



# Dutch housing for international students

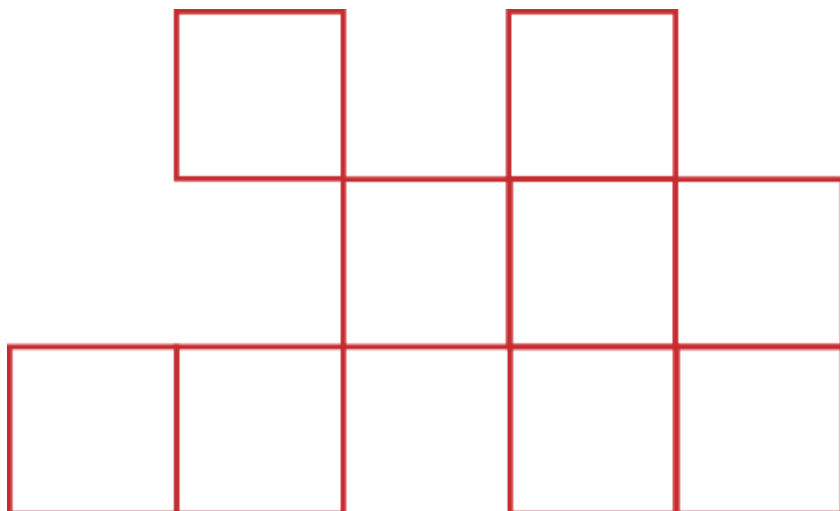
Housing Hotline 2019 – June 2020: an inventory of the housing situation of international students in The Netherlands



landelijke studentenvakbond



Erasmus Student Network  
The Netherlands



Dit is een uitgave van de Landelijke Studentenvakbond (LSVb) en ESN The Netherlands. Voor vragen of extra informatie kan gemaild worden naar: [lsvb@lsvb.nl](mailto:lsvb@lsvb.nl).

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## Samenvatting

De 'Housing Hotline' is in 2017 opgezet door de Landelijke Studentenvakbond (LSVb) in samenwerking met ESN The Netherlands– de vertegenwoordiger van internationale studenten – met als doel het ondersteunen van internationale studenten bij de zoektocht naar een geschikte woning, het informeren over de rechten die studenten hebben en hen daarnaast op weg te helpen wanneer zij (juridische) problemen ondervinden op de huizenmarkt. Ook is de 'Housing Hotline' een middel om inzicht te krijgen in de problemen die internationale studenten op de Nederlandse huizenmarkt ervaren en deze te rapporteren. De LSVb verzamelt hiervoor de binnengekomen vragen en rapporteert deze jaarlijks in de vorm van een verslag. **Dit rapport is gebaseerd op de 480 vragen die tussen 1 januari 2019 en 1 juni 2020 bij de LSVb zijn binnengekomen via de 'Housing Hotline'.**

Uit de 480 vragen die binnen zijn gekomen bij de Housing Hotline blijkt dat internationale studenten soms in zorgelijke situaties terecht komen wat betreft huisvesting. **Net als vorig jaar ondervinden studenten de meeste problemen in het vinden van een kamer.** Er zijn zeer weinig kamers te vinden voor een normale prijs, op een locatie dicht bij de universiteit. Daarnaast maakt het de zoektocht extra moeilijk omdat internationale studenten vaak nog niet in Nederland zijn om te zoeken, daarbij worden internationale studenten in advertenties voor kamers geweerd. Veel internationals maken zich zorgen dat ze niet op tijd een kamer zullen vinden voor de start van hun studie.

**Omdat er zo weinig keuze is in kamers worden internationale studenten gedwongen hoge prijzen te betalen.** Daarnaast worden ze geconfronteerd met hoge servicekosten, soms ook na het tekenen van het contract omdat ze deze niet kunnen lezen aangezien deze vaak in het Nederlands zijn. Studenten maken overhaaste beslissingen omdat ze niet anders kunnen door de hoge druk op de huizenmarkt. Dit zorgt er ook voor dat sommige studenten huurcontracten tekenen waar onjuistheden in staan, of zelf helemaal geen huurcontract ontvangen. Studenten komen hierdoor in situaties waaruit conflicten met de huisbaas kunnen ontstaan. Deze situaties zijn zorgwekkend: studenten voelen zich onveilig en worden geïntimideerd. **De situatie met het coronavirus maakt het niet makkelijker voor internationale studenten. Sommige studenten verliezen hun inkomen of willen naar huis toe en willen daarom hun huurcontacten opzeggen.**

Uit de problemen die worden gemeld bij de Housing Hotline blijkt dat de huisvesting van internationale studenten veel problemen oplevert. Het vinden van een kamer is heel moeilijk waardoor studenten genoegen nemen met kamers en contracten die later problemen opleveren. Internationale studenten worden komen daardoor in zorgelijke situaties terecht waarbij de huisbaas een machtige positie heeft omdat de student anders op straat komt te staan. **Het is heel belangrijk dat studenten weten welke rechten ze hebben, helemaal in een land waar ze de taal niet kennen en vaker maar voor een kortere periode zijn.**

**De oplossing voor de achtergestelde positie van internationale studenten op de huurmarkt kan gevonden worden in het opzetten van goede en toegankelijke huurteams in studentensteden.** Door hun slechte kennis van huurrecht in Nederland staan internationale studenten op de huizenmarkt direct 1-0 achter. Door ze de mogelijkheid te bieden zich te richten tot een huurteam kan deze achterstand opgelost worden.

## Summary

The Dutch Student Union (Landelijke Studentenvakbond, LSVb) in collaboration with ESN The Netherlands– the advocacy organization for international students – has set up the Housing Hotline in order to assist international students in their search for accommodation, to inform them of their rights and to provide support when they face problems on the housing market. A secondary aim of the Housing Hotline is to gain insights in the problems international students face and provide an overview in the form of this report. In order to do this, the LSVb collects the questions received and reports on this information annually. **The current report is the third edition of the Housing Hotline inventory, based on information from 480 reports, collected between January 1<sup>st</sup> 2019 and June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020.**

From the 480 questions received by the Housing Hotline, it became clear that international students find themselves in worrying situations regarding housing. **Just like last year students have most problems in finding a room.** Very few rooms can be found for a normal price, in a location close to the university. In addition, the search for a room is extra difficult for international students because they are not in the Netherlands yet. Also, in a lot of advertisement international students are excluded. Many internationals are concerned that they will not find a room in time for the start of their studies.

**Because there is so little choice in rooms, international students are forced to pay high prices.** In addition, they are confronted with high service costs, sometimes they cannot read rental contracts because they are in Dutch. Students make rash decisions because they have no choice because there is so much pressure on the housing market. This also ensures that some students sign leases that contain inaccuracies, or do not receive a lease at all. This puts students in situations that can lead to conflicts with their landlords. These situations are extremely worrying. Students feel unsafe and are intimidated.

**The situation with the coronavirus makes life more difficult for international students. Some students lose their income or want to go home and therefore want to cancel their rental contracts.**

The problems reported to the Housing Hotline show that the housing of international students poses many problems. Finding a room is very difficult, so students are okay with rooms and contract that later cause problems. As a result, international students end up in worrisome situations where the landlord had a powerful position because the student otherwise would be homeless. **It is very important that students know what rights they have, especially in a foreign country.**

**The solution for the disadvantaged position of international students on the rental market is the setting up of good and accessible huurteams (rental teams) in student cities.** Due to their poor knowledge of tenancy law in the Netherlands, international students are immediately behind in terms of their position on the housing market. By offering them the opportunity to address a rental team for help, this disadvantage can be solved.

## Introduction

The influx of international students in the Netherlands increases every year. In the academic year 2018-2019, an amount of 89.955 international students from 170 countries were enrolled in Dutch public higher education (Nufflic, 2019). That comes down to 11,5% of the total amount of students in the Netherlands, compared to 10,5% in the academic year 2017-2018. In the upcoming eight years, a growth of 33% of international students in the Dutch higher education is expected (Kences, 2019). The increase can be explained by the agreements made by the government and the Dutch universities' associations (VH and VSNU) in 2018, where they agreed on investing in the development of the internationalization of education in the Dutch higher education. However, these plans received a lot of criticism. Opponents feared that the accessibility of the Dutch higher education for Dutch students were at stake. In September 2019, the Dutch government accommodated the opponents by instituting measures to reduce the number of international students (Chaudron, 2019).

First of all, the recent measures should lead to a reduction of the pressure on the education system. Another direct consequence is a reduction of international students looking for housing during their stay in the Netherlands. International students coming to the Netherlands face multiple problems when looking for accommodation, in contrast to most Dutch students. International students do not yet have a social network via which they can look for accommodation, they do not speak the language and are unable to go to viewings beforehand. The current shortage of student accommodation in the Netherlands is somewhere around 40.000 units (Rijksoverheid, 2020).

Due to the current situation, it is still unsure whether the expected increase in international students will take place. The corona crisis has a great effect on the plans and studies of international students. As a consequence of the crisis and the implemented lockdowns, about 30% of the international students had to or wanted to leave the Netherlands. By doing so, some of them encountered problems related to their housing in the Netherlands. For instance, they could not end their rental contract early or they faced challenges about the rent. Because of a lack of knowledge, international students often do not know what to do in these situations. With the new academic year in sight, nothing is certain yet. How many international students will come to the Netherlands if nearly all classes will take place online? Will the housing shortage still be an issue the next year? Will the peak of students coming to the Netherlands looking to find a place to stay be in January instead of August?

The Dutch Student Union (Landelijke Studentenvakbond, LSVb) conducts annual research into the issues international students face by looking for accommodation. The Housing Hotline assists international students in their search for accommodation, informs them about their rights and provides support if they face difficulties on the housing market. Besides, the annual report attempts to give an overview of the problems international students face concerning the housing situation. This is the third edition of the Housing Hotline.

## The Housing Hotline

Through the Housing Hotline, which was first published in 2017, LSVb wants to support international students experiencing issues related to their housing situation. At the same time, the aim of the Housing Hotline is to create an inventory about the issues international students face.

The LSVb wanted to make the housing hotline approachable for international students to discuss their issues. Through a Google form document, international students can fill in their name, place of studying and their issue(s) regarding their housing situation. The Google form is sent to a dedicated e-mail address, [housinghotline@lsvb.nl](mailto:housinghotline@lsvb.nl). The LSVb policy officers responsible for housing then formulate a helpful answer to the issues. If the answer is not satisfactory to the international students, students are free to send a follow-up mail. In difficult cases, LSVb policy officers can contact the students directly via their mobile phone numbers.

The data is logged in a logbook. With this logbook, the LSVb is able to make an overview of all the issues. The logbook is managed and stored by the LSVb and thus not accessible to the public.

The logbook contains the following variables:

**Table 1. Variables logged in the Housing Hotline logbook**

Variables
Date e-mail
Privacy statement
Contact details
Type of student
Country of origin
Current housing situation
Story in short
Found Housing Hotline via
Space for other comments

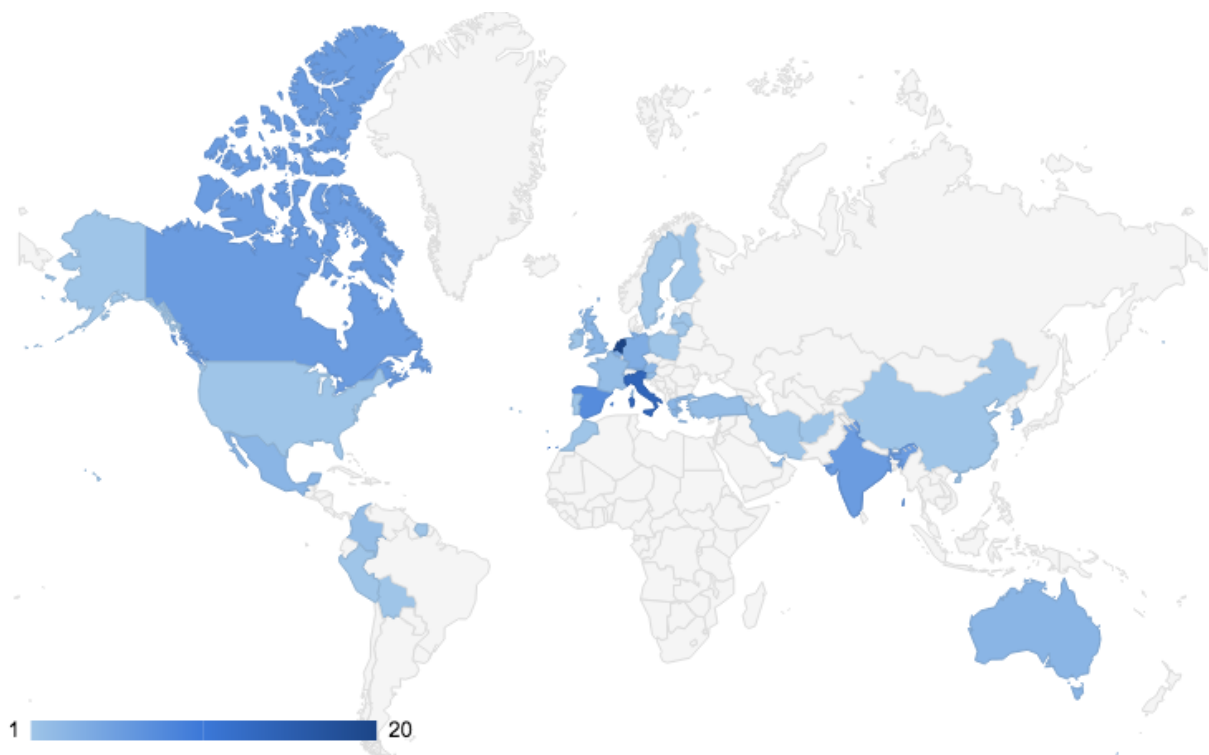
## Sample description

The Housing Hotline usually includes data of one year. In this particular case, where the corona crisis started, LSVb has chosen to make an overview of the past 17 months. During these months, the Housing Hotline received a total of 480 reports.

### *Origin international students*

The map (figure 1) visualizes the origins of the total amount of international students that contacted the Housing Hotline. As one can see, the majority of the reports come from international students originally based in Europe.

**Figure 1. Country of origin (N=480)**

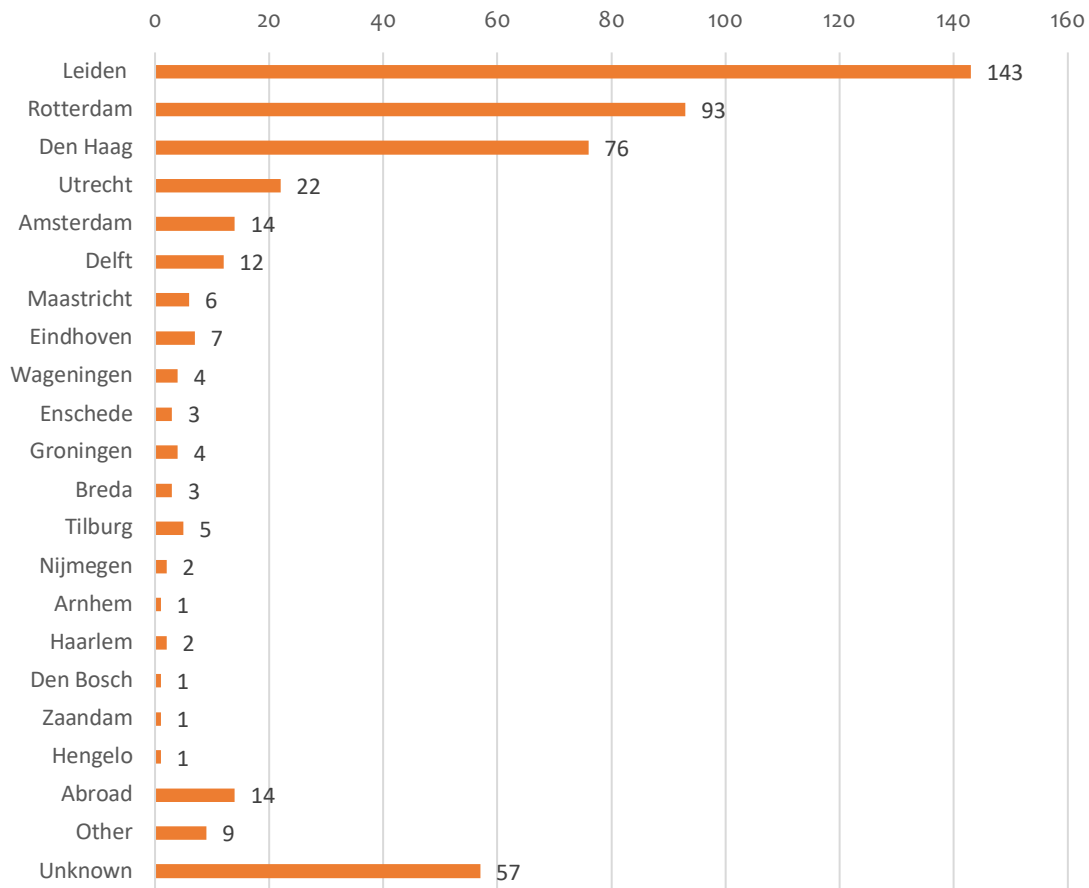


### *Reports per city*

Most of the reports come from Leiden, followed by Rotterdam and Den Haag. The reports per city are visualized in figure 2. There are also quite a few cases (N=57) that did not specify their city in the form. As one can see, there are a lot of reports coming from the five big cities of the Netherlands (Leiden, Rotterdam, Den Haag, Utrecht and Amsterdam). These reports are equal to 72,5% of the total amount of reports. One can assume that the Housing Hotline is more promoted in these cities and we have to take this bias in consideration in this report.



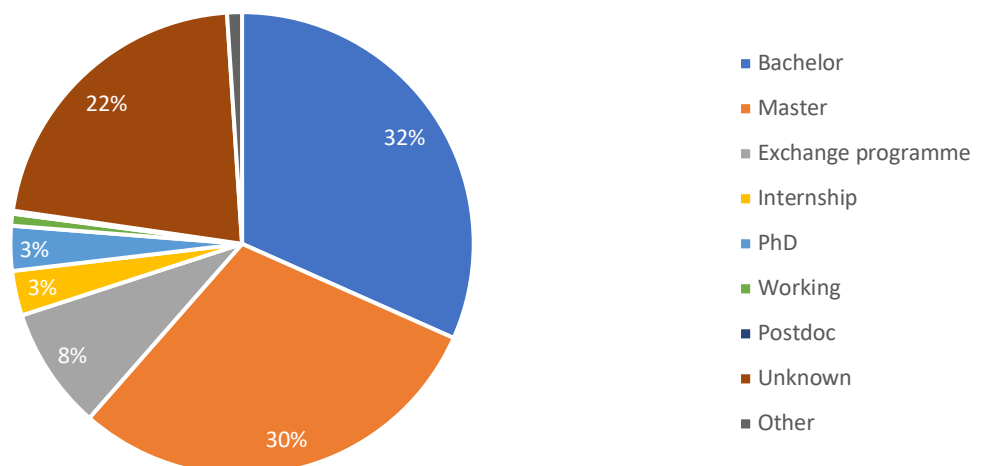
**Figure 2. Number of reports per city (N = 480)**



*Types of students*

As visualized in figure 3, most of the international students that contacted the Housing Hotline are enrolled in their bachelor's (32%) or master's degree (30%). They mostly stay in a foreign country for a longer period, for example to finish their bachelor's or master's degree. In total, this group of international students exists of 297 students. Exchange students mostly stay for a shorter amount of time, a semester or year (N=41). A lot of students did not answer this question, which results in a total of 22% of the students who chose to not answer this question (N= 104).

**Figure 3. Types of students (N=480)**

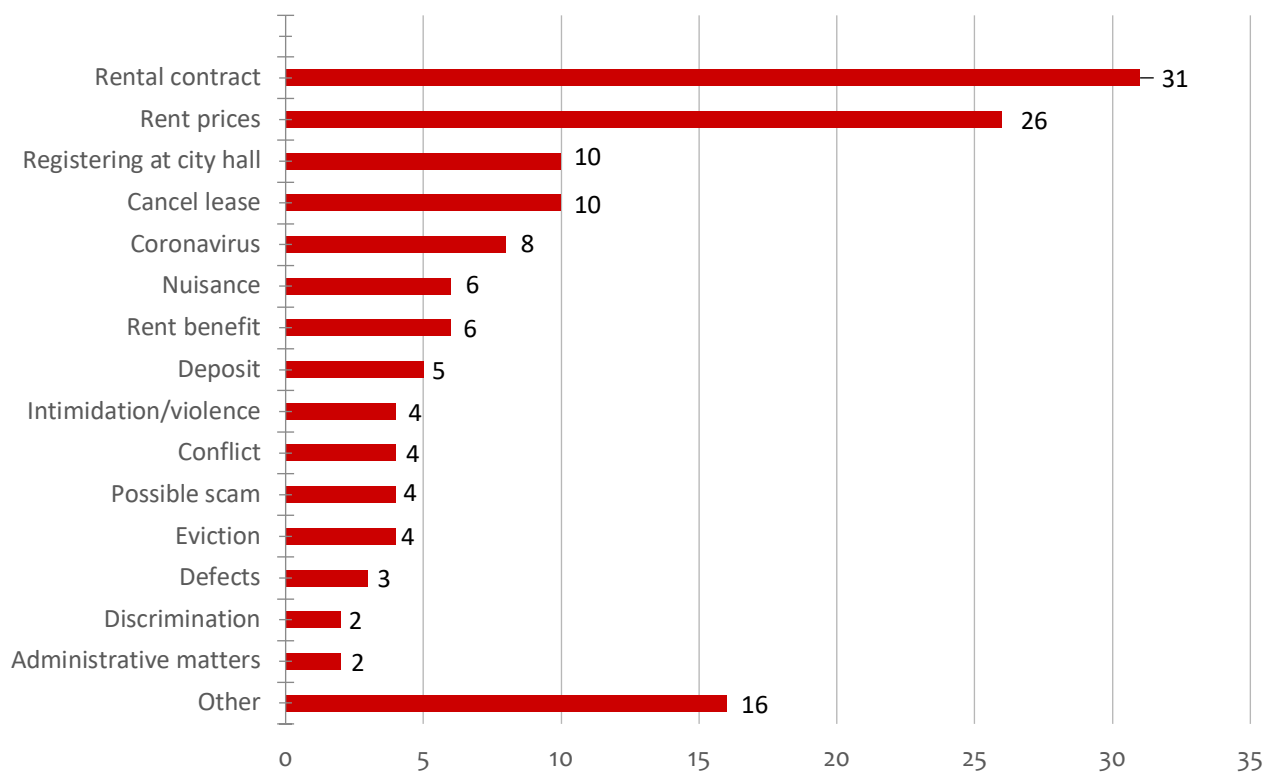


### *Categories of issues related to housing situation*

The questions and complaints are divided into multiple categories. As expected, based on the previous Housing Hotline reports, most international students have struggles finding a room in the Netherlands (N=339).

Figure 4 embodies all the other complaints and questions (N= 141). This figure thus does not include the category struggle to find a place to live. The categories itself can further be specified into different questions and complaints. For example, issues related to rental contracts can refer to a contract written in Dutch, but also questions about certain parts of the contract. Compared to last year, there is a slight increase in issues about registering at a city hall and there is a new category of issues: coronavirus. We will elaborate on these topics in the next paragraphs.

**Figure 4. Categories of questions or complaints, excluding the category 'finding a room' (N=141)**



## Questions and complaints

To give more insight into the problems experienced by international students in the Dutch housing market, this part of the report provides a systematic overview of the qualitative data collected, in the form of the specific content of the questions and complaints received by the Housing Hotline.

### Finding a room

Like last year, the majority of the reports concerned issues in finding a room (N=339). Some of these students contact the Housing Hotline because they would like to have more information about finding a room and try every possibility that is out there. Students say: *"I'm looking for a room for the second semester, starting from February. I don't trust the websites like rooming or kamernet so much... where can I search?"* and *"Needing advice on the best way to find housing by myself", "I am looking for a room for two weeks at the end of January. Can you help me?", "I am an exchange student and I struggle to find a place to live."*

Student struggle to find a room that is close to the university and affordable. Student say: *"Houses are either too expensive or too far away from campus", "I am struggling to find an apartment that is walking distance from the school"*. Students also have problems with finding a room for a shorter period. Exchange students stay here for approximately six months. Some students state: *"I am experiencing problems with finding an apartment in short period for only 6 months"*.

Another thing that makes it harder for international students to find a room is that advertisements sometimes state that they do not look for internationals: *"I have joined numerous sites to search for accommodation. An issue constantly coming up is that of 'Dutch only' advertisements. Then where this is not said I have received replies denying international students simply for the fact I am international"*.

For internationals it is also extra hard to find a room because they are not in the country yet. This makes it a lot harder to visit a viewing and have contact with landlords or estate agents. For example: *"Beyond this is the real issue of viewings. The earliest I can travel to view accommodation is the 21st of January. Viewings are occurring before this and naturally preference is given to those who can attend these. Do you have any advice on this? I would really appreciate any advice you have for finding accommodation. I have been searching the last few months and the start date for my course is now less than a month away."*

Because student are struggling with finding a room, many students worry that they will not find housing in time before they arrive in the Netherlands.

## Rent prices

A lot of students' state that it is really hard to find a room that is in their price range. It is difficult to find a room and it is even more difficult to find a room that is affordable. Students say: *"There are no rooms available for less than 600 euros."*

The cities where these students try to find a room differ. Housing Hotline received complaints about the prices in Den Haag, Leiden, Rotterdam and Amsterdam.

There are also students who already live in places where they think they pay too much. An example of this is that students have doubts about the service costs they pay:

*"I am renting a room in Utrecht (roughly 10.5 meters squared) for a total of 700 euros per month. My rent is broken up into 360 for the base rent, 40 for bills and 300 for 'other costs and services.' I have contacted my landlord multiple times (the first in October) about why I pay so much a month for 'services' as apart from the furniture in my room I do not receive any additional services. He refuses to communicate with me via email and says he will only speak to me in person."*

In some situations, international students are not aware of the prices they have to pay. They are tricked into signing a contract that they do not understand.

*"I have found a place on Kamernet and I went there for a viewing and later on I signed a contract. I could not understand it, as it was in Dutch, but the guy from the agency told me what is in it. After signing the contract I had a problem: my bank's netbanking system had a breakdown, so I could not transfer the money (425 euro for the first month, 425 euro deposit and 395 euro agency fee). I think that was my luck. He told me it is ok, I can transfer the money later, but I have to give him some money. So I gave him all the cash I had (345 euro) and he told me, then I have to transfer only 900 euros. It was at Saturday.*

*But later on I made it read with the landlady of my temporal placement (Airbnb) and she said me that this contract contains elements that the guy did not talk about. First it includes a plus 100 euro per month payment for gas, electricity and internet. It also includes a fine of 50 euros per day if I don't pay the rent in time."*

## Rental contracts

31 students who filled in the Housing Hotline had a problem with their rental contracts. Some students wanted to get their contracts checked, *"I would like get verify the contract I received was true or not. I would like to avoid get scammed. Appreciate your support"*. Other students had more complicated problems, that also in some cases caused conflicts with their landlords. Conflicts can run so high that students get evicted out of their homes. This is especially a difficult situation if students do not have a rental contract. For example, this student: *"I enter my current accommodation without a contract because my landlord doesn't let me to and I think for tax purposes. He also won't let me register in the*

*municipality so I am still registered in my old address". Students accept this from landlords because sometimes this is their last resort: "The reason why I did it in the first place because I was almost homeless, I have nowhere to go and I am desperate to find a proper house. I know it's stupid but at that time the stakes are very high. I was at a such disproportionately disadvantaged place since I know nothing about the Dutch housing system and rights, and I am desperate enough to take anything". If students do not have a rental contract or the rental contract is not right, students worry about the rights they have: "Now, I regret my decision. Because my rights are literally scraped to the ground." This can cause conflicts with the landlord.*

*"My landlord keep using intimidation/coercion/threats to kick me out of the house, harassing me, yet I cannot do anything because I know then I will be homeless. He knows this so he keep using this argument every time I speak about his behavior to me. Today I just got the ultimatum because I am speaking my mind. I am kicked out of the house. I want to report him so bad to the police yet at the same time, I know it will bring me more problems. Not registering yourself to the municipality can cost me a fine and I am financially not ready enough to take this. At the same time, his behaviors are unacceptable, and I feared that he will do the same thing to other people. I don't know what else I should do that's why I am reaching out to you here. I hope you can understand my situation. Thank you in advance for having this hotline!"*

*Hello, I am facing a problem and I need your help. I have signed a contract for a room I found on Housing Anywhere for the period of 01.08.2019 until 31st of July 2020. However, at the beginning of the week I have informed my landlord that I would like to end the contract due to personal reasons and because I have to leave the country. He told me that it is not a problem and that I just have to cancel my residence at this address. I was appointed to Gemeente Rotterdam on Wednesday. However, today the landlord has emailed me saying that the rental contract is going to end on the 31st of January and that I have to pay for the month of February nonetheless. I have replied politely asking as to why I have to pay for February when in the rental contract it is said that in case the tenant cancels the contract before the period that was indicated, they will not receive the deposit back as to compensate the landlord for searching for another tenant. The landlord has reacted to my reply negatively, he knocked on my door and threatened me to leave the apartment immediately if I don't follow what he has told me. I am in despair, I feel unsafe and I am begging for your help. I need to stay in this room until January 31st.*

These quotes paint a very distressing picture of the kind of troubles international students can have. The Dutch housing market is very inaccessible for international students, which leads to a very powerful position of landlords. Students need to have a place to stay and don't know what their rights are, so they take a lot from landlords. We are glad that these students contact the Housing Hotline, so we can make students aware of their rights.

## International students and corona

The last couple of months international students experienced problems due to the coronavirus. Most students had problems with losing their income or wanting to go home and cancelling their lease in the Netherlands. Therefore, students had questions about their rights in leaving their houses because of Covid-19 and paying their rent. For example, this student: *"I have had to return to the UK for the foreseeable future because of the COVID-19 crisis. This means my property is empty and I will not be using gas, electricity, water or internet. The property manager still says I need to pay rent in full including all of these utilities. Is there any way in which I can get a reduction?"* We can advise students in the ways they can respond in these kinds of cases. Unfortunately, international students are not always in the position to make sure that they get the utility costs back and just accept the situation and overpay.

Other students asked if they are still obligated to pay rent in case they leave to their country of origin: *"I have left the country and I'm back in my home country but I'm still paying rent because of the contract, has there been any rule/law towards suspension of rent for people who are already back home?"* Students also indicate that it is hard to find new housemates, or people who will take over their rooms.

Another problem for students is the loss of income. *"During the Corona lockdown my income from a part time occupation in my home country have been halved and eventually stopped. Therefore I cannot make rent and I have to return to my country. The issue that I would like to discuss with you is about the one month period notice payment. My landlord heavily insists on it, and I wonder if there are measures because of the Covid situation."*

As mentioned, the situation with the coronavirus brings a lot of extra problems for international students. The Housing Hotline received a lot of worrying stories from students about their living situations:

*"The coronavirus crisis has impacted my living circumstances greatly. I live in a house of 6 people, 3 of whom have left due to the crisis. I may need to return home to India immediately, as both of my parents have preexisting health conditions, and require my support at this time. I am also struggling to pay rent, as the crisis has caused me to lose any job prospects. As a masters student, my classes have concluded and I was meant to be working at this time, alongside my thesis. Being a girl, it has also become very uncomfortable to live here with only 2 male roommates, seeing as my female roommates have moved out. I have for these reasons requested the agency 'room for rent' to terminate my contract, however they will not allow for this, and insist that the only way is for me to sublease my room. No one is trying to rent a room in this climate. Furthermore, I have received an eviction notice from the municipality before the crisis. The landlord has not communicated to us at all about the outcome. I would appreciate any and all help in terminating this contract. Thank you."*

*"I rented a room and share the whole flat with my landlord in Rotterdam, but due to the coronavirus situation, I came back to Spain in March but left my stuff at my room as at the*

*beginning I didn't think that this was going to take so long. I signed a contract from January to July, but I didn't receive a copy back signed by the landlord and she made me leave the keys from the house and the room when I came back to Spain in case there was a leak or fire. I have to pay the month the first day of it, and we agreed to pay half the rent of April, which I did, and May, as only my stuff is there and in Spain both my parents are not working and we are 5 at home and we need the money for expenses and food. The problem comes when I told the landlord's daughter (who is the one taking the responsibility of all the papers) that if I do not have to go back to university I will try to end my contract earlier, what she didn't like and threatened me telling that or I paid the whole month for May or she will unregister me, remove my stuff from my room and keep the deposit. I do not have the contract nor the keys and the only thing I have to prove that I was living there are the deposit and April payments (the other ones were in cash), e-mails and whatsapp conversations where we talked about the rent and the house. Thus, I would like to know if, 1) it is legal that they remove my stuff if I do not pay this whole month and 2) if, in case I want to go back to pick up my stuff and they do not let me enter the flat, if it is enough to prove that I was living there with the documents and conversations I have. Thank you in advance".*

## Conclusions

The aim of this report was to gain insights in the problems international students face regarding their housing situation in the Netherlands. This report is an overview of the queries sent to LSVb in during 2019 and the first part of 2020. In total, Housing Hotline received an amount of 480 queries during these 18 months. The most queries concerned 1) finding a room; 2) rent prices, 3) rental contracts and 4) corona crisis.

### *Finding a room*

Just like last year students have big struggles in finding a place to live in the Netherlands. Very few rooms that are relatively close to the university and have an acceptable price are available. In addition, the search for a room is extra difficult for international students because they are not in the Netherlands yet. In many cases, this leads to troubles for international students because they cannot attend viewings. A second problem international students experience is that they are excluded in a lot of housing advertisements. Online Dutch advertisements often come with the text 'no-internationals'. International students are bothered by this. They also are bothered by the fact that they do not receive any reply after writing a message saying that they are interested in the room. Due to the struggles with finding a room, many internationals are concerned that they will not find a room in time for the start of the study year.

### *Rent prices*

Because there are not enough rooms, international students are forced to pay high prices. It is difficult for international students to find affordable rooms. Because international students have no other options, they often decide to take the room they can take. It is likely that the rent price they pay is way too high. In addition, they are confronted with high service costs. International students often do not know what to do and just accept the fact that their service costs are high. Another problem is that international students sometimes cannot read their rental contract because they are in Dutch. Students make rash decisions because they have no choice. This because there is so much pressure on the housing market. This also ensures that some students sign leases that contain inaccuracies, or do not receive a lease at all. This puts students in situations that can lead to conflicts with their landlords. These situations are worrying, because students feel unsafe and are intimidated.

### *Rental contracts*

The problems reported to the Housing Hotline show that the housing of international students poses many problems. Finding a room is very difficult, so students are often put in the position where they accept rooms and contracts they cannot read or look into on forehand. Just like other years, Housing Hotline received a lot of questions and complaints about rental contracts. International students end up in worrisome situations where the landlord has a powerful position because the student otherwise would be homeless. International students do not have enough knowledge about their rights concerning their rental contracts, which are mostly written in Dutch. It is very important that students know what rights they have, especially in a foreign country. This means that international students should be able to turn to an accessible *huurteam* (rental team) for help when they have troubles. Student cities should make sure these huurteams exist, are accessible for international students, do not have a fee-for-service model and do more than forwarding



queries to the Huurcommissie. Cities like Utrecht, Groningen and Maastricht have these *huurteams* and should treasure them. Cities like Rotterdam and Leiden should do more to create a *huurteam* or improve the quality of the *huurteam*.

### *Corona crisis*

The coronavirus situation has created a lot of problems for international students. The corona crisis has really impacted the life of international students in the country. A lot of lessons and exams suddenly got cancelled or were moved online. On the other hand, multiple countries decided to enter into a lockdown or send out an official guidance stating that residents should return home. As a consequence, international students got worried and many decided to go back to their country of origin. Most of the times, they did not take all their belongings with them. Another issue is that some students have lost their income and therefore also want to cancel their lease. This causes a lot of stress and problems, as landlords often do not accept the students leaving earlier than the end date of their rental contracts. It is important to help out these international students, as trying to make them pay their rent until the end of their contracts is more troublesome than being a bit more lenient.

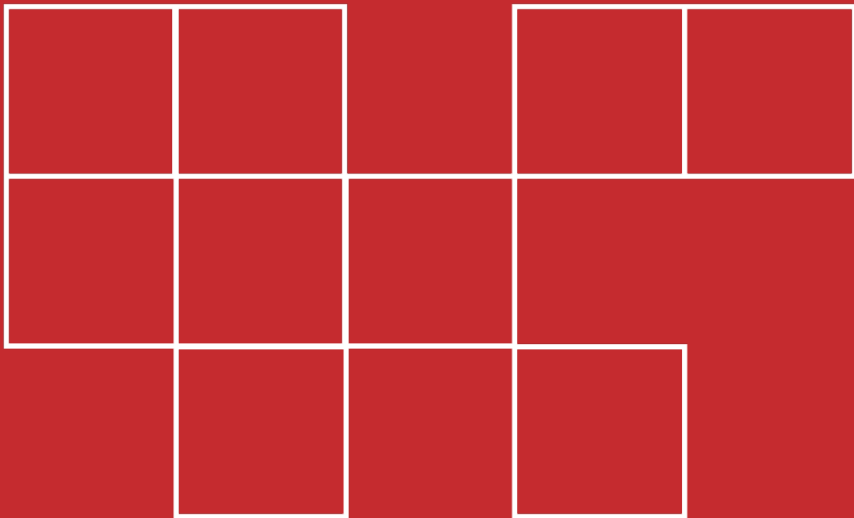
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