

A low-angle photograph of a large group of graduates in black gowns and stoles, cheering with their arms raised against a clear blue sky. Numerous black graduation caps are captured mid-air, scattered across the upper half of the frame. The scene conveys a sense of joy and accomplishment.

ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY 2020

Background

AISS 2020 is the third edition of the Annual International Student Survey (AISS), a shared project by the Erasmus Student Network (ESN) The Netherlands, the Landelijke Studentenvakbond [National Student Union] (LSVb) and the Interstedelijk Studenten Overleg [Dutch National Students Association] (ISO). In recent years, the number of international students studying in the Netherlands, either for an exchange or a full study, has increased enormously. There is more and more discussion about the internationalisation of higher education in the Netherlands. ESN, LSVb and ISO therefore have a shared need for more insight into the position of international students in the Netherlands, in order to identify where there is room for improvement. In 2018 it was decided to make an overview of the position of international students in the Netherlands, resulting in the first edition of AISS. In order to continue monitoring the experience of international students, it was decided to update the overview annually, resulting in this report of the third edition.



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Introduction

The AISS

De Annual International Student Survey (AISS) is an online questionnaire that asks international students in the Netherlands about their experiences regarding education, higher education institutions, work, social inclusion, the Dutch system, wellbeing, and reasons for (not) staying. The questionnaire is distributed annually by ESN Nederland, de Landelijke Studentenvakbond (LSVb) and the Interstedelijk Studenten Overleg (ISO). In 2020, the AISS was implemented for the third time.

Motivation

The number of international students in the Netherlands has been growing steadily for years. Since 2007-2008, the number of international degree students studying in the Netherlands has more than doubled.¹ In 2019, more than 85,000 international students from over 170 countries followed a full degree programme in the Netherlands. That is 11.5 percent of the total number of enrolled students. The number of international students enrolled in a university bachelor's programme increased from 17.8 percent in 2017-2018 to 20.4 percent in 2018-2019.²

The Netherlands is a very popular destination for international students and seems to be becoming all the more popular. This offers many opportunities, but also brings great challenges. In recent years, there has been an increased discussion about the internationalisation of Dutch higher education and the consequences this has for both Dutch and international students. It is important that international students feel at home in the Netherlands. Although the Cabinet wants to curb internationalisation³, according to the CPB international students still provide the Dutch treasury with more than they cost.⁴ Nevertheless, the economic perspective is, of course, only one of the possible approaches. For example, the large influx of international student institutions is putting pressure on the already very scarce student housing market.

AISS wants to contribute to the discussion on internationalisation by taking a relatively rare but highly relevant perspective: that of the international student themselves. This way, the discussion about the position of international students will not only be about, but also with international students. What are their experiences and what do they run into? The international perspective is important in order to be able to manage internationalization in the right direction. This is valuable because, according to CPB, international students only generate more benefits than costs if they settle in the Netherlands permanently after their studies. So, it is in everybody's interest that international students feel at home here.

Parties involved

The ISO, LSVb and ESN Nederland are the initiators of AISS. This means that the project is fully supported by students, for students. ESN Nederland is part of the international ESN network and with branches in more than 40 countries, it is the leading voluntary organisation for students in international higher education in Europe. The ISO is the umbrella body of organisations that represent the interests of students

¹ <https://www.nuffic.nl/onderwerpen/internationalisering-feiten-en-cijfers/>

² <https://www.nuffic.nl/actueel/nuffic-publiceert-nieuwe-cijfers-internationale-studenten/>

³ <https://www.trouw.nl/onderwijs/kabinet-pakt-internationalisering-van-het-hoger-onderwijs-aan-bod26a1b/>

⁴ <https://www.cpb.nl/de-economische-effecten-van-internationalisering-het-hoger-onderwijs-en-mbo-o>

at their university or university of applied sciences at a local level. The LSVb is a federation of local student unions. Together, the ISO and the LSVb represent the general interests of more than 750,000 students at Dutch universities and universities of applied sciences.

The AISS 2020 and the COVID-19 pandemic

The AISS questionnaire closed before the first lockdown measures were taken. As a result, the answers given do not contain references to the COVID-19 pandemic. This report analyses the given responses and consequently also does not contain any references to the pandemic. Some parts of this report, particularly the recommendations, may therefore strike those reading this report at a time when the lock-down measures are still in full effect as somewhat strange. That is why we have drawn up a separate document with recommendations to improve the position of international students that do specifically relate to this COVID-19 period: 'Internationale studenten en COVID-19' (only in Dutch).

Methods and accountability

Representativeness

Although the sample of 558 international students gives a good picture of what international students run into, it is important to emphasize that the respondents in the investigation are not a random sample in themselves. This affects the extent to which the investigation is representative. However, guaranteed representativeness is not the starting point and therefore the results will not be presented as such. An investigation that is guaranteed to be representative requires more resources, time and money than the ISO, the LSVb and ESN Netherlands have available. However, the exploratory character of AISS is eminently suitable for making pronouncements on matters that international students generally seem to run into and for giving examples to illustrate.

Questionnaire

The questions in the survey are as similar as possible to the questions in previous editions. However, the 2020 edition includes more open-ended questions than previous editions. This gave many opportunities to respondents to give examples of specific problems. This is also the first edition in which respondents were asked which institution they study at. This allows the results to be further differentiated, something that is not only useful for the many local chapters of ESN, but can also be the incentive for changing and/or initiating local policy. The questionnaire contains questions on the following themes: education and higher education institutions, work, social inclusion, the Dutch system, housing, wellbeing, and reasons for (not) staying. This order of themes is also maintained in the report.

Distribution and promotion

The AISS could be completed between the 12th of February and the 20th of March 2020. A link to the questionnaire was distributed by ESN, the ISO and the LSVb through their social media channels and among their constituency/local departments, international offices of higher education institutions, boards of directors of institutions, and international study and student associations. The questionnaire could be completed anonymously, although respondents were asked to leave their e-mail address if they wanted to be considered for one of the six gift vouchers that would be raffled off among all respondents.

Quotes

The questionnaire contained many open-ended questions where respondents were asked to further elaborate on their answers. All quotes in this report are literal answers from participants to one of these open-ended questions. The quotes have only been adjusted with regard to spelling and grammar where necessary.

Descriptive statistics

This chapter contains some descriptive statistics to provide an overview of the background of the respondents.

Nationality

The AISS was completed by 558 students from 80 different countries. Most of them are from Europe: 76 percent of all respondents are citizens of a country of the European Economic Area (EEA). They pay the statutory tuition fee. The 24 percent who do not come from an EEA country are not entitled to this; they pay the institutional tuition fee. Table 1 provides an overview of the top 10 countries from which most respondents come.

Country

Germany	148
Bulgaria	53
Italy	28
Romani	21
France	20
United Kingdom	19
Finland	16
India	16
Spain	15
Portugal	11

Table 1: number of respondents from most frequent countries

Duration of stay

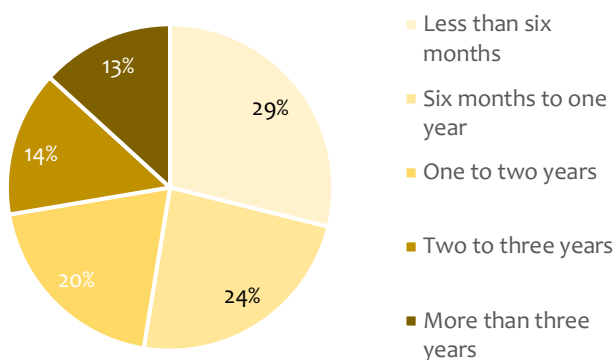
How long respondents have been in the Netherlands varies, as can be seen in Figure 1: 16 percent have been here for less than six months, 16 percent have been here for more than three years and the other respondents fall somewhere in between. Figure 2 shows that the majority of respondents expect to stay in the Netherlands for a long time: 56 percent of all respondents expect to stay here for more than three years.

Institution and degree programme

The majority of the respondents, 57 percent, follow a hbo-course [a degree programme at a university of applied sciences]. The remaining 43 percent are following a university course. Of the respondents following a hbo-course, 61 percent indicated that they were studying at Fontys. This is obviously a non-representatively high percentage, probably owing to Fontys spreading the link to AISS more widely among its students than other university of applied sciences. Among the respondents following a university degree programme the institutions are somewhat more proportionally distributed: the most common institutions here are the University of Groningen (24 percent), Leiden (21 percent) and Utrecht (11 percent).

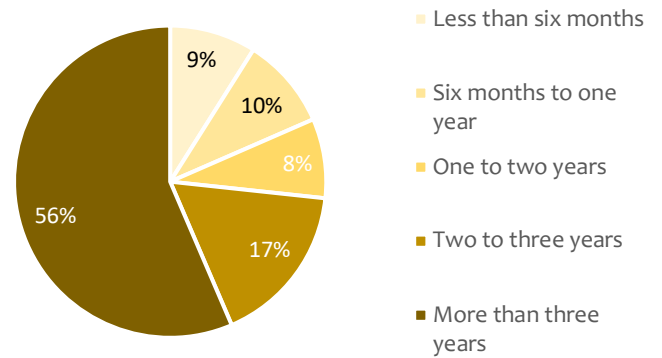
73 percent of the respondents are pursuing a full bachelor's degree, 12 percent a full master's degree and 14 percent is on exchange. The remaining percent is following a pre-master's programme.

Figure 1: how long have you been in the Netherlands?



Respondents are pursuing studies in many different sectors. The most popular sector is (business) economics (30 percent of respondents), followed by beta technology [STEM sector] (11 percent), psychology and liberal arts and sciences (university colleges), both pursued by 6 percent of respondents.

Figure 2: how long do you expect to stay in the Netherlands?



Results

Education and higher education institutions

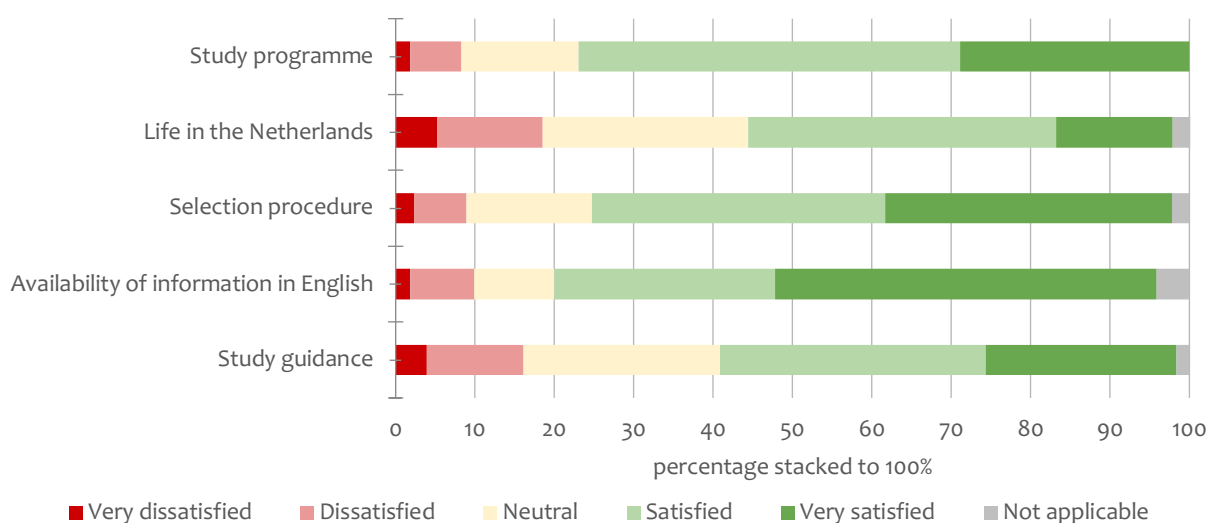
Key points

- Respondents are generally satisfied with the information provided by their higher education institution. Only 10 percent are (very) dissatisfied with the availability of English information, the study programme or the selection procedures.
- They are also satisfied with the quality of the education, in particular with the quality and English language proficiency of instructors: more than 70 per cent are satisfied or very satisfied with this.
- here is little consideration of cultural differences by both teachers and fellow students: a quarter of the respondents indicated that cultural differences are taken into account poorly or very poorly.
- Only a third of the respondents feel that their voices are heard well or very well at their educational institution.

Every international student not only ends up in a new country, but also in a new educational system. After all, each country and even each institution has its own educational culture. That is why it is good to monitor how the Dutch educational system is experienced by international students.

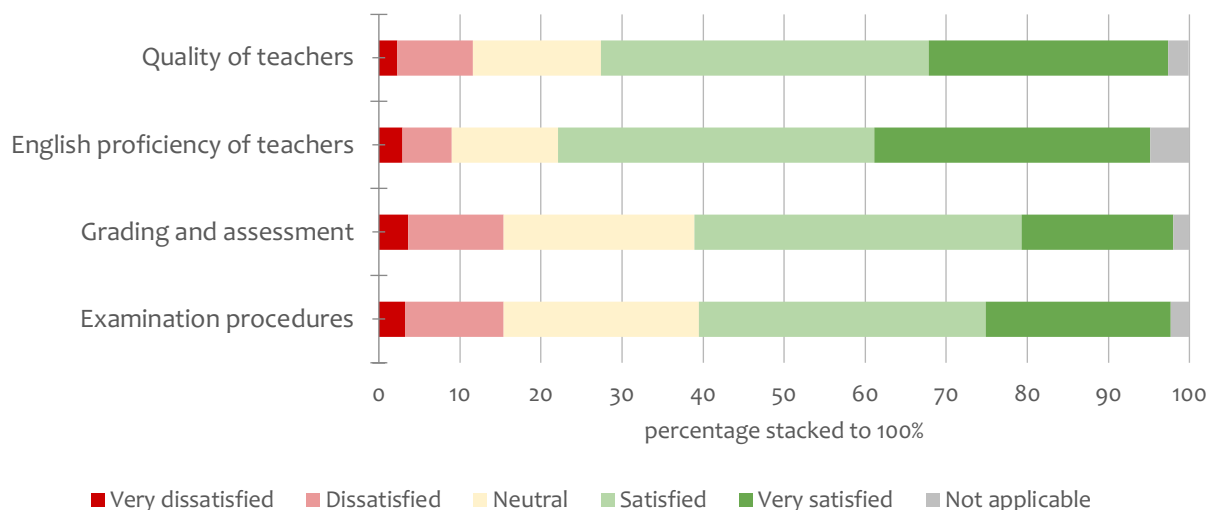
Respondents were asked how they experienced the supply provided by their educational institution. **This revealed that at all sections more than half were satisfied or very satisfied with the provision of information. With regard to the study programme and the availability of English information, the respondents were the most satisfied.** Slightly less than 20 percent indicated that too little information is provided about life in the Netherlands. A little less than 20 percent were also dissatisfied with the information about student tutoring. In general, respondents were satisfied with the provision of information.

Figure 3: how satisfied are you with the following types of information?



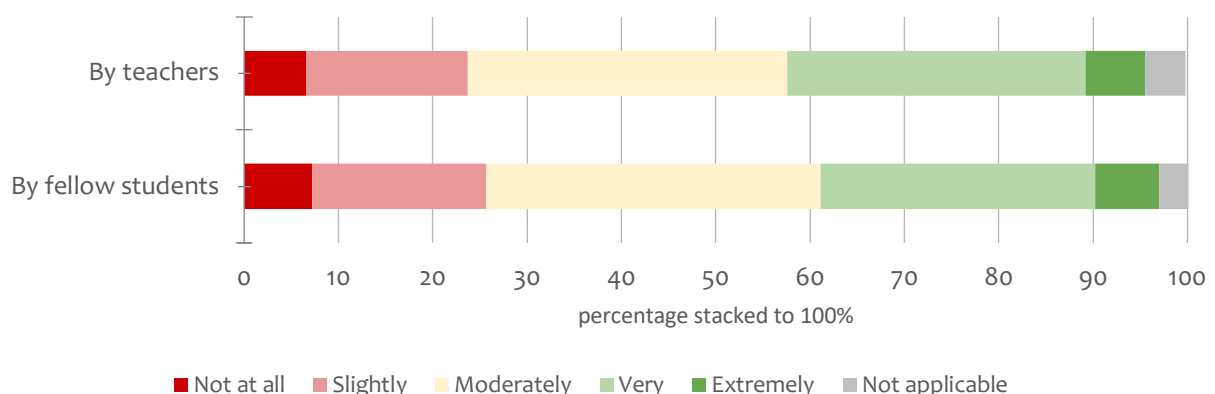
Respondents were also asked how they felt about the quality of the education they receive in the Netherlands. **In general, they perceived the quality of education to be positive. About 70 percent are very satisfied or satisfied with the quality of the teachers.** Slightly more than 10 percent indicated that they were not satisfied. Teachers' English proficiency is also evaluated well. **The evaluation of teaching and the assessment procedure score slightly less high, but still more than half of the respondents are satisfied with this.** There are no noticeably bad scores.

Figure 4: what do you think of the following components of education?



An important argument of universities to internationalise is the actualisation of an *international classroom*. Such an international classroom does not only consist of people from the Netherlands, but is much more diverse. Different cultures and nationalities can offer completely different insights, which broadens the perspective of every student. The international students who completed this survey were asked whether different cultures and nationalities are actually taken into account in the classroom. The results are shown in figure 5.

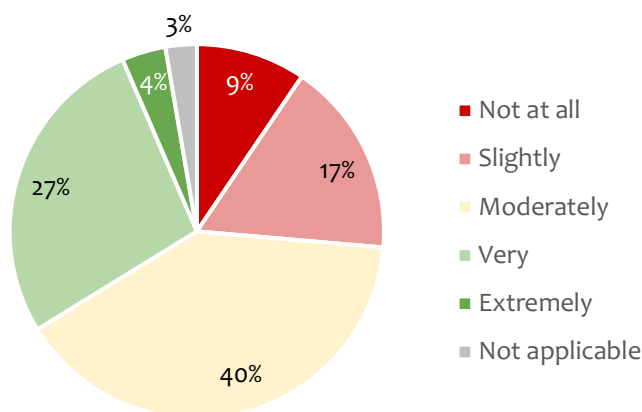
Figure 5: to what extent are cultural differences taken into account during lectures?



The results show that there is little difference between teachers and fellow students: generally, little to moderate consideration is given to cultural differences. **Nearly 60 percent of the respondents indicated that no, a little, or moderate consideration is given to cultural differences by both fellow students and teachers.** Respondents were asked to elaborate, and their answers showed that while some respondents feel that cultural differences are taken into account, the focus is still often on Europe:

“Teachers take into consideration cultural differences but still have a focus on Europe, leaving out people from other countries a bit.”

Figure 6: to what extent do you feel like your voice is heard at your institution?



Finally, a question was asked about the state of student participation at the institutions of the respondents: to what extent do the respondents feel that their voice is being heard at the institution? The results are shown in figure 6. **40 percent of the respondents indicated that their voices were heard moderately at the educational institution, and another quarter indicated that their voices were heard only slightly, or not at all.** A third of the respondents feel that their voices are heard well to very well at their educational institution. The additional explanation provided by the respondents shows that several respondents indicate that the opportunity to participate is offered, but that rarely anything actually changes.

“We have a lot of international student associations which is great, and some are well recognised at the university. However, the cooperation could be much closer with a lot of the faculties.”

“I’m a student representative and I think that in fact we are heard but then nothing changes. That’s the problem.”

“We’ve been giving the university feedback for almost 4 years now and they’ve done near nothing to rectify their shortcomings.”

In addition, it is mentioned several times that knowledge of Dutch is required to be able to participate:

“The student council requires knowledge of the Dutch language. This reduces the opportunity to be elected as a foreign person.”

“If you don’t know Dutch fluently, it is difficult to get things done.”

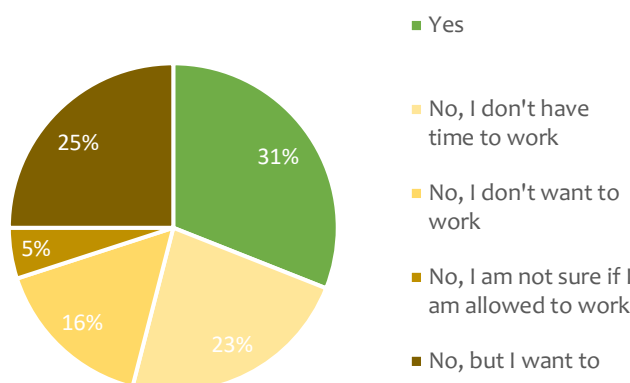
Work

Key points

- 25 percent of the respondents indicated that they would like to work, but despite the very tight Dutch labour market conditions, they were unable to find a job or were hindered by Dutch legislation and regulations.
- Non-EEA students are told during their orientation regarding possible studies and countries that it is possible to work in the Netherlands. Some even base their choice for the Netherlands on this. Once here, however, it turns out that it is very difficult to find work as a non-EEA student, because most employers do not want to request a work permit.

For Dutch students it is common practice to work alongside their studies: 79 percent of the hbo-students and 68 percent of the wo-students in the Netherlands have a paid job in addition to their studies.⁵ This percentage has been fairly stable for years. Among international students this percentage is lower. This lower percentage can have many different causes: exchange students often stay only for six months, a good command of the Dutch language is required, Dutch laws and regulations do not allow it, or international students find it more important not to delay their studies and therefore consciously choose not to work next to their studies. It is important to have an overview of what international students who work or want to work in the Netherlands run into, so that possible obstacles can be eliminated wherever possible. A part-time job alongside studies has many advantages for international students: you get to know the Dutch (working) culture better, you can practise the language and you make valuable connections.

Figure 7: do you work alongside your studies?



31 percent of the respondents indicate that they had a job. In addition, 16 percent say they do not want to work and 23 percent have no time to work. 5 percent do not know whether they are even allowed to work. **The remaining 25 percent indicate that they would like to work, but for various reasons, which will be discussed in more detail below, this is not feasible.** This is a high percentage, which is surprising given the tightness of the Dutch labour market conditions at the time this questionnaire was drawn up (February/March 2020). So, it seems that there are still improvements to be made in this respect.

Of the 31 percent of respondents who say they do work, the majority (40 percent) works 10-20 hours a week. Only 12 percent works more than 20 hours.

⁵ Monitor Beleidsmaatregelen [Monitor Policy Measures] 2018-2019, <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/rapporten/2019/08/31/monitorbeleidsmaatregelen-hoger-onderwijs-2018-2019>

Problems encountered by students from the EEA differ from those of non-EEA students. Non-EEA students are only allowed to work if their employer arranges a work permit. In addition, they are only allowed to work 16 hours per week (or full-time in June, July and August, but this is precisely when many of these students go home). Students are told in advance that there are many opportunities for non-European students to find a part-time job in the Netherlands. Some even base their choice for the Netherlands on this:

“I was told before coming here that I would be able to work, but it turns out I need any potential employers to apply for a work permit for me which none of them will. This has stopped me from being able to work and has left me in a very difficult financial situation. This has been the biggest disappointment I have had in the Netherlands. A large reason that I decided to come to the Netherlands for my masters was because I thought I would be able to work part-time while I studied, but I feel as though I have been misled.”

“During my research, I read that foreign students here are allowed to work a specific number of hours alongside studying. This privilege further motivated me to prefer studying in the Netherlands. However, upon arrival my resident permit didn't allow me to work. Sadly, it has made my studying very challenging.”

Although a part-time job for non-EEA students should not pose any problems in theory, it turns out to be more difficult in practice. Many employers indicate that hiring a non-EU student is too much of a hassle:

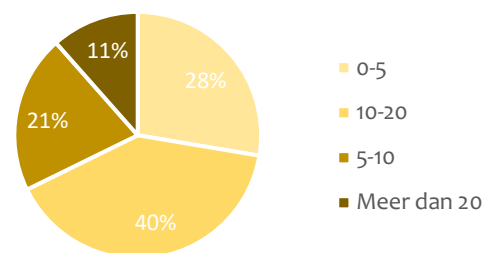
“All employers state that the process to hire a non-EU student is too tedious and time consuming, they don't have the time or resources to go through the process. I would appreciate a summer job or even part-time during my studies, this would definitely assist with social activities and being productive whilst living in this society.”

“Companies don't employ non-EU because of the extra step of applying for a permit. I haven't had any luck in 2.5 years.”

European students do not need a work permit, nor are they bound to a maximum number of hours. In addition, they are not required to pay the expensive institutional fee. As a result, they report fewer problems. However, they do need Dutch health insurance as soon as they start working, and in order to be eligible for Dutch student funding (including the student travel product), EEA students must work a minimum of 56 hours per month. Some find this unfair, because Dutch students can also claim this without working a minimum of 56 hours. In addition, 56 hours is simply too much for some students:

“I was unable to balance a part-time job of 56 hours/month alongside my studies and as a result, I'm no longer entitled to DUO's student travel product.”

Figure 8: on average, how many hours do you work per week?



A concern that both EEA and non-EEA students raise is the lack of clear, unambiguous, up-to-date information about working as an international student, compiled in a central place. This is also apparent from the fact that 5 percent of all respondents indicated that they did not know whether they were allowed to work at all. There are various websites that want to familiarise international students in the Netherlands (e.g. studyinholland.nl, an initiative of Nuffic) and institutions themselves often have web pages especially for international students. In addition, an administrative body such as DUO also offers information of its own. It is difficult for international students not to get overwhelmed, especially when some sources contradict each other.

“Worked besides my studies, but ended up almost spending more money than making money, because there was no information online on how to apply for the student travel product. When I figured out how to do it on my own, it took DUO 2 months to just process my application.”

Another problem encountered by many international students, both EEA and non-EEA, is the fact that many part-time jobs expect a reasonable command of the Dutch language.

Social inclusion

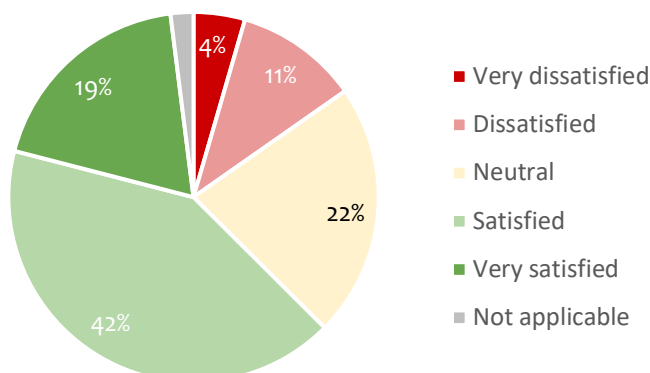
Key points

- The majority of respondents is satisfied with their social life. However, 15 percent is unsatisfied or very unsatisfied.
- Sports and study associations are generally easily accessible to international students. This is not the case for student associations: less than 20 percent of the respondents are satisfied with this.
- Respondents indicate that the learning of the language is important to promote social inclusion. One third of students are dissatisfied with the opportunities to meet Dutch students and learn the language.
- 77 percent of all respondents would like more interaction with Dutch students. Dutch students are often not very welcoming towards international students.

Social inclusion is important to improve the experience of international students, promote cultural exchange and increase the chances of permanent settlement. The AISS therefore contains questions that provide insight in to what extent international social inclusion is experienced.

Respondents were first asked how satisfied they are with their social life in the Netherlands. 42% of the respondents are satisfied with their social life in the Netherlands and another 19% are actually very satisfied. **The majority of the respondents are therefore satisfied with their social life. 22 percent are neutral, 11 percent are dissatisfied, and 4 percent are very dissatisfied,** as shown below in figure 9.

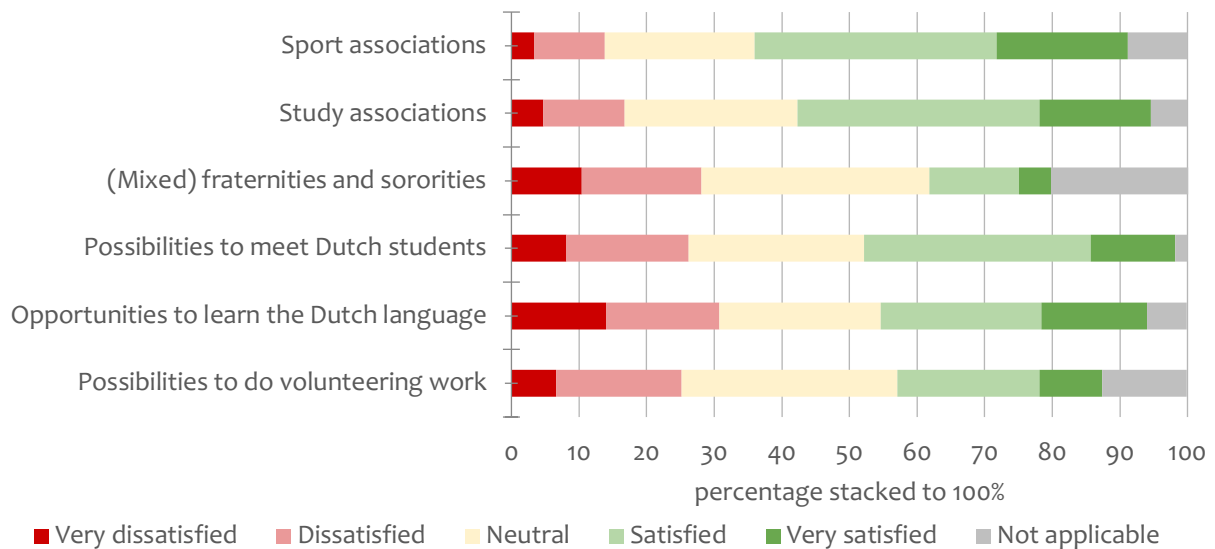
Figure 9: how satisfied are you with your social life in the Netherlands?



A student's social life can be stimulated by becoming active alongside your studies. Examples of this are activities of associations or voluntary work. Respondents were asked how accessible these activities are in the Netherlands. **This shows that sports and study associations generally score well on accessibility.** More than half of the respondents indicated to be satisfied or very satisfied with the accessibility of sports or study associations. **Student associations are perceived as less accessible. Less than 20 percent are satisfied with the accessibility of student associations, almost 30 percent are dissatisfied.** Furthermore, respondents were

not always positive about the opportunities to meet Dutch students and learn the language. **One third of the students are dissatisfied with the opportunities to meet Dutch students and learn the language.**

Figure 10: how satisfied are you with the accessibility of the following components?



Not all respondents were satisfied with the opportunity to meet Dutch students. This is also apparent from the answers to the question: would you like to interact more with Dutch students? **A staggering 77 percent of the respondents indicated that they would like to interact more with Dutch students.** An open question asked how the interaction between Dutch and international students could be promoted. The importance of offering accessible Dutch language courses was raised several times, because language plays a key role in social inclusion:

“The Dutch course is quite intense and is only free if one passes every single test. On top of that the instruction book is quite expensive. I think integrating into the Dutch culture would be much easier if the Dutch language were more easily accessible”.

“Make international students aware of how important language is for integration. It is essential to know at least some of the language to properly be integrated in the Dutch society.”

“Have more free or cheap Dutch courses, knowing the language might help interactions.”

Another obstacle seems to be the attitude of Dutch students:

“Open mindedness on their part. It is not enough to put us in the same classes: there should be the same activities for internationals and locals. Dutchies have to be willing to meet an international and make friends”.

“Encourage Dutch students to speak English more with each other and especially when internationals are around, so that they can participate in the conversation.”

A large number of students mention that more joint activities should be encouraged:

“Creating more common associations and activities which break the barrier that Dutch students form by only choosing to associate with Dutch people.”

“Providing meeting spaces for cultural exchanges.”

“Maybe more activities together where groups are randomly assigned.”

There is a responsibility for both educational institutions and associations to promote this.

The Dutch system

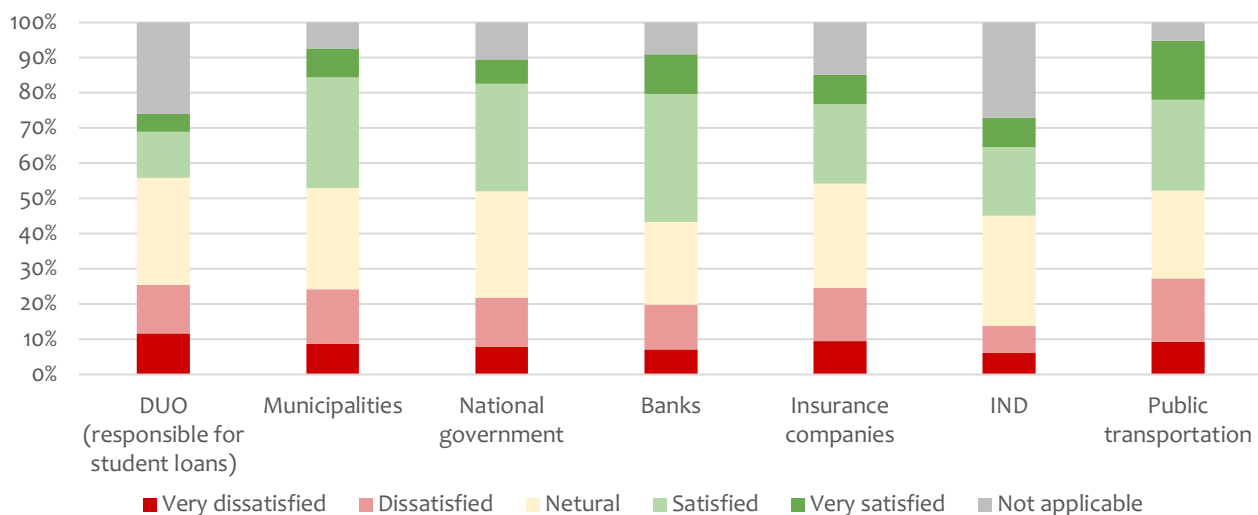
Key points

- There is still a lot of room for improving the information that is available in English. DUO scores the lowest on this.
- It is very difficult for international students that virtually all letters from both local and national government are in Dutch. As a result, they are missing important information and sometimes unconsciously fail to comply with the rules.
- There is a discrepancy between information and reality: international students are told that it is possible to open a Dutch bank account without a BSN number, but it is only when they are in the Netherlands that it turns out many banks actually do not allow this.

As international students, you come into contact with many new organisations and institutions, ranging from DUO to the municipality and from the Immigratie- en Naturalisatiedienst [immigration services] (IND) to banks. For most international students, these organisations and agencies are unknown territory when they arrive in the Netherlands. The AISS therefore monitors to what extent international students are satisfied with the (English) information provided by various organisations. The following graph illustrates this.

The graph shows that there are no major differences between the various organisations.

Figure 11: how satisfied are you with the (English) information provided by the following organisations?



DUO stands out in a negative sense: less than 20 percent are (very) satisfied with the provision of information in English. Banks stood out positively: they were the only organisation where the majority of the respondents were (very) satisfied.

In order to form a more detailed picture, respondents were asked about specific examples of problems they had encountered or were encountering. This showed that **the first weeks/months in particular were very difficult for international students, because it was not clear what they had to arrange and how to arrange it:**

“My first few weeks in the Netherlands were extremely difficult because it felt as though I had not been given sufficient information about how to set up my life here. No one told me that in order to get one thing (for example, a BSN), you had to have a housing contract, be registered to a house, etc, and it felt like you couldn't do anything without already being established here. It was a very difficult time and it would have been nearly impossible if I didn't already have a place to stay (which many people do not). Moving here was an extremely stressful experience for these reasons.”

Many respondents pointed out the problem that **not nearly all banks allow the opening of a bank account without BSN, whereas according to many websites and information brochures this is possible:**

“Every semester international students who come to Netherlands for the first time try to open a Dutch bank account. They often face the same problem, namely that some of them can open a student bank account without BSN and some cannot. According to the brochure you can open a student bank account without BSN, but the staff working in the bank often doesn't let students open an account.”

In addition, international students often find that **a lot of essential information is not available in English.**

“The biggest problem has been the language. A lot of important info is only available in Dutch.”

“All information about student loans and all correspondence of DUO is done in Dutch and I am worried I might do it wrong, which is why I have not applied for it until now.”

“Every single document I have ever received has been in Dutch.”

The Belastingdienst [tax and customs administration] is regularly cited as a textbook example of an authority that does not provide relevant information in English. In some cases, this even resulted in fines.

In addition, many of the mentioned examples show that some agencies and organisations simply do not understand the situation themselves, which further increases the lack of clarity for international students:

“I have been threatened with a fine for not having medical insurance, but as I do not work, have an EHIC card, and am covered by my own country's insurance, I shouldn't have to pay Dutch medical insurance.”

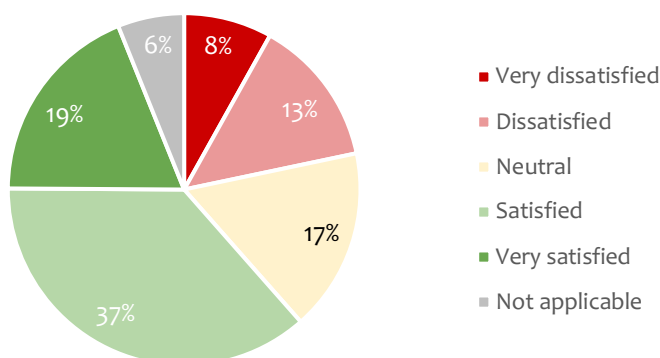
Housing

Key points

- 21 percent of the respondents are (very) dissatisfied with their current living situation.
- It takes a lot of time for international students to find housing. 32 percent took one to three months to do so, and 15 percent spent more than three months.
- There is discrimination on the housing market. More than half of the respondents had to deal with advertisements stating that internationals were not welcome. 40 percent have been rejected for housing because they are not Dutch. 30 percent have experienced higher prices for international students.

If you are choosing to study abroad, one of your top priorities is finding a place to live. Housing is an even bigger issue for international students than for Dutch students, because as an international student you don't have the possibility of living with your parents if you can't find anything.

Figure 12: how satisfied are you with your current living situation?



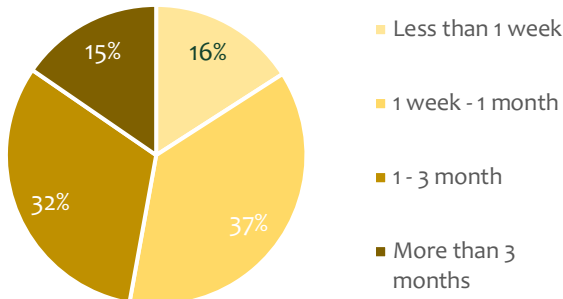
The respondents were first asked to what extent they were satisfied with their current living situation. A small majority of the respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with their current living situation, as shown in Figure 12. **21% were (very) dissatisfied with their current living situation.**

Figure 13 shows that the surveyed international students generally took quite some time to find accommodation. **For a third of the respondents it took between one and**

three months to arrange accommodation. For 15 percent it took more than three months. For 37 percent it took between a week and a month and for 16 percent it took less than a week. The vast majority of respondents indicated that they had arranged accommodation before arrival (79%).

International students can often be a target group for discrimination and scams. The results show that the respondents did indeed have to deal with this. **Almost half of the respondents have once, or several times, had to deal with advertisements that indicated that they did not want international students. In addition, almost 30 percent of the respondents have sometimes been rejected for accommodation because they are international students:**

Figure 13: how much time did it take you to find accomodation?



“There is a discrimination of landlords against internationals and I know it. That's why I haven't bothered moving away from my current room. I might not happy with my current arrangement, but it is better than nothing or the difficulties I might encounter in searching.”

“In many places, they didn't take me because I'm an international. I'm learning Dutch but they told me that they preferred to have a Dutch person.”

Almost 15 percent of the respondents indicated that they have been scammed when it came to housing:

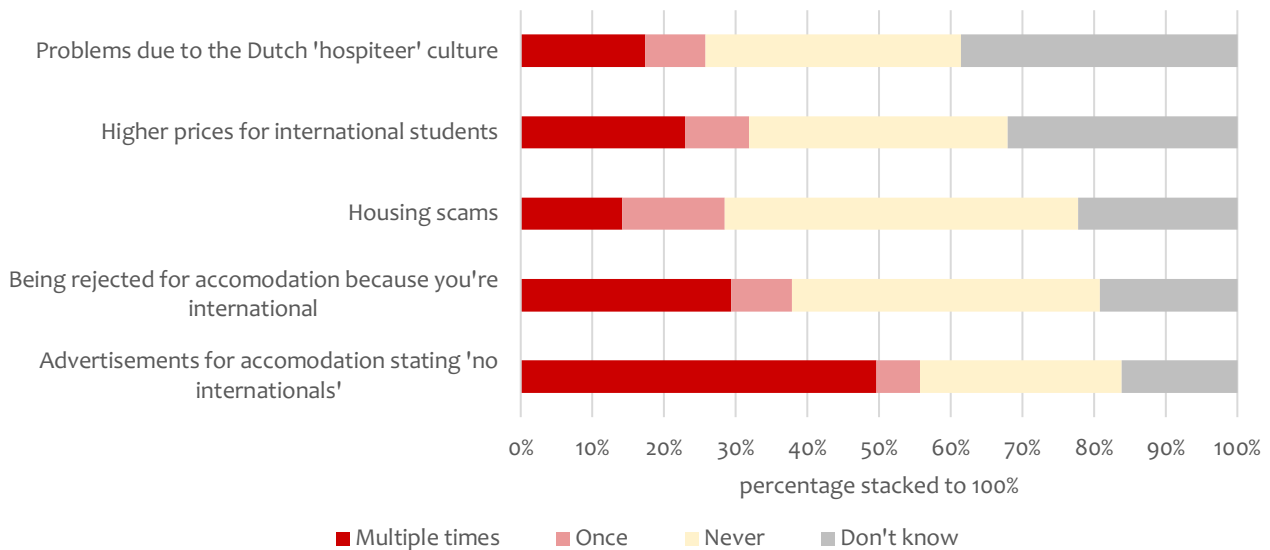
“Multiple housing scams, which made it impossible for me and another Greek exchange student to share a house together, as we were planning to do.”

“I almost fell into a housing scheme where I had to send the money before seeing the house. I also was told the price of a place was higher because I am a student and I represent a greater risk. I was denied certain accommodation because they were looking only for Dutch housemates.”

“Once, I had an appointment with an agency to check one of the rooms they were offering. I was at the right place, at the right time. However, no one showed up. I called them to ask what went wrong and they said they would call me soon but they actually never did.”

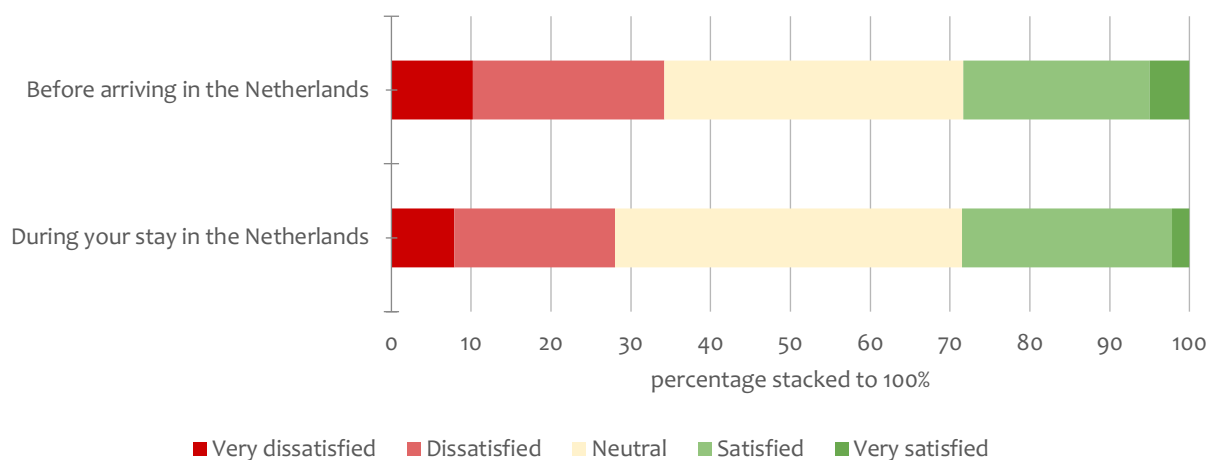
“I almost got scammed by a fake advertisement about an apartment. They asked me to put 2000 euros as a guarantee and after they would have received the money, they would send me the keys via post. Luckily, my mom investigated the situation and decided not to pay, only to later find out that they were scammers.”

It is also noteworthy that more than 20 percent of the respondents indicate that they have experienced higher prices being charged to international students. A quarter of the students indicated that the Dutch 'hospiteer' culture also presented difficulties in finding housing.

Figure 14: did you ever run into any of the following problems?

It was also asked who should be responsible for housing international students. Several options could be selected here. **85 percent of the respondents were of the opinion that the higher education institution should be (co-)responsible for it. 50 percent believe that the municipality also has a responsibility for it, and 38 percent believe that the national government should also take responsibility for it.**

In order to help international students as much as possible in finding the right accommodation, correct and truthful information is very important. Respondents were asked what they thought about the provision of information about housing before and during their stay in the Netherlands. **34 percent of the respondents were dissatisfied with the provision of information before they arrived in the Netherlands, 28 percent of the respondents were dissatisfied with the provision of information during their stay in the Netherlands.** Less than a third are satisfied with the information provision before and during their stay in the Netherlands.

Figure 15: how satisfied are you with the provision of information about housing?

Well-being

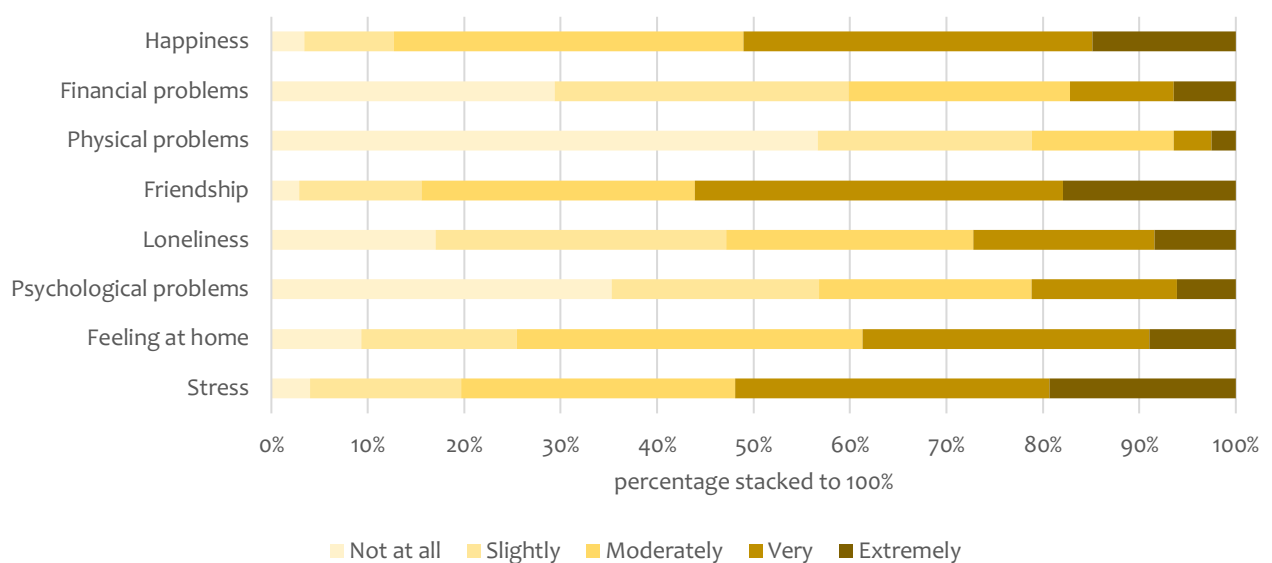
Key points

- Over three-quarters of all respondents experienced between average and (very) high feelings of friendship, happiness and feeling at home.
- More than half of the respondents experienced a high to very high level of stress and more than a quarter experienced a high to very high level of loneliness.

More and more attention is being paid to the mental and physical well-being of students. International students are a high-risk group: living in another country causes stress and the social safety net of international students is often smaller because family and friends live further away. This is why it is very important to monitor the well-being of international students.

The chart below illustrates that **more than 80 percent of the respondents indicated that they experienced between average and (very) strong feelings of friendship and happiness.** More than 75 percent feels moderately to very much at home here. **However, more than half of the respondents indicated that they experienced high to very high levels of stress. More than a quarter also felt (very) lonely.**

Figure 16: to what extent did you experience the following feelings during your stay in the Netherlands?



The answers to the open questions confirm the impression that feelings of well-being vary widely among international students:

"I feel very well integrated, thanks to my "studentenvereniging" that allowed me to join as the first and only non-Dutch speaking member. This made me learn Dutch quickly and thereby also get to know a lot of dutch friends and traditions. With my study association and my board year there I still got to know a more diverse group regarding nationalities. Through this and some personal effort, I have made some great friends, feel at home in the Netherlands and could imagine staying here after my studies."

“The stress from school can be too much and also the Dutch are not welcoming so it can be really lonely and make you feel like you don’t belong.”

High academic workload is most often mentioned as a source of stress. However, this will not be very different for Dutch students. However, international students may have other major sources of stress, such as homesickness, financial problems, difficulties finding housing, few friends or being in a different cultural space.

Reasons for (not) staying

Key points

- The majority of respondents do not yet know whether they will stay in the Netherlands after graduation or whether they will return later. 28 percent do expect to stay.

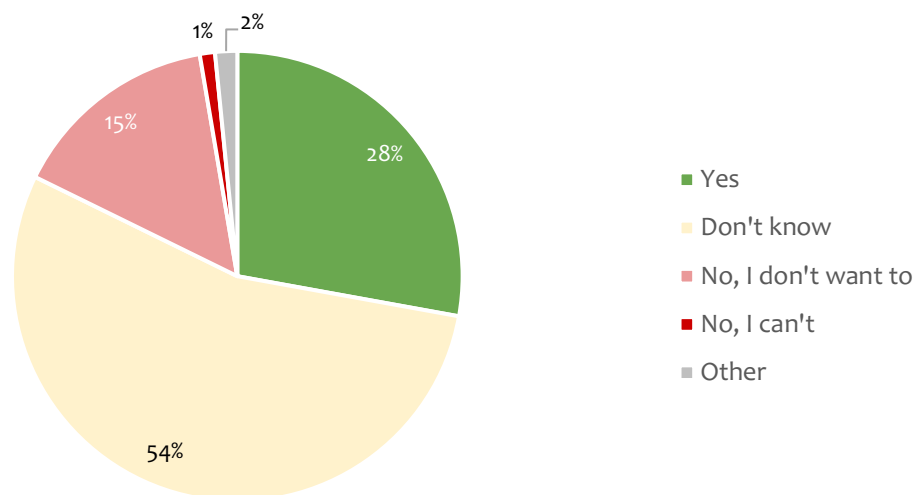
The majority of the students (55 percent) do not yet know whether they will stay in the Netherlands after their studies or if they will come back to work. 28 percent indicate that they expect to stay in the Netherlands, 15 percent do not want to stay in the Netherlands. The explanations given by the respondents vary: some of them indicated that they did not enjoy their stay, others were positive about their stay. Some respondents indicated that finding a job and housing will be difficult:

"I am not sure I could secure a job here or get a house."

"Because it seems difficult for international students to get a job based on language barrier and other stuff."

"I am considering working in the Netherlands, however, Dutch language requirements and the housing situation in larger cities are a concern."

Figure 17: are you planning to stay in the Netherlands after graduation and/or return to work in the Netherlands later?



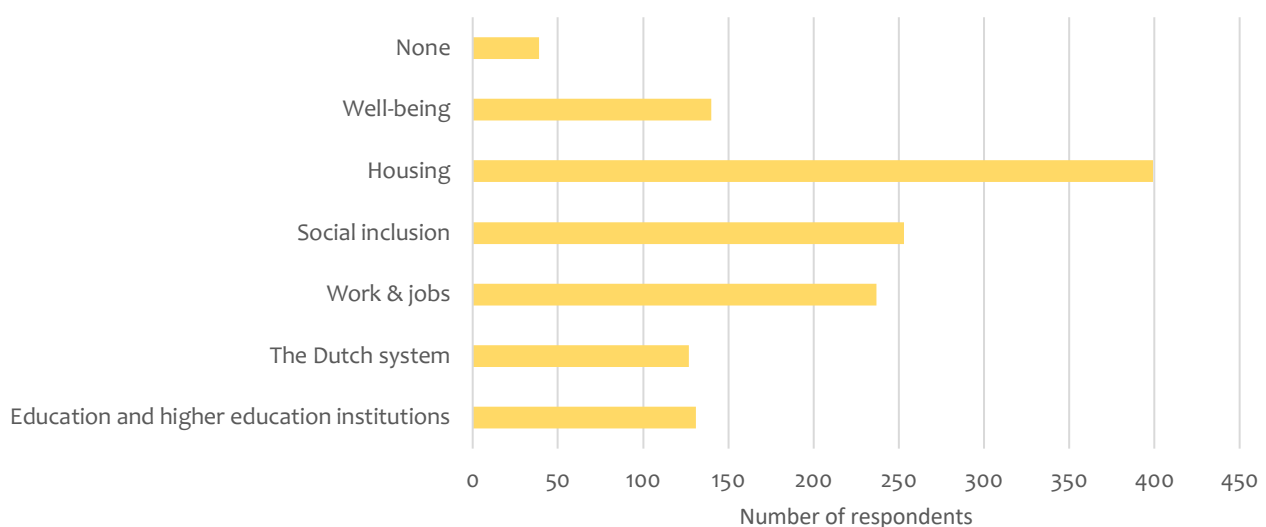
Most necessary improvements

Key points

- Housing improvements are considered necessary by over 70 percent of all respondents. Higher education institutions should not admit international students if housing is not available for these students.
- International students deem it very unfair that they do not have the same rights to a student travel product as Dutch students and are not even entitled to a discount or a trajectkaart [card for discounted or freer travel along a fixed route]. This exacerbates the housing problem, as it is now simply too expensive for international students to live in a different city to where they are studying.

The AISS concluded with the question in which areas improvements are needed the most, and which concrete improvements they should be. Respondents could select multiple areas. The graph below shows the results.

Figure 18: in which areas are improvements needed the most?



Over 70 percent of all respondents indicate that improvements in the area of housing are necessary. This once again underlines the urgency of the housing problem among internationals. It is already becoming increasingly difficult for Dutch students to find a room: for international students this problem is even greater. **The crisis is so severe that several respondents indicated that higher education institutions should only admit international students if they can guarantee housing.** Contrary to Dutch students, international students cannot stay at home for the time being if they cannot find a room.

“Stop increasing the number of students accepted to the programmes until the housing crisis is moderated. My school keeps expanding more programs but not expanding resources.”

Improvements in the area of work and social inclusion are also of great importance according to many respondents. As pointed out in the chapter on work, non-EEA students in particular are struggling to find

work because employers do not want to request a work permit. Some of these students had based their choice of the Netherlands on the idea that they could, in theory, work here.

Social inclusion also remains an issue that almost half of the respondents feel needs improvement. Dutch people and Dutch student culture are still often not sufficiently welcoming.

What bothers many international students is the fact that, unlike Dutch students, they are not entitled to a student travel product. They are not even entitled to a discount. This makes it more difficult for international students to live in a different city to where they are studying: the daily commute would cost them a lot of money. Given the shortage of affordable housing in many student cities, this is an extra painful problem. It also prevents students from getting to know cities other than the one they are studying in, which in turn can be an obstacle to smooth integration.

“International students should be eligible for the same free public transportation benefits as Dutch students.”

“PLEASE allow us to get free travel when doing an internship.”

Conclusions and recommendations

This report clearly shows that there are many opportunities to further improve the position of international students in the Netherlands. The importance of this should not be underestimated: international students who feel at home in the Netherlands are more inclined to stay here or return at a later point in their lives. According to the CPB, international students provide the Dutch treasury with more than they cost, but only if they decide to stay in the Netherlands after their studies.⁶ Improving the position of international students is therefore in the interest of those students themselves, but also of greater economic importance for the whole of the Netherlands.

On the basis of the preceding chapters, we have arrived at the following concrete recommendations, broken down by policymakers/politicians and higher education institutions.

Higher education institutions

1. **Communicate honestly about a possible housing shortage and do not accept more international students than there is housing available.** The housing shortage in student cities is great, both for Dutch and international students. However, the difference between these groups is that international students do not have a fall-back option. They cannot choose to 'live at home for just another year' but have to settle for whatever they find. In addition, because of the disadvantageous public transport system, it is even more important for them to live as close to the educational institution as possible. This encourages abuse and exploitation. Higher education institutions have a responsibility to communicate honestly and clearly about housing options and not to admit more international students than there is housing available.
2. **Encourage more interaction between Dutch and international students.** Provide, for example, additional funding opportunities for study or student associations that are also fully accessible to non-Dutch-speaking students. Make sure that Dutch and international students mix right from the start; for example, do not organise separate introduction weeks and randomly assign werkgroepen [tutorial groups] and all forms of group work.

Policymakers/politicians

1. **Provide some form of discount on travel expenses for international students.** Dutch public transport is pricey. The vast majority of international students are not entitled to a student travel product. This discourages them from discovering other places than the city where their educational institution is located. This impedes integration. The lack of a travel expense arrangement also makes it necessary for international students to find accommodation as close as possible to their educational institution, so that their travel costs remain limited. Given the very tight housing market in all the Dutch student cities, this puts international students in a vulnerable position.
2. **Collect truthful and clear English-language information about working, entitlement to student finance, health care, opening a bank account, registering with the municipality, Dutch government systems, etc. on one central website.** The results show that the provision of English information by governments and government organisations can sometimes be unsatisfactory. This

⁶ <https://www.cpb.nl/de-economische-effecten-van-internationalisering-het-hoger-onderwijs-en-mbo-o>

website could thus function as a 'reference' for both future and current international students in the Netherlands. Make a clear distinction between information for EEA and non-EEA students. Collaborate as much as possible with higher education institutions, umbrella student organisations and other relevant parties so that all parties refer to this website by default and to avoid duplicate (possibly incorrect or outdated) information as much as possible.

3. **Create an annual monitor from the ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap [ministry of Education, Culture and Science] to make the AISS superfluous.** The conclusions from this report provide a good initial impression of the problems encountered by international students, but monitoring such an important subject should not be the task of ESN, LSVb and ISO.