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## Breaking out of the international bubble

**I**n 2019 I arrived in Groningen, from Finland, to begin my bachelor's studies in International Relations. I was drawn to the country due to the dynamic international setting, the excellent international reputation of its third level education, and because I had heard many great things about Groningen from friends who studied there.

Upon being accepted for my bachelor's degree, I was quickly faced with the challenge of finding housing as an international student. I was surprised by the vast number of messages I had to send daily, and how often I found the words 'no internationals' attached to the descriptions of the rooms I was looking at. After an arduous but unfruitful search, I reluctantly accepted a room in a student housing centre, which many people in student Facebook groups warned only to accept as a last resort. I soon realised why that was, as the student housing centre wildly overcharged the predominantly international student population while providing accommodation which was hardly fit for purpose.

After living in the Netherlands for some time, I noticed that I did not have many Dutch friends and spent most of my time surrounded by other international students. Initially this did not bother me, as I imagined myself leaving the country after completing my degree programme. However, I soon realised that I could see myself living in the Netherlands long-term, as I began to love the culture, people, and how accepted I felt as an international student in the country. This made me want to burst out of the 'international bubble' I had been in.

Due to the outstanding level of English in the country, I initially felt that I could

dodge learning the Dutch language as I could always speak in English. As I began to try to move beyond the 'international bubble' I was in, I noticed that I struggled to fit in with the native Dutch students more than I would have imagined. This was primarily due to my weaker grasp of the Dutch language, which resulted in situations where even if I was surrounded by Dutch students, I would struggle to connect with them as easily as I would with other international students. To overcome this, I decided to put myself in situations where I can learn the language, which is why I also began babysitting kids who only speak Dutch.

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Currently, I have never felt more connected to the Netherlands and its people. Many new experiences, such as starting a master's degree with many Dutch students and working with Dutch professionals, have given me opportunities to make more Dutch friends and to learn more of the language, though for now I am still more comfortable writing this column in English.

By international standards, the Netherlands is welcoming to international students. However, my experience as a (white) EU student likely differs significantly from that of other international students, so I cannot speak for everyone. Nevertheless, breaking out of the 'international bubble' can still be a challenge.

*Dit jaar worden de columns geschreven door mensen wier verblijfsrecht of dat van hun familie ooit door het migratierecht is bepaald.*