

# Tall tale: world-beating Dutch are getting shorter

September 17 2021, by Danny Kemp

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Despite new data showing a generation of shorter people, the Netherlands remains the tallest country in the world.

The world's tallest country is shrinking.

The generation of Dutch people born in 2001 is shorter than the one

born in 1980, a study by the country's statistics office said on Friday.

Lofty Dutch 19-year-old men currently measure an average of 182.9 cm (six feet) tall, and [women](#) are on average 169.3 cm (five feet seven inches) tall.

Factors including immigration and diet are likely to be responsible for the change in height, which reverses a century and a half of rapid growth, the study said.

"In the course of the last century we have become taller and taller, but since 1980 the growth has stopped," it said.

"The men born in 2001 were on average 1 cm shorter than the generation from 1980, women 1.4 cm on average."

But all is not lost.

"The Netherlands is still the tallest nation in the world," the Central Bureau for Statistics said in a statement.

Dutchmen rank first above Montenegro, Estonia and Bosnia, while the women are above Montenegro, Denmark and Iceland, it said, citing 2020 figures from the Non-Communicable Disease Risk Factor Collaboration, a global network of health scientists.

The smallest men are in East Timor while the smallest women are in Guatemala.



Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte often towers over his counterparts, including French President Emmanuel Macron.

### **'Unhealthy eating habits'**

The full reasons for the Dutch comedown are not entirely clear.

One reason was immigration, "especially of people with a non-Western background", whom the study said tend to be smaller on average.

But growth had also "stagnated" among Dutch people whose parents and grandparents were born in the Netherlands, it said.

Men had not got any taller since 1980 while there was a "downward

trend" among women.

That could be because of a "biological limit" but was also likely linked to "unhealthy eating habits and excessive energy intake in the growing up phase".

The study was based on self-measurements of 719,000 Dutch people aged 19 to 60.

The Dutch were not always so lanky.

At the start of the 19th century they were small by European standards and only started to shoot up in the 1840s.

Even a century ago the United States and Scandinavia produced the tallest men, and it was not until the generation born in the late 1950s that the Dutch took the title.

The question of why the Dutch are so tall remains unclear.

A popular myth—that the cheese-loving Dutch consume a lot of dairy products—is discounted by scientists.

Increased prosperity as well as "natural selection in which taller men and women had more children than shorter couples" is likely the real reason, the statistics bureau said.

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