

How is COVID-19 affecting the plans of international graduates in the Netherlands?

Nuffic

26 October 2020

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Main findings and considerations/executive summary

- i. The majority of respondents' plans after graduation seem not to have changed since the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis. 70.7% of the 608 graduates who completed our survey indicated that they wanted to pursue the plans they had before the crisis (e.g. they had been planning to look for a job in the Netherlands before the crisis began and they still intended to do so).
- ii. Even though the percentage of respondents who intended to work in the Netherlands, whether still looking for work or already with a job offer, had decreased only slightly, from 57.3% to 53.5%, almost 20% of the respondents who indicated in September that they intended to work in the Netherlands were residing in their home country. With the current crisis, it is possible that they will not be able to return to the Netherlands, for example due to travel restrictions.
- iii. The COVID-19 crisis seems to have had a negative influence on respondents' attitudes towards career prospects with regard to their decision to stay in the Netherlands: more graduates saw career prospects as a deterring factor when it came to their decision to stay and work in the Netherlands (the percentage increased from 28.3% to 43.8%) and fewer students saw it as a positive factor (this percentage decreased from 50.8% to 38.2%).
- iv. Among non-EU respondents, the percentage of graduates who were planning to apply for a residency permit (such as the Search Year permit) dropped by 16% (from 71.5% to 55.5%).
- v. The plans of the graduates who were planning to move to a third country changed the most (only 45.1% still had this plan in mind in September). The plans of those who had already found a job or who were looking for one changed the least: 73.3% of this group were planning to pursue their initial plans.
- vi. Pre-crisis, the availability of accommodation was the strongest negative factor influencing the decision to stay. The development of COVID-19 has now surpassed this, as 43% of respondents indicates it had had a negative or highly negative influence on their decision to stay. For 21.9% of respondents, the development of COVID-19 in the Netherlands was a factor that contributed positively to their decision to stay.
- vii. Overall quality of life in the Netherlands was the biggest positive factor for international graduates deciding to stay in the Netherlands, followed by the quality of education/research and the work-life balance. The COVID-19 crisis had not changed this top 3.
- viii. In line with previous stay rate studies, more graduates with a technical degree were planning to stay in the Netherlands to work (59.5%) compared to other graduates (51.8%). Moreover, in both situations – before the crisis started and during the crisis – technical degree graduates indicated that career prospects had a (strong) positive influence on their decision to stay in the Netherlands more often than other respondents. However, this percentage fell by 11.5% from 57.3% before the COVID-19 crisis started to 45.8%.
- ix. A majority of respondents (52.8%) indicated that the information provision about starting a career in the Netherlands was insufficient.

A. Introduction

The stay rate of international graduates is one of the key elements in the public and political debate surrounding the number of international graduates in the Netherlands, as their talent contributes to the Dutch knowledge economy. The COVID-19 crisis has had and continues to have a profound impact on almost all aspects of society and the economy. This is why we have taken the initiative to investigate the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the future stay rates of international graduates in the Netherlands. In earlier reports, we investigated the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on international students coming to the Netherlands and on Dutch students seeking to go abroad for a study experience.¹

A [recent study by the Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis \(CPB\)](#)² (hereinafter: CPB study) found that every international student has a positive impact on public finances. Why? Because if they stay in the Netherlands after graduation, the taxes they pay exceed their cumulative burden on the public purse. It follows that the higher the stay rate of international graduates, the greater their contribution to the Dutch economy. International graduates also contribute to society and the economy in non-financial ways, for example by enriching society culturally, linguistically and demographically (they boost the aging population with an influx of productive people) while strengthening the innovation capacity of locals and the economy.³

In the previous stay rate reports of both Nuffic and the CPB, the term **stay rate** was defined as the percentage of international students who graduated from a Dutch higher education institution (research universities and universities of applied sciences) and are still resident in the Netherlands after a specified number of years (one to five years).⁴

It is important to point out that for this current report, the respondents were not only international students who had obtained a Bachelor's or Master's degree, but also those who had obtained a PhD, as well as internationals who had pursued an internship in the Netherlands. Whereas the first two categories were included in earlier studies, the latter two (those who had obtained a PhD and those who had

About Nuffic

Nuffic is the Dutch organisation for internationalisation in education – from primary and secondary education to vocational and higher education, research and adult education. Nuffic is publicly funded by the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the European Commission. Nuffic advocates the importance of embedding internationalisation and international cooperation in the broader objectives of the education sector, civil-society organisations and the public sector.

Make it in the Netherlands

In recent years, the stay rate of international students has been a subject of research and programme interventions for Nuffic, with fluctuating levels of intensity informed by the changing priorities of Nuffic's funders. From 2014 until 2016, Nuffic coordinated the national Make it in the Netherlands programme, which was focused on attracting and retaining international students. Many countries around the world have developed specific policies to not only attract, but also retain international talent. The same is true for the Netherlands.

Netherlands Education Support Offices (NESOs)

The Dutch higher education institutions and other relevant stakeholders, such as governmental organisations, are supported in their international outreach and promotion activities, including fostering alumni relations, by the NESOs.

¹ <https://www.nuffic.nl/en/news/international-students-uncertain-about-studying-netherlands> and <https://www.nuffic.nl/en/news/international-experience-many-students-risk>

² <https://www.cpb.nl/de-economische-effecten-van-internationalisering-het-hoger-onderwijs-en-mbo-0>

³ Ozgen, C., Nijkamp, P. & Poot, J. IZA J Migration (2013) 2: 18. <https://doi.org/10.1186/2193-9039-2-18>

⁴ <https://www.nuffic.nl/publicaties/stayrate-van-internationale-afgestudeerden-nederland>

pursued an internship) were not. Furthermore, it is important to note that it is too early to predict what the impact of COVID-19 will be on the long term (five years after graduation). In this report, we are only dealing with the current sentiments and plans of international students and graduates who want to stay in the Netherlands.

For this report, we made segmentations in our analysis, which we hope will be useful to our stakeholders. For example, the difference between EU and non-EU graduates is considerable as, according to previous stay rate reports, non-EU graduates are more likely to stay after their studies.⁵ Furthermore, there is a difference with regard to residency and work permits between EU and non-EU graduates. Whereas EU nationals are free to work and live in the Netherlands, non-EU citizens mostly need a work and/or residence permit to continue living in the country.⁶

We also paid special attention to respondents from the countries in which Netherlands Education Support Offices (NESOs) are located with the aim of improving the programmes and interventions of the NESOs in those countries. Lastly, we examined variance between graduates who had completed a technical degree and other graduates. This was because of recent national policy developments regarding key technologies⁷ and the high demand for international talent with a technical background due to Dutch labour market shortages.

In recent years, the debate on the stay rate of international graduates has gained momentum in part due to the interdepartmental policy evaluation⁸, for which the aforementioned CPB study was one of the supporting documents. The latter showed the extent to which international students who remain in the Netherlands after graduation and participate in the labour market contribute to the Dutch economy.

Context: a short overview of stay rates in the Netherlands

Our latest study in 2018 showed that 22,000 of the 85,880 international students who had graduated between 2006 and 2013 remained in the Netherlands.⁹ This study showed that the probability of leaving the Netherlands was highest in the first year after graduation, when half of these graduates left. This percentage decreased with every year that a graduate stayed in the Netherlands. On average, 24.7% of international students still resided in the Netherlands after five years.¹⁰ As seen in Figure 1, the EEA group was much larger in the first year after graduation, but after 5 years the EEA and non-EEA groups were comparable in size.¹¹ Moreover, students with a technical degree had the highest stay rates of all students of all disciplines. Of all graduates who had obtained a technical degree at a research university, more than 41% were still in the Netherlands 5 years after graduation. Furthermore, 26.3% of graduates who had obtained a technical degree at a university of applied sciences still resided in the Netherlands after this period.¹²

⁵ <https://www.nuffic.nl/publicaties/stayrate-van-internationale-afgestudeerden-nederland>

⁶ For more information on who needs a residence or work permit, visit https://business.gov.nl/regulation/residence-permit/?gclid=CjwKCAjw5p_8BRBUeIwAPpJO6wEFM0aKK6eJqzHjkSMbijYVX0EouhzYE831_iTN-3LtNEMzH_Xx7hoCxV8QAvD_BwE

⁷ <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/publicaties/2019/04/26/aanpak-sleuteltechnologieen>

⁸ <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/rapporten/2019/07/02/ibo-internationalisering-van-het-hoger-onderwijs>

⁹ <https://www.nuffic.nl/publicaties/stayrate-van-internationale-afgestudeerden-nederland>

¹⁰ <https://www.nuffic.nl/publicaties/stayrate-van-internationale-afgestudeerden-nederland>

¹¹ <https://www.nuffic.nl/publicaties/stayrate-van-internationale-afgestudeerden-nederland>

¹² <https://www.nuffic.nl/publicaties/stayrate-van-internationale-afgestudeerden-nederland>



Figure 1: Stay rate and number of graduates remaining in the Netherlands after 1 to 5 years, broken down by EEA/non-EEA for the combined graduation cohorts 2006-2007 to 2012-2013.¹³

Methodology

This report provides an insight into recent developments regarding the stay rate among international students who will soon graduate or who have recently graduated, shortly before or during the COVID-19 crisis. It can serve as an aid in deciding on future interventions and further research. This report does not intend to be an extensive investigation into the drivers of and changes in the stay rate of international graduates in the Netherlands.

Distribution of the survey

The survey was aimed at international graduates who had either completed a degree programme (Bachelor's, Master's, PhD) or an internship in the Netherlands since June 2019 or who were due to graduate by December 2020 or before. The survey was distributed among these groups through a variety of channels, such as the websites and social media channels of Study in Holland, the [Holland Alumni network](#), [Erasmus+](#) and the [NESOs](#). The survey could be completed between 24 August and 14 September 2020.

¹³ <https://www.nuffic.nl/publicaties/stayrate-van-internationale-afgestudeerden-nederland>

The respondents

In total, 608 respondents completed the survey. The responses of 279 respondents who only completed the first few questions were excluded from the dataset. Of the respondents that were included, 26.3% finished or will soon finish a full degree (Bachelor's or Master's) at a Dutch university of applied sciences, and 57.6% had graduated, or will soon graduate, from a Dutch research university (both Bachelor's and Master's). Moreover, 9.2% is or was pursuing a PhD and 3.1% had come to the Netherlands for an internship. The most common field of study among the respondents was Social Sciences (22.9%), followed by Economics and Business (17.6%).

Furthermore, the respondents were from 86 different countries. Indian students formed the largest group (14.0%) in this survey, followed by respondents from Germany (11.4%) and Indonesia (10.9%).

Representation

Even though the great diversity in countries of origin among international students in the Netherlands is reflected in this sample, the distribution in nationalities is not representative. The largest group, by far, of international students in the Netherlands comes from Germany, followed by Italy and China. This means that India (nr. 7 on the list of countries of origin in 2019-2020) and Indonesia (nr. 14) were slightly overrepresented and Germany was underrepresented. In fact, the group of EEA nationals as a whole was underrepresented in our survey (33.6%) compared to the share of EEA students among the total number of international students studying in Dutch higher education (excluding PhD students and interns). In 2019-2020, 72% of international degree students in the Netherlands were from an EEA country (EU plus Liechtenstein, Iceland and Norway). However, on average, the stay rate of non-EEA students was substantially higher than that of EEA-students, as the aforementioned studies have shown (excluding PhD students, as mentioned before). The 2018 stay rates study showed that in the fifth year after graduation, 38.6% of the non-EEA students who had graduated between 2006-2013 still resided in the Netherlands, compared to 18.3% of the EEA-students.¹⁴ The relatively large share of non-EEA students is therefore not as problematic as it seems at first glance.

With respect to the most commonly chosen fields of study, these corresponded with the usual distribution of fields of study chosen by international students in the Netherlands. Economics & Business and Social Sciences were the two most commonly chosen fields of study by international degree students in 2019-2020. Similar to the actual numbers for 2019-2020, approximately twice as many respondents in this survey studied at a research university than at a university of applied sciences.

¹⁴ <https://www.nuffic.nl/publicaties/stayrate-van-internationale-afgestudeerden-nederland>

B. Analysis of the survey questions

1. What were they planning to do?

Table 1 (on the next page) provides an overview of the respondents' future plans, both before and during the COVID-19 crisis. Before this crisis hit, the majority of respondents (57.3%) planned to stay in the Netherlands to work (11.2% of the respondents had already found a job in the Netherlands). Furthermore, 13.5% planned to stay and pursue an additional degree (Bachelor's, Master's or PhD) while 16.1% planned to return to their home country. Finally, 8.4% of the respondents were planning to move to another country. The remaining 4.8% indicated that they did not know yet.

2. What are they planning to do now?

As shown in Table 1, the majority of respondents were still planning to stay in the Netherlands to work (they were either looking for a job or they had already found one). However, the share of this group had decreased from 57.3% to 53.5%. Further research is needed to determine the drivers of these decisions with greater certainty. One possible explanation of the change in priorities might be the growing uncertainty with regard to the foreseeable future and changes in the job market. Moreover, almost 20% of the respondents who were planning to work in the Netherlands currently resided in their home country. Furthermore, 14.5% of the respondents were currently planning to stay to pursue another degree (Bachelor's, Master's or PhD), which was only a slight increase in comparison to the pre-crisis situation. The percentage of respondents who indicated they were now staying in or returning to their home country also hadn't changed much (up from 16.1% to 17.4%). Finally, 6.6% stated they would move to another country (other than the Netherlands or their home country) and 8.1% indicated that they did not know yet what their plans would be.

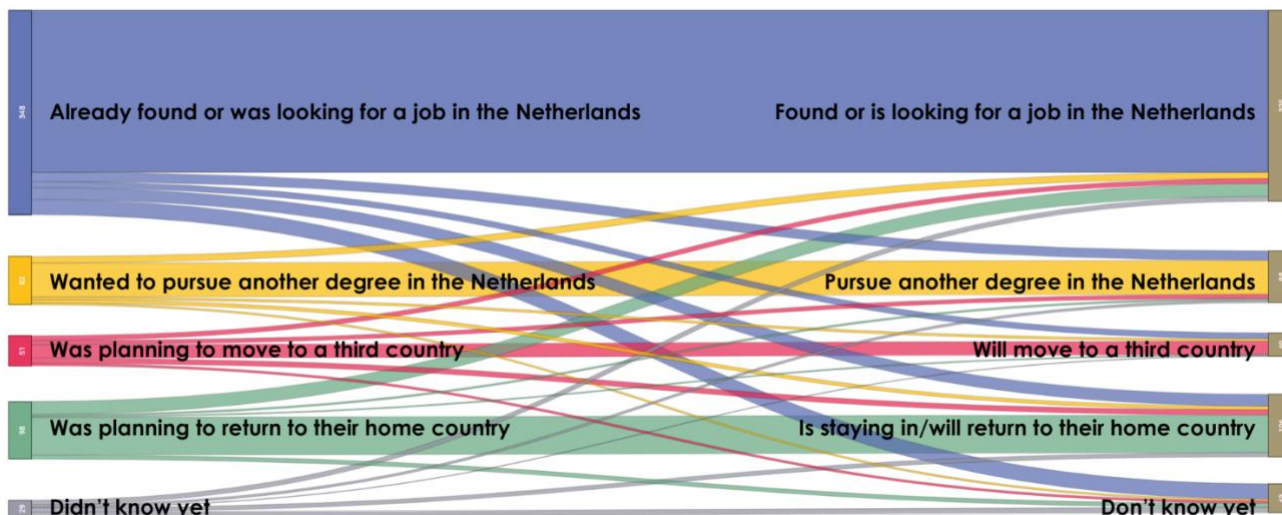
Table 1: The future plans of the respondents, both before and during the COVID-19 crisis

| Respondents' plans | What the respondents were planning to do before the COVID-19 crisis started | What the respondents are planning to do now (during the COVID-19 crisis) |
|--|---|--|
| | <i>Subtotals</i> | <i>Subtotals</i> |
| Total found/will look for a job in the Netherlands | 57.3% | 53.5% |
| Will look for a job in the Netherlands <i>(while in the Netherlands)</i> | 46.1% | 30.4% |
| Found a job in the Netherlands <i>(while in the Netherlands)</i> | 11.2% | 12.5% |
| Will look for a job in the Netherlands <i>(currently in home country)</i> | | 9.9% |
| Found a job in the Netherlands <i>(currently in home country)</i> | | 0.7% |
| Total pursue another degree in the Netherlands | 13.5% | 14.5% |
| Pursue another degree in the Netherlands <i>(while in the Netherlands)</i> | 13.5% | 11.4% |
| Pursue another degree in the Netherlands <i>(currently in home country)</i> | | 3.1% |
| Return to (or stay in) home country | 16.1% | 17.4% |
| Move to third country | 8.4% | 6.6% |
| Did/do not know | 4.8% | 8.1% |
| Total | 100% | 100% |

The Sankey diagram (Figure 2) provides information about shifts at the individual level that cannot be derived from the percentages in Table 1. For example, it is possible that the current group of respondents who want to work in the Netherlands – which is similar in size – is now made up of different individuals compared to before the crisis.

Figure 2: Sankey diagram of what the respondents were planning to do before the COVID-19 crisis (on the left-hand side) and what they are planning to do now (on the right). The width of a bar is

proportional to the visualised quantity: if a bar is twice as wide, it represents double the number of respondents.



Main findings we would like to highlight:

- The majority of respondents' future plans had not changed. 70.7% were still planning to do the same as before the crisis (the horizontal bars in the Sankey diagram). These are the graduates who, for example, wanted to pursue working in the Netherlands and who were still planning to do so.
- The 178 respondents (29.3% of the total number of respondents) who had changed their plans since the crisis caused no major change in the size of the different response categories (the overall distribution). For instance, the gap that the 24 students who wanted to pursue another degree in the Netherlands left behind was filled by 30 students who were initially planning to do something else, but who now wanted to pursue another degree in the Netherlands.
- The plans of the graduates who had been planning to move to a third country (neither the Netherlands nor their home country) changed the most (only 45.1% stuck to this original plan). The plans of those who had already found a job or who were looking for one changed the least: 73.3% of this group were planning to do the same as before the crisis.

3. Factors that influence the decision to stay

Figures 3 and 4 show to what extent several factors influenced respondents' attitudes towards staying in the Netherlands either negatively or positively, both before the crisis started (Figure 3) and during the crisis (Figure 4).

Which aspects had/have a positive influence on graduates' attitudes towards staying in the Netherlands?

Both before the crisis and at the time the respondents completed the survey, the overall quality of life in the Netherlands was the factor that had the most positive influence on graduates' attitudes towards staying in the Netherlands. The percentage of respondents who felt that this had a positive or highly positive influence in both cases was around 65%, and only a small group (both times around 17%) indicated that this factor had a negative or highly negative influence. The quality of

education and research in the Netherlands and work-life balance complete the top 3 of positive factors.

Which aspects had/have a negative influence on graduates' attitudes towards staying in the Netherlands?

Before the crisis started, the number 1 factor that negatively influenced respondents' attitudes towards staying in the Netherlands was the availability of accommodation. A share of 39% of respondents indicated this had a negative or highly negative influence on their decision to stay in the Netherlands. This factor had a positive or highly positive influence on their decision for only 18.3%. The development of COVID-19, both worldwide as well as in the Netherlands, surpassed the availability of accommodation as the largest negative influence in the current situation. Among the respondents, 43.4% indicated that the development of COVID-19 in the Netherlands had a negative or highly negative influence on their attitude towards staying, and almost the same number (43.8%) indicated that the development of the disease worldwide had a negative or highly negative influence. At the same time, 21.7% and 21.9% indicated that the development of COVID-19 in respectively the Netherlands and worldwide had a positive or highly positive influence on their attitude towards staying.

Differences between before and after the COVID-19 crisis started

As Figures 3 and 4 illustrate, the influence of most factors remained approximately the same (changes of only a few percentage points). The only factor showing a big difference between before and after the crisis started, was career prospects in the Netherlands. Before the crisis started, 28.3% indicated that this aspect had a negative or highly negative influence. After the start of the crisis, this percentage increased to 43.8%. Vice versa, the percentage of respondents who indicated that this factor had a positive or highly positive influence on their attitude towards staying in the Netherlands decreased from 50.8% to 38.2%.

Figure 3: Before the COVID-19 crisis

Before the COVID-19 crisis

The extent to which the following factors positively or negatively influenced the respondents' attitudes towards staying in the Netherlands after their studies

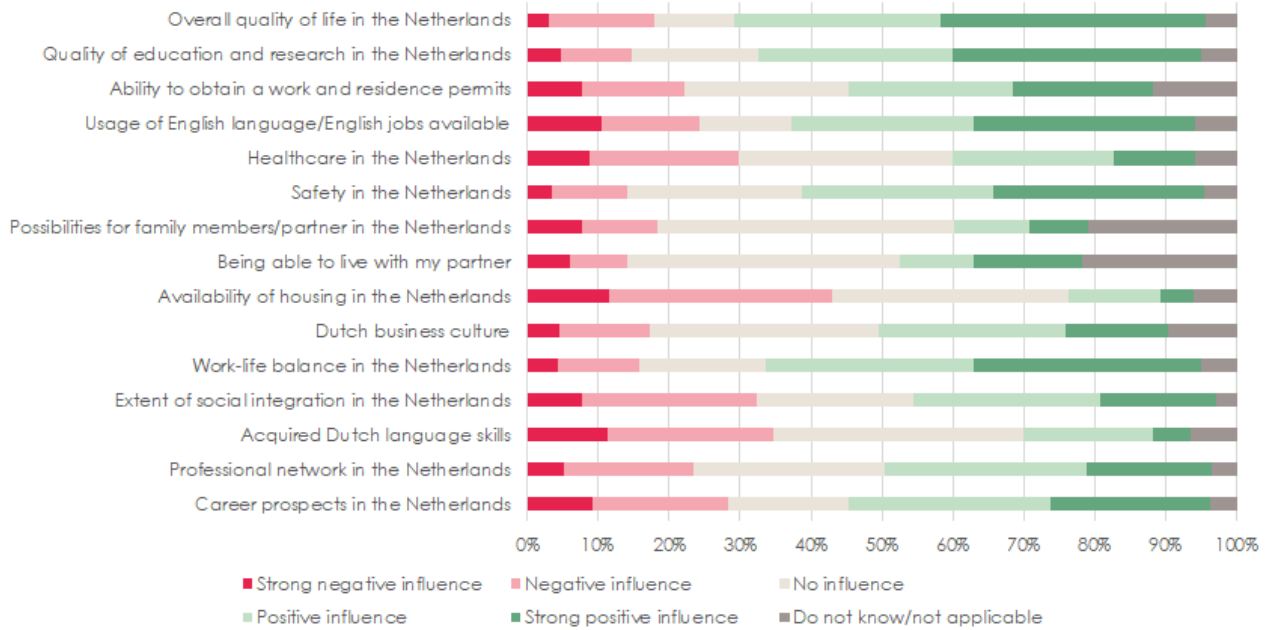
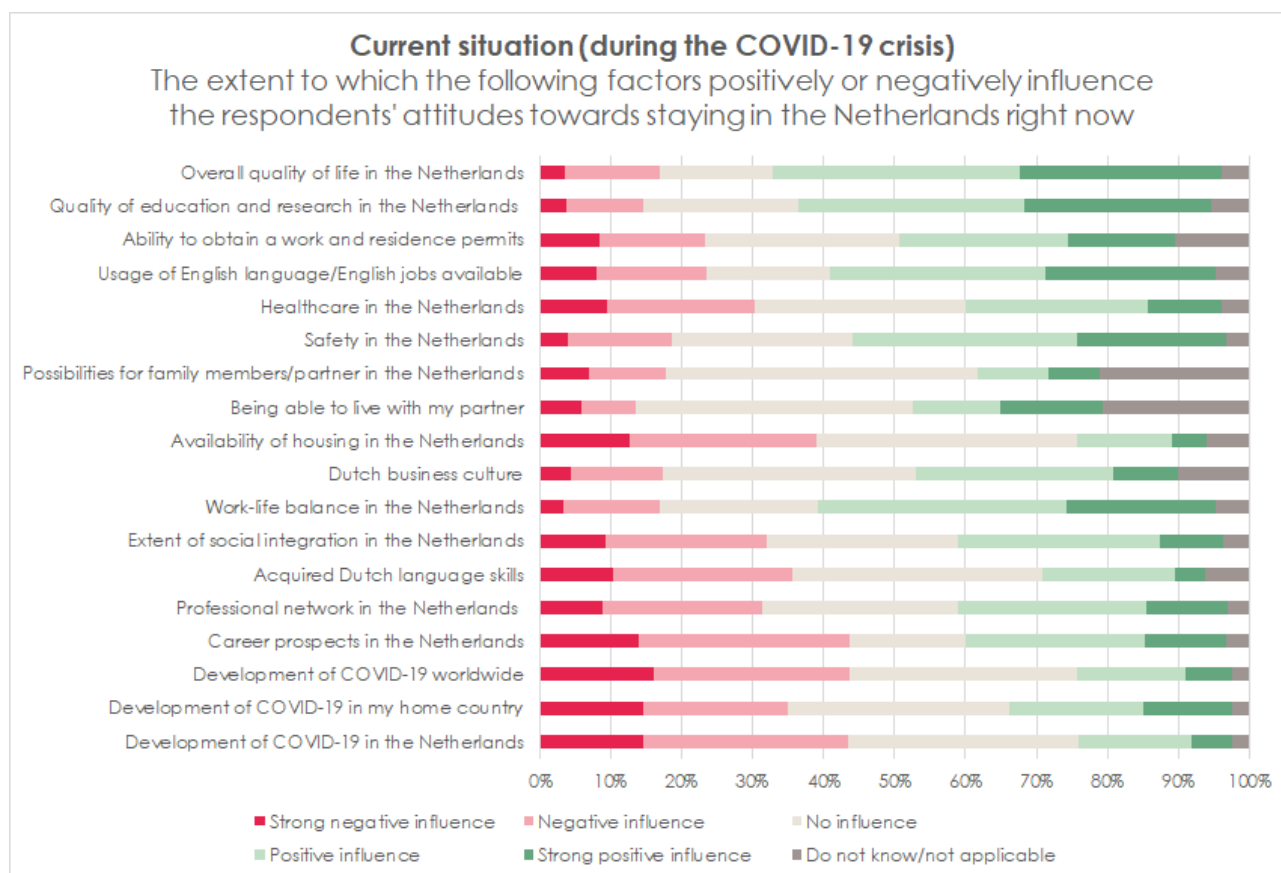


Figure 4: Current situation (during the COVID-19 crisis)



4. Graduates with a technical degree

The responses of the 131 respondents with a technical degree (83 engineering graduates and 48 science graduates) were compared with the responses of those from other fields of study. For most questions, the responses were quite similar between both groups, with some exceptions that are worth highlighting. Consistent with previous stay rate studies, more graduates with a technical degree were planning to stay in the Netherlands for either another degree or work (74.0%) than graduates from other fields of study (66.2%).

Technical degree students indicated that career prospects had a positive or highly positive influence on their decision to stay in the Netherlands more often than the other respondents. However, this percentage had fallen significantly by 11.5%, from 57.3% to 45.8%. For non-technical students, this percentage remained not as high, with respectively 49.1% and 35.9% of respondents indicating that career prospects had a positive or highly positive effect on their attitudes towards staying in the Netherlands after their studies before and during the crisis.

In the pre-crisis situation, the availability of accommodation was the strongest inhibiting factor for both groups: around 43% of both technical and non-technical students indicated that this factor had a negative or highly negative influence on their decision to stay in the Netherlands. This percentage dropped only for the non-technical group, falling to 37.3%.

Before the crisis, graduates from other fields of study indicated social integration as having a positive or highly positive effect on their decision to stay in the Netherlands (45.5%). The responses of technical graduates to this question varied widely, with 29.8% indicating a negative or highly negative effect, 23.7% indicating social integration had no effect and only 32.1% indicating it had a positive or highly positive influence on their attitudes towards living and working in the Netherlands. The COVID-19 crisis has not changed the effect of social integration on the decision to stay much, although the influence of this factor decreased slightly for both technical and non-technical graduates.

The Dutch work-life balance was experienced as particularly positive before the COVID-19 crisis hit, with 62.1% of non-technical graduates indicating a positive or highly positive effect and 58.8% of technical graduates indicating the same. After the start of the crisis, work-life balance was still seen as a positive or highly positive factor, though the percentages fell to 55.8% and 57.3% respectively.

Much like work-life balance, safety was also a positive or highly positive factor in students' attitudes towards staying in the Netherlands. 54.9% of non-technical graduates indicated safety having a positive or highly positive influence, compared to 62.6% for technical graduates. In both groups, these percentages fell by approximately 5% after the COVID-19 crisis hit.

In conclusion, both groups indicated that both the overall life quality of life in the Netherlands and the quality of education and research had a positive or highly positive effect on their attitude towards staying in the Netherlands (around 65% for both groups). Whereas there was no change in how graduates viewed the overall quality of life in the Netherlands before and after the COVID-19 crisis hit, the positive or highly positive responses to the quality of education and research did fall, to 63.4% for graduates with a technical degree and to 56.8% for graduates from other fields of study.

5. EU and non-EU students

We also compared the responses of the respondents from EU countries with those from outside the EU, as there were large differences between these groups with regard to their plans after graduation. More than two-thirds of the non-EU respondents (69.8%) come from countries in which a [Netherlands Education Support Office](#) (NESO) is located (Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Russia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey and Vietnam).

In line with previous stay rate reports, the percentage of non-EU students who were planning to work in the Netherlands (regardless of whether they had already found a job) was substantially higher than that of EU students (62.1% versus 36.3% – see Figures 5-8). Whereas only 8.9% of non-EU students was planning to pursue another degree in the Netherlands, this percentage was much higher for EU students (25.5%). Furthermore, staying/returning to their home country (25.0%) and moving to a third country (8.8%) were more popular among EU students compared to non-EU students (13.6% and 5.5%, respectively).

Before the COVID-19 crisis started, looking for a job/having found a job in the Netherlands (35.8%), pursuing another degree in the Netherlands (22.1%) and returning to their home country (18.6%) were less or slightly less popular options among EU graduates, while moving to a third country was much more popular (16.7%).

For non-EU graduates, this was the other way around. Before the crisis, looking for/having found a job in the Netherlands (68.1%), pursuing another degree in the Netherlands (9.2%) and moving to

their home country (15.9%) were more popular options, while moving to a third country was less popular (4.2%).

Figure 5: What were non-EU students planning to do before the crisis started?

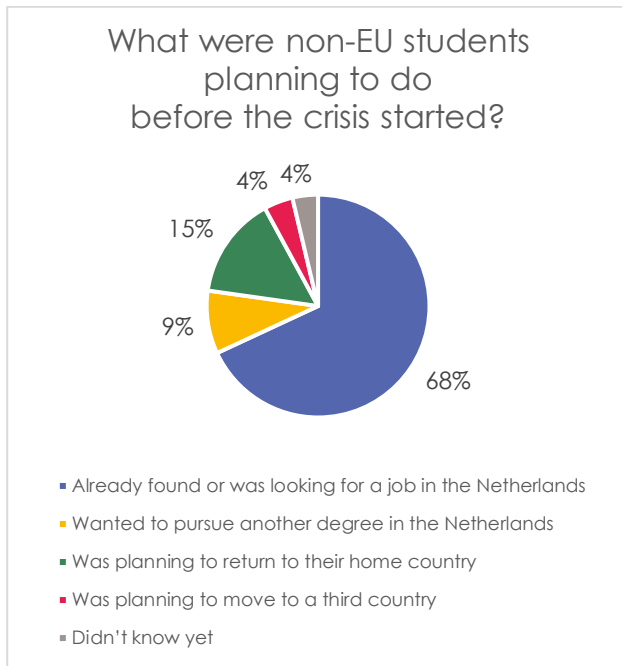


Figure 6: What are non-EU students planning to do now?

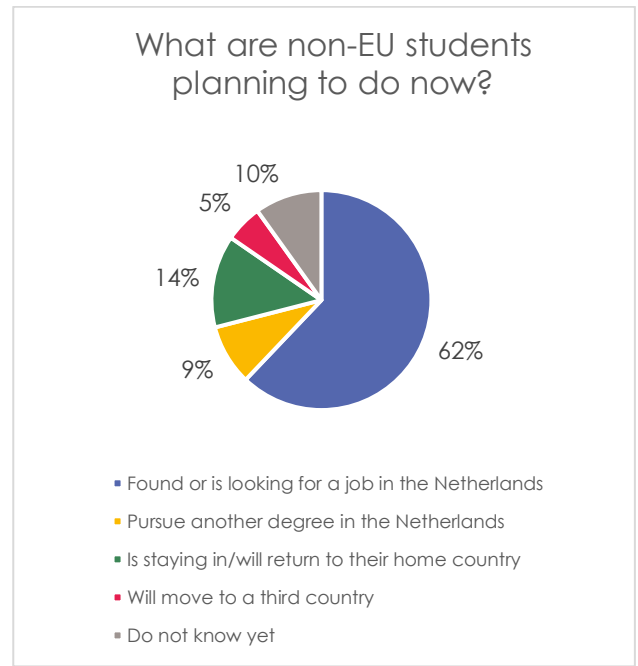


Figure 7: What were EU students planning to do before the crisis started?

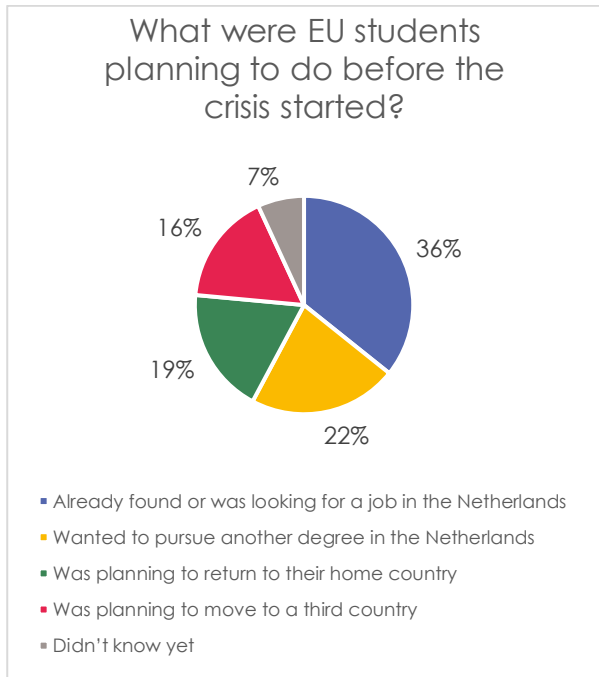
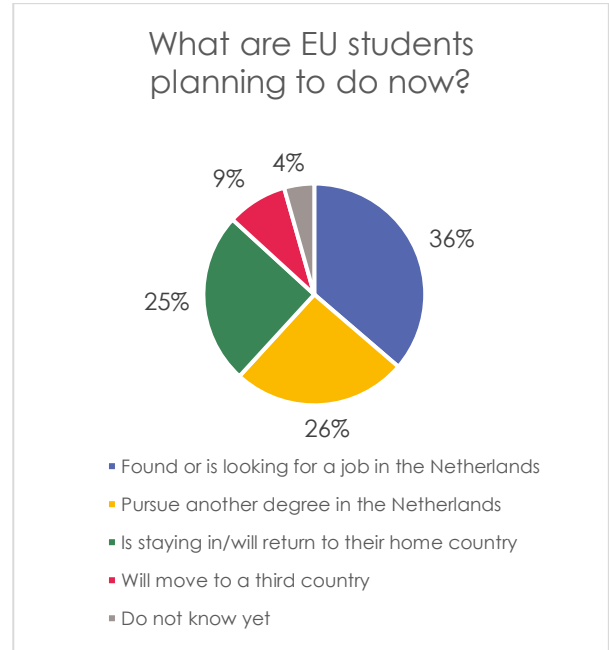


Figure 8: What are EU students planning to do now?



With regard to respondents' answers to the questions about which factors positively or negatively influenced their attitude towards staying in the Netherlands, both EU nationals and non-EU nationals indicated that health care in the Netherlands was a positive or highly positive factor before the COVID-19 crisis hit, albeit to a different extent (26.5% EU graduates, 38.1% non-EU graduates). Interestingly, this increased in both groups after the COVID-19 crisis hit, to 28.4% and 39.9% respectively, indicating confidence in the Dutch health care system – even if the increase was only minor. The development of COVID-19, whether worldwide, in the Netherlands or in the graduates' home country, was a negative or highly negative influence overall, more so among the non-EU graduates than the EU graduates.

With regard to career prospects, graduates from non-EU countries indicated that career prospects in the Netherlands had a positive or highly positive effect on their attitude towards staying (51.3%), but as the COVID-19 crisis hit, this percentage fell sharply to only 35.2% of respondents (for respondents from countries with a NESO, this percentage decreased from 53.9% to 35.1%). This decline was not as evident in the group of graduates from EU countries, yet still fell by 10.3% from 50.0% before to 37.7% during the crisis.

Regarding work-life balance, there was a large difference between the respondents from EU countries and those from non-EU countries when comparing the pre-crisis situation with the current situation. Whereas respondents from non-EU countries were only slightly less positive about the work-life balance during the crisis compared to before the crisis, the responses from EU respondents showed a much larger decrease. Before the crisis, 60.9% of the non-EU respondents indicated this factor had a positive or highly positive influence on their decision to stay compared to 58.2% during the crisis, a drop of 2.7% (for respondents from a country with a NESO, this percentage decreased from 65.6% to 60.3%.) By contrast, this percentage fell by 10.3% for EU students, from 62.3% to 52.0%.

The last factor for which there were differences between respondents from EU countries and non-EU countries was the perception of safety in the Netherlands. Graduates from non-EU countries indicated that safety had a positive or highly positive effect on their attitudes towards staying, both before and during the COVID-19 crisis (58.9% before and 54.7% during). For respondents from countries with a NESO, this percentage decreased even more, from 60.6% to 54.6%. Only 52% of graduates from EU countries originally indicated that safety had a positive or highly positive effect on their attitudes towards staying, and this fell by 3.5% to 48.5% during the COVID-19 crisis.

We also asked the 404 non-EU nationals a few specific questions in terms of familiarity with the possible residency permits for which they were eligible upon graduation, as well as their intentions to apply for any of them. The Search Year permit (orientation year for highly educated persons) was the most well-known: 89% of non-EU respondents had heard of this permit. Moreover, 66.3% had heard of the Highly Skilled Migrant permit, 35.2% was familiar with the Start-up permit and 32.4% had heard of the Self-employed permit.

The Search Year permit was also the one that most people were planning to apply for before the crisis. 60.3% of non-EU respondents indicated that they planned to apply for the Search Year permit, starting either immediately (45.7%) or in 1 to 3 years after graduation (14.6%). Furthermore, 10.9% were planning to apply for the Highly Skilled Migrant permit and one respondent (0.3%) was planning to apply for a Self-employed permit, while 28.5% of non-EU respondents were not planning to apply for any of these permits.

Since the COVID-19 crisis started, the number of respondents who do not intend to apply for any of these permits increased (to 44.6%). The Search Year permit was still the most popular permit: 44.8% of non-EU respondents were in the process of applying for this permit, either now (31.2%) or in 1-3 years (13.6%). Finally, 9.4% of non-EU respondents were in the process of applying for the Highly Skilled Migrant permit, whereas 1.2% of respondents were in the process of applying for a Start-up or Self-employed permit.

6. Adequacy of information provision

To conclude, we asked respondents two questions about how they rated the information provision for international students and alumni. The first question was about information on starting a career in the Netherlands, the second about the development of COVID-19 in the Netherlands and the consequences for them as internationals. The questions were phrased in a general fashion, not distinguishing between the information provision of any specific party or organisation.

With respect to the first question, the majority of respondents (52.8%) indicated that the information provision was insufficient or even extremely insufficient. When segmenting the respondents into EU nationality and non-EU nationality, the results did not show any significant differences between both groups. Respectively, 50.0% and 54.2% of EU and non-EU respondents indicated that the information provision about starting a career in the Netherlands was insufficient or extremely insufficient.

The responses for the second question, concerning the information provision for international students and alumni about the development of COVID-19 in the Netherlands and the consequences for them as internationals, were a bit more positive. Still, 40.8% of all respondents indicated that the information was insufficient or extremely insufficient, but they were no longer in the majority: 18.8% were neutral, 25.1% rated the information provision as sufficient and 4.4% rated it as excellent. Another observation was that non-EU graduates seemed to be more critical of the information about the consequences of COVID-19: 48.3% of non-EU respondents rated the provision of this information as insufficient or extremely insufficient, compared to 26.0% of EU respondents.

In short, the results show there is room for improvement when it comes to information provision towards international students and alumni. However, we did not ask whether the information itself was seen as unclear or whether existing information did or did not reach them. Nor did we ask which channels respondents mainly used, whether national/governmental (rijksoverheid.nl etc.), institutional (their own Dutch higher education institution) or Nuffic-administered (such as Holland Alumni network, Study in Holland etc.). Therefore, a recommendation could be to conduct further research into the information provision towards international graduates.

C. Conclusions and recommendations

In this report, we focused on the short-term effects of COVID-19 on the stay rate of recent graduates. At the time of writing, the majority of respondents' future plans had not changed due to the COVID-19 crisis. However, there were outcomes that indicated this could still change in the upcoming months, including in 2021, depending on how long the crisis will continue to hamper mobility and affect possibilities for staying in the Netherlands and finding a job. For example, 20% of the graduates who indicated they wanted to work in the Netherlands currently reside in their home country due to the COVID-19 crisis. In addition, an interesting outcome among the non-EU respondents was that considerably fewer respondents were now planning to apply for a postgraduate residency permit (such as the Search Year permit) compared to their plans before the crisis. Furthermore, more graduates now considered career prospects as a deterring factor than before the COVID-19 crisis; see also main findings ii. and iii (page 3).

While the long-term effects of the COVID-19 crisis on international graduates' stay rates cannot be predicted, the preceding analysis leads us to the following recommendations:

- Further research into the drivers of stay rates is needed, including the influence of learning Dutch and social integration on the decision to stay in the Netherlands.
- Further research is needed into the particular drivers and determining factors of attracting talent in key technologies and to address other structural shortages in the labour market, such as in IT, education and health care.
- More interventions are needed to address the gaps in the information provision for international students and alumni on starting a career in the Netherlands. A needs analysis is necessary in order to determine exactly what is missing. This is even more important now that a bigger group is studying online and from their home country. How can we reach them and is their need for information changing?
- The availability of accommodation for international graduates could have a significant impact on the stay rate of international alumni, especially once the COVID-19 crisis comes to an end. Interventions in this regard would be advisable.

If you have any specific questions regarding this report, please send them to alumni@nuffic.nl.

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