

Fact sheet on international students in the Netherlands 2025

This fact sheet contains the most important facts and figures on international students in the Netherlands, such as the total numbers, incoming and outgoing students, stay rate, and languages of instruction at universities of applied sciences and research universities. You will also read about the perceived bottlenecks and how the Netherlands benefits from the presence of international students. You can find references to relevant studies and publications for further reading at the bottom of this fact sheet. Note that this is an updated version of our [2023](#) fact sheet.

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Facts and figures: international students in Dutch higher education

Number

In the academic year 2024/25, 131,004 international degree students were studying at publicly funded universities of applied sciences and research universities in the Netherlands. This was 16.6% of the total student population. Of all students in research universities, 27.2% were international, compared to 8.6% in universities of applied sciences. Of all international students, 72.3% were from the EEA and 27.7% from outside the EEA.

New enrolments of international students

In the academic year 2024/25, publicly funded higher education institutions received 39,097 new international enrolments for a full bachelor's or master's programme. From this group, 66.8% (26,097) were from the EEA and 33.2% (12,949) from outside the EEA. Of these students, 72.5% (28,327) attended research universities (RU), of which 66.4% (18,789) were from the EEA and 33.6% (9,507) from outside the EEA. At universities of applied sciences (UAS), there were 10,770 new international enrolments, of which 68.0% (7,308) were from the EEA and 32.0% (3,442) non-EEA. For bachelor's programmes, there were a total of 25,888 new international enrolments (71.9% EEA; 28.1% non-EEA), compared to 13,209 for master's programmes (57.0% EEA; 43.0% non-EEA) (Data source: *1-cijfer HO* (central register of students enrolled on publicly funded higher education programmes in the Netherlands), DUO).

Difference between EEA and non-EEA students

Students from the European Economic Area (EEA: all EU countries plus Liechtenstein, Norway and Iceland) pay the statutory tuition fee in the Netherlands (€2,601 for 2025/26), to which the government contributes financially. Switzerland is not part of the EEA but its degree students pay a reduced (statutory) tuition fee based on agreements. Switzerland is therefore included in the EEA category here. EEA students are eligible for study loans and grants in some cases, for example if they have lived in the Netherlands for more than 5 years or work more than 32 hours per month (Source: DUO, 2025). Students from outside the EEA pay the higher institutional rate. Students from outside the EEA also usually need a residence permit, which allows them to work limited hours (16 hours per week, or full time in the summer months) (Source: IND, 2025).

What do we mean by “international students”?

International students are students who have obtained their secondary education diploma outside of the Netherlands and do not hold Dutch nationality (Source: CPB, 2019: 12). This means that ‘homecoming students’ (Dutch students with a prior education abroad) do not count. International degree students are those pursuing an entire degree abroad; exchange students are only going abroad for part of their studies or for their internships. VET (vocational education and training) students are outside the scope of this fact sheet.

Figure 1 - Numbers of international students relative to the total student population at universities of applied sciences and research universities in the academic year 2024/25.

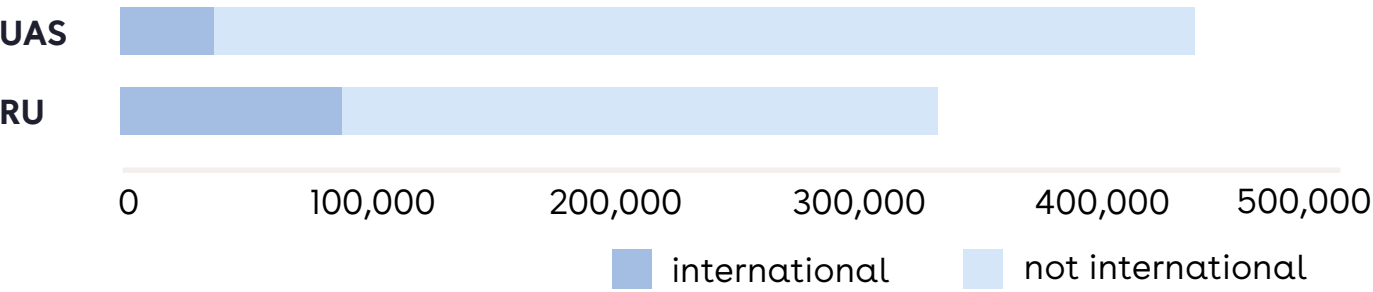


Figure 2 - Percentage of international student population from the EEA versus from outside the EEA in 2024/25.

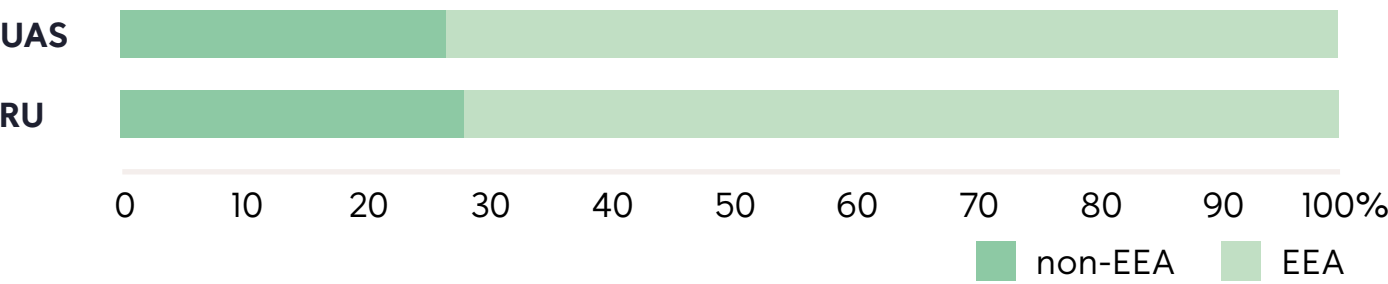


Figure 3 - New enrolments of international bachelor's students at universities of applied sciences and research universities in the academic year 2024/25.

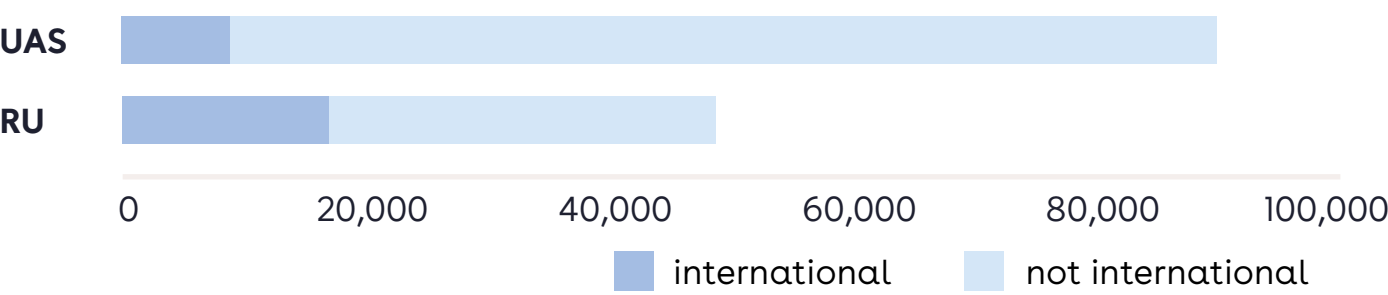


Figure 4 - Percentage of new international enrolments from EEA versus non-EEA at universities of applied sciences and research universities in 2024/25.

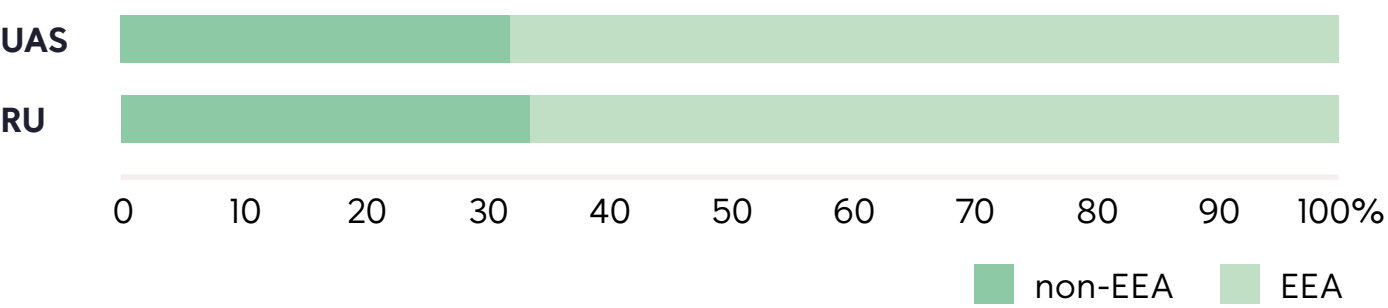


Figure 5 - New enrolments of international bachelor's students compared to the total number of new bachelor's enrolments at the top 10 institutions with the most international bachelor's enrolments, and percentage of EEA versus non-EEA student

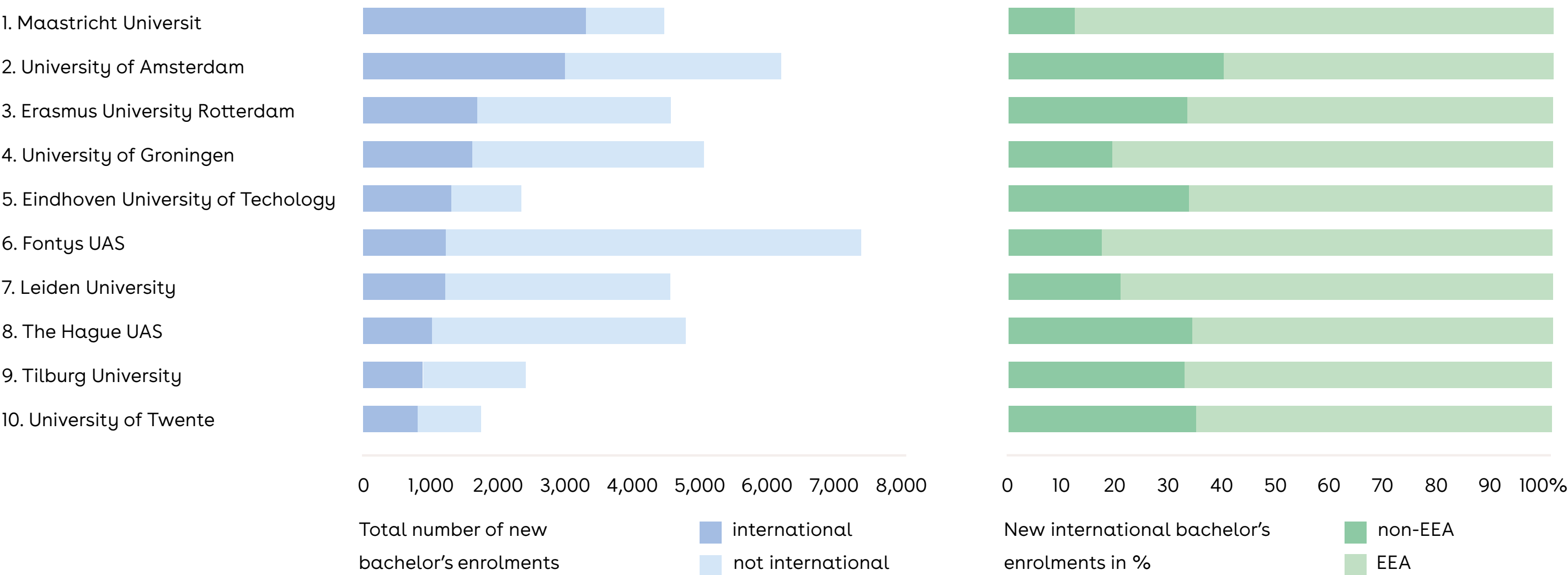
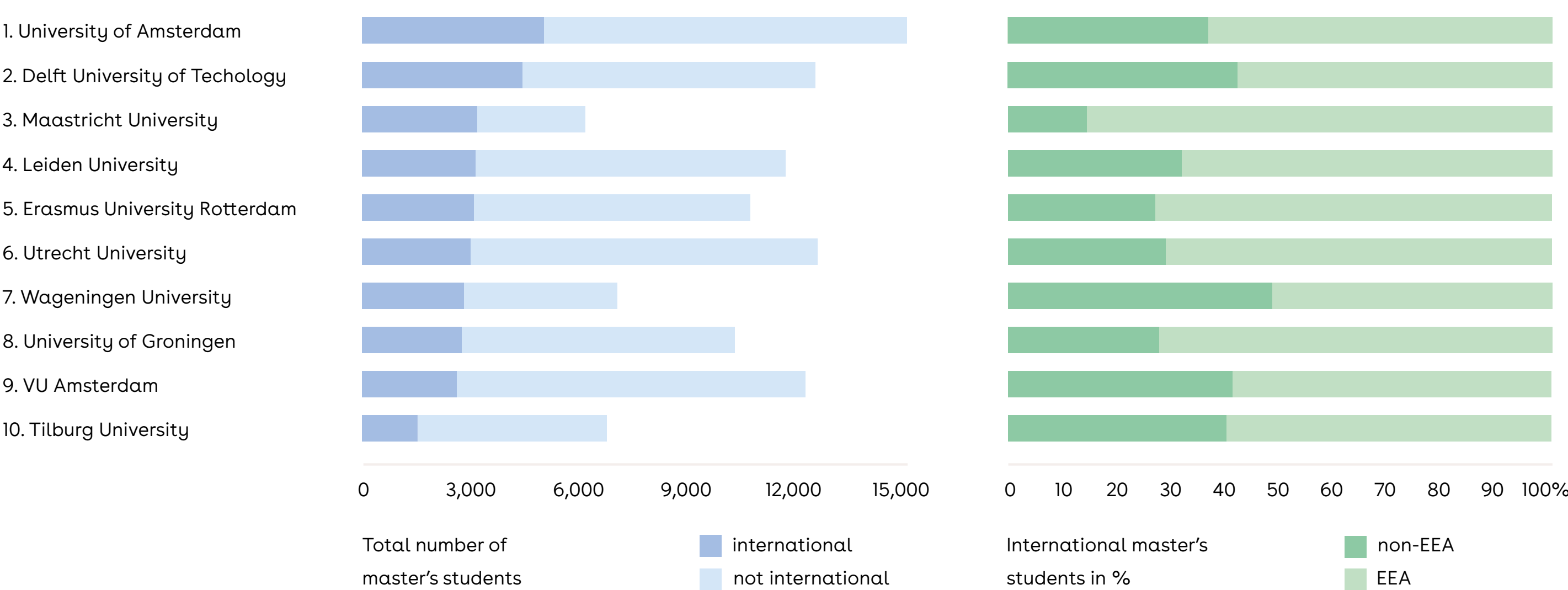


Figure 6 - International master's students relative to the total master's student population at the top 10 institutions with the most international master's students, and percentage of EEA versus non-EEA students



New enrolments

The percentages of international students at master's level often give a distorted picture. 'New enrolments' are students enrolling for the first time in a higher education programme in the Netherlands¹. As most Dutch master's students have completed a bachelor's programme in the Netherlands, 'new enrolments' in master's programmes are therefore largely international. As a result, the percentage of international students may be disproportionately high. A possible solution is to look only at the total number of international students in relation to the total student population at the master's level. This solution has been applied in Figure 6.

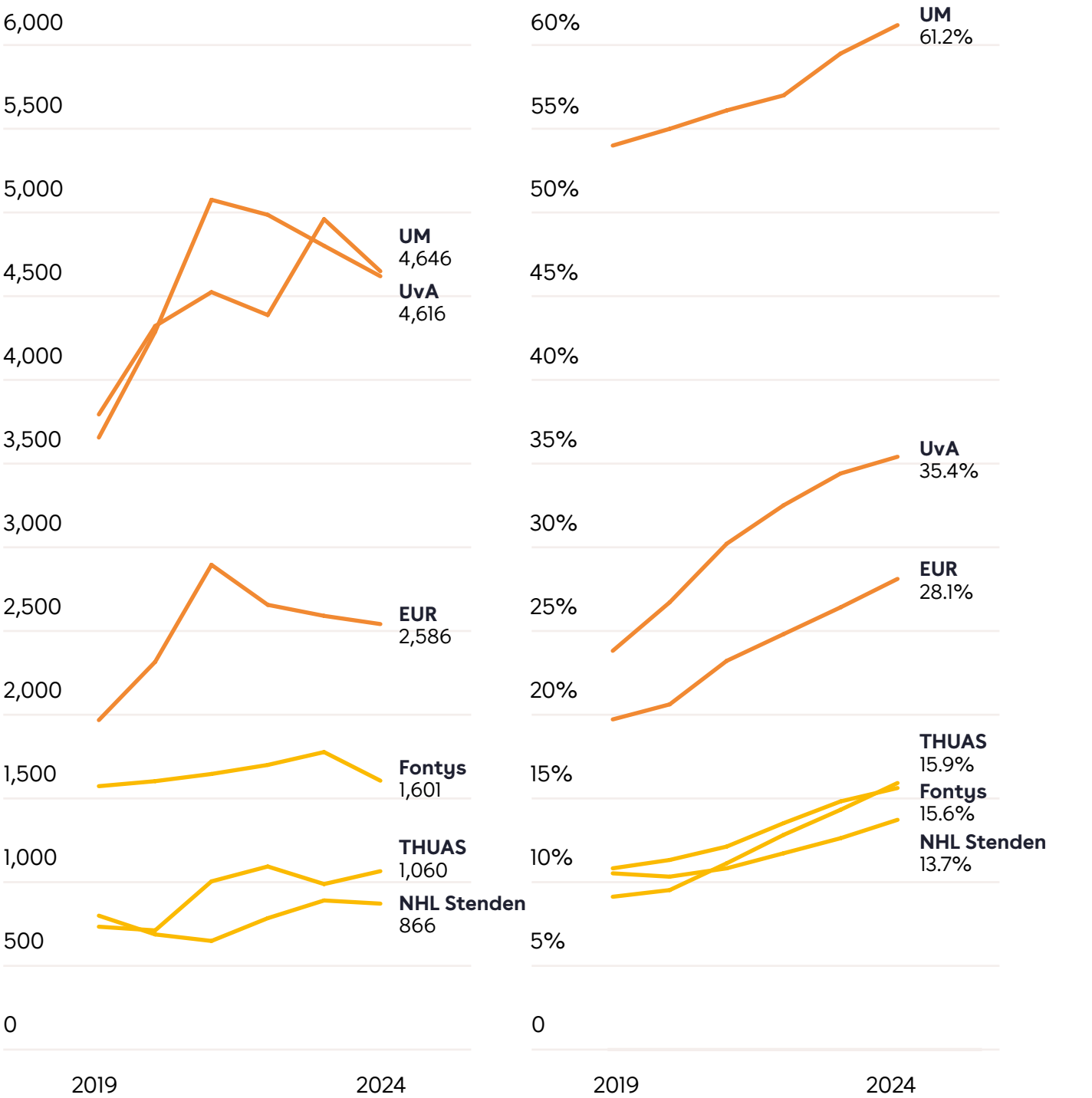


Figure 7 - 5-year trend in the number of new international enrolments and in the percentage of international students in the total student population at the top 3 research universities and universities of applied sciences with the highest numbers of new international enrolments in 2024/5

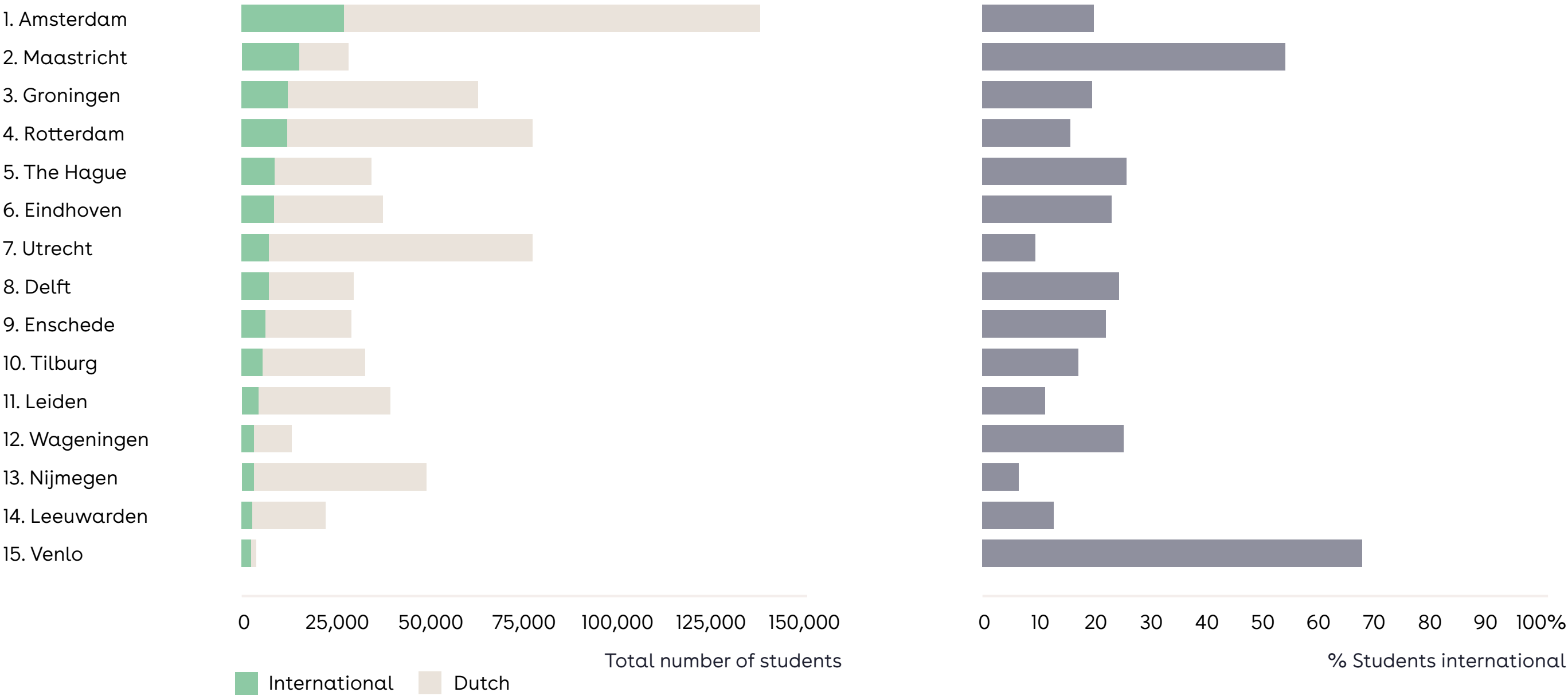
¹ In our report *Incoming Degree Mobility in Dutch Higher Education 2024-25*, we use a different definition of new enrolments, leading to different numbers. More information on the different definitions can be found on page 12 of that report.

Tabel 1 - Top 10 cities based on the number of new international enrolments in 2024/25. Total number of new international enrolments and percentage of EEA versus non-EEA students for each city

City	Total	EEA	Non-EEA
1. Amsterdam	7,684	58.54%	41.46%
2. Maastricht	4,983	85.21%	14.79%
3. Rotterdam	3,535	63.11%	36.89%
4. Groningen	3,067	74.08%	25.92%
5. Eindhoven	2,580	62.56%	37.44%
6. The Hague	2,474	73.73%	26.27%
7. Utrecht	2,255	62.48%	37.52%
8. Delft	1,995	60.55%	39.45%
9. Tilburg	1,634	63.59%	36.41%
10. Enschede	1,619	64.79%	35.21%

These figures refer to the main location of the institution where the students are enrolled, not to their place of residence (Source: 1 cijfer HO (DUO)).

Figure 8 - Total number of international degree students, total student population, and share of international students in the top 15 municipalities with the most international students in 2024/25



Growth and trends in number of international students: new enrolments and total numbers

Research universities (RU)

New enrolments

In research universities, the number of new enrolments of international degree students decreased by 4.1% in the academic year 2024/25. There were 1,226 fewer enrolments of international students this year compared to last year. The enrolment of Dutch students increased slightly by 1.5% (469 more students).

Total numbers

In the academic year 2024/25, the share of international degree students in the total student population was 27.2%, compared with 26.3% in the previous year. The growth in the total number of international students was 3.0%. This growth is due to more international students starting their studies than graduating,

reflecting the rapid growth in enrolments in previous years. There are 2,670 more international students in research universities this year compared with last year. The growth has continued to slow down after growing 5.8% in 2023/24 and 7.1% in 2022/23.

Universities of applied sciences (UAS)

New enrolments

The number of new enrolments of international degree students at universities of applied science (UAS) was also lower than last year. In the academic year 2024/25, there was a decrease of 5.4% (619 fewer new international students than last year). In 2023/24, there was still a growth of 3.1%. The enrolments of Dutch UAS students in academic year 2024/25 increased by 2.1% (1,691 more new Dutch students).

Total numbers

In the academic year 2024/25, there were 1,165 more international degree students in UAS compared to last year. The total number of international students in UAS has grown by 3.1%, again due to more international students starting with their studies than graduating. In 2023/24, the growth was 4.6%. In 2024/25, 8.6% of all students in UAS are international, compared to 8.1% in the previous academic year.

Exchange students

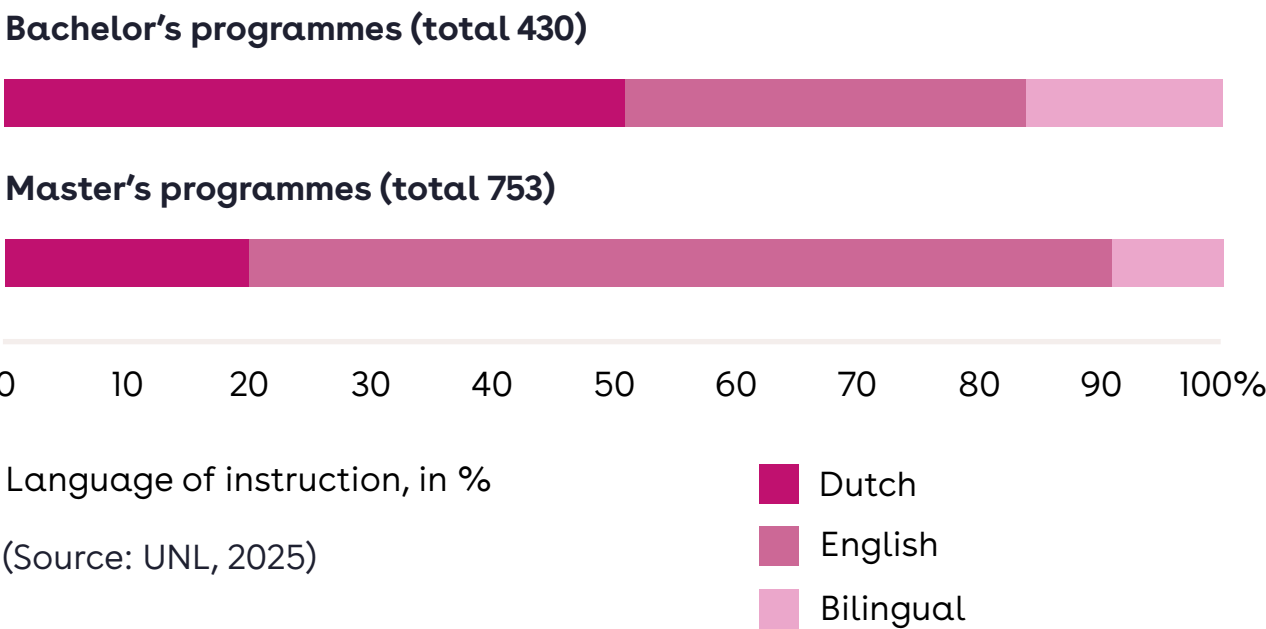
Besides degree students, there are also international students who do part of their studies or an internship in the Netherlands, the so-called exchange students. No recent and complete figures are available on the size of this group. However, we know that in the academic year 2020/21, there were 7,714 incoming students with an Erasmus+ scholarship. This number is significantly lower than 2019/20, when there were 14,455 incoming Erasmus+ students. This decrease is probably related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The majority (4,743) of Erasmus+ students in 2020/21 were here to study; the remaining students (2,971) did an internship. In the same academic year (2020/21), 3,658 Dutch students with an Erasmus+ grant went abroad: 1,661 to study

and 1,997 for an internship. The most popular destination countries in that year were Germany, Spain and Belgium (Source: Nuffic, 2025a).

Drop-out rates among international students

The drop-out rate among international first-year students is higher than among Dutch first-year students; however, after the first year, the drop-out rate is lower. Of international degree students, 17% quit their studies in the first year, compared to 3.5% of Dutch students. Over a period of 4 years, about a quarter of all international students starting a bachelor's programme at a research university stops studying in the Netherlands without having obtained a diploma. Among Dutch students, this is at 5%. Among international students who are still in the programme after the first year, a large proportion obtain their degree within 4 years (66% EEA, 62% non-EEA). Among Dutch students this is slightly lower: 61% (Source: Education Inspectorate, 2022)

Figure 9 - Share of Dutch-taught, English-taught and bilingual programmes at Dutch research universities in 2024/25



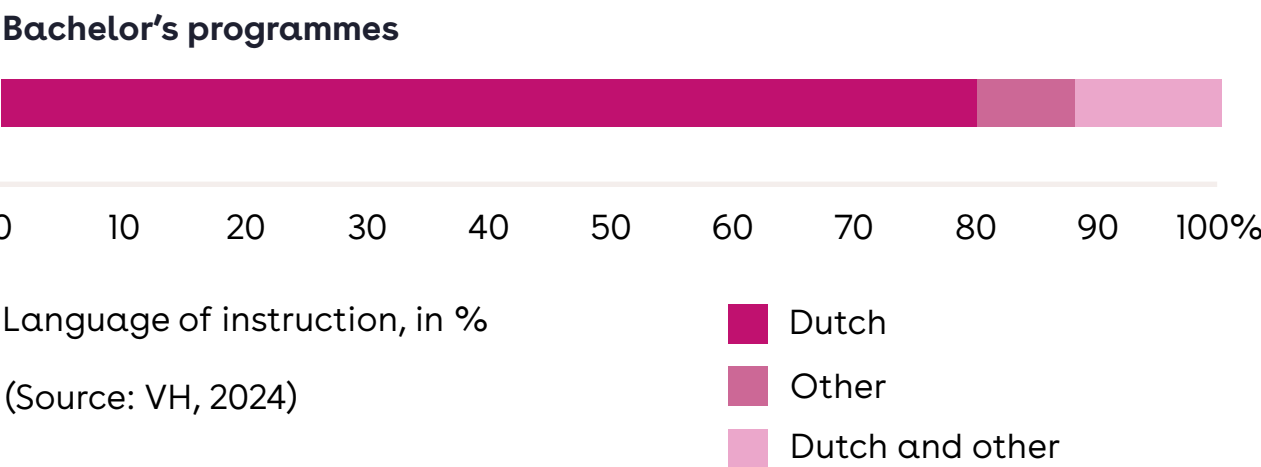
Study programmes taught in languages other than Dutch

Research universities (RU)

The majority of research university bachelor's programmes are taught in Dutch. According to the most recent data, in 2024/25 just over half (51%) of the 430 unique bachelor's programmes at Dutch research universities were taught in Dutch (Source: UNL, 2025). The proportion of programmes taught in English at the bachelor's level was 33%. The remaining 15% were taught in both English and Dutch. At the bachelor's level, only the study fields of Interdisciplinary, Engineering and Economics had most of their courses taught in English. The remaining fields of study were predominantly taught in Dutch (Source: UNL, 2025).

The most commonly used language of instruction at the master's level is English. Of the 753 RU-master's programmes, 71% were offered exclusively in English, compared to 20% exclusively in Dutch. Of all RU-master's programmes, 9% were taught in both languages. At the master's level, English was the most common language of instruction in all fields of study except Law and Education. Master's programmes in Agriculture & Natural Environment were exclusively in English (Source: UNL, 2025).

Figure 10 - Share of Dutch-taught, English-taught and bilingual programmes at Dutch universities of applied sciences in 2023/24.



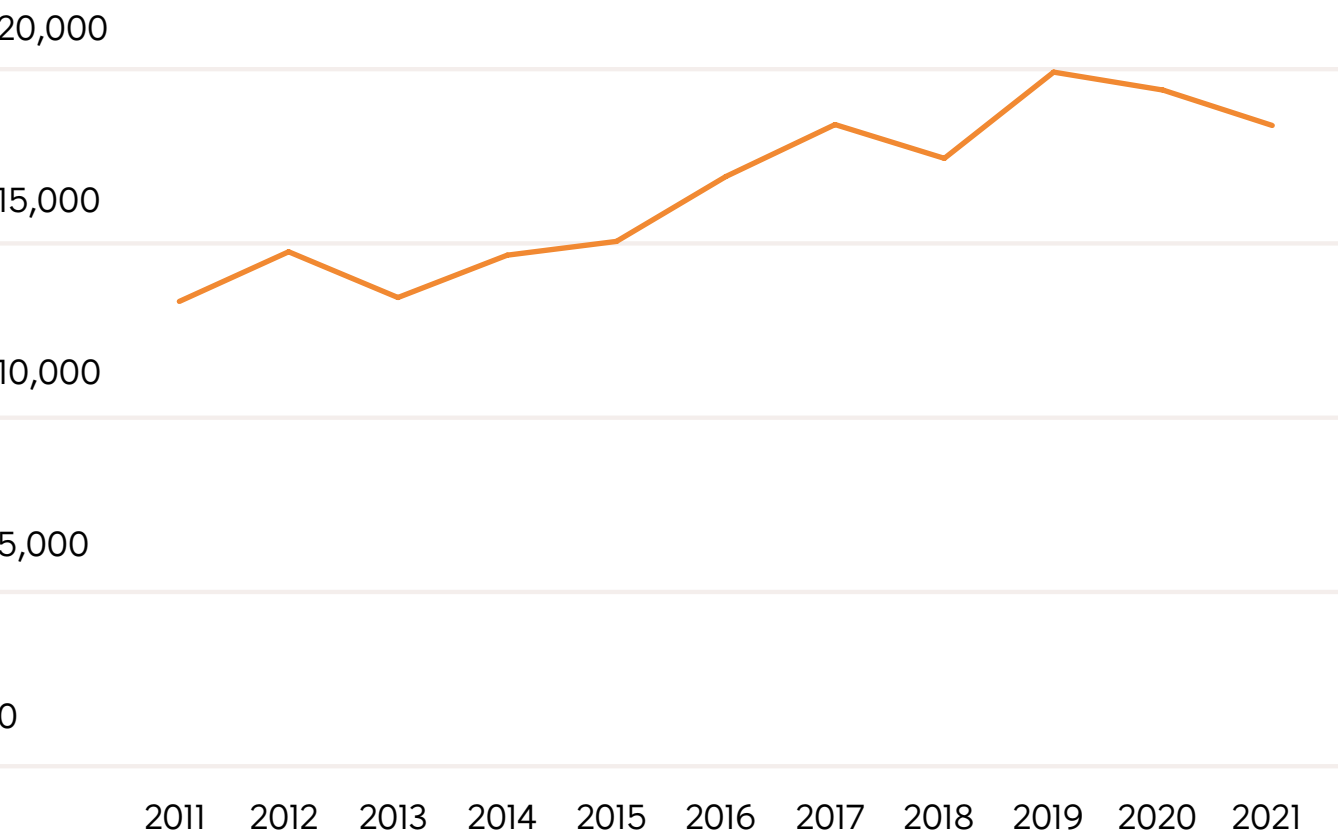
Universities of applied sciences (UAS)

The Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (VH) reported in 2024 that in the academic year 2023/24, 92% of bachelor's programmes were offered in Dutch and 80% of all programmes exclusively in Dutch. Of the UAS bachelor's programmes, 8% were offered exclusively in a foreign language. Eight of the 36 UAS in the Netherlands exclusively offered Dutch-language programmes in 2023/24 (Source: VH, 2024).

Dutch students abroad

The number of students from the Netherlands studying abroad is growing, but much smaller than the number of international students coming to the Netherlands. According to UNESCO's most recent data, 18,459 Dutch students were studying abroad for a full bachelor's or master's degree in 2021. This is 36.3% more compared with 10 years earlier (13,543 in 2011; source: Nuffic, 2024). Nevertheless, the share of Dutch students studying abroad remains relatively low: around 2.5% in 2021 (calculated by Nuffic).

Figure 11 - Number of Dutch degree students in higher education abroad from 2011 to 2021.



(Source: UNESCO)

Bottlenecks in the short term

Pressure on capacity of institutions



More international students come to the Netherlands to get a degree here than Dutch students go abroad for their studies. The growing number of international students has implications for the capacity of our higher education institutions (Source: Ministry of Finance, 2019). Consider, for instance, lecture halls, laboratories and the number of students per lecturer. However, an Interministerial Policy Review (IBO) published in 2019 found no evidence of negative impact on capacity (Source: Ministry of Finance, 2019). Most programmes were assessed for accreditation by the NVAO in 2022 and meet quality requirements. This shows that the quality of higher education in the Netherlands remains stable (Source: NVAO, 2022). The student-staff ratio has also been stable for years (Sources: Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2025).

In 2024, a legislative amendment was passed following the Martens-America amendment (Source: House of Representatives, 2024). This amendment allows universities of applied sciences and research universities to set a *numerus fixus* for English-language tracks within a programme from the 2025/26 academic year onwards.

Effects on accessibility



In 2019, the Education Inspectorate of the Netherlands concluded that internationalisation has no effect on the accessibility of higher education for Dutch students (Source: Education Inspectorate, 2019). However, there were signs that programmes with a limited number of places may be less accessible to certain groups. This can also be related to self-selection: some students might have the right qualifications but may still feel discouraged from applying. Another study from the Education Inspectorate shows that some Dutch students may choose not to follow an English-language track in higher education because they think they cannot cope (Source: Education Inspectorate, 2022).

Internationalisation affects selection procedures in higher education. Due to the variation in prior education of (international) students, additional entry criteria are sometimes added, such as specific skills or prior knowledge (Source: Education Inspectorate, 2023: 49). However, the effects of this selection process on accessibility are not yet known.

Contributing to the housing shortages



There is a general housing shortage in the Netherlands. This also affects Dutch and (international) students who need suitable housing in the city or area where they are going to study. Thanks to the recent completion of new student housing, the shortage in 2023 did not increase as expected, but remained the same (Source: Kences, 2024).

In 2023/24, the housing shortage for students in the largest cities was estimated at 23,100 homes. The number of students living away from home has increased due to the increase in international students and, to a lesser extent, the increase in Dutch students as a result of the reintroduction of the basic student grant. Whereas Dutch students often have the option to continue living in their parental home, international students usually do not have that option (Source: Kences, 2024).

Bottlenecks in the short term

Negative impact on funding for higher education



In the longer term, the benefits to the Dutch treasury from international students exceed the costs (see the section *A net 'plus' for the national budget* below). In the short term, however, degree students from the EEA + Switzerland constitute a cost to the national budget because they pay statutory tuition fees, which are subsidised by the government. These are costs for the education budget, while the positive balance generated by international students for the national budget in the longer term does not necessarily accrue to education. The increase in the number of international students from the EEA has thus resulted in lower public funding per student, including research expenditure (Source: Ministry of Finance, 2019: 9.29-30, 32.35). Moreover, the Dutch Spring Memorandum 2025 states a structural reduction of €58.8 million in public funding for higher education (Source: House of Representatives, 2025). At the same time, institutions themselves often have extra income thanks to international students (Source: Ministry of Finance, 2019: 9.29-30, 32.35).

Pressure on Dutch as a scientific language



The growth of English-taught programmes may put pressure on the position of Dutch as a language of education and science. Almost three-quarters of all RU-master's degree programmes in the academic year 2024/25 were available exclusively in English (71%), compared with only 20% taught exclusively in Dutch (Source: UNL, 2025). In addition, almost half of academic staff at universities are of foreign origin (Source: Rathenau, 2024), which may reduce the use of Dutch as a teaching and research language.

There are also other aspects to the discussion on language. For instance, a study by the Social and Cultural Planning Office (SCP) (2019) shows that for Dutch people, the Dutch language plays an important role in Dutch identity. In addition, language strengthens the sense of belonging to the Netherlands. In contrast, globalisation, internationalisation and sudden social changes can create a sense of loss of national individuality and cohesion (Source: SCP, 2019: Ch.5).

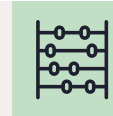
Pressure on mental health among international students



International students often face stress due to language barriers, cultural differences, financial concerns and housing problems. These factors can have a negative impact on their mental well-being. According to the Monitor Mental Health and Substance Use Students (Nuijen et al., 2023), international students are more likely to suffer from depression, anxiety and loneliness than Dutch students. Besides housing problems, unfamiliarity with the Dutch healthcare system and Dutch educational culture can also contribute to the feelings of stress and isolation. The lack of a local social network and distance from family and friends can make it more difficult to find support, which can reinforce feelings of homesickness and social isolation (Trimbos Institute, 2024).

Benefits for the Netherlands

A net 'plus' for the national budget



The balance of costs and benefits of international students in the Netherlands is positive in the long run. This applies for both EEA and non-EEA students. This is because part of the international students stay and work in the Netherlands after their graduation, thus paying taxes (Source: CPB, 2019: 35, 36). For non-EEA students, the total contribution is significantly higher, as they are not entitled to the government contribution towards their tuition fee and they stay more often. The percentage of students who still stay in the Netherlands five years after graduation is called the 'stay rate'.

Five years after graduation, 25% of international students are still in the Netherlands. Especially the 2018-2019 graduating cohort (the most recent cohort with available stay rate data) shows an increase. Graduates from outside the EEA have a higher stay rate (39%) than those from the EEA (30%). Of the international graduates who stay in the Netherlands, 80% have paid employment (Source: Nuffic, 2025b: 17).

Alleviating labour market shortages



Labour shortages in the Dutch labour market have increased in recent years. According to the UWV (2024), the Netherlands has the third tightest labour market in the European Union. This has major economic and social consequences in particular in sectors such as Healthcare, Education, Engineering, and Information and Communication. International graduates are filling vacancies in sectors with labour shortages, such as within the sector of Government, Education and Healthcare. International graduates from studies within the shortage sectors very often go on to work in the relevant labour market sector (Source: Nuffic, 2025b).

Of the international graduates who are still in the Netherlands five years after graduation, 18% have a job in the sector government, education and healthcare (Source: Nuffic, 2025b). Among the staying international graduates from Healthcare, 73.8% are working within this sector five years after graduation; for the field of Education, the percentage is as high as 95.4%. Moreover, international graduates from almost all fields of study are working in the Information and Communication sector; of the international graduates still in the Netherlands after five years, 9% are working in this sector.

Advantages of the *international classroom*



An *international classroom* provides a rich learning experience in which students learn from each other, develop international and intercultural skills, as well as more specific skills such as communication, collaboration, critical thinking and openness (Source: Poort & Okken, 2024). Social interaction and dialogue with (culturally or otherwise) diverse groups promote intercultural learning and provide a safe learning environment, while reflection on one's own intercultural experiences enhances learning. Teachers play an important role here by supporting this process.

Research shows that the *international classroom* is especially beneficial for Dutch students (Source: Hofhuis et al, 2022). Students already become more open-minded and proactive in the first months.

Larger pool of teachers and academic staff



English-taught education and research is accessible to academic staff from all over the world, and therefore expands the pool of competent teachers and academic staff. The proportion of international staff in Dutch higher education institutions is particularly high in Engineering (59%) (Source: Rathenau, 2024).

Benefits for the Netherlands

Scaling up



Incoming international students increase the student population and therefore the number of subjects and courses (Source: CPB, 2019: 25). As a result, there is also more to choose from for Dutch students.

Preparation for the international workplace



The offer of English-taught programmes gives Dutch students an extra opportunity to make a well-considered study choice. Some students choose an English-taught programme because of the importance of being well prepared for the international labour market (Source: Education Inspectorate, 2025: 16). For students with international ambitions, the use of English as a language of instruction can be important, especially in fields such as science and technology where English (professional jargon) is often the standard language (Source: Van Den Broek & Van Mensvoort, 2025: 22). In addition, using English as a working language facilitates access to professional literature and further studies, and can prepare students for an international career or international cooperation.

Ambassadors for the Netherlands



Returning international students can fulfil roles in their home countries after studying in the Netherlands that promote and support the Netherlands (Source: Ministry of Finance, 2019: 61). International alumni can act as informal ambassadors, sharing their experiences in the Netherlands and promoting Dutch products and services and strengthening diplomatic ties.

In-depth information and further reading

International students in the Netherlands

1. Figures on international students following a full bachelor's or master's programme at a Dutch higher education institution (2024/25), with an overview of current trends and developments. [Incoming degree mobility in Dutch higher education 2024-25 | Nuffic](#)
2. With Nuffic's interactive dashboards, readers can find statistics and filter on variables such as country of origin of international students in the Netherlands, and number of international degree students per region and per institution. [Interactive dashboards | Nuffic & Facts and figures | Nuffic](#)
3. This 2022 fact sheet provides insight into the study success of international students at universities in the Netherlands. [Fact sheet on study success of international students in bachelor's programmes at research universities | Publication | Education Inspectorate \(onderwijsinspectie.nl\)](#)
4. This 2020 inventory provides an overview of current research into the added value of internationalisation in vocational education and training (VET) and higher education (HE) in the Netherlands. [Ministry of Education, Culture and Science report – Added value of internationalisation in MBO and HE \(nuffic.nl\)](#)
5. This fact sheet from 2021 provides a numerical overview of the intake of non-EEA students with a secondary school diploma below pre-university (vwo) level into university bachelor's programs, based on figures available to the Inspectorate: [Fact sheet "Enrolment of non-EEA students in bachelor's programmes in higher education" | Education Inspectorate \(onderwijsinspectie.nl\)](#)

6. This benchmark from 2019 describes findings from the synthesis report 'Attracting and retaining international students in the EU' in relation to the Dutch context. [EMN_benchmark_int-studenten.pdf](#)
7. This fact sheet from 2024 examines where the largest growth in student numbers is and which fields of study students choose. It also compares the increase in the number of students in the Netherlands and their study choices from a labour market perspective with those of students in other countries. [Internationalisation in perspective: student numbers, study choices and labour market | Rathenau Institute](#)

Outgoing mobility

1. Figures on Dutch students going abroad for full study programmes, part of their studies or internships, with an overview of current trends and developments. [Dutch students crossing borders | Nuffic](#)
2. Nuffic has an interactive dashboard with figures on outgoing degree mobility. There are links to more statistics on destination countries and educational institutions at the bottom of the page. [Dutch degree students abroad | Nuffic](#)
3. In 2025, Nuffic conducted a research on the international experience (credit mobility and digital international collaborations) of higher education graduates from 2020/22. Nuffic investigated who participated, how accessible an international experience was, why graduates participated and where they went. Nuffic also investigated what graduates learned from an international experience and what benefits it gave them in the labour market. [Learning beyond borders | Nuffic](#)

Labour market and economy

1. In 2019, an Interministerial Policy Review (IBO) was conducted on the effects of international incoming and outbound students. This report also formulated a number of policy options. The link also includes the government's response to this IBO. [Interministerial Policy Review: Internationalisation in \(higher\) education – Lower House of the States General](#)
2. The results of a 2025 study on the stay rate and labour market position of international students who graduated from a higher education institution in the Netherlands. The research investigates how often international graduates stay in the Netherlands and how this percentage varies between European and non-European students and depending on the fields of study. [Stay rate and labour market position of international graduates 2013/2022 | Nuffic](#)
3. In 2025, Abbink, Bakens & Meijer investigated the stay rate of international students who graduated from a higher education institution in the Netherlands and their impact on labour market estimates. [Stay rate of international graduates and their impact on labour market projections | ROA](#)

Language use in higher education

1. The central question of this exploration is what knowledge of languages and cultures the Netherlands needs in business and government, civil society organisations and knowledge institutions. It mentions, among other things, that there should be a low threshold for learning Dutch for international students. [Languages for the Netherlands - KNAW](#)
2. In 2021, Van den Doel examined [the effects of English as a language of instruction in higher education](#). Among other things, it was shown that group work and effective teacher guidance are important for programmes in the Netherlands taught in English.

In-depth information and further reading

Admission and inclusion

1. The study 'Internationalisation and the accessibility of higher education for Dutch students' answers the following question: what does internationalisation in higher education mean for the accessibility for Dutch students and for specific groups and for the steering of that accessibility by the institution or programme? [Internationalisation and the accessibility of higher education for Dutch students | Report | Education Inspectorate \(onderwijsinspectie.nl\)](#)
2. This report describes the role that self-selection plays in the considerations of students and pupils who are deciding whether or not to enrol in their preferred higher education programme. Among the aspects explored are the obstacles associated with specific study programmes, such as the selection procedure or the language of instruction. [Unintentional self-selection: obstacles to a specific study programme | Thematic report | Education Inspectorate \(onderwijsinspectie.nl\)](#)

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