



Muziekgebouw, a modern concert hall

## A short history of education in the Netherlands

TRADE was the main driving force of Dutch companies for exploring the world in the 16th and 17th century. Initially, the Dutch were not really interested in imprinting their own cultural tradition in its colonies and trade settlements through administration, religion or education. The social, political and economic changes in the Netherlands as a result of the industrial revolution at the beginning of the 19th century, however, paved the way for developing and expanding the public education system not only at home, but also in its colonies.

Some serious political decisions had to be made in order to unify the education system. An important part of the system was based on religious pillars and was excluded from public funding. This was the cause of a long-lasting struggle, known as the School Struggle, a historical conflict between 1848 and 1918 over the equalization of public financing for religious schools. The Protestant and Catholic wanted their religious schools to receive financing equal to that received by public schools and to maintain their freedom in for example curriculum policy, teacher appointments etc. that came with their religious tradition. Liberals tried to protect the privileged financial position of public schools. The conflict lasted from 1888 to 1918, when it was resolved in what is called "the pacification", whereby all schools since then received equal funding.

This principle of freedom of education is

embedded in the Constitution. At present, the education system is organized as follows. Education policy is coordinated by the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, together with municipal governments. Compulsory education starts at the age of five, although in practice, most schools accept children from the age of four. From the age of sixteen there is a partial compulsory education, meaning a pupil must attend some form of education for at least two days a week. Compulsory education ends for pupils age eighteen and up. There are public, special (religious) and private schools. The first two are government-financed and officially free of charge, though schools may ask for a parental contribution.

Public schools are controlled by local governments. Special schools are controlled by a school board and are typically based on a particular religion. There are government-financed Catholic, Protestant, Jewish and Muslim elementary schools, high schools, and universities. In principle a special school can refuse the admission of a pupil if the parents indicate disagreement with the school's educational philosophy. This is an uncommon occurrence. Practically there is little difference between special schools and public schools, except in traditionally religious parts of the country. Private schools and public schools both receive equal financial support from the government if certain criteria are met.



Oosterschelde dam



Pioneers in international business

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foreign companies invest in the Netherlands. The logistic facilities - including the 'new' one such as broadband internet access - are first class. The corporate tax and wage tax rates are very low at 25.5 and 15.5 percent respectively, and earnings from innovative products and services are subject to an even lower rate of 10 percent. The quality of the public services and infrastructure and the standards of living are all high. The workforce is flexible and well educated. The Dutch are open, achievement and result-oriented, punctual, keep their promises, are firm but fair and speak English.

The Dutch economy has several sectors in which it has a comparative advantage and in which Dutch companies are true pioneers in international business. These sectors include Water Management, Energy, Environment, Logistics and Financial services, Shipbuilding, Food and Flowers, and Chemicals.

### Bilateral trade with Bangladesh

The Netherlands has been a trading partner for many centuries with Bangladesh. The current trade links between the two countries are relatively modest and mainly skewed towards Bangladesh export to the Netherlands. Dutch export to Bangladesh was around EUR 47 million while Dutch import from Bangladesh amounted to circa EUR 305 million. When looking at the composition of the bilateral trade figures, the Netherlands mainly imports RMG from Bangladesh, while Dutch export to Bangladesh mostly consists of machinery & transportation products and chemicals.

Trade between the two countries is promoted by the Dutch Bangla Chamber of Commerce and Industry, based in Dhaka. This chamber represents around 80 companies which all have a business relationship with the Netherlands.

### Private Sector Development

To support the Private Sector of Bangladesh and to further stimulate the long standing bilateral economic relation between the Netherlands and Bangladesh, the Dutch Government offers a number of support programmes aimed at Business to Business support, infrastructure development, and providing access to skills and knowledge.

### B2B support

The Private sector Investment Programme (PSI) provides subsidies to Dutch and foreign companies entering into long-term cooperation with local partners in developing countries. The preferred sectors for Bangladesh are Agriculture and Agro Business, and Information Technology. However, this does not mean that projects in other sectors are not eligible under the PSI program in Bangladesh. To achieve financial growth, employment creation and income generation in Bangladesh, the Dutch government provides companies with an opportunity to make

an innovative investment together with a partner in Bangladesh. The maximum budget per project is 1.5 million euro of which 50% will be provided in the form of a grant. PSI has two granting procedures a year.

Moreover, to help Bangladeshi companies find a suitable business partner, Dutch government has developed the Match Making Facility (MMF). Bangladeshi companies, looking for a Dutch counterpart for either expertise, joint investments, opening of export markets or trading, can apply for this facility. For this type of assistance companies could contact the Netherlands Embassy in Dhaka.

### Infrastructure development

The Netherlands government also launched a new programme for infrastructure development in developing countries, called ORIO. This facility aims to stimulate investment in public infrastructure in developing countries. For Bangladesh the applicable sectors are: water management, energy, environment, and agriculture. The total annual funds available for ORIO worldwide are euro 180 million. The budget for each project must be between Euro 2 million and 60 million euro. ORIO has two tenders a year.

### Providing access to skills and knowledge

In addition to PSI and MMF, capacity development among local business is stimulated via the Netherlands Management Cooperation Programme (PUM) and the Centre for the Promotion of Imports from Developing Countries (CBI). Under PUM, senior Dutch experts give businesses in Bangladesh tailor-made advice. The CBI provides businesses from developing countries with the knowledge, skills and approach they need to enter into trade relations with and export to the European Union.



Erasmus Bridge, Rotterdam

## Small facts and tall figures about the Netherlands

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- According to Richard Florida, an authority in the field of design, Amsterdam is one of the world's foremost creative centres. Additionally, the Netherlands ranks eighth on his Global Creativity Index.
- With an average of 6 foot 1 inch, Dutch men are the tallest in the world (women are on average 5 foot 7 inch). Being the tallest people in the world is not without disadvantage. In recent years, the Dutch have had to make changes to building codes in order to provide taller doorframes, and more 'height' friendly aspects to each new building and car design. Further, the measurement is 'average height' which means some people far exceed 6 feet, 1 inch. Some people are significantly taller and may stand nearly 7 feet (2.13 m) tall, which can make travelling in the average car quite uncomfortable.
- Rotterdam is the third largest harbour in the world for transit goods.
- The colour of the Dutch Cricket team is orange. The last time Bangladesh played against The Netherlands in an official tournament was in 1997 (ICC Trophy). Bangladesh won and continued to become the winner of the tournament.
- We are the 3rd largest exporter of agricultural products in the world (and the 8th largest exporter overall) despite only occupying 0.008 % of the world's surface.
- We have approx. 1000 working (wooden) windmills.
- We are the best quitters when it comes to giving up smoking. Thirty percent of the population has given up smoking (EU

- average is 21%).
- In the Netherlands one in three citizens is an active member of a sports club.
- And finally.....
- Did you know that while landing at Schiphol Airport airplanes hit the ground 4.5 meters below sea level?



Modern windmills in the Netherlands

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## Focussing on gender in Bangladesh

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their lifetime. Also in Bangladesh violence against women is widespread. Different sources (WHO, ICDDR'B, CPD) estimate that more than 40 percent of women in Bangladesh face regularly domestic abuse, while 19 percent are victims of serious physical abuse. The Netherlands embassy published in 2008 a booklet titled "Breaking the Silence" on violence against women in Bangladesh. The booklet includes already available statistics as well as detailed case stories of 21 women confronted with violence. As a follow-up the embassy has recently commissioned the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) to undertake a study for setting up a databank to collect evidence of gender based violence in Bangladesh and to monitor the number of incidences. Also a study on legal measures to protect women has been undertaken which supports the case for a special law against domestic violence.