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Blue Search and Guidance

Helping international families find childcare

Childcare in The Netherlands

Like many countries around the world, finding good childcare in the Netherlands can be a challenge. The majority of daycare centers (nurseries) are filled to capacity with waiting lists of at least twelve months, and finding the right school for your children can be a daunting prospect if you don't speak the language or understand the system. Blue Umbrella can help international families find the right childcare for their needs.

What are the different childcare options?

Daycare centers (crèches) are the most popular form of childcare in the Netherlands for children aged 0-4. For parents with older children, after school clubs and vacation schemes are widely used.

Home-based childcare ("gastouderopvang"), is childcare at a childminder's home or childcare provided by a nanny in the family home. Home-based childcare is an increasingly popular childcare alternative in The Netherlands. Parents looking for greater individual care, from an experienced childcare giver ("gastouder") often choose this type of care.

Waiting lists

Unfortunately, because of their popularity, it is extremely difficult to secure places with daycare centers and after school care providers on short notice. On average, it takes 230 days to obtain a place with an after school care provider and 194 days for a place with a daycare center¹. Waiting lists are longer in the major Dutch cities. Amsterdam, Utrecht and Den Haag have the longest waiting lists in the Netherlands.

At Blue Umbrella we can't reduce the length of a waiting list, but we can help you to identify the best daycare center and after school facilities in your area.

It is often difficult to obtain accurate information from childcare providers regarding the length and duration of their waiting lists, and not all providers can answer your questions in English. Our English speaking staff can help you find out how long you may need to wait to get a place at your local daycare center(s) and help you to arrange visits to the center(s).

Once you have chosen a daycare center or after school care provider we can complete registration and application forms on your behalf and maintain regular contact with your chosen daycare center to ensure that you keep moving up the waiting list for a place and aren't disadvantaged if you don't speak Dutch. If you are in need of childcare services before an opening becomes available at a local daycare center,, then we also have a database of nanny CVs. We can help you set up interviews with potential nannies and ensure your chosen nanny is appropriately registered and has the necessary police checks in place.

How do you find the right Dutch childcare provider?

Finding a daycare center/after school care provider:

- Start your search early! All childcare providers have long waiting lists (not just those with a strong reputation).
- Find out how many daycare centers/after school care providers there are in your preferred location.
- Visit as many childcare centers as you can (at least three). Most daycare centers want to see you in person before they will send you further information.
- Bear in mind that you may need to register with more than one provider to secure a place for your child.
- Make sure you are properly registered on waiting lists for each of the daycare centers/after school clubs you like.
- Contact the daycare centers regularly to check your status on the waiting list (and remind the daycare that you are still looking for a place).

Choosing the right daycare center/after school care provider for your family:

- First impressions are important, but try not to use these as your primary selection criteria.
- Find out how many childcare providers are employed, what qualifications they have and how many children are typically in each class.
- Ask how the classes are grouped, for example, what are the age ranges?

¹ Regioplan Beleidsonderzoek, publicatienummer 1745, Amsterdam, October 2008

- Ask what kind of child development program is being used. How are the children trained and disciplined? How are they stimulated, for example through music, dancing, expression, play, reading, food?. Request to see a class timetable.
- Find out how each child's development and behavior is monitored, and whether parents are given regular feedback on their child's progress.
- Pay attention to the kinds of toys available to the children to play with.
- Check how many meals are provided throughout the day and what kind of food is served? Ask to see example menus.
- Check what cleanliness and hygiene practices are employed at the daycare center.
- Remember to find out what safety practices are employed? How do visitors and parents enter the premises? And consider the implications if the daycare center is located near a busy road, river, or a canal?
- Look at the outside space available for the children to play in. If it is small or there isn't any outside space, find out if the children are taken to nearby parks regularly and what the ratio of childcare givers to children is for any outings.
- Don't rule out a daycare center based on location.
- Speak to other parents that have children at the daycare.

Most daycare centers operate similar opening hours, but it is still worth checking what time they open and close and what their policies are regarding closure during holiday periods. Some centers offer a half day option (morning or afternoon). Fees vary, but are typically between €6 - €7 per hour.

Some daycare centers charge a fee to put you on their waiting list, and this fee is frequently not refunded if you don't take a place at that center. Some centers will not put you on a waiting list more than 6 months before you need a place.

Childcare regulation in the Netherlands

The Dutch Childcare Act sets out the health and safety requirements that every daycare center must meet. Inspectors are assigned by the local municipality to ensure that the childcare centers in their area comply with these requirements. Reports setting out the inspectors' findings for individual daycare centers and after school care providers are available online. To view the current report for a particular daycare provider, parents should visit the website for the municipality in which that childcare provider is located and look under the heading "Register Kinderopvang".

Parental Commissions

For parents who have visited a crèche but still have questions, the Parental Commission is the best place to turn. Every daycare center is required by law to organize a "Parental Commission" (parents council) comprised of parents that have children attending that crèche or afterschool care center. The parental commission liaises with the management of the daycare center over its childcare policies. Any family looking for a daycare center can contact the parental commission to find out more about that center from a parental perspective.

Daycare Center Enrolment

Once you receive a place at a daycare center, there is a legal requirement to enrol your child through a formal childcare contract. The contract will specify the days of the week that your child will attend the center and the number of hours of care you require per day. You will be charged for the number of hours specified even if the actual care hours are less. You are contractually bound to the days specified in the contract. You will only be able to alter the days if you find someone else to swap days with. Childcare agreements are fairly standard documents and are commonly written in Dutch with the exception of International daycare centers and schools, which do produce English language agreements and documentation. Notice terms are usually between 1 and 3 months.

Childcare Cost – the Dutch Government supports parents

The cost for childcare is high. Luckily, the Dutch Government reimburses a substantial portion of the cost. The reimbursement is provided by the Dutch Tax Office in the form of an allowance. This allowance is available for every parent, irrespective of income. Foreign parents staying temporarily in the Netherlands and tax exempt residents, such as diplomats and employees of International Organization can also apply for the allowance.

When your child enrolls at a childcare center, you're offered a contract. This contract usually specifies the days of the week for which your child is enrolled. Most childcare centers charge for a full day, comprising 10 or 11 hours, even if your child is only part of a day in care. Childcare centers typically charge an hourly rate between €6 and €8 per hour. A full day of 10 hours would then cost between €60 and €80.

Blue Search and Guidance – what do we do?

Our Blue Search and Guidance service has been designed specifically to help expat families secure childcare at reputable daycare centers and afterschool providers in the Netherlands.

We have an extensive network of daycare center and after school centers that we work with on a day to day basis and our experienced and knowledgeable, English speaking staff can quickly identify the providers that can offer you the best chance of a place. The care providers we work with include local daycare center and afterschool providers as well as international schools with nurseries attached.

Please note, we cannot circumvent waiting lists, but we will try to find you suitable alternatives if time is a factor. We also regularly check your position on the waiting list.

If you decide to use Blue Search and Guidance to help you find suitable childcare for your family, this is how the service works.

1. Our English speaking staff will discuss your childcare requirements and find out where you are (or will be) based in The Netherlands. We will then locate all the childcare providers in your vicinity. If you have a Dutch address then we will produce a tailor made map with all the daycare center pinpointed.
2. Our staff will provide a short list of the daycare center/after school centers in that area that match your requirements and personal preferences most closely.
3. We will schedule appointments for you to visit the short listed daycare center/after school centers. Our staff can also liaise with the daycare centers to answer any questions that you may have about a particular crèche or after school provider and help source references and/or other parents for you to speak to about a specific provider.
4. We will ensure your child is placed on the waiting list for all the daycare centers that you like. We will also let you know how long you can expect to wait for a place to come up.
5. We will contact the childcare providers regularly on your behalf to find out what your status is on their waiting lists and provide you with regular updates.
6. Once a place has been secured with a childcare provider that meets your criteria, we will help you with all the paperwork required to enrol your child. We will also check all the legal terms and conditions and explain these to you in English. There is a legal requirement to sign a contract with a childcare provider before your child can attend that crèche or after school club.
7. Finally, we can ensure that you receive your Dutch childcare allowance, which reduces the cost of childcare in the Netherlands by up to 80%. For more information about Dutch childcare allowance please read our Blue Daycare brochure or speak to one of our advisors.

Registering

Registering for Blue Umbrella's Blue Search and Guidance service is quick and easy:

1. Visit our website at www.blueumbrella.nl to register online for the Blue Search service.
2. Once you have registered, you will receive an email with payment options for the fixed, upfront search fee.
3. Upon receipt of your payment we will begin the search process.
4. We will maintain regular contact with you during the entire search process, until your child is enrolled at a crèche or after school club you are happy with.

It's that simple. We look forward to helping you with your childcare needs in the Netherlands. Welcome Abroad!

Contact details

You can contact our English speaking staff at +31 20 468 7560 (within the Netherlands: 020 468 7560) or e-mail info@blueumbrella.nl.

Governmental Partners

Blue Umbrella works in partnership with the Dutch Tax Office and the Amsterdam Expatcenter.