

From Graduates to Maastrichtenaren

Local Measures to Retain More International Graduates in Maastricht

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May 2026

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Key Statistics



11.6%

International graduates still in Maastricht 5 years post graduation



25.3%

National average stay-rate (more than double Maastricht's figure)



49.3%

Less likely to re-migrate even when graduates feel welcome in the region

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1 Nuffic, Stay rate and labour market position of international graduates 2013-2022, Den Haag: Nuffic, 2025, p. 9.

7 J. Reinold, Essays on attracting and retaining highly educated migrants, Maastricht: Maastricht University, 2024.

The Retention Paradox



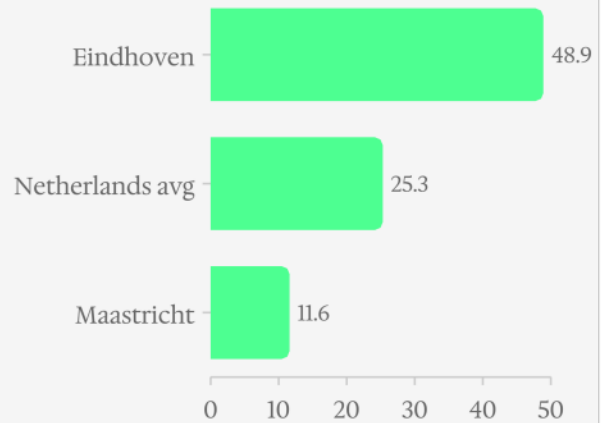
Maastricht positions rightly itself as a European, cozy, cross-border city. Over 60% of students at Maastricht University are international.^{3} It is colloquially considered as an international university city that embraces you. For eg, it was the first in the Netherlands to extend the energy allowance (energietoelag) to international students.⁴

Despite this infrastructure, regional partners openly acknowledge that the Maastricht Region has the lowest stay-rate of international graduates in the Netherlands ^{5}. The Nuffic longitudinal tracking study confirms this: only 11.6% of graduates who studied in Maastricht still live in the Netherlands about five years after graduation ^{1}.

The Euregio Meuse-Rhine (EMR) spans four million people, 128,000 students at 22 higher education institutions and 300 research companies ^{7}. Cross-border mobility is norm here, yet border barriers also mean that graduates may routinely leave rather than build careers locally by virtue ^{7}.

Stay-Rate Comparison

% of graduates remaining after 5 years



"Maastricht trains the talent. It should also keep it."

Important note on the Maastricht figure

Nuffic explicitly flags that border cities have specific characteristics that influence their stay-rate figures. Maastricht University's own research shows that 33% of its international graduates stay to work in the broader region within a 100-kilometre radius, a zone that largely falls outside Dutch national borders ^{6}.

The 11.6% figure therefore underestimates true regional retention, but it does confirm that formal registration in the Netherlands after graduation is far below the national norm.

1 Nuffic, Stay rate and labour market position of international graduates 2013-2022, Den Haag: Nuffic, 2025, p. 9.

3 Volt Maastricht, Verkiezingsprogramma 2026-2030, Maastricht: Volt, 2026.

4 Gemeente Maastricht, Energietoelag voor internationale studenten, 2022.

5 Welcome to Maastricht Region, Strategisch Plan 2023-2026, Maastricht: WtMR, 2023.

6 Maastricht University, Graduate Survey 2023, Maastricht: UM, 2023.

7 J. Reinold, Essays on attracting and retaining highly educated migrants, Maastricht: Maastricht University, 2024.

National Headwinds & Why Local Action Is Urgent



The Wet internationalisering in balans (WIB) and related ministerial letters aim to "rebalance" internationalisation in Dutch higher education by:

- Making Dutch the default language in bachelor's programmes {8}
- Allowing universities to set separate enrolment caps for English-taught tracks {9}
- Encouraging a general reduction in international student inflows {8}

These measures reinforce a political narrative in which "too many internationals" is the core problem, rather than the under-management of housing, integration, and labour-market pathways. That framing is popular but both empirically questionable and strategically counterproductive for a border city like Maastricht and objectives of its organisations like the Expat Centre and Welcome to Maastricht Region.

Crucially, border regions with distinct demographic realities may also qualify for differentiated treatment {8}. Maastricht is precisely such a region: it faces structural labour shortages, population ageing, and cross-border dynamics that differ fundamentally from the Randstad cities that are driving the national rebalancing debate.

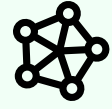
The Contradiction at the Heart of National Policy

Ministerial communications simultaneously state that these reforms are designed, in part, to retain international talent for the Dutch labour market {9}. That admission confirms the core argument of this brief.

8 Ministerie van OCW, Wet internationalisering in balans — Memorie van Toelichting, Den Haag: Rijksoverheid, 2024.

9 Minister van OCW, Kamerbrief over internationalisering in het hoger onderwijs, Den Haag: Rijksoverheid, 2024.

What Makes Graduates Stay?



Julia Reinold's doctoral thesis, based on survey data (n=410) from highly educated migrants in the EMR, supplemented by serial interviews; is the most directly relevant empirical study available for this context {7}.

49.3%

Feeling Welcome

EMR migrants who felt welcome were 49.3% less likely to intend to remigrate{7}.

The strongest predictor is the openness and friendliness of locals and not of the institutional services.



Local Internship Experience

Graduates who completed an internship within the region were significantly more likely to stay {7}.

Internships create local networks and employer familiarity.



Regional Familiarity

Getting to know the city, its labour market, institutions & community life; increases the probability of staying {7}.

Many graduates leave before building this familiarity.



Language Access

Dutch skills are key for both employability & social integration {7}.

Main barriers, however, are cost, lack of relevance in national employment & timing {3}.



SME Capacity

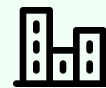
Most SMEs in the area lack formal HR procedures for international recruitment {7}.

Retention challenges include slow or no onboarding & no language support.

3 Volt Maastricht, Verkiezingsprogramma 2026-2030, Maastricht: Volt, 2026.

7.J. Reinold, Essays on attracting and retaining highly educated migrants, Maastricht: Maastricht University, 2024.

Existing Infrastructure and Its Gaps



Maastricht has already invested in internationalisation infrastructure {2}:

ECMR

Expat Centre Maastricht Region: a one-stop registration, immigration services, & information for expats, in cooperation with municipalities and the IND {10}

WtMR

Welcome to Maastricht Region: talent attraction campaigns, International Career Service, recruitment events and a job platform for employers {11}

Energy Allowance

Maastricht was the first Dutch city to extend the energietoeslag to international students with low incomes {4}.

Volt's Programme

Commitments to affordable housing, Dutch-language courses & traineeships for internationals {3}.

However, these efforts remain fragmented and service-oriented {2}

- Municipal internships (stages en traineeships) are advertised in Dutch and are implicitly designed for Dutch-speaking students {12}
- ECMR and WtMR are largely reactive and they do not proactively reach final-year students with a clear "stay in Maastricht" message {2}. Even when most students reach out to them, they are known to be unhelpful with actual jobs to apply to {2}.
- Many schemes & communication channels may still unintentionally exclude internationals, despite the energy allowance example {2}.

2 Decisio, Expat survey 2024: Maastricht Region, Amsterdam: Decisio, 2024.

3 Volt Maastricht, Verkiezingsprogramma 2026-2030, Maastricht: Volt, 2026.

4 Gemeente Maastricht, Energietoeslag voor internationale studenten, 2022.

10 Expat Centre Maastricht Region, Dienstverlening, <https://www.ecmr.nl>

11 Welcome to Maastricht Region, International Career Service, <https://www.welcometomaastrichtregion.com>

12 Gemeente Maastricht, Vacatures en stages, <https://www.gemeentemaastricht.nl/werken>

Bridge Jobs Graduate Pipeline



PROBLEM

International graduates face risk-averse HR practices, Dutch-only job adverts and no structured entry into local employers or government {7, 12}

RECOMMENDATION

Establish a Bridge Jobs Graduate Pipeline that:

- Creates part-time or project-based roles (6-12 months) in the municipality, semi-public bodies & partner organisations for international graduates with skills in policy analysis, data & communications
- Uses English or mixed-language working environments where possible, while integrating Dutch-language learning (minimum 2 hours per week)
- Coordinates with WtMR's International Career Service and job platform to ensure employer participation
- Includes a Graduate Starter Pack at semester 7 or 8: one-stop communication on local employers, Bridge Job openings, housing options, permit pathways & ECMR services

WHY IT WORKS

Workplace exposure creates local networks and employer familiarity: the two strongest structural predictors of staying in the region {7}.

SMART TARGET

10 Bridge Job positions filled within 6 months of launch; 30% conversion to permanent contracts within 12 months.

Phase	Timeline	Activities	Lead
Scoping	Month 0-2	Employer roundtable (10 firms); Bridge Job contract template	Volt + WtMR
Pilot	Month 3-6	5-10 positions recruited, onboarded, monitored	Municipality + WtMR
Scale	Month 7-24	Expand to 30+ positions; integrate into municipal traineeship system	Municipality + WtMR + ECMR

7 J. Reinold, Essays on attracting and retaining highly educated migrants, Maastricht: Maastricht University, 2024.

12 Gemeente Maastricht, Vacatures en stages, <https://www.gemeentemaastricht.nl/werken>

Targeted Dutch-Language and Integration Support



PROBLEM

Dutch-language courses are expensive, not ECTS-bearing & presently, weakly linked to local career opportunities. {7, 3}

RECOMMENDATION

Develop a targeted scheme in partnership with UM, Zuyd, and WtMR that:

- Offers subsidised Dutch courses for final-year international students and orientation-year permit holders, conditional on participation in local internships, Bridge Jobs, or community projects
- Integrates practical modules on working in Dutch organisations and navigating local institutions
- Offers sector-specific language tracks in healthcare, ICT, education, and public administration
- Advocates for ECTS recognition of workplace Dutch modules within UM and Zuyd curricula

WHY IT WORKS

Language support linked to employment increases both language acquisition and retention; uptake is low when courses are expensive & disconnected from career pathways {7}.

SMART TARGET

300 enrolments in Year 1; 60% of participants reach B1 within 12 months.

3 Volt Maastricht, Verkiezingsprogramma 2026-2030, Maastricht: Volt, 2026.

7 J. Reinold, Essays on attracting and retaining highly educated migrants, Maastricht: Maastricht University, 2024.

Inclusion Audit of Municipal Schemes and Communication



PROBLEM

The energy allowance extension shows that inclusion is possible when prioritised politically, but other schemes may still unintentionally exclude internationals through eligibility criteria set to Dutch-only or EU nationals only or opaque procedures.^{2, 4}.

RECOMMENDATION

Commission a rapid inclusion audit that:

- Reviews all major municipal support schemes to identify where internationals are formally or informally excluded
- Maps key communication channels (gemeentemaastricht.nl, UM, ECMR, WtMR, mymaastricht) and assesses language accessibility and navigation for non-Dutch speakers
- Produces a public summary and action plan with specific changes: eligibility criteria, form language, and outreach strategies

SMART TARGET

Audit completed within 6 months; top 5 low-cost changes implemented within 6 months of the audit report.

² Decisio, Expat survey 2024: Maastricht Region, Amsterdam: Decisio, 2024.

⁴ Gemeente Maastricht, Energietoelag voor internationale studenten, 2022.

Maastricht Policy Lab



PROBLEM

International and Dutch students with strong policy and research skills have no structured route to contribute to local policy design.² Volt's English Policy Team needs a pipeline of motivated, capable contributors.¹³

RECOMMENDATION

Create a Maastricht Policy Lab as a joint initiative of Volt's English Policy Team, UM/UNU-MERIT, ECMR, WtMR and interested councillors that:

- Hosts small, time-bound projects (one per semester) where mixed teams work on concrete municipal challenges: housing, tourism, integration and mobility
- Produces short policy briefs (6 pages & one public presentation) usable for moties, schriftelijke vragen and citizens' council agendas
- Uses projects to identify candidates for Bridge Jobs & Volt's own policy work
- Runs its first pilot project in autumn 2026, using ROA and Nuffic graduate data to map international graduate pathways

SMART TARGET

First cohort launched by September 2026; 2 policy briefs per academic year; 5 Bridge Job referrals in Year 1.

¹ Nuffic, Stay rate and labour market position of international graduates 2013-2022, Den Haag: Nuffic, 2025, p. 9.

² Decisio, Expat survey 2024: Maastricht Region, Amsterdam: Decisio, 2024.

¹³ Volt Maastricht, English Policy Team Charter, Maastricht: Volt, 2025.

¹⁴ ROA, Graduate tracking data 2023, Maastricht: Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market, 2024.

SME Capacity Building and First-Hire Incentives



PROBLEM

Most SMEs in the Maastricht region lack formal HR procedures for international recruitment and see it as a necessary burden rather than an opportunity {7}

RECOMMENDATION: A THREE-PART SME PACKAGE

<p>A. First-Hire Incentive</p> <p>A conditional grant to employers who hire an international graduate through the Bridge Jobs programme and retain them for at least 6 months.</p> <p>Funded from the municipal economic development budget and employer co-funding.</p>	<p>B. First-Hire Toolkit</p> <p>English-language contract templates, IND sponsor registration guidance, onboarding checklists & language-support options</p> <p>Co-designed by WtMR and KvK Limburg, distributed free of charge. {11, 12}</p>	<p>C. "Willing Employer" Label</p> <p>A publicly visible badge on the WtMR job portal for employers who commit to language-flexible recruitment, structured onboarding & participation in Bridge Jobs.</p>
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WHY IT WORKS

SMEs with dedicated HR capacity & international experience are significantly more successful at retaining international employees; the challenge is giving that capacity to those who lack it {7}.

SMART TARGET

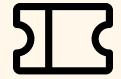
20 SMEs enrolled within 12 months; 60% toolkit uptake among participating employers.

7 J. Reinold, Essays on attracting and retaining highly educated migrants, Maastricht: Maastricht University, 2024.

11 Welcome to Maastricht Region, International Career Service, <https://www.welcometomaastrichtregion.com>

12 Gemeente Maastricht, Vacatures en stages, <https://www.gemeentemaastricht.nl/werken>

Graduate Talent Mobility Pass



PROBLEM

Graduates who intend to stay often leave in the first 6 months due to accumulated practical friction: transport costs, expensive housing transitions and limited permit navigation support {2, 7}

RECOMMENDATION

A time-limited bundle for internationally graduating students entering the orientation year or a Bridge Job:



Public Transport Pass

OV pass including cross-border Euregio connections to Liege and Aachen for 6 months



Coworking Access

Subsidised access at local workspaces during active job-searching



Legal/Immigration Clinic

2 appointments at ECRM included {10}



Relocation Stipend

One-off payment for those transitioning from student housing



Condition

ECRM orientation session and local address registration required

WHY IT WORKS

Small concrete friction points, not lack of desire, cause early exit; removing these friction points and replacing them with checkpoints changes the effective default from "leave" to "perhaps stay and explore" {7}.

SMART TARGET

25-person pilot cohort in first 6 months; stay-rate measured at 6 and 12 months against a matched comparison group.

2 Decisio, Expat survey 2024: Maastricht Region, Amsterdam: Decisio, 2024.

7 J. Reinold, Essays on attracting and retaining highly educated migrants, Maastricht: Maastricht University, 2024.

10 Expat Centre Maastricht Region, Dienstverlening, <https://www.ecmr.nl>

Implementation Plan



PHASE 1: SCOPING (MONTH 0-6)

- Volt's English Policy Team conducts stakeholder conversations with ECMR, WtMR, UM, and 10 key employers
- Municipality commissions short inclusion audit using existing survey data
- Design and launch: 5-10 Bridge Job positions across 2-3 organisations, plus the first Policy Lab project
- Launch the Graduate Talent Mobility Pass with an initial cohort of 25 graduates

PHASE 2: SCALING (MONTH 6-24)

- Expand Bridge Jobs and integrate into municipality's established traineeship system
- Deploy Dutch-language courses to 300 students
- Roll out SME toolkit and first-hire incentive to 20 employers
- Run second Policy Lab cohort and publish first impact report

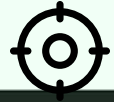
Indicative Budget (Year 1)

Measure	Cost Estimate	Funding Source
Bridge Jobs Graduate Pipeline (10 positions)	Staff time + coordination	Municipal budget
Dutch-Language Courses (300 subsidies)	Per-student subsidy	UM/Zuyd + Municipality
Inclusion Audit	Consultant fee	Municipal budget
Maastricht Policy Lab	Coordination + venue	Volt + UM/UNU-MERIT
SME First-Hire Incentives (20 grants)	Per-hire conditional grant	Economic dev. budget
Graduate Talent Mobility Pass (25 pilots)	Transport + stipend	Province + Municipality

2 Decisio, Expat survey 2024: Maastricht Region, Amsterdam: Decisio, 2024.

13 Volt Maastricht, English Policy Team Charter, Maastricht: Volt, 2025.

Monitoring Framework



Measure	Key Indicator	Target (Year 1)	Data Source
Bridge Jobs Pipeline	Positions filled; conversion rate	10 positions; 30% conversion	WtMR tracking
Dutch-Language Support	Enrolments; B1 attainment	300 enrolments; 60% B1	UM/Zuyd records
Inclusion Audit	Audit completion; changes made	Audit done; 5 changes	Municipality report
Maastricht Policy Lab	Cohorts; briefs; referrals	1 cohort; 2 briefs; 5 refs	Volt/UM tracking
SME Capacity Building	SMEs enrolled; toolkit uptake	20 SMEs; 60% uptake	WtMR/KvK records
Mobility Pass	Pilot participants; stay-rate	25 pilots; measured at 6/12mo	ECMR/CBS data

Stakeholder Map

Stakeholder	Role	Interest/Leverage
Gemeente Maastricht	Lead implementer; budget holder	Economic growth; demographic balance
Maastricht University	Student pipeline; career services	Graduate outcomes; rankings
ECMR	Immigration services; orientation	Service volume; integration success
WtMR	Employer engagement; job platform	Talent attraction; employer relations
SMEs/Employers	Hiring partners; Bridge Job hosts	Talent access; reduced HR burden
Volt Maastricht	Policy advocacy; Policy Lab host	Programme delivery; political capital
Province of Limburg	Co-funder; regional coordination	Regional development; brain drain

SECTION 9

The Fiscal Case

Retaining international graduates generates direct fiscal returns through income tax, municipal levies, and reduced recruitment costs for local employers.

The economic literature consistently finds that highly educated migrants are net contributors to public finances within 3-5 years of labour market entry {7}.



SECTION 10

Conclusion and Next Steps

Maastricht already has the infrastructure for international student success. What is missing is a coherent pathway from graduate to resident. The six recommendations in this brief are designed to be locally feasible, evidence-based, and politically actionable. They require coordination more than new spending.

Immediate Next Steps

- 1 Volt presents this brief to the coalition and relevant wethouder(s)
- 2 Municipality convenes a stakeholder roundtable with ECMR, WtMR, UM, and 10 employers
- 3 Launch the first 5 Bridge Job positions by end of Q3 2026
- 4 Commission the inclusion audit using existing Expat Survey 2024 data

7 J. Reinold, Essays on attracting and retaining highly educated migrants, Maastricht: Maastricht University, 2024.

15 Study in Estonia, International Students in Estonia: Economic Impact Analysis 2022/23, Tallinn: Archimedes Foundation, 2024.

Bronnenlijst



1 Nuffic, Stay rate and labour market position of international graduates 2013-2022, Den Haag: Nuffic, 2025, p. 9.

<https://www.nuffic.nl/publicaties/stay-rate-and-labour-market-position>

2 Decisio, Expat survey 2024: Maastricht Region, Amsterdam: Decisio, 2024.

<https://www.decisio.nl/publicaties>

3 Volt Maastricht, Verkiezingsprogramma 2026-2030, Maastricht: Volt, 2026.

<https://www.voltmaastricht.nl/programma>

4 Gemeente Maastricht, Energietoeslag voor internationale studenten, Maastricht: Gemeente Maastricht, 2022.

<https://www.gemeentemaastricht.nl/energietoeslag>

5 Welcome to Maastricht Region, Strategisch Plan 2023-2026, Maastricht: WtMR, 2023.

<https://www.welcometomaastrichtregion.com>

6 Maastricht University, Graduate Survey 2023: International Alumni Tracking, Maastricht: UM, 2023.

<https://www.maastrichtuniversity.nl/research/graduate-survey>

7 J. Reinold, Essays on attracting and retaining highly educated migrants, Maastricht: Maastricht University, 2024.

<https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20240401jr>

8 Ministerie van OCW, Wet internationalisering in balans - Memorie van Toelichting, Den Haag: Rijksoverheid, 2024.

<https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/hoger-onderwijs>

9 Minister van OCW, Kamerbrief over internationalisering in het hoger onderwijs, Den Haag: Rijksoverheid, 2024.

<https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken>

10 Expat Centre Maastricht Region, Dienstverlening, Maastricht: ECMR, 2024.

<https://www.ecmr.nl>

11 Welcome to Maastricht Region, International Career Service, Maastricht: WtMR, 2024.

<https://www.welcometomaastrichtregion.com/career>

12 Gemeente Maastricht, Vacatures en stages, Maastricht: Gemeente Maastricht, 2024.

<https://www.gemeentemaastricht.nl/werken>

13 Volt Maastricht, English Policy Team Charter, Maastricht: Volt, 2025.

<https://www.voltmaastricht.nl/policy-team>

14 ROA, Graduate tracking data 2023, Maastricht: Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market, 2024.

<https://roa.nl/research/graduates>

15 Study in Estonia, International Students in Estonia: Economic Impact Analysis 2022/23, Tallinn: Archimedes Foundation, 2024.

<https://www.studyinestonia.ee/economic-impact>



Methodology

This policy brief synthesises:

- Primary sources: Nuffic longitudinal tracking data (2013-2022), Decisio Expat Survey 2024, UM Graduate Survey 2023
- Academic research: Julia Reinold's doctoral thesis on EMR migration (n=410 survey, serial interviews)
- Policy documents: WIB legislative texts, ministerial correspondence, municipal programme documents
- Stakeholder mapping: Review of ECMR, WtMR, and municipal services

All recommendations are designed to be locally feasible within existing budget structures and institutional frameworks.

Key Data Sources

Nuffic Stay Rate Study

Longitudinal tracking of international graduates 2013-2022, n=cohorts over 10 years

Reinold Doctoral Thesis

Survey (n=410) and serial interviews with highly educated migrants in EMR

Decisio Expat Survey 2024

Regional survey of expat experiences and service usage in Maastricht

Abbreviations

ECMR	Expat Centre Maastricht Region
EMR	Euregio Meuse-Rhine
IND	Immigratie- en Naturalisatiedienst
KvK	Kamer van Koophandel
OCW	Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap
ROA	Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprise
UM	Maastricht University
UNU-MERIT	United Nations University - Maastricht
WIB	Wet internationalisering in balans
WtMR	Welcome to Maastricht Region

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Acknowledgments

This brief benefited from conversations with stakeholders at ECMR, Welcome to Maastricht Region & Maastricht University. The analysis draws heavily on Dr. Julia Reinold's empirical work on migration retention in the EMR. Special thanks to the Volt Maastricht English Policy Team for their input & review.