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# At Home in Holland? How Staff Members of International Organisations View Life in The Netherlands

Report on Survey Results

Prepared by the  
Secretariat of the International Organisations' Staff Associations  
in The Netherlands (IOSA-NL)

Approved on 12 October 2005

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International Organisations' Staff Associations in the Netherlands

Members

European Patent Office (EPO), European Space Agency (ESA/ESTEC), NATO CS Agency (NSA), International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (UNICTY),  
European Police Office (Europol), European Organisation for the Safety of Air Navigation (Eurocontrol), International Court of Justice (ICJ), International Criminal Court (ICC),  
Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)



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### INTRODUCTION TO IOSA-NL

IOSA (the International Organisation of Staff Associations in the Netherlands) represents 75% of all international civil servants working and living in the Netherlands in nine large international organisations. The current membership includes: The European Patent Office (EPO), The European Space Agency (ESA/ESTEC), NATO C3 Agency (NC3A), The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (UN/ICTY), The European Police Office (EUROPOL), The European Organisation for the Safety of Air Navigation (EUROCONTROL), The International Court of Justice (ICJ), The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), and The International Criminal Court (ICC). A number of organisations have communicated their interest in joining IOSA (Eurojust, for example); and other organisations that are not invested members come to IOSA for advice, have expressed their appreciation for the work it is doing, and have freely shared information and data. IOSA's impressive network of contacts—formal and informal—is steadily growing.

The mandate of IOSA is to monitor and promote the welfare of the staff of its member international organisations (IOs) through inter-agency consultation and dialogue with the Netherlands Foreign Ministry and local government agencies. As an umbrella organisation, IOSA provides a forum for its members to come together to exchange information, to discuss policy, and ultimately, to voice concerns that the organisations they represent have in common.

IOSA holds three to four plenary sessions per year. The next general session will be held on 12 October 2005 and will be hosted by OPCW (Johan de Wittlaan 32, 2517 JR, The Hague).

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More information can be found on our website: [www.iosa-nl.org](http://www.iosa-nl.org).

### BACKGROUND TO THE SURVEY

This draft report briefly summarises the findings of a survey that IOSA conducted amongst its membership during summer 2005, with the exception of EPO for which the survey was

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conducted earlier. IOSA's Secretariat wished to provide the relevant Dutch bodies and the executive bodies of our member IOs with the opportunity to respond to some of its findings before it issues its final report, and so the current report has been circulated to solicit feedback from relevant individuals and/or groups.

During the course of the last few years, and particularly in 2005, it had become increasingly clear to IOSA that serious issues of contention had arisen between international organisations and the various Dutch ministries and governmental bodies responsible for both attracting international organisations (IOs) to the Netherlands, and for ensuring the welfare of international civil servants already stationed in this country. These issues were not new, but it would appear, both from media reports and from information gleaned from the IOs themselves, that a critical juncture had been reached and that issues that had been long-standing for years could no longer be ignored.

It was in this context that IOSA undertook to commission a survey to enable its membership to articulate their concerns about how, as international employees, they assess their quality of life here in the Netherlands. Many of the international staff members here have lived and worked elsewhere and are in a position to analyse how the Netherlands compares with other countries hosting international organisations. The survey is also intended to provide useful information to the relevant Dutch authorities, who have clearly indicated that they wish to continue attracting and keeping IOs in this country.

The survey was constructed to be very brief and simple and contained concrete questions. The simplest and most primary question was: "Given the opportunity, would you prefer to stay in the Netherlands or to leave?" Not all of the results have been presented here, but the general trends are summarised.

The survey consists of answers received from the following IOs: EPO, ESA/ESTEC, NATO NC3A, ICTY, and OPCW. In total 3406 responses were given, representing over 60% of the IOSA membership; the fact that the survey took place over the summer months impacted on the number of respondents available as did other organisational difficulties and concerns over privacy. Nevertheless, IOSA is of the view that these responses are highly significant and add a concrete dimension to the abstract topics being discussed.

At the time the survey was carried out, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs policy paper on privileges and immunities distributed in June 2005 to all IOs in the Netherlands was not in the public domain, and the information contained therein cannot, therefore, be reflected in the results presented here. It remains to be seen whether or not, and in what respect, the policy paper might have altered the opinions expressed by staff had the survey been carried out at a later time. IOSA-NL remains at the service of the Dutch Authorities to perform a follow-up survey in order to help answer this question, should they so wish.



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

What is dramatically striking is the consistency of the responses to the first question of the survey: more than three-quarters of the people surveyed indicated that they would prefer to leave The Netherlands. This majority includes both Dutch and non-Dutch individuals (the reasons for this are explained in more detail below). These results are highlighted by the graphs, which, in visual form, summarise the findings. Together with the comments that have been made (included elsewhere in this document), they paint a revealing picture of how employees of international organisations view life in this country.

The overall results appear clear and confirm perceptions that have been discussed in a variety of fora (including meetings of IOs and publications in the media) over the past months. In short, a high percentage of IO employees are not satisfied with the working environment in The Netherlands, and feel that conditions here have deteriorated over the last few years (and certainly contrast sharply with what was prevalent when many IOs first set up their headquarters here). In addition, whatever means the Dutch authorities are employing to retain the staff of IOs, their efforts are insufficient since over 50% of Dutch nationals working for these organisations would *also* prefer to leave. Although trends in organisations are similar—to leave—there is a variation in the numbers. The statistical results correlate well with the numerous comments that were received.

Reasons for unhappiness stretched across a broad spectrum of factors: cultural (this includes deteriorating conditions in terms of the political, social, and physical environment, the erosion or even (in the case of some organisations) non-existence of privileges and immunities offered by other countries), environmental (high cost of living, pollution, climatic conditions, and so on), and practical (poor quality of medical care, living in a non-service-oriented society, and lack of amenities).

To understand the reasons for individuals and organisations wishing to stay or to leave The Netherlands, the survey invited responses to ten broad areas of life in The Netherlands to which the respondents could give their views (a copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix I). The discussion of the statistical results below touches upon a number of factors that the respondents indicated shaped their views of their lives in this country. Some areas of especial concern were:

- Deteriorating relationships with local and governmental authorities
- Dissatisfaction with the medical system
- Environmental issues (climatic conditions, pollution)
- Tax issues
- Practical issues (cost of living concerns, housing difficulties)
- Naturalisation and residency difficulties

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The results of the survey give a snapshot of attitudes and perceptions at the “grassroots level” – that is, from ordinary people that work for a variety of international organisations. It is IOSA’s hope that this survey and the information it contains will contribute to the discussion within organisations, between organisations, and between the IOs and the relevant Dutch ministries and bodies, of the concerns that have been raised here. Certainly, if The Netherlands wishes to continue attracting and retaining IOs, the competent authorities will need to ponder carefully the information contained in this report.

## SUMMARY OF STATISTICAL RESULTS

The similarity of responses across IOs is startling. These results are highlighted by the sequence of figures displayed below.

The most significant result is given by Figure 1, which illustrates the global results of the survey and reflects the high percentage of IO employees that are not satisfied with conditions in The Netherlands.

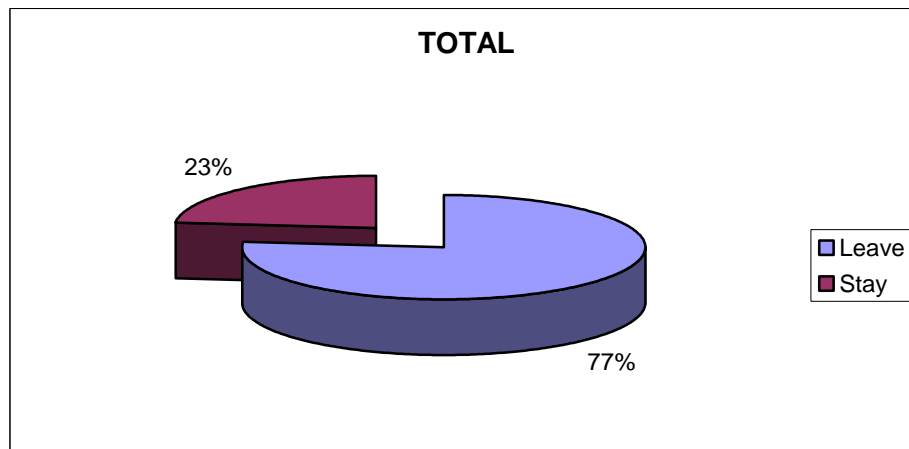


Figure 1. Percentages of total responses to “Stay or Leave The Netherlands”



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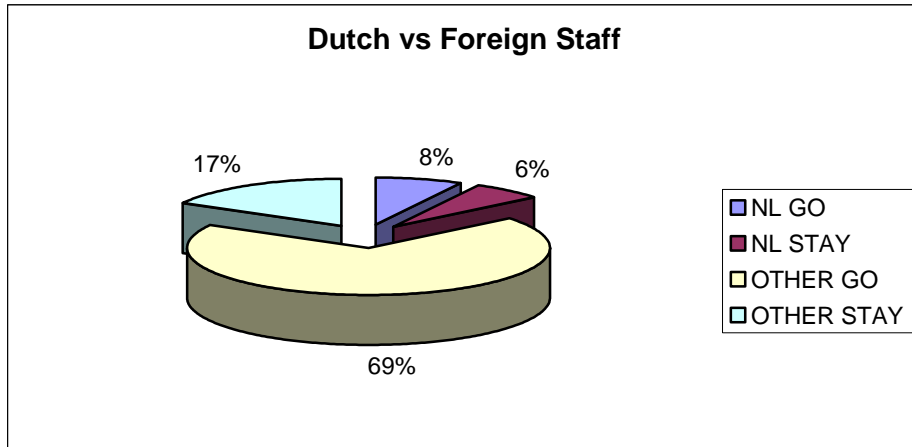


Figure 2. Percentages of total responses to “Stay or Leave The Netherlands” displaying the distribution between Dutch and foreign staff

These results are broken down in Figure 2 to reflect differences between responses from Dutch and foreign staff, and show that 80% of foreign staff and over 50% of Dutch nationals working for IOs would prefer to leave the country. This leads one to conclude that there exists a general, “global” dissatisfaction that cannot be traced back to some trans-cultural prejudice.

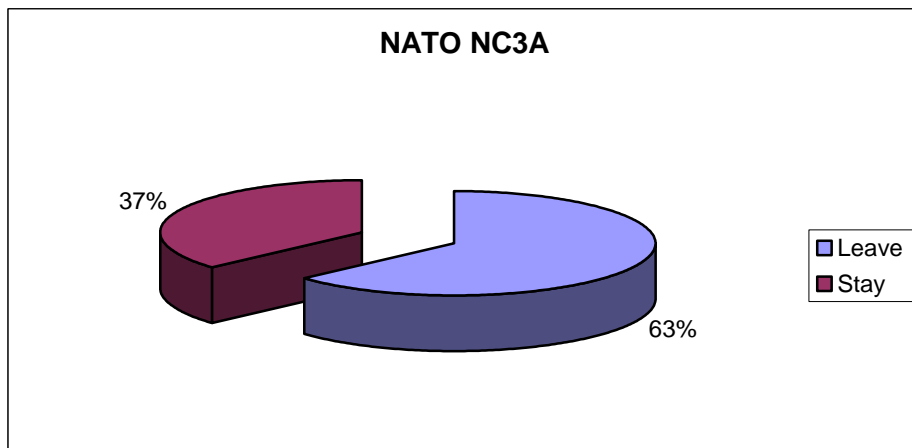


Figure 3. Percentages of NATO NC3A responses to “Stay or Leave The Netherlands”

Figures 3 to 7 confirm the results previously discussed, but are broken down according to the IO concerned. The percentages vary according to the organisation. It is interesting to compare the results from the OPCW (88% of respondents expressed the desire to leave) and



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NATO NC3A (63% of respondents expressed the same desire, still a significant percentage). Although the trend is similar, variations in numbers do exist. This result correlates well with the substance and application—or lack thereof—of the corresponding seat agreement, the perception of whether contractual undertakings have been met, and such factors as work interest and stability, age, and the perception of whether the possibility of moving is concretely realizable or not. Nevertheless, the consistency of views amongst the organisations is clear and indisputable.

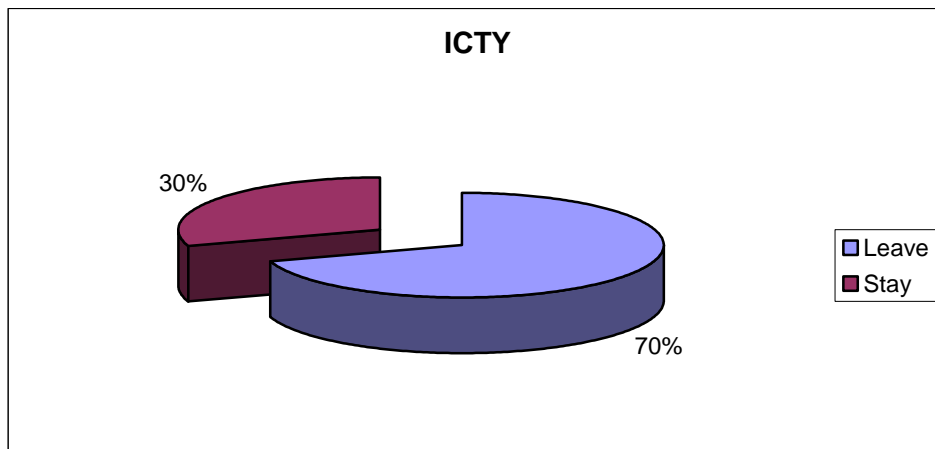


Figure 4. Percentages of ICTY responses to “Stay or Leave The Netherlands”

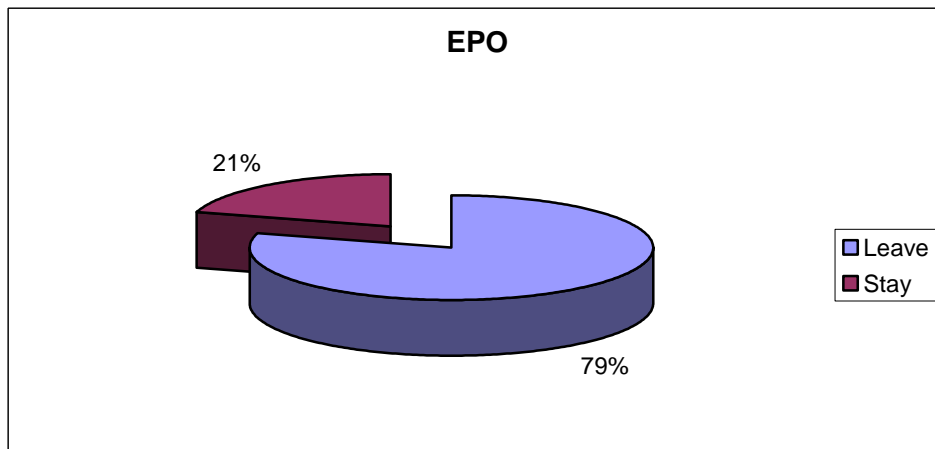


Figure 5. Percentages of EPO responses to “Stay or Leave The Netherlands”



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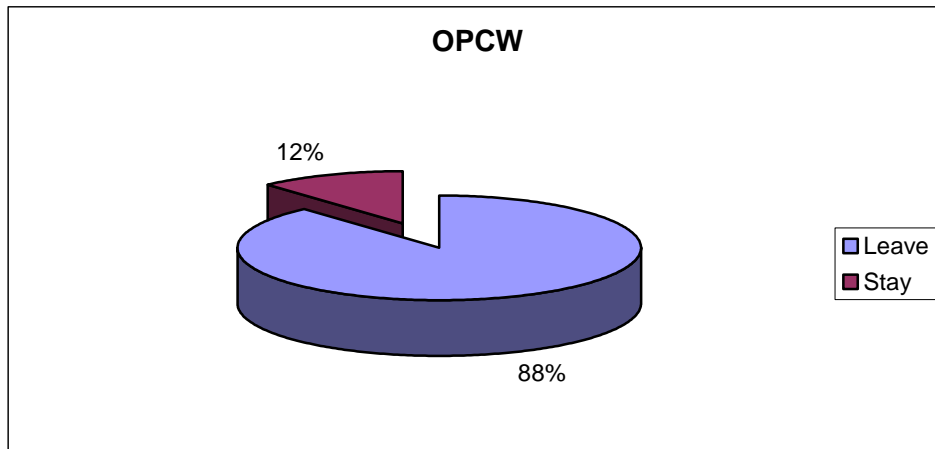


Figure 6. Percentages of OPCW responses to “Stay or Leave The Netherlands”

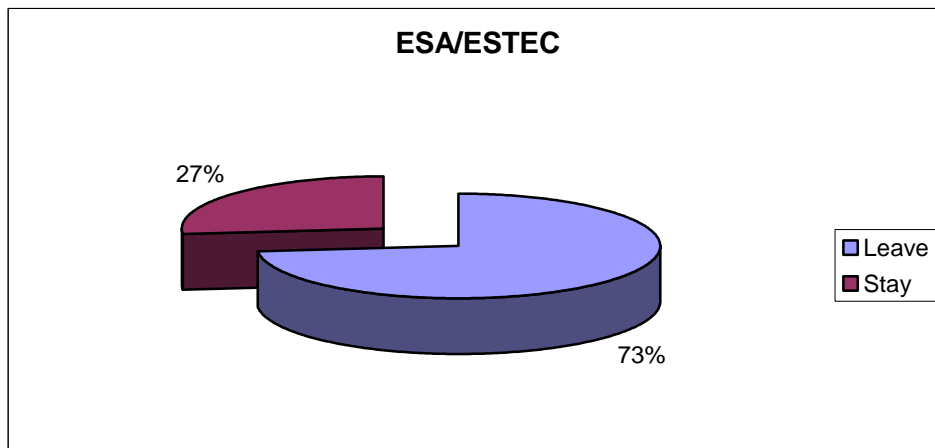
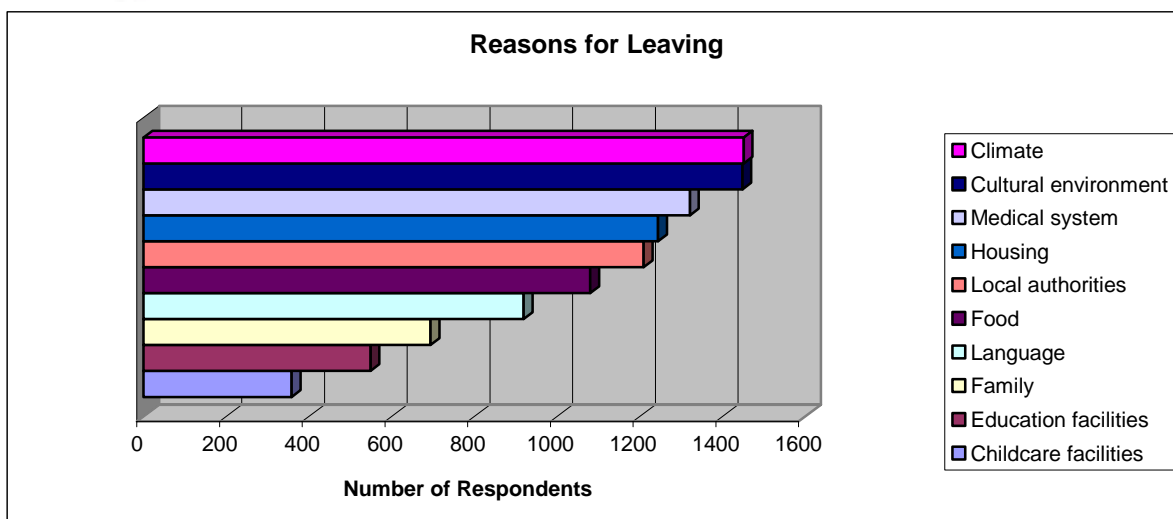


Figure 7. Percentages of ESA/ESTEC responses to “Stay or Leave The Netherlands”





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**Figure 8. Bar chart illustrating itemisation of reasons for leaving The Netherlands**

The survey allowed for multiple responses on a list of ten broad areas of life in the Netherlands, thus providing an indication of what quality-of-life considerations are common to international staff. The issues and the responses that were given are ranked from those of the greatest to the least concern (in terms of multiple responses given as justification for the answers) and are illustrated in Figure 8<sup>1</sup>.

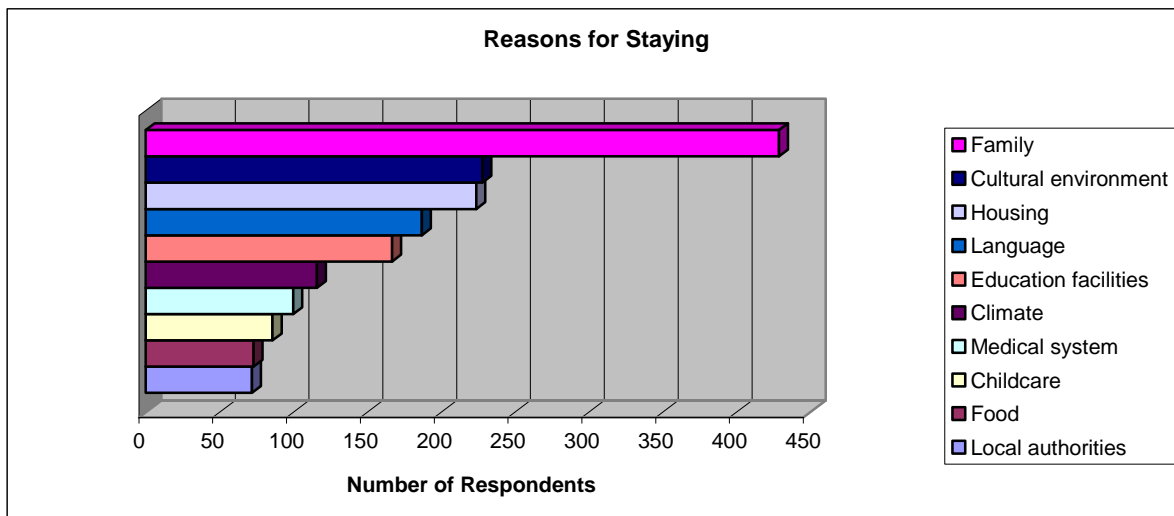
Language, family, education and childcare had an impact on fewer respondents, presumably for demographic reasons.

A number of respondents expressed a desire to remain in this country, and the reasons for their wanting to do so are illustrated in the graph below.

<sup>1</sup> What the comments that people submitted with their replies made clear, was that by “cultural reasons” they meant elements that pertain to the political, social, and day-to-day environment of the Netherlands. Reasons for dissatisfaction that were often cited were: the “non-service-oriented” nature of life here, a growing distrust and dislike of the presence of foreigners (both by the local population and by official bodies) in the country, and the apparent, growing ambivalence of Dutch authorities and bodies to employees of IOs and the organisations that brought them here.



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**Figure 9. Bar chart illustrating itemisation of reasons for staying in The Netherlands**

As can be seen in Figure 9, the most cited reasons for staying are first and foremost family reasons, followed by cultural factors, housing, and language considerations.

To summarise the statistical analysis: On the basis of the results illustrated above, two conclusions may be drawn about why the majority of international civil servants wish to relocate from The Netherlands. Firstly, there are considerations that mirror subjective preference (climate, culture, and food). Secondly, and independently from the former, the majority of international civil servants are experiencing substantial difficulties with the local authorities, the medical system and housing—regardless of their age or other demographic factors. Clearly, only by addressing the latter issues can the Dutch authorities offset the former and hope to continue attracting and retaining IOs in the future.

The underlying reason for international staff wishing to stay on is family. Staff who wish to remain do so because they have settled in The Netherlands (many of whom have Dutch partners and/or children who have been born here).

## SUMMARY OF COMMENTS

The survey was devised to enable staff to express the reasons for their choice in the form of comments. About 18% of all respondents took this opportunity to explain in more detail the reasons behind their choices. The most important factors mentioned for the negative perception by respondents of living and working in the Netherlands were:

- Dissatisfaction with the medical system



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- Host Agreement/Seat Agreement issues
- Tax issues
- Cost of living concerns
- Naturalisation
- Environmental issues

In the discussion below, extracts (verbatim) from survey responses follow a summary of the general consensus.

The inadequacy of the educational opportunities for children of expatriates living in the Netherlands was also expressed. This topic, which has called for further investigation, will not be discussed in this draft report.

### Medical system

Dissatisfaction with the medical system in place in the Netherlands figured prominently in the survey results. Specific complaints reflected in the comments were: long waiting lists, a lack of preventive medical practices, the government's policy on reducing costs, and the general quality of care and treatment available. It is apparent that many staff of international organisations elect to be treated abroad. Where treatment abroad was made available or subsidised by the international organisation, it was felt that extraordinary expenses were being unfairly passed on by the Dutch authorities for the account of the end-user and/or their organisation and/or member states.

*"...the health system is catastrophic and almost criminal: I have many cases of colleagues who were not diagnosed of serious illnesses on time."*

*"The medical system in the Netherlands is a scandal: it is bureaucratic, careless, badly organized and only geared towards cost reductions. Since 10 years I live in the Netherlands, I have been helped properly only once, all the other times, the care was disastrous and I had to take my family to other countries for medical help."*

*"The local doctors (GPs) work in isolation (i.e. there seems to be little if any concept of group practice) are not up to date in their knowledge – with a consequence the many Brits, Germans and Turks (!) prefer to go home for treatment."*

*"...the medical system [in] the NL is a full-size drama."*

*"The medical system in the country makes very complicated (sometimes impossible) to get preventive exams, which may put in danger our life. This is not happening in other countries."*

*"Appointments have to be scheduled months ahead although treatment is needed immediately. It forces [name of IO deleted] staff members to seek treatment abroad."*

*"I am "furious" on the quality of the Dutch medical system...and, by the way, would have lost 50% of my family (youngest child and wife) if I would have adhered to the advice given e.g. at the "University/Academic" Hospital in Leiden" – they cannot detect a simple appendicitis with an 8 year old child, nor can the "Bronovo Hospital" in Den Haag detect a simple "uterus cancer". In a similar way, the dental capacities here are 'provocatively low!' In other terms: we go just "cross order" and are served 'nearly perfect'."*

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*“Preventive medicine is impossible to obtain in the Netherlands. This is the second time my wife had to pick up her luggage and take the kids with her to Prague, her hometown. The state of the medical system in the Netherlands is lamentable.”*

*“...a useless medical system (I lost the function of my foot due to this).”*

*“I think the medical system is one of the main drawbacks of living in The Netherlands. For instance, I have a 2-year old daughter and she has been so poorly treated from an ear infection (the specialist at the Bronovo refused to see her...”*

*“The Dutch medical system is appalling and would be my main motivation for moving to another country.”*

### Difficulties with the Host/Seat Agreement

Host/Seat Agreement issues are the primary reason expressed by international civil servants' comments as to their dissatisfaction with the local authorities (it was interesting to note that this issue elicited a great number of written responses). A high level of awareness of the contents of their international organisation's Host/Seat Agreement—and the Netherlands authorities' adherence/non-adherence to its terms—was evident in the survey responses. The majority of comments on this topic were related to complaints about the Host/Seat Agreement. Non-compliance with the terms of the Host Agreement and the deterioration of privileges granted to international civil servants were highlighted as reasons why their particular organisations should want to relocate. Common responses cited comparisons with other nations regarding a better track record of compliance to Host Agreements as well as more favourable terms. It is apparent that international civil servants are cognisant of the positive contribution that their international organisations and that their home countries make towards the Netherlands economy. (For example, a recent Hague/Amsterdam Times article estimated their contribution to the Hague economy at about 750 million euros and 27,000 Dutch jobs.) They are of the view that the Dutch government: firstly, does not apportion a commensurate amount of resources to the expatriate community; and, secondly, does not recognise the positive contribution expatriates make to life in the Netherlands. A selection from the many comments made about this issue stated:

*“The Nederland authorities repeatedly try to get economic benefit of the international Staff through all series of taxes and attack the privileges of the International Organisations irrespective if they are agreed in the International Conventions or in the Host Agreements.”*

*“The conditions of living and support from the government/local authorities are poor to non-existent. If I compare this to the conditions provided to expatriated staff in Belgium or France, I really feel unfortunate to be living in the Netherlands.”*

*“I find it rather irritating that the Dutch authorities issue "official" documents concerning the privileges of the international staff (see "Protocol Guide for International Organisations") but then they negotiate these so-called privileges away when they establish the Host Agreement with the individual International Organisation.”*

*“Very bad host agreement deal with Holland, compared to other international organizations in other countries.”*

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*"Dutch must recognise the specific employment conditions of expatriated staff as part of a contract and not as a privilege."*

*"I propose that a decentralisation of [name of IO deleted] takes place and propose to civilised countries that are prepared for the reception of an international organisation and are fully prepared to integrate this new organisation (or part thereof) into its arms. Efforts at a negotiation with the Dutch government have proven to be useless, it sees no point in releasing easy money received due to a poorly negotiated host agreement."*

*"[name of IO deleted] staff have no access to most privileges as listed in the "Protocol Guide for International Organisations" issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Protocol itself is NOT known by staff and we are denied -for no apparent reason- privileges like tax-free petrol which would make a considerable difference considering we do not have access (as most of the population here) to subsidized housing or mortgages."*

*"It is also rather irritating that the Dutch put the different international organisations in different categories – I fail to understand why the international staff of the [name of IO deleted] have different problems than the international staff at [name of different IO deleted] when living abroad."*

*"The Dutch authorities should do much more efforts to attract international staff to work and live in The Netherlands. The perception is not very good. International expats compare The Hague or Amsterdam with Brussels, Paris, Geneva, which have so much more to offer, the quality of life is much better there."*

*"In spite of the "Protocol Guide for International Organizations" of Dec. 2000 I feel that we are having less and less of the economic privileges foreseen for Staff of International Organizations of BO status. I refer to the fake exemption of BPM and BTW on cars (this exemption becomes real only if you keep the car for at least 25 YEARS), to the not applied exemptions from road taxes and fuel excises, to the extremely high local taxes we have to pay on houses, and so on."*

*"The reason for the discrepancy between benefits for [name of IO deleted] staff and staff of other International Organisations is unclear. Particularly since [name of IO deleted] works on areas of the European (and therefore Dutch) economy/infrastructure, which directly relate to Europe's FUTURE competitiveness and not just the management of existing, mature areas."*

*"Expatriation has been a deliberate choice, however there is a general misunderstanding on the quality of life of expatriates. The quality of life is in general poor. The main reasons are : - access to medical treatment totally inadequate (no routine checks, Paracetamol or equivalent as the typical prescription, state-of-the-art investigation refused most of the time only because of costs) - no specific benefits. From this point of view the diplomatic status needs to be granted including exemption from local/state taxes and Dutch legislation. Note that a survey has shown, for [name of IO deleted], that out of any Euro that the Dutch State is giving there is a return of 5 Euros for the local economy."*

*"Local authorities should look for more benefits to workers of international organizations, because what they get from us is a lot, but it seems that is not sufficient for them. It would be good to see all international organisations getting basically the same rights (e.g. tax free car, interface to local governments, taxation, etc) and not being subject to negotiations with different Dutch Ministries."*

*"The Dutch hospitality seems hostility on diplomatic level. If other countries offer better conditions and perhaps you could reduce an x100 million euro expenditure - we should accept this chance. Diplomatic relations are not engraved in stone, if one side shifts attention, the other [name of IO deleted] might move too."*

*"...would like an alternative site in a country which will both benefit from and value the presence of an international organisation and welcome the people working for that organisation. We are not welcome in The Hague."*

*"The Dutch authorities are making life increasingly more difficult for international civil servants."*

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*"I have found in the last four years or so that in general the Dutch citizens do not like us being here."*

*"Privileges agreed with the government are no longer recognised now – e.g. tax-free car, servants, visas for parents, etc."*

*"Seems to me that the Netherlands lured many IOs into their country with promises or incentives they either did not live up to, or altered at a later stage. Any other IO should therefore think twice before it settles here."*

*"Considering the vast amount of money that is plowed back into the host country's infrastructure, i.e. shops, local businesses, schools, etc by the employees of the various int. organisation in the Hague, the Dutch government still has no idea of our [contribution]."*

*"They changed the rules arbitrarily without considering agreement that prevailed."*

*"Privileges originally afforded IO staff in NL are constantly changing. Obtaining permission for family to stay in NL with IO staff members is increasingly difficult, if not impossible. They don't seem to care about cultural considerations about family values."*

*"It would be appreciated if agreements were adhered to and not changed in [an] ad-hoc manner."*

*"The...Agreement is a binding commitment...It is disappointing and unfair for the host country to take advantage of its superior position of power in order to avoid or diminish the privileges."*

*"A proper host agreement would not have allowed the situation to exist where a hopeless medical and disjointed education systems exist and be proposed as adequate for an incoming international organisation."*

*"Local authorities seem not to appreciate the fact that international organisations provide benefits that have a positive impact in their community (providing jobs, real estate values have increased because of expats demands, car sales, etc."*

*"In the Netherlands there is continuous erosion of the privileges and immunities agreed with the host country. There is a clear trend to reduce them and a growing intolerance towards foreigners."*

## Tax system

Issues of unfair and double taxation as well as a mistrust of Netherlands authorities were prevalent. The general consensus was that any advantages of a tax-free salary are surpassed by the exceptionally generous tax deductions that the Netherlands government grants their own constituency. Tax deductions to which international organisations have no access to, such as the refund on mortgage interest, effectively inflate prices in the housing and services markets—which in turn erodes the standard of living for staff employed in international organisations, including Dutch staff. Calls for the Netherlands government to recognise the Protocol Guide and Vienna Convention also arise from this issue since the implementation of privileges would help to offset the distortionary effects of what is perceived to be, discriminatory taxation legislation. Note, however, that this proposition would leave out Dutch IO staff.

*"We are fed up with being hostages of a Dutch government always changing the rules as they like just to get more money."*

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*"Dutch principle of taxation based on capital worldwide instead of revenue is in fact often giving rise to double taxation."*

*"Lots of work needs to be done by the Dutch authorities to remove the wrong impression by the Dutch people that [name of IO deleted] salaries are tax free (indeed the internal tax we pay cannot even be balanced against mortgage payments as Dutch people can)."*

*"We appreciate the (in general) good receptivity of Dutch people to international organisations and the kindness and open attitude. However, Dutch authorities seem to be trying to 'melk the cow' constantly, especially when taxes are involved."*

*"...the Dutch found a smart way of transferring these expenses to the other nations contributing to the costs of the international organisation – Introduction of the new tax law that does not allow to transfer tax deductibles between the different incomes; this is specifically disadvantageous for international staff (whose international salary is not subject to Dutch taxation), since in the past e.g. mortgages on your dwelling could be transferred and used as tax deductibles against "other income", e.g. from capital or shares - Change of the tax system to lower the taxation on income but raising the BTW to ensure they have the same amount of money available from tax; while international staff did not benefit from the first measure, we certainly have to pay the higher BTW - Latest change of the tax system: in the past it was possible that a staff member transferred his default ("flat rate") tax deductible allowance to his or her partner (since his or her own salary was not subject to Dutch taxation, the spouse could benefit from a higher tax deductible); this seems to be not possible anymore - again a specific law from which the international staff suffer. - The so-called local taxes (e.g. the real estate tax) have tripled over the last ten years (since it is driven by the value of the property - and in this part of Holland the value of houses has tripled during this time); apart from the fact that the quality of the housing is extremely poor while the prices for renting and for buying are extremely high I'm not arguing whether any of the above issues are right or wrong; however, fact is that living in the Netherlands is getting less and less attractive and the standard of living has been going down and down."*

*"One could even get the impression that the Dutch authorities are determined to find more and more ways of extracting money from the international staff."*

*"The taxation in this country is prohibitive compared to other locations where I was living previously. Due to the taxation, in my situation, I lose 15% of income compared to any country I used to live."*

*"Fighting with the Dutch financial and tax system..."*

*"Taxation issues (what are real, what are rumours) are a cause of considerable concern."*

*"The tax system is completely illogical."*

*"Ministry of Foreign affairs didn't keep its obligation in terms of financial/tax issues that was promised to international servants. Tax exemption and diplomatic privileges getting cut or limited after years. This country shouldn't be recommended."*

*"I just feel we are cheated by the NL government, I'm fed up of the attitude shown towards the [name of IO deleted] and am amazed by the lack of (re)action by [name of IO deleted]."*

Taxation legislation, it was noted, also impacted on the affordability of childcare:

*"Regarding child care facilities; the Dutch childcare facilities are good, but even with a good salary it is difficult to be able to pay up to EURO 1000 per child and month for small children and up to EURO 500 per child and month for school children (after school clubs) without having any tax deduction for it like the Dutch."*

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Members

European Patent Office (EPO), European Space Agency (ESA/ESTEC), NATO CS Agency (NSA), International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (UNICTY), European Police Office (Europol), European Organisation for the Safety of Air Navigation (Eurocontrol), International Court of Justice (ICJ), International Criminal Court (ICC), Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)



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*"...the local authorities charge for services based on the income of the one who uses the service: when my son went to the local playgroup the fee was determined based on the income of the parents; i.e. I had to pay four times more than someone in the lowest income group. This constitutes an indirect taxation of my international income - isn't our international salary supposed to be tax exempted from the Dutch national taxation? ....Children allowance for spouses of international staff working in the Dutch system (Dutch employer or self employed) was cancelled (there was a special law issued for that)."*

...and that of vehicles:

*"...The car prices are also 60% higher than a normal country."*

*"Road Taxes on cars and taxes on gasoline should be removed as for those working for international organisations."*

*"As I mentioned before as an EXPAT that I have left my country to work abroad I have no benefits apart from being able to buy one tax free car within the first 10 years of employment with [name of IO deleted]. After this - if I need to buy a new car I have to pay outrageously high BMP and VAT taxes which is almost 100 % of the car price."*

### Cost of living

The high cost of living figured significantly in the survey as a source of major concern. Inflation associated with the introduction of the euro currency as well as spillover effects from taxation legislation (see taxation issues above) were expressly acknowledged. Concern was expressed about the accuracy of statistical data provided on cost of living as reported by the Netherlands government. Statistical data given by the Netherlands government to the international organisations constitute a significant basis by which salary adjustments are computed. If rising living expenses are not accurately reported, then they are not reflected in the periodical remuneration adjustments.

*"Cost of living increase due to the introduction of the Euro does not appear to have been matched by salary increase, despite the official inflation statistics claiming the contrary. NL has therefore become a very expensive country to live in."*

*"We have privileges corresponding to the fact that we have left our native environment /countries. However, the effect of a tax free salary gets reduced by high living costs (housing in Randstad ) and high fees for childcare (school fees, and after school club fees) and a jealous attitude from the authorities. It does not become better when your own organisation does not fight for maintaining /using the agreed rights."*

*"...after many years in NL I feel there is less and less incentive for expatriates or international functionaries to actively seek to stay. Additional elements are the cost of living, cost of commuting from home to work, (foreseen) worsening of the tax situation, etc."*

*"The house prices are really prohibitive, I'm trying for 3,5 years to find something suitable to my family and the prices are as high as twice France, Italy and so on."*

*"The ratio quality / price in the Netherlands is really too high, I mean too high price for low quality level (housing in particular). I'm a young staff arrived three years ago, and I know that despite the fact that I have a very good income, I will never afford to buy even a tiny house with a tiny garden, unless I'm ready to pay at least 400 000 Euros and take a mortgage over 30 years."*





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*"Living in the Netherlands for us means to accept: high cost of living housing prices that are TOTALLY detached from the quality you get less and less benefits for expatriates that could compensate for the above."*

*"Most negative aspect of the Netherlands: Inability to claim mortgage relief thus leading to house prices being very expensive for us compared to local nationals."*

## Naturalisation

Naturalisation was also an issue among staff who—by virtue of their permanent employment in an international organisation specifically based in the country—have raised their families in the Netherlands, but whose organisation's host agreement prevents them from permanently settling:

*"The major problem I have come across having children here is that they CANNOT become naturalized and these poses on them (almost Dutch now after more than 20 yrs of living here) insecurity and a discrimination vis-à-vis their Dutch friends and partners. Further, the question I pose is: what will happen to them (for their status in NL) when I will reach my pension age and leave the country. Will they be forced to leave as well? As now they still have, like me, the special permit from the Buitenlands Zaken. I find this is unacceptable situation and very negative for my children future and status in this country."*

## Pollution

There is a growing concern about pollution, its associated health risks, and about overcrowding.

*"Holland is one of the most polluted countries in Europe. See link here below, picture taken by Envisat in June. [http://esamultimedia.esa.int/images/EarthObservation/pollution\\_europe\\_hires.jpg](http://esamultimedia.esa.int/images/EarthObservation/pollution_europe_hires.jpg)."*

*"The density of the population in the Randstadt has dramatically increased in the last 20 years and the infrastructure has not been upgraded accordingly (roads, public transport etc...)"*

*"Environmental issues given latest reports on air pollution in NL and especially around The Hague."*

## Electing to stay

Twenty-three percent of all survey respondents answered in favour of staying in the Netherlands: family, friends, good will and strategic location were the main reasons.

*"It's where I have lived for the last 20 years, it's home, and it's where my friends are."*

*"...central location in Europe, with the efficiency of Schiphol airport and its wide range of destinations."*

*"Current family situation benefits most from stability w.r.t living location. However an improvement in medical system would be appreciated."*

*"I like the way of living and attitude of the Dutch people and just to let you know the medical system has a lot of room for improvements and when I retire it might be the only reason why I would leave the country."*

*"Easy commuting by bicycle; quick, healthy, and safe (thanks to the Dutch investment in cycle paths). It's a nice country with nice people!"*

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*“Living in The Hague area makes it easy to live without learning the language (a blessing and curse). I advise that The Hague area is excellent first choice for English speakers who have never been overseas.”*

*“Netherlands is a good place to live, not least for the widespread use of English by the local population.”*

*“Multicultural, open-minded society.”*

*“A very positive point is that there are many possibilities for recreational activities, which are very well organized and inexpensive.”*

## CONCLUSIONS

This preliminary report gives a snapshot of the opinion of a statistically relevant portion of international staff working for IOs in the Netherlands. It is not meant as a political pamphlet; rather, the intention is to provide information and honest, objective feedback, leaving the reader to draw his/her own conclusions. This survey was conducted at the “grassroots” level; it is a reflection of the views and perceptions of ordinary international employees living and working in the Netherlands, and brings a fresh perspective to the various issues raised here.

It is clear from the survey results that the main areas of concern involve issues related to the medical system and to the local/governmental authorities. Discontent with the Dutch medical system has been expressed across the board in the survey. Difficulties pertaining to local and national authorities, in particular, the Headquarters/Seat Agreement and the non-provision and/or erosion of contractual obligations (privileges and immunities) comprise the other keynote of the survey’s results. The perception is widespread that IOs, and the people who work in them, are no longer welcome in the Netherlands. It is felt that the environment in which they work has deteriorated markedly. The status quo is not conducive to the efficient functioning of IOs or to good relations with the Host Country. Ultimately, this will discourage other IOs from basing themselves here.

However, the survey also indicates that it is not too late for constructive dialogue to begin. Those who expressed the view that they wanted their organisation to remain in the Netherlands cited reasons—such as family, the ease of communication (English), efficient transportation, and the well-organised nature of Dutch society—as positive aspects of the environment they lived in.

IOSA is of the view that the Netherlands can regain its reputation. What is needed is: firstly, the reinstatement of the positive policy that typified the Netherlands’ campaign to attract IOs, and, secondly, better coordination at the ministerial level to ensure coherent implementation of the policies necessary to recruit and retain international organisations.

# APPENDIX I

## Questionnaires for IOs in the NL.

**Dear Colleague**, employee of International Organisations whose Staff Representations are members of IOSA-NL (International Organisations Staff Associations in the Netherlands, see <http://www.iosa-nl.org/>).

In recent weeks, several reports concerning the dissatisfaction of International Organisations' staff in the Netherlands have appeared in the Dutch and foreign media. IOSA-NL would like to find out what YOU think about living in the Netherlands. So please take 5 minutes and answer a very few simple questions contained in this questionnaire. Your answers will be kept confidential and nowhere will your name be mentioned. The results will be made available shortly after closing date.

The closing date is xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx.

Answering questions 1 and 10 is imperative, but please answer as many of the other questions as you can. The engine used guarantees total confidentiality for each individual answer: in fact, we will obtain no other information than what you fill in.

Thank you very much!  
Philippe de Heering, Chairman  
IOSA-NL (International Organisations Staff Associations in the Netherlands)

**Q1: Would you be interested in being transferred to a new or existing site of your organisation (with suitable conditions being met)?**

**A1a: Yes, I would like to move to the following 3 countries, in order of preference:**

Most preferred country =?

Second most preferred country =?

Third most preferred country =?.

(Drop down menu of UN countries)

A1b: No, I would rather stay in the Netherlands.

Q2: Please give the reason(s) for this choice (tick all applicable):

1. Medical system
2. Child care facilities
3. Education facilities
4. Relation with the local authorities
5. Cultural environment
6. Housing
7. Climate
8. Language
9. Food
10. Family reasons
11. Other (add text)

Q3: Your citizenship (if multiple: tick the one you consider most important):

(Drop down menu of nationalities)

Q4: What is your age range:

- <30
- 30 to 39
- 40 to 50
- >50

Q5: How many people are in your household:

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- >6

**Q6: Are you expatriated?**

1. Yes
2. No

**Q7: What is your employment status?**

1. Professional staff
2. General support staff
3. Other (please specify): (add text)

**Q8: I have worked for my IO in the Netherlands:**

- <5 years
- 5-10 years
- 11-20 years
- >20 years

**Q9: I am currently employed by:**

EPO  
ESA/ESTEC  
EUROCONTROL  
EUROPOL  
ICJ  
ICTY  
NATO C3A  
OPCW

**Q10: If you would like to make any additional comments, please add them below:**

(Add text)

**Thank you for answering the questions: it will help to better understand the current situation.**