

Concern over Ireland's poor performance in EU-wide survey of international students' experiences accessing accommodation

“Ireland is rated among the worst in Europe when it comes to the experience of international students trying to find accommodation. This is hardly compatible with our international education strategy to increase international student numbers by 27% over the next couple of years” said Sheila Power, ICOS’ Director, who expressed her concern at findings in an EU-wide survey which pointed to a poor performance from Ireland in a number of areas.

“A collaborative effort will be needed involving Government, city planners and higher education institutions in addressing the issues which the research identifies” Ms Power added saying she was particularly concerned with the level of fraud experienced by international students in Ireland and about the affordability of accommodation including purpose built student accommodation.

Full Statement from ICOS here:

The Irish Council for International Students (ICOS) welcomes recently published European Commission-funded research conducted by *HousErasmus+* which “aims to identify the challenges and best practices around accommodation for international students” throughout Europe.

Based on a survey of 8,000 students who studied at 600 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) across the continent, the study reveals that the experience of accessing the housing market in Ireland is one of the worst in Europe for international students. Nearly 77% of those respondents who studied in Ireland found housing to be more expensive than they had expected, while almost 30% reported experiencing fraud—the highest levels across Europe. 12% of international students in Ireland reported experiencing discrimination.

The current difficulties in securing suitable and affordable accommodation in the Irish market is an issue for all students, but particularly affects international students, who are at the same time faced with the challenges of adapting to a new country, culture and academic environment. This transition leaves students more vulnerable to fraud, and this research highlights that urgent action needs to be taken to tackle this.

In the context of the government’s ambitious targets, restated in its Trading and Investment Strategy to increase international student numbers by 27% by 2019/20, the findings of this study are particularly alarming, and a lack of action in this area can only serve to impede the internationalisation agenda for higher education. Moreover, with the numbers of international students expected to increase by more than the numbers of new student beds, the situation will only deteriorate further without intervention from government and the HEIs.

While recognising that solutions to this ongoing issue are complex, ICOS supports the recommendations outlined in the *HousErasmus+* report that HEIs become more involved in assisting international students to secure appropriate accommodation, and that the international offices increase their collaboration and engagement with student housing providers. Such engagement should also include efforts to ensure high-quality housing, while controlling the spiralling costs with

which students are currently struggling. This would require that colleges' international student support services are properly resourced with qualified staff to deal with these matters.

ICOS believes all stakeholders in this sector need to be proactive. We recognise the Union of Students in Ireland's (USI) efforts to date in this area through initiatives such as their accommodation relief website launched in 2015, and we look forward to working closely with USI to find solutions that address the challenges that are particular to international students.

In addition, we look forward to the release of the Interdepartmental Working Group's national student accommodation strategy in the coming weeks, and hope that it will address the issues for international students highlighted in the *HousErasmus+* research.

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Notes

You can read the research report at

<http://houserasmus.eu/sites/default/files/HOUSERASMUS%20article%20from%20TCO2020%20Mag.pdf>

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