[Template:About](/wiki/Template:About" \o "Template:About) [Template:Distinguish2](/wiki/Template:Distinguish2) [Template:Pp-move-indef](/wiki/Template:Pp-move-indef) [Template:Use dmy dates](/wiki/Template:Use_dmy_dates) [Template:Infobox country](/wiki/Template:Infobox_country)

The **Netherlands** ([Template:IPAc-en](/wiki/Template:IPAc-en); [Template:Lang-nl](/wiki/Template:Lang-nl) [Template:IPA-nl](/wiki/Template:IPA-nl)) is the main [constituent country](/wiki/Constituent_country) ([Template:Lang-nl](/wiki/Template:Lang-nl)) of the [Kingdom of the Netherlands](/wiki/Kingdom_of_the_Netherlands). It is a small, densely populated country located in [Western Europe](/wiki/Western_Europe) with [three island territories](/wiki/Caribbean_Netherlands) in the [Caribbean](/wiki/Caribbean).[[nb 1]](#cite_note-1) The European part of the Netherlands borders [Germany](/wiki/Germany) to the east, [Belgium](/wiki/Belgium) to the south, and the [North Sea](/wiki/North_Sea) to the northwest, sharing [maritime borders](/wiki/Maritime_boundary) with Belgium, the [United Kingdom](/wiki/United_Kingdom) and Germany.[[1]](#cite_note-2) The largest and most important cities in the Netherlands are [Amsterdam](/wiki/Amsterdam), [The Hague](/wiki/The_Hague) and [Rotterdam](/wiki/Rotterdam). Amsterdam is the [country's capital](/wiki/Capital_of_the_Netherlands),[[2]](#cite_note-3) while [The Hague](/wiki/The_Hague) holds the Dutch seat of [government](/wiki/Cabinet_of_the_Netherlands) and [parliament](/wiki/States_General_of_the_Netherlands).[[3]](#cite_note-4) The [port of Rotterdam](/wiki/Port_of_Rotterdam) is the largest port in Europe – as large as the next three largest combined – and was the world's largest port between 1962 and 2004.[[4]](#cite_note-5) The name [*Holland*](/wiki/Holland) is also frequently used to refer informally to the whole of the country of the Netherlands.

"Netherlands" literally means "[lower countries](/wiki/Lower_Countries)", influenced by its low land and flat geography, with only about 50% of its land exceeding one metre [above sea level](/wiki/Above_mean_sea_level).[[5]](#cite_note-6) Most of the areas below sea level are man-made. Since the late 16th century, large areas ([polders](/wiki/Polder)) have been [reclaimed](/wiki/Land_reclamation) from the sea and lakes, amounting to nearly 17% of the country's current land mass. With a [population density](/wiki/Population_density) of 408 people per km2 – 500 if water is excluded – the Netherlands is a [very densely populated country](/wiki/List_of_sovereign_states_and_dependent_territories_by_population_density). Only [Bangladesh](/wiki/Bangladesh), [South Korea](/wiki/South_Korea), and [Taiwan](/wiki/Taiwan) have both a larger population and a higher population density. Nevertheless, the Netherlands is the world's second-largest exporter of food and agricultural products, after the United States.[[6]](#cite_note-7)[[7]](#cite_note-8) This is partly due to the fertility of the soil and the mild climate. The Netherlands was the third country in the world to have an elected [parliament](/wiki/Parliament), and since 1848 it has been governed as a [parliamentary](/wiki/Parliamentary_system) [democracy](/wiki/Democracy) and a [constitutional monarchy](/wiki/Constitutional_monarchy), organised as a [unitary state](/wiki/Unitary_state). The Netherlands has a long history of social tolerance and is generally regarded as a [liberal](/wiki/Liberalism) country, having legalised [abortion](/wiki/Abortion_in_the_Netherlands), [prostitution](/wiki/Prostitution_in_the_Netherlands) and [euthanasia](/wiki/Euthanasia_in_the_Netherlands), while maintaining a progressive [drugs policy](/wiki/Drug_policy_of_the_Netherlands). In 2001, it became the world's first country to legalise [same-sex marriage](/wiki/Same-sex_marriage_in_the_Netherlands).

The Netherlands is a founding member of the [EU](/wiki/European_Union), [Eurozone](/wiki/Eurozone), [G-10](/wiki/Group_of_Ten_(economic)), [NATO](/wiki/NATO), [OECD](/wiki/Organisation_for_Economic_Co-operation_and_Development) and [WTO](/wiki/World_Trade_Organization), and a part of the trilateral [Benelux](/wiki/Benelux) Union. The country is host to the [Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons](/wiki/Organisation_for_the_Prohibition_of_Chemical_Weapons) and five international courts: the [Permanent Court of Arbitration](/wiki/Permanent_Court_of_Arbitration), the [International Court of Justice](/wiki/International_Court_of_Justice), the [International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia](/wiki/International_Criminal_Tribunal_for_the_Former_Yugoslavia), the [International Criminal Court](/wiki/International_Criminal_Court) and the [Special Tribunal for Lebanon](/wiki/Special_Tribunal_for_Lebanon). The first four are situated in The Hague, as is the EU's criminal intelligence agency [Europol](/wiki/Europol) and judicial co-operation agency [Eurojust](/wiki/Eurojust). This has led to the city being dubbed "the world's legal capital".[[8]](#cite_note-9) The Netherlands is also a part of the [Schengen Area](/wiki/Schengen_Area). The Netherlands has a market-based mixed economy, ranking 17th of 177 countries according to the [Index of Economic Freedom](/wiki/Index_of_Economic_Freedom).[[9]](#cite_note-10) It had the [thirteenth-highest](/wiki/List_of_countries_by_GDP_(PPP)_per_capita) per capita income in the world in 2013 according to the [International Monetary Fund](/wiki/International_Monetary_Fund). In 2013, the [United Nations](/wiki/United_Nations) [World Happiness Report](/wiki/World_Happiness_Report) ranked the Netherlands as the seventh-happiest country in the world, reflecting its high quality of life.[[10]](#cite_note-11)

## Contents

* 1 Etymology[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=1)]
* 2 History[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=2)]
  + 2.1 Prehistory (before 500 BC)[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=3)]
  + 2.2 Germanic groups and Romans (500 BC – 410 AD)[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=4)]
  + 2.3 Early Middle Ages (411–1000)[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=5)]
  + 2.4 High Middle Ages (1000–1384)[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=6)]
  + 2.5 Burgundian and Habsburg Netherlands (1384–1581)[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=7)]
  + 2.6 Dutch Republic (1581–1795)[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=8)]
  + 2.7 Batavian Republic and kingdom (1795–1890)[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=9)]
  + 2.8 World wars and beyond (1890–present)[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=10)]
* 3 Geography[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=11)]
  + 3.1 Floods[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=12)]
  + 3.2 Delta works[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=13)]
  + 3.3 Climate[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=14)]
  + 3.4 Nature[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=15)]
  + 3.5 Caribbean islands[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=16)]
* 4 Politics[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=17)]
  + 4.1 Political culture[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=18)]
  + 4.2 Political parties[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=19)]
  + 4.3 Administrative divisions[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=20)]
  + 4.4 Foreign relations[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=21)]
  + 4.5 Military[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=22)]
* 5 Economy[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=23)]
  + 5.1 Agriculture[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=24)]
  + 5.2 Religion[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=28)]
  + 5.3 Education[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=29)]
  + 5.4 Healthcare[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=30)]

## Etymology[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=1)]

[Template:See also](/wiki/Template:See_also) The Netherlands in its entirety is often referred to by the much older designation "[Holland](/wiki/Holland)" (meaning *holt land*, or wood land), though this refers only to [North](/wiki/North_Holland) and [South Holland](/wiki/South_Holland), two of the nation's twelve provinces, formerly a single province and earlier the [County of Holland](/wiki/County_of_Holland). This originally [Frankish](/wiki/Franks) county emerged from the dissolved [Frisian Kingdom](/wiki/Frisian_Kingdom) and was after the decline of [Brabant](/wiki/Duchy_of_Brabant), economically and politically the most important county in the region. Because of this importance and the emphasis on Holland during the [Anglo-Dutch Wars](/wiki/Anglo-Dutch_Wars) in the 17th and 18th century, Holland served as a [*pars pro toto*](/wiki/Pars_pro_toto) for the entire country in English, and is considered either incorrect,[[11]](#cite_note-12)[[12]](#cite_note-13) informal,[[13]](#cite_note-14) or on occasion opprobrious, depending on the context, but is more acceptable when referring to the [national football team](/wiki/Netherlands_national_football_team).[[14]](#cite_note-15) Place names with *Neder* (or *lage*), *Nieder*, *Nether* (or *low*) and *Nedre* are in use in various places in countries where a Germanic language is spoken, and has in French and Latin its respective counterparts in *Bas* or *Inferior*. They are sometimes used in relation to a higher ground that consecutively is indicated as *Upper*, *Boven*, *Oben*, *Superior* or *Haut*. In the case of the Low Countries the geographical location of the *lower* region has been more or less downstream and near the sea, the geographical location of the upper region changed over time tremendously. The [Romans](/wiki/Roman_Empire) made a distinction between the Roman provinces of downstream [Germania Inferior](/wiki/Germania_Inferior) (nowadays part of Belgium and the Netherlands) and upstream [Germania Superior](/wiki/Germania_Superior) (nowadays part of Germany). The designation 'Low' to refer to the region returns again in the 10th century Duchy of [Lower Lorraine](/wiki/Lower_Lorraine), that covered much of the Low Countries.[[15]](#cite_note-16)[[16]](#cite_note-17) But this time the corresponding *Upper* region is [Upper Lorraine](/wiki/Upper_Lorraine), in nowadays Northern France. The [Dukes of Burgundy](/wiki/Dukes_of_Burgundy), who ruled the Low Countries in the 15th century, used the term *les pays de par deçà* (~ the lands over here) for the Low Countries as opposed to *les pays de par delà* (~ the lands over there) for their original homeland: [Burgundy](/wiki/Burgundy) in present-day east-central France.[[17]](#cite_note-18)[Template:Verify-inline](/wiki/Template:Verify-inline) However, *Niderlant* was also the region between the [Meuse](/wiki/Meuse_(river)) and the lower [Rhine](/wiki/Rhine) in the late Middle Ages. The area known as *Oberland* (High country) was in this deictic context considered to begin approximately at the nearby higher located [Cologne](/wiki/Cologne).

From the mid-sixteenth century on, the *Low Countries* or the "Netherlands" was – besides [Flanders](/wiki/Flanders) – probably the most commonly used name. The [Eighty Years' War](/wiki/Eighty_Years'_War) (1568–1648) divided the Low Countries into the northern [United Provinces](/wiki/Dutch_Republic) (*Belgica Foederata* in [Latin](/wiki/Latin), the "Federated Netherlands") and the [Southern Netherlands](/wiki/Southern_Netherlands) (*Belgica Regia*, "Royal Netherlands"). The Low Countries today is a designation that includes the countries the Netherlands, [Belgium](/wiki/Belgium) and [Luxembourg](/wiki/Luxembourg). It is used synonymous with the more neutral and geopolitical term [Benelux](/wiki/Benelux).

## History[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=2)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article)

### Prehistory (before 500 BC)[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=3)]

[thumb|upright|left|upright|The Netherlands in 5500 BC](/wiki/File:5500vc_ex_leg.jpg) [thumb|upright|left|upright|The Netherlands in 500 BC](/wiki/File:500vc_ex_leg_copy.jpg) [thumb|right|upright=.6|An oak figurine found in](/wiki/File:Mannetje_van_Willemstad.jpg) [Willemstad, North Brabant](/wiki/Willemstad,_North_Brabant) (4500 BC)

The prehistory of the area that is now the Netherlands was largely shaped by the sea and the rivers that constantly shifted the low-lying geography. The oldest human ([Neanderthal](/wiki/Neanderthal)) traces in the Netherlands were found in higher soils, near [Maastricht](/wiki/Maastricht), from 250,000 years ago. After the end of the Ice Age, various [Paleolithic](/wiki/Paleolithic) groups inhabited the area, and around 8000 BC [Mesolithic](/wiki/Mesolithic) tribes resided in Friesland and Drenthe, where the [oldest canoe](/wiki/Pesse_canoe) in the world was recovered.[[19]](#cite_note-20) Autochthonous [hunter-gatherers](/wiki/Hunter-gatherers) from the [Swifterbant culture](/wiki/Swifterbant_culture) are attested from around 5600 BC onwards.<ref name=Kooijmans1998>Louwe Kooijmans, L.P., "[Trijntje van de Betuweroute, Jachtkampen uit de Steentijd te Hardinxveld-Giessendam](https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/bitstream/handle/1887/1108/171_060.pdf?sequence=1)", 1998, *Spiegel Historiael* 33, pp. 423–428</ref> They are strongly linked to rivers and open water and were related to the southern Scandinavian [Ertebølle culture](/wiki/Ertebølle_culture) (5300–4000 BC). To the west, the same tribes might have built hunting camps to hunt winter game. People made the switch to [animal husbandry](/wiki/Animal_husbandry) sometime between 4800 BC and 4500 BC. Agricultural transformation took place very gradually, between 4300 BC and 4000 BC.[[20]](#cite_note-21) The farming [Funnelbeaker culture](/wiki/Funnelbeaker_culture) extended from Denmark through northern Germany into the northern Netherlands, and erected the [dolmens](/wiki/Dolmens), large stone grave monuments found in [Drenthe](/wiki/Drenthe) (built between 4100 BC and 3200 BC). To the southwest, the [Vlaardingen culture](/wiki/Vlaardingen_culture) (around 2600 BC), an apparently more primitive culture of hunter-gatherers survived well into the [Neolithic](/wiki/Neolithic) period. Around 2950 BC there was a quick and smooth transition from the [Funnelbeaker](/wiki/Funnelbeaker) farming culture to the pan-European [Corded Ware](/wiki/Corded_Ware) pastoralist culture.<ref name=Bloemers>[Template:Full citation needed](/wiki/Template:Full_citation_needed), [Template:Page needed](/wiki/Template:Page_needed), in J.H.F. Bloemers & T. van Dorp (Eds), *Pre- & protohistorie van de lage landen*. De Haan/Open Universiteit, 1991. ISBN 90-269-4448-9, NUGI 644</ref> The [Bell Beaker culture](/wiki/Bell_Beaker_culture), also present in the Netherlands, apparently rose out of the Corded Ware culture.<ref name=Lanting>Lanting, J.N. & J.D. van der Waals, (1976), "Beaker culture relations in the Lower Rhine Basin", [Template:Page needed](/wiki/Template:Page_needed), in Lanting et al. (Eds) *Glockenbechersimposion Oberried 1974*. Bussum-Haarlem: Uniehoek N.V.</ref>[[21]](#cite_note-22) Copper finds show that there was trade with other areas in Europe, as natural copper is not found in Dutch soil. The [Bronze Age](/wiki/Bronze_Age) probably started somewhere around 2000 BC and lasted until around 800 BC. The many finds in [Drenthe](/wiki/Drenthe) of rare and valuable objects, suggest that it was a trading centre in the Bronze Age. The [Bell Beaker cultures](/wiki/Beaker_culture) (2700–2100 BC) locally developed into the Bronze Age Barbed-Wire Beaker culture (2100–1800 BC). In the second millennium BC, the region was the boundary between the [Atlantic](/wiki/Atlantic_Bronze_Age) and [Nordic](/wiki/Nordic_Bronze_Age) horizons, roughly divided by the course of the [Rhine](/wiki/Rhine). In the north, the [Elp culture](/wiki/Elp_culture) (c. 1800 BC to 800 BC)[[22]](#cite_note-23) was a [Bronze Age](/wiki/Bronze_Age) archaeological culture having [earthenware](/wiki/Earthenware) pottery of low quality as a marker. The initial phase was characterised by [tumuli](/wiki/Tumulus) (1800–1200 BC) that were strongly tied to contemporary tumuli in northern Germany and Scandinavia, and were apparently related to the [Tumulus culture](/wiki/Tumulus_culture) (1600–1200 BC) in central Europe. This phase was followed by a subsequent change featuring [Urnfield](/wiki/Urnfield) ([cremation](/wiki/Cremation)) burial customs (1200–800 BC). The southern region became dominated by the [Hilversum culture](/wiki/Hilversum_culture) (1800–800 BC), which apparently inherited cultural ties with Britain of the previous Barbed-Wire Beaker culture.

The [Iron Age](/wiki/Iron_Age) brought a measure of prosperity. Iron ore was available throughout the country, including [bog iron](/wiki/Bog_iron) extracted from the [ore](/wiki/Ore) in [peat bogs](/wiki/Peat_bogs) in the north, the natural iron-bearing balls found in the [Veluwe](/wiki/Veluwe) and the red iron ore near the rivers in Brabant. [Smiths](/wiki/Blacksmith) travelled from small settlement to settlement with [bronze](/wiki/Bronze) and iron, fabricating tools on demand, including [axes](/wiki/Axe), [knives](/wiki/Knife), [pins](/wiki/Pins), [arrowheads](/wiki/Arrowheads) and [swords](/wiki/Sword). Some evidence even suggests the making of [Damascus steel](/wiki/Damascus_steel) [swords](/wiki/Sword) using an advanced method of [forging](/wiki/Forging) that combined the flexibility of iron with the strength of steel. The [King's grave of Oss](/wiki/Vorstengraf_(Oss)) dating from around 500 BC was found in a burial mound, the largest of its kind in western Europe and containing an iron sword with an inlay of gold and coral.

### Germanic groups and Romans (500 BC – 410 AD)[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=4)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [upright|thumb|left|Germanic dialects around 1 AD](/wiki/File:Germanic_dialects_ca._AD_1.png) [Template:Legend](/wiki/Template:Legend) [Template:Legend](/wiki/Template:Legend) [Template:Legend](/wiki/Template:Legend) [Template:Legend](/wiki/Template:Legend) [Template:Legend](/wiki/Template:Legend)

[thumb|](/wiki/File:Celts_in_Europe.png)[Template:LegendTemplate:Legend](/wiki/Template:Legend) The deteriorating climate in Scandinavia around 850 BC, that further deteriorated around 650 BC, might have triggered migration of [Germanic](/wiki/Germanic_peoples) tribes from the North. By the time this migration was complete, around 250 BC, a few general cultural and linguistic groups had emerged.[[23]](#cite_note-24)[[24]](#cite_note-25) The [North Sea Germanic](/wiki/North_Sea_Germanic) [Ingvaeones](/wiki/Ingvaeones) (or [Istvaeones](/wiki/Istvaeones)) inhabited the northern part of the [Low Countries](/wiki/Low_Countries). They would later develop into the [Frisii](/wiki/Frisii) and the early [Saxons](/wiki/Saxons).[[24]](#cite_note-25) A second grouping, the [Weser-Rhine Germanic](/wiki/Weser-Rhine_Germanic) , extended along the middle Rhine and [Weser](/wiki/Weser) and inhabited the Low Countries south of the great rivers. This group consisted of tribes that would eventually develop into the [Salian Franks](/wiki/Salian_Franks).[[24]](#cite_note-25) Also the [Celtic](/wiki/Celts) [La Tène culture](/wiki/La_Tène_culture) (c. 450 BC up to the Roman conquest) had expanded over a wide range, including the southern area of the [Low Countries](/wiki/Low_Countries). Some scholars have speculated that even a third ethnic identity and language, neither Germanic nor Celtic, survived in the Netherlands until the Roman period, the Iron Age [Nordwestblock](/wiki/Nordwestblock) culture,[[25]](#cite_note-26)[[26]](#cite_note-27) that eventually was being absorbed by the [Celts](/wiki/Celts) to the south and the Germanic peoples from the east.

[thumb|Rhine Frontier of around 70 AD](/wiki/File:Germania_70.svg) During the [Gallic Wars](/wiki/Gallic_Wars), the area south of the [Oude Rijn](/wiki/Oude_Rijn_(Utrecht_and_South_Holland)) and west of the [Rhine](/wiki/Rhine) was conquered by [Roman forces](/wiki/Roman_Empire) under [Julius Caesar](/wiki/Julius_Caesar) from 57 BC to 53 BC.[[26]](#cite_note-27) Caesar describes two main tribes living in what is now the southern Netherlands: the [Menapii](/wiki/Menapii) and the [Eburones](/wiki/Eburones). The Rhine became fixed as Rome's northern frontier around 12 AD. Notable towns would arise along the [Limes Germanicus](/wiki/Limes_Germanicus): [Nijmegen](/wiki/Nijmegen) and [Voorburg](/wiki/Voorburg). At first part of [Gallia Belgica](/wiki/Gallia_Belgica), the area south of the Limes became part of the [Roman province](/wiki/Roman_province) of [Germania Inferior](/wiki/Germania_Inferior). The area to the north of the Rhine, inhabited by the Frisii, remained outside Roman rule (but not its presence and control), while the border tribes [Batavi](/wiki/Batavi_(Germanic_tribe)) and [Cananefates](/wiki/Cananefates) served in the [Roman cavalry](/wiki/Ala_(Roman_military)).[[27]](#cite_note-28) The Batavi rose against the Romans in the [Batavian rebellion](/wiki/Batavian_rebellion) of 69AD, but were eventually defeated. The Batavi later merged with other tribes into the confederation of the [Salian Franks](/wiki/Salian_Franks), whose identity emerged at the first half of the third century.[[28]](#cite_note-29) Salian Franks appear in Roman texts as both allies and enemies. The Salian Franks were forced by the confederation of the [Saxons](/wiki/Saxons) from the east to move over the Rhine into Roman territory in the fourth century. From their new base in West Flanders and the Southwest Netherlands, they were raiding the [English Channel](/wiki/English_Channel). Roman forces pacified the region, but did not expel the Franks, who continued to be feared at least until the time of [Julian the Apostate](/wiki/Julian_the_Apostate) (358), when Salian Franks were allowed to settle as [*foederati*](/wiki/Foederati) in [Toxandria](/wiki/Toxandria).[[28]](#cite_note-29) After deteriorating climate conditions and the Romans withdrawal, the [Frisii](/wiki/Frisii) disappeared from the northern Netherlands, probably forced to resettle within Roman territory as [*laeti*](/wiki/Laeti) in c. 296. Coastal lands remained largely unpopulated for the next two centuries.[[29]](#cite_note-30)

### Early Middle Ages (411–1000)[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=5)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [thumb|upright|left|Franks, Frisians and Saxons (c. 716 AD)](/wiki/File:Frisia_716-la.svg)

After [Roman](/wiki/Roman_Empire) government in the area collapsed, the Franks expanded their territories in numerous kingdoms. By the 490s, [Clovis I](/wiki/Clovis_I) had conquered and united all these territories in the southern Netherlands in one [Frankish kingdom](/wiki/Frankish_kingdom), and from there continued his conquests into [Gaul](/wiki/Gaul). During this expansion, Franks migrating to the south eventually adopted the [Vulgar Latin](/wiki/Vulgar_Latin) of the local population.[[24]](#cite_note-25) A widening cultural divide grew with the Franks remaining in their original homeland in the north (i.e. southern Netherlands and Flanders), who kept on speaking [Old Frankish](/wiki/Old_Frankish), which by the ninth century had evolved into [Old Low Franconian](/wiki/Old_Low_Franconian) or [Old Dutch](/wiki/Old_Dutch).[[24]](#cite_note-25) A Dutch-French language boundary came into existence.[[24]](#cite_note-25)[[30]](#cite_note-31) [upright|thumb|left|Frankish expansion (481 to 870 AD)](/wiki/File:Franks_expansion.gif)

To the north of the Franks, climatic conditions on the coast improved, and during the [Migration Period](/wiki/Migration_Period) the abandoned land was resettled again, mostly by [Saxons](/wiki/Saxons), but also by the closely related [Angles](/wiki/Angles), [Jutes](/wiki/Jutes) and ancient [Frisii](/wiki/Frisii).[[31]](#cite_note-32) Many moved on to [England](/wiki/England) and came to be known as [Anglo-Saxons](/wiki/Anglo-Saxons), but those who stayed would be referred to as [Frisians](/wiki/Frisians) and their language as [Frisian](/wiki/Frisian_languages), named after the land that was once inhabited by Frisii.[[31]](#cite_note-32) Frisian was spoken along the entire southern North Sea coast, and it is still the closest to English related living language on continental Europe. By the seventh century a [Frisian Kingdom](/wiki/Frisian_Kingdom) (650–734) under King [Aldegisel](/wiki/Aldegisel) and King [Redbad](/wiki/Redbad,_King_of_the_Frisians) emerged with [Utrecht](/wiki/Utrecht_(city)) as its centre of power,[[31]](#cite_note-32)[[32]](#cite_note-33) while [Dorestad](/wiki/Dorestad) was a flourishing trading place.[[33]](#cite_note-34)[[34]](#cite_note-35) Between 600 and around 719 the cities were often fought over between the Frisians and the Franks. In 734, at the [Battle of the Boarn](/wiki/Battle_of_the_Boarn), the Frisians were defeated after a [series of wars](/wiki/Frisian–Frankish_wars). With the approval of the Franks, the [Anglo-Saxon](/wiki/Anglo-Saxon_mission) missionary [Willibrord](/wiki/Willibrord) converted the Frisian people to [Christianity](/wiki/Christianity). He established the [Archdiocese of Utrecht](/wiki/Archdiocese_of_Utrecht_(695–1580)) and became bishop of the Frisians. However, his successor Boniface was murdered by the Frisians in [Dokkum](/wiki/Dokkum), in 754. [thumb|upright|Geography of the Netherlands c. 800AD](/wiki/File:800nc_ex_leg.jpg)

[thumb|upright|](/wiki/File:Rorik_by_H._W._Koekkoek.jpg)[Rorik of Dorestad](/wiki/Rorik_of_Dorestad), [Viking](/wiki/Viking) ruler of [Friesland](/wiki/Friesland) (romantic 1912 depiction)

The Frankish [Carolingian empire](/wiki/Carolingian_empire) modeled itself after the Roman Empire and controlled much of Western Europe. However, as of 843, it was divided into three parts—[East](/wiki/East_Francia), [Middle](/wiki/Middle_Francia), and [West Francia](/wiki/West_Francia). Most of present-day Netherlands became part of [Middle Francia](/wiki/Middle_Francia), which was a weak kingdom and subject of numerous partitions and annexation attempts by its stronger neighbours. It comprises territories from [Frisia](/wiki/Frisia) in the north to the [Kingdom of Italy](/wiki/Kingdom_of_Italy_(medieval)) in the south. When the middle kingdom was partitioned, the lands north of the [Alps](/wiki/Alps) passed to [Lothair II](/wiki/Lothair_II_of_Lotharingia) and consecutively were named [Lotharingia](/wiki/Lotharingia). After he died in 869, Lotharingia was partitioned, into [Upper](/wiki/Upper_Lotharingia) and [Lower Lotharingia](/wiki/Lower_Lotharingia), the latter part comprising the Low Countries that technically became part of [East Francia](/wiki/East_Francia) in 870, although it was effectively under the control of Vikings, who raided the largely defenceless [Frisian](/wiki/Frisians) and [Frankish](/wiki/Franks) towns lying on the Frisian coast and along the rivers. Around 850, [Lothair I](/wiki/Lothair_I) acknowledged the Viking [Rorik of Dorestad](/wiki/Rorik_of_Dorestad) as ruler of most of Frisia.[[35]](#cite_note-36) Around 879, another Viking raided the Frisian lands, [Godfrid, Duke of Frisia](/wiki/Godfrid,_Duke_of_Frisia). The Viking raids made the sway of French and German lords in the area weak. Resistance to the Vikings, if any, came from local nobles, who gained in stature as a result, and that lay the basis for the disintegration of Lower Lotharingia into semi-independent states. One of these local nobles was [Gerolf of Holland](/wiki/Gerolf_of_Holland), who assumed lordship in Frisia after he helped to assassinate Godfrid, and Viking rule came to an end.

### High Middle Ages (1000–1384)[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=6)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) The [Holy Roman Empire](/wiki/Holy_Roman_Empire) (the successor state of East Francia) ruled much of the Low Countries in the 10th and 11th century, but was not able to maintain political unity. Powerful local nobles turned their cities, counties and duchies into private kingdoms, that felt little sense of obligation to the emperor. [Holland](/wiki/County_of_Holland), [Hainaut](/wiki/County_of_Hainaut), [Flanders](/wiki/County_of_Flanders), [Gelre](/wiki/Duchy_of_Gelre), [Brabant](/wiki/Duchy_of_Brabant), and the [Utrecht](/wiki/Bishopric_of_Utrecht) were in a state of almost continual war or paradoxically formed personal unions. The language and culture of most of the people who lived in the County of Holland were originally [Frisian](/wiki/Frisia). As Frankish settlement progressed from Flanders and Brabant, the area quickly became [Old Low Franconian](/wiki/Old_Low_Franconian) (or [Old Dutch](/wiki/Old_Dutch)). The rest of [Frisia](/wiki/Frisia) in the north (now [Friesland](/wiki/Friesland) and [Groningen](/wiki/Groningen_(province))) continued to maintain its independence and had its own institutions (collectively called the "[Frisian freedom](/wiki/Frisian_freedom)") and resented the imposition of the feudal system.

Around 1000 AD, due to several agricultural developments, the economy started to develop at a fast pace, and the higher productivity allowed workers to farm more land or to become tradesmen. Towns grew around [monasteries](/wiki/Monasteries) and [castles](/wiki/Castles), and a mercantile middle class began to develop in these urban areas, especially in Flanders and later also Brabant. Wealthy cities started to buy certain [privileges](/wiki/City_rights_in_the_Low_Countries) for themselves from the [sovereign](/wiki/Monarch). In practice, this meant that [Brugge](/wiki/Brugge) and [Antwerp](/wiki/Antwerp) became quasi-independent republics in their own right and would later develop into some of the most important cities and ports in Europe.

Around 1100 AD, farmers from [Flanders](/wiki/County_of_Flanders) and [Utrecht](/wiki/Bishopric_of_Utrecht) began draining and cultivating uninhabited swampy land in the western Netherlands, and made the emergence of the County of Holland as center of power possible. The title of [Count of Holland](/wiki/Count_of_Holland) were fought over in the [Hook and Cod Wars](/wiki/Hook_and_Cod_Wars) ([Template:Lang-nl](/wiki/Template:Lang-nl)) between 1350 and 1490. The Cod faction consisted of the more progressive cities, while the Hook faction consisted of the conservative noblemen. These noblemen invited the Duke [Philip the Good](/wiki/Philip_the_Good) of Burgundy – who was also Count of Flanders – to conquer Holland.

### Burgundian and Habsburg Netherlands (1384–1581)[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=7)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [thumb|left|*The*](/wiki/File:Van_Soest,_Four_Days_Battle.jpg) [*Four Days' Battle*](/wiki/Four_Days'_Battle)*, 1–4 June 1666*, during the [Second Anglo–Dutch War](/wiki/Second_Anglo–Dutch_War). [thumb|upright|The Low Countries in the late 14th century](/wiki/File:Political_map_of_the_Low_Countries_(1350)-NL.svg)

Most of the [Imperial](/wiki/Holy_Roman_Empire) and [French](/wiki/France_in_the_Middle_Ages) fiefs in what is now the Netherlands and Belgium were united in a [personal union](/wiki/Personal_union) by Philip the Good, duke of [Burgundy](/wiki/Duchy_of_Burgundy) in 1433. The [House of Valois-Burgundy](/wiki/House_of_Valois-Burgundy) and their [Habsburg](/wiki/House_of_Habsburg) heirs would rule the Low Countries in the period from 1384 to 1581. Before the Burgundian union, the Dutch identified themselves by the town they lived in or their local duchy or county. The Burgundian period is when the road to nationhood began. The new rulers defended Dutch trading interests, that developed rapidly. The fleets of the [County of Holland](/wiki/County_of_Holland) defeated the fleets of the [Hanseatic League](/wiki/Hanseatic_League) several times. [Amsterdam](/wiki/Amsterdam) grew and in the 15th century became the primary trading port in Europe for grain from the [Baltic region](/wiki/Baltic_region). Amsterdam distributed grain to the major cities of Belgium, Northern France and England. This trade was vital, because Holland could no longer produce enough grain to feed itself. Land drainage had caused the [peat](/wiki/Peat) of the former [wetlands](/wiki/Wetland) to reduce to a level that was too low for drainage to be maintained.

[thumb|right|upright|William I, Prince of Orange (](/wiki/File:William_I,_Prince_of_Orange_by_Adriaen_Thomasz._Key_Rijksmuseum_Amsterdam_SK-A-3148.jpg)[William the Silent](/wiki/William_the_Silent)), leader of the [Dutch Revolt](/wiki/Dutch_Revolt).

Under Habsburg [Charles V](/wiki/Charles_V,_Holy_Roman_Emperor), ruler of the [Holy Roman Empire](/wiki/Holy_Roman_Empire) and King of [Spain](/wiki/Spanish_Empire), all fiefs in the current Netherlands region were united into the [Seventeen Provinces](/wiki/Seventeen_Provinces), which also included most of present-day [Belgium](/wiki/Belgium), Luxembourg, and some adjacent land in what is now France and Germany. In 1568, the [Eighty Years' War](/wiki/Eighty_Years'_War) between the Provinces and their [Spanish](/wiki/Spanish_Empire) ruler began. In 1579, the northern half of the Seventeen Provinces forged the [Union of Utrecht](/wiki/Union_of_Utrecht) in which they committed to support each other in their defence against the Spanish army.[[36]](#cite_note-37) The Union of Utrecht is seen as the foundation of the modern Netherlands. In 1581, the northern provinces adopted the [Act of Abjuration](/wiki/Act_of_Abjuration), the declaration of independence in which the provinces officially deposed [Philip II of Spain](/wiki/Philip_II_of_Spain) as reigning monarch in the northern provinces.[[37]](#cite_note-38) The [Protestant](/wiki/Protestant) Queen [Elizabeth I of England](/wiki/Elizabeth_I_of_England) sympathised with the Dutch struggle against the Spanish, and sent an army of 7,600 soldiers to aid the Dutch in their war with the Catholic Spanish.[[38]](#cite_note-39) The English army under command of [Robert Dudley, 1st Earl of Leicester](/wiki/Robert_Dudley,_1st_Earl_of_Leicester) was of no real benefit to the Dutch rebellion.[[39]](#cite_note-40) Philip II, the son of Charles V, was not prepared to let them go easily, and war continued until 1648, when Spain under King [Philip IV](/wiki/Philip_IV_of_Spain) finally recognised the independence of the seven north-western provinces in the [Peace of Münster](/wiki/Peace_of_Münster). Parts of the southern provinces became *de facto* colonies of the new republican-mercantile empire.

### Dutch Republic (1581–1795)[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=8)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) After declaring their independence, the provinces of [Holland](/wiki/County_of_Holland), [Zeeland](/wiki/County_of_Zeeland), [Groningen](/wiki/Lordship_of_Groningen), [Friesland](/wiki/Lordship_of_Friesland), [Utrecht](/wiki/Lordship_of_Utrecht), [Overijssel](/wiki/Lordship_of_Overijssel), and [Gelderland](/wiki/Duchy_of_Gelderland) formed a [confederation](/wiki/Confederation). All these duchies, lordships and counties were autonomous and had their own government, the [States-Provincial](/wiki/States-Provincial). The [States General](/wiki/States_General_of_the_Netherlands), the confederal government, were seated in [The Hague](/wiki/The_Hague) and consisted of representatives from each of the seven provinces. The sparsely populated region of [Drenthe](/wiki/Lordship_of_Drenthe) was part of the republic too, although it was not considered one of the provinces. Moreover, the Republic had come to occupy during the [Eighty Years' War](/wiki/Eighty_Years'_War) a number of so-called [Generality Lands](/wiki/Generality_Lands) in [Flanders](/wiki/County_of_Flanders), [Brabant](/wiki/Duchy_of_Brabant) and [Limburg](/wiki/Duchy_of_Limburg). Their population was mainly Roman Catholic, and these areas did not have a governmental structure of their own, and were used as a buffer zone between the Republic and the Spanish-controlled [Southern Netherlands](/wiki/Southern_Netherlands).[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed)

[thumb|Winter landscape with skaters c. 1625](/wiki/File:Hendrick_Avercamp_-_Winterlandschap_met_schaatsers_bij_de_stad_Kampen.jpg) [thumb|](/wiki/File:Johannes_Lingelbach_001.jpg)[Amsterdam's](/wiki/Amsterdam) [Dam Square](/wiki/Dam_Square) in 1656

In the [Dutch Golden Age](/wiki/Dutch_Golden_Age), spanning much of the 17th century, the [Dutch Empire](/wiki/Dutch_Empire) grew to become one of the major seafaring and economic powers. Science, military, and art (especially [painting](/wiki/Dutch_Golden_Age_painting)) were among the most acclaimed in the world. By 1650, the Dutch owned 16,000 merchant ships.[[40]](#cite_note-41) The [Dutch East India Company](/wiki/Dutch_East_India_Company) and the [Dutch West India Company](/wiki/Dutch_West_India_Company) established [colonies](/wiki/Colonization) and [trading posts](/wiki/Trading_post) all over the world, including ruling the northern parts of [Taiwan](/wiki/Taiwan) between [1624–1662 and 1664–1667](/wiki/Taiwan_under_Dutch_rule). The [Dutch settlement in North America](/wiki/New_Netherland) began with the founding of [New Amsterdam](/wiki/New_Amsterdam) on the southern part of [Manhattan](/wiki/Manhattan) in 1614. In South Africa, the Dutch settled the [Cape Colony](/wiki/Cape_Colony) in 1652. [Dutch colonies in South America](/wiki/Dutch_colonisation_of_the_Guianas) were established along the many rivers in the fertile [Guyana](/wiki/Guyana) plains, among them [Colony of Surinam](/wiki/Surinam_(Dutch_colony)) (now [Suriname](/wiki/Suriname)). In Asia, the Dutch established the [Dutch East Indies](/wiki/Dutch_East_Indies) (now [Indonesia](/wiki/Indonesia)), and the only western trading post in Japan, [Dejima](/wiki/Dejima).

Many economic historians regard the Netherlands as the first thoroughly [capitalist](/wiki/Capitalism) country in the world. In early modern Europe it had the wealthiest trading city ([Amsterdam](/wiki/Amsterdam)) and the first full-time [stock exchange](/wiki/Amsterdam_Stock_Exchange). The inventiveness of the traders led to insurance and retirement funds as well as phenomena such as the [boom-bust cycle](/wiki/Boom_and_bust), the world's first [asset-inflation bubble](/wiki/Asset_price_inflation), the [tulip mania](/wiki/Tulip_mania) of 1636–1637, and the world's first [bear raider](/wiki/Bear_raid), [Isaac le Maire](/wiki/Isaac_le_Maire), who forced prices down by dumping stock and then buying it back at a discount.[[41]](#cite_note-42) The republic went into a state of general decline in the later 18th century, with economic competition from England and long-standing rivalries between the two main factions in Dutch society, the republican [*Staatsgezinden*](/wiki/Dutch_States_Party) and the supporters of the [stadtholder](/wiki/Stadtholder) the [*Prinsgezinden*](/wiki/Orangism_(Netherlands)), as main [political factions](/wiki/Political_faction).[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed)

### Batavian Republic and kingdom (1795–1890)[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=9)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) With the armed support of [revolutionary France](/wiki/French_Revolution), [Dutch republicans](/wiki/Patriots_(faction)) proclaimed the [Batavian Republic](/wiki/Batavian_Republic), modelled after the [French Republic](/wiki/French_First_Republic) and rendering the Netherlands a [unitary state](/wiki/Unitary_state) on 19 January 1795. The [stadtholder](/wiki/Stadtholder) [William V of Orange](/wiki/William_V_of_Orange) had fled to England. But from 1806 to 1810, the [Kingdom of Holland](/wiki/Kingdom_of_Holland) was set up by [Napoleon Bonaparte](/wiki/Napoleon_Bonaparte) as a puppet kingdom governed by his brother [Louis Bonaparte](/wiki/Louis_Bonaparte) to control the Netherlands more effectively. However, King Louis Bonaparte tried to serve Dutch interests instead of his brother's, and he was forced to abdicate on 1 July 1810. The Emperor sent in an army and the Netherlands became part of the French Empire until the autumn of 1813, when Napoleon was defeated in the [Battle of Leipzig](/wiki/Battle_of_Leipzig).[thumb|A map of the](/wiki/File:Dutch_Empire35.PNG) [Dutch colonial empire](/wiki/Dutch_Empire). Light green: territories administered by or originating from territories administered by the [Dutch East India Company](/wiki/Dutch_East_India_Company); dark green: the [Dutch West India Company](/wiki/Dutch_West_India_Company). In yellow the territories occupied later, during the 19th century. [William Frederick](/wiki/William_I_of_the_Netherlands), son of the last stadtholder, returned to the Netherlands in 1813 and proclaimed himself [Sovereign Prince of the Netherlands](/wiki/Sovereign_Principality_of_the_United_Netherlands). Two years later, the [Congress of Vienna](/wiki/Congress_of_Vienna) added the southern Netherlands to the north to create a strong country on the northern border of France. William Frederick raised this [United Netherlands](/wiki/United_Kingdom_of_the_Netherlands) to the status of a kingdom and proclaimed himself [King William I](/wiki/William_I_of_the_Netherlands). In addition, William became hereditary [Grand Duke of Luxembourg](/wiki/Grand_Ducal_Family_of_Luxembourg) in exchange for his German possessions. However, the Southern Netherlands had been culturally separate from the north since 1581, and [rebelled](/wiki/Belgian_Revolution). The south gained independence in 1830 as [Belgium](/wiki/Belgium), while the [personal union](/wiki/Personal_union) between Luxembourg and the Netherlands was severed in 1890, when [William III](/wiki/William_III_of_the_Netherlands) died with no surviving male heirs. [Ascendancy laws](/wiki/Salic_Law) prevented his daughter [Queen Wilhelmina](/wiki/Wilhelmina_of_the_Netherlands) from becoming the next Grand Duchess.

[thumb|The submission of](/wiki/File:Nicolaas_Pieneman_-_The_Submission_of_Prince_Dipo_Negoro_to_General_De_Kock.jpg) [Diponegoro](/wiki/Diponegoro) to [General De Kock](/wiki/Hendrik_Merkus_de_Kock) at the end of the [Java War](/wiki/Java_War) in 1830; [painting](/wiki/The_Submission_of_Prince_Dipo_Negoro_to_General_De_Kock) by [Nicolaas Pieneman](/wiki/Nicolaas_Pieneman)

The Belgian Revolution at home and the [Java War](/wiki/Java_War) in the Dutch East Indies brought the Netherlands to the brink of bankruptcy. However, the [Cultivation System](/wiki/Cultivation_System) was introduced in 1830; in the Dutch East Indies, 20% of village land had to be devoted to government crops for export. The policy brought the Dutch enormous wealth and made the colony self-sufficient. On the other hand, the colonies in the West Indies ([Dutch Guiana](/wiki/Surinam_(Dutch_colony)) and [Curaçao and Dependencies](/wiki/Curaçao_and_Dependencies)), relied heavily on [African slaves](/wiki/Atlantic_slave_trade) in which the Dutch part is estimated at 5–7 percent, or more than half a million Africans. The Netherlands abolished slavery in 1863.[[42]](#cite_note-43) Furthermore, slaves in [Suriname](/wiki/Suriname) would be fully free only in 1873, since the law stipulated that there was to be a mandatory 10-year transition.[[43]](#cite_note-44) The Dutch were also one of the last European countries to [industrialise](/wiki/Industrial_Revolution), in the second half of the 19th century.

### World wars and beyond (1890–present)[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=10)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [thumb|left|](/wiki/File:Rotterdam,_Laurenskerk,_na_bombardement_van_mei_1940.jpg)[Rotterdam](/wiki/Rotterdam) after [German air raids](/wiki/Rotterdam_Blitz) in 1940.

The Netherlands were able to remain neutral during [World War I](/wiki/World_War_I). In part, because the import of goods through the Netherlands proved essential to German survival, until the blockade by the British Royal Navy in 1916.[[44]](#cite_note-45) That changed in [World War II](/wiki/World_War_II), when [Nazi Germany](/wiki/Nazi_Germany) [invaded the Netherlands](/wiki/Battle_of_the_Netherlands) on 10 May 1940. The [Rotterdam Blitz](/wiki/Rotterdam_Blitz) forced the main element of the Dutch army to surrender four days later. During the occupation, over 100,000 [Dutch Jews](/wiki/History_of_the_Jews_in_the_Netherlands)[[45]](#cite_note-46) were rounded up and transported to Nazi [extermination camps](/wiki/Extermination_camp) of whom only a few survived. Dutch workers were conscripted for forced labour in Germany, [civilians who resisted](/wiki/Dutch_resistance) were killed in reprisal for attacks on German soldiers, and the countryside was plundered for food. Although there were thousands of Dutch who risked their lives by hiding Jews from the Germans, over 20,000 Dutch fascists [joined the Waffen SS](/wiki/23rd_SS_Volunteer_Panzer_Grenadier_Division_Nederland),[[46]](#cite_note-47) fighting on the [Eastern Front](/wiki/Eastern_Front_(World_War_II)).[[47]](#cite_note-48) Political [collaborators](/wiki/Collaboration_with_the_Axis_Powers_during_World_War_II) were members of the [fascist](/wiki/Fascism) [NSB](/wiki/National_Socialist_Movement_in_the_Netherlands), the only legal political party in the occupied Netherlands. On 8 December 1941, the [Dutch government-in-exile](/wiki/Dutch_government-in-exile) in London declared war on Japan,[[48]](#cite_note-49) but could not prevent [the Japanese occupation of the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia)](/wiki/Japanese_occupation_of_Indonesia).[[49]](#cite_note-50) In 1944–45, the [First Canadian Army](/wiki/First_Canadian_Army), which included Canadian, [British](/wiki/I_Corps_(United_Kingdom)) and [Polish](/wiki/1st_Armoured_Division_(Poland)) troops, was responsible for liberating much of the Netherlands.[[50]](#cite_note-51) But soon after [VE day](/wiki/VE_day), the Dutch fought a [colonial war against the new republic of Indonesia](/wiki/Indonesian_National_Revolution).

[thumb|The Netherlands became a co-founder of the](/wiki/File:Tratado_de_Lisboa_13_12_2007_(081).jpg) [European Union](/wiki/European_Union) predecessors (1993), introduced the [Euro](/wiki/Euro) currency (2002), and signed the [Lisbon Treaty](/wiki/Lisbon_Treaty) in 2007 (pictured).

In 1954, the [Charter for the Kingdom of the Netherlands](/wiki/Charter_for_the_Kingdom_of_the_Netherlands) reformed the political structure of the Netherlands, which was a result of international pressure to carry out [decolonisation](/wiki/Decolonisation). The Dutch colonies of [Surinam](/wiki/Surinam_(Dutch_colony)) and [Curaçao and Dependencies](/wiki/Curaçao_and_Dependencies) and the European country all became countries within the Kingdom, on a basis of equality. Indonesia had declared its independence in August 1945 (recognised in 1949), and thus was never part of the reformed Kingdom. [Suriname](/wiki/Suriname) followed in 1975. After the war the Netherlands left behind also an era of neutrality and gained closer ties with neighboring states. The Netherlands was one of the founding members of the [Benelux](/wiki/Benelux), the [NATO](/wiki/NATO), [Euratom](/wiki/Euratom) and the [European Coal and Steel Community](/wiki/European_Coal_and_Steel_Community), which would evolve into the [EEC](/wiki/European_Economic_Community) ([Common Market](/wiki/Common_Market)) and later the [European Union](/wiki/European_Union).

Government-encouraged emigration efforts to reduce [population density](/wiki/Population_density) prompted some 500,000 [Dutch people](/wiki/Dutch_people) to leave the country after the war.[[51]](#cite_note-52) The 1960s and 1970s were a time of great social and cultural change, such as rapid [*ontzuiling*](/wiki/Pillarization) (literally: depillarisation), a term that describes the decay of the old divisions along political and religious lines. Youths, and students in particular, rejected traditional mores and pushed for change in matters such as [women's rights](/wiki/Women's_rights), [sexuality](/wiki/Human_sexuality), [disarmament](/wiki/Disarmament) and [environmental issues](/wiki/Environmental_issues). On 10 October 2010, the [Netherlands Antilles](/wiki/Netherlands_Antilles) was [dissolved](/wiki/Dissolution_of_the_Netherlands_Antilles). Referendums were held on each island to determine their future status. As a result, the islands of [Bonaire](/wiki/Bonaire), [Sint Eustatius](/wiki/Sint_Eustatius) and [Saba](/wiki/Saba) (the BES islands) were to obtain closer ties with the Netherlands. This led to the incorporation of these three islands into the country of the Netherlands as [*special municipalities*](/wiki/Special_municipality_(Netherlands)) upon the dissolution of the Netherlands Antilles. The special municipalities are collectively known as the [Caribbean Netherlands](/wiki/Caribbean_Netherlands).

## Geography[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=11)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [thumb|A satellite overview of the Netherlands.](/wiki/File:2012-NL-prov-relief-3000.jpg)

The European area of the Netherlands lies between [latitudes](/wiki/Latitudes) [50°](/wiki/50th_parallel_north) and [54° N](/wiki/54th_parallel_north), and longitudes [3°](/wiki/3rd_meridian_east) and [8° E](/wiki/8th_meridian_east).

The Netherlands is geographically a very low and flat country, with about 26% of its area[[52]](#cite_note-53) and 21% of its population<ref name=milrek>[Template:Cite web](/wiki/Template:Cite_web)</ref> located below sea level, and only about 50% of its land exceeding one metre [above sea level](/wiki/Above_mean_sea_level).[[5]](#cite_note-6) The country is for the most part flat, with the exception of foothills in the far southeast, up to a height of no more than 321 metres, and some low hill ranges in the central parts. Most of the areas below sea level are man-made, caused by [peat](/wiki/Peat) extraction or achieved through [land reclamation](/wiki/Land_reclamation). Since the late 16th century, large [polder](/wiki/Polder) areas are preserved through elaborate drainage systems that include [dikes](/wiki/Dike_(construction)), canals and pumping stations. Nearly 17% of the country's land area is reclaimed from the sea and from lakes.

Much of the country was originally formed by the [estuaries](/wiki/Estuary) of three large European rivers: the [Rhine](/wiki/Rhine) (*Rijn*), the [Meuse](/wiki/Meuse_River) (*Maas*) and the [Scheldt](/wiki/Scheldt) (*Schelde*), as well as their [tributaries](/wiki/Tributary). The south-western part of the Netherlands is to this day a [river delta](/wiki/River_delta) of these three rivers, the [Rhine-Meuse-Scheldt delta](/wiki/Rhine-Meuse-Scheldt_delta).

The Netherlands is divided into north and south parts by the Rhine, the [Waal](/wiki/Waal_(river)), its main tributary branch, and the Meuse. In the past these rivers functioned as a natural barrier between [fiefdoms](/wiki/Fief) and hence historically created a cultural divide, as is evident in some phonetic traits that are recognisable on either side of what the Dutch call their "Great Rivers" (*de Grote Rivieren*). Another significant branch of the Rhine, the [IJssel](/wiki/IJssel) river, discharges into [Lake IJssel](/wiki/IJsselmeer), the former [Zuiderzee](/wiki/Zuiderzee) ('southern sea'). Just like the previous, this river forms a linguistic divide: people to the northeast of this river speak [Dutch Low Saxon](/wiki/Dutch_Low_Saxon) dialects (except for the province of [Friesland](/wiki/Friesland), which has its own language).[[53]](#cite_note-54)

### Floods[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=12)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [thumb|The](/wiki/File:Christmas_flood_1717.jpg) [Christmas flood of 1717](/wiki/Christmas_flood_of_1717) was the result of a northwesterly storm. In total, approximately 14,000 people drowned.

Over the centuries, the Dutch coastline has changed considerably as a result of natural disasters and human intervention. Most notable in terms of land loss was the storm of 1134, which created the [archipelago](/wiki/Archipelago) of [Zeeland](/wiki/Zeeland) in the south-west.

On 14 December 1287, [St. Lucia's flood](/wiki/St._Lucia's_flood) affected the Netherlands and Germany killing more than 50,000 people in one of the most destructive floods in recorded history.[[54]](#cite_note-55) The [St. Elizabeth flood](/wiki/St._Elizabeth's_flood_(1421)) of 1421 and the mismanagement in its aftermath destroyed a newly reclaimed [polder](/wiki/Polder), replacing it with the [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) [*Biesbosch*](/wiki/Biesbosch) tidal floodplains in the south-centre. The huge [North Sea flood of early February 1953](/wiki/North_Sea_flood_of_1953) caused the collapse of several dikes in the south-west of the Netherlands; more than 1,800 people drowned in the flood. The Dutch government subsequently instituted a large-scale programme, the "[Delta Works](/wiki/Deltawerken)", to protect the country against future flooding, which was completed over a period of more than thirty years.

[thumb|left|Map illustrating areas of the Netherlands below sea level](/wiki/File:The_Netherlands_compared_to_sealevel.png) The impact of disasters was to an extent increased through human activity. Relatively high-lying [swampland](/wiki/Swamp) was drained to be used as farmland. The drainage caused the fertile [peat](/wiki/Peat) to contract and ground levels to drop, upon which groundwater levels were lowered to compensate for the drop in ground level, causing the underlying peat to contract further. Additionally, until the 19th century peat was mined, dried, and used for fuel, further exacerbating the problem. Centuries of extensive and poorly controlled [peat](/wiki/Peat) extraction lowered an already low land surface by several metres. Even in flooded areas, peat extraction continued through turf dredging.

Because of the flooding, farming was difficult, which encouraged foreign trade, the result of which was that the Dutch were involved in world affairs since the early 14th/15th century.[[55]](#cite_note-56) To guard against floods, a series of defences against the water were contrived. In the first millennium [AD](/wiki/AD), villages and farmhouses were built on man-made hills called *terps*. Later, these terps were connected by dikes. In the 12th century, local government agencies called *"*[*waterschappen*](/wiki/Water_board_(Netherlands))*"* ("water boards") or *"*[*hoogheemraadschappen*](/wiki/Water_board_(Netherlands))*"* ("high home councils") started to appear, whose job it was to maintain the water level and to protect a region from floods; these agencies continue to exist. As the ground level dropped, the dikes by necessity grew and merged into an integrated system. By the 13th century [windmills](/wiki/Windmill) had come into use to pump water out of areas below sea level. The windmills were later used to drain lakes, creating the famous [polders](/wiki/Polder).[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed)

[thumb|A polder at 5.53 metres below sea level.](/wiki/File:Netherlands,_Zoetermeer,_Zoetermeerse_Meerpolder_(1).JPG) In 1932 the [*Afsluitdijk*](/wiki/Afsluitdijk) ("Closure Dike") was completed, blocking the former [*Zuiderzee*](/wiki/Zuiderzee) (Southern Sea) from the North Sea and thus creating the [IJsselmeer](/wiki/IJsselmeer) ([IJssel](/wiki/IJssel) Lake). It became part of the larger [Zuiderzee Works](/wiki/Zuiderzee_Works) in which four polders totalling [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) were reclaimed from the sea.[[56]](#cite_note-57)[[57]](#cite_note-58) The Netherlands is one of the countries that may suffer most from [climate change](/wiki/Climate_change). Not only is the rising sea a problem, but erratic weather patterns may cause the rivers to overflow.[[58]](#cite_note-59)[[59]](#cite_note-60)[[60]](#cite_note-61)

### Delta works[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=13)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [thumb|left|The](/wiki/File:Deltawerken_na.png) [Delta Works](/wiki/Delta_Works) are located in the provinces of [South Holland](/wiki/South_Holland) and [Zeeland](/wiki/Zeeland). After the [1953 disaster](/wiki/North_Sea_Flood_of_1953), the [Delta Works](/wiki/Delta_Works) were constructed, a comprehensive set of civil works throughout the Dutch coast. The project started in 1958 and was largely completed in 1997 with the completion of the [Maeslantkering](/wiki/Maeslantkering). New projects have been periodically started since to renovate and renew the Delta Works. A main goal of the Delta project was to reduce the risk of flooding in South Holland and Zeeland to once per 10,000 years (compared to 1 per 4000 years for the rest of the country). This was achieved by raising [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) of outer sea-dykes and [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) of inner, canal, and river dikes, and by closing off the sea [estuaries](/wiki/Estuary) of the Zeeland province. New risk assessments occasionally show problems requiring additional Delta project dyke reinforcements. The Delta project is considered by the [American Society of Civil Engineers](/wiki/American_Society_of_Civil_Engineers) as one of the [seven wonders of the modern world](/wiki/American_Society_of_Civil_Engineers#World_wonders).[[61]](#cite_note-62) It is anticipated that [global warming](/wiki/Global_warming) in the 21st century will result in a rise in [sea level](/wiki/Sea_level) which, despite popular belief, will possibly not overwhelm the [measures the Netherlands has taken to control floods](/wiki/Flood_control_in_the_Netherlands).[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed) Even more specifically, the Netherlands is the only country in the world actively preparing for a sea level rise. A politically neutral Delta Commission has formulated an action plan to cope with a sea level rise of [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) and a simultaneous land height decline of [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert). The plan encompasses the reinforcement of the existing coastal defenses like [dikes](/wiki/Levee) and [dunes](/wiki/Dune) with [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) of additional flood protection. Climate change will not only threaten the Netherlands from the sea side, but could also alter rain fall patterns and river run-off. To protect the country from river flooding, another program is already being executed. The [Room for the River plan](/wiki/Room_for_the_River_(Netherlands)) grants more flow space to rivers, protects the major populated areas and allows for periodic flooding of indefensible lands. The few residents that lived in these so-called "overflow areas" have been moved to higher ground, with some of that ground having been raised above anticipated flood levels.<ref name=NYT021313>[Template:Cite news](/wiki/Template:Cite_news)</ref>

Protecting the country against floods is one element of climate change. The other is that the pressure of the sea water on ground water will increase.[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed) As a result, the fresh water table will be pushed more inland, resulting in more brackish or saline groundwater in the coastal provinces. Due to this change, some drinking water areas will be forced to apply desalination despite the apparent abundance of water. It will also affect agriculture. The [greenhouses](/wiki/Greenhouse) can continue their production by becoming more water efficient (they are already disconnected from the groundwater, thereby not becoming more saline), though they will need to become more energy and water efficient. The push of more brackish water into the mainland will also cause changes in flora and fauna.[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed)

### Climate[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=14)]

The predominant wind direction in the Netherlands is southwest, which causes a moderate [maritime climate](/wiki/Oceanic_climate), with cool summers and mild winters, and typically high humidity. This is especially true close to the Dutch coastline, where the difference in temperature between summer and winter, as well as between day and night is noticeably smaller than it is in the southeast of the country.

The following tables are based on mean measurements by the [KNMI](/wiki/KNMI_(institute)) weather station in [De Bilt](/wiki/De_Bilt) between 1981 and 2010:

[Template:Weather box](/wiki/Template:Weather_box)

Ice days (maximum temperature below [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert)) usually occur from December until February, with the occasional rare ice day prior to or after that period. Freezing days (minimum temperature below [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert)) occur much more often, usually ranging from mid-November to late March, but not rarely measured as early as mid-October and as late as mid-May. If one chooses the height of measurement to be [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) above ground instead of [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert), one may even find such temperatures in the middle of the summer. On average, snow can occur from November to April, but sometimes occurs in May or October too.

[thumb|](/wiki/File:Nijlânnermolen_Workum.jpg)[Friesland](/wiki/Friesland)

Warm days (maximum temperature above [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert)) in De Bilt are usually found in April to October, but in some parts of the country these warm days can also occur in March, or even sometimes in November or February (usually not in De Bilt, however). Summer days (maximum temperature above [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert)) are usually measured in De Bilt from May until September, tropical days (maximum temperature above [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert)) are rare and usually occur only in June to August.

Precipitation throughout the year is distributed relatively equally each month. Summer and autumn months tend to gather a little more precipitation than the other months, mainly because of the intensity of the rainfall rather than the frequency of rain days (this is especially the case in summer, when lightning is also much more frequent). [thumb|](/wiki/File:Netherlands_Grote_Peel_lake.jpg)[De Groote Peel National Park](/wiki/De_Groote_Peel_National_Park) in [North Brabant](/wiki/North_Brabant). The number of sunshine hours is affected by the fact that because of the geographical latitude, the length of the days varies between barely eight hours in December and nearly 17 hours in June.

### Nature[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=15)]

[Template:Further](/wiki/Template:Further) The Netherlands has 20 national parks and hundreds of other nature reserves, that include [lakes](/wiki/Lake), [heathland](/wiki/Heathland), [woods](/wiki/Woodland), [dunes](/wiki/Dune) and other habitats. Most of these are owned by [Staatsbosbeheer](/wiki/Staatsbosbeheer), the national department for [forestry](/wiki/Forestry) and [nature conservation](/wiki/Habitat_conservation) and [Natuurmonumenten](/wiki/Vereniging_Natuurmonumenten) (literally 'Natures monuments'), a private organisation that buys, protects and manages nature reserves. The Dutch part of the [Wadden Sea](/wiki/Wadden_Sea) in the north, with its [tidal flats](/wiki/Tidal_flat) and [wetlands](/wiki/Wetland), is rich in [biological diversity](/wiki/Biodiversity), and was declared a [UNESCO](/wiki/UNESCO) [World Heritage Nature Site](/wiki/World_Heritage_Site) in 2009.

[thumb|right|](/wiki/File:Phoca_vitulina_Terschelling.jpg)[Common seals](/wiki/Harbor_seal) on [Terschelling](/wiki/Terschelling), a [Wadden Sea](/wiki/Wadden_Sea) island

The [Oosterschelde](/wiki/Oosterschelde), formerly the northeast [estuary](/wiki/Estuary) of the river [Scheldt](/wiki/Scheldt) was designated a national park in 2002, thereby making it the largest national park in the Netherlands at an area of [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert). It consists primarily of the salt waters of the Oosterschelde, but also includes mud flats, meadows, and shoals. Because of the large variety of sea life, including unique regional species, the park is popular with [Scuba divers](/wiki/Scuba_diving). Other activities include sailing, fishing, cycling, and bird watching.

[Phytogeographically](/wiki/Phytogeography), the Netherlands is shared between the Atlantic European and Central European provinces of the [Circumboreal Region](/wiki/Circumboreal_Region) within the [Boreal Kingdom](/wiki/Boreal_Kingdom). According to the [World Wide Fund for Nature](/wiki/World_Wide_Fund_for_Nature), the territory of the Netherlands belongs to the [ecoregion](/wiki/Ecoregion) of Atlantic mixed forests. In 1871, the last old original natural woods were cut down, and most woods today are planted monocultures of trees like [Scots pine](/wiki/Scots_pine) and trees that are not native to the Netherlands.[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed) These woods were planted on [anthropogenic heaths](/wiki/Heath_(habitat)#Anthropogenic_heaths) and sand-drifts (overgrazed heaths) ([Veluwe](/wiki/Veluwe)).

### Caribbean islands[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=16)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) The [Caribbean Netherlands](/wiki/Caribbean_Netherlands) are designated as special municipalities of the Netherlands. The islands form a part of the [Lesser Antilles](/wiki/Lesser_Antilles). Within this island group, [thumb|right|View of the coast of](/wiki/File:Bonaire_1.jpg) [Bonaire](/wiki/Bonaire)

* **Bonaire** is part of the [ABC islands](/wiki/ABC_islands_(Lesser_Antilles)) within the [Leeward Antilles](/wiki/Leeward_Antilles) island chain off the [Venezuelan](/wiki/Venezuela) coast. The Leeward Antilles have a mixed volcanic and coral origin.
* **Saba** and **Sint Eustatius** are part of the [SSS islands](/wiki/SSS_islands). They are located east of [Puerto Rico](/wiki/Puerto_Rico) and the [Virgin Islands](/wiki/Virgin_Islands). Although in the English language they are considered part of the [Leeward Islands](/wiki/Leeward_Islands), French, Spanish, [Dutch](/wiki/Dutch_language) and the English spoken locally consider them part of the [Windward Islands](/wiki/Windward_Islands). The Windward Islands are all of volcanic origin and hilly, leaving little ground suitable for [agriculture](/wiki/Agriculture). The highest point is [Mount Scenery](/wiki/Mount_Scenery), [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert), on [Saba](/wiki/Saba). This is the highest point in the country, and is also the highest point of the entire [Kingdom of the Netherlands](/wiki/Kingdom_of_the_Netherlands).

The islands of the Caribbean Netherlands enjoy a [tropical](/wiki/Tropical) [climate](/wiki/Climate) with warm weather all year round. The Leeward Antilles are warmer and drier than the Windward islands. In summer, the Windward Islands can be subject to [hurricanes](/wiki/Hurricanes).

## Politics[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=17)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [thumb|left|The](/wiki/File:Den_Haag_Binnenhof.jpg) [Binnenhof](/wiki/Binnenhof), where the lower and upper houses of the States General meet

The Netherlands has been a [constitutional monarchy](/wiki/Constitutional_monarchy) since 1815 and a [parliamentary democracy](/wiki/Parliamentary_system) since 1848. The Netherlands is described as a [consociational state](/wiki/Consociational_state). Dutch politics and governance are characterised by an effort to achieve broad consensus on important issues, within both the political community and society as a whole. In 2010, [*The Economist*](/wiki/The_Economist) ranked the Netherlands as the 10th [most democratic country in the world](/wiki/Democracy_Index). The [monarch](/wiki/Dutch_monarchy) is the [head of state](/wiki/Head_of_state), at present [King Willem-Alexander](/wiki/King_Willem-Alexander). Constitutionally, the position is equipped with limited powers. By law, the king (the title queen has no constitutional significance) has the right to be periodically briefed and consulted on government affairs. Depending on the personalities and relationships of the king and the ministers, the king might have *influence* beyond the *power* granted by the constitution.

[thumb|upright|](/wiki/File:Willem-Alexander_(Royal_Wedding_in_Stockholm,_2010)_cropped.jpg)[Willem-Alexander](/wiki/Willem-Alexander_of_the_Netherlands), King of the Netherlands since 2013

The [executive power](/wiki/Executive_(government)) is formed by the [council of Ministers](/wiki/Council_of_Ministers_of_the_Netherlands), the deliberative council of the [Dutch cabinet](/wiki/Cabinet_of_the_Netherlands). The cabinet usually consists of 13 to 16 ministers and a varying number of [state secretaries](/wiki/State_Secretary_(Netherlands)). One to three ministers are [ministers without portfolio](/wiki/Minister_without_portfolio). The [head of government](/wiki/Head_of_government) is the [Prime Minister of the Netherlands](/wiki/Prime_Minister_of_the_Netherlands), who often is the leader of the largest party of the coalition. The Prime Minister is a [*primus inter pares*](/wiki/Primus_inter_pares), with no explicit powers beyond those of the other ministers. [Mark Rutte](/wiki/Mark_Rutte) has been Prime Minister since October 2010; the Prime Minister had been the leader of the largest party continuously since 1973.

The cabinet is [responsible](/wiki/Ministerial_responsibility) to the [bicameral](/wiki/Bicameralism) parliament, the [States General](/wiki/States_General_of_the_Netherlands), which also has [legislative powers](/wiki/Legislative). The 150 members of the [House of Representatives](/wiki/House_of_Representatives_of_the_Netherlands), the [Lower House](/wiki/Lower_House), are elected in [direct elections](/wiki/Direct_election) on the basis of [party-list proportional representation](/wiki/Party-list_proportional_representation). These are held every four years, or sooner in case the cabinet falls (for example: when one of the chambers carries a [motion of no confidence](/wiki/Motion_of_no_confidence), the cabinet offers its resignation to the monarch). The [States-Provincial](/wiki/States-Provincial) are directly elected every four years as well. The members of the provincial assemblies elect the 75 members of the [Senate](/wiki/Senate_of_the_Netherlands), the [upper house](/wiki/Upper_house), which has the power to reject laws, but not propose or amend them.

### Political culture[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=18)]

Both trade unions and [employers organisations](/wiki/Employers_organisation) are consulted beforehand in policymaking in the financial, economic and social areas. They meet regularly with government in the [Social-Economic Council](/wiki/Social-Economic_Council). This body advises government and its advice cannot be put aside easily.

The Netherlands has a long tradition of [social tolerance](/wiki/Toleration). In the 18th century, while the [Dutch Reformed Church](/wiki/Dutch_Reformed_Church) was the [state religion](/wiki/State_religion), [Catholicism](/wiki/Roman_Catholicism_in_the_Netherlands), other forms of Protestantism, such as Baptists and Lutherans, and [Judaism](/wiki/History_of_the_Jews_in_the_Netherlands) were tolerated but discriminated against.

In the late 19th century this Dutch tradition of religious tolerance transformed into a system of [pillarisation](/wiki/Pillarisation), in which religious groups coexisted separately and only interacted at the level of government. This tradition of tolerance influences Dutch [criminal justice](/wiki/Criminal_justice_system_of_the_Netherlands) policies on [recreational drugs](/wiki/Drug_policy_of_the_Netherlands), [prostitution](/wiki/Prostitution_in_the_Netherlands), [LGBT rights](/wiki/LGBT_rights_in_the_Netherlands), [euthanasia](/wiki/Euthanasia), and [abortion](/wiki/Abortion_in_the_Netherlands), which are among the most liberal in the world.

### Political parties[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=19)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [thumb|upright|](/wiki/File:Mark_Rutte-4.jpg)[Mark Rutte](/wiki/Mark_Rutte), Prime Minister of the Netherlands since October 2010.

Because of the [multi-party system](/wiki/Political_parties_of_the_Netherlands), no single party has held a majority in parliament since the 19th century, and [coalition cabinets](/wiki/Coalition_government) had to be formed. Since [suffrage](/wiki/Suffrage) became universal in 1919, the Dutch political system has been dominated by three families of political parties: the strongest of which were the [Christian democrats](/wiki/Christian_democracy), currently represented by the [Christian Democratic Appeal](/wiki/Christian_Democratic_Appeal) (CDA); second were the [social democrats](/wiki/Social_democracy), represented by the [Labour Party](/wiki/Dutch_Labour_Party) (PvdA); and third were the [liberals](/wiki/Liberalism_in_the_Netherlands), of which the right wing [People's Party for Freedom and Democracy](/wiki/People's_Party_for_Freedom_and_Democracy) (VVD) is the main representative.

These parties co-operated in coalition cabinets in which the Christian democrats had always been a partner: so either a [centre-left](/wiki/Centre-left) coalition of the Christian democrats and social democrats was ruling or a [centre-right](/wiki/Centre-right) coalition of Christian democrats and liberals. In the 1970s, the [party system](/wiki/Party_system) became more volatile: the Christian democratic parties lost seats, while new parties became successful, such as the [radical](/wiki/Radicalism_(historical)) democrat and [progressive](/wiki/Progressivism) liberal [D66](/wiki/D'66).

In the [1994 election](/wiki/Dutch_general_election,_1994), the CDA lost its dominant position. A "[purple](/wiki/Purple_(government))" cabinet was formed by VVD, D66, and PvdA. In the [2002 elections](/wiki/Dutch_general_election,_2002), this cabinet lost its majority, because of an increased support for the CDA and the rise of the right [LPF](/wiki/Lijst_Pim_Fortuyn), a new political party, around [Pim Fortuyn](/wiki/Pim_Fortuyn), who was assassinated a week before the elections. A short-lived [cabinet](/wiki/First_Balkenende_cabinet) was formed by CDA, VVD, and LPF, which was led by the CDA leader [Jan Peter Balkenende](/wiki/Jan_Peter_Balkenende). After the [2003 elections](/wiki/Dutch_general_election,_2003), in which the LPF lost most of its seats, a [cabinet](/wiki/Balkenende_II) was formed by CDA, VVD, and D66. The cabinet initiated an ambitious programme of reforming the [welfare state](/wiki/Welfare_state), the [healthcare system](/wiki/Healthcare_in_the_Netherlands), and [immigration policy](/wiki/Immigration_policy).

In June 2006, the cabinet fell after D66 voted in favour of a motion of no confidence against the Minister of Immigration and Integration, [Rita Verdonk](/wiki/Rita_Verdonk), who had instigated an investigation of the asylum procedure of [Ayaan Hirsi Ali](/wiki/Ayaan_Hirsi_Ali), a VVD [MP](/wiki/Member_of_Parliament). A [caretaker cabinet](/wiki/Balkenende_III) was formed by CDA and VVD, and [general elections](/wiki/Dutch_general_election,_2006) were held on 22 November 2006. In these elections, the CDA remained the largest party and the [Socialist Party](/wiki/Socialist_Party_(Netherlands)) made the largest gains. The [formation of a new cabinet](/wiki/2006–07_Dutch_cabinet_formation) took three months, resulting in a [coalition](/wiki/Netherlands_cabinet_Balkenende-4) of CDA, PvdA, and [ChristianUnion](/wiki/ChristianUnion).

On 20 February 2010, the cabinet fell when the PvdA refused to prolong the involvement of the Dutch Army in [Uruzgan](/wiki/Uruzgan), Afghanistan.[[62]](#cite_note-63) [Snap elections](/wiki/Snap_election) were held on [9 June 2010](/wiki/Dutch_general_election,_2010), with devastating results for the previously largest party, the CDA, which lost about half of its seats, resulting in 21 seats. The VVD became the largest party with 31 seats, closely followed by the PvdA with 30 seats. The big winner of the 2010 elections was [Geert Wilders](/wiki/Geert_Wilders), whose right wing [PVV](/wiki/Party_for_Freedom),[[63]](#cite_note-64)[[64]](#cite_note-65) the ideological successor to the [LPF](/wiki/Pim_Fortuyn_List), more than doubled its number of seats.[[65]](#cite_note-66) [Negotiation talks for a new government](/wiki/2010_Dutch_cabinet_formation) resulted in a [minority government](/wiki/Minority_government), led by VVD (a first) in coalition with CDA, which was sworn in on 14 October 2010. This unprecedented minority government was supported by PVV, but proved ultimately to be unstable,[[66]](#cite_note-67) when on 21 April 2012, Wilders, leader of PVV, unexpectedly 'torpedoed seven weeks of austerity talks' on new austerity measures, paving the way for early elections.[[67]](#cite_note-68)[[68]](#cite_note-69)[[69]](#cite_note-70) VVD and PvdA were the big winners of the elections. Since 5 November 2012 they have formed the [second Rutte cabinet](/wiki/Second_Rutte_cabinet).

### Administrative divisions[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=20)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article)

[thumb|330px|](/wiki/File:Map_provinces_Netherlands-en.svg)[Provinces](/wiki/Provinces_of_the_Netherlands) and [special municipalities](/wiki/Special_municipality_(Netherlands)) of the Netherlands. The Netherlands is divided into twelve provinces, each under a Commissioner of the King (*Commissaris van de Koning*), except for [Limburg province](/wiki/Limburg_(Netherlands)) where the position is named Governor (*Gouverneur*). All provinces are divided into [municipalities](/wiki/Municipalities_of_the_Netherlands) (*gemeenten*), of which there are 390 (2016).<ref name=MUNICPS>[Template:Cite web](/wiki/Template:Cite_web)</ref>

The country is also subdivided into 24 water districts, governed by a [water board](/wiki/Water_board_(Netherlands)) (*waterschap* or *hoogheemraadschap*), each having authority in matters concerning water management.<ref name=WATER>[Template:Cite web](/wiki/Template:Cite_web)</ref> The creation of water boards actually pre-dates that of the nation itself, the first appearing in 1196. The Dutch water boards are among the oldest democratic entities in the world still in existence. Direct elections of the water boards take place every 4 years.

The administrative structure on the 3 BES islands, collectively known as the [Caribbean Netherlands](/wiki/Caribbean_Netherlands), is different. These islands have the status of *openbare lichamen (*[*public bodies*](/wiki/Public_body_(Netherlands))*)* rather than municipalities and as administrative units are generally referred to as *special municipalities*. They are not part of a province.<ref name=WOLBES>[Template:Cite web](/wiki/Template:Cite_web)</ref>

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| |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | [**Flag**](/wiki/Flag) | **Province** | **Capital** | **Largest city** | **Area**[**[70]**](#cite_note-71) **(km2)** | **Population**[**[71]**](#cite_note-72) **31-08-2015** | **Density (per km2)** | | [Template:Flagicon](/wiki/Template:Flagicon) | [Drenthe](/wiki/Drenthe) | [Assen](/wiki/Assen) | [Assen](/wiki/Assen) | 2,639 | 488,871 | 185 | | [Template:Flagicon](/wiki/Template:Flagicon) | [Flevoland](/wiki/Flevoland) | [Lelystad](/wiki/Lelystad) | [Almere](/wiki/Almere) | 1,415 | 403,280 | 285 | | [Template:Flagicon](/wiki/Template:Flagicon) | [Friesland](/wiki/Friesland) | [Leeuwarden](/wiki/Leeuwarden) | [Leeuwarden](/wiki/Leeuwarden) | 3,340 | 646,092 | 193 | | [Template:Flagicon](/wiki/Template:Flagicon) | [Gelderland](/wiki/Gelderland) | [Arnhem](/wiki/Arnhem) | [Nijmegen](/wiki/Nijmegen) | 4,970 | 2,031,123 | 409 | | [Template:Flagicon](/wiki/Template:Flagicon) | [Groningen](/wiki/Groningen_(province)) | [Groningen](/wiki/Groningen_(city)) | [Groningen](/wiki/Groningen_(city)) | 2,325 | 582,649 | 250 | | [Template:Flagicon](/wiki/Template:Flagicon) | [Limburg](/wiki/Limburg_(Netherlands)) | [Maastricht](/wiki/Maastricht) | [Maastricht](/wiki/Maastricht) | 2,150 | 1,115,805 | 519 | | [Template:Flagicon](/wiki/Template:Flagicon) | [North Brabant](/wiki/North_Brabant) | ['s-Hertogenbosch](/wiki/'s-Hertogenbosch) | [Eindhoven](/wiki/Eindhoven) | 4,914 | 2,495,107 | 507 | | [Template:Flagicon](/wiki/Template:Flagicon) | [North Holland](/wiki/North_Holland) | [Haarlem](/wiki/Haarlem) | [Amsterdam](/wiki/Amsterdam) | 2,665 | 2,775,617 | 1,039 | | [Template:Flagicon](/wiki/Template:Flagicon) | [Overijssel](/wiki/Overijssel) | [Zwolle](/wiki/Zwolle) | [Enschede](/wiki/Enschede) | 3,324 | 1,142,360 | 344 | | [Template:Flagicon](/wiki/Template:Flagicon) | [Utrecht](/wiki/Utrecht_(province)) | [Utrecht](/wiki/Utrecht_(city)) | [Utrecht](/wiki/Utrecht) | 1,383 | 1,268,489 | 916 | | [Template:Flagicon](/wiki/Template:Flagicon) | [Zeeland](/wiki/Zeeland) | [Middelburg](/wiki/Middelburg) | [Middelburg](/wiki/Middelburg) | 1,784 | 381,182 | 213 | | [Template:Flagicon](/wiki/Template:Flagicon) | [South Holland](/wiki/South_Holland) | [The Hague](/wiki/The_Hague) | [Rotterdam](/wiki/Rotterdam) | 2,808 | 3,607,150 | 1,282 | | **Total** | | | | **33,718** | **16,922,460** | **512** | |

[thumb|right|Government House,](/wiki/File:Saba's_Government_House_(6549997737).jpg) [Saba](/wiki/Saba)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
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| |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | [**Flag**](/wiki/Flag) | **Name** | **Capital** | **Largest city** | **Area**[**[72]**](#cite_note-73) **(km2)** | **Population**[**[73]**](#cite_note-74) **31-12-2012** | **Density (per km2)** | | [Template:Flagicon](/wiki/Template:Flagicon) | [Bonaire](/wiki/Bonaire) | [Kralendijk](/wiki/Kralendijk) | [Kralendijk](/wiki/Kralendijk) | 288 | 17,408 | 60 | | [Template:Flagicon](/wiki/Template:Flagicon) | [Sint Eustatius](/wiki/Sint_Eustatius) | [Oranjestad](/wiki/Oranjestad,_Sint_Eustatius) | [Oranjestad](/wiki/Oranjestad,_Sint_Eustatius) | 21 | 3,897 | 186 | | [Template:Flagicon](/wiki/Template:Flagicon) | [Saba](/wiki/Saba) | [The Bottom](/wiki/The_Bottom) | [The Bottom](/wiki/The_Bottom) | 13 | 1,991 | 153 | | **Total** | | | | **322** | **23,296** | **72** | |

### Foreign relations[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=21)]

[thumb|The](/wiki/File:International_Court_of_Justice.jpg) [Peace Palace](/wiki/Peace_Palace) (*Vredespaleis*), [The Hague](/wiki/The_Hague) [Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article)

The history of [Dutch foreign policy](/wiki/Foreign_relations_of_the_Netherlands) has been characterised by its [neutrality](/wiki/Neutral_state). Since World War II, the Netherlands has become a member of a large number of international organisations, most prominently the UN, [NATO](/wiki/NATO) and the EU. The Dutch economy is very open and relies strongly on [international trade](/wiki/International_trade).

The [foreign policy](/wiki/Foreign_policy) of the Netherlands is based on four basic commitments: to [Atlantic co-operation](/wiki/Atlanticism), to [European integration](/wiki/European_integration), to [international development](/wiki/International_development) and to [international law](/wiki/International_law). One of the more controversial international issues surrounding the Netherlands is its [liberal policy towards soft drugs](/wiki/Drug_policy_of_the_Netherlands).

During and after the [Dutch Golden Age](/wiki/Dutch_Golden_Age), the Dutch people built up a commercial and colonial empire. The most important colonies were present-day [Suriname](/wiki/Suriname) and [Indonesia](/wiki/Indonesia). Indonesia became independent after the [Indonesian National Revolution](/wiki/Indonesian_National_Revolution) in the 1940s following a war of independence, international pressure and several [UN Security Council Resolutions](/wiki/UN_Security_Council_Resolutions). Surinam became independent in 1975. The historical ties inherited from its colonial past still influence the foreign relations of the Netherlands. In addition, many people from these countries are living permanently in the Netherlands.

### Military[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=22)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article)

The Netherlands has one of the oldest standing armies in Europe; it was first established as such by [Maurice of Nassau](/wiki/Maurice_of_Nassau). The Dutch army was used throughout the [Dutch Empire](/wiki/Dutch_Empire). After the defeat of Napoleon, the Dutch army was transformed into a [conscription](/wiki/Conscription) army. The army was unsuccessfully deployed during the [Belgian Revolution](/wiki/Belgian_Revolution) in 1830. After 1830, it was deployed mainly in the Dutch colonies, as the Netherlands remained neutral in European wars (including the First World War), until the [Netherlands was invaded in World War II](/wiki/Battle_of_the_Netherlands) and quickly defeated by the Wehrmacht in May 1940.

[thumb|*Zr. Ms. Holland*, a](/wiki/File:HNLMS_Holland.jpg) [Royal Dutch Navy](/wiki/Royal_Dutch_Navy) [offshore patrol vessel](/wiki/Offshore_patrol_vessel)

The Netherlands abandoned its neutrality in 1948 when it signed the [Treaty of Brussels](/wiki/Treaty_of_Brussels), and became a founding member of [NATO](/wiki/NATO) in 1949. The Dutch military was therefore part of the NATO strength in [Cold War](/wiki/Cold_War) Europe, deploying its army to several bases in Germany. More than 3,000 Dutch soldiers were assigned to the [2nd Infantry Division](/wiki/2nd_Infantry_Division_(United_States)) of the [United States Army](/wiki/United_States_Army) during the [Korean War](/wiki/Korean_War). In 1996 conscription was suspended, and the Dutch army was once again transformed into a professional army. Since the 1990s the Dutch army has been involved in the [Bosnian War](/wiki/Bosnian_War) and the [Kosovo War](/wiki/Kosovo_War), it held a province in [Iraq](/wiki/Iraq) after the defeat of [Saddam Hussein](/wiki/Saddam_Hussein), and it was engaged in [Afghanistan](/wiki/War_in_Afghanistan_(2001–present)).

The military is composed of four branches, all of which carry the prefix *Koninklijke* (Royal):

* *Koninklijke Landmacht* (KL), the [Royal Netherlands Army](/wiki/Royal_Netherlands_Army)
* *Koninklijke Marine* (KM), the [Royal Netherlands Navy](/wiki/Royal_Netherlands_Navy), including the Naval Air Service and Marine Corps
* *Koninklijke Luchtmacht* (KLu), the [Royal Netherlands Air Force](/wiki/Royal_Netherlands_Air_Force)
* *Koninklijke Marechaussee* (KMar), the [Royal Marechaussee](/wiki/Royal_Marechaussee) (Military Police), tasks include military police and border control

General [Tom Middendorp](/wiki/Tom_Middendorp) is the current Commander of the Netherlands armed forces. All military specialities except the [submarine service](/wiki/Koninklijke_Marine#Submarine_service) and the [Royal Netherlands Marine Corps](/wiki/Royal_Netherlands_Marine_Corps) (*Korps Mariniers*) are open to women. [The Korps Commandotroepen](/wiki/Korps_Commandotroepen), the Special Operations Force of the Netherlands Army, is open to women, but because of the extremely high physical demands for initial training, it is almost impossible for women to become a commando.[[74]](#cite_note-75) The Dutch Ministry of Defence employs more than 70,000 personnel, including over 20,000 civilians and over 50,000 military personnel.[[75]](#cite_note-76) In April 2011 the government announced a major reduction in its military because of a cut in government expenditure, including a decrease in the number of tanks, fighter aircraft, naval ships and senior officials.[[76]](#cite_note-77)

## Economy[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=23)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [thumb|The](/wiki/File:Amazonehaven.JPG) [Port of Rotterdam](/wiki/Port_of_Rotterdam) is Europe's largest port.

The Netherlands has a developed economy and has been playing a special role in the European economy for many centuries. Since the 16th century, shipping, fishing, agriculture, trade, and banking have been leading sectors of the Dutch economy. The Netherlands has [a high level of economic freedom](/wiki/List_of_countries_by_economic_freedom). The Netherlands is one of the top countries in the [Global Enabling Trade Report](/wiki/Global_Enabling_Trade_Report) (3rd in 2014).

[Template:As of](/wiki/Template:As_of), the key trading partners of the Netherlands were Germany, Belgium, UK, United States, France, Italy, China and Russia.[[77]](#cite_note-78) The Netherlands is one of the world's 10 leading exporting countries. Foodstuffs form the largest industrial sector. Other major industries include chemicals, metallurgy, machinery, electrical goods, and tourism (in 2012 the Netherlands welcomed 11.7 million international tourists). Examples of international companies operating in Netherlands include [Randstad](/wiki/Randstad_Holding), [Unilever](/wiki/Unilever), [Heineken](/wiki/Heineken_International), [KLM](/wiki/KLM), financial services ([ING](/wiki/ING_Group), [ABN AMRO](/wiki/ABN_AMRO), [Rabobank](/wiki/Rabobank)), chemicals ([DSM](/wiki/DSM_(company)), [AKZO](/wiki/AkzoNobel)), petroleum refining ([Shell](/wiki/Royal_Dutch_Shell)), electronical machinery ([Philips](/wiki/Philips), [ASML](/wiki/ASML_Holding)), and car navigation ([TomTom](/wiki/TomTom)).

The Netherlands has the [17th-largest economy in the world](/wiki/List_of_countries_by_GDP_(nominal)), and [ranks 10th in GDP (nominal) per capita](/wiki/List_of_countries_by_GDP_(nominal)_per_capita). Between 1997 and 2000 annual economic growth (GDP) averaged nearly 4%, well above the European average. Growth slowed considerably from 2001 to 2005 with the global economic slowdown, but accelerated to 4.1% in the third quarter of 2007. In May 2013, inflation was at 2.8% per year.[[78]](#cite_note-79) In April 2013, unemployment was at 8.2% (or 6.7% following the [ILO](/wiki/International_Labour_Organization) definition) of the [labour force](/wiki/Labour_force).In April 2016 this was reduced to 6.3% [[79]](#cite_note-80) In [Q3](/wiki/Quarter_(time)) and Q4 2011, the Dutch economy contracted by 0.4% and 0.7%, respectively, because of European Debt Crisis, while in Q4 the Eurozone economy shrunk by 0.3%.[[80]](#cite_note-81) The Netherlands also has a relatively low [GINI coefficient](/wiki/Gini_coefficient) of 0.326. Despite ranking 7th in [GDP per capita](/wiki/GDP_per_capita), [UNICEF](/wiki/UNICEF) ranked the Netherlands 1st in child well-being.[[81]](#cite_note-82) On the [Index of Economic Freedom](/wiki/Index_of_Economic_Freedom) Netherlands is the 13th most [free market](/wiki/Free_market) capitalist economy out of 157 surveyed countries.

[Amsterdam](/wiki/Amsterdam) is the financial and business capital of the Netherlands.[[82]](#cite_note-83) The [Amsterdam Stock Exchange](/wiki/Amsterdam_Stock_Exchange) (AEX), part of [Euronext](/wiki/Euronext), is the world's oldest stock exchange and is one of Europe's largest bourses. It is situated near [Dam Square](/wiki/Dam_Square) in the city's centre. As a founding member of the [euro](/wiki/Euro), the Netherlands replaced (for accounting purposes) its former currency, the "gulden" ([guilder](/wiki/Dutch_guilder)), on 1 January 1999, along with 15 other adopters of the euro. Actual [euro coins](/wiki/Euro_coins) and [banknotes](/wiki/Euro_banknotes) followed on 1 January 2002. One euro was equivalent to 2.20371 Dutch guilders. In the [Caribbean Netherlands](/wiki/Caribbean_Netherlands), the [United States dollar](/wiki/United_States_dollar) is used instead of the euro.

[thumb|left|The Netherlands is part of a monetary union, the](/wiki/File:BlueEurozone.svg) [eurozone](/wiki/Eurozone) (dark blue), and of the [EU single market](/wiki/Internal_Market_(European_Union)).

The Dutch location gives it prime access to markets in the UK and Germany, with the [port of Rotterdam](/wiki/Port_of_Rotterdam) being the largest port in Europe. Other important parts of the economy are [international trade](/wiki/International_trade) (Dutch colonialism started with co-operative private enterprises such as the [VOC](/wiki/Dutch_East_India_Company)), banking and transport. The Netherlands successfully addressed the issue of public finances and stagnating job growth long before its European partners. Amsterdam is the 5th-busiest tourist destination in Europe with more than 4.2 million international visitors.[[83]](#cite_note-84) Since the enlargement of the EU large numbers of [migrant workers](/wiki/Migrant_worker) have arrived in the Netherlands from [central](/wiki/Central_Europe) and [eastern Europe](/wiki/Eastern_Europe).[[84]](#cite_note-85) Of economic importance is [BrabantStad](/wiki/BrabantStad), a partnership between the municipalities of [Breda](/wiki/Breda), [Eindhoven](/wiki/Eindhoven), [Helmond](/wiki/Helmond), ['s-Hertogenbosch](/wiki/'s-Hertogenbosch) and [Tilburg](/wiki/Tilburg) and the province of North Brabant. BrabantStad is the fastest growing economic region in the Netherlands, with [Brainport](/wiki/Brainport_(Netherlands)) as one of the three national top regions and as a top region in the world. The region lies within the [Eindhoven](/wiki/Eindhoven)-[Leuven](/wiki/Leuven)-[Aachen](/wiki/Aachen) Triangle (ELAT).[[85]](#cite_note-86) The partnership aims to form an urban network and to make North Brabant explicitly known as a leading knowledge region within Europe. With a total of 1.5 million people and 20% of the industrial production in the Netherlands is BrabantStad one of the major economical important, metropolitan regions of the Netherlands. Of all the money that goes to research and development in the Netherlands, one third is spent in [Eindhoven](/wiki/Eindhoven). A quarter of the jobs in the region are in technology and ICT.[[86]](#cite_note-87) Of all European patent applications in the field of physics and electronics about eight per cent is from North Brabant.[[87]](#cite_note-88) In the extended region, BrabantStad is part of the [Eindhoven](/wiki/Eindhoven)-[Leuven](/wiki/Leuven)-[Aachen](/wiki/Aachen) Triangle (ELAT). This economic cooperation agreement between three cities in three countries has created one of the most innovative regions in the European Union (measured in terms of money invested in [technology](/wiki/Technology) and [knowledge economy](/wiki/Knowledge_economy)).[[88]](#cite_note-89) The economic success of this region is important for the international competitiveness of the Netherlands; Together [Amsterdam](/wiki/Amsterdam) ([airport](/wiki/Amsterdam_Airport_Schiphol)), [Rotterdam](/wiki/Rotterdam) ([seaport](/wiki/Port_of_Rotterdam)), and [Eindhoven](/wiki/Eindhoven) ([Brainport](/wiki/Brainport_(Netherlands))) form the foundation of the Dutch economy.[[89]](#cite_note-90) The Netherlands continues to be one of the leading European nations for attracting foreign direct investment and is one of the five largest investors in the United States. The economy experienced a slowdown in 2005, but in 2006 recovered to the fastest pace in six years on the back of increased exports and strong investment. The pace of job growth reached 10-year highs in 2007. The Netherlands is the fifth-most competitive economy in the world, according to the [World Economic Forum's](/wiki/World_Economic_Forum) [Global Competitiveness Report](/wiki/Global_Competitiveness_Report).[[90]](#cite_note-91) Apart from coal and gas, the country has no mining resources. The last coal mine was closed in 1974. The [Groningen gas field](/wiki/Groningen_gas_field), one of the largest [natural gas fields](/wiki/Natural_gas_field) in the world, is situated near [Slochteren](/wiki/Slochteren). Exploitation of this field has resulted in €159 billion in revenue since the mid-1970s.[[91]](#cite_note-92) The field is operated by government-owned Gasunie and output is jointly exploited by the government, Royal Dutch Shell and Exxon Mobil through NAM (Nederlandse Aardolie Maatschappij). "Gas extraction has resulted in increasingly strong earth tremors, some measuring as much as 3.6 on the Richter scale. The cost of damage repairs, structural improvements to buildings, and compensation for home value decreases has been estimated at 6.5 billion euros. Around 35,000 homes are said to be affected."[[92]](#cite_note-93)

### Agriculture[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=24)]

[thumb|Farmland in the Netherlands](/wiki/File:NL_Moerdijk_municipality_Zevenbergen_city_IMG_2832.JPG) [thumb|Dutch flower fields near De Zilk](/wiki/File:Bollenvelden_bij_De_Zilk.ogv)

The Dutch agricultural sector is highly mechanised, and has a strong focus on international exports. It employs about 4% of the Dutch labour force but produces large surpluses for the food-processing industry and accounts for 21 percent of the Dutch total export value.[[93]](#cite_note-94) In most lower level secondary school educations ([*vmbo*](/wiki/Voorbereidend_middelbaar_beroepsonderwijs)), one additional modern foreign language is mandatory during the first two years.[[133]](#cite_note-134) In higher level secondary schools ([*havo*](/wiki/Hoger_algemeen_voortgezet_onderwijs) and [*vwo*](/wiki/Voorbereidend_wetenschappelijk_onderwijs)), two additional modern foreign languages are mandatory during the first three years. Only during the last three years in *vwo* one foreign language is mandatory. Besides English, the standard modern languages are French and German, although schools can replace one of these modern languages with Spanish, [Turkish](/wiki/Turkish_language), [Arabic](/wiki/Arabic), or Russian.[[133]](#cite_note-134) Additionally, schools in the Frisia region teach and have exams in [Frisian](/wiki/West_Frisian_language), and schools across the country teach and have exams in classical Greek and Latin for secondary school (called gymnasium or vwo+).

### Religion[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=28)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [Template:Pie chart](/wiki/Template:Pie_chart)

Historically, the Netherlands was a predominantly [Christian](/wiki/Christianity) society. From the onset of the [Protestant Reformation](/wiki/Protestant_Reformation), the Dutch population became divided into about two-thirds [Protestant](/wiki/Protestant) (mostly [Reformed](/wiki/Reformed)) and one-third [Roman Catholic](/wiki/Roman_Catholic) believers.[[nb 2]](#cite_note-135) This began to change gradually in the 20th century[[nb 3]](#cite_note-136) as there has been a steep decline in religious adherence, which continues. There was a [strong religious difference](/wiki/Pillarisation) between the Roman Catholic south and the Reformed north, remains of which are still in evidence. The Netherlands is currently one of the most [secular](/wiki/Secular) countries in the world. About 39% of the population is religiously affiliated and in 2010 fewer than 5.6% visited religious services regularly (once or more per month). In spite of an overall decline in religiosity, a countervailing trend is the religious revival in the Protestant [Bible Belt](/wiki/Bible_Belt_(Netherlands)), and the growth of Muslim and Hindu communities.[[134]](#cite_note-137)[[135]](#cite_note-138) Religion in the Netherlands is generally considered a personal matter and is not supposed to be propagated in public.[[136]](#cite_note-139)[[137]](#cite_note-140)[[138]](#cite_note-141)The Dutch constitution guarantees freedom of education, which means that all schools that adhere to general quality criteria receive the same government funding. This includes schools based on religious principles by religious groups (especially Roman Catholic and various Protestant). Three political parties in the Dutch parliament ([CDA](/wiki/Christian_Democratic_Appeal), [ChristianUnion](/wiki/ChristianUnion), and [SGP](/wiki/Reformed_Political_Party)) are based upon the Christian belief. Several Christian religious holidays are national holidays (Christmas, Easter, [Pentecost](/wiki/Pentecost) and the [Ascension of Jesus](/wiki/Ascension_of_Jesus)).[[139]](#cite_note-142) [Christianity](/wiki/Christianity) is currently the largest religion in the Netherlands, accounting for about one-third of the population. [Roman Catholicism](/wiki/Roman_Catholicism_in_the_Netherlands) is the largest Christian religious grouping with around four million registered adherents (23.7% of the population).[[140]](#cite_note-143) The provinces of [North Brabant](/wiki/North_Brabant) and [Limburg](/wiki/Limburg_(Netherlands)) have historically been strongly Roman Catholic, and their people still largely consider the Catholic Church as a base for their [cultural identity](/wiki/Cultural_Christian). Protestantism in the Netherlands consists of a number of churches within various traditions. The largest of these is the [Protestant Church in the Netherlands](/wiki/Protestant_Church_in_the_Netherlands) (PKN) (10.2% of the population), a [United](/wiki/United_and_uniting_churches) church which is [Reformed](/wiki/Reformed) and [Lutheran](/wiki/Lutheran) in orientation.[[141]](#cite_note-144) It was formed in 2004 as a merger of the [Dutch Reformed Church](/wiki/Dutch_Reformed_Church), the [Reformed Churches in the Netherlands](/wiki/Reformed_Churches_in_the_Netherlands) and [a smaller Lutheran Church](/wiki/Evangelical_Lutheran_Church_in_the_Kingdom_of_the_Netherlands). Several orthodox Reformed and liberal churches did not merge into the PKN. Although in the Netherlands as a whole Christianity has become a minority, the Netherlands contains a [Bible Belt](/wiki/Bible_Belt_(Netherlands)) from [Zeeland](/wiki/Zeeland) to the northern parts of the province [Overijssel](/wiki/Overijssel), in which Protestant (particularly Reformed) beliefs remain strong, and even has majorities in municipal councils. The [Dutch Royal Family](/wiki/Dutch_Royal_Family) has historically been members of the Reformed branch of Protestantism.

[Islam](/wiki/Islam) is the second largest religion in the state. In 2012, there were about 825,000 [Muslims](/wiki/Islam_in_the_Netherlands) in the Netherlands (5% of the population).<ref name=CBS2>[Template:Cite web](/wiki/Template:Cite_web)</ref> Muslim numbers increased from the 1960 as a consequence of large numbers of [migrant workers](/wiki/Demographics_of_the_Netherlands#Im-_and_Emigration). This included migrants from former [Dutch colonies](/wiki/Dutch_Empire), such as [Surinam](/wiki/Surinam) and [Indonesia](/wiki/Indonesia), but mainly migrant workers from [Turkey](/wiki/Turkey) and [Morocco](/wiki/Morocco). During the 1990s, [Muslim refugees](/wiki/Muslim_refugees) arrived from countries like [Bosnia and Herzegovina](/wiki/Bosnia_and_Herzegovina), [Iran](/wiki/Iran), [Iraq](/wiki/Iraq), [Somalia](/wiki/Somalia), and [Afghanistan](/wiki/Afghanistan).[[142]](#cite_note-145) Other religions account for some 6% of the Dutch people. Hinduism is a minority religion in the Netherlands, with around 215,000 adherents (slightly over 1% of the population). Most of these are [Indo-Surinamese](/wiki/Indo-Surinamese). There are also sizable populations of Hindu immigrants from [India](/wiki/India) and [Sri Lanka](/wiki/Sri_Lanka), and some Western adherents of [Hinduism-oriented new religious movements](/wiki/Hinduism_in_the_West) such as [Hare Krishnas](/wiki/International_Society_for_Krishna_Consciousness). The Netherlands has an estimated 250,000 [Buddhists](/wiki/Buddhism_in_the_Netherlands) or people strongly attracted to this religion, mainly ethnic Dutch people. There are about 45,000 [Jews](/wiki/History_of_the_Jews_in_the_Netherlands) in the Netherlands.

### Education[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=29)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) Education in the Netherlands is compulsory between the ages of 5 and 16 when HAVO, VWO or MBO level 2 or higher completed or 18.[[143]](#cite_note-146) All children in the Netherlands usually attend elementary school from (on average) ages 4 to 12. It comprises eight grades, the first of which is facultative. Based on an aptitude test, the 8th grade teacher's recommendation and the opinion of the pupil's parents or caretakers, a choice is made for one of the three main streams of secondary education (after completing a particular stream, a pupil may still continue in the penultimate year of the next stream):

* The [vmbo](/wiki/Voorbereidend_middelbaar_beroepsonderwijs) has 4 grades and is subdivided over several levels. Successfully completing the vmbo results in a low-level vocational degree that grants access to the mbo.
  + MBO ("middle-level applied education"). This form of education primarily focuses on teaching a practical trade, or a vocational degree. With the MBO certification, a student can apply for the HBO.
* The [havo](/wiki/Hoger_algemeen_voortgezet_onderwijs) has 5 grades and allows for admission to the hbo.
  + HBO ("higher professional education"), are [universities of professional education](/wiki/Vocational_university) (or applied sciences) that award professional bachelor's degrees; similar to polytechnic degrees. A HBO degrees gives access to the university system.
* The [vwo](/wiki/Voorbereidend_wetenschappelijk_onderwijs) (comprising [atheneum](/wiki/Atheneum_(school)) and [gymnasium](/wiki/Gymnasium_(school))) has 6 grades and prepares for studying at a (research) university.
  + Universities offer of a three-year bachelor's degree, followed by a one-, or two year master's degree, which in turn can be followed by a four-year [doctoral degree](/wiki/Doctoral_degree) program. Doctoral candidates in the Netherlands are generally non-tenured employees of a university.

### Healthcare[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=30)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [thumb|Portrait of](/wiki/File:Anthonie_van_Leeuwenhoek_(1632-1723)._Natuurkundige_te_Delft_Rijksmuseum_SK-A-957.jpeg) [Antonie van Leeuwenhoek](/wiki/Antonie_van_Leeuwenhoek) (1632–1723) by [Jan Verkolje](/wiki/Jan_Verkolje). [thumb|](/wiki/File:UMC_Utrecht.jpg)[University Medical Center Utrecht](/wiki/University_Medical_Center_Utrecht).

In 2015 the Netherlands has maintained its number one position at the top of the annual [Euro health consumer index](/wiki/Euro_health_consumer_index) (EHCI), which compares healthcare systems in Europe, scoring 916 of a maximum 1,000 points. The Netherlands has been in the top three countries in each report published since 2005. On 48 indicators such as patient rights and information, accessibility, prevention and outcomes, the Netherlands secured its top position among 37 European countries for the sixth year in a row.[[144]](#cite_note-147)The Netherlands was ranked first in a study in 2009 comparing the [health care systems](/wiki/Health_care_system) of the United States, Australia, Canada, Germany and New Zealand.[[145]](#cite_note-148)[[146]](#cite_note-149) Ever since a major reform of the health care system in 2006, the Dutch system received more points in the Index each year. According to the HCP ([Health Consumer Powerhouse](/wiki/Health_Consumer_Powerhouse)), the Netherlands has 'a chaos system', meaning patients have a great degree of freedom from where to buy their health insurance, to where they get their healthcare service. But the difference between the Netherlands and other countries is that the chaos is managed. Healthcare decisions are being made in a dialogue between the patients and healthcare professionals.[[147]](#cite_note-150) Health insurance in the Netherlands is mandatory. Healthcare in the Netherlands is covered by two statutory forms of insurance:

* Zorgverzekeringswet (Zvw), often called "basic insurance", covers common medical care.
* Algemene Wet Bijzondere Ziektekosten (AWBZ) covers long-term nursing and care. While Dutch residents are automatically insured by the government for AWBZ, everyone has to take out their own basic healthcare insurance (basisverzekering), except those under 18 who are automatically covered under their parents' premium. If you don't take out insurance, you risk a fine. Insurers have to offer a universal package for everyone over the age of 18 years, regardless of age or state of health – it's illegal to refuse an application or impose special conditions. In contrast to many other European systems, the Dutch government is responsible for the accessibility and quality of the healthcare system in the Netherlands, but not in charge of its management.

Healthcare in the Netherlands can be divided in several ways: three echelons, in somatic and mental health care and in 'cure' (short term) and 'care' (long term). Home doctors (*huisartsen*, comparable to [General Practitioners](/wiki/General_practitioner)) form the largest part of the first echelon. Being referenced by a member of the first echelon is mandatory for access to the second and third echelon.[[148]](#cite_note-151) The health care system is in comparison to other Western countries quite effective but not the most cost-effective.<ref name=BCG>Boston Consulting Group, 'Zorg voor Waarde', 2011</ref>

Healthcare in the Netherlands is financed by a dual system that came into effect in January 2006. Long-term treatments, especially those that involve semi-permanent hospitalization, and also disability costs such as wheelchairs, are covered by a state-controlled mandatory insurance. This is laid down in the [*Algemene Wet Bijzondere Ziektekosten*](/wiki/AWBZ) ("General Law on Exceptional Healthcare Costs") which first came into effect in 1968. In 2009 this insurance covered 27% of all health care expenses.[[149]](#cite_note-152) For all regular (short-term) medical treatment, there is a system of obligatory [health insurance](/wiki/Health_insurance), with private health insurance companies. These insurance companies are obliged to provide a package with a defined set of insured treatments.[[150]](#cite_note-153) This insurance covers 41% of all health care expenses.[[151]](#cite_note-154)