

## Info-Sheet Students' Housing in Europe

The students' perspective on the overall situation, main challenges and national best practices .



Photo by Leah Kelley from Pexels

## The current state of play with regards to student housing in Europe

*“Accommodation costs continue to be one of the most important if not the most important expenditure item for students especially for those who live away from their parents.*

” EUROSTUDENT VI”

When looking at the current situation linked to affordable, sufficient and high-quality students’ housing in Europe we can see a number of clear patterns affecting the issue in almost all of the countries that answered our survey.

In general, students experience an ongoing rise in rent prices especially in bigger European cities where most higher education institutions are located. Insufficient provision of student housing and a universal lack of vacancies on the housing market aggravate the problem. The situation is particularly terrifying for international students that encounter vast difficulties when trying to access the housing market in a variety of countries. International students suffer from structural discrimination and rejection on the basis of racial discrimination both from landlords and fellow students who prefer to share their dormitory with students that share the same mother tongue.

The substantial lack of available students’ accommodation and the continuous rise of housing costs appears to be the biggest overall issue in the assessed countries. National Unions of Students (NUS) furthermore report student dormitories with extremely low living standards right up to facilities that possess threats to tenant’s wellbeing.

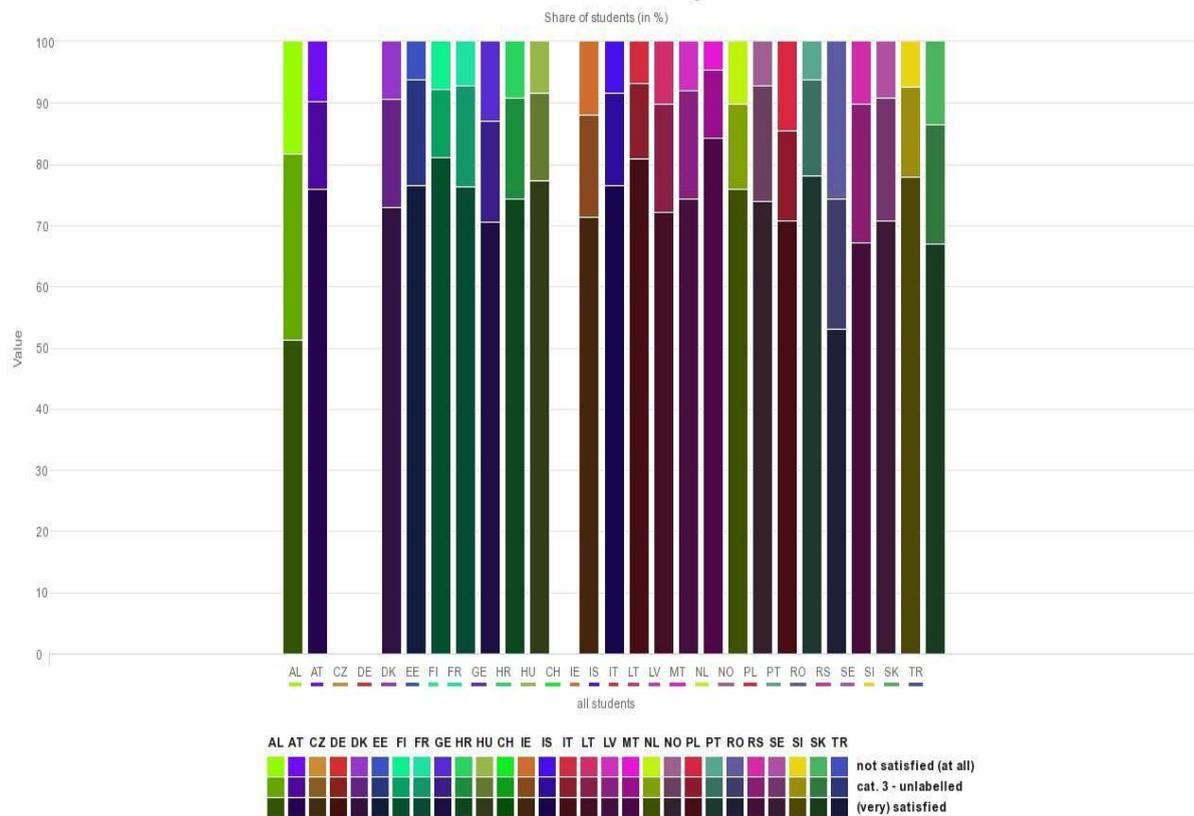
Student unions all over Europe are united in the fight for more affordable high-quality students housing. While the overarching aim is congruent, the main priorities and strategies towards improvement differ from country to country. Lobby and advocacy work of NUS’s is directed at the creation of new dorms as well as at the enhancement and expansion of existing student housing facilities.

Other national unions of students focus on fighting for better financial support services for students in order to enable them to rent a decent apartment close to their higher education institution. Alongside these efforts NUS’s focus on the provision of information with regard to the legal situation of tenants and the respective national housing market in general.

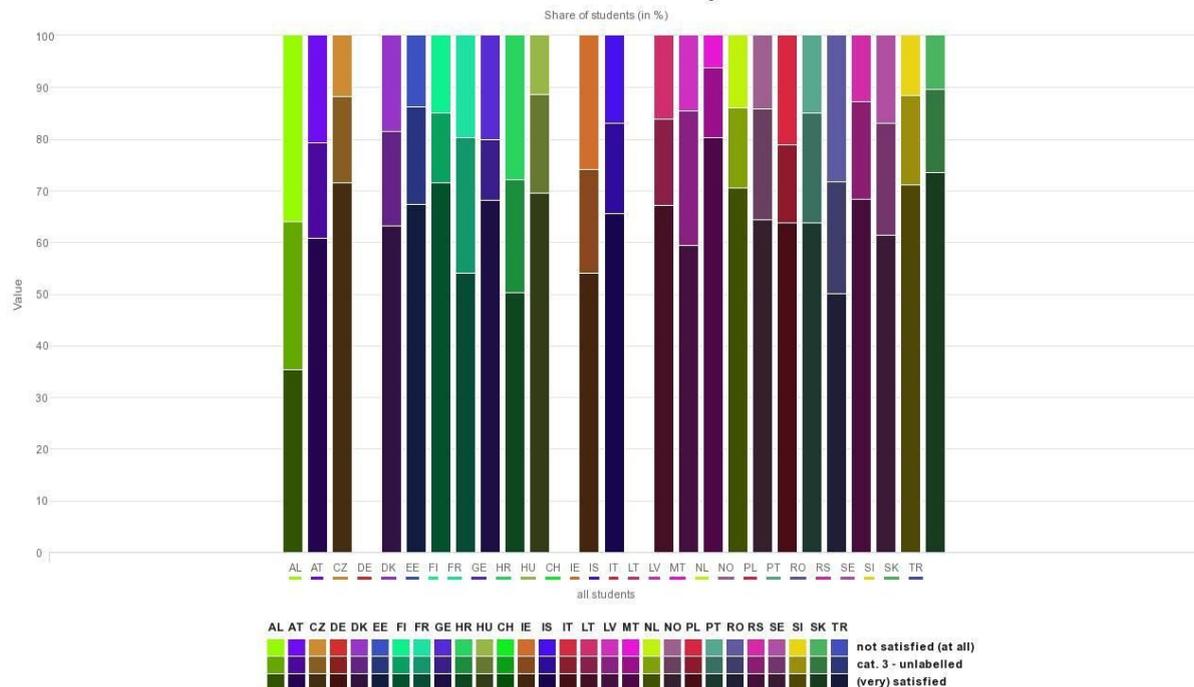
The following charts showcase some of the findings of EUROSTUDENT VI when it comes to students’ satisfaction with the housing situation in their country.

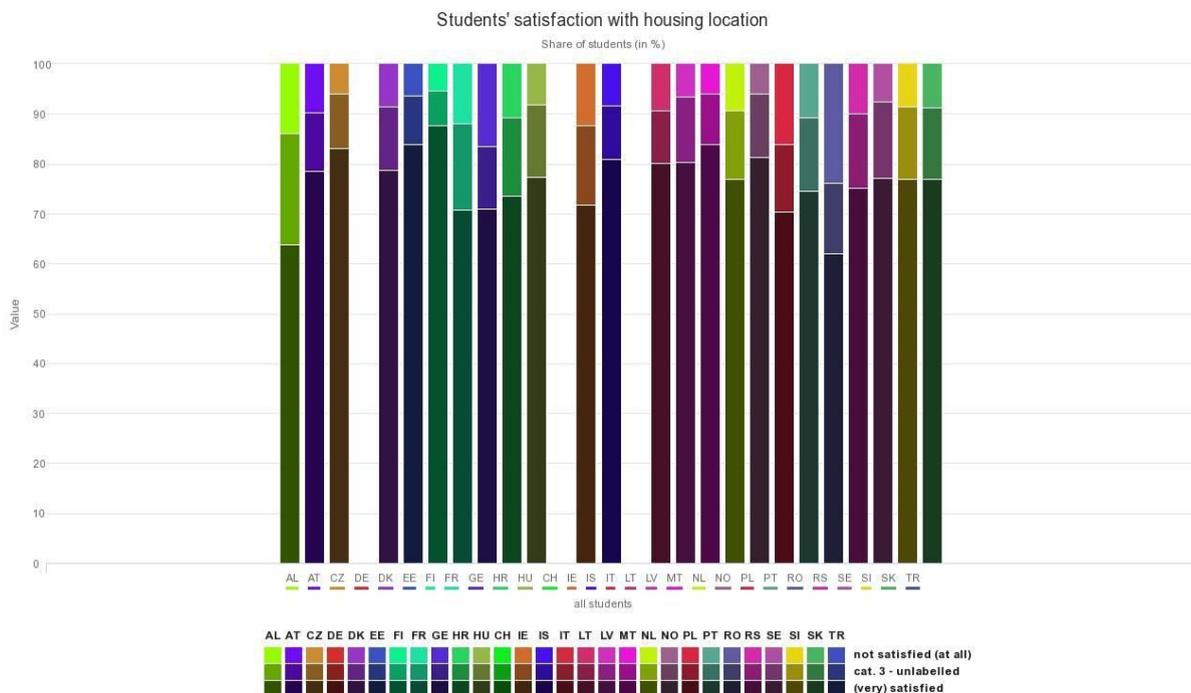


### Students' satisfaction with housing condition



### Students' satisfaction with housing costs





Source: *EUROSTUDENT (2018): Social and Economic Conditions of Student Life in Europe: Synopsis of Indicators. EUROSTUDENT VI 2016-2018*

## Country Profiles and Findings

This Info-Sheet summarizes NUS answers to the housing section of the social dimension survey sent out by ESU in March 2019. A total of 18 national unions of students representing 16 countries took part in the survey. The following questions were asked to the participating unions:

1. Please outline the current state of play with regard to student housing in your country. (Overall situation, main challenges and problem areas.)
2. Please describe the main priorities of your NUS in supporting student housing, including any projects/programs your NUS offers in this regard.
3. Does your NUS have any policy linked to students housing? Please sum up the main priorities and key strategies in the text box below.
4. Please highlight some cases that you consider national best practices when it comes to student housing in your country.

The country profiles were established based on the information provided by the partaking NUS's.

**Country Profiles** were established for: Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Switzerland.

## Austria



The housing situation in Austria, especially for students, got drastically worse in recent years. According to the Austrian “Student Social Survey 2015” - 39% of all students under the age of 21 live with their parents, mainly those who come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Keeping in mind that not all students have the possibility to stay with their parents, since some must enrol at higher education institutions that are simply too far away from their hometown, this number is alerting. Rents in major higher education capitals dramatically rose within the last couple of years.

Students spend an average of 40% of their monthly income on rent. Cheap dormitories have become rare and student’s accommodation fees have been rising continuously, while students experience a lack of vacancies and extremely long waiting list in order to be admitted in student housing.

The Austrian Students Unions offers legal counselling on the Austrian right of abode and negotiates with the ministry about amendments to the law on student dormitories.

ÖH demands the reintroduction of financial aid for dormitories and an amendment to the law on student dormitories that will make housing more affordable. Furthermore, NUS demands a nationwide housing benefit for students, a capping on rents, a tax on vacant property and the abolishment of the brokerage.

The main strategies are lobbying towards the respective ministry and parties associated with the current students’ fractions forming the ruling coalition within ÖH. The NUS also supports the EU-wide initiative “Housing for all”.

## Belgium



FEF reports a lack of campus housing, high costs and a monopoly of private stakeholders dominating student housing in Belgium. The NUS is advocating for a nationwide legal frame while working on the launch of a label for "proper student housing" which will be awarded to housing providers that comply with the quality criterions set by FEF.

## Croatia



Student housing is available for all full-time students, but the number of places in dorms is limited. The admission procedure is based on the socio-economic background of students, taking special conditions such as pregnancy, invalidity, student parenthood and minority background, into account.

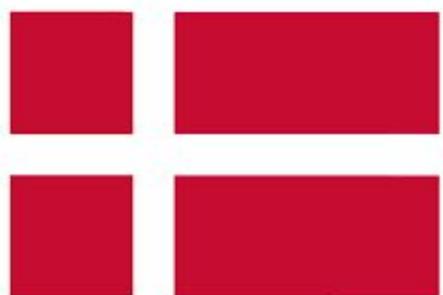
The ministry of science and education determines the conditions for direct dorm placement, for those students who did not write a proper application for the student dorm but fall under the conditions for eligibility, or in some way were not recognized by the system.

There are not enough dorms for all students provided, and that the facilities sometimes lack general conditions, such as Internet, hot water, and sun blinds on the windows. Most of the student housing centres do not perceive themselves as service providers, but rather aim at maximizing profits. Therefore, prices for dorm services are constantly being elevated.

Student dormitories in Croatia are turned into guest houses for tourists in summer.

CSC wants the profit made from guests during summer, in a certain percentage of raw profit (7,5% or above), to be invested in infrastructural improvements for the student housing facilities. Another political goal is an increase in numbers of low-income students in dorms, from 65% to 70% or more. CSC believes that student housing facilities must be accessible to students with physical disabilities. NUS lobbies for lower fees in student dorms, while emphasizing that students must remain a priority, also in summer and high season, when tourist are taking over student dorms in Croatia.

## Denmark



Housing represents a big challenge for the majority of students in Denmark, especially for the ones living in Copenhagen. There is a very small amount of available housing compared to the number of students in the country, leading to extremely high housing fees. In many cases housing in Denmark is not stable, resulting in a situation where students are pressured to move multiple times within their course of studies.

DSF is pushing for the creation of small room student housing at affordable prices. A survey conducted on the matter provides evidence that students in Denmark do not strive for fancy and expensive housing but rather search for decent and affordable places to live. There is an ongoing cooperation with relevant civic organisations in the area and a partnership with the organisation representing tenants in Denmark.

When it comes to housing policy DSF demands that:

- Student accommodation must be placed so that the distance does not limit the connection to the study environment.
- The rent for student housing must not exceed 50% of the student grant received.
- There must be enough student housing for students in and near all university cities in Denmark.
- More funds need to be allocated for building new student housing.
- Temporary housing must never stand in the way of long-lasting solutions.

- A national housing guarantee at the start of studies should be imposed.
- The efforts to help particularly exposed students in need of housing is important and must be maintained.
- Information about rights on the housing market must be easily accessible for all students.
- There must be no discrimination on the housing market based on ethnicity, gender, nationality or choice of education.
- There should always be a majority of students in the dispensation committees for dorms and student housing.

## Estonia



EÜL reports that the housing situation is currently not one of the main problem areas. There is a need for more dormitory spaces, but the situation isn't critical. More and more students go into private housing, while rent prices are getting higher and higher.

NUS stands for affordable housing for all students. Student dorms must be located nearby higher education institutions while being accessible to all students. There are no special programs nor projects regarding this topic. Representations in housing issues are ensured through local unions.

- **National best practice**

Most higher education institutions (HEI's) provide dormitory spaces in different price ranges nearby campuses. There are rooms for families and for students with special needs. Student representatives are in the decision-making bodies of the NGOs that run the dormitories. Thus the pricing and conditions are as student-friendly as possible.

## Finland



Student housing is subsidized by the state and students receive a monthly housing allowance. Depending on the counting method about 20-35 % of students live in a government-subsidized student apartment. The main problem in student housing is the lack of sufficient facilities, especially in bigger cities such as the capital Helsinki. A report issued by the ministry of environment (which is also responsible for housing) in 2018 states that during the next few years there is an acute need to build at least 10000 additional new student apartments, most of them in Helsinki and other big cities.

In Finland, the youth moves to their own apartment at a young age compared to other EU countries (only 4% of higher education students live with their parents). The remaining 96 % live either in rental apartments (student housing or private rental housing) or in their own house. For the past few years living in one-room flats has gained popularity while some of the shared flats located in less central areas without proper public transport connections to campuses are lacking new residents.

Finnish students can get a general housing benefit (same social benefit as all other citizens) which compensates 80% of the housing costs (up to a maximum level of cost, which depends on the area). In bigger cities, the housing costs have elevated to a level where the maximum general housing allowance cannot compensate the cost anymore.

SAMOK's main goal is to increase the amount of student housing in Finland. This includes actions in order to make building student housing cheaper, (by fewer regulations) and increasing government subsidies. The main strategy towards achieving this is lobbying politicians.

SYL has a partner organisation called SOA, which represents the student housing communities in Finland. As for now, the main common goal is directed towards the upcoming national elections, since the next parliament is about to implement a reform of social benefits including housing regulations.

A sufficient supply of student housing decreases the housing shortage in growth centres and eases the housing situation for others of limited means. The state should grant enough support for building new student apartments as well as for renovations so that the apartments are affordable and of high quality. Municipalities must ensure that there are enough places available for supported student housing. SYL is convinced that the state should promote lot availability by turning over its own protection free land to an advantageous price to student housing communities.

When building student apartments, attention must be paid to quality, accessibility, the environment and comfort, while supporting the community. Building and maintenance companies should pay attention to health issues, such as the quality of the indoor air. Student apartments must be close to good public transport, as well as good possibilities for walking and biking between the apartments, the campuses, and the centre. Higher education institutions, student apartment organisations, and cities have a shared responsibility for the housing provided for international students. The higher education institutions must take responsibility for the cost of housing for international students. The integration of international students and staff in the community must be promoted by increasing housing for internationals in the same houses and areas where Finns live. The rental fees for student apartments must stay below general market prices.

- **National best practice**

The Finish government regularly issues a report on the situation of student housing. NUS takes part in meetings with the minister of housing or his assistants. Continuous communication has evoked into new ideas such as a student housing forum, in which student housing communities, as well as students and ministry special advisers, meet once a year for discussion on topics connected to student housing.

## Germany



Students in Germany are confronted with fast-growing prices in the general housing market, especially in big university cities such as Munich, Frankfurt and Berlin. The skyrocketing prices are caused by a series of malfunctioning regulations on rental

fees. There is only little coverage of the students' housing demand through designated student dorms or related facilities

German students suffer under a bad funding system, that hardly covers the accommodation expenses. International students encounter enormous problems when searching for accommodation. The inability to provide the necessary securities to rent a place combined with a high degree of structural racism exacerbates the situation.

FZS demands increased funding for student support systems in order to comply with the ever-rising rental fees. The lobby efforts are concentrated towards enhancing the number of student dorms funded by the government instead of private entities providing the facilities. There are ongoing corporations with a series of affected groups, aiming at achieving something in solidarity, united in protests and similar forms of activism.

The situation in some regions is unbearable. At the beginning of the academic year, local student unions organize emergency accommodations for first semester students in gyms, private houses, on the floor or in private living rooms. FZS strives for the general political vision of making housing more affordable by offering more subsidised rooms for living as well as more social housing funded by the government.

NUS has launched a big campaign which, amongst others, targeted the problem of student housing, drawing a lot of media attention on the issue. A key goal here is awareness and attention raising in the public through the media, in order to intensify the pressure on politicians. FZS considers it of high importance to address the individual student, as housing is something everybody has to deal with at some point, while the problem is mostly individualized, even though it is a highly structural issue.

FZS's housing policy paper emphasises the importance of sufficient student funding systems, fighting against rising rent prices, long term vacancy of potential living houses and the provision of subsidised housing for everyone who needs it.

## Hungary



In Hungary, students suffer from insufficient provision of dormitory spaces and rising renting-fees. The National Union of Students in Hungary is primarily focusing on scholarship reforms and takes part in a Student-City project located in Budapest. NUS is fostering a close relationship with students and stakeholders in order to solve problems through participation in decision and policy making.

### Iceland



LIS reports a prominent lack of student accommodation, especially within the capital area. The amount of student housing in Iceland only serves about 10% of all students close to Reykjavik. There is a strong need for further investment in facilities providing students with accommodation in the country.

The NUS so far did not launch any projects on student housing. The topic of students housing is addressed in policy papers and remains a priority in discussions held within the union. The main priority within the policy field is working on an increased amount of accessible & affordable student housing.

### Italy



Most of the student housing facilities, especially those of high quality, are located in Northern Italy while students in the South suffer from a lack of high-quality accommodation. The Italian legislation only allows a restricted number of students to

be eligible for student housing and in many regions not all the eligible students can make use of the service.

UDU sees an urgent need to increase the number of student housing facilities in Southern Italy, as well as the necessity to ensure that everyone eligible for student housing will be able to profit from quality accommodation for fair prices.

The NUS seeks to increase the number of those eligible to student housing as well as to increase the number of student dorms in Southern Italy, while advocating for quality improvements of existing facilities.

- **National best practice**

Pavia colleges student housing is one of the best in Italy. Apart from housing, other services such as tutoring are offered to the residing students within the facilities. However, the closure of these dorms might be near due to underfunding from the region of Lombardy. This, amongst others, is one of the reasons why UDU is fighting for an increase in funds, to keep student friendly projects like the one in Pavia open and running.

## Latvia



LSE reports a quite severe situation when it comes to student housing in Latvia. Accommodations are of very low quality and often possess threats to the tenant's well-being. There are around 30 facilities in the country, that mostly belong to higher education institutions and can be considered as widely underfunded.

In Latvia, the National Union of Students is used as a platform to solve common problems that students in dorm facilities suffer from. LSA is lobbying against the unreasonable rise of rents in the country. Local Unions protect the interest of their students when it comes to disputes between HEI housing administration and tenants.

## Lithuania



Student accommodation in Lithuania is provided by higher education institutions. Research conducted by LSS indicates that the accommodation conditions and prices differ quite radically from one HEI to another, creating an unequal situation within the students' body. Another problem revealed by the conducted research is that students mostly choose a dormitory because their financial capacity prevents them from renting an apartment. The practice of higher education institutions shows that international students are offered better-equipped rooms in dormitories.

LSS seeks to sign an agreement with the Government of the Republic of Lithuania on investing funds for internal renovation of dormitories. The money would be allocated from the sale of real estate of higher education institutions in the context of consolidation.

The work plan of LSS foresees the preparation of a quality standard for dormitories which clearly identifies the essential conditions for a dignified life for each student in each dormitory.

## Netherlands



Student housing in the Netherlands is becoming increasingly problematic, especially for international students. The Netherlands does not offer a lot of on-campus living

opportunities since most students live in the cities where their higher education institution is situated. The housing prices are increasing, and less housing is available these days while the average price of a room is now already more than 400 Euros per month.

The Netherlands has a large shortage of student housing (approximately about 12.000 rooms) in the cities with universities and universities of applied sciences. This shortage is the most pressing in the cities of Amsterdam, Utrecht and Rotterdam, but is substantial in other cities as well. Moreover, students are taken advantage of by landlords on a structural basis. Many landlords ask for too much rent for often very small rooms and apartments, intimidate tenants and refuse to maintain their buildings in a proper way.

One of the main challenges in students housing is, that in most cases the housemates choose their new room buddies. Discrimination of international students is an enormous problem because a lot of Dutch students don't want to speak English when they are at home, leading to international students often being not able to find a decent room. Last year, a group of international students even had to sleep in tents in Groningen.

ISO mainly focuses on increasing the provision of information to international students with regards to the housing situation in the Netherlands. Further efforts are directed towards stimulating Dutch students to accept international students in their student houses.

At this moment there are several ongoing projects. ISO helps (international) students with questions about their (potential) housing situation (Dutch Housing Hotline). Furthermore, a website was created where students can check whether they pay a fair amount of rent (Check-je-kamer). Additionally, this summer there will be a "Check your rent tour" where students will be informed about their rights with regard to housing. An accessible book on tenancy law was published this year, explaining complicated regulation in an understandable manner.

Together with the Erasmus Student Network in the Netherlands, the LSVb set-up a Housing Hotline that is an online platform as well as a telephone line which is aimed to help students finding a room or translating contracts to English. The hotline also offers support when students get into problems with their landlords.

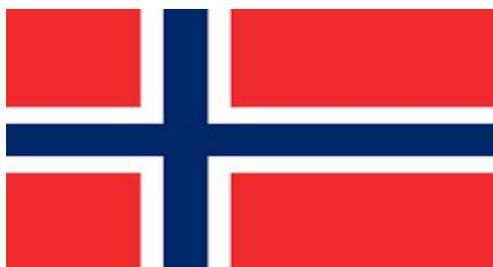
In the Netherlands, National Union of Students are lobbying to get more student housing available while working on improving the legal standing of tenants by informing them about their rights and lobbying for enhanced enforcement on malicious landlords. Active lobby work is conducted to create more affordable, high quality student housing facilities. Attention is drawn to the problem via actions rooted in activism and issuing of reports in order to increase higher education institutions responsibility to care for student housing.

- **National best practice**

In the Netherlands, there is a strong system of housing associations which provide a share of the student housing. These housing associations do offer affordable and qualitative housing. Moreover, there is a culture of consultations (on a national and local level) between the government, student unions or organisations, universities and housing associations in order to improve the housing situation in the Netherlands

Apart from a Housing Hotline for international students, NUS operates a website called 'Check your room' where students can check whether they pay too much for their room according to the maximum standards (depending on size and utilities) as set in Dutch legislation.

## Norway



The national coverage of students housing is around 14 %. NSO`s goal is to raise the number up to 20 %. One of the main challenges is access to land for student housing facilities close to campuses and the terms and conditions from the ministry. There is an ongoing cooperation between the student welfare organisations, NSO and the ministry in the field of students housing.

NSO`s main priority is a national student housing coverage of 20 % as well as the improvement of terms and conditions for building students housing. Student housing is also the main priority in NSOs national budget demands.

- **National best practice**

Almost all student housing is built by a student welfare organisation in which students hold the majority of seats within decision-making boards.

## Romania



Most state universities manage to cover housing facilities for at least 30% of the total students (this is a QA regulations requirement). Most of the dormitories charge approximately a fee of around 25-50 Euros per month for each student, considering that most rooms are for 4 or 5 students.

ANOSR sees the standard of living as the main challenge in student housing. A series of likewise big and wealthy higher education institution in Romania do not assure acceptable living conditions for students according to European standards. In big cities such as Cluj or Bucharest, the lack of student dorms is a huge problem while the prices for private housing are prohibitive. The problem is worsened by the lack of strategic investments in student housing and the slow process of building new dorms. According to a study conducted by ANOSR in 2017, the average construction time for a student dorm is over 7 years. Furthermore, students with impairments experience issues with access to accommodation since most of the dorms were built without access facilities and are difficult and expensive to adapt.

ANOSR has always pushed for a transparent budget funding allocation for housing. Approximately half of the average student housing costs are supported by the state budget and the other half by the students themselves. In 2017, ANOSR launched a campaign linked to the ongoing issue of student housing, through which students from all over Romania were asked to send pictures of their rooms, showcasing irregularities and the sometimes-poor conditions. It was proven that a lot of dormitories do not comply with the national sanitary standards. After the successful campaign and due to additional lobbying efforts by ANOSR, new regulations regarding the distributions of housing funds were introduced, leading to increased transparency and a declaration by the Ministry, the National Conference of Rectors and other stakeholders to increase the budget for the area.

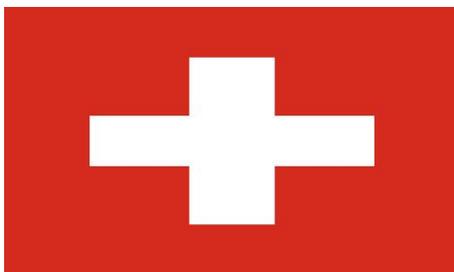
ANOSR is campaigning for an increase in the budget for housing and especially for investments in building new dorms. Another priority of ANOSR's efforts in the next period is the adoption of a general national regulation on the management of student dorms and canteens which should combat the difference in treatment of students between different HEI's, due to an irregular interpretation of national legislation.

When it comes to student housing, the main priorities of ANOSR are directed towards a transparent budget allocation (from the national authorities to the HEI's), the transparent use of budget by higher education institutions (they should publish the financial balance for each dormitory periodically), constant fees for students from year to year, enough places to cover student housing requests and prioritised places for students with high academic performances as well as students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

- **National best practice**

Approximately 40% of the housing fee is covered by the state budget. Many higher education institutions cover students housing expenses up to 100%.

## Switzerland



VSS-UNES-USU reports multiple problems regarding housing in different cities and an overall situation that can be described as rather difficult. The prices for accommodation are very high, resulting in a big financial burden for many Swiss students. Low vacancy rates and expensive renting fees often lead to a time-consuming process when searching for suitable accommodation.

The NUS puts emphasis on supporting local unions in their campaigns for better students' housing, while being part of an initiative that tries to establish affordable accommodation, not only for students but for people from disadvantaged backgrounds in general.

VSS-UNES-USU is committed to fair access to higher education. All people with interest and abilities must be able to study. A social selection on the basis of socio-economic background is therefore unacceptable. In order to improve the housing situation for students, the Swiss student's union urges the higher education institutions to foster the creation of accommodation on campuses and cooperation with student-friendly associations operating in the field of student housing.

On the municipality level NUS lobbies for the construction of additional student accommodation and the conversion or temporary use of vacant buildings for student housing in order to provide subsidised housing for financially disadvantaged students while on the canton (state) level VSS UNES USU is advocating for an increase in scholarships in order to enable students to afford decent housing.

- **National best practice**

The community of Lausanne is currently building a Colosseum (called Vortex) that will serve as a village for athletes during the Youth Olympic games. Vortex will then provide housing for nearly 1,000 students and academic visitors after the games. Students were involved in the process of planning and negotiated that Vortex will be equipped with a private cultural centre and children's area as well as restaurants and shops on the ground floor.

In two cases in Switzerland, older or single people provide students with unused housing in exchange for household support. In addition, this creates a fruitful exchange between generations.

Author: Sebastian Berger, May 2019

Contributing National Union of Students:

