



# SHARE

Building a resettlement network for European municipalities, cities and regions [www.resettlement.eu](http://www.resettlement.eu)

## THE SHARE PROJECT

The SHARE network will facilitate structured dialogue and exchange of expertise between experienced resettlement countries planning or considering resettlement.

With a worldwide membership, staff and operations working with migrants and refugees in more than 40 countries, ICMC Serves and protects uprooted people - refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants - regardless of faith, race, ethnicity or nationality.

Since its creation in 1951, ICMC has identified and accompanied one million refugees for resettlement. Additionally, ICMC provides expert resettlement personnel through the ICMC-UNHCR Resettlement Deployment Scheme to support UNHCR resettlement activities in field offices around the world.



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## SHARE Country Profile: the Netherlands

### 1. Governance

Government in the Netherlands consists of 4 different types of entities - the state, Provinces, municipalities and the Polder Boards. The state has competence for matters of national interest, whilst the other 3 levels are associate authorities. The 12 provinces are typically responsible for public space, environmental issues and traffic, and the 403 municipalities for social services, housing, employment and public safety.

Currently, there is a trend to shift power and responsibility in the social domain, for example in relation to healthcare and services for youth, away from the state and to municipalities. This change takes place at a time when funding provided to the local level is also being reduced, creating a challenging context for the change. Another trend is for more institutions to work on a regional level, such as housing associations, although the borders of these operational regions do not necessarily follow the borders of provinces.

Municipality mergers have been encouraged by national authorities for some time. Mergers are not enforced, but can be undertaken and facilitated where local support exists for them. During 2004-14, the number of municipalities has reduced via mergers from 467 to the current 403.

Local authorities in the Netherlands are elected every 4 years, and the next round of local elections take place on 19 March 2014.

### 2. Migration & asylum

The Netherlands has 16 million inhabitants, of which 20% are of non-Dutch origin.<sup>1</sup> 9.3% of these are from other European countries, and 11.6% from countries outside of Europe.<sup>2</sup> The biggest non-western groups resident in the Netherlands are from Turkey (2.3%) and Morocco (2.2%). Migrants from these countries arrived in the Netherlands as

<sup>1</sup> The definition of 'allochtoon' is a person who was born outside the Netherlands (first generation) or at least one of the parents of whom was born in another country (second generation).

<sup>2</sup> CBS, Central Bureau of Statistics, the Netherlands (1 January 2012).



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labour migrants during the 1960s, and half or more of this population is now defined as 'second generation' (see footnote 1).

The largest refugee groups in the Netherlands are Iraqis (0.3 %/53,000 people), Afghans (0.2 %/41,000 people), Iranians (0.2%/34,000 people) and Somalis (0.2%/34,000 people). Just 20% of the refugee population of the Netherlands is defined as 'second generation' (see footnote 1, previous page).

### 3. The asylum process

The asylum determination procedure takes place whilst asylum seekers are resident in an initial Application Centre, with the aim of completing the initial decision procedure within 2 weeks. Asylum seekers whose cases cannot be resolved within this time period are referred to an extended asylum procedure, and move to asylum seeker centres run by the national Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA). Asylum seekers receive a weekly allowance for food and other basic needs, and the Dutch Council for Refugees (*VluchtelingenWerk Nederlands*) is present in all such centres to inform and support asylum seekers during their asylum procedure. Asylum seekers remain in the centres until the asylum procedure is concluded.

During 2004-14, 9-15,000 asylum applications were received in the Netherlands each year. Each year, around 6-9,000 asylum seekers are granted refugee status or subsidiary protection.

### 4. Housing for refugees

Asylum seekers recognised as refugees are housed in municipalities. Municipalities are legally obliged to house a specific number of refugees according to a quota agreed every 6 months, under a legal concept called *huisvestingstaakstelling*. The quota is set on the basis of the municipality's population and an estimate by the national Immigration Service (IND) of the need for housing amongst refugees in the Netherlands for the coming 6-month period. This system of local quotas for refugee housing effectively ensures refugees are dispersed all over the national territory.

Difficulties in sourcing housing at the local level means that refugees often wait for very long periods to be moved to a municipality when the asylum procedure has concluded. Currently, around 30% of newly recognised refugees choose to find housing independently rather than wait for a municipality place to become available. This phenomena caused difficulties within the system in some instances, because COA was not always aware that a refugee has found accommodation themselves and so continued to try to place them in a municipality. Additionally, many refugees that move independently often move to very temporary or illegal housing, for example as sub-tenants.



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In 2012, responsibility for finding housing places for specific refugees in municipalities was moved from COA - previously responsible for 'matching' refugees to a house that has been offered by a municipality - to municipalities themselves. Currently, refugees are presented to a municipality almost immediately after they have received their residence permit, and the municipality is then responsible for finding a suitable house within a few weeks. The new model initially worked well, and waiting times for new refugees to be allocated housing were drastically reduced to an average of just 3 months. However, a recent increase in individuals arriving into the Netherlands under family reunification family - due to a change in the family reunion policy - and an increase in the number of Syrian asylum seekers granted refugee status, has led to waiting times increasing once more. An evaluation of the new matching system is due to take place in late 2014.

The provinces supervise how municipalities perform their duty to house refugees. Theoretically, if a municipality does not comply with the legal obligation to house a refugee, they can house them somewhere and reclaim the costs from the non-performing municipality. To date no province has exercised this power of sanction, but provinces sometimes use the possibility of implementing this measure to provoke municipalities into action, in particular where a municipality has a severe backlog in terms of the refugees that it is required to house.

## 5. Refugee resettlement

The Dutch resettlement programme offers a multiyear quota of 2000 persons received over a 4-year period (an average of 500 refugees per year, with places carried over to subsequent years within a defined 4-year period). In September 2013, a Parliamentary motion noted the under-utilisation of the quota in 2012 and 2013 and called for the unused places to be used during 2014 in addition that year's quota ([click here](#) for more information on the motion - in Dutch). A concurrent motion called for 250 places to be made available for Syrian refugees additional to the regular quota commitment ([click here](#) for more information on this motion - in Dutch). Currently, 250 places have been made available for Syrian refugees within the existing quota for 2014.

Resettled refugees are included within the legal obligation to house refugees, and COA is responsible for matching resettled refugees to housing offered by a specific municipality ahead of their arrival into the Netherlands.

Although refugee housing quotas are mandatory for municipalities, within quotas municipalities can voluntarily decide if they will receive resettled refugees. The COA will personally contact municipalities that have expressed or may express an interest in housing resettled refugees, and often target municipalities that have a backlog on their 6-monthly refugee housing quota to see if they would like to increase their numbers by receiving resettled refugees.



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For municipalities, resettled refugees are a group of interest for various different reasons. Resettled refugees are often families, whilst approximately 70% of refugees who arrive into the Netherlands as asylum seekers are single people, and municipalities often have more family homes than for single people. Additionally, resettled refugees are not able to refuse a house that is offered to them, whilst refugees leaving reception centres sometimes refuse houses provided for them by municipalities.

Currently, municipalities also receive additional per capita payments for housing resettled refugees (€2000 per adult and €1000 per child), although this arrangement will cease at the end of May 2014. Around 40% of municipalities receiving refugees have announced they will no longer house resettled refugees if additional payments are no longer provided and costs incurred in receiving resettled refugees are not compensated.<sup>3</sup> Extra costs that municipalities have raised for additional reimbursement are those related to furnishing houses, coordinating reception and integration, organising medical care and the more intense guidance required by resettled refugees relative to refugees exiting the asylum system.

In most municipalities the local departments of the Dutch Council for Refugees are responsible for the social guidance of resettled refugees. When COA contacts a municipality about their willingness to receive resettled refugees, the municipality will in most cases discuss this with the local Dutch Council for Refugees. In some cases, local Dutch Refugee Councils have successfully approached municipalities independently to advocate that they receive resettled refugees.

## 6. Integration

There is no specific national integration policy for refugees in the Netherlands, and refugees of any background/entry route can access the national mainstream integration programme for newcomers to the country. In recent years, however, the Dutch government has commissioned several pieces of research about the position of refugees within Dutch society and their integration experiences, the findings of which have led to new policies creating some exemptions within the integration programmes for refugees, as set out below.

Migrants are obliged to pass the 'civil exam' - or integration test - within 3 years of their arrival into the country (European citizens and other 'western' migrants are exempted from this obligation). If migrants do not pass the exam they can be fined €1250, and cannot receive a permanent residence permit until they have passed. Various institutions and organisations provide Dutch lessons and knowledge of the Dutch society courses linked to the civil exam, all of whom must have a specific quality mark (the so-called '*Blik op Werk*') in order to do so.

The civil exam consist of 5 components - knowledge of Dutch society, and the ability to speak, listen, write and read Dutch. All elements must be passed in order for the overall test to be passed. If a migrant is illiterate

<sup>3</sup> Pro Facto/WODC 2013 Directe plaatsing van hervestigde vluchtelingen in gemeenten.



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in his/her first language the time available to pass the test can be extended by 2 years.

Until 2013, the organisation of integration programmes was the responsibility of municipalities and took place at the local level. Currently, municipalities are only responsible for the organisation of social guidance for refugees and not for other migrants, who are now responsible for arranging their own language tuition. After migrants receive their residence permit they should then receive a letter from DUO, the national governmental educational authority, communicating the final date before which they must pass the civil exam. Whilst migrants can request a loan of up to €5000 from DUO to pay for the lessons, refugees can borrow a higher amount of €10,000. Refugees are additionally exempted from repaying the loan if they succeed in passing the exam within 3 years.

The Dutch Council for Refugees usually informs refugees about the organisation of their integration programme. In most provinces, the regional office of the Dutch Council for Refugees also directly provide lessons. This is a new area of work for the organisation - previously, the Dutch Council for Refugees only organised language support activities such as language buddies and homework support for children. Regional offices of the Dutch Council for Refugees that wish to provide courses must also carry the '*Blik op Werk*' quality mark.

In early 2014, a number of challenges exist for the effective operation of this new method of implementing the integration programme. A major obstacle to date has been communication between IND and DUO, resulting in migrants being informed very late of the requirement to take a course, often outside of the period during which they can request a loan. Only a very small number of migrants have begun their programmes, raising the possibility of fines and non-granting of permanent residence permits within 3 years of the new system starting. The national government has acknowledged these challenges and promised improvements in the future.