

# Living and Working in **HOLLAND**

Robbi Forrester Atilgan & René Kroes

2nd  
Edition



The most comprehensive book published about living and working in Holland, containing up to twice as much information as some similar books.

# Living & Working in **HOLLAND**

● A Survival Handbook ●



Robbi Forrester Atilgan & René Kroes



Survival Books ● London ● England

## Acknowledgements

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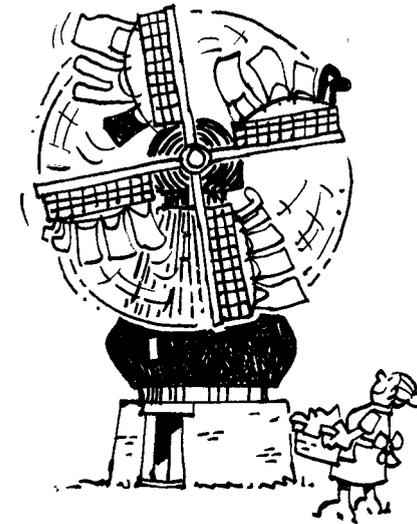
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## What Readers and Reviewers Have Said About Survival Books:

"If I were to move to France, I would like David Hampshire to be with me, holding my hand every step of the way. This being impractical, I would have to settle for second best and take his books with me instead!"

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"Let's say it at once. David Hampshire's Living and Working in France is the best handbook ever produced for visitors and foreign residents in this country; indeed, my discussion with locals showed that it has much to teach even those born and bred in l'Hexagone. It is Hampshire's meticulous detail which lifts his work way beyond the range of other books with similar titles. This book is absolutely indispensable."

**The Riviera Reporter**

"Covers every conceivable question that might be asked concerning everyday life – I know of no other book that could take the place of this one."

**France in Print**

"It was definitely money well spent."

**Reader (Amazon)**

"The ultimate reference book – Every conceivable subject imaginable is exhaustively explained in simple terms – An excellent introduction to fully enjoy all that this fine country has to offer and save time and money in the process."

**American Club of Zurich**

# Important Note

Holland is a diverse country with many faces. It has a variety of religions and customs, many ethnic groups, and continuously changing rules and regulations – particularly with regard to foreign residents. Always check with an official and reliable source (not always the same) before making any major decisions or taking an irreversible course of action. Don't, however, believe everything you're told or read, even, dare I say it, herein!

To help you obtain further information and verify data with official sources, useful addresses and references to other sources of information have been included in all chapters, and in appendices A to C. Important points have been emphasised throughout the book, some of which it would be expensive or foolish to disregard. **Ignore them at your peril or cost.**

## NOTE

Unless specifically stated, a reference to a company, organisation or product in this book doesn't constitute an endorsement or recommendation. None of the businesses, products or individuals listed have paid to be mentioned.



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## Authors' Notes

- ◆ Frequent references are made in this book to the European Union (EU), which comprises Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the UK. The European Economic Area (EEA) includes the EU countries plus the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries of Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, plus Switzerland (which is a member of EFTA but not the EEA).
- ◆ All times are shown using the 12-hour clock; times before noon are indicated by the suffix 'am' and times after noon by 'pm'.
- ◆ Unless otherwise stated, all prices quoted are in euros (€) and include VAT. They should be taken as estimates only, although they were mostly correct at the time of publication and fortunately don't change overnight in Holland. (You can make currency conversions online at [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com).)
- ◆ His/he/him also means her/she/her (please forgive me ladies). This is done to make life easier for both the reader and the author, and isn't intended to be sexist.
- ◆ British English and spelling is used throughout this book.
- ◆ Warnings and important points are printed in **bold** type.
- ◆ The following symbols are used in this book: ☎ (telephone), 📠 (fax), 🌐 (Internet) and ✉ (email).
- ◆ Lists of **Useful Addresses**, **Further Reading** and **Useful Websites** are contained in **Appendices A, B** and **C** respectively.
- ◆ For those unfamiliar with the metric system of **Weights & Measures**, conversion tables are included in **Appendix D**.
- ◆ A physical map of Holland and a map showing the provinces are included in **Appendix E**.



Delft

## Introduction

Whether you are already living or working in Holland or just thinking about it, this is **THE BOOK** for you. Forget about those glossy guide books, excellent though they are for tourists; this book was written especially with you in mind and is worth its weight in rollmops! Furthermore, this fully revised and updated 2nd edition has been redesigned, enlarged and is printed in colour. ***Living and Working in Holland*** has been written to meet the needs of anyone wishing to know the essentials of Dutch life, whether you're moving there for work or love, to study or explore, to make your fortune or a new life. However long your intended stay, you'll find the information contained in this book invaluable.

In sharp contrast to the wealth of information provided by the Netherlands Board of Tourism, reliable and up-to-date information specifically intended for foreigners living and working in Holland isn't so easy to find – particularly in the English language. Our aim in publishing this book was to help fill this void, and provide the comprehensive, practical information necessary for a relatively trouble-free life.

You may have visited Holland as a tourist, but living and working there is a different matter. Adjusting to a different environment and culture and making a home in any foreign country can be a traumatic and stressful experience – and Holland is no exception. You need to learn how to do things the Dutch way, e.g. finding somewhere to live, buying a car and getting your phone connected. At the same time, you must 'get to grips' with the Dutch people, who although warm and welcoming, can also be complex and contradictory. Never mind that many of them speak English, they think and act in a way which is determinedly Dutch!

Adjusting to life in a new country is a continuous process, and although this book will help you acclimatise and minimise the frustrations, it doesn't contain all the answers. What it will do, is help you make informed decisions and calculated judgements, instead of uneducated guesses and costly mistakes. Most importantly, it will help save you time, trouble and money, and repay your investment many times over.

Although you may find some of the information a bit daunting, don't be discouraged. Most problems occur only once and fade into insignificance after a short time (as you face the next half a dozen...). Most foreigners in Holland would agree that, all things considered, they love living there. A period spent in Holland is a wonderful way to enrich your life, broaden your horizons, and, with any luck (and some hard work), even make your fortune. I trust this book will help you avoid the pitfalls of life in Holland and smooth your way to a happy and rewarding future in your new home.

Veel Geluk!

*Rabbi Forrester Atilgan & René Kraes*

August 2010



office block, Rotterdam

# 1. FINDING A JOB

**D**utch workers enjoy good salaries, with generous benefits and job protection mandated by the state, thanks to the Dutch fondness for negotiation and co-operation between employers and works councils. However, in the wake of the credit crunch, finding a job in Holland is no easier than in most European countries, and finding a good job requires experience, qualifications, perseverance and more than a little luck.

At the bottom end of the scale are jobs that many Dutch people are unwilling to do, such as fruit-picking or cleaning, although the number of foreigners willing to do them has increased. If you're a national of a European Economic Area (EEA) country (EU countries plus Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland – the latter isn't an EEA member but the Swiss have the same rights as EEA nationals) you'll (in theory) be on an equal footing with the locals in the job hunt. Americans and other nationals without an automatic right to work in Holland must meet visa and work permit requirements (see **Chapter 3**) in order for a prospective employer to go to the considerable hassle and expense of hiring them in preference to an EEA citizen.

The Dutch are a well-educated workforce; a third of high-school students go on to university, and many take advantage of national vocational and on-the-job training programmes. As a result, Dutch workers are renowned for their high levels of skill and efficiency. The best opportunities for foreign workers are in occupations such as sales and marketing, secretarial and administration, IT, logistics and management. The business and financial and commercial services sectors are by far the largest employers, while health care, business services and the chemicals sector are tipped as growth industries.

Holland's long history of international trade is reflected in its population. Many migrants have come from former Dutch colonies in

Indonesia and Suriname, while during the '60s large numbers of guest workers (*gastarbeiders*, although these days they're referred to more politely as *arbeidsmigranten* or migrant workers) were brought in from Turkey and Morocco to fill low-skilled jobs. More recently, the Benelux region as a whole has taken in several thousand refugees from Afghanistan, Iraq and the former Yugoslavia, especially Kosovo.

It's estimated that around a fifth of the population has its roots in countries other than Holland, while according to Statistics Netherlands (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek), the country's official bureau of facts and figures, foreigners account for just under 20 per cent of the workforce. Of these 2.3m workers, roughly 1m are westerners and the remainder are non-western foreigners. The number of non-western foreign workers is projected to increase over the next ten years as the number of Dutch-born workers falls. According to a survey by the ING Group, around a tenth of small companies and a quarter of medium-sized businesses employ foreigners in their workforce. The number is probably greater than official statistics suggest, as people working for the various international organisations, particularly those in and around The Hague, often aren't considered as residents.

As in much of Europe, illegal immigration is a major problem, and like other European countries Holland has tightened its immigration laws in recent years, both to protect native citizens'

rights and to discourage trafficking in economic refugees. Surprisingly in such a tolerant country, in some circles there has been an undercurrent of resentment towards immigrants, particularly Muslims. Dutch immigration rules are now among the toughest in the EU and favour skilled, well-qualified recruits – low-paid foreign workers are surplus to requirements. So, while there are certainly opportunities for foreigners in Holland, it's by no means easy to penetrate the Dutch labour market, especially for workers from outside the EEA, and it takes skill and determination to do so.

## EMPLOYMENT PROSPECTS

To find a good job in Holland takes the right qualifications or sufficient experience in a field or profession where demand exceeds supply. It also requires a good command of the Dutch language. Even if you're seeking a job in the upper echelons of a multi-national organisation, perhaps one which has connections with an English-speaking country, or in certain scientific or academic areas where English is the *lingua franca*, or in a sector such as information technology, it's still a bonus if you have a working knowledge of Dutch. Most Dutch people study English at school and many speak it fluently, therefore a native command of English isn't an automatic advantage in the job market unless you have complementary skills or experience. It's particularly difficult to find work outside the main cities and towns if you don't speak some Dutch. Jobs of any sort can be difficult to find in rural areas and you need to be aware of the wide range of job categories for which you'll need a formal qualification or certificate.

### ☑ SURVIVAL TIP

The free public education system is geared toward producing highly-skilled workers through on-the-job training as well as providing an academic education. However, there are still some areas where training and education haven't kept up with demand and if you have experience in one of these your prospects of finding a job will be better, even with limited language skills.

Information technology (*informatietechnologie*, usually shortened to IT) has always been a principal area of demand; however, 2009 saw a 65 per cent fall in IT job vacancies compared with the previous year. Building and commercial services sectors have also been hit hard by the recession. In early 2010, areas where there were jobs available included transport, communications, chemical, electrical, metal and health industries. Qualified professionals in IT, natural scientists (e.g. biologists, chemists and physicists), engineers, health professionals, professors and researchers, can have their work permit applications fast-tracked under the highly skilled (knowledge) migrants scheme. Academic Transfer ([www.academictransfer.com](http://www.academictransfer.com)), a portal for academics seeking work in Holland, features post-doctorate and PhD positions with Dutch universities and other employers, while major research institutes such as TNO ([www.tno.nl](http://www.tno.nl)) and the National Aerospace Laboratory ([www.nlr.nl](http://www.nlr.nl)) also list jobs for highly-qualified candidates.

Holland's long history of trade has made it a centre for logistics and distribution, and these areas can also provide work. Less skilled job-seekers, especially those from EU countries who don't need work permits, may be able to find jobs in the service sector, which is by far Holland's largest area of employment. For the most up-to-date picture of job vacancies, check the jobs advertised on the website of the Public Employment Service (UWV WERKbedrijf or UWV, [www.werk.nl](http://www.werk.nl)) or an international jobs' website such as Xpat Jobs ([www.xpatjobs.com](http://www.xpatjobs.com)).

In order to find a job in Holland, it's important to have a positive reason for living and working there; being fed up with your boss or your current job isn't the best motive for moving abroad. It helps if you can show that you have friends or family in the area, or experience of living or working abroad. Having a genuine interest in Dutch culture or specific aspects of Dutch society can give you added credibility in the job search, as well as greatly enhancing your stay in the country. As in most places, it's a great advantage to have friends or contacts that can help with your job hunt.

## UNEMPLOYMENT

The number of Dutch people out of work peaked in the '80s, causing the Dutch government to take action in the early '90s to liberalise and expand their employment base, by reducing social charges and some social benefits. As a result of these sometimes painful measures, unemployment was reduced; it hovered around 6 per cent throughout the decade and has remained fairly low ever since.

According to figures from Statistics Netherlands, in August 2008 Holland had the lowest rate of unemployment in Europe; while the average unemployment rate in EU member states was 6.9 per cent, Holland's was just 2.6 per cent. The credit crunch caused unemployment to rise and in July 2010 it was around 5.5 per cent, with over 400,000 people out of work. At the same time, working hours have been cut drastically in recent years to the point where 'part-time' employment – especially among women – is almost the norm. It could be some time before Holland's job market returns to its previous healthy state.

## ECONOMY

Despite Holland's small size – smaller than Ireland and less than an eighth of the size of neighbouring Germany – its economy ranks as the 16th-largest in the world. Much of this is due to the Dutch skill at negotiation, logistics and trade. Holland has been a land of traders for centuries, and import and export are still a mainstay of its economy. The volume of goods it exports ranks among the world's top ten, and trade accounts for up to two-thirds of its gross domestic product (GDP), which was US\$677bn in 2009.

Holland's main exports are natural gas, petroleum, machinery, chemical and mineral products, electronics, food products and agricultural goods – including flowers, bulbs and tomatoes. Its main trading partners are close to home: Germany (which receives a quarter of Dutch exports), Belgium, the UK and France. It also benefits from moving other countries' goods around. Holland is known as the gateway to Europe, as its location and excellent transport infrastructure have made it an international trading and transport hub.



Schiphol Airport is the fourth-largest in western Europe, while Rotterdam is the second-largest seaport in the world after Shanghai. Foreign investment is another important factor in the Dutch economy; many foreign investors are attracted by its political and economic stability, and its businesslike and innovative workforce – the three largest overseas investors in Holland are the US, the UK and Germany.

Dependence on trade and overseas investment has created problems for Holland during the recent financial crisis, although it appears to be weathering the storm. In 2008, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) ranked its gross domestic product/GDP (*bruto binnenlands product* or BBP) the 16th-highest among IMF members.

Although Holland's GDP fell by 4.3 per cent during 2009, it began creeping up again in 2010. The inflation rate was 0.8 per cent in June 2010 – among the lowest in industrialised countries.

Over the past couple of decades, the resourceful Dutch have built up a strong service sector, focused on transportation, logistics and the financial sector, and services now dominate the economy. The service

industry generates three-quarters of the country's GDP, as well as providing nearly 75 per cent of jobs. Amsterdam is the centre for many service-related businesses, with vast offices and industrial estates in many of the surrounding suburbs.

Industrial activity and manufacturing account for around a quarter of the Dutch economy, with metalworking, oil refining, chemical- and food-processing among the most important industries. Holland has a large number of well-known brands for such a small country, including Royal Dutch Shell, Unilever, ING Group (banking and insurance), Philips (electronics), DAF (trucks), Grolsch and Heineken (beer). Natural gas production is a vital part of the economy, and Holland has the second-largest reserves of natural gas in Europe. In spite of its long traditions in fishing and farming – herrings, cheese and tulips are among its national icons – agriculture accounts for less than 2 per cent of Holland's GDP.

The Dutch are renowned for their careful – some might say parsimonious – attitude to money and this is reflected in the way they handle their economy: they only spend as much as they need to and avoid throwing money at a problem. Previous governments have favoured privatisation and deregulation, encouraging competition in the marketplace and enterprise among individuals and businesses, although many complain that business has to contend with a vast number of permits, rules and regulations, all part of the bureaucracy for which Holland is noted.

Recent governments have kept tight financial control over the economy, implementing strict reforms to reduce the budget deficit and boost economic growth. Like other western countries, Holland faces the expense of looking after an aging population and is likely to tighten its belt even further in coming years.

## INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

Strikes are rare in Holland. Although union membership is low – Statistics Netherlands revealed that in 2008 only 21 per cent of people working over 12 hours a week belonged to a trade union – Dutch employers and employees usually prefer consensus



to confrontation and industrial relations are generally good.

The 'polder model' refers to the way the Dutch have had to learn to work together to keep their country safe from flooding; polders are low-lying tracts of land reclaimed from the sea. Holland has successfully adopted this culture into many aspects of the way it runs its society and economy, and it has an especially important role to play in the workplace. There's a great deal of legislation regulating the relationships between employers, employees, the government and the trade unions, but the most important factor is a willingness to negotiate, compromise and make agreements for the good of the company and its workers. This covers such aspects as wages, welfare of workers and the development of the company. As a result, the vast majority of workplaces rely on collective bargaining to resolve issues and around 85 per cent of Dutch employees are covered by a collective agreement (CAO). Central government creates the framework for negotiation – by setting such parameters as the minimum wage and maximum working week – but the bargaining goes on at a local level.

Union membership is optional in most industries, but all companies over a certain size must establish an elected works council (*ondernemingsraad*) while smaller companies are required to set up personnel delegations. Works councils are comprised of worker representatives who have an advisory role in management affairs. The works council must be consulted on all significant management decisions, including the hiring and firing of key executives, lay-offs and plant closures, and must be regularly informed about the state of a business. Individuals serving on a works council enjoy certain privileges and job protection under labour laws; in larger companies, representatives of the works council may hold seats on the board of directors, and work closely with local unions, although they aren't required to be members themselves. Employers also have their own organisations, which work closely with works councils.

## WORK ATTITUDES

There's no doubt that the Dutch are hard-working. They're widely regarded as some of the most hard-headed business people of Europe, renowned for their negotiation skills and also for their fair-mindedness, if perhaps also for a certain lack of humour involving business dealings. It's true that they take their work seriously, but at the same time they work one of the shortest weeks in Europe – on average they put in between 36 and 40 hours – enjoy long holidays with extra pay, and are skilled at separating work and leisure time and rarely take work home.

The Dutch workplace can be a disconcerting place for foreigners used to a strict hierarchy of management and staff, as is found in more conservative countries such as Germany or Spain. So casual are some organisations that it can be difficult to distinguish between the chief executive officer and a secretary; both have ordinary offices, or even a desk in the main work pool, stand in line in the staff canteen and even dress in a similar fashion. This is another example of Dutch egalitarianism, whereby one worker is seen to be the equal of the next, irrespective of rank or salary. It's rare for a boss to take credit for a success without

acknowledging the input of his workers, even if he knows that the acclaim is really his. And if he does try to take all the credit, he'll receive little support from his staff or peers.

It sometimes feels as if the Dutch invented teamwork. Virtually everything that happens is a result of group consultations known as *overleggen* – the nearest translation is discussion. Rather than give orders, Dutch managers engage all their staff in *overleg* so that everyone is involved in the important (and not so important) decision making and feels that their opinion is heard and valued. The result is that the whole team feels some ownership of the final decision and bonds together, hence increasing the productivity that the Dutch are famous for. The downside of this consensual approach to management is that the Dutch spend an inordinate amount of time in meetings which can be hugely frustrating for, say, Americans, who are used to making quick decisions.

Few Dutchmen (or women) are shy about expressing their opinions in public – they're known for their bluntness – and business meetings tend to last until each participant has had his or her say. You'll learn a lot about your colleagues by attending their meetings, and if you don't attend they'll think you don't take their business (or them) seriously.

It's expensive to hire and fire employees in Holland, where workers are protected by statutory employment law. In some cases, an employer must seek government approval before firing an employee. However, during the recession it has become easier for companies to fire people lawfully if the employer can show he has economic problems.

Time spent in the office or on the job is generally highly productive, with little or no time wasted on socialising or idle chatter, except during official (and short) break periods or on birthdays which are celebrated without fail in the Dutch workplace. Socialising with colleagues take place but this is usually after work, when everyone is expected to join in social occasions, such as retirement parties, company outings and other events.

## WORKING WOMEN

The Dutch obsession with equality doesn't extend to its female workforce. Although there are European and Dutch laws governing equal pay and equal opportunities for women, in reality they're still several steps behind their male colleagues. Women in Holland comprise over 40 per cent of the workforce but work shorter hours, in lower positions and take home less pay. Some of this is due to the way they work. A European Labour Force survey in 2007 showed that three-quarters of Holland's female workforce worked only part time and that the average woman's working week was just over 25 hours, compared with 37 hours for men. Some 20 per cent of female workers have temporary contracts – above the EU average – and unemployment is higher among women than men.

There's a considerable wage gap between the sexes in Holland. A report published by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) in 2007 revealed that Dutch men earned an average gross monthly salary of €2,400, while the amount earned by women was just €2,000. On average, women in Holland earn 18 per cent less than men, even

in comparable jobs. The gender pay gap is wider than in many EU countries, including France, Greece and Portugal.

A major factor is that a lot of Dutch women simply don't want to work full time. Beneath its forward-thinking veneer, Holland remains a conservative country when it comes to family matters, and one reason why women lag behind in the workplace is that many prefer (or are expected?) to spend more time attending to home and family responsibilities. Another reason is the difficulty in finding affordable, reliable child care, and the reluctance of many families to leave child-care responsibilities to 'outsiders'. However, opportunities for promotion and career development are often less available – or even unavailable – to workers on part-time or temporary status, or when it's assumed that a woman will be taking advantage of maternity leave and other legal allowances.

There are a number of laws designed to protect women from dangerous jobs, excessive overtime or late working. Maternity leave is generous and time off for family duties (including caring for sick children) is a basic legal right. However, this can work against women, as many employers may be reluctant to hire women of child-bearing age for jobs involving lifting, for example, which would have to be modified during pregnancy (the law requires a female employee to notify her employer of a pregnancy at least three months before her due date). Other employers may fear losing a key supervisor or manager to extended maternity leave at a crucial point in the business cycle. Of course, it's illegal for employers to discriminate against women in recruiting or promoting staff – and there's no legal obligation for a woman to reveal that she is pregnant during the recruitment process, although there may be a moral duty – but in practice it can be virtually impossible to prove why a particular candidate didn't receive a desirable job or promotion.

Foreign high-fliers should be aware that there's a glass ceiling for female executives in Holland, and that women are far less well represented than men in management and executive positions. A government study in 2007 revealed that only 4 per cent of

upper management positions were occupied by women, while barely 1 per cent of Holland's top 500 companies has a female director. Foreign women with business or management credentials may have better luck with multinational, British or American companies if they aspire to management positions. Many British and American women's organisations maintain job banks for their members or can direct them to networking groups for career women.

Women are, however, well represented in Dutch politics. In June 2009, women occupied 63 of the 150 seats in Holland's lower house, the *Tweede Kamer*, which equates to the UK's House of Commons, and 25 seats in its upper house, the *Eerste Kamer* or Senate – a much higher proportion than in the UK or US. Women also enter the Dutch university system in roughly equal numbers to men, but many study arts and humanities subjects, and far fewer complete the rigorous business, science and engineering programmes required for many managerial and executive level jobs, and only around 12 per cent become professors in an academic field, although numbers are increasing.

## HOLLAND & THE EUROPEAN UNION

Holland was one of the six founder members of the European Community (now the European Union) in 1957, along with Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg and Germany. It has gained a great deal from membership of the EU, which has boosted its economy and made trade much easier – around three-quarters of Dutch exports go to other EU member states. Although still protective of Dutch interests – Holland was one of the countries to reject the Treaty of Lisbon's early proposal for an EU constitution in 2005 – its government has been positive in its response to the extension of EU membership to poorer countries in eastern and southern Europe, including Poland, the Czech and Slovak republics, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta and Slovenia, who joined in 2004. The latest additions to the EU were Romania and Bulgaria in 2007.

Nationals of 'older' EU states (pre-2007) have the right to work in Holland or any other member state without a work permit, provided they have a valid passport or national identity card and comply with the member state's laws and regulations on employment. Nationals of Romania and Bulgaria must have a work permit for their first year of employment, but after 12 months they can work permit free.

All EU (and EEA – see page 13 - Authors' Notes) nationals are entitled to the same treatment as Dutch citizens in matters of pay, working conditions, access to housing, vocational training, social security and trade union rights, and their families and dependants are entitled to join them and enjoy the same rights.

There are, however, still barriers to full freedom of movement and the right to work within Europe. For example, certain jobs in various member countries require job applicants to have specific skills or vocational qualifications. The EU has developed a general system for the recognition of professional and trade qualifications and guidelines for mutual recognition of qualifications (see below). Nevertheless, there are restrictions on employment in the civil service, where the right to work may be limited in certain cases on grounds of public policy, national security or public health.

Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg have been formally linked by the Benelux Customs Union since the late '40s and enjoyed full freedom of movement for labour, capital and services within their own 'harmonised' region long before the formation of the European Community. Close proximity means it's possible to live in Holland and work over the border in Belgium – or vice versa. This may be especially relevant for anyone seeking employment in an EU organisation, e.g. as a translator or bureaucrat, as many work in Brussels.

## International Organisations

The United Nations maintains a number of agencies in The Hague, including the International World Court of Justice. Job



postings can be found on the UN website ([www.un.org](http://www.un.org)). The Hague is also home to many foreign delegations, embassies and consulates. Although upper level employment is restricted to the diplomatic corps of the various countries, most government delegations hire clerical and linguistic staff from the local labour force. However, if you're a non-EU national, you may need an unrestricted work permit before they'll consider you for employment.

## QUALIFICATIONS

Holland has a large number of professions and independent trades requiring registration or licensing, and many jobs are regulated, at least to the extent of requiring a formal qualification. Most qualifications involve a training programme lasting at least two years or as long as four years, with or without supervised on-the-job experience, or even a formal apprenticeship. The Dutch are a highly-skilled nation and almost 40 per cent of the working population has undertaken vocational training at one of the 17 Centres of Expertise located around Holland. These are administered by COLO (Centraal Orgaan van de Landelijke Opleidingsorganen, Boris Pasternaklaan 4, 2719 DA Zoetermeer, ☎ 079-329 4000, [www.colo.nl](http://www.colo.nl)). Some English-language brochures are available on their website ([www.colo.nl/publications.html](http://www.colo.nl/publications.html)).

As in many countries, some Dutch qualifications can be fairly specific, making it difficult to change jobs unless you've taken a supplementary training programme that meets the particular requirements of the new job. Some employers provide continuous training for employees, which (if applicable) is usually specified in the job contract.

To find out if your qualifications are accepted in Holland, you can enquire at a Dutch job centre (UWV WERKbedrijf) or contact your local chamber of commerce (*Kamer van Koophandel*) for specific information about your profession. However, it's advisable to find out



whether your qualifications will be recognised in Holland before you travel there or before you start applying for jobs.

This is much easier if you're a citizen of an EU member country, as Holland abides by the EU's general system for recognition of

diplomas and qualifications. This means that, if your field of work is regulated in Holland, you must have your home country's qualification formally recognised before you're permitted to work in that field. It also means that there's a formal framework in place for assessing qualifications across the EU. While this obviously applies to professionals such as doctors, nurses and teachers, many other occupations are regulated in Holland, from driving instructors to security guards.

The Europe Open for Professionals organisation provides information for workers migrating within the EU states, as well as contact points in each member country where prospective employees can obtain information and advice. The Dutch contact point is NUFFIC (Postbus 29777, 2502 LT, The Hague, ☎ 070-426 0260, [www.nuffic.nl](http://www.nuffic.nl) – for more information, see below). The UK's contact point is European Open (UK Naric, Oriel House, Oriel Road, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire GL50 1XP, ☎ 0871-226 2850, [www.europeopen.org.uk](http://www.europeopen.org.uk)). The website provides an online form for email enquiries. Other countries' contact points can be found at [www.ec.europa.eu/internal\\_market/qualifications/docs/contact-points/info-points\\_en.pdf](http://www.ec.europa.eu/internal_market/qualifications/docs/contact-points/info-points_en.pdf). For more information on the internal jobs market within the EU, go to the section of the European Commission's website which deals with professional qualifications ([www.ec.europa.eu/internal\\_market/qualifications/index\\_en.htm](http://www.ec.europa.eu/internal_market/qualifications/index_en.htm)).

If you're from outside the EU, the onus is on you to prove that your training and experience covered a similar syllabus and duration as that of the equivalent locally required qualification. You may also be required to demonstrate your fluency in Dutch; language competence applies to all foreign nationals,

including those from EU countries. If you're lacking in any significant respect, you may be given the opportunity to qualify by passing an examination or performing further supervised practice. To determine what the qualification criteria are for your profession, contact the regulatory board or professional society for your profession in your home country, who will put you in contact with the appropriate agency in Holland if they don't have specific information about reciprocity.

There are a number of ways to check the validity of your qualifications in Holland. You can contact the Dutch competent authority for your trade or profession which will provide you with their requirements: this usually involves the submission of your diploma, certificate or other documentation confirming your training or work experience. It may also be possible to obtain a certificate of experience, documenting three to six years' practical experience, from a chamber of commerce in your home country. This can be particularly useful if you've been self-employed in a trade.

There are a number of organisations in Holland which specialise in recognising and evaluating foreign qualifications. The Netherlands Organisation for International Cooperation in Higher Education (NUFFIC) is an independent, non-profit organisation based in The Hague which works closely with the Dutch government and with the two EU-wide information organisations – the National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NARIC) and European Network of Information Centres (ENIC) – to advise Dutch employers and would-be employees about foreign credentials. NUFFIC has a useful website with sections on diploma recognition and professional recognition ([www.nuffic.nl/international-organizations/services](http://www.nuffic.nl/international-organizations/services)), which is a good place to start.

The Information Centre for Credential Evaluation (IcDW) also offers a service for evaluating foreign diplomas (IcDW, PO Box 7338, 2701 AH Zoetermeer ☎ 079-321 7930 or 079-320 0174, ✉ [info@idw.nl](mailto:info@idw.nl), [www.idw.nl](http://www.idw.nl)). In 2010, the fee for a credentials evaluation was €120.

## GOVERNMENT EMPLOYMENT SERVICE

The Dutch Public Employment Service is called the UWV WERKbedrijf or UWV for short. It maintains around 100 job centres (*arbeidsbureau*) in cities and towns throughout the country. As well as linking employers with employees, it also provides vocational guidance and training, and assessment and re-integration services for disabled people and the long-term unemployed. It also administers various benefit programmes related to employment, compiles labour statistics, and conducts market and labour research.

Addresses and phone numbers for local UWV WERKbedrijf offices are listed in the phone book. There's a comprehensive website ([www.werk.nl](http://www.werk.nl)) which combines job postings with job-hunting advice. It includes a range of information and work contacts in English, German, French and Spanish – however, the job listings section is only in Dutch. The UWV WERKbedrijf has a department for foreign job applicants, which also handles placements for Dutch job seekers abroad, although you may need to visit an office in person to take advantage of this. The English section of the UWV website isn't particularly helpful.

Another official jobs resource for EU citizens is the European Employment Service (EURES) network, the members of which include all EEA countries and Switzerland. EURES has its own job search engine – it showed some 35,000 available jobs in Holland in spring 2010 – and there's a facility for you to upload your CV. Members exchange information regularly on job vacancies, and local EURES offices have access to extensive information on how to apply for a job and the living and working conditions in each country. You can also contact a multi-lingual EURES advisor (there are 22 in Holland) for expert advice on finding a job. To learn more about EURES, speak to an adviser in your home country or visit the EURES website ([www.ec.europa.eu/eures](http://www.ec.europa.eu/eures) – click on your country code). EURES is rarely the fastest or the most efficient way of finding a job in Holland, especially from abroad, as national employment services give priority to their own nationals and jobs aren't generally referred to EURES or other national agencies