



INTERNATIONAL BROCHURE

A guide for international students new to Groningen

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Introduction

Welcome to Groningen!

Situated in the heart of the Netherlands north, welcome to one of the country's most vibrant student cities. Indeed, Groningen is like no other. With one of the largest student populations in the country, the university forms part of the heart of the city. Groningen offers a great mix of student life, culture and Dutch tradition. It can be intimidating at first, but soon you'll see all the city has to offer....

In fact, Dutch society is highly international. Major Dutch cities like Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and even Groningen have been centres of international trade since the 17th century. So, the Dutch are typically tolerant and accepting of other people's beliefs and cultures. But it's good to know that the Dutch are renowned for their directness. Although most people are not easily offended, be prepared for the Dutch to be straightforward with you. It might be surprising at first, but the Dutch value straightforward and honest communication. So don't worry, they're not being rude, they're just being blunt!

As you settle into Groningen we encourage you to immerse yourself, ask questions, and participate in local (Dutch) student life. This city with its canals, historic buildings and energetic student scene is set to offer you an unforgettable university experience. The brochure should provide you with everything you need to dive into Dutch culture and make Groningen your new home away from home.



Necessities

Okay, so you've made it to the Netherlands. Now what? There are a few practical steps to follow once you've moved into your new home and taken some time to explore the city. Here's some of the basic necessities you should look into and some support links to check out for more information.

Register with the municipality and get your BSN

One of the first things to do once you have moved to the Netherlands is to sign up at the municipality of Groningen, or whichever municipality you reside in, to get a BSN (citizen service number). Officially, this has to be done within 5 days of moving to Groningen, so hopefully you have all taken care of this already, but if this is not the case, then please register yourself at the BRP, as this is required to obtain a BSN, which in turn is required for many of the other arrangements listed further.

Do you not have a permanent address at the moment (being in emergency housing or living in a hotel)? You can still schedule an appointment to register for a BSN via the website of the municipality.

You can read more about getting a BSN and make an appointment [here](#). You will receive a BSN number a couple of weeks after you applied.

Get your DigiD

Once you have your BSN, it would be advisable to get your DigiD. This is an online log-in which finds many different uses in the Netherlands. These may be websites of the government (DUO for study finances), university-related necessities (Studielink), Belastingdienst (taxes), as well as healthcare organisations.

You can apply for a DigiD through this website: <https://digid.nl/en/aanvragen>.

Open a Bank account

Most people in the Netherlands use a Maestro debit card (pinpas in Dutch). Of course keeping your international bank account is absolutely fine, but it is probably more practical to have a Dutch bank account, and not only for taxes or online payments.

To open a bank account just choose a bank, make an appointment and go there to open a bank account. The employees will guide you all the way through the process. To open an account all you need is a BSN, an ID, and, if you are under 18, parents consent.

On the subject of Dutch bank accounts, Triodos Bank is definitely one to consider. They pride themselves in being one of the most sustainable banks in the world, in their own words, exclusively supporting efforts made towards a green and fair society. Check their website here: <https://www.triodos.nl/particulieren>.

If you want to read more about Dutch banking, you can check out these websites: <https://www.iamexpat.nl/expat-info/official-issues/banking-in-the-netherlands> and https://iwc.nl/living/banking_finance/.

A Dutch bank account will enable you to pay Tikkies - another essential part of Dutch culture. Tikkie is an app that quickly allows users to create payment requests and is very popular with students. Usually, the Dutch spending culture is such that all costs are split evenly, down to the last cent. It can come as a surprise and even seem stingy if you're more used to hospitality culture.

Apply for Health Insurance & Zorgtoeslag

By law, you are required to have healthcare insurance but the type of insurance you need depends on your personal situation. The [Healthcare for Internationals website](#) maintains extensive information on the healthcare system in the Netherlands and has also produced a brochure which is available [here](#).

If you are from the EU, health insurance should not be a problem. Your national insurance will be accepted and you will be insured up to the level of Dutch basic coverage. If you are not from the EU, then [AON](#), the health insurance for students abroad, would be a good choice. AON offers different levels of insurance according to your situation. The most expensive is 40 euros a month and covers everything except pre-existing conditions, which is significantly cheaper than the Dutch national health insurance.

However, if you plan to get a (part-time) job, you need to take out a Basic Dutch Healthcare insurance as this is obligatory - at risk of receiving a large fine. This also applies when you have a paid internship, and you earn more than € 150,- per month and € 1.500,- per year. If you want to take out Dutch basic health insurance, you must be insured under the [Wlz scheme](#). You can choose from one of the [Dutch public health insurers](#), and if you're looking for comparing the different options a good option is [Independer](#). Around the end of the year, many insurance companies offer deals, so even if you already have insurance, it may be smart to reevaluate this at the end of the year. You can find more information on health insurance in the Netherlands on the [website of Zorgverzekeringslijn](#).

A significant part of your health insurance may be reimbursed by the government, so it would seem smart to apply for this "[Zorgtoeslag](#)" once you have a Dutch health insurance. You can find more detailed information about all

Register with a General Practitioner

In the Netherlands, the general practitioner or family doctor (huisarts) plays a significant role in the healthcare system. They can treat common and minor illnesses as well as some minor surgical procedures (larger procedures are still done in hospitals). They can help patients with chronic illnesses and respond to the majority of general health inquiries. Additionally, they act as your point of contact for referrals to other medical services like hospitals, specialists, home care, etc.

Usually, a GP located near to your home address is preferred. They already serve many international students and accept both EU health insurance and AON. They are also located on campus which is quite convenient.

In case of 'off hours' emergencies, so during the night, weekends or holidays, you can still call your GP and you will be provided (in Dutch) with the name and phone number of the doctor on duty in your region. Medical care is always available during off hours.



Finances and Living in the Netherlands

There's no denying that being a student is expensive. Students spend an average of € 800 - € 1,100 a month. Luckily, the Dutch government, specifically the Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs or DUO, offers student loans to those who can't make ends meet without this.

Student Finance

For international students, the rules in obtaining this student finance are strict and differ depending on your country of origin; for students from the EU, for instance, you will need to either have been in the Netherlands for 5 consecutive years or be employed for at least 56 hr/month. You can find out your eligibility via the website of DUO. These student loans can be paid back at 0% interest within 30 years of finishing your studies.

An alternative to student loans are grants. Based on your program, your country of origin, your scholarly results, certain EU organisations and the RUG, you may receive such a grant to assist you during your studies. The exact details of these grants may be found on the website of the University of Groningen.

Housing

You are probably all aware of the current housing crisis in Groningen. There are some emergency housing options available, which can be found either on the [website of municipality of Groningen](#) or the initiative [Shelter our Students](#), which places (predominantly) international students with students who have a room to spare. This is by no means a permanent solution, but it helps to cycle new international students through the system until they are able to find a room.

When it comes to finding a room, you should be fast. Often, vacant rooms will find lots of responses in little time, so finding a way to put on push notifications whenever a room opens up might be the way to go. Popular options include joining one of the numerous Facebook groups for rooms in Groningen, using the platform [SSH](#), which has a partnership with the university of Groningen and exclusively houses international students, [Xior](#) student housing, or the platforms [Pararius](#) or [Kamernet](#). The downside of Pararius, however, is that predominantly larger apartments are listed, which are more expensive than a typical room in a student house. You can read more about finding a room in the Netherlands, rent, bills, and how to protect yourself from scammers [here](#).

If you live in an apartment with your own front door, bathroom, and kitchen, you can apply for the rent subsidy. It varies depending on the basic rent price (excluding utilities) and your annual income. More details can be found [here](#).

If you manage to find a room in a shared apartment, then two things can happen next. Either the landlord makes a decision based on who they like best or the choice is up to the group of people already living in the house. Most of the time in your response to the room you tell a little bit about yourself, and about how you are as a housemate. Because demand is high not

all people can be invited to the viewing so make sure your piece of text stands out! When you get invited, then you're lucky: you get to go to a "hospi" or also called "hospiteeravond"! This is a social event where you will be able to see the room and meet the housemates. Hospi's differ per house, you can be alone or with other people also applying for that room. It can also happen that they ask you to bring something. The main goal of the hospi is for the housemates already living there to see who fits best into the house. Most of the time you don't hear right away if you have the room or not. Some tips and more information can be found [here](#).

TV, Internet, and Telephone

Utility costs vary by company and personal usage, but you can generally expect to pay approximately €35-€75 a month for TV & Internet. Whether you need a Dutch (mobile) phone provider depends on your needs and usage. There are some Dutch services though, like hospital appointments or even food deliveries, that do require a Dutch number. Additionally, some service numbers (0800-numbers) only work with a local phone number. You can opt for either a prepaid SIM or a subscription, with the later being for 1 or 2 years.

More information about available providers and phone plans are available [here](#).

Food

Dutch cuisine is probably different from what you are used to at home. A typical Dutch breakfast includes coffee or tea, sliced bread, cheese, thinly sliced cold meat, and hagelslag (typical Dutch spread resembling chocolate sprinkles!). Lunch is very similar and may also include soup, salad, or fruit. The warm meals are reserved for dinner where Dutch people would usually have potatoes and other vegetables along with meat or fish. Some typical dishes include Erwtensoup (pea soup), Hollandse Nieuwe (fresh salted herring), and stamppot (a steamed dish of potatoes, vegetables, and meat or sausage).

Dutch people also do not have a significant "eating out" culture but they frequently eat dinner together with friends at home. All cities have pubs (called eetcafés) where you can get good meals at reasonable prices. But the cheapest way to eat is to do your own cooking.

You'll almost certainly always be close to a supermarket in Groningen but you could also try out different specialty shops, such as 'le Souk' or 'Amazing oriental'. The Netherlands has many different brands of supermarkets but the most common ones are Jumbo, Albert Heijn (AH) and Lidl. Albert Heijn has a discount system called the bonuskaart which activates the discount in the store. You are also able to couple your bonuskaart to the AH app to get personal discounts on items you regularly buy. The AH app also has an abundance of good recipes that are often loved by students. Lidl and Aldi are likely the cheapest supermarkets in the city. Lidl has a LidlPlus app you can download on your phone to get discounts. Jumbo also has a points system called Jumbo Extras where you can accumulate points whilst buying groceries to be used later. If you're looking for meat, the best deals are usually in international supermarkets like Nazar.

The farmers market deserves an honourable mention. Every Tuesday, Friday and Saturday you can go to Vismarkt in the city centre to get various fresh products for affordable prices.

Although Vismarkt translates as 'fish market', you can find fruits and vegetables, various types of meat, fish and cheese, and even nuts and bakery products.

On campus, there is always a cafeteria or Albert Heijn to go nearby, and Zernike even has its own Food Court where you can meet, relax, or socialise with fellow students. However these are more expensive lunch options than bringing your own.

Transportation

The Netherlands is a biking country. There's actually more bikes than people here! While it is easily possible to move around via the buses in Groningen, a bike might just offer you that little bit of versatility in transportation. Having a new bike in the city, however, might be dangerous; flashy new bikes often end up stolen. Getting a second-hand bike from the municipality or online marketplace Marktplaats may prove a better option, just be sure to lock it properly!

It is also possible to rent a so-called OV-bike from the central station for short term usage or get a long term bike subscription at Swapfiets! This Dutch initiative charges a monthly fee to offer you a bike with the characteristic blue front tire and to "swap" this bike for a new one should it break down. It may be possible you don't yet know how to ride a bike, but this is no problem! City Central is an organisation which offers one-on-one lessons on cycling, traffic rules and nice sights in Groningen; a lot of students new to the city are still learning how to cycle the Dutch way, or even how to cycle all together.

Of course, if bikes aren't your thing, or if you wish to travel outside of Groningen, then you may need to make use of the public transport system, called the OV. Bus tickets cost around €2 for a single fare in the city and you can always check bus and train times via the app 9292. Buying tickets for public transport can be quite a hassle and rather expensive, luckily you can get an OV-chip card, which functions similar to a debit card for buses and trains. Just be sure to check in and out at the posts at the station or on the bus! Visit the [website of the Dutch railways](#) for more information about discounts and group tickets or [this website](#) which keeps track of all currently cheap valid offers.

You can choose a personal or a non-personal card, on which you can deposit money to then travel with. The personal card can be linked to your bank account, so it does not have to be manually recharged. An amazing part of this personal OV-chip card is the student travel product! This form of student finance allows you to travel for free during either the week or the weekend, and if you get your degree within 10 years, you will not have to pay it back. If you are not Dutch by nationality or a working student, you might not be eligible for this student product; you can check the eligibility depending on your nationality [here](#).

Student discounts and second-hand options

Many bars, restaurants, museums and cinemas offer student discounts. Most of the time you will only need your RUG student card as proof. If you're looking for savings on travel, shopping, and museums worldwide, you can look into getting an [International Student Identity Card \(ISIC\)](#). And with the [Dutch CJP discount card](#) you will receive discounts for lots of festivals, museums and shopping in the Netherlands.

For second-hand goods, from furniture to books, many Dutch cities including Groningen have Facebook groups where ads are posted, prices are displayed and you can easily contact the seller. In addition to Facebook, there is Marktplaats, a special website for such transactions in the Netherlands. Some second-hand shops even have a cargo bike (bakfiets) you can borrow to bring your new possessions home, and stores like Mamamini and GoudGoed also offer delivery of purchased furniture to your home for a small fee.

For students in Groningen it is really normal to move using a cargo bike. You can rent a sturdy cargo bike at the stadswerkplaats for cheap. It seems daunting at first but it is easier than you think!

Start Learning Dutch

While most Dutch people, especially students, will not struggle to speak English, it may be nice to know some small Dutch phrases to help you get around. You can register for the Free online Introduction to Dutch Course developed by the RUG Language Center via this link.

For those of you who are serious about learning Dutch, a Dutch language course may be an option. While the university offers a yearly course, this has a relatively small capacity which gets reached hours after sign-ups open. So should you wish to enrol in this course next year, you can sign-up for the newsletter of the Language Centre so that you may know when sign-up opens for their next rendition.

In case you prefer an online course and aren't scared of receiving passive-aggressive stalking messages from an eerie owl mascot, you can always use Duolingo. However, the online platform Flowently provides a similarly efficient service, without the impending sense of doom that at any moment a man-sized bird could jump you because you don't yet know how to pronounce "Scheveningen".



Life as a student in Groningen

Now that you settled down and arranged the basic necessities, it's time to explore the city and its vibrant student culture.

With two universities and nearly 25% of the population being made up by students, Groningen is always lively. The city has an extraordinarily broad and varied cultural environment, as well as a thriving and famous nightlife. You can find more than 400 street art projects and a handful of internationally famous museums in the city. With numerous renowned festivals held in Groningen, artists from all over the world come to perform at Eurosonic, Noorderzon, Kingsland, and Kadepop, among others.

Nightlife

As the typical Dutch student city, Groningen also has an unrivalled nightlife, drawing visitors from all over the world to its more than 150 bars and entertainment establishments. Unlike other Dutch cities, Groningen does not have set closing times, so you can party all night long which makes the nightlife here so distinctive.

VERA is our most famous underground music venue which has played host to a number of up-and-coming acts. These have previously included early performances by Nirvana, Joy Division, Pearl Jam, and U2, all of whom had their debuts here. And if you're looking for alternative music, Simplon is an excellent place to go.

You can read more about Groningen's hotspots [here](#).

Join your study association, a student, sport, or cultural association

Groningen is a city that stands out for having a vibrant student culture. This culture is partly formed by the many student organisations known in Groningen. But student participation is central in the whole Dutch academic environment as students highly value having a fulfilling social life outside of the classroom. Student organisations are completely run by students. There are many different kinds of student organisations that offer many affordable events, activities and facilities to all students in Groningen, ranging from social events to career events, cultural events and sports facilities.

By becoming an active student you can learn valuable skills, improve the organisations you're part of, gain access to various activities and make long-lasting friendships. Here are some options of associations to consider:

- Study association: [GLV Idun](#)
- Student associations: [ESN](#), [KEI](#) & [others](#)
- Sports associations: [ACLO](#)
- Student cultural centre: [USVA](#)

What is a student association?

Student associations are organisations run by students for students. The goal of joining is quite simple: to meet other students and have fun during your study years! As all large student cities, Groningen also has a great number of student associations with distinct styles, and a majority of them having their own buildings in or near Groningen's city centre. In actuality, Vindicat atque Polit, the oldest student association in the Netherlands, has its headquarters in Groningen at the prestigious Grote Markt. These associations host various social events where students can meet each other, form 'year clubs' together, or join existing groups where you can mingle with older students. The majority of Groninger student associations welcome international students, although you should be aware that Dutch is typically the language spoken. You can read more about Groninger student associations here: <https://www.groningenlife.nl/en/associations/student-associations/>.

What is a sports association?

Joining a sports association can be great to meet like minded people. Groningen has a broad scale of sports associations and there is something for everyone. Most of the sport associations are connected to ACLO, which is the overarching student sports organisation of the University of Groningen and the Hanze University of Applied Sciences. This is also why you will have to buy an ACLO membership before enrolling in a sports association in Groningen. There are big sports associations for popular student sports like Tennis (Veracket, TAM), football (TKB) or rowing (Aegir, Gyas) but also smaller associations for more niche sports like roundnet (de Graancirkel), climbing (GSAC) or survivalrun (Moddervet).

By joining ACLO you can also enrol in a variety of classes, from fitness to ballroom dance. The membership is 59.95 euros per year when you pay for it through your RUG account. For their courses, you must pay a 10 euro deposit, which you will receive back once you have attended 80% of the classes. On their website, you can also make reservations for the pool or any of the other courts. Visit [their website](#) to see everything ACLO has to offer.

What is a study association?

Joining a study association gives an extra dimension to your student life in Groningen! Study associations have multiple purposes for their members including support in education, organising social events, and providing insights into future career paths. Contrary to a student association in which the members' study programmes are not relevant, the members of a study association are characterised by their study programme. Note: Study association new members do not have to take part in any form of hazing (ontgroening in Dutch).

What is GLV Idun?

The bachelors Biology, Biomedical Engineering, and Life Science & Technology and masters Behavioural and Cognitive Neuroscience, Biology, Biomedical Engineering, Biomedical Sciences, Biomolecular Sciences, Ecology & Evolution, Marine Biology, and Molecular Medicine & Innovative Treatment are all part of one study association, which is the "Groninger Levenswetenschappen Vereniging" (Groninger Life Science Association) Idun, in short, GLV Idun.

Our association consists of 20 committees, all of which organise different activities. They are a friendly group that looks out for one another, and have a lot of fun being active and joining activities together. Some organise study-related activities like lectures or a congress. Others organise career-related activities like workshops, company visits, or lunch lectures. Lastly, some committees of course also organise social activities for the needed relaxation. There are monthly parties, annual galas, multiple national and foreign excursions, and several sports events. Applications for committees happen at the beginning of every academic year.

Introduction Weekend

A great way to get to know your fellow students as soon as possible is the GLV Idun Introduction Weekend. It will take place on the 8-9-10 of September 2023. You will travel to Kampeerboerderij Wouda in Appelscha together with your 'godparents' (experienced Idun members that will also guide you during Introduction Day) . The point of this weekend is to have fun and to get to know your fellow students and the study association.

You can register for the Introduction Weekend on the Introduction Day on the 1st of September. If you can't make it to the Introduction Day, please contact the board (board@idun.nl) and they will help you register.

For any questions about the weekend, feel free to email the First Year Introduction Committee (EI), as they are organising the weekend. You can reach them at introductie@idun.nl. You can find information about other kick-off week activities on our [website](#) or [social media](#).



Resources used to create this brochure [in working]

<https://www.studyinnl.org/>

<https://iwc.nl/>

<https://www.groningenlife.nl/en/>