



# THE LIVES OF HIGHER ED STUDENTS IN A TURBULENT ERA

A study on the living conditions, addiction issues, mental health and future outlook of university students in Romania.





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# ABOUT THE STATE OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

“The Lives of Higher Ed Students in a Turbulent Era” is the third instalment in The State of University Students series, following the first study conducted in 2022 and the second in 2023. This research is based on an extensive survey addressed to students from all university centers in Romania, aimed at identifying and understanding their living conditions, addiction, mental health and future outlook-related issues. “The Lives of Higher Ed Students in a Turbulent Era” has been conducted under the patronage of Victoria Stoiciu, a Senator in Romania’s Parliament and the author of several policy proposals aimed at combating poverty, domestic violence and drug use. The study has been carried out in collaboration with the Center for the Study of Democracy, a think tank founded in 2006 within the Department of Political Science, which is a part of the Faculty of Political, Administrative and Communication Sciences, Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca.

For more information, you can find us at:

- 🌐 [stareastudentilor.ro](https://stareastudentilor.ro)
- 📘 [facebook.com/stareastudentilor](https://facebook.com/stareastudentilor)
- 📷 [instagram.com/stareastudentilor](https://instagram.com/stareastudentilor)
- ✉️ [iulia.git@stareastudentilor.ro](mailto:iulia.git@stareastudentilor.ro)

The State of University Students is a partnership between 39 student associations from across Romania. This partnership aims to draw attention to the challenges faced by Romanian students, which are often overlooked by the institutions in charge. Their challenges, just like the challenges of European university students at large, cannot be solved by a single entity or a single university center; identifying solutions for their future requires the involvement of organizations from across the continent. Below, you can see all the extraordinary people who have joined us as partners.

## Partners



# FOREWORD

The living conditions and mental health of young people, together with the growing issue of addictions, rank among the most significant challenges facing Romanian society today, as well as the European Union as a whole. As a society, we still lack a truly comprehensive vision of young people's living conditions and of the ways in which we can help them overcome these difficulties. This is why I chose to join the project "The Lives of Higher Ed Students in a Turbulent Era", a study that offers a mapping of living conditions, mental health, and addiction-related issues among Romanian students.

Why a study that covers all of these complex issues at the same time? The answer is simple: these phenomena do not exist in isolation from one another. Addiction, housing insecurity, and mental health issues should not be addressed separately, as they are deeply interconnected and reinforce one another. Adolescents who spend 8–12 hours a day on social media are more prone to anxiety and depression, which can in turn lead to alcohol or other substance use. Similarly, precarious housing conditions can generate stress

that fuels both psychological distress and risky behaviors.

This study shows that addiction-related problems are continuously increasing, in all their forms. Over the past 12 months, 79.7% of respondents spent excessive time on screens, 65.7% excessively consumed unhealthy food, 41.6% smoked excessively, and 32.2% consumed alcohol excessively. Additionally, 21.5% used so-called "light" drugs, while 8% used so-called "hard" drugs. Most alarming of all, 32.2% of respondents did not seek help to overcome addictive behaviors due to a lack of financial means.

The problems are no less serious when it comes to the living conditions of students in Romania. Only 22.8% have access to a dormitory room, while 32.5% cite the level of utility bills and maintenance expenses as their main problem. Moreover, 25.9% of respondents can only afford basic necessities, and 9% do not even have enough money to cover those basic needs.

The situation is even more severe in terms of mental health. Stress and anxiety have increased for 83.3% of respondents. Of

these, 10.7% engaged in self-harm, and 21.1% reported suicidal thoughts—a significant increase compared to the already high rate of 9.8% reported in the 2023 The State of University Students study.

How can we overcome this crisis? "The Lives of Higher Ed Students in a Turbulent Era" proposes a series of public policies aimed at preventing and combating these issues. From an integrated national strategy to combat addictions, to the creation of dedicated funding lines for universities for the construction of student dormitories to address the shortage of student housing, many of these policies can greatly improve the living conditions of higher ed students, both in Romania and all over the European Union.

Debates about young people's issues—whether related to mental health, living conditions or addiction—are difficult and complex. "The Lives of Higher Ed Students in a Turbulent Era" seeks to mark a new beginning for this conversation, with solutions that can only be found through a holistic approach involving all relevant

institutions, alongside students through their representative organizations and universities. The future of young people—and therefore the future of this country, and the future of our continent—depends greatly on our ability to mobilize and cooperate institutionally in the face of problems whose resolution can no longer be postponed.

Victoria Stoiciu, Senator



## TEAM

### George Jiglău

George is a political scientist, a university lecturer in Political Science at Babeş-Bolyai University, and the president of the Center for the Study of Democracy. Energy policies and their impact on housing play a central role in his research, and the strong relationships he builds with each generation of students are reflected in their active involvement in his research projects.



### Andra Literat

Andra graduated from the Faculty of Dental Medicine at the Iuliu Hațieganu University of Medicine and Pharmacy in Cluj-Napoca and is currently a resident doctor specializing in Periodontology. She has been actively involved in the debate movement in Transylvania for over 10 years, as a member of the AGORA Debate Association, where she plays a key role in coordinating debate programs for young people.



### Emil Mesaroş

Emil is the Honorary President of the BBU Debate Society, a role in which he has organized numerous public debates on issues related to youth and Romanian society. He is also a communication expert, with a 20-year career in branding—experience that he brings to his work as an associate lecturer at Babeş-Bolyai University.



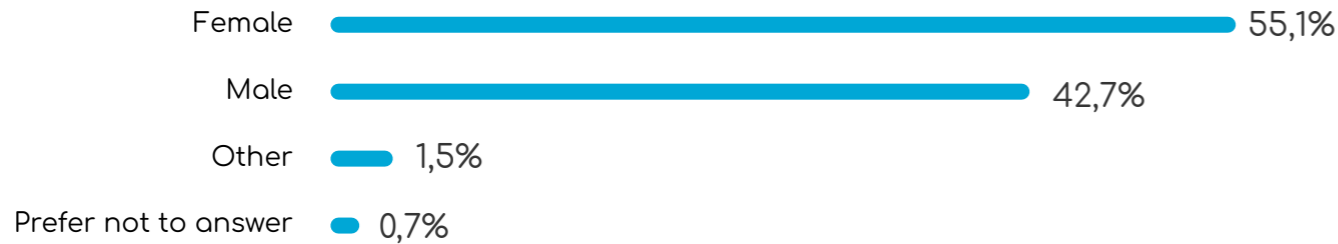
### Iulia Giţ

Passionate about social issues, Iulia has been involved in volunteer activities and student representation since high school. A graduate of the Faculty of Law at Babeş-Bolyai University, she currently works in data protection, supporting businesses across Europe. However, she continues to advocate for youth-related issues through her role as the coordinator of The State of University Students initiative.



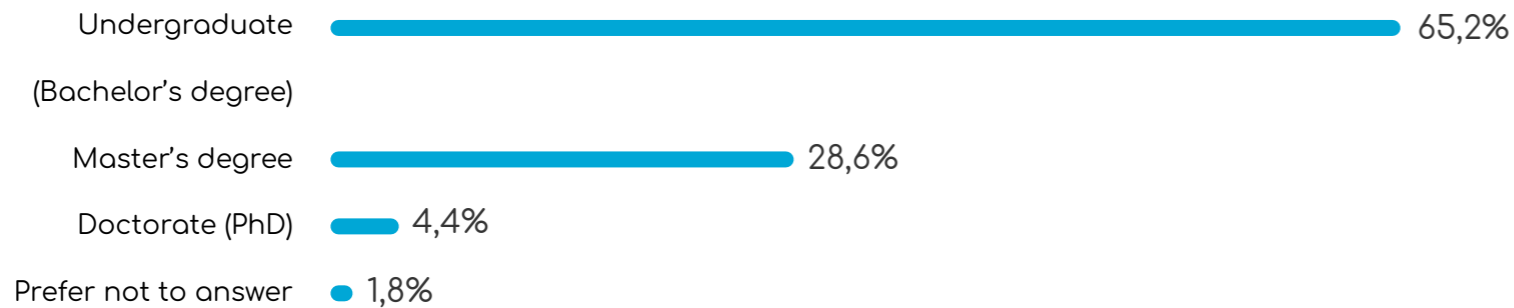
Some insights about the students who responded to this survey:

### Gender of Respondents:



The proportion of female respondents is higher than that of male respondents, though not by an overwhelming margin. This reflects the fact that the student population in Romanian universities is predominantly female and enhances the representativeness of this study.

### Academic Level of Respondents:



The proportion of undergraduate, master's, and doctoral students in this survey closely matches the data presented in official reports from the Ministry of National Education, such as the "Report on the State of Higher Education in Romania 2022-2023".

## METHODOLOGY

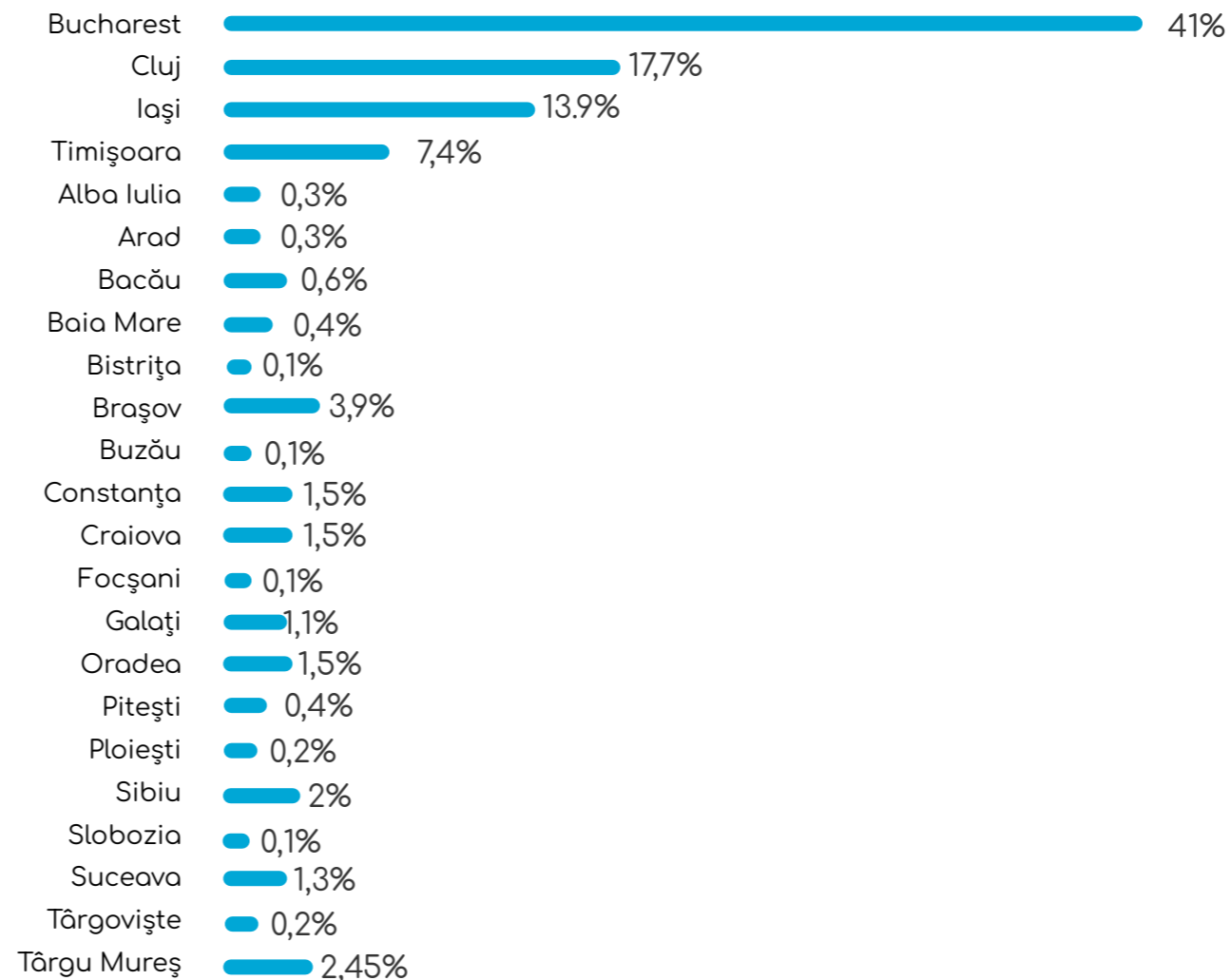
"The Lives of Higher Ed Students in a Turbulent Era" is an online survey conducted with the participation of 1,423 respondents, students enrolled in universities across 23 cities in Romania. The survey was carried out between June 15, 2025, and September 27, 2025. Respondents who took part in this survey were required to answer three control questions about their personal situation, followed by 25 questions regarding their consumption and addictive behaviors, the quality of their housing and overall living conditions over the past 12 months, as well as aspects related to their mental health and career prospects.

All survey questions were mandatory.

## METHODOLOGY

Based on the topics they address, the survey questions were divided into four chapters: 1. Addiction issues; 2. Quality and cost of living; 3. Mental health and future prospects. At the beginning, the „Key findings” section provides a selection of the most significant insights in this research. However, for a thorough understanding of the survey, we encourage you to read the entire final results section where, starting on page 9, you can find a detailed presentation of the results recorded for each of these questions.

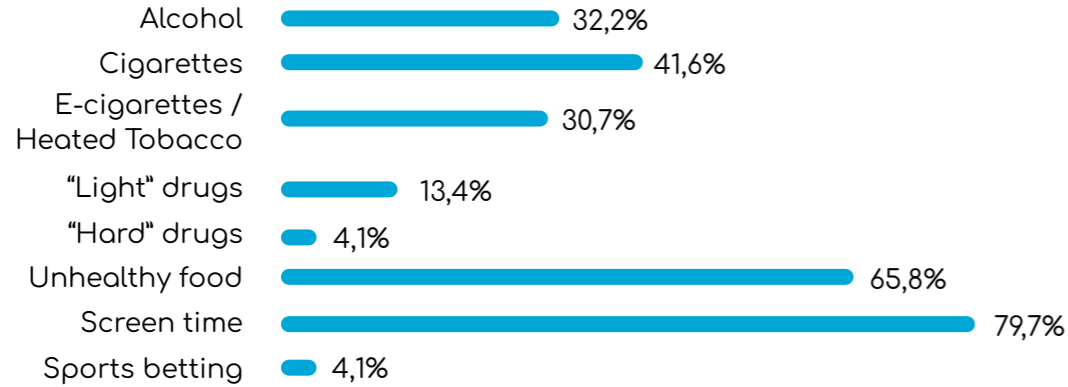
### University Centers Where Respondents Study:



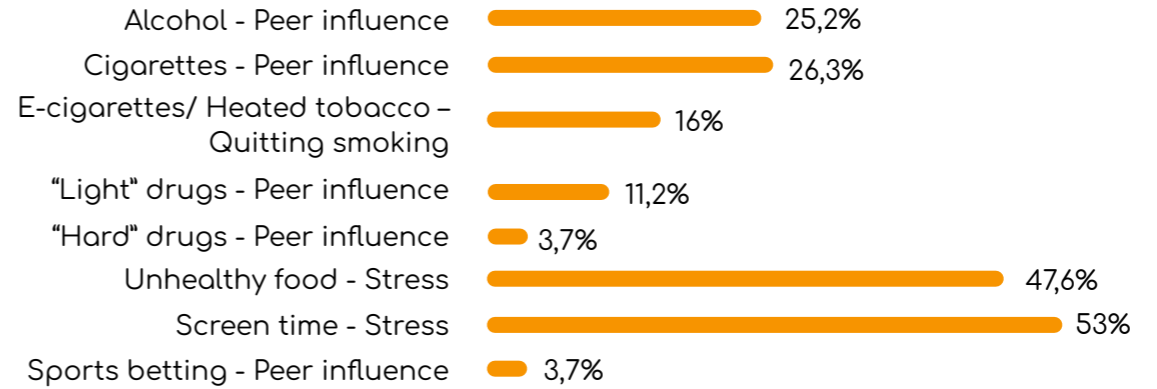
As expected, the majority of respondents come from Romania's four largest university centers. However, a significant number of responses were also recorded from Brașov, Oradea, Târgu Mureș, Sibiu, Constanța and Craiova, along with various other cities across the country. This broad distribution ensures national coverage for the survey.

# KEY FINDINGS

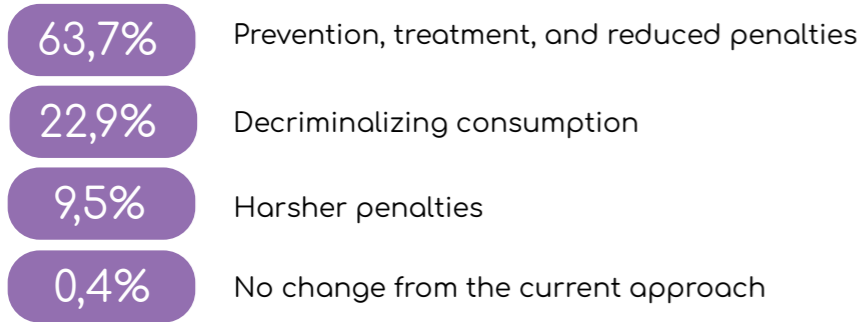
Over the past 12 months, students have excessively engaged in the following behaviors:



Primary factor behind each addictive behavior:



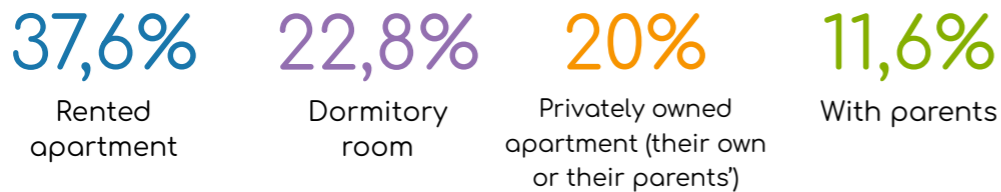
How students believe the state should address drug-related issues:



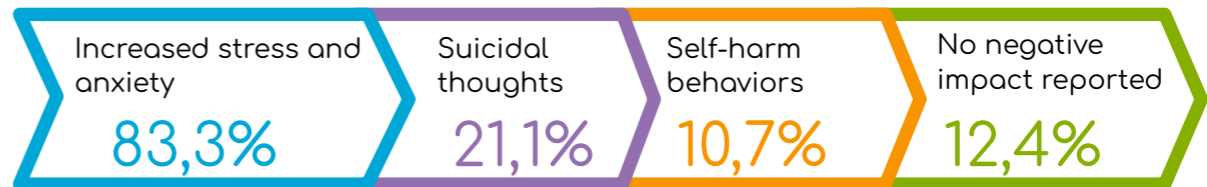
How students assess their personal income:



University students' housing during the academic year:



Their mental health over the past 12 months:



# POLICY PROPOSALS – SUMMARY

Based on the conclusions of this study, below is a summary of the policy proposals put forward at the end of each chapter. For a more detailed presentation of each policy, please consult the policy proposals section at the end of each chapter (pages 23, 33, and 41).

## Chapter 1 Policy Proposals on Addiction Issues

- 1.A. Development of an integrated national strategy to combat addictions, covering all types of addiction—from tobacco, alcohol, drugs, and gambling to screen addiction.
- 1.B. Stricter regulation of gambling advertising.
- 1.C. A shift in focus from punitive policies to public health-oriented policies.

## Chapter 2 Policy Proposals on Housing Issues

- 2.A. Creation of dedicated funding lines for universities, including through European funds or partnerships with banks, for the construction of new student dormitories to meet student housing needs.
- 2.B. Establishment of a special legal framework for student tenants, allowing student rents to be partially subsidized by the state.
- 2.C. Provision of incentives for property owners who rent to students, for example through reduced taxes on rental income or access to special

funds for renovation or upgrading rental properties.

- 2.D. Mapping by local authorities and universities of areas predominantly inhabited by student tenants, in order to optimize public transport routes.
- 2.E. Educational programs focused on teaching students how to optimize household energy expenses, delivered to students through universities and student organizations.

## Chapter 3 Policy Proposals on Mental Health Issues

- 3.A. Mental health programs—expanding the number of free counseling sessions.
- 3.B. Development of integrated support and assistance programs.



**CHAPTER 1:  
ADDICTION ISSUES**



01

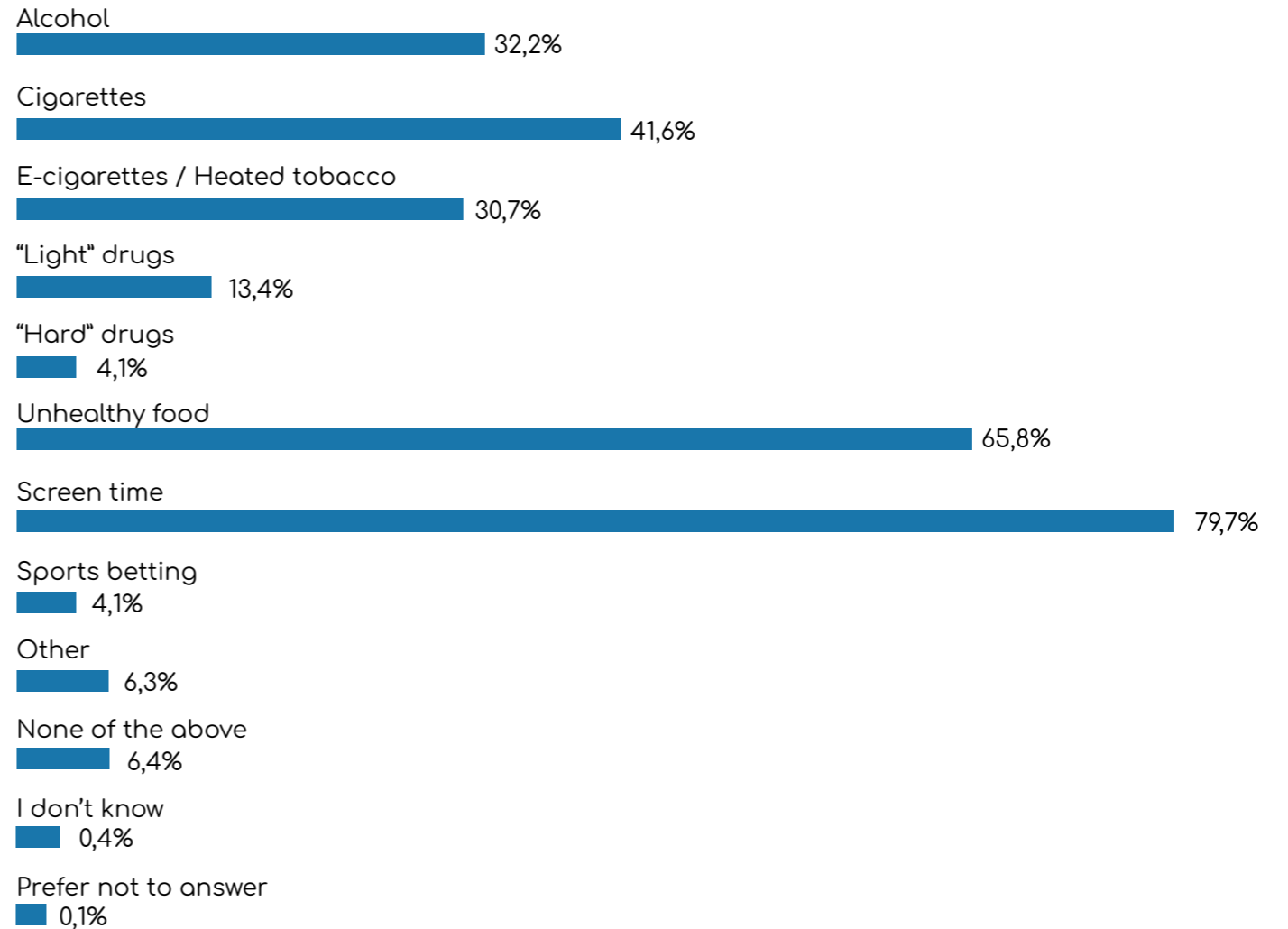
## IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS, HAVE YOU USED THESE SUBSTANCES OR ENGAGED IN THESE HABITS MORE THAN YOU SHOULD?

Screen time (79.7%) and unhealthy food consumption (65.8%) are the behaviors students report having overused the most in the past period. These are followed by cigarette smoking (41.6%) and alcohol consumption (32.2%).

1. In the past 12 months, have you used these substances or engaged in these habits more than you should?

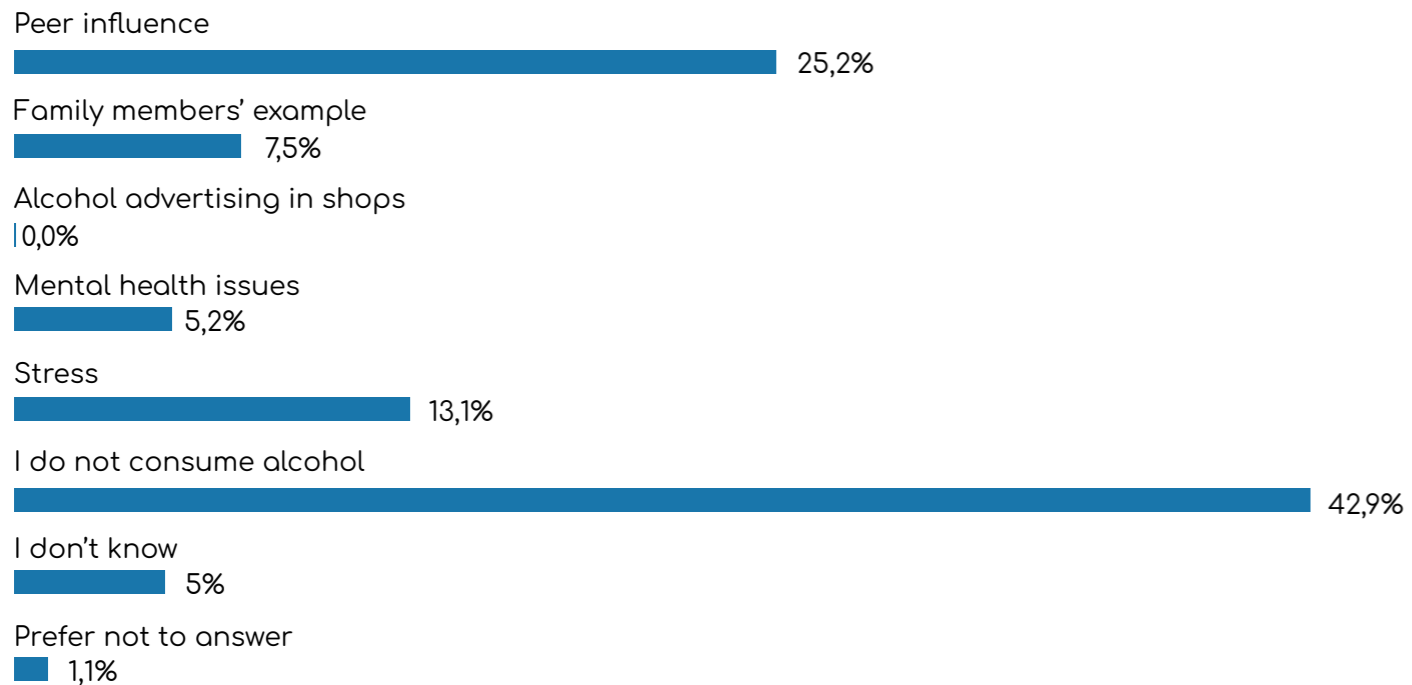
Multiple-choice question.

### 1423 respondents



1423 respondents

02



## WHAT LED YOU TO START CONSUMING ALCOHOL?

The main factor behind the initiation of alcohol consumption is peer influence (25.2% of respondents), followed by stress (13.1%), family role models (7.5%), and mental health issues (5.2%). A total of 42.9% of students report that they do not consume alcohol on a regular basis.



2. What led you to start consuming alcohol?

Single-choice question.

03

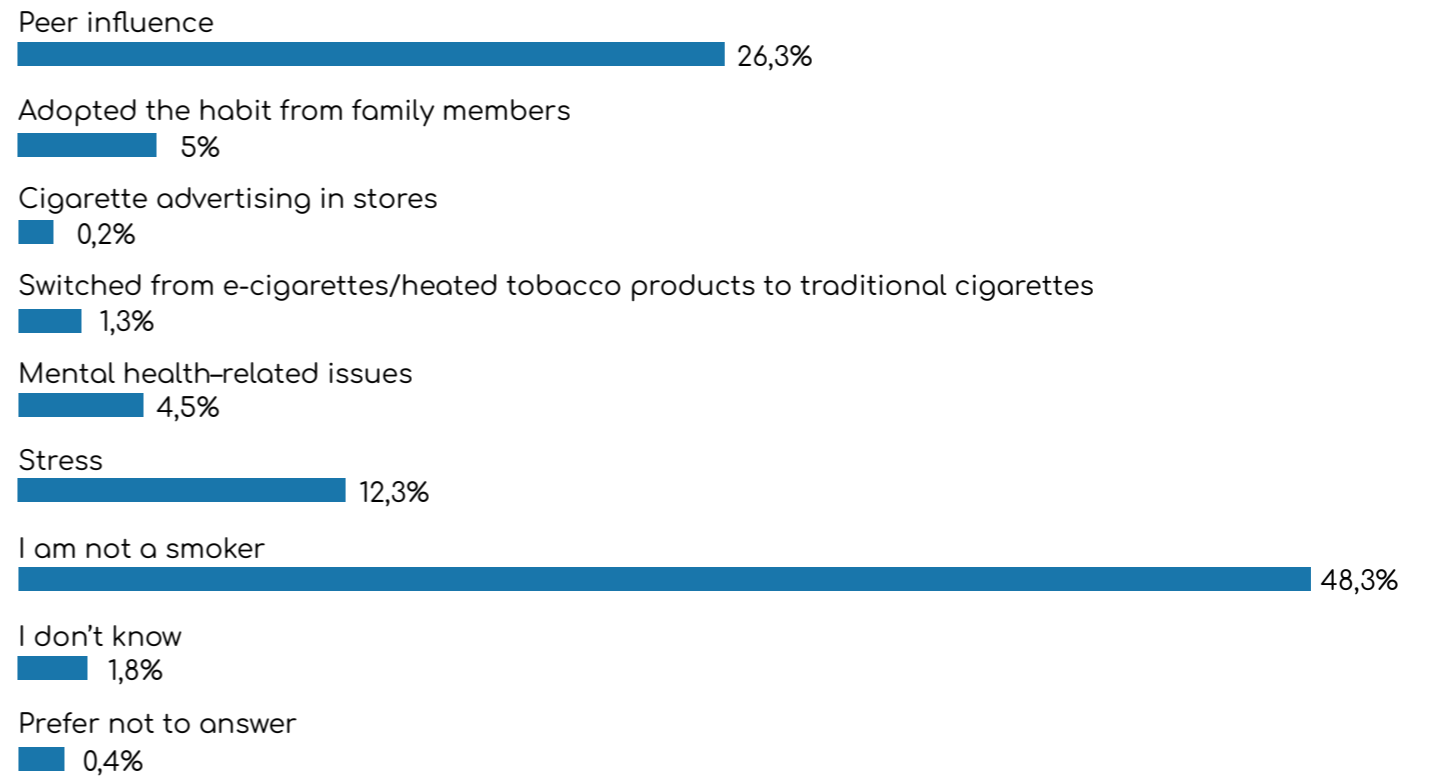
## WHAT LED YOU TO START SMOKING?

A total of 48.3% of students report that they are non-smokers. Among those who do smoke, the primary factor is peer influence (26.3%), followed—similarly to alcohol consumption—by stress (12.3%). To a lesser extent, family environment (5%) and mental health issues (4.5%) also play a role. Only 1.3% of students transitioned from e-cigarettes or heated tobacco products to traditional cigarettes.

3. What led you to start smoking?

Single-choice question

1423 respondents



## 1423 respondents



04

## WHAT LED YOU TO START USING E-CIGARETTES / HEATED TOBACCO?

Unlike alcohol and traditional cigarettes—where peer influence is by far the main determinant—here it represents the primary motivation for only 9.6% of respondents. The leading reason for using e-cigarettes or heated tobacco products is the desire to quit traditional cigarettes, reported by 16% of respondents. Stress accounts for 6.7% of initial use, while 61% of students do not use e-cigarettes or heated tobacco products on a regular basis.

4. What led you to start using e-cigarettes / heated tobacco products?

Single-choice question.



05

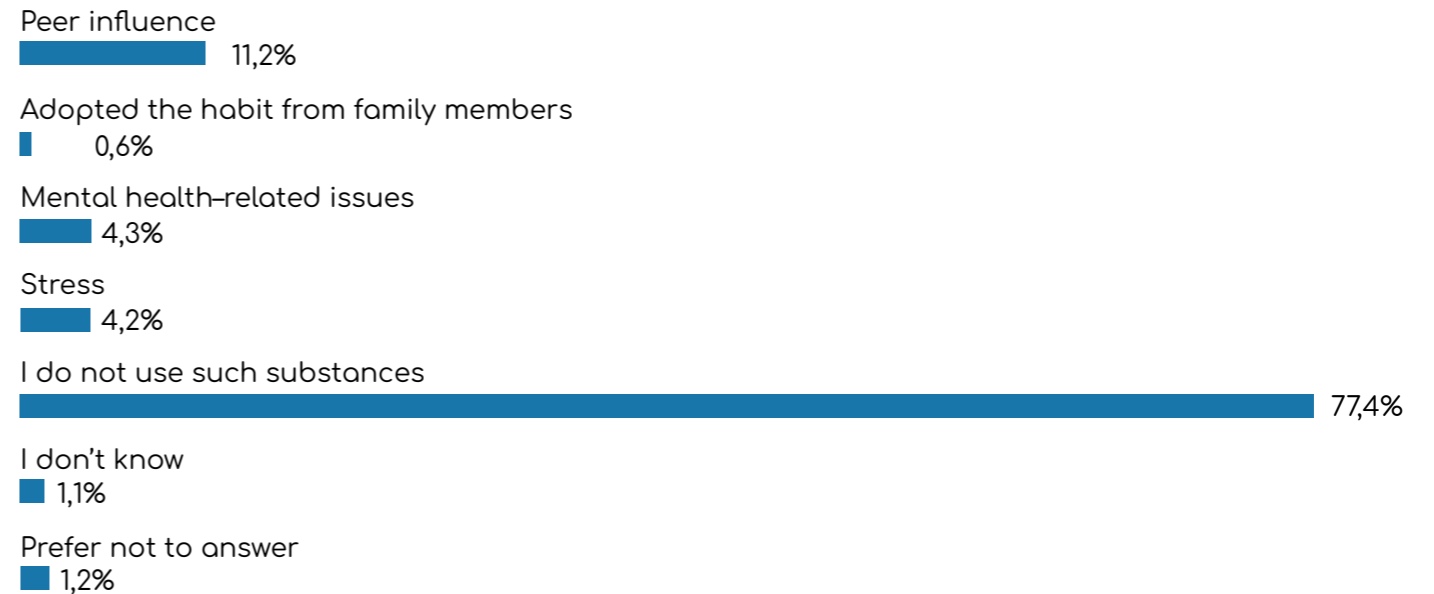
## WHAT LED YOU TO START USING SO-CALLED “LIGHT” DRUGS (CANNABIS, ETHNOBOTANICALS, ETC.)?

Here as well, the main factor is peer influence, reported by 11.2% of respondents, followed to a lesser extent by mental health issues (4.3%) and stress (4.2%). Unlike in the case of other addictive substances, family influence plays a very limited role in this case, accounting for only 0.6% of students. A total of 77.4% of respondents report that they do not use this type of drugs.

5. What led you to start using so-called 'light' drugs (cannabis, ethnobotanicals, etc.)?

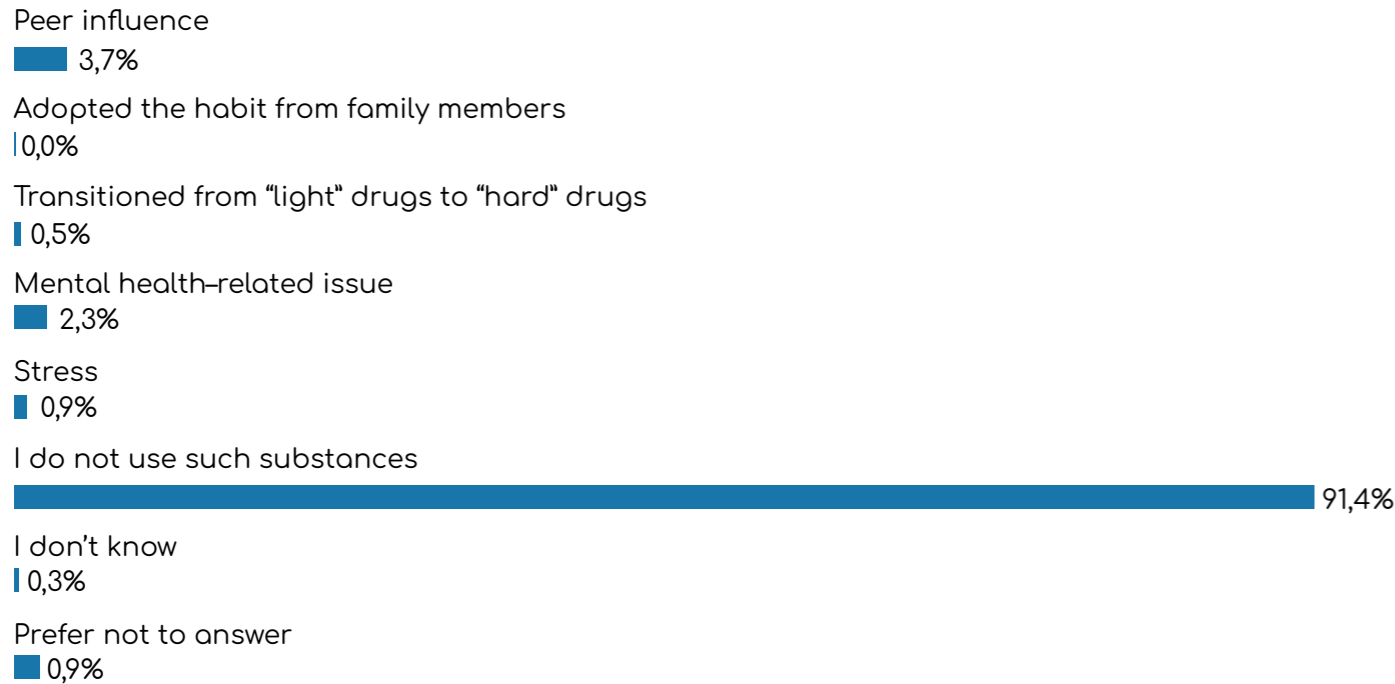
Single-choice question.

1423 respondents



**IMPORTANT:** The distinction made in this study between “light” and “hard” drugs is not universally accepted. Multiple classifications exist, and some avoid making such a distinction altogether. The definition used in this study is intended to help guide respondents toward the most relevant answer. However, differences between types of drugs are fluid and subject to ongoing change.

## 1423 respondents



06

### WHAT LED YOU TO START USING SO-CALLED "HARD" DRUGS (COCAINE, HEROIN, METHAMPHETAMINE, OPIOIDS, MUSHROOMS, ETC.)?

Although the share of respondents who do not use this type of drugs is very high (91.4%), among those who do, the primary reason for initiating use is peer influence (3.7%). Another significant factor is mental health-related issues (2.3%), followed by stress (0.9%). By comparison, the proportion of students who transitioned from so-called "light" drugs to "hard" drugs is relatively small, at just 0.5%.

6. What led you to start using so-called 'hard' drugs (cocaine, heroin, methamphetamine, opioids, mushrooms, etc.)?

Single-choice question.

07

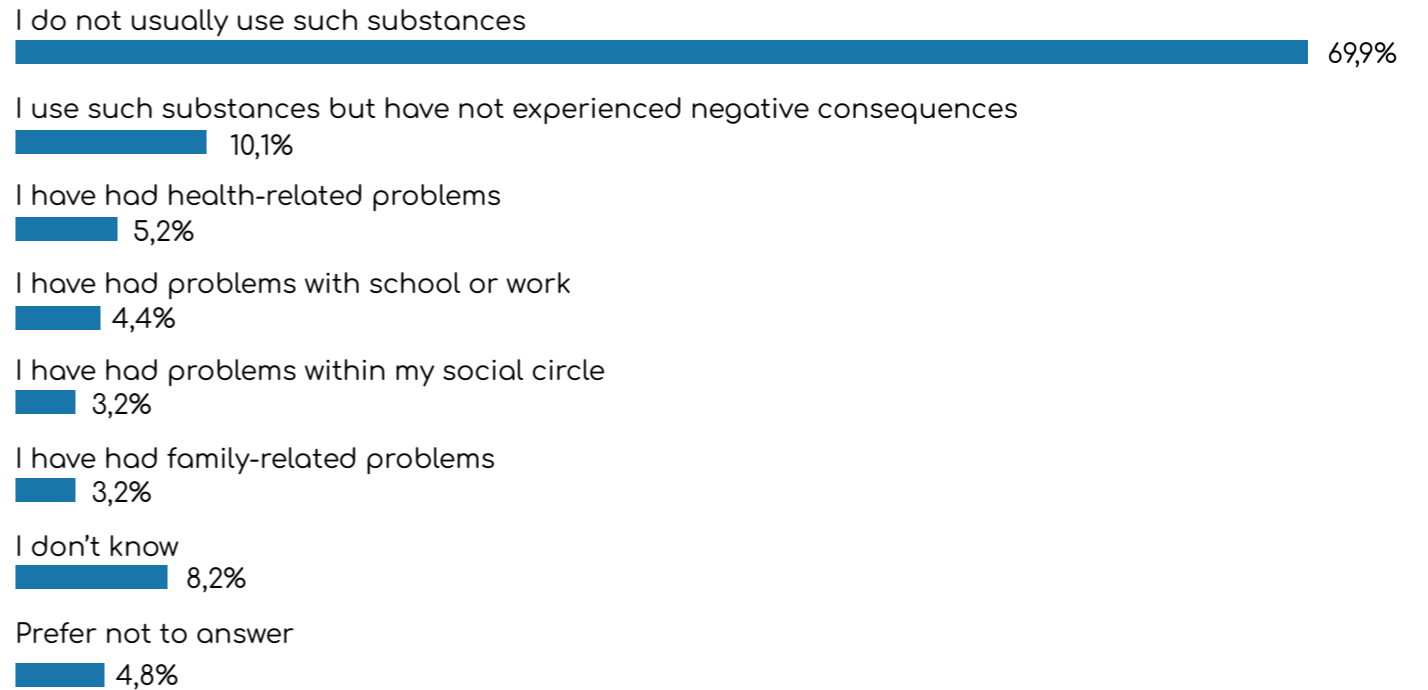
## HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES AS A RESULT OF DRUG USE?

A total of 16% of respondents report having experienced health problems, difficulties at school, or issues with their social circle or family. Meanwhile, 10.1% state that they have not experienced any problems, and 69.6% report that they do not usually use such substances. Notably, a relatively high share of respondents—4.8%—preferred not to answer.

7. Have you experienced any negative consequences of any kind as a result of drug use?

Multiple-choice question.

1423 respondents



## 1423 respondents

08



### WHAT LED YOU TO START USING SPORTS BETTING?

The main reason for initiating sports betting is peer influence, reported by 3.7% of respondents, closely followed by exposure to sports betting advertisements, at 2.7%. A total of 91% of respondents report that they do not use sports betting.

09

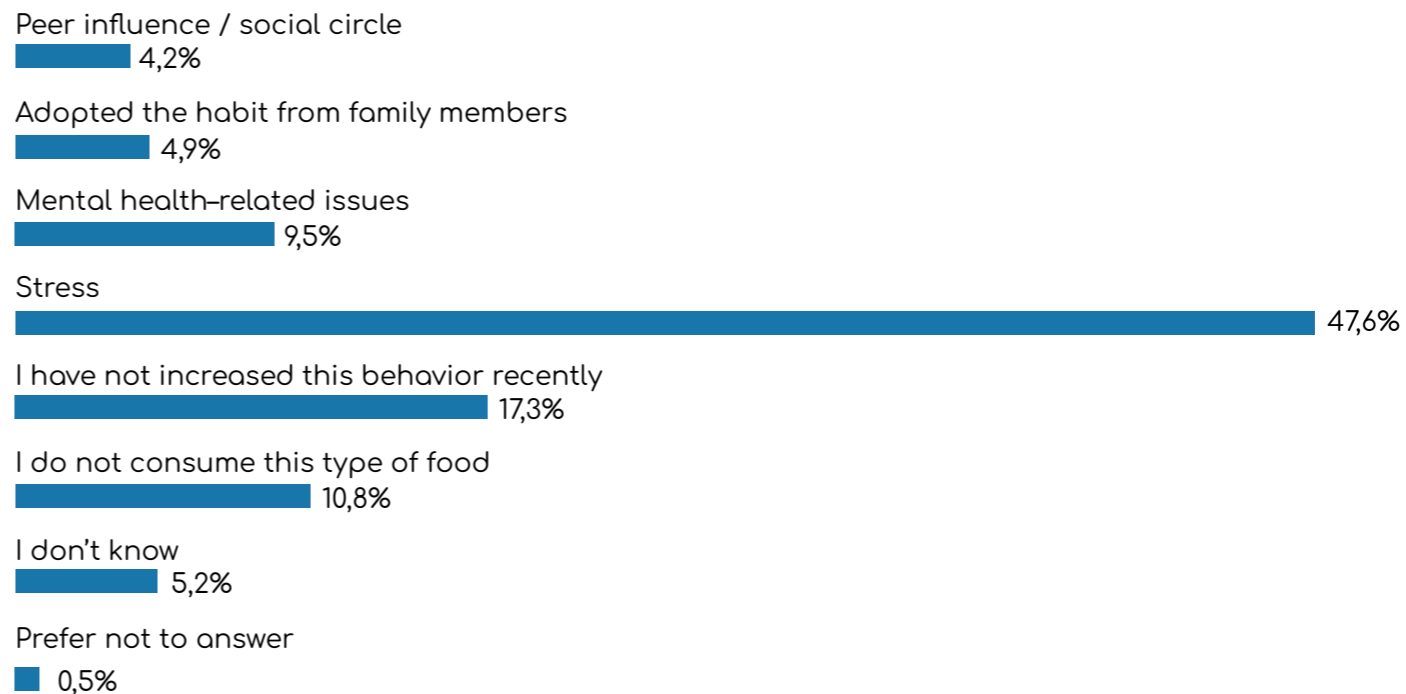
## WHAT LED YOU TO INCREASE YOUR CONSUMPTION OF UNHEALTHY FOOD?

The main reason for increased consumption of unhealthy food is stress, reported by nearly half of respondents (47.6%). For 9.5% of students, mental health-related issues are the primary factor, while 4.9% report adopting this habit from family members and 4.2% from their social circle.

9. What led you to increase your consumption of unhealthy food?

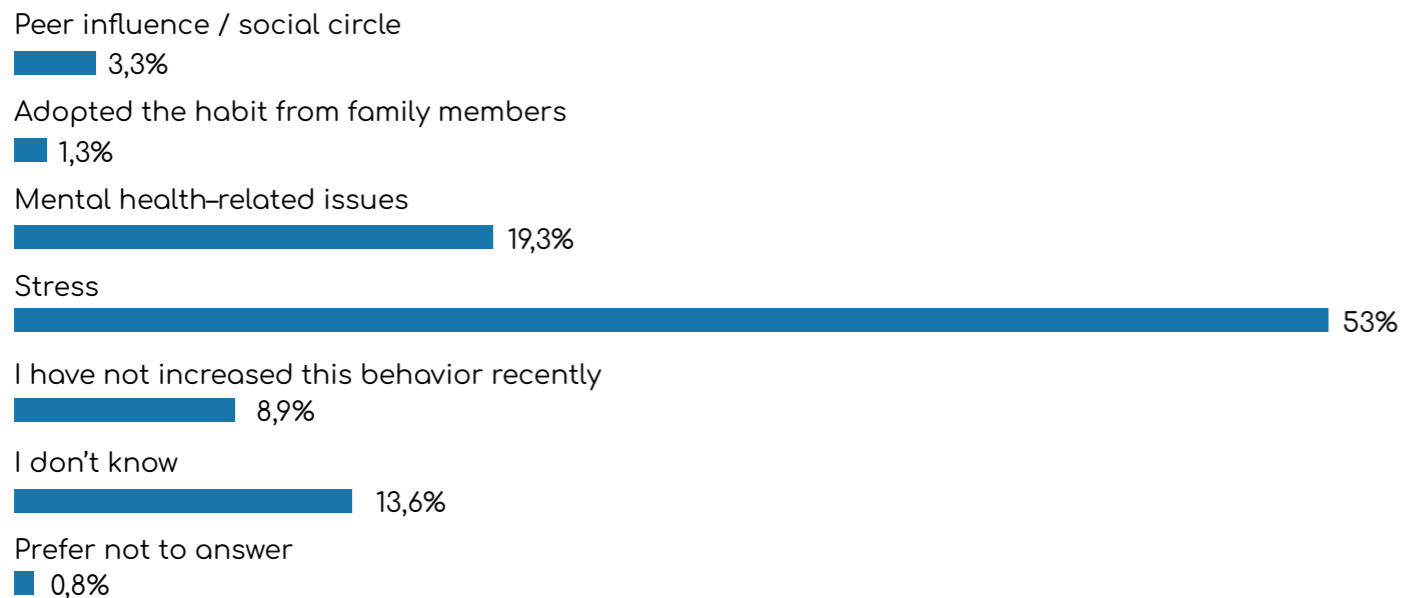
Single-choice question.

1423 respondents



1423 respondents

10



## WHAT LED YOU TO INCREASE THE TIME YOU SPEND ON SCREENS?

Once again, stress is the main reason why 53% of students report spending more time on screens than in the past, followed by mental health-related issues for 19.3% of respondents. Peer influence remains a primary factor for 3.3% of students, while only 1.3% report adopting this habit from family members.



10. What led you to increase the time you spend on screens?

Single-choice question.

11

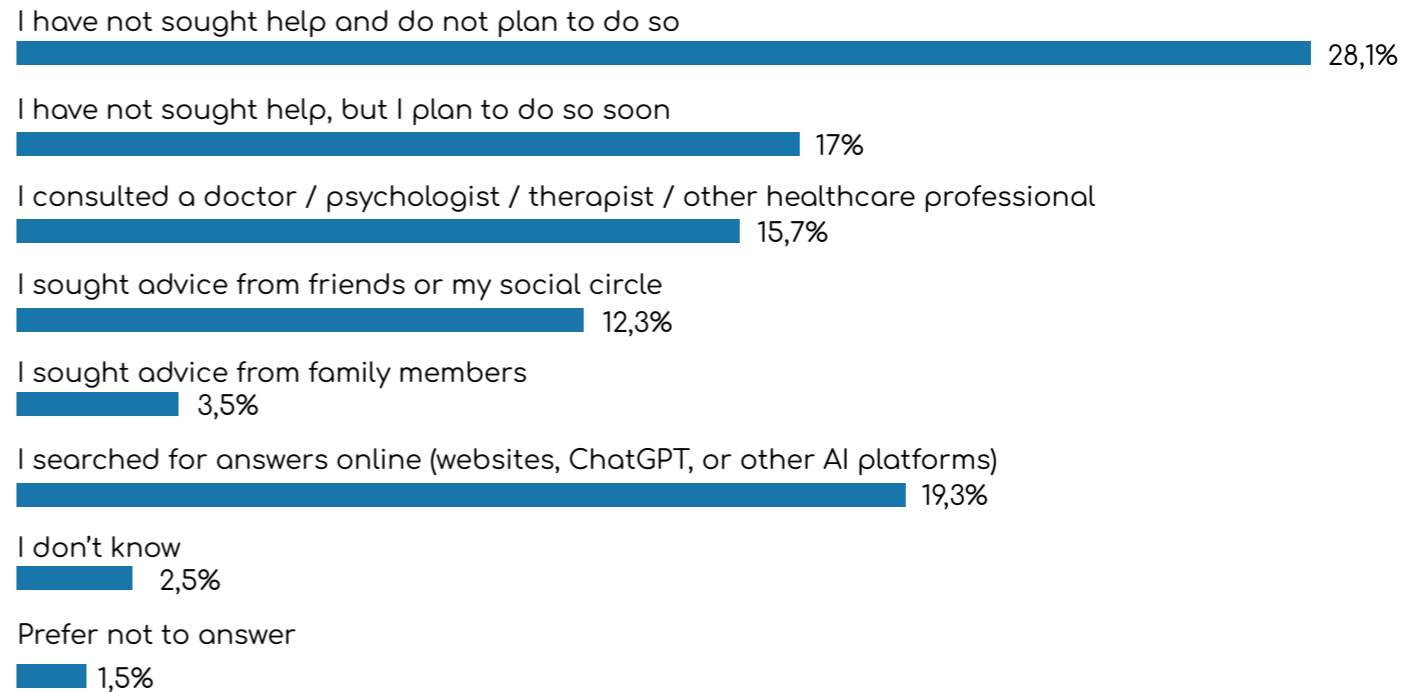
## HAVE YOU SOUGHT HELP FOR ANY OF YOUR ADDICTIVE BEHAVIORS?

While 28.1% of respondents have neither sought help nor plan to do so, it is particularly important to note the very high share—19.3%—of those who searched for answers online (on websites, ChatGPT, or other AI platforms). Additionally, 17% of respondents have not yet sought help but plan to do so. Only 15.7% consulted a doctor, psychologist, therapist, or another specialized professional, while 12.3% sought advice from friends or their social circle, and 3.5% from family members.

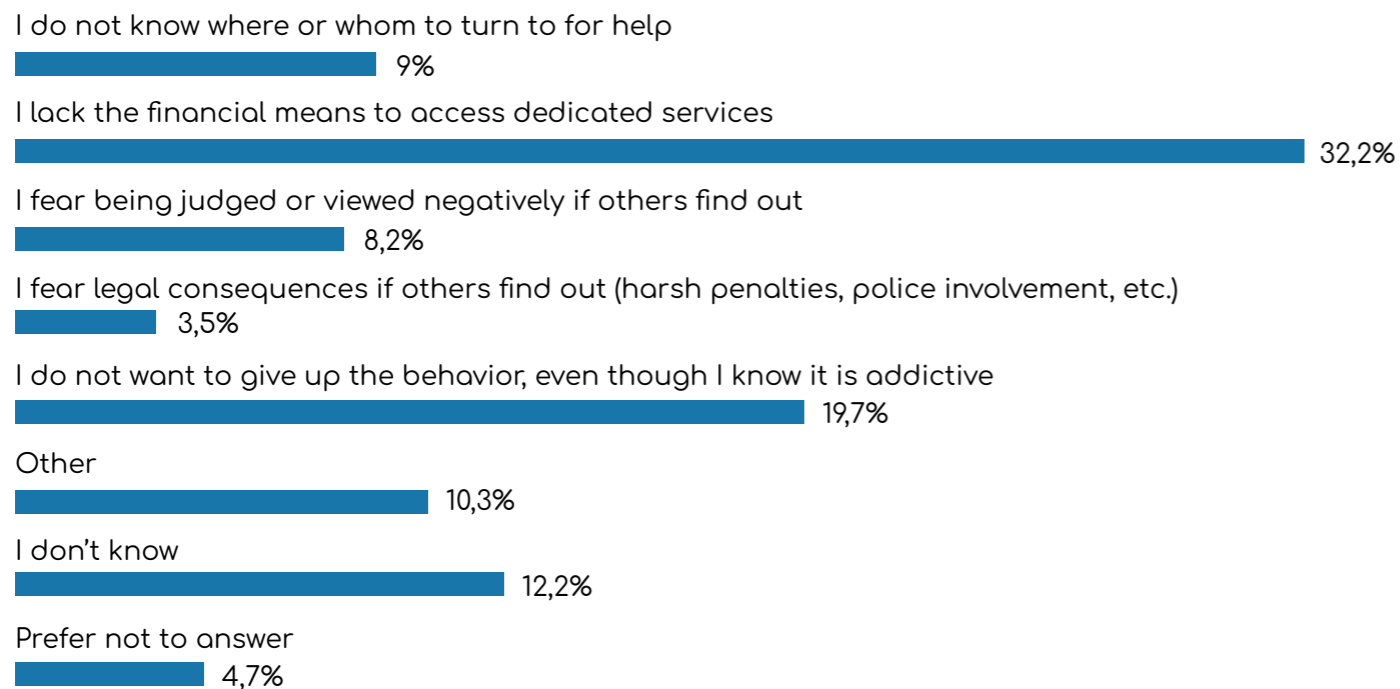
11. Have you sought help for any of your addictive behaviors?

Single-choice question.

### 1423 respondents



## 1423 respondents



12

### WHAT ARE THE MAIN OBSTACLES THAT PREVENTED YOU FROM SEEKING HELP TO OVERCOME YOUR ADDICTIVE BEHAVIOR?

A total of 32.3% of students report lacking the financial means to access dedicated services, while 9% do not know where or whom to turn to for help. Additionally, 8.2% fear being judged or viewed negatively if their addiction were to become known. Another 3.5% are concerned about potential legal consequences (police involvement, severe penalties), and 19.7% do not wish to give up their behavior, even though they recognize it as addictive.

12. What are the main obstacles that prevented you from seeking help to overcome your addictive behavior?

Single-choice question.

13

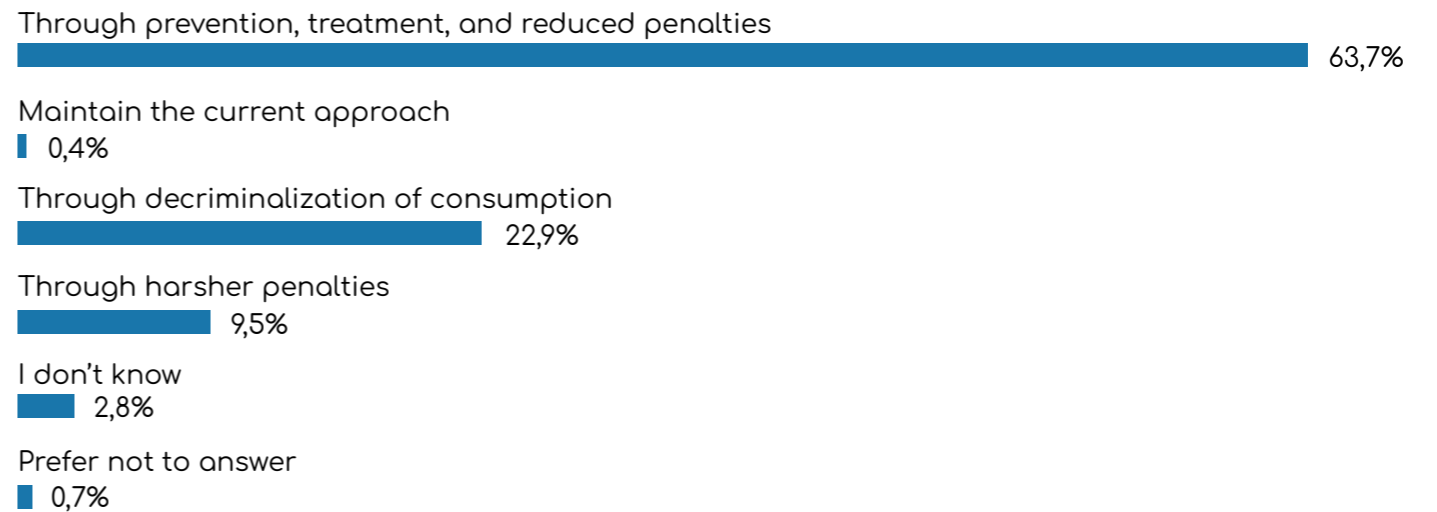
## HOW DO YOU THINK STATE AUTHORITIES SHOULD ADDRESS THE ISSUE OF DRUG USE?

A total of 63.7% of students favor an approach focused on prevention, treatment, and reduced penalties when addressing drug use. Meanwhile, 22.9% support the decriminalization of consumption. By contrast, 9.5% call for harsher penalties, while a very small proportion—just 0.4%—prefer maintaining the current approach to drug use.

13. How do you think the state should address the issue of drug use?

Single-choice question.

1423 respondents



# POLICY PROPOSALS ON ADDICTION ISSUES

In these two pages, you can find several of the study's proposals for addressing addictions. These proposals are formulated based on the conclusions of this study regarding the consumption behaviors of Romanian students. Space does not allow for an exhaustive presentation of these policies, but we are available to discuss more detailed proposals and collaborations on these topics.

## 01. Developing an integrated national strategy to combat addictions

The conclusions of this study show that, unfortunately, addictive behaviors among young people are worsening. How can we address them effectively? To achieve real results, it is essential for Romania to adopt a holistic approach to the treatment and prevention of addictions. Without a unified approach, we risk going in circles. Alcohol, tobacco, sugar, gambling, and social media all contribute—and, moreover, these addictions share common risk factors such as high accessibility and a lack of preventive education.

Romania needs an Integrated National Strategy to Combat Addictions that covers all types of addictions, from tobacco, alcohol, drugs, and gambling to screen addiction.

Principles of an integrated approach:

- Calibration according to the severity and type of addiction, with an emphasis on reducing negative effects on both individuals and society;
- A differentiated and integrated approach: specific treatments and measures for

each type of addiction, coordinated at the national level to address shared root causes;

- Genuine intersectoral collaboration: coherent involvement of all relevant institutions, as well as civil society;
- Development of prevention, education, and early intervention programs that function in a synchronized manner and address common risk factors;
- Improved access to treatment and psychological support, especially for young people and vulnerable populations;
- Progressive intervention and continuous evaluation: phased implementation with clear mechanisms for impact measurement and ongoing adjustment.

# POLICY PROPOSALS ON ADDICTION ISSUES

## 02. Stricter regulation of sports betting advertising

As highlighted by the findings of this study, factors such as peer influence and stress are, in most cases, the main drivers behind the onset or intensification of addictive behaviors. One of the few exceptions to this pattern appears in the case of sports betting, where the share of respondents who cite sports betting advertising as the main reason for engaging in this activity is very close to the share of those who cite peer influence.

This is not surprising, given that sports betting advertisements are highly visible on television, online platforms, and at sporting events, exposing young people to messages that normalize gambling. Various studies show that early exposure increases the risk of developing problematic gambling behaviors at a young age. Therefore, stricter regulation of such advertising is needed, following the example of countries such as Italy and the United Kingdom, which have introduced severe restrictions on gambling advertising (such as banning TV spots during certain time slots and limiting sponsorships).

The principles underlying such regulation should include:

- preventing addiction and related social problems;
- limiting psychological pressure and manipulative messaging;
- balancing economic freedom with the public interest;
- enhancing the credibility and integrity of sports.

## 03. Shifting the focus from punitive policies to public health-oriented policies

Relaxing criminal penalties could help reduce overcrowding in the penitentiary and judicial systems, allowing the resources saved to be redirected toward combating large-scale drug trafficking and, above all, toward developing integrated health and support services for people affected by drug use.

We therefore recommend the development of a comprehensive health and integrated support infrastructure, ranging from treatment centers to post-treatment rehabilitation facilities for people who use drugs, with a strong emphasis on recovery and social reintegration, including medical and psychological rehabilitation.

At the same time, it is necessary to expand and strengthen harm reduction services related to substance use. This could include counseling programs, rapid testing, needle exchange initiatives, and community-based interventions. Such an approach would help reduce the medical and social consequences of drug use while increasing the capacity of the public system to respond to addiction in an integrated and effective manner.



THE LIVES OF  
HIGHER ED  
STUDENTS

THE STATE  
OF UNIVERSITY  
STUDENTS

## CHAPTER 2: QUALITY AND COST OF LIVING

14

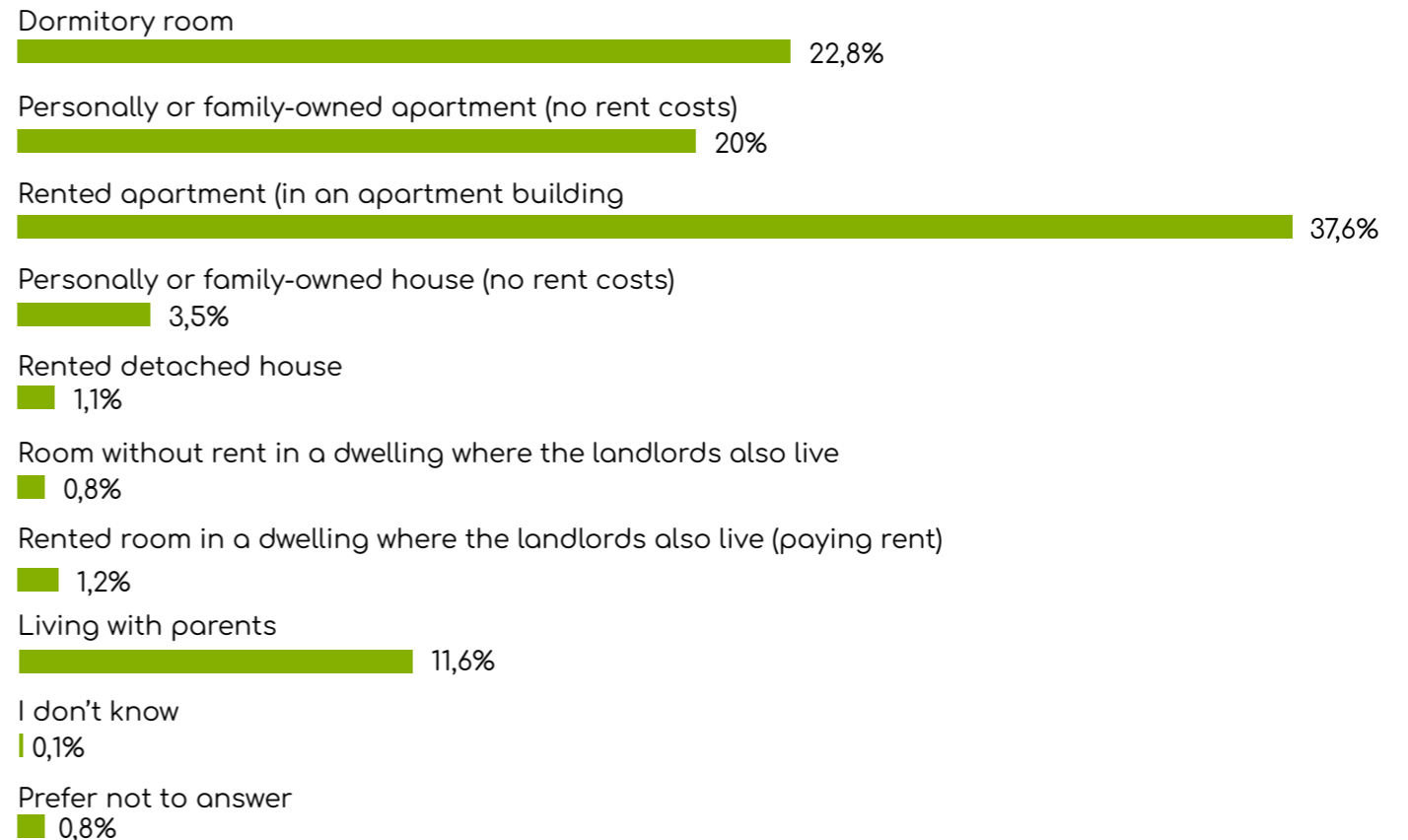
## WHERE DO YOU LIVE MOST OF THE TIME SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE CURRENT ACADEMIC YEAR?

The majority of students (37.6%) live in a rented apartment (in an apartment building), a significantly higher proportion than the 22.8% who live in a dormitory room. Meanwhile, 20% live in an apartment owned by themselves or their family, and 11.6% live with their parents.

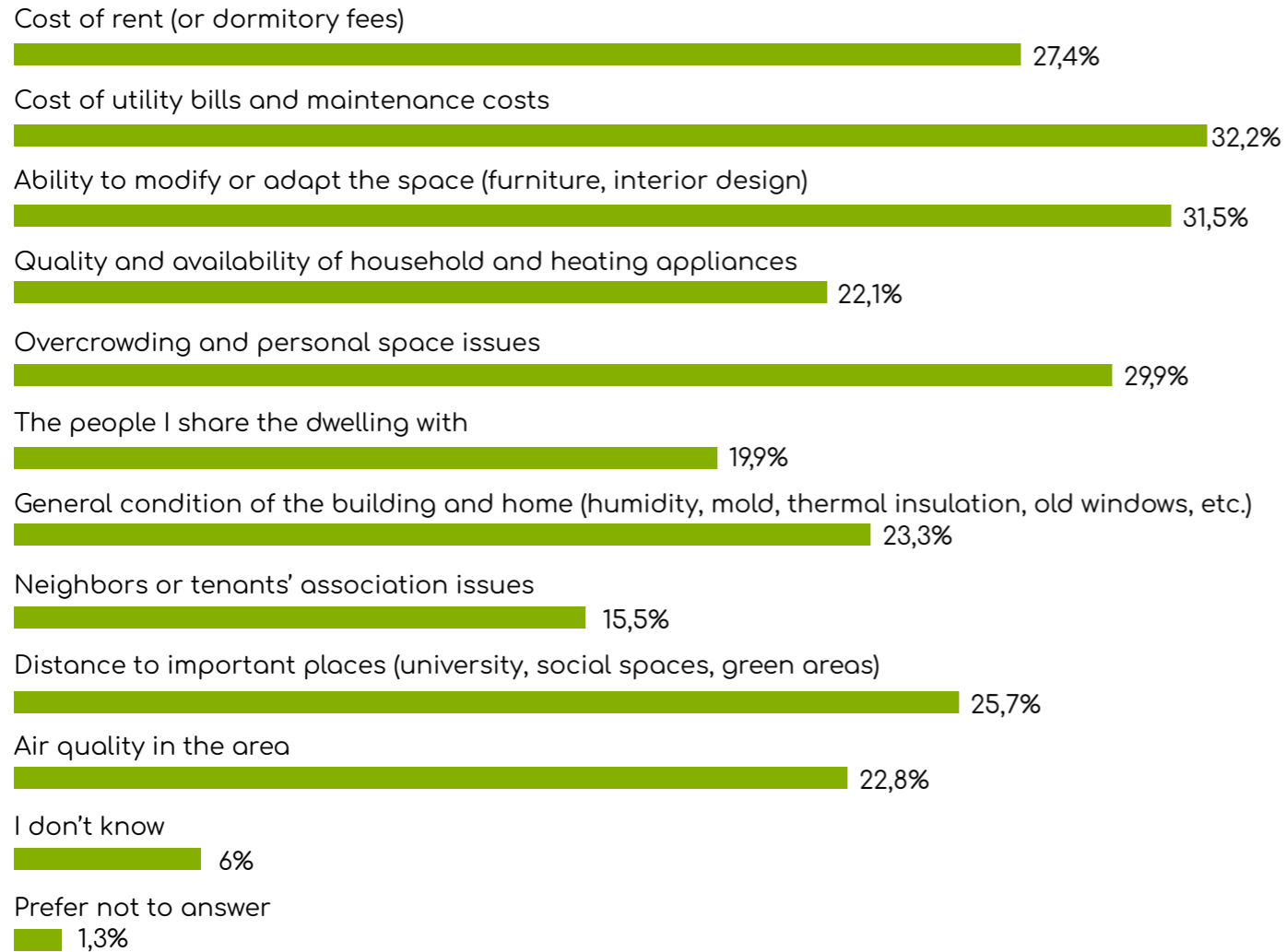
14. Where do you live most of the time since the beginning of the current academic year?

Single-choice question.

1423 respondents



## 1423 respondents



## WHEN THINKING ABOUT YOUR HOME, WHICH ASPECTS ARE YOU DISSATISFIED WITH?

The cost of utility bills and maintenance expenses is the main concern for 32.5% of students. Additionally, 31.5% are dissatisfied with the lack of flexibility to adapt or modify their living space as they would like, while 29.9% point to overcrowding and lack of personal space. For 27.4%, the biggest issue is the cost of rent (or dormitory fees), and for 25.7%, it is the distance from important places (university, social spaces, green areas, friends).

15. When thinking about your home, which aspects are you dissatisfied with?

Multiple-choice question.

16

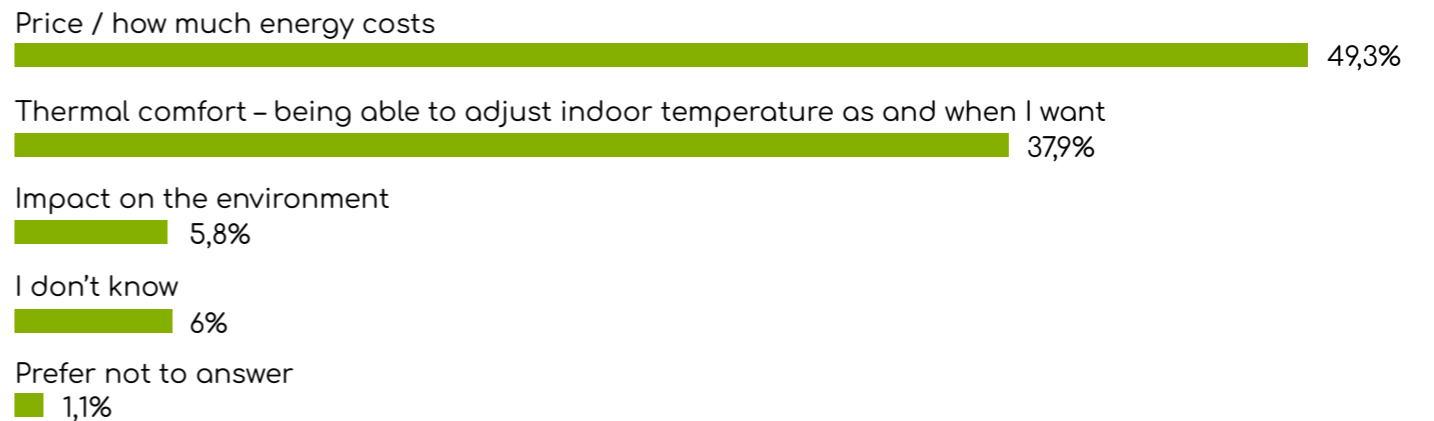
## WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING ASPECTS RELATED TO HOUSEHOLD ENERGY USE IS MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU?

Nearly half of respondents (49.3%) prioritize price and the overall cost of energy bills, while 37.9% consider thermal comfort—the ability to regulate the temperature as they wish—to be the most important factor. Only 5.8% state that environmental impact is their main concern regarding home heating.

16. Which of the following aspects related to household energy use is most important to you?

Single-choice question.

1423 respondents



## 1423 respondents



## HAVE YOU HAD OVERDUE UTILITY BILLS IN THE PAST YEAR?

A classic indicator of energy poverty is the presence of unpaid utility bills. A total of 14.9% of respondents state that they have had overdue bills, a situation that may lead to cutbacks in other areas related to quality of life, such as clothing, access to technology, social activities, and healthcare services.

17. Have you had overdue utility bills in the past year?

Single-choice question.

18

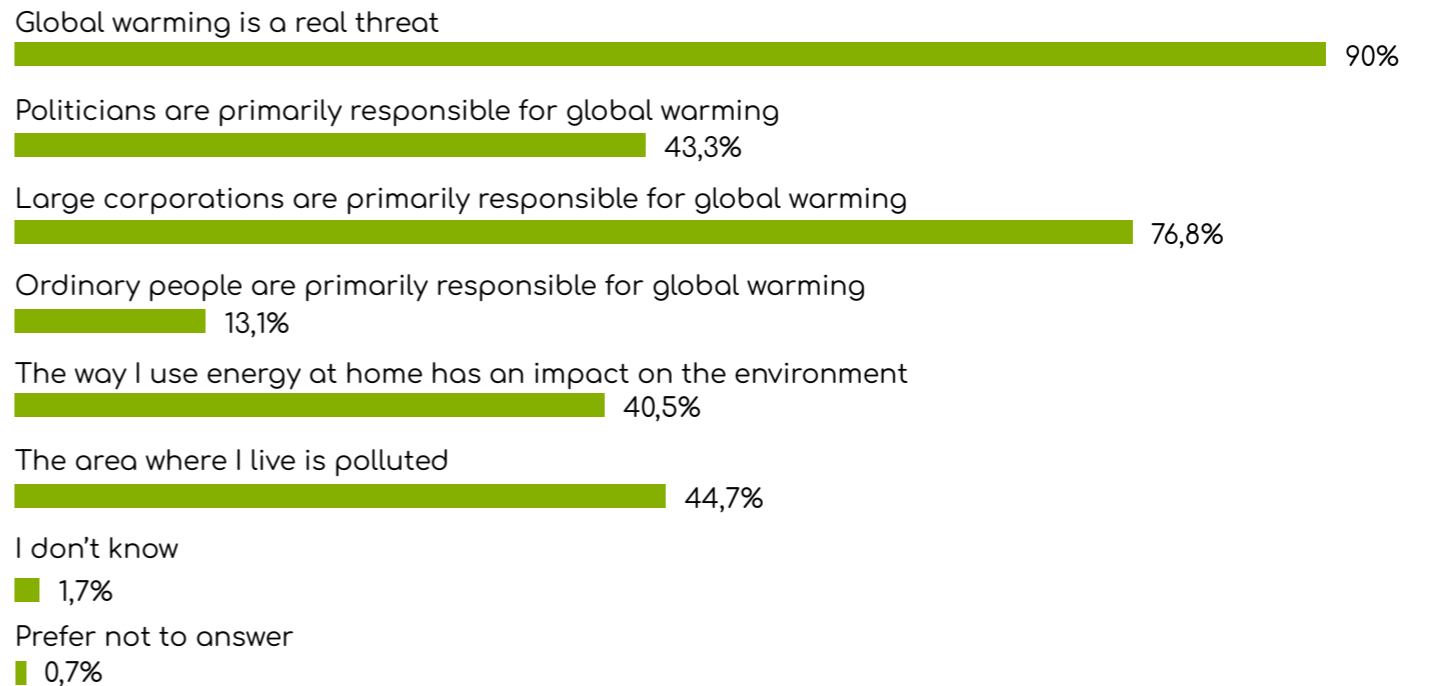
## WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS DO YOU AGREE WITH?

A total of 90% of students consider global warming to be a real threat. However, only 13.1% acknowledge that ordinary people are mainly to blame, while 76.8% believe that large companies bear the greatest responsibility. Additionally, 43.3% point to politicians as primarily responsible. Although 40.5% recognize that the way they use energy at home has an environmental impact, only 13.1% attribute global warming mainly to ordinary people. Meanwhile, 44.7% state that the area in which they live is polluted.

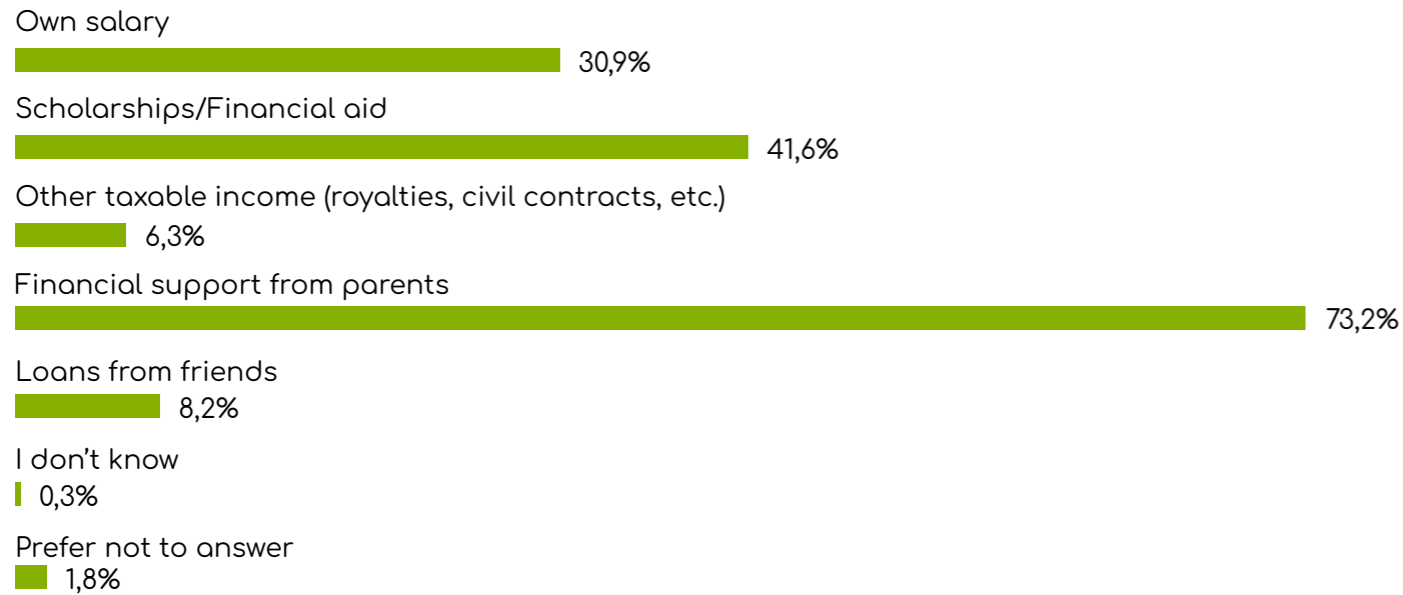
18. Which of the following statements do you agree with?

Multiple-choice question.

1423 respondents



## 1423 respondents



## WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING SOURCES OF INCOME DO YOU HAVE ACCESS TO?

Money received from parents represents the main source of financial support for students, with 73.2% reporting that they receive financial assistance from their parents. Meanwhile, 30.9% earn their own salary. Scholarships are a source of income for 41.6% of respondents. Additionally, 8.2% rely on loans from friends, and 6.3% report having other taxable sources of income.

19. Which of the following sources of income do you have access to?

Multiple-choice question.

20

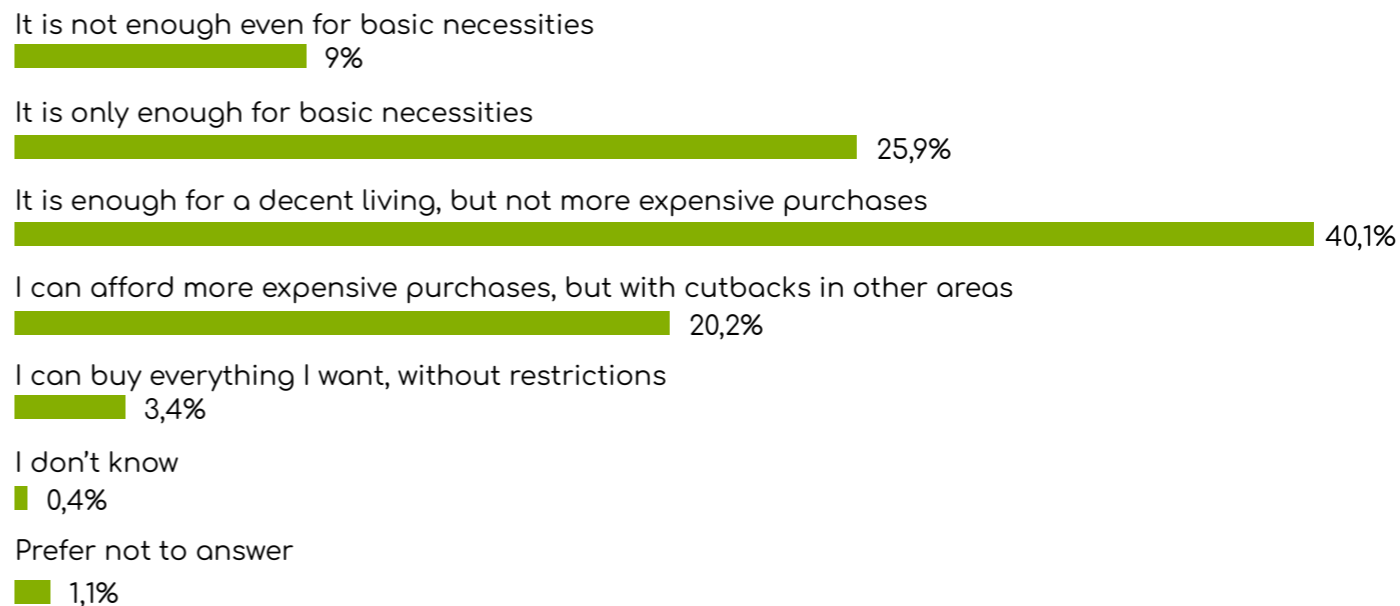
## HOW DO YOU EVALUATE YOUR INCOME?

A total of 9% of respondents state that their income is not sufficient even for basic necessities, while 25.9% say it only covers essential needs. Meanwhile, 40.1% report that they can afford a decent standard of living, but not more expensive purchases. Another 20.2% can afford more expensive items, though with cutbacks in other areas, and only 3.4% say they can buy everything they want without restrictions.

20. How do you evaluate your income?

Single-choice question.

1423 respondents



# POLICY PROPOSALS ON HOUSING ISSUES

In these two pages, you can find several of the study's proposals for improving the quality and affordability of student housing. These proposals are based on the conclusions of this study regarding the living conditions of Romanian students. Space does not allow for an exhaustive presentation of these policies, but we remain available for more detailed proposals and collaboration on these topics.

**01.** Creating dedicated funding lines for universities—including through European funds or partnerships with banks—to support the construction of new student dormitories aimed at addressing the shortage of student housing.

The fact that only 22.8% of respondents in this study live in dormitories indicates that we are facing a student housing crisis. Financing the construction of new dormitories would help:

- reduce pressure on the housing market – students who cannot find places in dormitories turn to the rental market, where high demand drives up prices; new dormitories would help mitigate this trend;
- increase the attractiveness of Romanian universities – modern and accessible housing infrastructure is an important factor for international students and can help reduce academic migration;
- improve students' quality of life – affordable and adequate housing reduces financial stress and allows students to focus more on their studies;
- promote urban and regional development – new dormitories can be integrated into

urban regeneration plans, creating university hubs that stimulate the local economy (cafés, services, transport);

- enhance financial flexibility for universities – access to credit lines or dedicated European funds would allow institutions to invest without relying exclusively on the state budget.

**02.** Creating a special legal framework for student tenants, allowing student rents to be partially subsidized by the state.

This measure would complement existing policies and could also serve as an incentive to reduce student dropout rates, as such support could be granted only if the student provides proof of their student status each year.

## POLICY PROPOSALS ON HOUSING ISSUES

- 03.** Providing incentives for property owners who rent housing to students, through measures such as reducing taxes on rental income or offering access to special funds for renovating or upgrading facilities in properties rented to students.

Again a complementary measure, it could also help reduce the grey economy in the rental sector, since rental contracts would need to be officially declared in order for property owners to access these incentives.

- 04.** Mapping by local authorities and universities of areas with high concentrations of student tenants to optimize public transport routes

Since access to important destinations for students is also highlighted as a challenge in this study, optimizing public transport routes would contribute significantly to:

- reducing commuting time – adapting routes to areas with a high density of students would shorten daily travel times and increase the efficiency of public transport;
- increasing the attractiveness of public transport – if routes better match students' needs, more students may choose public transport instead of cars or ride-sharing services, reducing traffic and pollution;
- improving access to education – faster and more direct transportation increases the likelihood of regular attendance at classes and university activities;

- strengthening partnerships between local authorities and universities – joint involvement in such projects fosters cooperation between public institutions and the academic community in local development.

- 05.** Educational programs on optimizing household energy costs, delivered through universities and student organizations.

Utility bills and maintenance costs are the most frequently cited concerns when respondents are asked about their housing conditions. Implementing educational programs for students on how to optimize household energy consumption would help to:

- reduce costs for students – through education on efficient energy use (responsible use of appliances, simple thermal insulation measures, and responsible consumption habits), students can lower their monthly bills;
- develop long-term habits – behaviors learned during student years often carry into adulthood, influencing long-term personal and household sustainability;
- generate a positive environmental impact – reduced energy consumption lowers the carbon footprint and supports national and European green transition objectives.



**CHAPTER 3:  
MENTAL HEALTH AND  
FUTURE OUTLOOK**

21

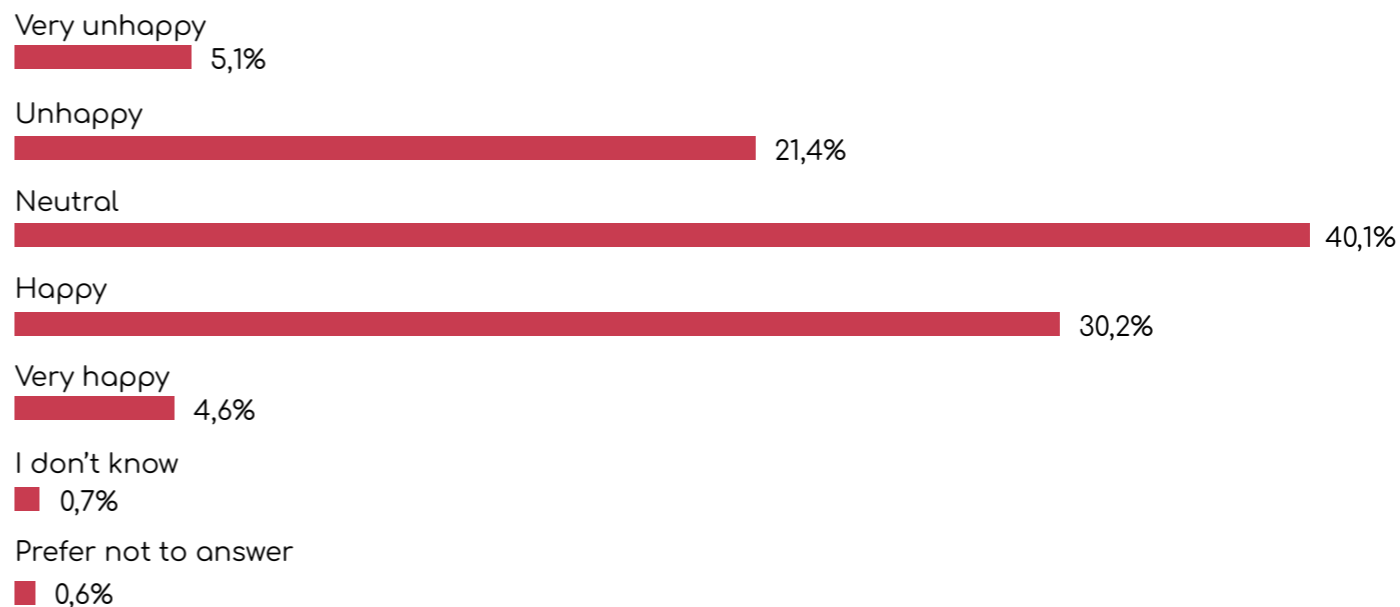
## OVERALL, ALL THINGS AND EVENTS CONSIDERED, HOW HAPPY DO YOU FEEL?

Compared to the [2023](#) study, the number of respondents who consider themselves unhappy has increased from 14.2% to 21.4%. At the same time, the share of those reporting a neutral level of happiness has decreased from 41.6% to 37.4%. The proportion of respondents who consider themselves happy has also declined, from 34.8% to 30.2%.

21. Overall, considering all recent things and events, how happy do you feel?

Single-choice question.

1423 respondents



## 1423 respondents

22



## HOW HAS YOUR MENTAL HEALTH SUFFERED IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS?

Compared to the 2023 study, the figures show a negative trend. Stress and anxiety have increased for 83.3% of respondents, compared to 78.4% in 2023. Meanwhile, 10.7% report having engaged in self-harm, compared to 4.3% in 2023, and 21.1% report having had suicidal thoughts—a major increase from the already high 9.8% reported in the 2023 study.



22. How has your mental health suffered in the past 12 months?

Multiple-choice question.

23

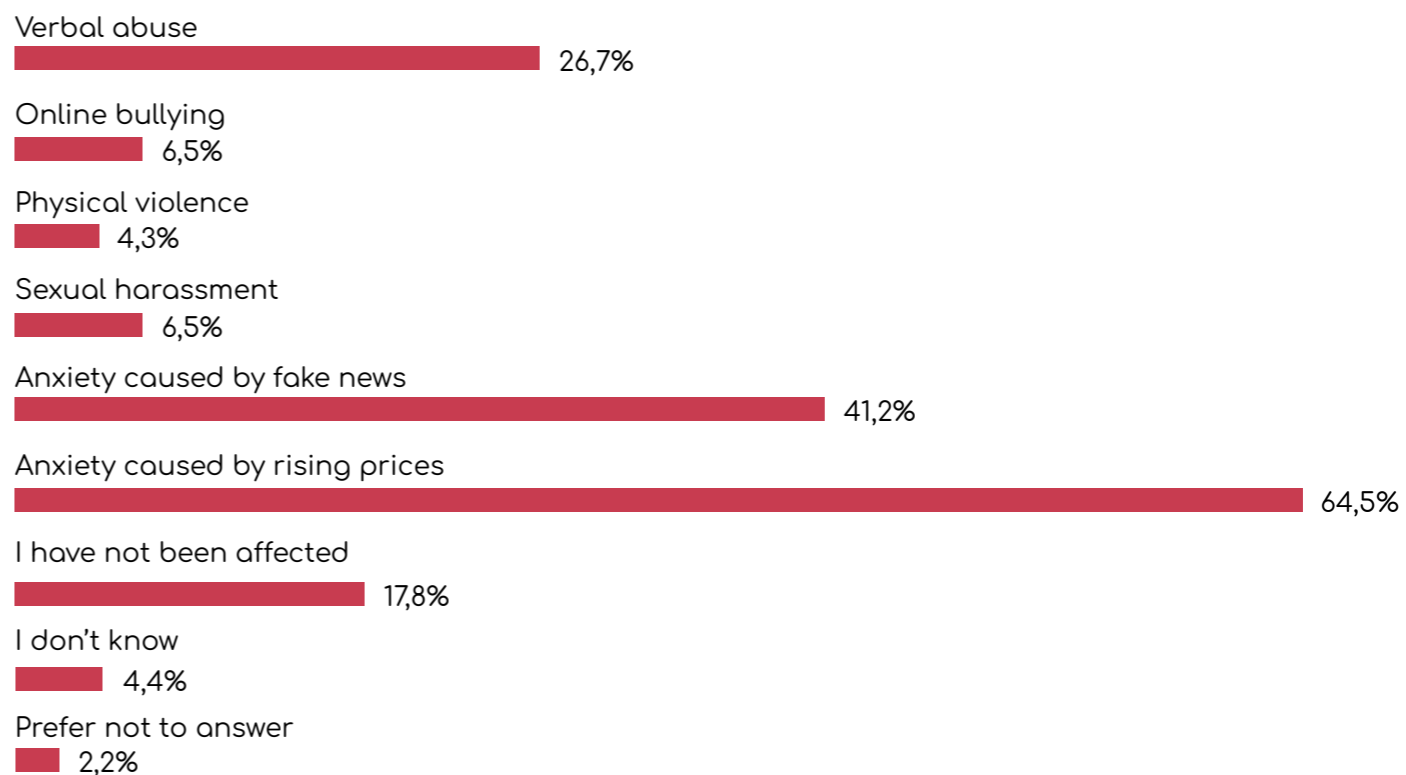
## HAVE YOU SUFFERED FROM ANY OF THE FOLLOWING IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS?

Anxiety caused by rising prices is by far the most frequently reported issue, cited by 64.5% of respondents, followed by anxiety related to fake news, at 41.2%. Verbal abuse was reported as a source of distress by 26.7% of students, followed by online bullying and sexual harassment, both at 6.5%, and physical violence, at 4.3%.

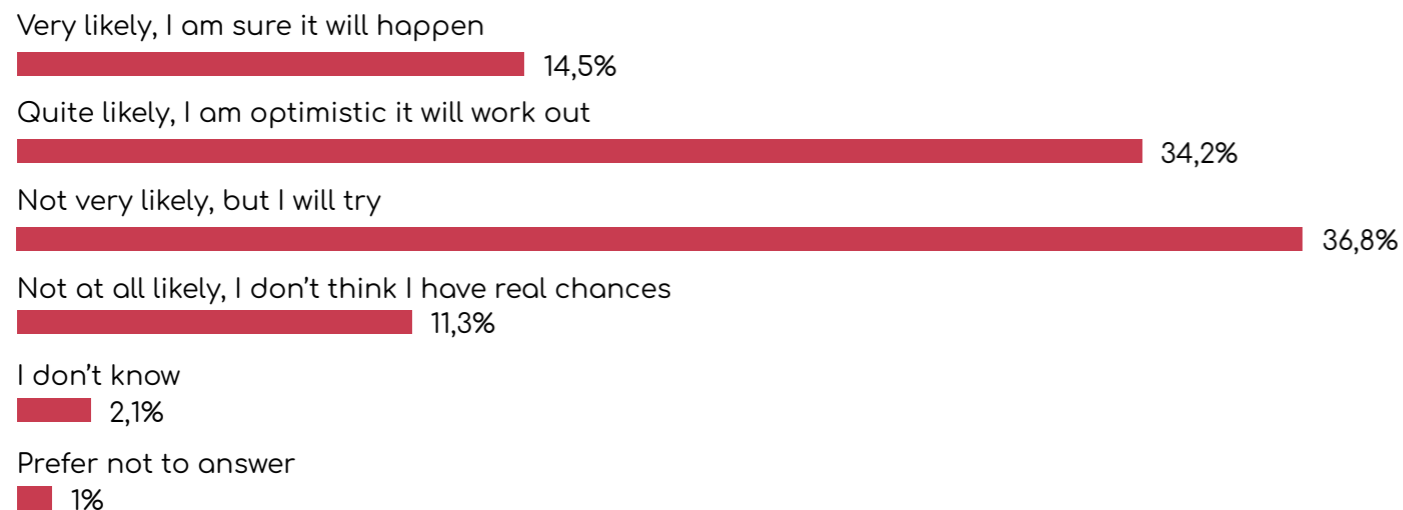
23. Have you been affected by any of the following in the past 12 months?

Multiple-choice question.

1423 respondents



1423 respondents



24

## AT THE END OF YOUR STUDIES, HOW LIKELY DO YOU THINK IT IS THAT YOU WILL FIND A JOB IN YOUR FIELD IN THIS COUNTRY (ROMANIA)?

Most students (36.8%) believe it is not very likely that they will find a job in their field in the country, although they say they will still try, while 11.3% do not believe they have any real chances of finding such a job. On the other hand, 34.2% are fairly optimistic about this prospect, and 14.5% are very optimistic.

24. At the end of your studies, how likely do you think it is that you will find a job in your field in this country?

Single-choice question.

25

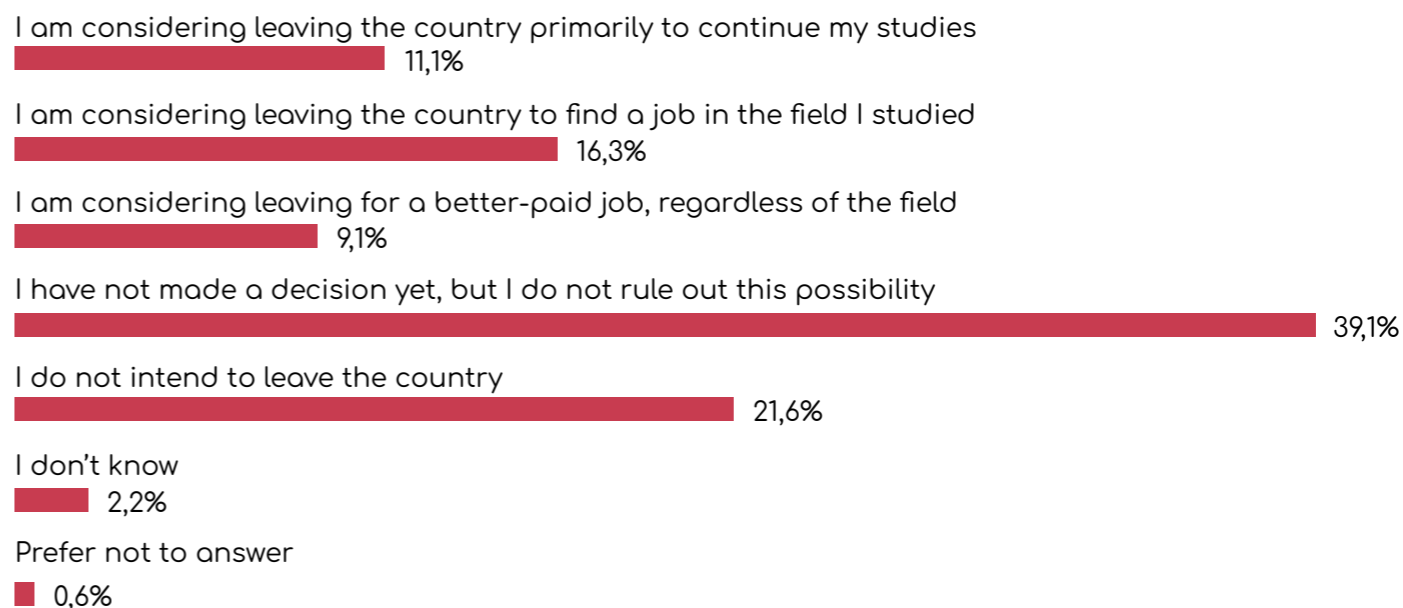
## ARE YOU CONSIDERING LEAVING THE COUNTRY (ROMANIA) AFTER COMPLETING YOUR STUDIES?

A total of 39.1% of students do not rule out the possibility of leaving the country, although they have not yet made a decision. Meanwhile, 16.3% say they would leave for a job in their field, 11.1% to continue their studies, and 9.1% in search of a better-paid job. At the same time, 21.6% of students say they do not intend to leave the country under any circumstances.

25. Are you considering leaving the country after completing your studies?

Multiple-choice question.

1423 respondents



# POLICY PROPOSALS ON MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

In these two pages you can find several of the study's proposals for improving mental health policies. These proposals are based on the conclusions of this study regarding the mental health challenges faced by Romanian students. Space does not allow for an exhaustive presentation of these policies, but we remain available for more detailed proposals and collaboration on these topics.

## 01. Mental health programs – increasing the number of free counseling and therapy sessions

The conclusions of this study show that Romania is facing a mental health crisis, with the situation having worsened significantly compared to 2023. A major effort is needed to improve access to psychotherapy services, especially given that the same study shows that many respondents lack the financial means to access them.

It is clear that the current number of free counseling and psychotherapy sessions is insufficient and needs to be increased. Expanding psychotherapy programs would help to:

- improve and reduce mental health problems – access to psychotherapy can prevent the development of severe mental health conditions and reduce long-term costs associated with more complex treatments;

- reduce the stigma surrounding mental health – providing free services helps normalize access to psychotherapy and reduces stigma toward those seeking help;
- increase equity in access to mental health services – expanding free psychotherapy programs ensures that people from disadvantaged backgrounds have the same opportunity to receive treatment as those in more privileged environments;
- integrate mental health services into communities – developing mobile clinics and online platforms can facilitate access to psychotherapy services in rural or isolated areas.

# POLICY PROPOSALS ON MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

## 02. Development of integrated mental health support programs

A complementary measure to increasing the number of free psychotherapy sessions is the development of integrated mental health support programs. Such programs could generate several positive effects:

- greater coherence between services – integrating psychotherapy, psychological counseling, social support, and medical treatment ensures continuity of care and avoids fragmentation of services;
- faster access to interventions – integrated programs allow rapid referrals between specialists (psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers), reducing delays in diagnosis and treatment;
- prevention and early intervention – an integrated approach allows early identification of mental health disorders and preventive interventions before problems worsen;
- reduction of stigma – offering services within a unified, multidisciplinary framework normalizes access to support and reduces the perception of marginalization among people experiencing mental health conditions;
- economic and social efficiency – coordinated services reduce healthcare system costs by avoiding duplication of interventions and unnecessary hospitalizations.

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