

# Why The Netherlands Has No Asylum Crisis Anymore

by

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The Netherlands is the second most densely populated country in the European Union, after Malta. The Dutch population has increased considerably during the last decades; while in 1980, 14 million people lived in the Netherlands, in 2024, the 18 millionth national was counted.<sup>i</sup> This increase is due to immigration.

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of November 2023, the Dutch parliamentary elections took place, which was a result of the resignation of the former government; the cabinet of the former Prime Minister Mark Rutte disagreed on the topic of reducing migration.<sup>ii</sup> The outcome of the elections was historic. Many analysts were astonished to see the enormous victory of the Party for Freedom, which was labeled as “far right” by the mainstream media. The party was founded in 2006 by Geert Wilders, and henceforth, it has been the most outspoken voice against immigration and Islam in the Dutch parliament. Even though the Party for Freedom has been the biggest party of the opposition since 2012, no mainstream party wished to collaborate with Geert Wilders. However, after the elections of 2023, this cordon sanitaire was finally broken. The Dutch people have pronounced a clear message to The Hague: “We want less immigration!”

According to public opinion polls, 76% of the Dutch population agrees that immigration must be reduced significantly. This means that not only those who vote for right-wing parties support this position. In fact, 38% of the followers of the largest left-wing party of the current opposition also perceive the need for a decrease in immigration.<sup>iii</sup>

Refugees make up only 10-12% of the entire immigration flow, a fact that mainstream media in the Netherlands usually emphasize.<sup>iv</sup> However, such a narrow focus does not provide a nuanced perception of the entire phenomenon. According to Dutch mathematician and ethnologist Jan van de Beek, immigrants from Africa and the Middle East struggle more to integrate due to profound cultural differences.<sup>v</sup> In his recently published book *Migratiemagneet Nederland* (Migration Magnet Netherlands), Van de Beek discusses in detail how the inability to integrate into Dutch society weighs down on the economic system. As Van de Beek points out, one should take into consideration the migration balance, that is immigration minus emigration, rather than focusing only on the number of refugees arriving.

The migration balance shows the number of migrants that stay long-term in the country; these are the ones who contribute to the increase of the population. The largest among immigrant groups is foreign employees who move to the Netherlands for work. The second largest group of migrants arrive through family reunification. International students make up the third group, and the smallest group of migrants are the refugees. Data from the national bureau of statistics show that after ten years, only 23% of those who migrated to the Netherlands for work, and only 17% of the international students are still living in the country. However, the same figure for refugees is at least 55%. This means that, even without taking into consideration the number of migrants who reunify with their families, it can be stated that 25% of the current population growth is due to refugees.<sup>vi</sup>

The high migration rate causes a number of problems in the Netherlands, such as extremely high property rental prices and the general feeling of loss of identity. It is therefore not such a surprise that almost a quarter of the electorate voted for the Party for Freedom (PVV) whose election campaign assigned a central role to the issue of migration. After negotiating 223 days with its coalition partners – People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), New Social Contract

(NSC), and Farmer-Citizen Movement (BBB) – an ambitious governmental agreement was published, which stated that the new cabinet would announce an official asylum crisis and initiate an opt-out on the asylum and migration policies of the EU. Furthermore, they promised to introduce the strictest regulations on migration ever seen in the Netherlands.

However, only very little of the original agreement has been put into practice so far. The cabinet is hindered by the parties of the opposition who claim that the declaration of an official asylum crisis in order to change current policies without initial approval of parliament would be undemocratic and unacceptable. Bickering among the coalition partners creates additional obstacles. Even though New Social Contract (NSC) took part in the elaboration of the ambitious governmental agreement published on the 16<sup>th</sup> of May, the party now openly questions the legitimacy of an official asylum crisis. Since the elections of last year, New Social Contract (NSC) has lost a tremendous part of its supporters: if the Dutch people were to vote today, only four seats would be allocated to the party, which is 16 fewer than last November.<sup>vii</sup> Yet due to their shifting positions, the cabinet will not declare an asylum crisis.

Geert Wilders, who made numerous compromises during the negotiations with the coalition partners, promised his electorate not to make any concessions when it comes to harsh policies to decrease immigration. Giving in to the will of New Social Contract for the sake of keeping the coalition together, Wilders could not keep his word. Nevertheless, his optimism did not diminish. Being a politician *pur sang*, he managed to introduce even stricter regulations than previously agreed on. As a state of asylum crisis will not be officially put into place, the planned regulations will first have to be approved by the parliament. This may become challenging when it comes to the senate where the current coalition partners do not have a majority. However, in return for the asylum crisis previously agreed upon, the coalition now agreed, among others, to declare parts of Syria safe as soon as possible to be able to return some of the refugees to those areas. Another new regulation planned is to prohibit the application of indefinite residence permits. Instead, the government wants to extend residence permits for a maximum of three years. Furthermore, the rules for family reunification will be stricter, and as of the 9<sup>th</sup> of December, controls will be reintroduced at the land borders with Belgium and Germany.<sup>viii</sup>

The message of the Dutch electorate has been clear: the majority of the people want less migration. Instead of taking this message seriously, the political parties seem to try their best to prevent the cabinet from introducing any changes for a more rigorous immigration policy, which forces the Party for Freedom to make compromises on its election promises. The question is how satisfied the electorate will be with the tactical maneuvering.

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<sup>i</sup> CBS. “Bevolkingteller” 2024.11.18. <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/visualisaties/dashboard-bevolking/bevolkingsteller>

<sup>ii</sup> Parlement. “Kabinet Rutte IV (2022-2024)” 2024.11.18. [https://www.parlement.com/id/vlombyx8gxvd/kabinet\\_rutte\\_iv\\_2022\\_2024](https://www.parlement.com/id/vlombyx8gxvd/kabinet_rutte_iv_2022_2024)

<sup>iii</sup>MDH. “Hoe denkt Nederland over migratie” 2024.11.19. <https://maurice.nl/2024/01/21/hoe-denkt-nederland-over-immigratie-en-asiel/>

<sup>iv</sup> Amnesty International. “Hein de Haas: Er is helemaal geen explosieve toename van migratie” 2024.11.19. <https://www.amnesty.nl/wordt-vervolgd/migratiewetenschapper-hein-de-haas-er-is-helemaal-geen-explosieve-toename-van-migratie>

<sup>v</sup> Wynia’s Week. “Jan van de Beek: ‘Wat de asielcrisis is? Steeds weer grote aantallen nieuwe mensen, die niet goed kunnen integreren” 2024.11.19. <https://www.wyniasweek.nl/jan-van-de-beek-wat-de-asielcrisis-is-steds-weer-grote-aantallen-nieuwe-mensen-die-niet-goed-kunnen-integreren/>

<sup>vi</sup>Van de Beek, Jan H. “Asiel draagt minstens een kwart bij aan de bevolkingsgroei: twee keer zoveel als meestal wordt gesuggereerd” 2024.11.19. <https://www.wyniasweek.nl/asiel-draagt-minstens-een-kwart-bij-aan-de-bevolkingsgroei-twee-keer-zoveel-als-meestal-wordt-gesuggereerd/>

<sup>vii</sup> <https://www.maurice.nl/2024/11/10/vertrouwenscijfers-polarisatie/>

<sup>viii</sup> Mediahuis N.V. “Nederland begint vanaf 9 december met controles aan grens met België en Duitsland” 2024.11.20. [https://www.nieuwsblad.be/cnt/dmf20241111\\_95619882](https://www.nieuwsblad.be/cnt/dmf20241111_95619882)

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