

# Whitepaper

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## The shortage of Dutch student housing and the sustainable city of tomorrow



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## **01** Introduction

**Students increasingly less likely to live away from home**

## **02** National Action Plan for student housing

**Advancing the increase in student housing**

## **03** Turning the National Action Plan for Student Housing into concrete steps

**Availability, affordability and quality, as well as sustainability**

## **04**

**Conclusion**



## Introduction

# Students increasingly less likely to live away from home

Dutch students are increasingly less likely to live away from home, as concluded by the Knowledge Centre for Student Housing (Kences) in September 2023. The National Student Housing Monitor (LMS) shows that the proportion of students living independently dropped to 44% in 2023 from 53% in 2015/16. Affordability (48%) and availability (20%) are the two main reasons for not moving out.[1]

These trends are exacerbated by the housing market crisis and the removal of the basic grant in 2015, which further increased pressure on students. Additionally, extremely high living costs - including skyrocketing energy costs - make it virtually impossible for many students to find suitable and affordable housing. As a result, students are staying at home longer, and the total number of students living in cities is decreasing.[2] It is not surprising that the housing market was the most important election issue among young people aged 18 to 34. [3]

The decline in the number of students living in cities over recent years is concerning, according to Kences.[4] Students contribute to a healthy urban climate, and it is crucial to have sufficient affordable housing for students sooner rather than later. The goal is to create a million more homes, including 60,000 more student housing units, within eight years (2022-2030).

## Increasing shortage in student housing - Change in the situation for student living necessary

Although there was a temporary decrease in the shortage of student housing in the 20 largest cities in the Netherlands in 2023 - from approximately 27,000 units to over 23,000 - it is expected that demand will increase in the coming years, partly due to the reintroduction of the basic grant (June 2023). According to the LMS, the national room shortage is estimated to increase to 56,700 housing units by 2030/31.[5]

The expected increase, along with the current housing situation in a saturated market with sharply rising costs, including rent, food, and energy costs, makes the student housing situation urgent. In 2022, student housing corporation Stichting DUWO already sounded the alarm: housing for students is becoming unaffordable, and a change in the student living situation is necessary.[6]

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[1] [Nederlandse student steeds minder vaak op kamers - Kences.](#)

[2] [Landelijke monitor studentenhuisvesting 2023 - Kences.](#)

[3] Peiling van Ipsos in opdracht van de NOS, zie: [Peiling: Stemzekerheid | Verkiezingsthema's | Bestuurlijke hervorming | Ipsos.](#)

[4] [Nederlandse student steeds minder vaak op kamers - Kences.](#)

[5] [LMS - Samenvatting - Nederland \(incijfers.nl\).](#)

[6] [Wonen voor student vrijwel onbetaalbaar en kamertekort onverminderd hoog - Stichting DUWO.](#)



Accelerating the creation of more student housing units presents several challenges. How can so many more homes be realised in a short time in a densely populated country, while also meeting sustainability guidelines and ensuring affordability and quality for students? What are the guidelines, and what tools are available to developers and housing corporations? This whitepaper will explore these questions in more detail.

"Student housing is crucial for cities, regions, and the country, for educational institutions, and for the students themselves.

The Netherlands is a knowledge-based country with various knowledge regions. For the further development of the city and region, students, PhD candidates, and researchers are of great importance; they bring knowledge, insights, entrepreneurship, and diversity to cities, regions, and the country.

Through this interaction, incubators for innovation, knowledge, creativity, and talent development are created." [7]





## National Action Plan for student housing

# Advancing the increase in student housing

To improve the situation for students and address the housing shortage, policymakers, municipalities, housing corporations, market parties, educational institutions, and students joined forces and, in September 2022, launched the National Action Plan for Student Housing 2022-2030 (Landelijk actieplan studentenhuisvesting). This plan underscores the importance of students in cities and addresses five core issues:

- Better control over student intake
- **Creating more supply**
- **Affordability**
- Handling peak loads
- The position of international students

**When it comes to increasing student housing, the focus of this whitepaper is on core issues 2 and 3. We will expand on five important topics related to these two core issues:**

- **1. Affordability: Suitable affordable housing for every student**

The aim is to provide housing that matches students' preferences and budgets in a more holistic way. To help

students with rising living costs, the Dutch Government has reintroduced the basic grant as of June 2023.[8]

- **2. Distribution: Balancing housing supply and educational capacity**

When developing student housing, it is crucial to align the intake of students in cities with the capacity of educational institutions.[9] This means assessing the current supply and, where possible, distributing education across municipalities that can accommodate more students to reduce pressure on areas like Greater Amsterdam and Greater Rijnmond.

- **3. Sustainability**

Another point in the action plan is that the development of student housing should align with and contribute to the main challenges of the coming decades. These challenges include climate adaptation, sustainability, and the energy transition. The ESG and CSRD guidelines provide tools to support this.

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[8] [Landelijk-actieplan-studentenhuisvesting-2022-2030.pdf](#), p.7-23.

[9] [Landelijk-actieplan-studentenhuisvesting-2022-2030.pdf](#), p.7.





## ESG: Sustainable real estate from construction to completion

In line with the Paris Agreement guidelines to curb global warming and achieve climate neutrality by 2050, the Netherlands agreed to halve CO2 emissions by 2030. To support responsible and sustainable business practices, European Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) guidelines have been established. These guidelines help companies and organizations integrate sustainability aspects into their operations and decision-making processes. Additionally, large companies are required to produce sustainability reports starting from January this year under the European Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD).

These reports provide insight into the sustainability impact of companies and contribute to more transparent and responsible business operations.<sup>[10]</sup> Sustainability and these guidelines will play an increasingly key role in real estate development and housing corporations for both new and existing residential buildings.

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[10] <https://www.kvk.nl/duurzaamheid/verplichte-duurzaamheidsrapportage-dit-betekent-het/>.





- **4. Quality of living & good landlord practices**

Fourthly, the plan emphasizes "good landlord practices", which encompass fair rent prices, equal opportunities, good communication with tenants, and timely maintenance of housing units. It highlights the quality of living, often substandard in student housing, stressing that it should be a basic requirement rather than a luxury.[11]

- **5. Student well-being & communal housing**

The quality of living also impacts students' mental health. The report states that 'the housing experience significantly affects students' mental health, and that student housing can positively contribute to their well-being and study experience'. Given that many students (80% - see sidebar) feel lonely, there is a call to reduce the number of individual housing units and consider community amenities in student housing.[12]

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[11] [Landelijk-actieplan-studentenhuisvesting-2022-2030.pdf](#), p.9-10.

[12] [Landelijk-actieplan-studentenhuisvesting-2022-2030.pdf](#), p.9.





## Housing experience plays a major role in students' mental health

Housing experience plays a major role in students' mental health:

"Student housing can positively contribute to the well-being and study experience of students. The first report of the Monitor Mental Health and Substance Use among Higher Education Students paints a concerning picture of students' mental health. For instance, 51% of students experience psychological complaints such as anxiety and depression. Almost all students (97%) experience stress, with a majority experiencing a lot of stress. Nearly 80% of students feel lonely, and almost 29% report feeling very lonely." [13]

The LAS states that the 2022 student monitor (ABF Research) shows that 'students living in communal housing have significantly higher well-being than those in independent housing or living at home.' It also notes that for student well-being, 'meeting others is crucial,' making it important for student housing to provide communal facilities and programs that foster social interaction and integration. [14]

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[13] [Landelijk-actieplan-studentenhuisvesting-2022-2030.pdf](#), p.9.

[14] [Landelijk-actieplan-studentenhuisvesting-2022-2030.pdf](#), p.12.

"Students living in shared accommodation have significantly higher well-being than students living independently and those living at home." [15]



# Availability, affordability and quality, as well as sustainability

## Turning the National Action Plan for Student Housing into concrete steps

The increase in more housing units presents a significant challenge for developers and housing corporations. The National Action Plan for Student Housing provides not only tools but also guidelines that can be seen as 'basic requirements' in housing construction. We cannot ignore sustainability (point 3), while ensuring quality of living and student well-being (points 4 and 5). How can we make these points of the action plan concrete in the development of student housing?

### **New construction and redevelopment**

The supply of (student) housing must be increased through new construction on the one hand and the redevelopment and transformation of existing areas on the other. Redevelopment and transformation produce less nitrogen and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions than new construction projects. On the other hand, new homes can be built more sustainably and made energy-neutral more easily. It is important to view the development of sustainable student housing in a broader perspective.

It is recognised that 'rising construction costs, long procedures, and high land prices make it difficult to build affordable student housing at an

acceptable return'.<sup>[16]</sup> By making smart use of existing space and investing in redevelopment and transformation, we can reduce the environmental impact, possibly limit construction costs, and maintain housing affordability.

### **A flexible layout of the built environment**

With housing shortages in a densely populated country with limited space, it is important to think about how we can increase the 'effective use of existing housing stock.'<sup>[17]</sup> By not only considering the type of housing but also thinking about how people can move from one type of housing to another — think of students moving directly from their student room to another unit or encouraging older people whose children have moved out to downsize to a smaller apartment — we can use living spaces more efficiently. This requires a more flexible layout of the built environment and (re)organisation of functions.

### **The well-being of students**

In addition to stimulating flow, the action plan aims to create more communal housing units and shared amenities that will strengthen the community feeling. Over the past decades, almost exclusively independent housing units for students have been

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[16] [Landelijk-actieplan-studentenhuisvesting-2022-2030.pdf](#), p.26.

[17] [Landelijk-actieplan-studentenhuisvesting-2022-2030.pdf](#), p.17.

added, disrupting the balance between independent and communal rooms. This is not a positive development as, according to the LAS, 'meeting others is crucial' for student well-being (see sidebar).

This presents both an obligation and an opportunity for the development of student housing in the coming period. The LAS emphasizes that developers, policymakers, and municipalities should think about how to better implement 'communal facilities and programs that promote social interaction and integration' within student housing. This raises the question: How can this be done from the earliest stages of development to ensure these elements are integrated from the design phase rather than added later?[18]

### **Moving towards a more hybrid use of spaces**

These trends invite us to consider the targeted development of more communal housing units and a more hybrid use of spaces. Creating shared functions could contribute to this goal. It is best to consider the design of these shared functions at the outset of development. However, it also raises the question of how to enhance the housing experience and quality of living for students without overburdening building managers and facilities staff.

An example of an increasingly included service in shared spaces and communities, is indoor parcel lockers. Placing lockers provides residents with an extra service, relieving building managers and reducing the growing problem of transport movements of different parcel deliverers. This way, a building can contribute to a greener living environment and reduced emissions in the neighbourhood, especially in larger residential complexes.

Through efficient flow, one can stimulate more efficient use of housing units, while creating shared functions allows for more efficient use of spaces and simultaneously enhances the living experience and community feeling. An example where this is already happening, and where the MyPup service is included, is at The Social Hub. Here, they do not refer to it as student housing, but as 'hybrid hospitality', because it caters to multiple facilities for residents ('guests') alongside living. They describe the stay at The Social Hub as an "All-inclusive Student Stay", where in addition to the MyPup service, amenities such as workspaces, lounge areas, a gym, a shared bike service, and a laundry room are included.[19]

Curious about this solution? Read the customer case study [here](#).

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[18] Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties. (2022, 12 september). Landelijk actieplan studentenhuisvesting: "Alle partijen willen stappen zetten".

[19] <https://www.thesocialhub.co/>.



## New forms of living

What is not clearly mentioned in the National Action Plan for Student Housing is in what form these shared living spaces can be developed. A student complex lends itself well to this, but doesn't it also provide an opportunity to actively experiment with new housing formats? In the Middle Ages, the Netherlands had more diverse housing forms than it does today.[20] In the article 'Living in the Netherlands: a uniformity. Here's how it can be different' from NRC (April 2024), it is argued that in an escalating battle for space in a densely populated country, housing experiments might just help solve certain problems. The graph from CBS in the same article illustrates the uniformity of housing forms in the Netherlands well.[21]

With the realisation of one million more homes in eight years, experimentation is unlikely to be prioritised, while various housing forms focusing not only on shared spaces but on fostering communal living could provide opportunities in the transition to a more sustainable housing climate.

In the report 'Room for Living' (April 2024), also referenced in the same article, it is concluded that 'there is a strong need for greater diversity in homes and housing forms that accommodate the diverse ways people in the Netherlands want to live and cohabit'. The State Commission on Demographic Developments 2050 argues that 'a new housing and construction culture is urgently needed' and calls for a radical reassessment of urban planning.[22]





"There is a strong desire for a greater diversity of homes and housing types to suit the diverse ways people want to live and cohabit in the Netherlands." [23]

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[20] Schreuder, A. (2024, 31 januari). Architect Floris Alkemade: 'Nederland beschikte in de Middeleeuwen over meer woonvormen dan nu'. NRC.

[21] Klumpenaar, S., & Van Noort, W. (2024, 26 april). Wonen in Nederland: eenheidsworst. Dat het anders kan, zie je hier. NRC.

[22] Hagen, T. V. D. & TU Delft. (2023). Ruimte voor wonen: Naar een integrale aanpak van de Nederlandse woonopgave.

[23] Klumpenaar, S., & Van Noort, W. (2024, 26 april). Wonen in Nederland: eenheidsworst. Dat het anders kan, zie je hier. NRC.



# Conclusion

The future of our cities demands a radical reconsideration of urban planning, with student housing forming an integral part of the redesign of the entire urban landscape. If we are to create a sustainable city of tomorrow, we must not only strive for more housing that meets sustainability standards, but also take a broader look at the entire urban landscape, offering a diverse range of housing types thriving in car-free areas, where various communities live together.

In the sustainable city of tomorrow, housing extends beyond 'living', with buildings combining various services to enhance living comfort, strengthen community spirit, and simultaneously increase operational sustainability. Students play an essential role in the dynamics of urban life, and student housing, in particular, lends itself to experimenting with new housing formats that integrate various shared functions.

This is not an easy task and certainly not at a time when we are dealing with soaring construction costs and a

housing crisis, but it does create a renewed look and - albeit forced - approach to housing. Can we make a virtue of necessity with a view to the sustainable city of tomorrow? The housing crisis, scarcity of space, construction costs and housing requirements offer limitations, but to end with what the report [Room for Living](#) starts with:

**"The housing crisis also offers opportunities. The chance to build a sustainable and long-term healthy living environment."**

# Together we contribute to the sustainable city of tomorrow

Has your interest been piqued after reading this whitepaper and would you like to discuss this further? Then please contact us for a cup of coffee.

We would love to think with you about how your organisation can take the first step towards a more sustainable solution for receiving and sending parcels!

Find out how you can make an impact: [my-pup.com](http://my-pup.com)



