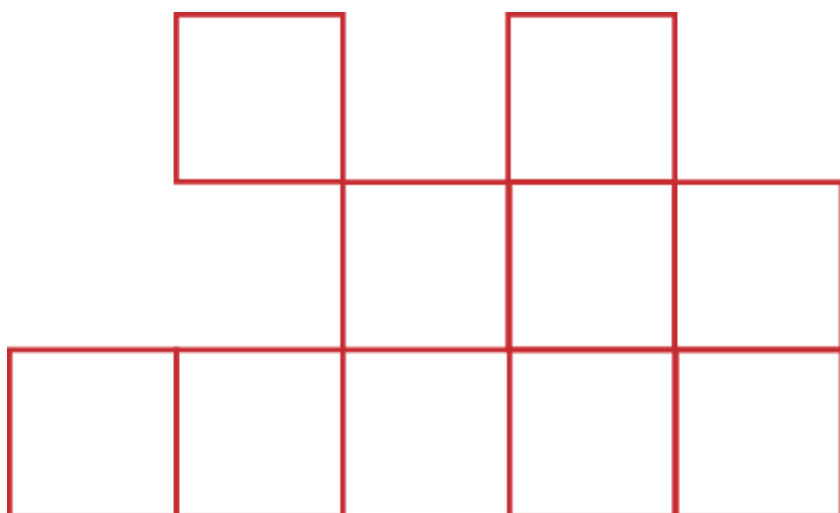




Dutch housing for international students

Housing Hotline 2020-2021: an inventory of the housing
situation of international students in The Netherlands



Dit is een uitgave van de Landelijke Studentenvakbond (LSVb). Voor vragen of extra informatie kan gemaild worden naar: lsvb@lsvb.nl

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Introduction

On the 9th of August, students occupied the Academiegebouw of the University of Groningen. They were demanding accommodation for students who are at risk of becoming homeless due to the extreme shortage of housing. The Dutch Student Union (Landelijke Studentenvakbond, LSVb) supports the actions of these students. As LSVb-president Ama Boahene said, international students in Groningen have had to sleep in bus shelters. The occupation of the Academiegebouw is a cry for help: a solution for the shortage of student accommodation has to come now.

The initiative in Groningen was started by Shelter our Students. The LSVb also pointed out that the shortage of student accommodation is not just an issue in Groningen. There is a huge shortage in every major student city in the country. There are also students sleeping in emergency shelters or on campings in Enschede, Utrecht, Maastricht and Amsterdam.

The LSVb has called upon the minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, municipalities and educational institutions to facilitate more emergency shelter immediately. Of course, there is a need for structural solutions as well.

More and more international students will come to the Netherlands in the coming years. In the time period between 2019-2020 and 2027-2028, a growth in the amount of international students of 36% is expected; this means that there will be 33.000 additional international students. The share of international students of 15.4% in the academic year 2019-2020 will increase to 20.4% in the academic year 2027-2028.

The *Landelijke Monitor Studentenhuisvesting 2020* shows that there is currently a shortage of 22.000 student accommodations. There are plans to build more, but in the same amount of time that it takes to complete those plans, the shortage will have increased. This means that a shortage of 36.000 will remain.

The Dutch Student Union conducts annual research into the issues international students face when 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. Moreover, the annual report attempts to give an overview of the problems international students face concerning the housing situation. This is the fourth edition of the Housing Hotline. In addition to the quantitative data collected via the Housing Hotline, this edition also highlights some personal stories of international students regarding their housing situation.

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 Forms document, international students can fill in their name, place of studying and their issue(s) regarding their housing situation. The Google Forms is sent to a dedicated email address: 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 variables logged in the Housing Hotline logbook can be found in table 1.

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

Table 1: Variables logged in the Housing Hotline logbook

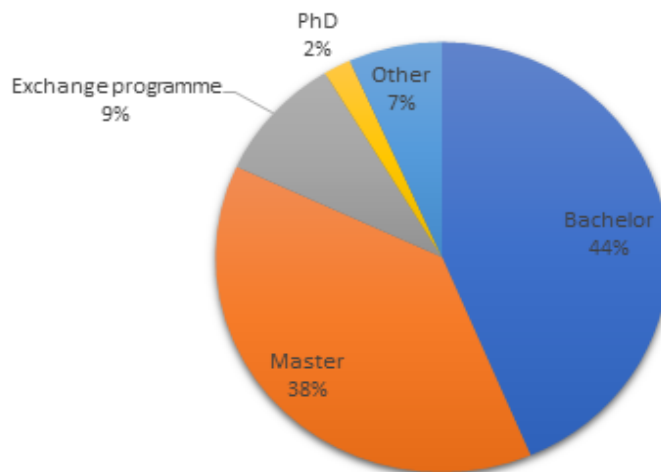
Sample description

The Housing Hotline usually includes data of one year. For this year, the LSVb decided to make an overview of the last year and a half. This means that the data in this report has been collected between June 1st, 2020 and August 25th, 2021. In total, the Housing Hotline received 658 reports coming from international students. Compared to other Housing Hotline reports, this amount is significantly higher.

Types of students

This report makes a distinction between four types of students: exchange students, bachelor students, master students and PhD students. Figure 1 shows that most of the students that made a report through the Housing Hotline are international students following their bachelor (44%) or master (38%) degree in the Netherlands. Compared to last year, there is not a higher amount of reports coming from exchange students (9%). This may be a result of the ongoing COVID-crisis. A small amount of reports came from PhD students (2%).

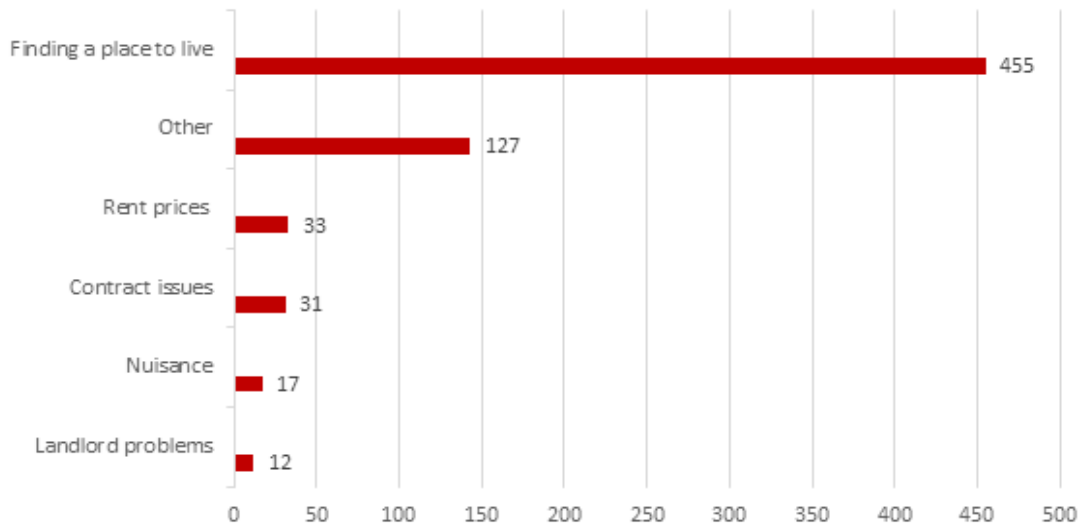
Figure 1: Types of students (N=658)



Categories of problems

According to the reports, international students in the Netherlands have a hard time finding (affordable) housing. The majority of the reports, 455, include troubles with finding a place to live. Troubles with finding proper housing include a lack of available housing for international students and internationals finding themselves not eligible for housing in the Netherlands. Besides the fact that internationals are struggling to find a place to live, they also complain about the rent prices (33 reports) and about their rental contract (31 reports). International students struggle with the high rent prices and often need help with rental contracts regarding the language of the contract. The categories of problems are visualized in figure 2.

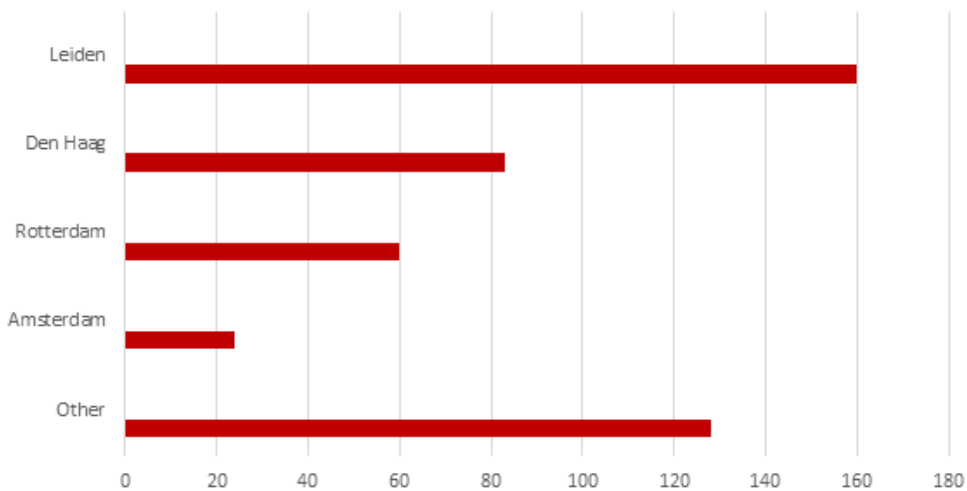
Figure 2: Categories of problems (N= 658)



Finding housing per city

To gain a better understanding of the problems international students face with finding a room, one can make a distinction in the reports to find out in which city international students find it hard to find a place to live. Figure 3 shows that the majority of the international students are struggling to find a place to live in Leiden (160 reports) and the Hague (83 reports). The reports also show that it is hard for international students to find a place to live in Rotterdam (60 reports) and Amsterdam (24 reports).

Figure 3: In which city are you looking for housing? (N=455)



Struggling to find a room: stories of international students

To give more insight into the problems experienced by international students in the Dutch housing market, this part of the report provides a qualitative overview of the data collected by the Housing Hotline. Out of all the complaints about international students struggling to find a place to live, several students were interviewed about their housing situation. In this report three of these interviews are reported, as most international students were afraid of possible repercussions for coming out. The qualitative data collected is supported by the quantitative data of the Housing Hotline.

In short, what are the problems of international students regarding their housing situation?

- The majority of the students say they find it difficult to find (proper) housing. Most of the reports come from international students looking for a place to live in Leiden, The Hague, Rotterdam and Amsterdam.
- International students often do not get responses if they reply to housing advertisements for example via Kamernet or Facebook. They fear that because they are international instead of Dutch, they do not get an invitation to view the house.
- International students also find it difficult to find affordable housing. Housing is often too expensive for international students. Besides that, a lot of international students cannot find housing via their university and have to look for private housing.
- International students sometimes feel that they are being used. For example, they regularly get asked to pay for housing before they have even seen the place. They also find it hard to read the contract, especially if it is written in Dutch.

The LSVb spoke with three different international students: Carla, Anastasia and Dani & Martino. They faced different kind of difficulties within the Dutch housing market. The interviews illustrate the problems international students are facing regarding their housing situation in the Netherlands.

International Students share their stories

Story 1: Anastasia - Groningen

“My other experiences with studying in the Netherlands are great! But I am not friends with any Dutch students. I get the feeling that they often do not really want to mix with the internationals.”

“I searched for a flat on Facebook for a long time. I wanted to live together with a friend, so we were searching for two bedrooms. But there are only a few of them on Facebook.

Before that, I was looking for student housing and for one housing via Kamernet. That turned out to be very bad. Prices were very high. Many advertisements said weird things like ‘not for internationals’, or not for Eastern Europeans specifically.

I have a lot of other friends who are still looking for a space to live. At first, four friends wanted to live together in one flat they found online. This was possible because it had four bedrooms. So they signed the contract and one day beforehand, the landlord said it was illegal. Only two people could live in the flat, so they kicked them out. As for now, these four friends do not have a place to live right now. They also did not get their deposits back.

All my friends were struggling and the universities did not do anything. A friend of mine from Ukraine emailed Hanze University often to get some help, but they could not help. She was told to check out the university website. If they would have had some sort of a university dorm, it would be better. But they do not have that. Dutch universities are the most useless institution if you are in such a situation where you are desperately looking for a place to live. That girl was actually trying to find help via her university, other friends did not even try, thinking: they are not going to help us anyway.

I don't really know exactly how many places there are for students in the Netherlands. But it's clear that there is a big shortage. There is a space problem that should be solved. Do not try to take so many students if you are not able to offer them places to live.

I was also very shocked to hear that universities do not provide any spaces. I would say that that should be their role as well. Or at least part of it.

The situation right now really upsets me. All students that look for housing should at least be able to get something.”



Story 2: Dani & Martino – The Hague

“Warm water was completely unreliable, the radiators went off for a complete week, and it was literally raining in one of the rooms which impeded us to use this room.”

“Our landlord always kept communication on the phone to make sure that there was no evidence of what he was saying. After we moved out we realised that all the promises for reparation of damages or financial compensation were just a way to please us until we would move out.

Warm water was completely unreliable, the radiators went off for a complete week, and it was literally raining in one of the rooms which impeded us to use this room. We called and called, send emails and whatsapp messages. The only thing we would get is petty repairs that didn't fix the issue. The builder confided in us that the landlord didn't want to repair it because it would cost too much money.

One time we called extremely angered because one of my housemates couldn't sleep in his bed due to the leaking of the ceiling and he said that we could not expect him to fix things fast because he had more than 80 properties which made it hard for him to act in time. He also said that he had only been young and lived in bad accommodation in his life so that we should just take it as is.

Finally, when threatened with a rent reduction, he intimidated us and told that he would call his lawyers and evict us. Since we never got the contract back from him (he didn't seem to have signed it himself), we were scared that he could actually do it. Searching for legal help was impossible with everything being complicated Dutch legal terms so we decided to just take it for the time being and then throw ourselves to the uncertainty of the housing market again.

All in all, our experience in the house was a complete nightmare.”



Story 3: Carla - Groningen

“I totally understand that Dutch people want international students to try to speak Dutch. But that is very difficult because I barely have time to learn the language.”

“In Facebook groups, I saw a lot of advertisements that said ‘no internationals’. And when I responded to rooms that did not say that, I never got any responses back.

I totally understand that Dutch people want international students to try to speak Dutch. But that is very difficult because I barely have time to learn the language. At the same time, universities accept English students, so they should also expect and accept that the international students don’t speak Dutch.

When searching for a room, I did not get any help from my university. I also was very surprised that they did not offer any spaces themselves. I would say that it should be part of their role as well: having an international desk or academic counseling. Eventually I did find housing in a student accommodation luckily.”



Story 4: The others

There were more international students who were willing to share their stories, but were afraid of possible repercussions from their landlords.

Conclusions

This report aims to gain insights into the problems international students face regarding their housing situation. This rapport gives an overview of the reports from June 2020 until the end of August 2021. During this time, the Housing Hotline received a total of 658 reports from international students. Just like other years, most reports concerned finding a place to live, rent prices and contract issues. In this research, international students told their stories about finding a place to live in the Netherlands. There are a several conclusions that can be drawn from this content.

Overall the main conclusion is that housing for international students is still a major problem that keeps on growing over the years. Compared to the previous Housing Hotline report, this year there was an increase of 37% of cases reported. This might be the result of international students finding the Housing Hotline forms easier and that our outreach increased, but when we take in the numbers and conclusions from the *Landelijke Studenten Monitor* we can conclude with certainty that a growing shortage of housing is the main reason for the increase.

Finding a room

As stated earlier, the main issue international students face is finding a room. The cities students mainly struggle to find housing are, like previous year, Leiden, The Hague and Rotterdam. One of the central problems is that international students often don't receive a reply if they respond to housing advertisements, for example via Kamernet or Facebook.

International students also find it difficult to find affordable housing. Housing is often too expensive for international students. Besides that, a lot of international students cannot find housing via their university and have to look for private housing, which again makes it even harder to find affordable housing.

Discrimination

Many international students experience some level of discrimination when looking for housing. They are afraid that they generally are denied by landlords or other students when responding to an advertisement because they are internationals. This varies from subtle ignoring of reactions to explicit discrimination (e.g., an international student is denied because they are Eastern European).

Scam

International students are also more prone to scams than national students. They don't have the means to check the Dutch housing law and learn about their rights as they don't speak the language. International students are also more desperate for a place to live compared to Dutch students, and thus are more willing to pay illegal fees, such as brokerage fees. Especially with the COVID-pandemic, international students generally were only offered online sightseeing, while they do have to right for sightseeing in real life by Dutch law.

Landlords also often ask for high deposits or give international students a hard time receiving back their deposits for various 'maintenance costs' which are – according to them – caused by international students, such as cleaning or painters costs.

Literature

Kences (2020). Landelijke Monitor Studentenhuisvesting 2020. Opgehaald via <https://www.kences.nl/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/20201105-Kences-Landelijke-monitor-studentenhuisvesting-2020.pdf> op 20 september 2021.



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