

Resolution on Student Housing and Student Cooperative Housing in Ireland

The lack of availability of student accommodation is the biggest issue facing students currently, particularly as the number of students pursuing higher education continues to rise. With limited housing options, many students are finding it increasingly difficult to secure affordable and appropriate accommodation near their colleges and universities. Purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA) is in short supply, leading to intense competition for available spaces, while the private rental market is becoming more expensive due to high demand and limited availability. This has forced many students into precarious living arrangements or long commutes, adding time, cost, and stress to their daily lives. The resulting instability is not only disrupting students' academic and social engagement but also contributing to broader mental health issues. The financial burdens and stress of securing housing have left many feeling overwhelmed and anxious, with some resorting to sleeping in cars or couch surfing. Furthermore, the lack of stable accommodation has pushed students to take deferral years, and in the worst cases, withdraw entirely from their courses. Without significant intervention, the student accommodation crisis in Europe will continue to severely impact students' academic performance, mental health, and overall college experience.

Student accommodation in Ireland is at the breaking point. With nearly 30,000 students applying for on-campus PBSA and being turned down, urgent investment is needed to build affordable student housing. Although announcements of developments at three institutions have been made (numerous times), actual progress has been slow, with the same projects repeatedly re-announced. Promised "affordable" rooms lack clarity on pricing, and the last strategic plan for student accommodation was published in January 2020—before the COVID-19 pandemic and the current government assumed office. Since then, no updated strategy has been implemented despite repeated promises.

The Dáil is the legislative body responsible for enacting laws and overseeing government actions. A new student accommodation strategy must be prioritized to ensure affordable and sufficient housing is available to meet the increasing demand from students.

Too many students depend on “digs” or living with a host family, with no legal protections. This means that they can be thrown out on an hour’s notice and have no right to use the facilities in the house. In the short term, the government must introduce legislation to protect those students and ensure digs are only a short-term solution until affordable PBSA is built. International students are not exempt from the issues and challenges faced by students, and in some cases, are paying the most for student accommodation and are unable to stay in digs, which only offer five days of accommodation per week.

USI/AMLÉ advocates for significant action to refurbish the over 160,000 vacant and derelict properties in Ireland. These properties, which currently incur minimal taxes, could be repurposed to provide much-needed housing. Furthermore, housing should be recognized as a civil and human right in the Irish Constitution, ensuring that anyone who wishes to live and study in Ireland can access stable and affordable accommodation.

Long-term solutions should also include the development of student cooperative living (co-ops), an affordable and sustainable housing model successfully implemented in countries like Switzerland and Germany, Netherlands, France, Italy, Hungary, etc.

Co-ops allow students to collectively manage and maintain their accommodation, reducing costs and fostering a sense of community. This model promotes collaboration, sustainability, and inclusivity, while addressing the financial and social challenges of the current housing crisis. It also provides flexibility and scalability, as it can be implemented across any variety and style of housing facility that can house multiple students. Co-op organisations can also develop to include multiple units that are not necessarily similar, as they are democratic and needs-based.

Without decisive intervention, the student accommodation crisis will continue to worsen, leaving future generations of students at risk of disrupted education and

compromised wellbeing. The government must act urgently to deliver affordable, secure, and adequate housing solutions for all students.

With the united voice of European students, ESU and USI/AMLÉ call for Ireland to:

- Build affordable, public, purpose-built student accommodations for HEIs
- Support student cooperative housing as an alternative to help fill the gap in the student bed shortage
- Finalise and pass the digs legislation to protect students in digs-style accommodation
- Provide a Technological University borrowing policy, so these institutions have capital access to build accommodation
- Launch a comprehensive, long-term plan for student accommodation

Proposers: USI

Seconders: SAMOK, EÜL, NUS UK, UAS, ANSA, MFS