



# Incoming degree mobility in Dutch higher education 2020-2021

2 December 2021

# Contents

<b>Main findings/executive summary</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1. Total numbers and yearly growth rates</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2. New enrolments</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3. Countries of origin</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>4. Fields of study</b>	<b>11</b>
4.1 Universities of applied sciences	11
4.2 Research universities	12
<b>5. Study programmes</b>	<b>13</b>
5.1 Universities of applied sciences	13
5.2 Research universities	13
<b>6. Dutch higher education institutions</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>7. Regional differences</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>8. Countries with a Neso</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>9. Language of instruction at research universities</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>23</b>

## Main findings/executive summary

In this annual report, we present data for the academic year 2020-21 on university students coming from abroad to study in the Netherlands for a full degree programme, also known as incoming degree student mobility. Our analysis of current trends and developments is based on data from the DUO register. What proportion of students in 2020-21 were international and how does this compare to previous years? Which countries did the international students come from? What did they study and where? Below we summarise our main findings – you can learn more about these (and other interesting results!) in the main body of the report.

- In 2020-21, there were **103,708 international degree students enrolled in Dutch public higher education. This is a 9.6% increase compared to 2019-20.** Some 12.7% of all higher education students in the Netherlands were international in 2020-21, up from 12.2% the previous year.
- **Bachelor's programmes at research universities (RU) remained the most popular amongst international students in absolute terms (40,851).** In 2020-21, 21.6% of all new enrolments on these programmes were international. International bachelor's students at universities of applied sciences (UAS) were the second largest group (29,863), although they accounted for only 6.3% of all UAS bachelor's students.
- Both for RU and UAS master's programmes, the shares of international students were much higher than at bachelor level. In 2020-21, **24.4% of all RU master's students (29,741) and 23.3% of UAS master's students were from abroad (3,253).** UAS master's programmes saw the percentage of international new enrolments increase from 26.1% in 2019-20 to 28.7% in 2020-21.
- The number of students from countries outside the European Economic Area (EEA) increased by 2,303 compared to 2019-20. Non-EEA students accounted for 26.7% of the international student population in 2020-21, slightly less than the previous year.
- In 2020-21, international students represented a total of 167 nationalities. **Germany is the country of origin with the greatest absolute growth in student numbers,** adding 1,562 students to total 24,569 students enrolled in the Netherlands. Germany also remains the most common country of origin.
- **At universities of applied sciences, the field of Arts and Culture had the highest relative share of international students (35.0%).** In absolute numbers, Economics and Business had the most international students enrolled with 14,890.
- **At research universities, Liberal Arts and Sciences had the highest relative share of international students (41.5%).** In absolute numbers, the field of Social Science had the most international students enrolled with 16,060.
- The province of **South Holland had the most international students enrolled** in 2020-21 (25,903), followed by North Holland (18,227). Amsterdam was the city with the largest number of international degree students enrolled, with 18,227, accounting for 14.9% of all students in the city. **Maastricht had the largest share of international students in its entire student population at 55.5%.**
- Some 53% of RU bachelor's programmes were offered exclusively in Dutch, while 28% were offered in English only. The share of RU bachelor programmes offered in both languages increased from 15% in 2019-20 to 19% in 2020-21. Meanwhile, 77% of RU master's programmes were taught in English in 2020-21, compared to 14% in Dutch.

## Introduction

The academic year 2020-21 has been an eventful year for students worldwide. A year in which the majority of students attended classes from home due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In the Netherlands specifically, travel restrictions were imposed on students wishing to enter the country and on students wishing to travel back to their home country. Moreover, the EU-UK Withdrawal Agreement became fully operational on 1 January 2021. As a result, British students beginning their studies in 2021 are considered as non-EEA students and can no longer participate in the Erasmus+ programme.

In this annual report, we present data for the academic year 2020-21 on university students coming from abroad to study in the Netherlands for a full degree programme, officially known as incoming degree student mobility. Our overview of the current trends and developments is based on an analysis of the DUO register data. The goal of this report is to inform the discussion on the internationalisation of Dutch higher education. We hope that it will help policymakers and other decision makers to arrive at evidence-based decisions.

In this year's report, we have only included numbers for degree mobility, meaning international students who are enrolled in full degree programmes at publicly-financed Dutch higher education institutions. We have not included numbers for credit mobility, meaning international students who come to the Netherlands for part of their study programme or for an internship. For the most recent available data on credit mobility within the Erasmus+ programme, see our [dashboard on Erasmus+ higher education student mobility](#).

The text and figures in this report provide a detailed analysis of the current situation and its most important developments. We offer additional information online, for example, data on specific countries and study programmes. You can check the facts and figures on the interactive dashboards, available at [www.nuffic.nl/facts-and-figures](http://www.nuffic.nl/facts-and-figures).

## 1. Total numbers and yearly growth rates

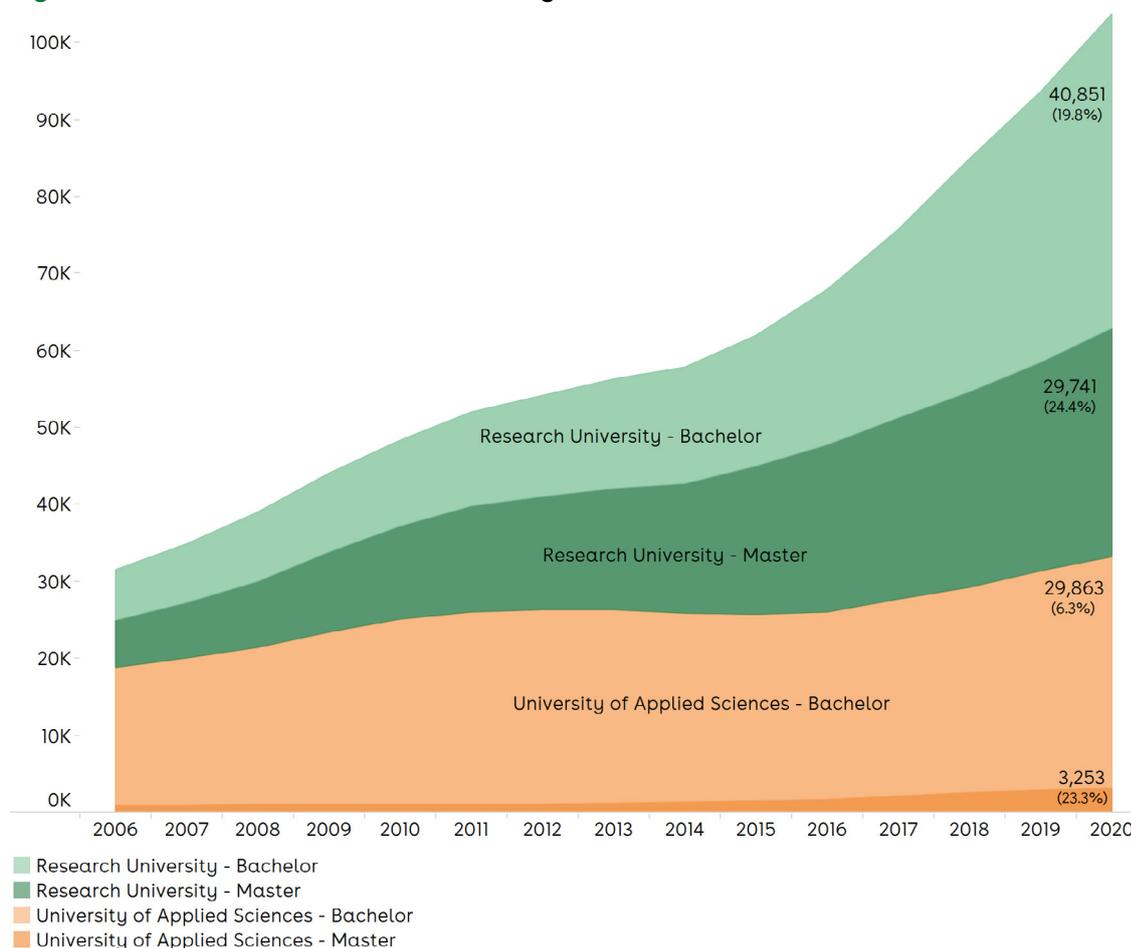
In this report we present data for the academic year 2020-21 only. We do not consider the number of enrolments in 2021-22 because the data from DUO concerning the academic year 2021-22 have not yet been confirmed.

In the academic year 2020-21, there were 103,708 international degree students enrolled in public higher education in the Netherlands. This amounts to a 9.6% increase relative to 2019-20. Some 12.7% of all higher education students were international in 2020-21, up slightly from 12.2% the previous academic year. This is equivalent to an absolute increase of 10,059 international degree students.

Compared to 2019-20, the number of international degree students in RU bachelor's programmes showed the fastest increase (see Figure 1). According to the DUO register, the percentage of all RU bachelor's students in the Netherlands who came from abroad stood at 19.8% in 2020-21, up from 18.2% in 2019-20. After international bachelor's students in RU programmes (40,851), those studying for a bachelor's degree at universities of applied sciences were the second largest group in absolute terms in 2020-21 (29,863). As in previous years, however, they only accounted for a small share of all UAS bachelor's students (6.3%).

As shown in Figure 1, master's programmes continued to see the largest relative share of international students in 2020-21; some 24.4% for research universities and 23.3% for universities of applied science. These percentages increased compared to the academic year 2019-20, from 24.3% and 21.7% respectively.

**Figure 1.** Total number of international degree students in the Netherlands over time



There were also 15,779 homecoming students enrolled in higher education in the Netherlands in 2020-21. Homecoming students are students who hold Dutch citizenship and have obtained secondary education outside of the Netherlands (ISCED 3). These students are more likely to speak Dutch, more likely to have a social network in the Netherlands, and they qualify for subsidies like the other Dutch students coming out of the Dutch secondary school system. Just as in our [2019 report](#), we do not count homecoming students as international students. This is in line with the definition of the Ministry of Education and of the Association of Universities in the Netherlands.

### **Current development 1: Call for government assistance to manage flow of international students**

Provisional figures released in November 2021 by the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (in Dutch: *Vereniging van Universiteiten*, VSNU) reveal that enrolments at Dutch research universities reached an all-time high in the academic year 2021-22. Nationwide, the RU student population now stands at 340,700, an increase of 4% relative to 2020-21. This is attributed to the growing number of international students choosing to study in the Netherlands. According to the VSNU, Dutch research universities now have a combined total of almost 80,000 international students. As of October 2021, 23% of all students enrolled at research universities came from abroad. RU bachelor's programmes currently have the largest share of international students, at 29% (up from 24% in the previous 2 years).

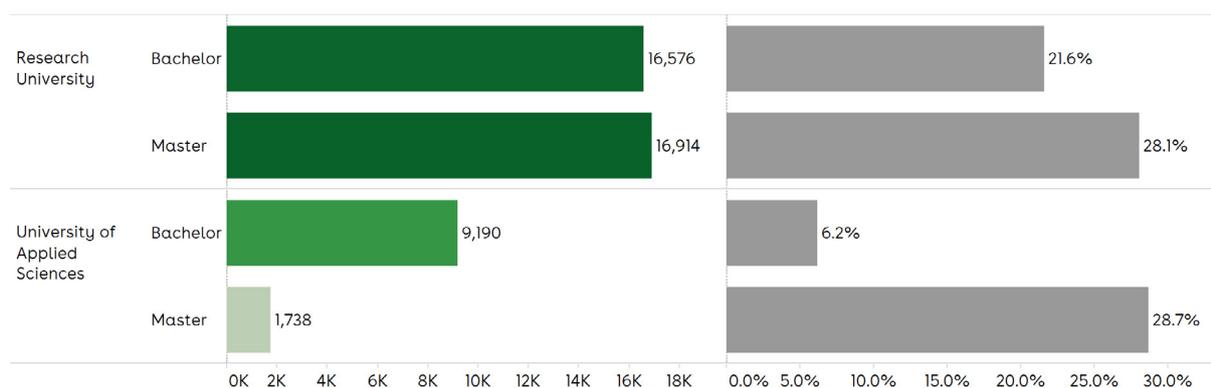
In a [statement](#) on 4<sup>th</sup> November 2021, the VSNU chair Pieter Duisenberg acknowledged the added value of internationalisation for universities, but raised concerns about their ability to accommodate the sustained growth in international enrolments without compromising education quality. Duisenberg reiterated a call for government assistance in managing the flow of international students, in the form of policy guidance (in Dutch: *'sturingsinstrumenten'*) for universities.

## **2. New enrolments**

Public institutions of higher education in the Netherlands received 44,418 new international enrolments in the academic year 2020-21. This is 2,575 more than were recorded in the academic year 2019-20. By new enrolments we mean degree students who had not previously enrolled on a given study programme, as opposed to those re-registering for a programme.

In terms of the share of new international students, UAS master's programmes have narrowly overtaken RU master's programmes. International students accounted for 28.7% of all new enrolments on UAS master's programmes this year (see Figure 2), up from 26.1% in the academic year 2019-20. The share of new international enrolments on RU master's programmes has slightly decreased in the same period, from 29.0% to 28.1%. When it comes to bachelor's programmes however, research universities continued to attract a larger share of new international students relative to universities of applied science. As shown in Figure 2, students from overseas accounted for 21.6% of all new enrolments on RU bachelor's programmes this year, compared to 6.2% of the new enrolments on UAS bachelor's programmes.

**Figure 2. Number and share of new international degree student enrolments, per type of institution, and type of education in 2020-21**



### Current development 2: COVID-19 impact

The COVID-19 crisis has a significant impact on internationalisation in higher education. The Dutch government announced the closure of higher education institutions on 12 March 2020. All educational activities involving direct contact were cancelled and institutions had to provide online alternatives for their teaching. Travel restrictions led to concerns amongst international students about being able to travel to the Netherlands to start their studies. In our 2020 study on how COVID-19 was affecting international students' plans to study in the Netherlands, we found that the majority (80%) of international students from Neso countries was still interested in studying in the Netherlands. We repeated the 2020 study in 2021 and found that a large majority (73%) of the respondents still considered it (very) likely that they would study at a Dutch higher education institution in the academic year 2021-2022. However, almost half of the respondents (45,6%) were (much) less inclined to apply to a Dutch higher institutions if their classes would mostly be online.

From 30 August 2021, social distancing was no longer required at secondary vocational schools (MBOs), universities of applied science (HBOs), and research universities, and as of the start of the academic year 2021-2022, students could attend on-site teaching (with some additional regulations to ensure safe and responsible on-site learning).

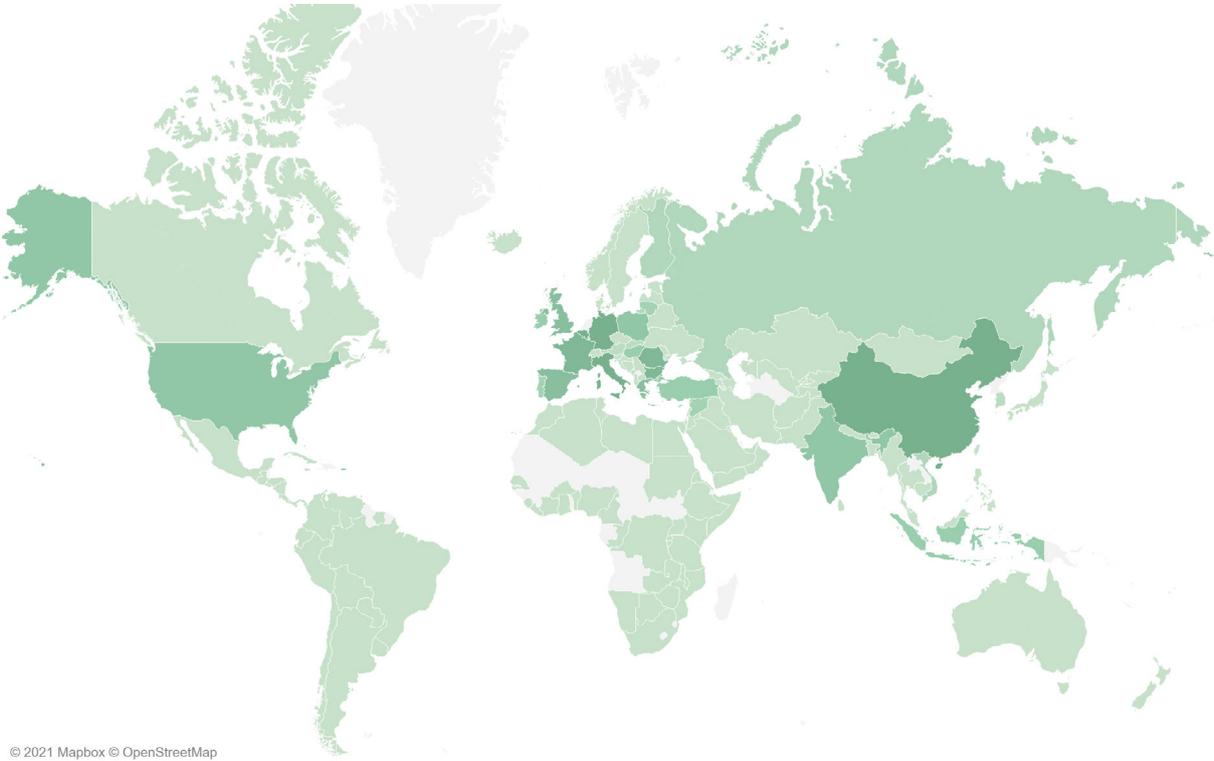
### 3. Countries of origin

#### Almost 3 quarters of international students from within the EEA

Students from 167 different countries studied in the Netherlands in the academic year 2020-21 (see Figure 3). In that year, 75,770 international students from countries within the European Economic Area (EEA) were enrolled in Dutch public higher education institutions (see Figure 4). The EEA comprises all 28 countries in the European Union (EU), plus Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland. As the UK had not yet completely withdrawn from the EU at the start of the academic year 2020-21, it is considered an EEA country for the purposes of this report (see Current Development 2). EEA students accounted for 73.3% of all international students, a slight increase on the previous year (72.9%). The absolute number of non-EEA students enrolled on accredited degree programmes in 2020-21 was

27,662 – 2,303 more than in the academic year 2019-20. In relative terms, however, the year 2020-21 saw a small decrease in students from countries outside the EEA as a percentage of all international students (26.7%, compared to 27.1% in 2019-20).

**Figure 3.** International degree students in the Netherlands, per country of origin in 2020-21



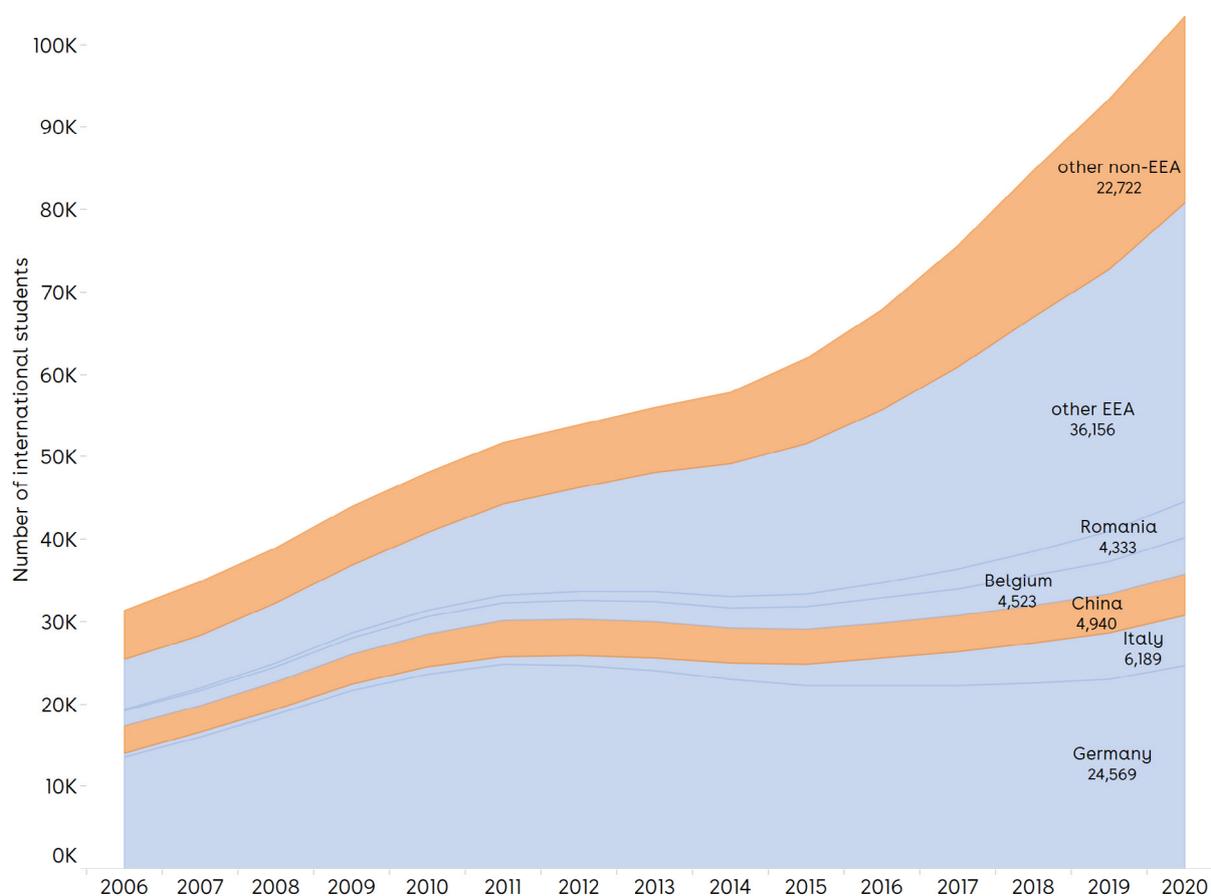
Note: The darker the shade of green, the more international students.

Master’s programmes remained a relatively more popular choice than bachelor’s programmes amongst students from outside the EEA. Figure 4 shows that about one third of the international students enrolled on RU and UAS master’s programmes were non-EEA in 2020-21. These percentages were down slightly compared to the previous academic year. At the same time, there was a modest increase in the percentage of international bachelor’s students from non-EEA countries compared to 2019-20. In 2020-21, non-EEA students accounted for almost a quarter of international bachelor’s students, both at research universities and universities of applied sciences (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4.** International students in the Netherlands by institution type, degree, and nationality (EEA or non-EEA) in 2020-21 (in total numbers and in percentages)



**Figure 5. International degree students by country of origin (2006-07 to 2020-21)**



*Note: The top 5 countries of origin in 2020-21 are shown, the remaining countries are clustered by EEA or non-EEA countries.*

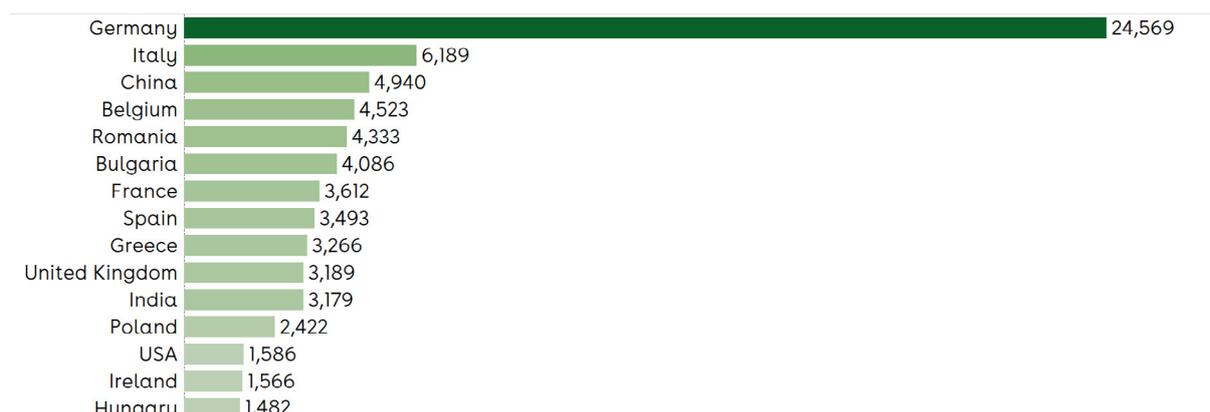
### **New enrolments from Germany increase more than three-fold**

As in previous years, Germany was the most common country of origin for international students by a considerable margin (see Figures 5, 6, and 7). There were 24,569 degree students from Germany at Dutch institutions of higher education in 2020-21. Furthermore, the academic year 2020-21 saw an unusually high number of new enrolments from Germany: 1,562 compared to 449 the year before. This was the largest absolute growth seen by any country of origin in 2020-21. Notably, 3 quarters of German degree students were enrolled on bachelor's programmes. This sets Germany apart from other common countries of origin like Italy and China, which had a more balanced distribution of bachelor's and master's students studying in the Netherlands.

### **Gap between China and Belgium narrows**

Ranked second only to Germany, Italy remained an important country of origin (6,189). With 612 new enrolments in 2020-21, the number of Italian degree students in the Netherlands increased by 11%. However, a look at the trends reveals a year-on-year decline in Italy's rate of growth since 2014 (see Figure 7). Figure 6 shows that international students from China were the third largest group (4,940, +252), although Belgium in 4<sup>th</sup> place is steadily closing the gap (4,523, +579). For every new degree student from China in the academic year 2020-21, there were more than 2 new enrolments from Belgium.

**Figure 6. Top 15 countries of origin of international students studying in the Netherlands**



### **Romania enters top 5 while the UK slips to 10<sup>th</sup> place**

Of the top 15 countries of origin for international degree students, Romania saw the largest percentage growth in the academic year 2020-21. Figure 7 shows that the number of international students from Romania grew by 18.1% compared to the previous year (4,333, +663), allowing it to beat Bulgaria (4,086, +409) to 5<sup>th</sup> place. The number of international students from the United Kingdom showed signs of recovery in 2020-21 after shrinking by 5.9% the previous year (likely a response to Brexit). Relative to other countries of origin, however, the UK continued to lose ground (3,189, +100). It was ranked 10<sup>th</sup> in 2020-21 (Figure 6), down from 5<sup>th</sup> most common country of origin 2 years before. France (+529) and Spain (+426) overtook the UK, rising to 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> position respectively. They also superseded India (-12), which dropped 4 places relative to the previous year. Meanwhile, the USA retained its position as the 13<sup>th</sup> most common country of origin (+142), as shown in Figure 6. Newcomers to the top 15 were Ireland (+343) and Hungary (+237) in 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> place respectively, pushing Indonesia (+34) and Lithuania (+81) out of the ranking.

For more detailed information about all countries of origin, see our [dashboard countries of origin](#), and see our [dashboard top 10 countries of origin over time](#) for a visualisation of the incoming mobility trends in the period 2006-07 to 2020-21.

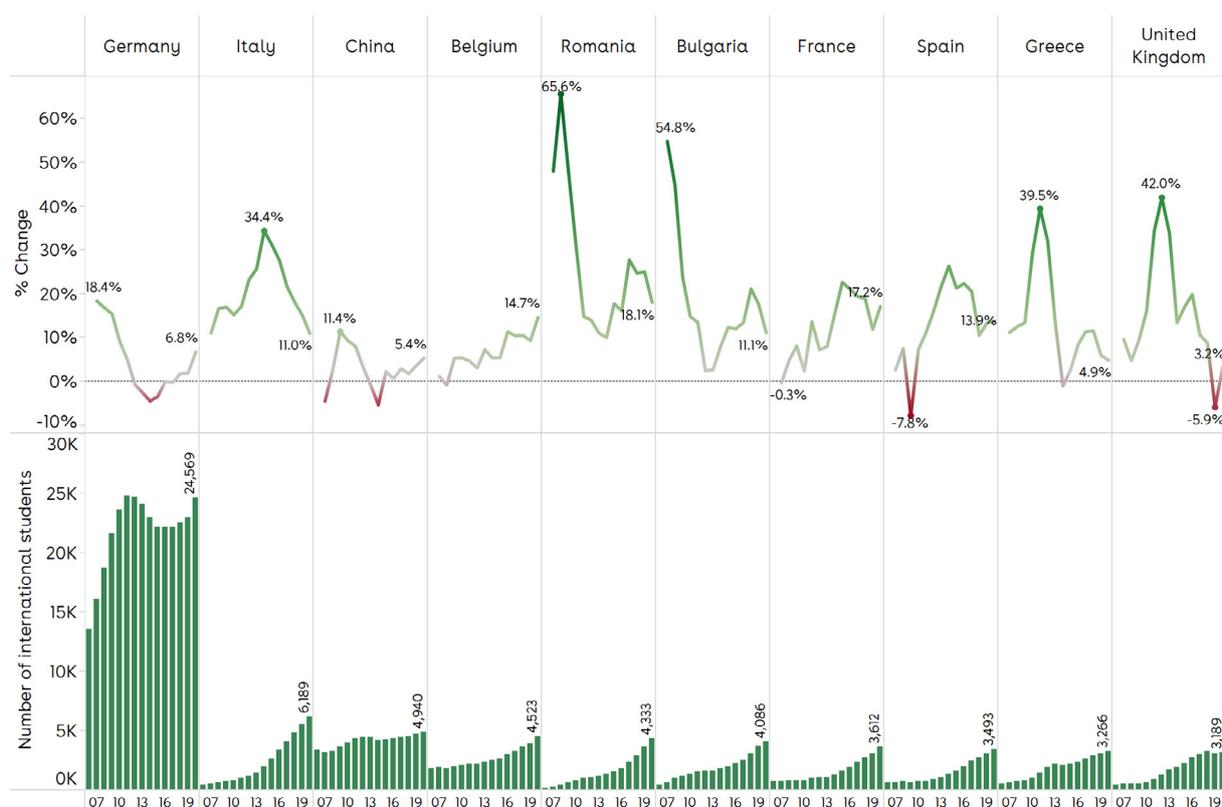
### **Current development 3: Brexit effects**

The United Kingdom left the European Union as of 1<sup>st</sup> January 2021, almost 5 years after voting in a referendum to leave the union. From 1<sup>st</sup> January 2021 onwards, British students are treated as non-EEA citizens and need to pay non-EEA tuition fees (In this report, British students are still considered as EEA students). Furthermore, the UK no longer participates in the Erasmus+ project. As a replacement for the Erasmus+ programme, the British government launched the Turing scheme, which allows students to study and do work placements abroad.

As a result of Brexit, EEA students are no longer paying the same UK tuition fees as British nationals. Research conducted in 2020 by Study.eu amongst EEA students who were planning to study in the United Kingdom showed that most students would choose the Netherlands as an alternative study destination if UK tuition fees were too high for them.

New data concerning the number of students enrolled in Dutch higher education in the academic year 2021-2022 has yet to show the exact consequences of Brexit for incoming degree mobility in the Netherlands.

**Figure 7. Trends in incoming degree mobility for current top 10 countries of origin (2006-07 to 2020-21)**



Note: In this figure you can see the trends in the number of international students per year for each of the current top 10 countries of origin in the period 2006-07 to 2020-21. The green bars show the absolute numbers per year and the lines show the year-by-year change (%). When a line is above 0%, it means that the number of international degree students from this country increased in that year compared to the year before. When a line is below 0%, on the other hand, the number of international degree students declined compared to the previous year.

## 4. Fields of study

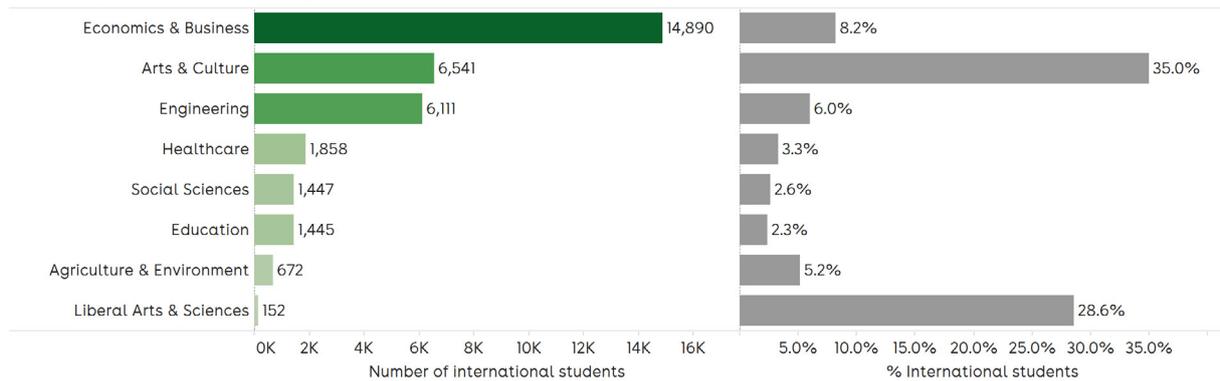
### 4.1 Universities of applied sciences

At universities of applied sciences, the field of Arts & Culture maintained the largest relative share of international degree students (35%) in the academic year 2020-21, amounting to 6,541 students in total (see Figure 8). Within this field, Music remains the most popular study programme for international students, who accounted for more than half of all UAS Music students (50.3%), up slightly from 49.3% in 2019-20 (see Figure 10).

The largest group of international students in absolute terms was in the field of Economics & Business (14,890; Figure 8). International Business once again proved the most popular study programme within Economics & Business, with 30.3% of its students coming from abroad. As a field, Engineering attracted the third largest number of international students in the academic year 2020-21 (6,111). The relative shares of international students in these fields were much smaller than in Arts & Culture, however: just 8.2% for Economics & Business and 6% for Engineering.

Figure 8 shows that international students were the least represented in the UAS fields of Education (2.3%), Social Sciences (2.6%), and Healthcare (3.3%). In the case of Education, concerns have previously been raised about the low numbers of students from abroad, given that aspiring teachers need to be equipped for diversity in their own future classrooms. There are signs, however, that the situation could be improving: for the second year in a row, the field of Education saw a modest growth in its international student population, both in relative and absolute terms.

**Figure 8. International degree students at universities of applied sciences (total number and share) per field of study (2020-21)**



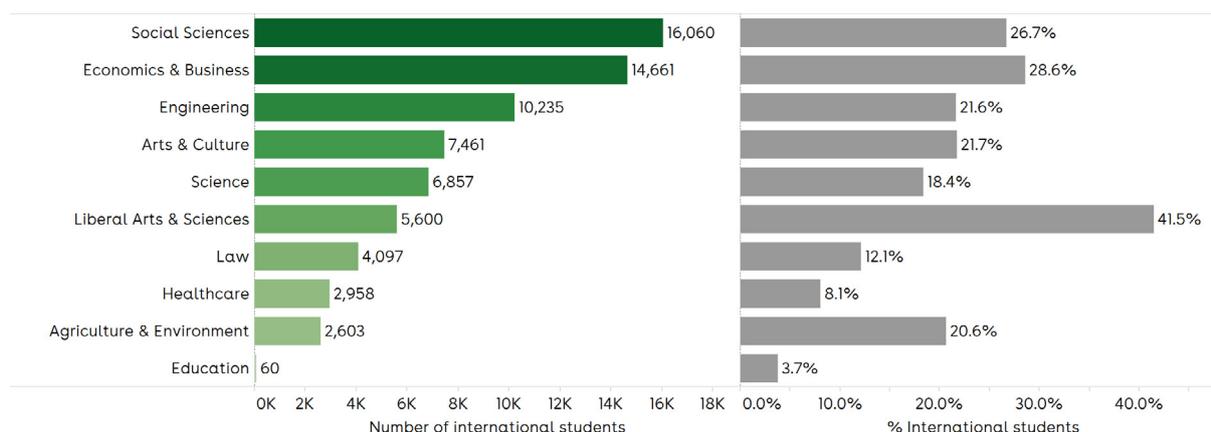
## 4.2 Research universities

In 2020-21, Social Sciences remained the most popular field of study for international degree students at research universities (16,060), followed by Economics & Business (14,661). Figure 9 shows that students from abroad accounted for 26.7% of the total student population in the Social Sciences, slightly less than in the field of Economics & Business (28.6%). Although rather small in absolute terms (5,600), the field with by far the largest share of international students was Liberal Arts & Sciences (41.5%). As in previous years, RU international students were the least represented in Education, Healthcare, and Law (Figure 9). This can in part be explained by the limited availability of English-language programmes in these fields, especially at bachelor level (see Section 9).

The field of Social Sciences also saw the most substantial growth in its international student population compared to the year before (+2,109), followed by Economics & Business (+1,764). All RU fields of study increased their relative share of international students in the academic year 2020-21, except for Agriculture & Environment and Education, which are down slightly on the year before.

For more detailed information about all fields of study, see our [dashboard fields of study](#).

**Figure 9.** International degree students at research universities (total number and share) per field of study (2020-21)

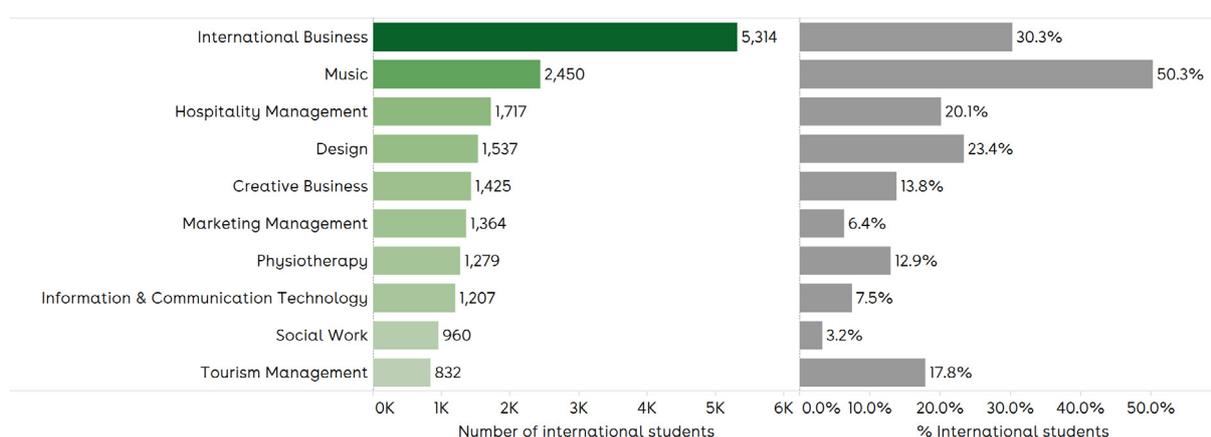


## 5. Study programmes

### 5.1 Universities of applied sciences

The ranking of the top 10 most popular UAS study programmes for international degree students (see Figure 10) has remained stable since 2019-20. Of these, all programmes except Hospitality Management, Social Work, and Tourism Management have observed growth in international student numbers compared to the previous academic year. The UAS study programmes with the largest absolute increases were Information & Communication Technology (+209) and Design (+198).

**Figure 10.** Top 10 study programmes among international degree students at universities of applied sciences (2020-21)



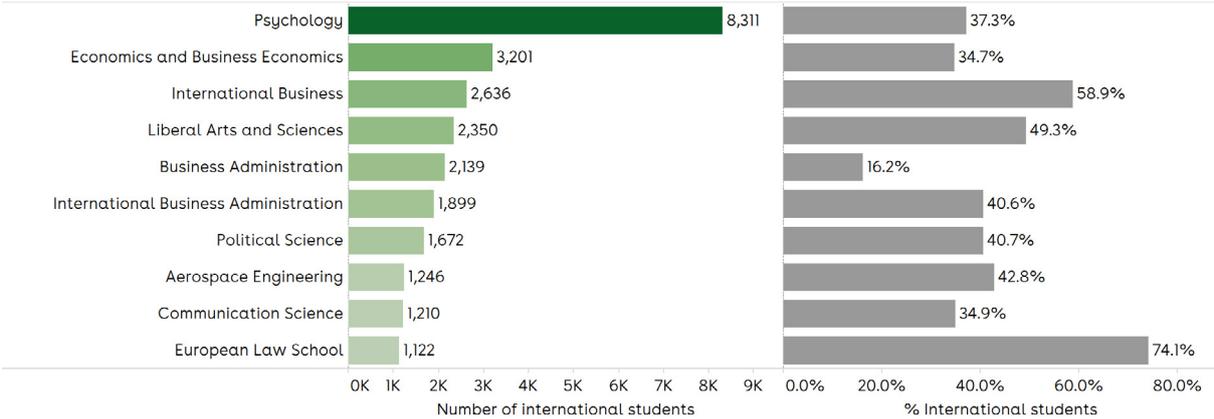
### 5.2 Research universities

At the research universities, Psychology leads the way by a considerable margin in terms of the number of degree students it attracts from abroad (see Figure 11). There were 8,311 international students studying Psychology in the academic year 2020-21. This amounted to 37.3% of all enrolled Psychology students. Due to the content of these programmes, it is not surprising that European Law School and International Business had the largest shares of

international students (74.1% and 58.9% respectively; Figure 11). Although still small in absolute terms, the relative share of international students studying European Law has increased sharply relative to the academic year 2019-20 (+14.9%).

For more detailed information about all study programmes, see our [dashboard fields of study](#).

**Figure 11. Top 10 study programmes among international degree students at research universities (2020-21)**



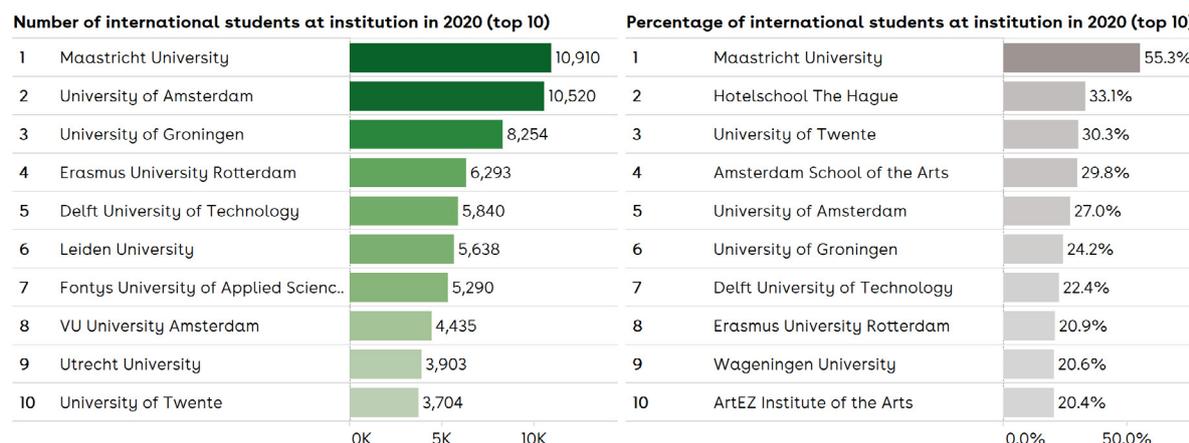
### 6. Dutch higher education institutions

There is considerable variety in both the total number and share of international degree students across the different Dutch higher education institutions (see Figures 12 and 13). Below, we highlight the most important findings.

#### Maastricht University: Research university with the highest number and share of international students

Maastricht University (UM) stands out as the institution with by far the most international students and the highest proportion of international students among all Dutch universities. Maastricht University had 10,910 international students in 2020-21, making up 55.3% of its student body (Figure 12). Amongst the international students at UM, those from nearby Germany (38%) and Belgium (14.8%) form the largest groups, together accounting for about 53% of all internationals. Maastricht University also hosts considerable numbers of students from Italy, France, Spain, and Poland.

**Figure 12. International degree students in Dutch higher education, top 10 institutions (2020-21)**



*Note: For the sake of comparison, we have excluded institutions that have fewer than 2,000 students enrolled for this figure.*

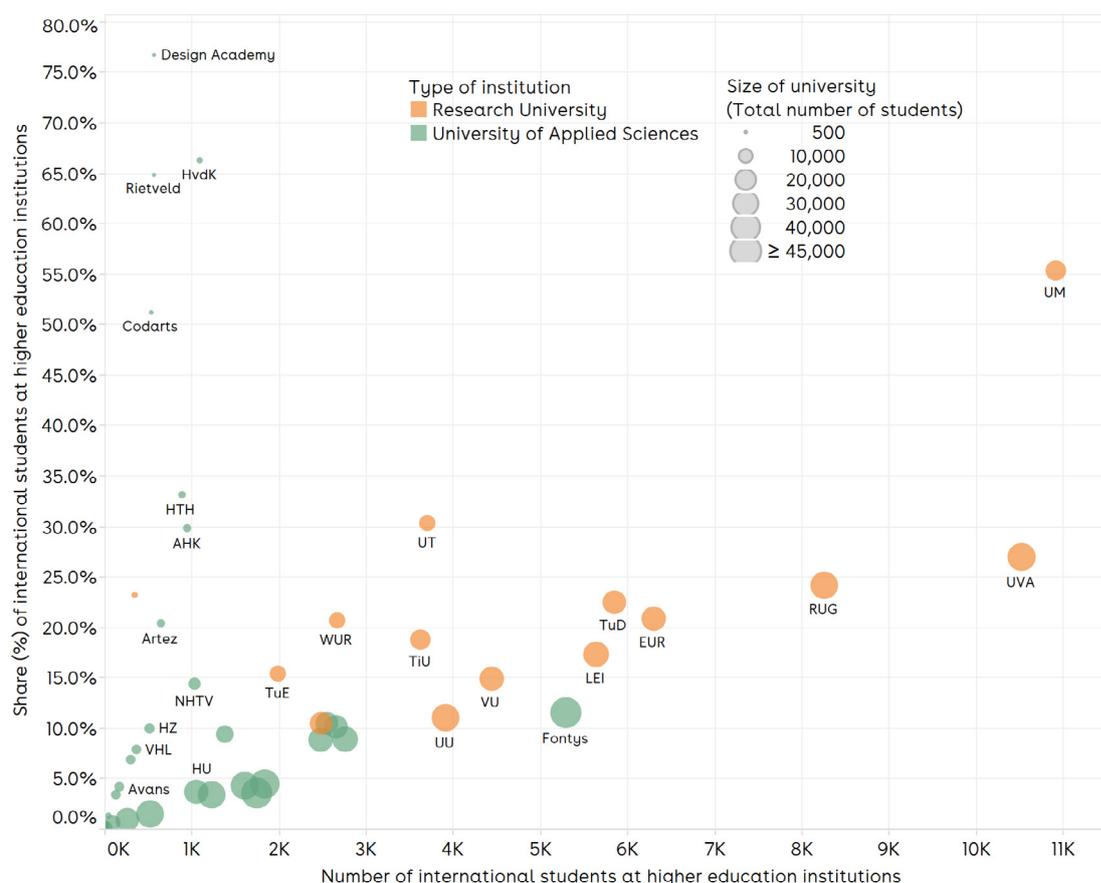
#### **4TU: Large shares of international students**

The technical research universities in Delft (TuD), Twente (UT), and Eindhoven (TuE), along with Wageningen University (WUR) are the 4 specialised technical or agricultural universities commonly jointly referred to as the 4TU. They attract relatively large shares of international graduate students, especially at master's level. The total number of international master's students at these institutions has more than quadrupled since 2006-07, from around 3,100 to almost 14,200 students in 2020-21. Of the 4TU, the share of international students grew most in Eindhoven over the last 2 years, increasing from 13.8% in 2019-20 to 15.4% in 2020-21. This makes Eindhoven the institution with the 13<sup>th</sup> largest share of incoming degree students. At 3<sup>rd</sup> on the list, Twente ranks the highest among the 4TU, with 30.3% international students. The overall share of international students at Delft and Wageningen is around 21%, putting them in 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> place respectively.

#### **International classrooms at universities of applied sciences specialising in fine arts**

As Figure 13 shows, universities of applied sciences specialising in fine arts have strikingly international student populations. In fact, all universities of applied sciences where more than half of the student body is international are small fine art institutes (i.e., less than 2,000 students enrolled in 2020-21). These are namely Design Academy (76.7%), University of the Arts The Hague (HvdK; 66.2%), Gerrit Rietveld Academie (64.9%), and Codarts (51.2%). Larger institutions specialising in fine arts also have considerable shares of international students, such as Amsterdam School of the Arts (AHK; 29.8%) and ArtEZ (20.4%).

**Figure 13. Absolute number and relative share of international degree students per university (2020-21)**



### Research universities: Remarkable growth in international enrolments over the past ten years

The University of Amsterdam, Leiden University, VU Amsterdam, the University of Groningen, and Erasmus University Rotterdam stand out as research universities that have seen remarkable growth in international student enrolment over the last 10 years. In 2010-11, the share of international students at these universities was between 4% and 10%, totalling fewer than 2,200 each. By 2020-21, the number of international students at each institution had increased by at least 233% compared to 2010-11. The University of Amsterdam showed the highest increase (429%). The share of international students at each university is also much larger than in 2010-11, ranging from 14.9% (VU Amsterdam) to 27% (University of Amsterdam). The other large research universities in the Netherlands (i.e., at least 2,000 students enrolled) had between 10.5% and 55.3% international degree students in 2020-21.

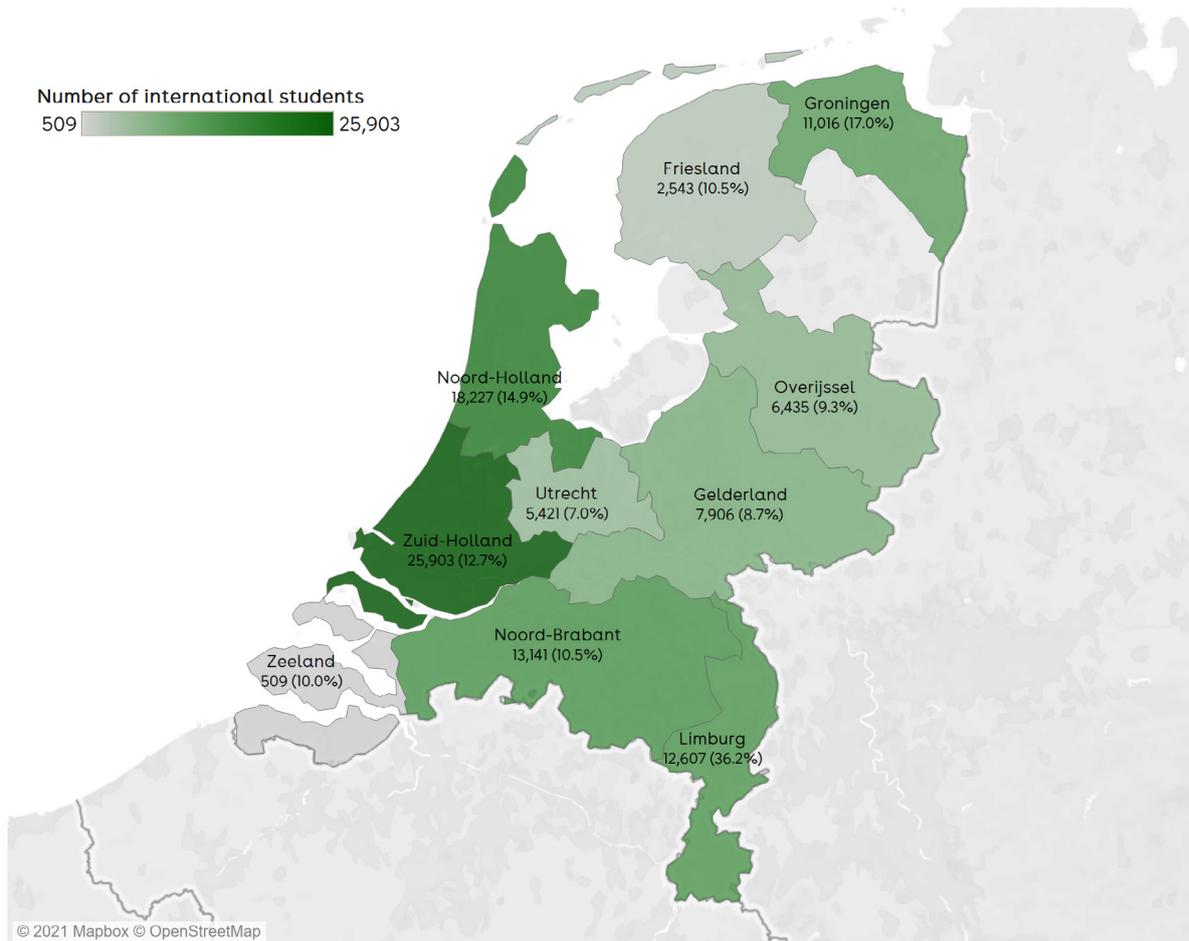
For more detailed information about each institution, see our [dashboard focused on regions and universities](#).

## 7. Regional differences

Degree students coming from abroad show very distinct regional preferences in terms of where they enrol. At a provincial level, South Holland has the most international students enrolled, with 25,903 in 2020, followed by North Holland (18,227; see Figure 14). (Note that these numbers represent the province in which students are enrolled, and not where they live. The place of

enrolment is based on the official main location of each institution according to DUO.) In relative terms, however, Limburg has the highest percentage of international students enrolled at its higher education institutions, with 36.2%, followed by Groningen (17%).

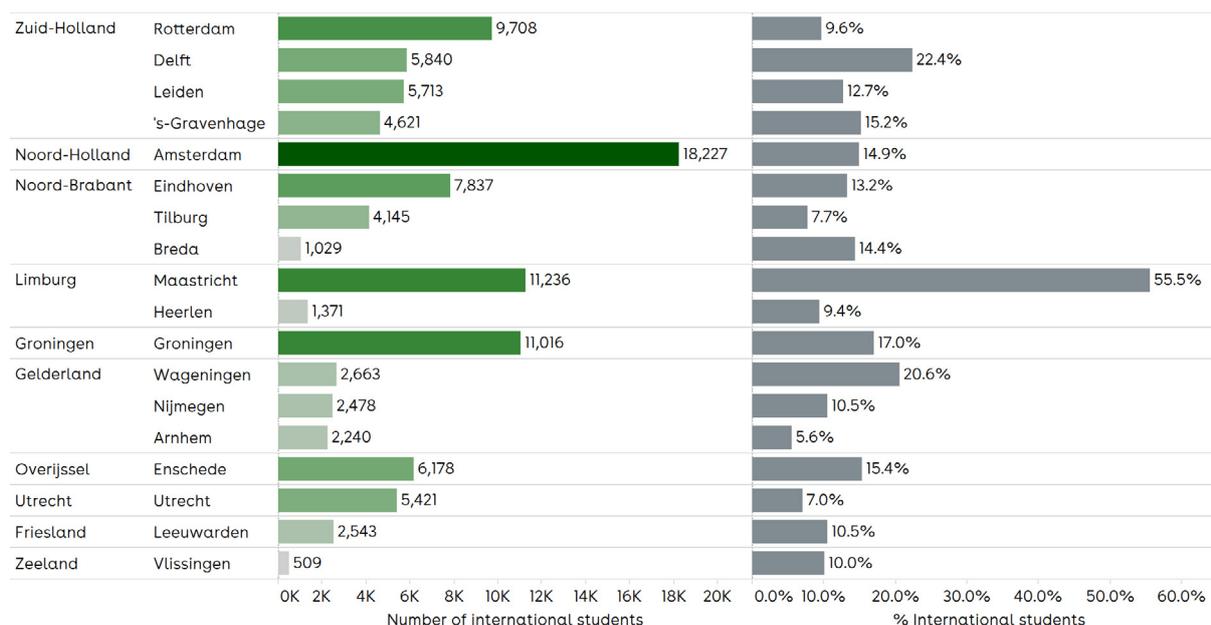
**Figure 14.** Total number and share of international students studying at Dutch higher education institutions per province



At a municipal level, Amsterdam is the city with the most international degree students enrolled (18,227); however, this group accounts for 'just' 14.9% of all students in Amsterdam (see Figure 15). Maastricht has the largest share of internationals, at 55.5% of its entire student population (11,236), followed by Delft with 22.4% (5,840).

For more detailed information about the provinces and municipalities, see our [dashboard focused on regions and universities](#).

**Figure 15. International students per province and city, location of study programme (2020-21)**



Note: Only cities with more than 500 international students are included in this visual.

## 8. Countries with a Neso

In the academic year 2020-21, the 9 countries in which a Netherlands Education Support Office (Neso) is located had 14,098 of their citizens enrolled as international degree students at publicly-financed Dutch higher education institutions. This equates to a 2.5-fold increase since 2006-07 (see Figure 16). Relative to the academic year 2019-20, the number of international students from Neso countries grew by 3.8% in 2020-21. As Figure 16 shows, however, this was smaller than the increase observed in students coming from EEA countries (11.3%) and from non-EEA countries without a Neso (15.1%).

Almost half (46.8%) of the students from Neso countries who were enrolled in Dutch higher education in 2020-21 followed a master's programme. This proportion is large compared to students from EEA countries (29.2%) and students from non-EEA countries without a Neso (30.9%).

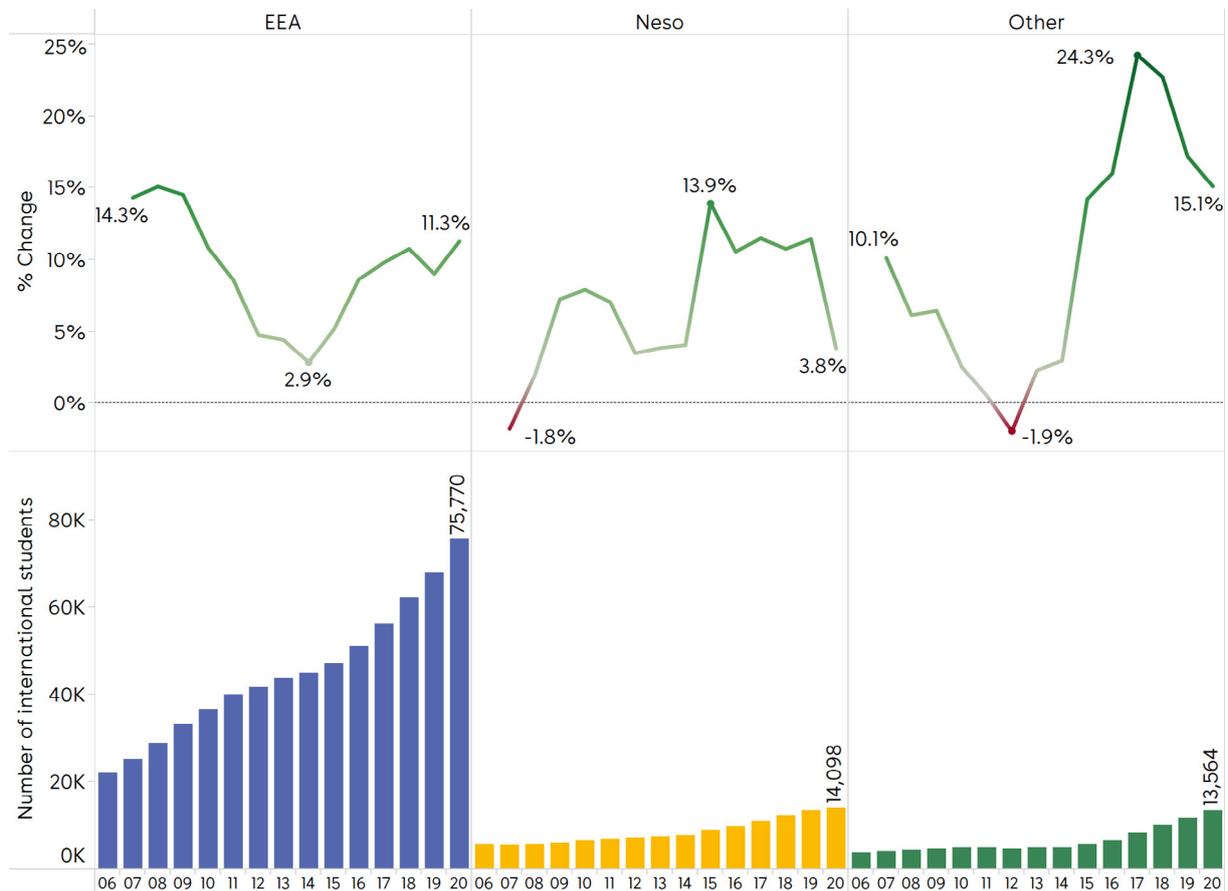
Students from countries with a Neso were mostly enrolled at research universities (74.9%), more so than their counterparts from non-Neso countries (67%). However, students from countries with a Neso do not form a homogeneous group when it comes to institution type. India (87.7%), China (84.5%), and Mexico (74.4%) have the top 3 largest shares of students attending research universities. Students from Vietnam, on the other hand, are mostly enrolled at universities of applied sciences (only 40.5% are enrolled at a research university).

### Neso offices

Nuffic Netherlands Education Support Offices (Nuffic Neso's) provide information on international courses, education and training programmes in the Netherlands. They organise pre-departure briefings for students preparing to pursue a bachelor's, master's, or PhD degree (or a short course) in the Netherlands. We have Neso's in nine countries worldwide: Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Russia, South Africa, South Korea, and Vietnam.

South Africa (57.8%) and South Korea (59.7%) also saw relatively small shares of their students enrolled at research universities. For more detailed information per country, see our [dashboard focused on Neso countries](#).

**Figure 16.** Number of international students in the Netherlands from EEA countries, countries with a Neso, and remaining countries (2006-07 to 2020-21)



*Note: In this figure you can see the trends in the number of international students per year for the 3 groups of countries (EEA, Neso, other countries) in the period from 2006-07 to 2020-21. The bars show the absolute numbers per year and the lines show the year-by-year change (%). When the line is above 0%, this means that the number of international students increased in that year compared to the year before. When the line is below 0%, on the other hand, the number of international students declined compared to the previous year.*

As Table 1 shows, the Neso country with the largest absolute increase compared to 2019-20 was China, with an extra 252 students (an increase of 5.4%), followed by Russia with an extra 151 students (+14.4%). China remains the largest country of origin with a Neso by a considerable margin. The Neso country with the largest relative increase compared to 2019-20 was South Africa (+17.0%; 40 extra students). Mexico (-4.6%) and India (-0.4%) are the only Neso countries that experienced a decline. All other countries sent an extra 15 to 45 students to the Netherlands in 2020-21 compared to the previous academic year.

**Table 1. International degree students from countries with a Neso, from 2006-07 to 2020-21**

Country	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
China	3,345	3,196	3,279	3,654	3,996	4,318	4,461	4,424	4,189	4,285	4,314	4,441	4,522	4,688	4,940
India	230	247	294	372	465	493	531	665	898	1,284	1,498	1,998	2,603	3,191	3,179
Indonesia	922	968	905	847	806	862	864	878	1,006	1,194	1,497	1,485	1,398	1,418	1,452
Vietnam	317	245	237	237	242	249	237	256	268	362	487	736	944	1,202	1,247
Russia	282	285	322	337	354	401	436	502	588	675	678	746	869	1,050	1,201
South Korea	268	267	271	266	271	256	253	286	310	412	584	740	934	1,044	1,059
Mexico	130	160	160	180	217	235	265	288	303	385	439	431	415	413	394
Brazil	83	111	113	111	121	120	122	135	174	221	239	276	307	336	351
South Africa	61	59	65	52	64	64	74	89	93	102	127	145	190	235	275
Grand Total	5,638	5,538	5,646	6,056	6,536	6,998	7,243	7,523	7,829	8,920	9,863	10,998	12,182	13,577	14,098

#### Current development 4: Phase-out and termination of Neso network

As announced in September 2020, the network of Nuffic Neso offices will be phased out and terminated over the coming years. The precise timing of the planned termination differs per office. This move is in line with the government's response to the Interdepartmental Policy Survey on the Internationalisation of (higher) education, namely the decision by the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science to phase out subsidies for the Neso network, ending them altogether by 1<sup>st</sup> January 2024.

Neso Turkey closed in December 2020. Neso Brazil, Neso China, and Neso Mexico are scheduled to close by 31<sup>st</sup> December 2021. The remaining offices will follow until all are closed by 31<sup>st</sup> December 2023. The phase-out of the Neso offices is accompanied by an intensification of the Dutch government's diplomatic network in the field of education and science.

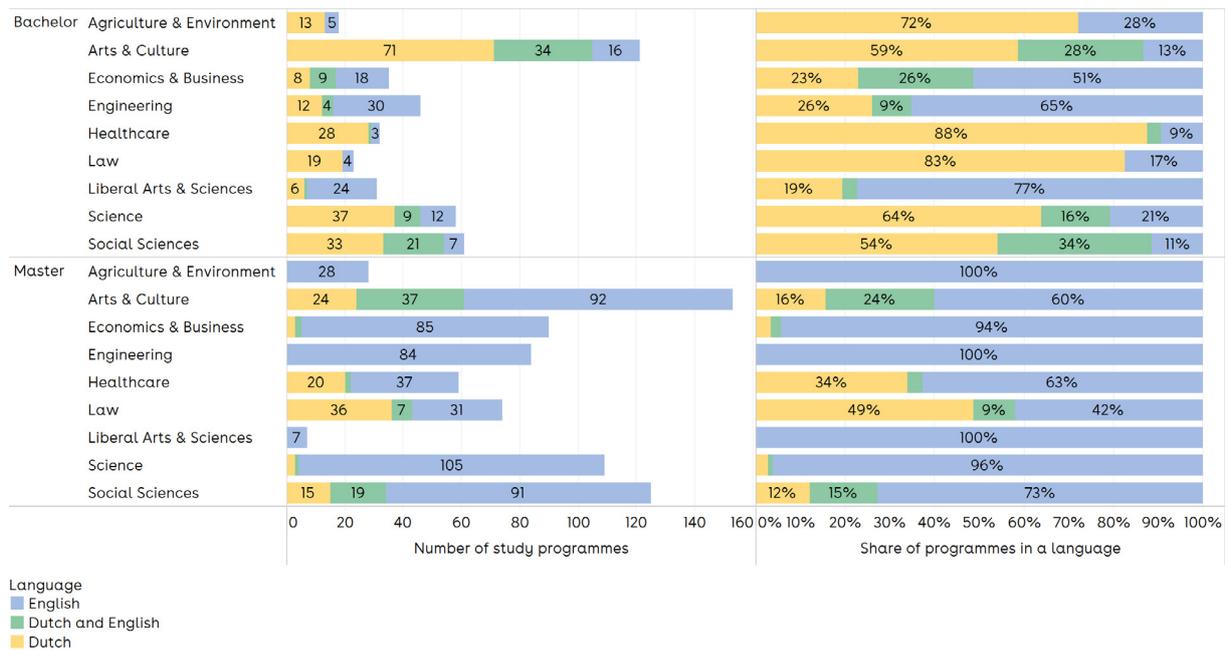
For each Neso office, a transition plan is being developed by the relevant ministries, in collaboration with Nuffic and other stakeholders, including for any transfer of tasks to the diplomatic network. As supporting student mobility to and from these countries was one of the key responsibilities of the Neso offices, it is expected that their closure may affect incoming and outgoing student mobility flows.

## 9. Language of instruction at research universities

*Although the language in which degree programmes are taught is not centrally registered, the VSNU collects this information each year from research universities. Here we present the latest data for RU programmes only, as the equivalent information for universities of applied sciences is not available in up-to-date form.*

Just over half (53%) of the 425 unique bachelor's programmes at Dutch research universities in the academic year 2020-21 were taught exclusively in Dutch. The share of English-only programmes at bachelor level was 28%, while the remaining 19% were offered in both English and Dutch. Of the 729 research university master's programmes, the large majority (77%) were taught in English, compared to 14% in Dutch. A further 9% of RU master's programmes were offered in both languages (see Figure 17).

**Figure 17. Number and share of RU programmes offered in English, Dutch and multiple languages, per type of education and field of study (2020-21)**

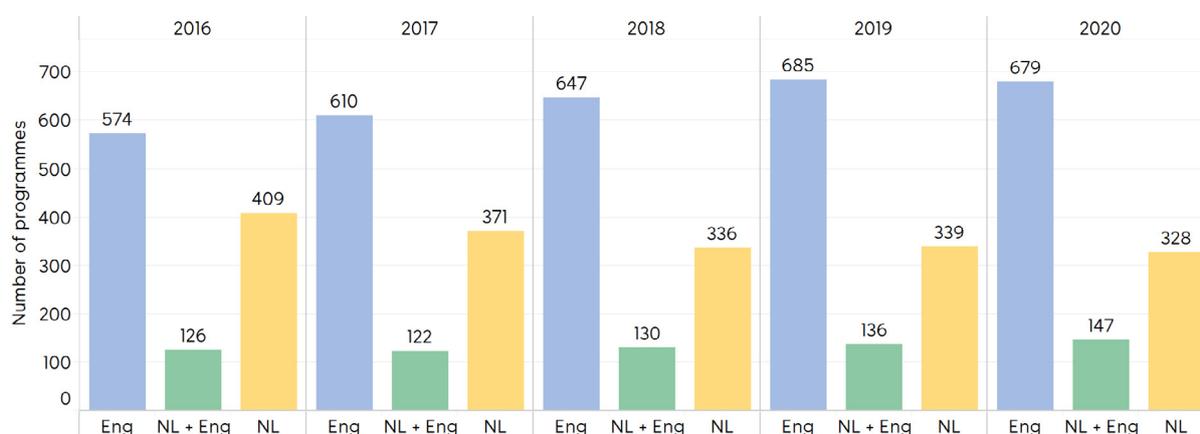


As expected based on previous years, the availability of English-language programmes varied widely according to the field of study, particularly at bachelor level. For example, English was the predominant teaching language for Engineering and Liberal Arts & Sciences, while RU bachelor's programmes in the fields of Healthcare and Law strongly favoured Dutch. There was more consistency at master's level, with English the most common language of instruction in all fields except Law.

The absolute number of English-language programmes offered at Dutch research universities was slightly lower in 2020-21 compared to the year before (down from 685 to 679; see Figure 17). At bachelor level, there was notable growth in programmes offered in multiple languages (up from 15% to 19%), while the share of courses taught exclusively in Dutch or English decreased by 3 and 1 percentage points respectively relative to 2019-20 (see Figure 18). In the fields of Science, Engineering, and Arts & Culture, for example, research universities reduced their English-only offer at bachelor level in favour of more courses taught in both English and Dutch. On the other hand, the availability of English-language bachelor programmes in the field of Liberal Arts & Sciences continued to expand, with English-taught courses now exceeding 3 quarters of the total. Similarly, an additional 4 bachelor programmes in Economics & Business were taught exclusively through English in 2020-21 (more than half of the total).

Overall, there was only a slight increase (1 percentage point) in the English-language offer for RU master's programmes, and little or no change compared to the previous academic year within each field of study.

**Figure 18.** Number of research university programmes offered in English, Dutch and multiple languages over the period 2016-2020



### Current development 5: Use of English in Dutch higher education

In recent years, there has been a large increase in English-taught or partially English-taught study programmes offered at Dutch higher education institutions. Currently, the Netherlands has the largest range of English-taught programmes in continental Europe. The rise of English-taught study programmes in the Netherlands has fuelled the debate on internationalisation in higher education. On the positive side, Dutch higher education has become much more accessible for international students. Because of the presence of international students in Dutch higher education, Dutch students can participate in an 'international classroom' where they can develop their intercultural skills. The challenges discussed in relation to English-taught study programmes include maintaining high-quality higher education in the Netherlands and preserving Dutch as a language of science. The Minister for Education, Culture and Science proposed a law to limit the anglicisation of Dutch higher education (**Wetsvoorstel taal en toegankelijkheid**), which would require higher education institutions to demonstrate the added value of their English-taught study programmes. This bill will be further discussed once a new cabinet is formed.

## Conclusion

The Netherlands remained a popular destination for international degree students in the academic year 2020-21, with record numbers enrolled at Dutch public higher education institutions. On average, 1 in every 8 students was from abroad. The substantial number of new international enrolments in 2020-21 suggests that incoming mobility was hardly disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which began earlier that year.

### **Research universities and bachelor's programmes still see the most international students**

Consistent with previous years, research universities (RU) attracted more international degree students than did universities of applied sciences (UAS), and bachelor's programmes were generally more popular than master's programmes. Almost a quarter of all master's students in the Netherlands came from abroad, however, a larger proportion than at bachelor level. With the majority of their master's programmes taught in English, Dutch research universities are an attractive option for international graduate students. Universities of applied science, too, are increasing their intake: relative to the year before, UAS master's programmes saw a boost in the proportion of new enrolments from abroad.

### **Substantial growth in already very high number of German students**

International degree students from countries within the European Economic Area (EEA) accounted for almost 3 quarters of the total in 2020-21, up slightly on the previous year. Germany remained the most important country of origin by a considerable margin, having added an unusually large number of new students relative to the year before. Other EEA countries with a significant presence included Italy, Belgium, and Romania, while China, India, and the USA were the most common countries of origin outside the EEA.

### **Most popular fields of study**

At universities of applied science, programmes in the field of Arts & Culture saw the highest percentage of students from abroad in 2020-21. In terms of total numbers, however, Economics & Business remained the most popular field of study for international students. At research universities, these titles were held by the fields of Liberal Arts & Sciences and Social Sciences respectively.

### **Regional disparities**

As expected, there are major regional disparities in the distribution of international degree students across the Netherlands. In the academic year 2020-21, the province with the most international students enrolled was South Holland, followed by North Holland. Amsterdam was home to more international students than any other city while as a university, Maastricht had the highest concentration of students from abroad, accounting for over half of its student population.

# Colophon

## Authors

Astrid Elfferich

Saoradh Favier

Florine Snethlage



This publication, with the exception of images and illustrations, is subject to the Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial 3.0 Unported Licence. Please visit [www.nuffic.nl/ccl](http://www.nuffic.nl/ccl) for the rules for reuse of this publication.



Nuffic Kortenaerkade 11 2518 AX The Hague  
PO Box 29777 2502 LT The Hague, The Netherlands  
Tel: +31 (0)70 4260 260 [www.nuffic.nl/en](http://www.nuffic.nl/en)