

FINANCIAL INEQUALITY IN THE TULP HOOFDKLASSE

WRITTEN BY
LEX TUMP



TABLE OF CONTENTS

3	INTRODUCTION	15	CLUB BUDGETS	23	INTERNATIONALS & STIPENDIUM	35	THANK YOU
5	METHODOLOGY	16	COMPARISON	26	FOUNDATIONS		
5	DEMOGRAPHICS	17	CAUSES	28	BAR REVENUE		
8	NATIONALITIES	20	VIEWING NUMBERS	30	MALE SILENCE		
12	SALARIES	21	FOREIGN PLAYERS	32	SOLUTIONS		

SUMMARY

In this report, I dive into the financial figures of the Tulp Hoofdklasse. Specifically, in to the compensations of men and women and the differences between the genders.

The conclusion is sharp: women in the Tulp Hoofdklasse structurally earn less than their male counterparts.

This report maps that gap, provides context and reasoning behind the differences and formulates concrete solutions.



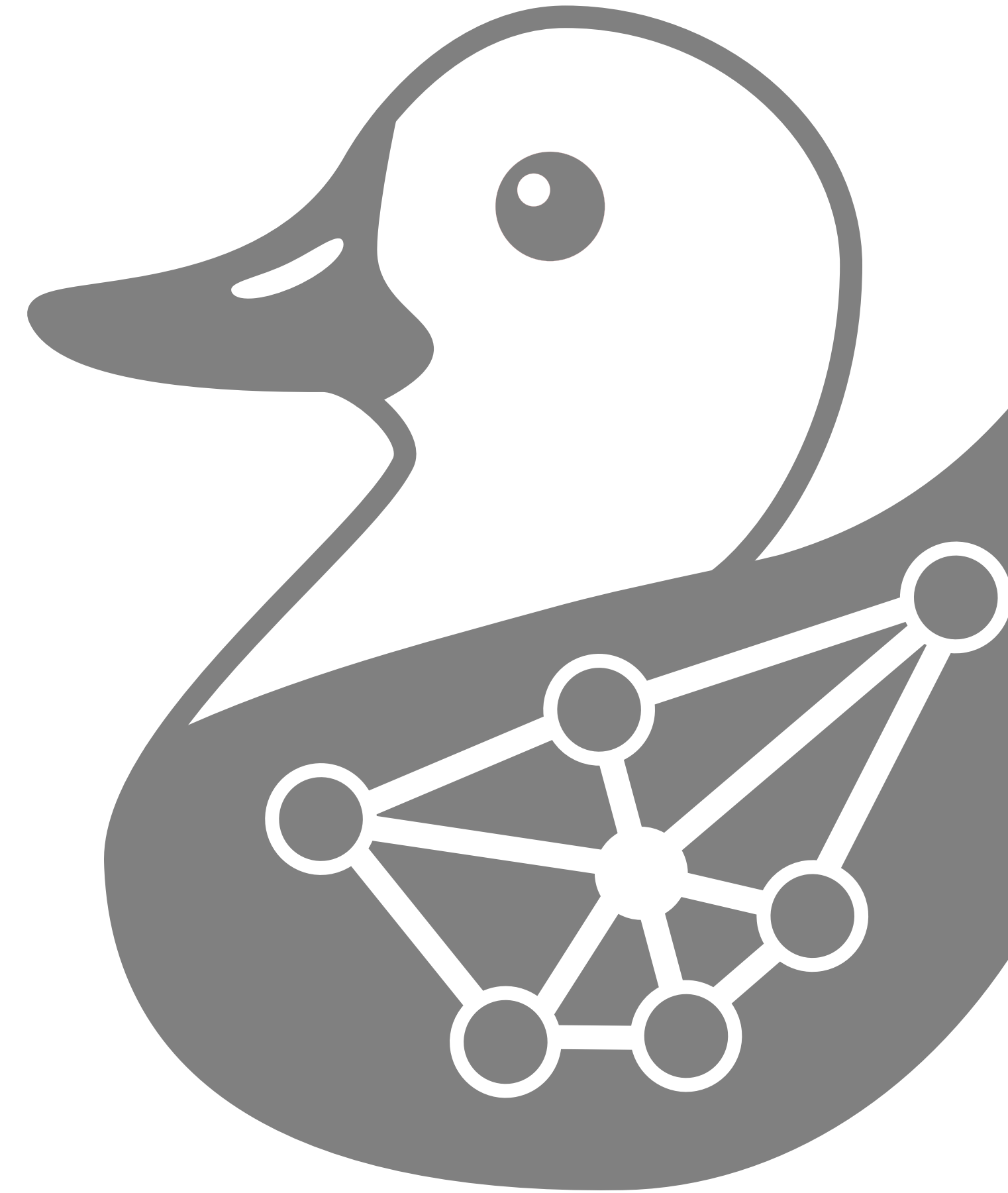
INTRODUCTION

In this report and in my research, I dive into the actual remuneration figures of players and specifically the differences between men and women at the highest level in the Netherlands (and the world).

The conclusion is sharp: at virtually every level, women in the Hoofdklasse structurally earn less than their male counterparts — sometimes by a factor of 2 to 3. This report maps that gap, provides context through 18 interviews with players, coaches, agents and sponsors, and formulates concrete solutions.

WHO IS DATADUCK?

I am Lex Tump, 26, and a graduate in Movement Sciences. I play and captain THC Hurley, one of the largest clubs in the country with 2,200 members. I have played there for 8 years in the first men's team, the last 3 as captain. De Dataduck started 2 years ago, with this company I aim to facilitate and stimulate data usage in hockey.



GOALS OF THIS REPORT

Provide insight
into budgets
and salaries
in the men's and
women's Tulp
Hoofdklasse

Identify the
structural causes of
the difference based
on interviews and
source research

Offer concrete
solutions for clubs,
HHcV/KNHB,
sponsors and
players

METHODOLOGY

This report aims to create clarity on what players in the Tulp Hoofdklasse actually earn. This subject is rarely talked about openly and no public overview exists. Additionally, we dive into reasons and solutions for the financial inequality between men and women in the Tulp Hoofdklasse.

The research is built on two pillars, interviews and desk research. These are explained below.

A third layer comes from De Dataduck's own background in hockey. As a company specialised in field hockey data, Dataduck has built up multiple years of expertise and a wide network within the sport. This means the research also draws on data sources and market insights that are not publicly available.



INTERVIEWS

Conversations were held with active players, coaches, agents, sponsors and the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND). The conversations aimed to validate salary brackets per category; not to obtain exact individual salaries.

For this research, roughly 30 hockey insiders were spoken with, including players, coaches and board members. All conversations have been documented; these are not shared in this research for anonymity reasons.



DESK RESEARCH

Additionally, public sources were consulted: General members' meeting reports of clubs, Chamber of Commerce registrations of top hockey foundations, municipal budget documents, NOS press releases about viewing figures and previously published articles. Viewing figures come from NOS press releases and Viaplay sources.



DEMOGRAPHICS

OF THE HOOFDKLASSE

Male players in the Tulp Hoofdklasse are on average over a year older than their female counterparts, an age gap that already partly explains the pay gap before any other factor is considered.

To investigate this, we looked at the demographics of male and female players in the Tulp Hoofdklasse. The numbers below are based on player lists from the 2025/2026 season, combined with birth dates and nationalities. We are not sharing this dataset publicly out of privacy considerations; the original player lists are published each year on knhb.nl. The bar chart shows the ages of all Tulp Hoofdklasse players at the start of the season, 1 September 2025, grouped by age category.

The men's and women's Tulp Hoofdklasse have roughly the same number of players (263 men vs 265 women), but the age spread is different. Female players are significantly younger, averaging 23.54 years, compared to male players, who average 24.97 years.

To summarise, male players (24.97) are significantly older than female players (23.54) in the Tulp Hoofdklasse.

AVERAGE AGE

ON 01-09-2025

MEN
24.97 YEARS

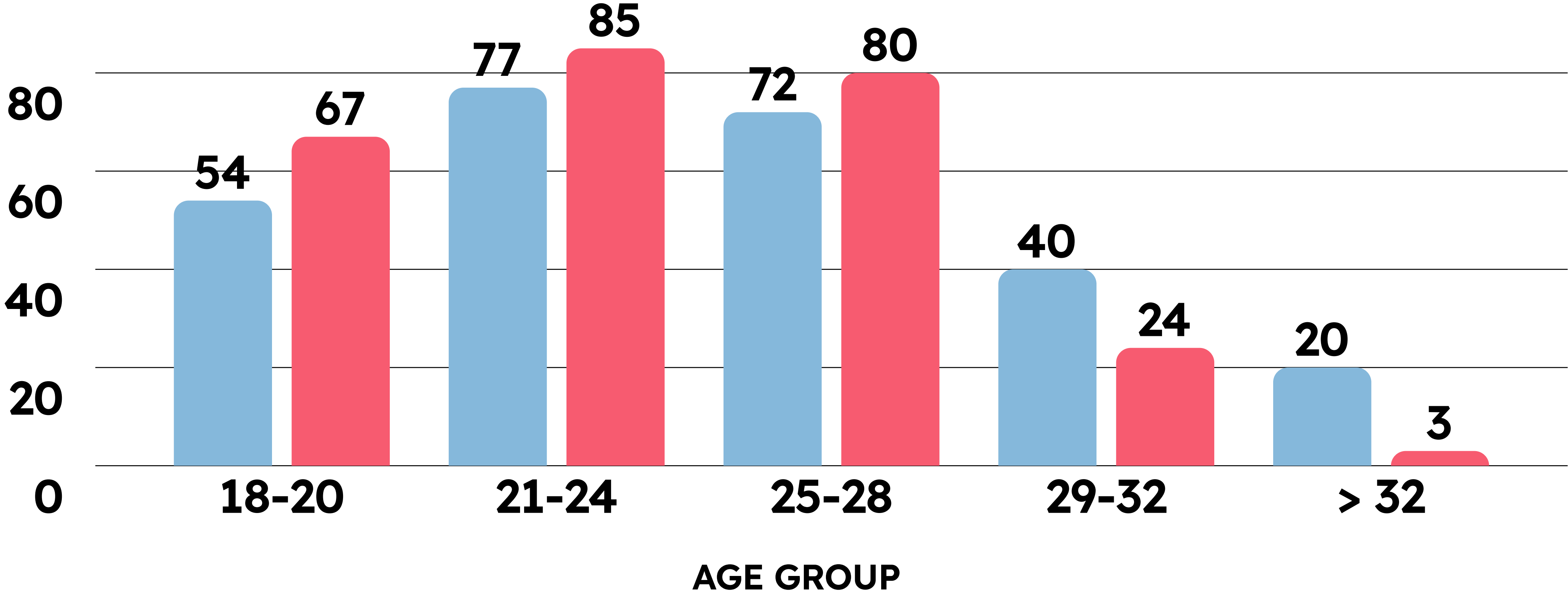
LADIES
23.54 YEARS

AGE DISTRIBUTION OF THE HOOFDKLASSE

 MEN

 LADIES

NUMBER
OF PLAYERS



FOREIGN PLAYERS AND SALARY LEVELS

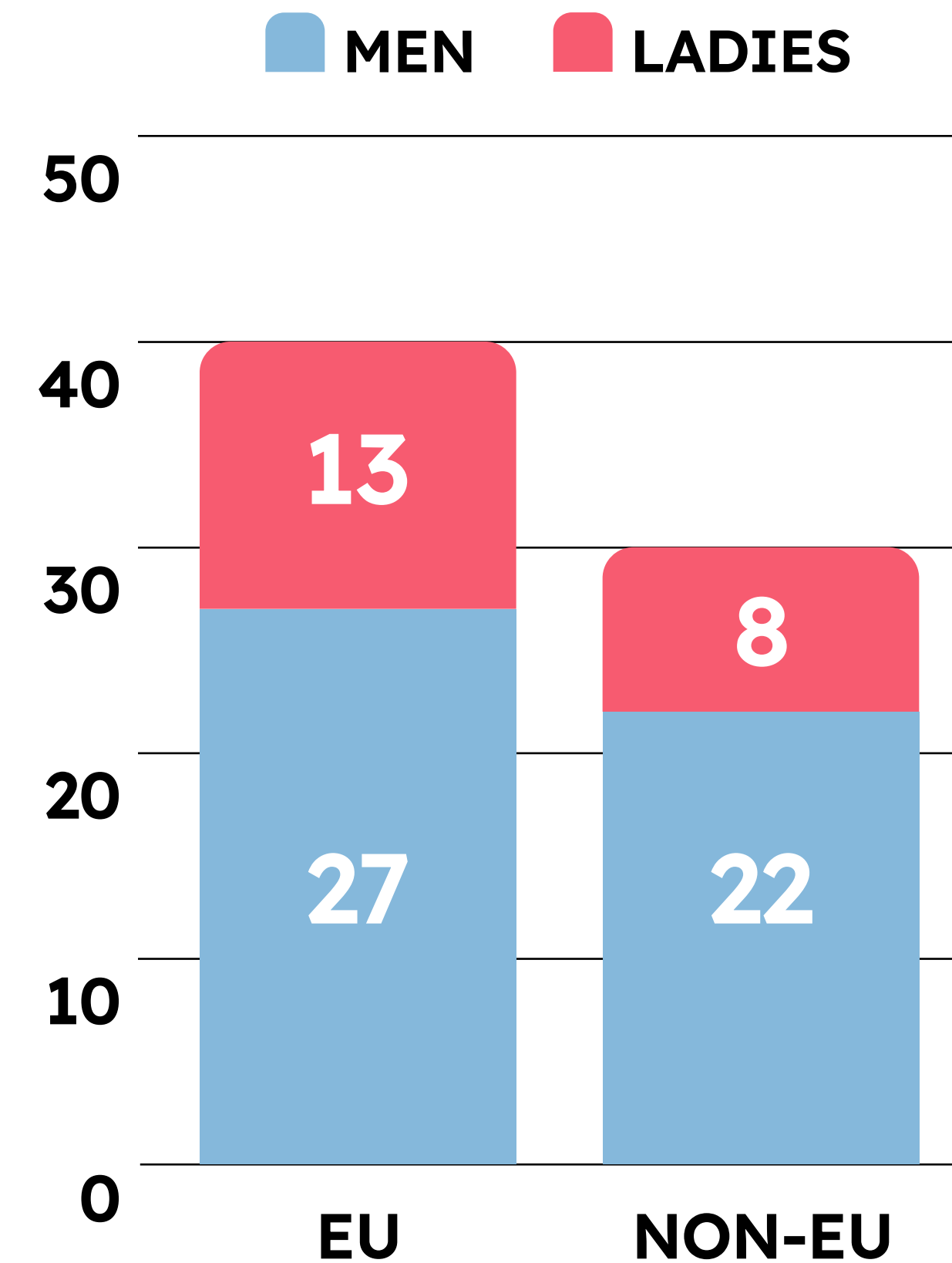
The Tulp Hoofdklasse men has significantly more foreign players from outside the EU than the Women's competition, a difference often cited as a key driver of the overall pay gap.

There are more foreign players in the men's Hoofdklasse (49) than in the women's Hoofdklasse (21). Of these players in the men's Hoofdklasse, 22 are from a country outside the EU and 27 from inside the EU. For women, 13 are from inside the EU and 8 from outside the EU.

Foreign players from outside the EU must earn a certain salary to obtain a work and residence permit in the Netherlands. It is often argued that this is a reason for the pay difference between men and women: because there are more non-EU foreign players in the men's Hoofdklasse, their wages inflate the market and lead to an overall increase in salaries and budgets.

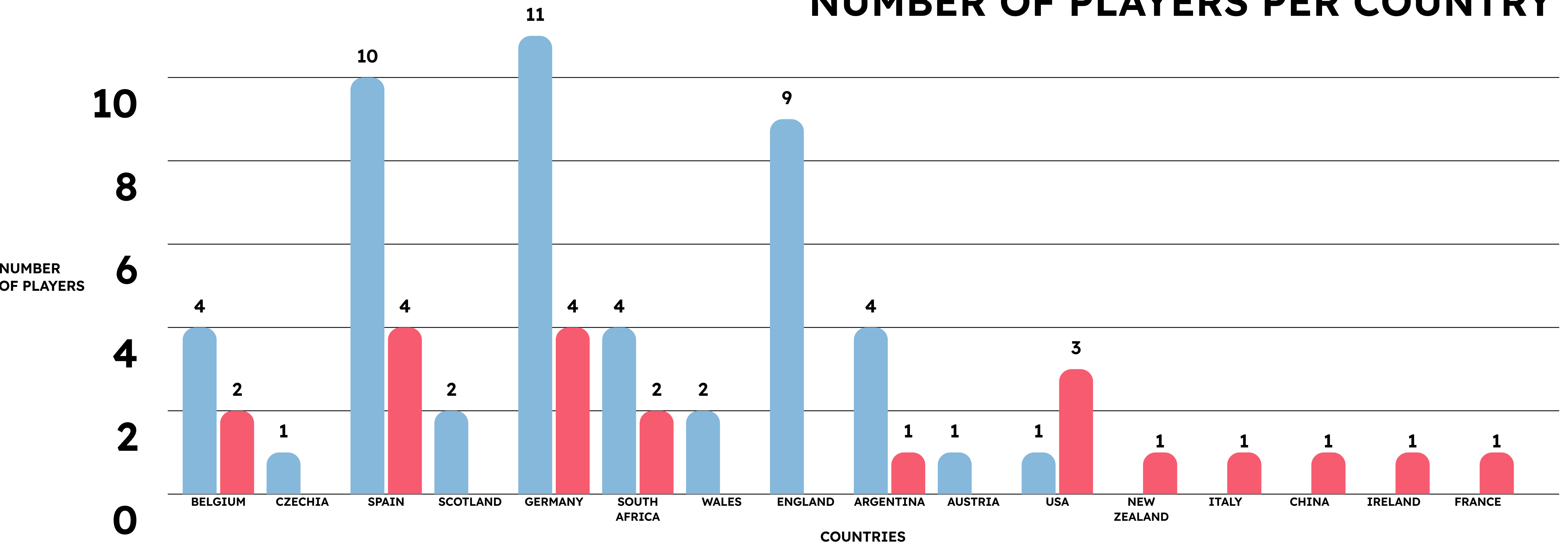
Interestingly, several players are registered with a nationality from a non-EU country but, upon closer inspection, also hold an EU passport and therefore do not fall into this category. More on this in the chapter "Foreign players push up the average".

FOREIGN PLAYERS IN THE
TULP HOOFDKLASSE



The difference in number of foreign players is due to the dominant position of the Dutch women compared to the rest of the world in field hockey. For men, there is more competition and a higher level in other countries. For women, the Dutch ladies are far better than their competition which eliminates the need for foreign players for Dutch clubs.

NUMBER OF PLAYERS PER COUNTRY



SALARIES

Based on multiple interviews and validations, we have determined the following bandwidths for male and female players in the Tulp Hoofdklasse. The numbers are gross and per season.



SALARIES

MEN



Category	Min.	Max.	Type of player
Junior player (17-21 yr)	€ 500	€ 2,200	A player that just joined a first mens team from the U18. Sometimes there is representation for national U18 teams.
*Experienced player (Bottom 4)	€ 5,000	€ 15,000	A player that plays at one of the bottom 4 clubs, has experience but is not an international athlete or pushing to be one
*Experienced player / High talent (TOP 8)	€ 15,000	€ 25,000	A world-class talent pushing the international level and national team or experienced in the top leagues. Also, an experienced player with some international caps playing in a top 8 team, no longer pursuing an international career
International	€ 30,000	€ 50,000	A player that regularly plays for their national team and is a key player for their top 8 club
Elite	€ 50,000	-	Absolute world-class player often in spotlights for individual accomplishments and key player for both club and nation

*THESE CATEGORIES DIFFER BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

SALARIES

LADIES



Category	Min.	Max.	Type of player
Junior player (17-21 yr)	€ 0	€ 2,200	A player that just joined a first mens team from the U18. Sometimes there is representation for national U18 teams.
*Experienced player (Bottom 8)	€ 2,200	€ 10,000	A player that plays at one of the bottom 8 clubs, has experience but is not an international athlete or pushing to be one
*Experienced player (Top 4)	€ 7,500	€ 15,000	An experienced player with some international caps playing in a top 4 team, no longer pursuing an international career
International	€ 12,500	€ 20,000	A player that regularly plays for their national team and is a key player for their top 4 club
Elite	€ 25,000	-	Absolute world-class player often in spotlights for individual accomplishments and key player for both club and nation

*THESE CATEGORIES DIFFER BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

CLUB BUDGETS

MEN'S



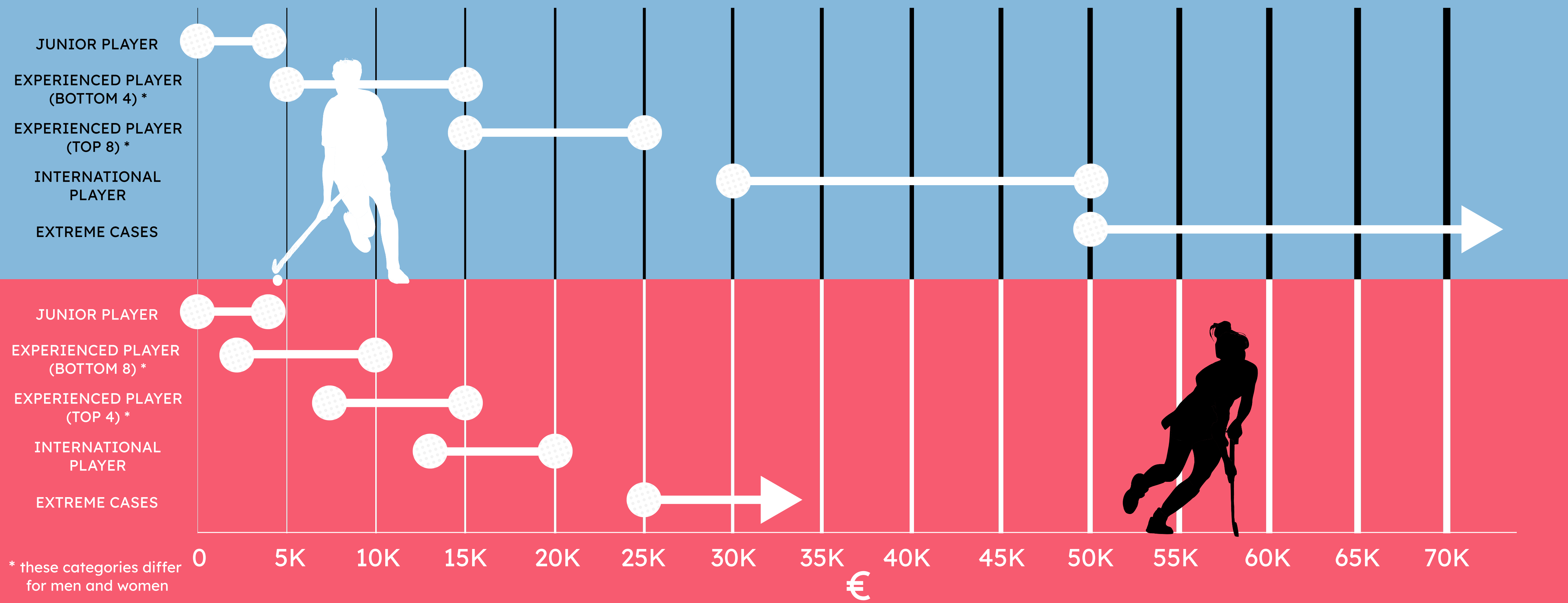
Category	Min.	Max.
TOP 4 PROMOTIEKLASSE	€ 100,000	€ 200,000
*BOTTOM 4 HOOFDKLASSE	€ 250,000	€ 400,000
*TOP 8 HOOFDKLASSE	€ 700,000	-

WOMEN'S



Category	Min.	Max.
TOP 4 PROMOTIEKLASSE	€ 50,000	€ 150,000
*BOTTOM 8 HOOFDKLASSE	€ 150,000	€ 300,000
*TOP 4 HOOFDKLASSE	€ 300,000	€ 500,000

COMPARISON



CAUSES OF DIFFERENCES

The pay gap between male and female hockey players cannot be attributed to a single cause. It is a combination of structural, financial and cultural factors. This chapter addresses the six most important ones and examines whether these causes are data-driven.

VIEWING NUMBERS

Despite common arguments that women's hockey attracts fewer viewers, an analysis of 30 matches across NOS and Viaplay found no statistical difference in viewing numbers between men's and women's hockey.



FOREIGN PLAYERS

The foreign player argument does not explain the pay gap. The work permit minimum is only €2,294.40 per month, far below actual salaries, and many non-EU players hold EU passports anyway.



CAUSES OF DIFFERENCES

INTERNATIONALS & STIPENDIUM

The stipendium meant to support athletes acts as a financial ceiling for female players. However, this only affects 40 players and does not explain the full pay gap.



FOUNDATIONS & SPONSORING

Top hockey is largely financed through informal networks and “Tophockey foundations”. This creates vague structures which allow inequality to continue to exist.



CAUSES OF DIFFERENCES

BAR REVENUE

Analysis of the bar revenue of a major club in Holland shows no meaningful difference between men's and women's matches. The only factor that matters is whether both teams play at home on the same day.



MALE SILENCE

The pay gap persists not just due to market forces, but because male players, clubs and administrators who benefit from the status quo have no incentive to change it and stay silent.



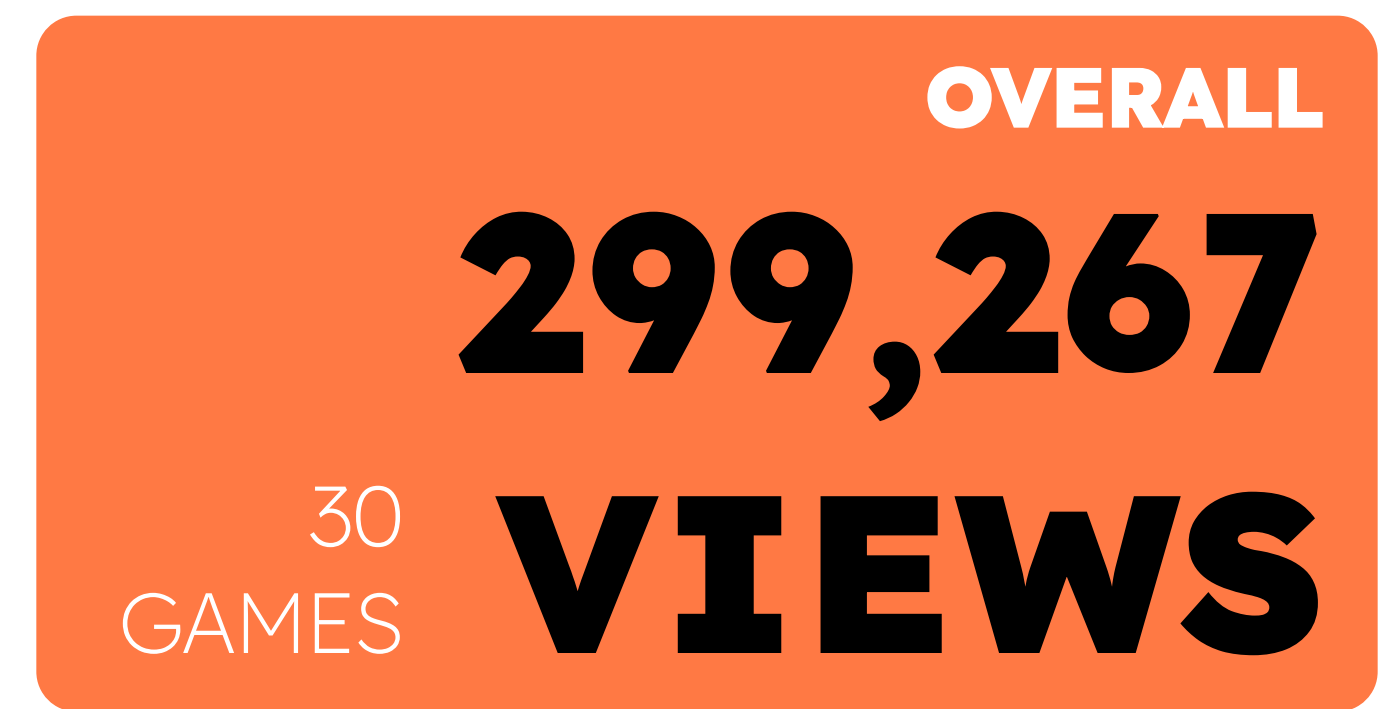
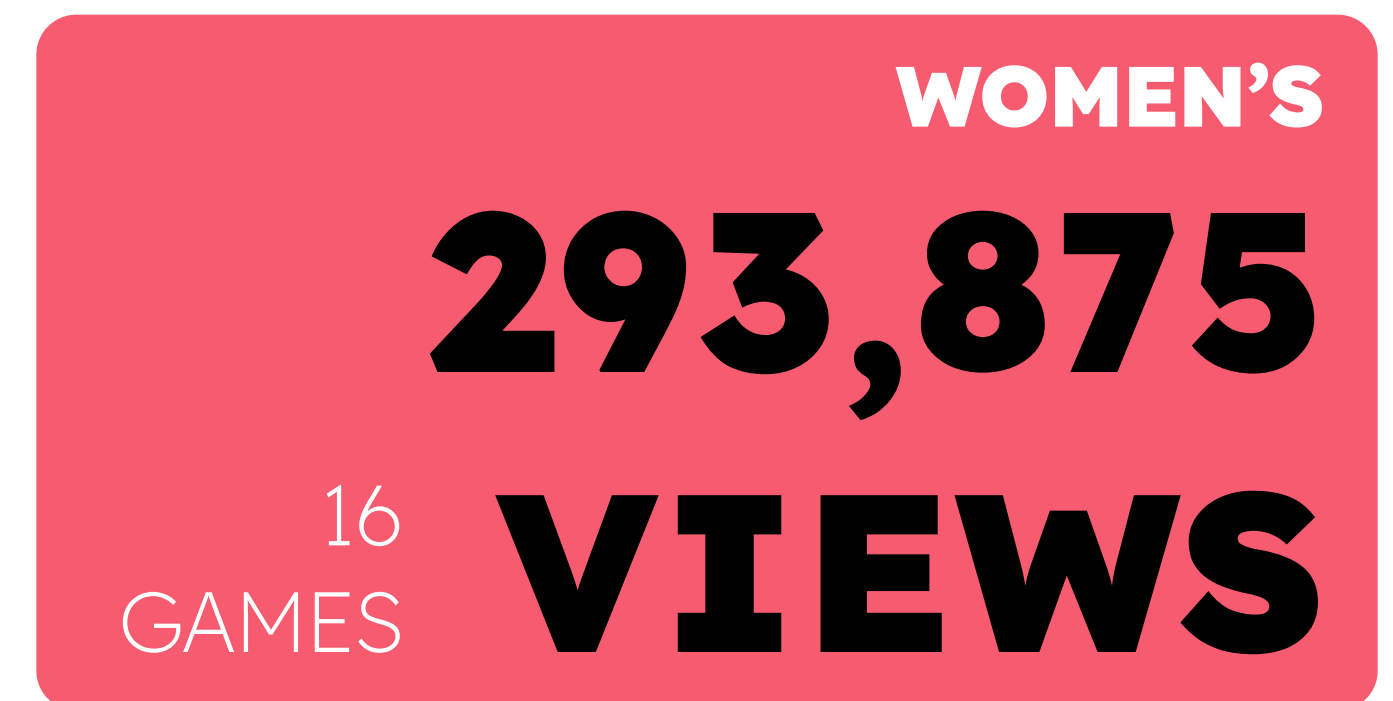
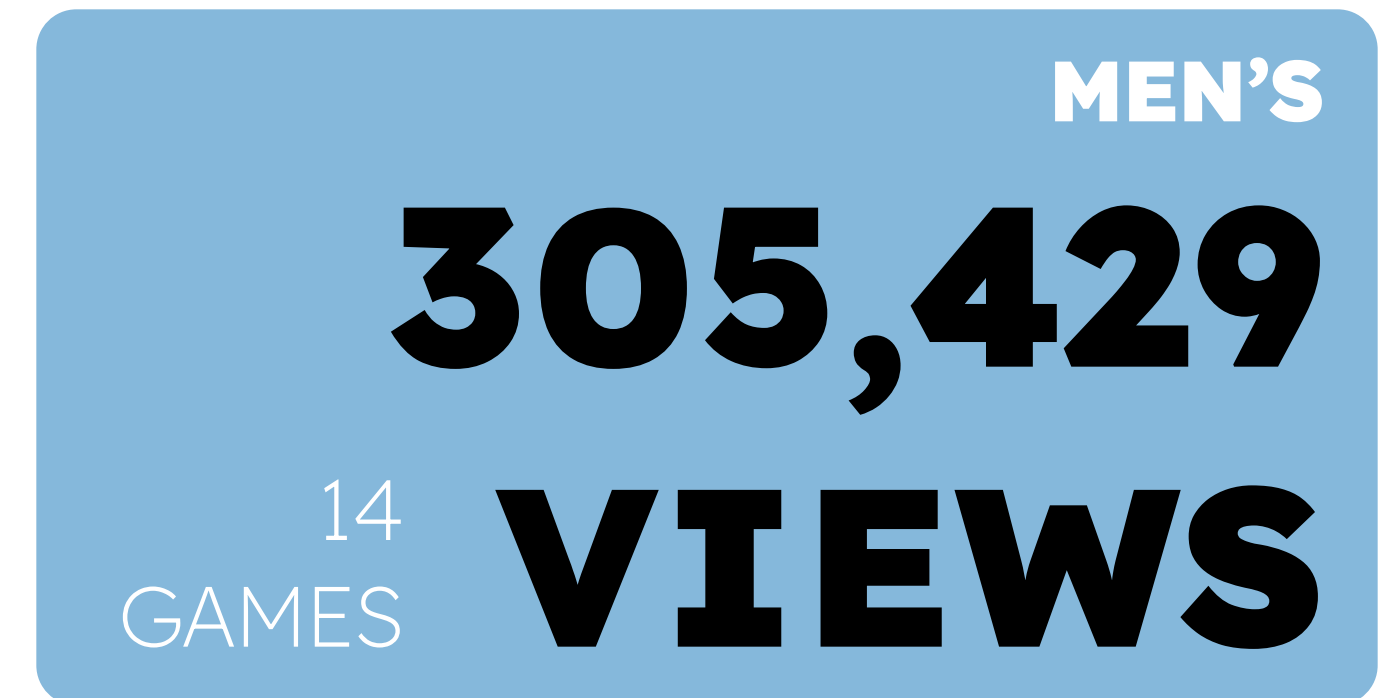
VIEWING NUMBERS

The argument that women's hockey is less commercially attractive due to lower viewership does not hold up against the data. A frequently heard argument for lower salaries for women is that women's hockey is commercially less attractive because fewer people watch it. This would be supported by higher spectator numbers at matches, which leads to higher bar revenue and more sponsorship exposure. In the recent past, initiatives were taken to swap the women's and men's starting times (12:45 and 14:30), but this trial has since been discontinued. Clear reasoning for this was not found.

Based on historical matches broadcast by NOS and Viaplay, this argument is not true. We analyzed viewing numbers for 30 games, split between broadcasters (NOS and Viaplay) and gender, covering finals and semifinals of club hockey as well as World Cup matches.

Based on this research, there is no statistically significant difference between viewing numbers for men's and women's hockey.

AVERAGE VIEWERSHIP



FOREIGN PLAYERS

PUSH UP THE AVERAGE

The number of foreign players does inflate budgets, but less than commonly assumed and the number of foreign players is often overestimated. The number of foreign players is often cited as a reason for the higher budgets in the men's Hoofdklasse. Foreigners from outside the EU must earn a certain salary to obtain a work and residence permit, while players from within the EU are not subject to this due to the free movement of persons and goods within the EU.

The minimum wage a non-EU foreigner must earn is €2,294.40 gross per month, which is not comparable to the high amounts currently paid to some male players, sometimes above €35,000. Additionally, many players from outside the EU still hold an EU passport due to dual nationality. After researching all 22 male players marked as "outside the EU," at least 10 arrange their visa through a partner, another job, or hold an EU passport. For the 8 women in the same category, at least 3 have a different visa arrangement.

But why are there more foreign players in the men's Hoofdklasse in the first place? For women, the level of Dutch players is significantly higher than that of other nations, making a 19-year-old Dutch player and a 25-year-old foreign player comparable on level. The Dutch player might still live with their parents, study, and therefore does not require a high salary, whereas a foreign player needs housing and a certain salary, which weighs more heavily on the budget.

FOREIGN PLAYERS

PUSH UP THE AVERAGE

For men, the level of other countries is also very high; the comparison between a 19-year-old Dutch player and a 25-year-old foreign international is much clearer: the international is better. This results in more foreign players, rising wages, and Dutch internationals following suit. The entire market rises. This is the market dynamic often cited as the cause of wage differences between men and women.

The argument that foreigners drive up the market is only partially true and certainly (!) does not explain the full difference between men's and women's salaries in the Hoofdklasse.



SUFFERING FROM SUCCESS

Because the level of Dutch women's hockey is so high, there is no need to bring in foreigners who drive up the market. This keeps budgets low as young Dutch players are less expensive.

INTERNATIONALS & STIPENDIUM

Elite Dutch athletes with an A-status receive a monthly allowance from NOC*NSF, called the stipendium. For a 24-year-old, this can be up to €31,472 gross per year. The exact amount depends on age. It is not a fixed salary; it is an advance that is settled through the annual tax return. There is one important condition: total income may not exceed the stipend plus €18,000. For a 24-year-old, that ceiling is €49,472. Earn more than that, and the excess is taken back from the stipendium.

Dutch female internationals typically earn right around the €18,000 barrière at club level. With the full stipendium, they land exactly at the income limit. Any extra income, whether a raise, a side job, or a sponsorship deal, is cancelled out euro for euro by the take-back. A €4,000 raise leads to nothing extra in net terms. Neither the club nor the player has a reason to push for higher pay.

**MAX INCOME
WITH STIPEND**

€49,472

INTERNATIONALS & STIPENDIUM

For male players, the situation is completely different. Their club salaries of €30,000 are already very near the the income limit or might even exceed it, so applying for the stipendium would mean paying almost all of it back. Every raise or side job will directly result into more take-home pay.

Therefore, this tool designed as a safety net for elite athletes has become a financial ceiling, and it disproportionately affects female athletes. Josine Koning, chair of the Athletes' Committee and goalkeeper for Den Bosch and the Dutch national team, confirms that the stipendium rules, and the income limit in particular, are under active discussion and may be revised. There are also reports of workarounds through private company structures or pension arrangements, which appear to be tolerated for now.



INTERNATIONALS

& STIPENDIUM

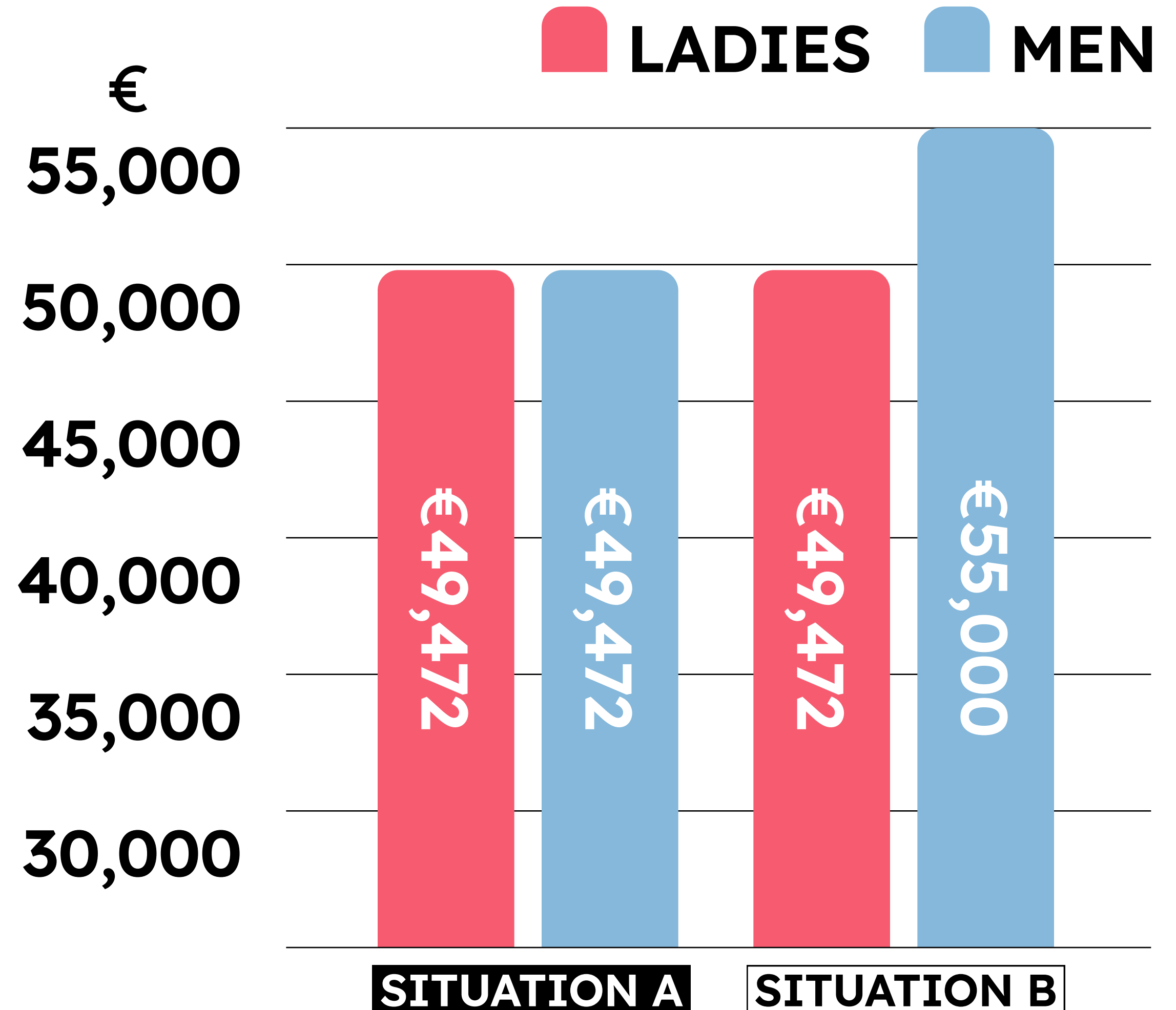
One final point worth noting: the stipend only applies to the roughly 40 Dutch internationals across both squads. With 260 players in the Tulp Hoofdklasse for each gender, the pay gap is more structural and widespread than just this group. Women across all levels of the Hoofdklasse are structurally paid less than their male counterparts. The stipendium is a real obstacle, but it explains only a small part of the bigger picture.

SITUATION A

An international only plays at the club and gets stipendium

SITUATION B

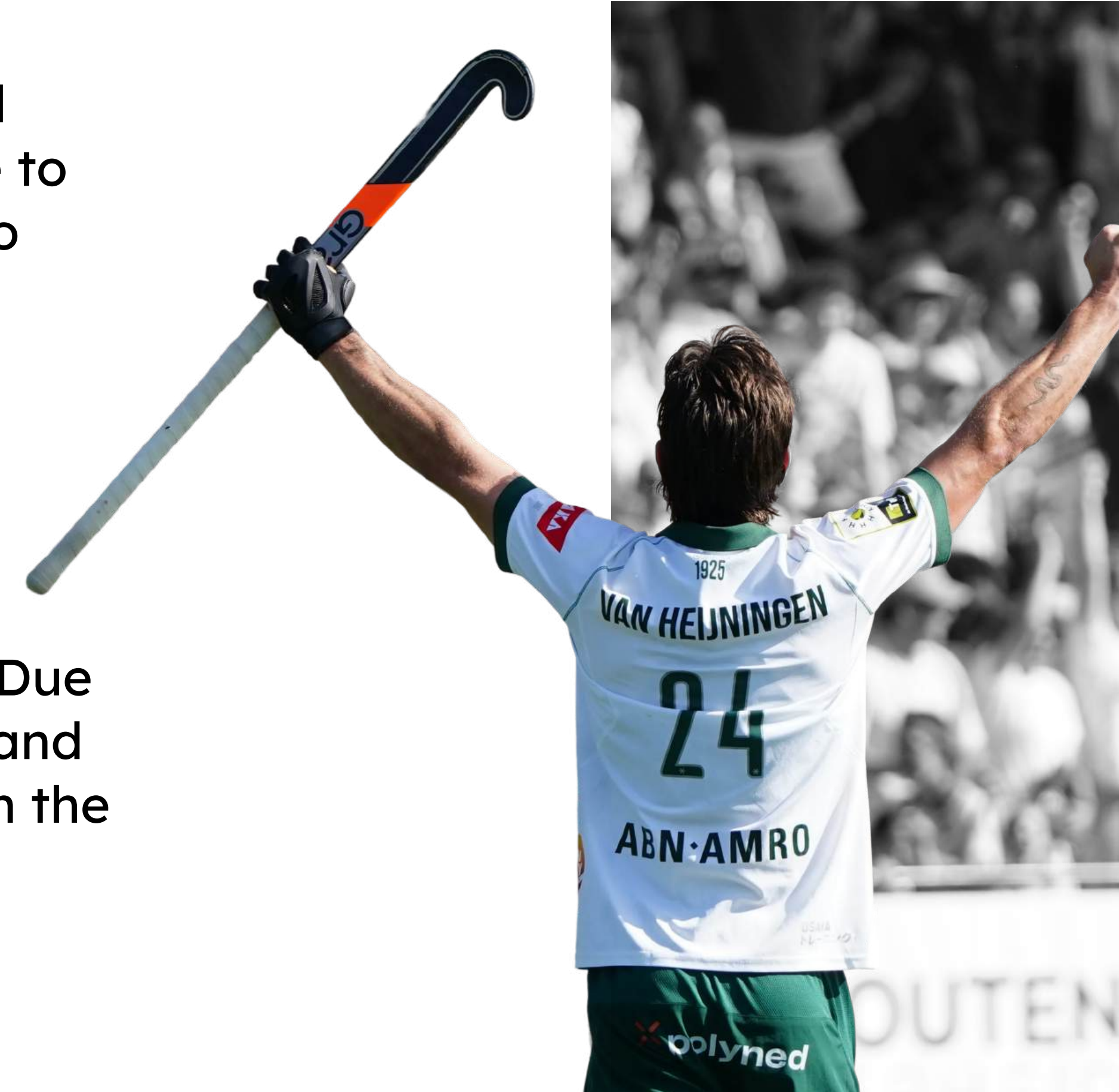
An international works 2 days in the week for €15000 gross per year



FOUNDATIONS & SPONSORING

Most elite clubs finance their professional hockey through a separate legal entity called a Stichting Tophockey, or Tophockey Foundation. This is done to create a barrier between expensive tophockey, which has and can lead to bankruptcy for clubs.

These foundations are legally independent from the club and decide for themselves how money is distributed. This creates inequality and a lack of transparency. When top hockey is financed directly through the club, its finances must be presented at a general members' meeting (ALV), giving members and players the right to see the numbers and vote on decisions. Due to the foundations, many financial flows within top hockey are not visible and rarely pass through the club itself. This way of financing is deeply rooted in the sport, but it also creates significant inequality between players.



FOUNDATIONS & SPONSORING

A recurring pattern is that male sponsors invest primarily in men's hockey, leading to higher budgets on that side of the sport. While this has been shown on multiple occasions, tangible evidence remains difficult to find, partly because these sponsors often prefer not to communicate openly about it. However, it is consistently confirmed by a large number of people within the hockey world.

In my view, this is the main cause of financial inequality in Dutch hockey: an informal network of influential people who fund top hockey from their own means, investing mainly in the men's game. Clubs are either unwilling or unable to challenge this, and in doing so they accept the resulting inequality in order to protect their position in men's hockey.



BAR REVENUE

Bar revenue data shows no meaningful difference between men's and women's matches once context is taken into account.

We collected bar revenue data across all 2025-2026 home matches of Hurley's first men's and women's teams in Amstelveen, both of which played in the Hoofdklasse this season. There was no significant difference in bar revenue between men's and women's matches once match context is accounted for. Revenue was measured from thirty minutes before kickoff until two hours after the start of the match.

We examined start time, average temperature, rain, day of the week, and whether the match fell on a "Super Saturday" or "Super Sunday" to account for any differences. A Super Saturday or Super Sunday occurs when both the men's and women's first teams play at home on the same day; six such days took place during the 2025-2026 season for THC Hurley. On these occasions, men's bar revenue averaged +220% above a regular men's home match, while women's matches on the same days came in +181% above a typical women's fixture. Other factors, such as which team is playing, the opposition, or the point in the season, did not produce a significant or consistent effect.

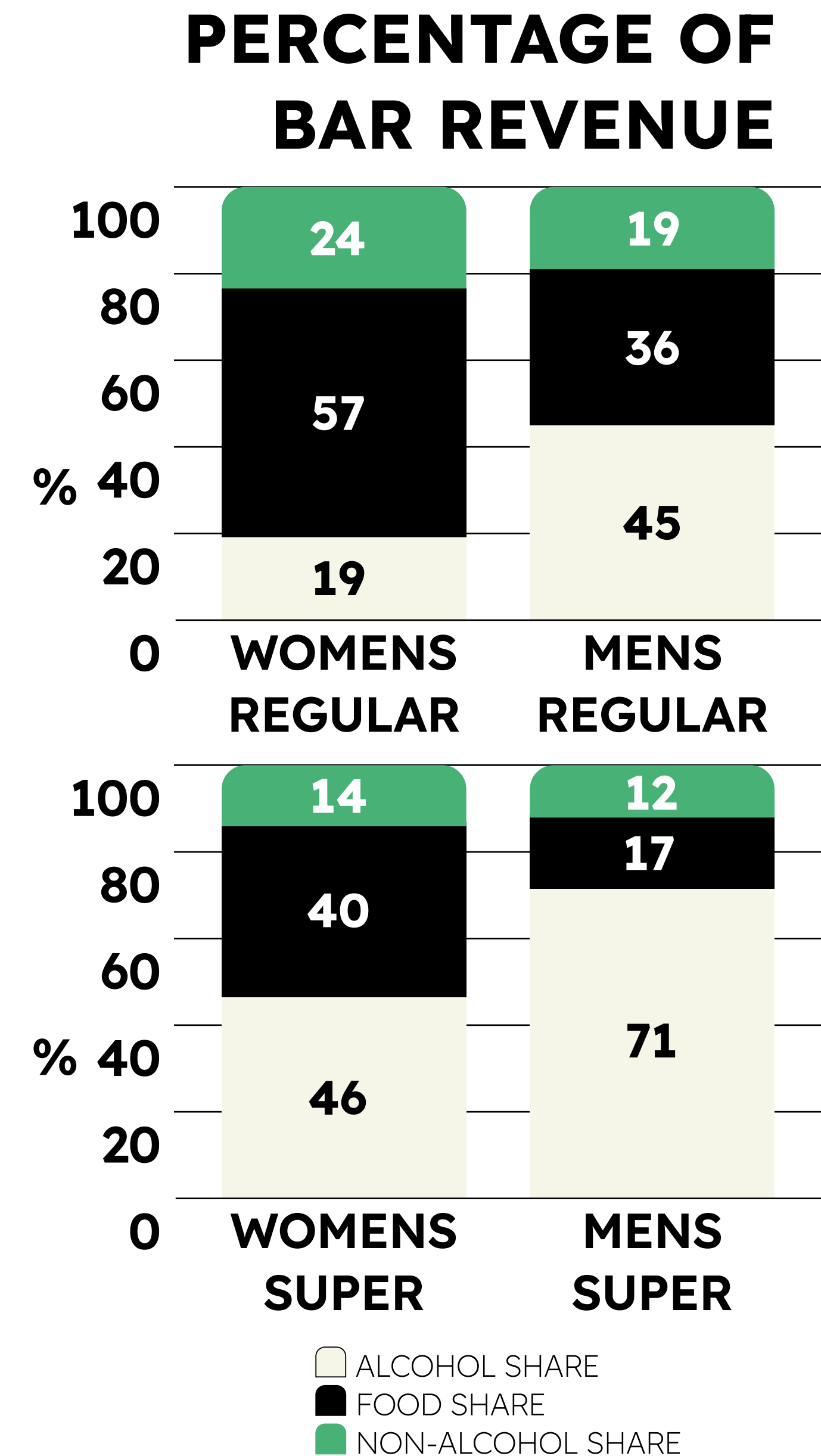


BAR REVENUE

Another interesting fact is which items are which products are sold at the bar at which time, the composition of bar revenue. The composition of revenue changes a lot based on the game characteristics. During regular home games, food and non-alcoholic drinks are sold most. On Super Sundays, the alcohol share rises sharply for both groups, from 19% to 46% for women's matches, and from 45% to 71% for men's. The crowd that attends when both teams are at home drinks more, regardless of which match they are watching. It is worth noting that the men always played after the women in the 2025-2026 season.

Weather appears in the data but is hard to separate from the Super Sunday effect: all six Super Sundays occurred on dry days. Within regular home matches only, rain is associated with somewhat lower revenue, but the sample is too small to draw conclusions.

In short, there is no significant effect of gender on the bar revenue of a field hockey club in the highest competition of Holland. The main factor driving this is Super Sundays.



MEN DO NOT TAKE RESPONSIBILITY

One of the more uncomfortable conclusions of this research is structural rather than financial: male players in the Tulp Hoofdklasse are benefiting from this inequality and have no reason or incentive to speak up. Almost never does an active male player in the Hoofdklasse publicly speak out about the pay gap.

This is not strange or new. Male players in the Hoofdklasse have no incentive to advocate for change. Equal pay structures, mandatory salary publication, or tighter regulation would almost certainly lead to a decrease in male salaries to compensate the ladies in a fair and equal way. This means lower budgets for men or at least a stop to the increasing salaries and budgets. Additionally, speaking up carries reputational risk within a club or a team. In short, men who speak up have very little to win and enough to lose.



MEN DO NOT TAKE RESPONSIBILITY

The same logic applies at club level. Boards and directors who manage both men's and women's programmes have little reason to voluntarily redistribute resources. Decreasing budgets and salaries for the men's team will lead to a decrease in team performance as the best players might leave to higher paying clubs. Additionally, all clubs in the women's Hoofdklasse work with lower budgets, so increasing a budget at only 1 club is not necessary to play along with the top teams.

Several people interviewed for this research noted that the issue is widely understood within the hockey community; players, coaches and administrators are all aware of the inequality. However, this awareness has not translated into action and the discussion is often stated as something only for women.

In short, a strong cause of this inequality is because men are not actively participating in the discussion as they have nothing to gain from it.



SOLUTIONS ● ● ●

PLAYERS COLLECTIVE

The Netherlands has no recognised players' collective for hockey players. The Dutch field hockey association (KNHB) is in itself a collective organizing all field hockey competitions in Holland. The Hoofdklasse Hockey CV (HHcv) is a collective for the clubs, although mostly focused on creating commercial deals for the competition. However, there is no collective for players. **Establishing a union or players' collective is the most direct way to give players a collective voice in their employment conditions.**

This would particularly benefit female players, who currently have limited leverage in negotiations. Beyond salary, a union could also address image rights, individual disputes with clubs, and pension arrangements.

The VVCS, the dedicated union for professional football players, shows that such a structure is both feasible and effective in a Dutch team sport context.



SOLUTIONS ●●●

KNHB/HHCV STANCE

The KNHB has so far set no binding rules on salaries or budget distribution within clubs. A licencing model, similar to what already exists in professional football through the Eredivisie, could change this.

It would include introducing mandatory minimum pay scales per player category, equal for men and women, combined with an obligation to publish club budgets and salary ranges. Participation in the Hoofdklasse could be tied to these requirements, giving the KNHB a concrete tool to enforce compliance.

A similar approach would be possible through the HHcv, however, they currently do not have this authority. Therefore, a change in their description or bylaws (governed by the clubs) would be necessary.



SOLUTIONS ●●●

NEW EU REGULATIONS

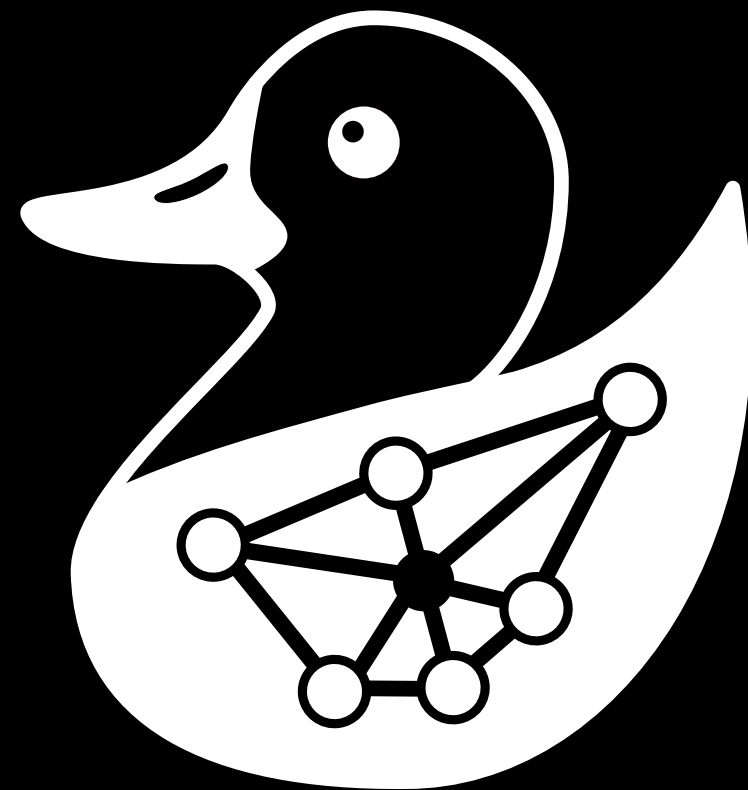
The European Pay Transparency Directive (2023/970) will be transposed into Dutch law in 2027. It requires employers to be open about salaries during recruitment and gives employees the right to know what colleagues in comparable roles earn. If there are differences between genders exceeding 5%, changes must be made.

For professional hockey players, who will legally qualify as employees, this directive is relevant. When clubs are designated as employers, they are required to make their salary distribution transparent. This gives players a direct and legal tool to address unequal treatment.

This will be a huge issue for clubs that facilitate this inequality.



INSIGHTS
PROUDLY
PROVIDED
BY



DATADUCK

@dedataducks

THANK YOU FOR READING THIS REPORT

I trust this report clearly outlines the inequalities in the Tulp Hoofdklasse and has shown the steps necessary to start changing this.

CONTACT

+31 6 45147979

EMAIL

lex@dedataduck.com

INSTAGRAM

@dedataducks