

HOW UNIVERSITIES ACCOMMODATE GENERATION ERASMUS

Europe's first large-scale student housing research shows that students heavily rely on university help, but universities struggle to find the accommodation to support their accommodation goals, finds Jérémy Apert.

For decades, the European Commission (EC) has worked to break down barriers between European higher education systems. The Bologna process has harmonized study programmes, making it a breeze for European students to study in other European countries. International student exchange serves as a tool for creating better understanding between cultures and establishing ties and networks that span a continent. The EC has supported this form of exchange mobility with funding for Erasmus students, and has set a goal for 2020: 20% of graduates should have had an international study experience.

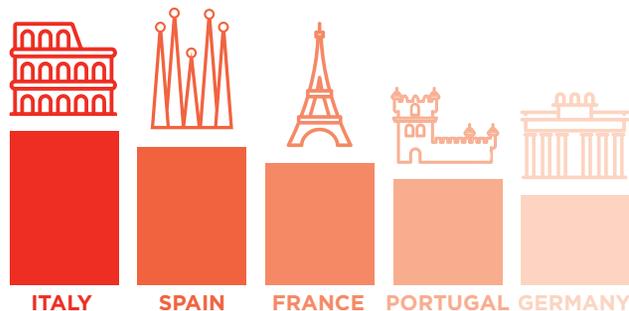
But while the barriers in academia may have been broken down, the commission is looking at other factors that might discourage students from going abroad. Housing is often the biggest cost involved in studying abroad, and international students are often confronted with oversaturated housing markets.

First European student housing survey

To date, very few studies have been conducted on international student housing in Europe. The *HousErasmus+* project aims to rectify that and identify the main challenges international students and trainees face when looking for accommodation abroad. The project also aims to gather the best practices from universities, student organizations, policymakers and housing providers to improve the situation in Europe.

The *HousErasmus+* study includes a literature review and five surveys targeting international students and trainees, universities, housing providers, student organizations and policymakers. It also comprises ten study visits across Europe to complement the quantitative analysis. The information contained in this article is drawn from the university and student surveys, which reached 8,000 students and 600 higher education institutions from all over Europe.

Top 5 respondents per home country



Top 5 respondents per host country



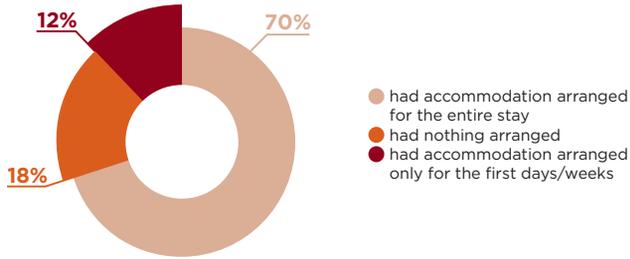
How do students find their accommodation?

Finding accommodation is especially complex from a distance. However, 70% of survey respondents managed to arrange their accommodation before going abroad, and of these 30% had the host university arrange it for them. The most important source of information was the website of the host university. This means that the way that universities communicate about accommodation has an enormous influence on the decisions that students make.

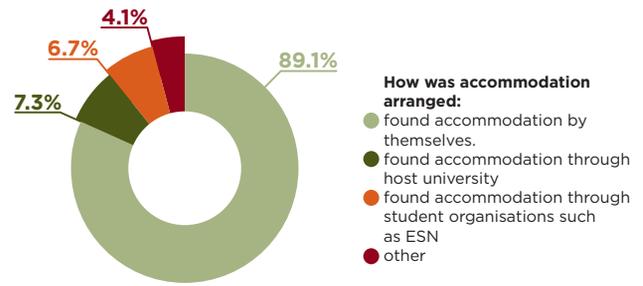
The role of universities

It's clear that higher education institutions are the number one place that visiting students consult when looking for accommodation. And universities are actively getting involved in helping students. Some provide accommodation, and many provide information about housing without directly handling it. Almost two thirds of students found the information they received useful. On a scale of 1 to 5, the average rating of the usefulness ranged from 3.3 in Greece, Lithuania and Portugal, to 3.9 in Bulgaria, Romania and Slovakia. When asking the universities' International Relations Offices (IROs) about accommodation issues, over 61% of respondents said that more than half of the international

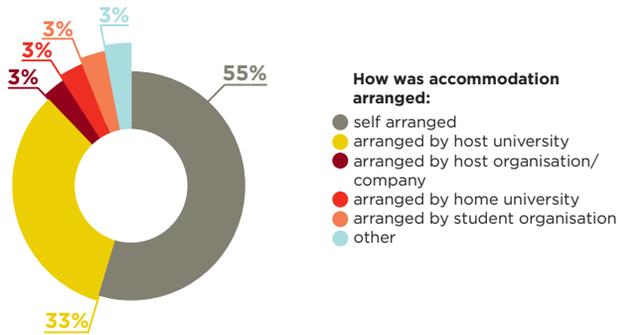
Before going abroad:



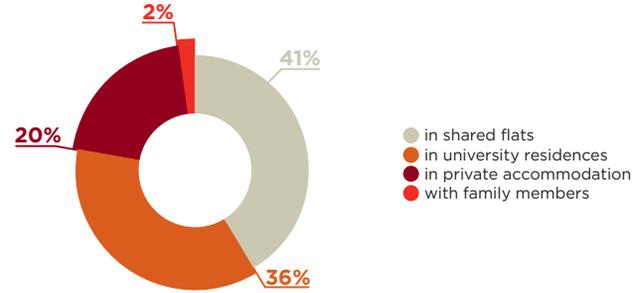
Of the 30% of students that did not book accommodation in advance:



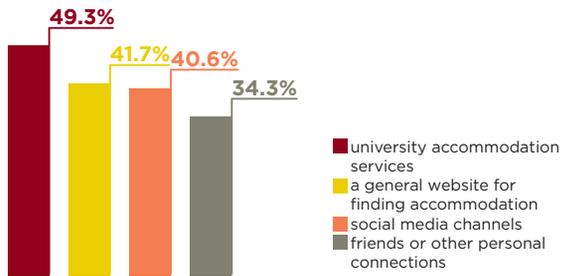
Of the 70% who arrange housing in advance:



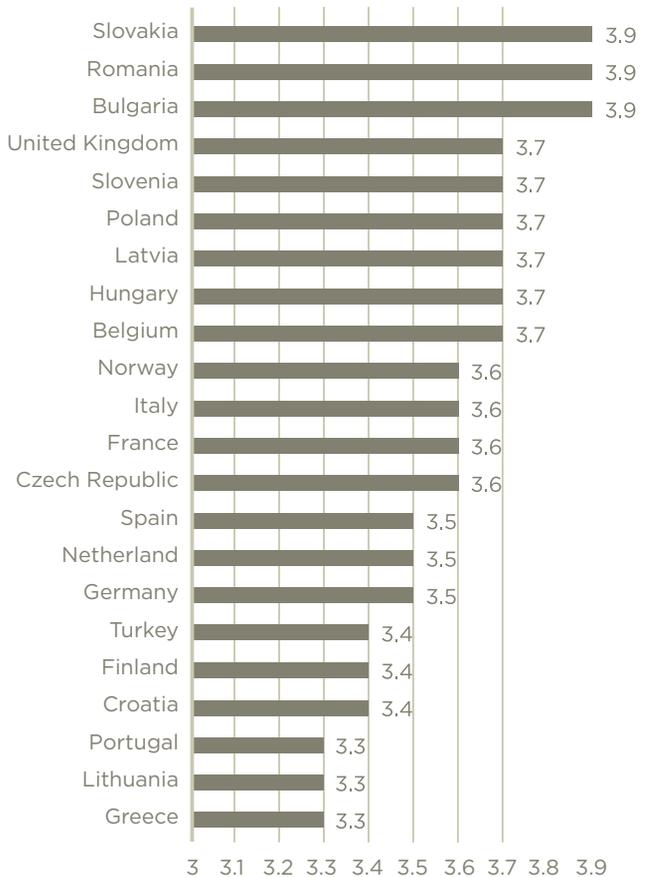
Of all students, in what type of accommodation did students stay:



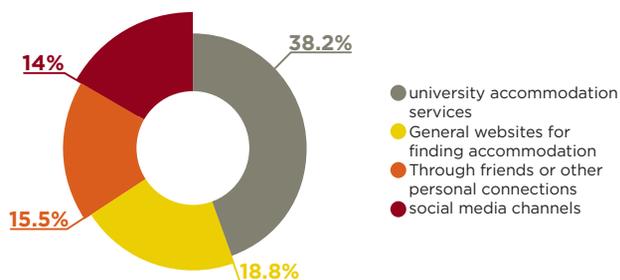
Sources students use to find accommodation:



How useful was the information on housing from the host university?



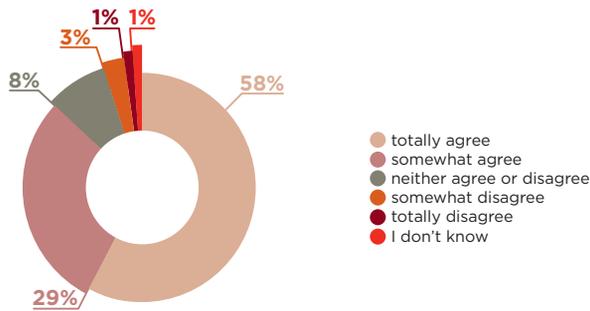
Which source led to a booking of accommodation:



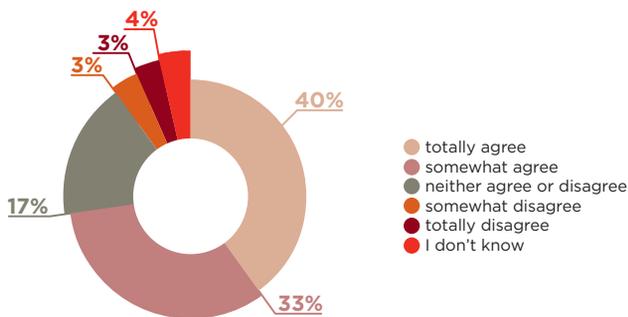
students come to them for information on finding housing. 88% of respondents saw it as their task to provide incoming students with information on housing, and 30% of respondents said they had at least one staff member focused primarily on helping students find accommodation. The majority of universities, however, provide accommodation support either via interns, student helpers or part-time work from colleagues with a more general role

36% of the universities had more than six employees in their International Relations Office, showing a dedicated commitment to internationalization. 87% of respondents named internationalization as a university priority. But supporting students does not always lead

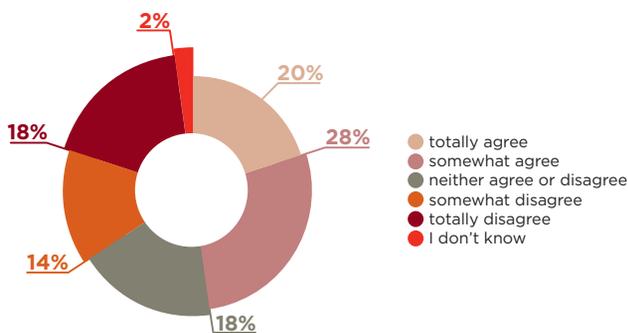
For the HEI, internationalisation is a priority



The HEI attempts to remove accommodation obstacles for incoming students



The HEI can meet all demand for housing international students



to success, and many respondents fear that housing is a barrier to internationalization. In fact, 53% of university respondents considered a lack of accommodation to be an obstacle to the HEI's internationalization goals.

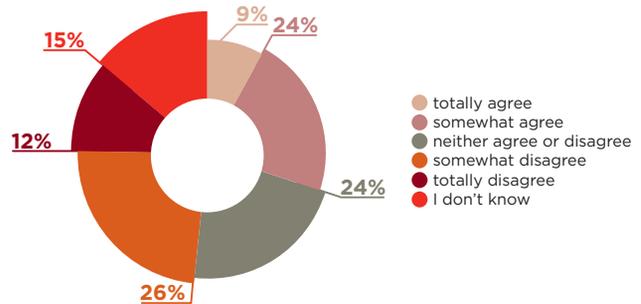
In order to solve this, the IROs make suggestion to improve the situation. Some of the suggestions:

- Increasing agreements and synergy between universities and the private housing sector
- Increasing HEIs' responsibilities in finding accommodation
- Increasing staff qualifications to deal with the issue
- The creation of centralized databases for reliable landlords
- The creation of platforms where universities, housing providers, policymakers and students meet
- Increasing the responsibility of the city in accommodating international students

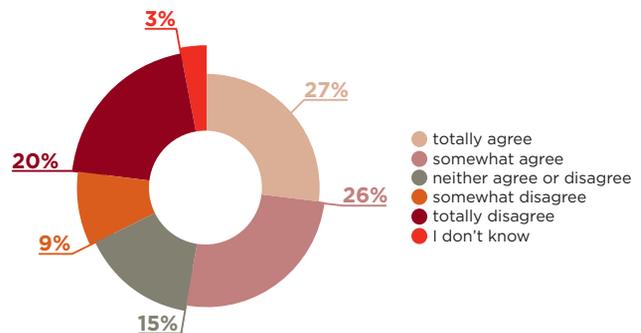
Financial aspects

In the survey, 62% of student respondents stated they found accommodation that represented good value for money, yet slightly more than 40% said that accommodation costs were higher than expected. The results varied considerably depending on the host country: Bulgaria and Slovakia were considered the least costly and Iceland, the UK and Ireland the most expensive.

Homeowners are reluctant to rent to international students

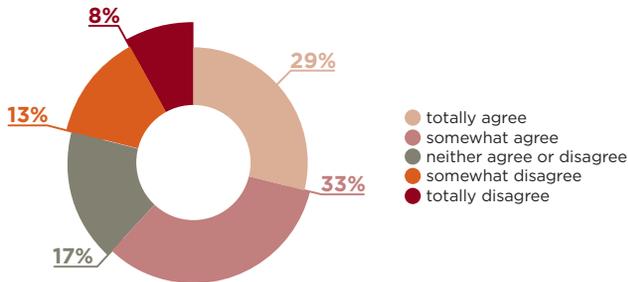


Lack of accommodation is an obstacle to HEI internationalisation

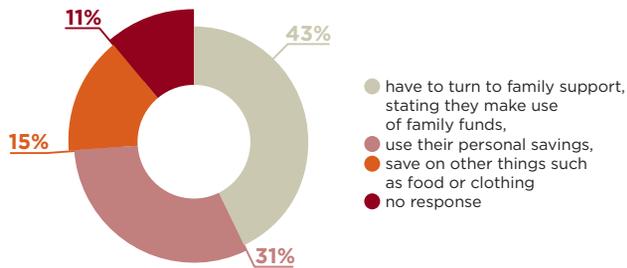


When asked whether the extra cost made it difficult to finance studying abroad, more than 60% of those staying in Norway (73%), Denmark, France, Ireland, Italy and Turkey responded in the affirmative. Students and interns staying in Bulgaria reported the fewest difficulties.

Accommodation was good value for money:



How do exchange students and interns finance the additional cost of accommodation?



Discrimination and fraud

Unfortunately, the survey also reveals that many international students suffer from discrimination and/or fraud. 18.6% of respondents said that they faced discrimination, and the countries with the highest numbers were Turkey, Denmark and Italy. The lowest numbers were in Norway, Finland and Croatia.

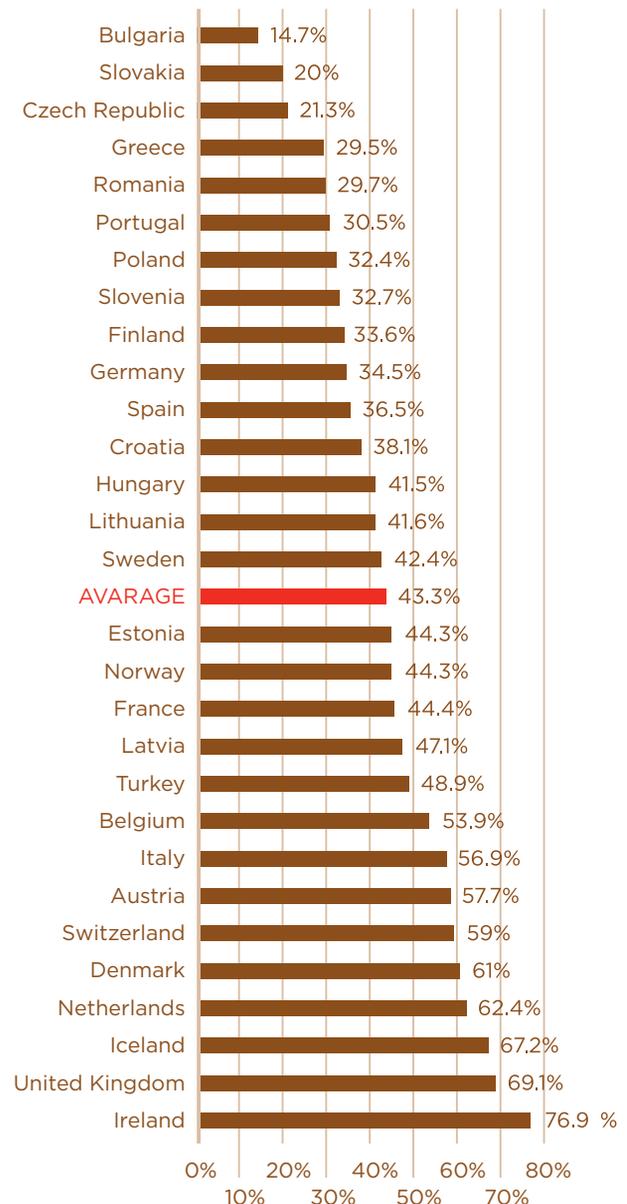
An average of 12% of respondents said they had experienced fraud, ranging from less than 2% in Slovakia and Norway to over 20% in Turkey, Denmark and Ireland. The types of fraud mentioned included fake advertisements posted on social media or being asked for a deposit in return for receiving a key via mail. It should be noted that of the 12%, some refer to *attempted* fraud rather than actually being cheated.

The issue of student accommodation is clearly a hot topic within the Erasmus programme. Students struggle to find the right place to live, although the majority do eventually seem to land on their feet. Universities see it

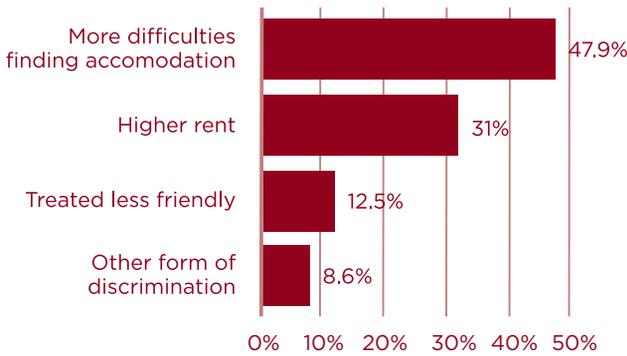
as their responsibility to accommodate these students, but do not generally have the capacity to solve the issue for all of their visiting students. Increasing the cooperation between housing providers and universities seems like a logical step to address these issues.

While these are complex issues without easy or quick fixes, it is important that all stakeholders – including HEIs, policymakers on all levels, housing providers and student organizations – recognize the problem and do their best to overcome the obstacles that currently exist.

Percentage of responders perceiving costs of accommodation higher than they had expected, by host country (only countries n>30)



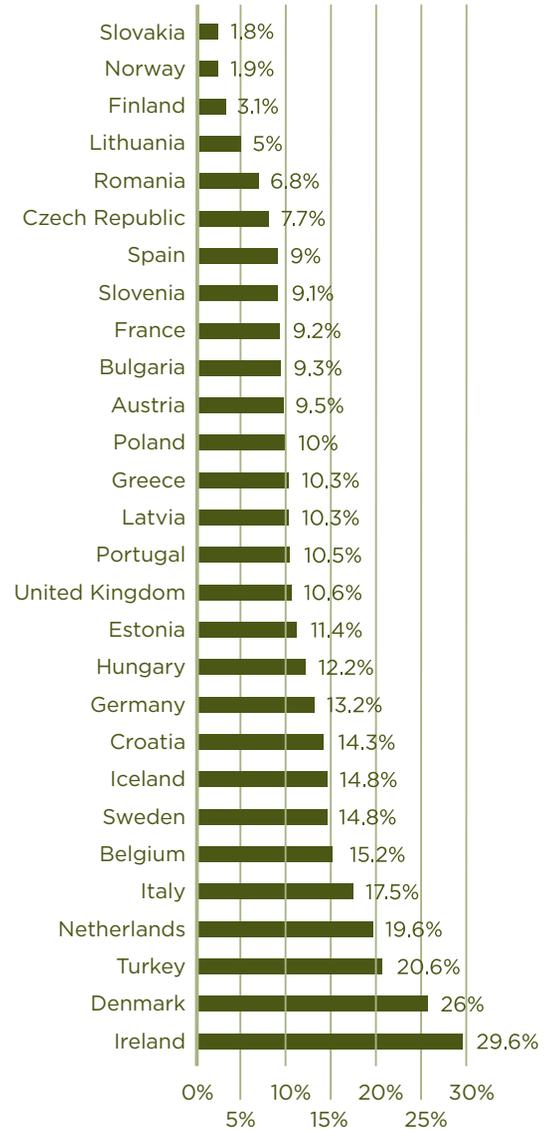
Forms of discrimination



Percentage of responders who face discrimination in their host country (only considered if n>50)



Percentage of respondents experiencing fraud while looking for accommodation in their host country (only considered if n>50)



Within ESN, Jérémy Apert is responsible for the implementation of the Erasmus+ funded project called HousErasmus.

The *HousErasmus+* project will continue until October 2017 and in the last months of the project ESN will produce policy recommendations on the topic which will be spread to decision-makers on European as well as national levels. If you would like to get involved or if you would like to see more results from the surveys, see houserasmus.eu or contact house-erasmus@esn.org.