

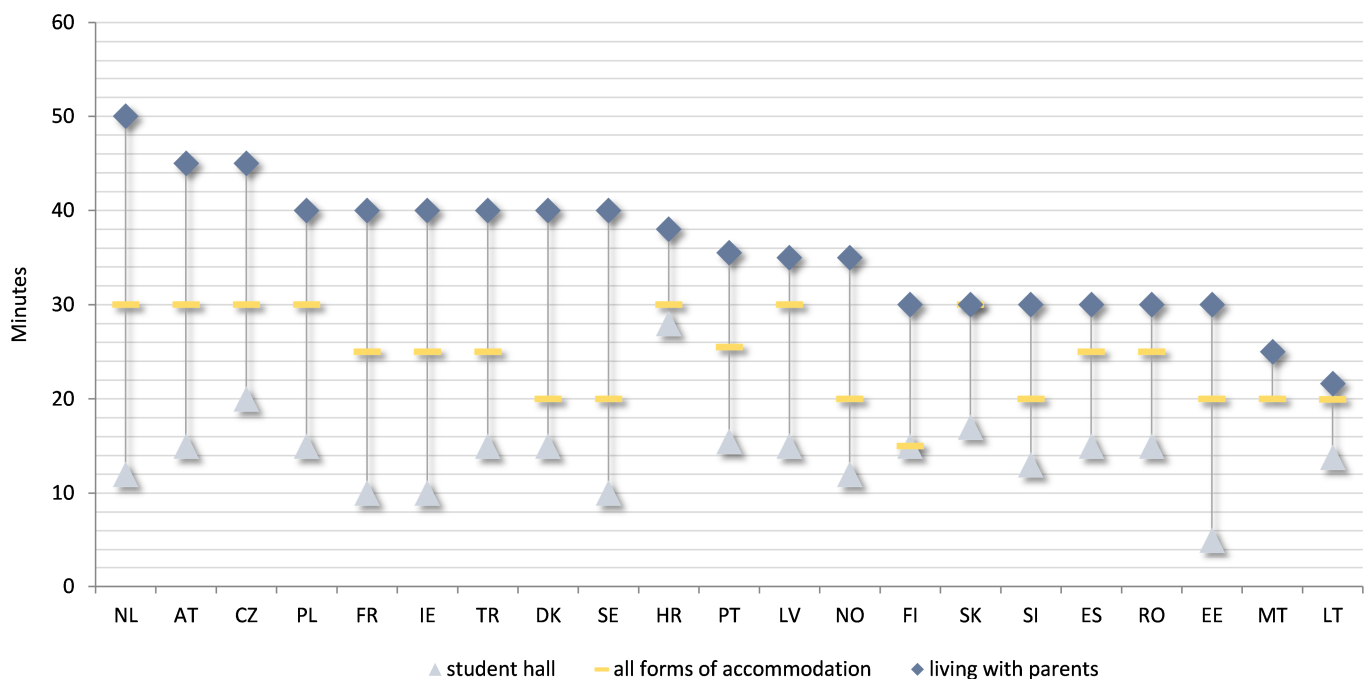
INTELLIGENCE BRIEF: STUDENTS' COMMUTING TIME AND ITS IMPLICATIONS¹

The EUROSTUDENT project collates comparable student survey data on the social dimension of European higher education. It focuses on the socio-economic background and on the living conditions of students, but it also investigates temporary international mobility. The project strives to provide reliable and insightful cross-country comparisons. The data used here come from the fourth round of EUROSTUDENT, for which data were collated in the years 2009 and 2010. The fifth round of EUROSTUDENT will report autumn 2014.

What effect does the housing situation of students have on their daily commuting time?

The question of time that students spend per day commuting from their home to the higher education institution is important for understanding the consequences of a particular form of housing for the use of time, expenditure structures and indeed for the choice of higher education institution. Data on the travel time of students were analysed for the categories 'all forms of housing' and as part of that for 'living with parents' and 'student halls'. Figure 1 shows for these categories the median commuting time of students.

Figure 1: Time for daily commuting from home to the higher education institution by form of housing (median in minutes; time for one way)



Source: EUROSTUDENT IV, Subtopic D.7. No data: CH, DE, E/W, IT. Too few cases for student hall: MT.

In all countries observed,² students spend most time commuting when they are living with their parents (with the exception of students in the Slovak Republic, where the median values for 'living with parents' and 'all forms of accommodation' are the same). The median time for travelling from home to the higher education institution (for one way only) for students who are living with their parents is 36 minutes across all countries. In country comparison, students in this type of housing spend most time commuting in The Netherlands, Austria and the Czech Republic (45 to 50 minutes). At the low end of the continuum, there are Malta and Lithuania where students spend about 25 minutes on travelling. One of the main reasons why students are willing to sacrifice a relatively big chunk of their time budget for commuting is that by staying at their parents' home they are able to

¹ Authors: Dominic Orr, Christoph Gwość, Hendrik Schirmer, all HIS-HF, Germany.

² AT = Austria, CH = Switzerland, CZ = Czech Republic, DE = Germany, DK = Denmark, E/W = England/Wales, EE = Estonia, ES = Spain, FI = Finland, FR = France, HR = Croatia, IE = Ireland, IT = Italy, LT = Lithuania, LV = Latvia, MT = Malta, NL = Netherlands, NO = Norway, PL = Poland, PT = Portugal, RO = Romania, SE = Sweden, SI = Slovenia, SK = Slovakia, TR = Turkey.

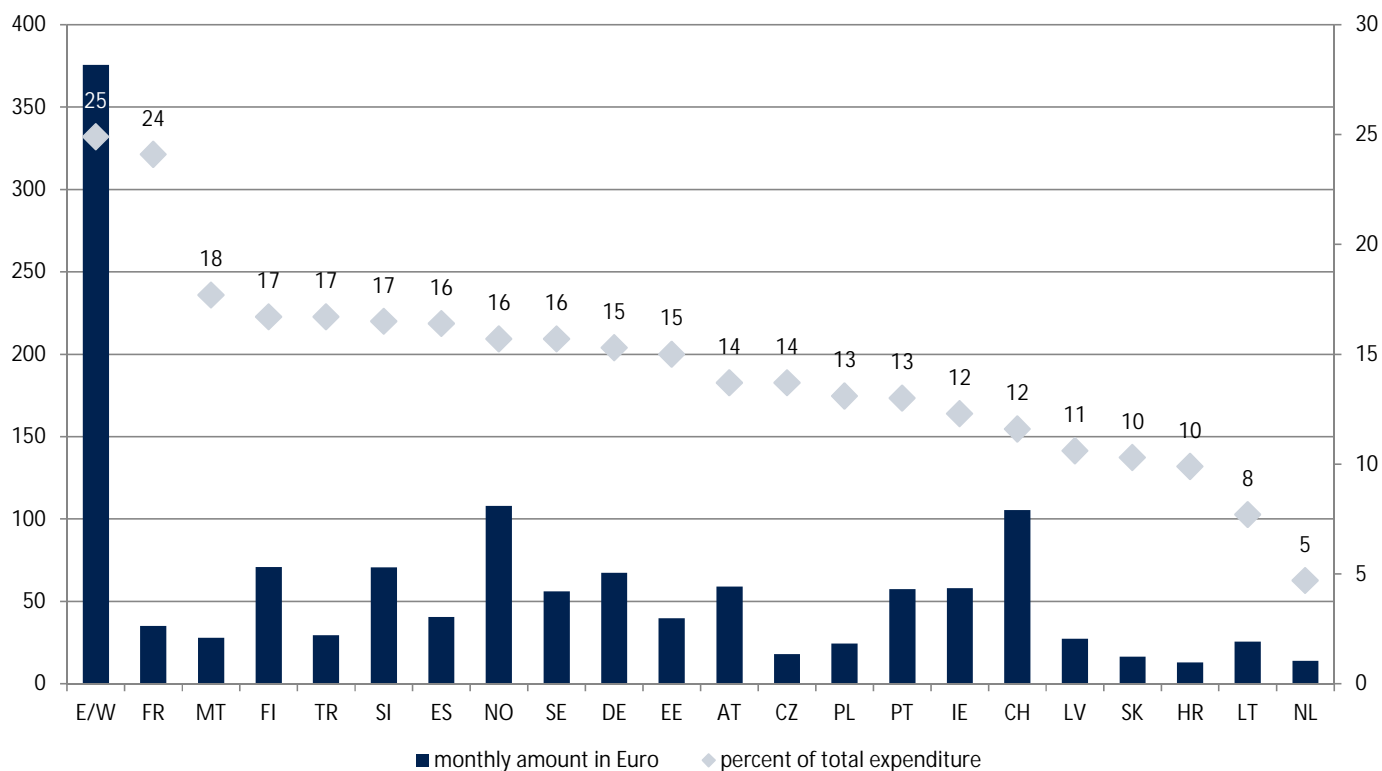
save expenditure on rent, food and perhaps on other goods. At least in some countries – such as Spain, Latvia and the Netherlands – this seems also to be related to studying in big cities (with more than 500,000 inhabitants) where the costs for accommodation are often higher compared to small cities (with up to 100,000 inhabitants). In addition, in many countries students can commute at relatively low direct costs as their use of public transportation is subsidised by the state; this may also ease the decision for staying with the parents and bearing longer travel times.

Another commonality between the countries is that students who reside in student halls have to spend the least time commuting (except for Finland, where the median travel time for students in student halls equals the value for all forms of accommodation). Across all countries, the median value for the travel time of students in this form of housing is 15 minutes. Noteworthy exceptions are Croatia and Estonia. In Croatia students seem to profit less from this form of accommodation with respect to saving time as they still have to spend 28 minutes on their one way daily commute. In Estonia students literally seem to live on campus as it takes them only 5 minutes to cover the distance from student hall to university. One of the main reasons for students to move to a student hall is certainly the vicinity to the higher education institution attended.³

To what extent is the budget of students burdened by their travel costs?

Although the use of public transport may be subsidised for students in many countries, their expenses for transportation can amount to a substantial sum. Figure 2 contains the average monthly expenses for all means of transportation of those students who are living with their parents. This group was chosen as they spend most time commuting between home and higher education institution and, therefore, use means of transportation particularly intensely.

Figure 2: Average expenses for transportation of students living with parents (monthly amount in Euro and as percent of total expenditure)



Source: EUROSTUDENT IV, Subtopic E.1. No data: DK, IT, RO.

³ In Germany, for instance, a large majority of students (73 %) who live in student halls originate from regions which are more than 50 km away from the higher education institution. Wank, J. / Willige, J. / Heine, C. (2009). Wohnen im Studium, HIS-Projektbericht, Hannover, p. 10.

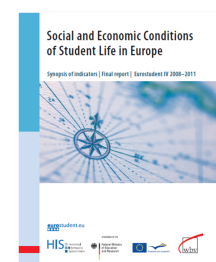
The values are displayed in Euro (left axis) and as percentage of students' total expenditure (right axis). In most countries, between 10 and almost 20 % of students' total monthly expenses is dedicated to transportation. That means especially in those countries where the percentage is close to 20 %, students who are living with their parents not only spend relatively much time on daily commuting, but also a substantial share of their income. In the Netherlands and Lithuania students are in a rather good position as their expenses for transportation are below 10 % of their budget. Students in England/Wales by far have to carry the highest burden in absolute and relative terms. They report an average monthly amount for transportation of more than € 370 which absorbs 25 % of their total budget. In fact, the Eurostudent IV data set shows that this is the biggest expenditure item for these students, which even exceeds their expenses for fees.⁴ The same cross-country comparison reveals that students in England/Wales who are living with their parents receive the highest monthly income out of 23 European countries. Nevertheless, spending a quarter of the budget on transportation appears an extraordinarily high burden for students. In France, students seem to spend nearly as high a share of their budget on transportation as their peers in England/Wales. However, the comparison is somewhat constrained. The high percentage is influenced by the fact that the French students did not report data for all expenditure items which exaggerates the relative meaning of expenses on transportation. This is also the explanation for the striking disproportion of the absolute and relative amounts compared to other countries.

The general debate

The EU Commission has paid attention to the geographical accessibility of higher education institutions as well. In a recently published report on education inequalities across and within EU Member States and regions, the geographical accessibility of the population to higher education institutions was considered among other things (http://ec.europa.eu/education/news/doc/nesse/report_en.pdf). In particular, the spatial distribution of regional populations living at more than 60 minutes travel distance (by car or train) from the nearest university as a proportion of the total population in the region was used as indicator for the quality of geographical access. According to the findings, the regions with the best geographical accessibility are mostly in Germany, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. In contrast, most of the regions with the lowest scores for geographical accessibility are in south-east Europe, northern Sweden, Finland, the Baltic States, Spain, Denmark and France.⁵ The study then compares these scores with overall participation rates. The report highlights that although the populations of central and western EU are on average located very near universities compared to southern Europe and Nordic countries, there are comparably higher participation rates of tertiary education students in several regions in Greece, Spain, Italy, the Scandinavian and Baltic countries. This would simply mean that immediate vicinity to higher education institutions does not necessarily result in higher participation. At the same time, it surely means that commuting time and possibility to live near campus (e.g. through the provision of student halls) are particularly important aspects of higher education policy in these countries. Further research is necessary here.

EUROSTUDENT IV Data set

Of course, there are other important questions when talking about students' economic situation: How high is students' total income per month and how does it differ by student characteristics? Does gender play an important role in students' income? What are the differences in income and income sources between students of different socioeconomic backgrounds? EUROSTUDENT provides some of these analyses in the comparative report Orr, D. / Gwoś, C. / Netz, N. (2011): Social and economic conditions of student life in Europe. W. Bertelsmann Verlag, Bielefeld. The EUROSTUDENT data base allows users to explore country data by topic area and in comparison between countries. See our website for more details: www.eurostudent.eu.



Lifelong Learning Programme

⁴ The data originate from a period before the maximum ceiling for tuition fees in England was raised to £ 9,000 per year.

⁵ For methodical reasons the EUROSTUDENT data in figure 1 are not suitable to verify the results of the EU study.