

Dutch residential mortgage market

The Dutch residential mortgage debt stock is relatively sizeable, especially when compared to other European countries. Since the 1990s, the mortgage debt stock of Dutch households has grown considerably, mainly on the back of mortgage lending on the basis of two incomes in a household, the introduction of tax-efficient product structures such as mortgage loans with deferred principal repayment vehicles and interest-only mortgage loans, financial deregulation and increased competition among originators. Moreover, Loan-to-Value (LTV) ratios have been relatively high, as the Dutch tax system implicitly discouraged amortisation, due to the tax deductibility of mortgage interest payments. After a brief decline between 2012 and 2015, mortgage debt reached a new peak of EUR 880.8 billion in Q3 2024¹. This represents a rise of EUR 31 billion compared to Q3 2023.

Tax system

The Dutch tax system plays an important role in the Dutch mortgage market, as it allows for partial deductibility of mortgage interest payments from taxable income. Historically, this has resulted in various deferred amortisation mortgage products, most importantly the use of interest-only loan parts.

Since 1 January 2013, all new mortgage loans have to be repaid in full in 30 years, at least on an annuity basis, in order to be eligible for tax relief (linear mortgage loans are also eligible). The tax benefits on mortgage loans, of which the underlying property was bought before 1 January 2013, have remained unchanged and are grandfathered, even in case of refinancing and relocation. As such, new mortgage originations still include older loan products, including interest-only. However, any additional loan on top of the borrower's grandfathered product structure, has to meet the mandatory full redemption standards to allow for tax deductibility.

A second reform imposed in 2013 was to reduce the tax deductibility by gradually lowering the maximum deduction percentage. As a result, the highest tax rate against which the mortgage interest may be deducted is 37.48% in 2025. This is a slight increase compared to 2024 due to the introduction of an additional income tax bracket which is slightly higher than the lowest income tax bracket. Mortgage interest can be deducted from income in the second tax bracket in 2025.

There are several housing-related taxes which are linked to the fiscal appraisal value ("WOZ") of the house, both imposed on the national and local level. Moreover, a transfer tax of 2% is due when a house is acquired for owner-occupation. From 2021, house buyers aged between 18 and 35 years will no longer pay any transfer tax. From 2025, this exemption only applies to houses sold for 525,000 euros or less (2025) and can only be applied once. In 2025, a transfer tax of 8% is due upon transfer of houses which are not owner-occupied (compared to 10.4% in 2023 and 2024).

Although these taxes partially unwind the benefits of tax deductibility of interest payments, and several restrictions to this tax deductibility have been applied, tax relief on mortgage loans is still substantial.

Loan products

The Dutch residential mortgage market is characterised by a wide range of mortgage loan products. In general, three types of mortgage loans can be distinguished.

Firstly, the "classical" Dutch mortgage product is an annuity loan. Secondly, there is a relatively big presence of interest-only mortgage loans in the Dutch market. Full interest-only mortgage loans were popular in the late nineties and in the early years of this century. Mortgage loans including an interest-only loan part were the norm until 2013, and even today, grandfathering of older tax benefits still results in a considerable amount of interest-only loan originations.

¹ Statistics Netherlands, household data. The total amount of mortgages outstanding reported has also increased including historic data due to a benchmark revision.

Thirdly, there is still a big stock of mortgage products including deferred principal repayment vehicles. In such products, capital is accumulated over time (in a tax-friendly manner) in a linked account in order to take care of a bullet principal repayment at maturity of the loan. The principal repayment vehicle is either an insurance product or a bank savings account. The latter structure has been allowed from 2008 and was very popular until 2013. Mortgage loan products with insurance-linked principal repayment vehicles used to be the norm prior to 2008 and there is a wide range of products present in this segment of the market. Most structures combine a life-insurance product with capital accumulation and can be relatively complex. In general, however, the capital accumulation either occurs through a savings-like product (with guaranteed returns), or an investment-based product (with non-guaranteed returns).

A typical Dutch mortgage loan consists of multiple loan parts, e.g. a bank savings loan part that is combined with an interest-only loan part. Newer mortgage loans, in particular those for first-time buyers after 2013, are full annuity and often consists of only one loan part. Nonetheless, tax grandfathering of older mortgage loan product structures still results in the origination of mortgage loans including multiple loan parts.

Most interest rates on Dutch mortgage loans are not fixed for the full duration of the loan, but they are typically fixed for a period between five and 15 years. Rate term fixings differ by vintage, however. In recent years, there was a strong bias to longer term fixings (20-30 years) but since Q2 2022 10 year fixings have rapidly increased in popularity as the sharply increased mortgage rates drove borrowers to seek lower mortgage payments by going for shorter fixings. Most borrowers remain subject to interest rate risk, but compared to countries in which floating rates are the norm, Dutch mortgage borrowers are relatively well-insulated against interest rate fluctuations.

Underwriting criteria

Most of the Dutch underwriting standards follow from special underwriting legislation (“Tijdelijke regeling hypothecair krediet”). This law has been present since 2013 and strictly regulates maximum LTV and Loan-to-Income (LTI) ratios. The current maximum LTV is 100% or 106% when financing energy saving measures. The new government has indicated not to lower the maximum LTV further. LTI limits are set according to a fixed table including references to gross income of the borrower and mortgage interest rates. This table is updated annually by the consumer budget advisory organisation “NIBUD” and ensures that income after (gross) mortgage servicing costs is still sufficient to cover normal costs of living.

Prior to the underwriting legislation, the underwriting criteria followed from the Code of Conduct for Mortgage Lending. Although the Code of Conduct is currently largely overruled by the underwriting legislation, it is still in force. The major restriction it currently regulates, in addition to the criteria in the underwriting legislation, is the cap of interest-only loan parts to 50% of the market value of the residence. This cap was introduced in 2011 and is in principle applicable to all new mortgage contracts. A mortgage lender may however diverge from the cap limitation if certain conditions have been met.

Recent developments in the Dutch housing market ³

In October, existing homes were as much as 11.5% more expensive than in the same month last year; the fourth consecutive month of double-digit growth (Chart 3). And this compares with a year-on-year price growth of just 1.8% in January. The fact that existing owner-occupied homes are again rapidly becoming more expensive reflects the still mounting housing shortage. The demand for houses is still increasing rapidly due to population growth and high wage growth, while the supply of housing lags behind. Average collective labor agreement wage growth was a whopping 6.8% in the third quarter of 2024. Robust wage growth has allowed home buyers to borrow and bid more on a home. Moreover, borrowing capacity increased further due to a slight fall in many fixed mortgage rates in 2024 (Chart 5) and due to some changes in mortgage terms. For example, student debt weighs less heavily on the

maximum mortgage amount and households are allowed to borrow an extra amount for an energy-efficient home. And are you single with an income of at least EUR 28,000? Then you may borrow an additional EUR 16,000 from 2024 onward according to the lending standards.

Currently house prices are clearly rising faster than wage growth and increases in borrowing capacity. As a result, the affordability of owner-occupied housing is deteriorating. And that causes supply and demand to gradually become more balanced, thus reducing price growth.

Borrowing capacity is a significant factor when it comes to house price trends, but it's not the only one. The housing market is a confidence market, where sentiment factors play a major role. Over the past two years, confidence in the Dutch housing market has picked up, according to the Market Indicator of Dutch homeowners association Vereniging Eigen Huis (Chart 6). Many housing consumers believe that house prices will continue to rise. Optimistic expectations may further increase demand for owner-occupied homes. However, slightly more people are still negative about housing market conditions than positive. Moreover, more and more people think it is an unfavourable time to buy a house: The buying mood is depressed by the fact that houses are less affordable and by the limited choice of houses for sale.

In the first 10 months of 2024, nearly 165,000 existing homes for sale changed hands. This is 11.6% more than in the same period last year. The higher number of housing transactions is mainly due to many more apartments being sold. For other house types, such as mid-terrace houses, or semi-detached houses, the number of sales was stable or showed only a very limited rise. This development seems to be a direct result of the sale of buy-to-rent properties by both private and corporate landlord.

The recovering market for existing homes for sale offers prospects for new construction. When the housing market cooled down temporarily from 2022 onward, many construction projects ran into trouble. Now that house prices are rising again at a rapid pace, project revenues are increasing, and housing construction – at a given level of ambition – is more likely to be financially viable again.

This is reflected in the new construction sales. The 12-month moving average of new construction sales was 38% higher in October than in the same month in 2023. But a full recovery is not yet underway: In the past 12 months, sales of new construction homes were still 23% lower than in 2021 and 14% lower than in 2020. In 2021, new construction had the wind in its sails due to exceptionally low interest rates and sharply rising house prices. The impact of the cooling housing market on the new construction market was reflected primarily by falling sales rather than falling prices. While existing homes for sale fell in price, the prices of new homes for sale continued to rise steadily. The reversal in this trend that started some time ago, increases the attractiveness of a new-build home.

Forced sales

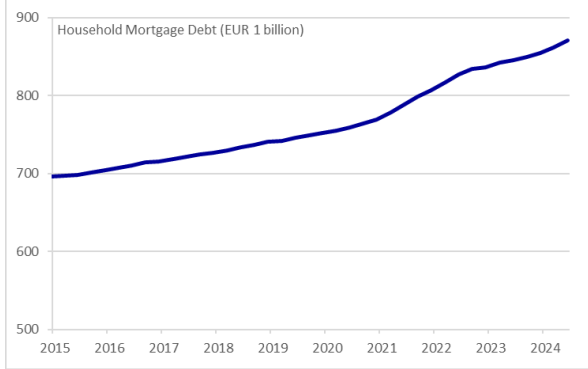
Compared to other jurisdictions, performance statistics of Dutch mortgage loans show relatively low arrears and loss rates². The most important reason for default is relationship termination, although the increase in unemployment following the economic downturn post financial crisis was increasingly also a reason for payment problems. The ultimate attempt to loss recovery to a defaulted mortgage borrower is the forced sale of the underlying property.

For a long time, mortgage servicers opted to perform this forced sale by an auction process. The advantage of this auction process is the high speed of execution, but the drawback is a discount on the selling price. The Land Registry recorded 50 forced sales by auction in Q3 2024 (0.12% of total number of sales over a 12 month period).

² Comparison of Moody's RMBS index delinquency data.

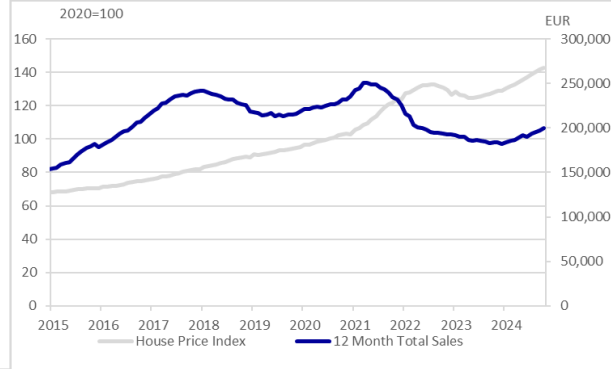
³ Rabobank Housing market quarterly of 23 December 2024

Chart 1: Total mortgage debt



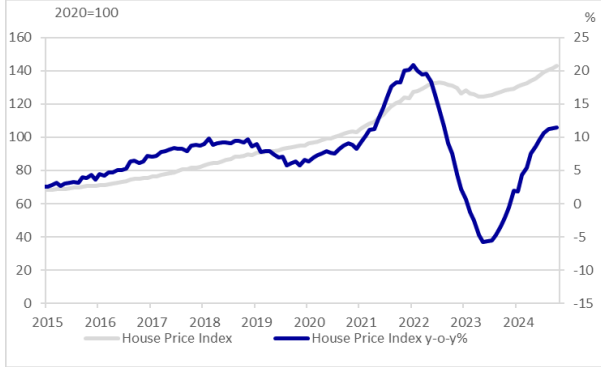
Sources: Statistics Netherlands, Rabobank

Chart 2: Sales



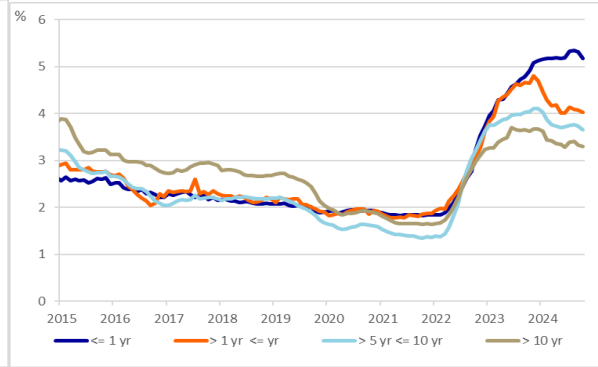
Sources: Dutch Land Registry (Kadaster), Statistics Netherlands (CBS)

Chart 3: Price index development



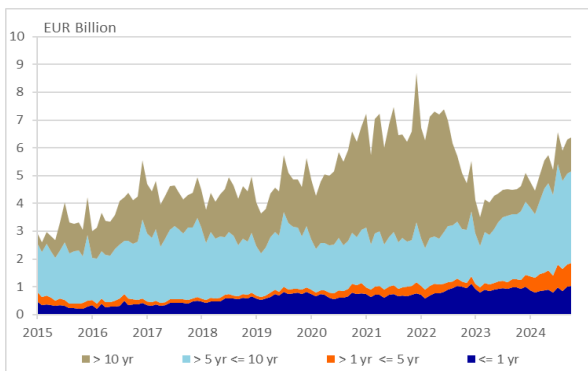
Sources: Statistics Netherlands, Rabobank

Chart 4: Interest rate on new mortgage loans



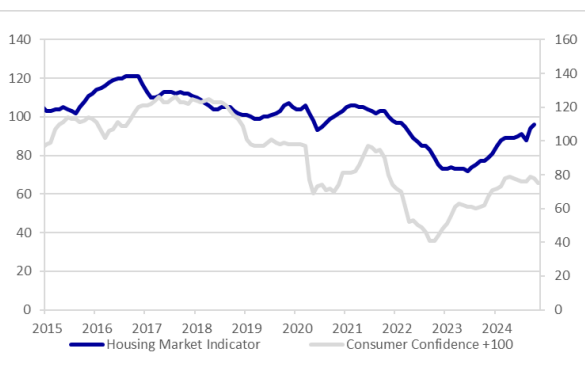
Source: Dutch Central Bank

Chart 5: New mortgages by interest type



Source: Dutch Central Bank

Chart 6: Confidence



Sources: Statistics Netherlands, OTB TU Delft and VEH