

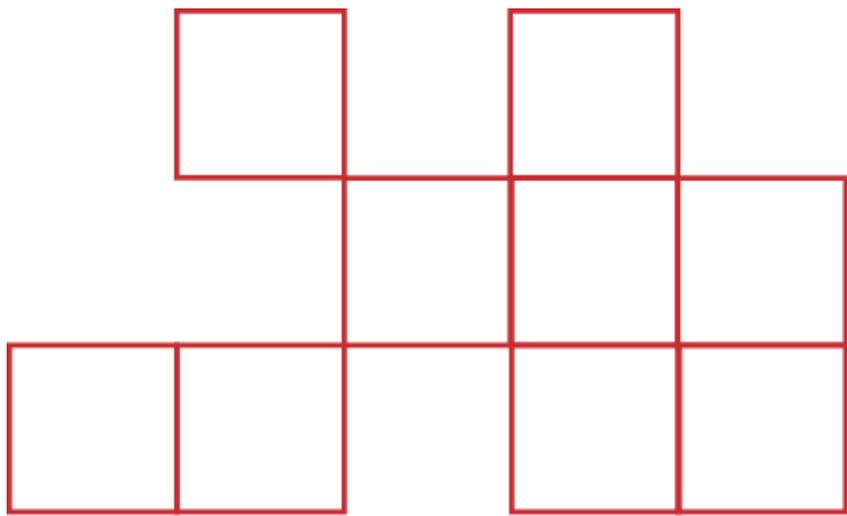
# Housing Hotline Report 2022

Housing Hotline 2022

An inventory of the housing situation of international students in The Netherlands



landelijke studentenvakbond



This report is a production of the Dutch National Student Union (LSVb). For questions or information kindly mail [lsvb@lsvb.nl](mailto:lsvb@lsvb.nl)

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## Summary

In this housing hotline report the state of housing in the Netherlands for international students is examined, in particular bringing the lived experience of international students into focus. The Housing Hotline received 525 viable reports over the course of the 2021-2022 academic year in regards to finding housing, maintenance or other costs related to renting in the Netherlands. This report examines these responses to elicit which of these issues impacted international students in the Netherlands the most.

The most important outcomes:

**Housing remains experienced differently by international students when compared to Dutch students' experiences. This experience is often one of exclusion and increased costs.**

Whilst this may be unsurprising due to the wide variety of cultures that provides the Netherlands with students, it remains problematic in that the difference in housing costs are significant. Furthermore, international students face discrimination in the acquisition of housing as well as their treatment by landlords in the Netherlands. The LSVb suggests that the various parties involved remain critical of their own services so as to improve the lived experience of International students to bring it in line with their Dutch counterparts.

## 1.0 Introduction

The housing market in the Netherlands is a hot one - finding a place to live remains difficult in many cities and this crisis shows little sign of letting up despite measures taken at local and national levels to help alleviate the difficulty many are facing when it comes to finding affordable and adequate housing. This report will examine how that situation has developed since the previous Housing Hotline (2021) report and how the situation is experienced by students in the Netherlands, in particular this report will attempt to elicit the issues that face international students. Each year the Dutch National Student Union (hereafter LSVb) conducts research in this area to better understand and to inform the relevant parties about students' lived experience when it comes to housing in the Netherlands; The Housing Hotline is an online help-desk intended to assist (international) students in their search for accommodation through provision of information as well as to inform them of their rights and responsibilities when it comes to (student) housing. The following is the fifth edition of this report. The housing hotline can be accessed here: <https://dutchstudentunion.nl/housinghotline/>.

This report will draw broadly on data collected by the LSVb via the Housing Hotline to inform us where students are feeling the pinch most acutely. This includes not only geographical data, i.e. which cities students most commonly face problems in, but which kinds of problems appear to be the most common. This data is limiting as to some extent it tells us where the Housing Hotline is most widely used, accessible or advertised, rather than the whole extent of all the problems faced by students in the Netherlands, be those Dutch or International students, however the LSVb intends for this information to be used as a representative cross section of issues broadly faced by students when it comes to housing in the Netherlands over the past year.

This report falls under the umbrella of wider student housing reports, such as the yearly KENCES student housing monitor report 2022 (Landelijke Monitor Studentenhuisvesting 2022, hereafter LMS) on which this report will draw to inform and provide context to the data available to the LSVb through the Housing Hotline. As of the LMS 2022 report there are 768,300 HBO and WO students in the Netherlands, of which around 15 percent of those are international students. This report will provide analysis on 526 responses from international students who reached out to the Housing Hotline in search of advice.

## 2.0 Student Housing Demographics

This report will briefly dive into the demographics of the student population in the Netherlands, with a view on eliciting how housing is experienced differently between Dutch and International student populations on top of the work done in the LMS. The absolute majority of students in the Netherlands are between 18 and 28 years old.<sup>1</sup> This is important to note when it comes to rental subsidy availability which this report will return to. Around 15 percent of the total student population in the Netherlands is international, around 125,000 in absolute figures, this accounts for students aiming to achieve both HBO and WO diplomas. The LSVb does not see a reason to distinguish between the different types of diploma when it comes to International students as the housing need remains the same. It is important to note that according to the LMS report 2022, cities with a greater proportion of international students also appear to be the cities where the housing deficiency in the Netherlands is the greatest. There was an estimated shortage of 26,800 dwellings for students in the Netherlands in 2021/2022, with this shortage being particularly acute in cities where the proportion of international students was high in comparison to cities with fewer international students.

In recent years there has been a shift toward single-unit living within younger populations. While it is difficult to pinpoint exactly why this has occurred, this report assumes that this has occurred at least in part due to the limits enforced by provincial governments to ensure that houses remain accessible primarily for starters and young families rather than allowing them to be transitioned into student

<sup>1</sup> (van Huijsdijnen 2022)

rooms.<sup>2</sup> This is an interesting development as single-unit dwellings are more accessible when it comes to rental subsidies, although questions must be raised due to the increased incidence of loneliness and feelings of social exclusion that appear to be more common in this type of dwelling among students.<sup>3</sup> This may be particularly noticeable to international students who do not have a familial support base in the Netherlands and are entirely reliant on the support network(s) that are available to them locally via local government or the Universities themselves.

The following figures are drawn from the LMS 2022 as regards housing costs for Dutch students in comparison with international students. In short, international students spend more and spend a higher proportion of their budget on accommodation in comparison to Dutch students. This means to say that no matter the type of accommodation, international students spend more than their Dutch counterparts:

*Table 1: Comparison between Dutch and International housing costs*

	Dutch (€ per m2)	Dutch (total)	Dutch % budget spend	International (€ per m2)	International (total, €)	International % budget spend
Living costs shared	€28	€420	45%	€34	€490	65%
Living costs 1 room	€23	€440	45%	€31	€525	72%
Living costs 2+ rooms	€14	€435	335%	€15	€450	45%

This follows the more general trend of younger people having to spend more of their income on living expenses.<sup>4</sup> This is particularly problematic for those under 23 as these students were unable to apply for rental subsidy during the period examined. International students' access to rental subsidy is dependent on other factors than that of a Dutch student. This depends on whether the International student has EEU or non-EEU citizenship; EEU citizens should in principle not be treated any differently than Dutch students, however in practice this is not the case as many adverts indicate that international students are not welcome.

According to LMS data it appears that students living away from home will regularly spend more than half of their monthly living budget on housing costs - before other utilities such as water and gas, as well as food, books and other necessities are factored in (Table 1). This means that the average student in the Netherlands experiences rent overburden over the course of their studies even before other living costs are accounted for. Whilst this may differ when examined on a case by case basis we can assume that many students living away from home in the Netherlands will experience rental cost living overburden. Here this report is unable to distinguish between study mobile students and full-time bachelor or master students due to data limitations. However, the clear difference in cost calls into question the level of accessibility of higher education institutions in the Netherlands if it is not financially feasible to undertake courses due to prospective high living costs. That means to say – if the Netherlands sees a diverse and inclusive atmosphere at its higher education institutions as positive then changes need to be made to ensure this continues. In these difficult times for international students, what insights does the housing hotline elicit?

<sup>2</sup> (van Huijsdijnen 2022)

<sup>3</sup> (van Huijsdijnen 2022)

<sup>4</sup> (O'Connor 2022)

## 2.1 Impacts of rental and energy subsidies for students

Within the scope of this report the LSVb finds it important to discuss how access to subsidies will impact housing accessibility and affordability for students. At the time of writing students' access to energy subsidies remains limited – and the housing hotline enlightens us that international students' knowledge of exactly which price increases are legal on the side of landlords and rental associations remains hazy (see figure 2). Rising energy costs are clearly a pain point for international students and an area where more clarity and more support would not go amiss.

Rental subsidies remain accessible for EEU students in the same manner as they are available for Dutch students. The age barrier for accessing rental subsidies will be lowered from 23 to 21 in 2024. This means that in principle younger students have a better position in an extremely competitive housing market. However, the maximum rent for under 23s remains around €450 per month, which means that affordability remains problematic - many Dutch students are able to request this subsidy if they live in a single-unit dwelling but as internationals pay more for their accommodation in general, they may be priced out of subsidies. This is due to the fact that rental subsidy is generally only available for students who live in studios or apartments with their own utilities are able to access rental subsidy funds, therefore in practical terms the LSVb is unsure of the impact this will have for the vast majority of international students .

## 3.0 Methodology

### 3.1 Housing Hotline form

This report is based upon data collected via the Housing Hotline form, available on the [LSVb website](#). The form is primarily designed as an information point to help assist International Students about their rights and responsibilities when it comes to housing. Simultaneously the LSVb can use this information to create an inventory about the self-reported issues that (international) students face. The questions asked in the form can be found in *Table 1*. 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](mailto:housinghotline@lsvb.nl). The LSVb policy officers responsible for housing then formulate an answer to assist the students in either the form of information or steps to resolve the students' issue. If the answer is not satisfactory to the international students, they are free to send a follow-up mail. In cases where immediate action may be required, LSVb policy officers can contact the students directly via their mobile phone number. 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 following results section utilises the data set for the period between September 2021 and September 2022. This report assumes that respondents are international students as the responses did not provide indication otherwise, these international students may or may not already reside in the Netherlands.

*Table 1: Questions in the online housing hotline form*

What is your email?
What kind of student are you?
In which city do you currently live?
In which city are you looking for housing?
What is your current housing situation?
From whom do you rent this house?
In what category would you place your problem/issue?
Can you specify the problem you are experiencing?
How did you get to know about this hotline?
Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

## 3.2 Data Cleaning and Organisation

### 3.2.1 Categorisation of students by diploma type and problem type

Due to the large amount of heterogeneous data collected for this study it was necessary to first organise the data to ensure that similar situations were categorised correctly. This occurred across. For example, when the form was filled in by a parent (of a bachelor student) this query was categorised as a bachelor student looking for accommodation and thus the data was modified to reflect this prior to analysis. In a similar manner, responses that were not reflective of the target group were removed, such as test responses, responses from individuals in full-time work and responses that were clearly not from (prospective) students or current students on exchange. Data collected from individuals that are not students has been removed from the following discussion. Furthermore, the categories used by the students that responded to the survey were inconsistent. To remedy this the responses have been categorised in a consistent manner so as to be able to further understand the issues. More broadly a response indicates that an international student is unable to identify relevant sources of information elsewhere and thus has turned to the LSVb for further advice and support in lieu of other resources.

### 3.2.2 Geography: Where are students struggling to find housing?

Core to the housing hotline report is *where* students are struggling to find accommodation. For the sake of simplicity we have taken the first choice city of each student in question. Thus, if a student is looking for housing in Leiden as their preferred location and secondarily in the Hague, for the sake of this report the LSVb understands the student to be looking for housing primarily in Leiden. All results that included "the Netherlands" as a second variable were simplified to only include the ideal town of residence. While we understand that some towns are close enough to be acceptable (i.e. the commute is short enough so that ability to study is not impacted), using the primary wishes of the student gives a clearer idea of where issues appear to be.

### 3.2.3 Answers unrelated to finding accommodation in a particular city

In cases where it is unclear where the respondent is looking for housing we have classified these cases as "unknown". In some cases this report is able to use their current city of residence as indicative of where the issue has occurred. As noted in *figure 4*, 60 responses to the housing hotline survey were *not applicable* and 20 were *unknown*; that means to say the inquiry was unrelated to the acquisition of a rental dwelling but rather related to one of the other categories of problems as seen in *figure 2*. In cases where respondents were not looking for new housing this has been classified as *not applicable*. A response classed as *not applicable* relates to a request about information, while if it has been classed as *unknown* then it may be related to the search of housing although the housing hotline survey was not provided with the geographical information within the response.

### 3.2.4 Remaining questions

Unfortunately the data collected by many of the questions was heterogeneous to the point where we are unable to draw any conclusions from the data due to the small . For example, in principle the LSVb would like to know which landlord is responsible for each of the responses to the form as it allows for further examination as to which landlords appear to be the most problematic for students and which issues in particular appear most commonly as regards each different kind of landlord. However, the data does not allow for this. In particular this is an area that can be improved upon in further editions of this report.

## 4.0 Results & Discussion

As seen in *figure 1*, the majority of students that contacted the housing hotline is relatively reflective of the distribution of types of students in the Netherlands as follows the LMS 2022. That means to say the majority of responses came from full-time students at a bachelor or a master level, while the remainder of responses came from students doing short-term programmes or internships; so called study mobile students.

The most important split here is between long term (Bachelor, master, PhD) and exchange students as they have different housing wishes. Exchange students will be here for a much shorter period of time than any of the other types of student and often ideally wish for furnished rooms - although this is not always entirely necessary it is convenient for these students. It is also necessary to address where it is possible for students to live. For native students it is possible (although maybe not ideal) to live at home with parents as well as finding housing in or nearby the city where they study. However, International students have no other choice than to live away from home. This is important to note when this report returns to discussion around discrimination as the options available for international students are far more limited than for native Dutch students; that means to say they have little flexibility and fixed timeframes as to when they need accommodation.

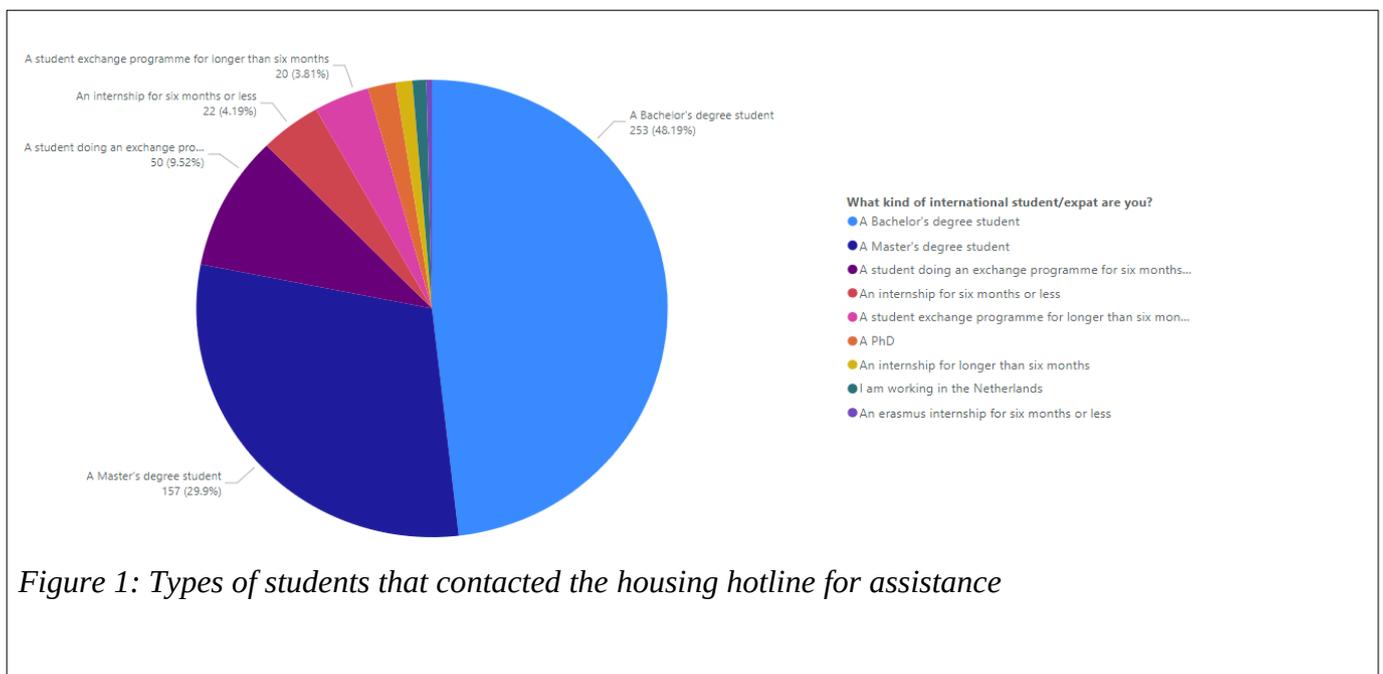
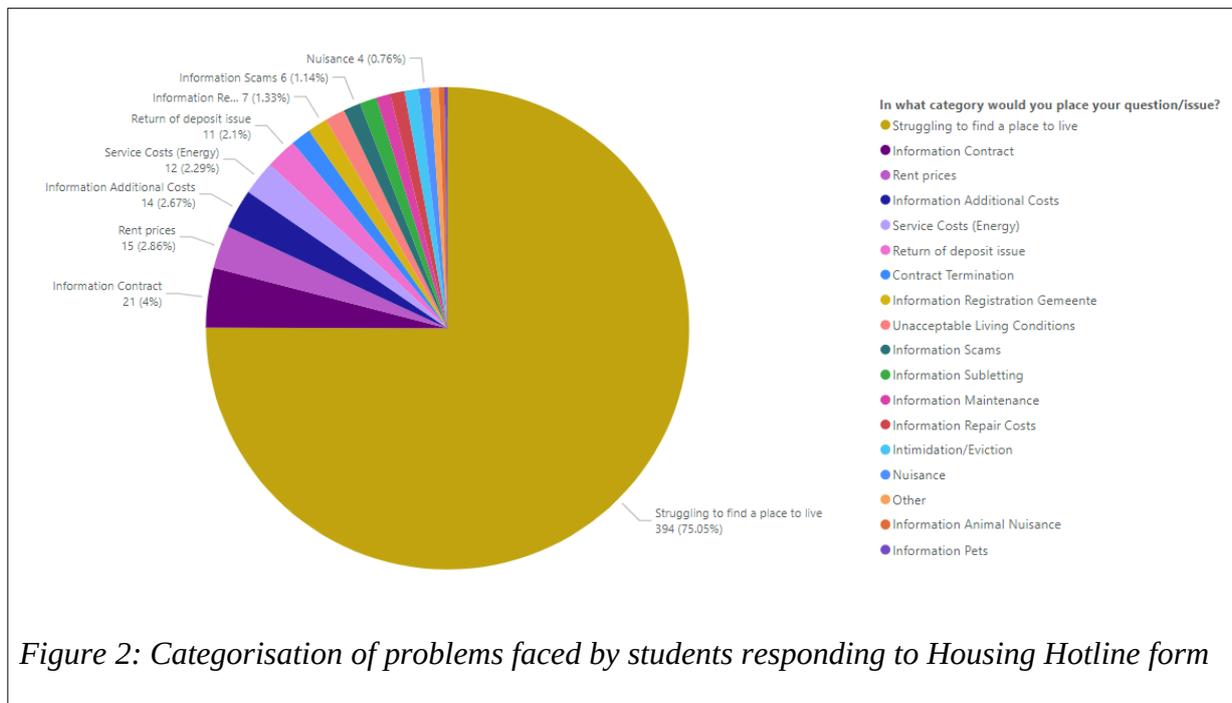


Figure 1: Types of students that contacted the housing hotline for assistance

### 4.1 Categories of problem

So, which problems appear to have been the most common over the course of the last year? Following previous years' reports we see that by and large many students are struggling to find housing both when they already live in the Netherlands as well as when they come from abroad. Struggling to find housing accounted for 71% of the total reports received through the Housing Hotline form (Figure 2). A further set of the responses indicated that they were struggling with rental costs. This is unsurprising when we take into account the LMS 2022 report highlights that International students pay more across the board for their accommodation. The next largest category of question was a request for information or clarification on various matters related to housing. These include information requests about contracts, additional costs related to renting and questions about rising energy prices which has impacted many students' service costs.

These issues can broadly be attributed to a lack of understanding of who exactly was responsible for issues with accommodation; this report recommends that more needs to be done to clarify to international students exactly which costs are expected of them when they move to the Netherlands. These costs include not only the base rent but a breakdown of service costs as well as water taxes and costs related to the collection of general waste. Often these costs are advertised as included within the service charge, though as this is far from uniform as housing is provided by a wide array of actors and the follow-on from this is that there appears to be much confusion about which payments need to be made and when; indeed the legitimacy of the landlord is often called into question as many students are afraid of the potential of scams.



#### 4.1.1 Energy and service costs

The increased incidence of questions regarding service costs in comparison to previous years' reports is almost certainly directly related to the increase in energy and gas prices. Many students have been asked by their landlords to pay an increased monthly service charge to reflect the increased cost of energy in the Netherlands due to outside influence. This has resulted in much panic and confusion for many international students who already pay over the odds for their accommodation - stretching a tight budget even further. This is not a phenomena limited to only students, however the vast majority of students already face rent overburden due to housing costs; thus it is concerning that at this moment in time few, if any, students are able to access energy subsidies provided by the Dutch government.<sup>5</sup> Many international students in particular were unsure of the legality of increasing service costs during the course of a contract where the service fee sum had already been agreed between student and landlord - though in principle the energy costs are the financial responsibility of the tenant, the understanding of this issue, particularly for internationals remains limited. To remedy this, this report suggests that further effort is made to inform international students about how the Dutch energy system works; information in English appears relatively limited and would certainly benefit International Students' understanding of financial responsibilities.

<sup>5</sup>This in particular is subject to change. At the time of publishing only some local governments in the Netherlands have made energy subsidies available to students.

### 4.1.2 Issues with finding suitable housing

Broadly the widest category of problem in 2021-2022 was the acquisition of a dwelling for the study term. Like 2021, Leiden tops the Housing Hotline response list, though the reports pertaining to a search for accommodation appear to be high in all cities of the Randstad.



*Figure 3: Map of response to "In Which City are you Looking for Housing"*

Other responses are spread across the whole of the Netherlands. In short: where there is a University or school there are students looking for housing; this is particularly acute in the Randstad where the housing market is the hottest. The vast majority of these responses informed the hotline as to where exactly they were looking for housing, in fact just over a quarter of all responses (394) reported that they were struggling to find accommodation in the Netherlands. Where it was not applicable or unknown the response was identified as such. Here we advise caution in interpreting the results in this report as representative; as mentioned previously, these figures could be representative of where the housing hotline is most widely advertised to students, rather than being representative of where the most problems occur. However, the LSVb believes that these reports reflect a more widespread issue in the Netherlands as regards housing.

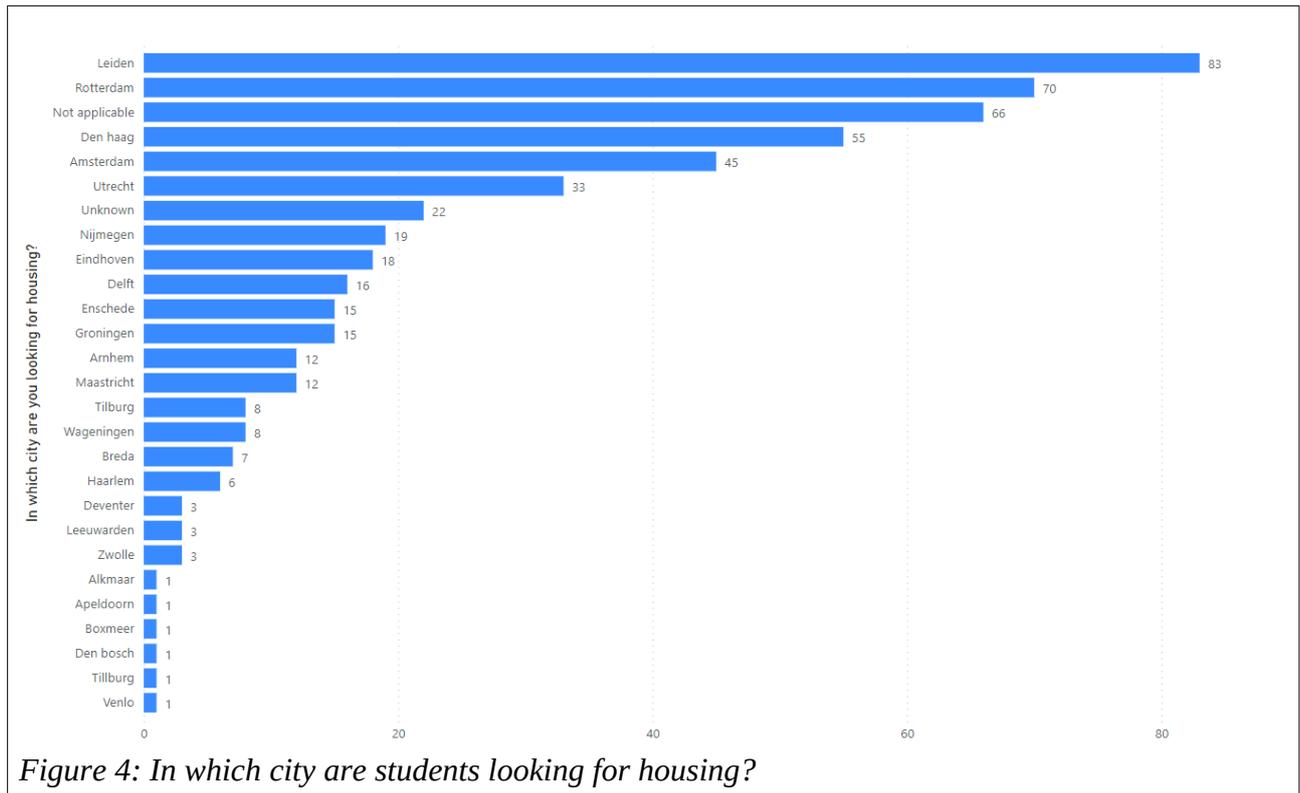


Figure 4: In which city are students looking for housing?

### 4.1.3 Responses not related to acquisition of a dwelling

As not all of the responses were related to finding accommodation in a particular city it is pertinent to examine these responses for insights, as seen in figure 2. Many of these responses were information inquiries; in other words students seeking to better understand the responsibilities of the landlord and tenant in the Netherlands. The most concerning issue appears to be related to the return of a deposit. Some 11 responses detailed how their landlords provided little to no information as regards the return of the deposit after the rental period had come to an end. This is particularly frustrating when the students themselves have no recourse to recover their deposit – many leave the Netherlands after the completion of their study and requests for more information as regards the deposits are not taken up

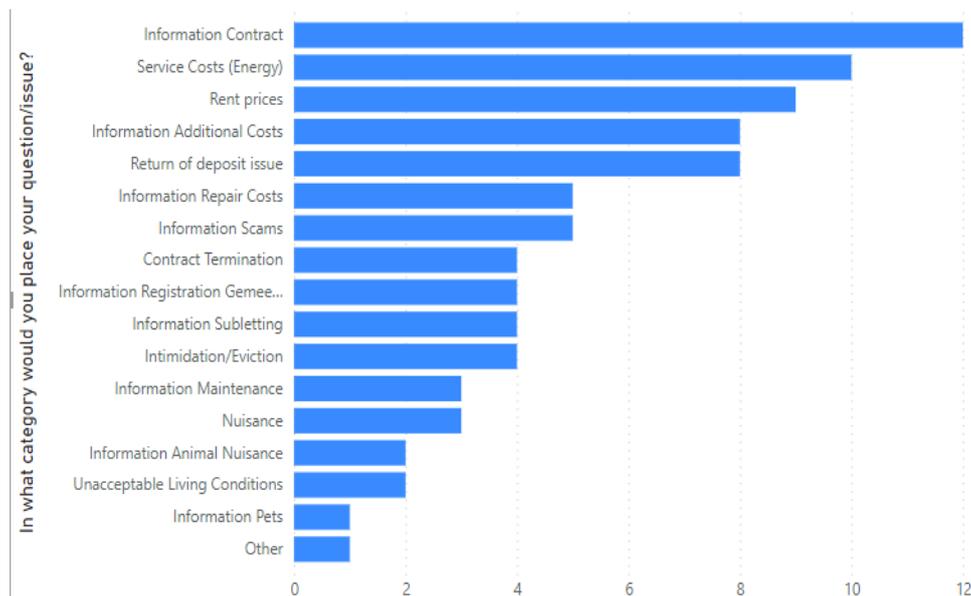


Figure 5: Breakdown of issues not directly related to acquisition of a dwelling

by the landlord. These deposits are usually one or two months rent - a not insignificant sum for international students who already pay over the odds for their accommodation in the Netherlands. This suggests that this issue requires more attention although the number of reports related to these issues was limited, suggesting that in general the information available is sufficient.

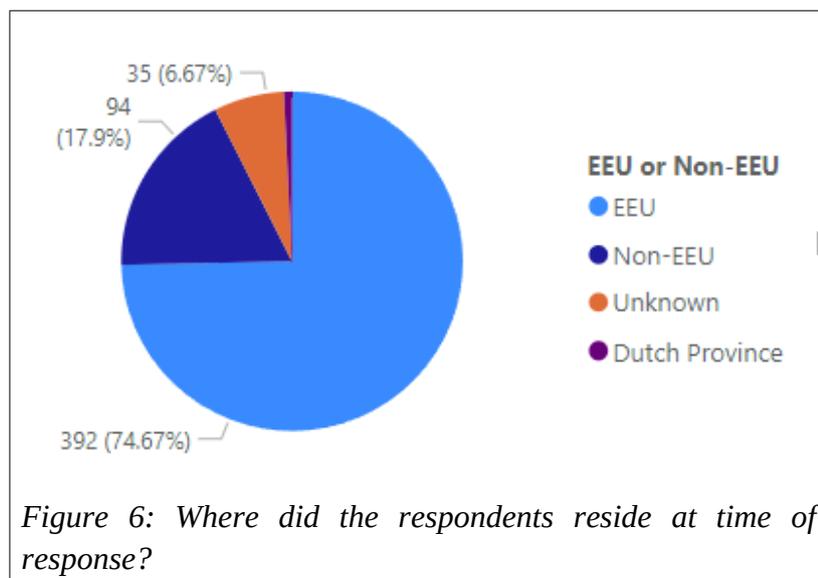
Other responses here include queries about maintenance of properties in question; who is responsible for repairs and maintenance, what kind of timeframe should tenants expect and what to do in such cases. The LSVb would like to stress that good landlordship is necessary in these matters - if this does not occur then it is difficult to imagine that these kinds of reports will reduce in volume. Fit for use, affordable and accessible accommodation is critical for all and unsuitable living conditions negatively impacts students' lived experiences significantly. While tenants' complaints may stop if they move out of these properties this only means the problems will remain for the next tenant - which is no solution at all. This report suggests that the LSVb can do more to address these frequently asked questions with help of the Housing Hotline.

#### 4.1.4 Scams

The prevalence of scams appears to be limited, however knowledge in various areas remains limited. These include costs related to: entrance of contract, exit of contract, renewal of contract, legal initial deposit amounts, and maintenance and repairs. This confusion leads to perceptions of illegitimacy as to whether or not payments requested by landlords or other parties are legal. Interestingly, of 6 responses that we are able to determine that are actually related to scams (rather than contract issues) 5 of the responses were unwilling to share further information about their situation. This indicates that students are afraid of repercussions when it comes to this topic, although here this report is unable to draw further conclusions.

## 4.2 The International Problem

Thanks to the geographical data provided by various respondents, we are able to see where the reports came from. The majority of the reports were from international students within the European Union, with 392 responses, and 94 responses outside of the EU as seen in *figure 5*. The large number of questions from students currently living outside of the Netherlands likely reflects how difficult it is to find housing in the Netherlands (see *figure 7*). This is of course another barrier that internationals must face when moving for their studies.

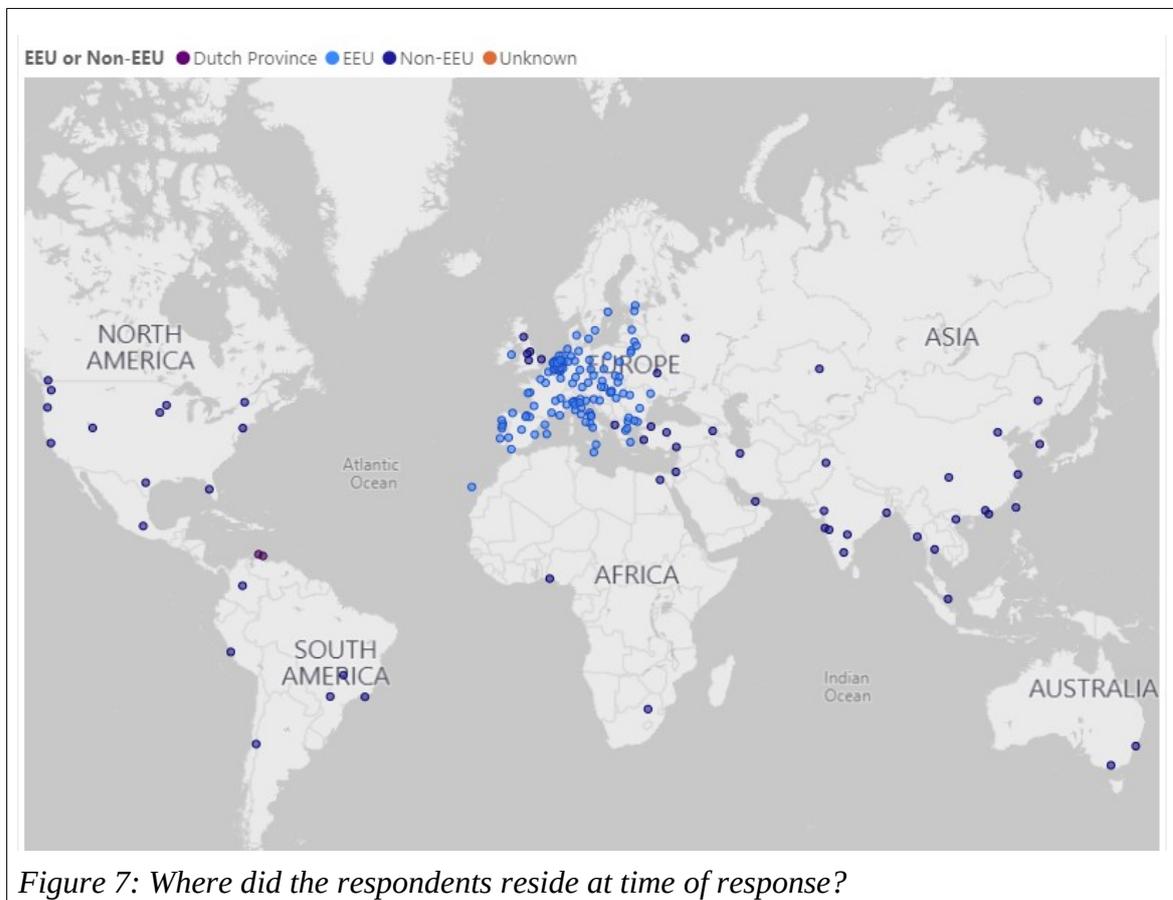


#### 4.4.1 Discrimination against international students continues

This report once again brings to light the discrimination faced by International Students in the Netherlands. Not only does it appear to be particularly difficult for international students to find housing

in the first place, highlighted by the high proportion of the reports to the Housing Hotline, once they do find housing they spend more than Dutch students on all kinds of housing whilst their budgets are commonly far lower than that of Dutch students. The LMS 2022 brings to light that international students pay more per square metre for both single-unit apartments as well as dwellings with shared utilities. While the LSVb is unable to identify precisely why this occurs, the difference is likely intensified by the “no international” mindset of many landlords. This kind of advertisement is currently *only* allowed where the landlord lives in the same property, although to what extent this occurs is unclear. Further research is necessary to say to what extent this occurs and why; though this report can conclude that without further legislation or cultural change this practice is likely to continue.

Therefore, even where discrimination is not directly perceived (i.e. students are able to find housing despite 'no internationals' mindset being very common) discrimination appears to exist structurally, although the reason for these structural differences is unclear. The LMS attributes this to international students requiring more furnished rooms - though this report contests this view; a Bachelor or Master student studying for a fixed period of time has the same housing need irregardless of their nationality and therefore in principle there should not be significant difference between what international students and Dutch students pay. The extent to which this is perceived by International Students is unknown; though this is likely to be reinforced by a lack of understanding of the related maintenance, service and water-tax costs as well as the lack of knowledge surrounding the responsibilities of the landlord and responsibilities of the tenant. This report assumes that the actual living costs themselves are no doubt felt in the wallets of internationals. In short International Students are vulnerable and as such they experience the housing market significantly differently to Dutch students in a structural manner. *Figure 7* highlights just how many different people from many different cultures percieve studying in the Netherlands to be of interest – and therefore Universities, local councils and the Dutch cabinet must ensure that the living situation for these people is accessible and affordable if they are to come and study at a Dutch higher education institution.



## 5.0 Conclusion and critical remarks

This report aims to gain insight into the problems facing students with their housing and in finding suitable housing across the Netherlands, in particular this report seeks to examine the lived experience of international students enrolled for HBO and WO diplomas in the Netherlands. The report gives an overview of the responses to the LSVb Housing Hotline, where students are provided an outlet to voice their concerns and problems with their housing situation. Responses for this edition of the report were collected between September 2021 and the end of September 2022. The vast majority of responses were in relation to the very real difficulty of securing rental housing in the Netherlands, while the rest of the responses eluded to issues with understanding contracts (in Dutch), problems with service costs rising due to the increasing gas prices across Europe - which appears to be a relatively new phenomena, issues with unacceptable housing conditions due to poor maintenance, mould - this seems to occur in both privately owned dwellings as well as dwellings owned by rental corporations; and finally it appears that many students continue to struggle with a lack of sufficient contact from landlords as regards reimbursement of costs related to maintenance and in the case of International students in particular the reimbursement of deposits for apartments. This is compounded by many landlords asking for two months rent instead of one in the case of international students, with the cost of paying the deposit being prohibitive to prospective residents to begin with and the cause of much frustration when the deposit is eventually not returned to the students residing in these dwellings.

It appears that the housing concerns in the Netherlands are fairly consistent with the conclusions of previous years' reports; namely finding a room remains difficult in most cities across the Netherlands and is particularly acute in cities where the international student population is larger, reinforcing the conclusions of the National Student Housing Report 2022. The LSVb suggests that the various parties involved remain critical of their own services so as to improve the lived experience of International students to bring it in line with their Dutch counterparts. This includes the Gemeentes who must continue to ensure that registration (and therefore a BSN number and a bank account) is accessible to internationals. This includes providing sufficient information as regards how to register as well as why registration may not be possible. This also includes to the universities, who the LSVb encourages to continue to provide sufficient information to international students; this report suggests that in particular the functioning and legal process behind deposits is examined and explained. The same is also necessary for service costs and how energy costs may change. With these steps in place the LSVb hopes that the housing situation and lived experience thereof for internationals can continue to improve.

## 6.0 Literature

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## 7.0 Definition of Terms

### **Housing cost overburden rate**

The percentage of population living in households where the total housing costs represent more than 40% of disposable income<sup>6</sup>.

### **Study mobile students**

Students undertaking education in the Netherlands for a short period of time – usually between a few months and a year – before returning to complete their education elsewhere. These exchange students have the same housing need as other students whilst in the Netherlands though they are present for a far shorter period of time.

<sup>6</sup> (Glossary: housing cost overburden rate, n.d.)