

RYDE

Regional Youth Dialogue
for Europe



Funded by
the European Union

Comparative Analysis of Conditions in Student Dormitories in Albania, North Macedonia and Serbia Compared to Those in Slovenia and Germany as EU Member States



May 2025

*This publication was prepared as part of the project “Students from the Western Balkans in the Battle for European Living Conditions,” implemented by the informal group **Fighters for Improving the Conditions of Student Accommodation Facilities and Other Rights**. “Fighters” is one of five regional informal groups that received financial support through the Active Achievement Fund, a sub-granting component of the “Regional Youth Dialogue for Europe – RYDE” project, funded by the European Union. This informal group is composed of five students from Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia who aim to highlight the poor living conditions students face in these countries compared to those in EU member states. The group advocates for urgent action from public authorities to improve these conditions, considering them a prerequisite for EU accession.*



This publication was funded by the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the Network of Progressive Initiatives and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

CONTENTS

| | | |
|-----------|---|-----------|
| 1. | | |
| | INTRODUCTION..... | 4 |
| 1.1. | THEORETICAL CONTEXT..... | 6 |
| 1.1.1. | <i>Conditions in Student Dormitories in the Republic of North Macedonia.....</i> | <i>6</i> |
| 1.1.2. | <i>Conditions in student dormitories in the Republic of Albania.....</i> | <i>9</i> |
| 1.1.3. | <i>Conditions in student dormitories in the Republic of Serbia.....</i> | <i>11</i> |
| 2. | CURRENT CONDITIONS IN STUDENT DORMITORIES IN THE REPUBLIC OF N. MACEDONIA..... | 16 |
| 2.1. | <i>Current Conditions in “Goce Delchev“.....</i> | <i>16</i> |
| 2.2. | <i>Current Conditions in “Pelagonija“.....</i> | <i>17</i> |
| 3. | CURRENT CONDITIONS IN STUDENT DORMITORIES IN THE REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA..... | 19 |
| 3.1. | <i>Current Conditions in the old building "Student City" - Tirana.....</i> | <i>19</i> |
| 3.2. | <i>Current Conditions in the renovated building "Student City" Tirana.....</i> | <i>20</i> |
| 4. | CURRENT CONDITIONS IN THE STUDENT DORMITORIES IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA..... | 22 |
| 4.1. | <i>Current Conditions in Paviljonu 3 – Niš Student Centre.....</i> | <i>22</i> |
| 4.2. | <i>Current Conditions in Paviljonu 2 – Niš Student Centre.....</i> | <i>22</i> |
| 5. | SITUATION IN EU COUNTRIES: SLOVENIA AND GERMANY..... | 25 |
| 5.1. | <i>Current Conditions in Student Dormitories in the Republic of Slovenija.....</i> | <i>26</i> |
| 5.2. | <i>Student Dormitories in the Federal Republic of Germany.....</i> | <i>27</i> |
| 6. | CONCLUSION..... | 30 |
| 7. | REFERENCES..... | 33 |
| 8. | INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED FOR THE PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH..... | 36 |
| 9. | ATTACHMENTS | 37 |

1

INTRODUCTION



INTRODUCTION

University education is not available to every student in their place of residence. The first challenge each student faces when they arrive in a new city is securing accommodation. Student dormitories are usually the first option considered. Unfortunately, the conditions in these dormitories are far from ideal, with a number of limitations that seriously affect the basic living conditions of students. In the 21st century, in countries like the Republic of North Macedonia, the Republic of Albania, and the Republic of Serbia, poor student standards are for the most part commonplace. In the Republic of North Macedonia, in recent years, the only reaction to this issue has been a lot of noise, if we exclude the colourful revolution resulting from traditional student protests in response to the overall poor political and social situation in the country at the time. In the Republic of Albania, students protested in 2018, particularly due to poor conditions in student dormitories and living standards. In the Republic of Serbia, students have been protesting for over two months now, not only due to poor conditions but primarily as the result of overall systemic weaknesses. The catalyst to these protests was the collapse of a concrete canopy in Novi Sad on 1 November 2024, which killed several innocent people. Many non-governmental organisations and state institutions, such as the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, student associations, and authorities, constantly warn of the low level of quality, services, and benefits available for students.

Reports from the European Commission correspond to the mentioned problem areas. The percentage allocated from public spending for education as a share of Gross Domestic Product in these three Balkan countries is far below the European Union average of almost 5 percent. Therefore, in the latest European Commission progress report on the Republic of North Macedonia in 2024, public spending for education and training has slightly decreased to 3.17% of GDP in 2024, compared to 3.58% in 2022, which is still far below the EU average of 4.7%. Additionally, the education budget has been reduced as a share of the total state budget in 2024 to 9.15%, compared to 11.7% in 2023.¹ The data in the European Commission report on the Republic of Albania clearly show that public spending on education accounted for 3.33% of GDP in 2023, while the forecast for 2024 and 2025 is 2.41% and 2.68%, respectively, which is significantly

¹ European Commission Progress Report on the Republic of North Macedonia 2024 https://www.mep.gov.mk/data/North%20Macedonia%20report_MK2.pdf downloaded 3 January 2025

lower than the EU average of 5%.² "According to INSTAT data, in the 2023-2024 school year, 533,711 students were enrolled in formal education, which is a decrease of 3.7% compared to the previous year. The European Commission's report on the Republic of Serbia states that the level of public spending on education in Serbia in 2023 was 3.2% of GDP, which is below the EU average. There is a certain vulnerability to corruption throughout the sector, especially in higher education, and the decrease in the student population continues due to negative demographic trends and emigration. It is necessary to implement measures to reduce dropout rates from education and segregation.³

In order to address the main issue of this research : *Allocating larger financial resources from the state budget and better legal solutions for higher education will bring the conditions in student dormitories in the Republic of North Macedonia, the Republic of Albania, and the Republic of Serbia closer to those in EU countries*, a comparative analysis will be conducted on the conditions in student dormitories in three Western Balkan countries that are of interest to us as informal groups, as well as conditions in two EU member states.

The purpose of this research is to demonstrate the dependence of student conditions and standards on the existence of larger budget allocations for this purpose and better legal solutions as priority commitments and obligations of the relevant authorities. Therefore, the state (existence, functioning, conditions) of student dormitories will be monitored, and a comparative method will be used to compare these components. Taking into account the knowledge and experiences of the functioning of student dormitories in developed democratic EU countries, the research will aim to compare all conditions, opportunities, benefits, and management of student dormitories. Specifically, through examples of successful models of state-run student dormitories in the Republic of Slovenia and the Federal Republic of Germany, the study will analyse the situation in three Western Balkan countries. Interviews and surveys will be conducted with students (20 each) from student dormitories in Skopje, Tirana, and Niš, as well as students studying and residing in student dormitories in Ljubljana and Bochum. We will use data from relevant state institutions,

² European Commission Progress Report on the Republic of Albania 2024 https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/albania-report-2024_en, downloaded 4 January 2025

³ European Commission Progress Report on the Republic of 2024 https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/serbia-report-2024_en, downloaded on 4 January 2025

NGOs, and other sources, which will be analysed as part of the research. The results obtained will be compared with the conditions in two EU countries in order to understand the reasons and necessary prerequisites for better functioning of student dormitories, as well as to provide students with far better conditions and opportunities. The research will consist of two parts:

- Fieldwork, conducting interviews and surveys
- Study and selection of alternative materials to improve results

A qualitative research method will be conducted. Specifically, all field notes, observations, data, etc., will be presented narratively, as the focus is on six student dormitories in the Republic of North Macedonia, the Republic of Albania, and the Republic of Serbia, and two from the Republic of Slovenia and the Federal Republic of Germany, as well as insights from relevant state institutions, ministries, and non-governmental organisations. This may contribute to assessing whether a larger state financial allocation from the budget for dormitories will bring the conditions of student dormitories in North Macedonia, Albania, and Serbia closer to those in the EU. The assessment should encourage student associations and assemblies to make this issue more visible, while simultaneously offering solutions and urging the relevant authorities to improve the situation in the long term. Additionally, it aims to encourage state institutions and bodies to immediately prioritise resolving this urgent issue on the agenda.

1.1. THEORETICAL CONTEXT

1.1.1. Conditions in Student Dormitories in the Republic of North Macedonia

Scholarship payments are delayed, student meal cards often do not work, and student dormitories have poor living conditions. These are just some of the issues faced by the students from this country. As time passes, these issues continue to increase, leading to reduced student numbers.

Students in the Republic of North Macedonia live in poor conditions, and the measures taken are insufficient for normal functioning. This is the final report of the authorized state auditor on the effectiveness of measures, policies, and projects aimed at meeting the conditions in which

state student dormitories in the Republic of North Macedonia operate, with a focus on student life and standards. According to the analysis, students gave low ratings for the technical equipment in the dormitories, as well as for the living conditions and food.⁴ According to the Chief State Auditor, Maksim Acevski, it is sad that students in the country struggle to access hot water over the winter. And, even more concerning, according to him, is that our country fails to take sufficient measures to bring back students who are studying abroad. The findings in the audit report, according to Chief Auditor Maksim Acevski, in no way indicate conditions that should be humane for student life in the Republic of North Macedonia, and they are far below those in European Union countries. Figures regarding accommodation capacities are disappointing, as evidenced by complaints about the lack of hot water in certain areas, internet access, and especially the quality of accommodation, food, and hygiene in state student dormitories.⁵ „The cost of accommodation in state student dormitories has remained unchanged since 2008, amounting to **MKD 6,820**, with half of the amount subsidised by the state and the other half paid by students. Sixteen years of frozen prices are creating artificial pressure, preventing the provision of quality services to students and citizens alike," Acevski (November 2024).

According to the Minister of Education, Vesna Janevska, the doubling of accommodation fees from MKD 7,340 to 14,680 will be a major shock both for students and the state. This situation could have been avoided if previous governments had adjusted prices in line with actual costs and inflation. In addition to issues with catering and accommodation, there have also been cases of illegal subletting of rooms, overpriced food purchases, and students receiving low-quality meals. Improvements are expected as two dormitories are currently undergoing renovation, with plans for the refurbishment of others. However, the most important changes will come through amendments to the legislation.⁶ “Amendments to the Law on Student Standards are necessary. We have agreed with the President and the entire Assembly of UKIM that by June 2025, a new law will be adopted

⁴ Final report of the authorised state auditor on the effectiveness of measures, policies, and projects for meeting the conditions in which state student dormitories in the Republic of North Macedonia operate and the development of student standards
https://dzr.mk/sites/default/files/202403/59_RU_Efikasnost_merki_politiki_proekti_razvoj_studentski_standard_2023.pdf, downloaded 7 January 2025

⁵ The Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia – session of the Club for Youth Issues and Policies, where the final audit report was discussed <https://vzv.facebook.com/watch/?v=462558992957549> 04.11.2024

⁶ Vesna Janevska, Izjava na TV Šenja (novembar 2024) <https://shenja.tv/ministrja-e-arsimit-beri-te-ditur-se-do-te-hetohet-puna-e-udhehekesive-ne-konviktet-e-nkenesve-dhe-studenteve-ku-ka-indikacione-te-renda-per-krim/> downloaded 7 January 2025.

alongside the Higher Education Act, with parts of the law included in by-laws to enable operational implementation.” – Janevska (2024). According to the President of the UKIM Assembly, Aleksandar Nikolovski, the goal is to establish a new programme for better student standards. Committees are being formed to address every issue, from student meals and scholarships to accommodation, which will receive the highest priority during the law's adoption. “The new Law on Student Standards should foresee new funding for student dormitories, as investment in this area has been minimal. Additionally, changes to dormitory management practices are required. By assigning greater importance to decision-making, more effective and long-term solutions can be implemented to address issues such as the lack of hot water and other inadequate living conditions.”⁷ Future academic citizens complain that, despite the Ministry's claims of having undertaken various reforms, the conditions – particularly for those living in student dormitories – remain poor. According to students who spoke before MPs during the parliamentary committee debate (December 2024), they emphasised that it is unacceptable for a country that is a candidate for EU membership to struggle with issues such as a lack of nutritious meals or access to free internet. While the European Union discusses artificial intelligence, we are still talking about printers, scanners, computers, and access to free internet.⁸ When we weigh the lack of milk and fruit against the lack of internet, we consider the lack of internet to be the more significant issue.⁹

Last year, the Government assured that it was giving serious attention to improving the conditions for studying and reducing the challenges faced by young people in the higher education process. “In the recent period, a number of new categories of student scholarships were introduced, and the monthly amounts of existing ones were significantly increased, with some types rising by over 80%. Scholarships were also introduced for students in the second and third cycles of study after a 15-year hiatus.”¹⁰ MON, 2024.

⁷ Nikolovski, Aleksandar, MRT (January 2025) <https://plai.mrt.com.mk/plai/578446>, downloaded 8 January 2025

⁸ Student, Parliamentary Session, Statement, December 2024, <https://ads.sitel.com.mk/javna-rasprava-ima-li-spas-za-studentskite-domovi-vo-makedonija>, downloaded 8 January 2024

⁹ Student, Parliamentary Session, Statement, December 2024, <https://ads.sitel.com.mk/javna-rasprava-ima-li-spas-za-studentskite-domovi-vo-makedonija>, downloaded 8 January 2024

¹⁰ Statement, Ministry of Education of the Republic of North Macedonia, 2024, <https://mon.gov.mk/content/?id=8497>

1.1.2. Conditions in student dormitories in the Republic of Albania

In the Republic of Albania, 7%-10% of students studying at state universities are accommodated in student dormitories. Some facilities are still undergoing reconstruction, while others are outdated. Following student protests in 2018, five new buildings were added to the Student City in Tirana, built to European standards, with financial support from the German government. The project also includes the reconstruction of 15 additional buildings, supported by the programme 'Energy-Efficient Renovation of Student Dormitories at State Universities in Albania'. More than 2,600 students will benefit from these improvements, and according to the Mayor of Tirana, Veliaj, they are expected to have the same conditions, the same standards, and the same administration as students in the European Union.¹¹ The My Tirana application for online room reservations in the Student City was meant to be an innovation for students, as the most transparent way of handling what is called *first come, first served*, and I believe it is the ideal way to utilise these facilities.¹² Veliaj (2024).

However, the conditions for most students are unsatisfactory. Executive Director of the Civil Center, Rigels Džemolari, states that no student dormitory in Tirana has a public cafeteria offering students discounted meals, which would save them half of their monthly budget. Not all facilities are fenced or built in a *safe zone*. “Cars, bars, hair salons, and many other businesses disrupt normal student life or peace. Students housed in old student buildings pay roughly ALL 4,300 per month, while household appliances such as stoves and refrigerators are provided by the students themselves. Student dormitories are not included in accommodation capacities at all.”¹³ Džemolari 2023.

According to student rights activist Aurel Kujtimi, only a few buildings have been completely renovated, and these renovations do not meet the needs or expectations of the students, for the most part. For the tuition fees that students pay, they deserve much more. “The problems in Student City are not limited to structural damage; students have been facing ongoing issues for

¹¹ Veliaj, Erion Tirana, October 2024, (<https://shkiptarja.com/lajm/perurohen-godinat-e-reja-ne-kitetin-studenti-veliaj-me-kushte-shume-here-me-te-mira-dhe-rezervim-online-ne-app-tirana-ime-1>), downloaded 8 January 2025

¹² Veliaj Erion, Tirana, October 2024, (<https://shkiptarja.com/lajm/perurohen-godinat-e-reja-ne-kitetin-studenti-veliaj-me-kushte-shume-here-me-te-mira-dhe-rezervim-online-ne-app-tirana-ime-1>), downloaded 8 January 2025

¹³ Albanian Center for Quality Journalism, 2023, Rigels Xhemollari, <https://ackj.al/studentet-mes-premtimeve-dhe-realitetit>, downloaded 13 January 2025

years related to hygiene and sanitary conditions, such as collective bathrooms for dozens of students, where even the most basic elements are missing.”¹⁴ Aurel Kujtimi 2024.

Due to numerous apparent issues that the student dormitory administration in the Student City has been slow to address, and based on the Law on the Right to Information (Law No. 119/2014), the Albanian Center for Quality Journalism, submitted requests that were ignored or delayed beyond legal deadlines. On 5 April 2024, the Center officially requested details concerning reconstruction projects from the RSU, including plans for buildings that have yet to be renovated. After receiving an incomplete response at the end of the month, the investigative team filed a complaint with the Commissioner for the Right to Information. Aurel Kujtimi filed criminal charges against the Mayor of Tirana, Erion Veliaj, and the Director of the Student Dormitories in the Student City, Anila Shehu, for the misuse of renovation funds and tender processes, which are currently being prosecuted in courts.¹⁵

More and more students are reacting to the scandalous conditions. “The conditions in the student dormitories are so scandalous that even when compared to prisons, prisons are better. In prison, the Albanian state pays at least ALK 20,000 (old lek) for prison accommodation, while students pay ALL 45,000 per month and, in return, are housed in buildings dating from 1945 which provide the bare minimum. In Albania, we are in a situation where even animals are not accepted. Students have been prohibited from staying in these facilities.”¹⁶

“We don't have much space, I can't take all my clothes, I have to rotate them by season.”¹⁷ Student According to Olta B, a student there are no toilet lids, no locks on the doors, and in winter, there is rarely hot water. The water issue is so widespread that even after reconstruction, barrels with cold water are placed in the bathrooms as a daily reminder of the harsh conditions. They pay regularly, but nothing changes. The problem of inadequate heating contributes to the difficulties students face in the cold winter months. According to Steven, a second-year student at the Faculty

¹⁴ Studentet.al, January, 2025 <https://studentet.al/erion-veliaj-zirtarisht-si-person-nen-hetim-per-4-akuza-deklarata-e-spak-si-reagim-ndaj-kendrimeve-te-veliajt/>, downloaded 13 January 2025

¹⁵ Kujtimi, Aurel, Tirana, <https://studentet.al/kujtimi-godinat-ne-kitetin-studenti-nuk-plotesojne-as-kushtet-elementare-bregu-abuzimet-me-rinovimet-11-fish-me-te-larta/>, downloaded 13 January 2025

¹⁶ Student, Emiljando, Intervju , <https://rde.al/revolta-e-studenteve-kushtet-ne-konvikt-jane-ak-skandaloze-sa-edhe-burgjet-jane-me-mire/>, downloaded 11 January 2025

¹⁷ Albanian Center for Quality Journalism, 2023, Olta B., students, ngs Tirana, <https://ackj.al/studentet-mes-premtimeve-dhe-realitetit/>, downloaded 13 January 2025

of Law who also lives in Building 6, heating is rarely turned on. They just wrap themselves in blankets and wait for the rare moments when the heating is turned on, and it only comes on when the temperature drops below 3°C. “We live in these student dormitories, but the conditions are not what was promised to us. There are times when we have to queue in order to take showers and sometimes when it's finally our turn, there's no hot water left.”¹⁸.

1.1.3. Conditions in student dormitories in the Republic of Serbia

Data from the Statistical Office of the RS, as of the latest update on 26 December 2024, shows that in the 2024/25 academic year, there are 26,335 enrolled students, which is 622 fewer than last year's number of 26,957 newly enrolled students at state universities in Serbia. In terms of study financing, 48.3% of the newly enrolled students are beneficiaries of the budget.¹⁹ The trend of decreasing enrolment has been ongoing for several years. Furthermore, in 2023, a total of 248,508 students were enrolled in higher education institutions at all levels, while the number of available spaces in student dormitories is only 17,270, which is 6.9% of the total number of active students. However, not all students are eligible to live in student dormitories, except those who meet the criteria for high grades, passed exams, and, of course, budget-funded studies. According to Gordana Adamov, programme manager at the Youth Umbrella Organisation, research shows that approximately 20% of young people abandon further education due to a lack of financial means. The research 'Student Attitudes on Studying at the University of Belgrade,' conducted last year by students from the Faculty of Political Sciences, identifies key issues faced by today's students. The study includes factors affecting students' daily lives, such as the use of cafeterias and food quality, financial challenges, accommodation issues, and tuition fees, which are among the biggest challenges.²⁰ According to Vladimir Pajić from the Movement of Free Citizens, there are insufficient accommodation capacities, and there are no plans to build new buildings for this purpose.²¹ Additionally, a large number of students believe that the conditions in dormitories are

¹⁸ Albanian Center for Quality Journalism, 2023, Stiven, student nga Tirana, <https://ackj.al/studentet-mes-premtimeve-dhe-realitetit/>, downloaded 13 January 2025

¹⁹ Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 26.12.2024 <https://publikacije.stat.gov.rs/G2024/Htm/G20241353.html>, downloaded 19 January 2025

²⁰ Istraživanja, Belgrade, 2023. <https://opseg.rs/2023/06/17/istrazivanje-stavovi-mladih-o-studiranju-na-beogradskom-univerzitetu/>, downloaded 15 January 2025

²¹ TV N1, Belgrade, 2024 <https://n1info.rs/vesti/problemi-studenata-nereseni-studentski-domovi-puni-insekata-i-glodara/>, downloaded 16 January 2025.

poor. “Most dormitories do not have acceptable living conditions. There are many problems with bathrooms in dormitories—bursting pipes, clogged sinks and toilets, and repairs are not made on time. Furthermore, there are numerous issues with lighting, heating, and hygiene, and there are frequent insect and rodent infestations. Rooms are often insufficiently equipped, for example, no space to store extra food, the rooms themselves are tiny with too many people in them,”²² – said student Aleksandra Đurđević for N1. Problems also exist with food, particularly in student cafeterias. “The portion sizes are small and insufficient.

With meal price increases, both quality and quantity have declined. Although they may be worth the price, they are not enough to satisfy someone who spends up to eight hours a day at university. Additionally, cafeterias are usually crowded, and there are none near the university,” said student Đorđe Petrović, N1 2024. In a survey conducted by *Student Life*, 545 respondents participated. The majority of respondents, 50%, live in student dormitories. Nearly half of the respondents, 46%, rated the quality of meals as average with room for improvement, 20% stated that they were dissatisfied with the quality of food in cafeterias, and only 9% of respondents were satisfied with the quality of meals.²³

Da li ste zadovoljni kvalitetom obroka u studentskim restoranima?

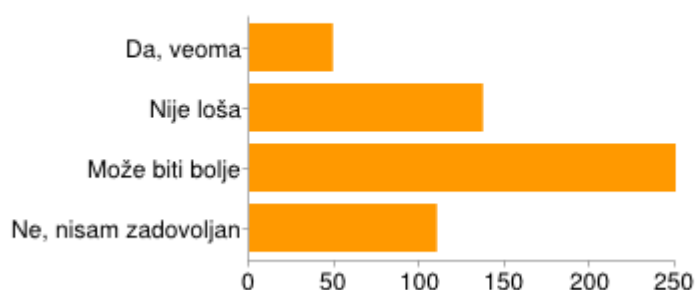


Figure. 1 Sample taken from the *Student Life* survey

²² TV N1, Beograd, 2024 <https://n1info.rs/vesti/problemi-studenata-nereseni-studentski-domovi-puni-insekata-i-glodara/>, preuzeto 16. januara 2025. g.

²³ „Studentski život“, istraživanje, <https://vvv.studentskizivot.com/istrazivanja-ankete/anketa-o-kvalitetu-ishrane-studenata-i-menzama/>, preuzeto 16. januara 2025. g.

Student dormitories in Serbia continue to function under challenging conditions, making life in them far from easy. Students in Belgrade face issues with air conditioning, while in Niš, the Student Centre is self-financing, and in Kragujevac, they are working to improve conditions through active participation in decision-making. They receive very little support from the state. One such neglected centre that helps students is the self-financing Student Center in Niš. As explained by the Assistant Director, Dobrivoje Ljujić, they have never received anything from the city. He describes the situation as negligence and indifference, comparing it to an “ostrich burying its head in the sand.” “Every student who comes to the city brings a certain sum of money with them, which they spend in Niš, from which the city collects taxes and other fees, and it can be used in various ways - on average, approximately 17,000 students. Every year, we resolve current issues from our own funds. Currently, we are working on the vertical water supply and sewage network in Pavilion Four. Last year, we renovated forty bathrooms, and this year, the same,”²⁴, explains Ljujić, adding that everything is being done to improve the student standard. However, the issue of climate control has not yet been resolved. In Pavilion Three at the Faculty of Medicine, furniture and equipment are being replaced, and rooms are being renovated at a cost of RSD 4.5 million (VAT excluded). As Ljujić states, an entire floor is being renovated, which has been on hold for several years due to a lack of funds. Financing from their own resources means working throughout the summer and ensuring accommodation for others while the students are at home. “We worked all summer, hosting many events such as Nešvil, Film Encounters, and others, the participants of which were accommodated with us,” explains Ljujić, adding that this way they are able to cover not only dormitory costs, but also to provide scholarships for both university and secondary school students.

According to Zoran Kasalović, the State Secretary of the Ministry of Education, the Government of Serbia is continuously working on improving the living and working conditions of students in dormitories. For this purpose, RSD 262 million have been allocated from the budget for 35 projects, most of which have already been realised. “The Government of the Republic of Serbia and the responsible ministry allocate roughly RSD 3.5 billion for 18,000 students, which

²⁴ Ljujić, Dobrivoje, in a statement made for Vreme, 2024. <https://vreme.com/drustvo/studentski-domovi-pali-u-zaborav-jalova-borba-za-bolji-zivot-akademaca/>, downloaded 16 January 2024

ensures truly reasonable prices for accommodation and meals. It is well-known that three meals cost RSD 262. The Ministry of Education awards student scholarships and loans every year, and the number is constantly increasing. In 2000, 700 scholarships were awarded, and today there are just over 8,000 scholarships and 6,500 student loans, with both types of aid amounting to RSD 13,000.”²⁵ (Kasalović, 2024)

The President of the Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, Ana Brnabić, announced that she would request the parliamentary committee to address issues related to students, such as financial security when they lose their loans due to blockades, studying as a beneficiary of the budget, and accommodation in student dormitories. “What is the solution for all students? Not just for the plenary, but for all students.”²⁶ (Brnabić, 2025).

However, just a day later, Brnabić threatened to freeze all university accounts due to the student protests. This would result in a drastic decline in the student standard. Nevertheless, despite the threat, students continue with the strike.

²⁵ Kasalović, Zoran, Euronevs, 2024 <https://vvv.euronevs.rs/srbija/drustvo/138723/za-poboljsanje-uslova-u-studentskim-domovima-izdvojeno-262-miliona-dinara-za-15-projekata/vest>, downloaded 16 January 2024

²⁶Ana Brnabić, Telegraf, 2025. <https://vvv.telegraf.rs/vesti/politika/4038962-brnabic-iduce-nedelje-bicu-na-odboru-za-obrazovanje-pitacu-koji-je-izlaz-za-studente>, downloaded 20 January 2025

2

CURRENT CONDITIONS IN STUDENT DORMITORIES IN THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA



2. CURRENT CONDITIONS IN STUDENT DORMITORIES IN THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA

Considering the overall situation over the previous period, as well as the data indicating poor conditions in student dormitories and low student standards, for the purposes of this research, we conducted mini-interviews and surveys with dozens of students from two student dormitories in the capital, Skopje, namely Goce Delčev and Pelagonija. The main questions we sought to answer were related to: internet access, food quality, public transport, scholarships, conditions for students with special needs, and areas that need improvement.

2.1. *Current Conditions in “Goce Delchev”*

Based on the responses regarding the conditions at the Goce Delčev dormitory, the following issues prevail: there is central heating, but no cooling in the summer, making it very difficult for students to study; lifts are frequently out-of-order; hot water is not available all the time; and there are an insufficient number of chairs available in the study hall. Regarding internet access, students almost unanimously agree that internet access is unreliable. Although there is a network, it is weak, slow, and often cuts out, making it practically useless. There are two meals included in the price of accommodation consists, with an additional fee for the second meal. The assortment of meals is lacking and sometimes meal portions are insufficient. As for the menu, deviations are frequent.

Public city transportation is free for full-time students. Scholarships are available, but under certain conditions, such as a GPA of 8.5 and a cleared academic year, though pay-outs are often delayed. Students mentioned that they rarely notice peers with special needs, but that the conditions for them are poor because the lift is usually out of service, resulting in improper access to the dorm. The key message is that immediate improvements are needed in terms of hot water supply, hygiene, food quality, and internet access. They would also like intercity transportation to be free. They wish they could work on weekends and receive free books and vouchers. In particular, the students mentioned corruption, which is the cause of their lower standard of living, and which needs to be combated.²⁷

²⁷ Results of the survey (interviews) conducted at the Goce Delčev dorm, 2024-2025

2.2. *Current Conditions in “Pelagonija” - Skopje*

In interviews and surveys, students from this dormitory complained of poor heating, the lack of cooling during the summer, which makes studying difficult. They mentioned the almost constant lack of hot water. The rooms are cramped and accommodate four students, with mouldy ceilings in some areas. They did praise the dorm for having the best study hall in comparison to other dormitories. Despite there being an internet network, it is not functional and therefore basically non-existent. Two meals are included in the accommodation price; the food is free for financially (socially) vulnerable students. Portion sizes are adequate, but quality is subpar. Public transportation is free, while intercity transport offers a small discount. Scholarships are available under various conditions and amounts, but the problem is that they are often delayed. Accessibility for students with special needs is questioned as lifts are frequently out of service. However, an alarming concern is that most respondents don't know whether such colleagues even exist, nor do they know about the availability of cafeterias or dormitory facilities (as they are invisible). Their demands include dorm renovation, improvement in terms of food quality, reducing the number of students per room, ensuring consistent access to hot water, heating, and cooling, and, most of all a change in the approach to dorm management.²⁸

²⁸ Results of the survey (interviews) conducted at the Pelagonija dorm, Skopje 2024-2025

3

CURRENT CONDITIONS IN STUDENT DORMITORIES IN THE REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA



3. CURRENT CONDITIONS IN STUDENT DORMITORIES IN THE REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA

The situation with student dormitories in the Republic of Albania is quite specific. In addition to the varying perceptions of conditions and standards, there are cases of corruption for which student activists have already filed criminal complaints regarding abuses during the renovation of dormitories and public procurement processes, which are being handled by the relevant judicial authorities. However, the prevailing opinion is that even in renovated dorm buildings, the conditions do not meet the European standards that the country aspires to.

3.1. Current Conditions in the Student Dorm Located in the Old Building of Student City - Tirana

Regarding the conditions in the old building, most of the interviewed students confirmed that heating is inadequate, there is no air conditioning, and, except for a few decent rooms, most are dilapidated and mouldy. The conditions in the toilets are dreadful. The internet is free, but it is rarely available, more specifically, it doesn't work and therefore it's basically non-existent. Two meals are included in the accommodation fee, with all other meals requiring additional payment.

The food is of poor quality and insufficient quantity. Public transportation is not free, but there are student cards offering a small discount, though remaining difficult to obtain. To receive a scholarship, students need a high GPA and number of passed exams, with an exception for students from vulnerable groups. As for students with special needs, most of the interviewed students are unaware of their presence. Those who have noticed special needs students claim that their rooms are inaccessible due to the fact that lifts are often out of service and access to classes is rare, if it exists at all. Student demands include renovation, access to hot water, better quality meals, improved hygiene, changes in leadership, enhanced dormitory management, better lecture rooms and improved internet access.²⁹

²⁹ Results of the survey (interviews) conducted with students housed in Student City – in the unrenovated building – Tirana, 2024-2025

3.2. Current Conditions in Student Dorms Located in the Renovated Building of Student City – Tirana

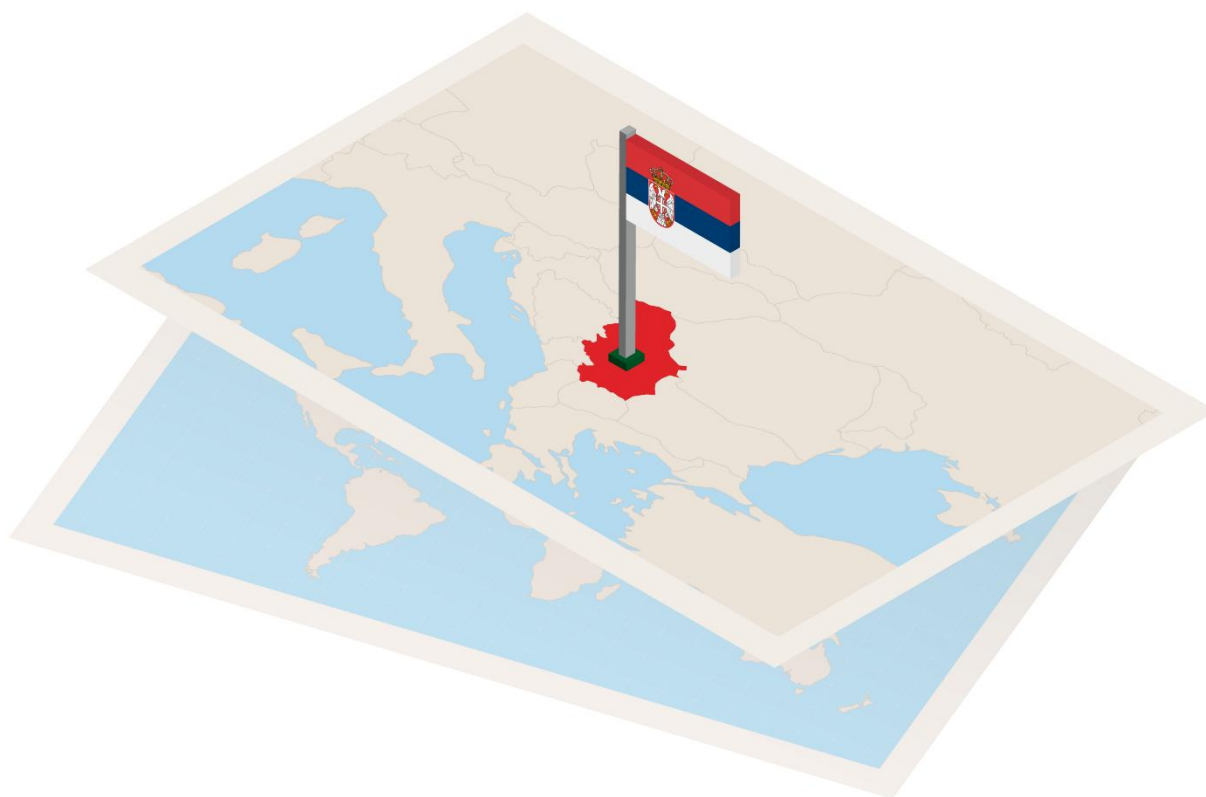
Regarding the conditions in the renovated building of Student City - Tirana, students report that the conditions are sufficient, with renovated rooms. However, there is a lack of air conditioning the summer and better hygiene. There is free internet, but it is not always functional due to weak signal strength. Two meals are included in the accommodation fee, while additional meals must be paid for separately. The meals are tasteless, lacking in quality, and insufficient in quantity. Public or city transportation is not free, but there are discounted student cards, though the discount is minimal, and the cards are still difficult to obtain.

To receive a scholarship, students need a high GPA and number of passed exams, with an exception for students from vulnerable groups. As for students with special needs, most of the interviewed students are unaware of their presence. Those who have noticed special needs students claim that their rooms are inaccessible due to the fact that lifts are often out of service and access to classes is rare, if it exists at all. Student demands include renovation, access to hot water, better quality meals, improved hygiene, changes in leadership, and better dormitory management, lecture rooms, and internet access.³⁰

³⁰ Results of the survey (interviews) conducted with students housed in Student City – in the renovated building – Tirana, 2024-2025 g.

4

CURRENT CONDITIONS IN STUDENT DORMITORIES IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA



4. Current Conditions in Student Dorms in the Republic of Serbia

Given the overall situation in the Republic of Serbia regarding student standards and conditions in student dorms, in order to assess the current conditions in a certain number of them, we interviewed dozens of students from the Niš Student Centre, specifically from Pavilion 3 and Pavilion 2.

4.1. Current Conditions in Paviljonu 3 – Niš Student Centre

In the responses from students housed in Pavilion 3 regarding the conditions, the prevailing feedback is that heating is good, there is air conditioning in the newer rooms and in the study hall, there is always hot water, and the furniture is new except for the beds, which need to be replaced, as well as the flooring. The internet is available, but it is slow, weak, and often non-functional. Although there are routers in the rooms, the connection remains poor. The meals consist of three meals a day, and they are paid separately from accommodation. The quality and quantity of the food are considered decent. Public transportation is charged with a 20% discount with a student index or ID. To receive a scholarship, a GPA of 9 and a cleared year are required, but the amount granted is small. Two separate rooms are designated for students with special needs, with access and a lift available, although the key to the exercise room must be requested from the staff. It is concerning that some students are unaware of the conditions for colleagues with special needs.

Their requests include air conditioning in all areas during the summer, a larger reading room, fast and reliable internet, a kitchen and coffee machine on every floor, free gym access, and free train transportation.³¹

4.2. Current Conditions in Paviljonu 2 – Niš Student Centre

In the responses from students in Pavilion 2 regarding the conditions, the prevailing opinion is that the heating is excellent, but there is no air conditioning in the rooms, only in the study hall. Hot water is always available, the furniture is new, but noise is a problem, making it difficult to study

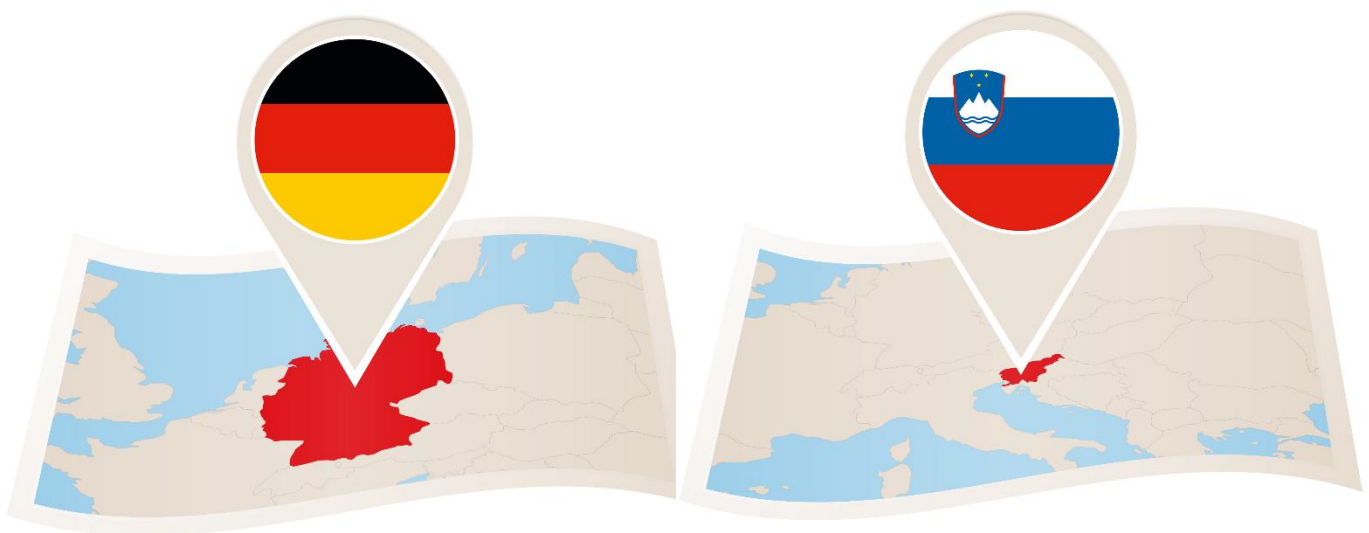
³¹ Results of the survey (interviews) conducted with students housed in the Niš Student Centre, Paviljon 3, 2024-2025

at times. There is free internet, but students have divided opinions about its quality. Meals are charged separately from accommodation, and a minimum of 10 meals must be purchased. According to most students, the quality and quantity of the food are good, but not diverse. There is no free public transportation, a mere 20% discount is offered, and transportation is expensive. Scholarships are available, but only for those with a GPA of 9 or more and a 'cleared' year (meaning all exams have been passed for that specific year), and are very low. There are no facilities for students with special needs in the dorms, but provisions for lectures and practical classes are available. Students' requests include: air conditioning, mini-fridges, larger rooms, bigger gyms, better internet, free meals, and free transportation.³²

³² Results of the survey (interviews) conducted with students housed in the Niš Student Centre, Paviljon 2, 2024-2025

5

SITUATION IN EU COUNTRIES: REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA AND THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY



5. SITUATION IN EU COUNTRIES, REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA AND THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY

We chose the Republic of Slovenia and the Federal Republic of Germany as EU member states to compare the situation in student dormitories. Slovenia, as a country once part of the same According to the latest data from the Statistical Office of Slovenia, public spending on formal education amounts to EUR 3,286 billion, which is nominally 9.4% higher than the previous year, but its share of GDP has decreased from 5.3% to 5.1%.³³

EUR 3,041 billion, or 92.5% of total public funds for formal education, is directly allocated to educational institutions. The volume of this asset is nominally higher by 9.1%. The largest increase in these funds has been for higher education, up by 15.4%. EUR 508 million, or 16.7% of all funds allocated to educational institutions, are subsidies for participation in educational programmes (tuition fees, outdoor schools, school meals, student dormitories). The largest portion of these funds (85.5%) goes to subsidies for kindergartens, which accounts for 82.7% of all public funds allocated for preschool education. At other levels of education, the mentioned subsidies on average represented 3% of all public funds intended for educational institutions.³⁴

The funds allocated as direct transfers to the private sector or households for their expenses outside educational institutions (such as scholarships, transportation, and student meals) amount to EUR 246 million (7.5% of all public funds). Compared to the previous year, this figure has increased by 12.3%, mainly due to a rise in funding for primary education (up by 25.5%) and higher education (up by 16.5%). The expenditures (basic funds) of the Federation, states, and local governments in the Federal Republic of Germany are presented in the statistical breakdown for financing public budgets. In 2022, the public sector spent a total of EUR 176.3 billion on daycare centres for children, general and vocational schools, higher education institutions, financial aid for pupils and students, other education-related costs, as well as extracurricular education for young people and youth associations. This amount included EUR 12.5 billion for the Federation, 122.0 EUR billion for the states, and EUR 41.8 billion for local governments. These figures represent

³³ Statistical Office of Slovenia, <https://vvv.stat.si/StatVeb/en/nevs/Indek/13284>, downloaded 18 January 2025

³⁴ Statistical Office of Slovenia, <https://vvv.stat.si/StatVeb/en/nevs/Indek/13284>, downloaded 18 January 2025

6% of GDP and 20.2% of the total public budget. These funds are several times larger than what is allocated for education, particularly higher education, in the three countries compared.

5.1 Current Conditions in Student Dormitories in the Republic of Slovenia

Only the student dormitories in Ljubljana have a capacity of 7,500 students, spread across 29 dormitories located in different parts of the city and its surroundings. In Maribor, the number of student beds is around 2,500, and on the coast, there are five more student dormitories with a capacity of about 500 people. There are approximately 70,000 students in Slovenia, and according to the Statistical Office of Slovenia, a simple statistical calculation shows that there is a bed available in a student dormitory for approximately every fifth student. For comparison, in North Macedonia, which is the closest of the three countries, there is a bed for every tenth student enrolled in university. Slovenia offers better conditions for studying, with a strong focus on students.

According to Vanja Anđelović, a former student at the University of Ljubljana, student accommodation is well organised, and according to their regulations, most students are accommodated in student dormitories. For example, in Ljubljana, the capital and largest city of Slovenia, there are roughly 12,000 student beds organised into double, single, and family rooms in approximately thirty student dormitories across the city. While the number of student beds in other towns is smaller, it aligns with the population size. “The quality of rooms varies from one dormitory to another, and as such, the rental prices differ. On the other hand, the rooms meet basic living standards. I lived in the Bežigrad student dormitory in Ljubljana, and I had the opportunity to see both the exterior and interior, understand the conditions, and see the prices. Conditions can always be improved, but it should be noted that the basic living conditions are met. For example, in this dormitory, there is a laundry room and a shared kitchen on every floor. Room prices range from EUR 160 to 200, depending on whether you want a single or double room. Hygiene is at a satisfactory level,” said Vanja Anđelović, January 2025. In addition to better living conditions, students in Slovenia have two basic student benefits – 'student vouchers,' which are similar to student meal programmes, and a student card for public transportation. "It can be said that there

are no significant differences between Slovenia and North Macedonia where meals and transportation are concerned, which is not the case with Albania and Serbia. Financial assistance and benefits are almost identical. Students have the right to choose teaching staff, to dismiss staff who have not been elected for full-time positions, and most importantly, to participate in the financial spending of the university's budget,³⁵ says Vanja Anđelović 2025. According to Vanja, perhaps the most important aspect of student work in Slovenia is the opportunity for students with fewer resources to apply for certain jobs that do not take up much of their time and help supplement their budgets. Of course, there are many other differences among students in terms of their rights. Slovenia's educational system shares similarities with that of former Yugoslavia, but in any case, it is a system where students are well organised, and the responsibilities and rights they bear are at a much higher level than in our country.

5.2. Student Dormitories in the Federal Republic of Germany

At the national level, student associations and federations in Germany offer approximately 195,000 student housing accommodations. Student dormitories remain the most affordable form of living outside the family home and a popular alternative to rented accommodation. The average gross rent for student federations is EUR 279.92 per month. Additionally, most locations provide accommodation for individuals with special needs, and there are specially equipped apartments available for students with children. In addition to affordable rent, students particularly appreciate the proximity to campus and universities and the various opportunities for social interaction. Good capacity is also a key factor. Nearly two-thirds of first-year German students consider finding accommodation at the start of their studies to be difficult or very difficult (according to the HISBUS online survey).

A quarter of these students made dorms their first accommodation because they couldn't find anything else, didn't have time to search further, or considered it a temporary solution from the beginning. International students are also especially dependent on affordable housing. For them, low costs and the ability to communicate and integrate are particularly important: over 40% of international students live in student dorms. They rely on inexpensive accommodation that is available on short notice: their monthly budget is, on average, 10% lower than that of German

³⁵ Interview with Vanjom Anđelovićem, 2025, former student housed in Bežigrad student dorm, Ljubljana.

students. Many student federations offer a so-called *service package* for this group, which guarantees students a place in a dormitory during their stay. Moreover, student federations strive to support integration through teaching programmes. They offer barrier-free living spaces in student dormitories. These are typically apartments designed so that many activities can be carried out independently. They also provide suitable accommodation for students with walking difficulties or short-term wheelchair users, within the limits of available resources. Many housing complexes have rooms available for students with children. Some dormitories also offer family apartments, typically two- or three-room flats, some with special equipment like cribs for children. The offerings vary from one student federation to another. For our research, we interviewed Eva Stojanovska, a student from North Macedonia studying at the Faculty of Medicine in Bochum, Germany, who is housed in Akafo student dorm. According to Eva, the conditions are excellent, with everything they need: new furniture, uninterrupted heating and cooling, hot water at all times, etc. “The internet is free, and all students have their own eduroam access.

Meals are not included in the accommodation price, but students can eat in the student cafeteria at very low prices. We have *deutschlandticket* student monthly passes for all transportation in Germany, costing EUR 30, which is several times cheaper than the regular price. There are also scholarships available under various conditions, and for students with special needs, there are facilities for accessing dormitories, lectures, and practical classes everywhere. I don't know what to say about the conditions, when I'm so satisfied with them,”³⁶ says Stojanovska, 2025.

³⁶ Interview with Eva Stojanovska, a student at the Faculty of Medicine in Iteta u Bochum, housed in Akafo student dorm, 2025.

6

CONCLUSION



6. CONCLUSION

In the Republic of North Macedonia, the Republic of Albania, and the Republic of Serbia, the percentage of the education budget allocated to student housing stands at 3.17% in North Macedonia, 3.33% in Albania, and up to 3.7% in Serbia. According to European Commission progress reports for these three countries, this percentage is far below the EU average, which is around 5%. Statements from other relevant institutions, such as the Audit Office of the RS and the Statistica Office of the RS, indicate insufficient state funding dedicated to improving the standards and conditions of student dormitories. In contrast, in EU countries like Slovenia and the Federal Republic of Germany, this percentage is more than double, with Slovenia at 5.1% and Germany at 6%. Unlike these three Balkan countries, where the debate about student dormitory requirements centres on improving basic conditions such as food quality and variety, heating, cooling, constant hot water, quality internet access, and increasing scholarships, in EU member states, the debate revolves around how to invest public funds to improve conditions that go far beyond the basics.

These improvements include equipping rooms with full furniture, digitalization, access to sophisticated tools, and additional entertainment options. Students in these countries talk about artificial intelligence, while students in the three Balkan countries struggle to even access basic internet for simple searches. Based on interviews and materials we analysed, the conditions in student housing in Skopje and Tirana are poor. In the “Goce Delchev” and “Pelagonija” dormitories, there is no adequate heating, no air conditioning, no internet, poor quality food, poor hygiene, low and delayed scholarships, and only students with a high GPA and a cleared year receive them. There are no accommodations for students with special needs; lifts are often out of order, and buildings are not adapted for these groups. The only benefit for students in Skopje is free public transportation, although last year, this was frequently interrupted due to debts owed by the public company. The situation in Tirana is nearly identical. Students in the Niš Student Centre are in a better position. They have better conditions in their rooms, are better equipped, always have heating and cooling, electricity, and hot water, higher quality food, but their scholarships are still low and subject to certain conditions. Public transportation is not free for them. In Skopje, meals are included in accommodation costs for students, while students from Niš pay 260 dinars for meals. Students in Ljubljana have better conditions and benefits, but the system there is much better organised, both in terms of quality and quantity of services and accommodation. Students

in Bochum are very satisfied with the conditions, as everything is tailored to their needs, including provisions for students with special needs, where everything has been planned in advance.

In EU member states, state-owned student dormitories operate as hostels during the summer months, which in turn provides additional income for the institutions. In the Western Balkans, student dormitories also function as hostels in the summer, but this is merely a way to secure additional funding for their activities, while the primary operations are fully funded by the state, as they are a public service regulated by law. A bit differently, in the Niš Student Centre, according to Director Ljujić, it is financed through its own funds, which means operating during the summer and providing accommodation to others while students are at home. “We worked all summer, hosting many events such as Nešvil, Film Encounters, and others, the participants of which were accommodated with us,” explains Ljujić, adding that this way they are able to cover not only dormitory costs, but also to provide scholarships for both university and secondary school students.³⁷ Ljujić.

From the comparative analysis, it can be concluded that an increase in financial allocation from the state budget and better legislative solutions for higher education will bring the conditions in student dormitories in North Macedonia, Albania, and Serbia closer to those in EU countries. A significant challenge is whether legal reforms will be implemented to increase the budget and address other issues. Students from St. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje and students from Tirana are demanding changes in the management of dormitories, primarily to eradicate the corruption recorded in North Macedonia and Albania, where criminal charges have already been filed for abuses in public tenders and misuse of German aid funds for dormitories. At the same time, students from Serbia have been protesting for two and a half months due to systemic corruption. They are also advocating for the possibility of working on weekends to increase their budget, as is the case in other European countries. There is no need to mention the basic living conditions. Another challenge will be whether the Ministries of Education and Science in these Balkan countries will increase the budget allocated to students, or whether they will provide more funds to improve student standards.

³⁷ Ljujić, Dobrivoje, Statement made for Vreme, 2024 <https://vreme.com/drustvo/studentski-domovi-pali-u-zaborav-jalova-borba-za-bolji-zivot-akademaca/>, downloaded 16 January 2024

Another danger is whether food, a bed, and a toilet will remain an unattainable triangle for students in these three countries for much longer. Will the state institutions responsible for the welfare of their citizens take sufficient action to improve student standards? Will students, the youth, and their issues be a priority for state institutions, as they are the future of the nation? The research clearly indicates that governments must allocate a higher percentage for higher education, particularly for student dormitories, scholarships, and meals, as basic conditions for future academic citizens. To achieve the goal set by this research, measures are needed to provide financial assistance, scholarships, and affordable loans to students so that higher education becomes accessible to a wider group of students. Support is required for students through grants, loans, and research opportunities, for example. Cooperation with educational institutions, professors, and students is necessary to exchange knowledge on the policies implemented to meet the needs of learners. Continuous data collection and research should be conducted to identify areas for improvement and assess the effectiveness of educational policies. A monitoring model should be developed to track the state of basic conditions and to gather data on the conditions, on an annual basis.

Undoubtedly, the greatest responsibility will lie with student representatives and unions to put pressure on authorities to make the necessary changes to the legislative solutions in each of these countries.

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8. INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED FOR THE PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH

1. Interview with Emilijan S., student from Tirana, 2024.
2. Interview with Olta B., student housed in a dorm in Tirana, 2024.
3. Interview with Vanja Anelovich, former student of the University of Ljubljana, housed in Bežigrad student dorm, 2025.
4. Interview with Eva Stojanovska, medical student in Bochum, Germany, housed in Akafo student dorm, 2025.
5. Survey - Interview with 20 students housed in “Goce Delchev“ student dorm, Skopje, 2024-2025.
6. Survey - Interview with 20 students housed in “Pelagonija“ student dorm, Skopje, 2024-2025.
7. Survey - Interview with 20 students from the Niš Student Centre, housed in Pavilion 3, 2024-2025.
8. Survey - Interview with 20 students from the Niš Student Centre, housed in Pavilion 2, 2024-2025.
9. Survey - Interview with 20 students housed in Tirana’s Student City, unrenovated building, 2024-2025.
10. Survey - Interview with 20 students housed in Tirana’s Student City, renovated building, 2024-2025.

9. APPENDICES: SURVEY CODES - INTERVIEWS WITH STUDENTS HOUSED IN 6 STUDENT DORMITORIES

