



The search for housing for international students continues to be a disaster.

'I have watched internationals be homeless for up to 4 months, some even being forced to return home due to no accommodation being available.'

The housing problem in Utrecht has been a bit of a disaster for the last few years. Each year, there are thousands of students who want and need accommodation, and a large part can not obtain it. In 2021, the shortage of student residencies has been estimated to be more than 8000, which is an increase from the calendar year of 2019-2020. Adding to this shortage; around 3000 international students come to Utrecht each year for their studies, in desperate need of accommodation. They make up a large part of the students unable to find a room, since the search is made even more difficult for internationals versus Dutch students. The large shortage of rooms for international students has left these students feeling desperate and hopeless about their housing options in Utrecht and this problem should definitely be improved in the future.

The last ISHA report from the calendar year of 2020-2021 was written based on surveys which were distributed amongst international students from December 2020 to early June 2021. Since it was a Covid-19 year, in which there were less international students in Utrecht than normal, the response was quite low. This should be noted as it makes the validity a little less reliable than in previous years. The answers to the survey did however still offer a lot of information about the housing problems most internationals have faced. It paints quite a bleak picture, to say the least. Finding a room in Utrecht is described as “very difficult” and “absolutely awful”.

It seems that even though there may have been less international students in Utrecht than normal, the average time to find accommodation has increased drastically from an average of 4 weeks in 2018 to almost 8 weeks in 2021. Through some agencies, it even took students up to 20 weeks to find accommodation. Some students even say they were unable to find a room in time. This problem, combined with the increase in rent in the last year (for an average of 22.61 euro per month) and a decrease in room size (2.31m² less than 2019) is very worrying. It's no wonder that the satisfaction rate of internationals about housing in Utrecht has been dropping since 2016.

Because of the sheer degree of difficulty to find a room, a lot of internationals end up settling for a less than ideal living situation. For instance: *“The bedroom size is extremely small. There is barely any space to walk. Although the housing location is very good and the whole house is accessible.”* Other respondents for instance ended up living in a room with a number of roommates that do not quite meet their wishes. Or they don't live with Dutch housemates even though they wanted to. This seems to be an ongoing trend from last year (and the years before that) in which living in a mixed house of Dutchies and internationals seems to be near impossible for the international students due to discrimination. The label “NO INTERNATIONALS” is still a far too common occurrence on housing ads online.

Additionally, internationals had to deal with consequences of the COVID pandemic when it came to their living and housing situation. Therefore, the survey asked the participants about their experience of loneliness since the outbreak. It turns out that 66.7% of participants do indeed experience loneliness.

All of the previously mentioned housing problems seem very worrying, especially considering that the amount of international students coming to Utrecht each year continues to grow (outside of Covid-19 years), and thus the accommodation shortage will only continue to grow. *“International students get little help in their search for housing which is worrying since having good accommodation is essential for a pleasant study time and a productive learning environment”.* The educational institutes such as Utrecht University indicate that they want to help with the process of creating more accommodation for (international) students. In recent years, for example, they have reserved more housing with the SSH, and they are trying to inform students at an early stage about the difficult housing market utilizing a webinar. However, this turns out not to be enough, as the housing shortage is only increasing, not decreasing. Thus, Utrecht University and other housing providers in Utrecht must quickly come up with a better approach to prevent the exploitation of international students.

Read the report here: <http://www.ishau.nl/reports/>

Note for editorial, not meant for publication:

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ISHA is a combined organization of four student associations in Utrecht: ESN, VIDUIS, BuddyGoDutch and BoKS. This collaboration exists to protect the housing rights of international students in Utrecht.