

Management summary

City Deal: Warm Welcome for Talent

International entrepreneurial talents are drawn most strongly to urban agglomerations. The Netherlands needs precisely these high-potentials to feed its innovative and globally focused economy. Though the Netherlands is already attractive to startups², there is more it could do, with Dutch cities signalling missed opportunities to recruit and retain talented internationals. To boost the country's appeal, the municipalities of Amsterdam, The Hague, Eindhoven and Groningen and the ministries of Economic Affairs, Safety and Justice, Education, Culture and Science, and Social Affairs and Employment have concluded a 'Warm Welcome for Talent' City Deal. This City Deal ties in with Urban Agenda.

Customer journey

The City Deal partners established a dedicated working group, which in turn commissioned a customer journey analysis to gain a personal perspective on how foreign entrepreneurs in the Netherlands view the experience and process of establishing their business here. The analysed target group comprised foreign startups, foreign entrepreneurs with growth ambitions, foreign students in the Netherlands wishing to start a business here, and foreign artists. This analysis also drew on the knowledge and experience of other departments, executive organisations, researchers, experienced startup coaches and immigration lawyers to help map out the customer journey.

² The Netherlands has ranked 19th in the Global Startup Ecosystem Ranking for two years running. Startup Genome (2017), Global Startup Ecosystem Report 2017.

Findings

The foreign entrepreneurs that were interviewed are happy with their decision to establish in the Netherlands but describe the journey needed to do so as complicated. Obtaining information is difficult, there is scant assistance, and procedures are lengthy and laborious. One wrong decision can have massive consequences. All this leaves entrepreneurs feeling uncertain and forced to fend for themselves. None say they experienced much of a 'warm welcome'. Though the Dutch quality of life is high, we are doing too little to advertise this abroad. We need to 'be good and tell it'!

Recommendations

Based on these findings, the City Deal partners drew up a number of recommendations. These have been presented to and approved by the target group.

A. Acquisition and branding

Actively seek out talent and promote the Netherlands as the place to be for entrepreneurial talent.

- Intensify Holland Branding, showcase what the Netherlands has to offer.
- Scout entrepreneurial talent abroad.
- Tap into the networks of foreign alumni of Dutch universities.
- Scout for talent already in the Netherlands, especially by regional parties.
- Create a platform that is accessible to regional parties where foreign entrepreneurs can outline their plans.
- Have regional parties share information on high-potential foreign entrepreneurs.

B. Information services

Improve information on doing business and living in the Netherlands.

- Create a single English-language portal that brings together all information relevant to establishing a business in the Netherlands.
- Structure the platform to ensure entrepreneurs are directed to the right information regardless of entry point ('no wrong door').
- Make informational material appealing and appropriate to all different target groups: students, entrepreneurs, those already in the Netherlands and those still abroad.
- Use chatbots to provide information.

C. Admittance and residence

Authorise cities to decide on admittance, improve existing regulations and create additional facilities tailored to startups.

- Give the metro region more influence over the admittance of talented foreign entrepreneurs (expand third-party endorsement system).
- Adjust the point-based system where needed and review it regularly.
- Make the point-based system outcomes more predictable.
- Offer separate startup and facilitator applications for startup visas.
- Streamline and speed up the decision-making process.
- Resolve the bank account – residence permit – means requirement catch-22.
- Expand the scope of the startup visa to include key personnel.
- Give these foreign entrepreneurs and their family members unrestricted access to the labour market (hybrid entrepreneurship).
- Further improve the job-search visa system for foreign recent graduates.

D. Coaching

Set up a national helpdesk and ensure a soft landing in the Netherlands.

- Set up a government-based national helpdesk operated by the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO).
- Facilitate smooth transitions between organisations involved in the procedure, with a centralised coordinating body.
- Open one-stop shops for foreign entrepreneurial talent within expat centres.
- Provide coaching for not only establishing a business but also moving your family to the Netherlands.

E. Enterprise and growth

Help foreign entrepreneurs to do business in the Netherlands and expand options for hiring foreign talent.

- Provide information on key aspects of starting and growing a business in the Netherlands in English.
- Expand employers' options for recruiting foreign talent to work for them:
 - Simplify the recognised sponsor requirements in the knowledge migrant scheme.
 - Lower the minimum salary requirement in the knowledge migrant scheme.
 - Enable first-phase startups to hire a limited number of migrants without salary requirements.
 - Create a provision for professions in short supply.
- Keep the 30% facility in place.
- Offer assistance in getting to grips with Dutch business culture and developing a network.
- Facilitate innovation and internationalisation.

F. Quality of life

The customer journey analysis found that foreign entrepreneurs are very positive about quality of life in the Netherlands. Therefore the Warm Welcome for Talent Working Group has no specific recommendations to make on this aspect. However, the many foreigners who are in paid employment in the Netherlands fell outside the scope of this analysis and it is possible that a customer journey analysis of this group would reveal areas for improvement, for example in the availability of international schools. This topic could be a focus of future City Deals.