

# STUDENT SURVEY 2024

## ANALYSIS OF CHALLENGES FACED BY ARUBAN STUDENTS IN THE NETHERLANDS

by the Cabinet of the Minister  
Plenipotentiary of Aruba

DOCUMENT PREPARED BY DESTINY ARENDS

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# INTRODUCTION

The transition from Aruba to the Netherlands for higher education represents a significant journey for many students. While this move offers promising academic opportunities, it also introduces a variety of challenges that can impact students' academic success and overall well-being. This analysis aims to explore these challenges by examining data collected from Aruban students currently studying in the Netherlands. By understanding the primary issues these students face, we can identify areas for improvement and suggest measures to support their academic and social integration. The importance of this analysis aligns with the mission and vision of the Cabinet of The Minister Plenipotentiary of Aruba, which is dedicated to ensuring that students not only achieve academic success but also lead fulfilling and balanced lives during their time in the Netherlands. By addressing the identified challenges students face, we can develop strategies to enhance the overall experience of Aruban students abroad, ultimately contributing to their long-term success and well-being. The survey conducted among 158 students has provided valuable insights into the specific hurdles faced by the Aruban students. This paper will delve into these issues in greater detail, offering a thorough analysis of the obstacles and proposing practical solutions to facilitate smoother transitions and better outcomes for Aruban students in the Netherlands.

# METHODOLOGY

The data for this analysis were gathered through a comprehensive quantitative survey of 150 students and a brainstorming session with a smaller group of students (18) at the "Ban Topa" event in The Hague. The students are attending various institutions across the Netherlands, including universities, hogescholen (universities of applied sciences), and other educational institutions. The survey conducted provided comprehensive data on various aspects of students' experiences. The main areas of focus were academic challenges, social integration, financial difficulties, and cultural adjustments. The data revealed a diverse representation of gender among the participants, with 57.59% identifying as female, 41.77% as male, and 0.63% as other. Furthermore, the survey delved into the educational backgrounds of the participants, showcasing the range of their academic levels attained in Aruba. The data highlighted that students had completed education up to various levels, with 27.22% having achieved VWO, 52.53% HAVO, 2.53% MAVO, 11.39% MBO, and 5.06% Bachelor's degrees. This analysis will focus on several key aspects: academic challenges, social integration, financial difficulties, and cultural adjustments.



# CHALLENGES

After a productive brainstorming session with students at the “Ban Topa” event, we concluded that there are several significant challenges that the students face (See Figure 1). One of the biggest challenges students face when living in the Netherlands is housing. Once in the Netherlands, finding a house is difficult, which poses a significant obstacle for many. Isolation and missing contact with other students is another major challenge, leading to feelings of homesickness. Many Arubans find it difficult to adapt to life in the Netherlands without the support network they are used to back home. Discrimination and racism are also significant issues, as many Arubans encounter racial prejudice. This, combined with the culture shock of transitioning from Aruba to the Netherlands, where cultural norms and societal structures can be vastly different, makes the adjustment period particularly tough. The weather in the Netherlands is another common challenge. The climate is quite different from Aruba’s warm and sunny weather, and many Arubans struggle to adapt to the colder, often greyer Dutch weather. Additionally, there is a general lack of information available to Arubans about living in the Netherlands, which can make the transition more difficult. This includes difficulties related to the language barrier, as some Arubans may struggle with Dutch, which can hinder their ability to integrate and access necessary services. Mental health issues are also prevalent among Arubans living in the Netherlands, partly due to the challenges mentioned above. There is insufficient information provided from Aruba about schools and study opportunities in the Netherlands, which can leave students feeling unprepared and unsupported.

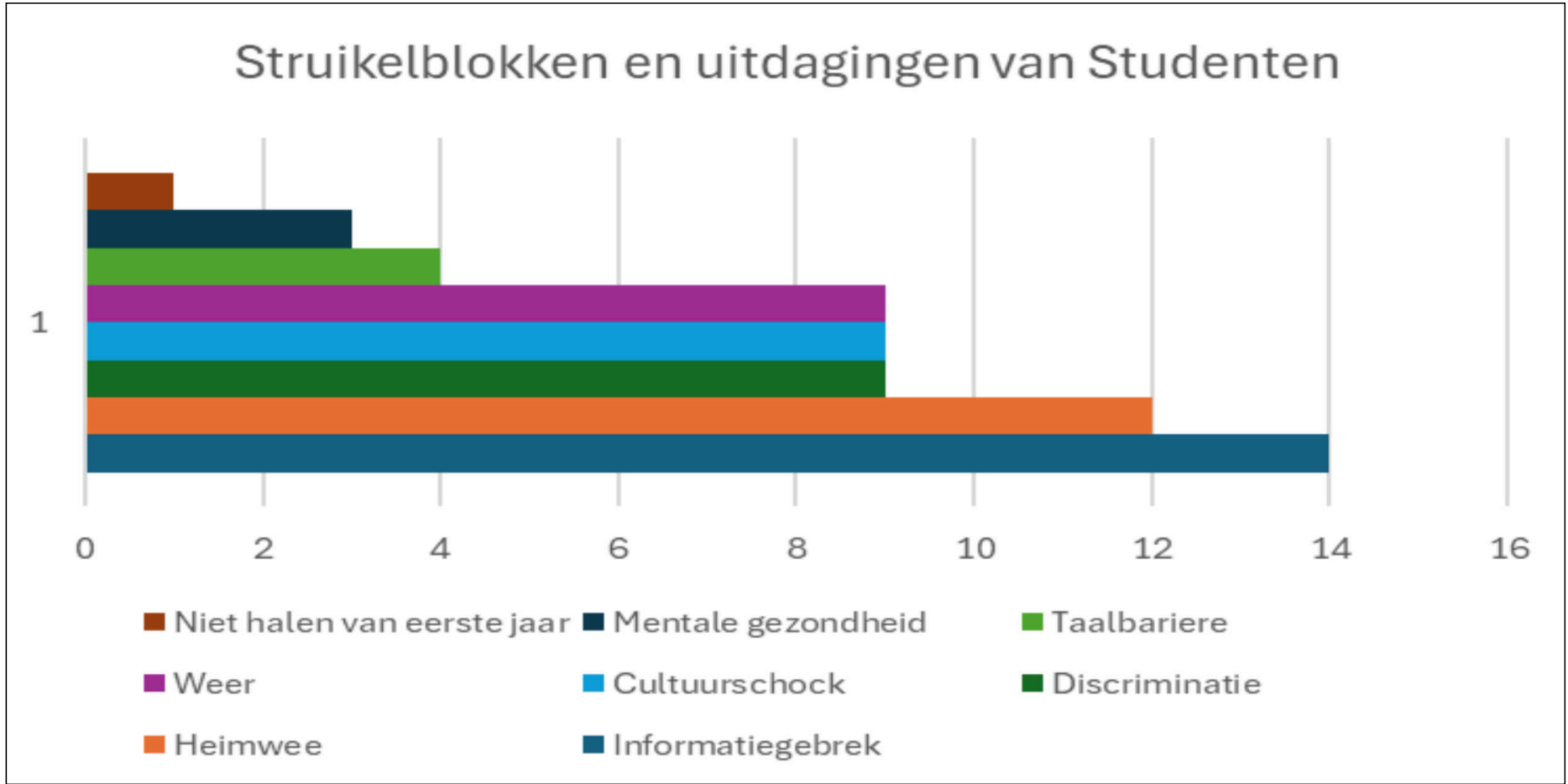


Figure 1. Biggest challenges faced by the students

Other challenges mentioned include dealing with insurance, taxes, and finding employment. Opening a bank account can also be a hurdle, as can failing to obtain the propedeuse (a foundational certificate) in the first year of study. Budgeting, getting used to public transport, and missing familiar home food add to the list of difficulties. The different mentality and lifestyle in the Netherlands can also be a barrier, and there is often inadequate communication and knowledge from Dutch institutions about the needs of Aruban students. Moreover, there is a lack of motivation to return to Aruba, compounded by confusion or doubt about the decision to go back. Key reasons for staying abroad include the need to repay student loans in euros, higher salaries in the Netherlands, and the desire to build CVs and gain experience. Additionally, frustrations with Aruba’s job market, corruption, high cost of living, lack of housing, and conservative culture deter students from returning. These challenges have been thoroughly analyzed with the assistance of the survey conducted among 158 students. The remainder of this paper will explore these issues in greater detail.



1

# EDUCATION

More importantly, the survey explored students' perceptions of how their education in Aruba prepared them for studying in the Netherlands. The data indicated that 22.29% felt well-prepared, 58.60% somewhat prepared, 17.83% not prepared, and 1.27% felt none of the above (See Figure 2). This insight sheds light on the students' perspectives on the adequacy of their educational background in Aruba for pursuing further studies abroad, highlighting areas for potential improvement in academic preparation and support services. The survey allowed the participants to give a further explanation to their answer regarding their preparation before coming to the Netherlands.

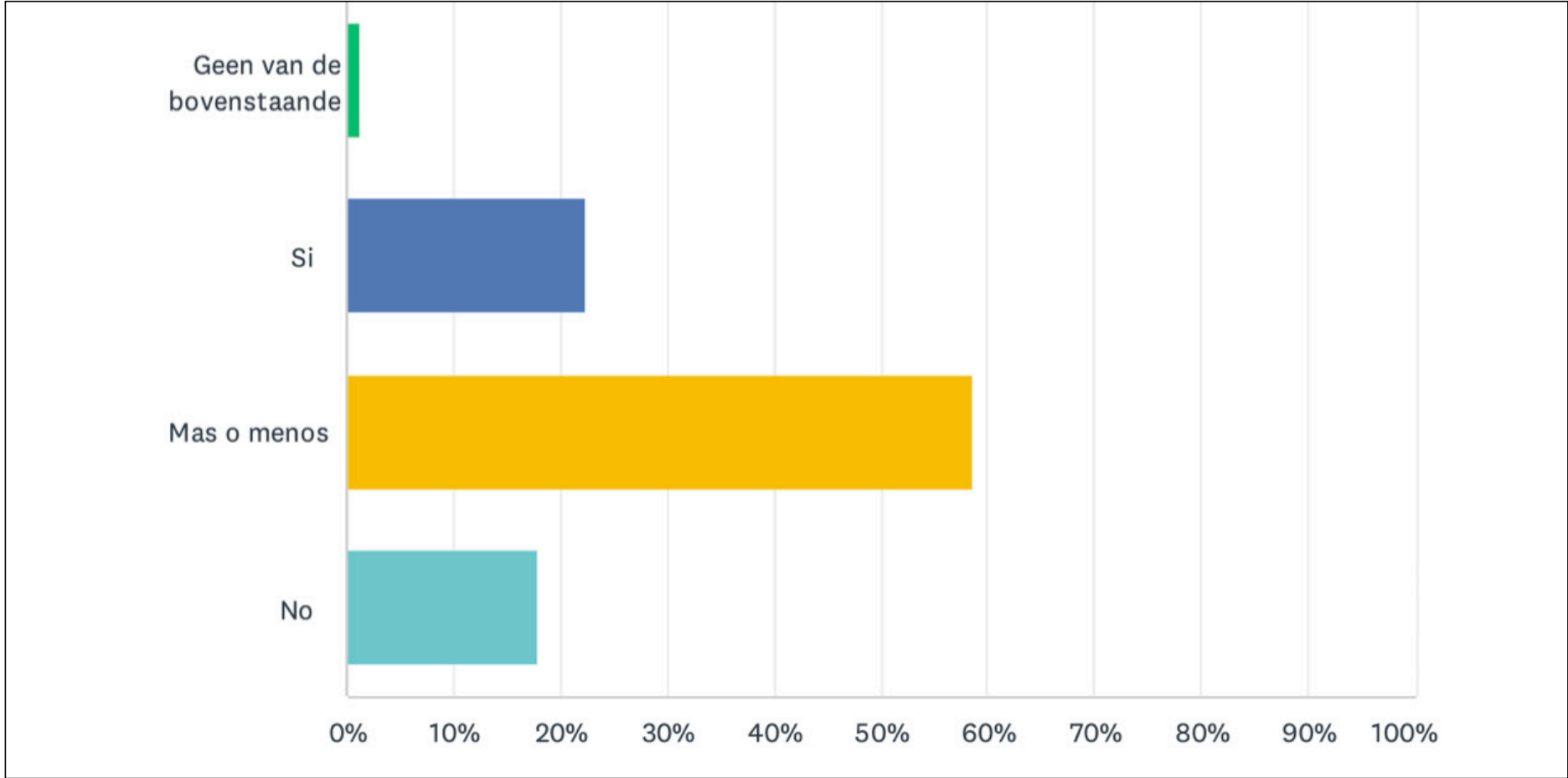


Figure 2. "Do you feel like your education in Aruba prepared you to further your studies in the Netherlands?"



First, the level of Dutch before arriving in the Netherlands is the answer given the most by participants. They feel as if they are not prepared and there is significant language deficiency upon arrival: *“The Dutch subject in Aruba does not truly align with learning Dutch; rather, it is based on the method (e.g., the book “Nieuw Nederlands”) to further develop the Dutch you have already learned at home or in primary school, which is intended for Dutch children. The method is not designed for acquiring Dutch or learning Dutch as a foreign language. This creates a very large gap for many students in the areas of grammar, vocabulary, and syntax. The government needs to promote Dutch (not just by selling Dutch books and giving them to us) and develop methods in our context! For example, see how the SAM program was introduced, which is not at the right level or why the “Zonning Nederlands” program was stopped?”.*

Second, they mentioned independent living. They explain that they felt a significant lack of information regarding living independently for the first time. In relation to the second point, they mentioned the lack of planning. They feel that they were not prepared to deal with the significant amount of planning that is required to keep up with their responsibilities in the Netherlands. Fourth, they mention the fact that the preparation for classes is the opposite to what they are used to in Aruba. In Aruba, you receive all the theory and information in class for the first time, and the teachers then help you understand it. However, in the Netherlands, you are expected to prepare before coming to the class (self-study), and then the information and theory will be elaborated on and you have the space to ask questions.

Despite this, some participants still feel that the theory taught in classes in Aruba were sufficient to further expand their knowledge on the same topics in Universities; *“The VWO study level was quite high, and the subjects we had in VWO were explained well enough, making it easier in universities now”.* However, this does not seem to be the experience amongst every student: *“After finishing VWO at Colegio, I feel that I was not prepared to study at the level of someone who completed VWO in the Netherlands. The way of thinking is also different”.* Moreover, participants state that there is a lack of information regarding the studies and schools in the Netherlands: *“In Aruba, we don’t really learn much about how to perform certain tasks that are required of us at the HBO level. I would say that my Foundation Year at the University of Aruba helped me more than my years at HAVO”* and *“They did not inform you about how many possibilities there are”.*

A bachelor’s or master’s degree is not your only path in life, especially when you come from Aruba”. They are missing things such as open days, workshops, and meetings with the schools. It is apparent that the information provided on the website is not enough to help them understand what the study entails: *“The expectation of the HBO level is higher. It is a different way of thinking and learning, language and writing levels, and internships, and theses. It might be more insightful for students to know what they can expect from HBO so that they are better prepared. This also applies to the Cabinet of Aruba, what it means to live in the Netherlands; Aruban students need more guidance”.*



Moreover, participants state that they don’t feel like they are equipped with the necessary tools to make an efficient and effective CV prior to arriving in the Netherlands, for both school and work purposes: *“There needs to be more focus on the possibility of extracurricular activities. In the Netherlands, many students have an extensive CV before they start studying”.* Similarly, the participants state that they are not as capable as writing essays and reports, and they experience a lot of challenges with plagiarism.

They also state that they are not accustomed to group assignments in Aruba, whereas in the Netherlands, especially HBO, there are a lot of group assignments that are already difficult as it is adapting to group assignments, but also assignments that require students to work with other students, from different races, ethnicity, cultures, religion etc. Making it more challenging, is the culture shock and homesickness that they experience. Another common answer by the participants is the increase in level of expectations in higher education; *“The expectation of the HBO level is higher. It is a different way of thinking and learning, language and writing level, internships, thesis. It would be more insightful for students to know what to expect from HBO to better prepare students. This also applies to the Cabinet of Aruba, what it means to live in the Netherlands, students from Aruba need more guidance.”*

## 1.1 DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

As previously mentioned, the participants felt that they had a lack of information before going to the Netherlands. Understanding where they are obtaining their information is crucial. The survey revealed that 19.11% received their information from the Department of Education, 30.57% from mentors at their school, 1.27% from mentors at the Cabinet of Aruba, 34.39% from friends and family, and 14.65% from other sources, such as online platforms, other students, and educational consultants such as Kompas for students (See Figure 3).

The survey revealed that 19.11% of participants received their information from the Department of Education in Aruba, a key institution for the successful transition of students moving abroad to further their studies. Understanding why this number is as it is and the reasoning behind it is a crucial aspect of the survey. Additionally, the survey showed that 22.29% of participants felt that the Department of Education was helpful with the information provided before their move to the Netherlands, 52.87% felt it was somewhat helpful, and 24.84% felt it was not helpful at all (See Figure 4).

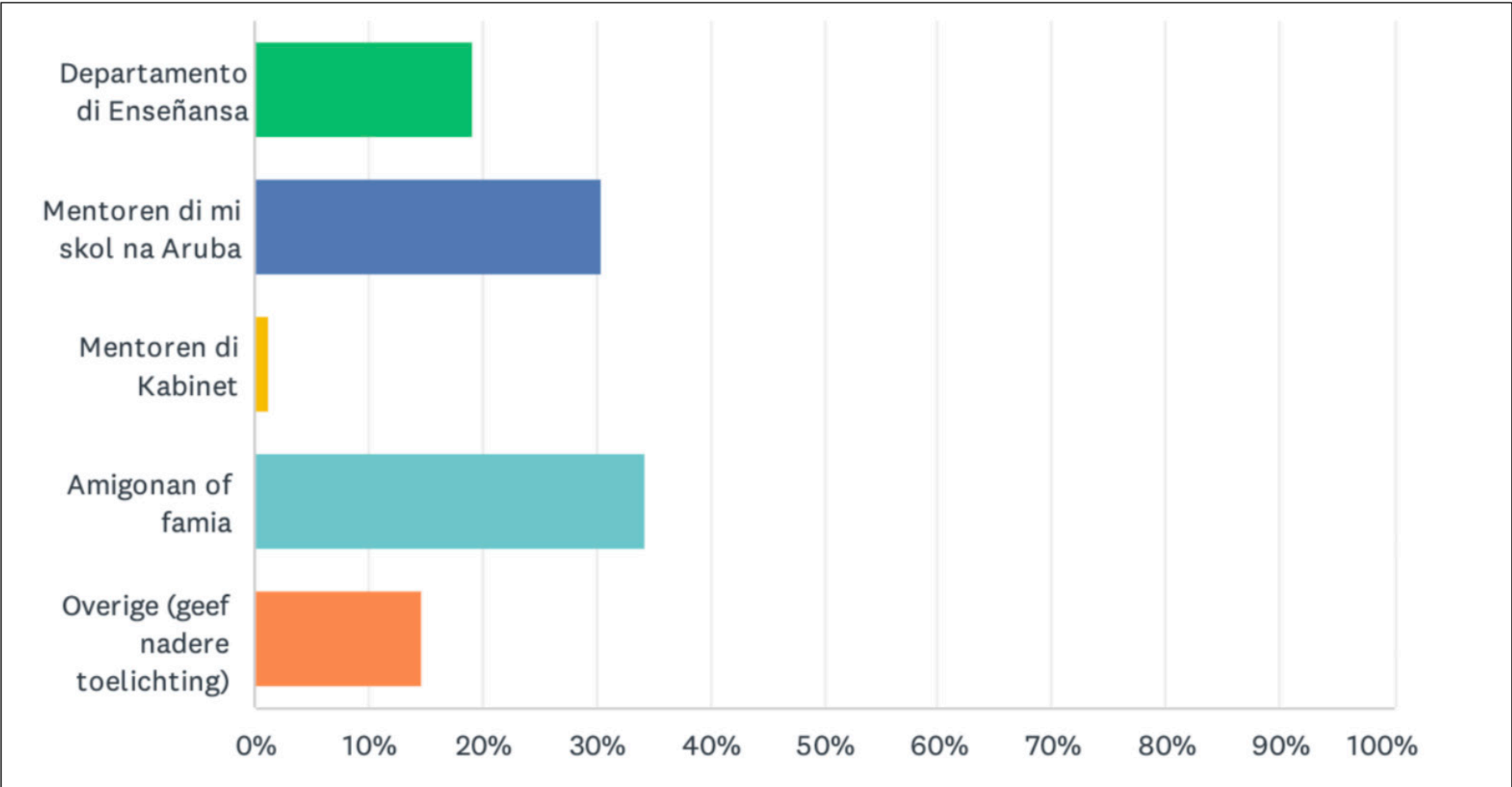


Figure 3. “From which source did you receive information before you continued your studies in the Netherlands?”

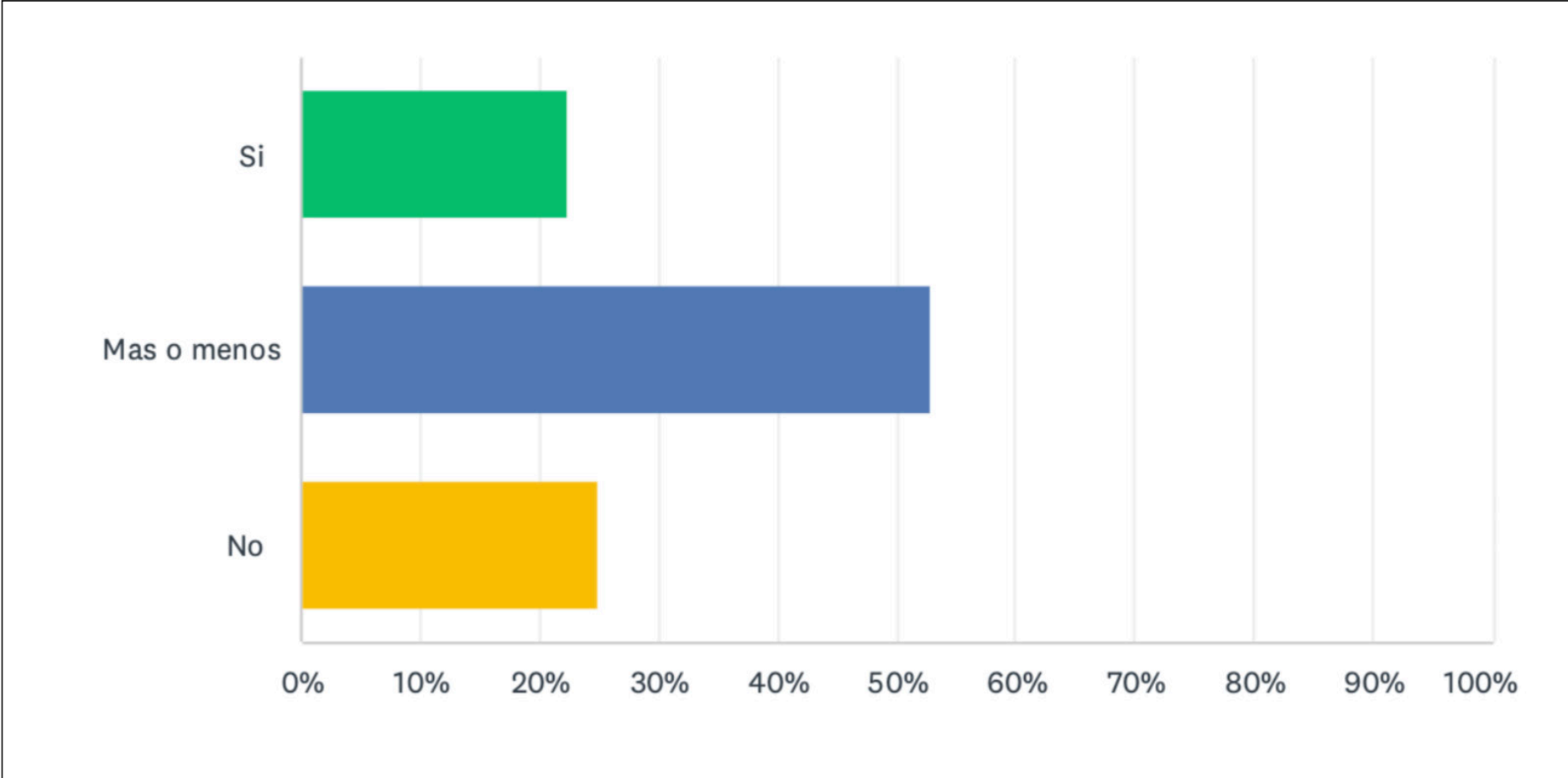


Figure 4. “Do you feel like the information provided by the Department of Education or your school prepared you to live and study in the Netherlands?”

The participants provided various reasons for feeling well-informed, somewhat informed, or not informed at all. The majority of responses highlighted a lack of information. One participant noted a lack of awareness within the department: "The Department of Education can try to organize some information evenings (webinars) or invite representatives from the universities so that students can have the opportunity to gain better insight and also ask questions.

I think this should start from MAVO/HAVO already so they can have an idea of what to expect when they arrive in the Netherlands” and “The information about finding housing and arranging DUO before arriving was good, but I found the information about choosing a study was less helpful, as it was heavily based on what is available on the internet without practical experience.

Something may look good when you read about it, but in reality, when you test it, you realize it is completely different from what you expected." Moreover, participants expressed that they lacked information regarding taxes and insurance in the Netherlands:



"The Netherlands has a completely different system, tax authorities, insurances, HBO level, healthcare for students, timely registration for housing, especially on Woonnet Rijnmond when they become starters. There was a lack of guidance. It would be good to have an expert (someone who has studied, lived, interned, worked, and can share their experience) and for the Cabinet of Aruba to provide better information for students to feel confident to start a life in the Netherlands and pursue the education they desire." Regarding finances, participants mentioned a lack of information and explanation on financial management at the start of their studies, specifically concerning Arubalening (the money provided to students as a startup for their lives in the Netherlands).

## 1.2 MENTORS (POC)

Another important aspect for the students in their transition to the Netherlands is how they are received by their assigned mentors (POCs) during their first week in the country. Therefore, the survey collected data on the reception of the students and what they suggest could be improved. The survey revealed that 68.21% had a good experience, 23.18% had a somewhat good experience, and 8.61% had a bad experience (See Figure 5).

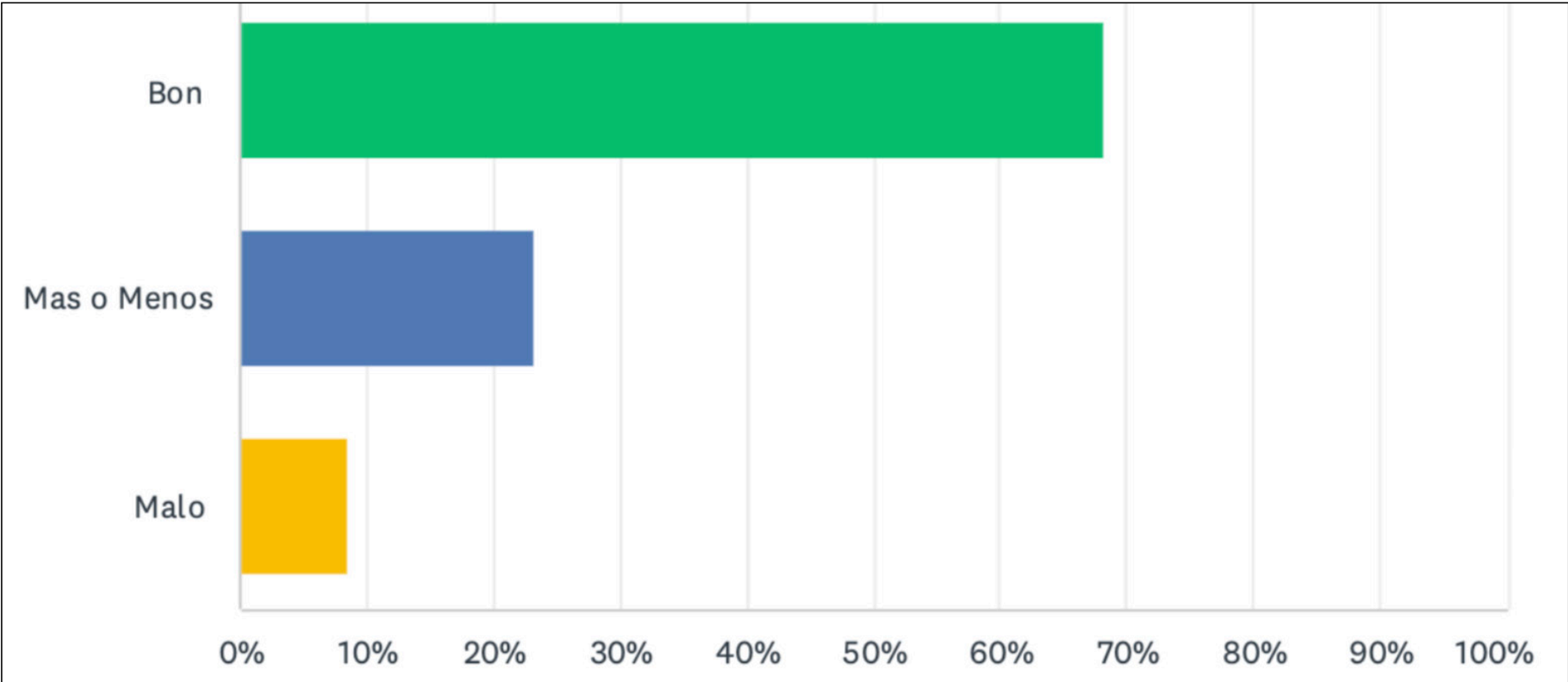


Figure 5. "How did you experience the reception from the mentors when you arrived in the Netherlands?"

The majority of students reported having a good experience. A common response among participants was that they benefited from assistance with the municipality and registering for a bank account. They also stated that the mentors were immensely helpful, treated them well, and that the week provided an opportunity to socialize with new people: "The mentors made me feel that I was not alone in the country and that if I had any questions or concerns, they would always be there for me and the other students". However, there is room for improvement. Some participants noted that although the initial experience was nice, they felt neglected after the first week. They had difficulties contacting their mentors and were left to fend for themselves. They also expressed that after their first year in the Netherlands, they did not have access to their mentors anymore, leaving them feeling alone: In the beginning, the support was very good, and they spent time with you, but after a while, they no longer checked up on you and just "forgot" about you".

Another student addressed this issue by giving a suggestion: "Perhaps after a year, organize a get-together to see if there are students who have gotten stuck halfway or who still have questions or problems after the first few months". Moreover, they emphasized the lack of support for mental health. Additionally, they expressed that there was insufficient information regarding housing, public transportation, and important documents necessary in the Netherlands. The participants offered several suggestions to address the issues discussed above. A common suggestion was to maintain contact with the students after their initial arrival in the Netherlands.

They expressed that they often feel forgotten by their mentors after the first few weeks. To address this, they suggested extending the duration of the mentors' commitment and clarifying the roles of the Cabinet of Aruba and the mentors to the students. Additionally, participants recommended better preparation before arriving in the Netherlands. One participant stated: "Let at least mentors from each city and a few leaders have a meet and greet in Aruba before students come to the Netherlands so they can start creating a bond and get answers to their questions. They will also be better prepared for when they need to come here. Parents will be more at ease knowing the mentors and the group that will guide their child in the first weeks." Another participant suggested implementing a feedback mechanism: "Let students fill out an anonymous online feedback sheet so they can express every year how their reception went." Moreover, participants expressed a need for further explanation on topics such as subsidies, budgeting, housing, and taxes. They suggested discussing these topics as early as possible with students who will graduate in approximately 2-3 years.





2

# LIVING AND STUDYING IN THE NETHERLANDS

Another important aspect is the living experience of Aruban students in the Netherlands. The survey revealed that 56.96% of the participants enjoy living in the Netherlands, 37.34% said they liked it more or less, and 5.70% said they did not like it (Figure 6).

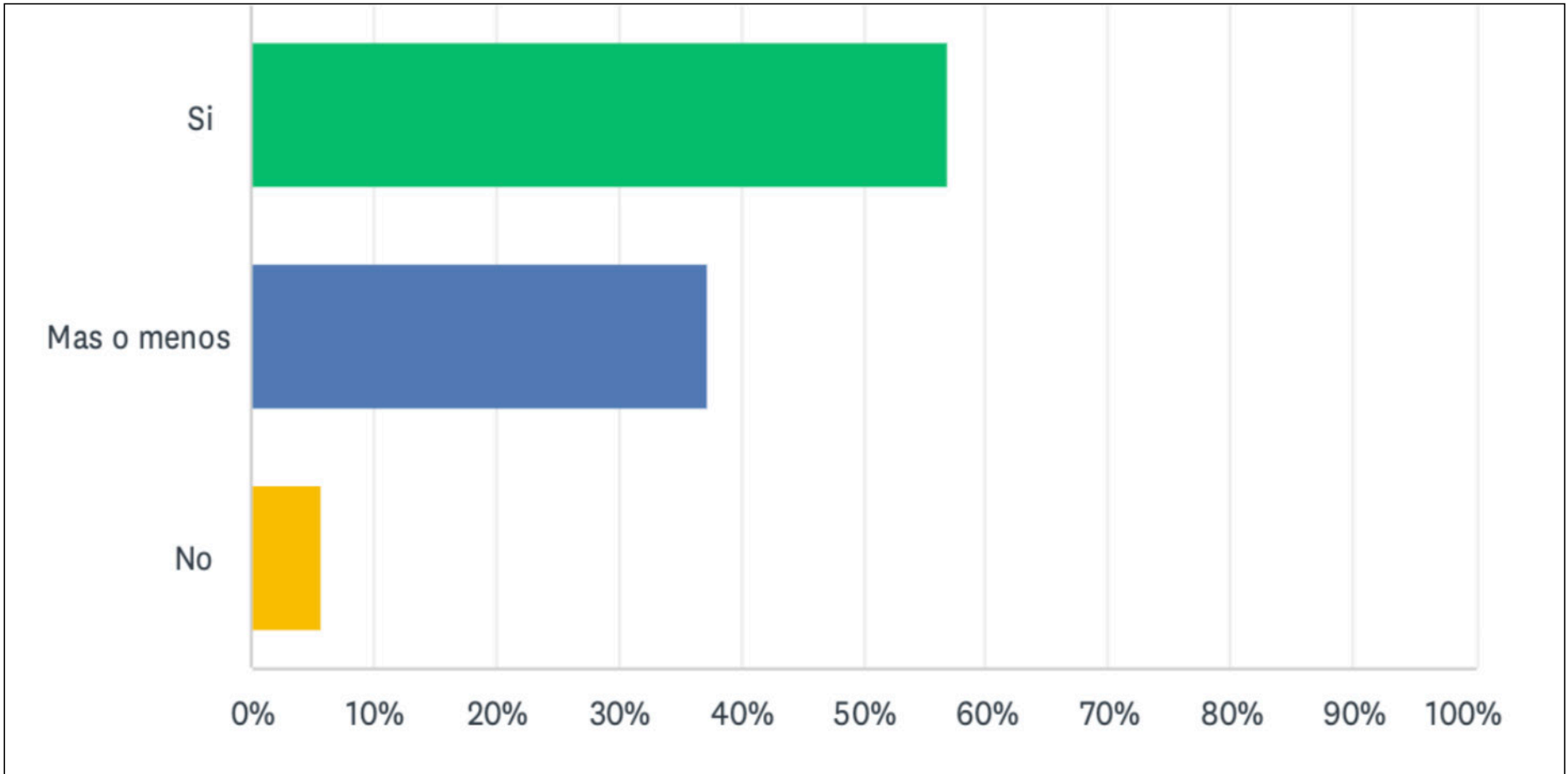


Figure 6. "Do you like living in the Netherlands?"



Those who responded with "more or less" or "no" provided various reasons to justify their answers. Among these participants, 21.88% attributed their dissatisfaction to the weather in the Netherlands, 26.56% to Dutch culture, 7.81% to homesickness, 6.25% to the high cost of living, 3.13% to the difficulty of their studies, and 34.38% chose "other" as their answer. The most common issues cited under "other" included racism, discrimination, and culture shock: "They did not prepare you for dealing with discrimination, abuse, or mental health issues. Going back to Aruba for vacation does not fix everything when you come from a difficult life. Not everyone has it their parents".

Furthermore, the survey revealed the distribution of students who are working and studying in the Netherlands. As shown in Figure 6, 42.68% of participants are solely studying, 15.92% are solely working, 40.13% are both working and studying, and 1.27% are doing neither (Figure 7).

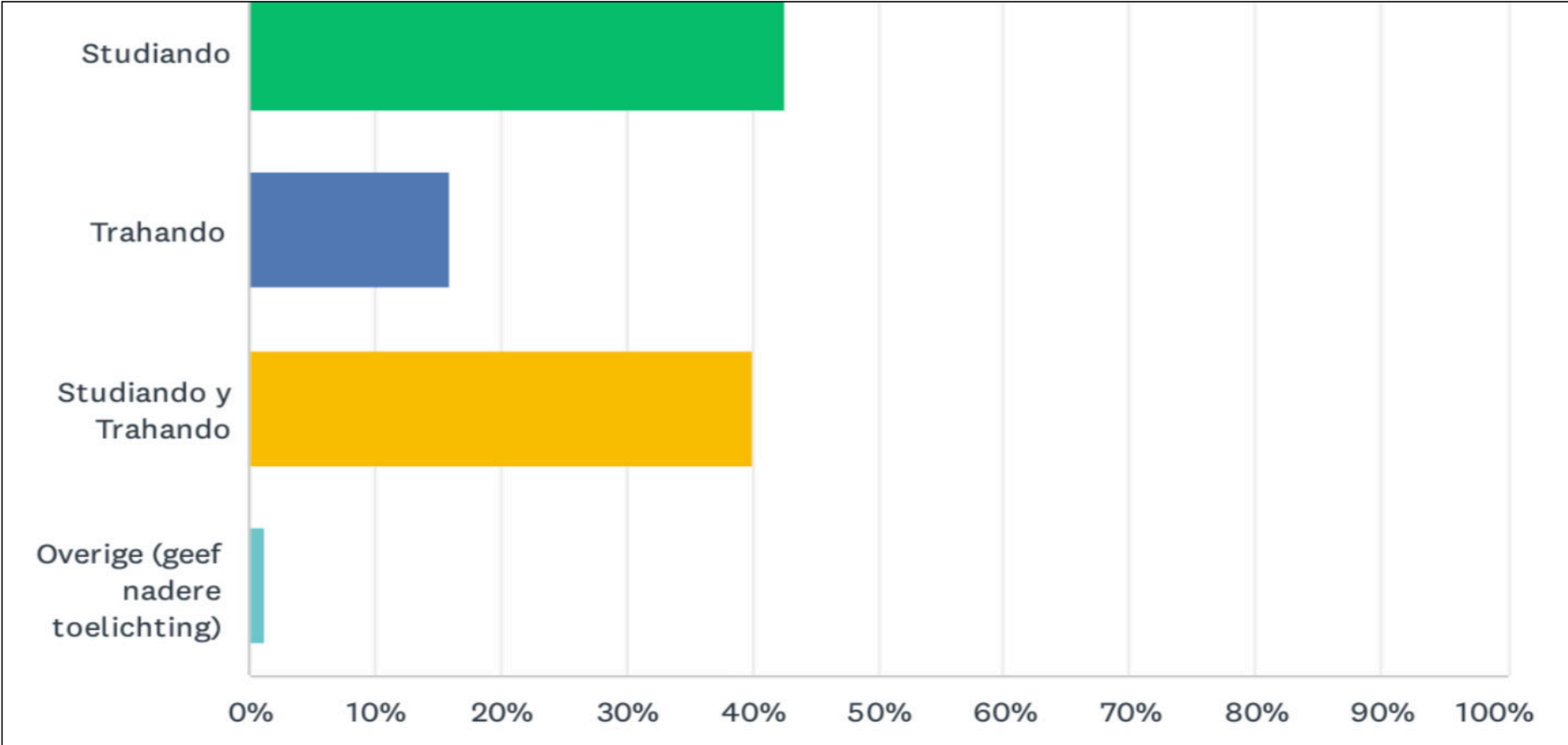


Figure 7. "Are you currently working or studying?"

The participants who are currently employed work in a wide variety of sectors, as revealed by the survey, allowing us to uncover valuable insights into how students from Aruba navigate the job market while studying abroad. The survey reveals that 12.63% work in the technical sector, 20% work in the hospitality sector, 13.68% work in the social sector, 9.47% work in the financial sector, while 44.21% chose "other" as their answer (See Figure 8). Within these answers, the most common ones are cashier, retail, the healthcare sector, the education sector, and the government.

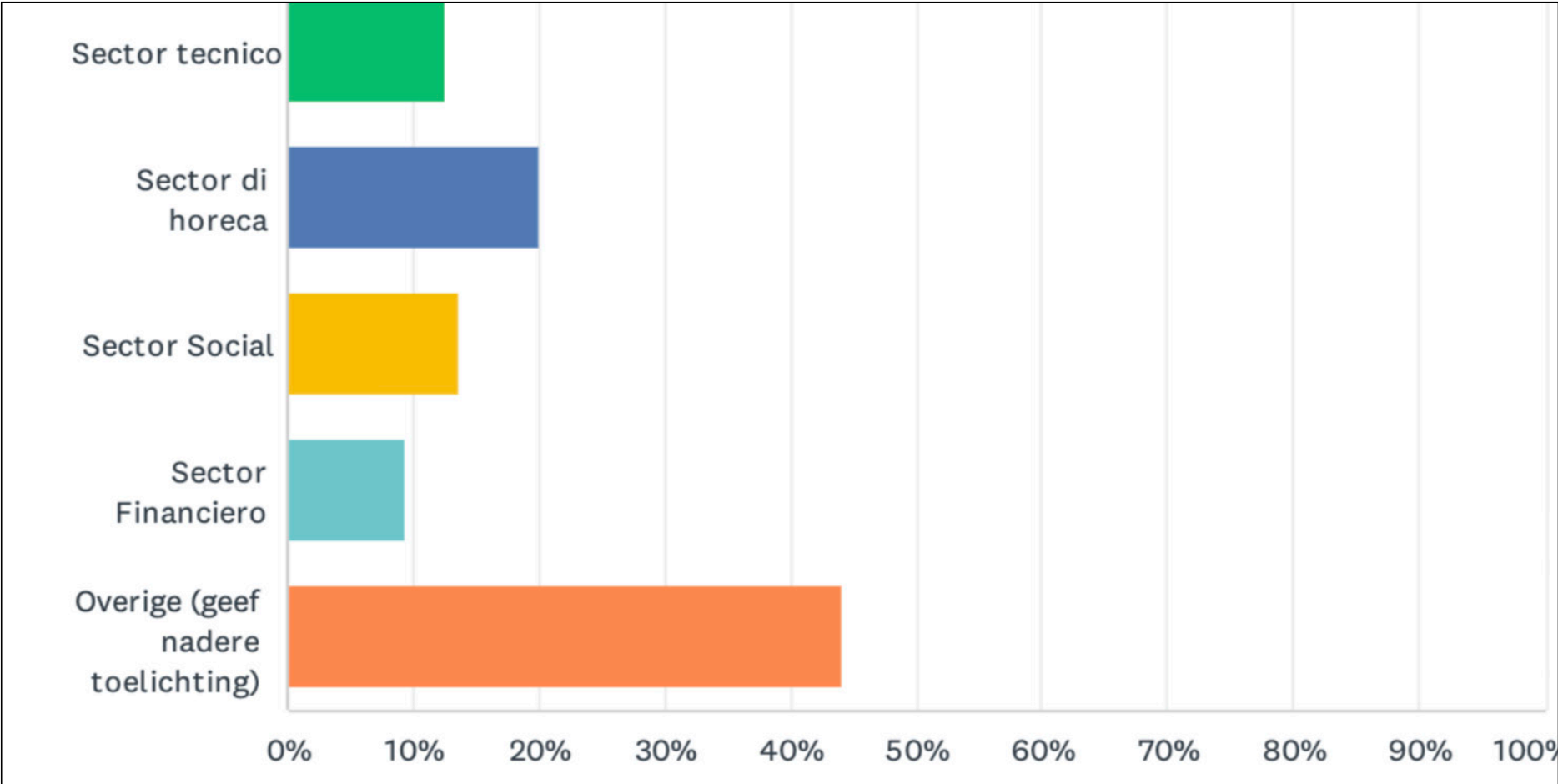


Figure 8. "In which sector are you working?"

2.1 UNIVERSITIES

The participants who are currently studying are enrolled in various universities. This data provides important insight into the most attended schools by our students and offers a broader perspective on their locations within the Netherlands (See Table 1).

UNIVERSITY	STUDENTS	LOCATION
The Hague University of Applied Sciences	17	The Hague
Fontys University of Applied Sciences	11	Tilburg - Eindhoven
Leiden University	8	Leiden - The Hague
Inholland University of Applied Sciences	8	Amsterdam - Rotterdam
HAN University of Applied Sciences	7	Arnhem - Nijmegen
Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences	7	Amsterdam
Utrecht University of Applied Sciences	6	Utrecht
Erasmus University	6	Rotterdam
Avans University of Applied Sciences	5	Breda
Utrecht University	5	Utrecht
Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences	5	Rotterdam
NHL Steden University of Applied Sciences	4	Leeuwarden
Leiden University of Applied Sciences	4	Leiden
Hanze University of Applied Sciences	4	Groningen
TU Delft	3	Delft
Saxion University of Applied Sciences	3	Enschede
Van Hall Larenstein University of Applied Sciences	3	Leeuwarden
Tilburg University	3	Tilburg
Vrije University Amsterdam	2	Amsterdam
Groningen University	2	Groningen
Breda University of Applied Sciences	2	Breda
Nyenrode Business University	1	Breukelen
Capabel Onderwijs	1	Rotterdam
Open Universiteit	1	Rotterdam
Codarts University for the Arts	1	Rotterdam
Radboud University	1	Nijmegen
Universidad di Aruba	1	Aruba
Maastricht University	1	Maastricht
TU Eindhoven	1	Eindhoven
Techniek College Rotterdam	1	Rotterdam
University of Amsterdam	1	Amsterdam
Universiteit Antwerpen	1	Antwerpen

Table 1. Dataset of universities, number of students enrolled, and location.



2.2 SPECIALIZATIONS

The table below summarizes the number of students enrolled in various specializations within their studies. It highlights the diversity of academic interests and the distribution of students across different fields of study (See Table 2).

STUDY	STUDENTS
Law	8
International Business	7
Biomedical Research	7
Nursing	4
Social Work	4
Psychology	4
ICT	3
Communications	3
Finance	3
Chemical Engineering	3
Software Engineering	3
Life Sciences	3
Creative Business	3
Aviation	3
Biology	3
International and European Law	2
Environmental Sciences	2
Human Resource Management	2
Hotel Management	2
Civil Engineering	2
Sociology	2
English Teacher	2
Architecture	2
Leisure and Events Management	2
International Relations	1
Business Administration	1
Pedagogy	1
Accounting	1
Health Management	1
Safety and Security Management	1
Coastal and Marine Management	1
Logistics Management	1
Marketing Management	1
International Sports Management	1
Mechanical Engineering	1
Aeronautical Engineering	1
Educational Science	1
Geography Teacher	1
Marine Biology	1
Safety Studies	1
Physiotherapy	1
Travel and Hospitality	1
Dental Hygiene	1
Electrical Engineering	1
World Music	1
Economics	1

Table 2. Dataset of the specializations and students enrolled.

2.3 SWITCHING STUDIES

Another significant issue that Aruban students in the Netherlands face is the frequent switching of their study programs. Many students find that their initial choice of study does not align with their expectations or career goals, leading to changes in their academic path: “The information about finding housing and arranging DUO before arriving was good, but I found the information about choosing a study was less helpful, as it was heavily based on what is available on the internet without practical experience. Something may look good when you read about it, but in reality, when you test it, you realize it is completely different from what you expected”. The responses were as follows: 6.19% said yes to changing their study program, 1.56% said they don’t know, and 82.31% said no (See Figure 9). This shows that despite there being a big group of students who have chosen to stick with their study program, there is still a group of 18% who do not align with their initial study choice.

This challenge can stem from a variety of factors, including insufficient guidance during the selection process, a lack of practical information about the courses, and the cultural and educational adjustments required when moving to a new country. Understanding this issue is crucial for developing better support systems and providing clearer, more comprehensive information to students before they make these important decisions.

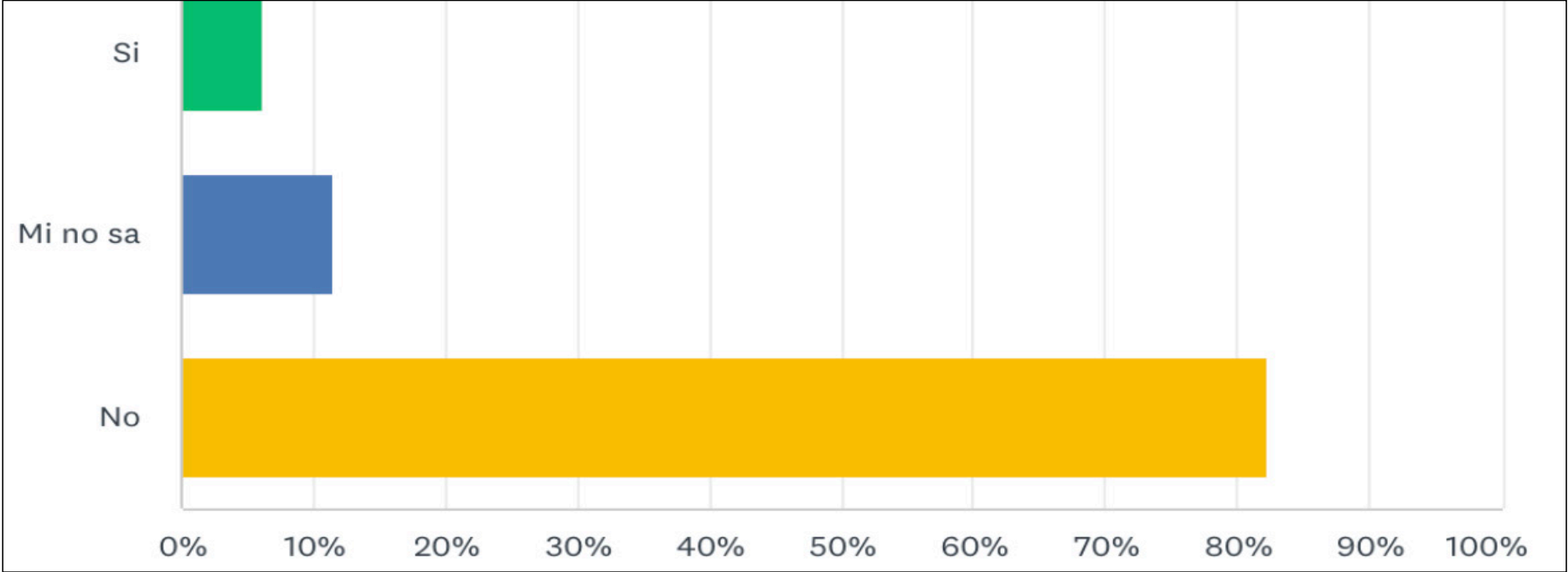


Figure 9. “Have you thought about changing your study program?”

2.4 HOUSING

Housing is a critical aspect of the student experience, especially for those studying abroad. For Aruban students in the Netherlands, finding suitable accommodation can significantly impact their overall well-being and academic performance. This section of the analysis explores the challenges and experiences related to housing that Aruban students face, including availability, affordability, and the support systems in place to assist them. Understanding these factors is essential for improving the transition and living conditions of these students in their new environment.

In the survey, respondents were asked about the challenges they faced in finding housing in the Netherlands. The first question was whether it was difficult for them to secure accommodation. The responses varied, with 54.55% indicating that it was difficult, 27.27% selecting more or less, and 18.18% indicating that it was not difficult (See Figure 10).

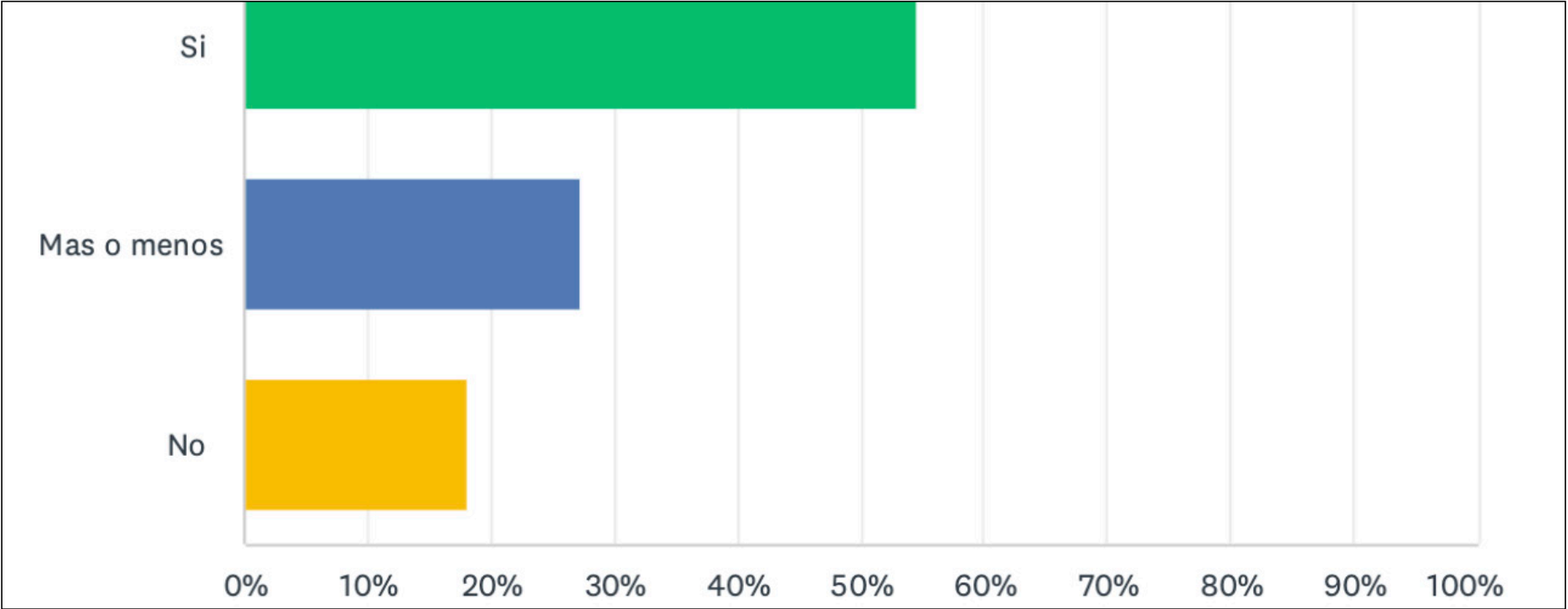


Figure 10. “Was it difficult to find housing in the Netherlands?”



The participants provided multiple reasons for the difficulties they faced in finding accommodation. The most common responses revealed by the survey indicated that people with higher incomes have a higher probability of finding housing, leaving students with less priority. Notably, it takes a long time to find a room or studio, and some participants expressed that the only way they managed to find a place was through family or friends already living in the Netherlands. They also expressed frustrations with the waiting lists on different websites, often needing to be enrolled for over two years to get chosen for a room. Participants also mentioned a lack of assistance with the housing search and highlighted the issue of housing shortages. During the transition from Aruba to the Netherlands, students struggle to find accommodation because most renters do not offer virtual viewings, and students cannot commit to renting without first viewing the property. This makes it difficult for them to arrange housing while still in Aruba.

Furthermore, they noted the problem of scammers on various housing websites, making it hard to trust renters. Many participants also expressed frustration with the high prices, claiming that the cost is too high for such small spaces. Another common challenge faced by students is discrimination and racism, with many Dutch students unwilling to live with international students. On the contrary, some participants shared their positive experiences. Many mentioned the help of mentors and the Cabinet of Aruba in finding housing. Some noted that, as students from Aruba, they were given priority in certain places. Others used agencies, which, while costly, provided housing in a timely manner. Most participants emphasized the need for preparation, advising future students to sign up on different housing websites at least two years before moving to the Netherlands. The different ways as to how participants managed to find housing is illustrated in Figure 9 below. The responses varied, with 16.03% indicating they found housing via their mentor, 21.79% through family or friends, 16.67% with a private real estate agent, 1.28% through SSH, 11.54% via DUWO, 6.41% through Stadswonen, and 26.28% through other means. Those who selected others, mostly provided different websites such as klikvoorkamers, huurwoningen.nl, facebook, kamernet, pararius, and room.nl (Figure 11).

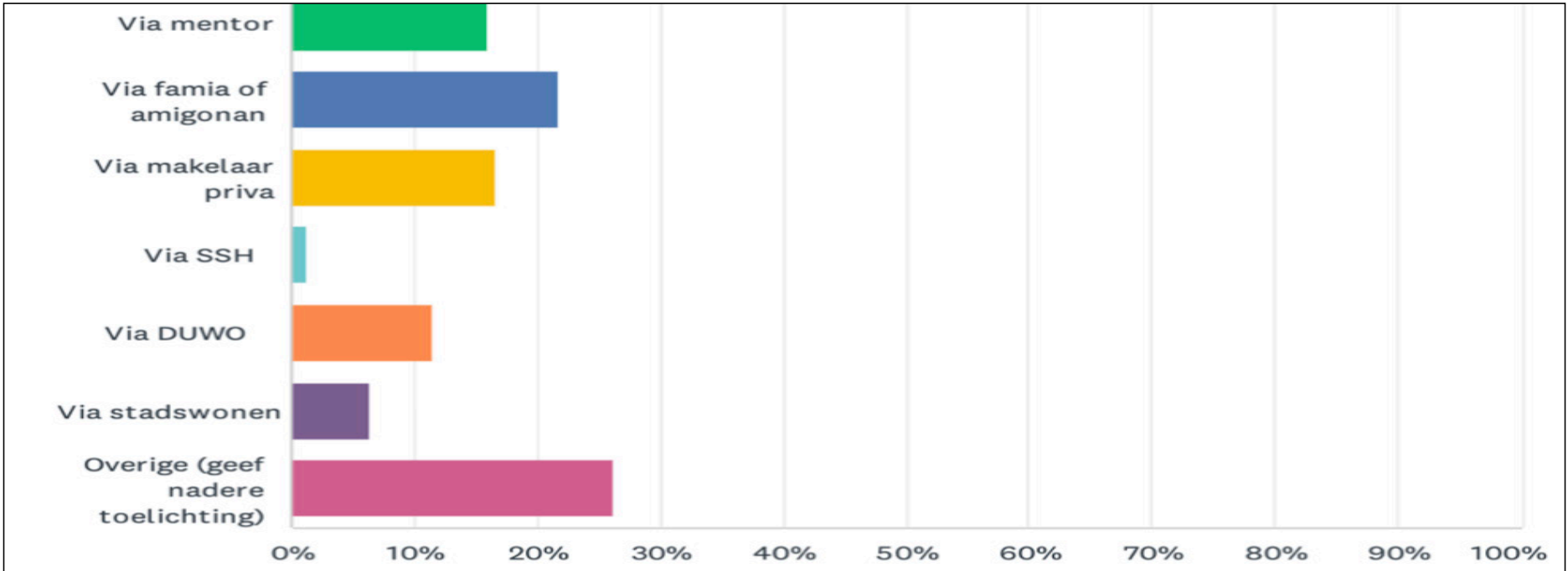


Figure 11. “How did you manage to find accommodation?”

Following the challenges related to finding housing, this section of the survey illustrates the responses regarding the rent costs paid by Aruban students in the Netherlands. Understanding these rent expenses provides further insight into the financial challenges students face, highlighting the economic burden associated with securing accommodation abroad. The survey revealed that 5.92% of the participants are paying between 200 to 400 euros, 40.13% are paying between 400 to 600 euros, 32.24% are paying between 600 to 800 euros, 14.47% are paying between 800 to 1000 euros, and 7.24% are paying over 1000 euros (See figure 12). These findings provide insights into the range of rental costs incurred by students pursuing their studies in the Netherlands.

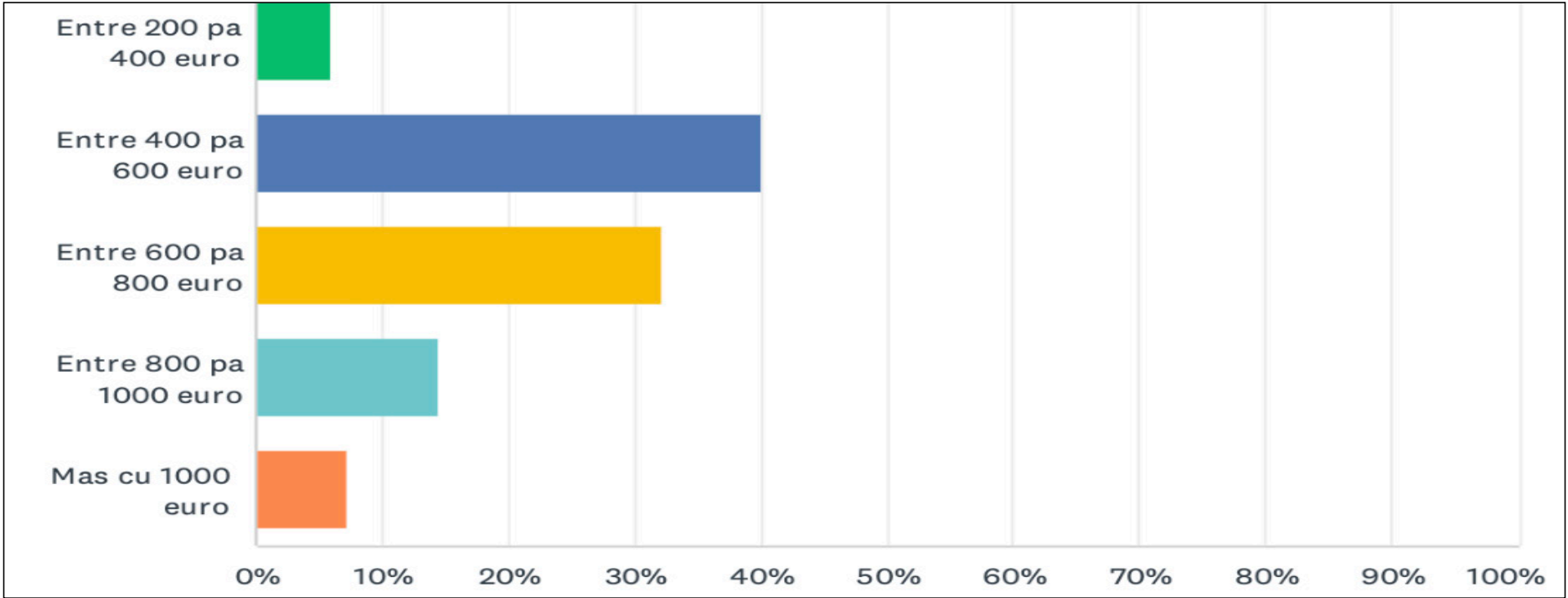


Figure 12. “How much are you paying for rent?”



3

# RETURNING BACK TO ARUBA

16

Student Survey 2024

This section of the analysis explores the perspectives and plans of Aruban students regarding their return to Aruba after completing their studies in the Netherlands. By examining their intentions, motivations, and potential challenges, we can gain a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing their decision to return or stay abroad. This insight is crucial for developing strategies to support these students and address any concerns that may impact their reintegration into Aruban society. As revealed by the survey, participants were asked about their willingness to return to work in Aruba after completing their studies. The responses were as follows: 5.88% expressed an immediate desire to return, 19.61% were open to returning after 2 to 5 years, 20.26% considered returning after 5 to 10 years, 18.95% contemplated returning after 10 years, and 35.29% stated they had no intention of returning (See Figure 13).

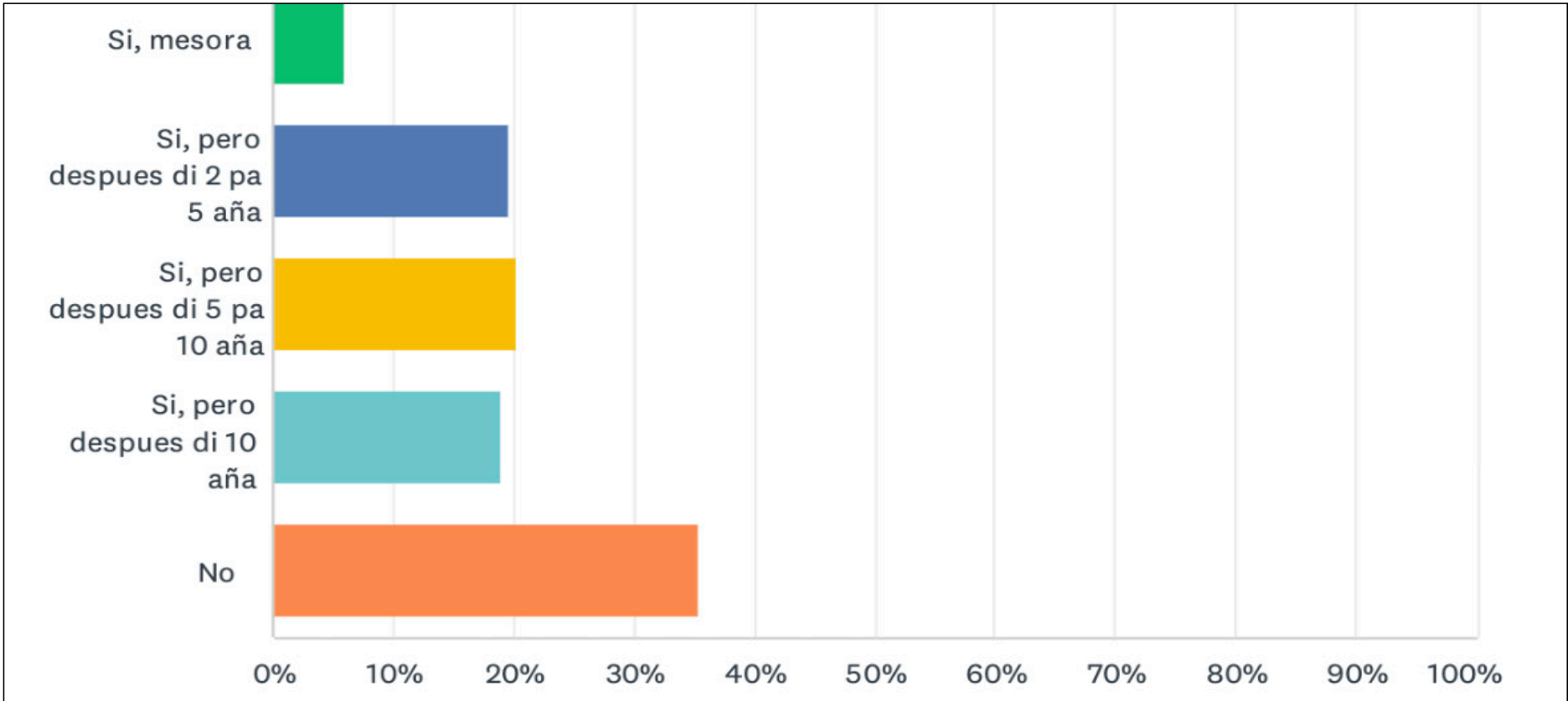


Figure 13. "Do you want to go back to Aruba to work after you finish your studies in the Netherlands?"



Those who responded "no" or "after many years" to the question about returning to Aruba were asked to explain why. This allows us to gain a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing their decision. The most common answer among participants is the challenge of repaying their student loans (DUO). They prefer to remain in the Netherlands to work and repay their loans in euros rather than in Aruban florin, as the exchange rate is approximately 1 euro to 2 florin. Moreover, many participants express the significant difference in salary between the Netherlands and Aruba, opting to stay in the Netherlands because of the more attractive salaries. Others want to remain in the Netherlands to build up their CVs and gain experience, which is often required in Aruba. Participants also express frustrations with the job market in Aruba, feeling they won't secure the jobs they studied for. Additional reasons for staying include concerns about corruption, high cost of living, lack of housing, unstable economy, healthcare, and the conservative Aruban culture. Some argue that the quality of life and social safety net is better in the Netherlands. Conversely, those who wish to return to Aruba mainly cite reasons such as wanting to create a family, return to their homes, and settle down.

To develop strategies to support the students and address any concerns that may impact their reintegration into Aruban society, they were asked about the incentives that would make it more attractive for them to move back to Aruba. The responses were as follows: 28.21% indicated that a discount on their student loan from DUO would be appealing, 5.13% preferred having a house or apartment to live in on the island, 37.18% desired a job that aligns with their studies, 3.85% considered starting a family, and 25.64% provided other reasons for their decision (See figure 14). The other reasons provided by the participants were mainly a job that is in alignment with their study, a combination of all the options provided, a better salary, and a better political environment.

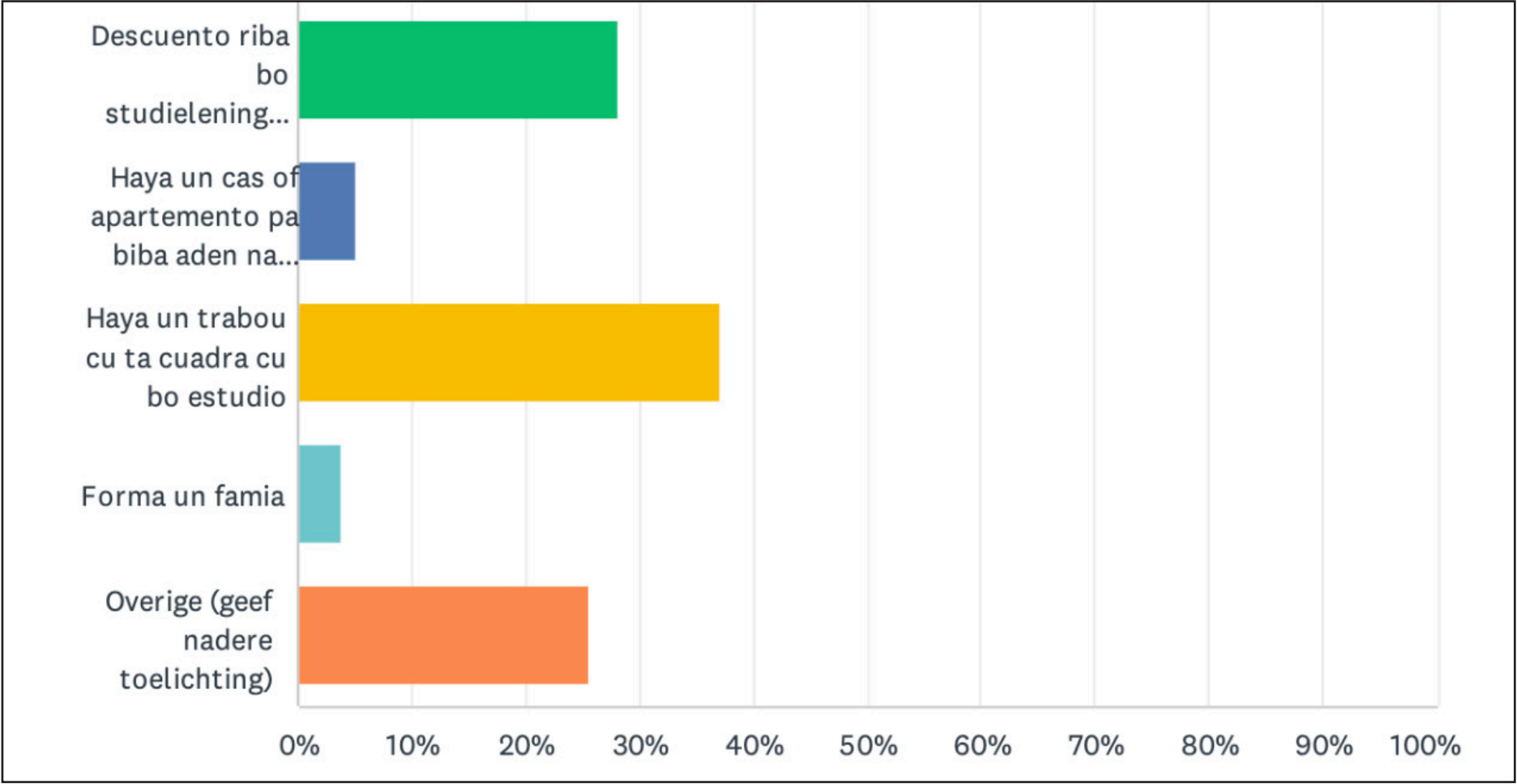


Figure 14. "What would make it more attractive for you to return to Aruba to live and work?"





# CONCLUSION

The analysis of the survey data reveals several key challenges and insights regarding Aruban students' experiences in the Netherlands. The transition from Aruba to the Netherlands for higher education presents numerous academic, social, financial, and cultural challenges. Understanding these challenges is crucial for developing strategies to better support these students.

First, the survey indicates that a significant number of students felt inadequately prepared for the academic demands of studying in the Netherlands. Language proficiency, particularly in Dutch, was a major barrier. Additionally, the shift from the teaching style in Aruba to the self-study approach in the Netherlands posed difficulties for many students. To address this, enhancing language training and providing more information about academic expectations could better prepare students.

Second, a substantial number of students reported a lack of sufficient information before moving to the Netherlands. The survey highlighted that the primary sources of information were mentors at school, the Department of Education, and friends and family. Improving the quality and accessibility of information, such as organizing webinars and information sessions, could greatly benefit students. Moreover, maintaining continuous support and guidance from mentors beyond the first few weeks is essential.

Third, finding suitable accommodation emerged as a significant challenge, with students facing long waiting lists, high costs, and issues with trust due to scammers. The lack of virtual viewing options and the high competition for affordable housing added to the difficulties. Recommendations include providing more support in housing searches, ensuring students sign up for housing websites well in advance, and addressing the issue of affordability.

Fourth, many students are working while studying to manage the high living costs. The survey revealed that students are employed in various sectors, but financial management remains a challenge. Enhanced financial guidance and support services could help students manage their finances better.

Lastly, a significant proportion of students expressed reluctance to return to Aruba immediately after completing their studies. Key reasons include the desire to repay student loans in euros, higher salaries in the Netherlands, and the need for relevant work experience. Addressing these concerns by offering incentives such as student loan discounts, housing options, and job opportunities aligned with their studies could encourage more students to return to Aruba.





# RECOMMENDATIONS

After analyzing the data collected from Aruban students studying in the Netherlands, it is evident that they face a range of challenges that impact their academic success and overall well-being. To address these issues, this section will provide six detailed recommendations aimed at improving their experience.

These recommendations focus on enhancing language training and academic preparation, improving the accessibility and quality of information, offering continuous support and mentorship, providing comprehensive housing assistance, offering financial management workshops and support, and developing targeted incentives to encourage students to return to Aruba.

## 1. ENHANCE LANGUAGE TRAINING AND ACADEMIC PREPARATION PROGRAMS

To enhance language training and academic preparation programs for students planning to study in the Netherlands, it is crucial to develop intensive Dutch language courses tailored specifically for Aruban students, focusing on both academic and everyday use. As previously mentioned by a student: “The Dutch subject in Aruba does not truly align with learning Dutch; rather, it is based on the method (e.g., the book “Nieuw Nederlands”) to further develop the Dutch you have already learned at home or in primary school, which is intended for Dutch children.

The method is not designed for acquiring Dutch or learning Dutch as a foreign language. This creates a very large gap for many students in the areas of grammar, vocabulary, and syntax. The government needs to promote Dutch (not just by selling Dutch books and giving them to us) and develop methods in our context! For example, see how the SAM program was introduced, which is not at the right level or why the “Zonning Nederlands” program was stopped?”

Thus, it is important to give students the opportunity to learn Dutch as a foreign language before arriving in the Netherlands, rather than as a language they are already familiar with and practice daily. Aruban students typically only practice Dutch in the classroom, which does not align with the method used in the Dutch subject.

Moreover, preparatory courses that cover key academic skills such as research methods, critical thinking, plagiarism, CV-writing and academic writing in Dutch should be introduced. Partnering with Dutch educational institutions to offer summer bridging programs will help familiarize students with the Dutch education system and culture before they commence their studies.

## 2. IMPROVE THE ACCESSIBILITY AND QUALITY OF INFORMATION PROVIDED BY EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS, DEANS AND MENTORS.

Improving the accessibility and quality of information provided by educational institutions, deans and mentors is essential. A suggestion is to collaborate with the Department of Education and create a centralized portal that provides comprehensive, up-to-date information on study programs, housing, financial aid, and student life in the Netherlands. Another possibility is to include this information in a digital student booklet, where students planning to study abroad, students who have just arrived, and students who are already living in the Netherlands can find the information that is necessary to their specific situations and challenges. Ensuring that this information is available in multiple languages, including Papiamentu, Dutch and English, will cater to diverse linguistic backgrounds.

Additionally, organizing regular webinars and Q&A sessions with mentors, deans, current students, and alumni will provide first-hand insights and answer prospective students' questions. Another important aspect for the students who are planning on studying abroad is meeting their mentors, or current students, to ask questions regarding topics such as housing, the study programs, DUO, life in the Netherlands etc.

## 3. OFFER CONTINUOUS SUPPORT AND MENTORSHIP BEYOND THE FIRST YEAR

Offering continuous support and mentorship beyond the initial year in the Netherlands is critical for student success. A structured mentorship program should be established where experienced students or alumni provide ongoing support to new students throughout their first two years.

The data indicates that various students share the need of extending the mentorship from one to two years: "Check-ups for 2 years instead of just one," "Perhaps after a year, organize a get-together to see if there are students who have gotten stuck halfway or who still have questions or problems after the first few months". Regular check-ins, either in person or virtually, should be scheduled to monitor students' well-being, academic progress, and social integration. Support groups or peer networks should be created to facilitate connections among students facing similar challenges, providing a platform for sharing experiences, advice, and broadening of the community.

For example, collaborating with local Aruban psychologists to offer students mental health services. Moreover, extra curricular activities should also be implemented. For example, sporting events, arts and music, cultural celebrations, job fairs, brainstorming sessions, holiday celebrations, and workshops. These are moments where students can come into contact with other students, broaden their life and academic skills, celebrate their culture, and improve their overall wellbeing.

## 4. PROVIDE COMPREHENSIVE STUDY PROGRAM SELECTION SUPPORT

Implementing a "studiekeuzecheck" (study choice check) to help students who often struggle with their choice of study program can mitigate the prolonged study period of Aruban students in the Netherlands. Many students find that their initial choice of study does not align with their interests, strengths, or career goals, leading to frequent switching of programs and added stress, both mentally and financially.

A study choice check can help mitigate this issue by providing a comprehensive assessment of a student's aptitudes, interests, and career aspirations before they make a final decision on their study program. Despite the availability of a study choice check, it is primarily designed for Dutch students and conducted in the Dutch language. A more personalized study choice check tailored specifically for Aruban students would be much more beneficial. The study choice check should include a series of evaluations, such as personality tests, interest inventories, and skills assessments.

These tools can help students gain a deeper understanding of their preferences and strengths, and how they align with various study programs and career paths. Additionally, the check should involve one-on-one counseling sessions with their academic advisors who can provide personalized guidance based on the assessment results. Moreover, a collaboration between the Department of Labor in Aruba can also be beneficial. Providing students with information about job requirements, available vacancies, and professions that are in demand on the island can also help guide them toward a better understanding of the opportunities available if they wish to return to Aruba.

This proactive measure will reduce the likelihood of students switching programs later on, thereby enhancing their academic experience and increasing their chances of success. Moreover, it will save time and resources for both students and educational institutions, ensuring a more efficient and satisfactory educational journey.



5. PROVIDE COMPREHENSIVE HOUSING ASSISTANCE

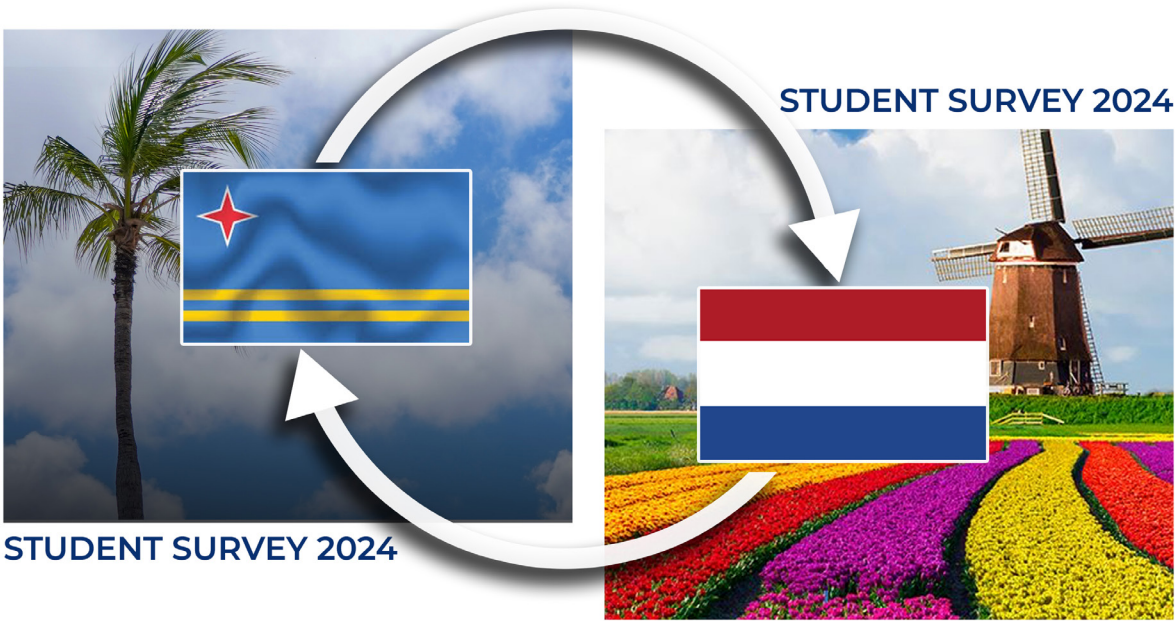
To provide comprehensive housing assistance and address affordability issues, collaboration with Dutch universities and housing organizations is necessary to secure affordable housing options specifically for Aruban students. More importantly, a housing assistance program should be developed that helps and informs students who are planning to move to the Netherlands as early as when they are in the 3rd or 4th class of HAVO/VWO, to inform them of the different websites and housing organizations already available in the Netherlands. This could help them get on to the list earlier, allowing them to have a higher chance of securing a room or studio when they arrive. This program should include comprehensive information that students are often unaware of before applying to housing websites. For example, many rental properties have strict income qualifications or require a guarantor, which can disqualify students from renting. Additionally, some housing websites mandate that students must be enrolled in a study program within the city to qualify for a room or studio. Furthermore, students frequently encounter difficulties in securing housing from Aruba because many realtors do not offer remote assistance. By addressing these issues, the program can provide students with a clearer understanding of the rental market and its requirements. It can offer guidance on how to meet income qualifications, secure a guarantor, and navigate housing websites effectively and on time.

6. OFFER FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT WORKSHOPS AND SUPPORT SERVICES.

Financial management workshops and support should be implemented to help students navigate their finances. Many students express their struggles with finances and taxes upon arriving in the Netherlands. To address this, mandatory financial literacy workshops covering topics such as budgeting, managing student loans, and understanding financial aid options should be introduced. A collaboration between Aruban schools and mentors should be developed to inform students about the necessary financial management skills required in the Netherlands. This education should begin before they leave Aruba and be reinforced upon their arrival. A common mistake students make is applying for financial aid (such as zorgtoeslag and huurtoeslag) without understanding the requirements. To help mitigate such issues, a workshop would be significantly helpful, along with an online resource center or a digital booklet that offers tools, tips, and guides on effective financial management for students living in the Netherlands. This resource center would provide valuable information and support, helping students navigate the financial landscape more confidently and avoid common pitfalls.

7. DEVELOP TARGETED INCENTIVES TO ENCOURAGE RETURNING TO ARUBA

Developing targeted incentives to encourage students to return to Aruba after their studies is vital. A loan forgiveness program offering significant discounts should be considered for graduates who return to Aruba and work in their field of study for a specified period. A housing program should be developed to provide affordable housing options for returning graduates, including rental assistance or homeownership incentives. Partnering with Aruban businesses and government agencies to create job placement programs will guarantee relevant job opportunities for returning graduates, ensuring they can find employment that aligns with their education, skills, and salary. Additional incentives such as professional development opportunities, networking events, and career counseling should be offered to support the transition back to Aruba and encourage long-term retention.



**STUDENT SURVEY 2024:**

Analysis of Challenges Faced by Aruban Students in the Netherlands  
by the Cabinet of the Minister Plenipotentiary of Aruba

Date: 19 June 2024

Document prepared by Destiny Arends