Incoming degree mobility in Dutch higher education 2021-22

Astrid Elfferich
Saoradh Favier
Florine Snethlage

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International degree students in the Netherlands 2021-22

How many international students are there in the Netherlands? What percentage is from EEA countries and what type of programme is the most popular?

Number and share increased

This academic year there are 115,068 international students in the Netherlands. That is 12% more than last year. 14% of all higher education students in the Netherlands were international, up from 13% the previous year.

About 3 in 4 international students is from European countries

72% of international students are from countries in the European Economic Area, slightly more than the previous year (+1 percentage point).

RU bachelor programmes most popular

Bachelor's programmes at research universities remain the most popular amongst international students. This group also showed the fastest absolute increase compared to the year before (+3.5k).

Top 3 countries of origin now only European

As in all previous years, Germany remains the most important country of origin by a considerable margin. Italy, Romania, China and Belgium make the top 5 complete. In total, international students represent 168 nationalities.

Brexit: sharp decline in number of UK students

Compared to last academic year, the number of students from the UK has decreased by almost a quarter. No other country in the top 100 countries of origin has shown such a large decline.

References

Source: DUO (1 cijfer ho), analysis: Nuffic
Main findings

In this annual report, we present data for the academic year 2021-22 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 2021-22 was 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 this report.

- In 2021-22, there were 115,068 international degree students enrolled in Dutch public higher education. This is a 12% increase compared to 2020-21.
- Some 14% of all higher education students in the Netherlands were international in 2021-22, up from 13% the previous year.
- Bachelor’s programmes at research universities (RU) remain the most popular amongst international students in absolute terms (47.1 thousand).
- The number of students from countries outside the European Economic Area (EEA) increased by 8% compared to 2020-21, but the number of EEA students increased faster (14% more than the previous year). Non-EEA students (including UK students) accounted for about 28% of the international student population in 2021-22, slightly less than in the previous year.
- In 2021-22, international students represented a total of 168 nationalities. Germany remains the most common country of origin, followed by Italy. **Romania is now the third most common country of origin, having grown by 30% to overtake China.** The number of international students from Poland also grew substantially, with 47% more Polish students enrolled than in 2020-21.
- Likely as a result of Brexit, **there were 24% fewer students from the UK enrolled at Dutch higher education institutions in 2021-22 compared to the year before.** No other country in the top 100 countries of origin has shown such a large decline in this period.
- The data suggest that **incoming mobility was hardly disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic.** Of the 163 countries of origin with international degree students in the Netherlands in 2019-20 (the academic year that started before the pandemic), only 27 countries had fewer international students in 2021-22.
- At Universities of applied sciences, the field of Language & Culture had the highest relative share of international students (36%). In absolute numbers, Economics had the most international students enrolled with 15.5 thousand.
- At RU, the Interdisciplinary programmes had the highest relative share of international students (46%). In absolute numbers, the field of Behavioural & Social Sciences had the most international students enrolled with 17.6 thousand.
- The province of South Holland had the most international students in 2021-22 (28.5 thousand), followed by North Holland (21.4 thousand). Amsterdam was the city with the largest number of international degree students, with 21.4 thousand, accounting for 17% of all students in the city. **Maastricht had the highest share of international students in its entire student population at 56%.**
- As in the previous year, 53% of RU bachelor’s programmes were offered exclusively in Dutch in 2021-22, while 28% were offered in English only. The remaining 19% were taught through both languages. Of all RU master’s programmes, 77% were taught in English, compared to 14% in Dutch.
Introduction

The academic year 2021-22 brought with it both old and new challenges, from the global coronavirus crisis, now entering its third year, to the armed conflict in Ukraine. Across the world, students are living through extraordinary and uncertain times.

In this annual report, we present data for the academic year 2021-22 on university students coming from abroad to study in the Netherlands for a full degree programme, officially known as incoming degree student mobility. Our analysis of the current trends is based on the latest DUO register data. The goal of this report is to inform the discussion on the internationalisation of Dutch higher education. We hope that the information will help policymakers and other decision makers to reach evidence-based decisions.

The scope of this report is 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 (e.g., an exchange) or an internship. For the most recent available data on credit mobility within the Erasmus+ programme, see our dashboard on Erasmus+ higher education student mobility.

In line with the definition used by the Ministry of Education and the Association of Universities in the Netherlands, we do not count homecoming students as international students. 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 qualify for subsidies like the other Dutch students coming out of the Dutch secondary school system. There were 16,837 homecoming students enrolled in higher education in the Netherlands in 2021-22.

Throughout the report we discuss the following current developments, which provide a broader national and global context for this year’s statistics on incoming degree student mobility.

■ The formation of a new governing coalition and its vision for higher education in the Netherlands.
■ The call from Dutch higher education institutions for policy guidance to manage the flow of international students.
■ Brexit: 2021-22 is the first full academic year since the United Kingdom formally completed its withdrawal from the European Union.
■ The ongoing impact of Covid-19 on students in the Netherlands.
■ The phase-out and termination of Nuffic’s global network of education support offices (Neso).

With respect to the rapidly-developing crisis in Ukraine, Dutch higher education institutions expect to see the number of student refugees increase in the coming months. In next year’s report we will be able to quantify this effect.

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 our interactive dashboards, available at www.nuffic.nl/facts-and-figures.
1. **Total numbers and yearly growth rates**

**Increased number and share of international degree students**
In the academic year 2021-22, there were 115,068 international degree students enrolled in public higher education in the Netherlands. This amounts to a 12.2% increase relative to 2020-21 and is equivalent to an absolute increase of 12,507 international degree students. Some 13.8% of all higher education students were international in 2021-22, up from 12.5% the previous academic year.

**RU bachelor’s programmes still the most popular amongst internationals, now followed by RU master’s programmes**
Compared to 2020-21, the number and share of international degree students in both types of degree (Bachelor and Master) has increased. This is also the case within both types of institutions (research universities (RU) and universities of applied sciences (UAS), see Figure 1). RU bachelor’s programmes showed the fastest absolute increase compared to the year before (+3,407). Moreover, RU bachelor’s programmes remained the most popular option for international students in absolute terms (47,110). For the first time in history, the number of international RU master’s students (33,101) has surpassed the number of those studying for a bachelor’s degree at UAS (31,355), making it the second largest category.

Master’s programmes continued to see the largest relative shares of international students in 2021-22; some 25.9% for research universities and 23.3% for universities of applied science. These percentages increased relative to the academic year 2020-21, from 24.3% and 23.1% respectively.

**UAS still have relatively small shares of international bachelor’s students**
In contrast to the share of international bachelor’s students in RU (22%), the percentage of international bachelor’s students in UAS remained relatively small at 6.6% in 2021-22. In fact, this has been the case for the past 15 years. Whereas the other 3 categories saw their share of international students increase from 5-8% in 2006-07 to 22-26% in 2021-22, the share of international bachelor’s students at UAS has remained stable at 5-6%.

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**Current development 1: Cabinet formation 2021-2022**
After nine months of negotiations, a new Dutch cabinet presented their coalition agreement on 15th December 2021. The governing coalition consists of VVD (People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy), D66 (Democrats ‘66), CDA (Christian Democratic Alliance), and CU (Christian Union). The title of their coalition agreement for 2021-2025 reads: ‘Looking out for each other, looking ahead to the future’. The coalition agreement emphasises the themes of climate, education, housing, and safety. The cabinet has put forward a number of policies designed to make higher education more accessible. The basic grant for all students will be reintroduced, every bachelor’s degree graduate will get the opportunity to enrol in a subsequent master’s degree course at the same institution, and students who do not obtain the required number of credits for their binding study advice (BSA) in their first year will get the opportunity to try again in their second year. The cabinet is aware of the increasing number of incoming degree students and in their coalition agreement they pay specific attention to offering policy guidance to manage the flow of international students.
Figure 1. Trends in incoming degree mobility per type of institution and type of degree (2006-07 to 2021-22)

Note: In this figure you can see the trends in the number of international students per year in the period 2006-07 to 2021-22. The bars show the absolute numbers per year and the lines show the year-on-year change (%). When a line is above 0%, it means that the number of international degree students in this category increased 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.

2. New enrolments

More than 50 thousand new international enrolments, accounting for almost 1 in 5 of all new enrolments

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. Public institutions of higher education in the Netherlands received 50,906 new international enrolments in the academic year 2021-22, equal to 18.2% of the total number of new enrolments (Dutch and international enrolments combined). This is 6,872 more than were recorded in the academic year 2020-21.

In terms of the absolute number of new international degree students, RU bachelor’s programmes (19,810, +3,202) this year narrowly overtook RU master’s programmes (19,382, +2,526). The number of new international enrolments on UAS programmes also increased relative to 2020-21 (bachelor’s programmes: 9,894, +957, master’s programmes: 1,820, +87).
Regarding the relative share of new international enrolments, RU master’s programmes surpassed UAS master’s programmes this year. International students accounted for 31.6% of all new enrolments on RU master’s programmes this year (see Figure 2), up from 28% in the academic year 2020-21. The share of new international enrolments on UAS master’s programmes has slightly decreased in the same period, from 28.6% to 26.6%. When it comes to bachelor’s programmes, research universities continued to attract a larger share of new international students relative to universities of applied sciences. As shown in Figure 2, international students accounted for 26.1% of all new enrolments on RU bachelor’s programmes this year, compared to 7.3% 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 degree in 2021-22

Current development 2: Call for policy guidance to manage flow of international students

Dutch research universities are expanding every year, partly due to the increasing number of incoming international degree students. Provisional figures released in November 2021 by the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (in Dutch: Universiteiten van Nederland, UNL) revealed that enrolments for the academic year 2021-22 at Dutch research universities reached an all-time high. The data from the DUO register validate these provisional figures. The number and share of international degree students have increased at both research universities and universities of applied sciences.

According to UNL, the growing number of enrolled students puts pressure on the quality of Dutch higher education and the workload for Dutch higher education institutions. UNL president Pieter Duisenberg expects the year-on-year growth in student enrolments to continue. He emphasizes that internationalisation contributes to the quality of Dutch education, but calls on the government to provide policy guidance to help manage the flow of international students.

In the coalition agreement of the new cabinet, specific attention is paid to offering policy guidance to manage the flow of international students (see Current development 1).
3. Countries of origin

Faster growth from EEA countries

International degree students from 168 different countries were studying in the Netherlands in the academic year 2021-22, compared to 167 the year before. From countries within the European Economic Area (EEA), the total number of international degree students this year was 82,794. The EEA comprises all 27 countries in the European Union (EU), plus Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland. This group no longer includes the United Kingdom (see Current development 3). EEA students (excluding UK students) accounted for 72.1% of all international students in 2021-22, a slightly larger share than the year before (70.9%).

The absolute number of non-EEA students enrolled on accredited degree programmes this year was 32,037, accounting for 27.9% of the international student population. Although both groups saw year-on-year growth in absolute terms, the number of international students from within the EEA increased by 14% in 2021-22, compared to a 7.6% increase in students from outside the EEA (including UK students) in the same period. The slower rate of growth of the non-EEA student population this year might partly be explained by the reduced flow of students from the UK, which we discuss later in this section.

Current development 3: Brexit effects

The United Kingdom left the European Union on 1st January 2021. As a result of Brexit, British students are now considered non-EEA citizens. Consequently, students from the United Kingdom need to pay non-EEA fees to study in the Netherlands as of the academic year 2021-22. Additionally, EEA students have lost their home fee status in the United Kingdom.

The DUO register data for the academic 2021-22 year show the likely impact of Brexit on Dutch higher education. Compared to the academic year 2020-21, the number of UK students enrolled at Dutch higher education institutions in 2021-2022 decreased by 24.3%.

In our 2021 study on how COVID-19 was affecting international students’ plans to study in the Netherlands, we found that just over a third of the 54 prospective students from non-EEA countries who were also considering the UK as a destination for their studies were (much) more likely to choose the Netherlands as a result of Brexit. Among the 526 survey participants, only 10 respondents from EEA countries indicated that the United Kingdom would be an alternative destination for their studies in Europe. We found that 8 of these 10 students were (much) more likely to choose the Netherlands as the destination for their studies as a result of Brexit.
Current development 4: Covid-19 impact

COVID-19 has led to another turbulent academic year in the Netherlands. The Dutch academic year 2021-22 began on-site at universities of applied sciences (in Dutch: hbo), and research universities (in Dutch: wo). Social distancing restrictions were lifted. However, higher education institutions had to close their doors again from 18th December 2021 until 14th January 2022 due to the hard lockdown announced by Prime Minister Mark Rutte. In January 2022, the measures were eased once again and students in the Netherlands could attend on-site teaching at higher education institutions.

In our 2020 and 2021 studies on how COVID-19 was affecting the plans of prospective international students to study in the Netherlands, we found that most students were still (very) likely to start their studies at a Dutch higher education institution in the upcoming academic year. The data from the DUO register also indicate that incoming mobility was hardly disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Of the 163 countries of origin with international degree students in the Netherlands in 2019-20 (the academic year that began before the pandemic), only 27 countries had fewer students in the Netherlands in 2021-22 (see Figure 4). For all other countries, the numbers have remained stable or increased since 2019-20. Moreover, the number of international students from these 163 countries of origin has increased on average by 37% per country in this 2-year period.
For privacy reasons, only data from countries with at least 5 international students in 2019-20 and in 2021-22 are shown. It should further be noted that, in general, countries of origin with more than a 2-fold increase between 2019 and 2021 are not countries that send large numbers of international students to the Netherlands. For example, Mongolia sent 10 more students in 2021 than in 2019, equating to a 200% increase. The same goes for Sierra Leone (+100%, from 6 to 12 students) and Botswana (+100%, from 7 to 14 students). Bangladesh is the only real exception to this. In 2021 there were 399 students from this country, 260 more than in 2019 (+187%).

Smaller shares of non-EEA students
Master’s programmes remained a relatively more popular choice than bachelor’s programmes amongst students from outside the EEA. Figure 5 shows that about a third of the international students enrolled on RU and UAS master’s programmes in 2021-22 were non-EEA. Amongst all international bachelor’s students, about a quarter came from countries outside the EEA. When we compare these figures to 2020-21, we see a decrease in the relative share of non-EEA international students across all categories except UAS bachelor’s programmes. UAS master’s programmes saw their share of non-EEA degree students decrease the most, from 36.4% last year (including UK students) to 33.8% in 2021-22. This group also showed the least growth in absolute numbers compared with non-EEA students on bachelor’s programmes and RU master’s programmes. To allow for comparison between years, we consider students from the UK as non-EEA students both in 2020-21 and 2021-22.
Figure 5. International students in the Netherlands by institution type, degree, and nationality (EEA or non-EEA) in 2021-22 (in total numbers and in percentages)

Note: the UK is included in the group of non-EEA countries

Figure 6. International degree students by country of origin (2006-07 to 2021-22)

Note: The top 5 countries of origin in 2021-22 and the UK are shown, the remaining countries are clustered by EEA (blue) or non-EEA countries (orange)
Germany remains the most common country of origin for international students by a very wide margin (see Figures 6, 7, and 8). There were 24,534 German degree students enrolled at Dutch higher education institutions in 2021-22, 0.1% fewer than in the previous year (-17). As in 2020-21, Italy was the second most common country of origin for international students in 2021-22 (7,190). With almost a thousand new enrolments this year, the number of Italian degree students in the Netherlands increased by 16% relative to 2020-21 (Figure 8).

Only EEA countries in the top 3
For the first time ever, the top 3 most common countries of origin for international degree students are all within the EEA (Figures 3 and 7). Despite growing by 8.4% relative to last year, Chinese students (5,338, +414) were in 2021-22 outnumbered by students from Romania (5,648, +1,314). Romania now stands at 3rd place, having grown by 30.4% since 2020-21 (see Figure 8). Spain saw a similarly large increase (34.3%) in the number of degree students it sent to the Netherlands this year, becoming the 6th most common country of origin (4,607) and France (4,294) to 7th and 8th place respectively, while Greece maintained its position as 9th most common country of origin for international students (3,862). Notably, the number of international students from Poland grew by almost 50% in 2021-22, to 3,554 (+1,132). This was the largest increase shown by any country in the top 10 (Figure 8).

25% fewer students from the UK
In contrast to the growth shown by almost all other countries in Figure 8, the United Kingdom saw a dramatic fall in the number of degree students it sent to the Netherlands this year (2,372, -760). Compared to 2020-21, there were almost 25% fewer British students enrolled in Dutch higher education in 2021-22. This is likely an effect of the UK’s separation from the EU, which was completed in January 2021 (see Current Development 3). The UK was the 12th most common country of origin for international students in 2021-22 (Figure 7), having dropped 7 places since 2018-19.

The UK’s downward trajectory also fits with a wider trend in which non-EEA countries of origin are overtaken by their faster-growing EEA counterparts. India (3,363, +190) and the USA (I,508, -70), for example, showed little or no growth in 2021-22. Turkey (1,849, +623) was a notable exception to this, although in absolute terms it is still only about half the size of Poland in 10th place (Figure 7). China is the only non-EEA country left in the top 10.
Figure 8. Trends in incoming degree mobility for current top 10 countries of origin and the UK (2006-07 to 2021-22)

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 plus the UK in the period 2006-07 to 2021-22. The green bars show the absolute numbers per year and the lines show the year-on-year change (%). When a line is above 0%, it means that the number of international degree students from this country increased 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

The largest group of international students in UAS in absolute terms was in the field of Economics (15,525), followed by Language & Culture (6,893; Figure 9). This number 1 position has not changed since 2006. International Business once again proved the most popular study programme within Economics, followed by Hospitality management, with 30.3% and 19.3% of the students respectively coming from abroad (see Figure 11). As a field, Engineering attracted the third largest number of international students in the academic year 2021-22 (6,653). The relative shares of international students in these fields were much smaller than in Language & Culture, however: just 8.6% for Economics and 6.6% for Engineering.

New translations for fields of study

As of this year, Nuffic has changed its English translations of some of the fields of study. The new labels are a better match with the content of the programmes and are more direct translations of the Dutch CROHO sectors. Landbouw en natuurlijke omgeving is now translated as Agriculture & Natural Environment, Taal en cultuur is now translated as Language & Culture, Economie is translated as Economics, Sectoroverstijgend (formerly known as Liberal Arts & Sciences) is translated as Interdisciplinary, Natuur is translated as Natural Sciences, and, finally, Gedrag en maatschappij is translated as Behavioural & Social Sciences. The names of the remaining fields of study (Education, Engineering, Healthcare and Law) have not changed.
Compared to 2020-21, the number of international degree students in UAS has increased in all fields of study but Agriculture & Natural Environment (-0.5%). The Interdisciplinary field of study saw the biggest increase (+22.5%), followed by Engineering (+15.1%) and Education (+14.5%).

At UAS, the field of Language & Culture maintained the largest relative share of international degree students (35.6%) in the academic year 2021-22 (see Figure 9). Within this field, Music remains the most popular study programme for international students, who accounted for more than half of all UAS Music students (51.6%), up slightly from 50.1% in 2020-21 (see Figure 11). Figure 9 also shows that international students were the least represented in the UAS fields of Education (2.5%), Behavioural & Social Sciences (2.6%), and Healthcare (3.3%).

**Figure 9.** International degree students at universities of applied sciences (total number and share) per field of study (2021-22)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field of Study</th>
<th>Number of International Students</th>
<th>% International Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>15,525</td>
<td>35.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language &amp; Culture</td>
<td>6,893</td>
<td>35.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>6,653</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthcare</td>
<td>1,906</td>
<td>28.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interdisciplinary</td>
<td>1,851</td>
<td>35.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioural &amp; Social Sciences</td>
<td>1,462</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture &amp; Natural Environment</td>
<td>560</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>1,571</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2 Research universities

The largest group of RU international students in absolute terms was in the field of Behavioural & Social Sciences (17,676; Figure 10). Behavioural & Social Sciences has been in the number 1 position since 2018-19. Before that, Economics had the largest number of international students at research universities, and is now in second place with 16,614 international students. Engineering completes the top 3 with 11,561 international students.

Compared to 2020-21, the number of international degree students in RU has increased in all fields of study but Education (-1.7%). Natural Sciences saw the biggest increase (+22.7%), followed by Law (+20%) and Interdisciplinary (+19.6%).

Figure 10 shows that students from abroad accounted for 27.9% of the total student population in the Behavioural & Social Sciences, slightly less than in the field of Economics (31%). Although rather small in absolute terms (6,682), the field of study with by far the largest share of international students was the Interdisciplinary field (46.3%). As in previous years, RU international students were the least represented in Education, Healthcare, and Law (Figure 10). This can in part be explained by the limited availability of English-language programmes in these fields, especially at bachelor level (see section 9).
Figure 10. International degree students at research universities (total number and share) per field of study (2021-22)

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 11) has remained stable since 2020-21, with International Business leading by a considerable margin. The only major change is that Tourism Management lost its place in the top 10 ranking to Communication, and is now in 11th place. All programmes in the top 10 except Hospitality Management and Social Work have observed growth in international student numbers compared to the previous academic year. The UAS study programmes with the largest absolute increases were International Business (+422), Design (+240) and Creative Media and Game Technologies (+190, now ranked 15th).

Figure 11. Top 10 study programmes among international degree students at universities of applied sciences (2021-22)

5.2 Research universities

At research universities, Psychology leads the way by a considerable margin in terms of the number of degree students it attracts from abroad (see Figure 12). There were 8,744 international students studying Psychology in the academic year 2021-22. This amounted to
38.1% of all enrolled Psychology students. Figure 12 shows that International Business had the largest share of international students (60%), followed by Liberal Arts and Sciences (53.7%), and Aerospace Engineering (45.7%; Figure 12).

The RU study programmes with the largest absolute increases compared to last year were International Business (+608), Psychology (+451), and International Business Administration (+381).

For more detailed information about all study programmes, see our dashboard on fields of study.

**Figure 12. Top 10 study programmes among international degree students at research universities (2021-22)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Programme</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>% International Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>8,744</td>
<td>38.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economics and Business Economics</td>
<td>3,802</td>
<td>38.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Business</td>
<td>2,898</td>
<td>60.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Arts and Sciences</td>
<td>2,674</td>
<td>53.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Business Administration</td>
<td>2,276</td>
<td>43.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Administration</td>
<td>2,266</td>
<td>43.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Science</td>
<td>1,946</td>
<td>39.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Science</td>
<td>1,450</td>
<td>45.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aerospace Engineering</td>
<td>1,345</td>
<td>29.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artificial Intelligence</td>
<td>1,244</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. Dutch higher education institutions

There is considerable variation in both the total number and share of international degree students across the different Dutch higher education institutions (see Figures 13 and 14). Below, we highlight the most important findings.

**Maastricht University surpassed by University of Amsterdam in absolute numbers but still has the highest share of international students**

For the first time, Maastricht University (UM) is no longer the university with the largest number of international students enrolled, having been overtaken in 2021-22 by the University of Amsterdam. The UvA had 12,504 international students in 2021-22 (Figure 13), an increase of 18.9% compared to the year before.

Maastricht University (UM) still stands out as the institution with by far the highest proportion of international students among all Dutch universities. UM had 11,834 international students enrolled in 2021-22, making up 56.3% of its student body (Figure 13). Amongst the international students at UM, those from nearby Germany (34.8%) and Belgium (14.0%) form the largest groups, together accounting for about 49% of all internationals. Maastricht University also hosts considerable numbers of students from Italy, France, and Spain.
### Research Universities: Remarkable growth in international enrolments over the past 10 years

The new number 1 position of the University of Amsterdam is in line with the remarkable growth this institution, and – albeit to a lesser extent – Leiden University, VU Amsterdam, the University of Groningen and Erasmus University Rotterdam have seen in the past decade. In 2011-12, the share of international students at these universities was between 4% and 15%, totalling fewer than 2,700 each. By 2021-22, the number of international students at each institution had increased by at least 240% compared to 2011-12. Leiden University showed the highest increase (519%), followed by the University of Amsterdam (471%). The share of international students at each university is also much larger than in 2011-12, ranging from 17.3% (VU Amsterdam) to 30.4% (University of Amsterdam). The other large research universities in the Netherlands (i.e., at least 2,000 students enrolled) had between 11.3% (Radboud University) and 56.3% (Maastricht University) international degree students in 2021-22.

### Figure 13. International degree students in Dutch higher education, top 10 institutions (2021-22)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of international students at institution in 2021 (top 10)</th>
<th>Percentage of international students at institution in 2021 (top 10)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 University of Amsterdam</td>
<td>1 Maastricht University</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Maastricht University</td>
<td>2 University of Twente</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 University of Groningen</td>
<td>3 Hotelschool The Hague</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 Erasmus University Rotterdam</td>
<td>4 University of Amsterdam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Delft University of Technology</td>
<td>5 Amsterdam School of the Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Leiden University</td>
<td>6 University of Groningen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Fontys University of Applied Sciences</td>
<td>7 Delft University of Technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>8 VU Amsterdam</td>
<td>8 Erasmus University Rotterdam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Utrecht University</td>
<td>9 Wageningen University</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 Tilburg University</td>
<td>10 ArtEZ Institute of the Arts</td>
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</table>

### 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 more than 15,700 students in 2021-22. Of the 4TU, the share of international students has grown the fastest in Eindhoven over the last 2 years, increasing from 15.3% in 2020-21 to 18.9% in 2021-22. This makes Eindhoven the institution with the 13th largest share of incoming degree students. At 2nd on the list (Figure 13), Twente ranks the highest among the 4TU, with 32.6% international students. The overall shares of international students at Delft (23.8%) and Wageningen (22.0%) put them in 7th and 9th place respectively.
Figure 14. Absolute number and relative share of international degree students per institution (2021-22)

International classrooms at universities of applied sciences specialising in fine arts

As Figure 14 shows, universities of applied sciences specialising in fine arts have strikingly international student populations. In fact, as in previous years, all UAS where more than half of the student body is international are small fine art institutes (i.e., less than 2,000 students enrolled in 2021-22). These are namely Design Academy (78.5%), University of the Arts The Hague (HvdK; 66.9%), Gerrit Rietveld Academie (64.6%), and Codarts (52.9%). Larger institutions specialising in fine arts also have considerable shares of international students, such as Amsterdam School of the Arts (AHK; 29.2%) and ArtEZ (22%).

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 28,488 in 2021-22, followed by North Holland (21,398; see Figure 15). (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 37.7%, followed by Groningen (18.2%). Moreover, the number and share of international students has increased in all provinces compared to 2020-21.

**Figure 15. Total number and share of international students studying at Dutch higher education institutions per province in 2021-22**

At a municipal level, Amsterdam is the city with the most international degree students enrolled (21,398); however, this group accounts for ‘just’ 16.9% of all students in Amsterdam (see Figure 16). Maastricht has the largest share of internationals, at 56.5% of its entire student population (12,193), followed by Delft with 23.8% (6,344). Moreover, the share of international students has increased for all cities shown in Figure 16 compared to 2020-21.

For more detailed information about the provinces and municipalities, see our dashboard focused on regions and universities.
Figure 16. Total number and share of international degree students enrolled per city (2021-22)

Note: Only cities with more than 500 international students in 2021-22 are included in this visual.

8. Countries with a Neso

Comparatively slower growth from Neso countries

In the academic year 2020-21, the 6 countries in which a Netherlands Education Support Office (Neso) is located had 8,801 of their citizens enrolled as international degree students at publicly-financed Dutch higher education institutions. This equates to a 4.2-fold increase since 2006-07 (see Figure 17). Relative to the academic year 2020-21, the number of international students from Neso countries grew by 5.4% in 2021-22. However, as Figure 17 shows, this was smaller than the increase observed in students coming from EEA countries (14.1%) and from non-EEA countries without a Neso (8.5%).

2 in 5 Neso students choose a master’s

Around 2 in 5 (37.9%) of the students from Neso countries who were enrolled in Dutch higher education in 2021-22 followed a master’s programme. This proportion is larger than for students from EEA countries (29%), but smaller than for students from non-EEA countries without a Neso (40%).

Neso offices

Nuffic Netherlands Education Support Offices (Nuffic Neso’s) provide information on international courses, education, and training programmes in the Netherlands as well as in the countries in which they are located. 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 and provide support to Dutch students coming to their countries for study or an internship. The network of offices is being phased out, but we currently still have Neso’s in 6 countries worldwide: India, Indonesia, Russia, South Africa, South Korea, and Vietnam.
RUs generally more popular

Students from countries with a Neso were mostly enrolled at research universities (70.8%), which is comparable to the percentages for EEA students (68.9%) and non-EEA students from countries without a Neso (72.3%). However, students from countries with a Neso do not form a homogeneous group when it comes to institution type. India (88.2%), Indonesia (68.3%), and Russia (64.6%) 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 45.4% are enrolled at a research university). South Africa and South Korea (both 59.4%) also saw relatively small shares of their students enrolled at research universities.

**Figure 17. Trends in incoming degree mobility from EEA countries, countries with a Neso, and remaining countries (2006-07 to 2020-21)**

As Table 1 shows, the Neso country with the largest absolute increase compared to 2020-21 was India, with an extra 190 students (an increase of 6.0%), followed by Russia with an extra 159 students (+13.6%). India also remains the largest country of origin with a Neso by a considerable margin. The Neso country with the largest relative increase compared to 2020-21 was South Africa (+29.2%; 79 extra students). Vietnam (-2.1%) and South Korea (-2.7%) are the only Neso countries that experienced a decline.
For more detailed information per country, see our dashboard on Neso countries.

Table 1. International degree students from countries with a Neso, from 2006-07 to 2021-22

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<td>230</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>463</td>
<td>492</td>
<td>529</td>
<td>662</td>
<td>892</td>
<td>1,277</td>
<td>1,489</td>
<td>1,990</td>
<td>2,598</td>
<td>3,187</td>
<td>3,173</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
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<td>967</td>
<td>903</td>
<td>845</td>
<td>804</td>
<td>860</td>
<td>863</td>
<td>878</td>
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<td>Russia</td>
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<td>284</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>354</td>
<td>401</td>
<td>435</td>
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<td>846</td>
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<td>Vietnam</td>
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<td>237</td>
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<td>248</td>
<td>236</td>
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<td>729</td>
<td>938</td>
<td>1,194</td>
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<tr>
<td>South Korea</td>
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<td>267</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>286</td>
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<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
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<td>59</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>86</td>
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<td>143</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>350</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>2,079</td>
<td>2,069</td>
<td>2,089</td>
<td>2,107</td>
<td>2,198</td>
<td>2,321</td>
<td>2,390</td>
<td>2,665</td>
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<td>5,815</td>
<td>6,894</td>
<td>8,093</td>
<td>8,353</td>
<td>8,801</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Current development 5: Phase-out and termination of Neso network

As announced in September 2020, the network of Nuffic Neso offices is currently being phased out and will be 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 1st January 2024. The offices in Turkey, Brazil, China, and Mexico have already been closed. Neso Russia, Neso Vietnam, Neso South-Africa and Neso Korea are scheduled to close by 31st December 2022 at the latest. The remaining Neso activities, in Indonesia and India, will cease by 31st December 2023.

The phase-out of the Neso offices is accompanied by an intensification of the Dutch government’s diplomatic network in the fields of education and science. For each 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 within the Neso remit, it is expected that the termination of these activities may affect incoming and outgoing student mobility.

9. Language of instruction at research universities

Although the language in which degree programmes are taught is not centrally registered, Universities of the Netherlands (UNL) 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.

More than half of bachelor’s programmes available only in Dutch

Similar to 2020-21, just over half (53%) of the 418 unique bachelor’s programmes at Dutch research universities this year were taught exclusively in Dutch. The share of English-only programmes at bachelor level was 28%, while the remaining 19% were taught in both English and Dutch (see Figure 19). Of the 723 research university master’s programmes, the large majority (77%) were offered exclusively in English, compared to 14% in Dutch. A further 9% of RU master’s programmes were taught in both languages.
English the most common language of instruction at master’s level

At bachelor level, only Interdisciplinary, Engineering, and Economics programmes did the majority of their teaching in English in 2021-22 (Figure 18). The fields of Healthcare and Law, on the other hand, were overwhelmingly taught through Dutch. At master level, English was the most common language of instruction in all fields except Law. Master’s programmes in the fields of Agriculture & Natural Environment, Interdisciplinary studies, and Engineering were available exclusively in English.

Overall decline in Dutch-only programmes

Figure 19 shows a gradual decline since 2016 in the absolute number of RU programmes offered exclusively in Dutch. This year, there were 318 Dutch-taught programmes in total, 10 fewer than in 2020-21. Now at 677, the absolute number of RU programmes offered exclusively in English has remained relatively more stable. The availability of programmes taught through both languages has also showed little change, totalling 146 in both 2021-22 and 2020-21.
Conclusion
The Netherlands remained a popular destination for international degree students in the academic year 2021-22, with record numbers enrolled at Dutch public higher education institutions. This year, about 1 in every 7 students was from abroad. The substantial number of new international enrolments in both 2020-21 and 2021-22 confirms the finding from our previous report that incoming mobility was hardly disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research universities and bachelor’s programmes still see the most international students
Consistent with previous years, research universities attracted more international degree students than did universities of applied sciences, and bachelor’s programmes were generally more popular than master’s programmes. Slightly more than a quarter of all master’s students in the Netherlands came from abroad, however, a larger proportion than at bachelor level where about 11% is international. With the majority of their master’s programmes taught in English, Dutch research universities are an attractive option for international graduate students.

Top 3 countries of origin for the first time only European
For the first time ever, the top 3 most common countries of origin for international degree students are all within the EEA. As in previous years, the most common country of origin is Germany, followed by Italy. This year, however, Chinese students were outnumbered by students from Romania, putting Romania in 3rd place. Furthermore, 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.

Effect of Brexit: substantial decline in number of UK degree students
The United Kingdom’s separation from the EU has likely had a substantial effect on the number of incoming students from that country. In contrast to the growth shown by almost all other countries, the UK saw a large decline in the number of degree students it sent to the Netherlands in 2021-22. Compared to 2020-21, there were almost 25% fewer British students enrolled in Dutch higher education this year.

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

University of Amsterdam overtakes Maastricht University as institution with the most international students
For the first time, Maastricht University is no longer the institution with the largest number international students. In 2021-22, the University of Amsterdam surpassed this university in terms of the number of international degree students enrolled. Maastricht University still stands out as the institution with the highest proportion of international students by a considerable margin.
Colophon

Authors
Astrid Elfferich
Saoradh Favier
Florine Snethlage

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