

ACCESS | Guide

BASED ON FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Your first three months in the Netherlands

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Introduction

Moving to another country can be an overwhelming experience. It means getting familiar with many practical things that seem so self-evident in your home country. The first three months are usually very stressful, starting a new job, living in a new country, experiencing a new culture and having to take care of many other things. This guide is intended to help you in that process. Bear in mind that if you decided to try and manage without assistance, you could stumble upon issues you have ignored and should be attended to.

Practical things

Once you have arrived in the Netherlands, there are many practical things you need to arrange, such as government formalities, housing, financial matters, gas, water, electricity connections and telephone, Internet and TV subscriptions. This will take time, but they are necessary in order to become settled.

Once you have a home, it is useful to meet your neighbours and familiarise yourself with the neighbourhood (e.g. where are the shops and what do they offer, schools and playgrounds for the children, public transport close to your home, etc.).

Socialising

Although practical things are very important to help get settled, socialising is equally important. There are many expat clubs such as business clubs, educational clubs, expatriate clubs (they usually focus on expats from a particular country), music clubs/choirs, social clubs, sports clubs and women's clubs. When you become a member of such a club, you will meet people who have been in the same situation as you. They know what it is like to be new in the Netherlands and can give you advice/tips based on their own experiences.

Frequently asked questions

ACCESS has many years of experience serving members of the international community. The questions outlined below are a collection of frequently asked questions ACCESS has received in the past years.

Please note that some of the websites mentioned are in Dutch only, but you can read them in English by using Google Translate (www.google.com/translate). It will not always give a perfect translation, but it will give you an idea of what the text is about.

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Formalities

Q. I have just arrived in the Netherlands. What are the formalities I need to complete?

Dutch law stipulates that all new residents need to register within five days if they will reside in the Netherlands longer than four months. You must register in your city or town of residence (and change this registration if you move to another city or town).

The following documents are usually required when registering at the local municipality office:

- Passport (or ID card for EU citizens)
- Proof of Occupancy

The following documents are not required in order to register. Both documents can be presented at a later date:

- A recently-issued original birth certificate
- If you are married or your spouse is accompanying you, a recently-issued original marriage certificate

Documents from certain countries must be legalised or have an Apostille. An Apostille Certificate is an official certificate issued to documents so they will be recognised in member states without further Legalisation. It must be done in the country where the documents were issued and cannot be done in the Netherlands. Find further information on: [government.nl/topics/legalising-documents](https://www.government.nl/topics/legalising-documents).

You can find more information about registration procedures for each case in the official website of Den Haag. Please bear in mind that other municipalities may state different requirements.

denhaag.nl/en/moving-and-immigration/moving-to-the-hague-from-abroad/settling-from-abroad.htm

If you are coming to the Netherlands to work or to study, you will need a *Burgerservicenummer (BSN)*, a unique personal number, which you get when you register with a Dutch municipality.

You will need a *BSN* to arrange all your affairs with Dutch government agencies. The *BSN* is required for starting a job in the Netherlands, enrolling in an educational programme, opening a bank account, using the health care system, applying for benefits and paying taxes, to name a few examples.

If you are planning to reside in the Netherlands less than four months, you will still need to register in order to get a *Burgerservicenummer*.

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In addition to this registration, if you want to stay in the Netherlands for longer than three months and you are not an EU/EEA or Switzerland citizen, you need to apply for a residence permit (*verblijfsvergunning*). Please take into account that for citizens coming from Croatia other procedure applies:

ind.nl/en/other/eu-eea/Pages/Croatian.aspx

To obtain a residence permit, you will need to contact the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND): www.ind.nl/en.

Diplomats and international organisations' employees obtain a special residence document, which is issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. These are for people who are working on Dutch soil as a diplomatic or consular official, or who are employed at an international organisation. They enjoy a special "privileged" status, are not considered foreigners under the auspices of the *Vreemdelingenwet* (Immigration Law) and are entitled to a special residency status by law. This protocol published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs applies to their stay in the Netherlands:

www.government.nl/ministries/bz/documents-and-publications/leaflets/2012/12/01/protocol-guide-for-international-organisations.html

Please note that the requirements for a residence permit are dependent on your personal situation and circumstances. You will also find details on:

ind.nl/en/stay-or-live-in-the-Netherlands

Q. What is a *BSN*? Am I required to get one?

The *Burgerservicenummer (BSN)* is a unique personal number issued to everyone registered with the *Basisregistratie Personen (BRP)*, or the Personal Records Database of the municipality. To request a *BSN* you can contact the Municipality of The Hague or one of 17 other selected municipalities. These are: Alkmaar, Almelo, Amsterdam, Breda, Doetinchem, Eindhoven, Groningen, Goes, Heerlen, Leeuwarden, Leiden, Nijmegen, Rotterdam, Terneuzen, Utrecht, Venlo, Zwolle. Once you have the *BSN* number you will be able to apply for your *DigiD*.

Q. What is *DigiD*?

DigiD (short for Digital Identification) is a form of online ID that allows you access to many services and government websites in the Netherlands. This includes doing your taxes, applying for a government benefit, checking your Dutch pension or health insurance, and any other actions. The *DigiD* consists of a username and password that are linked to your personal public service number (*BSN*). Most information about the *DigiD* can be found at: www.digid.nl/en/about-digid.

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The municipality of The Hague has translated the *DigiD* forms into English and provides also with a guide on how to apply for it:

www.denhaag.nl/en/moving-and-immigration/relocation-and-settling/digid-your-online-id.htm

You can find a more dynamic and simple explanation about *DigiD* on the following link (available in English, French, Arabic and Dutch): digid.uabc.nl/en.

Q. Will my driving licence be valid?

If your driving licence was issued in a European Union/European Free Trade Association (EU/EFTA) member country **before 19 January 2013**, then you can normally carry on driving with the foreign driving licence for 15 years (from the date of issue of the foreign driving licence). If your driving licence is already over nine years old, you can continue to drive with your driving licence for another two years (counting from the date of registering in a Dutch municipality). However, this is on condition that your driving licence is still valid. If you have a driving licence that was **issued after 19 January 2013** in one of the countries of the EU or the EFTA, then you can normally carry on driving with the foreign driving licence for up to 1 year. This is on condition that your driving licence is still valid.

If your driving licence was issued outside one of the countries of the EU/EFTA or in the Netherlands Antilles or Aruba, you may use an international driving licence for up to 185 days after becoming a resident in the Netherlands. Before the end of that period, you must have obtained a Dutch driving licence.

RDW (the national motor vehicle authority responsible for the safety and environmental regulation of the motor vehicle in the Netherlands) provides a listing of the EU/EFTA members as well as the most up to date information related to this topic:

<https://www.rdw.nl/englishinformation/Paginas/Using-a-foreign-driving-licence-after-becoming-a-resident-of-the-Netherlands.aspx>

In some cases, you will be able to exchange your foreign driving licence for a Dutch one. You may submit an application with the municipality. The procedure is explained on the *RDW's* website:

<http://www.rdw.nl/englishinformation/Paginas/Can-I-exchange-a-foreign-driving-licence.aspx>

Anyone who is entitled to benefit from the "30% tax ruling" can simply exchange their licence, no matter where they are from. This applies to your partner and children registered at the same address too. Ask for an exchange form for the foreign driving licence at a local municipal office.

Persons with diplomatic status or working at certain international organisations

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(privileged card holders) may drive in the Netherlands without the need to exchange their foreign licence for a Dutch one. You will, however, need a valid foreign driving licence and an identity pass for privileged persons from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. You can find more information in the privileged status protocols mentioned above.

A "Certificate of Fitness" (*Verklaring van Geschiktheid – VVG*) may be required by the authorities (*CBR – Central Office for Motor Vehicle Driver Testing*) over and above the health form when applying for a driving licence, in the following cases:

- when a Dutch licence is first issued
- when a driving licence is exchanged and the country of issue do not belong to the EU/EFTA
- if you have a medical restriction
- if you are older than 75 years

You can find more details about whether or not a *VVG* is required and how to proceed on the link below by *RDW* (in Dutch but understandable if translated into English):

www.rdw.nl/englishinformation/Paginas/Medically-fit-to-drive-a-vehicle.aspx?path=Portal/Information%20in%20English/Driving%20licence

Please note: When exchanging a driving licence, you will be asked to hand in your old licence. A counter clerk will collect your foreign driving licence and give you a certified copy and a receipt. You will not receive your old driving licence back after the exchange. Instead, the *RDW* will return your driving licence to the issuing authority in your country of origin.

Housing

Q. How can I find a house/apartment to buy or rent in the Netherlands?

- Contact a real estate agent, preferably one specialised in expat housing
- A good place to start is www.funda.nl, the Dutch Association of Estate Agents (*NVM*). Here you will find both properties to rent (rent is called "*huur*" and to buy is called "*koop*")

You can find more information in the ACCESS guide "Housing in the Netherlands" and on the ACCESS website:

www.access-nl.org/living-in-the-netherlands/living/housing.aspx

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Q. Are there any special rules for collecting household waste?

In many cities households have two separate waste containers: green for organic waste (*groente-, fruit- en tuinafval, GFT*) and grey/brown for all remaining waste (*restafval*). Both containers are emptied once a week or alternating weeks. If your municipality has decided that household waste should be compulsorily separated, you will receive a fine for non-organic waste placed in the green container.

You need to put your waste/bins outside your house at the time set by your municipality. If you don't, you may be fined.

Glass, paper, plastic (including cans) and clothing/textiles, medicines and batteries, small electrical appliances and bulbs can be deposited in special containers in your neighbourhood. Other types of waste (oversized household waste, domestic chemical waste etc.) can be brought to one of the city's garbage and recycling stations.

If you live in an apartment building with rubbish bins or underground containers, you can throw away your rubbish in these containers anytime. Be aware of any specific rules that may apply to the tenants of the building.

Utilities and communications

Q. How can I get water, electricity and gas connections?

- In many cases, the utilities (gas, water and electricity) will already be available in your home and you only need to transfer them into your name. Your real estate agent will usually help you with transferring contracts of your new home to your name
- The market for gas and electricity has been liberalised, so you can choose or change suppliers. Remember to check and be aware of the conditions for cancelling a contract or switching providers
- To find out which water company is covering your area, please have a look at: www.vewin.nl/english/Dutch%20water%20companies/Pages/default.aspx

ACCESS provides more information about the gas and electricity market on the link below:

www.access-nl.org/living-in-the-netherlands/living/gas-and-electricity.aspx

Q. How can I get connected to telephone, Internet and TV?

- Telephone, Internet and TV are now available digitally and/or via cable. Many providers offer bundles of all three services. It is important to bear in mind the

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length of your stay and your location, as not all providers have a complete country network. Compare price, quality, and conditions and remember to read the small print. It is advisable to drop in to providers or telephone shops which can help you to choose and arrange the most suitable package for Internet, TV and landline connections, since the existing comparing websites are in Dutch. However, if you prefer comparing prices and services via Internet, here you have some of the most popular websites:

www.providercheck.nl

www.digitelevisie.nl

www.breedbandwinkel.nl

- Satellite television is also an option, but you need to fix a satellite dish in the right direction and there are regulations covering this
- Separated mobile services (bundles) can be best set up by visiting one of many telephone shops. They also can advise which service suits you best according to your needs. For mobile phones you can also choose a prepaid option instead of a subscription. Top-up cards can be bought at most telephone stores and supermarkets. It is also possible to top-up your credit on the Internet and by phone. To check the main suppliers, visit local telephone shops or to compare the latest rates visit www.bellen.com (in Dutch only). For your information, 0800 numbers are toll free; 0900 numbers are charged (per call or minute)

Q. How can I make my international calls cheaper?

There are several ways to make your international calls cheaper:

- Video call programs or apps
- The 0900 numbers: There are several companies that use 0900 numbers to provide cheap international calls. These 0900 numbers are paid service numbers and prices for using them can vary. You pay an initial connection charge and then the costs for the call (normally per minute or per second). Check www.bellen.com for a comparison of prices for different providers
- Discount telephone cards. In the Netherlands there are many discount telephone cards available (*belkaarten* or *telefoonkaarten*; also known as “calling cards”). These can be purchased at telephone shops, post offices and tobacco shops. They have a fixed purchase price, but call costs may vary depending on the destination being called and the method of access. Some cards offer special rates to a particular world region – such as the Americas, Europe, Africa or Asia. It therefore pays to purchase a card which offers the cheapest rate to the destinations you most frequently call. Most cards have an

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expiry date, and a limited period of use, once activated. The cards can be used with domestic landlines, mobile phones, and with public pay-phones. Unfortunately, not all companies offering these cards are reliable. Some charge additional, unannounced costs or the card expires before the official expiry date.

Q. Can I use my mobile phone in my car?

Drivers and riders of motorised vehicles, mopeds and vehicles for people with disabilities are not allowed to make or receive telephone calls without an aid, such as a headset or "hands-free" car kit. Sending and receiving SMS and e-mail messages is also not permitted. You are not even allowed to hold your telephone in your hand when on the move. If you need to make or receive a telephone call while driving and you have no hands-free car kit, you must park your vehicle alongside and then make/receive the call.

This law applies not only during actual driving, but also while moving slowly for example in a traffic jam. You may use a mobile telephone while being parked or otherwise stationary. Violation of this law carries a fine.

Q. I am travelling on a regular basis to my home country. How can I use my mobile phone both in the Netherlands and in my home country?

For many members of the international community, it may be important to be able to make and receive calls while travelling to other countries. As of 15 June 2017, roaming charges do not apply when travelling in the EU, meaning that you will pay the same prices as at home. For data and calls limits while abroad, check with your phone provider.

International "roaming" agreements via cellular operators allow foreign operators to use their networks so that they have a broader international coverage. However, mobile phone providers charge rather high costs for making phone calls or data transfer with smartphones abroad. Even when somebody calls you when you are abroad, you have to pay for the call. This also applies for listening to your voice mail.

The best alternative is to buy a local prepaid SIM card once you are abroad (on the condition that your mobile phone is simlock free). You now have a local mobile number that you can pass on to family and friends. If they live in the Netherlands, they can make cheaper calls by using special 0900 numbers. They are only charged for the costs of calling the 0900 number. It works in a similar manner as making cheap international calls via your landline.

Unfortunately, not all mobile telephones are compatible with networks in different parts of the world. The USA, Canada, Latin American and African countries use a different network to the Netherlands. Depending on the bands of your mobile

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phone and those used by the country where you travel, it can happen that you cannot use your Dutch mobile telephone there. Please contact your Dutch mobile telephone provider for more information. The standard mobile nowadays is Triband which is useable in most countries. A Quad-band, also known as 'world phone', allows global use.

Q. How can I find a post office? I have been looking around but I don't see any signs indicating a post office.

The Dutch post office used to be an office where you could obtain all postal products and services and some services not related to mail. These post offices do not exist anymore and have been replaced by smaller postal shops located in other shops, such as bookstores, tobacco shops and supermarkets. These post shops are still called post offices and offer all products and services from *postnl* (the main provider of postal and parcel services in the Netherlands) and sometimes a few other services as well. For locating a post office please refer to website: www.postnl.nl/locatiewijzer/index.aspx (in Dutch only)

Finance

Q. What is the 30% ruling and when do I qualify for this?

This is a tax incentive for employees recruited from abroad who bring specific skills to the Netherlands. It acknowledges the additional expenses incurred by expats (extraterritorial costs) by allowing the employer to grant a tax-free lump sum to cover these costs up to a maximum of 30% of the sum of wages and allowances for a period of eight years. If you are eligible for the 30% facility and opt for partial non-resident taxpayer status, your taxable income from a substantial interest (box/category 2 on your tax form) and your taxable income from savings and investments (box/category 3 on your tax form) will, for income tax purposes, be determined according to the regulations that apply to non-resident taxpayer status. In practice, this means that, for these boxes/categories, tax is levied on a lower amount. As a result, you pay less tax.

Applications (completed by both employer and employee) should be made to the *Belastingdienst Limburg Kantoor Buitenland* in Heerlen. The conditions for qualifying for the 30% ruling have been changed since 1 January 2012 to be more relevant to the intended focus group. Ask your tax advisor or employer for more information.

More information can be found on the Tax Department (*Belastingdienst*) website: www.belastingdienst.nl/wps/wcm/connect/bldcontenten/belastingdienst/individuals

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You may find useful information related to this subject on the Expat Centre Leiden and Den Haag official websites:

www.expatscentreleiden.nl/en/formalities/other-government-services/30-ruling

www.denhaag.nl/en/moving-and-immigration/work/application-for-the-30-ruling.htm

Q. What is a contactless payment?

Contactless is a payment feature that has been introduced by banks in the Netherlands (as in other countries) on their payment cards. The aim is to make small value purchases quicker and more convenient for both retailers and consumers. The idea is that by using the contactless facility on the debit card, the customer's payment transaction will be quicker, as no cash needs to change hands and entering a PIN number is not required. This should reduce waiting times at the checkout (*kassa*) and prevent mistakes that can occur with cash transactions.

When making payments of €25 or less, a card featuring contactless technology can simply be held against the reader to pay rather than inserting a card into the chip and PIN machine and entering a PIN. In just a few seconds, the payment will be complete and the lights on the reader will illuminate, confirming that the transaction has been approved.



To use this feature, you should look out for retailers who display this payment reader sign.

The term contactless refers to the fact that the card does not need to physically make contact with the reader. Contactless cards are secured by the same advanced technology that underpins chip and PIN. Although a contactless transaction does not require a PIN to be entered, from time to time the terminal may ask that the cardholder undertake a full contact chip and PIN transaction. This is designed to deter fraudulent use should the card be lost or stolen; each time a PIN is used it re-affirms that the cardholder is in possession of their card.

Q. Which insurances are most important in the Netherlands?

In the Netherlands, the basic package of health insurance is compulsory. If you own a house and have a mortgage, a term life insurance (*overlijdensrisicoverzekering*) is usually required by your mortgage provider.

Although not compulsory, it is advised to get the following insurances:

- Supplementary package of the health insurance (*aanvullende verzekering*)

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- Liability insurance (*aansprakelijkheidsverzekering*)
- Legal insurance (*rechtsbijstandsverzekering*)
- Fire and theft insurance (*inboedelverzekering*)
- Building insurance (*opstalverzekering*), if you own a house

If you have a car, liability insurance (*aansprakelijkheidsverzekering*) for your car is compulsory. Structure insurance (*cascoverzekering*) is strongly advised. Depending on your situation, additional insurances can be taken, such as a personal accident insurance (*ongevallen inzittenden verzekering*), personal damage insurance (*schade inzittendenverzekering*) and legal aid insurance (*rechtsbijstandsverzekering*).

Healthcare

Q. Do I need a Dutch health insurance or can I use an international health insurance?

When you are legally living in the Netherlands for longer than four months, it is compulsory to get a Dutch health insurance. If you have an international health insurance, please be aware that this might not be accepted, as it isn't recognised as a valid Dutch health insurance. Upon arrival, it is best to have a look in your policy to see what the coverage of your international health insurance is. Please bear in mind that you will have to pay your insurance from the day you register with the municipality and not from the day you get the insurance. You can find more information on our guide about "Healthcare in the Netherlands":

www.access-nl.org/media/13949/guide_healthcare-in-the-netherlands.pdf

A list of Dutch Health insurers can be found on:

www.zorgwijzer.nl/zorgvergelijker/english

Q. Which vaccinations are common in the Netherlands and how can I arrange to get them?

For general vaccination information, you can approach the Municipal and Regional Health Service (*GGD*).

The *GGD* is the municipal health organisation for preventive healthcare. Once you have registered at the town hall, the *GGD* will let you know automatically which immunisation programme (if any) you need to follow.

For children, the Dutch national immunisation programme includes vaccinations for the following diseases:

- DKTP: D = Diphtheria, K = Whooping Cough, T = Tetanus, P = Polio-myelitis

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- HIB = Haemophilus influenza type B - only for children born after 01-04-1993
- BMR = Mumps, Measles, Rubella (German measles)
- Men C = Meningitis C - only for children born after 01-06-2001
- Pneu = Pneumococcal vaccination – only for children born after 01-04-2006
- Hep B = Hepatitis B vaccination - only for children born after 01-08-2011
- HPV = Human Papilloma Virus – only for girls

All early childhood vaccinations are given at a child birth clinic (*Consultatiebureau*).

Q. How can I find an English-speaking doctor?

Most GP's in the Netherlands are Dutch, but many have a good command of English. However, in areas with a large number of expatriate residents, there are also health centres specialised in providing specific service for expats.

Please contact ACCESS Helpdesk for an English-speaking GP in your area.

Children

Q. How can I find day care for my child?

Regardless of what form of day care you prefer, there are several kinds of care that your children can get and these including (but not limited to) playgroups; babysitters; child-minding; nurseries; flexible day care; pre-schools and after school care. In some areas in the Netherlands, you will be able to find international day care or playgroups providing childcare in English or other languages. If you need a list of day care centres in your area, please contact the ACCESS Helpdesk.

To find a suitable day care near you, you can use one of the following tools:

www.nomadparents.com/finder

www.kinderopvang.nl

check-nl.com

You can also visit your local municipality office or visit the ACCESS Helpdesk at any of the Expat Centres. You can find its locations on:

www.access-nl.org/living-in-the-netherlands/moving/expat-desks-centres.aspx

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Q. How can I get help with the cost of childcare?

The Dutch government reimburses a substantial portion of the cost of childcare. In order to know if you are entitled to child care benefits (*kinderopvangtoeslag*), visit the website of the Dutch authorities:

www.belastingdienst.nl/wps/wcm/connect/bldcontenten/belastingdienst/individuals/benefits/moving_to_the_netherlands/my_child_goes_to_a_child_care_centre

You can find further information about other subsidies for your child in the following ACCESS guide:

www.access-nl.org/media/9944/guide_your_child.pdf

Q. How can I find an international school for my children?

There is an organisation which offers detailed advice about international education in the Netherlands: www.educaide.nl.

You can also find a list of the current International Schools in the Netherlands on:

www.access-nl.org/media/324781/170630-ListIntEdu-w-compact-info.pdf

Q. I am planning to stay here for a long time. Should I send my children to a Dutch or an international school?

If your child has attended school for several years and is used to lessons in English, it might be best to send your child to an international school. If you are planning to stay here for a long time or your child is at the beginning of primary school, a Dutch school could be an option (depending on the age of your child).

Some Dutch schools offer special courses to learn Dutch for newly-arrived foreign children ages 6-11 (reception schools) and bridging classes for those aged 12 years or above. These so-called 'reception schools' (*opvangscholen*) are ordinary primary schools with a special class for learning Dutch: the reception group. Every week they are taught to speak, comprehend, read and write Dutch by someone who is experienced in teaching foreign children. When children are not attending lessons in the special reception group, they attend regular classes at the school for subjects such as math, history, science, arts and crafts, etc.

Q. I want to raise my children bilingually. Are there any Dutch schools which teach (partly) in English?

Yes, there are an increasing number of schools providing bilingual lessons. Most of them are secondary schools. In the Netherlands, *TTO* (*Tweetalig Onderwijs* or bilingual education, mostly English-Dutch) came into existence in 1989.

Q. If I send my children to an international school, what kind of diploma will they have when they have finished secondary school?

Some programme/diploma/exam options are international in nature. Others are more closely linked to a particular country. In certain instances, students may opt for two diplomas (the school's diploma and an external diploma). Many options may qualify students to pursue tertiary education in the Netherlands or abroad (The IB diplomas – IBDP and IBCP – are globally recognised as providing the student with a well-balanced pre-university education). Among the various options are:

- IBDP – International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (full diploma programme or individual courses/certificates)
- IBCP – International Baccalaureate Career-related Programme
- EB – European Baccalaureate
- English A-Levels
- APID – Advanced Placement International Diploma (originated in the United States; full diploma programme or individual courses)
- A school's/country's own programme/diploma/exam options/graduation requirements
- A school's own programme/diploma/exam options/graduation requirements plus full or partial IBDP or APID

Further information about International education in the Netherlands is available on: www.educaide.nl/_resources/downloads/ArtIntEducationNL_May2011.pdf

Q. What are the options for my child's secondary and higher education options in Dutch schools and universities?

The secondary and higher education options are:

- practical education
- vmbo – preparatory secondary vocational education (entrance to mbo – senior secondary vocational education and training)
- havo – senior general secondary education (entrance to hbo – university of applied science)
- vwo (*Voortgezet Wetenschappelijk Onderwijs*) – university preparatory education (entrance to hbo – university of applied science or wo – research university)

Find more information about foreign education systems and International Baccalaureate as well as overviews of foreign diplomas in comparison with Dutch diplomas on: www.nuffic.nl.

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Pets

Q. Do I need to register my pet?

Dogs must be registered with the Municipal Tax Department (*Gemeentelijke Belastingdienst*), and a dog tax (*Hondenbelasting*) is charged annually, calculated on the number of dogs in each household. You need to inform the municipality about the number of dogs you have.

Q. Can I bring my pet to the Netherlands?

For the transportation of dogs, cats and ferrets within EU countries, the following general rules apply:

- Any animal that travels in Europe must hold an EU pet passport. Each passport will receive a unique registration number and contains a description of the animal, the name and address of the owner and proof of vaccination against rabies. Any qualified vet can give vaccinations. The same veterinarian will document the vaccinations in the EU passport.
- All animals must also have an identification tag (ISO microchip).

For more information regarding travelling to the Netherlands with dogs or cats from EU member countries you can check the Dutch government publication below:

www.government.nl/topics/animal-welfare/question-and-answer/can-i-bring-a-pet-from-another-country-to-the-netherlands

For other pets, there is not yet unified legislation at the EU level, so national legislation applies. Different rules apply if you are bringing an animal from a non-EU country. For further details about travelling in the EU with dogs or cats from other countries, see the link below:

ec.europa.eu/food/animals/pet-movement/index_en.htm

Q. Where can I find a veterinarian?

There are good veterinarians and animal hospitals in the Netherlands. Ask neighbours or friends for a recommendation, or look up *dierenarts* in the Yellow Pages or on Google maps using "Search nearby". You can also contact the ACCESS Helpdesk for a list of veterinarians in your area.

Q. Should I clean up after my dog?

The Netherlands has *opruimplicht*, which means that it is required to clean up after your dog, and there are fines for those who do not do so. Use a paper bag, a

plastic bag or a special “pooper scooper” available at pet shops, veterinarians and municipal offices. Be aware of more regulations on keeping pets within your municipality.

Transport

Q. How can I find out which tram, bus and train I need and the departure times?

Via the website www.9292.nl/en, you can plan your journey from door to door. All options, bus, tram, train, metro and ferry for your journey are given here. 9292 provides a helpful app in English. Bear in mind that most information in the public transport system is announced in Dutch.

Q. How does the OV-Chip card work?

There are three different types of OV-Chip card to choose from:

- **Personal OV-Chip card:** This card is intended for the frequent traveller. To apply for a personal OV-Chip card, you can pick up a paper application form at the counters for public transport companies or apply online in the link below: www.ov-chipkaart.nl/apply-1/personal-ov-chipkaart/apply-for-personal-ov-chipkaart.htm
- **Anonymous OV-Chip card:** Designed for the infrequent traveller, this allows the holder to travel immediately. It can be purchased at sales devices in stations, newsagents, supermarkets and public transport companies’ counters.
- **Business OV-Chip card:** A third kind of OV-Chip card has recently been launched: the business OV-Chip card. This card will be offered to employees of companies by business card providers. If you have a business OV-Chip card and have a question, please contact your business card provider. The contact details can be found on the front of your card.
- **Disposable card:** This can be purchased at the station vending machines. This card allows for immediate travel, but cannot be re-charged or loaded. Disposable cards are not available at every public transport company yet. You can still buy single tickets (even in the bus or tram); this will be a paper ticket or a disposable OV-Chip card for onetime use. In general, buying a single ticket is more expensive than travelling with an OV-Chip card. If you want to use a single ticket, take a look on the website of your local public transport company to find out the options and where to buy them.

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The OV-Chip card must be purchased before you travel. To find a point of sale nearby visit the following website:

www.ov-chipkaart.nl/customer-service/service-points-finder.htm

This address finder is very useful to find out where all specific OV-Chip card services are located because services differ from location to location. Additional credit can be loaded onto your OV-Chip card at vending and add value machines or at OV-Chip card service points.

Cards must be validated at both the beginning and the end of a journey, by holding the card up to an OV-Chip card reader. These are located in various parts of the buses and trams. The card readers for trains are located on the platforms or at the entrance of the station. At the start of your journey, hold your OV-Chip card up to the screen. The sound and light signal indicates your card has been read. When disembarking, check out by holding your card up to the screen. Checking in and out is also required when you transfer from one form of transport to another, except when you transfer from train to train.

When using trains, you always need to have at least a certain minimum credit on your card to be able to check in with the NS. This boarding fee is **€10** for holders of a personalised OV-chip card with certain season tickets (*Weekend Vrij, Dal Vrij, Dal Voordeel, Altijd Voordeel or Voordeelurenabonnement*). There is no boarding fee for the Kids *Vrij* and *Altijd Vrij* season tickets. The boarding fee for holders of a personalised OV-chip card without a season ticket or an anonymous OV-chip card is **€20**. For other trains such as Syntus and Qliner/Arriva buses the boarding fee is always **€10**, and for trams, metros and other buses is **€4**. The latest information can be found on:

www.ov-chipkaart.nl/everything-about-travelling/price-list/boarding-fare-and-basic-fare.htm

When you check out, the boarding fee will be refunded and you will be charged for the number of kilometres you travelled. If you do not check out, you will pay the full boarding fee. If you fail to check in or buy a valid ticket, you face a fine plus the fare for your journey.

Q. What kinds of tickets are available for the train?

For the train you can use either paper cards or the OV-Chip card. The main tickets available are:

- Single ticket
- Return ticket
- Weekend ticket
- Day travel card for the train
- Day travel card for all public transport

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- Bicycle day travel card
- Rail runner (cheap ticket for children aged 4 to 11 accompanied by an adult)

Subscriptions are available for a particular route, for a discount outside rush hours, for unlimited travel by train or by other means of public transport as well. If you don't know which subscription fits best, you can use the information on the *Nederlandse Spoorwegen (NS)* website. It is the principal passenger railway operator in the Netherlands: www.ns.nl/en/season-tickets.

It is highly advisable that you drop into a sales point and ask for help when deciding which subscription would be the most adequate for your situation. For more information, visit www.ov-chipkaart.nl or www.ns.nl/en/travel-information.

Q. Where can I buy a train ticket?

There are several ways to buy a train ticket:

- The NS self-service ticket machine (no extra costs).
- The NS Service Desk (additional fee of €1.00 per ticket) Kiosk with Tickets & Service sign (additional fee of €1.00 per ticket) Online (e-ticket) and print it at home (no extra cost).
- Use the OV-Chip card. If you use the OV-Chip card, you need to make sure that there is enough money on your card and check in and out. If you have a subscription, you can use your OV Chip card as well.

Please note that the paper tickets are likely to be eliminated in the next few years.

Q. How can I go to the railway station or from the railway station to my destination?

There are several ways to travel to and from the railway station:

- By bus, tram or metro
- By bike or moped
- By foot
- By car (shared or rental)
- By taxi or shared taxi

For more detailed information about this topic, please visit: www.nsinternational.nl/en/to-and-from-the-station

Q. It seems that everybody is biking in the Netherlands. I want to bike as well. What kinds of bikes are available?

The most common type of bicycle is the *omafiets* (grandma bike). However, you will see a lot of other types of bikes, including the following: *stadsgiets*, *sportfiets*, *elektrische fiets*, *bakfiets*, *snorfiets* and *bromfiets*.

Stadsgietsen (city bikes) and *omafietsen* (grandma bikes) are most often used for everyday trips, including going to school and/or work, and running errands around town.

Sportfiets (sport bike) is a more convenient bicycle for longer trips. There are also the so called ATB (All Terrain Bikes). They are most convenient for those who bike on difficult terrain. A special type of ATB is the mountain bike (MTB), which is not often used in the Netherlands because of its flat terrain, but it is convenient for cycling in the mountains.

An *elektrische fiets* (electric bike) offers the possibility to get electric support while cycling. It is especially useful when it is very windy because you do not require as much strength for pedalling. In Dutch this is called *trapondersteuning*, which means that you have to bike yourself, but the electric motor will support you. Depending on the type of electric bike, you can choose between no support, little support, average support or a lot of support.

A moped is a bicycle with an auxiliary engine. In the Netherlands, there are two types of mopeds. A *snorfiets* has an engine capacity of 50 cc or less and can reach a maximum speed of 25 km/h. Helmets are not required and it has a light blue licence plate. *Bromfietsen* ride on the roadway and can reach a maximum speed of 45 km/h. They have a yellow licence plate. By law, children younger than 8 years old can be passengers on a moped only when they are provided with a proper, safe seat that gives them adequate support for their back, hands and feet. It is not permitted to hold a mobile phone while operating a moped.

Bakfietsen (cargo bikes) are transport bikes with three wheels and a large front bucket. It is common to see parents transporting children around in *bakfietsen* because the box is low to the ground making it is easier to transport more weight.

There are also four-wheeled vehicles, but they are not allowed on bike paths and have to follow the same rules as *bromfietsen*. They look like small automobiles and must have an overall weight of less than 350 kg (excluding the weight of the battery in electric vehicles). They can reach a maximum of 45 km/h and can be distinguished by their small size and a 45 km/h sticker that is displayed on the back of the car.

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Q. Are there any special traffic rules for cyclists?

The following laws apply specifically for bicyclists:

- Cycling is not allowed on sidewalks or pedestrian-only areas
- Use hand signals when preparing to make a left or right turn. Simply put your arm out in the direction you want to turn
- It is allowed to ride alongside another bicyclist, but cycling with three people in a row is not permitted
- Bicyclists share the bike paths with mopeds. Be prepared for them by cycling on the right side of the bike path so that they can pass you
- Cycling is not allowed on highways
- Tunnels may or may not be accessible for cycling. If they are, there is usually a separate bike path
- Bicycle lights are mandatory, white or yellow in the front and red in the rear. You can get a fine when cycling without lights in the dark, at dusk or in poor visibility

Brommers (mopeds) must use the main road rather than the bike roads. They are allowed on the bike lanes only if explicitly indicated by the blue traffic sign displaying a bicycle and a moped symbol.

Bicycles have bells for a reason! Use the bell to warn other bicyclists that you are approaching them and need to pass them, use it to warn pedestrians who are blocking the bike path, or to warn anyone else who might be in your way!

Do not park your bike in places that have signs posted saying, "*Geen fietsen plaatsen*" (No bike parking).

Q. I have hardly any knowledge of biking. How can I learn to bike?

There are several bike schools all over the country that offer lessons on how to ride a bicycle (*fietsles*). Most of them are called "*fietsschool*" or "*fietscollege*".

Q. What is the minimum age to ride a moped in the Netherlands?

If you want to ride a moped (*bromfiets* or *snorfiets*), you need to be at least 16 years of age. You also need to have a special driving licence (*bromfietsrijbewijs*). A driving licence for a car is category B, for a moped is category AM. If you have a driving licence category A or B, you can ask to add category AM when you renew your driving licence. You don't need to pass an exam for this.

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Q. I find it difficult and expensive to park my car in many major cities. Is there a way for me to park my car easier and cheaper?

There is a severe lack of parking space in most big cities in the Netherlands. In an effort to reduce congestion, many cities have a park and ride scheme (*P+R locaties*). The driver parks at an organised, out of town location and then finishes the journey via public transport to the city centre. The Royal Dutch Touring Club (*ANWB*) lists all park and ride schemes in an area. This scheme is very helpful to many people for finding a parking space more quickly as well as for spending less on parking fees.

Each city in the Netherlands has a Municipal Parking Department for all affairs related to parking such as parking permits. Please contact your local municipal office for further details.

You may find it handy to have a look on the guide "Road Traffic Signs and Regulations in the Netherlands" published by the Dutch Ministry of infrastructure and the environment on the link below:

www.government.nl/documents-and-publications/leaflets/2013/01/16/road-traffic-signs-and-regulations-in-the-netherlands.html

Dutch language, culture and etiquette

Q. What is the Civic Integration Act and who does it apply to?

The Civic Integration Act stipulates that most people from non-EU countries or Switzerland who immigrate to the Netherlands and live in the Netherlands must learn Dutch and understand how the Dutch society works. This is referred to as civic integration. The aim of the Dutch integration policy is to have everyone in the Netherlands, including newcomers, feel a sense of community with each other and involvement with the Netherlands. The government wants people who settle in the Netherlands to take part in Dutch society regardless of where they come from or what they believe in.

There are two types of civic integration exams:

- the basic civic integration examination abroad (*basisexamen inburgering in het buitenland*) that is taken in your country of origin or habitual residence before you travel to the Netherlands if you require an authorisation for temporary stay (*MVV*)
- the civic integration examination (*inburgeringsexamen*) that is taken in the Netherlands. This is necessary if you want to become a permanent resident in the Netherlands or a Dutch citizen

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Q. What are the different types of civic integration exams?

There are 3 types of civic integration exams:

- The integration exam (*inburgeringsexamen*) tests one's knowledge of Dutch and Dutch society at level A2.
- The Dutch as a second language state exam "NT2" (*als tweede taal staatsexamen*) is intended for adults and young adults from foreign countries who would like to work or study in the Netherlands. The examination results in a diploma, which certifies that the candidate has adequate proficiency in the Dutch language to start a study programme in Dutch, or to work. You can follow Programme I or II.
- The vocational diploma (*Beroepsonderwijs Diploma*) is designed for those who – aside from learning Dutch – want vocational training. This programme takes longer than the others because it requires focus on the chosen theme. Professional qualification (MBO-1 and MBO-2) is awarded upon successful completion.

Q. What is the basic civic integration examination abroad (*basisexamen inburgering in het buitenland*) and who has to take it?

The civic integration exam abroad is a test designed to assess basic knowledge of the Dutch language and Dutch society. You take the exam in Dutch at Dutch embassies and consulates-general in your country of origin or habitual residence, i.e. the country in which you are entitled to reside for longer than three months, for instance on the basis of a residence permit. You have to take the exam before you travel to the Netherlands. The exam must be taken by foreign nationals coming from countries whose residents require an authorisation for temporary stay (*MVV*) and are between the ages of 18 and 65. The aim of immigration being:

- wanting to marry a Dutch national
- wanting to reunite with family in the Netherlands
- wanting to work in the Netherlands as a cleric (e.g. as an imam or pastor)

As the law is amended on a regular basis, you should always check for the latest information on the Ministry of Foreign affairs website:

www.government.nl/topics/new-in-the-netherlands

The address of the Dutch embassy and/or consulate in your country can be found on this website.

You can also check what applies to your personal situation on the Immigration and Naturalisation Service website:

ind.nl/en/Pages/basic-civic-integration-examination-abroad.aspx

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Q. What is the civic integration examination (*inburgeringsexamen*) and who has to take it?

If you were not born in the Netherlands and want to live and work in the Netherlands, you may need to prove that you can integrate in the Dutch society by taking the civic integration exam. If you need to go through this process, you will have to register with DUO (*Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs*). You are usually exempted from this requirement if you:

- are younger than 18 years or older than 65 years
- are from the European Union, a country in the European Economic Area, Switzerland or Turkey
- resided in the Netherlands and attended school for 8 years or longer between the ages of 5 and 17
- have a diploma or certificate that shows that you have a good knowledge of the Dutch language and how Dutch society works. Please check with your municipality to see what are the valid exemptions
- are staying only temporary in the Netherlands for study or for work

As the law is amended on a regular basis, you should always check the latest information on DUO website: www.inburgeren.nl/en.

Q. Where can I follow a civic integration (*inburgering*) course?

There are different schools and private institutions that offer the *inburgering* courses. On the website of www.blikopwerk.nl/inburgeren, you can find officially registered schools/institutions which are certificated to give the *inburgering* course.

In addition to DUO, some municipalities such as The Hague and Amsterdam provide information and facilities to help you to learn Dutch. It may be a good idea to pay a visit to your municipality or have a look on the website.

Q. I want my children to learn Dutch. How can I arrange that?

Children can learn a foreign language very easily. There are several ways to enable your children to learn Dutch:

- Send them to a Dutch language training club
- There are an increasing number of schools that provide bilingual lessons. Most of them are secondary schools. Officially, bilingual education is forbidden at primary schools, but there is an experiment with bilingual education in 15 primary schools (14 of which work in English and Dutch, and 1 in German and Dutch).

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- If you want your child to attend a Dutch school, some of them offer special courses for newly-arrived, foreign children who speak very little or no Dutch. These so-called “reception schools” (*opvangscholen*) are ordinary primary schools with special classes for learning Dutch: the reception group. Children between the ages of 6 and 12 years who speak little or no Dutch are taught here. Every week they are taught to speak, comprehend, read and write Dutch by someone who has experience with teaching foreign children. When children are not attending lessons in the special reception group, they attend regular classes.
- If your child is attending a day care centre or a playgroup, you might want to consider a Dutch group. This way children will learn Dutch while they are playing
- Several international schools offer special Dutch courses for children
- Use of Internet and special computer programmes

Q. Is it important to learn Dutch? I am in doubt as to whether I should learn Dutch as everyone here seems to speak English.

If you are planning to stay in the Netherlands for several years, it is advised that you learn Dutch. Although there are many jobs for non-Dutch speakers, it is easier to find a paid job if you have at least a basic working knowledge of Dutch. Learning the language makes it easier to integrate and participate in Dutch clubs, understand Dutch TV, etc.

Q. Are there any Dutch traditions I should know about?

The most important Dutch traditions are:

- ***Carnaval (Carnival)*** is most celebrated in the Catholic regions, mainly in the southern provinces such as North Brabant and Limburg. The Dutch Carnival is officially celebrated on the Sunday through Tuesday preceding Ash Wednesday
- ***Elfstedentocht* or Eleven cities tour** (200-kilometer skating tour on real, natural ice along the 11 cities and villages in Friesland, a province in the northern part of the Netherlands). The last one was held on 1997 but Dutch people still hope that the canals will freeze again in winter to celebrate this tour.
- ***Koningsdag (King's Day)*** is officially celebrated on 27 April (the king's birthday), unless it falls on a Sunday. On **King's Day** there are celebrations throughout the Netherlands.

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- ***Dodenherdenking (Remembrance of the Dead)*** on 4 May. It commemorates all civilians and members of the armed forces of the Kingdom of the Netherlands who died in wars or peacekeeping missions since the outbreak of World War II.
- ***Sinterklaas (Saint Nicholas)*** on 5 December. In the days leading up to 5 December (starting when Saint Nicholas arrives by steamboat in late November, all the way from Madrid), young children put their shoes in front of the chimneys and sing *Sinterklaas* songs. On the evening of 5 December, *Sinterklaas* brings presents to every child who has behaved well in the past year (in practice, just as with Santa Claus, all children receive gifts without distinction).
- ***Beschuit met muisjes*** is a widespread tradition when people come to visit a new-born baby and its mother. *Beschuit* is a typical Dutch biscuit, *muisjes* are sugared anise seeds. For a boy the *muisjes* are blue and white in colour, while for a girl they are pink and white.

Some of these traditions are also public holidays in the Netherlands. You can find the official bank holidays in the Netherlands on: www.iamsterdam.com/en/plan-your-trip/practical-info/public-holidays

Q. Can you tell me the most important things about Dutch etiquette?

- Dutch manners are frank which can be described as a no-nonsense attitude, informality combined with adherence to basic etiquette. This might be perceived as impersonal by some other cultures but is the norm of the Dutch culture. As always, manners differ between groups. Asking about basic rules will not be considered impolite.
- Shake hands with everyone present – men, women, and children – at business and social meetings. Shake hands again when leaving. Introduce yourself if no one is present to introduce you. The Dutch consider it rude when you do not identify yourself.
- The Dutch value privacy and seldom speak to strangers. It is more likely that they will wait for you to make the first move. Do not be afraid to do so.
- The Dutch expect eye contact while speaking with someone.
- Food does not play a major role in hospitality as it does in many other cultures. It is not considered essential for making someone feel welcome. Do not expect to be served a meal unless the invitation specifically mentions a meal.
- Men should wait until all women are seated before they sit. Allow the hostess to start eating and drinking before you eat.

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- The Dutch prefer fashions that are casual, unpretentious, conservative and subdued. A traditional suit and tie are required only in certain circles of business and government.
- When invited to someone's home, bring a small gift for the hostess. Bring children a small gift or candy. Sending flowers before or after the party is also appropriate.

More information is available on: ediplomat.com/np/cultural_etiquette/ce_nl.htm

Q. Can you tell me the most important things about the Dutch business culture?

- Appointments should be made well in advance. Normal business hours are 09:00 to 17:00, Mondays to Fridays, although many workers start and finish earlier. Always turn up on time, as punctuality is expected.
- Conducting business affairs over lunch is unusual in the Netherlands. Lunch is usually a quick snack, where most office workers bring their own sandwiches from home.
- Normal business attire varies considerably between industries. Unless you are aware that informal dress is the norm in your business area, wear a conservative suit for interviews and meetings.
- People should be addressed by their personal or professional titles with family names, unless you are invited to use first names. Academic titles are not normally used in speech.
- Team structures tend to be flat, without much hierarchy, despite different levels of pay scales and responsibility.
- Respect is gained through speaking one's mind and being direct, thus avoiding wasting time. This directness of approach can sometimes be misconstrued as aggression or even rudeness but it is a tool for enabling the meeting to efficiently reach an agreed solution.
- The Dutch can have some antipathy towards those who use pre-meeting lobbying techniques in order to arrive at group position to expound in the meeting. This pre-meeting lobbying, endemic in many cultures, can be seen as devious and underhanded and lead to accusations of 'hidden agendas' and inflexibility.
- There is a relatively strong separation made between work and private life.
- Colleagues do not tend to socialise very much immediately after work, and most do not invite business guests into their family life at all.

Your first three months in the Netherlands

This ACCESS guide is intended to provide general information. If you need more specific information about this subject please contact the ACCESS Helpdesk on 0900 2 222377(€0.20/c per min) 10:00–16:00, Monday to Friday, or send us an email at helpdesk@access-nl.org.



We also work closely with our network of partners, associates and trainers.

You can find their contact details on our website: www.access-nl.org/about-access/how-we-do-it/helping-access.aspx

ACCESS guides available for downloading, free of charge, from the ACCESS website*:

- Banking, taxation and personal finance
- Having a baby in the Netherlands
- Healthcare in the Netherlands
- Housing in the Netherlands
- International student support
- Learning the Dutch language
- Leaving the Netherlands
- Legal matters regarding Key life events
- Partner support
- Your child
- Your first three months
- Winter driving
- Working and unemployment in the Netherlands

* The titles mentioned above will be published gradually during 2017. During this period, the actual titles available on the website may be different from the ones mentioned here.

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