

## Fact Sheet

### Accommodation for foreign researchers in the Netherlands

#### Overview

To be honest, finding accommodation may turn out to be one of your biggest challenges in moving to the Netherlands. Housing is in short supply even for locals, so resources to help others out are limited or otherwise not aimed at foreigners as you might expect in many places.

Living space is tight everywhere in Holland as a general rule, although some cities are worse than others. Availability of and assistance with housing are going to be locally determined; therefore it is not possible to provide one central help contact here. For assistance on housing, your personal contacts will come in very handy. A good idea is to alert anybody and everybody you know to the fact that you will be looking in a particular area, and ask them to alert anyone *else* they might know in the area. This is often how accommodation is secured even within businesses and university faculties that are aiming to help an incoming researcher.

While it would be ideal to try and secure something before arriving, this is most difficult. Unless you can travel to Holland often and during weekdays you will find that it is simply too difficult to get in touch with the necessary people or visit the available accommodations, as this is most often done during normal business hours.

On that note, though, most faculties or businesses will make at least some effort on your behalf to aid you through the first struggles. The bad news is this usually only means for the short-term. You also might feel that the short-term housing offered is too expensive, not furnished in the way you would like, or otherwise not to your expectations, but it is usually a worthwhile place to start. Do not neglect to ask there first. Even if your supporting institution does not have any pre-arranged assistance to offer, it will usually try to help out in a pinch. Finding suitable housing is tough, but in the end almost everyone finds something suitable.

More often than not, university assistance means the arrangement of short-term housing (three months to one year) while you search for something more permanent. After this initial period, it is up to you to find further accommodation. Sometimes university assistance simply means offering a list of real estate brokers (see below). In companies the help available varies even more from company to company. So, whether you find yourself looking for accommodation further in the future, or for immediately after your arrival in the Netherlands, it would help to be familiar with the general characteristics of the housing system.

#### Accommodation in Holland: Your Options

For renting, there are two categories of options for housing in Holland: subsidized housing for which there are often long waiting lists, or the “open market” which tends to be expensive. While this easily reveals why the situation is challenging, there are several options for finding what is available for each kind of housing.

But first, there is another option that most foreigners do not usually consider: buying. Most people assume that this will not be an easier option, and that it will mean an unnecessary burden of responsibility and something that ties them down to Holland when they do not plan to live here in the long term. However, keep in mind that the Netherlands often has attractive mortgage deals and, in comparison to many countries, this often includes convenient options for foreigners. Also, considering the high demand for housing in Holland, real estate accumulates in value relatively quickly, is easy to rent out, and easy to resell. For more information, good places to start are: the country's largest real estate website [www.funda.nl](http://www.funda.nl), or the English information site specifically for foreigners (with information about both renting and buying) on [www.expatica.com](http://www.expatica.com). Click onto the "housing" section (on the left-hand margin) for a guide on where to live, whether to buy or rent, and some explanation of Dutch mortgaging options. Your HR contact or a local bank could also be of assistance. Now on with the rental options:

**Government subsidized housing:**

Government subsidized housing is available through 'housing corporations'. In Dutch this government service is called *huisvesting*. Each locality has its own system. Your Human Resources office or local contacts can answer further questions and give advice on how to register. While the Netherlands has a higher percentage of government controlled housing than most countries, there is still a great shortage. There are waiting lists of varying length for this kind of housing, but at least you may be able to set yourself up to have more options in the future by getting on this list. The chance of getting something this way is very small, at least at first, but it is the most advantageous option if you succeed, so it is worth trying. Some foreigners sign-up before they leave their own country, to give themselves a start on the waiting list if they know they will be in Holland for a few years.

For complete and first-hand information on the system in your city, you can go to the municipal office for housing once here to ask if this is an option for you. Look for the office called 'huisvesting' or 'huisvestingzaken'. You can find it in the telephone book under the subject of 'gemeente'. The general website is available in English at [www.vrom.nl/international/](http://www.vrom.nl/international/). Contact information can also be found here.

**University Housing:** A very few universities will reserve some of its own housing for international workers. Ask your HR contact or colleagues. The downside to be aware of is that this option will mean no choice over certain aspects of the place you live (e.g. furnishings), and even though supplied through the university, this does not necessarily mean it will be cheap.

Other universities may simply have contracts with local housing corporations (see below) that offer some special opportunities. This is something that HR should tell you, but do not hesitate to ask if nothing is mentioned. Companies may also have a contract with these local housing companies, at least for your initial short-term housing.

**Real Estate companies:** The largest face of the 'open market', what you are looking for is 'makelaar' or 'makelaardij'. These are real estate agents. Some agencies will deal specially in rental rooms and are called 'kamerverhuurbedrijven'. While it is a common complaint that websites and information about them are in Dutch, there are indeed English sites. Again, the expat sites are a good place to start. If you use a *makelaar*, make sure they are registered with the NVM (National Association of Estate Agents).

When using a *makelaar*, be very explicit in what you want. It is important to properly communicate your personal needs as definitions may be different from yours at home. For example; ‘furnished’ in the Netherlands means that everything is provided except your own suitcase; ‘semi-furnished’ will include basic kitchen appliances, carpets and curtains. ‘Unfurnished’ means you will have to provide everything yourself, including the carpet! Also, you can expect to pay two months deposit plus the first month’s rent up-front to the landlord, and another month’s rent for the agent’s fee. There may also be contract fees of up to EUR 200. Obviously, using an agent means coming to Holland with some savings to get you started (good advice anyway).

One last thing concerning *makelaars*: remember that properties in Holland are usually only single-listed. This means that properties are listed with one agent at a time, so you cannot expect that any one agent will have most of the ‘good’ properties to show. While this may be different than in your home country, consider going to more than one agent, as their offerings will be completely different.

**Local Housing Corporations:** Some of these might also sometimes be called “student housing associations” (though not all by any means are just for students). These are not exactly *makelaars*, but nor are they government housing. These companies do offer subsidized or rent-controlled apartments within a region or locality. These are private housing companies, but they do not turn a large profit. They can be thought of as organizations or foundations. You should ask your HR contacts about these or try looking on the internet. The downside is that these corporations also usually have waiting lists.

A few examples of such corporations are DUWO, which can help those living in Delft, Amsterdam or The Hague or those working for TNO or IHE ([www.DUWO.nl](http://www.DUWO.nl)), [www.tiwos.nl](http://www.tiwos.nl) for those in Tilburg and [www.domijn.nl](http://www.domijn.nl) for those in Enchede (the last two are in Dutch but will likely answer your questions in English if you contact them).

**Other:** There is always a smattering of other less-organized possibilities. You may find a privately owned place that rents out only through personal contact instead of through a *makelaar*, or an entire building that works the same way. You might even find a renter who happens to have an extra room they do not mind letting. For these reasons, you should cast your net as wide as possible when looking for somewhere to live.

### **How to Begin Looking for Accommodation**

It is a good thing to know that August-October is the most difficult time to find housing. So if you can work around those months, do so.

- 1) Your first step should be to look on your company or university website. In connection with your status, there should be some mention of what kind of assistance is available.

Even if your company/university site makes no mention of housing assistance, write or call any given contact such as Human Resources and ask if there is any assistance available. Begin there to find out what particular resources or services you may have available.

If you are researching for a university, there are quite a few that have an office which is dedicated to helping students find housing. Even though this service is technically for fee-paying students, they may be able to help you too. These contacts can also tell you which of the options listed above are available in your area and how appropriate they are for your situation (how long you need it, if you need to accommodate family as well as yourself, how you stand financially, etc.).

- 2) Begin mentioning your move to any personal contacts. Putting out the word to friends/contacts that you are looking for housing is often the most helpful thing you can do. Do not neglect to do this! For example, as mentioned above, some properties (especially newer buildings) may require direct contact from an interested renter, and therefore will most likely be found through someone who knows of it first-hand, as you will not find them listed with real estate agents. Even if you think your acquaintances do not have any direct connections to anyone helpful in Holland, you never know. Or they might know someone else who does. It is *always* worth mentioning.
- 3) Begin following up on any links offered by the website of the university in your area (even if you are not working for that university). This might be the quickest way to get the contact information for English-speaking real estate agents as well as for the local housing corporations.
- 4) Search local advertisements. You may find small notices hanging on noticeboards where students congregate that will say something like 'kamer vrij' or 'huisgeno(o)t(e) gezocht'. These will indicate some sort of shared housing, so this may or may not be a desirable option for you depending on your personal situation and how long you will be staying.

You can also look for housing advertisements in free local newspapers, often offered door-to-door (any local person can give you a copy or tell you where to find one). You might also ask after papers that advertise second-hand items, as those are also likely to advertise rooms for rent. If you wish for something larger than a room, look for 'woningen' or 'appartementen'. ('Gevraagd' indicates someone wanting a place, not offering one.)

- 5) Check out the local housing situation at the *gemeente* and ask about the possibility of getting on the waiting list there. If you are reading this ahead of your travel to Holland, your HR contact should be able to tell you how to get started registering now. Again, the chances of finding something here are low, but it does not hurt to try.

What possibilities are open to you will depend on the area in which you are looking to live.

### **Tenant Issues**

Because of the strong demand for housing, landlords are in a more advantageous position than renters. They will try to do as little as possible, stating that they also have high costs, confident that new tenants are always in line to accept what a current tenant may not. However, as a renter you do have rights. It is always a good idea to be familiar with what rights you do and do not have as a tenant. They probably vary greatly from in your home country.

There is a website full of free information about tenant rights at [www.huurdersvereniging.nl](http://www.huurdersvereniging.nl). At the time of writing, this site is unfortunately only in Dutch, but if your HR contact will not help you get what you need from this site, you can also send them an email and they are likely to reply in English.

Other places to go if you have problems or need information:

- The rent commission (*huurcommissie*)—provides guidelines for what amenities must be available at certain prices. They can be reached at 0800 488 72 43 (free phone number).
- If you use a real estate agent, they will also have useful information. Do not hesitate to ask. You are paying a fee after all and they are trained (or should be) to know these things.
- Student housing office—even though this is for students, they will have useful information on general tenant rights and rental laws.

### Terms to Know

A review of some vocabulary that might come in handy:

Appartement-	apartment
Gevraagd-	asked for/requested
Gemeubileerd-	furnished
Gestoffeerd-	with curtains/carpet
Gezocht-	wanted
Huur-	rent
Huis-	house
Huisgenoot/genote-	indicates someone to share with
Kamer-	room
Keuken-	Kitchen
Kopen-	buy
Makelaardij/makelaar-	real estate agent
Onderhuur-	Sublet
Opmerkingen-	remarks
Verhuur-	rent out
Verkopen-	sell
Woning-	dwelling/house
Wel/Niet roken-	yes/non smoking
Zoeken-	to search

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