

Housing guide

Dutch housing law and tips



The purpose of the Housing Guide is informing students about their housing rights and duties and giving tips and tricks to find a decent room in Groningen. This book is free and everything in it can be used without limitations. It is permitted to reproduce and copy the content of this book for non-commercial use, if references are used correctly.

Groningen Students' Union

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Opening hours

Monday: 12.00 – 17.00

Tuesday: 12.00 – 17.00

Wednesday: 12.00 – 17.00

Thursday: 12.00 – 17.00

Friday: 12.00 – 17.00 (board only)

Saturday: closed

Sunday: closed

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What is the Groningen Students' Union?

The Groningen Students' Union (Dutch: Groninger Studentenbond, abbreviated to GSb) is the union for and by students in Groningen. This means that the Union fights for the interests of students who study at the Hanze University of Applied Sciences or University of Groningen. By informing students about their rights and by working with the municipality and other parties, we look after the interests of students in Groningen. Our vision is: students should not be faced with restraints regarding income and mobility and should have access to the best education and housing.

To assist us, we have multiple committees. There are committees within the Union that solve problems for students concerning housing, education, work and income. You can ask your questions to the Legal Helpdesk by calling to +31 50 363 4675, e-mailing to steunpunt@groningerstudentenbond.nl or you could drop by at the office of the Union. Be sure to call us, if you arrive.

There's also the Rental Team which is specialised in rental issues and law and helps students with problems with their landlord or roommates, paying too much rent and other problems concerning housing in Groningen.

You can always contact the Rental Team for questions and complaints by calling to +31 50 363 4675, by e-mailing to huurteam@groningerstudentenbond.nl or by dropping by at the office of the Union. Be sure to call us, when you arrive.

If you want to become an active member or if you want to come over for more information, contact us by e-mailing to bestuur@groningerstudentenbond.nl, calling +31 50 363 4581, or just drop by our office. If you want to support us and our work, then become a member for just 10 euros per year! Check www.groningerstudentenbond.nl/en for more information about becoming a member or information about what we do.

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Introduction

Finding a room in Groningen can be quite a hassle. Still, most students find a room within three months. You should definitely begin searching for a room as soon as possible. This book will help you with tips, tricks and information on the Dutch housing market law.

At first, you will find general information and tips on living and finding a room in Groningen. After you have found your room, we will get you going with an overview of relevant Dutch rental law, such as your rights as a tenant, pricing and maintenance. If you find out something is wrong, you can find ways to fix these issues in the next part. We will then close off by giving a list with important things to do when coming to Groningen.

Good luck with finding a room in Groningen and if you encounter any problems or if you want some information, feel free to contact the Rental Team of the Groningen Student's Union. The Rental Team consists of well-educated and trained law students who are specialised in the Dutch housing law. They will always help you with questions, complaints or problems and their advice and support is free.

1. Looking for a room in Groningen

1.1 Nice neighbourhoods to live

The University has most of its faculties in either the city centre or at Zernike. The Hanze University of Applied Sciences has all its locations at Zernike.

Many students live in the city centre, within five minutes reach to most faculties, the university library, pubs, bars, shops and everything important to students. The surrounding neighbourhoods, such as the 'Zeeheldenbuurt', 'Schildersbuurt', 'Oranjewijk', 'Tuinbouwbuur', 'Korrewegwijk' and the 'Oosterparkwijk' are nice places to live in, with many facilities and other students. The areas 'Vinkhuizen', 'Paddepoel' and 'Selwerd' are becoming more and more popular, since they are right next to Zernike. However, these areas are relatively far from the city centre, approximately 15 minutes by bike.

Think about what will suit you best: close to the city centre and central station or close to the Zernike campus? If you want to know more about the different areas of Groningen, just ask a Dutch student or ask us. We can help you with tips and descriptions of every area.

1.2 Public transport



The image above shows where the various neighbourhoods are located.

1 City centre

2 Oosterparkwijk

3 Korrewegwijk

4 Selwerd

5 Paddepoel

6 Vinkhuizen

7 Oranjewijk

8 Schildersbuurt

9 Zeeheldenbuurt

10 Rivierenbuurt

11 Oosterpoort

12 Tuinbouwbuurt

If you don't want to ride a bike or you don't know how to ride one, you can always use the public transport of Groningen. Bus lines to Zernike are: 1, 2, 9, 15, 171. Bus lines to the UMCG are: 5 and 7. Bus lines to the Grote Markt (central place in the city center): 1, 3, 4, 5 and 10. All start from central station. Unfortunately, there are no bus lines during the night, so you have to grab a taxi if you crawl out a pub late at night. A travel planner for public transit can be found on 9292.nl.

1.3 Finding a room

There are several ways to find a room. We will list the most relevant and successful options.

Social media

Social media like Facebook and Twitter offer cheap and easy ways to find a room in Groningen. You can place an announcement on your own profile or in a group. There are several public groups for finding an apartment or room in Groningen. Some examples are 'Kamer in Groningen' and 'Rooms/Housing/Kamers Groningen'. Be aware that your ad is public and everyone can respond, so be specific about your demands and budget. There have also been cases of fraud on social media, so be aware. Keep in mind as well that down-payments are not a common practice in Groningen.

Internet

You can find many sites on the internet that help you with housing, such as www.kamernet.nl, www.kamer.nl, www.housinganywhere.com, www.athomeingroningen.com and www.studentenkamers.nl. These sites help you to get in touch with landlords, rental agencies and students who want to sublet their room or give helpful information. A lot of sites, however, offer only paid services. Next to this, some websites are not as reliable as they seem to be, since there have been instances of fraud. Another disadvantage of these websites is that there is a lot of competition. This means that often it will take several tries and viewings before you find a room. Don't get discouraged after a rejection! It happens to all of us!

Student associations

Student associations have large networks and often have forums or Facebook pages where you can place your ad for free and they can forward you to the right organization. Becoming a member of a student association also offers you opportunities of getting in touch with other (international) students and to integrate in the student life of Groningen.

Housing corporations

Housing corporations are reliable organizations that offer decent rooms for a reasonable price. This is due to these organizations being semi-government controlled. Most apartments have their own front-door, kitchen and bathroom, but they also offer cheap shared apartments and single rooms. In Groningen the housing corporations are: Lefier, Patrimonium, Nijestee and the Huismeesters. Keep in mind that getting a room requires registration on www.woningnet.nl. On this site, you will get points each month, that you can spend on a room. It takes a long time to get enough points to find a room, so start early!

Housing agencies and mediation offices

Housing agencies are organizations that search for a room on your behalf, whilst taking your preferences into account. They have a number of rooms available throughout the city or can get in touch with numerous landlords. This means that, most of the time, you will be able to get a room pretty fast. However, agency prices are quite high, approximately hundreds of euros in general. You could wonder if you really need a housing agent to look for you, so our advice is to contact them only in case of urgency or lack of time. Next to this, they do not necessarily offer you a better room than you could get otherwise.

SSH

SSH, (Stichting Studenten Huisvesting), is an organization that provides (furnished) housing for international students. This organization rents exclusively to international students. It is relatively easy to get a room here, but keep in mind that the rooms are mostly filled within a day of being available and that you can only stay there for either 6 months or 12 months, due to them offering a special type of contract. If you want to learn more about this contract, and its implications, reach out to huurteam@groningerstudentenbond.nl.

1.4 Pros and cons of different housing options

Housing corporations

Pros

- + Maintenance is well arranged
- + Relatively fair system
- + Good service

Cons

- Register costs
- Waiting list can be long for decent rooms

Housing agents and mediating offices

Pros

- + Personal guidance
- + Quick result

Cons

- High mediation fees
- Maintenance can take a long time
- No guarantee for fair rent

Social media / internet

Pros

- + Free
- + Large network
- + Personal contact with providers

Cons

- Can take many tries before you get a room
- Not always responsive
- High demand, low supply

Looking for a room?

Check sshxl.nl



2. Dutch rental law

2.1 General housing law

Once you have found a nice place to live, it is important to know your rights as a tenant. It might seem weird, but most landlords don't know much about rental law. It is commonly known that most rental contracts are not in line with Dutch law and it is therefore important that you know what your rights are. One important fact to know is that your rental contract is not binding when it is against the law, even when your signature is on it. This means that you can just sign a contract that is in conflict with the law. Something which is not legally correct, does not actually exist in legal terms. We list the most relevant housing laws and rules in the next section.

2.2 Protected by law

The law is quite strict when it comes to protecting tenants, which means that for instance your landlord cannot kick you out of your house. There are some exceptions, for instance if the landlord needs to use the house for himself. However, the rules regarding these exceptions are very strict, and your landlord has to have a court order to evict you.

Cases in which the landlord can evict you:

- Malpractice of the tenant: the tenant doesn't pay rent for approximately longer than three months or creates severe disturbance.
- Urgent use: the house owner needs to use the place for himself (the interests of the house owner should outweigh the interests of the tenant). If the landlord invokes this exception, you have a right to receive a financial compensation.
- Proposal for a new reasonable contract, such as a renovation to lower the energy costs of the house which changes the rental contract. If you refuse these changes and the changes are considered reasonable by the court, your landlord has the right to end the contract.
- If you have a so-called 'campus contract', your lease ends after you stop being a student.

Although there are a few cases in which you can be evicted, the rules to end a rental contract are very strict. Your landlord can't change or end the contract without urgent reasons. The most important criterium is that the interests of the house owner outweigh the interests of the tenant and that ending the contract is absolutely necessary.

2.3 Prices maximum rent

There are specific and binding rules relating to the maximum rental price that your landlord can ask for a room or an apartment. The Rental Committee (Huurcommissie in Dutch) has made clear regulation to what a room should cost. Factors that influence the maximum price are square meters, condition of the house, kitchen size, etc. Location is not a factor! So it does not matter whether your apartment is in the city centre or in the surrounding areas. However, if the building you live in is regarded as 'protected city scape', your maximum rental price might increase.

Despite the fact that there is a binding (obligatory) maximum rental price, there is no government monitoring. This means that many landlords try to ask high prices and often get away with it. Fortunately, there are organizations, such as ours, who can help you and check your maximum rental price for free. We will also help you with contacting your landlord and if necessary, help you starting a procedure at the Rental Committee. If you are wondering if you might be overpaying, you can ask our Rental Team for advice. They will check if your rental price is in accordance with the law. You can then decide if you want to start a procedure. A healthy relationship with your landlord proves to be valuable, so before going to the Rental Committee, letting your landlord know that he is asking too much rent and asking for a specification of costs is often the best start. Even though he or she is obliged to lower the rent according to the binding maximum rent of the Rental Committee, starting a procedure is the last option. Our Rental Team consists of experienced law students who can help you with these situations and will provide you with

personal advice.

Deregulated rental price

All of the previous doesn't apply to you as a tenant when you have a deregulated (geliberaliseerd in Dutch) rental price. When you have a deregulated rental price the rules of the free sector apply. Per the 1st of January 2019, the deregulation limit is 720,42 euros per month. When the rental price in your contract is higher than 720,42 euros, the rental rules, with some exceptions, do not apply to your contract.

That means that there is no maximum standard rent, no maximum percentage for the annual rent increase and you are ineligible for rental subsidy/rental benefit.

When you have a dispute with your landlord, you cannot go to the Rental Committee but you have to go to court. However, if you file a request at the Rental Committee within six months after your contract began (the date stated on your rental contract), they can still test your contract – even if you have a deregulated rental contract. If the Rental Committee considers that the rent is too high and should be below or on the deregulation limit, they will lower the rental price and the contract will no longer be deregulated or 'liberalised' anymore.

It often occurs that the landlord has a single contract with one of the tenants in the house, the so-called main tenant (hoofdhuurder in Dutch). The main tenant has rental contracts with the other tenants in the house. When there are four students living in the residence, they transfer their rent to this main tenant. The main tenant then transfers the entire amount of rent to the landlord. This means that the amount of rent in the rental contract will be far above the deregulation limit and the

main tenant cannot request a rent reduction. If you want a rent reduction as a subtenant you would have to address the main tenant, your housemate.

2.4 Obligations landlord and tenant

Firstly, your landlord is obliged to make the apartment or room available to you. Secondly, he or she is required to fix material and immaterial defects, such as (gas/water) leakages and broken windows. The general rule is that the landlord has to pay if the renting party asks for a repair. However, some defects have to be paid by the tenant. Whether or not you have to pay for the costs, depends on the severity and the total costs of the defect.

Defects which should be paid by the landlord:

- Leakages;
- Wood rot;
- Broken windows and frames, if the tenant is not to blame.

Defects which should be paid by the tenant:

- Unclogging the sink;
- Small recoveries to the central heating.

These are just some examples of defects. The Dutch government has listed several types of defects on its website and whether the landlord or the tenant should pay for them. As a rule of thumb: everything above 70 euros should be paid by the landlord and everything beneath 70 euros should be paid by the tenant. Thirdly, the landlord is obliged to provide maintenance to the apartment or house. If he or she neglects to provide acceptable maintenance, the rental price should be decreased. The paragraph 'Rental Committee' describes what you can do when you encounter such problems and want to know whether you can get a lower renting price. You can also send an email to

huurteam@groningerstudentenbond.nl for help.

Finally, your landlord is not allowed to enter your room, since your room is your private space and entering someone's home without permission is a violation. However, the landlord can check the shared rooms and can ask you for an inspection of your private room. You are permitted to refuse.

As a tenant you are (of course) required to pay the rent in time and to use the room as your house, and not for business purposes. Secondly, you may not cause severe disturbance. Lastly, informing your landlord about defects is also required and is also a decent thing to do and in your own interest: the sooner you mention a defect, the sooner it will be fixed.

2.5 Contract information

Your rent is generally divided into two parts: service costs and the standard rent (kale huur in Dutch). The service costs are costs for electricity, gas, water and maintenance and the standard rent contains the costs for renting the room. Some contracts do not specify the different costs, but give only one price. This is forbidden because this makes it difficult to understand the actual costs of your apartment or room.

The landlord has permission to increase the rent twice each 24 months with a certain maximum percentage. This percentage is set by the government at 3.1 percent for rooms. This means that every rent increase above 3.1 percent compared to the year before, is not permitted. Subsequently, the renting price should always be at or beneath the maximum renting price determined by the Rental Committee.

Your landlord must inform you of an increase of the rental price two months before he or she actually raises the rental price, by either an e-mail or letter. If you think the increase is illegal, you can contact our Rental Team at huurteam@ groningenstudentenbond.nl. Be aware that when he or she increases the service costs, the actual costs made should be taken into account. If the service costs are raised more than the actual costs have raised, your landlord has to pay you the difference as explained in the next paragraph.

Service costs

Service costs are costs that your landlord charges for electricity, gas, water and maintenance. These costs will be charged on top of the standard rental price. Service costs are paid every month as an advantage of the actual costs made. If the actual costs turn out to be lower than what you have paid that year, your landlord is obliged to pay you the difference back. It could also be the case that you have not paid enough to cover the actual costs and that you have to pay the amount which is left. Your landlord should always provide you a list with all costs been made each year. The average amount of service costs per month per person are 70 till 80 euros, but it highly depends on the state of the house.

Standard rent

The standard rent entails the price you have to pay for just the physical square meters and facilities. As explained before, the maximum rental price that your landlord may ask concerns the standard rent of the room.

Duration and ending of contract

There are two different types of rental contracts: fixed and indefinite. Indefinite contracts do not specify an end date, while fixed contracts do. In case of a fixed contract, you are not allowed to terminate the contract before it ends. However, you can always ask your landlord if he agrees with you leaving. It is recommended to offer help with finding another roommate, so your landlord doesn't have to put too much effort and time in searching for a new tenant. This will increase your chances of ending the contract before the end date. Contracts without an end date, however, last indefinitely, unless parties decide to terminate. You are allowed to cancel your contract whenever you want, as long as you act according to the period of notice.

Period of notice

If you decide to terminate your indefinite contract, you have to let your landlord know at least one month before you leave, starting from the first of each month. If you are planning to leave on the 24th of May, you have to cancel your contract before the 1st of April. The period of notice depends on your payment terms: if you are paying your rent once per 3 months, your period of notice will also be three months. The period of notice cannot be shorter than 1 month and longer than 3 months. It is required by law that you inform your landlord either by an e-mail or a written letter. Always keep a copy of your letter for your own administration.

2.6 Mediation costs

Many mediation agencies unjustly charge a very high price for their services to students. These services may only account to printing a standard form contract, for which often an amount equivalent to a month's worth of rent is charged. According to Dutch law, a mediator may only charge tenants costs for provided services. This also goes for students. If the costs charged are much higher than the services provided, they are seen as an unjust advantage for the mediation agency.

If mediation costs are charged illegally, the tenant can reclaim them as unduly paid. It is recommended to try and reach an agreement with the mediation agency first, due to the importance of a good understanding between both parties and the possible high costs of legal action. If an agreement is impossible, a tenant can send the mediation agency in question a registered letter, reclaiming the unduly paid costs. If the mediator is unwilling to repay the mediation costs, judicial action is the only way to get it back. If there is indeed a disproportion between the costs and services provided, the tenant has a strong position in such a procedure. There is also a good chance that the mediation office will have to pay the procedural costs. For more detailed information on this matter you can visit www.steunpuntbemiddelingskosten.nl.

2.7 Rent supplement

Are you planning to rent a house in the Netherlands? And do you spend a large portion of your income on rent? Then you may be eligible for a subsidy for the rental costs: the rent supplement. Eligibility depends on, among other things, your age and living situation. You can apply for the rent supplement at the Dutch Tax Administration (Belastingdienst in Dutch).

If you want to know if you are eligible for a rent supplement, please contact our Rental Team. You can contact them by e-mailing to huurteam@groningerstudentenbond.nl.

Registration municipality

Since you are moving to another address, you have to register at the municipality of Groningen within five days after you moved to Groningen. You can find the exact registration rules at: <https://gemeente.groningen.nl/moving-to-the-municipality-of-groningen>

2.8 Summary

- There is a maximum price for your rent;
- Your landlord can't ignore the Rental Committee;
- Your landlord can't kick you out of the house;
- Both you and the landlord have obligations;
- Service costs are the actual costs of electricity, gas etc., so at the end of the year your landlord should let you know if you paid too much or too little;
- Don't pay mediating costs without receiving a clear service description.

3. Legal assistance

There are a lot of different steps you can take when you need help with your rental and/or housing situation. Below, you can find where you can go with your problems and questions.

3.1 Rental Committee

The Rental Committee is an independent government organisation dealing with conflicts between landlord and tenant about the rental price, maintenance and service costs. Every judgement of the Rental Committee is binding. You can start a procedure at the Rental Committee when you and your landlord can't come to an agreement. The process costs are 25 euros, which will be refunded if you win the process. It takes quite some time before the Rental Committee publishes a statement, since they often have to do a rental check and gather other required information. A couple of months of waiting time is quite normal. More information about the Rental Committee you can find on the following website: www.government.nl/topics/housing/rented-housing

3.2 GSb Rental Ream

The Rental Team of the GSb is a group of enthusiastic legal students who give free legal advice and carry out free rental checks at student houses. These students know how to contact a landlord, how to mediate between parties and to start a procedure at the Rental Committee. If case questions are too complex, our tenancy lawyer helps the Rental Team. When you have a question for the Rental Team of the GSb you can call them (050 - 363 4675), come by the office during visiting hours (see page 2) or you can send them an e-mail (to huurteam@ groningenstudentenbond.nl). The Rental Team will help you for free.

3.3 Meldpunt Ongewenst Verhuurdersgedrag

The Meldpunt Ongewenst Verhuurdersgedrag (abbreviated to MOV: this is translated to Contact Point Abusive Landlordship, CPAL) has been founded on July 1st, 2016 by the Groningen Students' Union in cooperation with the municipality of Groningen.

Every tenant having problems with his or her landlord can send a complaint on our website (www.groningerstudentenbond.nl/mov). Since the 1st of January 2019 the MOV is connected to the "vergunningstelsel" (a new license system). This means that the municipality can take more action when you send a complaint.

The Groningen Students' Union collects the data and supports the tenants on demand. The municipality uses all the data to register which landlord crosses the line. When it appears that a landlord structurally violates the rules, the municipality will impose and enforce measures against the firm or person in question (for example, penalty payments and administrative enforcement). Every complaint counts, so don't hesitate and file your complaint!

3.4 GSb Housing Team

The GSb has a Housing Team that is working on current topics in the housing area. In this team, everyone looks at the current situation with a critical eye and works on trying to improve it. The Housing Team works on writing suggestions to housing corporations, improving the information supply on housing for Dutch and international students and spreads surveys among students to map out their experience with certain aspects of the rental market.

If you have ideas on how to improve the housing situation, you can e-mail them: housing@groningerstudentenbond.nl.

4. To do list

We can imagine that all the information given in this housing guide can be quite overwhelming. That is why we have made a to do list for you. This list contains the steps you need to take to find a room and what you need to do once you have found one. Good luck!

Finding a room

- ☐ Register at SSH and other housing agencies;
- ☐ Place an announcement on social media and eventually make an account on sites that help you with housing, as described in paragraph 1.3.

Once you have found a room

- ☐ Register at the municipality;
- ☐ Get and keep in touch with your landlord;
- ☐ Ask the Rental Team of the GSb for a free rental check and contract check;
- ☐ Have fun in Groningen!

RENTAL ISSUES?

CONTACT OUR RENTAL TEAM

+ 31 50 363 4675

huurteam@groningerstudentenbond.nl

