

# Fact sheet on international students

This fact sheet contains the most important facts and figures on international students in the Netherlands, including total numbers, incoming and outgoing students, stay rates and languages of instruction, as well as the accessibility of research universities and universities of applied sciences. You will also find information on perceived challenges and how the Netherlands benefits from the presence of international students. For further reading, references to relevant studies and publications are provided at the bottom of this fact sheet.

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## Facts and figures: international students in Dutch higher education

### Numbers

**In the academic year 2022/'23, there were 122,287 international degree students studying at state-funded institutions of higher education (universities of applied sciences and research universities) in the Netherlands. This was 15% of the total student population.**

Of all students at research universities, 25.1% were international, compared to 7.7% at universities of applied sciences. Of all international students, 72.3% came from the European Economic Area (EEA) and 27.7% from outside the EEA. Of all first-year bachelor's students in 2022/'23, 20% were international (Source: *1-cijfer HO* (central register of students enrolled on funded higher education programmes in the Netherlands), DUO).

### Incoming students

**In the academic year 2022/'23, state-funded higher education institutions received 41,203 new international enrolments for a full bachelor's or master's programme; of this group, 69.6% came from the EEA (28,688) and 30.4% from outside the EEA (12,515).**

72.9% of new international enrolments (30,030) were at research universities. Of this group, 69.4% (20,837) came from the EEA and 30.6% (9,193) from outside the EEA. At universities of applied sciences, there were 11,173 new international enrolments, of which 70.3% (7,851) came from the EEA and 29.7% (3,322) from outside the EEA. Altogether, bachelor's programmes received 28,207 new international enrolments (74.6% EEA and 25.4% non-EEA), while master's programmes received 12,996 (58.9% EEA and 41.1% non-EEA) (Source: *1-cijfer HO*, DUO).

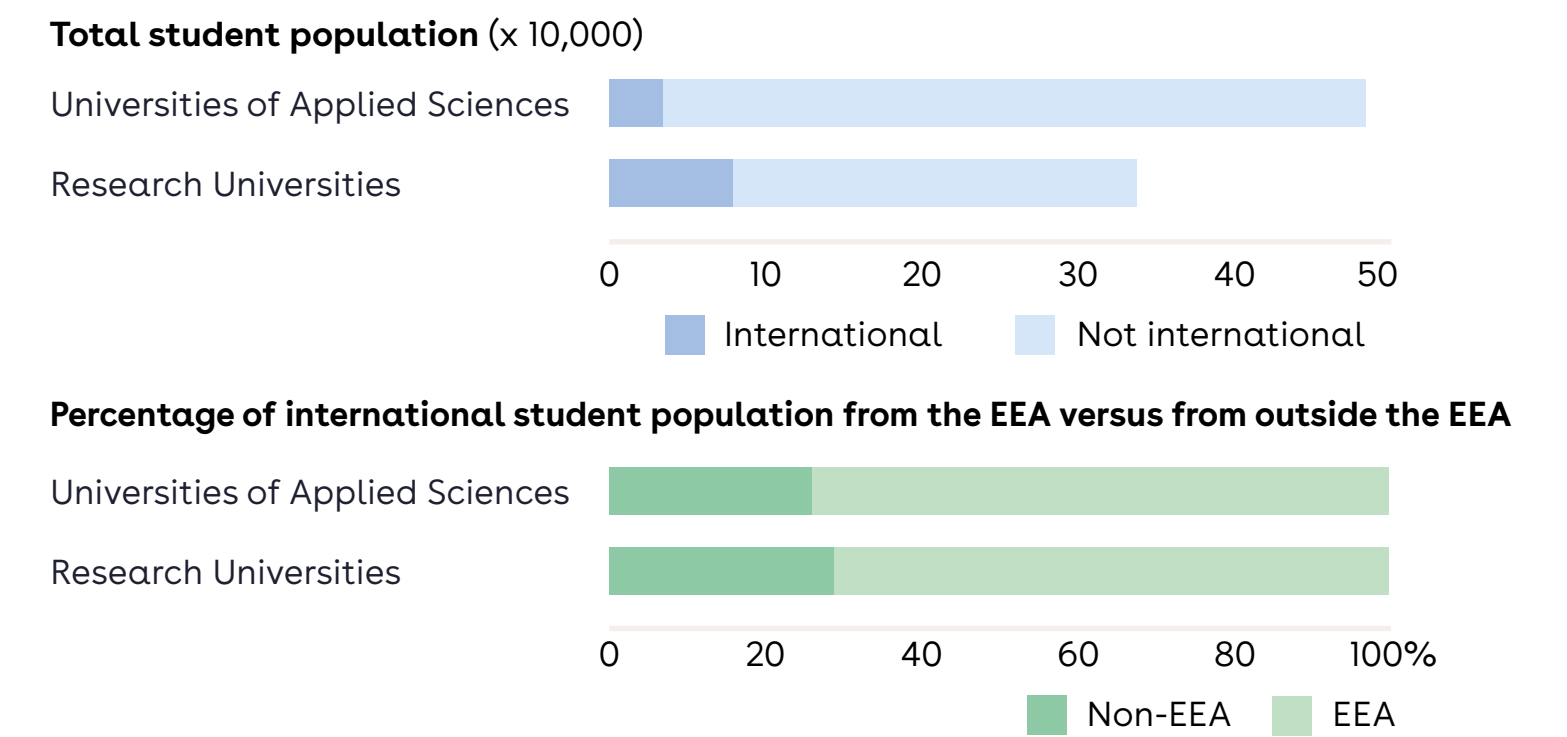
### Difference between EEA and non-EEA students

In the Netherlands, students from the European Economic Area (i.e. all EU countries plus Lichtenstein, Norway and Iceland) pay the statutory tuition fees € (for 2022/'23: € 2,209), to which the government contributes financially. In some cases, EEA students are eligible for student loans and grants, such as when they work more than 56 hours per month (CPB, 2019: 6). € Students from outside the EEA pay the higher institutional rate, without government subsidy. In most cases, students from outside the EEA also need to obtain a residence permit.

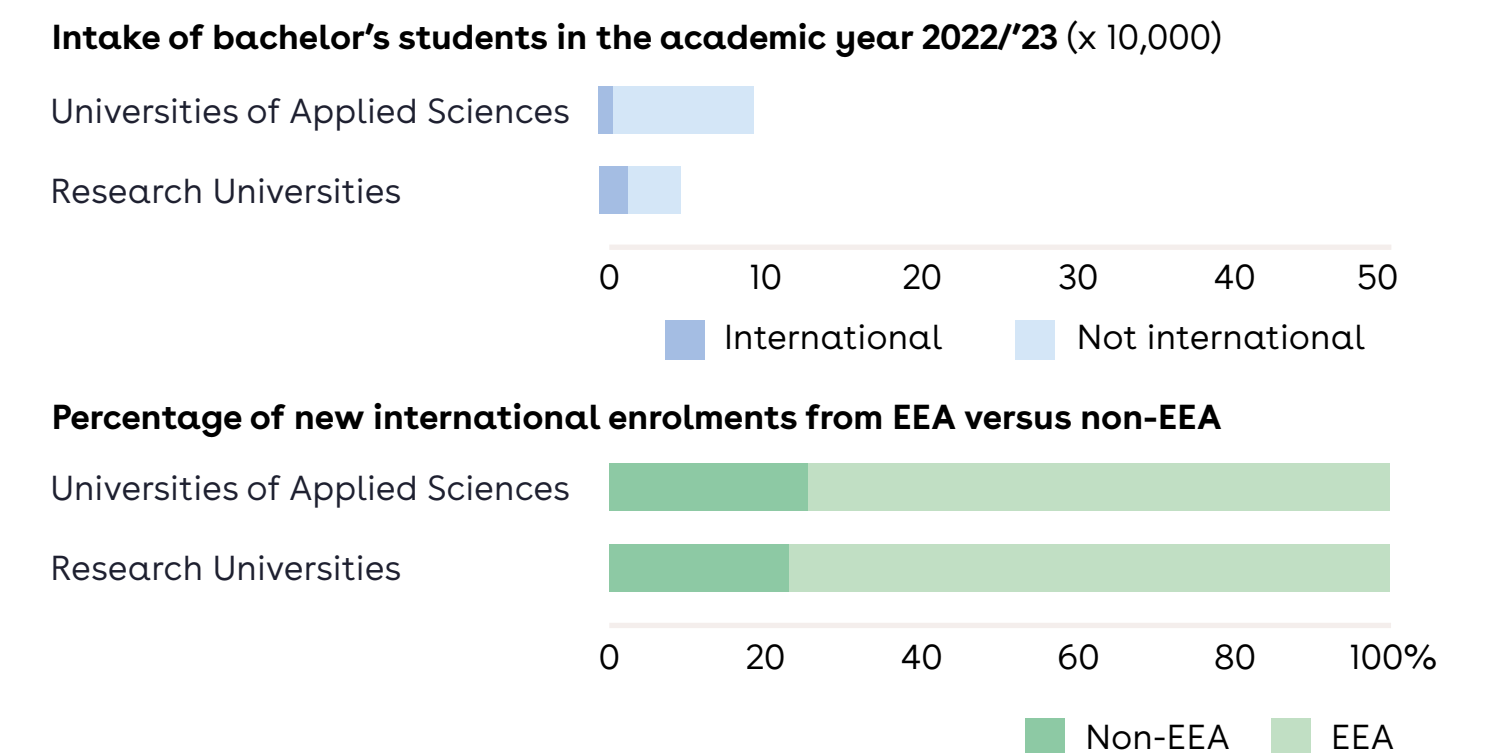
### What do we mean by 'international students'?

Students who are not Dutch citizens and have not completed prior education in the Netherlands (CPB, 2019: 12). International degree students are students who pursue an entire degree in another country, while exchange students complete only a part of their studies or an internship abroad. This fact sheet does not take vocational education and training students into account, nor refugee students.

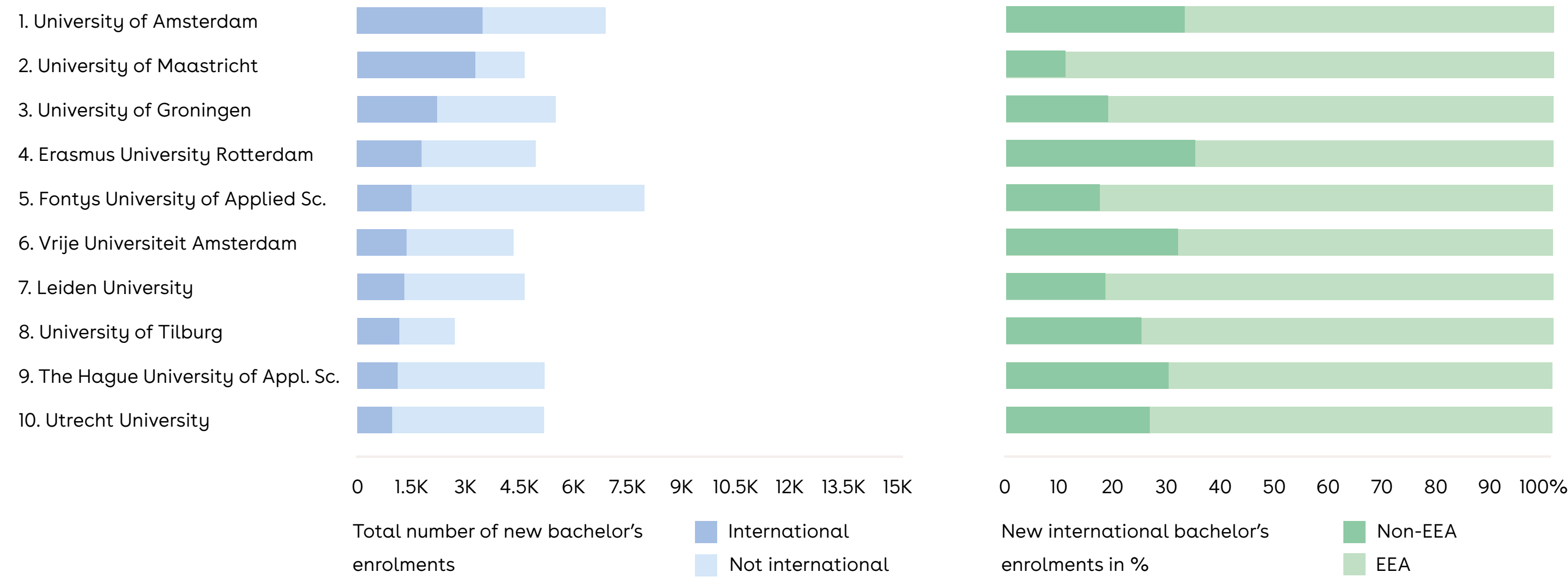
**Figure 1** - Numbers of international students relative to the total student population at universities of applied sciences and research universities in the academic year 2022/'23, and percentage of EEA versus non-EEA students.



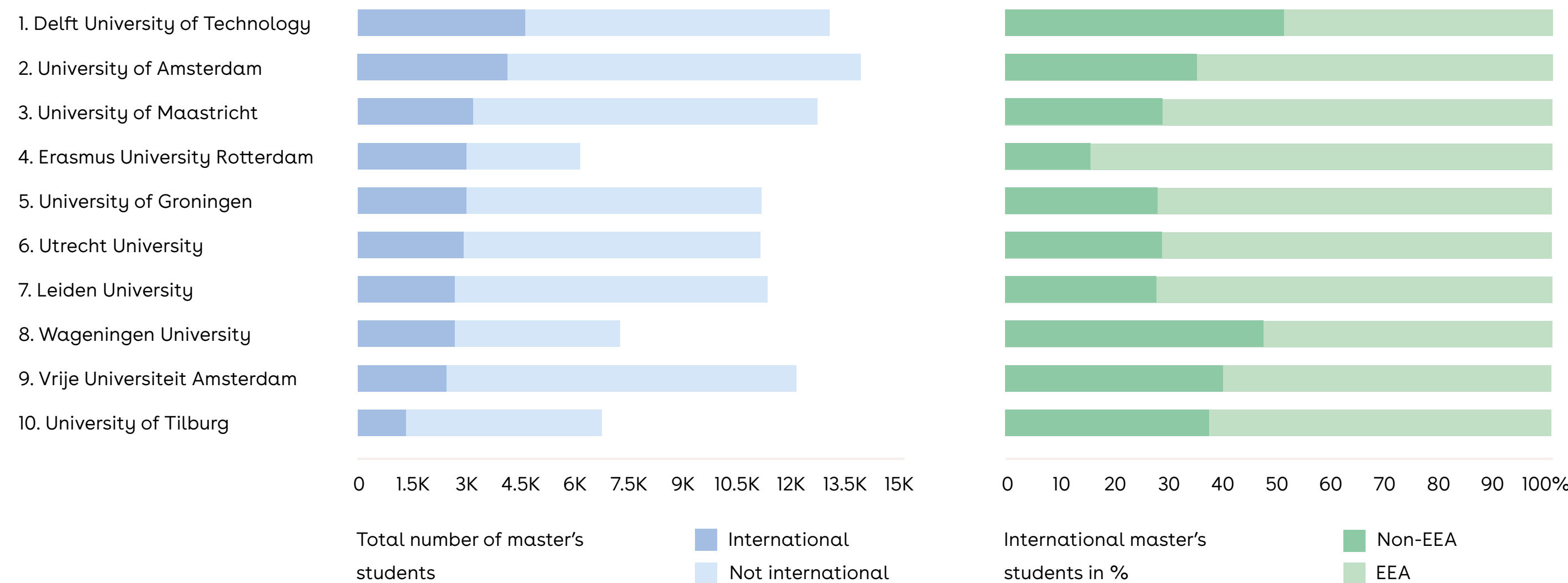
**Figure 2** - Numbers of new international enrolments relative to all new enrolments at universities of applied sciences and research universities in the academic year 2022/'23, and percentage of EEA versus non-EEA students.



**Figure 3 -** New enrolments of international bachelor's students compared to the total number of new bachelor's enrolments at the top 10 institutions with the most international bachelor's enrolments, and percentage of EEA versus non-EEA students.

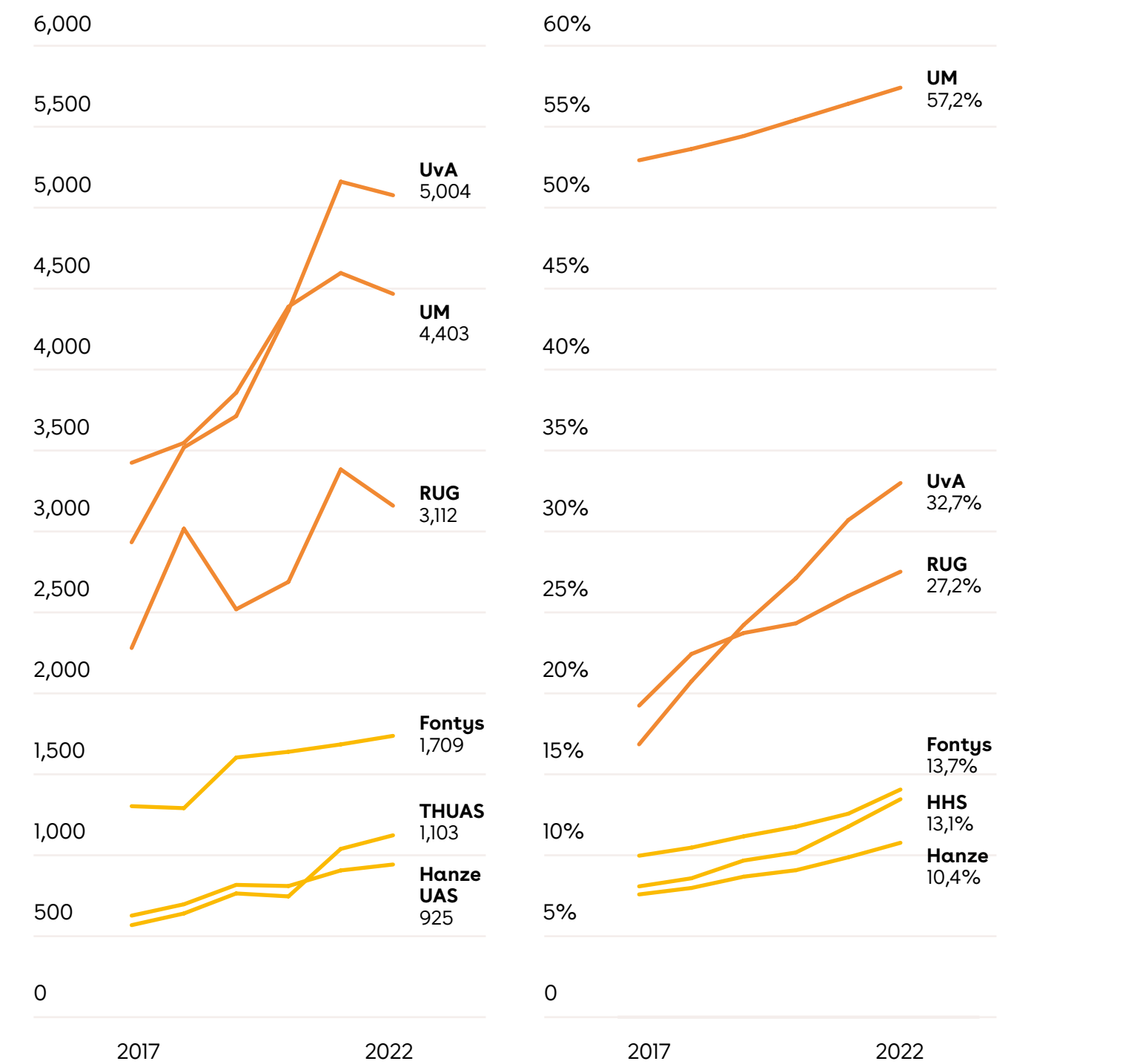


**Figure 4 -** International master's students relative to the total master's student population at the top 10 institutions with the most international master's students, and percentage of EEA versus non-EEA students.



**The percentages of international students on master's programmes often give a skewed impression.**

'New enrolments' are students enrolling in higher education in the Netherlands for the first time. Because the majority of Dutch master's students have previously completed a bachelor's programme in the Netherlands, international students account for most of the 'new enrolments' on master's programmes. As a result, the percentage of international students can be disproportionately high. One possible solution - at master's level - is to consider only the total number of international master's students relative to the total master's student population. This solution has been applied in Figure 4.



**Figure 5 -** 5-year trend in the number of new international enrolments and in the percentage of international students in the total student population at the top 3 research universities and universities of applied sciences with the highest numbers of new international enrolments in 2022/'23.

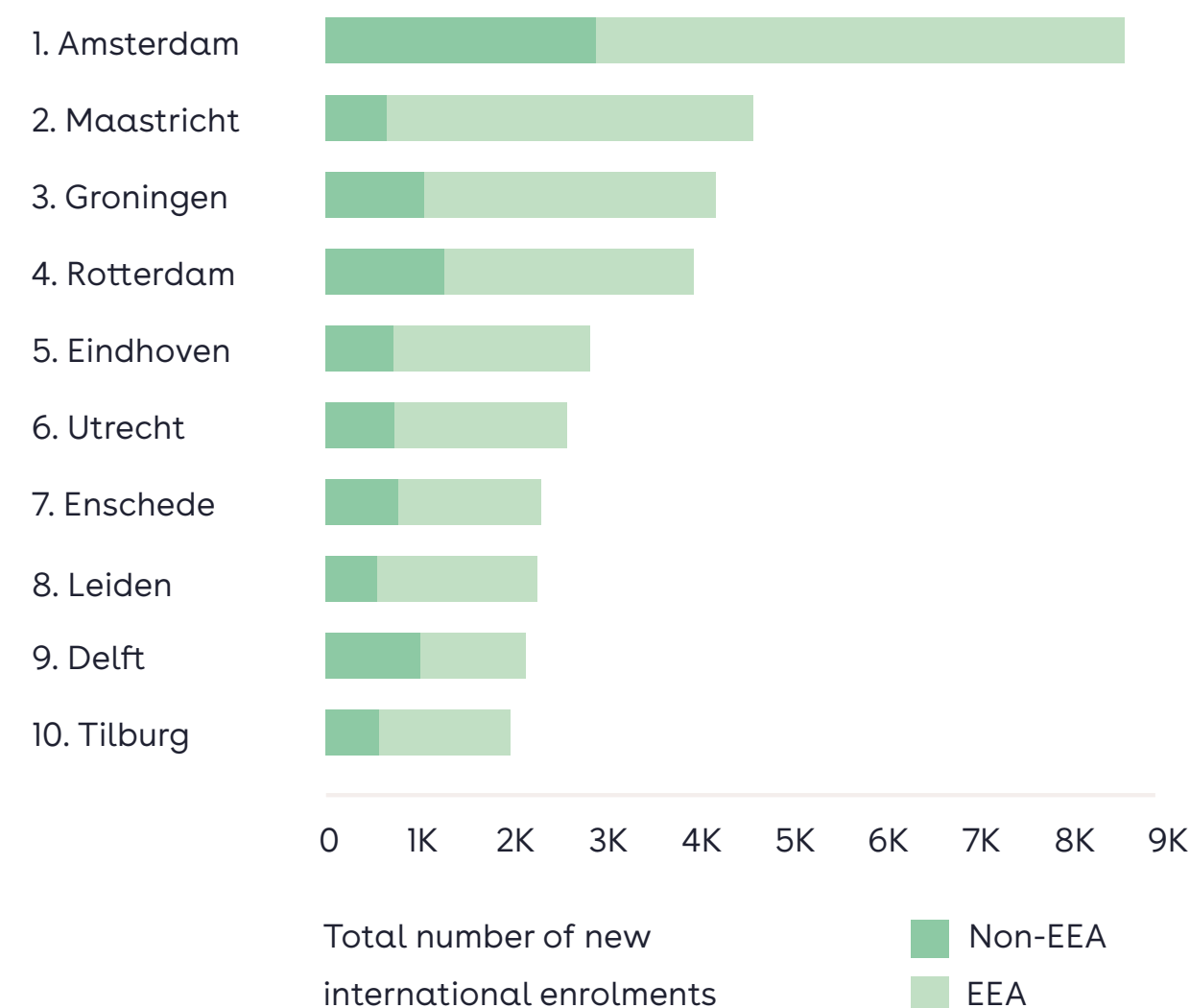
Research Universities  
Universities of Applied Sciences

**Table 1** - Top 10 cities based on the number of new international enrolments in 2022/23. Total number of new international enrolments and percentage of EEA versus non-EEA students for each city.

City	Total	EEA	Non-EEA
1. Amsterdam	8,660	66.2%	33.8%
2. Maastricht	4,641	85.8%	14.2%
3. Groningen	4,228	74.7%	25.3%
4. Rotterdam	3,990	67.9%	32.1%
5. Eindhoven	2,870	74.4%	25.6%
6. Utrecht	2,615	71.4%	28.6%
7. Enschede	2,340	66.4%	33.6%
8. Leiden	2,295	75.7%	24.3%
9. Delft	2,168	52.9%	47.1%
10. Tilburg	2,003	71.1%	28.9%

Note that these numbers represent the province in which students are enrolled, and not where they live (Source: *1 cijfer HO*, DUO).

**Figure 6** - Top 10 cities based on the number of new international enrolments in 2022/23.



## Growth and trends international students in NL: Enrolments and total numbers

### Research Universities (RU)

#### New enrolments

In the academic year 2022/23, research universities in the Netherlands saw a 4.2% drop in the number of new enrolments from international students. There were 1,310 fewer new enrolments from international students this year compared to last year. In the previous academic year (2021/22), the number of international new enrolments grew by 20.3%. The total number of new enrolments from Dutch students fell by 5.7% this academic year (1,919 fewer Dutch enrolments).

#### Total numbers

In the academic year 2022/23, the share of international students in the total student population is 25.1%, compared to 23.4% last year. The total number of international students grew by 7.2%. There are 5,751 more international students at research universities this year compared to last year. The rate of growth has declined: in the academic year 2021/22 the increase was 14.2%, almost double that of this year.

### Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS)

#### New enrolments

The number of international new enrolments received by universities of applied sciences has also grown less rapidly than last year. In the academic year 2022/23 there was an increase of 6.7% (697 more new international students). In 2021/22 this increase was 11.1%. New enrolments from Dutch UAS students for the academic year 2022/23 fell by 8.7% (7,640 fewer new Dutch students).

#### Total numbers

In the academic year 2022/23, there are 2,281 more international students at universities of applied sciences compared to last year. The total number of international students has risen by 6.6%. In 2021/22, this increase was

7.8%. This academic year, 7.7% of all UAS students are international, compared to 7.1% in 2021/22.

### Exchange students

**The number of incoming exchange students is approximately equal to the number of outbound exchange students.**

Besides degree students, there are also international students who complete only a portion of their studies (or an internship) in the Netherlands. No recent and complete figures are available on the size of this group. What we do know, however, is that, in the academic year 2018-2019, there were 14,719 incoming students with an Erasmus+ grant. The majority of these (10,060) came here to study, while the rest (4,659) took part in an internship. In that same academic year (2018-2019), an approximately equal number of Dutch students went abroad with an Erasmus+ grant: 14,353. Of these, 9,933 went abroad to study and the rest (4,420) to do an internship. The most popular destinations that year were Spain, the United Kingdom and Germany (Source: Nuffic, 2022). [↗](#)

### Drop-out rates among international students

**The drop-out rate among first-year international students is higher than among Dutch students; after the first year, the drop-out rate for internationals is lower.**

Of the international 'degree' students, 17% withdraw their enrolment in the first year, as compared to 6% of Dutch students. Of the international students who begin a bachelor's programme at a research university, around 25% will no longer be studying in the Netherlands after four years, without having earned a degree. For Dutch students, this rate is around 9%. Of the international students who are still enrolled in a study programme after the first year, a large portion will go on to earn their degree within four years (65% for EEA students and 61% for non-EEA students). For Dutch students, this figure is slightly lower: 60% (Source: Education Inspectorate, 2022). [↗](#)

## Study programmes taught in languages other than Dutch

### Research Universities (WO)

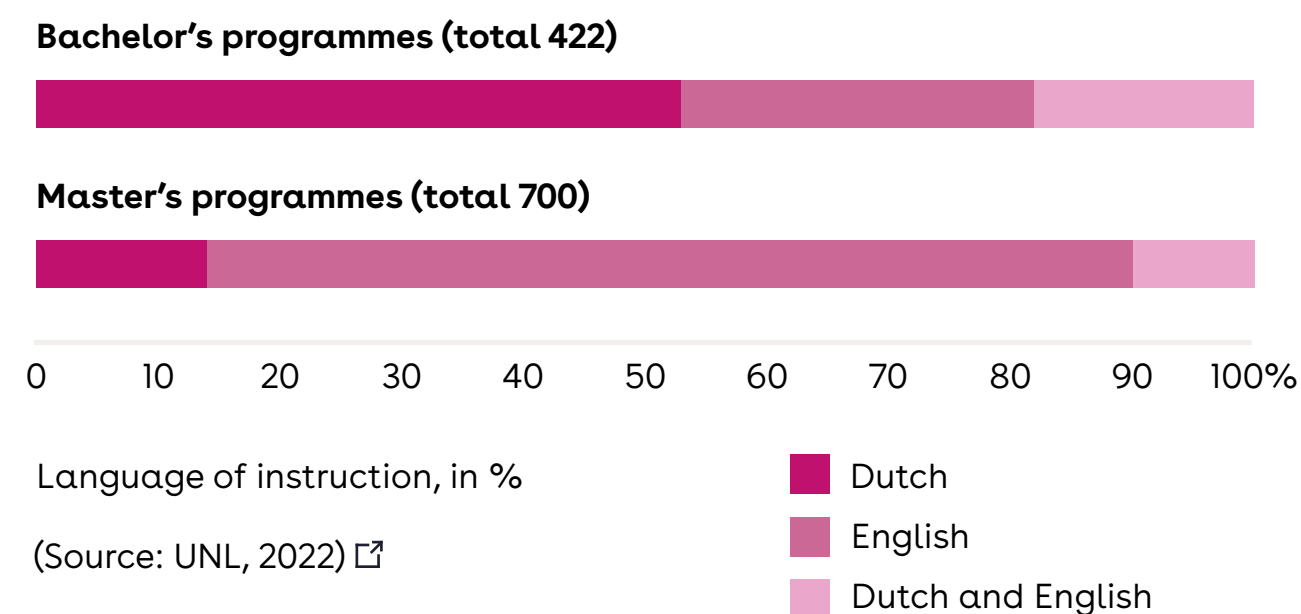
#### The majority of bachelor's programmes at research universities are taught completely in Dutch.

According to the most recent available data, slightly more than half (53%) of the 422 unique bachelor's programmes at Dutch research universities were taught in Dutch in 2021/'22. English-taught programmes accounted for 29% of bachelor's programmes at research universities. The remaining 18% were taught in both Dutch and English. At bachelor's level, only interdisciplinary, engineering and economics programmes provided the greater part of their education in English. The fields of healthcare and law were taught predominantly in Dutch.

#### English is the most common language of instruction at master's level.

Of the 700 master's programmes at research universities, 76% were taught exclusively in English, compared to 14% in Dutch. The remaining 10% of master's programmes at research universities were taught in both languages. At master's level, English was the most common language of instruction in all fields except law. Master's programmes in the fields of agriculture and natural environment, as well as interdisciplinary studies were

**Figure 7** - Share of Dutch-taught, English-taught and bilingual programmes at Dutch research universities in 2021/'22.



offered exclusively in English. In the academic year 2023/'24, approximately 72% of programmes at research universities will be offered (either wholly or partly) in a language other than Dutch (Source: Studiekeuze 123, 2022). [↗](#)

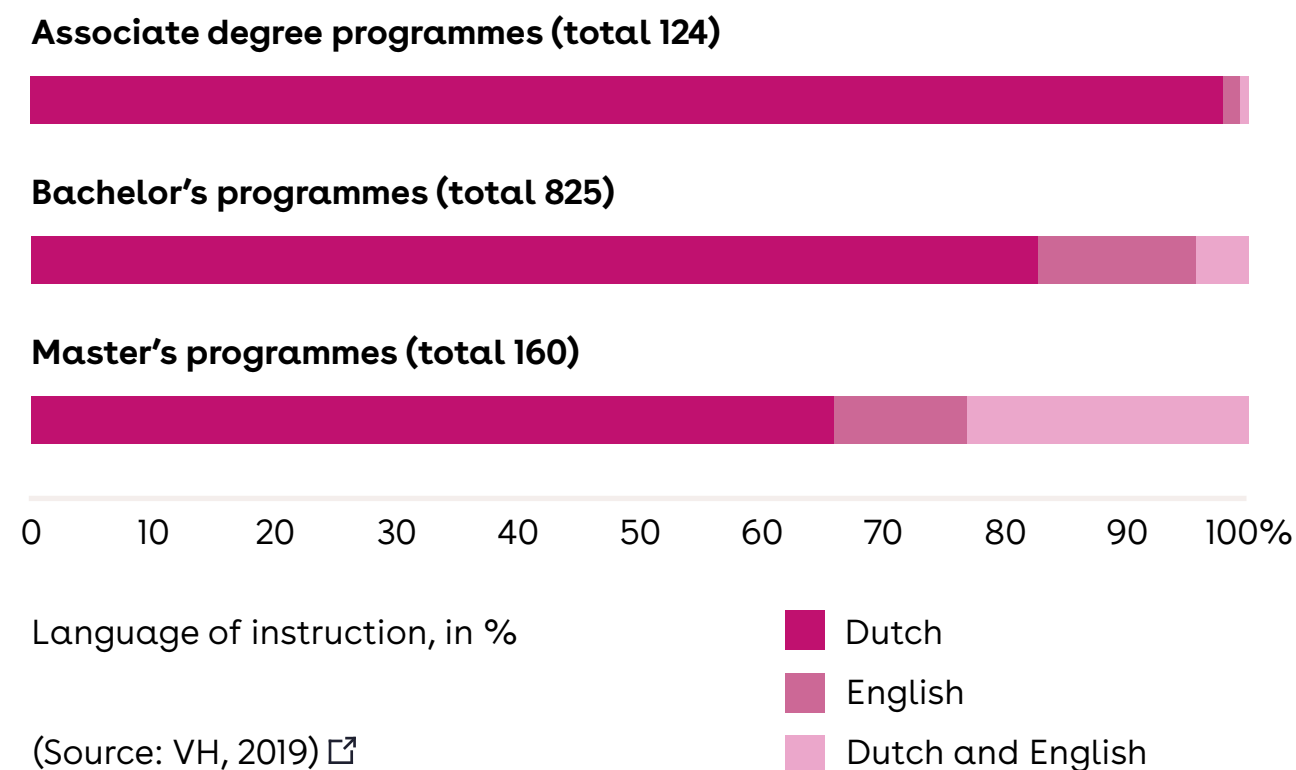
### Universities of Applied Sciences (HBO)

#### The vast majority of programmes at universities of applied sciences are still being taught in Dutch.

The most recently published figures on the language of instruction at universities of applied sciences date from 2017/'18. In that year, 82% of study programmes were offered entirely in Dutch. A further 11% were offered in both Dutch and English, and 7% were taught entirely in English (Source: VH, 2019). [↗](#)

We have examined the study programmes on offer for the academic year 2023/'24, although this list is not exhaustive. Of the 1,191 state-funded programmes at universities of applied sciences (bachelor's and master's), 892 will be taught in Dutch, 251 in English and 7 in another language (German

**Figure 8** - Share of Dutch-taught, English-taught and bilingual programmes at Dutch universities of applied sciences in 2017/'18.



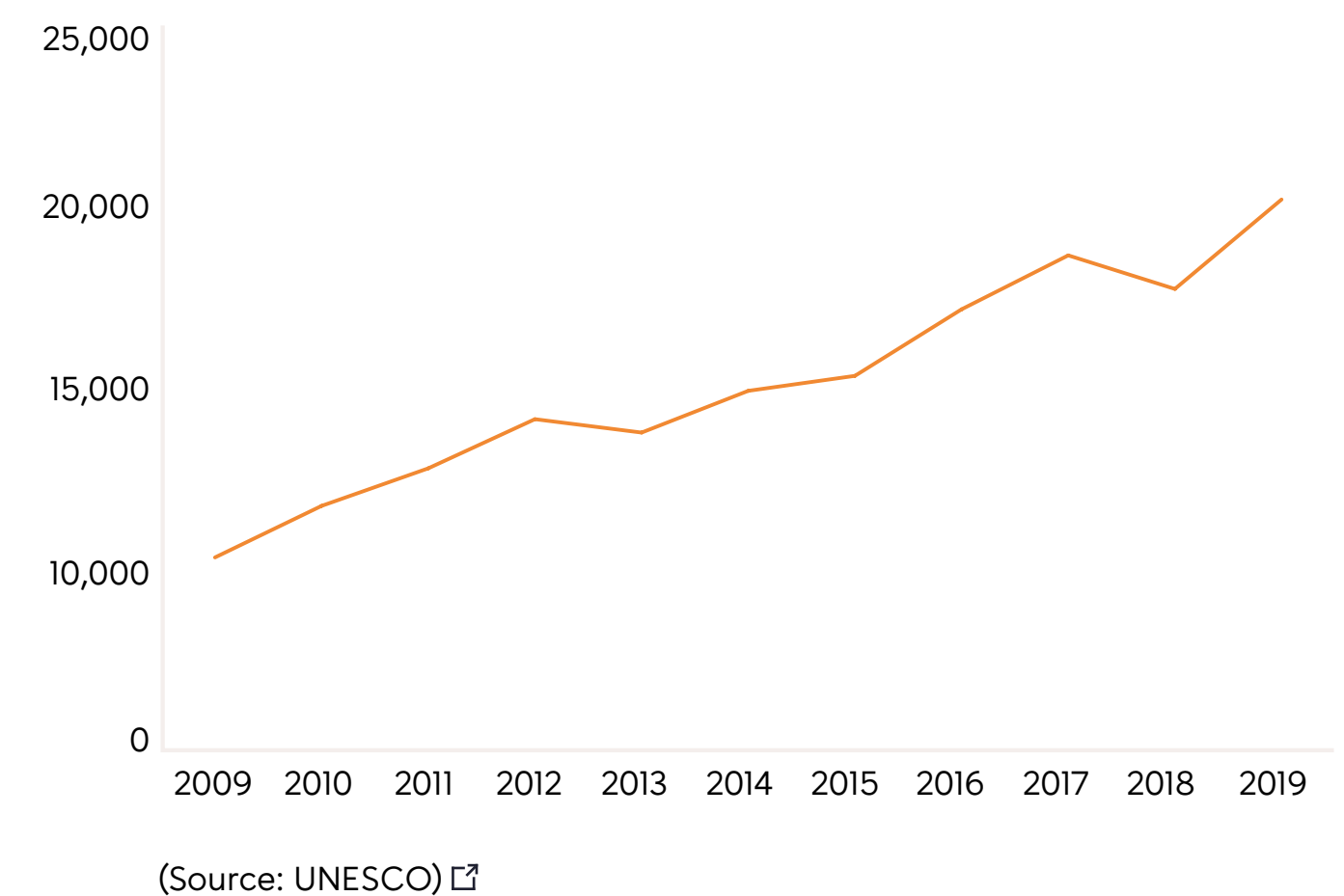
or French). It should be noted here that, for some programmes, the language is unknown, while other programmes are offered in two language variants. Of the 959 bachelor's programmes at universities of applied sciences, 79% will be taught in Dutch (N=756), compared to 62% of the master's programmes (N=232) (Source: Studiekeuze 123, 2022). [↗](#)

### Dutch students abroad

#### While the number of students who leave the Netherlands to study abroad is much smaller than the number of international students who come here, this number is growing.

The most recent data from UNESCO show that, in 2019, some 20,200 Dutch students pursued an entire bachelor's or master's degree in another country. That figure has almost doubled (+97%) compared to 10 years ago (10,200 in 2009; source: Nuffic, 2023). [↗](#) The portion of Dutch students who study abroad remains relatively low, increasing from around 1.7% in 2009 to around 2.9% in 2019 (as calculated by Nuffic).

**Figure 9** - Number of Dutch degree students in higher education abroad from 2009 to 2019



## Challenges in the short term

### Pressure on capacity of institutions

The fact that students coming from abroad to earn a degree outnumber Dutch students pursuing a degree elsewhere has consequences for the capacity of Dutch higher education institutions. Examples include use of lecture halls, laboratory facilities and the number of students per lecturer. An Interministerial Policy Review (IBO) from 2019 found no clear negative impacts on this capacity. No study programmes have lost their accreditation, and the student-to-staff ratio has been stable for years (Source: IBO, 2019: 9, 29-30, 32, 35). ☞ That being said, major differences do exist between fields of study: according to the IBO, the fields of science and technology have a higher student-to-staff ratio, and more of these programmes have found it necessary to adopt an intake restriction (Source: IBO, 2019: 32). ☞

### No impact on accessibility, but self-selection occurs among Dutch students

In 2019, the Dutch Education Inspectorate concluded that internationalisation is not impacting the accessibility of higher education for Dutch students (Source: Inspectorate of Education, 2019). There are only a few English-taught programmes with an intake restriction, and when this is the case, Dutch students are able to enrol in a similar programme taught in Dutch (Source: IBO, 2019: 33). ☞ However, self-selection does take place: Dutch students are less likely to choose an English-language track in higher education because they do not believe they can succeed in such programmes (Source: Inspectorate of Education, 2022: 6). ☞

### Scarcity in the housing market

The Netherlands is currently dealing with a general housing shortage. This also affects Dutch and international students, who need suitable housing in the city or region in which they are studying. The Dutch National Student Housing Monitor notes that international students contribute to the growing demand for places to live. While Dutch students often have the fall-back option of living with their parents, this is generally not possible for international students. Their options are limited to private-sector rental or student accommodation provided by their educational institution (Source: National Student monitor (LMS), 2022). ☞

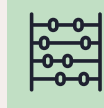
In 2022, there were around 27,000 too few student residences (Source: Kences, 2022). ☞ The European Migration Network (EMN) compared the climate for attracting and retaining international students in the Netherlands with that of other EU Member States. They identified 3 major challenges for the Netherlands: coping with the housing shortage, preserving the manageability of the intake (in terms of numbers, unpredictability and distribution between cities), and ensuring sufficient availability of teaching staff (Source: EMN, 2019) ☞ Due to the legal framework, institutions have only limited means of regulating the intake of students, and the numbers and distribution of students are unpredictable (Source: LMS, 2022). ☞

### Negative effect on funding for higher education

Over the long term, the benefits of international students for the Dutch treasury outweigh the costs. In the short term, however, degree students from the EEA constitute an expense for the national budget, because they pay the statutory tuition fees that are subsidised by the government. These costs are borne by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, while the positive balance that international students generate for the treasury in the long term is not necessarily allocated to higher education. As a result, the increase in international students has led to a lower total amount of state funding per student, including expenditure on research. International students are often a source of additional income for the institutions themselves (Source: IBO, 2019: 9, 29-30, 32, 35). ☞

## Benefits for the Netherlands

### A net gain for the Dutch treasury



In terms of the costs and benefits of international students in the Netherlands, the long-term balance is positive. This applies to both EEA and non-EEA students. The reason for this is that a portion of international students will start working in the Netherlands after they graduate and therefore become taxpayers (Source: CPB, 2019: 35, 36). [↗](#)

The percentage of students that remain in the Netherlands x years after graduation is known as the 'stay rate'. When compiling this fact sheet, a period of 5 years was applied. Of the nearly 139,000 international students who completed Dutch higher education programmes between 2006-2007 and 2015-2016, 46% were still living in the Netherlands 1 year after graduation. After 5 years, the stay rate had dropped to 24% (18.6% for EEA students and 37.6% for non-EEA students).

Students from non-EEA countries tend to remain in the Netherlands more often and generate more income than students from EEA countries. Non-EEA: € 68,500 and € 96,300 per university of applied sciences graduate and research university graduate respectively. EEA: € 5,000 and € 16,900 per university of applied sciences graduate and research university graduate respectively (Source: CPB, 2019: 3). [↗](#)

The intake of international students in the academic year 2022/'23 will ultimately contribute around € 1.5 billion to the Dutch public finances; see Table 3.

### Talent for the labour market



Research university graduates from non-EEA countries work the most hours, followed by research university graduates from EEA countries and Dutch research university graduates. Among graduates from universities of applied sciences, we also see that graduates from non-EEA countries work the most hours, followed by Dutch citizens and graduates from EEA countries (Source: CPB, 2019: 30). [↗](#)

Of the international students who remained living and working in the Netherlands after graduating (cohorts 2006-2007 to 2015-2016) for whom the sector is known, 36% are employed in the civil service, education or healthcare sectors 5 years after graduation (a total of 5,300 graduates). Business services (29%: 4,700) and the trade, transport and hospitality sectors (14%: 2,200) are also popular with international graduates employed in the Netherlands (Source: Nuffic, 2022: 18 & 25). [↗](#)

**Table 2 - Net contribution at an individual level and aggregated effect for incoming students in 2021-2022.**

	Student from EEA country		Student from non-EEA country		Total
	University of applied sciences	Research university	University of applied sciences	Research university	
<b>Higher education intake 2022/'23</b>	7,721	22,084	2,820	9,317	41,942
<b>Net contribution over lifetime (x € 1,000)</b>	5.0	16.9	68.5	96.3	N/A
<b>Aggregated effects (x € 1,000)</b>	€38,605	€373,220	€193,170	€897,227	€1,502,222

(Source: Nuffic, 2022: 25) [↗](#)

### The International Classroom



Provided there is effective lecturer supervision, the International Classroom concept can help students develop international competencies such as the ability to work together with people from other cultures, an open-minded attitude, social awareness, critical thinking and adaptability (Source: Nuffic, 2021). [↗](#) A recent study conducted by Erasmus University Rotterdam and Radboud University Nijmegen revealed that the International Classroom offers numerous benefits to Dutch students in particular. In just a few months' time, they became more open-minded and pro-active (Source: Hofhuis et al., 2022). [↗](#)

### Lecturers from around the world



Study programmes taught in English are accessible to lecturers from all around the globe. Especially in the field of engineering, the percentage of international staff at higher education institutions is high (56%) (Source: Rathenau, 2020). [↗](#)

### Scaling up



The net inflow of international students results in a larger student population and an increase in the number of courses and study programmes on offer. As a result, Dutch students have more options to choose from as well (Source: CPB, 2019: 25). [↗](#)

## More in-depth information and further reading

### International Students in the Netherlands

1. The figures on international students pursuing a full bachelor's or master's degree at a Dutch institution of higher education (2022/'23), with an overview of the current trends and developments. [Incoming degree mobility in Dutch higher education 2022-2023 \(nuffic.nl\)](#)
2. Nuffic's interactive dashboards provide the reader with statistics, which they can filter based on variables such as country of origin of international students in the Netherlands and/or the numbers of international degree students per region and per institution [Interactieve dashboards | Nuffic](#)
3. . This 2022 fact sheet offers insight into the study success of international students at research universities in the Netherlands. [Fact sheet on study success of international students in bachelor's programmes at research universities | Publication | Education Inspectorate \(onderwijsinspectie.nl\)](#)
4. This 2020 analysis presents an overview of studies currently being conducted into the added value of internationalisation in vocational education and training (MBO) and higher education (HE) in the Netherlands. [Ministry of Education, Culture and Science report – Added value of internationalisation in MBO and HE \(nuffic.nl\)](#)
5. For current figures regarding the total number of students and staff at research universities and the student-to-staff ratio, visit this webpage on Student Growth from Universities of the Netherlands (UNL) [\(universiteitenvannederland.nl\)](#)

6. This 2021 fact sheet provides a numeric overview of the intake of non-EEA students with a secondary school diploma rated lower than a Dutch pre-university-diploma into bachelor's programmes at research universities, based on the figures available to the Inspectorate: [Fact sheet on 'Intake of non-EEA students in bachelor's programmes at research universities' | Publication | Education Inspectorate \(onderwijsinspectie.nl\)](#)
7. This 2019 benchmark study describes the findings of the summary report 'Attracting and retaining international students in the EU' in relation to the Dutch context. [EMN\\_ benchmark\\_int-studenten.pdf \(emnetherlands.nl\)](#)

### Outbound mobility

1. The figures on Dutch students who go abroad for a full degree programme, part of their studies, or an internship, with an overview of the current trends and developments. [www.nuffic.nl/sites/default/files/2023-02/dutch-students-crossing-borders.pdf](#)
2. Nuffic has an interactive dashboard with statistics on outbound degree mobility. References to additional figures on destination countries are included at the bottom of the page. [Dutch degree students abroad | Nuffic.](#)

### Labour market and economy

1. In 2019, an Interministerial Policy Review (IBO) was conducted into the effects of international incoming and outbound students. This report also set out a number of policy options. The link also includes the government's response to this IBO. [Interministerial Policy Review: Internationalisation in \(higher\) education – Lower House of the States General](#)

2. The results of a 2022 study into the stay rate and labour market position of international students who earned a degree in the Netherlands. The study explored which portion of these students remained in the Netherlands, as well as the differences between EEA and non-EEA students and the various fields of study. It also looked at where the graduates who remained ended up living and working. [Stay rate and labour market position of international graduates in the Netherlands \(nuffic.nl\)](#)

### Language use in higher education

1. The central question of this exploratory study is what knowledge of languages and cultures the Netherlands needs in the business community, in government bodies, among social organisations and at knowledge institutions. One assertion of this study is that it must be made easier for international students to learn Dutch. [Languages for the Netherlands – KNAW.](#)
2. In another study, the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) investigated [the language choices of institutions](#). A vital recommendation from this study is that institutions must incorporate language policy into their strategic plans.
3. In 2021, Van den Doel studied [the effects of English as the language of instruction in higher education](#). One finding of that study was that working in groups and effective supervision from lecturers are invaluable for study programmes being taught in English in the Netherlands.

### Admission and inclusion

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

## References

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Nuffic (2022). How is it going with international students at Dutch higher education institutions? A report on study experience and well-being. [https://www.nuffic.nl/en/publications/how-is-it-going-with-international-students-at-dutch-higher-education-institutions](#)

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Education Inspectorate (2022). Onbedoelde zelfselectie: drempels die gekwalificeerde jongeren ervan weerhouden om een specifieke opleiding in het hoger onderwijs te kiezen [Unintentional self-selection: obstacles that keep qualified young people from choosing a specific study programme in higher education]. [https://www.onderwijsinspectie.nl/documenten/themaraapporten/2022/07/07/onbedoelde-zelfselectie-drempels-voor-eeen-specifieke-opleiding](#)