**Hello international!**

Welcome to the Guide to the Netherlands, which might help you get through all the struggles that the Netherlands and Utrecht can bring, as well as some things that may be difficult to find related to the UU. This guide will mostly be in chronological order, but you might want to do certain things later or earlier than others, so do (skim)read through everything. Hope you like it here, and if you still have questions after reading this long ass document, you can email or text me: [j.stienstra@live.nl](mailto:j.stienstra@live.nl) or +31 6 39806838 (my name is Janine 😊). If you have any tips to update this file, let me know as well!

**UU (un)conditional letter or applying to the UU: General information**

Yay, well done, you’ve made it! Or maybe you are here because you are already sure you want to study here. If you are (almost) certain you will be studying here, first thing to do now is to already look for housing. Housing is a terrible problem in the Netherlands, but especially in Utrecht. Try to subscribe to certain housing agencies with a waiting list (see “housing”) right now. It’s also good to figure out where your studies are going to be in Utrecht, which will depend on your exchange program/bachelor/master. All science related programs will be on the Utrecht Science Park (USP), also called the Uithof. This campus is to the east of the city. People with an economics or law related program will mostly be in the University College Utrecht (UCU). This campus is in the city itself, southeast of the city centre. People with a humanities program will be in the city centre, and your buildings will have an address name. This is not a campus as these are old buildings the university owned way before a campus even existed, and are therefore scattered throughout the city centre. Sometimes people from the UCU also go to the city centre, and vice versa.

**Housing**

So, the housing problem. It took me 4 months before I found something, and that is considered lucky. Every year, thousands of students (both Dutch and international) can’t find housing, with 26.800 students without a room in 2023. So, some general tips on what to do, where to look, etc.

Housing agencies

* SSH: The SSH has the most student accommodations in the entire province, so there will be a lot of rooms here as well. However, because it is such a large agency, a lot of people will try to apply as well. They usually have a set time somewhere in June where their website opens for Short Stay registration (<https://www.sshxl.nl/en/shortstay>). If you want to try this, you have to be fast, because the rooms will be gone in minutes. You can live in these rooms max. 1 year, and the rooms are furnished. You can also register with SSH Long Stay, but the waiting list for rooms is ~2,5 years. These rooms are also available for PhD positions. If you manage to get a room like this, you can stay in it for a long time (until 27 years of age, or until 30 years of age for a PhD). Rooms are unfurnished.
  + Cambridgelaan, Bisschoppen, Johanna, and Casa Confetti are on the USP (east, Utrecht)
  + De Sterren is in Rijnsweerd (east, Utrecht)
  + Gerbrandystraat is in Tuinwijk (northwest, Utrecht)
  + Warande is in Zeist (northwest, Zeist)
  + Sometimes rooms are available in Amersfoort (Amersfoort)
* Camelot/Plaza: Camelot or Plaza (they keep changing their name lol) is a smaller agency, and a bit expensive. They offer furnished rooms on the USP and in Vleuten (Utrecht, east and west, respectively) for 1 year. <https://www.plazaresidentservices.com/find-your-place>
* Canvas: Also a smaller agency, located in Kanaleneiland (southwest, Utrecht). Also offer furnished rooms: <https://www.canvas-student.com/locations/netherlands/utrecht/utrecht/>
* Holland2Stay: Larger agency. A new building called Boomerang has been made available by them, location is in Maarssen (just outside Utrecht). They also have many other buildings throughout Utrecht. <https://holland2stay.com/>
* Xior: Larger agency, has buildings in Rotsoord and in Tuinwijk (Utrecht, southeast and northwest, respectively). <https://www.xior.be/en/stad/utrecht>
* UCU: The university has some rooms available on the UCU itself, but this is only available for people also studying there

Individual buildings

* The Fizz: A housing agency, but it only has one building in Utrecht so far, called the Cube. It is located in Overvecht (northwest, Utrecht), and offers furnished rooms. <https://www.the-fizz.com/en/student-accommodation/utrecht/>
* Dijnselburg: The Dijnselburg estate was a monastery before it was converted to a student housing building. Located in the woods between Zeist and Bosch en Duin, they offer furnished rooms. <https://landgoeddijnselburg.nl/welcome-students/>
* Individual rooms: Located literally everywhere in Utrecht and other cities surrounding it, people own buildings in the cities and rent (parts of) them. These rooms are sometimes advertised on official websites, but most often can be found on Kamernet (<https://kamernet.nl/>) or on Facebook. If you type ‘Housing Utrecht’ on Facebook, you’ll find hundreds of groups, so decide for yourself how many you want to join. However, BE CAREFUL OF SCAMMERS, in these groups there are many people who “offer” rooms, but don’t actually have any, and try to take your money (see “scams”). Another option is trying HospiHousing, where you can stay in somebody’s room, together with the people who own the house: <https://www.hospihousing.com/nl/>

Housing elsewhere

* Sometimes you can also use websites like Pararius (<https://www.pararius.nl/>), Funda (<https://www.funda.nl/>), huurwoningen (<https://www.huurwoningen.nl/>) or something similar, as these websites sometimes have options for students as well
* It is fully understandable if you cannot find a room with the aforementioned websites, as Utrecht is very loved. What you can do in that case is look outside of Utrecht. Cities that you could try:
  + Cycle distance
    - Maarssen, Nieuwegein, Houten, Bunnik, De Bilt, Bilthoven, Zeist
  + Bus (or if you *really* like to cycle)
    - Vianen, IJsselstein, Driebergen-Rijsenburg, Soesterberg, Harmelen, Montfoort, Wijk bij Duurstede, Doorn, Maarn, Woudenberg, Amersfoort, Maartensdijk
  + Train (or bus in some cases)
    - Woerden, Breukelen, Geldermalsen, Baarn, Hilversum, Ede-Wageningen, Gouda, Rotterdam, Amsterdam, ’s Hertogenbosch/Den Bosch, Den Haag (The Hague), Apeldoorn, Almere, Arnhem
      * Cities beyond these last few are really far away, and I would only recommend looking for housing beyond that point if you really don’t have any other options
* Other options include staying in hostels or Airbnb’s, but this should be a last resort

Rental contract

* If you manage to get one, your contract should include a few specific things, and if it doesn’t include this, don’t sign the contract yet. In that case, ask your landlord to either change the contract, ask for legal advice, or simply don’t accept the room.
  + Both your name and your landlord’s name, with signature
  + An agreed monthly rent and method of payment
  + Rental security deposit information (if applicable)
  + An address and description of the place
  + Start and end dates (unless your agreed to a contract with an indefinite time period)
  + Specific house rules (for example about pets, third party housing, smoking, etc.)
  + Extra costs and/or utilities (energy like gas and electricity, water, internet, phone line, etc.)
  + The landlord’s duties (maintenance, repairs, etc.)
  + A notice period for terminating the contract
  + An inventory list if the apartment is furnished
  + How you should leave your room behind when you leave (for example if you need to close off holes, if you need to remove a floor you put in yourself, etc.)
  + The date on which the rent will be increased each year

**UU logistics and websites**

If you figured out housing (or are like f\*ck it I need to do something else), you can already get some stuff ready for your studies. Checking the specific requirements for your own program (check if you have all the documents, if you registered correctly, etc.) makes the most sense of course. When you’ve sent your documents and you are from outside of the EU, the UU will apply for a residence permit for you. You don’t need to contact the immigration service (IND) yourself. The process usually takes a few weeks (2-5 approximately), and the UU will let you know when your permit is ready (usually in September of February). An important thing for the residence permit is that the IND needs your biometric data. If you also need a visa, your biometrics will often be taken in your home country. If you only need the permit, the biometrics will be done in the Netherlands. If the IND needs these biometrics, you will be contacted by them. If your country is also part of the mandatory tuberculosis (TB) test, the IND and GGD (national physical health department) will contact you as well. Besides the residence permit (if applicable), the UU also has to approve your application of course. If you’ve sent in all the necessary documents but you haven’t heard anything yet, it’s most likely because they are still busy sorting stuff out. They have until approximately half of September or February to check your documents. If for some reason some documents are still missing or incorrect, you’ll get enough time to fix this so don’t worry about it. When most stuff has been completed, you will usually get your student number/Solis ID and UU email >two months before the start of your program. You can access a lot of UU stuff with this, as UU websites require you to login with your student number or your student email, and the password you create for them. The UU Wi-Fi uses your student email + password. Some useful websites:

Student services: <https://students.uu.nl/en/contact/student-services>

* Here you can check if you have everything for the UU set in order, for example your tuition fee, proof of enrolment, etc.

Blackboard: <https://blackboard-support.uu.nl/en/information-for-students/help/>

* Used to share information with you about your courses

Osiris: <https://manuals.uu.nl/en/manual/osiris-student-basis-functionaliteit/>

* Apply for courses, see your grades and enrolments, start and handle cases

MyTimeTable: <https://mytimetable.uu.nl/help>

* View your course schedule, in the app you can also see your student card and library card, your grades, etc. It can happen that your professor hasn’t uploaded your schedule yet so you won’t be able to see anything here. In that case just wait a bit, eventually they’ll upload it. When you do have your schedule but your classes overlap, for example you have classes at the same time with the same name but one has number 01 and the other 13, this means that you will all be following the same class, just in different rooms and hence in smaller groups. You don’t need to worry about choosing a class during this time, the professor will explain all of it and assign you to a group.

IT services: <https://www.uu.nl/en/organisation/information-and-technology-services-its>

* If you have some problems regarding the digital aspects of the UU

Printing: <https://www.uu.nl/en/organisation/information-and-technology-services-its/services/printing-photocopying-and-scanning>

* How and where to print (the fee is in eurocents, don’t worry)

Online library: <https://www.uu.nl/en/university-library>

* If you download the extension for your browser, you can access articles and books online for free

MyUU app: <https://students.uu.nl/en/myuu-app>

* Uses many of the aforementioned processes all in one app on your phone!

WorldCat: <https://www.uu.nl/en/university-library/help-in-searching/search-engines-explained/worldcat>

* Also part of the library, but here you can often find (course) books online. If your professor sends you a list of books to get beforehand (or during your course), you can check the UU library here if they have an online version or a physical copy you can borrow before you actually buy the book yourself

Welcome week: <https://www.uu.nl/en/education/welcome-to-utrecht/when-you-arrive/uuwelcomeweek>

* The UU organises a welcome week in the week before your studies start (so usually the last week of August for the summer enrolment for example). This event can help you get settled, meet new people, discover the cultural and sports-based activities that are available in Utrecht, help you with official stuff like getting a BSN or Dutch bank account etc.

Second hand student books: <https://www.tweedehandsstudieboeken.nl/>

* Here you can buy second hand books (because we all know studying is already expensive enough)

Frequently asked questions: <https://www.uu.nl/en/education/welcome-to-utrecht/prepare-your-stay/entry-visa-residence-permit/frequently-asked-questions>

* As said in the title, maybe some of your questions are already answered here 😊

**Government websites**

Always check if going to this country is still a safe option (mostly related to COVID, but maybe climate change will also drown us all): <https://www.government.nl/topics/coronavirus-covid-19/visiting-the-netherlands-from-abroad> and <https://www.government.nl/topics/holidays-and-travels>

Studielink: <https://www.studielink.nl/>

* Your official enrolment is in here, as well as your payment statement regarding tuition (so that needs to be completed on this website). You can pay everything all at once or in instalments, where the first (and possibly final) payment will always be around the 25th of September (so if you gave them your bank details, the money won’t be subtracted immediately). If you want, you can also pay the moment you fill in your details, but make sure you have enough money in your account for that

Belastingdienst: <https://mijn.belastingdienst.nl/GTService/#/inloggen>

* Official website of the tax system, here you can find stuff regarding your rent allowance

DUO: <https://mijn.duo.nl/isam/sps/MijnDUO-2-DigiDCC/saml20/logininitial?NameIdFormat=Transient&Target=https://mijn.duo.nl:443/particulier/portaal/dashboard/&&ForceAuthn=true&RequestBinding=HTTPPost&AuthnContextClassRef=urn:oasis:names:tc:SAML:2.0:ac:classes:PasswordProtectedTransport&AuthnContextComparison=minimum>

* Official website of the educational department, where you find diplomas and your loan/gift with the government (if applicable)

GGD (physical health): <https://www.ggd.nl/>

* The main healthcare system, mostly used for vaccines, STD tests and the TB test (if applicable)

GGZ (mental health): <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/geestelijke-gezondheidszorg>

* The main mental healthcare system, but you’ll most likely need a GP referral to get into this (see “doctors, GP, and the hospital”)

**Checklist before arriving in the Netherlands**

It is getting more common now that you can pay with multiple card types. Credit cards were usually rejected, as were some cards given out by Visa or MasterCard. However since this is changing, it should slowly be possible to pay with these cards in most places. Just keep in mind that not all of them might work. A debit Maestro card should always work. Debit cards of an European bank generally do as well. Cash is being less accepted as well. There are a lot of places where you can pay in cash, but stores usually prefer you to use a card. However, you can’t pay using bills of 100, 200, or 500 euros here. The last two will not be accepted anywhere (not even at banks), and the 100 euro bill is very often refused as well. If you are at an exchange office, ask them to give you bills of 50 and below.

Paying for stuff online can also be difficult without a Dutch bank. Most Dutch platforms use IDeal (similar to platforms like PayPal), which requires a Dutch bank. Some more international websites accept PayPal and credit card as well. Getting a Dutch bank account will definitely save you a lot of trouble (see “checklist arriving in the Netherlands”).

Dutch culture is of course a thing a lot of people have heard about and might be concerned about. However, don’t worry too much. Yes it is true, the Dutchies are direct and will say what is on their mind. However, this is in no way meant to be rude. If Dutchies want to be rude, they’ll use swear words, so then you’ll definitely know. If you do feel offended when somebody says something, just strike up a conversation about it. Say something like: ‘Hey I don’t think you meant to be rude, but in my opinion it sounded like that’, and then the Dutch person will let you know if they meant to be rude or not (which again, most of the time they are not and they will apologise profusely). If you want something from a Dutch person, just say what you want as well, don’t try to downplay your needs. If you want a cookie or a drink, just ask for it. If you turn down a request from a Dutchie, they will not get it for you later. It might be a bit confusing in the beginning, but in the end you wouldn’t want it any other way 😉.

The Dutchies also have a biking culture (see more on this in “bikes”), so knowing how to cycle is important. If you can’t do this yet, find somebody who can teach you! The same applies to swimming. A large part of this country consists of water (not just the ocean). In Utrecht there are many canals, ditches with water (called “sloten”), and just a lot of places with lakes and ponds. Be aware that even if the water isn’t that deep (like in sloten), you could still drown, especially if you don’t know how to swim or if you are drunk. So if you can’t swim, please learn how to. You can take swimming lessons in the Netherlands as well. If you want to go swimming in the ocean (or large lakes), please be aware of riptides. These strong currents are difficult to spot but will definitely sweep you away once you get caught in them. If you get stuck in these, don’t swim against the current! You will definitely not make it to shore. Instead, just try to float and let the current take you for a bit. Remaining calm is the most important part. If you feel its grip on you getting weaker, try to swim parallel to the shore until you don’t feel it pulling anymore. Then slowly swim to shore.

The Dutch weather is known to not be that great. Check “weather”, and bring clothes for all kinds of seasons, regardless of when you are actually coming here.

**Checklist arriving in the Netherlands**

When you are ready to go to this beautiful flat country, there are few things you should organise for yourself. The most important one is getting a BSN. Everything legal uses your BSN, so please try to get this as soon as possible. Getting a BSN is mandatory for everybody in the country, so even if you don’t plan on getting a Dutch bank account or health insurance for example, you do still need to get a BSN.

BSN

* The burger service nummer, or BSN, is a citizen service number/social security number/tax number which is placed in the BRP system. You’ll be given this personal number (don’t share it with people) in order for you to be registered with the government. There are two ways to get it. If you are here for <4 months, you need to register with the RNI. If you are here >4 months, you get it by registering with the municipality you’ll be living in. You cannot get your BSN using your living address if your address can’t be registered (see “scams”), and also not if the starting date of your contract is after your appointment with the municipality. What you need for your appointment depends on the municipality you’ll be registering with. Most of them require that you bring your passport or identity card, and your housing contract or address registration. The address registration can be a form (found on the municipality website) that your landlord needs to sign. Often you need more documents, for example a deregistration form if you are coming from the (previous) Dutch colonies/islands, a birth certificate/proof of marriage document, your residence permit or MVV stamp, etc. Check your municipality for their specific demands. All these documents should be officially certified, in Dutch, English, French, or German. If you don’t have these documents in those languages, you need them translated by an official translator. The easiest way to do this is have your documents be apostilled in your country, and then have them translated (and thereby legalised) by a certified translator here. You often have to register yourself in the municipality you live in. The municipality you’ll live in can be easily found on your housing contract, as your address will also state the city it is in. The websites will say you have to make an appointment within 5 days of arrival, but this is not always possible as a lot of students are arriving at the same time. If your appointment time is outside of these 5 days, don’t worry about it, they don’t care lol. You can make this appointment if you are not in the Netherlands yet as well, so don’t wait!
* Under 4 months, RNI registration: You can register in the RNI with any of the 19 municipalities (<https://www.nederlandwereldwijd.nl/rni/contact-rni-gemeente>) that do this (so this registration doesn’t depend on the address that you live at). Go to their respective websites and indicate that you want to register as “Registratie Niet-ingezetenen/RNI”. You need a valid passport or other ID card for this registration, but check each RNI municipality for the additional stuff you need to bring
* 4 months or longer, registration in Utrecht: There are two possible ways to tackle this. You can register using either ‘student registration’ or ‘immigration’. Both are fine to use, but the way to the BSN is slightly different. If you register as ‘student’ ([https://afspraak.utrecht.nl/qmaticwebbooking/index.html#/preselect/services/hide76d771a0614dc380def7ae0f1161dfa2a2dbf24a5633a4f80708d95cea](https://afspraak.utrecht.nl/qmaticwebbooking/index.html" \l "/preselect/services/hide76d771a0614dc380def7ae0f1161dfa2a2dbf24a5633a4f80708d95cea)), there are very limited options to select a date for this type of appointment. However, you do get your BSN right there at the desk. If you register as ‘immigration’ ([https://afspraak.utrecht.nl/qmaticwebbooking/#/](https://afspraak.utrecht.nl/qmaticwebbooking/" \l "/), burgerzaken -> verhuizing vanuit buitenland (immigration)), there are usually a lot more options to make an appointment. However, it can take 1-8 weeks before you get your BSN. Usually people get it within 4, but it can be very busy. Therefore I recommend looking at both appointment options, and calculate which one should give you your BSN the fastest. Another important thing to note is that the immigration one requires that you bring your birth certificate (and other formal certificates if they apply to you) in either Dutch, English, French or German as said before. The student registration one requires that you show your residence permit or that you/the UU applied for it. Keep this in mind as well
* 4 months or longer, registration in another municipalities
  + Zeist: <https://www.zeist.nl/verhuizen-en-verbouwen/verhuizen/moving-from-abroad>
  + Utrechtse heuvelrug (Amerongen, Doorn, Driebergen-Rijsenburg, Leersum, Maarn): <https://jccafspraken-prod.heuvelrug.nl/internetafspraken_gplan/>
  + De Bilt (De Bilt, Bilthoven, Maartensdijk, Westbroek, Hollandsche Rading, Groenekan): <https://www.debilt.nl/afspraak-maken#select/>
  + Stichtse Vecht (Breukelen, Loenen, Maarssen): <https://afspraken.stichtsevecht.nl/>
  + Nieuwegein: <https://www.nieuwegein.nl/afspraak-maken>
  + IJsselstein: <https://afspraken.ijsselstein.nl/InternetafsprakenIJS/>
  + Houten: <https://www.houten.nl/gemeentelijke-organisatie/contact/afspraak-maken>
  + There are many other municipalities as well, so if yours isn’t here, just google your city’s name and then put ‘afspraak’ (appointment) after it, then the website should pop up
* It often happens, due to the obvious housing shortage, that many students can’t find a room where they can register at. You basically have two options then. You can either register in the RNI registration system, with the requirement that you do find a place within the next 4 months where you can register at. The other option is that you get a letter address (briefadres). A letter address is the address of a person that you know, like that of a friend or family member. This address has to be in the Netherlands, and the person who owns the apartment/house needs to have their own BSN. If you can find such a place, the owner of that house needs to write down that their address can be a letter address for you, and you need to bring this statement together with a copy of their passport/ID card to a letter address appointment in *their* municipality. In the case where you don’t know such a person or place, you can also ask the municipality itself to be your letter address. You then make a letter address appointment at the municipality that *you* live in. For both types of appointments you also need your own ID card/passport of course. Do know that in the end the municipality decides whether you can make use of a letter address or not (they often approve it, but know that they don’t have to). If you do get a letter address, then that address will be used to receive your physical mail, so do keep in contact with the people at that location. More information on the letter address: <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/gemeenten/vraag-en-antwoord/kan-ik-een-briefadres-krijgen-als-ik-geen-vast-woonadres-heb>

Once you have your BSN, you can get everything else in check.

DigiD

* A digital ID card, based on your BSN, which you can use to get allowances (see “allowance”), or easily access other governmental/municipal-based websites. <https://www.digid.nl/en/>

Dutch bank account

* For a Dutch bank account you need your ID/passport, BSN, a residence permit (if applicable), and your housing contract/rental statement. There are a lot of banks you can chose from, most students go for ABN AMRO, ING, or Rabobank. Some students also go for Bunq or Revolut because these don’t require a BSN (Revolut) or only require one after 90 days (Bunq). With these European banks it is important that you make sure that you base your new account in the Netherlands, and that you check if you get a card that works in this country. As it is getting more common now that you can pay with both credit card and debit card, these banks are often fine to get. Just keep in mind that the system is still switching and that in some places your card might not be accepted (a debit Maestro card will always be accepted). You can check all bank websites and make a physical or online appointment. Sometimes an European, or even non-European bank card is enough to get around. There are however some specific occasions where you do need a Dutch one: Working in the Netherlands (need to pay for your health insurance with a Dutch bank or an European-based IBAN), if your tuition fee is a monthly payment, a mobile phone subscription (also monthly payment), to get your immigration deposit reimbursed, and to make online payments using Ideal (which is not always supported by international European banks like Revolut).

Health insurance

* Having health insurance is mandatory in this country, so even if you are here only for a bit, make sure you are covered
* European: You will often have an European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) which comes with any European insurance. If you decide to work here, you do need to switch to a Dutch health insurance
* Non-European: You need to have a specific Dutch-related insurance, as you will be told by the IND as well (because you’ll need it for your visa)
* If you do want to get insurance, a lot of students go with the AON student package. This will cover the most basic costs. However, if you need to see a doctor a lot (see “doctors, GP, and the hospital”), for example due to an old injury, current medication, or mental health, I would recommend getting a fully Dutch insurance, for example with VGZ or Zilveren Kruis. For these ‘fully’ Dutch insurances, you can get health care allowance (see “allowance”). Note that the AON student package is not considered a Dutch health insurance, so if you want to work you cannot use this one
  + Specifics on how the AON student package works: Finding a GP works the same way as specified under “doctors, GP, and the hospital”. Since the AON student package isn’t Dutch (it doesn’t have the necessary Uzovi number), you can’t formally register with your GP. You need to ask them every time that you visit them that you are registered as a ‘traveller/passenger’ in the system, and that you use the AON student package. Due to this, you have to pay your appointment(s) yourself, after which you can claim your money back from AON (<https://www.aonstudentinsurance.com/en/service-contact/file-a-claim>). Do keep in mind that some GPs might reject your appointment specifically because you cannot register at their practice
* Additional websites: <https://h4i.nl/> and <https://vidius.nl/en/healthcare/>

Dutch phone number

* Once you arrive at Schiphol Airport (or any other airport), you can get a Dutch phone number straight away. This is especially recommended for non-EU citizens. You can buy a prepaid version until you get your BSN. With your BSN you can get a monthly subscription, which can also get you 3G/4G/5G (roaming Wi-Fi) for example
* European: Roaming often applies for you, but still contact your provider for long-term use
* Non-European: Buy a prepaid SIM at the airport, and get a subscription later
* There are many phone providers, including Lebara, Vodafone, T-Mobile, KPN, and so many others. You can check this website to see which ones works for you: <https://www.expatica.com/nl/living/household/netherlands-sim-cards-and-mobile-phones-1026213/>

Sign up with a GP

* See “doctors, GP, and the hospital”, as the GP is your only way into getting any healthcare, so this is important

Getting a bike

* See “bikes”

Public transport and cards

* See “public transport”

Student job and governmental conditional student loan/gift

* You can get a job here, which can definitely help you pay for that insane tuition fee, your rent which is way too high, etc.
  + European: You need a BSN and basic Dutch health insurance (NOT your EHIC, see health insurance a few steps back). There isn’t a limit on hours you can work. However, if you work a certain number of hours each month, you might get free public transport (see “public transport”)
  + Non-European: You’ll need a work permit, which your employer applies for. Getting this permit might take up to a month. Get a basic Dutch health insurance. You can work up to 16 hours a week, or work full time throughout June, July and August (but only if you are not studying)
  + Many students find part time jobs in restaurants, bars, and retail. Also food and package delivery services are very common. You can find these jobs through advertisements online or on noticeboards. And no, it doesn’t matter that you don’t speak Dutch, around 95% of the people here speak English. Taskhero can also help you: <https://werkenbij.taskhero.nl/buddy-go-dutch-taskhero/>
* The governmental conditional gift, known in Dutch as the basisbeurs, is a temporary loan which can be turned into a gift when you finish your studies. There is a small interest rate on the loan as well, but you won’t have to pay this if you finish your studies
  + The basisbeurs for 2023-2024 consists of 274,90 euros/month for students not living with their parents, and 110,30 euros/month for those that do. You might get an additional 164,30 euros/month if you don’t live with your parents, but the government still hasn’t decided whether they want to implement that. You don’t have to pay back this loan if you finish your studies within 10 years
  + In addition to the basisbeurs, you can also apply for the aanvullende beurs (additional gift) and the student travel product (see “public transport” for this). The aanvullende beurs is an addition of max. 416 euros/month if your parents don’t make more than 70.000 euros a year.
  + For both basisbeurs and aanvullende beurs, DUO (the governmental department for education) will need quite some information from you and your parents. You can easily upload the necessary stuff online on Mijn Duo (<https://mijn.duo.nl/isam/sps/MijnDUO-2-DigiDCC/saml20/logininitial?NameIdFormat=Transient&Target=https://mijn.duo.nl:443/particulier/portaal/dashboard/&&ForceAuthn=true&RequestBinding=HTTPPost&AuthnContextClassRef=urn:oasis:names:tc:SAML:2.0:ac:classes:PasswordProtectedTransport&AuthnContextComparison=minimum>), for which you’ll need a BSN and DigiD. However for your parents it is definitely more tricky, as they most likely don’t have a BSN. In that case there might be an option for your parents to do it online, but most of the time your parents have to physically mail specific documents to DUO. Keep this in mind when you apply, as this process can take quite a while
  + The requirements for getting the basisbeurs, aanvullende beurs and the student travel product are the same (see also “public transport”)
    - You need to study at an MBO, HBO or WO/university, and your program should last for at least a year
    - You need to be at least 18, but under 30 years of age when you apply
    - You need to have the Dutch nationality or you need to live here for at least 5 years, which is often not the case. In that case, for EU, EEA and Swiss: You need to work at least 56 hours/month, or need to make at least 567,94 euros/month if you are 21 years or older, or 147,60 euros/month if you are <21. If this is also not the case, there is a possibility to still get it if your non-Dutch parent or partner has EU/EEA/Swiss nationality and works for 56 hours/month or has at least the aforementioned income. Specifically for the UK, the same applies but you also need an Article 50 residence permit. For other countries, the beurs options are sadly not available
  + In the case where you meet the aforementioned requirements, you can apply and DUO will assess your situation. In the case where you aren’t working 56 hours/month or don’t make the money I mentioned before, DUO will individually assess your case and will let you know what you can do to keep this student finance gift. If they say you can’t keep it, you can reapply again at a later time when you meet the requirements again.

Filing your taxes with the Belastingdienst

* When you get income in the country, whether that is from a job, an internship, a loan/gift, some side hustle, or you get a few hundreds from your parents, you need to have your income registered with the Belastingdienst. Especially when you have a Dutch bank account, but also with European bank accounts, the Belastingdienst is allowed to see what kind of income you have so you can’t really avoid them. If you just file your taxes appropriately, you won’t get an unnecessary fine or something similar. When you get a letter from the Belastingdienst stating that you need to file your taxes (aangifte doen), it is mandatory to do it as well
  + You can file your taxes here; <https://www.belastingdienst.nl/wps/wcm/connect/nl/belastingaangifte/belastingaangifte>. You need a DigiD for this. Taxes are filed in March-May of the next year. So if you had a job in 2020, you file your taxes for that year in 2021. If you had a job in December 2020 and January 2021, you have to file your taxes both in 2021 and 2022. Unfortunately the website is in Dutch (required by law), so definitely use a translation device or ask a Dutchie for help. Most important; once you’ve filled it in make sure you click save *and­* submit. Saving it wont send it to the Belastingdienst, which they will see as if you didn’t file it yet
  + If you had income in for example 2021 in both your home country and in the Netherlands, or you lived in your home country and started working here right away, the Belastingdienst requires that you file your taxes differently. On their website there are many different form options, so check which one applies for you. In case you filed incorrectly, the Belastingdienst will email you about it and will give you a chance to fix it

Moving addresses/municipalities/abroad and deregistering

* When you are moving again, you need to change your address. There are a few different options here
  + Moving within your municipality: Just go to the municipality website, use your DigiD, and indicate that you moved to a new address
    - Do you not have a DigiD? Applying for one is really easy and it only takes a few days to arrive, so I advice you to do that. If you don’t want to do that, you can often physically send your documents to your municipality, or you have to make a physical appointment
  + Moving outside of your municipality: Go to the website of your new municipality, use your DigiD, and indicate that you moved from another municipality to this one
  + Moving abroad: Are you leaving for >8 months? Then you don’t have to do anything. If you leave for more than 8 months, check “Leaving the Netherlands”
* Deregistering: Often your landlord will request that you deregister from the address you are registered at at that time. However, deregistering with the municipality is not an official thing. The only way to deregister is if you register yourself at a new address. The formal way of saying that you deregistered is when you get an email from your new municipality stating “yay you moved”. So if you move from a registered place to a place without registration, there is not a lot you can do. Tell your landlord that there is no formal process for this, and that if they want a new person in their apartment they should just do it. Often when this person tries to register at the address they can indicate that you no longer live there. The municipality will then email you or ask you to fill in a form stating that you in fact don’t live there anymore. In the end, this is not your problem as this is a liability that the landlord has to deal with

**Doctors, GP, and the hospital**

The healthcare system here is based on ‘treatment, not prevention’. This means that you won’t get a check-up each year or every few months. Instead, if something is bothering you, just go to a GP. We call a GP a ‘huisarts’ (home doctor). They are your ONLY way into the health care system. So even if you just need medication, or need to see a specialist, you need to see a GP first. If you don’t first see a GP, you have to pay for the medical bill yourself or you get rejected at the hospital/specialist. If you do see a GP first, your insurance will cover (most of) it.

Finding a GP

* This is actually easy. Once you have your BSN and healthcare insurance (either the EHIC, AON student package, or a Dutch one, see “checklist arriving in the Netherlands”), you can do this. Just google the words ‘huisarts/huisartsenpost/huisartsenpraktijk’ and see which ones are near you. Select one you like and register with them. Some GPs don’t have spots available for new students, and some won’t allow you to register with them because your address is too far away, but the websites will usually tell you this. If you are a non-EU student, you also need to bring your residence permit to your first appointment. You can also use these websites: <https://www.kiesuwhuisarts.nl/> and <https://www.zorgkaartnederland.nl/> to find GPs

Need general medication

* If you need “basic” medicine, like cough syrup, paracetamol, NSAIDs, etc., you can go to a local pharmacy like etos, kruidvat, trekpleister, etc. It helps if you just go to one of these stores at some point, and see what they have, then you can familiarize yourself with the medication that can be bought there, and the medication that you need a referral for (which includes antibiotics for example)

Need a specialized doctor or prescription medication

* If you need a specialized doctor (psychiatrist, psychologist, endocrinologist, cardiologist, etc.), or if you need prescription medication (antibiotics, birth control, intense pain killers, stomach protectors, etc.), you first need to go to your GP. Make an appointment online, by email, or by phone, and explain to your GP what your symptoms are. They will run some tests and decide if you indeed need medication or a specialized doctor
  + If you have prescription medication from home and you need a refill here, have your doctor write a note and bring that with you, or have them send an email to your current GP
  + If you feel like the GP is dismissing your symptoms, and is sending you home with nothing or just paracetamol, while you do feel like something more severe is going on, please say so! Be Dutch direct and say that you would like them to do some additional tests anyway because it just feels off. Mentioning previous illnesses related to your current one or your family’s medical history will often help. If your GP still doesn’t listen, just get a different one!

The “official” pharmacy

* This one will give you your prescription medication. Your GP will send out an email to them and you can pick up your medication there (either directly after your GP appointment, or a few days after). Your GP will let you know where these pharmacies are, and you can pick one that is for example close to home

The hospital

* There are several major hospitals in Utrecht (UMCU, diakonessenhuis, and St. Antonius hospital) where your GP could send you to. They could also send you to a smaller, more local hospital if you don’t need extensive tests. You probably have to register yourself in the hospital’s system, but the people there will lead you through it

Exceptions: The dentist, optician and the physiotherapist

* These are the only specialized doctors/medical professionals where you DON’T have to go through the GP in order to make an appointment. You can just look for a dental practice (tandartspraktijk), an optician (opticien) or a physiotherapist (fysiotherapeut) near you and register with them. Because you don’t need a GP for this process, these doctors/medical professionals aren’t always covered by your insurance. Check with yours if it is, or if you would like to pay more money to have it covered

In case of emergency

* It happens, you accidently cut yourself while making dinner and the bleeding won’t stop. But it is Sunday evening, the GP is closed, what do you do? Most GP practices have an evening and weekend emergency number so you can call this. It is also possible to call the nearest hospital and ask if you should visit them. They might redirect you to a GP that is available somewhere else. In the case of a more intense emergency, you are also free to just walk into a hospital and say you need immediate/emergency care. If you cannot get yourself or somebody else to the hospital and it is definitely an emergency, call 112 (see “police, ambulance, firefighters and the emergency numbers”)

**Allowance**

Student life is expensive, so every little bit that can help you spend less money is welcome of course. For both your room and your insurance you could get allowance.

Rent allowance

* Called ‘huurtoeslag’ in Dutch, the tax system (Belastingdienst) can give you money (not a loan) to help pay for your rent. However, a lot of terms apply, so always check every single one
  + Your rent isn’t too high: This depends on your age and on the year when you apply for allowance
    - Between 18 and 23 years old: Max. rent of €452,20 in 2023
    - 23 and older: Max. rent of €808,06 in 2023
    - Your rent will be calculated based on the base rent and service costs, so not the total rent. You’ll need to ask your landlord or view your contract to see what everything is. Usually, the base rent is depicted somewhere on your contract, the service costs are more difficult to find. The service costs include 4 sections: Cleaning of common areas, electricity of common areas, the caretaker, and recreational areas. Each of these 4 sections will have its own costs. For the Belastingdienst system these 4 sections will be between 0 and 12 euros. So for example, if your building has the following: Cleaning = 40 euros, electric = 12, caretaker = 0, and recreation = 5, you’ll fill in on the website: Cleaning = 12, electric = 12, caretaker = 0, and recreation = 5. In total, the service costs can therefore not exceed 48 euros. So in total, your base rent + the service costs should not exceed the max rent described above
  + You rent an independent living space: This means that you have your own living/bedroom, kitchen, toilet and a main entrance door. If you rent a room in a larger apartment, together with other students, the website will tell you that rent allowance isn’t possible. However, some student living spaces can get rent allowance anyway, so don’t get scared away by this immediately
  + Your income isn’t too high: This applies to both you and your official partner (a person you are married to, or who is registered with the Dutch government as your official partner). How high your income can be really depends on your situation (your age, rent, and the other people living with you). In general, students don’t make enough money to exceed this
  + Your wealth isn’t too high: Your wealth includes your savings, stocks, and if you own a house somewhere. Your official partner’s and roommates’ wealth is important here too. Important to note here is that if you rent a room in somebody’s home (for example if you got your room through Hospi Housing), there is a large chance that the person who owns the building/house lives together with you. If this is the case, you can’t get allowance as their wealth (the house) exceeds the max.
    - Your wealth: Max. €33.748 in 2023. If you have an official partner, your shared wealth is max. €67.496 in 2023. Your roommates have the same maximum wealth that you have
  + You are living in the Netherlands
  + You and the people living with you are registered at the address you are living at
  + You and the people living with you either have the Dutch nationality or are in this country legally
  + You are 18 years of age or older
  + You have signed your rental contract together with the landlord
  + You are paying rent for this room/apartment and can prove this by showing bank statements (which is usually not necessary)
* If everything checks out, you can make a pre-calculation: <https://www.belastingdienst.nl/wps/wcm/connect/nl/toeslagen/content/hulpmiddel-proefberekening-toeslagen> this will show you how much you will approximately get. If the website says you can’t get allowance, it might be that some of the aforementioned criteria don’t apply, or maybe something is incorrect. Applying is done through Mijn Toeslagen, together with a DigiD. If you applied and everything went well, you can expect a message from Belastingdienst within 5 weeks after applying. They’ll let you know how much allowance you get. You get your allowance around the 20th of the month. You can also get allowance for the months that you missed (so for example your contract starts in September, but you could only start applying for allowance in November, you can still get your allowance for the months September and October). You can also check your allowance on Mijn Toeslagen: <https://www.belastingdienst.nl/wps/wcm/connect/bldcontentnl/belastingdienst/prive/toeslagen/inloggen_op_mijn_toeslagen>. In the case where you aren’t sure if you can get allowance because it isn’t clear, just apply anyway. In the worst case scenario the Belastingdienst will let you know that you got money that you weren’t allowed to get and they’ll ask you to pay it back. That is basically it

Healthcare allowance

* As indicated (see “checklist arriving in the Netherlands”), you can get healthcare allowance (called zorgtoeslag) if you have Dutch healthcare. Important to note: If you have the AON student package, you cannot get this allowance (as this student package is not considered a Dutch healthcare package). This allowance is also a gift (not a loan). Some rules apply here as well
  + Your income isn’t too high: Your yearly income should not exceed €38.520 in 2023. If you have an official partner, your shared income cannot exceed €48.224 in 2023
  + Your wealth isn’t too high: Your wealth should not exceed €127.582 on January 1st 2023. If you have an official partner, your shared wealth cannot exceed €161.329. What is wealth? See the section above
  + You are 18 years of age, or older
  + You have your own Dutch healthcare insurance
* You can also make a pre-calculation for this (same link as for rent allowance), and applying is also done through Mijn Toeslagen

In the case where you need to call the Belastingdienst, getting on the phone with them might be a bit tricky as the answering machine will be completely in Dutch. What you should do: Call 0800 0543 (Belastingdienst), wait for the answering machine to be silent, press 1, press 1 again, then put in your BSN number and end your number with the # sign. Press 3, then please hold. Somebody should answer the phone and then redirect you to the English department (where they will probably forward you a few times again lol).

**Bikes**

Bikes are the most important transportation devices we have in the Netherlands, there are even more owned bikes here than people! The city’s infrastructure is built around using either a bike or your legs. Therefore I would not recommend getting a car here, as parking is very limited and expensive, and moving your way through the city is difficult. If you want to travel outside of Utrecht, public transport will still be cheaper than owning a car. Do invest in a good bike. What does a good bike have?

* Functional brakes (you’ll need them lol)
* A bell, to let everybody walking on the cycling lane know they should f\*ck off
* A head light (white) and preferably a tail light (red)
  + Your tail light can also be a reflector (red), but your head light should be a light that you can turn on and off
* Reflectors in the pedals and wheels (so people can also see you from the side)
* A double lock: A normal lock which goes through the back wheel, and a chain lock that you can detach and reattach to the bike
* Gears are not necessary (we don’t have mountains lol), but you are still free to buy one with gears (might help with the wind, see “weather”)
* A helmet, to a lot of people’s surprise, is also not mandatory. You are free to buy one, just know that you’ll get weird looks from the Dutchies. The cycling lanes here are very safe, so safe even that a helmet is not necessary 😉

Buying second hand bikes can be done online, but BE CAREFUL OF SCAMMERS (see “scams”). Second hand bike stores (who don’t sell stolen bikes) are adelaarfietsen, willemstraatbike b.v., fietsenwinkel terwijde, cheap bikes Utrecht, and celil city bikes, just to name a few. Depending on how fancy your bike is (has stuff been replaced/repaired, is it a newer or older bike, what accessories does it have, etc.), second hand bikes range from 50 to 300 euros. Anything below this usually means the bike is really crappy, so don’t get that.

You can also rend bikes, which is great! There are many bike rental programs like for example Swapfiets (<https://swapfiets.nl/>), but you can also get a public transport bike (see “public transport”). In general I would recommend buying a second hand bike if you are staying here for longer than 6 months, and if not; to rent one from Swapfiets.

Securing your bike: Use the second (chain) lock to secure your bike to something else, for example a pole, a tree, little hooks sticking out of the ground, your friend’s bike, etc. Always lock your bike by pulling the chain through the bike frame, or if this isn’t an option, through the back wheel. Don’t pull it through the front wheel as thieves will simply unscrew your front wheel and take the rest of the bike with them. They can also very easily open the basic lock most bikes have, so don’t rely on this.

If you don’t bike often, you might see people cycling in the city centre and think: This is where my life will end. That is totally understandable, bike culture in the city is pretty intense. If you are not used to this, try to cycle first in the more rural areas like the east or north of Utrecht, or even the small towns surrounding it. Gradually go towards the city centre. Cycling lanes are usually dark red in colour, so don’t cycle on the car road (black asphalt) or on the pedestrian walks (grey stones). If there is no cycling lane, you can cycle on the car road, but this doesn’t happen too often. The general rule is, if you cycle with a bit of a cocky attitude, everything will be fine 😉 just drive around as if you know what you are doing, and it will be fine. General traffic rules are: Cycle on the right side of the road, people from the right have priority, watch out for red traffic lights (even though not everybody cares lol), look at traffic signs, and turn on your lights when the street lights are also turned on. Also please don’t use your phone while on the bike, even holding it in your hand (without using it) is illegal. You can use your phone for Google maps and stuff by buying a bike phone stand and putting your phone in there.

**Public transport**

According to google, we have one of the best public transport systems out there, so that is great! Though most Dutchies will disagree with you (they’ll say; “trains are “always” late”, and Dutchies love to be punctual so they hate this), public transport here usually is at your stop in time, and navigating where to go is easy. So first thing to start with, the public transport types:

Train

* Trains are mostly owned by the NS (Dutch Railways, Nederlandse Spoorwegen), and they will go to 90% of the country. Therefore if you want train discounts (see below), I would recommend getting them for the NS. The NS has 3 types of trains: The Sprinter is a white with blue train, and will stop at every train station on its way. These trains are often used if you need to get to small towns, or if you get on in small towns. The InterCity/IC train is a yellow and blue train, and these stop only in the larger cities. The ICE (InterCity Express) is an international train, and will go to for example Germany and Belgium. With the NS, you can use the sprinter and IC train if you have a public transport card. You are free to sit in economy/second class (blue chairs). If you upgrade your public transport card (will cost more money), you can also sit in business/first class (red chairs). For international trains you need a special ticket, and you’ll be assigned a seat.
* Other trains are owned by Arriva, BlauwNet, and Valleilijn. The chances of you seeing and/or needing these trains is very small. If you do need to use them, check in at the correct columns (see below)

Metro

* Utrecht doesn’t have a metro, but cities like Amsterdam and Rotterdam do. The metro is mostly used to transport yourself within the city, and sometimes to surrounding cities. You can find the metro underground in the city itself, or above ground if there is also a train station nearby. The metro in Amsterdam is owned by GVB, and the metro in Rotterdam by RET

Tram

* Utrecht actually has a tram now since a few years. The tram is owned by U-OV (Utrecht public transport, Utrecht openbaar vervoer), and will get you to IJsselstein, Nieuwegein, and the USP, while crossing through the south and east of Utrecht. Other cities also have trams, including Amsterdam. Unlike the metro, the tram will always go above ground. The tram in Amsterdam is owned by GVB (just like the metro)

Bus

* Utrecht also has buses of course. Most buses are owned by either U-OV or Syntus. The bus can transport you within the city, but they also go to neighbouring cities. Other bus operators are for example Connexxion, Arriva, RET, GVB, Hermes, HTM, Qbuzz (U-OV is part of this), and Keolis. Almost every province has its own bus operator(s)

Taxi

* We also have taxis, which can be recognized by their blue licence plates. There are a lot of private Dutch taxi operators, and we also have Uber. Taxis are quite expensive, so I wouldn’t recommend them, as public transport can get you wherever you want. Moreover, because most Dutch people don’t use taxis either, operators like Uber can be a bit difficult to arrange. You can order a taxi online by just googling where you need one to be at.

So now that you know which types of public transport we have, let’s get into using them. The easiest way to use them is by having a public transport card. This can be the Dutch OV-chipkaart, or the international mobility card provided by the ISIC. You can put money on these cards, as well as discounts. In some rare cases you can even get free public transport. Another method of payment is by using your credit/debit card directly called OVPay. Since August 2023 all operators should provide this option. However, you cannot load any discounts onto your bank card, so if you want to use discounts or the free travel product (if that applies), you would have to get a public transport card.

Free travel, the student travel product

* As stated before (see “Checklist arriving in the Netherlands”), the student travel product is a loan/gift from DUO, which you could possibly get if the following applies:
* You need to study at a Dutch university (WO), applied sciences (HBO), or MBO school. Your study should allow the use for the travel product (most do)
* You need to be below 30 years of age when you apply
* You need a Dutch passport or have the Dutch nationality or:
* EU citizen (including Switzerland, Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway)
  + You have been living in the Netherlands for 5 consecutive years, or
  + You work here for at least 56h/month, or make at least 567,94 euros a month if you are 21 and older, or 147,60 euros a month if you are <21, or
  + Your (non-Dutch) parent or partner works here for at least 56h/month or makes the money described above
* UK
  + Similar to the aforementioned rules, but you need an Article 50 permit
* Non-EU: Not possible sorry ☹
* In case you or your parent/partner works/worked between 24 and 56 hours a month, DUO will investigate your situation and will determine if you can (still) use the product (see “Checklist arriving in the Netherlands” as well)
* This travel product is a loan with the government, and they’ll turn it into a gift if you finish your studies. If you don’t, you’ll have to pay them back

OV-chipkaart

* Anonymous OV-chipkaart (blue colour)
  + Not tied to your name (anyone can use it)
  + Under some circumstances you can get discounts on it, but they aren’t great
  + 7,50 euros for the card + whatever public transport will cost (depends on your travels)
  + You can buy this card at any train station, as well as at some supermarkets and at small bookstores like Primera and Bruna. You can also order it online: <https://www.ovshop.nl/shop/anonieme-ov-chipkaart-kopen/>
* Personal OV-chipkaart (yellow colour)
  + Tied to you (has your name and picture)
  + Can get discounts and the free travel product (if applicable)
    - Weekend voordeel (2,20 euros/month) on trains (<https://www.ns.nl/nsflex/webshop#/bestelling/producten/1>)
      * 40% discount during the weekend and holidays
    - Dal voordeel (5,60 euros/month) on trains (<https://www.ns.nl/nsflex/webshop#/bestelling/producten/2>)
      * 40% discount during the weekend, holidays, and off-peak hours (9:00-16:00, and 18:30-6:30)
    - Altijd voordeel (26,70 euros/month) on trains (<https://www.ns.nl/nsflex/webshop#/bestelling/producten/3>)
      * 20% discount during peak hours, 40% discount during the weekend, holidays, and off-peak hours
    - Other train discounts include free travel during for example the weekend (<https://www.ns.nl/nsflex/webshop#/bestelling/producten/4>), the off-peak hours (<https://www.ns.nl/nsflex/webshop#/bestelling/producten/5>), all the time ([https://www.ns.nl/nsflex/webshop#/bestelling/producten/6](https://www.ns.nl/nsflex/webshop" \l "/bestelling/producten/6)), or a specific line (so for example if you live in Amsterdam, you can pay for Amsterdam-Utrecht with a discount, but only this line) ([https://www.ns.nl/nsflex/webshop#/bestelling/producten/7](https://www.ns.nl/nsflex/webshop" \l "/bestelling/producten/7)). These discounts are quite expensive and usually not worth it unless you travel a lotttt
    - U-OV dal voordeel (16,80 euros/year) on all buses and trams belonging to U-OV and Syntus in the province of Utrecht (<https://www.u-ov.info/abonnementen-kaartjes/product-details/UFJPRFVDVF9UWVBFOjky/dal-voordeel>)
      * 40% off during off-peak hours
    - Altijd korting (21,55 euros/month) on all buses, trams and metros in the Netherlands (<https://www.u-ov.info/abonnementen-kaartjes/product-details/UFJPRFVDVF9UWVBFOjI/altijd-korting>)
      * 20% off during all hours
    - Other bus/tram discounts are also available with U-OV, but can be expensive as well (<https://www.u-ov.info/abonnementen-kaartjes/product-details/UFJPRFVDVF9UWVBFOjEwNg/sterabonnement>, <https://www.u-ov.info/abonnementen-kaartjes/product-details/UFJPRFVDVF9UWVBFOjEx/gemaksabonnement-regio>, <https://www.u-ov.info/abonnementen-kaartjes/product-details/UFJPRFVDVF9UWVBFOjEz/gemaksabonnement-stad>, <https://www.u-ov.info/abonnementen-kaartjes/product-details/UFJPRFVDVF9UWVBFOjk0/dal-vrij>, <https://www.u-ov.info/abonnementen-kaartjes/product-details/UFJPRFVDVF9UWVBFOjQ/netabonnement>)
  + You can get it charged automatically (so you don’t have to manually put money on it every time you use it: <https://www.ov-chipkaart.nl/automatisch-opladen>
  + You can get an OV-bike, which is 4,45 euros/bike/24 hours: <https://www.ns.nl/deur-tot-deur/ov-fiets>
  + 7,50 euro for the card + your discount + what public transport will cost minus your discounts
    - Ordering this card will require you either have a Dutch bank (pay using IDeal) or PayPal (from Belgium/Germany/Luxembourg). If you don’t have this, you can contact them through a form and they’ll help you further. They will send it to your address in 6 business days (usually will take 3)
    - Order the card: <https://www.ov-chipkaart.nl/persoonlijke-ov-chipkaart-aanvragen>
  + I would not advice getting NS Flex (<https://www.ns.nl/flex/>) as this usually doesn’t work with other discounts or other products on your card. If you want to get NS discounts and it tells you to get NS Flex, then at least deactivate the after payment option (paying at the end of the month), otherwise your other discounts won’t work

ISIC public transport card/Tripkey mobility card

* Has a discount
  + 15% discount during the weekend and off-peak hours on trains
* Will get charged automatically
* You can get a public transport bike (rent and buy)
* 15 euros for the mobility card + ISIC ID + what public transport costs minus the discount + a monthly fee of 4,50 euros
  + Ordering this card can be done with a lot of international payment methods
  + Order the card: <https://studentmobility.nl/mobility-package/?utm_source=ISIC_NL&utm_medium=website&utm_campaign=student_mobility_card>

Personally, I would recommend getting the personal OV-chipkaart, as the discount deals are way better than the ISIC card, and only this card can use the different discount options.

In the case where you don’t want to get a public transport card yet, you can also still buy individual tickets. For the train, metro, and tram, these tickets can be bought at large machines usually present at the train/metro station, or on the tram platform. For a bus you can buy a ticket in the bus. Tickets can also be bought online on the websites of the operators. It is important to note that if you want a physical ticket from a machine, you need to pay with your debit/credit card. In some cases you can pay with coins (not bills) at for example train stations. Paying with cash in the bus is not an option. Also important: If you have a ticket or a public transport card, you do not need to buy/use the other type (so if you have a OV-chipkaart, don’t buy a ticket and vice versa). Buying individual tickets is usually more expensive than buying the anonymous OV-chipkaart, so I would still recommend getting this blue card over buying tickets.

Whether you have an individual ticket, or a public transport card, it is important that you ‘check in’. With the ISIC card and an individual ticket in your hand, this can easily be done. If you have an OV-chipkaart, you’ll need a small extra step. With this card, you need to go to a large ticket-booth looking machine somewhere at the train/metro station, or on the tram platform. Here you can scan your OV, and put money on it. Now that every device has money on it, you can ‘check in’. For the train/metro/bus you need to do this at specific columns. These columns are in the colour of your operator. For example, the columns from NS (train) and U-OV (tram) are yellow, while the ones for RET in Rotterdam are red. Make sure that you check in at the correct columns (especially on a train station this is important). At metro stations, small train stations, and tram stops, these columns are just little coloured sticks sticking out of the ground. At large train stations, like Utrecht Centraal (central), these are gates. Just hold your public transport card in front of the scan part of these columns/gates, or hold the QR-code/barcode of your ticket in front of it. The machine should make a beeping sound and should show you ‘Ingecheckt’, meaning you checked in. Then you can just get onto your train/metro/tram. Small note: If you have a ticket and you want to check in at a column, they might not beep and might not check you in. Don’t worry about this, you can still travel with these tickets even if you didn’t check in. Sometimes this option just doesn’t work. When it is time to get off, you need to check out again, this is done the same way as checking in. The column/gate will beep again and will say ‘Uitgecheckt’ (checked out). It’s important to also check out and in again if: You are switching between operators, for example if you are using an NS train and then going onto an Arriva train, and also when you switch between vehicle types, for example if you are switching from tram to train. If you are using two trains which are both owned by the NS for example, you don’t need to check out or in again. For the bus it is a bit different, as the check-in/out system is inside the bus. They also have a small device in the bus for this where you just check in, and when you leave the bus you check out. This means that if you go from bus to bus you do have to check out and in again. Note: It might sometimes happen that you put money on your card but it gets declined by the column/gate. Try to check in again. If it still doesn’t work, and says something along the lines of: Niet genoeg saldo, it means that there isn’t enough money on your card and you need to put more on it (NS often requires you have at least 20 euros on it for example).

Finding which bus or train you need to take is also important of course. Most of us use the 9292 app, which will show you all types of public transport, which one has the fastest route, how much it costs, etc. It will also show you if your transport is going to be late, or isn’t driving due to maintenance or something else. You can also download the NS app, or the NS international app if you want to use ICE trains.

**Police, ambulance, firefighters and the emergency numbers**

The general emergency number 112

* In case something intense happens, you are free to call the emergency number 112. If you call this number, first state if you need police, ambulance, or firefighters, and then state the address you are at (if you don’t know the address, try to give a description of where you are or try to look it up in Google maps). After you’ve said this, you can start explaining the problem
* Situations were you call 112: Theft, burglary, shady situations (for example people walking around a house/car with a flashlight), fire, gas leak, assault, medical emergency, suicide attempt, etc. Basically anything where people need to come right now. Emergency services are usually at your location within 20 minutes

The mental health emergency number 113

* In the case where you need mental support because you are thinking about ending your life, you are allowed to call 0800-0113 for free, or call 113 (paid). You can also chat with people <https://www.113.nl/>. If you just want to talk to somebody you can call 088 0767 000, or go to their website: <https://www.deluisterlijn.nl/>

The animal health emergency number 114

* If you see an animal in distress or in a horrible situation, you can call 114. If you can move the animal yourself and bring it to a vet, this is recommended. This number can be called for all animal types (house pets, outdoor pets/farm animals, and wildlife). If you see a large herbivore (like sheep or cow) on its back/side with its legs sticking into the air, please contact the farmer (usually there is a farm nearby, or their phone number is on the fence somewhere). If you can’t find/contact the farmer, also call 114

Police

* In a lot of countries, the police isn’t trustworthy, or they are very aggressive. Luckily, that is not the case here. Many police officers here are very nice and want to help you. You are free to see for yourself, we have a police officer here in Utrecht who makes videos about what he does throughout the day: <https://www.youtube.com/c/PolitieVloggerJanWillem>. You are also free to give a statement/file a complaint at the police station (or online) in case of theft, assault, and similar situations. If there are situations where you need the police, but it is not an emergency (like for example loud music, drunk people, etc.), you can call 0900 8844. It is important to carry your ID (so ID card or passport) with you at all times, as this is mandatory in the Netherlands and when the police ask for it, it is obligatory to give it to them right there and then. Otherwise you’ll risk a fine.

Ambulance

* Don’t worry about healthcare or whatever when calling an ambulance, as everything will be covered here as long as you have some valid health insurance. If somebody else is hurt, first assess if your own situation is safe enough in order to help this person. Try to always first help the patient and leave them in the spot you found them (unless this is a very dangerous area, for example on a road). Give first aid to the patient and let somebody else call 112. If there is nobody else, assess again if your own situation is safe, help the patient, then call 112 and put it on speaker phone while still helping the patient. In the case of resuscitation, there are AEDs almost everywhere. Both the AED and the 112 operator on the phone with you will help you throughout the process. If you have never done this before, still try to do what you can and follow the advice given to you by the machine and the operator, as every minute counts

**Supermarkets and other stores**

There are many supermarkets here, ranging from very cheap to very expensive.

* Lidl, Aldi, Dirk, and Vomar are usually the cheapest, but that also means that they might not sell everything you want, and quality of the products isn’t always great, but still nice
* Plus, Jumbo and Coop are a bit in between. Jumbo has a policy that their products need to be the cheapest when compared to other supermarkets, but that means that they usually don’t sell the cheapest brands (Lidl and Aldi do). You can often find most of your stuff in these stores, sometimes they also have discount deals
* Albert Heijn (AH) and Spar are usually considered the most expensive supermarkets. They do sell good quality products that other stores don’t have, and often have deals to pull you in

Besides physical supermarkets, there are also online options. Many of the aforementioned stores have online shops, but there is also Picnic, Flink and Gorillas. Important to note that, unlike many other supermarkets around the world, our supermarkets don’t have a fresh meat/fish department. If you want to buy this, you have to go to a butchery or fishmonger. Fruits/vegetables and bread are made fresh in the supermarket, but usually buying these from a greengrocer or bakery ensures that the products are really fresh, and also taste amazing. Supermarkets do contain (big) sections with vegan/vegetarian stuff and also anti-allergen foods like gluten or lactose free. If you want very specific products that aren’t considered “Western/European”, you can go to a country- or continent-specific store like Amazing Oriental in the city centre (Asian-based) or halal stores (often owned by people with a Middle-Eastern or North African background like Turkish or Moroccan, thereby ensuring that the meat that’s sold there is halal slaughtered). Another cool thing we have are cheese stores, which only sell cheese (makes sense), so they are in that sense very similar to bakeries and butcheries. If you want to order food, we often use Thuisbezorgd, Uber Eats, or Deliveroo. Sometimes restaurants also have their own delivery service.

If you want furniture, you can go to IKEA or Jysk. There are also second hand stores, if you google ‘kringloopwinkel’, they should pop up. Electronics stores you can go to are MediaMarkt, CoolBlue, and BCC. For sports related stuff I always recommend Decathlon, or for more outdoors stuff the Bever store.

**Scams**

If you have read most parts of the document so far, you have seen the word ‘scam’ come by a few times now. Yes, people are assholes and will scam students to make quick money. How to recognize scams:

Housing scams: A lot of stuff is illegal here (we do like our rules), so that includes stuff regarding housing

* Never pay anything upfront regarding seeing a contract, doing a viewing, people looking for a home for you, or them saying they have found one but you can only get the address after you pay, etc. Anything that has to do with paying before you signed a contract is a scam
  + Note: Only official housing agencies (see “housing”) are allowed to charge you a fee up front in order for you to view their website, or for them to start looking for rooms that you might like
* There is a limit on how much a landlord can charge you for a room/apartment. You can check using this website (in Dutch): <https://www.betaalikteveelhuur.nl/>
* As stated before, registration is important (see “checklist arriving in the Netherlands”). If you find a room but the landlord says you can’t register there, DON’T DO IT. Especially if you are from outside of the EU, don’t get a room without registration. First of all, these rooms are being rented illegally, and if somebody decides to rat you and the landlord out, you have to pay a hefty fine (up to 21.750 euros). Moreover, without registration you can’t get a BSN, which is necessary for a lot of stuff (see “checklist arriving in the Netherlands”). If you are from the EU, it will be a bit easier to live without a BSN, but still not recommended. However, the housing market is a mess, so it is understandable if you want to try this when there are no other options left
* Common scams can be found on Facebook or Kamernet. Things to look out for here are: How trustworthy is their profile (do they only have a few basic pictures, or do they say that they have a room for rent in Utrecht but they themselves live in the USA, etc.)? Ask them for the address and cross reference that address with this website: <https://huispedia.nl/>. This website often indicates what the average price of the house would be. So if somebody offers you a room at the “Oudegracht” for 300 euros, while these houses are worth like 2 million euros, yeah that’s literally too good to be true. Ask them for pictures of the house and cross reference those pictures with the Google maps pictures of the address. What I usually look for is if the windows are the same for example (they often aren’t). The landlord is only contacting you through email or through a foreign (not +31) phone number, which could be a red flag. A common scam is that they say that they moved to for example Portugal, Italy, Spain etc. but that they still have their house in the Netherlands. No self-respecting landlord would rent out their room like that, so yeah that’s also fake. Ask for a viewing (either in person or digital): If they say they can’t do it, first ask them why. If they say they aren’t available because they moved or are busy, ask if people are currently renting the apartment. If that’s the case, ask the landlord if they can do the viewing. Otherwise ask the landlord if they know the neighbours (they should). If all these questions result in a ‘no viewing possible’ answer, then the chances are that this person doesn’t have a room for rent at all
* If you do get to the point of signing a contract, read it carefully (see “housing”). Some landlords also try to scam you (even if all their other stuff is legit) with their contracts. If something feels off, always ask others or look on the internet for your legal rights. Contracts usually have a pretty standard layout. If it looks like to be made in Microsoft Word and contains like pictures of flags or something like this, it’s probably fake as well
* Don’t get a room offered to you by: Marcel van Hooijdonk, Cees Engel, or Betty Chang. These people will not fix your apartment, not answer your calls/emails, will offer you homes for a ridiculous price, etc. We call these people “huisjesmelkers” meaning they will literally “milk” everything out of you and don’t care how you feel about that

Bike scams: People will try to sell stolen bikes

* The most obvious one is: Don’t get a bike offered to you by a shady dude walking around the canals (Oudegracht) or the shopping centre (Hoog Catharijne) in Utrecht. These people walk around usually after midnight and try to sell you bikes for only 20 euros or something similar. These bikes are always stolen
* People offering bikes online: Depends on the situation whether they are trustworthy or not. If they want you to pay up front, don’t do it of course. The most important thing will be to check the bike’s frame number (can usually be found underneath the frame). You can check if a bike is stolen with this number together with the brand of the bike: <https://fdr.rdw.nl/>. If the frame number has been scratched, making it unreadable, don’t buy the bike. If the bike is in the register (see link), also don’t buy it. If the bike is not in the register, don’t go through with it yet. Check if parts of the bike seem replaced, for example the front wheel is all shiny while the rest of the bike looks like sh\*t. This could also be an indication that the bike has been stolen. If the person selling the bike is being shady in general, like for example not wanting to state their full name or show ID, doesn’t want you to sign a contract regarding the bike, wants you to pay in cash, etc., just try looking for a different bike
* In the case where you want to sell your bike, be careful when giving people test drives. They might actually take off with your bike. Always have somebody nearby with their own bike who can follow the person in case they take off

‘Sympathy’ scams

* There will always be people in the city centre trying to make you feel sorry for them. These people might be homeless people, or scammers. You are free to help homeless people of course, just know that during winter they can get a free bed to sleep on at non-profit organisations, so if they tell you a story that they need money to go there; they don’t. Scammers might try a lot of tricks, which may include “giving” you stuff, like for example roses or bracelets, or they try to win you over by showing you pictures from “their families”, and some even bring actual children/babies with them. The police is very much onto this, and you won’t see them a lot. Still, if you do, don’t give them anything/take anything from them and just ignore them. If you do give them something/take something they’ll become aggressive, stating you need to give them (more) money

Phone scams

* Sometimes people will call you, seemingly from a Dutch phone number, stating in a robotic voice that your BSN has been found in a drug case, and that you need to press 1 in order to talk to a person from the Ministry of Justice. This is a scam, so don’t fall for this of course

**Weather**

It is commonly known that the weather in this country can be sh\*t. We also have almost every type of weather possible, so that doesn’t make it any easier. Even if you are here only for a few months, you could see all seasons in one week, so be prepared. The most important thing to get is a good rain coat. You need one that is waterproof, but still breathable.

This country has a sea climate, meaning that the air is very humid and this can make summer really hot and winter really cold. The average temperature of the country is around 10 degrees Celsius, but in winter it can be -5, while in summer it can be above 30 degrees. Especially now with climate change, the weather is becoming more extreme. Another important part is, because this country is so flat and is next to the ocean, there will be a lot of wind, from every direction. This can make cycling difficult (as if you are going uphill on a mountain), and in some cases even walking can be hard. So, what can you expect:

Winter (usually January, February, and March)

* Winter is dry and cold, occasionally there is snow and ice. In winter it is important to wear layers, and removing these layers when going inside. Gloves are recommended. It can still rain in winter and can also still be warm if the sun is shining. Wear long clothing, a jacket and warm shoes. Beware of black ice: When it rains, or if there is a lot of water in the air (which there usually is), that water might freeze during the night. If it freezes on roads, they look as if somebody recently painted them; they are very shiny. This means that there is a layer of ice on them, and this can be very dangerous. Even a thin layer can make you slip. Using a bike on black ice is definitely not recommended (neither is cycling through snow). If you do have to walk across black ice, use small shuffling steps and try relax your muscles a bit

Spring (usually April, May, and June)

* Spring is really pretty as everything will start to bloom again, but it is also very rainy. This means that you’ll most likely get wet a few times. Rains can be pretty intense, and you’ll see a lot of people with coats on or with umbrellas (even carrying umbrellas while cycling). Make sure that your shoes are water resistant, or that at least the sole of your shoe is. Clothing really depends on the rain; if it rains it is usually cold, if the sun shines it will be hot. Another fun thing that might occur is hail. These are rain drops that froze in the air and are now little balls of ice. If it hails, get inside or find shelter, as those little balls hurt, but the bigger ones can actually cause damage (on rare occasions, hail has the size of golf balls)

Summer (usually July, August, and September)

* Summer still has rain, just not nearly as much as the other seasons. There will be a lot more sun of course. Due to this, the water in this country (and there is a lot of it lol) will evaporate, creating humid thunderstorms. These storms can be quite dangerous, so please seek shelter (but not under a tree as this can cause electrocution if the tree is hit by lightning). These storms bring a lot of wind as well (and in rare cases small tornadoes), which can be a struggle but also make for some funny videos (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XgkQ3O5Pu2k>). If there are a lot of storms following each other, there might be small floods. The country is prepared for this (we have a lot of waterways), but there is still a chance that certain areas will be overrun by water. Don’t cycle through these, you will fall. Overall, the summers are getting hotter, so definitely bring short pants, sleeveless shirts, dresses, etc. But also be prepared to use that rain coat again. Temperatures above 25 degrees will mean that it will be pretty warm (due to the humidity) so be prepared for that when you go outside. Invest in a fan if you overheat easily

Autumn (usually October, November, and December)

* This season is pretty similar to spring, only here the plants are dying instead of growing. Again, lots of rain, very unpredictable weather. See the section on spring

So, if you want to be a star at predicting the weather, use this website/app: <https://www.buienradar.nl/>. Overall, this one predicts the weather the best (but still not 100%). Rain is usually indicated in shades of blue, thunder/storms with heavy rain will be in red/purple, and snow in orange/yellow.

**Learning Dutch**

It is not mandatory to learn Dutch here, as more than 90% of people here speak decent English. Still, stuff in supermarkets will be in Dutch (or German and French, so if you speak those languages it might be a bit easier), so knowing a bit of basic Dutch can help you. There are of course also translation apps you can use, like the one from Google or DeepL. The UU also offers a Dutch learning course: <https://www.uu.nl/en/education/welcome-to-utrecht/prepare-your-stay/learning-dutch>. Besides this, Babel (<https://www.babel.nl/en/course-overview/dutch-courses/>), Volksuniversiteit (<https://www.volksuniversiteitutrecht.nl/>), Lest Best (<https://lestbest.nl/en/?utm_source=iamexpat&utm_medium=listing&utm_campaign=dutch&utm_term=rotterdam>) and TopTaal (<https://www.toptaal.nl/opleiding/staatsexamen-programma-2-b2/>) also offer Dutch courses, including those for the integration exam if you want to take that at some point. Some free options to learn the basics of the language include DuoLingo (<https://www.duolingo.com/enroll/nl-NL/en/Learn-Dutch-Online>) and LearnDutch (<https://www.learndutch.org/online-dutch-courses/>). Know that these apps aren’t always too accurate or useful (for example DuoLingo has sentences that say you are an orange, but a cute orange at that 😉). Another good way to learn is to rent children’s books from the library and start reading them. And of course try to mix a bit with the Dutchies, try to follow their conversation. If they want to switch to English to accommodate you, just tell them to continue in Dutch because you want to learn. There are also some free groups/activities where you can learn Dutch, for example the Language Café (<https://www.meetup.com/nl-NL/language-cafe-utrecht/>), the Language Exchange (<https://www.mylanguageexchange.com/city/Utrecht__Netherlands.asp>), or other meetups (<https://www.meetup.com/find/?keywords=language&source=EVENTS>). Some basic words to get you started:

* Hello = Hallo/hoi/hey
* Yes/No = Ja/Nee
* Bye/see you later = Doei/Tot ziens
* Excuse me = Pardon
* Sorry = Sorry
* Thank you = Dankuwel (formal)/Dankjewel (informal)
* Please/here you go = Alstublieft (formal)/Alsjeblieft (informal)
* I don’t understand = Ik snap het niet
* Toilet/restroom = Toilet/WC
* I don’t speak Dutch, do you speak English? = Ik spreek geen Nederlands, spreekt u Engels?

**Leaving the Netherlands**

As I said before, when/if it is time for you to leave again, make sure you deregister with the municipality! Let them know you are leaving for at least 8 months (if that is not the case, you don’t have to deregister) either by using your DigiD, physically sending them your information, or making an physical appointment for it. <https://www.netherlandsworldwide.nl/personal-records-database-brp/how-deregister-brp> and <https://pki.utrecht.nl/Loket/product/3e70cf37a03c7f0441a1407c74d13bf9> for Utrecht

**Closing words**

Jeesh, that was a long document to read. Hope things are mostly cleared up for you now. If you still have questions, don’t be afraid and just reach out (see the introduction). Thanks for reading!