

New to the Netherlands

An initiative for giving refugees a voice

Welcome!

How are you doing in your new Dutch hometown? Have you gotten settled in yet? If you have, you've made a good start. What else do you need in order to feel safe and start your new life?

That's what Dutch journalism platform *De Correspondent* wants to find out. We launched this initiative on October 3, hoping to connect hundreds of refugees like you to hundreds of our 47,000 members. Refugees and members pledge to stay in contact for 6 months and meet up at least once a month.

What does that mean? If you choose to take part, you'll meet up with a Dutch person interested in how you're doing. You can practice your Dutch a little together. You may even become close, and they may be able to help you find your way in everyday life in the Netherlands.

Every month, you will meet once for about an hour. When you get together, you'll have the opportunity to talk about how things are going for you, while you get accustomed to things in this country and try to build a new life here. The person you're meeting – a member of *De Correspondent* – will bring along an online questionnaire to guide the conversation. Questionnaires remain anonymous. *De Correspondent* gathers information from participants, but keeps everything confidential. We will not share your information with anyone – not immigration, not social services, not the city, not the government of your country of origin.

We will use that information to write stories about refugees like you, and about your life in the Netherlands. These stories give newcomers a much-needed voice. Many people talk about refugees, but few of them talk with refugees. By telling us about your life in the Netherlands, you help Dutch people better understand your situation. The resulting articles will be translated into English and Arabic, and will be made freely available online.

We earnestly hope you will join us. Sign up now, together with the person who approached you about this project.

If no one has asked you to participate yet, but you would like to take part in the New to the Netherlands project, please email us at nieuwinnederland@decorrespondent.nl.

We will forward your email address to a *De Correspondent* member in your town or city, who will contact you about what to do next.

Greta Riemersma
Dick Wittenberg

The New to the Netherlands Initiative
De Correspondent
<https://decorrespondent.nl/>

The logo for De Correspondent, featuring the word 'de' in a small, simple font above the word 'Correspondent' in a large, elegant, cursive script.

Do's and don'ts when dealing with Dutch people

During this initiative, you will meet people from different backgrounds and will probably run into some cultural differences. It's impossible to tell you in advance exactly what will happen, but that's okay. What's most important is that you realize there are differences, that you talk about them if you wish, and then move on. Don't let cultural differences stand in the way of connecting with each other.

Below, we would like to point out a number of issues. We hope they answer some of the questions you may have about our initiative. This information comes from organizations like *The Dutch Council for Refugees (Vluchtelingenwerk)* and *Humanitas*, which have extensive experience with contact between refugees and Dutch people. We've also talked to a number of refugees who have been in the Netherlands for some time about the things they liked and disliked during their first years here.

- *De Correspondent* wants to tell the stories of refugees in the Netherlands. We want to give refugees a voice. And that's exactly what we'll do: we don't lie, and we don't twist the truth. It may very well be that where you come from, people don't trust journalists. Journalists there may be an extension of the government. In the Netherlands, things are different. Dutch journalists don't work for the government. They can tell the stories they want to tell, and they won't be put in jail for their work. Dutch journalists are independent.
- Participants in this *De Correspondent* project will remain anonymous. We hope to gather information from hundreds of refugees, and we will write stories about what we learn that will be shared online. Most of all, we will look at what experiences newcomers have in common. Are people like you managing to build new lives in the Netherlands? What helps make that possible? What stands in the way? If we want to know more about you, we'll ask the *De Correspondent* member who met with you whether it's okay with you if we contact you. On our website, you can see exactly what we do with the information you and your fellow newcomers share, as most of our articles will be published online in Dutch, English, and Arabic.
- Please note: *De Correspondent* will not pass any of your information to the authorities – not to immigration, not to social services or the municipality, and not to the government of your country of origin. Your information will be treated confidentially and stored securely. If you want to access it, feel free to contact us whenever you like.
- It helps if you speak Dutch or English, but it's not required. If you don't speak either language, perhaps you know somebody from your own country living in the Netherlands who is willing to interpret when you meet up with your local *De Correspondent* member. You could also ask around for an interpreter on social media. The questionnaires will be available in Dutch, English, and Arabic.
- Participating in the project only takes one hour a month. All you have to do is fill out the questionnaire. Of course, it's fine if you and your local *De Correspondent* member want to stay longer to talk or meet more often, but it's not required.

- It's possible that during your conversations, your local *De Correspondent* member may ask about things you would rather not talk about. Perhaps they'll ask how you ended up in the Netherlands, for example, and if you miss your country. Please realize that many Dutch people have no idea how you feel. Most of them have never been through a war. They live in a country where people aren't arrested for speaking their mind, or for disagreeing with each other. And most have never had to flee their homes. If Dutch people ask about experiences like these, they usually do so out of compassion or interest. If you don't want to answer a question, just say so.
- When asking questions, Dutch people may be more direct, less formal, or more open than you're used to. You might think they're being impolite or disrespectful, but it's probably just a cultural difference. Most Dutch people don't know how people from your country interact, just like you probably don't know exactly how Dutch people interact.
- You may want your local *De Correspondent* member to assist you with something besides the questionnaire. However, they may be unable or unwilling to help with other matters. In that case, simply ask if they will refer you to an institution that can help. All the project requires is filling out the monthly questionnaires; anything else you choose to do together is up to you and your *De Correspondent* partner.