Being Young in the Netherlands
In the Netherlands, the term ‘youth’ applies to children and young people from 0 up to 25 years of age. Approximately 30% of the Dutch population falls into this category. One in five young people come from a migrant background. As in most other industrialized countries, the proportion of youth in the total population is decreasing.

In 2011, 5 million young people aged 0-24 years are living in the Netherlands. Although this is over 7,000 more than last year, the number of children of primary school age (4-11 years) decreased by more than 13,000.

The average Dutch child is happy, likes his or her life, gets along well with his parents, gets by (reasonably) well at school, has an animated social life and is satisfied about his

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**Trends in Dutch youth policy**

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The average Dutch child is happy, likes his or her life, gets along well with his parents, gets by (reasonably) well at school, has an animated social life and is satisfied about his
relationships. Compared with many young people from other western industrialized countries, Dutch young people are considerably better off. However, approximately 15% of the Dutch children and adolescents have problems and may need some additional support. The majority of this group has problems which can be solved reasonably well. A small part of this group of children and adolescents, approximately 5%, is structurally at risk in their development.

Change in the Dutch youth system
From the late eighties, decentralization of the care for youth from the central government to the local and provincial administrative level was already taking place. This decentralization was intended to facilitate local and provincial authorities to find solutions to local issues, needs and demands. A distinction was made between general and preventive youth policy - such as education, leisure time and health care - being the responsibility of the municipalities and the youth care system being the responsibility of the provinces.

In July 2011 the public administration together with the Association of Dutch Municipalities (VNG) and the Interprovincial Consultative Structure (IPO) reached a set of agreements on decentralization for the coming five years (2011-2015). In their policy letter ‘No Child Excluded’ of 8 November 2011 to the parliament, the State Secretaries of Health, Welfare and Sport and of Safety and Justice describe a framework for further and complete decentralization to the local level, including a change in the youth policy system.

The ambition of the government is that all children grow up in health and safety, can develop their talents and participate to the best of their ability. The main goals of the change in the youth policy system are: earlier support, care made-to-measure and better cooperation around children and families.

The coalition agreed that all support and care for youth goes to the administrative and financial responsibility of municipalities. In this way the government expects that municipalities will be able to develop integrated policy and offer made-to-measure care and support, geared to local and individual situations and needs.

A new law on youth care is being developed. National quality demands for the services rendered to children, youth and parents will be laid down. The change in the youth care system does not stand alone but is interdependent with decentralization measures in the budget and policy for special health care, employment ‘work according to ability’ and suitable (special) education. The government wants to enable youth to participate in civil society.

Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport
With the arrival of a new Dutch government (October 2010), youth policy is one of the main responsibilities of the State Secretary for Health, Welfare and Sport, Marlies Veldhuijzen van Zanten-Hyllner. From 2007 until 2010 the Netherlands had a Ministry for Youth and Families. The main objective of the ministry was to integrate the different ministries involved in elements of youth policy and to tackle issues related to the upbringing of children through joint effort. Despite the end of the Ministry of Youth and Families, the Dutch parliament remained a supporter for integrated youth policy. Therefore it set up a new parliamentary commission that will closely monitor the coherence of the activities of all ministries that are responsible for youth (care) policy:

- the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport
- the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment
- the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science
- the Ministry of Security and Justice
Legislation for children and young people
In the Netherlands there is no encompassing law for issues on children and young people. The Youth Care Act, introduced in 2005, is the legal framework of youth care services for youth at risk and their families. This will be replaced by the Act on care for children and young people at some point in 2012 or 2013. Child day care is organized in a different law. This is also the case for education, the juvenile justice system, working conditions for young people and many other issues. In 2007 the Social Support Act came into effect. This law replaced the former Welfare Act. It covers welfare and social work issues at the local level, including aspects of parenting support and participation.

Convention of the Rights of the Child
The Netherlands have ratified the United Nation’s Convention of the Rights of the Child. This means that the Dutch government has to integrate the articles of the convention in its policy concerning children and youth. They have to report every five years to the UN committee on children’s rights. At the beginning of 2012 the Netherlands have to send their fourth report to the committee in Geneva. In 2009 the Dutch delegation was questioned about the long waiting lists in youth care and the tackling of child abuse in the Netherlands.
All is well with Thomas
Facts and figures on Dutch youth

Dutch school-aged children are among the happiest in the world, is stated by the third international Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) research (2009). What does the life of Thomas, an average Dutch 14 year old boy, look like?

Soft drinks, but no fruit
- The chance that Thomas has breakfast before he goes of to school, is 85%. 14 year old Dutch girls have breakfast less often than that: 21% does not have breakfast every day.
- There is a 21% chance that Thomas eats fruit today. Would he have been a girl the chance of eating fruit would be 31%.
- The chance that Thomas quenches his thirst with soft drinks is 46%. Of the 14 year old girls 32% drinks soft drinks daily.

School: just fine
- 15% chance that Thomas has skipped a school day in the past month. 14 year old girls are more decent: only 8% skipped school last month.
- The chance that Thomas gets bullied at school is 8%. The chance that he bullied someone himself in the last couple of months is 40%.
- The chance that Thomas likes school is 77 %. Girls of his age like school even better (84%).
- Thomas does not feel pressured by his school work.

Zapping and surfing
- Thomas watches television 2.8 hours a day.
- He plays computer games 2.3 hours a day. That is 1.3 hours longer than 14 year old girls.
- For 2.5 hours he is surfing the internet and texting on his cell phone.
- Still there is an 86% chance that besides those 7.6 hours behind a screen, he also plays sports or plays outside twice a week at minimum.
Mummy’s boy

- Thomas finds it easier to talk about problems with his mother than with his father.
- The chance that his parents offer him much support is 88%.
- Probably Thomas has more than two best friends. 84% chance that his parents know who they are.
- 80% chance that his parents know what he does in his spare time.
- The chance is 1% that his parents treat him roughly.

**Parents offer much support**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parents offer much support</th>
<th>Parents treat him roughly</th>
<th>Parents know who his friends are</th>
<th>Parents know what he does in spare time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Parents**

- **Watch TV**: 10 hrs
- **Surfing & Texting**: 7,5 hrs
- **Play PC games**: 5 hrs
- **Play games**: 2,5 hrs
- **Play music**: 0 hrs

Source: Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) research, 2009
Healthy boy

- There is a chance of 86% that Thomas is very healthy.
- He rates his own wellbeing as 80%.
- 14 year old girls are twice as likely to have headaches, bellyaches, dizziness and sleeping problems.
- The chance that Thomas is too thin is 10%. The chance that he has overweight is 11%.
- The chance that Thomas smokes daily is 5%.
- 16% chance that Thomas has been drunk once. At the moment Thomas drinks less than the girls in his class, starting from the age of 15 he probably will discover alcohol.
- The chance that he ever smoked a joint is 12%. The use of cannabis among students has decreased in comparison with 2005 en 2001.

Sex

- 89% chance that Thomas ever was in love.
- The chance that he had sex already is 9%.
- The use of condoms by young people has increased in comparison with 2005. 82% of 14 year old boys used a condom the last time they had sex.
Early years services

Children in the age of 0 to 12 years of age are being brought up and taken care of by their parents. In the time that one or both parents are working, there are several possibilities for day care. These early years services should contribute to the child’s health and wellbeing. It is important that the different services cooperate for the benefit of the child. Youth and family centres are available to support parenting.

Maternity and parental leave

A Dutch expecting mother has the right to 16 weeks of maternity leave. Usually this is divided in about 6 weeks before delivery and 10 weeks after. Parents with a paid job have the right to parental leave, which means that they can work fewer hours a week for a limited period and spend more time with their child. These hours are usually unpaid leave, unless otherwise agreed with their employer. This means that when a baby is about three months old a mother continues her paid job, but can take parental leave for a period of time, as can the father. In all cases it means that for a few days a week parents need a form of day care for their children. Dutch mothers, and often also fathers, work mostly part-time.

Child day care

Since 2010, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment has been responsible for child care. The first Dutch Child Care Act (2005) states that child care should contribute to every child’s health and wellbeing, in a safe and healthy environment.

There are three types of child day care in the Netherlands: child day care for 0 to 4 year olds, out-of-school care for 4 to 12 year olds and child minders for 0 to 12 year olds. Child care is financed by three parties: the national government, employers and parents. Apart from that, there are playgroups for 2.5 to 4 year olds that are financed by the local government.

Day care is provided by non-profit and commercial organizations. In 2010 there were relatively more commercial day care providers than in 2005, according to a report of the Central Planning Office. It is not known if there is a distinctive difference in price quality comparison between non-profit and commercial organizations. The amount of children that make use of child day care in the Netherlands in 2010 is 822,000. In 2009 that was 802,000, which means a growth of 2.5% in one year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total amount of children that makes use of child day care</th>
<th>Child care by guest parents (0 - 4 years old)</th>
<th>Out of school care (4 - 12 years old)</th>
<th>Day care by guest parents (4 - 12 years old)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>802,000</td>
<td>343,000</td>
<td>106,000</td>
<td>276,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>growth of 2.5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>822,000</td>
<td>376,000</td>
<td>75,000</td>
<td>315,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘Total amount of children that makes use of child day care’
Source: Branche-organisatie Kinderopvang, 2011
Since a serious case of sexual abuse at two day care centres in Amsterdam in December 2010, physical safety and screening of day care staff are important topics. In July 2011 the government proposed a continuous screening of day care staff by checking the vetting system of the Ministry of Safety and Justice.

**Harmonization**

Since August 2010 a new harmonization law on development opportunities through quality and education by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science has been in force. Municipalities should offer early childhood education to all young children. The aim of this law is to improve and increase early childhood education in playgroups and child care and let them work together. Also the ministry wants to improve the connection with school.

An example: child centre *Boomerang*

In child centre *Boomerang* in Tilburg day care, out of school care and playgroups are all integrated. The children are part of a basic group. They can choose themselves where they want to play that day: in the living room, in the work shop or in the kitchen.

**Youth and family centres**

In the current change of the Dutch youth policy system, youth and family centres are the front offices for youth care and parenting support. At the end of 2011 every municipality should have at least one youth and family centre. Smaller municipalities can choose to work together regionally. By law, all centres should offer prevention, advice, support, signalling and light care or support.
The core business of a youth and family centre is connecting, upgrading and strengthening the already available support on growing up and parenting. The basic principles of these centres are: easily accessible, recognizable and close to home. The youth and family centre is based on the concept of integrated services working together, with the public health care for children and young people being at the heart of the services.

As of 15 October 2011, 370 municipalities work according to the standard model of a youth and family centre. More than 85% of the municipalities have realized a form of youth and family centre.

**Education**

In the Netherlands, school entrance is possible at the day the children turn four years old. 95% of all children start at this age, but school is only obligatory the moment children reach the age of five. Until the end of the school year they turn 16, they have to go to school five days a week. Thereafter, education is partially compulsory up to age 18. The aim is that all young people have at least a minimum required level of secondary education.

**Early childhood education**

The Dutch education system has limited educational facilities for children under the age of 4. Early childhood education focuses on children aged 2 to 5 who are at risk of developing an educational disadvantage. By offering early childhood education, language or educational disadvantages among children are addressed early. Early childhood education can be offered in child day care facilities, playgroups and the first two year of primary education. The administrative and financial responsibility for preschool education offered in day care facilities and playgroups rest with local governments. In contrast, school boards are responsible for early childhood programmes offered in schools. Nowadays, there is more cooperation between the playgroups and first years of primary education to ensure a smoother transfer.
Freedom of education

One of the important characteristics of the education system in the Netherlands, which is described in article 23 of the Dutch constitution, is freedom of education: the freedom to start schools, to organize the teaching in schools and to determine the principles on which they are based. All schools are required to meet the quality standards set by the ministry of education. The ministry finances all types of schools. Schools with many children whose parents have low educational standards receive more money than schools with, for example, many parents having a university degree.

Secondary education

There are around 700 secondary schools in the Netherlands, both publicly and privately run. There are four types of secondary education in the Netherlands that prepare for either work and further vocational training or further education (e.g. university). Entrance is based on a national test in the final year of primary school.

1. Secondary education encompasses schools providing pre-university education (VWO; 6 years, age 12-18)
2. Senior general secondary education (HAVO; 5 years; age 12-17)
3. Pre-vocational secondary education (VMBO; 4 years, age 12-16)
4. Practical Training (PRO; age 12-18).

87.8% of the youth between 18 and 24 years old were either in school or had a basic qualification.
Community schools
An important development in the Netherlands is the concept of community schools. The community school links education with other services that are important to children and parents, such as education support, child care, health centres, etc. The concept relies heavily on participation – both by the children and by the parents.

The community school is vital in the fight against social and educational development disadvantage. More than ¾ of all municipalities is developing the community school approach. Each community school chooses its own organizational structure:

- Complete day-programmes or periodical after-school activities for children and young people
- Combinations of educational activities within and outside the school
- Various and diverse activities for parents and the community
- Partners in different locations or mostly in one building
- Different ways to organize staff, management and board functions.

The central government has no specific policy on community schools. Instead, they feel that local initiatives and fast decision-making should be facilitated and encouraged as much as possible, and strict national regulations would unnecessarily complicate this approach.

Youth work and participation

The way young people spend their leisure time has changed dramatically over the past decades. Today leisure time activities are far more individual in nature and it is becoming more common to spend this time away from the family. In the Netherlands, local authorities are primarily responsible for providing leisure time activities for young people. Due to the growing positive approach to youth policy participation, volunteering and youth work get more and more attention.

Participation
In the Netherlands, there is no specific definition of youth participation. Participation can be described as young people’s opportunities to influence decision making structures, but also to young people’s opportunities to take initiatives to be actively involved in society.

The responsibilities for preventive youth policy are laid down in various sections of the Social Support Act. It aims to create better conditions for all citizens to fully participate in society and on enabling young people to develop into independent and socially committed citizens. This responsibility is decentralized and is mainly shaped at local level. The Dutch policy is linked to the Renewed Framework of the European Youth Strategy of the European Union. Furthermore, the UN Convention on the
Rights of the Child has been ratified by the Dutch government. At last, a Children’s Ombudsman to protect children’s rights was installed at the end of 2010.

The Dutch National Youth Council (NJR) is an independent umbrella organization of national youth organizations in the Netherlands, for young people between 12 and 30 years old. The National Youth Council is responsible for improving youth participation at national and local level and advocating the best interests of young people and youth organizations. The National Youth Council is an active member of the Dutch national working group for the Structured Dialogue within the renewed Framework of the European Youth Strategy.

Civic society
Voluntary youth work is mostly organized by local organizations that have regional and national support structures or is based on private initiatives. It is not part of the local youth policy plans, as local governments mainly focus on decreasing problems in the youth field. There is however a tendency to focus more on positive youth policies and fostering better participation of young people and on creating opportunities for development of their talents. Though their number has decreased in comparison to 2000, still 41.9% of all Dutch youngsters is involved in volunteering. More recently there is a revival in the number of young volunteers: first of all the growing tendency in firms to encourage their employees to volunteer. Secondly, because of the social traineeships which are now compulsory in secondary education as part of the school curriculum.

Sports are the most popular form of leisure activity among young people, with a few reservations. The interest in sports declines with age and relatively few young people from ethnic minorities or with disadvantaged backgrounds are involved in organised sport activities. The aim of the government is to create a sport-minded society and therefore it promotes and finances sport activities and combats undesirable aspects of sport, such as injury and doping.

The national action plan ‘Sports and Exercise’ promotes the idea that young people can use public spaces for sports and exercise. Local authorities are responsible for the environmental planning and child-friendly planning is a growing concern. The aim is to improve the lives, opportunities and environment of children. Offering a child friendly environment is part of Dutch youth policy.

Youth work
Youth work is a low-threshold provision for all young people and can be described as activities outside the scope of school, work and family for and with (groups of) young people in the age-group 12-23 years. These activities have a pedagogical
purpose: promoting the personal development of youth and confronting them with their own behaviour. They also have a social target: promoting social inclusion of youth, and democratic citizenship, and preventing behaviour problems (vandalism, crime, school drop-out).

The main goal of youth work is to offer trust-based guidance, support and group interventions to enable all young people to develop their competences and to participate fully in society. It addresses the promotion of youth participation, non-formal training, education inside and outside schools, parenting issues, reinforcing of social connections in the community and meeting people and creating opportunities for recreation.

In The Netherlands, there is no Youth Act nor a youth work plan at the national level. Each municipality develops its own youth policy and is thus responsible for financing youth work. The primary focus is on vulnerable young people. The Professional Association of Youth workers, ‘BV Jong’, aims to monitor, reinforce and support the profession of youth work in the Netherlands.
> At the national level, there are 14 political youth organizations. 39% of all youngsters from 18 to 25 years old are members of a specific sports, hobby or other leisure time club. 15% is a member of an organization relating to their church, 13% of a charity, 12% of a students' association, and 6% of a neighbourhood association.

The number of young people active in non-formal structures at the local level or in open networks that are created for specific projects or short term actions is unknown.

> In the Netherlands there are at least 346 providers of professional child- and youth work. A large part (96%) concerns non-profit organizations. Nearly 80% of all providers focus on talent development and the reduction of nuisance.

> In the Netherlands, for every 800 youngsters (aged 12-17 years) there is 1 active youth worker.

> Over the period 2000-2008 there was a substantial decrease in the number of volunteers among the 18 to 24 year-olds (from 47.6% in 2000 to 34.4 in 2002 and 41.9% in 2008).

> Within the European Union, Dutch young people participate the most in organized volunteer work. As mentioned in the Eurobarometer in 2010 this group consisted of 40% of all Dutch youth. They are mostly active in a sports or youth club or cultural organisations.

> Two-thirds of all children are active in clubs after school. Sport is a favourite pastime for children; 85% of all children between 4 and 12 participate in sports at least one hour a week.
Youth and employment

The Dutch government believes that too many young people experience problems in their learning career. As a result, they drop out of school without a starting qualification. In times of economic crisis, young people lose their jobs first. The government wants to prevent a large group of young people from becoming unemployed. In this strategy municipalities have an important role.

Tackle drop-out and youth unemployment
To give young people a better future, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science developed ‘The Action Plan Youth’ to tackle school drop-out. The action plan is aimed at keeping young people in school for a longer period, offering more intensive support to match young people with already existing jobs and creating more internships and traineeships for young people. There is a focus on extra attention for the transition from preparatory to intermediate vocational education, better career orientation and guidance, more and better care on schools, attractive education, and more tailored individual solutions.

From January 2012 onwards the ‘Act investing in young people’ (in Dutch: Wet investeren in jongeren - WIJ) is no longer in use. This law, established in 2009 by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, obliged municipalities to offer youths from 18
to 27 years old that apply for social benefit either a job, some form of schooling or a combination of both. For those who fell under the scope of the WIJ, from now on the ‘Law Work and Assistance’ (in Dutch: Wet werk en bijstand) applies again. From the first of January 2013 the law ‘Work to your abilities’ (in Dutch: Wet werken naar vermogen) will apply. For everybody with the ability to work the same rules will apply. People are expected to be self-supportive and work to their abilities.

**Vulnerable young people**
The government invests extra in young people with multiple problems who do not attend any form of education. This policy is based on the Lisbon-strategy of the European Council and aimed at combating school drop-out by prevention in schools, maintaining compulsory education and extra investment in youth at risk in major cities.

The WIJ and the follow up measures do not apply to people who can not work, for example because of a disability. These young people may be eligible for financial assistance in line with the current social assistance through the Wajong Act (in Dutch: Wet Wajong). In the Wajong, employers get extra support to hire young people with a disability.

In the last few years unemployment, benefits and social assistance for young people between 15 and 23 increased. The unemployment rate increased, especially in 2008 and 2009, because of the economic crisis. The number of young people using the Wajong increased during the years due to inflow from special education and practical education, transferring young people from social assistance to Wajong, and better recognition of new disabilities such as ADHD and autism.

### Facts and figures

> In 2010, the number of unemployed young people decreased to 28,000 compared to 31,000 in 2009.
> In 2010, the working population of young people in the age of 15-23 decreased very slightly to 71,400.
> In 2010, the working population of young people without a starting qualification in the age of 15-23 decreased to 64,000, compared to 75,000 in 2009.
> In 2010, the number of unemployed young people without a starting qualification in the age of 15-23 decreased to 14,000, compared to 16,000 in 2009.
> The number of young people, who are unemployed or dependent on benefits and social assistance increased from 9,720 in 2008 towards 16,870 in 2010.
> The number of young people, who are dependent on benefits increased from 1,800 in 2008 to 6,280 in 2009.
> The number of young people, who are dependent on social assistance increased from 7,950 in 2008 to 10,640 in 2009.
> The number of young people, who are dependent on a Wajong benefit increased from 49,170 in 2008 to 54,340 in 2009.

*Source: Youth Monitor, CBS Statline*
More information

**Netherlands Youth Institute**
You can find information in English about the work of the Netherlands Youth Institute as well as articles and publications about youth issues on www.nji.nl/english. For English information on youth policy in the Netherlands, please visit our website www.youthpolicy.nl.

**Dutch government** on www.government.nl.

**Association of Dutch Municipalities** (VNG) on www.vng.nl under the English flag button, see information about youth.

**Dutch National Youth Council** on www.njr.nl under the English flag button.

**Defence for Children International** on www.defenceforchildren.nl, click on English. One of the themes is ‘Children’s rights’.

**Youth monitor** of CBS Statline on http://jeugdmonitor.cbs.nl under ‘English’.
Acknowledgements
The Netherlands Youth Institute is the Dutch national institute for compiling, verifying and disseminating knowledge on children and youth matters, such as child abuse, residential care, youth care, parenting support and family policy. The Netherlands Youth Institute’s main aim is to improve the physical, cognitive, mental and social development of children and young people by improving the quality and effectiveness of the services rendered to them and to their parents or carers.

For questions on the Netherlands Youth Institute, youth policy in the Netherlands, international cooperation and exchange programmes, please visit our website www.nji.nl and click on ‘English’ or send an email to international@nji.nl.

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