



Still Welcome?

International Student Perspectives on
De-Internationalization
in Dutch Higher Education

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Me

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- 25 years old
- Originally from Gouda
- BSc International Business Administration
- MSc Data Science and Society
- MA Management of Cultural Diversity



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Survey shows internationals feeling less welcome in the Netherlands: 'This will take decades to fix'

22 Nov 2023 [Antonia Leise](#)

[Lees dit artikel in het Nederlands](#)



1. Introduction & Problem Statement



The Shift

- 2023 elections marked turning point: PVV (Geert Wilders) won, coalition formed with parties favoring reduced international student influx: Schoof I government.
- Survey data: 70% of international students initially felt welcome → only 55% after elections; unwelcome feelings increased from 16.5% to 25%
- Netherlands transformed from actively internationalizing higher education to implementing restrictive policies.

1. Introduction & Problem Statement



Key Developments

- **Rutte IV government (2023):** Proposed "Internationalisering in Balans" (WIB) bill
 - Restricting English programs
 - Restricting the amount of students in English tracks and non-EEA students
- **Schoof I government (2024-2025):** Intensified measures

Research Aim



How do international students experience the latest national de-internationalization policies in Dutch higher education?

3. Theoretical Framework

A. Hostile Environment Framework (adapted from UK context)

- Policies create unwelcoming atmosphere through three domains: Facilities, Finances, Security
- Originally aimed at undocumented migrants; now applied to study migrants
 - **Facilities:** Stricter conditions for non-Dutch programs, main language should be Dutch
 - **Finances:** Increase fees for non-EEA students, aim to limit grants for EEA students
 - **Security:** Screening for non-EEA students

3. Theoretical Framework

B. Internationalization & De-internationalization

- Netherlands' "honeymoon phase" (post-Bologna Process): English programs, active recruitment
- Recent backlash: Overcrowded classrooms, housing crisis, budget cuts
- De-internationalization mirrors trends in Canada, UK, Australia

C. Sense of Belonging

- Fundamental human need affecting mental health, academic performance
- International students face acculturative stress, loneliness, isolation

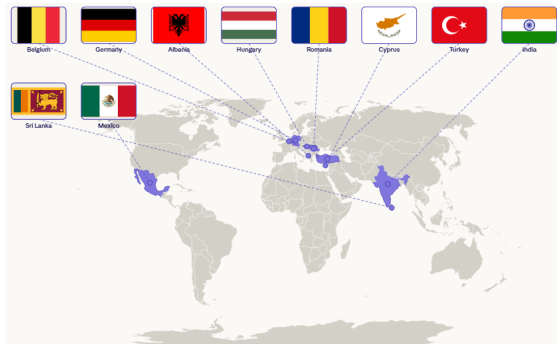
4. Methodology

Research Design:

- Qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews
- 13 international students at Tilburg University

Analysis:

- Thematic Analysis





Belgium



Germany



Albania



Hungary



Romania



Cyprus



Turkey



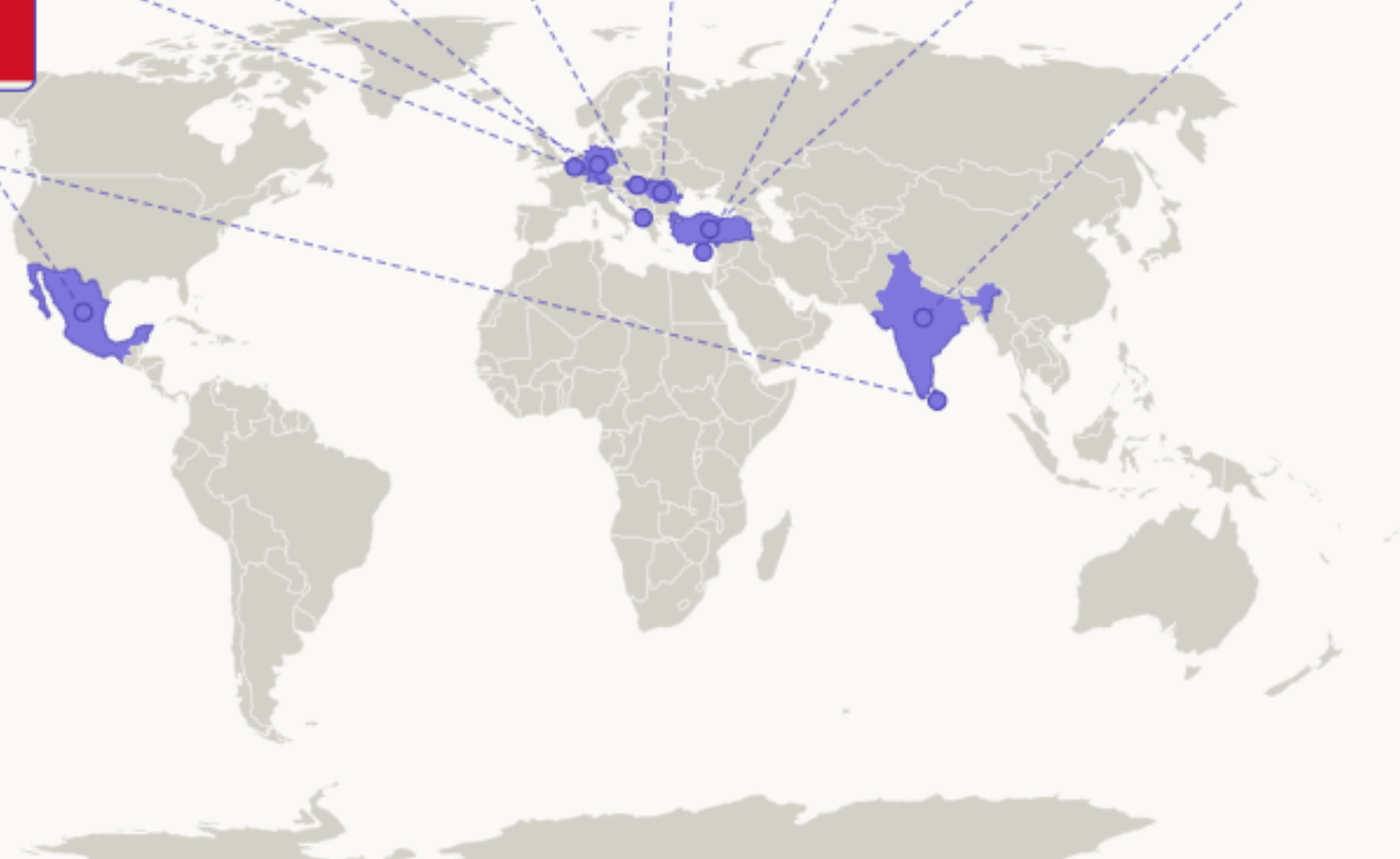
India



Sri Lanka



Mexico



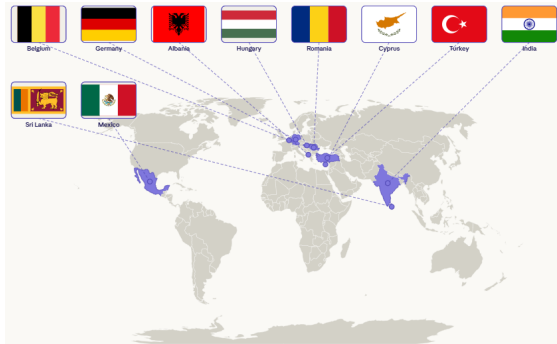
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- Thematic Analysis





**“I also have rights, you know.
I have the right to speak up.”**



“Now, what would happen to those teachers?

Will they be replaced?


Is anyone able to replace them even?

Do they have enough teachers?

Are they just gonna have to move out?

What's gonna happen?”





**“No change big enough
will be implemented that
it's gonna make it
impossible for me to stay
here.”**



5. Key Findings

5.1 The International Student Experience

- **Social Life:**
 - Strong bonds formed within international circles.
 - A strong divide between Dutch and international students.
- **Housing:**
 - The single biggest challenge.
 - Students encountered 'Dutch-only' and 'No internationals' ads.
 - Some faced homelessness

5. Key Findings

5.1 The International Student Experience

- **Bureaucracy:**
 - Government letters only in Dutch.
 - Service not provided in English.
 - Difficulty accessing healthcare.
 - Non-first year students reported fewer struggles, suggesting adaptation over time.
- **Finances:**
 - Non-EEA students pay a significantly higher institutional fee.
 - Some could only study thanks to scholarships.
 - Rising cost of living adding to pressure.

5. Key Findings

5.2 Perception of De-internationalization Policies

Most students were aware of the 2023 election results and policy shifts, though awareness of pre-2023 trends was lower. Reactions were overwhelmingly negative across all three policy domains:

- Language Policy:
 - Seen as impractical and discriminatory.
 - Students fear it will drive away international staff, reduce classroom diversity, and damage program quality.
 - Several programs are already being discontinued.

5. Key Findings

5.2 Perception of De-internationalization Policies

- **Financial Policy:** Budget cuts and reduced grants perceived as excluding less privileged students.
- **Security Policy:**
 - Widely viewed as discriminatory and xenophobic.
 - Non-EEA students already undergo visa checks.
 - Students question both the fairness and effectiveness of additional screening.

5. Key Findings

5.3 Effects on Sense of Belonging

- Sense of Belonging:
 - Most students noticed a decline in welcomeness.
 - University communications and social media are increasingly in Dutch.



5. Key Findings

5.3 Effects on Sense of Belonging

- **Future Worries:**

- First year students worried mainly about their own program continuity and finances.
- Non-first year students expressed broader concern for the future of Dutch higher education and incoming students.

- **Future Plans:**

- Several students are reconsidering staying in the Netherlands.
- However, certain students saw current policies not as severe enough to leave after graduating.

5. Key Findings

5.4 Student Demands for Universities

- **Transparency:** Regular, clear communication about policy developments and their implications.
- **Housing support:** More active university involvement in securing accommodation.
- **Integration:**
 - More Dutch language courses, ideally embedded in programs.
 - Better pathways into Dutch society and the labour market.
- **Advocacy:** Students, especially students studying more than one year want the university to publicly oppose harmful policies on their behalf.

Conclusion

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- Policies create systemic barriers and a shift in climate
 - Students oppose policies and feel increasingly unwelcome
 - Students call on university for: transparency, practical support, advocacy



Current Government led by Rob Jetten



- Universities gain more targeted options to attract international talent and retain domestic talent
- The language-of-instruction test for new programmes is scrapped; existing non-Dutch programmes are preserved
 - Binding agreements with institutions will manage capacity and regional impact of international student intake
- A numerus fixus can be applied to English-taught bachelor's programmes where needed