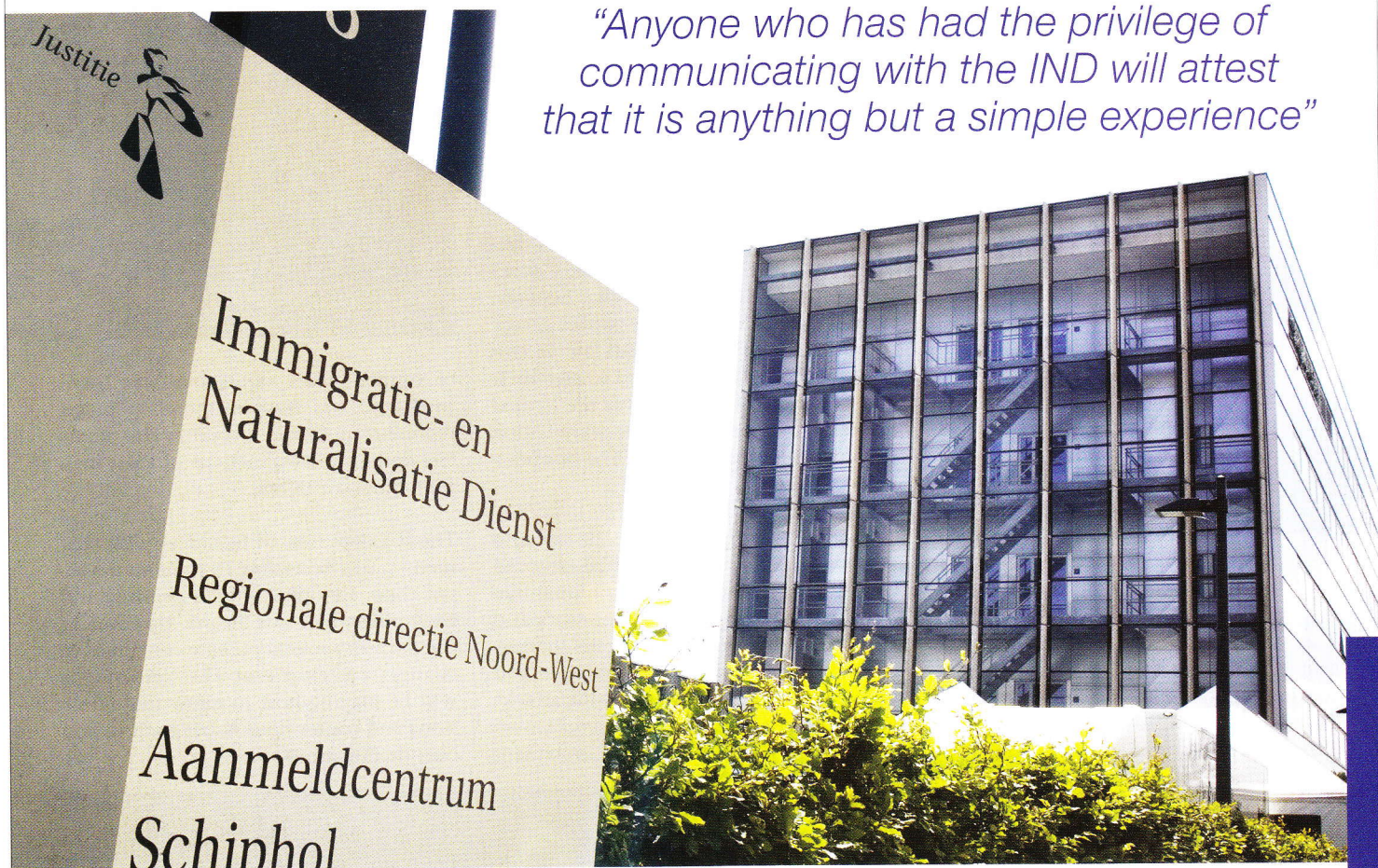


## MOVING TO THE NETHERLANDS

# How hard can it be?

Windmills, flower fields, same-sex marriage and cycle paths galore – what isn't there to like about Holland? But is it all smiles and tulips when people arrive in the country?

*“Anyone who has had the privilege of communicating with the IND will attest that it is anything but a simple experience”*



Searching on-line, it doesn't take long to find many forum posts from people wanting to relocate to the Netherlands and asking what is involved. At one point the Netherlands was one of the top destinations for asylum seekers and immigrants and the Dutch were pretty supportive in welcoming them to their country. However, the Dutch are a group of people with a very strong and proud identity and, as the country began to have more and more cultures and ethnicities in it, this identity started to be threatened. Because of this, the Dutch like to protect their identity and rights in any way possible and one way they do this best is with thousands of rules. For such a small country, The Netherlands must have as many rules per person as they do bikes and negotiating those rules when attempting to immigrate can be a mind-field.

It is the IND (Immigration and Naturalisation Service) that is responsible for the implementation of the immigration policy created by the Government and the Upper and the Lower Chambers. It is their responsibility to assess all of the applications from people who wish to stay in the Netherlands longer than their tourist visa allows or for those who wish to naturalise. The assessment is done on a number of points, including country of origin, length of residence in the Netherlands, reason for residence, income and/or age.

The IND is a process-driven, uniform organization and boasts its 'balance between rules and people'. However, anyone who has had the grand privilege of needing to communicate with the IND will attest that it is anything but a simple, uniform and balanced experience. It is likely to have been one that will leave you pulling your hair out as you are told yet another, differ-

ent version of events and breathless as you go in search of yet another document that doesn't exist or that needs to be translated, signed, sealed and delivered in Dutch.

While this doesn't seem to deter the many people who still want to come and live in the Netherlands, immigrants are finding it increasingly hard to do so in a country that traditionally had previously been known as being immigrant-friendly. For example, the introduction in 1998 of a required assimilation course, providing Dutch language training, orientation, information on working and social coaching for non-EU immigrants, has been met with mixed opinions.

In the future who knows what other hurdles will face people wanting to live in the Netherlands but what is certain is that it is likely to be more than they currently face. ■