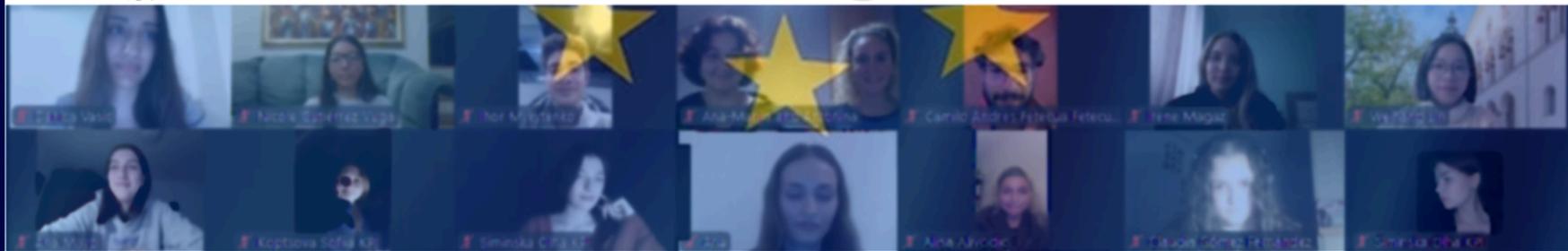


# European Perspectives 2025-26 A Virtual Exchange Project



Virtual Exchange Project:  
**European Perspectives 2025-26**

University of León, Spain  
University of Munich (LMU), Germany  
University of Primorska, Slovenia  
National Technical University Kyiv, Ukraine

All content in this book was created by university students, who take responsibility for its accuracy and presentation.

Cover design: Denis Erndl

December 2025

# **European Perspectives 2025-26**

A Virtual Exchange Project



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## **Preface**

In this virtual exchange project, students from four European universities explored and addressed challenges currently affecting countries of the European Union. The project took place in the winter semester 2025/26 and involved participants from Spain, Germany, Slovenia, and Ukraine who were enrolled in programs to become English teachers or to obtain degrees in English Studies as well as Sociology, Journalism, Communication, and Engineering. Students worked in international teams, conducted research, and developed solutions to pressing European issues.

Through a series of online discussions, research activities, and collaborative work, participants examined how key challenges affect countries across Europe and how they are perceived and experienced in different ways. They engaged with peers from different European countries to explore one challenge in depth and to develop practical solutions. Finally, they presented their solutions to all project participants, shared them both online and onsite at the University of Munich.

Each international working group produced a final output that includes the main outcomes of their research and proposed solutions to the challenge addressed, a recorded presentation, and a policy report.

We hope that these results provide valuable impulses and help to raise awareness of important European issues.

**Your project team**

# Environmental Sustainability

*Danica Vasić, Yongru Li, Lucía Acebes de la Torre, Qurin Niedermayer (WG 1)*

## ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY IN TOURISM

What strategies can make tourism in Europe more eco-friendly without jeopardizing the experience for travelers?



# Policy Report

## Environmental Sustainability

### 1. Issue and Main Recommendation

Tourism continues to grow every year, but its environmental impact is still underestimated. Travelers often lack clear information about how their choices affect nature, local communities, and resources. At the same time, eco-friendly options are available yet difficult to access, poorly promoted, or too expensive.

Our main recommendation is to improve access to sustainable tourism options through stronger environmental policies, better public communication, and greater investment in green infrastructure.

### 2. Problem Explanation (with relevant data)

There is a growing gap between what tourism currently offers and what is needed to protect the environment long-term. Our survey illustrates this problem clearly: 79% of respondents are 18–25 years old, mostly from Serbia, Spain, Germany, China, and Slovenia who have traveled to Europe. Most travel 2–3 times per year and feel only somewhat informed about sustainability in tourism.

Eco-friendly measures are seen as only moderately effective, with barriers such as high costs, lack of information, and limited options. While 47% might pay more, only 21% actually would, showing a gap between attitudes and behavior.

The most visible eco-practices are recycling bins, public transport, and protected natural areas. Nearly half believe eco-friendly tourism can improve travel experience.

This shows that although young travelers care about sustainability, they lack the tools, knowledge, and affordable options to act on it.

### **3. Key Findings & Research Support**

Countries in our project demonstrate both progress and remaining gaps:

Germany invests heavily in sustainable mobility such as cycling infrastructure in Munich, but large events still bring pollution, overcrowding, and traffic issues.

Slovenia leads with the Slovenia Green Scheme, eco-certified destinations, a car-free centre in Ljubljana, and strong protection of natural parks like Triglav.

Spain promotes eco-friendly tourism by protecting cultural and natural heritage. León is a UNESCO Biosphere Destination and part of the Smart Tourist Destination plan, showing strong commitment to innovation and sustainability.

These examples show that while progress is being made, policies and practices vary across countries and more coordinated action is needed.

### **4. Recommendations (Who Should Act & How)**

#### A. Government level

Introduce stronger laws against pollution and waste.

Increase investment in green infrastructure (bike lanes, EV chargers, public transport, pedestrian zones).

Place QR codes at tourist attractions to replace printed brochures and reduce waste.

Expand eco-certification programs to encourage sustainable tourism services.

#### B. Tourism businesses (hotels, agencies, restaurants, tour operators)

Offer green tours and promote local, eco-friendly food and products.

Reduce waste by providing reusable water bottles and recycling facilities.

Advertise sustainable options clearly so travelers can make informed choices.

#### C. Tourists

Use bikes or public transport instead of cars.

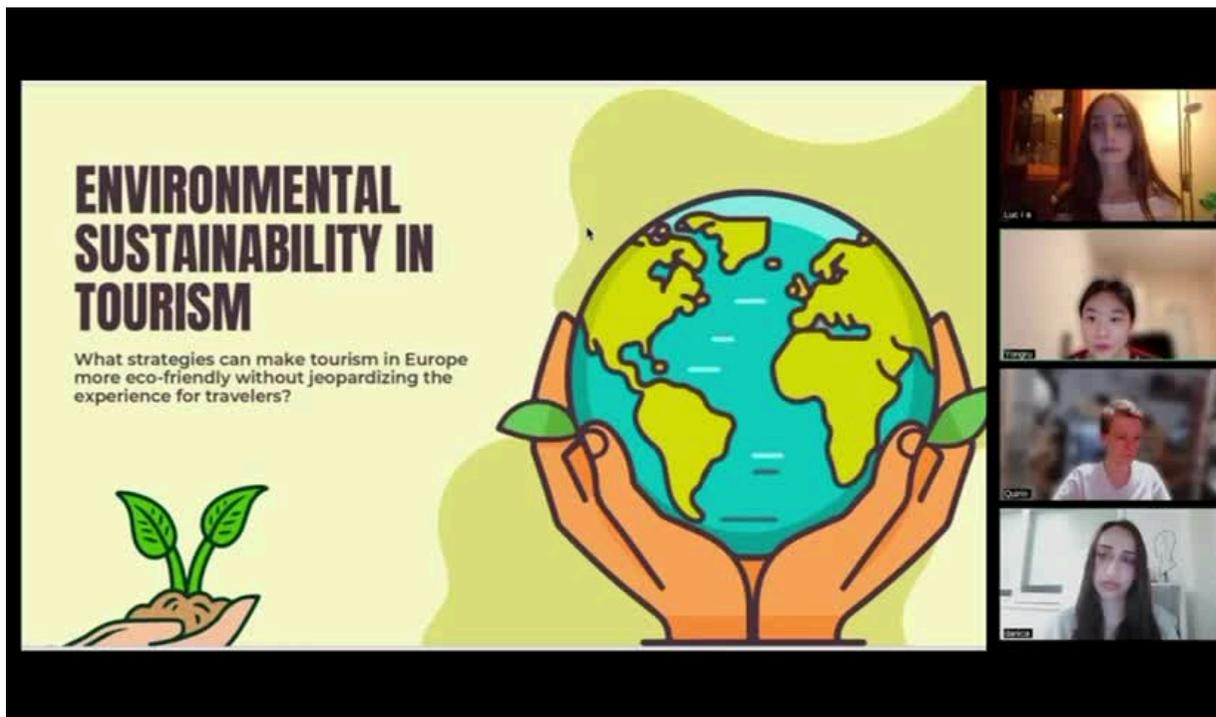
Avoid single-use plastics.

Choose eco-labeled accommodations and buy locally made souvenirs.

Participate in eco-friendly tours and respect protected areas.

## 5. Why These Recommendations Matter

Implementing these measures will make sustainable tourism more accessible, affordable, and visible. Clearer information, stronger infrastructure, and better policy support will help travelers make environmentally responsible choices. Ultimately, these changes protect natural resources, reduce pollution, support local communities, and ensure that future generations can enjoy the same destinations we visit today.



# Digital Wellbeing and Healthy Online Culture

*Sofiia Koptsova, Claudia Gómez Fernández, Ana Gomerčić, Alisa Alivodić, Weihang Lin (WG 2)*

Poster presentation  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xt9NYVaSaqo>

## DIGITAL WELLBEING ON SOCIAL MEDIA

### 1 Main concern

We studied how online habits impact digital wellbeing. From surveys, we learned the key problems and simple actions that can build awareness, better habits, and a safer online community.



### 2 Screen Time: Beliefs vs. Use

Our survey showed that most participants use social media for 2–5 hours a day, even though the majority believe that a healthy amount of screen time is less than 2 hours. The most commonly used apps were TikTok, messaging apps, Instagram, and YouTube. Overall, the results show a clear gap between how much people are actually online and what they consider healthy digital use.

### 3 Advantages vs. disadvantages

Most participants said the main advantage of social media is staying connected with friends and family. The biggest disadvantages were toxic online behavior and getting easily distracted. Overall, most people still believe social media has more advantages than disadvantages.

### 4 Digital Health

Most participants enjoy feeling connected through social media, but many also experience stress, tiredness, or even addiction. They added that while they feel good now, in their teens they often felt overwhelmed, distracted, and affected by online toxicity.

### 5 Solutions

- Educational Measures: Introduce compulsory weekly workshops and create quiet, cellphone-free areas in schools and universities to encourage healthier digital habits.
- Governmental Measures: Regulate internet access, including age verification for certain sites, to reduce anonymity and protect users.
- Personal Measures: Use built-in social media tools to limit screen time, set personal boundaries, and use platforms with specific purposes to avoid distractions and toxicity.



**5.24 B**  
USERS  
WORLDWIDE

#### HELPFUL APPS & SITES:

- HEADSPACE
- ONE SEC
- FOREST
- DIGITALWELLBEING.ORG

#### DONE BY:

ANA GOMERČIĆ, ALISA ALIVODIĆ, SOFIIA KOPTSOVA, WEIHANG LIN, CLAUDIA GÓMEZ FERNÁNDEZ



# Policy Report

## Digital Wellbeing and Healthy Online Culture

**1.** Using social media is a big deal today. It helps us talk to friends and get news, but spending too much time on it or seeing negative things can hurt how we feel about ourselves and our connections. More than 100 young people from nine different countries gave their views in our survey. The challenge is that people use social media a lot, but they also know about its risks and that they should use it less.

We should think about using the internet wisely, control screen time, and making online spaces kinder. This will help get the good parts of social media while staying safe and healthy.

**2.** Young people use social media a lot, but they know they need limits. This creates a gap between what they do and what they know is healthy. Most participants spend a significant amount of time on social media. The largest group, 42%, spends two to three hours daily, and others spend three hours or more. This shows social media is a major part of daily life. However, most respondents feel that keeping social media use under three hours a day is the healthiest option, with over half (52%) saying less than two hours is best. This difference shows we need clear ways to help people use social media as little as they know they should.

**3.** Our survey found key reasons why action is needed to support healthy habits. The worst parts of social media are that it distracts people (60%) and the toxic online behavior like cyberbullying and body comparison (57%). Many also pointed to fake news (36%). These negative effects can make people feel drained, unmotivated, or tired/sad. The most popular apps are Instagram (68%) and WhatsApp/Telegram (50%). People mostly use social media to stay connected with friends (73%), follow news (68%), and for entertainment (57%). Even though they see the risks, most participants believe that social media has more advantages (78%) than disadvantages. This suggests that if we fix the problems, the benefits will be even stronger.

**4.** We need three main actions to make social media better for everyone, and users have given us good advice on this.

1. Every country's government should regulate access to social media, including age verification and terminating anonymity in certain websites to protect users. This will allow much better control over the content and screen time that teenagers and children have in order to avoid them from getting addicted from a young age.
2. Within the educational environments, every teacher should include weekly workshops that teach how to properly act and what to look for in social media, and these should have some kind of importance for the grade of that course. In addition, universities should offer cellphone-free spaces in order to promote healthier digital habits to undergraduates and other students within the campus premises.
3. Finally, every social media user should make use of the built-in social media tools in order to limit their own screentime (and make sure to follow the limit established), as well as setting personal boundaries and using platforms for specific purposes to avoid not only distractions but also toxicity.

**5.** These simple steps are important because they give people the power to use the digital world in a way that truly helps them. Right now, the risks like distraction and toxicity are big. By working together on teaching better habits, providing tools for self-control, and encouraging kindness, we can help people close the gap between how much time they spend online and how much they know is healthy. This action will protect their social wellbeing and ensure they can benefit from the positive parts of social media, such as connecting and feeling inspired.

# Affordable Housing

University Students' Housing Crisis Across Regions and its Potential Solutions

*Leon O\_Donnell, Samir Laamimat, Valeriia Shymanska, Antonina Sazdovska, Ana Marija Jovanovska, Fruela López Guerrero (WG 4)*



## AFFORDABLE HOUSING

University students housing crisis across regions  
and its potential solutions

Group 4:

Leon O'Donnell; Samir Laamimat

Valeriia Shymanska; Antonina Sazdovska

Ana Marija Jovanovska; Fruela López Guerrero



# Policy Report

## University Student Housing Crisis: Comparative Analysis and Recommended Interventions

### Executive Summary:

A severe and systemic housing crisis is undermining higher education accessibility and student welfare across diverse European regions. Research focusing on universities in Spain (Universidad de León), Ukraine (Kyiv Polytechnic Institute), Slovenia (Univerza na Primorskem), and Germany (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München) reveals a common pattern: a critical shortage of affordable, purpose-built student accommodation forces the majority of students into an exploitative private rental market. On average, students spend 60-70% of their income on housing, far above the recommended 30% threshold. This brief details the region-specific manifestations of this crisis and proposes a multi-pronged policy framework involving supply-side investment, market regulation, and direct financial support to ensure housing security as a fundamental component of educational success.

### Problem Definition: A Converging Crisis

The crisis is defined by a fundamental mismatch between supply and demand for safe, affordable, and well-maintained housing for university students aged 18-28. While local contexts vary, the core drivers are universal: insufficient public and university-provided dormitory capacity, and a subsequent over-reliance on a private rental market that is largely unregulated concerning student needs. This failure disproportionately impacts international and displaced students, who face additional discrimination and logistical barriers.

## **Regional Case Studies**

### **Universidad de León, Spain:**

Supply Shortfall: Only 1,055 dormitory beds are available for at least 4,123 students requiring accommodation from outside the region.

Market Dysfunction: The private market is characterized by speculation (prices surge 30-50% in August-September), overt discrimination against students (particularly foreigners), and poor value. Students pay €200-€400 for poorly maintained rooms in shared apartments, a price point comparable to entire non-student apartments in peripheral areas.

Ancillary Factors: Tourism competition and stalled public infrastructure projects (e.g., a paralyzed tram line) exacerbate affordability and accessibility issues.

### **Kyiv Polytechnic Institute, Ukraine:**

Crisis within a Crisis: Students navigate housing insecurity amidst active warfare. While subsidized university dorms are affordable (€20-€100/month), they are oversubscribed and often feature outdated, communal facilities.

Unregulated Private Market: Private rentals (€100-€600+/month) carry extreme risk. Tenants face exorbitant upfront costs (first month + deposit + 50% realtor fee), no price regulation, and the constant threat of missile damage or power outages. Location preferences prioritize lower floors (for blackouts) and proximity to metro stations (for use as bomb shelters).

Policy Gap: State support programs (e.g., "eOselia" mortgages, IDP payments) are inaccessible or insufficient for the student population.

**Univerzana Primorskem, Slovenia:**

Insufficient University Provision: University dormitories (€120-€220/month) are the only affordable option but are allocated via a points system that cannot meet demand, leaving most students to compete privately.

Hyper-Competitive Private Market: Rooms in shared apartments in Koper cost €250-€400+, with landlords demanding immediate decisions and often discriminating by gender and nationality. Students report last-minute contract cancellations and viewing fees.

Forced Commuting: Many students are pushed to seek housing in surrounding towns (Izola, Ankaran), adding significant commute times (20-50 minutes) and costs (€30-€60/month) to their budgets.

**Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, Germany:**

Acute Shortage in a High-Cost City: Munich epitomizes the crisis in major urban centers. Dormitory spaces are severely limited, placing immense pressure on the private market.

Price Gouging: Landlords systematically raise rents before semester starts. The high general cost of living makes private rentals prohibitively expensive for students without substantial family support.

**Student Anecdotal Evidence**

Qualitative data underscores the human impact:

Search times of 5 months or more are common. Landlords demand entire annual rents upfront from international students. Contracts are offered on a "take it or leave it" basis for substandard properties. Last-minute cancellations by landlords and charging for viewings are reported. Students resort to expensive short-term rentals (e.g., Airbnb) while searching, deepening financial strain.

## **Recommended Policy Solutions**

A holistic approach targeting supply, market fairness, and student financial capacity is required.

### **Increase Affordable Supply:**

Direct Public Investment: Governments must fund and incentivize the construction of new, high-quality, accessible purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA).

Target: A measurable increase in beds per enrolled student requiring accommodation.

Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs): Create incentives for private developers to include affordable student units in new developments through density bonuses or streamlined permitting.

### **Regulate the Student Rental Market:**

Rent Control/Caps for Student Housing: Implement rent stabilization measures for properties marketed to students, pegging increases to inflation, not pre-semester demand surges.

Standardized Contracts & Tenant Rights: Legislate for plain-language, standardized rental agreements that protect students from predatory clauses and unfair eviction.

Anti-Discrimination Measures: Enforce and strengthen housing laws to prohibit discrimination based on tenant status (student), nationality, or gender.

### **Provide Direct Financial Support:**

Means-Tested Student Housing Grants: Introduce non-loan grants, calculated based on family income and local cost-of-living indices, providing students with flexible funds to address their most pressing needs, including housing.

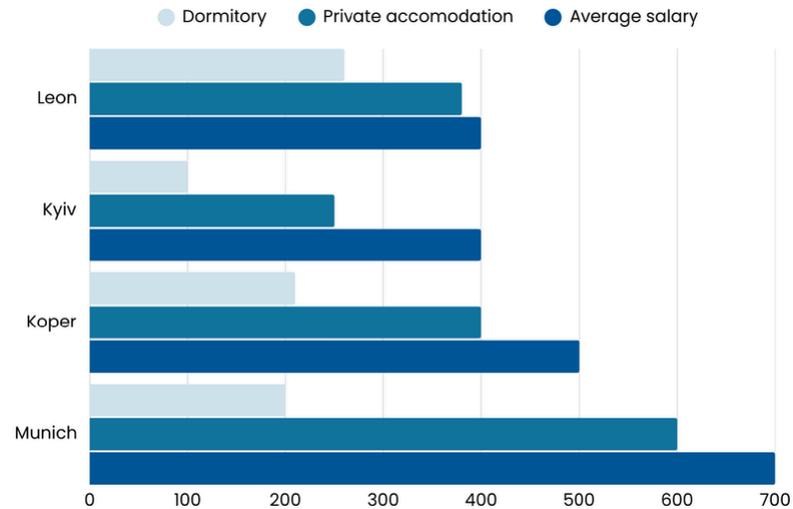
Landlord Incentives: To offset rent controls and encourage participation, offer tax breaks or subsidies to landlords who rent to students at or below controlled rates and adhere to quality standards.

Leverage Existing Infrastructure: Transportation Solutions: In regions like Primorska, coordinate with transport authorities to subsidize student commuter passes, making housing in surrounding towns a more viable and affordable alternative.

## Conclusion

The student housing crisis is not a series of isolated local issues but a structural failing of housing and education policy with demonstrable negative effects on academic performance, mental health, and social equity. The solutions—increasing supply, regulating the market, and providing direct support—are interconnected and require coordinated action at regional, national, and institutional levels. Failure to act will continue to erode the promise of accessible higher education and place an unsustainable burden on the next generation.

## Comparative Analysis of Student Housing Affordability

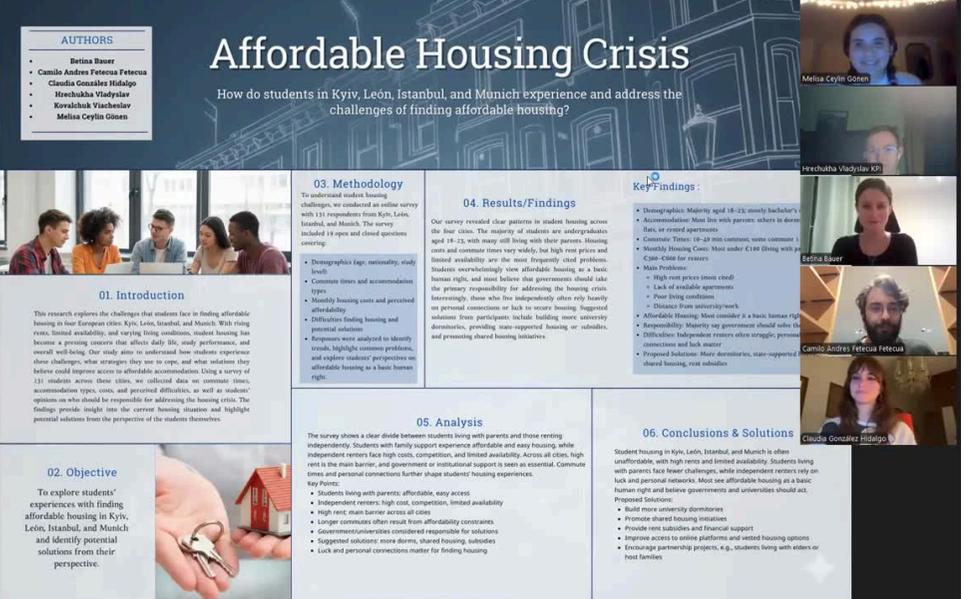


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# Student Housing Challenges in Kyiv, León, Istanbul and Munich

Betina Bauer, Camilo Andres Fetecua Fetecua, Claudia González Hidalgo, Hrechukha Vladyslav, Kovalchuk Viacheslav, Melisa Ceylin Gönen (WG 10)



## Affordable Housing Crisis

How do students in Kyiv, León, Istanbul, and Munich experience and address the challenges of finding affordable housing?

**AUTHORS**

- Betina Bauer
- Camilo Andres Fetecua Fetecua
- Claudia González Hidalgo
- Hrechukha Vladyslav
- Kovalchuk Viacheslav
- Melisa Ceylin Gönen

### 01. Introduction

This research explores the challenges that students face in finding affordable housing in four European cities: Kyiv, León, Istanbul, and Munich. With rising rents, limited availability, and varying living conditions, student housing has become a pressing concern that affects daily life, study performance, and overall well-being. Our study aims to understand how students experience these challenges, what strategies they use to cope, and what solutions they believe could improve access to affordable accommodations. Using a survey of 131 students across these cities, we collected data on commute times, accommodation types, costs, and perceived difficulties, as well as students' opinions on who should be responsible for addressing the housing crisis. The findings provide insight into the current housing situation and highlight potential solutions from the perspective of the students themselves.

### 02. Objective

To explore students' experiences with finding affordable housing in Kyiv, León, Istanbul, and Munich and identify potential solutions from their perspective.

### 03. Methodology

To understand student housing challenges, we conducted an online survey with 131 respondents from Kyiv, León, Istanbul, and Munich. The survey included 19 open and closed questions covering:

- Demographics (age, nationality, study level)
- Commute times and accommodation types
- Monthly housing costs and perceived affordability
- Difficulties finding housing and potential solutions
- Responses were analyzed to identify trends, highlight common problems, and explore students' perceptions on affordable housing as a basic human right.

### 04. Results/Findings

Our survey revealed clear patterns in student housing across the four cities. The majority of students are undergraduate-aged 18-23, with many still living with their parents. Housing costs and commute times vary widely, but high rent prices and limited availability are the most frequently cited problems. Students overwhelmingly view affordable housing as a basic human right, and most believe that governments should take the primary responsibility for addressing the housing crisis. Interestingly, those who live independently often rely heavily on personal connections or luck to secure housing. Suggested solutions from participants include building more university dormitories, providing state-subsidized housing or subsidies, and promoting shared housing initiatives.

### 05. Analysis

The survey shows a clear divide between students living with parents and those renting independently. Students with family support experience affordable and easy housing, while independent renters face high costs, competition, and limited availability. Across all cities, high rent is the main barrier, and government or institutional support is seen as essential. Commute times and personal connections further shape students' housing experiences.

**Key Points:**

- Students living with parents: affordable, easy access
- Independent renters: high cost, competition, limited availability
- High rent: main barrier across all cities
- Longer commutes often result from affordability constraints
- Governments/universities considered responsible for solutions
- Suggested solutions: more dorms, shared housing, subsidies
- Luck and personal connections matter for finding housing

### 06. Conclusions & Solutions

Student housing in Kyiv, León, Istanbul, and Munich is often unaffordable, with high rents and limited availability. Students living with parents face fewer challenges, while independent renters rely on luck and personal networks. Most see affordable housing as a basic human right and believe governments and universities should act.

**Proposed Solutions:**

- Build more university dormitories
- Promote shared housing initiatives
- Provide rent subsidies and financial support
- Improve access to online platforms and vetted housing options
- Encourage partnering projects, e.g., students living with seniors or host families

### Key Findings

- Demographics: Majority aged 18-23, mostly bachelor's
- Accommodation: Most live with parents; others in dorms, flats, or rental apartments
- Commute Times: 15-30 min common, some commute 1h
- Monthly Housing Costs: Most under €100 (living with parents); €200-€300 for renters
- Main Problems:
  - High rent prices (most cited)
  - Lack of available apartments
  - Poor living conditions
  - Distance from university/work
- Affordable Housing: Most consider it a basic human right
- Responsibility: Majority say government should solve it
- Difficulties: Independent renters often struggle; personal connections and luck matter
- Proposed Solutions: More dormitories, state-subsidized shared housing, rent subsidies

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## Key Findings :

- Demographics: Majority aged 18–23; mostly bachelor's students
- Accommodation: Most live with parents; others in dorms, shared flats, or rented apartments
- Commute Times: 10–40 min common; some commute 1–2 hours
- Monthly Housing Costs: Most under €100 (living with parents); €300–€600 for renters
- Main Problems:
  - High rent prices (most cited)
  - Lack of available apartments
  - Poor living conditions
  - Distance from university/work
- Affordable Housing: Most consider it a basic human right
- Responsibility: Majority say government should solve the crisis
- Difficulties: Independent renters often struggle; personal connections and luck matter
- Proposed Solutions: More dormitories, state-supported housing, shared housing, rent subsidies

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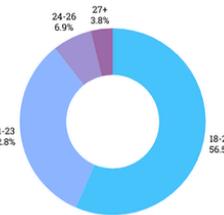
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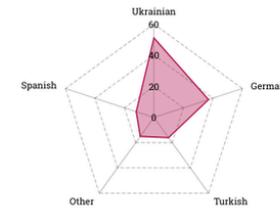
- Build more university dormitories
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- Improve access to online platforms and vetted housing options
- Encourage partnership projects, e.g., students living with elders or host families

# QUICK ANSWERS SUMMARY

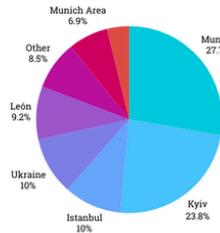
1. How old are you?



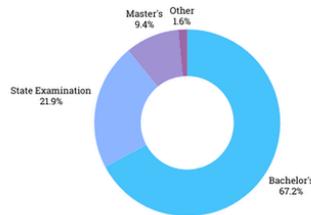
2. What's your nationality?



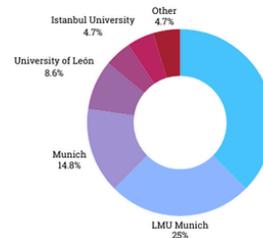
3. Where do you live now?



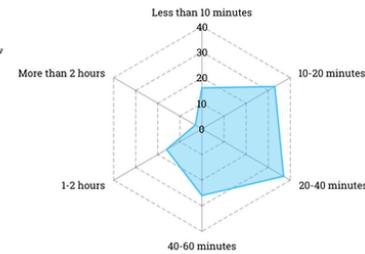
4. What is your study level?



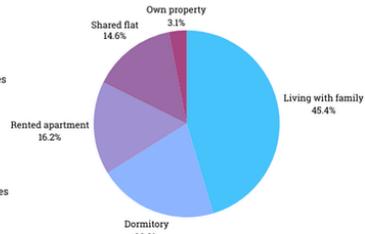
5. Where do you study?



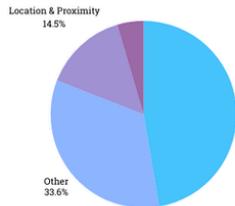
6. How long does it take to get to your university from where you live?



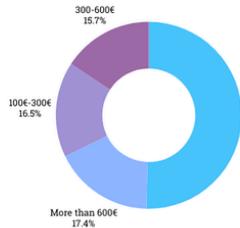
7. What kind of accommodation do you currently live in?



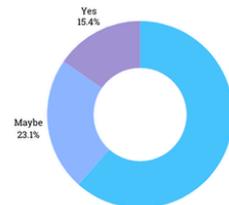
8. What main aspect did you consider when choosing your current accommodation?



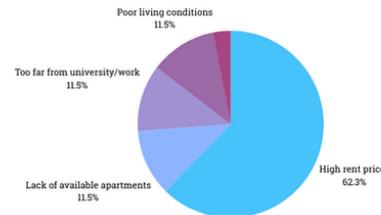
9. How much do you pay for housing per month?



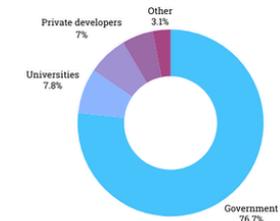
10. Do you think housing in your city is affordable for students?



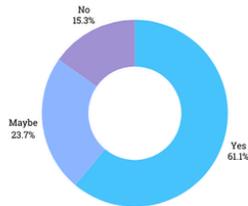
11. What is the biggest problem with housing in your area?



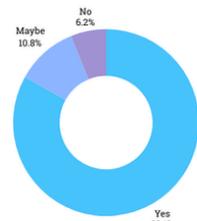
12. Who should take the main responsibility for solving the housing crisis?



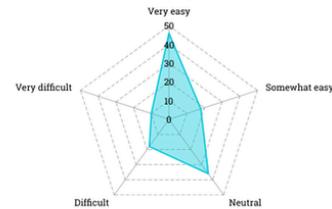
13. Would you consider living in shared housing to save money?



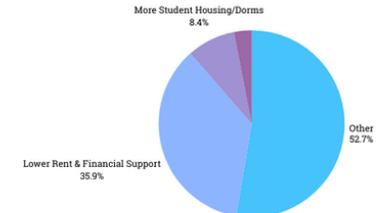
14. Do you believe affordable housing is a basic human right?



15. How difficult was it for you to find your current housing?



16. What type of changes would be most beneficial to you as a student looking for housing?



# **Policy Report**

## **Executive Summary**

Affordable student housing is a pressing concern across European cities, affecting students' financial stability, study performance, and well-being. Our research surveyed 131 students in Kyiv, León, Istanbul, and Munich to understand how students experience housing challenges, what solutions they use, and what strategies could improve affordability. Findings reveal that high rents, limited availability, and long commutes are the main issues, particularly for students renting independently. Most respondents consider affordable housing a basic human right and believe that government and institutional support is essential. Suggested solutions include expanding dormitories, shared housing initiatives, rent subsidies, and targeted support programs.

## **Introduction**

Student housing affordability is a growing challenge in Europe. Rising rents, limited supply, and poor living conditions make it difficult for students to live independently while pursuing their studies. This study aims to explore students' experiences, perceptions, and strategies for managing housing challenges in four cities: Kyiv, León, Istanbul, and Munich. The goal is to provide data-driven insights and practical policy recommendations for improving student housing accessibility.

## **Methodology**

- Surveyed population: 131 students, ages 18–27+
- Cities: Kyiv, León, Istanbul, Munich
- Study levels: Mostly bachelor's students, some master's students
- Survey: 19 open and closed questions covering demographics, accommodation type, commute times, housing costs, difficulties, and perceptions of affordability
- Data analysis: Trends, problems, and student-suggested solutions were summarized and interpreted

## **Key Findings**

The survey highlights significant trends in student housing across Kyiv, León, Istanbul, and Munich. Most respondents are young undergraduates aged 18–23, with many still living with their parents, which explains why a substantial number report low housing costs and ease in finding accommodation. In contrast, students who rent independently face high rents, intense competition, and limited availability, often relying on personal connections or luck to secure housing. Commute times vary widely: while some students live close to their university, others spend 1–2 hours traveling due to affordability constraints. Across all cities, students overwhelmingly view affordable housing as a basic human right and consider government intervention crucial to address the crisis.

## **Supporting Data**

- Accommodation: Parents (54), Dormitories (27), Shared flats (19), Rented apartments (21)
- Monthly Housing Costs: <€100 (61), €100–300 (20), €300–600 (19), >€600 (21)
- Main Problems: High rent, limited availability, poor conditions, distance from university
- Responsibility: Government (99), Universities (10), Private developers (9), Individuals (7)
- Suggested Solutions: More dormitories, shared housing, rent subsidies, financial support, innovative housing programs

## **Analysis**

The results show a clear divide between students living with parents and those renting independently. While family-supported students experience affordable and easy housing, independent renters struggle with financial and logistical challenges. High rents are a consistent barrier, and long commutes reflect the trade-off between affordability and proximity. Students overwhelmingly view housing as a human right and expect government and institutional action. Suggested solutions reflect both structural interventions (more dormitories, rent subsidies) and innovative housing models (shared housing, living with elders or host families).

### **Recommendations / Policy Solutions**

1. Expand university dormitories to accommodate more students in major cities.
2. Promote shared housing initiatives to reduce individual costs.
3. Implement targeted subsidies or rent caps for students in high-demand areas.
4. Improve digital platforms and internal university portals for vetted student housing.
5. Encourage innovative projects, e.g., students living with elders or host families in exchange for rent reductions.
6. Provide financial incentives to landlords to rent to students safely and affordably.
7. Support decentralized or online education options to reduce the need for long commutes.

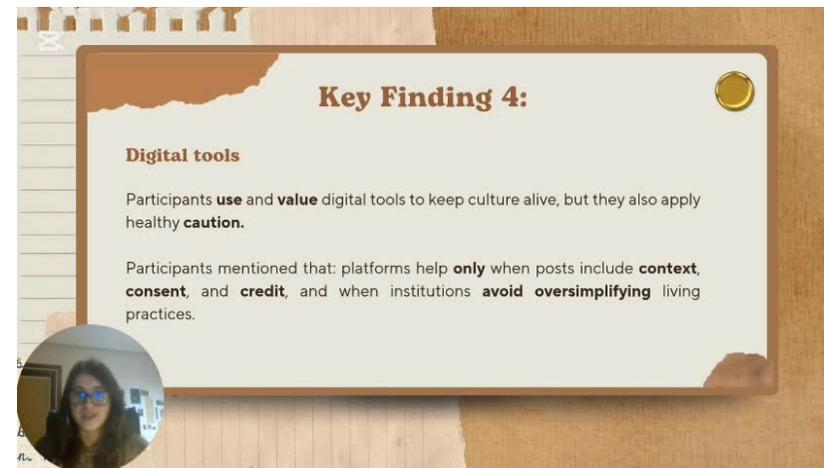
### **Conclusion**

Student housing remains a major challenge in Kyiv, León, Istanbul, and Munich. While family-supported students experience affordability, independent renters face high costs, competition, and limited options. Structural and policy measures—ranging from more dormitories, shared housing, and rent subsidies to government and institutional support—are essential to ensure that all students have access to safe, affordable housing. Future research should explore graduate-level housing needs and investigate long-term policy effectiveness

# Preserving Cultural Heritage and Identity in a Digital Age

A Cross-Country Study on Migrants' Experiences

*Valentina Castaño Marín, Marzhan Atygayeva, Naroa Chaparro Elola, Nicole Gutiérrez Vuga, Konstantinov Vladyslav*



## **Policy Report**

### **Issue and Main Recommendation**

Migrants across Europe struggle to maintain meaningful ties to their cultural heritage while adapting to new social environments. Digital platforms offer accessible ways to stay connected, yet they often simplify traditions, remove context, or circulate stereotyped representations. This creates a gap between the lived experience of culture and the ways it appears online.

**Main Recommendation** Universities and community institutions should implement structured digital heritage initiatives that support migrants in preserving, sharing, and transmitting their cultural identity in ways that are accurate, respectful, and sustainable.

### **The Problem**

International mobility continues to grow, yet cultural preservation practices have not adapted to the realities of digital life. Migrants depend heavily on online tools to stay connected, but current platforms rarely offer guidance on how to share culture responsibly.

Digital environments flatten nuance when traditions are reduced to short clips without context or consent. They rarely credit communities, languages, or storytellers. As a result, cultural elements that depend on intergenerational practice, oral transmission, or local community settings face particular risk. These include dialects, oral stories, crafts, rituals, and other practices that require hands-on experience and guidance from elders.

Survey data from 30 participants representing more than 15 home countries indicates that cultural identity remains deeply important. Eighty percent rated their connection to their heritage as four or five out of five. Yet many worry that the cultural elements they value most are those most likely to disappear in online environments. Participants repeatedly mentioned that language maintenance, community guidance, and shared memory are difficult to reproduce digitally.

## **Key Findings**

Migrants rely on digital tools, but they do so with care. Platforms help them keep culture alive when content includes clear context, community consent, and appropriate credit. Participants in our study value digital spaces as amplifiers of heritage, yet they do not see them as replacements for in person transmission.

When asked to imagine the future, participants consistently described a hybrid model. Digital platforms are useful for storing, sharing, and celebrating culture, but authentic preservation requires continued offline practice through family gatherings, ritual involvement, language use, and community spaces.

Across participants from four current countries and eight cultural backgrounds, there was strong agreement on three points:

- maintaining cultural identity is a priority
- cultural representation online must be handled carefully
- speaking or practicing one's native language in daily life remains challenging

## **Recommendations**

1. Create a Digital Heritage Archive within universities Universities should host a platform where migrants can upload stories, recipes, oral histories, dialect samples, photos, and videos. This archive should be community-driven and supported by university staff who ensure digital safety, storage, and long term accessibility.
2. Introduce a Respectful Digital Sharing Protocol Institutions should provide a simple checklist and toolkit that guides students and staff in responsible cultural sharing. This includes adding context, obtaining consent, giving proper credit, and prioritising the preservation of dialects, oral stories, and other vulnerable practices. This protocol can be integrated into digital literacy programs, orientation activities, and cultural events.

3. Support structured cultural spaces on campus Universities should expand cultural clubs, language exchange programs, and community-led events. These spaces sustain the offline aspects of cultural transmission that digital tools cannot replace. Migrant communities should be supported as the leaders of these initiatives.

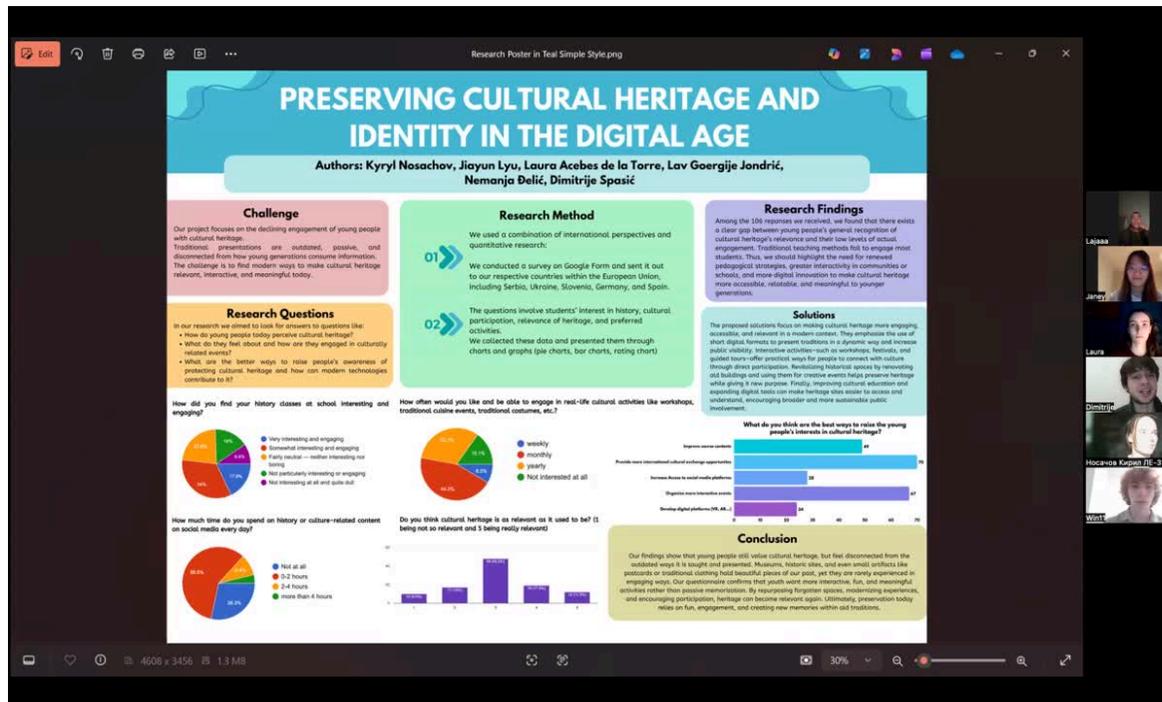
### **Why This Matters**

Cultural heritage plays a central role in identity, belonging, and wellbeing for migrants. Digital tools can strengthen these connections, but only when used with awareness and responsibility. Supporting respectful cultural preservation benefits both migrants and host communities by encouraging inclusion, reducing misrepresentation, and fostering appreciation for diverse traditions.

These recommendations offer practical steps that European universities and institutions can adopt to ensure that cultural heritage remains vibrant, accessible, and accurately represented in a rapidly changing digital landscape.

# Preserving Cultural Heritage and Identity in the Digital Age

Kyryl Nosachov, Jiayun Lyu, Laura Acebes de la Torre, Lav Goergije Jondrić, Nemanja Đelić, Dimitrije Spasić (WG 12)



# PRESERVING CULTURAL HERITAGE AND IDENTITY IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Authors: Kyril Nosachov, Jiayun Lyu, Laura Acebes de la Torre, Lav Goergije Jondrić, Nemanja Đelić, Dimitrije Spasić

## Challenge

Our project focuses on the declining engagement of young people with cultural heritage. Traditional presentations are outdated, passive, and disconnected from how young generations consume information. The challenge is to find modern ways to make cultural heritage relevant, interactive, and meaningful today.

## Research Questions

In our research we aimed to look for answers to questions like:

- How do young people today perceive cultural heritage?
- What do they feel about and how are they engaged in culturally related events?
- What are the better ways to raise people's awareness of protecting cultural heritage and how can modern technologies contribute to it?

## Research Method

We used a combination of international perspectives and quantitative research:

01 >> We conducted a survey on Google Form and sent it out to our respective countries within the European Union, including Serbia, Ukraine, Slovenia, Germany, and Spain.

02 >> The questions involve students' interest in history, cultural participation, relevance of heritage, and preferred activities. We collected these data and presented them through charts and graphs (pie charts, bar charts, rating chart)

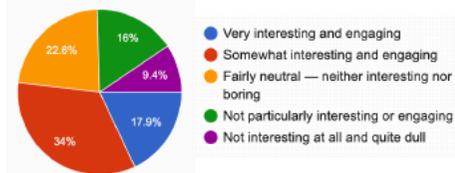
## Research Findings

Among the 106 responses we received, we found that there exists a clear gap between young people's general recognition of cultural heritage's relevance and their low levels of actual engagement. Traditional teaching methods fail to engage most students. Thus, we should highlight the need for renewed pedagogical strategies, greater interactivity in communities or schools, and more digital innovation to make cultural heritage more accessible, relatable, and meaningful to younger generations.

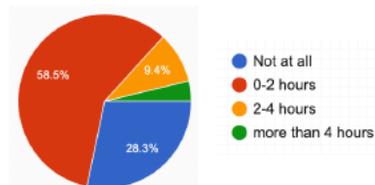
## Solutions

The proposed solutions focus on making cultural heritage more engaging, accessible, and relevant in a modern context. They emphasize the use of short digital formats to present traditions in a dynamic way and increase public visibility. Interactive activities—such as workshops, festivals, and guided tours—offer practical ways for people to connect with culture through direct participation. Revitalizing historical spaces by renovating old buildings and using them for creative events helps preserve heritage while giving it new purpose. Finally, improving cultural education and expanding digital tools can make heritage sites easier to access and understand, encouraging broader and more sustainable public involvement.

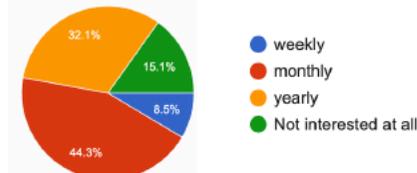
How did you find your history classes at school interesting and engaging?



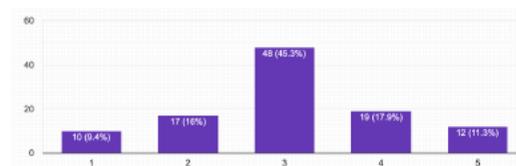
How much time do you spend on history or culture-related content on social media every day?



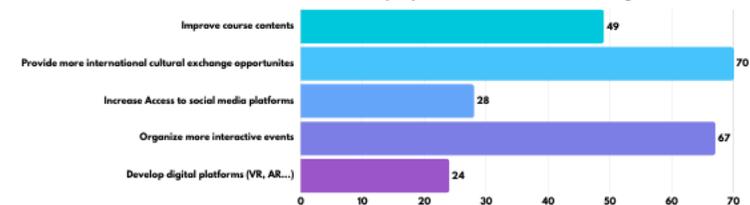
How often would you like and be able to engage in real-life cultural activities like workshops, traditional cuisine events, traditional costumes, etc.?



Do you think cultural heritage is as relevant as it used to be? (1 being not so relevant and 5 being really relevant)



What do you think are the best ways to raise the young people's interests in cultural heritage?



## Conclusion

Our findings show that young people still value cultural heritage, but feel disconnected from the outdated ways it is taught and presented. Museums, historic sites, and even small artifacts like postcards or traditional clothing hold beautiful pieces of our past, yet they are rarely experienced in engaging ways. Our questionnaire confirms that youth want more interactive, fun, and meaningful activities rather than passive memorization. By repurposing forgotten spaces, modernizing experiences, and encouraging participation, heritage can become relevant again. Ultimately, preservation today relies on fun, engagement, and creating new memories within old traditions.

## **Policy Report**

### **1. The Challenge**

Our project focuses on the declining engagement of young people with cultural heritage. Traditional presentations are outdated, passive, and disconnected from how young generations consume information. The challenge is to find modern ways to make cultural heritage relevant, interactive, and meaningful today.

### **2. Research Questions**

Our main research questions fall into:

- How do young people today perceive cultural heritage?
- What do they feel about and how are they engaged in culturally related events?
- What are the better ways to raise people's awareness of protecting cultural heritage and how can modern technologies contribute to it?

### **3. Research Method**

We used a combination of international perspectives and quantitative research:

We conducted a survey on Google Form and sent it out to our respective countries, including Serbia, Ukraine, Slovenia, Germany, and Spain.

The questions involve students' interest in history, cultural participation, relevance of heritage, and preferred activities.

We then collected these data and presented them through charts and graphs (pie charts, bar charts, rating chart)

#### **4. Research Findings**

So far, we have received 106 responses from our Google questionnaire. We found that there exists a clear gap between young people's general recognition of cultural heritage's relevance and their low levels of actual engagement. Traditional teaching methods in schools fail to engage most students. Young people are also showing low participation and digital engagement with cultural materials. These low participation levels further reflect a broader disconnection between young people's stated interest in cultural heritage and their actual involvement in heritage-related events. This pattern highlights the need for targeted digital strategies if cultural heritage promotion intends to meet young people where they are active.

Overall, the distribution suggests that cultural heritage retains perceived importance but lacks uniformly strong resonance across the youth population. Thus, we should highlight the need for renewed pedagogical strategies, greater interactivity in communities or schools, and more digital innovation to make cultural heritage more accessible, relatable, and meaningful to younger generations.

#### **5. Solutions**

The proposed solutions focus on making cultural heritage more engaging, accessible, and relevant in a modern context. They emphasize the use of short digital formats to present traditions in a dynamic way and increase public visibility. Interactive activities—such as workshops, festivals, and guided tours—offer practical ways for people to connect with culture through direct participation. Revitalizing historical spaces by renovating old buildings and using them for creative events helps preserve heritage while giving it a new purpose. Finally, improving cultural education and expanding digital tools can make heritage sites easier to access and understand, encouraging broader and more sustainable public involvement.

## **6. Conclusion**

Our findings show that young people still value cultural heritage, but feel disconnected from the outdated ways it is taught and presented. Museums, historic sites, and even small artifacts like postcards or traditional clothing hold beautiful pieces of our past, yet they are rarely experienced in engaging ways. Our questionnaire confirms that youth want more interactive, fun, and meaningful activities rather than passive memorization. By repurposing forgotten spaces, modernizing experiences, and encouraging participation, heritage can become relevant again. Ultimately, preservation today relies on fun, engagement, and creating new memories within old traditions.

# Language and Integration

A Practical Strategy for Helping International Students Integrate in Europe

*Cansu Şen, Ana Mayo Castañón, Kolesnyk Nazar, Patricija Mohorič (WG 6)*



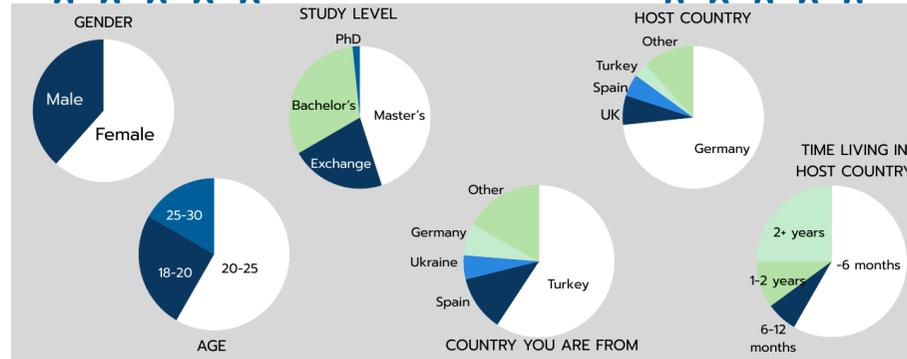
# LANGUAGE & INTEGRATION

**Purpose:** find the role of social media in international students' integration process



## SURVEY RESULTS

### Demographic Information



## Pre-Arrival Phase



## Post-Arrival Phase

Questions on social media:

- Feel safer and more informed
- Easier integration process
- Enough tools to solve problems
- Help in improving the language
- Help in integration process
- Created a "comfort zone"



## Findings:

- Not efficient tools -> misinformation
- Integration vs Comfort zone
- Language barrier
- Demand for structured support

## Solutions:

- International Students' Integration Hub
- Fund Digital Integration Literacy



International students Integration Hub

This is an unclaimed account. Claim it before it's lost. [Claim Account](#)

**Checkpoint**  
Look back at your 2025 on Discord  
[Dismiss](#)

International students Integra...  # 🏠 housing-verified

- # ✅ roles-and-verification
- # 📣 announcements
- # 📖 server-guide
- Survival kit (1st month) ▾
- # 🏠 housing-verified 
- # 🇵🇸 visa-legal-help
- # 🚇 public-transport
- # 💰 filing-taxes
- # 👤 part-time-job-offers
- Integration help ▾
- # 🧘 wellness-check-in
- Local diasporas ▾
- # 🇺🇦 ukraine
- # 🇹🇷 turkiye
- # 🇪🇸 spain

**#**

# Welcome to # 🏠 housing-verified!

This is the start of the # 🏠 housing-verified channel.

 Cansu Şen (LMU)  
Online

+  Message # 🏠 housing-verified

## **Policy Report**

### **A Practical Strategy for Helping International Students Integrate in Europe**

**Prepared for:** University Leadership, European Policy Makers, and Education Stakeholders

#### **1. Executive Summary: Issue and Main Recommendation**

International students arrive in Europe full of ambition but often navigate their new lives through a maze of confusing social media platforms. While these digital tools are a lifeline, they unintentionally create a comfort bubble, connecting students to other internationals while isolating them from the local community.

We recommend that universities and policymakers create official, moderated "**Digital Integration Hubs.**" These platforms will harness the efficiency of familiar tools while implementing targeted strategies to bridge the gap between the international student bubble and local society. Think of them as a curated online home base, a place that offers immediate, practical help while actively encouraging students to explore and connect with their new home. It's about making the digital world a bridge to real-world belonging, not a barrier.

## **2. The Problem:** The Unmanaged Digital Landscape

Europe's universities are global attractors, yet they often delegate the critical process of student integration to unregulated digital spaces. Our research, drawing on a diverse cohort of 60 international students across Germany, Spain, Türkiye, and other countries, reveals a system in crisis. The majority were Master's students in their early twenties, and their experiences highlight systemic shortcomings.

**The Pre-Arrival Phase:** Before arrival, 85% of students used social media like Instagram, WhatsApp, and Facebook for critical needs like housing and university information (85% each). They turned not to official websites, but to each other in unmoderated digital spaces.

**The Post-Arrival Phase:** While useful for practical problem-solving, this reliance has significant costs:

- **Pervasive Misinformation:** The weakness of official channels forces students to seek vital information from unvetted online sources, leading to confusion and practical difficulties regarding housing, visas, and administrative processes. Students have explicitly asked for "supervisions for housing" and "true information," noting that "things are really complicated."
- **The Digital Comfort Bubble:** These platforms create insulated communities where students interact primarily in English or their native languages. This discourages engagement with the local population and host culture, leading to social isolation despite being digitally connected. Students report feeling lonely and missing the cultural exchange they sought.

### **3. Key Research Findings**

Our survey data illuminates the dual role of social media:

- **An Essential Lifeline:** 84% of students used social media for pre-arrival information. While 75% found these tools "efficient" for solving practical problems, they also reported high levels of misinformation and frustration.
- **The Integration Paradox:** Students rated social media highly for making integration "easier" (avg. 3.9/5) but simultaneously acknowledged it creates a "comfort zone" (avg. 2.7/5) that limits real-life interaction with locals.
- **The Language Barrier:** Despite being highly connected online, students reported that social media provided minimal help in improving their host country language skills (avg. 2.9/5), indicating communication occurs within international bubbles.
- **Demand for Structured Support:** Qualitative feedback explicitly calls for "more official applications" and "supervisions for housing," highlighting a critical unmet need for guided support.

#### **4. Actionable Recommendations**

We propose a shift from leaving students to fend for themselves to building curated online communities that guide them toward integration.

##### **Recommendation 1: Digital Integration Hubs**

**Who:** University international offices, in partnership with student unions.

**How:** Develop and promote a centralized digital platform (e.g., on Discord) to replace fragmented social media groups. This hub should include:

- Practical Channels: #housing-verified, #visa-legal-help, #job-board(moderated for reliability).
- Integration Channels: #language-tandem-partners, #ask-a-local, #hobby-clubs to facilitate crosscultural connections.
- Support Channels: #mental-wellness, #home-country-connection to provide a safe, moderated space for community and support.

**Why:** It replaces chaos with clarity, offering reliable information and a clear path to building a social network.

##### **Recommendation 2: Fund Digital Integration Literacy**

**Who:** European Commission (Erasmus+ Programme), National Ministries of Education.

**How:** Fund resources and training modules on "Strategic Social Media Use for Integration," including grants for universities to develop best practices and research to evaluate the effectiveness of Digital Integration Hubs.

**Why it works:** It empowers students with knowledge and ensures our solutions evolve and improve.

## 5. Conclusion

This is about more than convenience; it is about fulfilling the promise of international education. By implementing these recommendations, we can:

- **Improve Student Well-being and Success:** Directly address mental strain and isolation, leading to better academic outcomes.
- **Create Diverse, Vibrant Campuses:** Build the inclusive communities we proudly advertise.
- **Foster Global Citizens:** Enable deep, lasting connections that turn international students into lifelong ambassadors for Europe.

# The Language Gap: Overcoming Barriers to Social Integration

*Priscilla Petrucci, Anastasiia Kyselova, Ihor Mykytenko, Mensah-Kusi Foster, Ibrahim Ucak (WG 9)*



## **Policy Report**

### **Language and Integration Challenges: Overcoming Barriers to social integration(The role of Universities,NGOs and Local Communities)**

#### **Executive Summary**

Across Europe, many communities face persistent challenges in integrating 'newcomers' including international students, refugees and labour migrants. Language barriers often constitute the primary impediments to meaningful social participation and consequently contributing to social isolation. The challenge is to find a lasting solution that will assist in overcoming language and integration barriers which is essential for building more inclusive and connected European communities.

**Research Procedures:** To analyse this complex challenges, we adopted a structured scientific approach.

- Objective: Language , a barrier to integration
- Methodology: Questions to friends in an interview for studying individual cases
- Research on Interviews with NGOs: A number interviews with migrants from European countries
- Challenge: Try to identify missing solutions and work to understand and popularise effective ones.

### **Research Findings (Challenges)**

- During our interviews, it was observed that, the primary driver of policy failure on integration is the “one – size-fit- all” approach. We can not treat ‘newcomers’ as a monolithic category. For example, refugees and international students can not fit in the same integration policy since it is obvious that the needs of refugees are different from an international student.
- We also find out one of the major challenge of international students to language and integration policies is identity crisis; either one should
  1. Throw away their old culture and embrace the new one fully(assimilation)
  2. Keep their culture and ignore the the integration process. (Separation)
  3. Whether to ignore both. (Marginalisation)
- Again our interviews and research showed that there are no specific programs organised by the universities to help integrate students into their local communities
- Local authorities also has not consciously been able to create a platform for members of the local community to participate in the integration of the ‘ newcomers’
- Existed NGOs and support groups which help in integration are not well known to students
- In Germany some schools offer German courses but with a fee which has a higher demand and a limited spots.

**Recommendations:** Based on our research findings we propose these solutions to curb these existing challenges

- Every policy made to solve language and integration issues should be tailored to address the needs of a specific group ( refugees, labour migrants, children or international students). Therefore our policies should prevent forcing a false choice between Assimilation or Separation
- In practice, integration programs should not be for migrants( newcomers) alone but with the entire community. We recommend this framework because it transforms passive coexistence into active, mutual cooperation
- Lastly, we also recommend a policy centered on 'Language-in-Action Model'. This is a hybrid approach combining a structured daily language classes to master the basics and a practical work experience to apply the skills in the real world.

### **Proposed solutions**

1. **Berry's Acculturation Model ("Two-Way Street")**. We propose shifting from Assimilation to Interculturalism. Integration must be a mutual process: migrants learn the local language, while the host community respects their cultural identity. This directly prevents the **identity crisis** found in our research.
2. **The "Language-in-Action" Framework**. To ensure practical application, we propose a hybrid model combining structured daily classes (grammar) with **mandatory volunteering** or work experience. This allows students to apply language skills immediately in real-world contexts.
3. **Specialized Diagnostic Assessment**. To tailor support, universities must use mandatory **Psychological, EQ, and IQ tests**. This ensures migrants are placed in educational or professional tracks that match their actual cognitive abilities and emotional readiness.
4. **Digital Integration Ecosystem (Mobile App)**. To solve the "information gap," we propose a unified **Mobile Application**. This app will serve as a single hub for **linguistic tools, health access, and maps of local NGOs**.

## **Conclusions**

Current "one-size-fits-all" policies fail because they treat newcomers as a monolithic group, leading to social isolation. A sustainable solution requires a holistic approach. By implementing **Berry's Model** (to resolve identity crises), **"Language-in-Action"** (for active practice), and **Diagnostic Tests** (for precision), we can bridge the gap between passive learning and active participation. The goal is to build a connected, inclusive European community.

# Mental Health Crisis Among Young Europeans

*Alex Thaler, Lucas Álvarez Martínez, Marta Dimitrovski, Nina Stojanovska,  
Sara Lovrec, Kateryna Karban (WG 3)*



## **Policy Report**

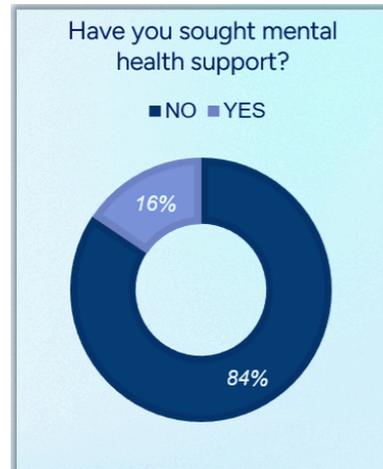
### **Access to Mental Health Support for Migrant Youth**

As students in Germany, Slovenia, Spain, and Ukraine, we identify mental health as a crisis that disproportionately affects young Europeans. Students face anxiety, depression, academic and social pressures, and economic struggles at unprecedented rates. Students with migration migrants face additional burdens, including language barriers, racism, xenophobia, cultural discrimination, and limited access to healthcare services. For our countries, the mental health of youth with migration identities is a matter concerning large populations: 5,014,189 (5.98%) of Germans, 2,685,762 (5.47%) of Spaniards, and 14,654 (0.69%) of Slovenians aged 0-29.

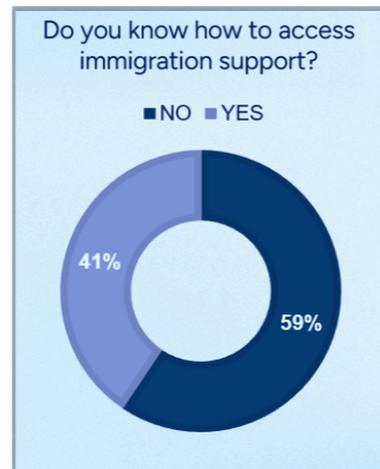
The EU remains steadfast in its commitments to its migrant populations, including the adoption of its Action Plan on integration and inclusion (2021-2027), taking action to ensure equal access to mental healthcare, combating discrimination in the housing market, and promoting inclusive education and training from early childhood. The EU has also set high standards to promote mental health, including support for and implementation of “best and promising practices,” a comprehensive approach to mental health in the ‘Healthier Together’ initiative, the funding of a support package on stigma and mental health, and capacity building and training for member states.

For policymakers, we aim to address the gaps that remain for students with migrant identities, which leads us to our central research question: What barriers do migrants face in accessing existing mental health resources?

Our group conducted a survey among 33 students with migrant identities across 8 EU member countries to analyze their abilities to navigate various resources. The results are as follows:



**Figure 2a.** Students seeking mental health support



**Figure 2b.** Student ability to access immigration support



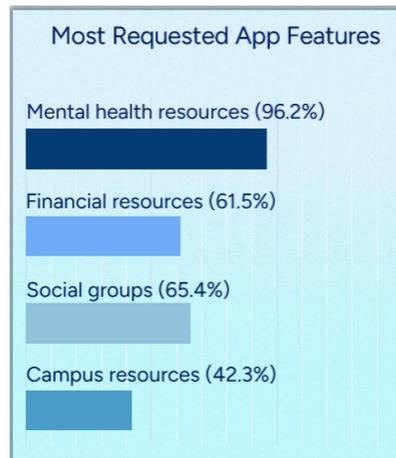
**Figure 2c.** Key improvements

Among the surveyed students, only 16% sought mental health support (Figure 2a). With over 57% of respondents indicating a struggle with mental health (anxiety, depression, burnout), the survey suggests a strong discrepancy between those needing mental health services and those receiving access to services. Survey respondents cited various reasons for this, with key survey findings suggesting that limited access to support, high costs, and language barriers were the primary hindrances. The surveyed students expressed a desire for free or reduced-price therapy outlets, multilingual services, and cultural sensitivity training for mental health practitioners (Figure 2c).

The survey also sought to locate problems particularly facing students with migrant identities, including financial burdens, social alienation, and struggles with bureaucracy. A key burden facing migrant students was a lack of support to navigate immigration services, with 59% of students unable to access immigration support (Figure 2b).

### 3. Policy recommendations

As an immediate response to navigating resources, migrant students were asked what they would most like to see present in an app for immigrants to EU countries. The survey results follow:



**Figure 3a.** Desired App Features

Of the needed resources, direction to mental health services was the most highly requested feature, with over 96% of respondents expressing such a desire. Aligning with the survey results, we suggest making these solutions especially available online so we can reach as many people as possible. An online tool for intercultural therapy workshops would make support more accessible and less taboo. This would connect people more easily, bridging a significant need for both social and mental health support. Other digital solutions could include apps and various social media platforms to help spread awareness about ways to improve one's well-being, such as through music, exercise, and art. Thematic areas for targeted group sessions could include multiculturalism and multilingualism, class struggles, and the negotiation of identity.

Alternatively, we suggest directing EU attention to on-campus mental health resources. As an alternative to EU-supported digital tools, campus mental health centers could address similar needs by offering individual counseling, group therapy options, and peer support sessions. We would propose subsidizing these services to keep the associated costs free or minimal for students. Counselors should also be trained in multiculturalism and intercultural sensitivity.

We anticipate that the implementation of these recommendations would bridge the gap between students experiencing mental health struggles and the accessibility of these services. These recommendations would reduce financial burden and struggles with resource navigation, particularly for migrant students. By destigmatizing mental health resources for students, we aim for them to complete their studies more effectively and integrate more smoothly into their host countries.

# Access to Mental Health Support for Young Europeans

*Irene Magaz, Jovana Danilović, Ivan Kisilov, Ahmet Mirza Ozan (WG 7)*

## Research Methodology

Our research used a mixed-method approach:

### Online survey (Google Form)

- 40 total responses
- 39 valid responses

### In-depth interviews

- 3 student interviews

This combination allowed us to analyze both statistical trends and personal experiences.

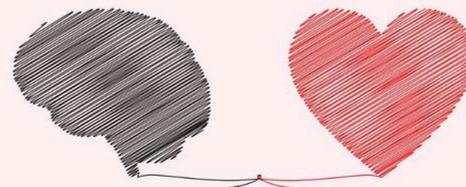


# Caring for Yourself is Brave

## How to Know if You Need Help

- Feeling sad or anxious for more than two weeks
  - Trouble sleeping or changes in appetite
  - Constant nervousness, anger, or lack of motivation
  - Thoughts of self-harm or suicide
- 
- Talk to a friend or family member
  - Keep a journal or use a UANA app
  - Join a school or community mental health workshop

School Psychologist: [contact]  
Youth Helpline: 0800-XXX-XXX



**Talk. Write. Share. You are not alone.**

## **Policy Report**

### **Access to Mental Health Support for Young Europeans**

As students from Spain, Slovenia, Ukraine and Germany, we have concluded that across Europe, young people face growing levels of anxiety, depression, isolation, and academic burnout. Although this trend is visible in all four of our countries, available support remains fragmented, and often difficult to access.

Our main recommendation is that the European Union and national education systems should create a coordinated, youth-centered mental health framework that expands prevention, improves access to services, and strengthens support structures within schools and universities.

While our national contexts differ, we experience similar obstacles:

- Spain: Young people report rising emotional distress and long waiting times to access psychological care. University counseling services are often understaffed.
- Slovenia: Preventive school programs exist, but mental health services for students vary widely across institutions, and many young people still avoid looking for help.
- Ukraine: The ongoing war excites trauma, anxiety, and instability. Many students face displacement, interrupted studies, or limited access to professional care.
- Germany: Although mental health is widely discussed, access to therapy is often slowed by long insurance approval processes and long waiting lists for specialists.

At EU level, mental health strategies exist, but there is no youth-specific, well-funded, and coordinated approach. Data collection is inconsistent across countries, limiting cross-border understanding and preventing policymakers from building comparable, youth-focused solutions.

Here are some key findings and research supporting our position:

- Increasing burden on young people: Across Europe, adolescents and young adults consistently report more symptoms of anxiety, depression and academic stress than any other age group.
- Early support is crucial: Research shows that early intervention significantly reduces long-term health, social and educational complications.
- Accessible services improve outcomes: Students who can easily access counseling show better academic performance, greater resilience, and higher college retention rates.

In Ukraine, exposure to conflict and displacement is strongly correlated with psychological distress.

In Spain and Germany, financial insecurity, workload pressure and long waits for therapy contribute to worsening mental health.

In Slovenia, strong physical health programs demonstrate how preventive frameworks can support overall well-being.

Overall, the evidence shows that prevention + accessible services, consistently produce better outcomes.

**Our actionable recommendations are:**

1. Create an EU Youth Mental Health Strategy (European Commission + Member States)
  - Develop comparable indicators for youth mental health (15–29 years).
  - Fund cross-country research and pilot programs.
  - Set minimum service-access standards for universities and youth centers.
2. Strengthen Mental Health Services in Universities (University leadership + National education ministries)
  - Increase the number of counselors and guarantee short waiting times for students.
  - Provide free or low-cost online mental health support in all EU universities.
  - Train academic staff to recognize early signs of distress and direct students to resources.

### 3. Expand Peer-Support and Anti-Stigma Programs (Universities + Youth NGOs + Local authorities)

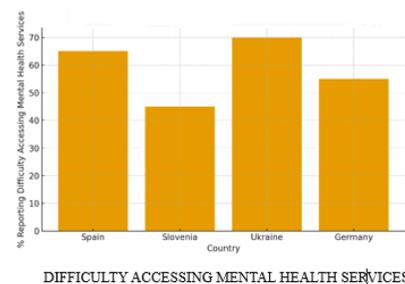
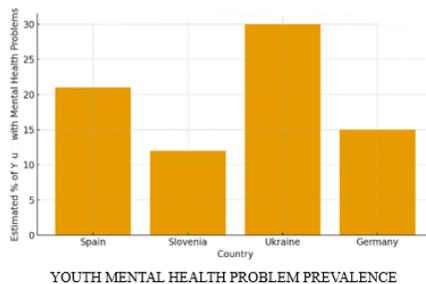
- Create student-led peer support groups in every institution.
- Include mental health education in first-year orientations.
- Run national and local anti-stigma campaigns designed with students and youth workers.

#### **These Recommendations Matter because:**

- Youth are Europe's future: Neglecting mental health now results in long-term social, academic, and economic consequences.
- Better support means better outcomes: Students with access to mental health resources demonstrate higher resilience, better academic performance, and stronger community engagement.
- A coordinated European approach works: No single country can solve this alone. Shared data, policies, and investments will create a healthier, more resilient generation of Europeans.

As students from Spain, Slovenia, Ukraine, and Germany, we urge European leaders, educational institutions, and community organizations to act now. Ensuring strong mental health support is not just a health priority, it is a commitment to Europe's social cohesion, academic success, and collective well-being.

Here we attach a couple of graphs that demonstrate our research.



# Academic Anxiety Among Young People in Europe

He Qiushuang (Rue), Sergio Francisco Pardo Moro, Olha Siminska, Oleksandr Lapii (WG 8)

## Academic Anxiety During Learning

Understanding causes,  
symptoms, and coping  
strategies.

Presenter - Siminska Olha, Kyiv  
Polytechnic Institute



## Policy Report

### Addressing Academic Anxiety Among Young People in Europe

#### 1. Executive Summary

Academic anxiety among young people in Europe is a growing and multifaceted crisis, worsened by academic pressure, social integration challenges, economic instability, and in some regions, war. Our research shows that students across Europe—including international students, Ukrainian students in conflict zones, and Spanish youth facing economic stress—experience high levels of anxiety, depression, and burnout.

**Our main recommendation** is that universities and policymakers implement integrated, culturally sensitive, and accessible mental health support systems, combined with academic reforms that reduce unnecessary pressure and promote resilience.

#### 2. Problem Statement & Policy Gap

Mental health disorders among European youth are rising sharply. WHO data indicates that **5.3% of young people suffer from anxiety** and **3.4% from depression**, with stress and ADHD also prevalent. In Spain, 29% of youth report continuous stress, while 25% experience anxiety (Fad Juventud, 2025). In Ukraine, wartime conditions have drastically increased student anxiety, depression, and PTSD. International students in Germany, particularly Chinese students, report **73.7% anxiety and 72.7% depression rates** (Bilecen, 2024).

Despite these alarming trends, there is a significant **policy and support gap**:

- Lack of accessible, timely, and culturally appropriate counseling.
- Insufficient institutional recognition of academic pressure as a mental health risk.
- Fragmented support for vulnerable groups (e.g., international students, women, low-income youth).
- No standardized EU-wide framework for student mental health in higher education.

### 3. Key Research Findings

Our mixed-methods research included **literature review, survey data, and case analysis** across three national contexts:

- **Spain:** Economic insecurity, academic overload, and future uncertainty are primary stressors.
- **Germany:** International students face “academic culture shock,” social isolation, and ROI anxiety (“future anxiety”).
- **Ukraine:** War has intensified pre-existing academic stress, with students balancing safety concerns and studies.

#### **Common themes identified:**

- High expectations and performance pressure are universal stressors.
- Women and younger students (15–25) are disproportionately affected.
- Social and economic factors exacerbate academic anxiety.
- Coping mechanisms are often informal and insufficient.

### 4. Recommendations

We propose **three actionable recommendations** targeted at universities, national education bodies, and EU policymakers:

#### **Integrate Mental Health into Academic Policy**

*Who:* University administrations, ministries of education.

*How:*

- Mandate accessible, free counseling services with short waiting times.
- Train academic staff to recognize and refer students in distress.
- Incorporate mental health education into orientation programs.

### **Develop Culturally Sensitive Support Programs for International Students**

*Who:* International offices, student services.

*How:*

- Establish peer mentorship and “buddy” systems.
- Create intercultural dialogue spaces and crisis support in multiple languages.
- Normalize help-seeking behaviors through awareness campaigns.

### **Create Resilience-Building and Crisis Response Frameworks**

*Who:* EU Education Directorate, national governments.

*How:*

- Fund structured resilience and stress-management workshops.
- In conflict-affected regions, provide trauma-informed counseling and academic flexibility.
- Promote research on student well-being as part of institutional quality assurance.

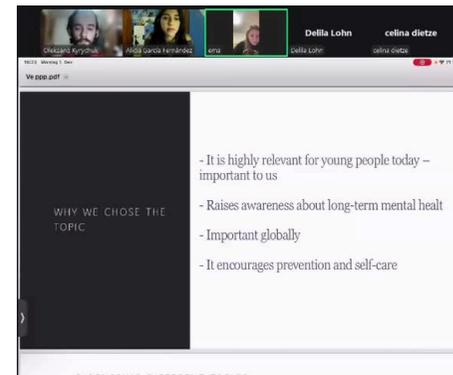
## **5. Why This Matters**

Investing in student mental health is not only an ethical imperative but also an educational and economic one. Anxious and depressed students are less able to learn, innovate, and contribute to society. By implementing these recommendations, European institutions can:

- Improve academic performance and retention.
- Foster inclusive, supportive learning environments.
- Prepare resilient future leaders capable of navigating complex global challenges.
- Align with the EU’s strategic goals for youth well-being and social cohesion.

# How does chronic stress rewire the brain and what does that mean for long-term mental health?

*Celina Dietze, Delila Lohn, Alicia García Fernández, Ema Jukan, Kyrychuk Oleksandrç, Sofjia Rohoza (WG 11)*



Podcast

Explanation on the podcast

## **Policy Report**

### **How does chronic stress rewire the brain and what does that mean for long-term mental health?**

#### **1. Issue**

Across Europe, young people are experiencing unprecedented levels of chronic stress, anxiety, and depression. Scientific research shows that chronic stress does not only affect emotions, it physically rewires the brain, impairing learning, memory, emotional regulation, and decision-making. At the same time, conflict, academic pressure, economic insecurity, and weak mental-health systems are intensifying the crisis.

#### **Main recommendation**

We recommend the creation of a European Youth Mental Health Exchange & Action Platform, a large-scale, accessible European youth forum focused specifically on mental health, stress prevention, peer support, and policy input from young people themselves.

#### **2. The problem**

Chronic stress causes structural, functional, and molecular changes in the brain:

- Prefrontal Cortex (decision-making & self-control): Stress causes shrinkage of neuron connections, reducing focus, planning skills, and self-regulation.
- Hippocampus (learning & memory): Chronic stress reduces neurogenesis and shrinks brain volume, directly impairing memory.
- Amygdala (fear & emotional processing): Stress increases neural growth, leading to higher emotional reactivity, anxiety, and fear responses.

Stress also alters neurotransmitters, synaptic plasticity, and gene expression, meaning its harmful effects can last long after the stressor ends. These changes contribute to:

- Weakened concentration and memory
- Poor decision-making
- Mood instability
- Increased risk of anxiety and depression

While the brain can recover through neuroplasticity, this requires reduced stress exposure, strong social support, physical activity, and mental-health services, all of which are currently insufficient for many young Europeans.

### **Youth mental health crisis across Europe**

- In Ukraine, since 2022, 80% of the population experiences daily stress, and over 15 million people need psychological support. Students now face war-related trauma alongside strict academic pressure, often during blackouts or shellings.
- In Germany, mental-health disorders among children and adolescents rose sharply between 2018–2023. Girls and young women are most affected, with depression and anxiety as the leading diagnoses. The overloaded and pressure-driven school system is a major contributor.
- In Spain, anxiety, sleep disorders, and depression are rising rapidly, driven by work stress, unstable living conditions, economic pressure, and overwhelmed public healthcare.
- In Slovenia, suicide rates remain among the highest in the EU, and young people face extreme levels of stress while waiting lists for mental-health care remain long due to staffing shortages.

### **3. Key findings supporting this position**

Neuroscientific research confirms that chronic stress causes physical damage to brain systems responsible for learning, emotional stability, and rational decision-making. At the same time, youth mental-health disorders are rising rapidly across multiple European regions, particularly among students. External stressors such as war, academic pressure, unemployment risk, and social instability are significantly intensifying psychological strain. Research also shows that preventive approaches such as physical activity, social connection, emotional education, stable sleep routines, and early intervention can greatly reduce long-term brain and mental-health damage. In contrast, countries with understaffed mental-health systems experience delayed treatment, poorer long-term outcomes, and higher suicide risk.

### **4. Actionable policy recommendations**

#### **a) Create a European youth mental health exchange platform**

European institutions, national education ministries, and youth organizations should collaborate to establish an annual European youth mental-health forum that is open to students from all European countries. This platform should combine workshops, peer-support groups, policy discussions, and practical training in stress management. Strong visibility must be ensured through promotion in schools, universities, and social media, so that young people are aware of and able to participate in the initiative. Youth delegates should be given the opportunity to submit formal policy proposals directly to European institutions, ensuring that young people actively contribute to shaping mental-health policy.

**b) Reform educational pressure and strengthen emotional education** National education ministries and school systems should take immediate action to reduce excessive academic workload and performance pressure placed on students. At the same time, mandatory emotional education, stress management, and mental-health literacy should be introduced from early schooling onward. Special protection must be provided for students affected by crisis situations such as war, displacement, or poverty, so that they are not held to unrealistic performance expectations during traumatic life circumstances.

### **c) Strengthen mental health services for youth**

National governments and healthcare systems should significantly increase funding for school psychologists, university counseling services, and outpatient youth mental-health care. Waiting times for psychological treatment must be shortened through better staffing and resource allocation. Additionally, governments should expand digital mental-health support, particularly for students living in crisis zones or remote areas. National anti-stigma campaigns targeting adolescents and young adults should be implemented to normalize seeking help and reduce shame around mental illness.

### **5. Why these recommendations matter**

If chronic stress continues unchecked, Europe risks:

- A generation with impaired cognitive potential
- Rising rates of mental illness, burnout, and suicide
- Lower educational achievement
- Weakened workforce productivity
- Higher long-term healthcare costs

By investing in prevention, youth participation, emotional education, and accessible care, Europe can:

- Protect the developing brain
- Strengthen resilience
- Improve academic success
- Reduce long-term healthcare burdens
- Empower young people as active contributors to solutions

A European Youth Mental Health Exchange Platform would not only give young people a voice, but also build solidarity, reduce stigma, and turn shared European stress into shared European strength.

# How are young Europeans feeling about the mental health situation in their countries?

Laura Daniela OLarte Amado, Diana Dragan, Christopher Zeipekkis (WG 13)



# HOW ARE YOUNG EUROPEANS FEELING ABOUT THE MENTAL HEALTH SITUATION IN THEIR COUNTRIES?

Mental health has become a growing concern among young Europeans in the last years, yet many still do not receive the support they need from the insurance, family or scholar institutions.

**High Need, High Cost:**  
The primary barriers to getting professional help are money and waiting lists, not lack of knowledge or high levels of stigma.

**Universal Experience:**  
Nearly 9 out of 10 people surveyed have personally dealt with mental health issues.

## 01. INTRODUCTION

Some of the reasons for this are social stigmatization, cultural taboos and myths, limited access to therapy, and lack of awareness prevent young people from seeking help. This project aims to explore the main challenges to mental health care, understand their impact, and suggest ways to make support more accessible and acceptable for everyone in Europe.

## 02. OBJECTIVES

- To find out what stops young Europeans from getting mental health help.
- To understand how depression/anxiety or stigmatization stop people from seeking help.
- To suggest ways to improve access to mental health (affordable prices and waiting times)
- To promote open conversations about mental health in schools, universities, and workplaces.

## 03. METHODOLOGY

- Survey (10 questions)
- Young Europeans (teens to late 20s)

Legal requirement to have a psychologist on every educational institution. They should be available for the students to seek for help in case they need at any time. Teacher should also be trained to know how to react in those cases.

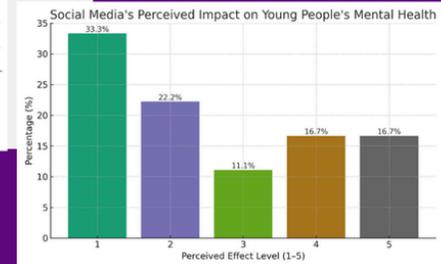
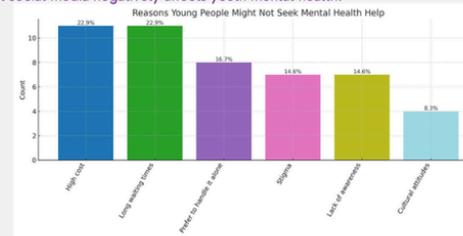
## 05. SOLUTIONS

- Online Therapy :
- Mental health apps
  - Text-based services
  - Hotlines
  - Online Chats

Create safe spaces and relaxation rooms for students.

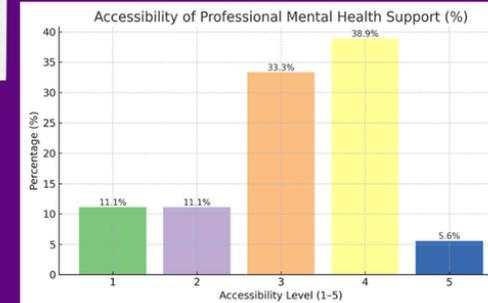
## 04. ANALYSIS

The people surveyed feel personally knowledgeable and comfortable discussing mental health, with over 70% reporting a good understanding. However, an overwhelming 88.9% have experienced mental health issues themselves. While most feel professional help is available, the biggest obstacles stopping people from getting support are high costs and long waiting times. Respondents also agree that social media negatively affects youth mental health.



Despite the high number of people who have experienced issues, a substantial group still doesn't seek professional help, indicating the practical barriers (cost, wait times) are highly effective deterrents.

Participants specified that social media harms youth by causing pressure to replicate unfulfilling or unrealistic lifestyles.



## **Policy Report**

### **How are young Europeans feeling about the mental health situation in their countries?**

#### **1. Introduction and Main Recommendation**

Mental health concerns among young Europeans have grown in recent years, yet many still struggle to access adequate support. Stigma, cultural taboos, limited availability of therapy and inconsistent institutional engagement remain persistent barriers. This project examined young people's views on these challenges and sought to identify practical ways to improve access and acceptance of mental health care.

#### **Main Recommendation:**

European universities, schools and policymakers should expand low-barrier mental health support by investing in digital services, ensuring on-site psychological assistance in educational institutions and creating safe, stigma free spaces for help seeking.

#### **2. Problem Statement: Gaps in Current Support Systems**

Our survey of young Europeans (teens to mid-20s, including students and early-career employees) reveals a clear mismatch between growing awareness and the availability of effective support:

- High prevalence of challenges: 88.9% of respondents reported having experienced mental health issues.
- Doubts about national response: Only 11.1% believe mental health is taken "very seriously" in their country; many perceive national efforts as insufficient or inconsistent.
- Barriers to care: Costs, long waiting times and personal reluctance to seek help were the most frequently cited obstacles. Stigma and lack of awareness also remain relevant.
- Mixed accessibility: While 61.1% had sought professional help at some point, many described the process as complicated, expensive or delayed.

These findings show that despite increasing recognition of mental health needs, policy frameworks have not kept pace with demand.

### **3. Key Findings Supporting Action**

Several survey insights point to the urgency of strengthening mental health support:

- Growing comfort and awareness: 72.2% reported a good or very good understanding of mental health and 77.7% felt comfortable discussing it.
- Heavy reliance on digital sources: Respondents most often use the internet (88.9%) and social media (66.7%) for information, underlining both the accessibility and risks of digital platforms.
- Perceived effects of social media: Participants widely agreed that social media negatively affects younger users by promoting unrealistic lifestyles and social pressures.
- Strong interest in low-stigma support: Many respondents highlighted the need for services that are accessible, affordable and discreet.

### **4. Policy Recommendations**

#### **4.1: Expand Digital Mental Health Services**

Who should act: National governments, EU health bodies, universities. Actions:

- Support affordable online therapy and evidence-based mental health apps.
- Integrate digital tools that assist with scheduling, crisis support and anonymity. These measures help overcome logistical and stigma-related barriers.

#### **4.2: Require On-Site Psychologists and Staff Training in Educational Institutions**

Who should act: Ministries of Education, university administrations. Actions:

- Ensure each school and university has a qualified psychologist available to students.
- Train staff to identify warning signs and respond appropriately. This increases access to early, professional support.

#### **4.3: Create Safe Spaces and Relaxation Rooms**

Who should act: Universities, youth centres, workplaces. Actions:

- Provide quiet, low-pressure areas for mindfulness, breaks and peer support sessions. Such environments normalise mental health focused self-care.

## **5. Conclusion**

Young Europeans are increasingly aware of mental health challenges but continue to face structural and social barriers when seeking help. By expanding digital services, embedding psychological support within educational institutions and fostering supportive physical environments, policymakers can meaningfully improve access to care. These actions contribute to healthier, more resilient youth populations and address a growing public health priority across Europe.

