



Ministry of Social Affairs and
Employment

Core values of Dutch society

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Introduction

This booklet provides information about the values that form the basis of Dutch society. Once you have read it, you will have a better understanding of how we deal with one another in the Netherlands and why we work this way. Perhaps you are already familiar with these values? But perhaps Dutch society is completely different to the society in the country you come from. This leaflet provides an overview of the most important values, social rules and basic rights in the Netherlands. Knowledge of these can help you integrate into society.

This booklet provides information about freedom, equality and solidarity. These are important values in our society. What do these values mean? How will they impact upon your daily life? What does Dutch society expect from you? And what can you expect from society?

Democracy

The Netherlands is a democracy. In a democracy, residents may help decide the government of the country. This involves elections: during elections every Dutch person over the age of

18 may vote for anyone who has put themselves forward for election. Elections are free and confidential. This means that everyone may vote and that you never have to tell anyone who you voted for. For the Lower House, the local council and the Provincial States, elections are organised every four years. Every five years, elections are held for the European Parliament.

Migrants from the European Union may vote for the local council in the municipality where they live. They may also vote for the European Parliament. Migrants from outside the European Union may only vote for the local council if they have lived in the Netherlands for five years. Only naturalised migrants, i.e. those who have Dutch nationality, may vote for the Lower House and the Provincial States. Furthermore, in general, people who can vote may also be voted into certain representative functions.

Constitutional State

The Netherlands is a constitutional state. This means that everyone has the same rights and that everyone must abide by the same rules. The government must also abide by the law. If you are not in agreement with a government decision, you



may submit an appeal or take legal action against the government. The government must accept the judge's decision. You may also submit a complaint to the National Ombudsman. He can investigate the grounds for the complaint.

The 'Grondwet' forms the basis of our constitution. This contains all of the rights and obligations of both government and citizens. Freedom, equality and solidarity are very important in the 'Grondwet'. The Netherlands has also signed up to international human rights treaties (such as the European treaty for Human rights) which also encompass these values.

Social rights

In the Netherlands, you are responsible for making a living. However, if this is not possible, and nobody can help, the government will provide assistance. For example, by paying for rent, food and clothing.

You are also entitled to receive medical care; just like everyone in the Netherlands however, you must take out compulsory insurance. If you have to visit a doctor, the insurance will pay the majority of the charge.

If you lose your job, you may receive benefits for a limited period. Also, if you are sick and cannot work as a result, you will receive benefits.

Good education is important in order to obtain a good job in the future. In the Netherlands, we believe education is so important that it is mandatory; children from five to sixteen must attend school. They can thus prepare themselves for society and the labour market. Youngsters that do not have a qualification at the age of sixteen, must continue with education until they are eighteen.

Dutch society

In the Netherlands everyone contributes towards society. Take, for example, taxes. Everyone must pay tax. People who earn more than others, must pay more tax. These taxes are used by the government to pay for things that benefit us all. Things like roads, education and the police.

In our country, there are people with different types of lifestyle and different nationalities. During your work, in the supermarket and at school, you will encounter people with different cultures. It is important that you respect others despite these differences.

Dutch society is very open. This means that people are free to say what they think. This also means that others, if they disagree with these opinions, may say so. The exchange of opinions and ideas is important because it allows people to be themselves. Nobody in our country is obliged to have specific beliefs.



In the Netherlands all people are expected to take part in society. Dutch society expects you to take part too. By learning Dutch, looking for a job or doing voluntary work (and meeting people).

In the Netherlands your interests are just as important as anyone else's. This leaflet clearly sets out your rights and obligations within society.



Freedom

Freedom means that you can think, say and do what you wish. In the Netherlands we have a great deal of freedom. Everyone in the Netherlands has the same degree of freedom. This means that other people may also think, say and do what they wish. The most important freedoms are set out in the text below.

Faith

In the Netherlands you may choose the beliefs you have. People with different religions can all live in our country safely. Nobody may be threatened or feel unsafe as a result of their beliefs.

The freedom to believe what you wish to believe also means that you may opt to have no faith. You may decide this at any time and nobody can stop you. You must also extend this freedom to other people: you cannot force someone else to have the same beliefs as you. And, if someone gives up their faith, you must respect that. Even if you do not agree.

Everyone may demonstrate their beliefs to others. For example, by wearing jewellery with symbols, a headdress or a

yarmulka or other clothing. If your religion states that you may not eat, nobody can force you to do so. You may invite people to attend a prayer meeting and may even start a new faith.

Some jobs, however, require that everyone wears the same clothes. For example, the army, the police or at court. Police officers cannot wear a cross, for example, or a headdress when working as they must be seen to be impartial.

Whatever faith you have, you must always abide by the law.

Opinions

The Netherlands is home to various people from various cultures. Everyone is entitled to their own opinion. In the Netherlands, you may think, say and write what you like. You may send a letter to a newspaper or the government, protest, discuss and express your own opinions. Of course, it is important to consider others.

In the Netherlands there are various TV channels, newspapers and journals. The government cannot control what is said or written in the media.



You may also state your opinions if you disagree with something. Nobody can prevent you from expressing your opinion. This freedom is very important in the Netherlands because, in a democracy, you can only take effective decisions if you have heard the opinions of as many people as possible.

Whatever opinion you have, you must abide by the law. This means that you may not deliberately offend someone, injure or incite them to hatred or hostility. It is not always easy to decide on the limits of freedom of expression. Much discussion takes place in the Netherlands on this topic and, ultimately, it is the court that decides.

You may say what you like. And because we treat everyone equally, everyone may say what they like. Perhaps, somebody will say something you don't agree with or which makes you feel hostile. Freedom of expression thus has two sides. If everyone may express their opinion, every now and then someone will be offended. However, freedom of speech does not mean that you have to express everything.

If you feel offended or discriminated against, you can submit a complaint or report this to an anti-discrimination bureau. The court will decide if what someone has said is a criminal act or not. Some things may not be expressed at all. For example, you cannot incite others to do or say things that would lead to violence.

Lifestyle

People in the Netherlands may express their beliefs and choose their own lifestyles. This means that you too can decide what music you listen to, what clothing you wear, what work you do, which newspaper you read and what you eat.

There are, however, exceptions to this. A police officer must remain neutral. And some companies have rules about tattoos and piercings. They do not permit their employees to display their piercings and/or tattoos. This could be due to safety issues or because they do not think they are very pleasant. Other people may not determine your lifestyle. Your neighbour may well have a different lifestyle to you, have other beliefs, wear different clothing or listen to different music. It is only if we accept that many other people are different to us, and consider one another, that we can create a good society in the Netherlands.

Just like the other freedoms, there are limits which correspond to the freedoms of your neighbour. Your neighbour may not, for example, listen to loud music at night if it disturbs you.

Freedom of expression?

A journalist wrote an article in the newspaper in which he was critical of the limited freedom of expression in another country. A number of youngsters, who originated from this country, felt offended by this article. They sent threatening messages to the journalist via the internet and Twitter. She received over one thousand messages which were abusive and called for her death. The journalist submitted a complaint regarding the threatening behaviour.

Everyone has freedom of expression but you cannot simply say anything you like. For example, you may not incite hatred or violence or offend other people.

Another example A few years ago, the police arrested a cartoonist. Hundreds of people had complained against this man. He had drawn the prophet Mohammed and published his images on the internet. Many Muslims were offended by his drawings. He was arrested because the cartoons he had published on the internet were offensive and discriminatory to Muslims and people with darker skin colour. The artist was a champion of complete freedom of expression. He used his drawings to express his opinion about Islam.

A cartoonist does not have to ask permission to publish his cartoons on the internet or in a newspaper. The courts have to decide, after the event, whether the cartoonist went too far. In this case, the judge decided he hadn't.

Association

It is important that you feel at home in the Netherlands as this will enable you to meet people and take part in society. You could, for example, join a sports association, go to a neighbourhood centre or take part in a course. You will then meet people that share the same interests as you.

In the Netherlands you can also start your own association. For example, a sports association, but also a union or a political party or an association of people from your home country. You can express your opinion via an association or political party. That it why it is important, in a democracy, that people can start up associations. Working in an association, not only allows you to meet people, you could also impact upon politics.

Of course, everyone in an association must abide by the law. If people in an association do not abide by the law, the

courts can ban the association itself. You cannot, for example, use violence.

In the Netherlands, you may form a group on the streets to demonstrate or meet. A demonstration is a form of protest. By demonstrating, you can express your opinion.

If you wish to demonstrate, you must first register at the municipality. The municipality may not ban a demonstration simply because it objects to the topic. You may demonstrate as long as your demonstration will not jeopardise the safety of others and as long as you will not hinder the traffic and health of others. If demonstrators fail to abide by these rules, the police may intervene and municipalities can decide to stop the demonstration.

Self determination

In the Netherlands, you may decide for yourself which choices you make in your life. This is referred to as the right to self-determination. You may thus choose whether or not to have a faith. You may choose your own lifestyle. You may decide who you wish to marry and whether or not you reveal your sexuality. The right to self-determination encompasses many freedoms to which citizens are entitled.

The right to self-determination also means that you can decide what you do with your body. Nobody may cause you pain or touch you if you do not want them to. Even a doctor may only examine you with your permission.

There are exceptions to this rule in law, however. Under certain circumstance, the police, for example, may check to see if you are carrying weapons. The police can also conduct a test to see if car drivers have been drinking alcohol.

There are also other important choices that you may makes regarding your own body. Women may terminate their pregnancies. Euthanasia is also permitted in the Netherlands under certain circumstances. Somebody who is suffering unbearably due to an illness and sees no chance of improvement, can ask a doctor to end their lives.

Despite the fact that euthanasia and abortion are permitted in the Netherlands, the subjects are always up for discussion. Political parties have differing opinions about these topics.



Equality

All people are equal. By equality, we do not mean that all people have to be the same because, clearly, everyone is different. However, all people are of equal value. And everyone must be treated in the same way.

Equal treatment

In the Netherlands, people in the same situations are treated equally. This is known as the right to equal treatment. Whether you are a man or woman, gay or straight, young or old or born in the Netherlands or elsewhere. Equal treatment also means that everyone in the Netherlands must abide by the same rules. There are no separate rules for Christians, Muslims or those of other faith and no different rules for women or gay people. Of course, equal treatment can only be applied in identical situations, or situations that are very similar. Employers may not turn down women for jobs or treat them differently because they

are pregnant or have young children. And a woman may not be paid less than a man for the same work. For example, in supermarkets, staff cannot be dismissed because they are getting too old.

Where you come from does not matter. No matter where someone comes from, everyone has a right to equal treatment. This means that you also have the same right to a job as someone who was born in the Netherlands.

It is also important that people with physical or mental disabilities can take part in society. They must therefore also be given the same opportunity to work as other people. An individual may not be turned down for a job for which he is suitable simply because he is disabled. Sometimes, a company will have to create a special workplace.



Ban on discrimination

In practice, you can unfortunately be confronted with discrimination. This may occur if employers would prefer a Dutch employee rather than a Pole or a person from Suriname. Or when people are refused entry into bars/nightclubs because they are a certain race. This is unacceptable.

Gay and straight people must also be treated equally. Gay people have the same rights as everyone to their own lifestyles and to their own associations; same-sex marriages are also permitted in the Netherlands. The Netherlands was the first country in the world to permit this.

In short, discrimination is never acceptable in the Netherlands. You may not face discrimination on the grounds of your beliefs, origins or lifestyle. You may also not discriminate against others on the basis of their beliefs, origins or lifestyle.

Do you feel as though you are facing discrimination at work, when going out or elsewhere? Then report this to an anti-discrimination bureau, the police or the human rights' board.

- Anti Discrimination Bureau. Check out www.discriminatie.nl
- Go to: www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/discriminatie/aangifte-doen-van-discriminatie
- www.mensenrechten.nl



Solidarity and work

What does solidarity mean? Solidarity means that we take one another into consideration and that we are aware that others do so too.

Helping one another

The Netherlands is one of the richest countries in the world. People here have a great deal of freedom and many opportunities to make something of their lives. Naturally, there are also issues in our country that have to be resolved. But many things are well organised and effective.

In the Netherlands everyone pays tax. People that earn a high income pay more tax than those who earn less. These taxes are used by the government to pay for schools, roads and the police. But the government cannot provide everything. That is why it is important to help one another.

Many people in the Netherlands engage in voluntary work. For example, at a sports club, in a care home or at schools. Other people provide care for others at home.

Social Security

You must ensure that you have sufficient money to support yourself. Learning to speak and write Dutch will help in this regard. If you do not yet speak Dutch, you can take lessons. If you find it difficult to find work, you can ask for help from family, friends or an organisation. If you really cannot find work in order to support yourself, the government will help you. For example, if you are too sick to work or if you have been made redundant and have no money to pay your rent or buy food. If this happens, under certain conditions, you can obtain housing benefit, other benefits and healthcare benefit from the government. You can then pay your rent, buy food and pay healthcare and other costs.

Work

If you work, you are entitled to receive the minimum wage. You can find the rate at <http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/minimumloon/vraag-en-antwoord/hoehoog-is-het-minimumloon.html>. Your boss may not pay you less than the statutory minimum wage. You are also entitled to leave and holiday days. There are also rules governing the number of hours that you may work per day and how often you may take breaks. If your boss fails to comply, you can join a union which can help you further.

Minimum wage

You work six days a week, from 08.00 to 17.00 for your boss. At the end of each week you are paid € 100. You suspect that this is too little. You do not dare to say anything because your boss can easily find other people who will work for this amount. What should you do?

In the Netherlands there is a minimum wage. For a working week of a maximum of 40 hours (in 2014), you must be paid at least € 342.85. This is the gross amount; you must pay taxes on this.

There are still employers that pay their employees less than the minimum wage. This is referred to as under-payment. You must take steps to challenge this if you are paid less than the minimum wage. If your employer will not listen to you, you can report them to the Ministry for Social Affairs and Employment or take legal action.

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