



INTELLIGENCE BRIEF:

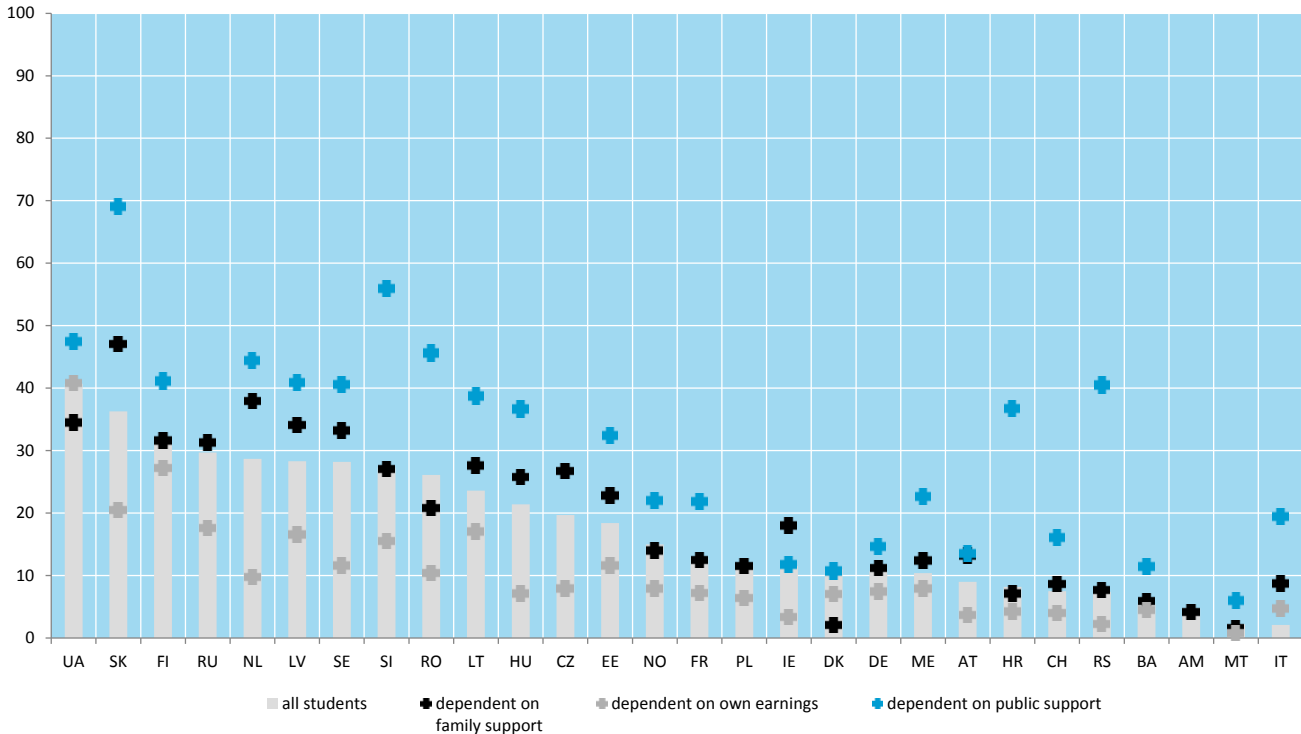
THE IMPORTANCE OF STUDENT ACCOMMODATION IN EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION

The EUROSTUDENT project collates comparable student survey data on the social dimension of European higher education, collecting data on a wide range of topics, e.g. the socio-economic background, living conditions, and temporary international mobility of students. The project strives to provide reliable and insightful cross-country comparisons. The data presented below stem from the fifth round of the EUROSTUDENT project and were collected between the years 2012 and 2014.

Who lives in student accommodation? – By Christoph Gwosć (DZHW, Germany)

Student accommodation, which is in this context viewed as a type of housing especially designated for participants in higher education, is often used as an instrument of social policy. Accordingly, in many countries the public sector provides subsidised housing space to students in order to make a contribution towards covering their costs of living. As Figure 1 shows, the importance of student accommodation varies across European countries.¹ In about one third of the countries displayed (the Ukraine, Slovakia, Finland, Russia, the Netherlands, Latvia, Sweden, Slovenia, and Romania), more than 25% of all students live in student accommodation. In these countries, the majority of all students live away from their parents (with the exception of Russia, where half of all students live with parents). In countries where a vast majority of students are living with their parents, student accommodation is of less importance. This applies, for instance, to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Armenia, Malta, and Italy, where at most 5% of all students reside in student accommodation.

Figure 1: Students living in student accommodation by dependency on income source (in percent)²



Source: EUROSTUDENT V, E.1 & E.3. No data: GE; students dependent on public support: PL. Too few cases: Students dependent on own earnings: AM; students dependent on public support: AM, CZ, RU.

¹ The data presented for Norway may deviate in particular cases from those published previously in the EUROSTUDENT final report due to some necessary adjustments.

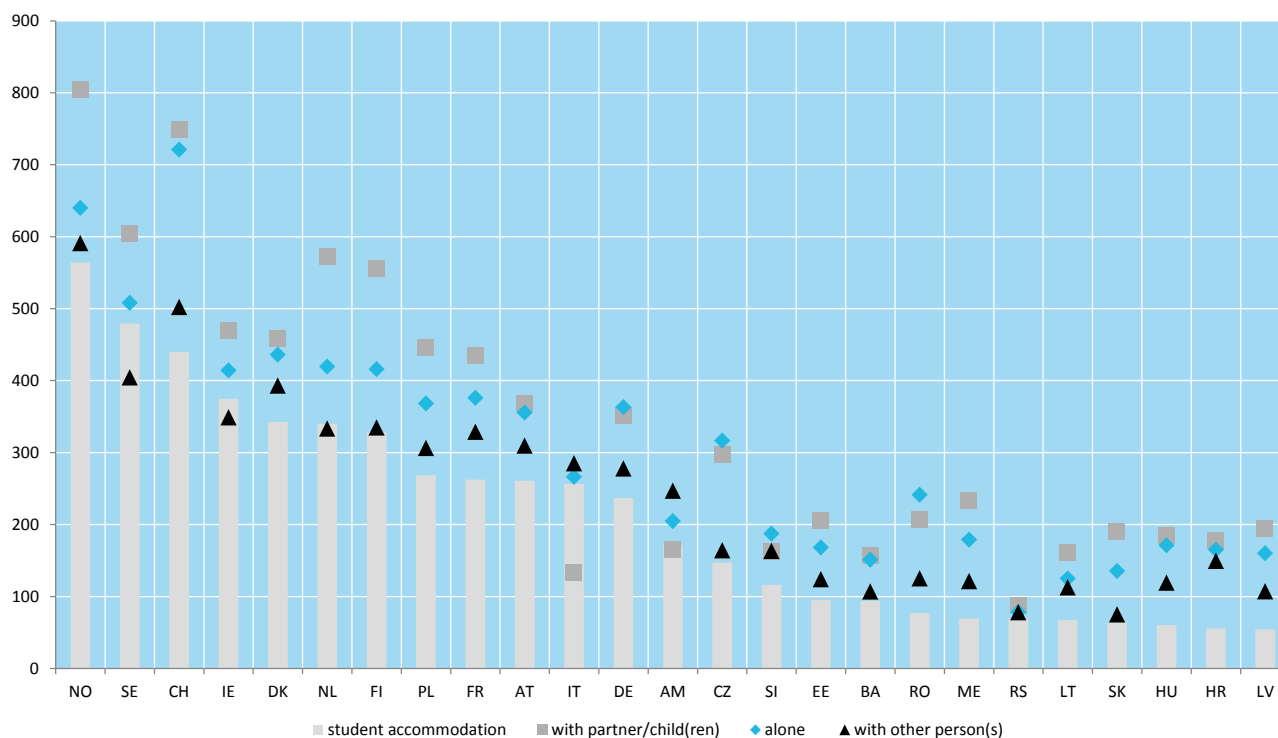
² Country abbreviations: AM = Armenia, AT = Austria, BA = Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina (without Republic of Srpska and District Brčko), CH = Switzerland, CZ = Czech Republic, DE = Germany, DK = Denmark, EE = Estonia, FI = Finland, FR = France, HR = Croatia, HU = Hungary, GE = Georgia, IE = Ireland, IT = Italy, LT = Lithuania, LV = Latvia, ME = Montenegro, MT = Malta, NL = The Netherlands, NO = Norway, PL = Poland, RO = Romania, RS = Serbia, RU = Russia, SE = Sweden, SI = Slovenia, SK = Slovakia, UA = Ukraine.

Can differences with regard to student accommodation be found among students dependent on different sources of income? For this analysis, only those students were taken into account whose total income is provided to more than 50 % by only one source (either by family / partner, or own earnings, or public support). As Figure 1 shows, in more than 90 % of the EUROSTUDENT countries with available data on all three finance-related student groups, the share of students living in student accommodation is highest among those depending on public support. In all countries, except Ireland and Denmark, the share of dwellers in student accommodation among students depending on public support is also higher than the respective share among all students. Students depending on own earnings are the group that lives in this form of housing the least often. This applies to all countries with data on all three finance-related groups, except for the Ukraine and Denmark. The remarkable difference in the usage of student accommodation between the two students groups may be explained by some fundamental differences in their living situation: As further EUROSTUDENT data show, students depending on public support are on average clearly younger than their peers who depend on own earnings; furthermore, they less often have children, receive lower incomes, and spend more time on study-related activities. This suggests that the living situation of students depending on public support may be more compatible with the features of student accommodation.

What does living in student accommodation cost?

Figure 2 depicts the average monthly expenses on accommodation (including utilities, water, electricity, etc.) as spent by students and their parents, partner or others. It is a comparison of housing forms outside the parental home.³ Only countries with available data on all four types of housing were taken into account.

Figure 2: Average accommodation costs per month by form of housing for students not living with parents (in Euro)



Source: EUROSTUDENT V, E.6. No data: GE, MT, RU, UA.

A comparison of the average (unweighted) expenditure on accommodation per month across all countries displayed in Figure 2 already yields a clear order of the housing forms: students living with partner/child(ren) spend the most at € 335. Students who live alone (€ 303) or with other person(s) (€ 244) have fewer expenses for housing, and students living in student accommodation pay the lowest on average at € 212. On a more disaggregated level, it turns out that in 80 % of the covered countries, student accommodation is the cheapest form of housing outside the parents' home.

³ In this case the housing forms depicted mutually exclude each other, i.e. the categories “with partner/child(ren)”, “alone”, and “with other person(s)” contain only students living in the respective housing forms outside student accommodation.

Only in Sweden, Ireland, and the Netherlands does living with other person(s) require the lowest expenditure; and in Italy and Armenia, living with partner/child(ren) is the type of housing that is least expensive. In the countries mentioned, however, student accommodation is still the second cheapest option of living outside the parental home. The data can be interpreted in such a way that state support for student accommodation, employed in many countries, is often successful in reducing students' housing costs. This may allow some students to move away from their parents, which is sometimes indispensable for taking up studies.

Why student accommodation needs public support – Comment by Sven Engel (European Council for Student Affairs)

In a European perspective, the data underlines that affordable student accommodation is an essential part of the social infrastructure of higher education. It is of particular importance for those groups of students who would not otherwise have sufficient (financial) means to access higher education: this includes first-year students, many international students, students who are regionally or nationally mobile (moving away from home), low-income and first-generation students.

Different models exist across Europe to support student housing. In some cases, this is done through direct public subsidies of students' personal budgets which often lead to an indirectly subsidized private housing market – the students receive a housing allowance that they then spend in the housing market, which at worst only raises accommodation rates. In most Western-European countries with large student populations, however, support of student housing is done through public financial support for student services associations such as the *Studentenwerke* in Germany, the *CROUS* in France or the *Regional Organizations for the Right to University Study* in Italy. Such public service providers can develop and operate student residence halls with affordable rents that specifically serve the student population, and often offer below-market rates for the students that need such housing most. In other countries, for example in Scandinavia, student accommodation is provided by (public) foundations that are specialized on student housing. In the Anglo-Saxon world, student residence halls are often operated by higher education institutions themselves, but they are then only available to students within that particular institution.

In all situations, a simple calculation can be made up: where there is public (financial) support for student residences, the rents for these will be lower than market average. Wherever this is not the case, students are dependent on the private housing market, and would be forced to pay the prices irrespectively of their own personal, financial, or social situation – a requirement that cannot be met by the most socially fragile groups. The situation is often aggravated by the fact that universities often create economic dynamics that make the university town or city attractive to a wider public, an additional incubator for high housing costs. Student housing, therefore, needs public subsidies in order to allow for affordable rents.

From a student affairs and services' point of view it is important to note that student accommodation is a key instrument in regulating access to higher education. The need for affordable housing is particularly strong at the beginning of studies, and then often declines when students grow older, start a family, or move into shared housing situations with peers or partners. Since students tend to be young in many countries, mobility in student housing is high, and students move on to other forms of housing that are best suited to their own personal and professional development. At the same time, student housing is highly seasonal, with demand obviously peaking at the beginning of academic terms. Further, it is of course particularly important for those that need to secure housing prior to their moving to the actual place of studying, a typical situation of international students.

Finally, beyond questions of finance and access, it might be noted that student service organizations across Europe have developed a supportive framework in student housing that consists of social and cultural activities targeted at students living in student residence halls, with a view to support social cohesion and inclusion, peer-to-peer support, and social contacts with the local community at large.

EUROSTUDENT V Data set

Of course, there are other important questions when it comes to students' housing situation: To what extent do students make use of other types of housing except student accommodation? Are there differences in the utilisation of various housing forms by sex, age, educational background, or other characteristics of students? What is the students' satisfaction with different types of housing? EUROSTUDENT provides some of these analyses in the comparative report "Social and Economic Conditions of Student Life in Europe" (2015). The EUROSTUDENT data base allows users to explore country data by topic area and in comparison between countries (<http://database.eurostudent.eu>). See our website for more details: <http://www.eurostudent.eu/>.



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