



Tue, 4 May 2010

Text size

# The Netherlands country factbook

02/10/2009



This in-depth profile of the Netherlands includes geography, people, government, economy and transnational issues.



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## Background

The Dutch United Provinces declared their independence from Spain in 1579; during the 17th century, they became a leading seafaring and commercial power, with settlements and colonies around the world. After a 20-year French occupation, a Kingdom of the Netherlands was formed in 1815. In 1830 Belgium seceded and formed a separate kingdom. The Netherlands remained neutral in World War I but suffered invasion and occupation by Germany in World War II. A modern, industrialized nation, the Netherlands is also a large exporter of agricultural products. The country was a founding member of NATO and the EEC (now the EU) and participated in the introduction of the euro in 1999.



## National flag

Three equal horizontal bands of red (at the top), white and blue; similar to the flag of Luxembourg, which uses a lighter blue and is longer; the colours were those of William I, Prince of Orange, who led the Dutch Revolt against Spanish sovereignty in the latter half of the 16th century; originally the upper band was orange but, because it tended to fade to red over time, the red shade was eventually made the permanent colour; the banner is perhaps the oldest tricolour in continuous use.

## Geography

**Location:** Western Europe, bordering the North Sea, between Belgium and Germany.

**Geographic coordinates:** 52 30 N, 5 45 E

**Total area:** 41,543 sq km

**Total land area:** 33,893 sq km

**Total water area:** 7,650 sq km

**Land boundaries:** 1,027 km

**Border countries:** Belgium 450 km, Germany 577 km

**Rivers:** Located at the mouths of three major European rivers (Rhine, Maas (or Meuse) and Schelde).

**Coastline:** 451 km

**Maritime claims:** territorial sea 12 nm; contiguous zone 24 nm; exclusive fishing zone 200 nm

**Climate:** Temperate; marine; cool summers and mild winters.

**Terrain:** Mostly coastal lowland and reclaimed land (*polders*); some hills in the southeast.

**Lowest point:** Zuidplaspolder -7 m

**Highest point:** Vaalserberg 322 m

**Natural resources:** Natural gas, petroleum, peat, limestone, salt, sand and gravel, arable land.

**Land use:** arable land 21.96 percent; permanent crops 0.77 percent; other 77.27 percent (2005)

**Irrigated land:** 5,650 sq km (2003)

**Total renewable water resources:** 89.7 cu km (2005)

**Freshwater withdrawal (domestic/industrial/agricultural):** Total 8.86 cu km/yr (6 percent/60 percent/34 percent); per capita 544 cu m/yr (2001)

**Natural hazards:** Flooding

**Environment issues:** Water pollution in the form of heavy metals, organic compounds and nutrients such as nitrates and phosphates; air pollution from vehicles and refining activities; acid rain.

**Environment agreements:** Part to international agreements on Air Pollution, Air Pollution-Nitrogen Oxides, Air Pollution-Persistent Organic Pollutants, Air Pollution-Sulfur 85, Air Pollution-Sulfur 94, Air Pollution-Volatile Organic Compounds, Antarctic-Environmental Protocol, Antarctic-Marine Living Resources, Antarctic Treaty, Biodiversity, Climate Change, Climate Change-Kyoto Protocol, Desertification, Endangered Species, Environmental Modification, Hazardous Wastes, Kyoto Protocol, Law of the Sea, Marine Dumping, Marine Life Conservation, Ozone Layer Protection, Ship Pollution, Tropical Timber 83, Tropical Timber 94, Wetlands and Whaling.

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## People

**Population:** 16,715,999 (July 2009 est.)

**Age structure:** 0-14 years 17.4 percent (male 1,485,873 / female 1,416,999); 15-64 years 67.7 percent (male 5,720,387 / female 5,604,014); 65 years and over 14.9 percent (male 1,070,496 / female 1,418,230) (2009 est.)

**Median age:** 40.4 years (male 39.6 years / female 41.2 years) (2009 est.)

**Population growth rate:** 0.412 percent (2009 est.)

**Birth rate:** 10.4 births/1,000 population (2009 est.)

**Death rate:** 8.74 deaths/1,000 population (July 2009 est.)

**Net migration rate:** 2.46 migrant(s)/1,000 population (2009 est.)

**Urban population:** 82 percent of total population (2008)

**Rate of urbanisation:** 0.9 percent annual rate of change (2005-10 est.)

**Sex ratio:** At birth 1.05 male/female; under 15 years 1.05 male/female; 15-64 years 1.02 male/female; 65 years and over: 0.76 male/female; total population 0.98 male/female (2009 est.)

**Infant mortality rate:** 4.73 deaths/1,000 live births (male 5.25 deaths/1,000 live births / female 4.19 deaths/1,000 live births) (2009 est.)

**Life expectancy at birth:** 79.4 years (male 76.8 years / female: 82.14 years) (2009 est.)

**Total fertility rate:** 1.66 children born/woman (2009 est.)

**HIV/AIDS adult prevalence rate:** 0.2 percent (2007 est.)

**People living with HIV/AIDS:** 18,000 (2007 est.)

**HIV/AIDS deaths:** Fewer than 200 (2007 est.)

**Nationality:** Noun Dutchman(men), Dutchwoman(women); adjective: Dutch

**Ethnic groups:** Dutch 80.7 percent; EU 5 percent; Indonesian 2.4 percent; Turkish 2.2 percent; Surinamese 2 percent; Moroccan 2 percent; Netherlands Antilles & Aruba 0.8 percent; other 4.8 percent (2008 est.)

**Religions:** Roman Catholic 30 percent; Dutch Reformed 11 percent; Calvinist 6 percent; other Protestant 3 percent; Muslim 5.8 percent; other 2.2 percent; none 42 percent (2006)

**Languages:** Dutch (official), Frisian (official)

**Literacy (age 15+ can read and write):** 99 percent (male 99 percent / female 99 percent) (2003 est.)

**School-life expectancy (primary to tertiary education):** 16 years (male 17 years / female 16 years) (2006)

**Education expenditures:** 5.3 percent of GDP (2005)

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## Government

**Country name:** Conventional long form: Kingdom of the Netherlands; conventional short form: Netherlands; local long form: *Koninkrijk der Nederlanden*; local short form: *Nederland*.

**Government type:** Constitutional monarchy

**Capital:** Amsterdam (geographic coordinates 52 23 N, 4 54 E); time zone Central European Time (UTC+1); daylight saving time (+1hr) begins last Sunday in March, ends last Sunday in October. (Time descriptions apply to the continental Netherlands only, not to the Caribbean components.)

**Seat of government:** The Hague

**Administrative divisions:** 12 provinces (*provincies*, singular *provincie*); Drenthe, Flevoland, Friesland (Fryslan), Gelderland, Groningen, Limburg, Noord-Brabant (North Brabant), Noord-Holland (North Holland), Overijssel, Utrecht, Zeeland (Zealand), Zuid-Holland (South Holland).

**Dependent areas:** Aruba, Netherlands Antilles.

**Independence:** On 23 January 1579, the northern provinces of the Low Countries concluded the Union of Utrecht breaking with Spain; on 26 July 1581 they formally declared their independence with an Act of Abjuration; however, it was not until 30 January 1648 and the Peace of Westphalia that Spain recognized this independence).

**National holiday:** Queen's Day (Birthday of Queen-Mother Juliana and accession to the throne of her oldest daughter Beatrix), 30 April (1909 and 1980).

**Constitution:** Adopted 1815; amended many times, most recently in 2002.

**Legal system:** Based on civil law system incorporating French penal theory; constitution does not permit judicial review of acts of the States General; accepts compulsory ICJ jurisdiction with reservations.

**Suffrage:** 18 years of age; universal.

### Executive branch:

- **Chief of state:** Queen Beatrix (since 30 April 1980); Heir Apparent Willem-Alexander (born 27 April 1967), son of the monarch.
- **Head of government:** Prime Minister Jan Peter Balken (since 22 July 2002); Deputy Prime Ministers Wouter BOS (since 22 February 2007) and Andre Rouvoet (since 22 February 2007).
- **Cabinet:** Council of Ministers appointed by the monarch.
- **Elections:** The monarchy is hereditary; following Second Chamber elections, the leader of the majority party or leader of a majority coalition is usually appointed prime minister by the monarch; deputy prime ministers appointed by the monarch.
- **Note:** There is also a Council of State composed of the monarch, heir apparent and councilors that provides consultations to the cabinet on legislative and administrative policy.

**Legislative branch:** Bicameral States General or Staten Generaal consists of the *Eerste Kamer* or First Chamber (75 seats; members indirectly elected by the country's 12 provincial councils to serve four-year terms) and the *Second Chamber* or *Tweede Kamer* (150 seats; members elected by popular vote to serve four-year terms).

- **Elections:** First Chamber - last held 29 May 2007 (next to be held in May 2011); Second Chamber - last held 22 November 2006 (next to be held by early 2011).
- **Election results:** First Chamber - percent of vote by party - NA percent; seats by party - CDA 21, PvdA 14, VVD 14, Socialist Party 11, Christian Union 4, Green Left Party 4, D66 2, other 5; Second Chamber - percent of vote by party - CDA 26.5 percent, PvdA 21.2 percent, Socialist Party 16.6 percent, VVD 14.6 percent, Party for Freedom 5.9 percent, Green Party 4.6 percent, Christian Union 4.0 percent, other 6.6 percent; seats by party - CDA 41, PvdA 33, Socialist Party 25, VVD 22, Party for Freedom 9, Green Party 7, Christian Union 6, other 7.

**Judicial branch:** *Hoge Raad* or Supreme Court (justices are nominated for life by the monarch).

**Political parties and leaders:** Christian Democratic Appeal or CDA [Pieter van Geel]; Christian Union Party [Arie Slob]; Democrats 66 or D66

[Alexander Pechtold]; Green Left Party [Femke Halsema]; Labor Party or PvdA [Mariette Hamer]; Party for Freedom or PVV [Geert Wilders]; Party for the Animals or PvdD [Marianne Thieme]; People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (Liberal) or VVD [Mark Rutte]; Reformed Political Party of SGP [Bas van der Vlies]; Socialist Party [Agnes Kant]; plus a few minor parties.

**Political pressure groups and leaders:** Christian Trade Union Federation or CNV [Rene Paas]; Confederation of Netherlands Industry and Employers or VNO-NCW [Bernard Wientjes]; Federation for Small and Medium-sized businesses or MKB [Loek Hermans]; Netherlands Trade Union Federation or FNV [Agnes Jongerius]; Social Economic Council or SER [Alexander Rinnooy Kan]; Trade Union Federation of Middle and High Personnel or MHP [Ad Verhoeven].

**International organization participation:** ADB (non-regional member), AfDB (non-regional member), Arctic Council (observer), Australia Group, Benelux, BIS, CBSS (observer), CE, CERN, EAPC, EBRD, EIB, EMU, ESA, EU, FAO, G-10, IADB, IAEA, IBRD, ICAO, ICC, ICCT, ICRM, IDA, IEA, IFAD, IFC, IFRCS, IHO, ILO, IMF, IMO, IMSO, Interpol, IOC, IOM, IPU, ISO, ITSO, ITU, ITUC, MIGA, NAM (guest), NATO, NEA, NSG, OAS (observer), OECD, OPCW, OSCE, Paris Club, PCA, Schengen Convention, SECI (observer), UN, UNCTAD, UNESCO, UNHCR, UNIDO, UNMIS, UNRWA, UNTSO, UNWTO, UPU, WCL, WCO, WEU, WFTU, WHO, WIPO, WMO, WTO, ZC.

**Diplomatic representation in the US:** Chief of mission: Ambassador Regina "Renee" Jones-Bos; chancery: 4200 Linnean Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20008; telephone: [1] (202) 244-5300, [1] 877-388-2443 fax: [1] (202) 362-3430; consulate(s) general: Chicago, Los Angeles, Miami, New York; consulate(s): Boston.

**Diplomatic representation from the US:** Chief of mission: Ambassador (vacant); Charge d'Affaires Michael Gallagher; embassy: Lange Voorhout 102, 2514 EJ, The Hague; mailing address: PSC 71, Box 1000, APO AE 09715

telephone: [31] (70) 310-2209; fax: [31] (70) 361-4688; consulate(s) general: Amsterdam.

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## Economy

### Overview

The Netherlands has a prosperous and open economy, which depends heavily on foreign trade. The economy is noted for stable industrial relations, moderate unemployment and inflation, a sizable current account surplus, and an important role as a European transportation hub. Industrial activity is predominantly in food processing, chemicals, petroleum refining, and electrical machinery. A highly mechanised agricultural sector employs no more than 3 percent of the labour force but provides large surpluses for the food-processing industry and for exports. The Netherlands, along with 11 of its EU partners, began circulating the euro currency on 1 January 2002. The country has been one of the leading European nations for attracting foreign direct investment and is one of the four largest investors in the US. The pace of job growth reached 10-year highs in 2007, but economic growth fell sharply in 2008 as fallout from the world financial crisis constricted demand and raised the specter of a recession in 2009.

**GDP (purchasing power parity):** USD 670.2 billion (2008 est.); USD 658.4 billion (2007); USD 636.1 billion (2006)

**GDP (official exchange rate):** USD 909.5 billion (2008 est.)

**GDP real growth rate:** 1.8 percent (2008 est.); 3.5 percent (2007 est.); 3.4 percent (2006 est.)

**GDP per capita (PPP):** USD 40,300 (2008 est.); USD 39,700 (2007 est.); USD 38,600 (2006 est.)

**GDP composition by sector:** Agriculture 2 percent; industry 24.4 percent; services 73.6 percent (2008 est.)

**Labour force:** 7.75 million (2008 est.)

**Labour force by occupation:** Agriculture 2 percent; industry 18 percent; services 80 percent (2005 est.)

**Unemployment rate:** 4.5 percent (2008 est.); 4.6 percent (2007 est.)

**Population below poverty line:** 10.5 percent (2005)

**Household income or consumption by percentage share:** Lowest 10 percent: 2.5 percent; highest 10 percent: 22.9 percent (1999)

**Distribution of family income (Gini index):** 30.9 (2007)

**Investment (gross fixed):** 20.3 percent of GDP (2008 est.)

**Budget:** Revenues USD 408.5 billion; expenditures USD 398.8 billion (2008 est.)

**Public debt:** 43 percent of GDP (2008 est.)

**Inflation rate (consumer prices):** 1.5 percent (2008 est.); 1.6 percent (2007 est.)

**Central bank discount rate:** 3 percent 31 December 2008; 5 percent 31 December 2007

**Commercial bank prime lending rate:** NA 31 December 2008; 8.72 percent 31 December 2007

**Stock of domestic credit:** USD 1.616 trillion 31 December 2008; USD 1.684 trillion 31 December 2007

**Market value of publicly traded shares:** USD 456.2 billion (31 December 2008)

**Agriculture products:** Grains, potatoes, sugar beets, fruits, vegetables; livestock

**Industries:** Agroindustries, metal and engineering products, electrical machinery and equipment, chemicals, petroleum, construction, microelectronics, fishing

**Industrial production growth rate:** 2.1 percent (2008 est.)

**Electricity production:** 105.2 billion kWh (2007)

**Electricity consumption:** 122.8 billion kWh (2007)

**Electricity exports:** 5.48 billion kWh (2007)

**Electricity imports:** 23.09 billion kWh (2007)

**Oil production:** 88,950 bbl/day (2007 est.)

**Oil consumption:** 984,200 bbl/day (2007 est.)

**Oil exports:** 1.639 million bbl/day (2005)

**Oil imports:** 2.648 million bbl/day (2005)

**Proved oil reserves:** 100 million bbl (1 January 2008 est.)

**Natural gas production:** 76.33 billion cu m (2007 est.)

**Natural gas consumption:** 46.42 billion cu m (2007 est.)

**Natural gas exports:** 55.66 billion cu m (2007 est.)

**Natural gas imports:** 25.73 billion cu m (2007 est.)

**Proved natural gas reserves:** 1.416 trillion cu m (1 January 2008 est.)

**Current account balance:** USD 47 billion (2008 est.)

**Exports:** USD 537.5 billion f.o.b. (2008 est.)

**Export commodities:** Machinery and equipment, chemicals, fuels; foodstuffs.

**Export partners:** Germany 24.4 percent, Belgium 13.6 percent, UK 9.1 percent, France 8.5 percent, Italy 5.1 percent, US 4.3 percent (2007).

**Imports:** USD 485.3 billion f.o.b. (2008 est.)

**Import commodities:** Machinery and transport equipment, chemicals, fuels, foodstuffs, clothing.

**Import partners:** Germany 17.7 percent, China 10.5 percent, Belgium 9.3 percent, US 7.3 percent, UK 5.8 percent, Russia 5.1 percent, France 4.4 percent (2007).

**Reserves of foreign exchange and gold:** USD 24.28 billion (31 December 2008 est.)

**External debt:** USD 2.277 trillion (30 June 2007)

**Stock of direct foreign investment at home:** USD 726.9 billion (2008 est.)

**Stock of direct foreign investment abroad:** USD 872.5 billion (2008 est.)

**Exchange rates:** Euros (EUR) per US dollar 0.6827 (2008 est.), 0.7345 (2007), 0.7964 (2006), 0.8041 (2005), 0.8054 (2004).

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## Communications

**Telephone lines in use:** 7.334 million (2007)

**Mobile telephones:** 17.3 million (2006)

**Telephone system:** Highly developed and well maintained. Domestic: extensive fixed-line fiber-optic network; large cellular telephone system with 5 major operators using the third generation of the Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM) technology; one in five households now use Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) services. International: country code 31; submarine cables provide links to the US and Europe; satellite earth stations 5 (3 Intelsat - 1 Indian Ocean and 2 Atlantic Ocean, 1 Eutelsat and 1 Inmarsat (2007)

**Radio broadcast stations:** AM 4, FM 567, shortwave 1 (2008)

**Television broadcast stations:** 342 (2008)

**Internet country code:** .nl (*punt n l*)

**Internet hosts:** 10.983 million (2008)

**Internet users:** 15 million (2007)

## Transportation

**Airports:** 27 (2008)

**Airports with paved runways:** Total 20; over 3,047 m 2; 2,438 to 3,047 m 9; 1,524 to 2,437 m: 3; 914 to 1,523 m 5; under 914 m 1 (2008)

**Airports with unpaved runways:** Total 7; 914 to 1,523 m 3; under 914 m 4 (2008)

**Heliports:** 1 (2007)

**Pipelines:** Gas 3,816 km; oil 365 km; refined products 716 km (2008)

**Railways:** 2,801 km (2,064 km electrified) (2007)

**Roadways (paved):** 135,470 km (includes 2,582 km of expressways) (2007)

**Waterways:** 6,215 km (navigable for ships of 50 tons) (2007)

**Merchant marine:** Total 622; bulk carrier 9, cargo 381, carrier 19, chemical tanker 44, container 76, liquefied gas 15, passenger 16, passenger/cargo 15, petroleum tanker 11, refrigerated cargo 10, roll on/roll off 23, specialized tanker 3; foreign-owned 203 (Belgium 2, Cyprus 8, Denmark 29, Finland 14, France 1, Germany 75, Ireland 10, Italy 1, South Korea 1, Norway 12, Sweden 28, Turkey 1, UAE 5, UK 2, US 14); registered in other countries 178 (Antigua and Barbuda 20, Australia 2, Austria 2, Bahamas 9, Cambodia 1, Canada 1, Cyprus 22, Germany 1, Gibraltar 21, Isle of Man 1, Liberia 6, Luxembourg 2, Marshall Islands 8, Netherlands Antilles 38, Panama 14, Paraguay 1, Philippines 23, Portugal 1, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines 3, US 1, unknown 1) (2008)

**Ports and terminals:** Amsterdam, IJmuiden, Rotterdam, Terneuzen, Vlissingen

## Military

**Military branches:** Royal Netherlands Army, Royal Netherlands Navy (includes Naval Air Service and Marine Corps), Royal Netherlands Air Force (Koninklijke Luchtmacht, KLu), Royal Military Police (2009)

**Military service age and obligation:** 20 years of age for an all-volunteer force (2004)

**Manpower available for military service:** Males aged 16-49 3,950,825; females aged 16-49 3,850,800 (2008 est.)

**Manpower fit for military service:** Males aged 16-49 3,224,790; females aged 16-49 3,143,096 (2009 est.)

**Manpower reaching militarily significant age annually:** Male 105,194; female 100,341 (2009 est.)

**Military expenditure:** 1.6 percent of GDP (2005 est.)

## Transnational issues

**International disputes:** None

**Illicit drugs:** Major European producer of synthetic drugs, including ecstasy, and cannabis cultivator; important gateway for cocaine, heroin and hashish entering Europe; major source of US-bound ecstasy; large financial sector vulnerable to money laundering; significant consumer of ecstasy.

Source: CIA World Factbook (August 2009)

**Further reading:** An introduction to the Netherlands

## Expatica Tools

