¹ intends to provide 80% of the financing for repair works of 2,500 water leaks⁵². The Water Office of Guadeloupe also allocates subsidies through its Pluriannual Intervention Programme (PPI) 2019-2024⁵³.

Constraining factors

The region faces challenges which partially constrain access to this basic need or are likely to constrain access in the future:

- ▶ Signs of improvement have been observed over the years, and the maximum number of working days to open connections for new subscribers decreased from 4.43 days in 2014 to 4.27 days in 2020⁵⁴. However, governance continues to be challenging. The creation of the Mixed Water Management and Sanitation Union entailed the merger of existing operators and aimed to provide regular access to water and sanitation and overcome the problems of diffused responsibility. This new institution inherited financial⁵⁵ and technical issues and is still resolving problems related to **governance and service management**^{56 57}. These often lead to suboptimal solutions on mobilising resources and water transfers, while slowing down improvements to the network and service performance. Consequently, citizens have voiced their concerns regarding service shortcomings through demonstrations⁵⁸ and complaints submitted to the Defender of Rights⁵⁹.
- ▶ Before the establishment of the Mixed Water Management and Sanitation Union, Guadeloupe was confronted with **financial obstacles** due to metering and billing malfunctions, as well as a high level of unpaid bills, while a proportion of staff in water and sanitation services (2 full-time equivalent people per 1,000 users) is above the standard in mainland France. As a result, investments in the maintenance, repair and renewal of water networks have not been adequate⁶⁰.
- ▶ Health controls are stricter in Guadeloupe due to the **pollution** from pesticides used for farming that are affecting both surface and groundwater. Many of these pesticides have been forbidden for years (e.g., Chlordecone) but their long-lasting nature and intensive use in the past still affect the south of Basse-Terre. Moreover, in some areas, aluminium levels are exceeding quality standards⁶¹.
- ▶ Water infrastructure is ageing, leading to **water loss** (approximately 60%⁶²) and regular **service cuts** (around a quarter of the population does not have access to drinking water every day, due to such cuts)⁶³.
- ▶ On average, only four out of 10 Guadeloupeans live in an area connected to a **public sewerage system**⁶⁴. This means that a considerable number of people rely on individual/independent sanitation or treatment plants and private collection networks. In 2019, 72% of treatment plants with a capacity for more than or equal to 2000 inhabitants were not compliant, which has a negative environmental impact on coastal waters⁶⁵.

3.0 Adequate housing

3.1 Access to adequate housing in Guadeloupe

3.1.1 Conditions in place to meet the needs and main factors constraining access

Conditions in place

- ▶ In terms of **habitability**, the proportion of over-occupied main residences has decreased from 11.4% in 2009 to 7.9% in 2020⁶⁶. In comparison to other French outermost regions, Guadeloupe is only marginally affected by overcrowding. In 2020, the archipelago displays the same number of rooms per person (1.8)⁶⁷ as the national average⁶⁸. This could be partly attributed to the demographic transformation⁶⁹.
- ▶ As for the **tenancy regime**, the homeowner rate has decreased by 2 percentage points since 2009, with a rate of 58.7% in 2020, compared to 63.6% in France, and a higher proportion of tenants and houses for free (*Logé gratuitement*)^{70 71}. The policy of eliminating substandard housing⁷² and high property prices most likely contributed to a reduction in the number of homeowners. In addition, the number of **social housing units** per 10,000 inhabitants is on the rise, from 859 units in 2018 to 1,002 in 2020, representing an increase of over 16%⁷³. The social housing offer is only partially meeting the demand, as

the French demand registration system records more than 10,000 active applications for social housing. Since 2016, the number of applications has increased by 6%⁷⁴, while the number of social houses allocated per year has been decreasing. Only 242 social housing units were commissioned in Guadeloupe in 2021. This is the second lowest value recorded over the last five years⁷⁵, and could be partly explained by high construction costs. Around 50% of the social housing stock was built more than 20 years ago, requiring retrofitting⁷⁶.

- ▶ When it comes to **affordability**, the average rent stood at 6.23 €/m² in 2021, 2.98% above the national average of 6.05 €/m²⁷⁷. This puts Guadeloupe in the top-3 most expensive French outermost regions. The high level of prices concerns both private and social housing. Surrounding neighbourhoods outside of urban centres do not always offer bus connections, shops, lighting, or sidewalks⁷⁸.
- ▶ When it comes to **housing typology**, over the period 2009-2020, Guadeloupe has experienced a decline in the share of wooden houses, makeshift dwellings and traditional huts⁷⁹. Of all main residencies, in 2020, wooden houses made up 4.5%, makeshift dwellings 0.6%, and traditional huts 1.4%⁸⁰. Consequently, Guadeloupe has increased the proportion of houses or solid buildings from 90.9% in 2009 to 93.5% in 2020, enhancing access to resilient and quality dwellings across the population⁸¹.
- ▶ Electricity and bath or shower and WC inside the accommodation **facilities** are present in nearly all households, with a rate of 98.5% in both cases in 2020⁸². Despite these upgrades, the population suffers from regular water cuts. Over half of households in 2020 were equipped with an air-conditioned room (50.8%), an increase of 17.3 percentage points over the period 2009-2020⁸³.
- ▶ From an **administrative** point of view, housing policy falls under the responsibility of the national government and is under the framework of the second **Overseas Housing Plan 2019-2022**, which was extended until 2023⁸⁴. At a local level, the **Local Housing Programme** (PLH) provides for a housing strategy at the inter-municipal level and its primary objective is to align the housing supply with the region's specific needs⁸⁵. The Department of the Environment, Planning and Housing (DEAL) of Guadeloupe has set up an observatory for substandard housing, providing support to inter-municipal housing authorities for the substandard housing section of their housing development plans, and for the development and implementation of inter-municipal plans to combat substandard housing (PILHI)^{86 87}. Lastly, the **Earthquake Plan Antilles** was devised in 2007 to ensure houses are adapted to the risk of earthquakes⁸⁸.
- ▶ The State offers **funding** for social housing through the so-called 'Unique Budgetary Line' (or LBU). Allocation is based on the needs observed in each region, determined in consultation with the respective DEAL and local social housing players⁸⁹. The other main tools of the State's policy to promote social housing are tax measures, grants, and loans from Action Logement and the National Housing Agency (ANAH)⁹⁰. According to the French RRP, one of the main priorities in terms of housing is to focus on the protection of windows against solar radiation and on efficient air conditioning to replace existing air conditioning units⁹¹. The Banque des Territoires also provides financing in the form of loans and equity investments⁹². The government programme 'Action Coeur de Ville'⁹³ is present in the region and aims at attracting people and businesses to city centres by funding renovation and economic development projects.
- ▶ At the **EU level**, the ERDF Programme for Guadeloupe 2021-2027 plans the allocation of 77 million euro for promoting adaptation to climate change, disaster risk reduction and resilience^{94 95}. Other programmes include InvestEU⁹⁶ and the French RRP⁹⁷, which offer grants and financial tools to increase access to or upgrade housing and to improve the resistance and resilience of essential public buildings in the event of major natural hazards⁹⁸. For the latter, the French Major Natural Risk Prevention Fund (FPRNM) also provides funding for risk prevention measures⁹⁹.

Constraining factors

The region faces challenges which partially constrain access to this basic need or are likely to constrain access in the future:

- ▶ The number of serious **comfort problems or defects** of houses is higher than the national French average. These problems can include a neighbouring property less than 10 metres away¹⁰⁰, problems with waterproofing and insulation of walls, roof or floor, seepage, or flooding. According to the report of the Abbé-Pierre foundation¹⁰¹, 31% of homes have one serious problem associated to comfort¹⁰², and approximately 30,000 dwellings are unfit, including 11,000 substandard dwellings and 4,700 makeshift dwellings or traditional huts. This high numbers could be attributed to the lack of affordable housing, pushing people to rely on unfit housing.
- ▶ The housing offer is often not suited to meet the **changing demand as a result of the demographic shift**. Housing units are often too big for small households and few buildings have elevators or are accessible for people with disabilities¹⁰³ or elderly people with mobility problems.

- ▶ Moreover, around 10% of **social homes were vacant** in 2020, compared to 4.8% for France¹⁰⁴. Possible reasons vary from inadequate size of the units, high rents, technical issues and state of repair to the location of units in remote areas, with no shops, services or attractive town centres. The high number of empty homes, coupled with inaccessible rent prices and a significant number of secondary homes (9.7%)¹⁰⁵, limit access to housing, particularly in the private market.
- ▶ Since the start of 2021, Guadeloupe has been hit by the **rising cost of building materials**, which are imported from the European continent. This increase is due to the shortages of certain materials and the rise in sea freight prices¹⁰⁶, mainly explained by the interruption of production lines during the COVID-19 crisis and Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The market is limited and there is a lack of competition, as only a few larger businesses can participate in public procurement markets.

4.0 Mitigating actions and recommendations

Needs identified in Key Area 1: Access to water and sanitation

OPTIMISE EXISTING NETWORKS TO ENSURE A RELIABLE DISTRIBUTION OF WATER ACROSS THE TERRITORY

- ▶ Reduce **water leaks** and improve **network efficiency**, by stepping up efforts to find and repair leaks and leveraging existing funding opportunities.
- ▶ Set up and improve **interconnections** between the different water sources to mobilise different resources and compensate shortages through water transfers.
- ▶ Offer and/or facilitate access to **workshops and trainings** to strengthen local authorities' capacity to manage major infrastructure projects and investments, covering decision-making, project and financial planning, funding acquisition, among others.

USE ALTERNATIVE WATER RESOURCES TO INCREASE WATER RELIABILITY

- ▶ Foster research and innovation to increase **groundwater supply and conservation** (more resistant to droughts) and explore non-conventional sources.
- ▶ Encourage **rainwater collection and the use of non-drinking water for various purposes** (including toilets, irrigation). To this end, further promote existing subsidies for household tank installations and extend the use of these systems to schools, hospitals and public buildings. Supervise the application of Regulations mandating rainwater catchment systems in all new construction projects.

DECONTAMINATE WATERCOURSES POLLUTED BY CHLORDECONE

- ▶ Systematically **monitor** the situation to gain a better understanding of the extent and effects of the Chlordecone pollution.
- ▶ Allocate resources for **research** to develop new and more effective decontamination techniques.

Needs identified in Key Area 2: Access to adequate housing

SET UP MULTI-SECTORAL TERRITORIAL PARTNERSHIPS TO PROMOTE THE DEVELOPMENT OF ADAPTED AND AGE-SENSITIVE HOUSING POLICIES AND APPROACHES

- ▶ **Foster coordination among economic development, transport, employment, healthcare, and environmental** departments to support housing policies and measures that strive for adequate, well-connected, well-located, and resource-efficient housing.

RENOVATE AND UPGRADE EXISTING STOCK TO ENSURE ADEQUATE AND SAFE HOUSING

- ▶ **Renovate** the older public and private housing stock. For the latter, facilitate the renovation process and raise awareness about existing support through physical and/or online one-stop-shops (OSS).
- ▶ In view of the aging population, **adapt homes** to address insulation and the loss of independence and encourage exploring alternatives like intermediate housing (i.e., small units of adapted, accessible housing, with a common space for joint activities¹⁰⁷).

TAILOR CONSTRUCTION NORMS AND PRACTICES TO THE SPECIFICITIES OF GUADELOUPE AND PROMOTE CIRCULAR CONSTRUCTION/RENOVATION

- ▶ Identify **regulatory requirements** (including the requirement of specific materials) that are not adapted to Guadeloupe and may deter housing development and propose adaptations.
- ▶ Implement **circular economy actions** to reduce the environmental footprint of the construction sector, especially given the high emissions and costs of transporting materials from mainland Europe. Actions can include reusing and recycling of building materials or using alternative local materials (e.g., timber or bamboo), or promoting local research and innovation involving local universities and stakeholders.

STRENGTHEN AWARENESS AND KNOWLEDGE OF THE CONDITIONS AND PROCEDURES TO APPLY FOR EXISTING SUBSIDIES FOR HOME IMPROVEMENT

- ▶ Organise **capacity-building and awareness raising workshops** at local level, to provide information and guidance on the subsidies currently available to them (i.e., 'home improvement' grants, MaPrimeRénov', among others), and the requirements and procedure to access them.
- ▶ Promote the **simplification of the procedures** to apply for these subsidies.

Annexes

Annex 1 - References

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- ³⁰ This indicator refers to the process of collecting water samples from the water distribution network to assess the microbiological quality of the water supplied to consumers.
- ³¹ It should be noted that the provided indicator refers to the compliance rate of distributed water samples taken in the framework of sanitary control with microbiological quality limits. It can be observed that although there has been an increase, the percentage is still low.
- ³² This indicator refers to the process of collecting water samples from the distribution network to assess the physico-chemical quality of the water supplied to consumers.
- ³³ It should be noted that the provided indicator refers to the compliance rate of distributed water samples taken in the framework of sanitary controls with the quality limits of physico-chemical parameters. It can be observed that although there has been an increase, the percentage is still low.
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- ³⁷ This indicator refers to the rate at which unexpected disruptions in water supply to consumers take place.
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