

Founders Keepers



Celebrating
10 years of
founders finding
their way to
the Netherlands







Dirk Beljaarts

Minister of Economic Affairs

Introduction

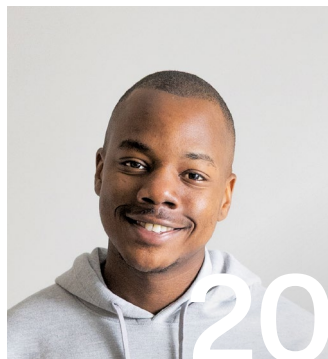
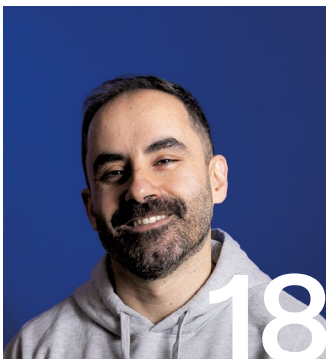
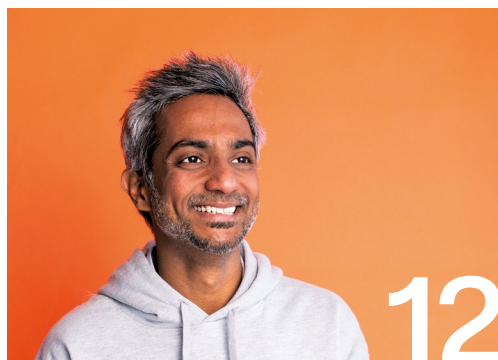
Ten years ago the Dutch Startup Visa was created with one clear goal: to attract international talent and to help innovative startups grow in the Netherlands. Since then, the Startup Visa has played a crucial role in strengthening the Dutch startup ecosystem. This visa has helped renew our economy and to make our country stronger.

This anniversary magazine looks back on a decade filled with entrepreneurship, innovation and success. It shows how the Startup Visa opened many doors for international entrepreneurs. For talent that contributes to the Netherlands. It reflects on the role they played in the Dutch economy, job creations and technological advances. This celebratory magazine uses inspiring stories and examples to highlight how talented entrepreneurs from all around the world got the chance to grow and flourish together with their startup in the Netherlands.

Think of Synano in Delft, for example, that specializes in developing nanotechnology based cooling solutions. Or Hable One in Eindhoven, they developed a screenreader controller and a braille keyboard for phones and tablets to make typing easier and faster for blind users. And SOVN, based in Utrecht, developed smart earplugs that detect and prevent teeth grinding so that users can continue sleeping soundly. Thanks to the Startup Visa, these, and many other companies, are able to immensely contribute to the Dutch economy .

This success is thanks to the Netherlands Point of Entry, a team within RVO, the entrepreneurs themselves, and the startup network - from facilitators and investors to government agencies and academic institutions. Together they made this possible. You can see this magazine as a glimpse back in time as well as a source of inspiration for the future. To the next 10 years filled with innovation and entrepreneurship!

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Special Envoy at Techleap
Constantijn van Oranje

A decade of Dutch innovation

The Netherlands has transformed into a global hub for startups and scale-ups. Staying ahead requires constant adaptation. Techleap, the organization dedicated to accelerating our tech ecosystem, has played a key role in this transformation.

At the forefront stands Special Envoy at Techleap Constantijn van Oranje, who has spent years driving the ambitious founders forward, forging international connections, and advocating for policies that fuel innovation. We asked him to reflect on the impact of the past decade, the challenges that lie ahead, and his vision for the future.



“International founders are essential for our startup ecosystem.”

Which developments have you seen in the startups and scale-ups over the past 10 years?

“Wow, where to start? So much has happened and in the middle of it all, we also had to deal with COVID-19. At the meta level, tech and high growth companies became highly strategic, whereas 10 years ago they might have seemed ‘nice to have’. We now have trillion euro tech companies. We also saw the acceleration of China as a real tech super power and the U.S. extending its lead, with Europe picking up some pace but not merely fast enough. The strength of a country’s tech sector and the leading companies that it produces have become a key strategic asset, determining the international relevance of countries and the future growth, and resilience of their economies.”

How has technology evolved in this time?

“We also witnessed the incredible rise of AI, heralding a new era in tech development with ever faster innovation cycles. The war in Ukraine propelled defense tech as a new sector and also opened the space tech race. COVID showed how vulnerable we have become and how strategic the access to natural resources, innovation and manufacturing capabilities have become.”

What is the added value of international startup founders to the Dutch startup ecosystem?

“They are essential. They bring fresh perspectives, attract global talent, form bridges to their home markets, and much more. In fact, every successful tech ecosystem in the world depends on foreign entrepreneurs and talent. The best example is Silicon Valley, where most of the big tech companies are either founded or led by migrants: Elon Musk, Steve Jobs, Satya Nadella and many more. They are often more ambitious than their Dutch counterparts. Especially in academia, we see an over-representation of foreign founders, maybe because Dutch PhDs are more interested in academic careers.”

Which international founder do you remember most?

“Hard to say, there are so many. A few examples that form part of the backbone of the success of the Dutch tech ecosystem are Andrey of Miro, Hamed of Nearfield, Fabrizio of Axelera AI, Maxim of Dott, Corinne of TomTom...”



What else could facilitators do or improve to add to this ecosystem?

“Trust is the basis of the Startup Visa. Trust in the judgement and good intentions of the facilitators. It’s also the foundation of strong entrepreneurial communities. Facilitators help foreign entrepreneurs enter the Dutch market, just as they support Dutch founders expanding abroad. An ecosystem is the sum of a complex set of relationships between individuals and organizations with mutual and complementary interests and roles, all together producing much more than the individual parts would.

Stronger connections in the ecosystem, produce more and better companies, as information is shared, investments are made, jobs are filled, clients are found. This cannot be built overnight and top down by governments. It requires, time, trust and bottom-up evolution. Ideally, it evolves into a self-sustaining flywheel, continuously generating more and bigger successes as knowledge, people and capital circulate, creating an ever-denser community of interest.”

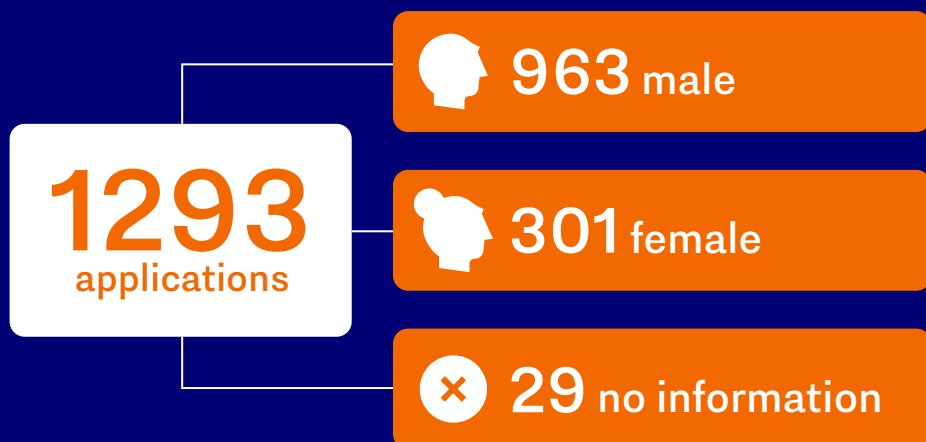
What does the Dutch startup and scale-up ecosystem need to maintain a strong international competitive position in the future?

“Start by not messing it up with bad policies. We are doing pretty well as long as international and domestic investors and talent keep finding their way to Dutch tech businesses. To make it even better, make sure the Netherlands becomes the leading venture capital market in the EU. We need much more capital for our companies to scale and be globally competitive. Also, ensure the labor market remains flexible and facilitates the needs of high growth companies. For that we need productivity to increase, labour costs to be controlled and the adoption of much simpler and competitive fiscal rulings for employee share options.”

Facts & findings

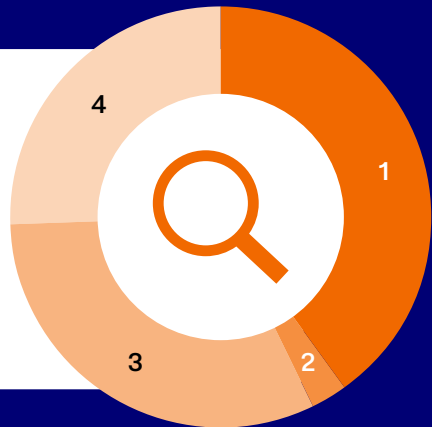
10 years Startup Visa

A lot happened between 2015 and 2025. Our network grew and the founders... found us! Over the past decade, the Startup Visa has helped ambitious entrepreneurs turn ideas into businesses. These numbers tell a story of growth and impact.



Current status

1. In business: 40%
2. In business but not in NL/
founder left: 2.8%
3. Out of business: 31.8%
4. No information: 25.4%



Common business sectors

1. AI/Software/IT
2. Agri-technology/Agri-food
3. Biotech
4. Sustainability/Environmental
services/Water
5. Maritime technology
6. Consulting
7. Financial services
8. E-commerce



Facilitator network

8 facilitators active in 2015 —————> 48 facilitators active in 2025

Product sustainability data for retailers

As Ajay watched *An Inconvenient Truth* in his hometown Chennai, India, the film's warnings hit close to home. Water scarcity and power outages were not uncommon there. Little did he know that it would spark a journey that would eventually lead to the founding of GreenSwapp AI, a data company that helps supermarkets track product-wise impacts at scale, and reduce supply chain emissions. "We saw the opportunity and jumped on it."

From India to Europe


Armed with dual master's degrees in Sustainability and Mechanical Engineering from the U.S., Ajay started his career in data science at Ford. Later, in Amsterdam, he founded Green Insights, a sustainability consulting firm. Working with major food brands on their supply chain impact revealed a crucial gap: companies wanted control of their impact data but were dependent on their suppliers to get it. The ideal solution, tracking impact per product, was too time-consuming to do manually.

"Luckily, a disruptive new AI technology, GPT, was being invented right around then. We saw the opportunity and jumped on it to solve impact tracking at scale."

AI for scalability

GreenSwapp AI developed a comprehensive database of ingredient impacts using machine learning, based on decades of published LCA research. After testing end-consumer demand with the world's first climate-transparent supermarket, the company shifted focus to B2B.

Now, GreenSwapp AI works with major retailers like Ekoplaza, Albert Heijn, and Crisp. Their AI tech helps supermarkets extract and structure vast amounts of supplier data and reduce environmental impact, while also working on ways to share this information with consumers on price tags and receipts. "It's like the Nutri-Score, but for climate."



“It’s like
the Nutri-Score,
but for climate.”

Challenges in the Netherlands

Finding early-stage funding wasn’t easy. The Dutch venture capital ecosystem favors low-risk and late-stage investments, while imposing a disproportionately high burden of proof on early-stage startups. “Hiring is expensive, and the Dutch work culture doesn’t always align with the fast-paced demands of a startup. On top of that, getting a recognized sponsorship status to hire skilled labor is tricky. You need revenue to qualify, but you need skilled talent to generate that revenue. That poses additional complications.”

Tips for aspiring entrepreneurs

Ajay emphasizes focusing on solving customer problems over building perfect products. While funding in the Netherlands can be a challenge, its digital infrastructure, freedom of travel and cosmopolitan environment make it easy for startups to attract talent. He advocates for direct, upfront financial support through the Startup Visa program over the typical tax credits and future benefits. Ajay suggests that could bridge the early-stage funding gap and create more Series A-ready startups that appeal to Dutch investors.

2016

Fridah Ntarangwi
ZidiCircle

“Migration can be
a force for good
when people are
given the right
tools and
attention.”



Empowering underserved entrepreneurs and investors

Diaspora entrepreneurs often struggle to access funding and business support – a challenge Fridah witnessed firsthand during her career in Kenya and later in the Netherlands. This inspired her to launch ZidiCircle, a platform designed for underrepresented entrepreneurs and investors to connect and overcome the funding challenges. “I believe that entrepreneurship can significantly improve lives.”

Passion for financial inclusion

Fridah grew up in a small village on the slopes of Mt. Kenya. She worked in various finance and business roles in Kenya before pursuing a master's degree in finance at Vrije Universiteit (Duisenberg Honors Program) in Amsterdam: “Despite knowing little about the Netherlands, I soon learned that it ticked all the boxes. Great opportunities for internationals, a welcoming environment, and potential for personal and professional growth. So, I decided to take the leap.” After completing her master's and an internship at a pension fund, she worked with an investment firm, deepening her passion for financial inclusion. “Particularly for women and diverse entrepreneurs. I believe that entrepreneurship can significantly improve lives.”

Investment platform for the diaspora

She was motivated by her own experiences and challenges that entrepreneurs face, including lack of access to funding. “I wanted to create a platform where underrepresented entrepreneurs could access resources and funding to help their businesses thrive.” With ZidiCircle, she created a global full support system for diaspora entrepreneurs and investors, with programs running across Europe and Africa. The platform

has reached over 4,000 startups and small and medium-sized enterprises and over 500 investors, from training to securing funding. “It's amazing to see all those businesses that wouldn't have existed without the right support. When we help entrepreneurs who may have faced barriers, it shows that migration can be a force for good when people are given the right tools and attention.”

Adapting to a new life

Adjusting to life in the Netherlands came with personal challenges. “Especially when it came to adapting to a new language and culture. I've integrated into society in many ways, but the language remains a struggle. Thanks to the RVO Startup Visa facilitator program, I met my business coach Toon Buddingh, who has been very helpful in establishing and building up ZidiCircle from scratch. He helped secure the technical expertise needed for our incubation programs.” Daily life in the Netherlands required practical adaptations too: “The bike culture here is incredible. I couldn't afford public transport when I first arrived, but once I got a bike, it became an essential part of my daily life.”

2017

Sana Fateh
Synano

Innovating thermal management

When Sana arrived in the Netherlands in 2013, she had no idea she would one day be leading her own deep-tech company. What started as an academic pursuit quickly evolved into creating Synano: a company specializing in nano fluids for advanced thermal management. “The Netherlands offers a great environment for startups, especially in high-tech industries.”

From student to startup founder

Originally from India, she moved to the Netherlands for her master's degree in Mechanical Engineering at TU Delft. After completing her studies, she first joined the startup Synext at Yes!Delft, TU Delft's startup incubator, where she worked on energy recovery from waste steam. “They offered me lab space, office facilities and a strong network of fellow entrepreneurs, as well as support in fundraising and business development. Everything an early-stage startup needs. During this project I became intrigued by nano liquids, the suspensions of nanoparticles that improve heat transfer. I developed this technology further, got the Startup Visa and started my own company.”



“The COVID-19 crisis was tough, but it strengthened our team and products.”

Scaling up

Building a company from scratch is never easy, especially in the deep-tech sector. “We faced technical challenges, such as developing stable nano suspensions. That means ensuring that the nanoparticles in our products remained evenly dispersed and did not settle over time. We have now perfected the formula and expanded our work into nano oils for immersion cooling in data centers and transformer oils.

In addition, we’ve also had financial challenges during the COVID-19 crisis. It was tough, but it strengthened our team and helped us develop solid products. During that time we participated in various funding programs, including MKB, Climate-KIC, and NWO Takeoff. The Netherlands offers a great environment for startups, especially in high-tech industries. There are multiple funding opportunities, and the business culture is open to innovation.”

A diverse and inclusive team

Sana has built a diverse and inclusive team, with employees from India, Ukraine, the Netherlands, Honduras, and the Czech Republic. “Our work culture is open and independent, with flexible hours and a strong emphasis on collaboration. We love discussing cultural differences, especially when it comes to food and the weather. The Dutch winters took some time getting used to. I think it’s impressive how locals love to complain about the weather year-round but continue cycling in rain, wind, and snow. And then they say ‘Je bent niet van suiker’ (You’re not made of sugar).”

Making industrial automation knowledge accessible

Bridging the gap between theoretical education and practical knowledge in industrial automation. That is what drove Shahpour to found RealPars, a global educational platform that trains professionals in industrial automation techniques. Today, RealPars is a leading name in the sector, working with top companies and researchers around the world: “It’s our mission to make technical knowledge accessible worldwide.”

Sharing knowledge online

Shahpour started his career in Iran, where he worked on complex systems for the oil, gas, and steel industries. With a background in electrical engineering and industrial automation, he quickly realized that much of what he had learned at university didn’t apply to his daily work: “Only 10% of what I learned was actually applicable in the real world. The rest I taught myself through online courses, books, and hands-on experience. I started sharing that knowledge online, and to my surprise,

it gained a lot of attention.” What started as educational YouTube videos on industrial automation quickly evolved into RealPars.

The move to the Netherlands

The decision to establish his company in the Netherlands wasn’t random. “Historically, the Netherlands has been a trading nation with strong infrastructure and an open attitude towards new ideas. It was a logical choice. Through couch surfing, I built friendships with Dutch people who introduced me to the culture. Through the Startup Visa program and with support from the Erasmus Centre for Entrepreneurship (ECE), I took the next step. Thanks to this network, I found investors, business partners, and a community that supported my venture.”

Worldwide ambitions

RealPars is now a successful platform with a global reach. The team consists of members in the Netherlands, Ireland, and the U.S., and the

“I am proud
to be part of
the international
entrepreneurs in
the Netherlands.”



company collaborates with major players like Siemens and Phoenix Contact. “We started with just a few hundred euros in monthly revenue. Now we generate €70,000 per month. But it’s not just about the money, revenue reflects the impact you’re making. It’s our mission to make technical knowledge accessible worldwide.”

Lessons learned

Shahpour emphasizes that new entrepreneurs should be aware of the unique

Dutch market: “If I were to start again, I would first look at the local needs. Sectors like trade and sustainable energy offer significant opportunities, supported by government subsidies and a strong network. The Netherlands is great for its openness, international connections, and opportunities for innovation. It is a significant achievement for the Dutch economy to attract entrepreneurs from around the world who add value. I am proud to be part of that.”

Soukaïna Adnane

Investment Manager at Deep Tech XL

From founder to funder

Startups and venture capital are two sides of the same coin. Soukaïna understands both. After launching and scaling Onera Health, a med-tech startup in the Netherlands, she transitioned into venture capital. As an Investment Manager, she now supports early-stage deep-tech founders.



Building a med-tech startup

Soukaïna, originally from Casablanca, Morocco, studied engineering in France before moving to Taiwan for a master's thesis project. That experience led her to set up business operations for a company in Eindhoven, where she collaborated with Dutch investment organizations: “Eventually, I chose Eindhoven over Paris, Berlin and Antwerp.”

Soon after moving to Eindhoven for her job, she decided to start her own company. She first heard about the Startup Visa through contacts in the high-tech ecosystem in Eindhoven, where it was still relatively unknown at the time.

“In 2017, I got the Startup Visa and founded med-tech startup Onera Health, a sleep diagnostic device that allows patients to conduct sleep studies at home instead of in a medical facility. I secured investments from local and international investors. The dream was to see this product in use helping patients, not sitting on a shelf.”

Transitioning to venture capital

After growing Onera Health from the seed stage to Series C funding, Soukaïna stepped away from the company and moved into venture capital. “I joined Deep Tech XL, a fund supporting early-stage startups. I enjoy working with entrepreneurs, focusing on innovation and business validation.”

“It’s important to keep the Startup Visa program alive.”



Staying competitive

“Now, I advise startup founders to build a strong network early. Fundraising relies heavily on relationships. Investors invest in people. The Dutch startup ecosystem faces challenges, including risk-averse investors and limited early-stage funding, but initiatives like TechLeap and university programs aim to improve support.”

Although the Netherlands is welcoming to startup founders, it can learn from other countries by fostering better regional funding (like in France), deeper investment pools (as seen in the UK), and stronger ecosystem collaboration (similar to Germany).

Soukaïna concludes: “If the Netherlands attracts international startups, it must provide better coaching and networking opportunities to ensure their success. It’s important to keep the Startup Visa program alive. It’s worth it to explore beyond regular paths.”



Michael Musandu
Lalaland

Inclusive shopping with virtual models


What if online shoppers could see how clothing looks on models who actually reflect their body type or ethnicity? That idea is at the core of Lalaland, the startup Michael founded. Using artificial intelligence, Lalaland is helping fashion brands create virtual models that promote diversity and sustainability: “Technology must serve humanity.”

Representation matters

After growing up in Zimbabwe and studying in South Africa, Michael had the opportunity to travel to Europe and eventually study at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. There, he discovered his passion for AI but realized that a traditional programming career wasn't for him.

“Entrepreneurship was the only option where I could fully use all my talents: programming, commercial thinking, client relations, and team management. During my studies, the idea for Lalaland was born. As a person of color, I rarely saw models who looked like me. Why can't brands better represent the diversity of society? The answer was simple: the process is too expensive and time-consuming.”





“You’re more likely to pursue a goal if you see someone who looks like you achieving it.”

Inclusive and transparent fashion

Lalaland uses AI to generate virtual fashion models, allowing clothing to be showcased on various body types and ethnicities.

This not only helps brands offer more inclusive shopping experiences, but also supports sustainability efforts by reducing the need for physical samples. At the same time, Michael emphasizes transparency in this process: “Consumers should know when they’re looking at an AI-generated model. Technology must serve humanity.”

It takes a village to build a business

The Dutch startup culture played a significant role in his success. “Incubators like Utrecht Inc. and ACE Incubator have been incredibly helpful.

They challenge you to validate your ideas, help you grow your network, and connect you with investors.” With Lalaland, Michael aims to support fashion brands and make a lasting impact on representation and sustainability: “It takes a village to raise a child, and the same goes for building a business. I’m grateful for everyone who’s been part of this journey. One of the highlights was receiving investment from Google’s Black Founders Fund after winning the Philips Innovation Award. I hope to inspire other young black entrepreneurs. You’re more likely to pursue a goal if you see someone who looks like you achieving it.”

Earbuds for better sleep and health

A good night's sleep is essential for a healthy life, but for many people, issues like teeth grinding and jaw clenching can disrupt rest and well-being. Partners Selina and Gabriel chose the Netherlands to build SOVN to address these sleep issues. Their health-tech startup solves this problem with innovative earbuds designed to reduce clenching and grinding during sleep. "We are now preparing for product testing and a market launch."

Wellness products

With nearly a decade of experience in medical devices, Selina was focused on strategy and product development: "I love solving complex problems in uncertain environments. The startup mindset has always been a part of me. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Gabriel and I began exploring ideas for wellness products. We spoke to over 200 people globally and noticed a recurring issue: teeth grinding and jaw clenching during sleep. Existing solutions only addressed symptoms, not the root cause. We designed innovative earbuds to address the sleep instability that's causing excessive clenching and grinding."

Thinking bigger

Incubators like Techleap and Utrecht Inc. challenged them to expand their vision. "We realized we're not just solving one issue, we're tapping into something bigger: the fundamental importance of sleep for health. While we view SOVN as our flagship product, the technology platform is designed to tackle other sleep issues, positioning us as the next evolution in sleep wearables. Our goal is not just to monitor but to improve sleep, giving customers the restorative sleep they deserve."

Utrecht Inc.'s nine-month validation program was instrumental, offering mentorship, strategic guidance, and access to an entrepreneurial network. After early prototypes, we are now testing the product and preparing for launch. Additionally, we were recognized as one of the top 100 EU startups at SLUSH, won the CES Innovation Award, secured three patent families, and grew a waitlist of over 3,000 customers." "The Dutch work-life balance aligns with our mission: improving sleep and rest for better health."



Cultural lessons

“The Dutch work-life balance became a key element for our culture at SOVN. We emphasize clear boundaries: no emails on weekends or vacations. Rest is just as important as work. And yes, there are hurdles, like navigating the BSN and banking system, but the Netherlands offers a welcoming and innovative ecosystem. With the right mindset and support, success is within reach. For example, in our first marketing meeting, we realized within five minutes it wasn’t a fit. Instead of wasting an hour, we ended the call respectfully. That efficiency was refreshing.”

“The Dutch work-life balance aligns with our mission: improving sleep and rest for better health.”

Facilitators in the Netherlands

Their experiences

Without facilitators (or 'incubators'), there would be no Startup Visa. They support founders from all over the world, making sure they have everything they need to grow their businesses. We asked 11 facilitators to share their experiences.

How many non-EU founders have been facilitated?

- Together, the 11 facilitators approximately supported 386 non-EU founders in the Netherlands
- Their success rates are high: between 50-100%, meaning that the startup is currently still operating

How do facilitators and founders usually work together?

- Monthly fees/application fees
- Minority ownership
- Shares and investments



Why did they become a facilitator?

- Fostering innovation in the Netherlands to make a meaningful impact
- Help make the Netherlands attractive for international talent, making it a solid choice for non-EU founders to settle
- Learning from other cultures and exchanging knowledge
- Bring foreign technologies to the Netherlands
- Help entrepreneurs/founders achieve their dreams

What do they like about the Startup Visa?

- Helps to attract highly skilled and motivated entrepreneurs to the Netherlands
- Diversify the entrepreneurial ecosystem of the Netherlands
- Rather flexible and quick process

What challenges do they encounter?

- Difficult for founders to find information and to find a direct contact person from the IND
- The initial duration of the visa is too short (1 year) to build a successful business
- Since the Netherlands has positioned itself as an attractive hub for entrepreneurial talent and startups, the number of applications can be a burden

Their advice for policy makers

- Do more thorough checks on the viability of a business, since some startups are not viable and fail within a year
- Have a more structured and clear process for applicants, so that they can track the status of their application
- Keep the process flexible and easy, and be aware that the Netherlands is not the only attractive option for non-EU founders



Crossing borders with real-time location systems

Accurate real-time location data can make workplaces safer, streamline operations, and enable digital transformation. That insight led Aziz Murat to found the startup Navbea. Using real-time location systems (RTLS) and smart tracking technology, Navbea supports businesses across industries such as energy, healthcare, logistics, and retail. “Be adaptable, build a strong network, and embrace the Dutch ecosystem.”

Choosing the Netherlands

In 2021, Aziz Murat moved to the Netherlands under a Startup Visa, laying the foundation for Navbea. He chose the Netherlands for its strong innovation system, startup-friendly policies, and access to global markets. “The Netherlands offers one of the most dynamic and well-connected startup environments in the world.

Our incubator TNW helped us gain access to strategic connections, financial opportunities, and insights into scaling in new markets.

Especially when expanding my business model beyond RTLS. Recently I also co-founded Wisemenu, together with a Turkish professor. This is an innovative startup in the digital dining space.”

Rapid growth and expansion

Navbea’s first large-scale project after settling in the Netherlands was the Dubai Museum of the Future. “We deployed smart tracking solutions and IoT technology to enhance visitor experience, optimize security, and improve operational efficiency.”

This marked the beginning of Navbea’s rapid growth, working on international projects such as the Coca-Cola Museum, HP, NASA Space Center Houston, Georgia Aquarium, and Azerbaijan’s largest theme park. “We are developing scalable RTLS solutions that will drive digital transformation across multiple industries. These collaborations provide us with the opportunity to co-create next-generation tracking technologies.”

A man with dark hair and a slight smile, wearing a grey hoodie with 'FOUNDERS KEEPERS' printed on it in blue and orange. He has his arms crossed and is standing against a solid orange background.

“The Netherlands
was our gateway
to the European
market.”

To Dubai and beyond

Navbea is set to expand further by opening an office in Dubai in early 2026. Aziz Murat believes that cross-border collaboration is the key to success, especially between Turkey and the Netherlands. “The Netherlands was our gateway to the European market. The Startup Visa program is an incredible opportunity for entrepreneurs looking to scale globally.

Strengthening partnerships between Dutch accelerators and Turkish tech hubs can create a bridge for high-potential startups entering the European market. My advice? Be adaptable, build a strong network, and embrace the Dutch ecosystem. It is welcoming, innovative, and full of opportunities.”

Denis Chernobaev
getplace.io

Smarter restaurants using data

Choosing the perfect spot for a new restaurant often comes down to a gut feeling, but what if data could remove the guesswork? With getplace.io, cofounders Denis Chernobaev, Sergey Scherbak and Yuri Morozov help restaurants make smarter decisions and navigate market challenges. “We want to give restaurants the insights they need to succeed.”

Passion for food


Denis, originally from Moscow, began his career in sales at Google, followed by roles at Mars Inc. in e-commerce. “I’ve always had a passion for cooking and food culture. McDonald’s fascinated me with its efficiency, branding, and success. That led me to Dodo Pizza, a fastgrowing chain where I helped scale the business from 80 stores in Russia to over 1,000 across 25 countries.”

Funding and support

While working at these large corporations, it became clear that the pace and independence of entrepreneurship were more appealing. “I had a business idea, and incubator Antler, based in Amsterdam, provided funding and support. In 2022 I decided to start a new chapter in the Netherlands by founding getplace.io.

We want to give restaurants the insights they need to succeed. Our data-driven tools





“Be ready to adapt,
your initial ideas
will likely change
drastically.”

assist small and medium-sized businesses in selecting optimal locations, benchmarking performance, and understanding market trends. We also address challenges such as choosing the best location for a new store and maximizing profit from delivery platforms. Over 400 clients from the U.S., UK, Spain, Poland, Bulgaria, Turkey, UAE, Qatar, Indonesia, and Georgia have benefited from our services.”

Embracing change

Integration into Dutch society has been a gradual process, especially without fluency in the language. Housing proved to be another significant challenge due to high costs and income requirements for renting, which startups often can't provide. Despite facing these challenges, Denis is still grateful for the opportunities he has taken. His advice for aspiring entrepreneurs is simple: “Be ready to adapt. Your initial ideas will likely change drastically once you start getting feedback from the market. Flexibility and speed are key. Launch quickly, iterate often, and evolve based on customer needs.

Over the past two years, getplace.io's approach has been refined multiple times. This adaptability has been essential for continued progress. Our focus is now on scaling, with an emphasis on automating analytics services to provide even more value to restaurants. With the right investment, growth can be accelerated, making a larger impact in the industry.”

2023

Eugen Ostrofet
1NA

“The Dutch ecosystem is fantastic for biotech and pharma startups.”



Biotech business for better healthcare

What if the cutting-edge tools used in academic labs could directly accelerate drug development and improve healthcare? Eugen, originally from Moldova, founded the startup 1NA, transforming biophysics research into practical solutions for the pharmaceutical industry. “The incubation program has been invaluable for me.”

Best of both worlds

Eugen went to France for his bachelor's and master's degrees, followed by doctoral studies in Germany. Afterwards, life took an unexpected turn with marriage and a brief move to the U.S. “During COVID-19, in the midst of worldwide lockdowns, I got an opportunity to work in Amsterdam in the field of single-molecule biophysics. The move to the Netherlands turned out to be a perfect fit. It feels like the best of both worlds: vibrant and welcoming, with opportunities for both personal and professional growth.”

Starting up in the Netherlands

“In this role, I focused on studying interactions between proteins and DNA. These interactions are crucial for understanding diseases and developing therapies. With expertise in instrumentation and method development, I realized our academic tools could be industrially relevant. That inspired me to start my own business, making these tools more accessible and impactful.

The Netherlands has an incredibly supportive ecosystem for startups. I learned about the Startup Visa through the Netherlands Point of Entry. They made the process straightforward: an innovative idea, a business plan, and a facilitator were all I needed.”

Eugen joined PLNT in Leiden as part of an incubation program. “I was skeptical. I thought I knew it all from my prior work experience. But starting a company is a completely different challenge. The program has been invaluable, from connecting me with relevant experts to helping secure grants and funding.”

Dutch opportunities

Grants like Health Holland and initiatives such as the Biotech Booster enhance credibility and provide vital resources for growth. “The Dutch ecosystem is fantastic for biotech and pharma startups. Collaboration is easy, and there are many opportunities for partnerships and learning. The Dutch business culture is straightforward and tactful, creating an ideal environment for building connections.

Adjusting to Dutch punctuality was an interesting cultural shift, but the honesty and precision of Dutch communication have been valuable in professional interactions. Founders should leverage the opportunities in the Netherlands, remain open to collaboration, and stay curious.”

Measuring mental health with AI

Mental fatigue, stress, and burnout are often detected too late. With SenTechAI, founder Ellen Wang wants to change that. Her wearable sensors use AI to measure mental performance in real-time, helping individuals and healthcare professionals intervene earlier. “I wanted to make a positive impact on people’s lives through technology.”

Positive impact with technology

While studying Electrical Engineering at TU Delft and a PhD in Computer Science in Amsterdam, Ellen became fascinated by the potential of biosignals to reveal what’s happening in the mind. “That’s when I realized this technology could have real-world applications for mental health. After my studies, I returned to China to focus on the production and validation of

sensor technology. The pandemic delayed my plans, but eventually, I returned to the Netherlands with a Startup Visa. I wanted to make a positive impact on people’s lives through technology, and knew the Netherlands offered a lot of opportunities for tech startups.”

Innovation in mental health

Ellen designed unique sensors that dynamically track changes, with applications in healthcare centers, elderly care, and even the automotive industry. “Our wearable devices provide objective measurements of mental health. These devices can accurately monitor stress levels, fatigue, and concentration. The technology focuses on the early detection of conditions such as dementia and burnout.”

“I hope to help others navigate the Dutch startup system.”



Incubator programs

She participated in incubator programs, such as YES!Delft and Boost Up NL. “These programs helped me develop a business model and provided access to mentors, networks, and valuable insights into Dutch business culture, like knowledge of subsidies, legal business structures, and finding the right partners.

Aspiring entrepreneurs should really participate in networking events and incubator programs. For the technical entrepreneur with a technical background, it's very important to learn how to build a business and how to take advantage of networking opportunities.”

Sharing experiences in a book

In addition to expanding SentechAI, Ellen is also working on a book: “In my book, I share my experiences and insights with other international entrepreneurs. I hope to help others navigate the Dutch startup system.

Although there are a lot of cultural differences, there are many similarities between Dutch and Chinese cultures. I've come to appreciate the Dutch direct communication, social connections and family values.”

Colophon



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Editorial address

Netherlands Point of Entry
(Rijksdienst voor Ondernemend Nederland)
Prinses Beatrixlaan 2
2595AL Den Haag
Nederland

Enquiries

nlentry@rvo.nl

Copy

RVO

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Nina Akollo

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