

# *'It's not the same to live in a house as to a small hall of residence'*

## Housing conditions, psychological distress and academic success of students in France during the first COVID-19 lockdown

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# OUTLINE

1. Context, Research questions, Theoretical background, hypotheses and methodology
2. Housing situation of students in France during the first lockdown
3. The effects of housing situation on psychological distress and on academic success

# CONTEXT

Our team has been formed thanks to the **EUROSTUDENT VII Final Conference** and we merged our data and research since then

In 2020, France implemented a very **strict lockdown** between mid-March and almost mid-May

**Student experiences**, study practices and young people's **mental health** were **heavily impacted**

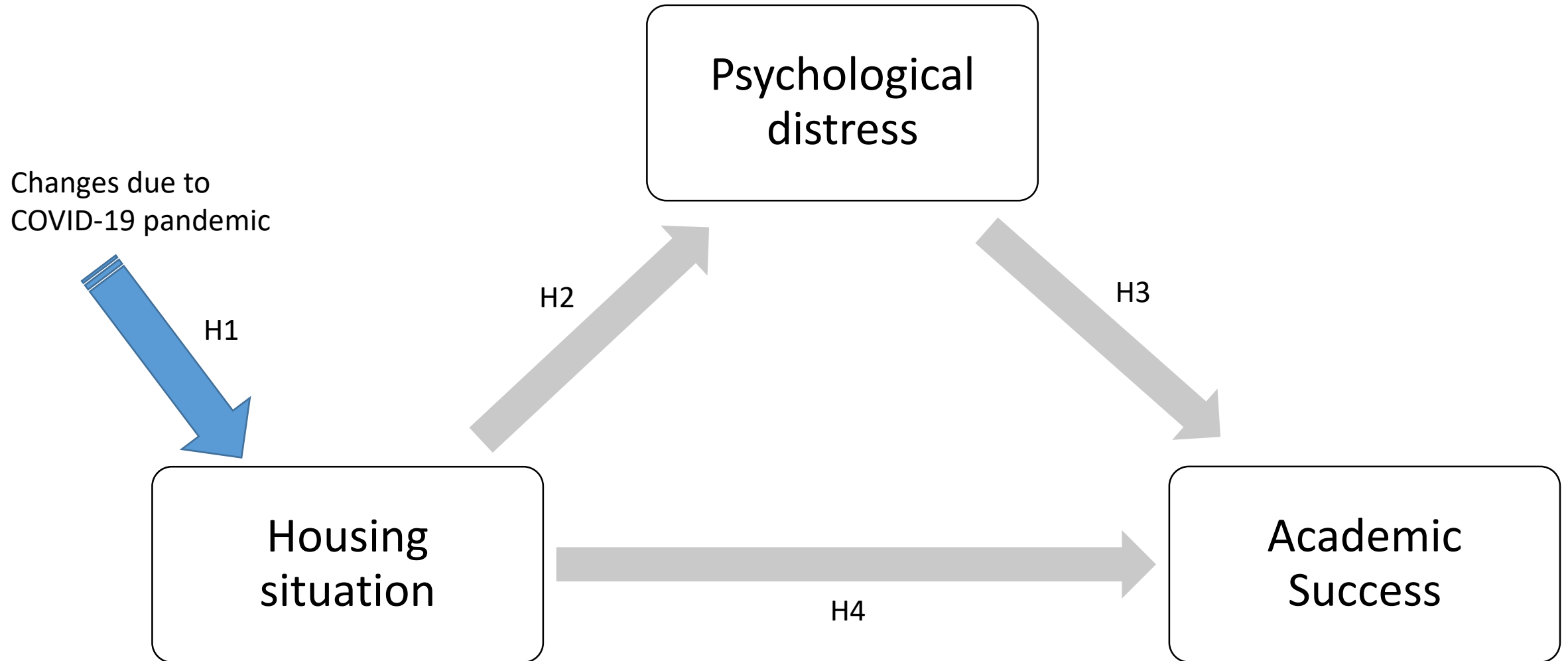
=> The **housing environment** became a **salient element** for understanding the **living conditions of students**, their **success** and their **perseverance in studies**



# RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Was there a direct impact of the pandemic on students' living situation?
2. What is the relationship between housing and distress – expecting adverse living conditions leading to lead to more distress?
3. What is the relationship between housing and academic performance and orientation – expecting partial mediation through distress?

# THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS



# THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

- **H1:** There have been changes in living situation due to the Covid-19 pandemic
- **H2:** Due to the Covid-19 pandemic we expect students in student accommodation to face a higher level of psychological distress.
- **H3:** Students with psychological distress have a lower level of study success compared to other students.
- **H4:** Due to the Covid-19 pandemic we expect students in halls of residence to have a lower level of study success (mediated through psychological distress) compared to students living in other accommodation.

# THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

## HOUSING SITUATION AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS

- Accommodation plays a **critical part** in students' transition towards adulthood
- **Accommodation's characteristics, morphology and arrangement have shown to affect:**
  - students' housing satisfaction (Alamel and Santana Bucio 2020; Thomsen and Eikemo 2010)
  - mental health (Morvan et al. 2016, van de Velde et al. 2021)

# THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

## HOUSING SITUATION AND STUDY SUCCESS

- An effect of **material living conditions**: positive effect of having a private room (Gouyon 2006), a good internet connexion or a PC (OVE 2020)
- An effect of the **social environment**: ambivalent effect of living with parents (“missing out” thesis, Holdsworth 2006), positive effect of a shared kitchen in a residence (Webb and Turner 2020)
- But **context matters** (cf students’ residences in France - Alamel 2019)



# THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

## PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AND STUDY SUCCESS

- A **negative correlation** between :
  - stress levels and **academic performance** in OECD countries (OECD 2015).
  - depression, mental disorders and **academic performance** (Morvan et al. 2013)
- A **positive correlation** between :
  - stress levels and **risks of dropping out** (Pascoe et al. 2020)
  - mental disorders and **risks of dropping out** (Van Ameringen et al. 2003)

# METHODOLOGY: A MIXED-METHOD APPROACH

## ➤ A double quantitative survey

### ➤ The 2020 Students' Living Conditions survey

- A national survey on students conducted every 3 years since 1994
- A survey field during the first lockdown period in the spring 2020 (more than 60,000 answers)

### ➤ A follow up survey focusing on the impact of this first lockdown (6,130 answers)

# METHODOLOGY: A MIXED-METHOD APPROACH

## ➤ Qualitative data

**Semi-structured interviews (Early-April to Mid-May 2020)**

**At the start of the academic year, all interviewees were accommodated in social student housing (CROUS)**

- **33 interviews** (19 female)
- **Average age: 46% between 20-24 y.o. (average 24 y.o.)**
- **42% undergraduate students, 48% Masters students**
- **55% of domestic students, International students (North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, Europe)**



# STUDENTS' HOUSING SITUATION - BEFORE THE LOCKDOWN

Table 1: Students' housing situation and conditions before lockdown

	Housing situation before lockdown (column %)	Area per person (mean value in m <sup>2</sup> )	General satisfaction with accommodation (mean value - scale from 1 to 5)	Change accommodation due to lockdown (row %)
ANOVA		***	***	
With parents	27%	33 (19.8)	4.3 (0.9)	12%
In a student accommodation	13%	16 (6.0)	3.8 (0.9)	67%
Alone (not student accommodation)	26%	27 (12.6)	4.1 (0.8)	62%
Shared accommodation	12%	27 (13.1)	4.2 (0.9)	63%
Other	23%	26 (23.3)	4.1 (1.1)	40%
All students	100%	27 (17.6)	4.1 (0.9)	44%

**A young student population:**  
 ✓ **86 % of students in France are under 25 years old** (EVII focus group)  
 ✓ **64% in EUROSTUDENT VII** (cross-country average)

Source: LCS 2020, National Observatory of Student Life (OVE)  
 Scope: All respondents to Life during Lockdown survey and Living Conditions 2020 survey (n=5,994)  
 Numbers in parenthesis indicate standard deviations

# STUDENTS' HOUSING SITUATION – (IM-)MOBILITY OF THE STUDENTS DURING THE FIRST LOCKDOWN (1/2)

- **44 % of students left their usual accommodation when the first lockdown period occurred**
- **Among those, 77% of students spent this period with at least a parent**

“ Well, just because my family is there. So, I didn't really want to be all alone in a small flat, a small space. It's not the same to live in a house as to a small hall of residence. I think that I live better at home. For instance, I can just go out in my garden or whatever, whereas in the hall of residence, there wasn't that possibility. ” (Estelle, F, 18 y.o)
- **But some could not change accommodation, as for most international students:**

“The first reason is that I can't go to my country and here I hardly know anyone. So, I have to stay here. ” (Idriss, M, 26 y.o)

# STUDENTS' HOUSING SITUATION – (IM-)MOBILITY OF THE STUDENTS DURING THE FIRST LOCKDOWN (2/2)

- **Some students chose to stay in their term-time accommodation (also domestic students) (53 % in the quantitative survey, and shown in the qualitative survey:)**

“I really stayed to make good progress on my doctoral thesis, to be in a setting where I can be 100% focused without being with my family, without having to change my work habits. ”  
(Fabien, M, 24 y.o)

“Above all, I was a little bit afraid of bringing the coronavirus home to my parents, if I were a healthy carrier, or something like that. ” (Aude, F, 23 y.o)

“I don't get on well enough with my family to be in lockdown with them. Yeah, I could have joined ... My parents are divorced but I could have gone with one of them but no. I'd rather stay in one square metre than, like, stay with them for two months. ” (Justine, F, 21 y.o)

# STUDENTS' HOUSING SITUATION – CHANGES DUE TO THE FIRST LOCKDOWN

- **Among all students, 58% of all students spent the lockdown with their parents or one of them**

Table 2: Students' housing situation during the first lockdown

Type of accommodation during the first lockdown	%
Still living with parents	25
Back living with parents	33
In a student accommodation (still)	4
Alone (not in student accommodation)	13
Lockdown spent with other relatives or friends (change of accommodation)	8
still living with other relatives or friends*	16
Other, unspecified	1

\*Before and during lockdown

Source: Life during Lockdown survey, 2020, National Observatory of Student Life (OVE)  
Scope: All respondents to Life during Lockdown survey and Living Conditions 2020 survey (n=5,994)

Alamel A., Ferry O., Tenret E. (2023)

# STUDENTS' HOUSING SITUATION – SOCIAL DIFFERENCIATION

Table 3: Students' characteristics according to housing situation during lockdown

Accommodation during lockdown	Distribution	Share of foreign students	Share of female students	Share of students <20 years old	Share of poor students*
Still living with parents	25%	4%	57%	42%	20%
Back living with parents	33%	3%	58%	37%	16%
In a student accommodation (still)	4%	56%	39%	14%	36%
Alone (not in student accommodation)	13%	22%	45%	10%	29%
Lockdown spent with other relatives or friends	8%	20%	57%	15%	33%
Still living with other relatives or friends	16%	20%	57%	7%	32%
Other	1%	19%	67%	15%	29%
<b>All students</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>23%</b>

\*Students who declared not having enough money (at all) to cover their monthly needs.

Source: Life during Lockdown survey, 2020, National Observatory of Student Life (OVE)

Scope: All respondents to Life during Lockdown survey and Living Conditions 2020 survey (n=5,994)



# STUDENTS' HOUSING SITUATION – LIVING CONDITIONS (1/2)

- **Students who spent the lockdown with their parent(s) benefited of better housing and studying conditions**

Table 4: Housing situation and living conditions during lockdown

Accommodation during lockdown	Not satisfied with housing conditions	With a study space, calm and separate	A good internet connexion
Still living with parents	3%	65%	62%
Back living with parents	2%	68%	61%
In a student accommodation (still)	18%	47%	63%
Alone (not in student accommodation)	10%	59%	72%
Lockdown spent with other relatives or friends	6%	30%	64%
Still living with other relatives or friends	7%	45%	66%
Other	6%	50%	71%
All students	5%	58%	64%

Source: Life during Lockdown survey, 2020, National Observatory of Student Life (OVE)  
Scope: All respondents to Life during Lockdown survey and Living Conditions 2020 survey (n=5,994)

# STUDENTS' HOUSING SITUATION – LIVING CONDITIONS (2/2)

- **Students who stayed in their halls of residence emphasised the worsening of their living conditions due to the circumstances:**

“It's mostly depressing because I only have one room. In my opinion, if I had a living room, a kitchen, I think it would be bearable, but I admit that the fact of having only one room, well ... the very first day I didn't turn the TV on, I didn't put on any music, and also, my walls are white. So, at the end of the day, I couldn't take it anymore, I couldn't take the room anymore, I couldn't take the whiteness.” (Océane, F, 27 y.o)

# STUDENTS' HOUSING SITUATION AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS (1/3)

- **31% of all students presented signs of psychological distress during the first lockdown :**
  - **41% of students who spent the lockdown in a student accommodation**
  - **36% of those who spent the lockdown alone (not in a student accommodation)**
  - **27% of those who spent the lockdown with their parent(s)**
- **81% of the students who stayed in a student accommodation suffered from loneliness, as the halls of residence emptied themselves during this time.**

# STUDENTS' HOUSING SITUATION AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS (2/3)

- **The interviewed residents in Crous accommodation recognised the difficulties to be in the halls of residence with limited interactions:**

“Mentally, I can say that I am affected in the sense that I spend all my time reading. Also, I feel the length of the day too much as I cannot physically interact with anyone.” (Oumar, M, 25 y.o)

- **Interviews revealed that the lockdown had exacerbated some of the psychological distress and ‘unwell-being’ experienced by some students before spring 2020, as illustrated by Agathe’s words:**

“I have had health issues for a while, but my mental and physical health got better until, well, the lockdown started, and then it was declining. I have to be hospitalised but after another hospitalisation, I won't be able to work. I don't even know how I'm going to feed myself, how I'm going to pay the rent and everything else, because I'm not going to be able to work this summer because I'm going to be in hospital.” (Agathe, F, 20 y.o)

# STUDENTS' HOUSING SITUATION AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS (3/3)

- **Linear regressions confirmed the net and significant effect of the type of accommodation of the psychological distress of students:**

		MODEL 2 + socio-economic aspects	
Intercept			***
Housing	Alone	ref	
	Back living with parents	-0.630	***
	In a student accommodation	0.014	ns
	Still living with parents	-0.534	**
	With other relatives or friends or other/unspecified	-1.052	***
Internet connexion	Good	ref	
	Poor	0.747	***
Calm study space	Yes	ref	
	No	1.143	***

Control variables : sex, nationality, age, parents' social class and financial difficulties  
ns p>0.1 ; °p<0.1 ; \* p<0.05 ; \*\* p<0.01 ; \*\*\* p<0.001  
N = 5,959

Scope: All respondents to Life during Lockdown survey and Living Conditions 2020 survey  
Source: Life during Lockdown survey, 2020, National Observatory of Student Life (OVE)

# STUDENTS' HOUSING SITUATION AND STUDY CURSUS (1/3)

## Effects of the lockdown on orientation and academic experiences

- **Academic orientation:** 1/4 of students have **changed** their academic orientation
- **Performances:** 27% of students' believe the lockdown period will have a **negative impact** on their academic results
- **Internships:** 38% of internships were **canceled**
- **International mobility:** 72% of international mobility projects have been **canceled**

# STUDENTS' HOUSING SITUATION AND STUDY CURSUS (2/3)

Table 6: Impact on study cursus according to housing situation during lockdown (row %)

	Direct validation of academic year	Perceived negative effects of lockdown on...		Perceived effects of lockdown on orientation		
		...academic results	...the rest of the studies	Intention to drop out	Change of project	No change
Still living with parents	82%	29%	49%	5%	19%	76%
Back living with parents	87%	23%	49%	2%	16%	82%
In a student accommodation	65%	38%	63%	3%	41%	56%
Alone (not in student accommodation)	77%	27%	48%	6%	21%	73%
Lockdown spent with other relatives or friends	75%	26%	54%	5%	17%	78%
Still living with other relatives or friends	80%	30%	49%	5%	21%	74%
Other, unspecified	35%	48%	41%	7%	32%	61%
All	81%	27%	50%	4%	19%	77%

Source: Life during Lockdown survey, 2020, National Observatory of Student Life (OVE)

Scope: (column 1) All respondents to Life during Lockdown survey and Living Conditions 2020 survey, except the answers "I haven't got my results yet" or "not applicable" (n=3,317).

Scope: All respondents to Life during Lockdown survey and Living Conditions 2020 survey, except the students that could finish their studies as planned (n=5,446)

# STUDENTS' HOUSING SITUATION AND STUDY CURSUS (3/3)

Table 7: Logistic Regression models on the impact of the first lockdown on orientation/drop out projects and validation of academic year

		Model 1: Validation of academic year		Model 2: Orientation plans			
		Ref: no immediate validation		Ref: no change			
				Change projects		Drop out	
Intercept			***		***		***
Housing	Alone	ref		ref		ref	
	Back living with parents	1.416	**	0.787	***	0.490	**
	In a student accommodation (still)	0.727	*	1.912	***	1.570	°
	Still living with parents	1.060	ns	1.104	ns	0.797	ns
	With other relatives or friends or other/unspecified	1.304	°	0.813	**	0.735	ns
Internet connexion	Good	ref					
	Poor	0.847	ns	1.204	*	1.278	ns
Calm study space	Yes	ref		ref		ref	
	No	0.651	***	1.214	*	1.813	**
Psychological distress score		0.936	***	1.079	***	1.117	***

Control variables : sex, nationality, age, parents' social class and financial difficulties  
ns p>0.1 ; °p<0.1 ; \* p<0.05 ; \*\* p<0.01 ; \*\*\* p<0.001

Scope (Model 1): All respondents to Life during Lockdown survey and Living Conditions 2020 survey, except the students that did not know their academic results at the time of the survey - N = 3,298

Scope (Model 2): All respondents to Life during Lockdown survey and Living Conditions 2020 survey, except the students that could finish their studies as planned - N = 5,416

Source: Life during Lockdown survey, 2020, National Observatory of Student Life (OVE)



# CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

## ➤ **Expected biases:**

- **Over representation of students with a good connexion in the quantitative survey**
- **Over representation of students meeting difficulties in the qualitative survey**

# CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

- **R1:** Most students returned to their parental home in a period of crisis BUT social inequality (H1)
- **R2:** The housing situation proves to be significantly correlated with psychological distress, even after controlling for social and economic characteristics (H2)
- **R3:** An effect of housing situation on academic success:
  - partly mediated through psychological distress (H3)
  - but also through a residual effect even after controlling with social characteristics and psychological distress (H4)

# CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

- **Family** mostly acted as a shelter (financially, socially, and mentally);
- On the contrary, staying in the **halls of residence** was a source of distress for students, as well as **staying alone** in a private rented flat.
- **A long lasting effect of the lockdown**

# PUBLICATION

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## RESEARCH ARTICLE



### 'It's not the same to live in a house as to a small hall of residence': housing conditions, psychological distress and academic success of students in France during the first COVID-19 lockdown

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#### ABSTRACT

On 17 March 2020, the population in France entered into a strict lockdown due to the critical spreading of COVID-19. Students could no longer go to their learning institutions. The initial 2-week-lockdown lasted overall 10 weeks and higher education institutions remained closed until the end of the academic year, affecting then even longer students' study situation. Many students chose to leave the accommodation they occupied during the study period if they had the opportunity. Our paper explores the effects of the housing situation on students' academic success during this lockdown using two quantitative national surveys (one on students' living and studying conditions before the pandemic and the other on the situation during this lockdown to which 5994 students responded) and 33 semi-structured interviews conducted amongst students living in university halls of residence in the North of France. Our study confirms that in a period of lockdown, housing plays a pivotal and active role in influencing students' psychological distress, study success, and orientation.

#### ARTICLE HISTORY

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#### KEYWORDS

Students living conditions;  
housing; COVID-19  
pandemic; psychological  
distress; social inequality

#### Introduction

'We are at war (...) I am asking you to stay home'. On 16 March 2020, in light of the critical spreading of the COVID-19, President Emmanuel Macron asks the population in France to stay imperatively home starting the next day. A few days before this solemn speech, the French President had already announced that higher education institutions (HEIs) and schools would be closed for at least two weeks. In consequence and given the timeframe provided by the government, students – but not only – had to decide quickly whether they would rather spend this initial two weeks' lockdown in their current accommodation or elsewhere, if the possibility existed. As HEIs gradually managed to provide adaptive teaching modalities such as online courses, video tutorials, and homework, students also

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