

HOUSING for
International Students



There are huge problems on the housing market in the Netherlands. Rents are rising, the number of homes on offer is falling and more and more homes are owned by investors. Students are already hit hard by this. Due to the appalling shortage of rooms at student housing associations (*sometimes up to 100 responses per room!*), students are driven to the private housing market. International students often have it even *t*; they are attracted here by the Radboud and HAN with sales pitches, shiny brochures, and wonderful promises to continue their studies in the Netherlands. Once they are here, in many cases they are offered a room for a year, after which they are expected to have built up a network to find a room themselves and their temporary lease expires. However, reality shows that in the private market the majority of advertisements read 'no internationals', which means that these students are stranded between two stools. There must of course be a solution to this problem, since the current situation where students sleep in tents, on the couch with friends or in an Airbnb is unsustainable.^t

Size of the Student Body

About **3300** international students lived in Nijmegen in 2017, while Arnhem housed **1390** internationals around that time. Students in Nijmegen rent for **34%** from SSH&, **6%** from other corporations and **50%** from the private market. There is an increase in students living away from home and this growing student population requires an adequate supply of housing. SSH& indicated that they will increase their housing supply by building **1200** additional homes in collaboration with the Municipality. These will be completed in 2030 but cannot meet the urgent and immediate need for more student rooms. The large shortage in the housing market is caused by several factors, which are explained in the next paragraph.

Shortage in the Housing Market

At the national level, laws have been passed that promote market forces when buying and renting real estate. As a result, a small group of investors and companies buy properties with the aim of renting them out for their own gain in the private sector. This means that more and more people find it more difficult to pay rising house and rent prices, because a large part of their income is spent on housing. This will also make it more difficult for graduate students to leave their old student residence, leaving some of the student rooms occupied for the current generation of students. Both speculation and vacancy can drive up prices. By buying up properties *en masse*, private investors and companies gain a lot of control over housing, resulting in rising prices. In Nijmegen Ton Hendriks is an important name in carrying out such practices.

The vacancy is substantiated by the municipality of Nijmegen with the concept of “friction vacancy” which is necessary “for the market to function”. In addition, a motion has been passed regarding the reconversion of homes in Nijmegen. The anti-compartmentalization measure will immediately increase the pressure on the Nijmegen housing market. In practice, for the time being, the only structural ways to realize more student rooms are via the SSH& or the private housing market. Because it is made more difficult to apply for a permit to renovate a building, in practice there are hardly any student rooms available on the private market. Although it is good that houses are no longer bought up, this is of no use to students. Because fewer rooms are being added and the number of students continues to grow, more people will not be able to find accommodation.

Discrimination and Short Stay Contracts

In addition to the shortage on the housing market, internationals are experiencing even more problems such as *discrimination* and the *short stay contracts*. The students who find a room through HAN and RU mostly end up at SSH& short-stay homes. A short-stay contract means that the tenant signs a rental contract for a fixed period, in this case one or two semesters. This contract form does not offer the tenant the option of premature termination. Students who find a room outside the educational institutions, end up in the regular offer of the SSH& or find accommodation with a private landlord. Because students do not have the option to terminate the contract prematurely, it means that they are obliged to look for a room on the private market only in July/August. These months are especially busy, and many Dutch students are also trying to get a room on the overstrained private rental market. The alternative is to bear double rent for a few months, otherwise they will end up on the street. Because the contracts cannot be terminated prematurely, students subsequently have to make way for a new cohort of home seekers and students do not receive any further help from

educational institutions or the SSH& in finding a new room, we can state that the short-stay product encourages homelessness.

The communication about housing problems from RU and HAN is also not always realistic enough. The RU Housing team website states: "Unfortunately due to a country-wide housing crisis, we cannot guarantee that we can find a room for all students. We are limited to the number of rooms we have on offer. Due to this housing crisis it is also hard to find a room after the first year for the rest of your stay. We therefore strongly urge students to start looking for that second room early and use the full potential of their network while doing so." Here we immediately see the downside of the RU's policy, as international students are encouraged to look for a room in their own network. Due to the non-cancellable short-stay contracts, this advice is therefore worthless and the responsibility for adequate housing is placed with the students themselves, instead of the educational institutions.

In addition to this, there is *discrimination* that international students experience in the housing market. To get a room, you often to go to a house-interview and you have to be invited for this. This is the result of the co-option right, in which tenants have the right to choose their own housemate. This is an important right because it allows students to choose someone who fits the house. Unfortunately, this often means that international students are passed over, because of their different culture and language, for Dutch student. Unfortunately, it often happens that on sites such as Kamernet or Facebook, the description of the student house explicitly says something like 'no internationals'.

Market Forces in Higher Education

Since the 1980s, the education budget for higher education has been divided among universities and colleges of higher education on the basis of the market share in total students and diplomas. That is why universities

have been trying to attract international students for a number of years now. It is an almost inexhaustible source of students that can increase the market share of these universities. However, the national education budget does not grow alongside it, which leads to a competition between universities and colleges of higher education for their financing and right to exist. In the coming academic year, a national growth of **14%** in international students is expected, all of whom must also be accommodated. There are currently **2,665** international students at RU. LMS 20-21 forecasts that the number of international students (excluding exchange students) will increase in the coming years. The increase in the number of students does not come out of the blue. The RU tries to attract students through various activities such as open days and advertisements. There is also a website called 'why Radboud University'. There is nothing on the website about the housing problems. Moreover, actively recruiting international students is an important point in the RU Annual Plan 2022, in which inclusivity is mentioned as an important point. By guaranteeing a room to first-year international students, RU keeps its promises, and the recruitment talks can continue. But as soon as the second year of study starts, the focus is mainly on the next cohort of first-year international students out of necessity, at the expense of the previous generation.

Solutions

The last section of this pamphlet will provide some solutions to the problems described in the previous paragraphs. The housing crisis is a complex issue and cannot be solved with a single new law, measure or hotline. The Housing Coalition is very much aware of this. That is why it is more important that the proposed solutions are not seen as individual ideas, but as parts of a *larger whole*.

Short Term Solutions

Free emergency shelter for homeless international students for the upcoming orientation week.

While the SSH& does its best to accommodate all incoming international students upon arrival in Nijmegen, there is still a group of internationals who are in fact homeless in Nijmegen when the academic year starts. In order to accommodate this group, the educational institutions must provide adequate and free emergency care for these students to at least bridge the first period in Nijmegen.

Stop actively recruiting international students

Under the guise of 'accessibility' and 'globalisation', students are brought to the Netherlands with roaring promises and shiny brochures, because educational institutions benefit financially from the arrival of international students. The institutions must annually distribute a subsidy from the government on the basis of the number of students and the number of diplomas issued. It is now clear that the basic infrastructure to manage the arrival of these students is insufficient.

Provide good and honest information about housing in the Netherlands
Good, honest, and timely information for international students about the housing market in the Netherlands is therefore a good short-term solution. By providing students with information about the problems on the housing market, clarifying their rights as tenants, and giving them addresses to turn to in case of problems (e.g. counters or rental commissions), international students can better estimate what to expect when they come to study in Nijmegen.

Expand the local rental teams

By expanding the capacity of the rental teams, they can also play a greater role for internationals. Huurteams Nijmegen is an important instrument fighting abuses in the rental sector, but the capacity is already at its maximum. As a result, students who are less able to find their way to these types of institutions, such as international students, are often left out.

Map discrimination against international students in the housing market F
Following the evaluation of the room rental policy in the Nijmegen city council on November 3, 2021, the Municipal Executive concluded that “discrimination against international students occurs in the housing market, but that at the moment it is not possible to paint a clear picture of the extent where that happens. It is clear, however, that discrimination takes place by both landlords and tenants and/or Dutch students.” The Commission hereby expresses the wish to tackle this by means of a “further investigation, setting up a hotline, better information, forms of sanctions, etc.” We therefore strongly advise the municipality to start an investigation to at least map out the problem.

The ban on chambering in Nijmegen must be lifted

As the number of students continues to grow in the coming years, the scarcity of housing will only increase in Nijmegen. The Housing Coalition was certainly not founded to defend the interests of pawnbrokers and slum landlords, but a measure such as the ban on housing is in practice more harmful to home/house seekers than to the owners of the properties.

Vacancy should be better utilized to accommodate people

In 2021, approximately **189,530** m² was vacant in the municipality of Nijmegen, of which **79,950** m² was previously empty (~**42%**). In a response from the municipality, part of this vacancy is “friction vacancy” “to allow the market to function.” Some homes are vacant due to relocations,

but there are about **480** homes that were also vacant a year earlier. The Housing Coalition finds it immoral to leave these buildings empty during a housing crisis, and not just for students. long-term vacant buildings must be obliged to find suitable functions, for example as emergency shelter or permanent housing.

The short-stay contracts should be reviewed

Because the contracts cannot be terminated within a year or have a notice period and students then have to make way for a new cohort of home seekers, we can say that the short-stay product promotes homelessness. We have heard from several international students in conversations that several months after their short-stay contract ended, they still had not found a room and were sleeping on the couch with friends or were homeless. They indicated that not being able to cancel the short-stay product early and the summer peak in the rental market are important bottlenecks in the process.

Long Term Solutions

Build more student rooms and increase the share of non-private rental

The **100** temporary homes on the RU campus and the approximately **1200** homes that the SSH& want to add are good developments, but not enough. Since no less than **50%** of students rent on the private, deregulated market, the municipality, educational authorities and SSH& would do well to realize more homes faster. This will reduce housing pressure in Nijmegen as a whole, and students can work on their studies with less stress.

Stop competition and give more money to education

When structurally more money is spent on education, the competition between educational institutions will decrease. This means that institutions are no longer obliged to focus on growth, but to make good policy for the students who actually study with them.

Ensure public access to real estate and land ownership information

Speculation on the housing market is one of the biggest causes of high rents, but the owners of all properties and land are often difficult to trace. With clear information and a transparent overview of who owns what, implementing measures is easier and more effective.

For further long-term solutions that must mainly be taken up by national politicians, the Nijmegen Housing Coalition refers to the Housing Manifesto, drawn up by the organizers of the Woonprotest and Woonopstand.

What You Can Do

The Housing Coalition Nijmegen report on international student housing, and this pamphlet, show in detail how international students are disadvantaged in their search for housing while study. That is why the Housing Coalition Nijmegen states: *Housing is a right! Also for international students!* Do you also think that students deserve a decent, safe and not too expensive room? That they can study carefree and contribute to society? That no one is discriminated against in a search for a home?

Share our report and this pamphlet, help us with actions and join the Nijmegen Housing Coalition!

Send us a DM on Instagram or Facebook, mail to Woonprotestnijmegen@gmail.com or fill out the contact form at Woonprotestnijmegen.nl

Housing is a right for everyone, and we fight for it together!

Demands

- 1.** *Make fighting (imminent) homelessness a top priority
Provide widely accessible public housing*
- 2.** *Guarantee affordability*
- 3.** *Guarantee housing security*
- 4.** *Reduce the housing inequality between purchase and rent*
- 5.** *Ensure equal access to housing*
- 6.** *Give citizens an equal say*
- 7.** *Curb the financialization of housing*
- 8.** *Don't give rogue landlords and brokers a chance*
- 9.** *Tackle vacancy firmly*



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