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# The Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students' residential mobility and future housing expectations: A comparative case study of Albania, Poland, Portugal, and Ukraine

**Abstract:** The aim of the study was to assess the housing situation of students through their self-evaluation of living conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as their expectations regarding potential changes in the student housing market triggered by the crisis, across four countries. The research used a survey questionnaire, and analyses employed structural equation modeling. Pandemic consequences were similar across countries but resulted in different housing decisions. Students combining education with paid employment were less likely to leave their residence in the academic city during the pandemic. The study provides empirical evidence of differences depending on the dominant housing market type and contributes to the international debate on housing conditions of vulnerable groups and their impact on student well-being.

**Keywords:** housing, dwellings, real estate market, students

## Introduction

Housing fulfils basic human needs and housing conditions significantly affect quality of life at all life stages (Beamish et al. 2001, Preece et al. 2020). Inadequate

or overcrowded living arrangements may disrupt everyday functioning (Bratt 2002, Greif 2015, Zavisca, Gerber 2016), while homeownership remains inaccessible for many households (McKee 2012, Lee et al. 2022). Depending on national housing policies, households rely on public housing or private rental markets (Mandic, Cirman 2012, Clapham 2018, McKee et al. 2019, Hegedus 2020).

University students constitute a specific group within housing markets, as entering higher education often involves leaving the family home for large urban centres (Christie et al. 2002, Rugg et al. 2004, Gil-Solsona 2021). This sustained inflow of students reshapes urban housing markets and creates additional demand pressures (Fang, van Liempt 2021, Franz, Gruber 2022). Conceptual and review papers explicitly argue that student housing is a distinct entity within housing studies requiring its own theories and measures (Ghani, Suleiman 2016, Gong, Söderberg 2023, Ehlenz et al. 2024). Across housing and urban studies, students are framed as a specific tenant segment and even a distinct “submarket” or “niche market” within the private rented sector (Rugg et al. 2002, Kinton et al. 2018, Miessner 2020). They are often described as:

- Temporary, young, usually single and highly mobile, tied to study periods and academic calendars (Kinton et al. 2018, Żróbek-Róžańska, Szulc 2018, Nguyen et al. 2024);
- Concentrated around universities, driving “studentification” and reshaping neighbourhoods and local housing structures (Kinton et al. 2018, Miessner 2020, Nguyen et al. 2024);
- A third urban population (besides city residents and suburbanites), using cities as temporary consumers of housing and amenities (Żróbek-Róžańska, Szulc 2018).

Consequently, they are perceived as a group with:

1. High mobility and flexibility: students readily terminate leases or move to optimize costs or living conditions (Christie et al. 2002, Żróbek-Róžańska 2022a);
2. Concentrated demand and volatility: academic cycles and enrollment expansion create sharp, localised pressures and volatile submarkets (Rugg et al. 2002, Kinton et al. 2018, Ehlenz et al. 2024, Nguyen et al. 2024);
3. Specific vulnerabilities: housing stress, inadequate quality, and affordability issues shape wellbeing, academic success, and even protest and activism (Fang, van Liempt 2020, Christie et al. 2022, Sotomayor et al. 2022, Gong, Söderberg 2023, Kurowska et al. 2024);
4. Consumer–citizen duality: students are framed both as empowered housing consumers shaping upscale markets and as marginalised tenants bearing a “hidden curriculum” of hustle and precarity (Kinton et al. 2018, Uyttebrouck et al. 2020, Kurowska et al. 2024).

The current structure of the real estate market allows for the satisfaction of student housing needs in several ways. Dormitories were traditionally the first choice of housing for university students (Popov 2018, Pettit, Bull 2020, Westwood 2023). However, with the rising number of students and their growing

influx into cities, the demand thus generated outpaced the capacity of university-provided accommodation (La Roche et al. 2010).

Contemporary patterns of student accommodation extend well beyond traditional university-managed dormitories or residence halls provided by higher education institutions and public authorities (McCann et al. 2020, Ehlenz et al. 2024). The contemporary accommodation landscape also encompasses the purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA) sector, typically developed and operated through public–private partnerships (PPPs) or by institutional and private investors (Revington, August 2019, Kenna, Murphy 2021, Wilkinson, Greenhalgh 2022, Revington, Benhocine 2023).

In addition, students are increasingly accommodated within houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) and shared apartments supplied by small-scale landlords operating within the conventional private rental market (Ghani, Suleiman 2016, Holton, Mouat 2020, Wilkinson, Greenhalgh 2022, Cocola-Gant, Calvo 2023, Dowelani, Gardee 2025). Finally, a substantial proportion of students rely on the broader private rented sector, accessing housing through individual property owners and letting agencies, where they compete directly with non-student households for available units (Revington, August 2019, Holton, Mouat 2020, Cocola-Gant, Calvo 2023, Jahan, Hasan 2025).

Empirical evidence consistently indicates that affordability constitutes the primary housing need articulated by students, most commonly operationalised through the criterion of relatively low rental costs (Ike et al. 2020, McCartney, Rosenvasser 2023). Financial constraints remain decisive even when accommodation is located in peripheral areas or characterised by lower physical standards, underscoring the structural centrality of cost considerations in student housing decision-making (Flanigan, Copeland 2010, Thomsen, Eikemo 2010, Kinton et al. 2018, Wang 2024).

Beyond affordability, students express expectations regarding minimum standards of adequacy and habitability (Gong, Soderberg 2023, McCartney, Rosenvasser 2023). This notion of adequacy encompasses the requirement for safe, structurally sound, and non-overcrowded living conditions. Substandard dwellings – such as those in disrepair, located in unsafe neighbourhoods, exposed to excessive noise, or characterised by overcrowding – contribute to what has been described as a “house-poor” condition among students, whereby limited financial resources constrain access to acceptable housing quality (Flanigan, Copeland 2010, Sotomayor et al. 2022).

Privacy constitutes another salient dimension of student housing preferences. Private bedrooms are strongly preferred, while shared use of kitchens and bathrooms is more widely accepted. Empirical studies demonstrate a consistent preference for studios and single-occupancy apartments over shared flats or corridor-style residence halls, reflecting the growing importance of autonomy and control over personal space (Thomsen, Eikemo 2010, Nijënstein et al. 2014, Verhetsel et al. 2017, McCartney, Rosenvasser 2023, Sonsfeld, Beusker 2023).

Location-related factors further shape student housing demand. Proximity to campus and/or city centres remains a key determinant, yet access to public

transportation, retail infrastructure (e.g., supermarkets), and everyday amenities is equally significant (Ike et al. 2020, Gong, Soderberg 2023, McCartney, Rosenwasser 2023, von Wittenhorst Zu Sonsfeld, Beusker 2024). When affordability pressures intensify, students demonstrate spatial flexibility by accepting longer commuting distances, provided that transport connections are reliable and efficient (Thomsen, Eikemo 2010, Nijënstein et al. 2014, Dowelani, Gardee 2025). Finally, functional attributes – particularly stable high-speed internet access, essential utilities, and personal safety – are prioritised over recreational or lifestyle-oriented features, indicating a hierarchy of needs grounded primarily in academic functionality and basic living standards (Flanigan, Copeland 2010, Tiwari, Roy 2025).

The housing markets in selected academic cities in Poland (Olsztyn), Portugal (Porto), Albania (Tirana), and Ukraine (Lviv) are characterised by differences. The Polish housing market is dynamic, especially among students. The predominant form of accommodation for this group is rented accommodation, which is a result of the limited supply of academic accommodation and the increasing expectations of students in terms of living standards. Olsztyn is an example of a medium-sized city where the university plays a key role in shaping the demand for rental accommodation. Its relatively low national profile means that changes in the housing market are more directly related to fluctuations in student numbers and housing preferences (Matysiak 2024).

The housing market in Portugal (Porto) is dominated by a student-family co-housing model, which significantly reduces the pressure to rent. The majority of students choose to live in family homes, which means that the rental sector does not play as important a role as in Poland or other CEE countries. Nevertheless, there is a developed rental market in the larger academic cities, including Porto, especially for international students. As Portugal's second-largest city, Porto has an important academic, economic, and cultural function. Porto Polytechnic and the University of Porto attract students from both Portugal and abroad, resulting in a relatively high demand for rental accommodation. Compared to Lisbon, Porto has a slightly lower cost of living, making it an attractive destination for students. However, in recent years, rising property costs and increased interest from private investors (including in the short-term rental sector) have made renting more expensive, which may have influenced students' decisions about where to live after the pandemic (Oktaba et al. 2024).

The Albanian student housing market differs significantly from Western and Central European countries. A high percentage of students still live with their families, which limits the development of the rental sector. Compared to Poland or Portugal, the number of student residences is much smaller and the standard of rental accommodation often does not meet students' expectations. In turn, students who choose to rent often face high rental costs about their income (Puliti 2022). As the capital of Albania and the country's main academic Centre, Tirana is the hub of student life. Compared to other Albanian cities, Tirana has a relatively developed rental housing market, although it is still in its infancy. An important factor influencing this market is the city's dynamic urban development

and the increasing number of students choosing to study away from home. However, despite Tirana's national importance, its student housing market remains limited compared to other European capitals. (Grzywińska-Rapca et al. 2021).

Ukraine is characterised by a housing market in which a significant proportion of students still live with their families, but compared to Albania and Portugal, a higher proportion of students choose to rent. In a national context, Lviv serves as one of Ukraine's most important academic centres. Ivan Franko University and other higher education institutions attract students from different parts of the country, which translates into a significant rental market. Compared to Kyiv, Lviv is a city with a relatively lower cost of living, which makes it an attractive place to study. In addition, the development of the IT sector and increased investment in the city's infrastructure in recent years have further boosted the city's importance both academically and economically. However, the war in Ukraine has affected the housing market, resulting in increased demand for housing due to internal migration and changing priorities in the real estate sector.

In summary, Poland, Portugal, Albania, and Ukraine differ in terms of the structure of the housing market, reflecting both historical conditions and the level of economic development. In Poland and Ukraine, the rental housing market plays an important role among students, while in Portugal and Albania, the family model dominates.

## **The COVID-19 pandemic and the student housing market**

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted this established system, particularly in university cities, as lockdowns and remote learning altered housing needs and intensified social inequalities linked to economic and demographic factors (Battistini et al. 2021, Liu, Su 2021, Soaita 2021, Głuszak, Belniak 2022, Pawson et al. 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic forced students to reconsider whether to stay at their current place of residence or return to their family home (Cook et al. 2022, Żróbek-Róžańska 2022a). This coincided with learning institutions closing their campuses and asking the students to move out (Bolumole 2020). While this was not a huge issue for domestic students, international students faced a far more complicated situation (Morris et al. 2020b).

Additionally, the restrictions on many branches of industry left young adults with no place to work for their livelihood and studies (Aucejo et al. 2020). As many universities maintained their e-learning regimes, and as businesses halted or severely limited their commerce/services, many students no longer felt a strong need to reside in the home city of their university (Tomal, Helbich 2022). The situation was straightforward for those moving out of dormitories, but not so for students who had lived in rental accommodation. The tenancy agreements provided for additional fees, such as deposits, which the students wanted returned, especially once the government decided to extend the remote learning regime (Żróbek-Róžańska 2022b). The new arrangements were worrisome for both parties. The landlords were facing reduced proceeds from rents, whereas

the student tenants were unsure whether they would be able to return to their accommodation of choice once the universities resumed in-person learning at a later date, which was as-of-then undetermined (Grodzicki et al. 2020, Cook et al. 2022).

Ever since the state of worldwide pandemic was declared, researchers have studied the housing situation of university students and the role it plays. Topics investigated include: how fit the current housing is for study and work (Cuerdo-Vlitches et al. 2021) and how specific living arrangements affect the effectiveness of both (Amerio et al. 2020, Morganti et al. 2022); how the housing situation of students has changed and/or worsened (Cournede et al. 2020, Grodzicki et al. 2020); how students choose between staying in their university-hosting city vs leaving (Morris et al. 2020a, Cook et al. 2022, Żróbek-Różańska 2022a, b); how the new status quo impacted students' personal development (Hansmann et al. 2021), learning outcomes (Krasnodębska, Łukasiuk 2022, Alamel et al. 2023) and general housing wellbeing (Morris et al. 2020b, Farris et al. 2021, Hansmann et al. 2021, Iglesia, Lu 2021); how the pandemic affected the housing market in general (Mohammed et al. 2021, Tomal, Marona 2021, Tomal, Helbich 2022) and the student housing rental market in particular (Soaita 2021, Revingtone, Benhocine 2023, Waldron 2023); how the particulars of managing this resource evolved during the pandemic (Gajowniczek 2021, Najbar 2021, Waldron 2023); and finally, how young adults who had tried "adult lives of independence" readjusted to living in their family homes (Janning et al. 2022, Preetz et al. 2022). A study by Kajta et al. (2023) identifies four types of self-reported housing situations: appreciated nesting, burdensome nesting, consolidated autonomy, and disrupted autonomy.

While a substantive body of literature has examined the housing conditions of students in Poland and Portugal during and in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, evidence concerning Albania and Ukraine remains fragmented, sporadic, and marginal within the broader scholarly discourse. In the Polish context, Żróbek-Różańska (2022a) demonstrated that students residing in university dormitories in Olsztyn were generally required to return to their family homes, typically without incurring continued accommodation fees. By contrast, students renting dwellings on the private market did not benefit from such clear and uniform arrangements, and the suspension of rental payments was neither automatic nor guaranteed. Complementary findings by Tomal and Helbich (2022) indicate that when students' earning opportunities diminished due to pandemic-related restrictions, their propensity to remain in academic cities declined markedly. Comparable dynamics were observed in Slovenia (Breznik et al. 2022), suggesting a broader regional pattern linking labour market contraction to residential mobility among students.

In Portugal, the pandemic similarly precipitated significant disruptions in student housing trajectories. In the metropolitan areas of Lisbon and Porto, dissatisfaction with both housing conditions and neighbourhood environments during lockdown periods was particularly pronounced among populations residing in substandard dwellings with limited access to amenities. These effects exacerbated pre-existing structural housing deficiencies, including overcrowding and thermal

discomfort (de Matos et al. 2024). Empirical research focusing specifically on Portuguese students reveals differentiated experiences: domestic students most frequently reported limited or no substantial change in their housing situation (Grzywińska-Rapca 2021, Gama et al. 2022), whereas international students and those occupying lower-quality housing encountered heightened precarity and deteriorating well-being (Calvo et al. 2021, Cairns et al. 2021, Iorio, Silva 2022).

In contrast, the Albanian case remains underdeveloped in the academic literature. Aside from analyses addressing the broader impact of the pandemic on higher education systems (Keri, Jupe 2021) and the real estate market (Dragusha, Memaj 2023, Istrefaj, Kumaraku 2023), no dedicated studies have systematically examined the housing situation of Albanian students during the pandemic period. Post-pandemic research has instead concentrated on the challenges and structural vulnerabilities affecting this social group (Lahi 2022, Cenaj, Daher, 2023, Borici, Gjegrji 2024). Over time, students' expectations regarding accommodation standards during their studies appear to have increased, standards that university dormitories in Albania have demonstrably struggled to meet. By 2025, approximately 40% of dormitory capacity reportedly remained vacant due to inadequate living conditions, thereby redirecting substantial student demand toward the private rental sector (Dedaj 2025).

The Ukrainian context remains even less systematically documented with regard to student accommodation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Student housing conditions in Lviv were included in a study on living conditions and consumption changes by Grzywińska-Rapca and Lutchny (2022). Students there reported a significant lack of changes in their housing situation due to the pandemic, which was attributed to their residential structure, which was primarily based on studying at university while remaining at home with their parents. The lack of comprehensive empirical research on students' subjective assessments of housing conditions, as well as their expectations regarding structural changes in the student rental market, indicates a clear research gap. In particular, there is a lack of integrated analyses covering self-assessment of accommodation quality, decision-making processes regarding accommodation, and anticipated transformations in student-oriented rental markets in both Albania and Ukraine. Taking the above into account, a research gap was identified as the lack of information regarding students' assessments of changes in the housing market caused by the pandemic, with changes in the student rental market being preferred. In other words, to what extent and through what mechanisms do non-standard phenomena of an international scale influence changes in students' self-assessment of their housing situation and the decisions undertaken by this group, taking into account the specific national contexts that shape these processes.

Against this background, the present study analyses students' self-assessed housing conditions during the pandemic in Portugal, Poland, Ukraine and Albania, offering a comparative perspective across university cities with differing socio-economic contexts.

The selection of countries and cities was guided by the objective of providing a comprehensive and comparatively grounded assessment of students'

self-evaluations of housing conditions. Portugal was adopted as a primary reference case due to its long-standing membership in the European Union and its well-documented structural housing challenges, including affordability pressures and supply constraints in major academic centres. As such, it offers a mature policy and market context against which other cases may be analytically positioned.

Poland was incorporated into the study as a post-socialist country that, at the time of its political and economic transformation, exhibited one of the most severe housing deficits in Europe. Its accession to the European Union in 2004 – within the largest enlargement round in the Union’s history – marked a significant institutional and economic turning point. Although classified as a developing economy at the time of accession, Poland has since undergone substantial socio-economic convergence, joining the group of developed countries. Its inclusion therefore enables an examination of how structural housing legacies intersect with processes of European integration and market maturation.

Albania and Ukraine were selected to broaden the comparative framework by incorporating non-EU contexts characterised by distinct trajectories of post-communist transformation and spatial differentiation. Their inclusion extends the analysis to encompass both Balkan and Slavic economies, thereby allowing for a more nuanced exploration of how divergent institutional environments, historical legacies, and levels of integration into European structures shape student housing conditions and perceptions thereof.

This study contributes to the literature by offering an international comparative analysis of student housing under diverse economic and regulatory conditions, demonstrating the impact of the pandemic on students’ future housing expectations and applies quantitative structural analysis to identify key relationships between demographic characteristics and housing choices.

In conclusion, this paper makes an important contribution to the state of the art by filling a gap in understanding how unexpected socioeconomic phenomena impact housing decisions and the expectations surrounding these developments, taking into account the proposed international context. Empirical analysis using data from four countries contributes to a better understanding of the dynamics of the long-term effects of pandemics (or other crises) on students as a specific group of tenants.

This article opens with a critical review of the literature that conceptualises students as a distinct social and economic group within the housing market. It synthesises existing scholarship on the mechanisms and institutional arrangements through which students’ housing needs are addressed, encompassing both public and private provision. The review further delineates the implications for student accommodation systems arising from the unprecedented disruptions to social, economic, and institutional structures precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The next section justifies the selection of academic cities and describes the research sample and then indicates the methods that were used to verify the main objective of the study. The discussion presents the main achievements verified in this study in relation to the existing literature on the subject. The article ends with conclusions and a list of limitations of the study itself.

## Materials

An empirical analysis was performed on usage data collected via CAWI surveys in April 2020, less than two months after lockdown and adverse effects were announced in the analysed countries. After cleaning and verifying the data, 736 observations were available for analysis.

Data preparation followed a multi-step procedure. First, incomplete queries and responses containing logical inconsistencies were removed. Secondly, the categorical variables relating to internet access were examined and recoded where necessary to ensure comparability across countries. Thirdly, all variables used in the structural model were checked for missing values. Due to the very low level of missing results (less than 2%), the missing values were deleted, i.e. cases (respondents) representing the absence of a single variable value were excluded.

Variables related to the provision and expectations of student self-assessment during and after the study were operationalised as ordinal variables derived from survey questions. The independent variables were gender, nationality and level of study. Gender was coded as a binary variable, nationality as a categorical variable (with Polish as the reference category) and level of study as an ordinal variable. All variables were coded so that higher values were greater than the phenomena analysed.

## Sample

The aim of the empirical analysis designed and conducted for this study was to identify whether different social and demographic characteristics of respondents determine their opinion on their housing situation during the pandemic, and if so – how strongly and significantly.

The first stage of the analysis identified key factors shaping students' housing behaviour using a CAWI survey conducted among 736 respondents from Poland, Albania, Portugal and Ukraine in early April 2020. The questionnaire included closed and open-ended questions on housing conditions, expenditure changes during the pandemic and future expectations, complemented by socio-demographic variables to enable cross-country comparisons.

The sample was stratified, taking into account full-time students, which allowed for a representative structure of respondents in terms of gender and country. The resulting sample structure is as follows: Albania: Female: 45 (65.2%), Male: 24 (34.8%), Poland: Female: 282 (72.1%), Male: 109 (27.9%), Portugal: Female: 72 (34.6%), Male: 136 (65.4%) and Ukraine: Female: 45 (66.2%), Male: 23 (33.8%). Student behaviour was examined using purposive surveys conducted among students from four universities in Poland (University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn), Albania (Qiriazhi University College), Portugal (Polytechnic University of Porto) and Ukraine (Ivan Franko National University of Lviv). The institutions were selected to reflect geographical and structural diversity and were located in medium-sized cities where universities play a key socio-economic

role. Although the research sample does not allow generalisations to be made, the results of this study can certainly be used as comparative material when analysing other agglomerations of a similar size and with a similar proportion of university students in the total population.

## Methods

To address the research objective, we employed structural equation modelling (SEM). This method was chosen because the analysed problem is inherently complex and multidimensional. It involves a network of interrelated relationships between students' socio-demographic characteristics (gender, nationality, and level of study) and various aspects of their housing situation and expectations during and after the pandemic (Konarski 2010).

Students' housing behaviour was captured across four dimensions: (1) changes in place of residence during the pandemic, (2) expectations regarding their place of residence after the pandemic, (3) anticipated post-pandemic housing costs, and (4) expected changes in rental agreements. These outcomes are likely to be interconnected and influenced by the same underlying characteristics. For this reason, SEM was more appropriate than running separate regression models, as it allows multiple relationships to be estimated simultaneously within a single, coherent framework. This integrated approach reduces the risk of fragmented or misleading interpretations that might arise from analysing each outcome independently (Bollen, Long 1993).

An additional advantage of SEM is the possibility of modelling covariance relationships between exogenous variables. In this study, correlations between gender, nationality and level of study were explicitly included in the model, as these characteristics may not be independent in an international comparative sample. Classical regression analysis would require stronger assumptions regarding predictor independence and would not allow for explicit modelling of their covariance structure. Parameter estimation was performed using the Asymptotically Distribution-Free (ADF) method. The choice of this estimator was determined by the character of the empirical data. The questionnaire included ordinal and categorical variables, and the assumption of multivariate normality required by the Maximum Likelihood (ML) estimator could not be fully satisfied. The ADF method does not impose strict distributional assumptions and is therefore more suitable for non-normally distributed data and variables measured on non-interval scales. Although ADF requires relatively large sample sizes, the final sample of 736 respondents meets the recommended threshold for stable parameter estimation in structural models of moderate complexity. The modelling procedure consisted of several stages. First, a conceptual model was specified on the basis of theoretical premises and previous research on student housing behaviour in crisis situations. Second, structural relationships between socio-demographic characteristics and housing-related expectations were defined. Third, covariance relationships among exogenous variables were incorporated. Finally, model

parameters were estimated and evaluated using goodness-of-fit indices. Model fit was assessed using both absolute and incremental indices. The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) was used to evaluate local model fit and the degree of approximation error. Comparative indices such as NFI, CFI, IFI and TLI were applied to assess global fit relative to a null model. This is consistent with the diagnostic and comparative character of the study. The relationship structure of the model is presented in Fig. 1.

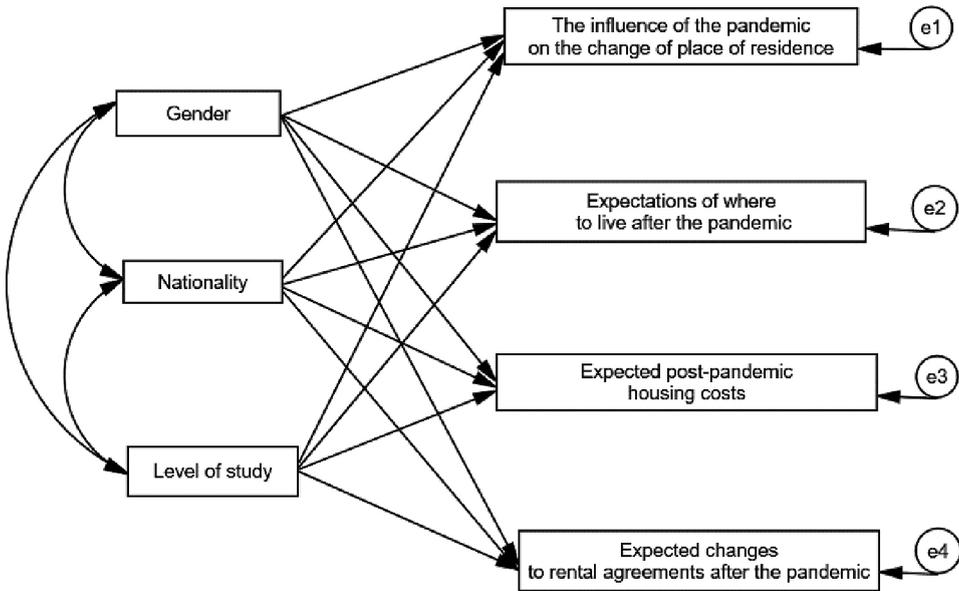


Fig. 1. Relationship structure in the multiple regression model for the determinants of respondents’ opinions on the post-pandemic housing situation (standardised coefficients)

Source: Own elaboration using AMOS29.

## Results and discussion

The model fit indices suggest a good local fit, as indicated by the low RMSEA value (0.0284), which shows that the model slightly deviates from the empirical data. However, the low values of the comparative indices (NFI = 0.695, CFI = 0.474, IFI = 0.485 and TLI = -0.842) and the significant chi-square statistic ( $\chi^2 = 361.786$ ,  $df = 6$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) suggest that the model does not fit the data globally. This indicates that the results should be treated with caution and interpreted as exploratory.

The covariance analysis revealed a significant negative relationship between nationality and level of study (Estimate = -0.161,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating differences in educational stages across countries. Smaller but statistically significant

correlations were also found between gender and nationality (Estimate = 0.036,  $p < 0.01$ ) and between gender and level of study (Estimate =  $-0.038$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The regression results confirm that gender, nationality and level of study significantly shape post-pandemic housing expectations. Gender significantly affected all analysed dimensions: men were less likely to change residence due to the pandemic (Estimate =  $-0.887$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), while women more often expected higher housing costs (Estimate =  $-0.359$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and changes in rental agreements (Estimate =  $0.182$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

Nationality was a strong determinant of housing behaviour, influencing relocation decisions (Estimate =  $-1.622$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), post-pandemic living expectations (Estimate =  $1.116$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), anticipated housing costs (Estimate =  $-0.493$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and expected rental agreement modifications (Estimate =  $0.595$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The level of study also played a significant role: students at higher educational stages were less likely to move (Estimate =  $-2.461$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), expected more stable living arrangements (Estimate =  $1.633$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), lower future housing costs (Estimate =  $-0.546$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and greater rental flexibility (Estimate =  $0.779$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

The survey revealed clear cross-country differences in students' housing situations before the pandemic: while most Polish students rented accommodation, students in Albania, Portugal and Ukraine predominantly lived with their families. The shift to remote learning mainly affected those who had rented housing, especially in Poland and Ukraine, forcing many to return to their family homes and redefining their independence. Students who remained in university cities often reported a deterioration in housing conditions, with overall assessments shaped by reduced housing standards and psychosocial factors such as insecurity and social isolation.

The survey revealed clear differences in the housing situation of students both domestically and before the pandemic. Polish students mainly rented apartments, while students in Albania, Portugal and Ukraine were more likely to live with their families. The shift to remote learning has particularly affected students renting apartments in university cities, especially in Poland and Ukraine, forcing many to return to their family homes and redefine their housing independence. Students who remained in university towns often reported a deterioration in housing conditions. These assessments were shaped not only by objective housing standards, but also by psychosocial factors such as uncertainty, social isolation and uncertainty about tenancy conditions. Post-pandemic expectations for housing quality and costs varied significantly across countries, reflecting distinct housing market structures and availability constraints.

The structural analysis confirms that these differences were not incidental. This study confirms that gender, nationality and level of study significantly influenced students' self-assessed housing situations during the COVID-19 pandemic, aligning with previous research. Gender-related differences are consistent with findings by Branquinho et al. (2022) and Jaeger et al. (2021), who reported higher levels of anxiety and insecurity among female students, as well

as cross-country variation in students' well-being. Similar patterns of housing insecurity were also observed in studies from Canada (Sotomayor et al. 2022; Hari et al. 2023).

The relationship between housing self-assessment and level of study, though less frequently analysed, suggests that undergraduate students were more concerned about housing security, while graduate students, often combining study with employment, displayed greater stability and independence.

## Conclusions

This study examines the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on student housing in Albania, Poland, Portugal and Ukraine, showing that housing decisions were shaped by demographic and educational factors. During the pandemic, many students returned to their family homes, particularly in Albania and Portugal, while in Poland and Ukraine the dominance of the private rental model led to a sharp decline in demand and forced relocations.

Statistical analysis confirmed significant relationships between gender, nationality and level of study and housing assessments: men were less likely to change residence, women more often feared rising rental costs, and master's students showed greater housing stability than undergraduates. Students also expected greater flexibility in tenancy agreements, with Polish students most frequently anticipating improved housing standards. Although limited by sample size and case-study design, the findings provide useful insights and a foundation for further research on student housing in crisis contexts.

## Conflict of interest & Authors' contributions

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest. They declare that the text of the article is entirely their own work. The authors' contributions are as follows:

- conceptualisation: MGR, MJ, MGB,
- methodology: MGR,
- research organisation: MGR,
- formal analysis: MGR, MJ,
- writing: MGR, MJ.

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## **Wpływ pandemii na zmianę miejsca zamieszkania i przyszłe oczekiwania mieszkaniowe studentów – studium przypadku Albanii, Polski, Portugalii i Ukrainy**

**Zarys treści:** Celem badania była ocena sytuacji mieszkaniowej studentów czterech państw poprzez ich samoocenę warunków życia w czasie pandemii COVID-19 oraz oczekiwań dotyczących potencjalnych zmian na rynku mieszkaniowym wywołanych kryzysem. W badaniu wykorzystano kwestionariusz ankiety, a do analizy zastosowano modelowanie równań strukturalnych. Konsekwencje pandemii były podobne w różnych krajach, ale skutkowały różnymi decyzjami mieszkaniowymi. Studenci łączący naukę z pracą zarobkową rzadziej opuszczali swoje miejsce zamieszkania w mieście akademickim w czasie pandemii. Badanie dostarcza empirycznych dowodów na różnice w zależności od dominującego typu rynku mieszkaniowego i stanowi wkład do międzynarodowej debaty na temat warunków mieszkaniowych grup szczególnie wrażliwych i ich wpływu na dobrostan.

**Słowa kluczowe:** mieszkalnictwo, mieszkanie, rynek nieruchomości mieszkaniowych, studenci

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