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## List of abbreviations and terms

EEA	European Economic Area
ERT	European Round Table of Industrialists
HvA	Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences
ISO	The Dutch National Students' Association
LSVb	Dutch Student Union
Nuffic	The Dutch organization for internationalization in education
UNL	Universities of the Netherlands, representative of universities, formerly VSNU Association of Dutch Universities
UvA	University of Amsterdam
WIB	Internationalization in Balance Act
VH	Association of Universities of Applied Sciences

# Vision on internationalization

## Introduction

ASVA is a union for all students in Amsterdam, representing them and promoting their interests at educational institutions and other bodies. In recent years, more and more international students have become members of ASVA, and some of our services are mainly used by international students. Because we also represent this group of students, we believe it is important to present a vision on the internationalization of education and its effects on both international and Dutch students. Below, we outline why this is a relevant topic.

The number of students in Amsterdam has grown exponentially in recent years, both among international and Dutch students. This follows a national trend. During the 2016-2017 academic year, more than 31,000 students studied at the UvA, and seven years later, in the 2023-2024 academic year, more than 43,000 students studied at the UvA.<sup>1</sup> Between 2016 and 2024, there was therefore a 39 percent increase in the number of students in the Netherlands. In the 2022-2023 academic year, 25.1 percent of students at Dutch universities were international, with 7.7 percent at universities of applied sciences.<sup>2</sup> The proportion of international students studying in Amsterdam also grew enormously in the same years, from 14 percent in 2016-2017 to 35 percent in 2023-2024.<sup>3</sup> Amsterdam distinguishes itself from the rest of the Netherlands by having a higher number of international students. In the 2022-2023 academic year, Amsterdam

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<sup>1</sup> 'University of Amsterdam in figures and graphs', Number of students per academic year, August 2025, <https://allecijfers.nl/wo/universiteit-van-amsterdam/>.

<sup>2</sup> Saoradh Favier and Bregje Wijsenbeek, *Factsheet international students* (Nuffic, 2023), 8, <https://www.nuffic.nl/sites/default/files/2023-05/factsheet-internationale-studenten-2023.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Jaap Draaisma, 'Foreign students in Amsterdam, Academic year 2024-2025', Foreign students in Amsterdam, 2022, <https://www.amsterdamsorteermachine.nl/buitenlandse-studenten>.

had the largest influx of international students of all cities, with 8,660 new international enrolments. Due to the large number of international students in both the Netherlands and Amsterdam, it is important that we formulate a vision on internationalization.

Nuffic, the Dutch organization for internationalization in education, identifies both advantages and challenges resulting from international students in Dutch education. Advantages include the fact that the 'international classroom' contributes to the development of students' international competencies. English-language programs are also accessible to teachers from all over the world. Challenges include increasing pressure on the capacities of institutions, the self-selection among Dutch-speaking students who are less likely to choose English-language education, and international students contributing to the increasing demand for housing. Whereas Dutch students can often fall back on previous places of residence, such as their parents' home, international students usually do not have this option. They are dependent on private rentals or student housing provided by the educational institution, which puts these students in vulnerable positions.<sup>4</sup> The economic balance of income and costs of international students in the Netherlands is positive in the long term, because some of the international students will later work in the Netherlands. We see that the motivation for educational institutions to recruit international students is often financial.<sup>5</sup> International students bring in more money for educational institutions than Dutch students because they pay higher tuition fees.<sup>6</sup> Large and internationally popular study programs can thus be used to promote the financial health of an institution (or faculty). This can be seen as something positive, because 'profitable' programs maintain the less

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<sup>4</sup> Favier and Wijsenbeek, *Factsheet international students*.

<sup>5</sup> Koen Marée et al., 'Universities call foreign students an enrichment. But they are mainly a revenue model', Journalism platform, De Correspondent, 2021, <https://decorrespondent.nl/9781/universiteiten-noemen-buitenlandse-studenten-een-verrijking-maar-ze-zijn-vooral-een-verdienmodel/9da2067b-b9e6-0a70-1f87-99a3e8530e8d>.

<sup>6</sup> Ministerie van Algemene Zaken. (2024, 13 juni). *Financiering hoger onderwijs*. Financiering Onderwijs | Rijksoverheid.nl. <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/financiering-onderwijs/financiering-hoger-onderwijs>

'profitable' ones.<sup>7 8 9 10</sup> It can also be seen as something negative because, in practice, the internationalization of education is not based on educational considerations, but on financial ones.

All students deserve high-quality education with adequate supervision and student housing close to their educational institution. Through this vision statement, we want to implement a clear line in what ASVA thinks about internationalization, so that there is more stability in ASVA's opinion. We hope that people can refer back to this when discussing internationalization.

This vision will shed light on national and international education policy concerning internationalization, considering both the influence of internationalization on university and professional higher education and other aspects of student life, such as housing and accessible public transportation. The vision is divided into two parts to make a clear distinction between the policy that created the circumstances and how we should deal with the circumstances that exist. The first part deals with education policy, and the second part deals with the circumstances of international students.

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<sup>7</sup> More students generate more income, and faculties with many international students are financially strong, such as Economics & Business and Psychology. The UvA distributes the money between faculties using an internal allocation model (described in the budget and framework letter). International students are regularly described in the media and in discussions among policymakers as a revenue model, and the decline in international students is seen as a financial setback. The framework letter states that 'In particular, the introduction and application of the Balanced Internationalization Act (WIB) may have a negative effect on the UvA's income. In addition, we see that various institutions, such as Utrecht University and Leiden University, fear the elimination of 'unprofitable programs'. Because there are only a limited number of (future) Dutch students to recruit, there is a financial incentive to recruit students from other countries.

<sup>8</sup> Marée, K., Been, J., & Hekkema, B. (2021, 8 november). Universiteiten noemen buitenlandse studenten een verrijking. Maar ze zijn vooral een verdienmodel. De Correspondent. [https://decorrespondent.nl/9781/universiteiten-noemen-buitenlandse-studenten-een-verrijking-maar-ze-zijn-vooral-een-verdienmodel/9da2067b-b9e6-0a70-1f87-99a3e8530e8d?utm\\_source=copilot.com](https://decorrespondent.nl/9781/universiteiten-noemen-buitenlandse-studenten-een-verrijking-maar-ze-zijn-vooral-een-verdienmodel/9da2067b-b9e6-0a70-1f87-99a3e8530e8d?utm_source=copilot.com)

<sup>9</sup> University of Amsterdam. (2025, 18 juli). Kaderbrief. <https://www.uva.nl/over-de-uva/beleid-en-regelingen/financien/kaderbrief.html>

<sup>10</sup> UvA-begroting 2026: klein verlies van bijna 3 miljoen. (z.d.). Folia. [https://www.folia.nl/nl/actueel/168716/uva-begroting-2026-klein-verlies-van-bijna-3-miljoen?utm\\_source=copilot.com](https://www.folia.nl/nl/actueel/168716/uva-begroting-2026-klein-verlies-van-bijna-3-miljoen?utm_source=copilot.com)

## Problem description

In recent years, there has been a major influx of international students. This is partly due to the anglicization of education. Anglicization of education means that Dutch-language education is increasingly making way for English-language education, or that the English language is playing an increasingly important role in Dutch-language education. There are both supporters and opponents of this trend. Supporters argue that the 'international classroom' enriches education, and that (partly) English-language education enriches the diversity of teachers, as well as boosting the Dutch economy. Opponents argue that it puts pressure on the quality of education and further increases the existing pressure on housing, among other things. In addition, we are also seeing an overload of educational facilities, a feeling of oppression among Dutch students, overcrowded lecture halls, poor English language skills among teachers, and a lack of connection and social cohesion between Dutch and international students. We see that when issues such as housing or educational quality are not in order, the role of international students is quickly called into question.

An important question is whether the anglicization of education is the cause of the above-mentioned problems, or whether it exposes and exacerbates existing problems. One of the important considerations is whether the policy that allows for so much anglicization is the core problem, or whether it is the structural underfunding of higher education that encourages the international recruitment of students. We will discuss this in more detail below.

# 1 Education policy

The policy pursued by educational institutions in Amsterdam stems from national, but above all international agreements on international education. Since 2000, various policy instruments, laws, rules, guidelines, and visions have been established to promote and limit internationalization. These national developments are linked to international interests and policy developments. As ASVA, we can do little about these international agreements, but to understand what is happening in Amsterdam, it is useful to know what agreements exist, where they come from, and how we view them. We can, however, adapt our actions to maneuver between international developments and Dutch policy. In this chapter, we will highlight international and national developments that preceded the emergence of the current local problems.

## 1.1 International education policy: the Bologna Declaration

The most influential international education policy on Dutch policy is the Bologna Declaration, and the context in which it was signed is important to understand. The development of science and technology has had a major impact on businesses and the knowledge-based economy over the past twenty years. The European knowledge-based economy needs to train highly educated, flexible workers in order to compete with other economies. Under pressure from the European Round Table of Industrialists (ERT) lobby, European countries adopted the Bologna Declaration.<sup>11</sup>

Under this agreement, 29 European states have committed themselves to creating the 'European Education Area'. The Bologna Declaration aims to provide a common framework for EU member states to create a flexible higher education system that is more closely and effectively linked to the interests and needs of the business community. Since the agreement was adopted, the ministers responsible from all 48

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<sup>11</sup> Apache, 'The round table of top industrialists who help determine EU policy', Journalism platform, Follow The Money, 2017, <https://www.ftm.nl/artikelen/dit-zijn-de-topindustrielen-die-het-eu-beleid-mee-bepalen?share=C9h3CI9MbFcWYlqVdVy87X%2Fio5EpEQxpP%2BqsMGCftl6rJYn2Q6r3vnR6qZoFsA%3D%3D>.

countries of the European Higher Education Area have been meeting every two years to make joint agreements. Examples of these agreements include guidelines for internal quality assurance that educational institutions must comply with, as well as agreements on external quality assurance that the Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organization (NVAO) must comply with.<sup>12</sup>

## 1.2 National education policy

Trends in Dutch education, such as 'lifelong learning', can be traced back to the Bologna Declaration and the agreements that followed.<sup>13</sup> An example of the enormous changes to the Dutch education system resulting from the Bologna Declaration is the introduction of the bachelor's-master's structure as we know it today.<sup>14</sup> The Netherlands was one of the first countries to implement the bachelor's-master's 'split' in 2002. Before that, four- or five-year programs were offered in the Netherlands, but after these changes, they became three-year bachelor's programs plus one- or two-year master's programs. This was a policy change that was heavily criticized at the time by student organizations, including the Dutch Student Union (LSVb) and the Dutch National Students' Association (ISO), because the change discourages extracurricular activities and makes it more difficult for students to study at their own pace.<sup>15</sup> This split and other system changes implemented throughout Europe seem intended to push students into the labor market more quickly.<sup>16</sup> The bachelor-master split ensures that education in the participating countries becomes more similar, making it easier for students to complete part of their education abroad.

<sup>12</sup> NVAO, 'Bologna Process', <https://www.nvao.net/nl/bologna-process>.

<sup>13</sup> EHEA secretariat, 'LIFELONG LEARNING', Ehea.Info, <https://ehea.info/page-lifelong-learning>.

<sup>14</sup> Amendment of, among others, the Higher Education and Scientific Research Act and the Student Finance Act 2000 in connection with the introduction of the bachelor's-master's structure in higher education, 28 024, no. 3, House of Representatives, 2001-2002 EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM.

<https://www.parlementairemonitor.nl/9353000/1/j9vvij5epmj1ey0/vi3ajy0aqfui>.

<sup>15</sup> Education editorial team, 'Hard cut between bachelor's and master's degrees', *Trouw* (Amsterdam), 2008, <https://www.trouw.nl/nieuws/harde-knip-tussen-bachelor-en-master-bbab481b/>.

<sup>16</sup> Derk Walters, 'Stopping after a bachelor's degree must become normal', *NRC Handelsblad* (Amsterdam), December 3, 2008.

The joint 'International Vision' published in 2014 by the Association of Dutch Universities (now Universities of the Netherlands, or UNL) and the Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (VH) makes it clear that the motivation for internationalization on the part of these umbrella organizations is to strengthen the knowledge-based economy. According to the umbrella organizations, English-language education contributes to the 'global brand' of the Netherlands as a knowledge-based country. The umbrella organizations also argue that the ambitions of universities of applied sciences and universities must be in line with broader government policy.<sup>17</sup> The objective of these umbrella organizations is not to enrich education, but – as with the Bologna Declaration – to remain internationally competitive with regard to emerging economies.<sup>18</sup> Internationalization is not only in the interest of the Dutch economy; educational institutions themselves also have economic interests in internationalization. According to a report by UNL: "The tuition fees paid by [international students] are an important part of the revenue model for many academic institutions."<sup>19</sup>

National and international policy developments are summarized in a timeline, which can be found in Appendix 1.

### **ASVA's position**

ASVA believes that the presence of international students and the 'international classroom' enrich Dutch education. At the same time, we must also acknowledge the

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<sup>17</sup> Association of Universities of Applied Sciences and VSNU, *Joint Vision on Internationalization* (The Hague, 2014), 3, [https://www.verenighogescholen.nl/system/knowledge\\_base/attachments/files/000/000/364/original/Gezamenlijke\\_Visie\\_Internationalisering\\_-\\_Vereniging\\_Hogescholen\\_VSNU.pdf?1443090100](https://www.verenighogescholen.nl/system/knowledge_base/attachments/files/000/000/364/original/Gezamenlijke_Visie_Internationalisering_-_Vereniging_Hogescholen_VSNU.pdf?1443090100).

<sup>18</sup> Association of *International Vision*, 6.

<sup>19</sup> 'Universities: increase in foreign students halted', *Friesch Dagblad* (Leeuwarden), November 11, 2023, <https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn%3acontentItem%3a69KX-PFG1-JC6P-V534-00000-00&context=1519360&identityprofileid=4WBGCC56941>.



challenges, as described in the problem description. It is important not to direct frustration and criticism about crowded lecture halls, poor English language skills among lecturers, or the shortage of student housing at individual international students who choose to study in the Netherlands. Instead, we must focus on the lobbies and governments that have increasingly turned education into a product.

ASVA will call for a critical stance towards the Bologna Declaration and the agreements arising from it at the General Assemblies of the ISO and the LSVb, because the Bologna Declaration does not serve the interests of European students, but rather the monopolies that want to profit from the knowledge of these students. In addition, we must always remain vigilant when educational institutions introduce new measures affecting international students and be critical of who benefits from these changes.

We strive to ensure that:

- ASVA expresses its criticism of the measures resulting from the Bologna Declaration at the General Assemblies of the ISO and the LSVb.
- ASVA remains critical of measures taken by educational institutions regarding international students and, where necessary, expresses its opinion.

## 1.3 Language policy

### 1.3.1 Language of instruction in academic education

The language of instruction of a study program dictates who can and cannot follow that study program. In addition to the fact that an international educational community enriches education, as described above, there are also Dutch-speaking students who consciously choose English-language education. Students who want to work in internationally oriented fields often choose an English-language program because this can help them later in their working lives.

There is also a lot to be said for programs taught in Dutch. For example, there is self-selection, whereby Dutch students are less likely to choose an English-language program in higher education because they think they cannot cope. Nuffic refers to this as self-selection, because it has been observed that when similar programs are offered in Dutch and English, students opt for the Dutch-language version.<sup>20</sup> Students who move from secondary vocational education (MBO) to universities of applied sciences (HBO) or from HBO to university education (WO) can experience considerable barriers when a program is offered only in English. For example, someone who has moved from MBO to HBO and wants to do a WO (pre)master's program will not have the same level of spoken and written English as someone who has completed a Dutch or English WO or bachelor's program after completing VWO. Even in Dutch-language university education, English-language texts are often used, which is not necessarily the case in non-academic education. For students who enter higher education via a different route and are, for example, first-generation students, offering sufficient Dutch-language education has a positive effect on accessibility. We therefore advocate a balance between Dutch and English-language education in the Netherlands to guarantee accessibility for multiple groups of students.

### **ASVA's position:**

The discussion about language policy is more prevalent in academic education, because the use of English is more common there. The position applies to education policy but is logically more relevant in the context of higher education.

ASVA strives for a varied range of courses in both English and Dutch. This is positive for students who prefer one of the two languages or for whom one of the two options is more accessible. ASVA believes it is important that Dutch students have sufficient opportunities to pursue their desired studies in Dutch somewhere in the Netherlands, but at the same time recognizes the added value of international students and English as a language of instruction at universities for Dutch society.

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<sup>20</sup> Favier and Wijsenbeek, *Factsheet on*, 5.

ASVA advocates:

- A varied range of courses in both Dutch and English.
- Involving student participation in decisions about which language is appropriate for a program or track of a program.

### 1.3.2 Language courses

ASVA advocates for an opportunity at the UvA where international students can learn Dutch for free, and more opportunities for Dutch students to learn English academic writing skills. This makes it possible for all students to master the Dutch language.

ASVA advocates for the possibility to take language courses for ECs within the study program, something that is quite normal outside the Netherlands. By including language courses as electives, everyone has the option of fitting the courses into their study program, rather than having them as an extra burden on top of their studies. This will enable students to better integrate into Dutch society during their studies and in their working lives after graduation. Many international students want to learn Dutch, but the current options are very limited and expensive. This means that most of them do not take a language course. Dutch students who wish to follow English-language courses should also have the opportunity to improve their speaking and writing skills if they feel the need to do so, for example by offering a course in English academic writing skills or extra lessons. This will improve the opportunities for Dutch-speaking students to find work internationally, especially in smaller fields.

#### **Transfer**

Offering free language lessons makes it easier for students to settle in the Netherlands after their studies. International students are desperately needed in the Netherlands to work in different fields after their studies, such as education. International lecturers bring knowledge to the Netherlands that is sometimes not available here. If English is pushed back too much at universities, lecturers will choose other countries. This could lead to a shortage of diverse staff and, in the extreme case, the disappearance of

small-scale subjects and programs. International students can also reduce shortages in the Dutch labor market. These shortages, particularly in healthcare, education, and technology, will increase dramatically in the coming years due to the aging population. In addition, international students bring with them a different background that enriches the diversity of the Netherlands, something we will always advocate for.

### **ASVA's position**

In order to give international students, the opportunity to participate fully in student life, it is important that they are given the opportunity to learn the language through:

- Advocating to educational institutions for opportunities to take Dutch language lessons within their elective program or within the educational institution, which are offered free of charge.
- Advocating to educational institutions for a course or tutoring in English-language academic speaking and writing skills. Ideally, this should not involve any financial barriers.

In addition, ASVA wants to actively contribute to creating places where Dutch and international students can build student communities.

## 1.4 Intake of students

From 2014 to 2018, we saw a huge influx of international students. This is the result of an active policy that focuses on the growth of international programs. For example, in 2017, Nuffic had more than 10 offices around the world to promote education in the Netherlands abroad, and in 2018 the UvA started offering an English-language track in Psychology. The extreme level of recruitment abroad led to criticism: students were often recruited without having accommodation in the city and were poorly informed. In 2017, a call was made to stop the unrestricted recruitment of international students.<sup>21</sup> In 2022, the recruitment of foreign students for popular UvA programs was curtailed by the cabinet.<sup>22</sup>

### **Numerus fixus**

Despite the decline in recruitment, Dutch education (particularly university education) remains extremely popular among international students when English-language tracks or entire programs are offered. For this reason, there is a desire to limit enrollment in these tracks, for example by introducing numerus fixus. Numerus fixus literally means "fixed number." Numerus fixus programs are often very popular programs, with more people wanting to enroll than there is capacity for.

### **Lottery versus selection**

When setting a numerus fixus for English-language tracks, consideration must be given to when students are or are not admitted to the program. There are various systems for this, within which we strive for a selection procedure that guarantees as little inequality of opportunity as possible. Research has shown that students with disabilities and students with a migrant background are less likely to succeed in selection procedures,

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<sup>21</sup> Erik Flentge, 'Stop recruiting international students without limits', Folia, September 11, 2017, <https://www.folia.nl/ opinie/114139/stop-met-het-grenzeloos-werven-van-internationale-studenten>.

<sup>22</sup> Het Parool, 'https://www.parool.nl/amsterdam/uva-teruggefloten-door-kabinet-buitenlandse-studenten-weren-mag-niet~be2e0ad7/', Het Parool, November 6, 2022, <https://www.parool.nl/amsterdam/uva-teruggefloten-door-kabinet-buitenlandse-studenten-weren-mag-niet~be2e0ad7/>.

which is why we want to be vigilant about the use of this method. The position of the LSVb and the ISO is in line with this. "The LSVb and the ISO consider this a worrying development and therefore advocate that selection should only be introduced if a program is facing capacity problems. If selection does take place, every student must have an equal chance of being admitted, regardless of their background or other socio-cultural or socio-economic characteristics."<sup>23</sup>

In this regard, ASVA considers an unweighted lottery to be the most equitable selection procedure. This means that a random selection is made from among the registered students, without interviews, motivation letters, or (secondary) school performance. We make this assessment because inequality of opportunity does not begin when someone enrolls in a program. High school performance, which is taken into account in a weighted lottery, is influenced by cultural and socioeconomic background.<sup>24</sup> Taking these school results into account in a selection procedure would lead to higher chances for students with parents from a higher socioeconomic class subsequently increasing inequality of opportunity.

ASVA has a clear preference for unweighted lottery, as this is the only way to ensure that students' backgrounds are not considered. It is important to realize that faculty councils and education committees are responsible for decisions regarding selection and enrollment quotas. Faculty participation bodies must be consulted by law on policy decisions made by the faculty board, and the education committee must be consulted on the quality of education. Both are influenced by the establishment of a selection procedure. Our position is therefore that the selection procedure must be reviewed

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<sup>23</sup> Tariq Sewbaransingh, 'Selection for study programs leads to unequal opportunities for students', lsvb.nl, July 11, 2017, <https://lsvb.nl/2017/07/11/selectie-opleidingen-leidt-tot-ongelijke-kansen-studenten/>.

<sup>24</sup> Alida Oppers, *The State of Education 2025* (Education Inspectorate, 2025), 147, <https://www.onderwijsinspectie.nl/binaries/onderwijsinspectie/documenten/rapporten/2025/04/16/rapport-de-staat-van-het-onderwijs-2025/Rapport+De+Staat+van+het+Onderwijs+2025+TGv3-69.pdf>.

annually in consultation with the representative bodies. ASVA must continue to inform the representative bodies of this every year.

**ASVA's position:**

- Unweighted random selection is the only selection method that guarantees equal opportunities.
- In cases where the capacity of the programme conflicts with the quality of education, we will, in principle, be in favour of a numerus fixus, subject to an unweighted random selection.
- We will inform the representative body each year about the possibility of having a say in the review of the student selection procedure. Once a board sees that councils are well informed about their advisory rights when it comes to selection procedures, an ASVA board can stop informing each representative body about their rights every year.

## 2 The circumstances of international students

Studying is not just about attending lectures; there is much more to it than that. Good-quality housing is essential for a healthy student population. Although Dutch and international students sometimes face similar problems, such as finding accommodation, loneliness, high study pressure, and long travel times, international students are often even more disadvantaged than Dutch students. Factors such as the language barrier, cultural differences, and being away from their own country contribute to this.

### 2.1 Housing

#### **Problems faced by international students in the student housing market**

In addition to the general shortage for student housing, which affects both Dutch and international students, international students often face specific problems in the area of housing. Although all students, both Dutch and foreign, should have equal rights to housing when studying here, we do see that the high influx of international students is one of the factors contributing to the overall shortage of student housing. Another reason for this is, for example, the unwillingness of the municipality of Amsterdam to provide permanent student housing.

Nevertheless, international students more often face problems in the housing market than Dutch students are less likely to encounter. First of all, we see that international students have fewer options to fall back on if they lose their accommodation. For example, international students cannot return to their parents if they must leave their student accommodation after completing their studies or if they are still studying but their contract expires.<sup>25</sup> This also contributes to the high number of international students who return to their home country or move abroad after completing their studies. If we want to retain international students after their studies to reduce the dropout rate, there must be housing available for these international students to

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<sup>25</sup> Favier and Wijssenbeek, *Factsheet on*



actually continue living in Amsterdam. Living in a completely new environment also means that these students have a smaller network, which plays an important role in the student housing market. This makes options such as subletting far less accessible to international students.

International students also often face a language barrier. This makes it more difficult for them to familiarize themselves with Dutch housing law. In addition, the assistance offered by the government and various organizations is only partially accessible. For example, the website of the rent assessment committee or the Legal Desk is only available in Dutch. Due to the high housing shortage for students, both Dutch and international, combined with this language barrier that hinders both the provision of information and the use of housing law, international students are more likely to encounter illegal behavior from housing providers.<sup>26</sup>

The rules on student travel passes for international students (which we will discuss in the next section) have a negative effect on the search for housing, because a long distance between home and campus not only costs a lot of time, but also money. This means that many potentially attractive housing options are lost to international students, which has negative consequences for both Dutch students who want to live closer to campus and international students who cannot afford the high prices in the city center.

### **ASVA's position:**

We aim to alleviate these burdens and barriers for international students by:

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<sup>26</sup> Tom Dieleman, 'Student union sounds the alarm: students increasingly being scammed in search of housing', Het Parool, April 8, 2015, <https://www.parool.nl/amsterdam/studentenvakbond-trekt-aan-de-bel-studenten-steeds-vaker-opgelicht-in-zoektocht-naar-woonruimte~b4655520/?referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F>; Abdelkader Karbache, 'Students increasingly victims of scams and fraud when looking for rooms', lsvb.nl, April 8, 2015, <https://lsvb.nl/2025/04/08/studenten-steeds-vaker-slachtoffer-van-oplichting-en-fraude-bij-zoektocht-naar-kamer/>.

- Raising awareness of the language barrier with support organizations related to housing rights and trying to get English versions of their info,
- Sharing know-how of tenancy law among (international) students through information provided by ASVA, social media, our website, or physical events,
- Bringing (international) students together through ASVA channels to share and disseminate housing options, to expand their network in a targeted manner,
- Raise awareness of the specific housing problems faced by international students among other stakeholders, such as the municipality, political parties/organizations, or student housing providers.

### 3 Public transportation

#### **Dutch students and student travel products**

Currently, full-time students in the Netherlands are entitled to a student travel pass for several years. This travel pass allows them to travel for free on all forms of public transport during the week and at weekends, and with a 40% discount during the rest of the week.

#### **International students with an EU/EEA passport and student travel product**

International students with an EU/EEA passport are also eligible for the student travel product if they have lived in the Netherlands for five years or longer, work more than 32 hours per month, or have a parent/partner (with an EU/EEA passport) who works more than 32 hours per month in the Netherlands. This shows a clear difference between Dutch and international students. There is no data available on the number of international students who have access to the student travel product because of this regulation. ASVA believes that the existence of these additional rules has a negative effect on the circumstances of international students.

#### **International students without an EU/EEA passport and the student travel product**

In addition, international students without an EU/EEA passport do not have access to a student travel product and therefore pay the full price for public transport.

#### **Impact**

The poor regulation of public transport funding also has a negative effect on the daily experience of international students. International students who do not meet the requirements for a student travel product are less able to use public transport for leisure activities. In a short qualitative study on student poverty, ASVA's Student Welfare Team spoke with several international students. Multiple students indicated that the lack of a student travel product prevented them from going to social events with friends. Due to the lack of free public transport, many international students are dependent on bicycles. This may not sound like a problem at first, but it can limit the

freedom of movement of international students, for example, students who are unable to use a bicycle due to a physical or visual impairment.

### **ASVA's position**

We aim to ease the burden on international students in this area by advocating for:

- The abolition of the additional requirements for international students to obtain a student travel product.
- Providing student travel passes to students without an EU/EEA passport.

## 4 Student well-being

International students are a risk group in many respects when it comes to well-being, as they experience more stress, performance pressure, loneliness, and psychological complaints than Dutch students. This is due to a variety of reasons that are closely interrelated. A combination of language barriers and cultural differences is often the cause of a reduced sense of inclusion.<sup>27</sup> In addition, international students often experience the current housing shortage in the Netherlands more intensely, as they are sometimes not adequately informed about this by their home university and are unable to move back in with their parents if they lose their accommodation.<sup>28</sup> Finally, international students sometimes face additional financial difficulties because, for example, they are not eligible for the student travel product or because visa restrictions prevent them from working.<sup>29</sup>

All these factors weigh heavily on the mental well-being of international students, who often do not receive sufficient help. Recent research shows that international students experience more barriers in finding help.<sup>30</sup> For instance, they are less likely to receive help for mental health issues, as Dutch is the language used in the UvA's complaints procedure, which makes it difficult for them to raise issues relating to social safety.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Jolien Dopmeijer et al., *Harder Better Faster Stronger?, A study of risk factors and solutions for performance pressure and stress among students in higher professional education and university education* (Trimbos Institute, ECIO, and RIVM, 2023), 153, <https://www.trimbos.nl/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/AF2084-Harder-Better-Faster-Stronger.pdf>.

<sup>28</sup> Elli Thravalou et al., *How Is It Going with International Students at Dutch Higher Education Institutions? A Report on Study Experience and Well-Being* (Nuffic, 2022), 27.

<sup>29</sup> Dopmeijer et al., *Harder Better Faster Stronger?, A study into risk factors and solutions for performance pressure and stress among students in higher professional education and university education*.

<sup>30</sup> J.M. Dopmeijer et al., *Monitor Mental Health and Substance Use Among Higher Education Students - Part I Mental Health of Students in Higher Education* (RIVM, Trimbos Institute, and GGD GHOR Netherlands, 2021), 120, [https://www.eerstekamer.nl/overig/20211210/monitor\\_mentale\\_gezondheid\\_en/document](https://www.eerstekamer.nl/overig/20211210/monitor_mentale_gezondheid_en/document).

<sup>31</sup> Marry de Gaay Fortman et al., 'Social Safety Needs Encouragement. Research into the Social Safety System at the University of Amsterdam', External Committee on Social Safety, 2020.

The current political climate is also not conducive to international students: the WIB can make them feel even more unwelcome in the Netherlands.<sup>32</sup> Precisely for this reason, it is important not to overlook international students when it comes to student well-being.

### **ASVA's position**

We strive for special attention within higher education for the well-being of international students by:

- Raising awareness of the issue so that lecturers, study advisors, and student psychologists are aware of the specific problems experienced by international students, to deal with them in an appropriate manner.
- Making the complaints procedures at various educational institutions accessible to international students, for example by offering English as a possible language during the complaints process.
- Advocate for student housing with shared facilities, so that loneliness can also be remedied at home by housemates.

## **4.1 Universities of applied sciences**

### **Position of international students at universities of applied sciences**

It is difficult for international students at universities of applied sciences to connect with the community. An important part of this connection, if it occurs, is during the introduction period and the introduction week. However, with the budget cuts announced by the government, in combination with the WIB, there is less money available for the introduction period. The HvA has decided to organize this per study program and to scale it back, which may further weaken the bond with the university of applied sciences.

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<sup>32</sup> WIB: Wet Internationalisering in Balans (Internationalization in Balance Act), a bill sent to the House of Representatives in May 2024.

It is important that we emphasize the community-building function of the introduction to the HvA. If it is not possible to organize HvA-wide introductions, we will have to look for alternatives aimed at the target group. It is important that international students can participate in introduction activities, for example by providing information and promotion in English. However, we could also consider organizing events, parties, etc. specifically aimed at international students. It is also possible to help organizations that focus on international students, for example by assisting with their establishment or providing other forms of support.

### **ASVA's position**

Pay attention to the engagement that international students at universities of applied sciences experience with student life and the educational institution by:

- Paying attention to this group during the introduction period.
- Supporting organizations for international students.

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