

2024 Housing Lobbying Report

Addressing Housing Scams in the International Student Sector

Introduction:

As part of our ongoing commitment to safeguarding the interests of international students and renters, Broken Chalk presents this lobbying report to address the pervasive issue of housing scams in Amsterdam. With the rising incidence of fraudulent activities targeting renters, especially expats and students, urgent action is needed to protect vulnerable populations and preserve the integrity of the rental market.

Problem Statement:

Amsterdam, like many major cities, faces a significant threat from housing scams, with scammers targeting expatriates and students seeking affordable accommodation. The financial losses incurred by victims of housing scams are substantial, posing a significant economic burden and jeopardising the financial well-being of renters.

Expatriates and students are particularly vulnerable to housing scams due to their limited familiarity with local housing norms and regulations, making them prime targets for exploitation. Victims of housing scams often fail to report incidents to authorities, contributing to a lack of accountability and perpetuating fraudulent activities within the rental market.

Recommendations:

We advocate for stricter regulation of the rental market, including mandatory membership in established realtors' organisations such as the MVA or the NVM and the strengthening of rental agencies to prevent fraudulent practices and hold perpetrators accountable.

We encourage the government to launch comprehensive educational campaigns targeting renters, particularly expatriates and students, to raise awareness of common housing scams provide guidance on identifying and avoiding fraudulent schemes and collaborate with organizations like !WOON to disseminate information and provide confidential advice to individuals seeking housing.

We urge the government and universities to implement measures to verify the legitimacy of rental listings and landlords, including access to resources such as the Kadaster property register and to encourage and raise awareness of renters to conduct thorough background checks and seek second opinions when evaluating rental opportunities. Proper measures should be taken against informal listings on social media, and penalties and fines should be placed to combat the surge of housing scams.

Furthermore, renters should be made aware of their rights regarding fees and financial transactions and guidance on legal deposits and recourse options for unjust fees should be provided. We urge the government to facilitate access to support services, such as those offered by!WOON, to assist victims of housing scams in reclaiming losses and seeking restitution.

Broken Chalk advocates for proactive measures to inform and support international students in navigating the Dutch housing market effectively. Our proposed solutions aim to empower students with the knowledge and resources needed to secure safe and legitimate accommodation during their time in the Netherlands.

We further recommend collaboration with home affairs departments at universities and colleges to incorporate housing education and assistance into orientation programs for international students. By integrating housing-related information sessions, workshops, and resources into existing initiatives, institutions can better prepare students for the challenges of finding accommodation in a new country.

We further advocate for legislation and policy frameworks that incentivize universities and colleges to prioritize housing support for international students. Encourage the establishment of dedicated housing offices or support services within educational institutions to provide tailored assistance and guidance to students throughout their housing search process.

The government has a duty to ensure that international students have access to comprehensive information on housing options, rights, and responsibilities from the moment they arrive in the country and to develop informational materials, online resources, and orientation sessions specifically focused on housing-related topics to equip students with the knowledge needed to make informed decisions.

Universities should be held to the same standard. We urge the government to implement specialised support programs or mentorship initiatives for first-year international students to address their unique housing needs and challenges and to pair incoming students with experienced mentors or peer advisors who can offer guidance, share personal experiences, and provide practical assistance in navigating the rental market.

We further fight for the establishment of mechanisms for monitoring the effectiveness of housing support initiatives and collecting feedback from international students to identify areas for improvement and regular assessments of student satisfaction with housing services and use this feedback to refine and enhance support programs over time should be conducted.

By prioritizing the integration of housing education and support services into existing institutional frameworks and advocating for policy changes to incentivize universities and colleges, we can ensure that international students receive the assistance they need to secure suitable housing and thrive in their academic pursuits.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, addressing the scourge of housing scams in Amsterdam requires a coordinated and multi-faceted approach. By implementing the recommended measures, we can protect renters, uphold the integrity of the rental market, and create a safer and more equitable environment for all residents. We urge the Ministry of Education to prioritize these initiatives and collaborate with stakeholders to combat housing scams effectively.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue.

Sincerely,

Broken Chalk

Anti-Scamming Team