Global Corporate Real Estate Guide - Netherlands

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*This chapter was last reviewed in September 2023.*

# Authors

# Real Estate Law

## What is included in the term “real estate”?

The term "real estate" includes the following:

Real properties such as the soil, unmined minerals, plants attached to the soil and buildings and works attached to the soil, either directly or through other buildings or works

Rights in rem that are created in relation to real properties such as ground leases (erfpacht), rights of superficies (opstalrechten) and rights of usufruct (vruchtgebruik)

## What laws govern real estate transactions?

Property law is governed by Dutch private and public law, including tax law, administrative law, leasing law and environmental law.

## What is the land registration system?

The Dutch land registry system protects legal certainty regarding real estate in the Netherlands. Through the land registration system, ownership of all real estate in the Netherlands can be verified. This also applies to rights over real properties.

The land registry provides information regarding real property located in the Netherlands, including the relevant landowner, address, cadastral area and permitted use of the plot. In addition, the land registry lists public law restrictions and rights in rem that may be applicable to the plot.

In principle, one can rely on the information contained in the land registry. The state will be held liable for damages for any mistake committed by land registration authority personnel.

## Which authority manages the registration of titles?

Title registration is usually managed by civil law notaries who execute the deeds of transfer of title of real property or rights over real property.

The land registry itself is kept and managed by the semipublic authorities responsible for the registration of real property and rights over real property.

## What rights over real property are required to be registered?

The following rights over real property require registration:

Ground leases (erfpacht)

Rights of superficies (opstalrecht)

Rights of usufruct (vruchtgebruik)

Rights of mortgage (hypotheek)

Rights of easement (erfdienstbaarheid)

Public authorities such as municipalities, provinces and environmental and water authorities can also publish certain restrictions in relation to real property in the land registry, such as municipal preemption rights.

## What documents can landowners use to prove ownership over real property?

Landownership may be proven using transfer deeds that have been registered with the land registry.

## Can a title search be conducted online?

Yes. Searches can be done by entering the property location details or the name of the owner in the land registry’s online tool. The results will show the owner of the property and the details of the deed of transfer. In addition, any attachments or mortgages will be visible. Furthermore, the underlying deeds can be retrieved online very quickly.

## Can foreigners own real property? Are there nationality restrictions on land ownership?

Yes. Foreigners can own real property and there are no restrictions.

## Can the government expropriate real property?

Yes. Based on the Expropriation Act (Onteigeningswet), which will be incorporated in the new Environment and Planning Act (Omgevingswet, hereinafter referred to as EPA), the local government has the means to start proceedings for expropriation if certain conditions, such as urgency, are met. The government may only proceed with expropriation if it demonstrably serves the public interest.

The expropriation decision must always be ratified by the administrative court and the notary must submit the expropriation deed for registration in the land registry. Please note that a claim for expropriation is not easily awarded because the government has to strictly adhere to all applicable conditions. The landowners facing expropriation are entitled to full compensation of related damages suffered.

## How can real estate be held?

Generally, a real estate interest is held as an asset or through shares.

## What are the usual structures used in investing in real estate?

The following are the usual structures for investing in real estate:

Asset deals

Share deals

## How are real estate transactions usually funded?

Usually, purchasers finance acquisitions with external loans and provide mortgage rights to external lenders.

## Who usually produces the documentation in real estate transactions?

Generally, the civil law notary will prepare a letter of intent, the sale and purchase agreement, the deed of transfer and the deed of mortgage (as applicable). The civil law notary also takes care of the registration of the transfer deed in the land registry. The registration of the transfer deed will complete the transfer.

## Can an owner or occupier inherit liability for matters relating to the real estate even if they occurred before the real estate was bought or occupied?

Yes. In general, liabilities carry over to the next owner or occupier. For this reason, thorough due diligence combined with appropriate representations and warranties in the sale and purchase agreement are required so the risks can be mitigated. For instance, in case of environmental claims, the current owner could be liable for the cleanup of soil pollution even if this has occurred before they purchased the property.

## Does a seller or occupier retain any liabilities relating to the real estate after they have disposed of it?

Yes, it is possible. To a certain extent, the risk for a seller can be mitigated through appropriate representations and warranties detailed in the sale and purchase agreement.

# Acquisition of Real Property

## What are the usual documents involved in such transactions?

The usual documents include the following:

Letter of intent

Sale and purchase agreement

Transfer deed

Loan agreement

Mortgage deed

## What are the warranties given by a seller to a buyer?

A seller usually gives the following warranties:

The seller has the right and full powers to transfer title to the property.

No government subsidy for which conditions have yet to be satisfied has been applied for or granted in connection with the property.

The property will not be used by third parties without any right or title thereto.

The property is connected directly to the public water, energy, and sewerage systems.

The property is used in accordance with its intended use and has all the characteristics (eigenschappen) needed for the intended use.

It will deliver to the purchaser a freehold title that is unconditional and not subject to encumbrances and/or any curtailment, cancellation or annulment whatsoever, which is not subject to seizures and is not encumbered by obligations relating to a particular title as referred to in Article 6:252 of the Dutch Civil Code and other rights in rem (zakelijke rechten).

There are no disputes regarding third parties, nor are there any (intended) legal proceedings, binding advice procedures or arbitrations pending with respect to the property.

No obligations exist to third parties based on a preferential right, right of option or contractual right of first refusal.

The authorities have not required compliance with any local laws for the property that have not yet been completed to the satisfaction of the authorities in question and neither have any such provisions been announced.

The property is not subject to the Municipalities Preferential Rights Act (Wet voorkeursrecht gemeenten) and the seller has not received notice that it may, or will, be subject to this act in the future.

The local authority has not adopted any urban renewal plan or environmental order involving the property, as defined in the Urban and Rural Regeneration Act (Wet op de stads-en dorpsvernieuwing).

The property has not been included in any designation or listing order or registration of the property as a protected townscape or landscape and there is no pending application to do the same.

The property is not part of a land development plan and is not nominated for expropriation. No rulings or orders pursuant to Article 55 of the Soil Protection Act (Wet Bodembescherming, hereinafter referred to as SPA, which act will be incorporated in the EPA ) relating to the property have been registered in the land registry in the Netherlands.

No underground tanks are present on the property that would limit or impair the intended use.

A sufficient fire and extended coverage insurance policy for the property has been obtained and all required premiums have been paid and, to the seller’s knowledge, there are no increased risks associated with the property.

The property, including all buildings on it, are built and used in accordance with (i) applicable environmental permit(s) (omgevingsvergunning(en)), which are irrevocable, (ii) the fire safety and building requirements under the Building Decree 2012 (Bouwbesluit 2012) (which will be replaced by the Structures (Living Environment) Decree (Besluit bouwwerken leefomgeving), (iii) the Environment and Planning Act and (iv) the zoning plan, which has been approved by the municipality, and the property is in compliance with all other applicable rules and regulations pertaining to public and private law.

The property is not encumbered by obligations in the Public Works (Removal of Impediments in Private Law) Act (Belemmeringenwet Privaatrecht) (which will be incorporated in the EPA) that require certain work or improvements to be made to the property.

## When is the sale legally binding?

The terms of the sale of residential immovable property or any of its components must be in writing if the purchaser is a natural person who, when entering into the agreement, is not acting in the course of purchasers, professional practice or business. Except as provided above, the requirement that the terms of the sale and purchase of immovable property must be in writing is, in principle, not prescribed by regulation. Therefore, parties can be bound to each other even under an oral agreement. In addition, under Dutch law, the parties can be bound vis-á-vis each other in the pre-contractual phase. For example, at a certain stage of the negotiations, if the parties withdraw from negotiations, they may be liable to each other to a certain extent.

## When is title transferred?

Title is transferred when the registration at the land registry of the deed of transfer, executed by a civil law notary, is completed.

## What are the costs usually shouldered by the parties?

The purchaser usually pays for the following:

Purchase price of the property

Real estate transfer tax or value-added tax

Notary’s costs

Costs of registration at the land registry

The seller usually pays for the following:

Seller’s own advicer’s costs

Costs of cancellation of mortgages

# Leases

## What are the usual forms of leases?

Leases are subject to various statutory provisions and administrative regulations. The three most important lease regimes are housing, retail space and other business space, including office space, (hereinafter referred to as office space). To determine which lease regime is applicable, consideration is given to the agreed use of the property and its designated use according to the layout of the premises at the time of entering into the lease.

For all three types of leases, the Dutch Real Estate Council provides a standard contract (Raad voor Onroerende Zaken (ROZ)), which also includes a set of general conditions that form an integral part of the contract. An ROZ contract contains certain approved deviations from mandatory law and is generally landlord friendly.

## Are lease provisions regulated or freely negotiable?

Lease provisions are subject to relatively strict regulation in the Netherlands.

With respect to office space, a limited semi-mandatory system applies, which allows parties — to a great extent — to freely negotiate the rent and other terms of their agreement based on prevailing market conditions. The rental price is often based on a price index figure (generally, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) as published by the Statistics Netherlands (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (CBS)). Upon termination of a lease, the tenant is granted two months’ protection from eviction by operation of law and the courts can grant protection from eviction to a tenant for a maximum of three years.

For retail space, a more regulated and semi-mandatory system applies. Unless authorized by the court, parties may not contractually deviate from statutory law in a lease agreement to the detriment of the tenant. For example, there are protections that prevent tenants from being evicted and from being subject to mandatory renewals of the term. The system also allows the court to control the rental price. Leases for retail space have a statutory five-year term (unless special circumstances apply) with an option allowing the tenant to renew the contract for another five years. After five years, the landlord is permitted to terminate the lease agreement on exceptional legal grounds. These retail lease provisions aim to protect the tenant’s business interests.

Housing leases are even more regulated under Dutch law. There is a considerable amount of mandatory law that protects the tenant. The most significant of these protections are the rules which relate to the termination of the lease and the rental price.

## Is there a maximum term for leases? Can these be extended?

There is no maximum term for leases.

## What are the usual lease terms?

The extent to which the lease term of lease agreements is regulated by statutory law depends on the lease regime of relevant lease. The leases of a retail space and housing are subject to a statutory minimum lease period that tenant and landlord must adhere to. In contrast, based on the freedom of contract of parties no statutory minimum lease period applies to the lease of an office space.

The terms with regard to retail space leases are regulated by means of semi-mandatory provisions and are generally promulgated to provide certain protections to the tenant.

As a general rule, a retail space lease has a term of at least five years with an option of renewal by operation of law (van rechtswege) for a second period. The length of the renewal period after expiration of the initial lease term depends on the length of the first lease term agreed upon by the parties. If the parties agree on an initial lease term longer than 5 years but less than 10 years, the lease term is automatically extended by a second lease period up to a total lease period of 10 years.

Notwithstanding above, the parties may agree on a lease period of more than ten years if such period is in favor of the tenant.

There are two exceptions to the semi-mandatory provisions. The first exception is that the parties — without court permission — can agree that the lease will be in effect for less than two years. If the short-term lease is renewed, this first exception will no longer apply, and the semi-mandatory lease provisions will apply. The second exception is that the parties can deviate from the semi-mandatory lease provisions with the court’s permission.

This system has the following implications:

A lease entered into for a period of more than two years, but less than five years will be converted by operation of law into a lease running for at least five years, which is extended by operation of law into a lease for a total of 10 years.

A lease entered into for a period of more than five years, but less than 10 years will be extended by operation of law into a lease for a total of 10 years.

The parties may agree that the lease will run for a period of more than 10 years.

The lease term for office space is governed by the principle of freedom of contract. However, the tenant of office space premises is entitled to eviction protection. This eviction protection enables the tenant to ask the court to extend the period within which the tenant must vacate the space as requested by the landlord by an additional year. The tenant may request this a total of three times. This eviction protection cannot be contracted away.

Regulations that relate to leases for housing are generally promulgated to provide protection for tenants. Tenant and landlord can enter into a lease for an indefinite or definite period. There is a maximum rental period of 2 years for non-self-contained housing and a maximum rental period of 5 years for self-contained housing.

A lease for housing entered into for a fixed term ends on the expiration date of the term, without the requirement for a written termination. The landlord must, however, notify the tenant not earlier than three months but no later than one month prior to the date of expiration. If the landlord fails to provide such written notice or in the case a new lease agreement is entered into with the same tenant after the initial period, the lease agreement renews by operation of law for an indefinite lease period. Conversely, a housing lease entered into for an indefinite period is terminated by a written agreement.

## Are there instances where tenants may demand an extension of the lease?

Yes, but this depends on the kind of premises that are leased (please refer to the sections under the heading “Leases” for more details).

## On what grounds may a lease be terminated?

The parties to a lease agreement for office space can generally terminate the lease agreement upon the expiration of the term. Since the principle of freedom of contract applies to office space leases, the parties may agree on different arrangements. Parties can agree on a notice period of at least 1 month before the date of termination of the lease. Tenants are only entitled to eviction protection (please refer to the sections under the heading “Leases” for more details).

In the case of a lease agreement for retail space, the landlord may only terminate a lease at the end of the first period of at least five, if the termination is based on one of the below two limited grounds:

The tenant has not acted with due care.

There is an urgent need for the landlord or members of the landlord’s direct family to use the space.

In addition to the grounds listed above, if the landlord desires to terminate the lease before the expiration of the period by which the lease has been extended by operation of law, the termination must be based on any of the aforementioned or following additional three grounds:

There is reasonable weighing of interests.

The tenant did not accept a reasonable offer to enter into a new lease, which offer did not include an increase in the rent.

Pursuant to an applicable zoning plan, the landlord wishes to effectuate the designated use for the leased space.

Please note that a lease agreement relating to retail space cannot be terminated by the landlord without court approval. Additionally, the landlord has to give the tenant a prior written notice within a minimum notice period of one year. The aim of these requirements is to protect the tenant’s business interests.

The early termination of a lease agreement for office space, retail space or housing may only occur with the approval of the court (e.g., in case of breach of contract) or upon mutual consent of the parties, subject to specific arrangements agreed between the parties. In the case of housing, the landlord may only terminate the lease agreement by registered letter or bailiff’s writ to the tenant, which must include the legal grounds for termination and with the tenant’s consent. The landlord has to consider the statutory notice period of three to six months depending on the duration of the lease. If the tenant does not consent within six weeks, the landlord must seek court approval.

The court will only grant termination on one of the following legal grounds:

The tenant has not behaved as befits a good tenant.

The parties explicitly agreed on an eviction period.

The space is urgently needed for Landlord’s use.

The tenant has refused a reasonable offer of a new lease agreement.

Pursuant to an applicable zoning plan, the landlord wishes to effectuate the designated use for the leased space.

Weighing of interests in the case of a non-self-contained residence in which the landlord had their main residence.

A lease agreement entered into for a period of two years for self-contained housing and five years for non-self-contained housing may be terminated by the tenant prior to the date of the expiration of the lease agreement by registered letter or bailiff’s writ, without a reason, with due observance of the legal notice period of one to three months.

## Must rents be paid in local currency?

No, parties are free to decide on the currency to be used for rent payments.

## Is rent paid on a monthly basis? Is it required to be paid in advance?

Rent is not required to be paid on a monthly basis and the parties are free to decide on the frequency of payments. However, monthly or quarterly payments are common since rent is paid in advance.

## How is rent reviewed? Are there limits to the increase in rent?

Under the commonly used ROZ template, rent is reviewed based upon the CPI published by the CBS. Parties may agree upon a cap on the aforementioned indexation.

For a lease agreement for retail space, after the expiration of the agreed initial period, the tenant may apply to the court for rent review in accordance with the rent of comparable retail space on site during the previous five years. An expert opinion is required to proceed with rent adjustment. The court will only consider the request for rent modification if it is accompanied by an expert opinion appointed by the parties.

In extreme cases of unforeseen circumstances, the court can require the landlord to proceed with a reduction of the rent following the tenant’s request.

For housing leases, tenants can request the rent commission (huurcommissie) to assess the reasonableness of the rent within six months of the commencement of the lease.

## What are the basic obligations of landlords and tenants?

The following is usually required of landlords:

Provide a well-maintained property (unless agreed otherwise)

Carry out certain maintenance of the leased property (parts like the roof, façade, etc.)

Repair any defects to the leased property

As of 1 January 2023, the landlord of office space has an additional obligation to provide the tenant with an energy performance certificate of at least an energy label of C.

The following is usually required of tenants:

Pay rent

Carry out maintenance of the property, such as installations and other internal/minor maintenance work

Provide a guarantee (concern guarantee/bank guarantee) or pay a cash deposit (usually equal to three month’s rent including service charges and VAT)

## What provisions or restrictions typically apply to the transfer of the lease by the tenant? May a tenant sublet the leased premises?

A transfer of the rights and obligations under the lease agreement is accomplished by a contract takeover agreement (contractsovememing). Under the commonly used ROZ template lease agreement, the tenant does not have the right to transfer its rights and obligations under the lease agreement without prior written consent from the landlord.

Pursuant to applicable provisions of the Dutch Civil Code, the tenant of an office or retail space has the right to sublet all or part of the leased property, unless the tenant had to assume the landlord will have reasonable objections to relevant sublease. However, under the commonly used ROZ template lease agreement, the tenant does not have the right to sublet without prior written consent from the landlord.

## What happens in the event of destruction of the leased premises?

In case of destruction of the property, subject to certain circumstances (e.g., if the destruction is not caused by any action of the tenant), both parties have the right to terminate the lease agreement.

## Who is usually responsible for insuring the leased premises?

The landlord is typically responsible for insurance relating to the building of which the leased space is a part (e.g., opstalverzekering). However, the parties may agree on different insurance arrangements depending on the type of lease (e.g., in the case of a triple net lease agreement the tenant insures the building).

## Will the lease survive if the owner sells the leased premises?

Yes. In principle, a transfer by the landlord of the property which is subject to a lease agreement will result in the rights and obligations of the landlord under the lease agreement becoming binding on the acquiring party.

Since January 2022, the enactment of the Purchase Protection Act (Wet Opkoopbescherming) limits the possibility of renting out a recently purchased dwelling. This act prohibits the leasing of dwellings that are designated by the municipality, within a period of four years after the date of registration of delivery in the land registry. This provision only applies to unlet designated dwellings that have been transferred and are registered in the land registry after the entry into force of a relevant provision in the respective municipality.

An exception to the aforementioned prohibition can only be made if the purchaser has obtained a rental permit. This permit can be granted on various grounds, including:

A lease by close relatives

If the dwelling is part of office or retail premises

For a temporary rental, where the owner has lived in the dwelling for at least 12 months in the preceding period

In addition, respective municipalities may include additional exceptions to the provision aligned with the needs and circumstances of the municipality. If provisions regarding purchase protection are violated, an administrative fine can be imposed.

## Will the lease survive if the leased premises are foreclosed?

The survival of the lease depends on the content of the mortgage deed and on whether the lease already existed when the mortgage deed was executed.

If the lease existed before the mortgage deed was executed, the lease will have to be respected in the event of foreclosure. If the effective date of the lease is after the execution of the mortgage, the lease will only have to be respected in case of foreclosure if the lease was expressly permitted under the mortgage deed or by the mortgage holder (huurbeding).

# Planning and Environmental Issues

## Who has authority over land development and environmental regulation?

Zoning laws, which relate to the zoning plan and the general environmental permitting (omgevingsvergunning), are enforced by various authorities (different authorities deal with different aspects of zoning law), which have a wide range of methods and rules at their disposal to ensure compliance.

## What environmental laws affect the use and occupation of real estate?

Depending on the kind of activities that the occupier of the premises intends to conduct, certain permits, based on different environmental laws (such as the Environmental Management Act (Wet milieubeheer) and the Hazardous Waste Decree (Besluit aanwijzing gevaarlijke afvalstoffen)), might be mandatory.

The Environmental Protection Act (Wet milieubeheer) currently contains the most important laws regarding environmental protection. The Environment and Planning Act (Omgevingswet) is expected to enter into force as of 1 January 2024 to simplify the current regulations and laws on spatial planning, land use, environmental protection, nature conservation, construction of buildings, protection of cultural heritage and water management, by integrating the existing rules in one legal framework. The enactment of this act will also include environmental laws regarding the use and occupation of real estate, especially with respect to the construction and development of real estate.

## What main permits or licenses are required for building or occupying real estate?

The following permits or licenses are required:

A building environmental permit (omgevingsvergunning)

A fire safety permit or notification (depending on the kind of real estate)

Several other permits, depending on the kind of real estate and the kind of construction work the owner intends to be performed

## Can an environmental cleanup be required?

Yes, under current law, the authorities have the right to demand a cleanup in case of serious and urgent soil pollution, depending on the circumstances, and order both the occupier and the owner of the property to carry out the cleanup. However, effective 1 January 2024 the EPA will introduce a new regulation which no longer includes a cleanup obligation for newly discovered soil pollution, but may require temporary protective measures be taken by the landowner. Local governments will have to further shape soil policy under the EPA. Thus, the approach to soil contamination may differ from one municipality to the other. However, the EPA provides for respectful consideration of decisions under the SPA that were taken before the effective date of the EPA.

## Are there minimum energy performance requirements for buildings?

Pursuant to the Energy Performance Buildings Decree (Besluit energieprestatie gebouwen), the owner of a building needs to be in possession of an energy label. This applies to certain new buildings or existing buildings as referred to in that decree as buildings for which an energy performance coefficient is required. Note that this does not apply to buildings with an industrial purpose. For a building subject to an energy label, it is required that the owner possesses an energy label and that this label is handed over to the purchaser of the building.

In accordance with the Building Decree 2012 (Bouwbesluit), as of 1 January 2023, offices with an area of 100 square meters or more must at least meet the requirements of energy label C. In particular, such offices must meet the requirements of an energy label with a primary fossil energy consumption of no more than 225-kilowatt hour per square meter per year or an energy label with the letter C or better. By 2030, the goal will be to achieve an energy label requirement of at least A. If this requirement is not met, the building cannot be used as office space. The municipality or environmental department is responsible for the supervision and enforcement of this obligation.

## Are there other regulatory measures that aim to improve the sustainability of newly constructed and existing buildings?

The Dutch government is reviewing Dutch planning and building legislation, and the EPA is set to enter into force on 1 January 2024. Under the Environmental and Planning Act, the applicable zoning plan will be replaced by an environmental plan (omgevingsplan) and several procedural aspects in relation to permits and requirements will be altered.

In addition, rules and regulations regarding the allowed amounts of nitrogen deposits are causing considerable delays in certain business activities (including construction works). Under the Dutch Nature Conservation Act (Wet natuurbescherming), a “nature permit’’ is required for any project that could negatively affect any sites forming part of the Natura 2000 network of protected areas. The obligation to hold or obtain a nature permit applies to each party that performs activities with potential significant negative effects on these Natura 2000 areas. In a recent decision, the Administrative Jurisdiction Divisionof the Council of State (Afdeling bestuursrechtspraak van de Raad van State) ruled that the so-called construction exemption, which provided that any nitrogen effects caused during the construction phase of a development project would not be considered when assessing whether a nature permit would be required, violates the European Habitats Directive (Richtlijn 92/43/EEG). As a result, each development project now requires an assessment of the nitrogen consequences in the construction phase, which may cause considerable delays in the development process.

Lastly, it is expected that the Quality Assurance (Building Sector) Act (Wet kwaliteitsborging voor het bouwen) will take effect on 1 January 2024 regarding quality insurance measures for construction. The focus will shift to parties being required to obtain permits in advance that demonstrate compliance with quality requirements during construction and afterward. With the advent of this law, the role and responsibility of contractors will increase. During construction, a contractor will be required to keep a log and report any environmental warnings to the employer in writing. This will ensure that defects are disclosed during construction and will limit any defects after completion. The act has not yet taken effect.

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