

Netherlands

Country name	Netherlands
State title	Kingdom of the Netherlands ¹
Name of citizen	Dutch
Official languages²	Dutch (nld) – nationally official West Frisian (fry) – official in Fryslân province English (eng); Papiamentu/Papiamentu (pap) ³ – official in parts of Caribbean Netherlands
Country name in official languages	Nederland (nld) Nederlân (fry) Hulanda (pap)
State title in official languages	Koninkrijk der Nederlanden (nld) Keninkryk fan de Nederlannen (fry) Reino Hulandes (pap)
Script	Roman
Romanization System	Not required
ISO-3166 code (alpha-2/alpha-3)	NL/NLD
Capitals	Amsterdam = capital (52°21'00"N 04°55'00"E) 's-Gravenhage, known as Den Haag (The Hague) = seat of government ⁴ (52°05'00"N 04°18'00"E)
Population	18,079,310 (2025 est.) ⁵
Area	41,543 sq km (of which 7,650 sq km is water) ⁶

Introduction

Netherlands is a constituent country of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Located in Western Europe, it has a coastline on the North Sea and shares land borders with Germany and Belgium.

¹ The Netherlands is one of four constituent countries making up the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the other three being the Caribbean islands Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten (part of the island of St Martin). For further details of the Dutch Caribbean see PCGN Toponymic Factfile *Kingdom of the Netherlands: Caribbean Constituent Countries*.

² ISO 639 codes are given for languages mentioned in this Factfile.

³ The language name is spelt *Papiamentu* in Aruba, and *Papiamentu* in Bonaire and Curaçao.

⁴ The name 's-Gravenhage has been officially used for the city from the 17th century onward. The name is an abbreviation of *des Graven hage*, literally meaning 'the Count's Grove'. This name remains is the only official name for both the municipality and the city but is rarely used. The city itself uses *Den Haag* in all its communications. The post office specifies that letters should be addressed to 's-Gravenhage, but a letter to *Den Haag* will be delivered just as well. De Haach is the name of the city in West Frisian (though this is not an official language in the city).

⁵ <https://www.cbs.nl/>

⁶ <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/netherlands/factsheets/>

Formerly the Spanish Netherlands, the Dutch United Provinces declared their independence from Spain in 1581. Later regaining its independence in 1813, after 18 years of French domination. In 1830, Belgium seceded and formed a separate kingdom.⁷

In addition to the European territory, the country of the Netherlands includes 3 islands located in the Caribbean Sea. These are Saba, Sint Eustatius and Bonaire, known collectively as BES islands or the Caribbean Netherlands. During the Dutch Golden Age (approx. 1588-1672), the Netherlands' trading companies established colonies and trading posts around the world. The Dutch Caribbean possessions are the legacy of these colonies.



Map produced by PCGN for illustrative purposes only, and is not to be taken necessarily as representing the views of the UK government on boundaries or political status.

⁷ <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/netherlands/factsheets/>

Country name

Netherlands literally means ‘lower countries’, in reference to the country’s low elevation, with 26% below sea level. Most of the areas below sea level, known as *polders*, are the result of land reclamation.

The country name is Netherlands. Although Holland is sometimes used informally in English, Holland is a geographical region within the Netherlands (the provinces of North Holland and South Holland). The country prefers to be known as the Netherlands (nld: Nederland). The definite article (the) is not part of the official country name but may be used in an English sentence, although it is not used with the Dutch country name.

Geographical names policy and sources

Geographical names should be taken from official Netherlands mapping and sources. All accents, diacritics, apostrophes and hyphens should be retained (see below for further details).

The Netherlands does not have a formally established geographical names authority. There are no formal or informal rules or procedures for geographical names standardisation agreed between the governmental agencies involved in the registration of geographical names. The [Commission on Geographical Names](#) (*Commissie Aardrijkskundige Namen*, CAN) is responsible for the standardisation of Dutch exonyms, and for consultancy on the orthography of domestic geographical names within the Dutch language area. The commission is a part of the [Dutch Language Union](#) (*Nederlandse Taalunie*), a supranational organization in which the governments of the Netherlands, Flanders and Suriname, together with the Dutch Caribbean countries of Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten, cooperate on Dutch language policy.⁸

The Netherlands’ three main surveying and mapping organizations are:

1. The Netherlands’ Cadastre, Land Registry and Mapping Agency, known as Kadaster:
<https://www.kadaster.nl>
2. the Hydrographic Service (*Dienst der Hydrografie*):
<https://www.defensie.nl/organisatie/marine/eenheden/dienst-der-hydrografie>
3. Rijkswaterstaat (the governmental agency for public works and water management)
<https://www.rijkswaterstaat.nl>

Authoritative geographical names data of the Netherlands can be found in two governmental registers:

1. Key Register Topography (*Basisregistratie Topografie*, BRT), which consists of the topographic databases and maps of the Netherlands. The data and the database are updated and maintained by Kadaster: <https://www.kadaster.nl/zakelijk/registraties/basisregistraties/brt>
2. Key Register Addresses and Buildings (*Basisregistratie Adressen en Gebouwen*, BAG), which contains official street names and populated place names that are used in addresses. The data is updated and maintained by the municipalities, and the database is maintained by Kadaster: <https://www.geobasisregistraties.nl/basisregistraties/adressen-en-gebouwen>

Other resources include:

- <https://www.spotinfo.nl/wp/>

⁸ [GEGN.2/2025/117/CRP.117](#) Report of the Netherlands.

- Nationaal Georegister:
<https://www.nationaalgeoregister.nl/geonetwork/srv/dut/catalog.search#/home>
- Publieke Dienstverlening op de Kaart (PDOK) 'public services on the map', official web portal for geographical data from the Dutch government (Dutch language only): <https://www.pdok.nl/>
- Inspire Geoportal: <https://inspire-geoportal.ec.europa.eu/srv/eng/catalog.search#/home>
- Dutch Oil and Gas Portal (NLOG) [geological maps]: <https://www.nlog.nl/en/geological-maps>
- <https://www.topotijdreis.nl/> - which provides old & current maps of the Netherlands

Fryslân

Dutch is official in all parts of the Netherlands. In the province of Fryslân, West Frisian (fry), often just known as Frisian, is also an official language. For most geographical names both a Frisian and a Dutch version exists, but only one name can be official, either the Frisian or the Dutch name. Originally all authoritative names were written in Dutch, but since the 1980s several municipalities decided to replace Dutch names with Frisian names. Currently about half of the populated place names and the vast majority of street names and water names in the Frisian language area are in Frisian. West Frisian place names will be found alongside Dutch on mapping and signage. On Dutch mapping the official name, being either Frisian or Dutch, is shown first in a larger font than the name in the other language in Fryslân province. The Frisian name is always rendered in italics, to easily distinguish between the Frisian and Dutch names. In cases where no official name exists, the Frisian name is given preference over the Dutch name. PCGN recommends showing the Dutch name followed by the Frisian name in brackets, e.g. Leeuwarden (Ljouwert). The sole official name of the province previously known as Friesland is Fryslân (i.e. the Frisian form of the name).

Caribbean Municipalities

In the Caribbean Netherlands, Papiamentu is co-official with Dutch in Bonaire, while Dutch and English are co-official in Saba and Sint Eustatius. According to the Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba Public Entities Establishment Act, Dutch will be used by all governmental institutions in these public entities, unless specified otherwise in the act. The act makes provisions that allow for the use of Papiamentu or English in contacts between civilians and the public entities as well as in mutual contacts between governments in the public entities, when this is 'more efficient', 'the interests of third parties are not disproportionately harmed' and it will not lead to a 'disproportionate burden on administrative traffic'.⁹

Papiamentu, Dutch or English toponyms can be found in the Caribbean municipalities. On Saba most toponyms are in English, on Sint Eustatius and Bonaire there are features with an English/Papiamentu name and features with a Dutch name. Names sources are limited for the Dutch Caribbean islands. In the US [Geonet Names Server](#) names in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius are recorded under Caribbean Netherlands.

Capitalisation and Abbreviations¹⁰

- Articles and prepositions at the beginning of geographical names are capitalised, unless abbreviated, in which case the name starts with an apostrophe and a lower case 't' or 'd'. Examples: Het Loo, Den Helder, Ter Aalst. But: 't Harde, 's-Hertogenbosch ('t = het (meaning 'the' or 'it'); 's- = des (meaning 'of the')).

⁹ <https://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0028063/2025-01-01>

¹⁰ Toponymic guidelines for international use by map editors and other editors for the Netherlands:
https://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/docs/11th-uncsgn-docs/E_Conf.105_142_CRP.142_9_toponymic%20guidelines%20Netherlands%202017_a.pdf

- ii. The initial letter of all other disconnected name parts, with the exception of articles, prepositions and conjunctions, are capitalized. Examples: Nederhorst den Berg, Kanaal van Terneuzen naar Gent, Millingen aan de Rijn.
- iii. When names written in one word are divided, because of lack of space, the initial letter of the second and following parts is not capitalised. Example: Westerwoldse A → Wester-woldse A
- iv. The grapheme IJ ij is regarded as one letter, so when capitalised should be written IJ instead of Ij. Examples: IJsselmeer, IJmuiden.

Languages

Dutch is the only nationwide official language. The Frisian minority language has an official status in the province of Fryslân only. Dutch and English are the official languages of Saba and Sint Eustatius, while Dutch and Papiamentu are the official languages of Bonaire. English is widely spoken as a second language throughout the Netherlands.

Dutch (ned)

Dutch (autoglottonym: *Nederlands*) is a West Germanic language of the Indo-European language family. The Dutch alphabet includes the standard 26 letters of the Roman alphabet plus the diagraph IJ, which is regarded as a single character. Foreign or archaic influences on geographical names have led to the incorporation of non-standard letters such as vowels with diaereses and accents in some geographical names. Furthermore ë, ï, ö and ü may appear in vowel clusters in Dutch words and names to mark a separate pronunciation of the vowels.

West Frisian (fry)

(West) Frisian (autoglottonym: *Frysk*) is a Germanic language akin to Dutch and English. It is an official language in the province of Fryslân and is spoken by about 350,000 inhabitants as their mother tongue (2011). The Frisian language is used and taught officially in educational and religious institutions, as well as in local and provincial government. West Frisian is also spoken in a number of villages bordering Fryslân, in the neighbouring province of Groningen.

The present situation can be considered as a transitional stage in respect to the use of Frisian toponyms on official documents. In many municipalities in Fryslân, street names are, completely or partially, officially spelled in Frisian. Some municipalities bear Frisian names. The province officially has a monolingual (Frisian) name (Fryslân). Several municipalities have officially spelled the names of their villages and towns unilingually in Frisian. This local usage is also reflected on the signposts and road maps.

Frisian versions of geographical names in Fryslân have been standardized at the request of the Frisian provincial government by the Toponymic Working Group of the [Frisian Academy](#) (Fryske Akademy).

West Frisian is written in Roman script and uses the following alphabet:

Aa Bb (C)c Dd Ee Ff Gg Hh Ii, Yy Jj Kk Ll Mm Nn Oo Pp Rr Ss Tt Uu (V)v Ww (Z)z

In addition to the normal alphabetical sequence in the Frisian alphabet, the letters A â, E ê, O ô and U û occur. In the Frisian alphabet they come under A, E, O and U respectively. Y y is a positional variant of I i and comes under I i in the alphabet. C only appears in the combination ch and as such never at the beginning of a word. C, v and z only occur at the beginning of a word in proper names that are part of a toponym, e.g. Vosseloane.

Papiamento (pap)

Papiamento, or Papiamentu¹¹ (pap) is a Portuguese-based creole language, which has official status in Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao. It is largely based on Portuguese as spoken in the 15th and 16th centuries, and has been influenced considerably by Dutch and Venezuelan Spanish.

The Papiamento alphabet has 27 letters – the 26 letters of the English alphabet plus ‘ř’. It also employs four digraphs (ch, dj, sh and zj).

Papiamento has two standardised orthographies; one used on the island of Aruba and the other on the islands of Curaçao and Bonaire. The governments of Curaçao and Aruba formally standardised orthographic rules in 1976 and 1977.

Inventory of characters (and their Unicode encodings¹²):

The following letter-diacritic combinations may be found in geographical names in the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

Dutch uses the following letter-diacritic combinations in addition to the unmodified letters of the basic Roman script:

Character	Unicode encoding	Character	Unicode encoding
Â	00C2	â	00E2
Ç	00C7	ç	00E7
È	00C8	è	00E8
É	00C9	é	00E9
Ě	00CB	ě	00EB
Ī	00CF	ī	00EF
IJ	0132	ij	0133
Ö	00D6	ö	00F6
Ú	00DA	ú	00FA
Ü	00DC	ü	00FC
Û	00DB	û	00FB

West Frisian contains the following letter-diacritic combinations in addition to the unmodified letters of the basic Roman script:

Character	Unicode encoding	Character	Unicode encoding
Â	00C2	â	00E2
Ê	00CA	ê	00EA
IJ	0132	ij	0133
Ô	00D4	ô	00FA
Ú	00DA	ú	00FA
Û	00DB	û	00FB

¹¹ The language name is spelt *Papiamento* in Aruba, and *Papiamentu* in Bonaire and Curaçao.

¹² See www.unicode.org

Papiamentu uses the following letter-diacritic combinations in addition to the unmodified letters of the basic Roman script:

Character	Unicode encoding	Character	Unicode encoding
Á	00C1	á	00E1
È	00C8	è	00E8
É	00C9	é	00E9
Í	00CD	í	00ED
Ñ	00F1	ñ	00D1
Ò	00D2	ò	00F2
Ó	00D3	ó	00F3
Ú	00DA	ú	00FA
Ü	00DC	ü	00FC

Administrative structure

Public administration in the Netherlands has four tiers: central government, the provinces, the municipalities and the water authorities (nld: *waterschap*). The water authorities are independent of the provinces and municipalities. Their role is to manage surface water in the environment. They are responsible for managing rivers and canals, drainage, water collection, flood and erosion prevention and provision of potable water. They also manage the polder¹³ systems. There are currently 21 water authorities.¹⁴

At first-order administrative level (ADM1) the European Netherlands is divided into 12 provinces (nld: *provincie*). These are further subdivided into 342 municipalities (nld: *gemeente*) at second-order level.

Provinces of the Netherlands

Province Name	ISO 3166-2 Code	Administrative Centre (PPLA)	Location of Centre
Drenthe	NL-DR	Assen	52°59'41"N 06°33'48"E
Flevoland	NL-FL	Lelystad	52°31'04"N 05°28'26"E
Fryslân	NL-FR	Leeuwarden (Ljouwert)	53°12'05"N 05°48'3"1E
Gelderland	NL-GE	Arnhem	51°58'47"N 05°55'32"E
Groningen	NL-GR	Groningen	53°13'00"N 06°33'00"E
Limburg	NL-LI	Maastricht	50°51'00"N 05°41'00"E
Noord-Brabant ¹⁵	NL-NB	's-Hertogenbosch ¹⁶	51°42'01"N 05°18'25"E
Noord-Holland ¹⁷	NL-NH	Haarlem	55°22'00"N 04°39'00"E
Overijssel	NL-OV	Zwolle	52°30'21"N 06°05'09"E
Utrecht	NL-UT	Utrecht	52°05'38"N 05°07'09"E
Zeeland	NL-ZE	Middelburg	51°30'01"N 03°36'47"E
Zuid-Holland ¹⁸	NL-ZH	Den Haag (The Hague)	52°05'00"N 04°18'00"E

¹³ The Dutch polders are low lying areas of land reclaimed from the sea, a lake, a river or a marsh, enclosed by embankments known as dikes (nld: *dijk*).

¹⁴ <https://www.waterschappen.nl/mijn-waterschap/>

¹⁵ North Brabant

¹⁶ Known colloquially as Den Bosch

¹⁷ North Holland

¹⁸ South Holland

Caribbean Netherlands

Dutch possessions in the Caribbean Sea were formerly known as the Netherlands Antilles (Dutch: Nederlandse Antillen). Aruba separated from the Netherlands Antilles and became a constituent country of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1986. In 2010, the Netherlands Antilles were dissolved in 2010, with Curaçao and Sint Maarten becoming constituent countries of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba becoming “public bodies” (Dutch: openbaar lichaam; pap: entidat públiko), part of the country of the Netherlands. In the Netherlands these administrative units are often referred to as special municipalities (Dutch: Bijzondere gemeente). Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba are collectively known as BES or the Caribbean Netherlands (Dutch: Caribisch Nederland).

Constituent Countries and Special Municipalities of the Kingdom of the Netherlands¹⁹



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The three public bodies of the Netherlands are similar to the municipalities in the European part of the Netherlands. Unlike those municipalities, however, the Caribbean islands are not part of a Dutch province. Each island has an executive council that is responsible for that island’s day-to-day governance. The executive council governs the island and is subject to scrutiny by the island council, which is the representative assembly of the people.

¹⁹<https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/caribische-deel-van-het-koninkrijk/vraag-en-antwoord/waaruit-bestaat-het-koninkrijk-der-nederlanden>

Special Municipalities of the Netherlands

Public Body	Location	ISO 3166 code (alpha2/ alpha-3)	ISO 3166-2 code	Administrative seat	Official languages	Population ²⁰	Area
Bonaire	12°11'28"N 68°15'24"W	BQ/BES	NL-BQ1	Kralendijk (nld) Playa (pap - colloquial)	Dutch and Papiamentu	20,104 (2019)	288 km ²
Saba	17°37'49"N 63°14'26"W	BQ/BES	NL-BQ2	The Bottom	Dutch and English	1,915 (2019)	13 km ²
Sint Eustatius ²¹	17°29'06"N 62°58'24"W	BQ/BES	NL-BQ3	Oranjestad	Dutch and English	3,138 (2019)	21 km ²

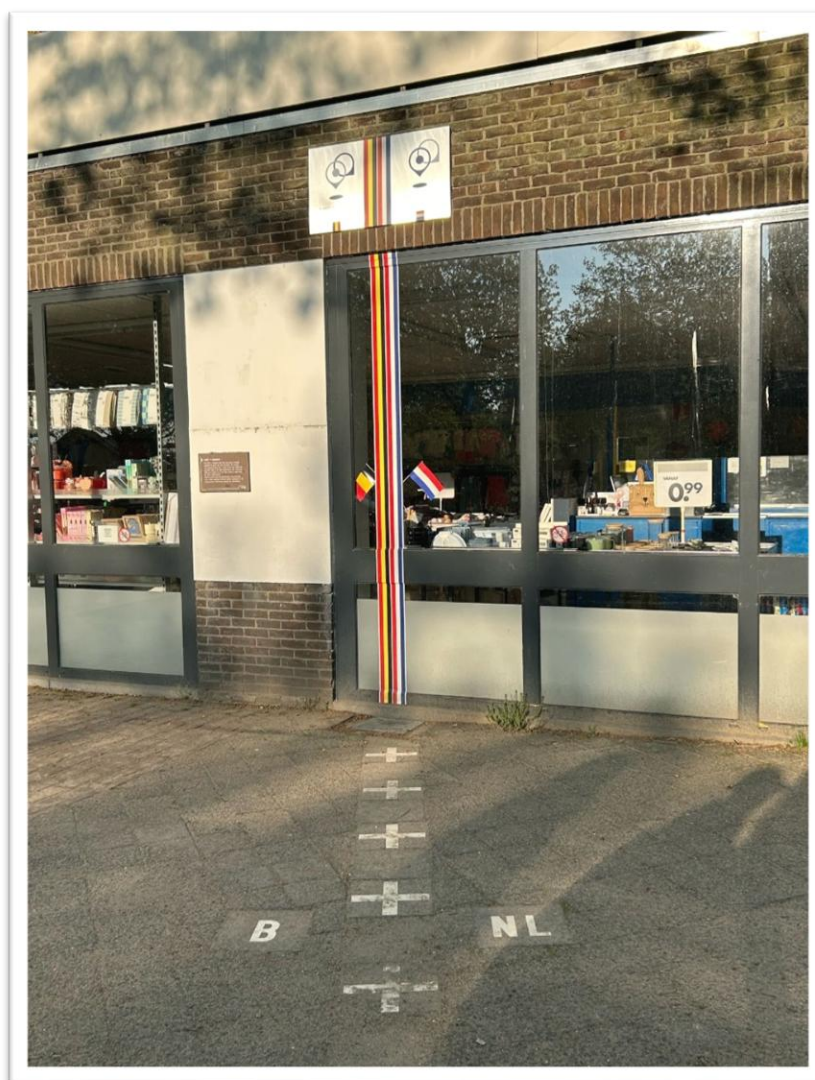
²⁰ Population and area data: <https://www.government.nl/topics/caribbean-parts-of-the-kingdom/question-and-answer/what-are-the-different-parts-of-the-kingdom-of-the-netherlands>

²¹ Known locally as Statia

Baarle Nassau/Baarle-Hertog (51°26'43"N 04°55'46"E)

This village consists of a patchwork of Belgian and Dutch territories. The Belgian parts of the village are called Baarle-Hertog and the Dutch elements are called Baarle-Nassau. The Belgian part includes 16 exclaves within Dutch territory. The exclaves, in turn, surround seven Dutch areas. Belgian territory also surrounds an eighth Dutch area near Ginhoven. The whole village is sometimes referred to as Baarle.

The line of the border means that some buildings straddle both countries. For these properties, the *voordeurregel* (literally: "front door rule") policy applies: their address lies in the country that contains their front door. The exception is a house on Loveren Street with both Belgian (No. 2) and Dutch (No. 19) house numbers, whose front door is on the border line itself. For convenience, every house number plaque shows a national flag.



A shop in Baarle Nassau/Baarle Hertog, which straddles the Netherlands-Belgium border (photo by PCGN, 2025)



The house on Loveren Street, whose front door straddles the Netherlands-Belgium border
 (photos by PCGN 2025)

Other Significant Locations

Netherlands Names	Conventional Name ²²	Alternative Names	Location	Feature Type
Noordzee (nld) Noardsee (fry)	North Sea*	Mer du Nord (fra); Nordsee (deu); Nordsøen (dan); Nordsjøen (nor)	55°20'00"N 03°00'00"E	Sea
Waddenzee (nld) Waadsee (fry)	Wadden Sea*	Wattenmeer (deu); Vadehavet (dan)	53°23'27"N 05°53'47"E	Intertidal zone; UNESCO World Heritage Site
Waddeneilanden (nld) Waadeilannen (fry) ²³	Wadden Sea Islands*		53°22'00"N 05°20'00"E	Island chain

²² PCGN advice is usually that conventional names be used for international (or disputed) features; those for which this pertains are marked in this table with an asterisk.

²³ These names apply to all islands in the Wadden Sea, including the East Frisian Islands, North Frisian Islands and Danish Wadden Sea Islands. There is no separate name in Dutch or Frisian for the West Frisian Islands. 'Frisian islands' (Fryske eilannen or Fryske Waadeilannen, Friese Waddeneilanden) may refer to the West Frisian Islands that are part of the province of Fryslân.

Netherlands Names	Conventional Name ²²	Alternative Names	Location	Feature Type
Rijn (nld)	Rhine*	Ryn (fry) Rhein (deu); Rhin (fra); Reno (ita); Rain (roh)	51°59'03"N 04°04'57"E	River
Schelde (nld)	Scheldt	Skelde (fry) Escaut (fra)	51°22'00"N 04°15'00"E	River
Maas (nld & fry)	Meuse*	-	51°43'00"N 04°50'00"E	River
IJssel	-	-	52°35'00"N 05°50'00"E	River
IJsselmeer	IJssel Lake	-	52°49'39"N 05°14'53"E	Lake
Hoek van Holland	Hook of Holland	Hoek fan Hollân (fry)	51°59'27"N 04°08'40"E	PPL & Port
Rotterdam	-	-	51°55'00"N 04°30'00"E	PPL & Port
Leiden	-	Leien (fry)	52°10'35"N 04°31'41"E	PPL
Gouda	-	-	52°01'21"N 04°42'25"E	PPL
Scheveningen	-	Skeveningen (fry)	52°05'51"N 04°16'59"E	PPL
Delft	-	-	52°01'07"N 04°22'41"E	PPL

Useful references

- Atlas Flevoland: https://www.flevoland.nl/getmedia/aeaa15c3-b957-4a8b-b5ce-65472aa5fa80/Atlas-Flevoland_digitaal_DV-LR.pdf
- Caribbean parts of the Kingdom of the Netherlands: <https://www.government.nl/topics/caribbean-parts-of-the-kingdom>
- CIA World Factbook: <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/netherlands/>
- Commissie Aardrijkskundige Namen: <https://namen.taalunie.org/>
- Ethnologue: www.ethnologue.com (for information on languages)
- Fryske Akademy: <https://www.fryske-akademy.nl/>
- International Organization for Standardization (ISO): www.iso.org
- ISO Online Browsing Platform (OBP): <https://www.iso.org/obp/ui#home>
- Nederlands Normalisatie-Instituut: <https://www.nen.nl/>
- Nederlandse Taalunie (Union for the Dutch Language): <https://taalunie.org/>
- Netherlands Ministry of Defence (maps and boundaries data): <https://www.defensie.nl/onderwerpen/hydrografie/maritieme-zones-en-zeegrenzen/zeegrenzen-caribisch-deel-van-het-koninkrijk>

- NGA Geographic Names Standardization Policy for the Netherlands: https://geonames.nga.mil/geonames/GNSSearch/GNSDocs/policies/Netherlands_Country_Policy_webversion_Latest.pdf
- Omniglot: www.omniglot.com (for information on languages and scripts)
- Ortografia de Papiamento (Aruba, 2009): https://papiamento.aw/pages/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/150520_papiamento-ortografia-version-april-2009.pdf (known as the 'Buki Blauw' (Blue Book))
- Ortografia i Lista di palabra Papiamentu (Curaçao, 2009): https://uoc.spin-cdn.com/media/buki_di_oro/20200214_2009_buki_di_oro_papiamentu_rs.pdf (Known as 'Buki di Oro' (Gold Book))
- PCGN Country Names list: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/country-names>
- Regla di Gramática di Papiamento (Aruba, 2008): https://papiamento.aw/pages/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/p.aw_PDF_regla_Gramatica.pdf
- Toponymic guidelines for international use by map editors and other editors for the Netherlands (2017): https://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/docs/11th-uncsgn-docs/E_Conf.105_142_CRP.142_9_toponymic%20guidelines%20Netherlands%202017_a.pdf
- Unicode: www.unicode.org
- US Board on Geographic Names GONet Names Server: <https://geonames.nga.mil/geonames/GNSHome/welcome.html>
- Vocabulario di Papiamento (Aruba, 2009): https://papiamento.aw/pages/wp-content/uploads/pdf/Paw_2009_Vocabulario_di_Papiamento.pdf
- Waterschappen (water authorities): <https://www.waterschappen.nl/>

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