

PALACKÝ UNIVERSITY OLMOUC

Faculty of Science

Department of Development and Environmental Studies



**The Impact of Socio-Cultural Adaptation  
on the Mental Health of International Students**

Master's Thesis

Bc. Aneta ŠILDOVÁ

Supervisor: Mgr. Tina POURPAKDELFEKR

Olomouc 2025

## **Bibliographic identification data**

**Author (personal number):** Bc. Aneta Šildová (R230710)

**Study field:** International Development and Environmental Studies

**Title of thesis:** The Impact of Socio-Cultural Adaptation on the Mental Health of International Students

**Supervisor:** Mgr. Tina Pourpakhdelvekr

**Abstract:** The master's thesis focuses on the relationship between socio-cultural adaptation and the mental health issues faced by international GLODEP students at Palacký University Olomouc. The research delves into the psychological effects of adapting to a new cultural environment and society, focusing on common issues such as stress, depression and anxiety that international students may experience as they navigate academic, social, and cultural experiences in a foreign country.

The thesis begins with a literature review, where general information on international students is introduced, including Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters programs and the Global Development Policy program. Then, it reviews key concepts of socio-cultural adaptation, including the Socio-Cultural Adaptation Scale, U-curve and W-curve adaptation models, acculturation strategies and cross-cultural adaptation. It examines the common mental health challenges that international students face, specifically stress, depression and anxiety. Academic expectations, social isolation, internal factors and homesickness are presented as factors influencing the mental health of international students. Finally, coping mechanisms and the importance of external support are highlighted, along with psychological support provided at Palacký University.

The research methodology employed an inductive approach to generate new insights using qualitative data from an online questionnaire. Socio-cultural adaptation was found not to be the only aspect influencing GLODEP students' mental health, as academic expectations also played a significant role. Personality traits and cultural backgrounds determined how challenging the process of adapting to a foreign environment is for international students. Most GLODEP students utilised social coping mechanisms to deal with stress.

**Keywords:** socio-cultural adaptation, international students, Global Development Policy program, mental health, student well-being, U-curve model, W-curve model, acculturation, cross-cultural adaptation, stress, depression, anxiety, academic expectations, social isolation, homesickness, coping mechanisms, peer support, institutional support, psychological support

## **Bibliografické identifikační údaje**

**Autor (osobní číslo):** Bc. Aneta Šildová (R230710)

**Studijní obor:** Mezinárodní rozvojová a environmentální studia

**Název práce:** Vliv sociokulturní adaptace na duševní zdraví zahraničních studentů

**Vedoucí práce:** Mgr. Tina Pourpakhdelvekr

**Abstrakt:** Diplomová práce se zaměřuje na vztah mezi sociokulturní adaptací a problematikou duševního zdraví zahraničních studentů GLODEP programu na Univerzitě Palackého v Olomouci. Výzkum se zabývá psychologickými dopady adaptace na nové kulturní prostředí a společnost se zaměřením na běžné problémy, jako je stres, úzkost a deprese, které mohou zahraniční studenti zažívat při zvládání akademických, sociálních a kulturních zkušeností v cizí zemi.

Práce začíná přehledem literatury, kde jsou představeny obecné informace o zahraničních studentech, včetně Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters programů a Global Development Policy programu. Poté práce podává přehled klíčových konceptů sociokulturní adaptace, včetně škály sociokulturní adaptace, modelů adaptace U-curve a W-curve, akulturačních strategií a mezikulturní adaptace. Práce zkoumá běžné problémy v oblasti duševního zdraví, s nimiž se zahraniční studenti potýkají, zejména stres, deprese a úzkost. Akademická očekávání, sociální izolace, vnitřní faktory a stesk po domově jsou představeny jako faktory ovlivňující duševní zdraví zahraničních studentů. Na závěr jsou zdůrazněny mechanismy zvládání stresu a význam externí podpory, spolu se seznamem psychologické podpory poskytované na Univerzitě Palackého.

Metodologie výzkumu využívala induktivní přístup k získání nových poznatků na základě kvalitativních dat z online dotazníku. Bylo zjištěno, že sociokulturní adaptace není jediným aspektem ovlivňujícím duševní zdraví studentů GLODEP programu, protože významnou roli hrají také akademická očekávání. Osobnostní rysy a kulturní kořeny určili, jak náročný je proces adaptace na cizí prostředí pro zahraniční studenty. Většina studentů GLODEP využila sociální mechanismy ke zvládání stresu.

**Klíčová slova:** sociokulturní adaptace, zahraniční studenti, program Global Development Policy, duševní zdraví, well-being studentů, model U-curve, model W-curve, akulturace, mezikulturní adaptace, stres, deprese, úzkost, akademická očekávání, sociální izolace, stesk po domově, mechanismy zvládání stresu, vzájemná podpora, institucionální podpora, psychologická podpora

### **Declaration**

I hereby declare that this master's thesis is the result of my own work, and all the sources I used are acknowledged in the references. Grammarly was used to improve the grammar and sentence structure, but not to generate new text for this thesis.

In Olomouc 10<sup>th</sup> April 2025

---

Bc. Aneta Šildová

## **Acknowledgements**

First and foremost, I would like to thank my friends and family, who have been a great source of support throughout my studies, for their patience during the final weeks leading up to the submission of this thesis. I would also like to thank my supervisor, Mgr. Tina Pourpakhdelbekr and my thesis consultant, Mgr. Tereza Nováková, as well as members of the GLODEP team who helped me narrow down the thesis topic and assisted with the research for this thesis. Lastly, I would like to thank all the respondents who kindly shared their personal experiences to help gain deeper insight into the mental health of international GLODEP students at Palacký University.

# UNIVERZITA PALACKÉHO V OLOMOUCI

Přírodovědecká fakulta

Akademický rok: 2024/2025

## ZADÁNÍ DIPLOMOVÉ PRÁCE

(projektu, uměleckého díla, uměleckého výkonu)

Jméno a příjmení: **Bc. Aneta ŠILDOVÁ**  
Osobní číslo: **R230710**  
Studijní program: **N0588A330002 Mezinárodní rozvojová a environmentální studia**  
Téma práce: **The Impact of Socio-Cultural Adaptation on the Mental Health of International Students**  
Zadávající katedra: **Katedra rozvojových a environmentálních studií**

### Zásady pro vypracování

The master's thesis focuses on the relationship between socio-cultural adaptation and the mental health challenges faced by GLODEP international students at Palacký University Olomouc. The study delves into the psychological effects of adapting to a new cultural environment and society, focusing on common issues such as stress, anxiety, and depression that international students may experience as they navigate academic, social, and personal changes in a foreign country.

The thesis begins by reviewing key theories of socio-cultural adaptation, including acculturation models and adaptation curves. It then explores the common challenges international students encounter, such as homesickness, language barriers, and social isolation. Additionally, it examines how personal traits and external factors like social support systems influence their adaptation process. A dedicated section on coping mechanisms highlights students' strategies to manage these challenges, such as seeking social support, developing new routines, and practising emotional regulation.

The research methodology involves a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data gathered from questionnaires completed by GLODEP international students from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Rozsah pracovní zprávy: **20—25 tisíc slov**  
Rozsah grafických prací: **dle potřeby**  
Forma zpracování diplomové práce: **tištěná**  
Jazyk zpracování: **Angličtina**

Seznam doporučené literatury:

- FLEKAČ, P. 2024. Welcome to Well-being: A Journey to Your Mental Harmony. Welcome Office. Palacký University Olomouc. Available at: [https://www.upol.cz/files/users/322/Welcome\\_to\\_Well-being](https://www.upol.cz/files/users/322/Welcome_to_Well-being).
- GROSS, R. D. 1992. Psychology. The Science of Mind and Behaviour. Second edition. United Kingdom: Hodder & Stoughton Ltd.
- HALADOVÁ, E. 2021. Psychologické aspekty kulturního šoku u vysokoškolských studentů. Online. Master's thesis. Olomouc: Palacký University Olomouc, Faculty of Arts. Available at: <https://theses.cz/id/wtt1px/>.
- CHING, G., CHAO, P., LIEN, W. 2014. Acculturative hassles and strategies: Relationship between study abroad related depression, anxiety, and stress. International Journal of Research Studies in Psychology. DOI:10.5861/ijrsp.2014.818
- JENSEN, K. D. 2022. Key components contributing to student development and cross-cultural adaptation during an international internship. Educational Research: Theory and Practice, 33(1), 22-28. Available at: <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1352028>.
- KERNEROVÁ, L. 2014. Zlepšení orientace a adaptace zahraničních studentů na Univerzitu Palackého. Online. Master's thesis. Olomouc: Palacký University Olomouc, Faculty of Arts. Available at: <https://theses.cz/id/1706wi/>.
- TAUŠOVÁ, J. 2016. Vliv vybraných osobnostních charakteristik a vnějších proměnných na míru prožívání akulturačního stresu u zahraničních studentů. Online. Dissertation thesis. Olomouc: Palacký University Olomouc, Faculty of Arts. Available at: <https://theses.cz/id/uv9363/>.
- UNESCO Institute of Statistics. 2024. Definition — Internationally mobile students. <https://glossary.uis.unesco.org/glossary/en/home>.
- WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION. 2022. Mental health. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response>.

Vedoucí diplomové práce: **Mgr. Tina Pourpakhdel**  
Katedra rozvojových a environmentálních studií

Konzultant diplomové práce: **Mgr. Tereza Nováková**  
Katedra rozvojových a environmentálních studií

Datum zadání diplomové práce: **21. listopadu 2024**

Termín odevzdání diplomové práce: **10. dubna 2025**

\_\_\_\_\_  
L.S.

**doc. RNDr. Martin Kubala, Ph.D.**

děkan

\_\_\_\_\_  
**doc. Mgr. Zdeněk Opršal, Ph.D.**

vedoucí katedry

V Olomouci dne 21. listopadu 2024

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	12
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .....	13
LITERATURE REVIEW .....	14
1. International mobility .....	14
1.1 International students .....	14
1.2 Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters.....	17
1.3 Global Development Policy .....	18
2. Socio-cultural adaptation .....	21
2.1 Concepts of socio-cultural adaptation .....	21
2.1.1 Socio-Cultural Adaptation Scale .....	21
2.1.2 U-curve model.....	22
2.1.3 W-curve model.....	23
2.1.4 Acculturation.....	24
2.1.5 Cross-cultural adaptation.....	25
3. Mental health .....	28
3.1. Selected mental health issues .....	29
3.1.1 Stress .....	29
3.1.2 Depression.....	30
3.1.3 Anxiety.....	30
3.2 Factors influencing mental health .....	31
3.2.1 Academic expectations.....	31
3.2.2 Social isolation .....	31
3.2.2 Internal factors .....	32
3.2.3 Homesickness.....	32
3.3 Coping mechanisms .....	33
3.4 Importance of external support.....	33
3.4.1 Psychological support at Palacký University .....	34
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .....	37
4. Research design and approach.....	37
4.1 Target group.....	38
4.2 Data collection method.....	38
4.3 Questionnaire piloting.....	41
4.4 Ethical considerations.....	41
4.5 Research timeframe.....	41
4.6 Research limitations .....	42
4.7 Data analysis methods.....	42

5. Research outcomes .....	44
5.1 Background information.....	44
5.2 Socio-cultural adaptation experience .....	47
5.3 Identified mental health issues .....	49
5.4 Coping mechanisms .....	53
5.5 Institutional and program support .....	54
5.6 Evaluation of the GLODEP program .....	56
6. Discussion.....	58
7. Conclusion.....	63
REFERENCES.....	64
APPENDICES.....	72
1. Socio-Cultural Adaptation Scale.....	72
2. Questionnaire.....	73

## **LIST OF ILLUSTRATIVE MATERIAL**

Figure 1 — International students globally, 2001 to 2021 (page 15)

Figure 2 — The U-curve of Cross-Cultural Adjustment (page 22)

Figure 3 — W-curve model adapted from Gullahorn and Gullahorn (page 23)

Figure 4 — Percentage of Responses Collected (page 40)

Chart 1 — Gender representation of respondents (page 44)

Chart 2 — Preparedness for future stays abroad after studying in the GLODEP (page 46)

Chart 3 — Representation of the level of difficulty for GLODEP students' adaptation (page 46)

Chart 4 — The state of mental health of GLODEP students (page 49)

Chart 5 — Mental health challenges of GLODEP students (page 50)

Chart 6 — Mental health support of Palacký University (page 54)

Chart 7 — Information about mental health support by the GLODEP team (page 54)

Map 1 — Respondents' countries of origin (page 45)

Table 1 — Research timeframe (page 41)

Table 2 — Socio-Cultural Adaptation Scale (page 72)

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

EACEA	European Education and Culture Executive Agency
EEA	European Economic Area
EMJM	Erasmus Mundus Joint Master
EU	European Union
GLODEP	Global Development Policy
OECD	The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
UIS	UNESCO Institute of Statistics
UP	Palacký University Olomouc
U.S.	United States

# INTRODUCTION

In the ever-evolving world characterised by globalisation and interconnectedness, international students represent a rapidly growing demographic in the educational environment. Since the Middle Ages, travelling to foreign countries to study had been primarily a privilege of the royal elite. Today, however, globalisation and various international study programs have made it significantly easier for individuals to take advantage of the opportunity to study abroad. According to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2024), the number of internationally mobile students<sup>1</sup> in tertiary education increased from 4.1 million in 2012 to 6.9 million in 2022.

The author chose this research topic loosely following the topic of her bachelor's thesis, which focused on foreigners' experiences with the Czech language and culture. This master's thesis aims to gain a deeper understanding of the personal experiences of international students, with a particular focus on mental health, the author's area of interest.

For international students, studying abroad presents numerous challenges, ranging from social awkwardness to severe mental health issues. While mental health has been discussed more in recent years than ever before, it remains a topic that is worth further exploration. Research indicates that international students often experience higher levels of stress, anxiety and other mental health issues compared to domestic students (Xiong et al., 2024). These mental health issues can be attributed to the difficulties they face, such as *“adjusting to unfamiliar academic practices, developing skills to manage everyday life in a different cultural context, and both recognizing and seeking professional help for mental health problems”* (Forbes-Mewett & Sawyer, 2016).

The master's thesis examines the relationship between the socio-cultural adaptation of international students and their mental health. It focuses on students of the Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters program in Global Development Policy who studied a semester at Palacký University Olomouc (hereinafter referred to as GLODEP students). The thesis delves into the psychological effects of adapting to a new cultural environment and society, focusing on common issues such as stress, anxiety, and depression that international students may experience as they navigate academic, social, and personal changes.

---

<sup>1</sup> *“Internationally mobile students are individuals who have physically crossed an international border between two countries with the objective to participate in educational activities in the country of destination, where the country of destination of a given student is different from their country of origin.” (UIS, 2024)*

The thesis is divided into two main parts: literature review and research. Beginning with a literature review, it first outlines international mobility in general, with a focus on specific study programs. Then, the key theories of socio-cultural adaptation are presented, including the Socio-Cultural Adaptation Scale, adaptation curves, acculturation strategies and cross-cultural adaptation. In the following chapter about mental health, the thesis examines the common challenges that international students face, including stress, depression, and anxiety. Then, the factors influencing mental health are presented, i.e., academic expectations, social isolation, internal factors and homesickness. A dedicated section on coping mechanisms highlights various strategies for managing stress. Finally, the importance of external support is highlighted with a list of available psychological support services at Palacký University.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research employs an inductive research design to explore the impact of socio-cultural adaptation related to studying abroad, particularly a semester in the Czech Republic, and its impact on the mental health of GLODEP international students during this period. The inductive approach is chosen for its suitability for generating new insights and theories from qualitative data rather than testing pre-existing hypotheses (Perry & Jensen, 2001).

### General research question:

- How does socio-cultural adaptation impact the mental health of international students in the GLODEP program at Palacký University Olomouc?

### Special research questions:

1. What socio-cultural challenges do GLODEP students face in the Czech Republic?
2. Do different cultural backgrounds play a role in socio-cultural adaptation in the Czech Republic?
3. What is the state of mental health of GLODEP students?
4. What coping strategies do GLODEP students employ to manage stress?
5. How supportive are the institutions in providing mental health support?
6. What improvements can be made to the GLODEP program to enhance international students' experience?

# LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents the literature review on which the research is based. It is divided into three main chapters. The first chapter focuses on international mobility, specifically targeting international students and international study programs, such as those offered through the Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters, with a particular emphasis on the Global Development Policy program. The second chapter of the theoretical framework presents the concepts of socio-cultural adaptation, particularly the Socio-Cultural Adaptation Scale, the U-curve and W-curve models, the concept of acculturation and the process of cross-cultural adaptation. The third chapter focuses on mental health, examining the impact of the socio-cultural adaptation process on mental health and presenting selected mental health issues affecting international students as well as factors influencing the state of students' mental health. This chapter also examines the coping mechanisms employed by international students. Lastly, it highlights the importance of external support and lists available psychological support at Palacký University.

## 1. International mobility

International mobility refers to individuals who move across countries for educational, training, or employment purposes. This experience offers opportunities to acquire new skills, broaden personal horizons, expand social networks, and immerse oneself in different cultures. Many students participate in exchange programs, undertake voluntary work abroad, or pursue degrees at foreign universities. For professionals, international mobility can involve study visits and training courses that contribute to their professional development (Euroguidance, 2024).

### 1.1 International students

The adjectives “international” and “foreign” were used interchangeably to describe students in the past. However, this has changed recently as the term “foreign” is considered outdated, potentially disrespectful, or even offensive. The consensus is further supported by various linguistic discussion forums dealing with this topic, such as the website English Language and Usage (2018). Since the terminology for international students was unclear, in 2015, UIS, OECD, and Eurostat agreed upon a definition of “internationally mobile students.” To further simplify, throughout this master's thesis, only the term “international student” is used.

In their article “Global Trends in Student Mobility,” Farrugia and Bhandari (2020) examine the evolving patterns of international student movements. Over recent decades, there has been a significant increase in the number of students pursuing education abroad, influenced by factors such as globalisation, economic development, and the internationalisation strategies of higher education institutions. The number of internationally mobile students worldwide has more than

tripled in the last two decades, as illustrated in Figure 1. In 2001, there were approximately 2.1 million international students globally, whereas in 2022, the number had increased to around 6.9 million (UIS, 2024). The top three countries of destination for international students have been the United Kingdom (10%), Germany (6%), and Australia (6%), with China, India, and Vietnam being the top three countries of origin (Migration Data Portal, 2022).

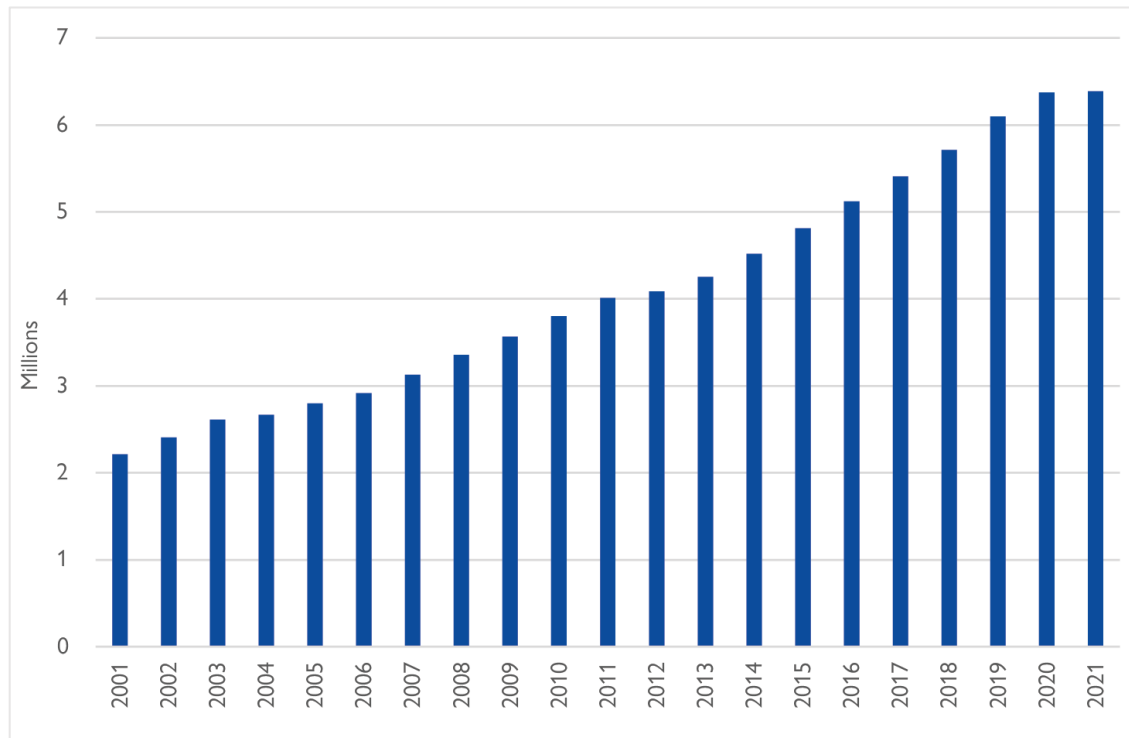


Figure 1 — International students globally, 2001 to 2021 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2021)

A similar trend has been observed in the Czech Republic, with a growing number of international students. In 2001, the number of students was below 10,000, whereas in 2022, the number of international students had increased to almost 55,000 (see Figure 2 on the next page). In 2022, the mostly represented international students’ countries of origin were Slovakia, Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and India (Ministry of Education Youth and Sports Czech Republic, 2022).

The latest publication by the Czech National Agency for International Education and Research, in collaboration with its initiative Study in Czechia (2024), presents results from questionnaire research on the experiences of international students studying and living in the Czech Republic. The research addresses topics such as support for international students before their arrival, the quality of Czech university study programs, and the services and living conditions for international students. The Czechia Alumni Programme also maintains contact with international graduates of Czech universities, fosters their relationship with the Czech Republic, and enhances the country’s image abroad (Ministry of Education Youth and Sports Czech Republic, 2024).

International students are considered short-term migrants, as defined in the World Migration Report published on the International Organization for Migration website (2024). This classification highlights the temporary nature of their stay in the host country, typically for the duration of their studies. International students, as well as other migrants, face various challenges as they navigate their new environments. Similar to the acculturation concept (discussed further in Chapter 2.1.4 *Acculturation*), Budyta-Budzyńska (2021) describes four degrees of entry into the host society, sorted from the least advanced to the most advanced stage:

- **Separation** - Immigrants remain isolated from the host society, maintaining strong ties with their culture of origin and having minimal interaction with the local community.
- **Adaptation** - This stage involves the minimal accommodation to the environment that enables survival, based on Darwin's concept of "survival of the fittest." Immigrants make necessary adjustments to navigate daily life in the host country while retaining strong connections to their culture of origin.
- **Integration** - Immigrants actively interact with the host society while maintaining their cultural identity. They participate in social, economic, and cultural activities, forming relationships with both locals and fellow immigrants.
- **Assimilation** - Immigrants adopt the host society's culture to the extent that their original cultural identity becomes less distinct, resulting in a high degree of cultural merging.

Budyta-Budzyńska's model emphasises that the stages of immigrant integration are not fixed and may vary based on individual experiences and contexts. The process can differ across economic, socio-political, cultural, and identity dimensions. Therefore, the time it takes to progress through stages varies widely. Factors such as personal circumstances, available support, and the host society's openness have a significant influence on this journey. Immigrants may skip stages or experience them in different orders, such as transitioning directly from separation to integration if they find a supportive community. .

This thesis focuses on the adaptation stage that most GLODEP students encounter during their semester in Olomouc. This emphasis is crucial due to the limited time allocated for their stay, which often does not provide enough support for their integration, let alone a complete assimilation. Adaptation may take several months to several years, while integration and assimilation may span several years or even generations (Budyta-Budzyńska, 2021). The adaptation phase is vital, as it significantly affects students' ability to adjust both academically and socially within a new environment. Challenges such as language barriers, unfamiliar social customs, and different academic expectations may hinder their engagement. Moreover, the short duration of their experience restricts opportunities for meaningful interactions and social and cultural immersion, further complicating their integration process.

## 1.2 Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters

According to the European Commission (2024), the Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters (EMJM) program is a prestigious international initiative aimed at enhancing the quality and global recognition of European higher education. It offers integrated master's degree programs delivered by a consortium<sup>2</sup> of at least three higher education institutions from different countries, with a minimum of two institutions from EU Member States or associated countries. These programs are designed to attract top-tier students worldwide by offering comprehensive scholarships that cover participation costs, travel expenses, and living expenses. However, if students do not meet the scholarship requirements, the tuition fees are relatively high. For students from program countries (EU/EEA), the tuition fee is approximately €9,000 for the entire program. Tuition fees for students from partner countries (non-EU/EEA) are around €18,000 (Erasmus Mundus, 2020). The cost can be a significant deciding factor for candidates from less economically developed countries to enrol in the program if they cannot qualify for a scholarship.

In May 2024, the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) released a publication titled “20 Years of Erasmus Mundus: Beyond Borders and Boundaries” to celebrate the success of Erasmus Mundus programs. This publication highlights its transformative impact on individuals, higher education institutions and countries worldwide. It is divided into six chapters dealing with historical overview, institutional participation, institutional impact, individual impact, system-level impact and future trajectory. The study combines existing data with questionnaires, interviews, and consultations with over 165 experts. The publication also addresses the topic of international students' mental health and the importance of supporting their well-being during the adaptation process to new environments. The need for specific support systems is mentioned, including counselling services, peer support, and workshops and seminars organised by some Erasmus Mundus institutions (Ferencz & Kypriyanova, 2024).

The Division for International Cooperation of Palacký University Olomouc offers several EMJM programs on their website as of 2025:

- **Global Development Policy (GLODEP)**—a two-year joint master's program led by Palacký University focused on training professionals in international development. Since the program first started in 2017, students have studied at three European universities: Palacký University Olomouc (Czech Republic), Université Clermont Auvergne (France), and Università degli Studi di Pavia (Italy). From the 2025–2027 cohort, Università degli

---

<sup>2</sup> A consortium is defined as “an agreement, combination, or group (as of companies) formed to undertake an enterprise beyond the resources of any one member” in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2024).

Studi di Pavia (Italy) will be replaced by the University of Göttingen (Germany). The fourth semester of this program is dedicated to practical training or research at partner institutions worldwide. Approximately 15 scholarships are awarded annually to cover tuition, insurance, travel, and living expenses.

- **Copernicus Digital Earth (CDE)**—a joint master’s program focused on geoinformation technologies and geovisualization. The program is studied at Palacký University (Czech Republic), the University of Salzburg (Austria), and the University of South Brittany (France). Students begin with two semesters in Salzburg before specialising in either GeoVisualization and Geocommunication (Olomouc, Czech Republic) or GeoData Science (Vannes, France) for their thesis. There is an opportunity to obtain a scholarship for the academic year 2022/23, with 16 scholarships available that cover tuition fees, insurance, travel, and living expenses. The program first started in October 2019.
- **EUROCULTURE**—a two-year interdisciplinary joint master’s program focusing on cultural and social developments in Europe, European identity, values, citizenship, and cultural relations. It is offered by a consortium of eight European universities, including Palacký University, which has been participating for over 15 years. Students spend their first two semesters at two selected universities. The program provides 22 yearly scholarships, covering tuition, insurance, travel, and living expenses. It has received continuous EU funding and was accredited in 2020.

Palacký University is also part of other international programs that do not fall under EMJM. To name a few, there are opportunities to pursue a master’s degree or conduct doctoral research at German universities through the DAAD—German Academic Exchange Service. Another program called AKTION offers joint research projects and academic exchanges between the Czech Republic and Austria. EHP funds support study stays between the Czech Republic, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway. Lastly, there is an opportunity to attend grant and scholarship programs through the International Visegrad Fund, which supports regional cooperation within the Visegrad Region (comprising the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia) and other countries in the Western Balkan region (International Cooperation UP, 2025).

### **1.3 Global Development Policy**

Global Development Policy (GLODEP) is a joint master’s program in development studies funded by the European Union as a part of Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees. It was first launched in 2016 in Olomouc; since then, there have been six cohorts of students. Initially, it was supposed to be a program studied at four European universities. However, Fatih University in Turkey cancelled its participation due to a coup that broke out a week before (Chovancová, 2022). Since then, the program has been structured to be studied at three universities over three

semesters: the first semester at Palacký University in Olomouc, Czech Republic; the second semester at Université Clermont Auvergne in Clermont-Ferrand, France; and the third semester at the University of Pavia in Pavia, Italy. The fourth and last semester is dedicated to writing the master's thesis and doing an internship or research stay (GLODEP, 2019). However, there is a change for the cohort starting in the winter semester of 2025—the third university the next cohort of students will be studying at is not the University of Pavia in Italy but the University of Göttingen in Germany (GLODEP, 2024).

According to the official website, GLODEP aims to prepare professionals in the field of international development. The program provides students with comprehensive knowledge and skills to analyse development issues and promote national, regional, and international development policies. An internship or research stay is an integral part of the program curriculum, designed to enhance the employability and competitiveness of graduates. With a network of over 120 alumni globally, the GLODEP program appears to be highly successful. This assumption can also be confirmed by visiting the official LinkedIn GLODEP website, where the professional achievements of their graduates are frequently shared.

The requirements for admission to the GLODEP program include excellent academic results in relevant fields such as development studies, economics, geography, international relations, or sociology. Submitting a bachelor's degree with minimum average grades relevant to the country where the degree was earned is required. It is also necessary to prove proficiency in the English language at the C1 level, write a motivational letter and attach a Curriculum Vitae with proof of nationality. The program is reportedly highly competitive, with several hundred applicants submitting their applications every year (GLODEP, 2024).

Since financial stress can also be considered one of the factors that hinder international students' adaptation, it is necessary to point out the different options for funding their studies. Similar to other EMJM programs, the GLODEP program has tuition fees totalling €8,400 over a two-year period. There is also a fee of around €31 involved in the application process. For around fifteen students in one cohort, there is an option for the EMJM scholarship, which covers tuition fees, insurance, travel and living expenses. It is awarded by the European Education and Culture Executive Agency to students who meet specific criteria, including holding a bachelor's degree, not having previously received an Erasmus Mundus scholarship, and demonstrating English proficiency (EACEA, 2024).

The GLODEP website lists other potential scholarship opportunities, sorted by nationality (Colombia, Mexico, Guatemala, Brazil, South Africa, Canada [Quebec], Indonesia, and India), as well as ten other organisations that could provide scholarships. There are also options to obtain a scholarship in each country that GLODEP students will study, for instance:

- In the Czech Republic, the government offers scholarships to students from developing countries as part of its Foreign Development Assistance program. Eligible countries for the 2025–2026 academic year include Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, Zambia, and Belarus (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 2025).
- Campus France offers scholarships from various providers. The scholarships support different levels of study, including undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral programs. The Campus Bourses tool helps students identify suitable funding options based on their nationality, field of study, and level of education (Campus France, 2025).
- The German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) offers a variety of scholarships for international students, graduates, doctoral candidates, and postdocs to study or conduct research in Germany. Key programs include the “Development-related Postgraduate Courses (EPOS)” and the “Hilde Domin Programme,” which target students from developing countries and those at risk in their home countries. Scholarships typically provide monthly payments to cover expenses and insurance, along with additional benefits (DAAD, 2025).

## Summary

In this first part of the literature review, the concept of international mobility was outlined, and the differences in the use of the term *international student* were discussed. Then, specific data on the growth in the number of international students in recent decades was presented, with a focus on the global and Czech contexts. In connection with the number of international students, a publication on the study and life of international students in the Czech Republic was presented.

International students were defined from the perspective of the International Organisation for Migration, and in this context, the four phases of migrant entry into the host country, and therefore, the international student experience, were presented. Based on these four phases, this research thesis explains why it focuses explicitly on the adaptation phase of international students.

The Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters Programme was then presented, along with a list of programmes from this initiative offered by Palacký University in collaboration with other European Union universities. Finally, the GLODEP programme was presented, detailing its establishment, the current consortium of universities involved, the study program’s aims, admission requirements, tuition fees, and scholarship opportunities that could help with the financial stress of students from economically less developed countries.

## **2. Socio-cultural adaptation**

Socio-cultural adaptation is defined as a process by which individuals acquire and demonstrate the necessary cultural competencies to function effectively and appropriately in a new cultural environment. Adapting involves understanding social norms, behaviours, communication styles, and cultural practices to navigate and integrate into the host society (Wilson et al., 2017). Socio-cultural adaptation is a significant challenge in international student mobility, as students often face difficulties when adjusting to new cultural environments. Language barriers, differences in academic expectations, and struggles with social integration may impact students' well-being and academic performance. As mentioned in the first chapter, institutional and social support is crucial during this process, as well as an individual's personal resilience and adaptive coping skills (Pinarbasi, 2023).

Several models and theories have been used to describe the process or level of socio-cultural adaptation. This chapter introduces some of the concepts of socio-cultural adaptation and their relevance to the topic of this research thesis. Firstly, it presents the Socio-Cultural Adaptation Scale, a tool that measures the level of adaptation. Afterwards, the U-curve and W-curve models, which describe the emotional levels of cultural adjustment, are introduced. Then, the acculturation process presents strategies for navigating contact with other cultures. Lastly, this chapter describes the process of cross-cultural adaptation.

### **2.1 Concepts of socio-cultural adaptation**

#### **2.1.1 Socio-Cultural Adaptation Scale**

In 1999, Ward and Kennedy developed the Socio-Cultural Adaptation Scale (SCAS) as part of their research on the cross-cultural transition and adaptation of Malaysian and Singaporean students in New Zealand. SCAS can be used to measure how well individuals adapt to the social and cultural demands of a new environment using a 41-item scale (see page 72 for the complete list of items). It assesses the difficulties individuals face in various areas of daily life, such as making friends, understanding local customs, and dealing with bureaucracy.

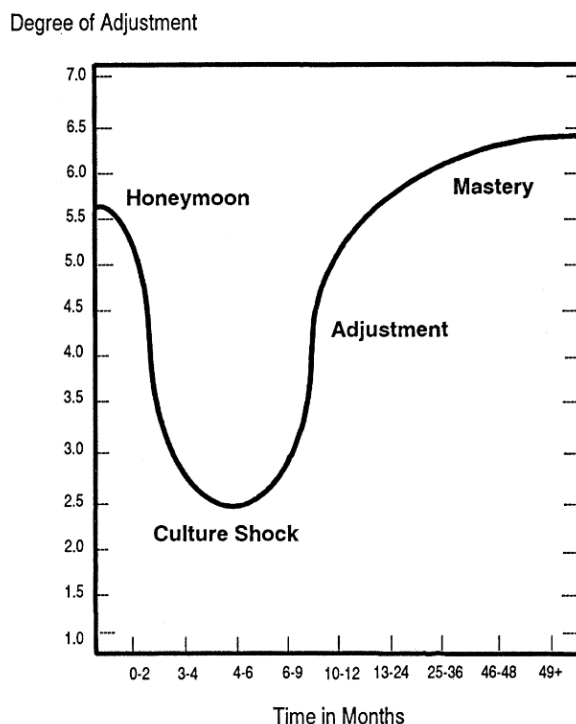
However, the SCAS will not be used in this research to assess the level of socio-cultural adaptation of GLODEP students. The primary focus of this thesis is the impact of the socio-cultural adaptation *process* on international students' mental health rather than the degree of their adaptation. The reason is that their adaptation period only lasts five months in each country, which is not long enough for a comprehensive assessment. A duration of six months to a year is often ideal because it allows individuals to progress through different stages of adaptation and provides a more accurate picture of their socio-cultural adjustment (Savicki, 2010). Furthermore, this scale would have been better suited for quantitative research involving a larger sample

of international students, using closed-ended questions to assess how well they manage the listed items or whether they have ever experienced them.

### 2.1.2 U-curve model

One of the most well-known models of cultural adaptation is the U-curve model. Norwegian sociologist Sverre Lysgaard first theorised this model in 1955, based on interviews with 200 students. It describes the emotional adjustment process during cross-cultural experiences over time. The U-curve theory explains an individual's emotional well-being when relocating to a new place (Evie, 2023). There are four phases of cultural adaptation, as illustrated in Figure 3.

The first phase, known as the honeymoon phase, is characterised by excitement and joy, as everything feels fresh and optimistic. This phase is followed by culture shock, during which individuals encounter challenges and experience worry, confusion, and anger due to the unfamiliar environment. Then, they move into the adjustment phase, where they get more comfortable and confident as they develop coping strategies. Finally, in the mastery phase, individuals achieve a sense of comfort and competence, feeling more integrated and capable



of navigating the new culture, although challenges may still arise (CORE, 2020).

The length of each phase may vary, meaning that individuals may be at various stages simultaneously when they are in a foreign country. They may also not progress consecutively from one phase to the next. For example, they may avoid a challenging phase or regress to a previous phase after appearing to have adjusted (Haladová, 2021).

Figure 2 — The U-curve of Cross-Cultural Adjustment (Black & Mendenhall, 1991)

The U-curve model could be a valuable tool for understanding the cultural adjustment process of international students. However, since the target group of this research thesis is very specific, with their stays in new countries limited to about five months in three countries (or four if they decide to pursue an internship), it is challenging to evaluate GLODEP students based on this model. It can be argued that they do not even reach the adjustment phase, based on the timeline

illustrated in Figure 3. Therefore, the relevant phases that remain are the honeymoon phase, characterised by the excitement of moving to a new country and experiencing a completely different environment, and the culture shock phase, characterised by discomfort, confusion, recoil and self-doubt, which may occur during the first few months (Bishop, 2023). Then, when they can finally begin the transformation to the adjustment stage, they must move to a different country and start the process from the beginning. This repetitive process can be incredibly frustrating and significantly impact GLODEP students' mental health.

### 2.1.3 W-curve model

The W-curve model is based on the previously introduced U-curve model and is extended to include additional phases. This model was developed by John and Jeanne Gullahorn in 1963 based on interview and questionnaire studies of 400 American students in France and another 5,300 American grantees who lived in foreign cultures worldwide. It is used to evaluate the emotional adjustment of individuals who experience reverse culture shock upon returning to their home culture. The W-curve model consists of two U-curves—one for initial adaptation to the new culture and another for re-adjustment to the home culture (as illustrated in Figure 4). The first U-curve was already discussed on a previous page. The second U-curve represents the re-entry adjustment upon returning home, where individuals may experience a similar sequence of emotional highs and lows. That includes the honeymoon phase, followed by reverse culture shock, which may lead to mental isolation, followed by recovery and, finally, re-adjustment to the home culture. This whole process can last from months to years (Wattanacharoensil et al., 2020).

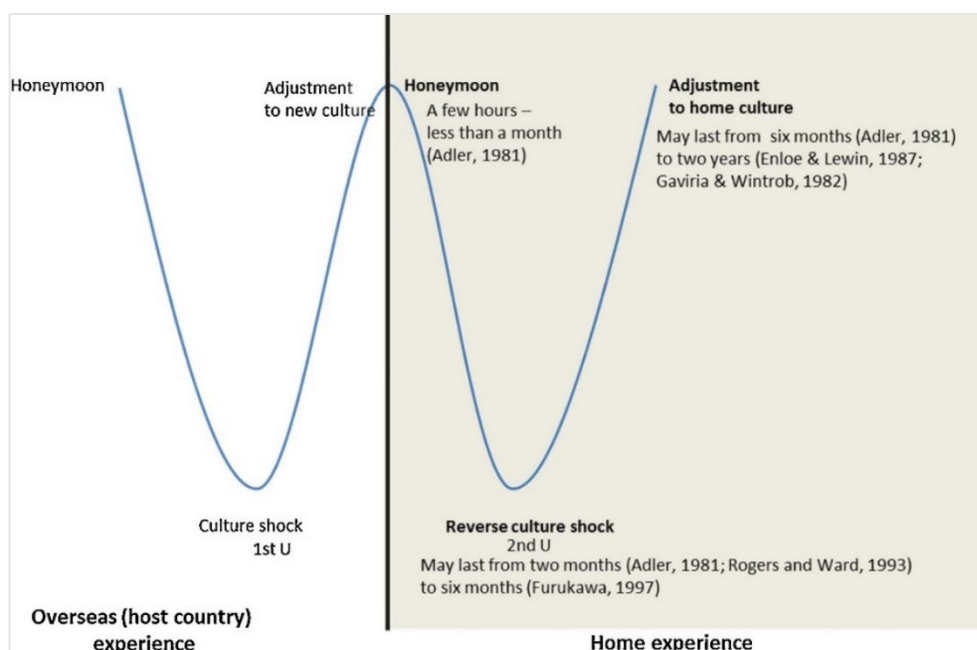


Figure 3 — W-curve model adapted from Gullahorn and Gullahorn (Wattanacharoensil et al., 2020)

The W-curve model is used when focusing on individuals who spend extended time abroad and then return to their home country. Therefore, this model is not applicable to evaluating GLODEP students, as this research only focuses on their five months at Palacký University and does not extend to their experience returning home after graduation. It is feasible to study only a part of the first U-curve, which includes the honeymoon phase, culture shock, and initial adjustment, referring to the previous model.

#### 2.1.4 Acculturation

Acculturation is another concept of socio-cultural adaptation. It occurs when individuals from different cultures come into continuous contact, which leads to changes in their original patterns for either or both groups. In 1997, John W. Berry published a paper on acculturation that examines the cultural and psychological changes that occur when individuals from different cultures interact. These four primary strategies are used to navigate acculturation:

1. **Integration** — This strategy involves preserving one's original cultural identity while simultaneously embracing aspects of the host culture. It is often linked with positive psychological outcomes and socio-cultural competence.
2. **Assimilation** — In this approach, individuals adopt the host culture entirely, abandoning their original cultural identity. While it can lead to successful adaptation in some cases, it may also result in a loss of cultural heritage.
3. **Separation** — Individuals maintain their original culture and reject the host culture. This strategy may lead to isolation and difficulty adjusting to the new environment.
4. **Marginalisation** — This occurs when individuals lose their connection to both their original and host cultures, often resulting in poor psychological well-being and social integration.

Berry's model is bidimensional, meaning it considers both the preservation of the original culture and the adaptation of the host culture. This model, therefore, provides a more detailed understanding of how individuals navigate cultural changes. Berry also discusses two types of adaptation outcomes—*psychological adaptation*, which refers to an individual's mental health and well-being, and *socio-cultural adaptation*, which refers to how well individuals function in their new cultural environment (Berry, 2006).

As previously stated, this research thesis does not focus on the adaptation outcomes but rather on the adaptation process itself. The acculturation process involves significant cultural and psychological changes as individuals adapt to a new cultural environment. The process can be challenging and stressful, leading to acculturative stress, which may negatively impact mental health (Oppedal et al., 2020).

In her dissertation thesis, Taušová (2016) investigated the acculturation process of international students. According to her findings, the factors contributing to international students' adaptation to life in a foreign country are support from the university, having social networks, prior experience with living abroad, personality characteristics and orientation in the host country's culture. On the contrary, factors complicating adaptation include language barriers, culture shock, lack of social contacts and feelings of loneliness. Furthermore, she notes that perceived significant cultural differences between the country of origin and the host country, as well as individual personality characteristics, can further complicate the adaptation process.

Many of these models and studies focus on individuals who spend extended periods of time in a foreign country. In the case of international students, the duration of their stay typically corresponds to the length of the study program, which can last one year or more. This research focuses on specific types of international students who spend two years pursuing master's studies in three different countries (or four, if they choose to undertake an internship). Therefore, they do not have enough opportunities to successfully adapt to a new culture before moving to another country.

It was thought that correctly assessing which acculturation strategy GLODEP students choose is not feasible, and any of the socio-cultural adaptation concepts can be used only loosely. However, a paper by Krsmanovic (2020) explored the acculturation experience of ten first-year international students in the United States by applying Berry's acculturation model. The study outcomes revealed that all ten students experienced separation, seven students reported integration, six students experienced assimilation, and four students showed evidence of marginalisation. These strategies were either freely pursued or imposed on the students. Based on this study of first-year students, who are the closest to the target group of this research, it can be assumed that GLODEP students primarily adopt either the integration or separation strategy due to their limited duration of stay in a foreign country and insufficient time to become fully immersed in the new culture.

### **2.1.5 Cross-cultural adaptation**

Cross-cultural adaptation is characterised as a process that unfolds through the *stress-adaptation-growth* dynamic. It involves individuals striving to achieve internal balance in challenging environmental conditions, often beginning with culture shock and progressing through continuous cultural learning (Kim, 2017). Studies of cross-cultural adaptation are most relevant to the target group of this research, as they focus on the process individuals undergo when adjusting to a new cultural environment rather than the outcome.

Olagunju et al. (2024) examine the cultural adaptation process and its impact on the academic success and well-being of international students at U.S. universities. The study reveals that language barriers, difficulties with social and cultural adjustment, and varying pedagogical approaches (discussed further in Chapter 3.2.1 *Academic expectations*) have a significant impact on the academic performance and personal well-being of international students. These challenges also apply to GLODEP students studying a semester at Palacký University.

- **Language barriers** — For GLODEP students, learning the Czech language can be challenging and somewhat unrewarding, as it is rarely spoken outside of the Czech Republic. The unfamiliarity with the local language may then impact the social adaptation of GLODEP students. Based on the author's bachelor's thesis that focused on the language integration of foreigners in the Czech Republic (Šildová, 2023), it was established that Czech people are usually very reserved and unwilling to speak English with foreigners, which can impact students' social adaptation and lead to feelings of isolation.
- **Cultural and social adjustment** — Many GLODEP students are non-European, which may lead to some cultural misunderstandings. From the view of a foreigner, Scharfenberg (2023) provides an overview of Czech culture. Czech people are said to be very reserved and formal upon meeting them for the first time. Additionally, an offer is needed to use someone's first name. The Czechs are also known to be punctual and logical thinkers; they value their privacy and personal space in social interactions (Commisceo, 2022).
- **Academic expectations** — The fixed GLODEP program curriculum, spanning three semesters across three universities, may be challenging for some students. There are eight subjects in the first semester, five subjects in the second semester and three subjects in the third semester. The fourth semester is dedicated to an internship or research stay (GLODEP, 2024). Upon reviewing the curriculum, it appears that studying at Palacký University is the most demanding among the consortium of universities, particularly for non-European students who may encounter unfamiliar academic expectations and requirements.

These challenges point out the need for a support system, either institutional or peer support, as previously mentioned. GLODEP's official website offers a lot of valuable information for future students, including details on admission requirements, fees, scholarships, visas, health insurance, living expenses, and housing options. Students can also compare costs on a website called Numbeo, which is a crowd-sourced database that allows anyone to contribute data about the costs of different items. However, from what can be seen on their website, a current student in the program would not find any advice or information about any support centre unless they contact the GLODEP team directly. Since GLODEP students also have orientation week at the

beginning of the semester at each university, it can be assumed that they provide all the necessary information for new students there. They also offer language courses at each of the universities. Career days are also incorporated into each semester to ensure opportunities to meet potential employers (GLODEP, 2024).

In comparison, Palacký University's Welcome Office offers comprehensive services for current and future visitors to the university, providing them with information about their stay. Their website lists everything an international student might need, including step-by-step information about the arrival to UP, visas, and residence permits. A special category titled 'Living in Olomouc' summarises all necessities for international students, including accommodation, meals, bank and mobile phone services, driving licences, job opportunities, Czech language courses, public transportation, and even information about sockets and plugs, which differ from country to country. Lastly, the Welcome Office provides information about health and well-being, which is further detailed in Chapter 3.3.1 *Psychological support at Palacký University*.

## **Summary**

In this second part of the literature review, the different concepts of socio-cultural adaptation were presented along with practical applications for the target group of this master's thesis. First, the Socio-Cultural Adaptation Scale was described, and the reason for not applying it to this research was explained. Next, the U-curve model provided insight into the emotional phases of adjusting to a new culture. Following, the extended W-curve model demonstrated its effectiveness in addressing the emotional adjustment of individuals who return to their culture and experience reverse culture shock. Both models were found irrelevant to this research due to their nature of evaluating individuals over more extended periods of time.

Then, the four acculturation strategies were described, accompanied by a relevant study that focuses on the acculturation experience of first-year students. In relation to this research, the assumptions for the research results were presented. Lastly, the most relevant concept of socio-cultural adaptation was found to be cross-cultural adaptation, which focuses on the process rather than the outcomes of adaptation. This section outlined the challenges and strategies related to cultural adaptation among students, particularly concerning GLODEP students and their experiences.

### 3. Mental health

*“Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realise their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community. It is an integral component of health and well-being that underpins our individual and collective abilities to make decisions, build relationships and shape the world we live in. Mental health is a basic human right. And it is crucial to personal, community and socio-economic development.” (WHO, 2022)*

The importance of mental health is a topic that has been increasingly discussed, with the evidence that many of the references related to mental health of international students have been published in the recent years (Alshammari et al., 2023; Clarke, 2023; Corney et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2024; Moussa-Chamari et al., 2024; Oppedal, 2020; Xiong, 2024). There is no doubt that mental health has become increasingly crucial, considering the impact of the global pandemic on every individual’s mental health. Several studies were published on the mental health of international students or students in general during the COVID-19 pandemic (Jamshaid et al., 2023; Ma et al., 2025). The data are significant, considering the social isolation and mental health problems that could stem from this time. The data about GLODEP students studying during the pandemic will be compared to data from students studying during a regular semester in Chapter 5. *Research outcomes.*

As the previous chapter illustrated, the process of adapting to a new culture and society can lead to psychological changes in many individuals. Ching et al. (2014) present a quantitative study on the mental health issues faced by international students in Taiwan. The findings show that students’ assimilation to the new environment negatively correlates with depression, anxiety and stress, while students’ marginalisation positively correlates with these issues. This means that the more students assimilate into a new environment, the less stress, anxiety and depression they experience.

This chapter specifically presents selected mental health issues that may occur among international students (i.e., stress, depression, and anxiety). It then discusses the factors influencing mental health—including academic expectations, social isolation, internal factors and homesickness. The following section outlines different types of coping mechanisms. Lastly, this chapter emphasises the importance of external support, providing specific examples of psychological support offered at Palacký University.

## 3.1. Selected mental health issues

### 3.1.1 Stress

*“Stress in psychology and biology is any environmental or physical pressure that elicits a response from an organism. Stress usually promotes survival by forcing organisms to adapt to rapidly changing environmental conditions. However, when an organism’s response to stress is inadequate or when the stress is too powerful, disease or death of an organism may result. Such maladaptive stress is referred to as distress.” (Britannica, 2024)*

In 1975, Cox identified three models of stress around which definition and research have evolved:

1. **The engineering model** (What causes stress?) states that external stresses give rise to a stress reaction. Stress is what happens to an individual, not within an individual. Moderate levels of this type of stress can be beneficial, and a complete absence of external stress could be detrimental. External stress keeps individuals alert when they are interested in their environment, prompting them to explore and adapt to it. In these aspects, stress is similar to motivation and emotion.
2. **The physiological model** (How do we react to stress?) concerns the internal responses that occur within an individual due to stress. It is *“the body’s non-specific response to any demand made upon it”*.
3. **The transactional model** (How do we cope with stress?) represents a blend of the first two models. It views stress as arising from an interaction between individuals and their environment, primarily when there is an imbalance between the individual’s perception of the demands being made by the situation and their ability to meet those demands. The sources of stress and the amount of stress experienced depend on individual differences.

In the context of the research topic of this thesis, the most relevant model is the transactional model, as it considers both internal and external factors that may influence the mental health of GLODEP students. Stress is a term with multiple classifications, as it relates to nearly every aspect of our lives. As first mentioned in Chapter 2.1.4 *Acculturation*, the process of adapting to a new cultural environment can be challenging and stressful, leading to acculturative stress. However, stress can also be viewed as a positive opportunity for growth, as it compels students to adapt more quickly and continue learning about the local culture, as mentioned in Chapter 2.1.5 *Cross-cultural adaptation*.

The relationship between acculturative stress and socio-cultural adaptation among international students in the United States is also examined in a quantitative study by Mahmood and Galloway Burke (2018). They found a negative correlation between socio-cultural adaptation and

acculturative stress. This means that as students become more proficient at adapting to their new environment, their levels of stress decrease. Since this research focuses on international students who spend only a few months in a new environment, their adaptation is not expected to be so advanced that they would experience low levels of stress.

### **3.1.2 Depression**

Depression is a common and serious medical condition that negatively impacts how individuals feel, think, and behave. It is characterised by ongoing feelings of sadness and a lack of interest or pleasure in activities once found enjoyable. Depression can lead to various emotional and physical issues and can reduce an individual's ability to function effectively both at work and at home. Symptoms may include changes in appetite, sleep disturbances, loss of energy, feelings of worthlessness or guilt, difficulties in thinking, concentrating, or making decisions, and thoughts of death or suicide (APA, 2024).

International students may experience depression due to cultural shock and feelings of homesickness, which can make adapting to a new environment overwhelming. Other factors include academic pressure, financial stress, and disrupted sleep routines. If they do not socialise due to language barriers, it can lead to social isolation, and if a student is in an unfamiliar mental health support system, it can prevent them from accessing necessary support (Muller, 2023). This is why institutional support is crucial in establishing a safe environment where international students feel welcomed and well-informed about their mental health counselling options (more on the importance of external support in Chapter 3.4).

### **3.1.3 Anxiety**

Anxiety is an emotion marked by feelings of tension and worried thoughts about potential danger or misfortune. The body responds by tensing muscles, faster breathing, and a higher heart rate. Unlike fear, which is a short-lived response to a specific threat, anxiety is a long-lasting, future-oriented response to a vague threat (APA, 2018).

Anxiety plays a significant role in the socio-cultural adaptation process of international students, similarly to stress. Any aspect of this adaptation process can trigger an anxiety response—acculturative stress, language barrier, academic pressure, social isolation and financial stress. Effective coping strategies are essential, such as engaging in social activities. Social support and counselling centres are equally crucial in managing anxiety (Sümer et al., 2008).

## **3.2 Factors influencing mental health**

### **3.2.1 Academic expectations**

Students from different parts of the world choose to study in a GLODEP program; therefore, it can be expected that their academic customs from their countries of origin differ from those of European universities. As mentioned in Chapter 2.1.5 *Cross-cultural adaptation*, the adjustment for international students involves not only social and cultural aspects but also academic challenges when students face unfamiliar academic expectations and requirements. This is emphasised in an article by Mewett and Sawyer (2016) regarding international students at Australian universities who needed to adapt to a different academic system with distinct cultural norms. For instance, mainland Chinese students were not used to voicing their opinions and arguments, which is typically expected of Australian students. These academic differences are challenging and can lead to high levels of stress for international students, which in turn hinders their academic success.

Ideally, the teaching style at host universities should be adapted to take into account the cultural backgrounds of international students, ensuring their academic success is not compromised due to their backgrounds. This approach is known as Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP), which can help international students develop their language proficiency, become effective academic communicators, promote inclusivity and a sense of belonging, take responsibility for their own learning, and gain intercultural competence (Khoo & Huo, 2022). Besides the language proficiency aspect, which is irrelevant to GLODEP students since they need to prove their English proficiency when applying to the program, this pedagogical approach would greatly benefit the academic experience of non-European GLODEP students.

### **3.2.2 Social isolation**

Social isolation can have severe impacts on mental health, leading to issues such as depression, anxiety, and other long-term psychological harm. Social isolation is a significant issue among international students, as language and cultural differences contribute to feelings of isolation (Alshammari, 2023). An article by Trusty and Chun-Kennedy (2024) indicates that international students consistently report higher rates of social isolation in comparison to domestic students, a phenomenon that the COVID-19 pandemic has intensified. To address social isolation among international students, institutions should prioritise providing suitable support and resources, including mental health services and opportunities for social engagement (Alshammari, 2023).

### **3.2.2 Internal factors**

International students should take care of themselves to ensure their mental well-being. In her article, Moussa-Chamari (2024) explores the relationship between quality of life, sleep quality, mental health, and physical activity among students from various continents, emphasising the significant interconnection between these factors. The researcher found that poor sleep quality and insomnia had a negative impact on the physical and social aspects of overall quality of life. On the other hand, engaging in physical activity had a positive influence on the quality of life. Physical activity can also serve as one example of the coping mechanisms discussed in the following chapter.

Continuing with helpful coping mechanisms for international students, mental hygiene is equally important. According to Greene (2024), mental hygiene should be an integral part of everyone's life, especially for international students who face additional everyday challenges. Mental hygiene is a way of preventing mental illnesses; however, it lacks proper guidelines. Some of the fundamental concepts focus on an adequate sleep schedule, proper nutrition, social support and regular check-ups with mental health professionals. The pillars of mental health also include physical health (diet, exercise, and sleep), emotional health, cognitive health (problem-solving, decision-making, mental analysing, etc.) and social health (quality of one's relationships) (Montare Behavioral Health, 2024).

Just as personal characteristics influence the acculturation process (Taušová, 2016), personality traits also impact the mental health of international students. Each individual's personality is unique, leading them to respond to the same situation in different ways. Individuals who are resilient, extroverted, open to experiences, have higher self-esteem, positive problem-solving skills, and lower levels of perfectionism are more likely to experience better psychological adjustment (Mesidor & Sly, 2016).

### **3.2.3 Homesickness**

In her master's thesis, Onallah (2024) examined homesickness and the ways expatriates cope while living in the Czech Republic. It was found that the most common expression of homesickness was sadness, low mood and social isolation, with one respondent also reporting anxiety. Interestingly, rumination about home or longing to return were less frequent expressions of homesickness. As coping mechanisms, the respondents mainly chose to contact family in their home country, seek out traditional foods, and have contact with their mother tongue through music and films. Distraction from thinking about home through sport or work was also a frequent strategy. Homesickness most often manifests itself during the first three months of moving abroad, which corresponds to the first semester of GLODEP students.

### 3.3 Coping mechanisms

Coping means using thoughts and actions to handle stress from inside or outside ourselves. It involves conscious efforts to deal with challenges, unlike “defence mechanisms,” which are automatic responses we are unaware of. Both coping and defence strategies aim to lessen or endure stress. When people face a stressor, they may use different coping methods, known as “coping styles.” These stable traits shape how an individual reacts to stress (Venner, 1988).

According to Folkman and Moskowitz (2004), there are four types of coping mechanisms:

1. **Problem-focused**, which addresses the problem causing the distress. Examples of this style include seeking solutions and creating a plan.
2. **Emotion-focused**, which aims to reduce the negative emotions associated with the problem. Examples of this style include seeking emotional support, using relaxation techniques, turning to religion, and using humour.
3. **Meaning-focused**, in which individuals find meaning in stressful situations, such as through positive reappraisal, where they reinterpret the situation in a more positive light.
4. **Social coping** (support-seeking) in which individuals reduce stress by seeking emotional or instrumental support from their community.

Besides these adaptive coping mechanisms, which increase the resilience and well-being of individuals and decrease socio-cultural adaptation stress (Pinarbasi, 2023), maladaptive coping mechanisms refer to coping mechanisms associated with poor mental health outcomes and higher levels of psychopathology symptoms. These include disengagement, avoidance, emotional suppression and poor problem-solving (Compas et al., 2017). Furthermore, according to Sánchez et al. (2010), individuals who employ maladaptive coping mechanisms are more likely to engage in health-risk behaviours compared to those who employ healthier, more adaptive strategies. These maladaptive mechanisms can include avoidance, denial, or substance use, which may temporarily relieve stress but ultimately lead to negative outcomes.

### 3.4 Importance of external support

As previously discussed studies suggested, institutional and peer support is crucial in the process of international students adapting to a new cultural and social environment (Ferencz & Kypriyanova, 2024; Beech, 2017; Taušová, 2016; Olagunju et al., 2024; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Muller, 2023; Sümer et al., 2008; Pinarbasi, 2023; Yilmaz et al., 2022).

The GLODEP team provides a support system for international students before and upon their arrival. Alternatively, students can refer to the information offered by the Welcome Office, which

contains all the necessary details for their studies at the university. Another option is the Erasmus Student Network UP Olomouc, one of the biggest student associations in Europe. They provide practical information about living in Olomouc. Students can be in contact with coordinators from the International Relations Office and sign up for a “buddy”—a local who will guide them throughout their first days in the city, helping with practical and bureaucratic matters. ESN UP also organises social events, trips and sports activities for Erasmus students (ESN UP Olomouc, 2025). Being part of this student association appears to be the most effective way for international students to adapt to a new environment successfully.

### 3.4.1 Psychological support at Palacký University

Besides *Mindful Mundus*, which was a six-week Erasmus+ Student and Alumni Alliance program in autumn 2023 aimed at supporting mental health awareness and intercultural competence of Erasmus students, another option for GLODEP students is to turn to Palacký University regarding their mental health.

As of 2024, the university offers a list of psychological and psychotherapeutic counselling services. However, it is hard to find this list directly on the UP website, and the English version of the website has significantly fewer contacts and website links than the Czech version. The GLODEP website does not provide information about mental health support at all. Focusing on the English version of UP counselling services, their list summarises contacts for services that claim to help with personal, academic, work-related, or other issues. The list is divided into three sections based on the location of the workplace:

- **OUSHI**—Olomouc University Social Health Institute is part of Sts Cyril and Methodius Faculty of Theology. It is a scientific and research organisation that aims to educate in the field of health, with an emphasis on social and spiritual aspects. They offer both individual and group therapy sessions, with a discount available to UP students for individual psychotherapy (OUSHI, 2024). In the OUSHI Lab, it is also possible to have your stress level diagnosed or take a three-minute online test to assess the degree of burnout syndrome. Unfortunately, this website is only available in Czech (Lab OUSHI, 2022).
- **University Psychological Counseling Center of the Faculty of Education**—a centre explicitly addressing international students, as well as international staff members, coming to Palacký University to study or work at the Faculty of Science or Faculty of Education. The centre provides counselling in various areas of an individual’s life, including stress related to studies, problems with concentration and adaptation to university life, issues with study organisation, and any other personal problems. Counselling services are provided in both English and Spanish, and they are free of charge. However, due to limited capacity, attendance is limited to a maximum of five meetings.

They declare that their services are strictly of a psychological counselling nature, helping to develop individual's personality, rather than psychotherapy, which offers acute crisis intervention. Their website also features useful links for mobile applications and virtual relaxation rooms to help care for one's mental health (Poradna PdF, 2024).

- **Welcome Office**—otherwise known as The support centre of Palacký University in Olomouc offers a range of services. It guides students and other guests through all the steps before their arrival to the Czech Republic, upon arrival, during residency, and after leaving the country. The Welcome Office assists with visa applications and provides information on transportation to the country and accommodation in Olomouc. Lastly, it offers support in the area of health and well-being. *“We prioritise the well-being of our students, recognising that a healthy mind and body are essential for academic success.”* The Welcome Office presents a guide for any student needing help with insurance, medical care, psychological counselling, spiritual support, and other resources. (Welcome Office, 2024).

The Welcome Office also published a brochure titled “Welcome to Well-being: A Journey to your Mental Harmony” (Flekač, 2024), which offers *“a unique opportunity aimed at finding balance and harmony in everyday life. This program, implemented by Welcome Office at Palacký University Olomouc, was designed to provide students, staff, and members of the international university community with the tools and support they need to achieve optimal mental health.”* It was written with the help of many experts and 140 students and staff members from the international community. The brochure presents various theoretical and practical activities and workshops to enhance mental well-being, manage stress, and foster positive thinking. The program also features study strategies and support tools designed to assist individuals in effectively handling their daily academic and work responsibilities.

## Summary

The last part of the literature review presented the topic of mental health in relation to international students. It was established why a focus on this area is relevant, given the increasing discussion about mental health. Due to the significant life changes that studying abroad entails, numerous studies described the importance of social and institutional support in ensuring the well-being and mental health of students.

This chapter provided insight into selected mental health issues relevant to international students. Stress was found to be the most prevalent one, specifically acculturative stress and its correlation with socio-cultural adaptation. Other issues were described—depression and anxiety—that might stem from cultural shock. The importance of social and institutional support was emphasised.

A section on factors influencing mental health highlighted academic expectations, which can differ significantly from those to which international students are accustomed in their home countries. Therefore, the approach of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy was presented, which considers students' backgrounds to ensure their academic success and overall well-being. Social isolation was another factor discussed, which can arise from language and cultural differences, potentially leading to mental health issues later. It was stated that international students need to take proactive steps to combat isolation and achieve better social inclusion. Again, the importance of external support was highlighted.

Then, internal factors such as good sleep quality, physical activity, and practising mental hygiene were presented, along with the pillars of mental health that everyone should strive for. The role of personality traits was also mentioned, as it appears that some individuals experience better psychological adjustment than others. Lastly, a thesis on homesickness among international students was presented, highlighting the mental health issues associated with it, as well as the coping mechanisms that students have adopted.

The following section described different types of coping mechanisms, as well as the differences between adaptive and maladaptive coping and the outcomes of each approach. Finally, this chapter presented studies that address the importance of external support, along with the services that Palacký University offers in terms of general support and psychological counselling services, including OUSHI, University Psychological Counseling Center of the Faculty of Education and Welcome Office, which were described in further detail.

# RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter represents the research part of the thesis. Firstly, it establishes the research design and approach, presenting the general and special research questions. Then, the target group of the research is specified, followed by the description of data collection method and questionnaire piloting. This chapter also addresses the ethical considerations of the research, as well as the timeframe and limitations that arose during the conduction of the research. Lastly, the research's data analysis methods are described.

## 4. Research design and approach

This qualitative research employs an inductive research design that focuses on the level of impact that socio-cultural adaptation in the Czech Republic has on the mental health of international students, specifically those who have studied for a semester in the GLODEP program at Palacký University Olomouc. Based on the literature review and the aim of this research, general and specific questions were defined. The data collection method involves distributing an online questionnaire directly to GLODEP students. The questionnaire includes closed-ended quantitative questions and open-ended qualitative questions to provide insights into students' personal experiences. The inductive approach is chosen for its suitability for generating new insights and theories from qualitative data rather than testing pre-existing hypotheses (Perry & Jensen, 2001).

### General research question:

- How does socio-cultural adaptation impact the mental health of international students in the GLODEP program at Palacký University Olomouc?

### Special research questions:

1. What socio-cultural challenges do GLODEP students face in the Czech Republic?
2. Do different cultural backgrounds play a role in socio-cultural adaptation in the Czech Republic?
3. What is the state of mental health of GLODEP students?
4. What coping strategies do GLODEP students employ to manage stress?
5. How supportive are the institutions in providing mental health support?
6. What improvements can be made to the GLODEP program to enhance international students' experience?

## **4.1 Target group**

This thesis proposal was originally targeted at all international students and their experiences studying at Palacký University; however, after considering various factors and consulting with the thesis supervisor and thesis consultant, it became clear that the target group needed to be much narrower. This is reasonable, considering the qualitative nature of this research, which requires small samples of individuals to study the topic in-depth, unlike quantitative research, which aims for a larger sample of respondents (Miles et al., 2014). The next option for the research target group we agreed upon was to compare the study experiences of GLODEP students at three different universities in the Czech Republic, France, and Italy. However, the research outcomes might overlap, as program evaluations are administered at the end of every academic year.

The current target group for this research thesis is international students and graduates who have studied a semester of the EMJM program in Global Development Policy at Palacký University Olomouc, Faculty of Science. The research focuses on their personal experiences with the process of socio-cultural adaptation in the Czech Republic and the impact on the state of their mental health. This research does not take into consideration their experience with socio-cultural adaptation and its influence on their mental health while studying at other universities in Italy and France for the other two semesters. The target group is not limited by any other variable such as age, gender, country of origin or date of graduation.

For this research, the target group was selected using a purposive sampling approach with a snowball method, whereby respondents were chosen directly and asked to provide the contact information of other potential respondents (Miles et al., 2014).

## **4.2 Data collection method**

Data collection was conducted using an online questionnaire created in Google Forms, with which the author had a positive experience, as she also used this platform for her bachelor's thesis questionnaire. The GLODEP team at Palacký University also sends a questionnaire at the end of every academic year to collect feedback about the students' level of satisfaction with the program and organisational matters. The primary difference between their questionnaire and the one used in this research lies in the aim of the questionnaires. The GLODEP questionnaire focuses on the process of administrative tasks and assistance from UP employees; differences between the enrolment process at the three universities; and grading the accommodation at UP, the Moodle study platform, and the UP information system called Study Agenda (STAG). In contrast, this research aims to explore the personal experiences of GLODEP international students during their semester at Palacký University.

The questionnaire begins with the author's introduction, followed by further information about the research and a statement assuring the respondent's anonymity. The respondents were also encouraged to email the author if they were interested in discussing the topic further. The idea behind this was to conduct interviews with respondents who were interested and willing to discuss their mental health during their studies in the GLODEP program in order to explore the topic in as much depth as possible. In fact, the initial idea for the research method of this thesis was to conduct only interviews. However, due to the sensitivity of the topic and the author's lack of psychological education, upon further reflection, it was decided that this method would not be ideal. The author believes that the data derived from the questionnaires are eloquent enough to answer the research questions stated above.

Following the introduction, the questionnaire was divided into six sections: background information, socio-cultural adaptation experience, mental health, coping mechanisms, institutional and program support, and reflections and suggestions. There were 28 questions in total, of which 22 questions were required to be answered (see page 73 for the complete questionnaire). The questions were a mix of quantitative closed-ended, multiple-choice questions and qualitative open-ended questions. For multiple-choice questions regarding the intensity of challenge, helpfulness, or support, a 4-point Likert scale was used to encourage responders to make a clear decision, excluding any neutral or middle option (Brown, 2010).

The combination of quantitative and qualitative questions was chosen to learn from the mistakes made in the bachelor's thesis, where the aim was to explore the topic in as much depth as possible; therefore, most of the questions were open-ended. This approach has proven unsuccessful, as the answers were mostly vague; thus, the use of quantitative, closed-ended questions would have been more appropriate. Questionnaires are often quantitative, as the respondents are not assumed to write lengthy answers to each question, and this type of research approach is more straightforward to analyse. An analysis of over a thousand articles published in the top two sociology journals over a 70-year period revealed that more than two-thirds of these articles employed quantitative methods (Hunter & Leahey, 2008).

Based on an article published on the SurveyMonkey website, which showed how long it takes for the majority of respondents to complete a survey, it is clear that it is not necessary to collect responses for more than two weeks. Figure 1 on the next page illustrates the percentage of responses collected over 21 days, with 80% of responses collected within 7 days (Zheng, 2025). The author of this thesis also believed that three weeks of data collection is the appropriate timeframe based on her previous research for her bachelor's thesis using a questionnaire. There were 130 responses in total, from which 124 responses were collected within the first seven days after sharing it. As the questionnaire is usually shared once, people

see it on their social media feed for a few days, and they either fill it out immediately or never return to it.

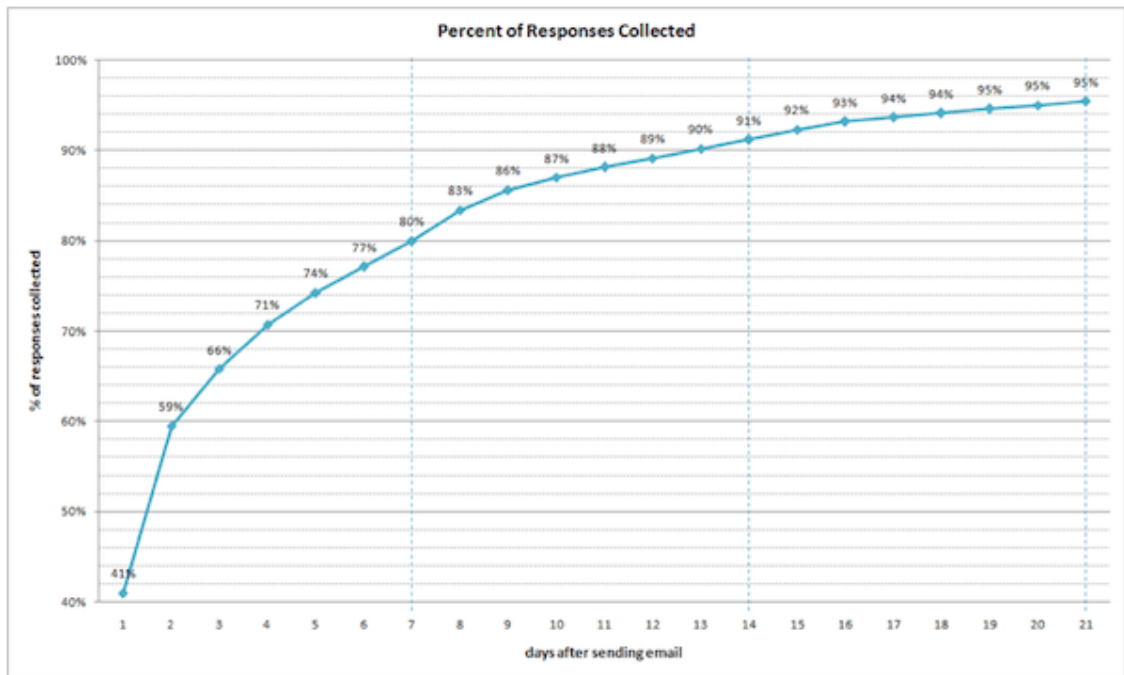


Figure 4 — Percentage of Responses Collected (SurveyMonkey, 2025)

However, this theory did not prove to be applicable to the target group of this thesis. The questionnaire that is part of this research thesis was shared in private Facebook groups for GLODEP students and alumni on 11<sup>th</sup> February 2025. Due to the low number of responses, a week later, the questionnaire was also sent privately to some GLODEP students and alumni through their LinkedIn and Facebook profiles. A few days before the end of the data collection period, a mass email was sent to three cohorts of students (2021–2023, 2022–2024 and 2023–2025)<sup>3</sup>. The questionnaire was open to accept responses until 4<sup>th</sup> March 2025, which made the data collection period last precisely three weeks. When the questionnaire was closed to stop accepting responses, a short message was added for potential respondents, providing the author’s email address for anyone interested in discussing the topic further; however, no respondent made use of this option.

---

<sup>3</sup> The GLODEP program was not open for the 2024–2026 cohort.

### 4.3 Questionnaire piloting

The questionnaire was first sent to several individuals who either had experience studying abroad or a good understanding of the English language to help ensure its coherence. The questionnaire underwent several rounds of editing, either changing the order of the questions or changing the required or optional questions. Some explanations have been added to clarify certain questions. It was also noted that since the GLODEP cohorts are relatively small and many GLODEP graduates are well-known, the question about nationality and graduation year might expose their anonymity. Those two questions were changed to not required, and in the data analysis, a connection between the nationality of responders and the year of their graduation will not be mentioned.

### 4.4 Ethical considerations

Participants were informed beforehand about the focus of the research and how their data would be handled. They were informed that their responses would be completely anonymous, used only for research purposes in this master's thesis and would not reach the hands of GLODEP administrators, although the questionnaire was distributed with their assistance. Their anonymity is further secured by not mentioning their nationality or cohort year, as mentioned above. Considering the sensitive nature of the topic of mental health and the personal experiences related to it, they were not required to fill in the questionnaire in any way. Their participation in the research was entirely voluntary, and they could stop responding to the questionnaire at any time while completing it. The respondents were not rewarded for completing the questionnaire.

### 4.5 Research timeframe

Phase	Tasks	Timeframe
<b>Research proposal</b>	Define thesis topic, research questions and methodology	July–August 2024
<b>Literature review</b>	Review relevant studies, develop a framework	September–December 2024
<b>Research design</b>	Prepare questionnaire	January 2025
<b>Data collection</b>	Distribute questionnaire	February 2025
<b>Data analysis</b>	Organise, analyse and interpret data	March 2025
<b>Finalisation</b>	Write outcomes, discussion and conclusion	March 2025
<b>Revision and submission</b>		April 2025

*Table 1 — Research timeframe (own design)*

## **4.6 Research limitations**

The main limitation of this research was that the number of expected respondents did not reflect the actual number of respondents. Based on previous experience with research using questionnaires, the author believed that collecting at least fifty responses was feasible while the questionnaire was open. This prediction was also rooted in personal experience and an article from SurveyMonkey, which revealed how long it takes most respondents to complete a survey (see more in Chapter 4.2 *Data collection method*). Unfortunately, after the link was sent to the closed Facebook GLODEP groups, there was only one response after three days of publicising the questionnaire. The thesis supervisor and consultant kindly provided a link to GLODEP's LinkedIn page and direct contacts for GLODEP students. After that, the questionnaire was sent privately to GLODEP students, asking them to share it with their classmates.

There were only eight responses after the questionnaire had been online for a week, which was not expected at the beginning of this research. Thankfully, after a mass email was sent to the 2021–2023, 2022–2024, and 2023–2025 cohorts, the total number of responses by the beginning of March was 23, which was considered enough to analyse them further. Since the start of the program in 2017, seven cohorts of students have been enrolled in this program. The last cohort, 2023–2025, has not graduated yet as of the writing of this thesis. The exact number of students in each cohort is unknown; however, according to the official GLODEP website, there are more than 120 alumni worldwide, indicating approximately 20 students in each cohort. The questionnaire received 23 responses, which seems like a reasonable basis for the research, considering there are around 140 students or alumni who have studied in the GLODEP program.

## **4.7 Data analysis methods**

The responses from the Google Forms questionnaire were exported to Google Sheets for improved legibility, organisation and graphical outputs. The charts available directly in the responses overview in Google Forms were used to analyse the quantitative closed-ended questions; however, the ones inserted into this chapter were modified due to the unintuitive colour-coding design (negative options in green and positive in red). Open-ended questions, which were qualitative in design, were coded to identify recurring patterns. Then, similar codes were clustered together to create categories related to the research questions (Miles et al., 2014). Since the number of responses was relatively low, the analysis was conducted entirely in Google Sheets, using separate sheets for each question.

## **Summary**

In this chapter, the purpose for choosing qualitative research for this thesis was explained. It then presented a general research question along with six special research questions, which were based on the literature review. The target group was defined, detailing the original target group and finally narrowing it down to GLODEP students. Then, the data collection method was introduced—using Google Forms—and acknowledging a separate questionnaire issued to GLODEP students by the program administrators. The thesis questionnaire was outlined in detail, including the type of questions related to learning from mistakes made in the author's bachelor's thesis and the improved implementation this time.

The duration of the data collection period was discussed, referencing SurveyMonkey, which indicates that the majority of questionnaire responses are typically collected within the first seven days after publication. The methods for phasing the publication of the questionnaire and locating additional respondents, as the data collection did not proceed as predicted, were also described.

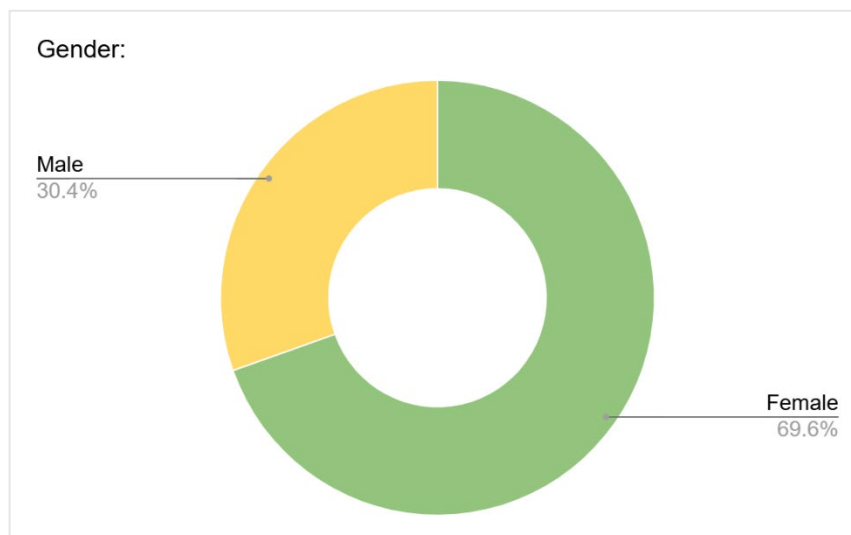
During piloting, the wording and order of several questions were adjusted, and the required response for the nationality and graduation year was removed to maintain the anonymity of GLODEP students. Ethical considerations included informing respondents about how the data from the questionnaire would be handled. The following section presented the research timeline from July 2024 to April 2025. The most significant limitation of the research was found to be the discrepancy between the expected and actual numbers of respondents. Finally, the same platform used to create the questionnaire was also used to analyse the quantitative data. The qualitative data were processed in Google Sheets, where the necessary coding was also done.

## 5. Research outcomes

This chapter is divided into six sections that present the research results, aiming to answer both general and special research questions. First, the respondents' background information is provided to outline their demographics. The second part discusses the socio-cultural adaptation experience of GLODEP students at Palacký University. Third, this chapter lists the identified mental health issues among the respondents. Fourth, the different coping mechanisms employed by GLODEP students are explored. The fifth part discusses institutional and program support from the respondents' perspective. Finally, the program's evaluation is presented.

### 5.1 Background information

Starting with background information about the 23 respondents, it is noted that only seven were men, as illustrated in Chart 1. The gender of the respondents will not be taken into consideration in further analysis since acculturative hassles are not gender-dependent, according to Ching et al. (2014). Despite the limited number of respondents, the representation of women in this research highlights a global trend of increasing women's enrolment in tertiary education worldwide. UNESCO's Higher Education Global Data Report (2022) shows that between 2000 and 2020, access to higher education grew faster for women than for men. The gross enrolment rate for women rose from 19% to 43%, while for men, it increased from 19% to 37%. In 2020, 113 women were enrolled in higher education for every 100 men. Despite this progress, only 30.5% of researchers worldwide were women in 2018.

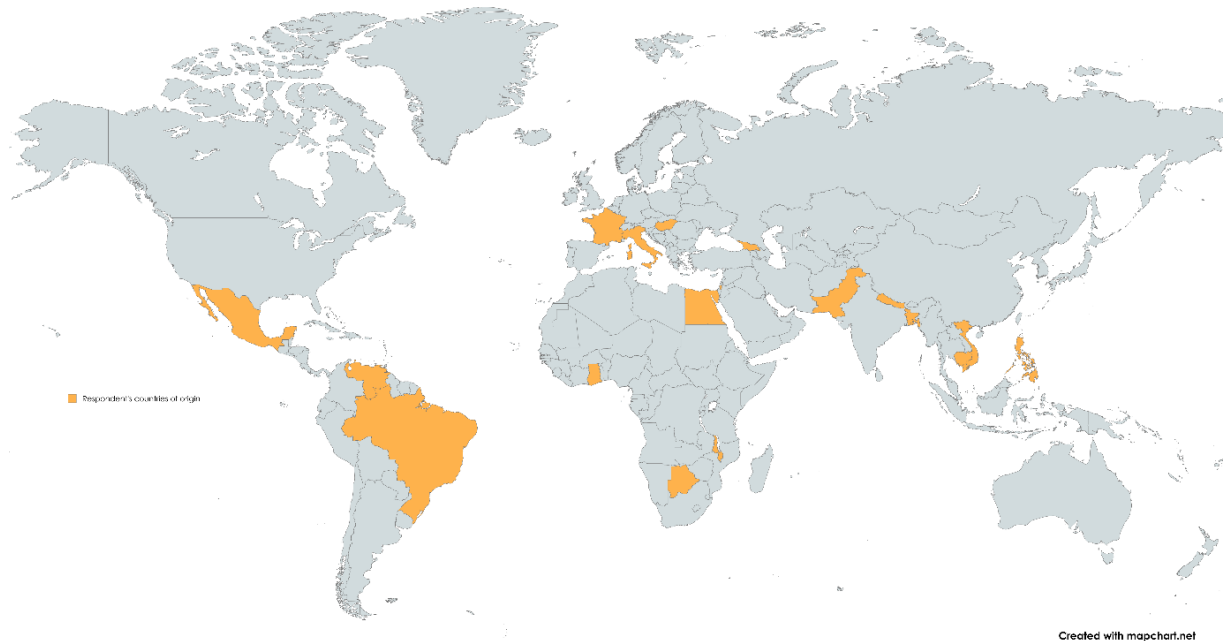


*Chart 1 – Gender representation of respondents (own research data)*

Although the respondents' age is irrelevant to the research topic and serves only for informative purposes, the average age of respondents was 27 years. The year of graduation varied among respondents. The most prevalent graduation year was 2025, indicating that 39.1% of respondents

are currently enrolled in the GLODEP program; therefore, the information from their responses can be considered up-to-date.

The country of origin also varied among all the responders, as illustrated in Map 1. In total, the responders were from 18 different countries. 10 respondents were from Asia, 4 from Africa, 4 from Europe and 3 from Central and South America. 2 respondents chose not to disclose their country of origin.



*Map 1 – Respondents’ countries of origin (created with mapchart.net)*

This representation of countries corresponds to a larger sample from a publication titled “20 Years of Erasmus Mundus,” which states that by 2024, the programme has provided scholarships for 34,197 master’s students from 179 countries. Most of these students were from Asia (34%), followed by Europe (18%), Latin America and the Caribbean (17%) and other neighbouring European regions (14%). The top five home nations of master’s scholarship recipients were India, Brazil, China, Mexico, and Pakistan (Ferencz & Kupriyanova, 2024). This data present a great opportunity for students from developing countries to study at prestigious European universities, thereby enhancing their future career prospects.

Fluency in the English language was the most common among respondents, with a total of 22 responses. Respondents indicated that they were also fluent in other languages, including Hindi, Spanish, Urdu, French, Italian, Arabic, Portuguese, and Turkish. The languages with only one fluent speaker were Azerbaijani, Bangla, Hungarian, Kazakh, Nepali, Russian, Setswana, Tagalog, and Vietnamese.

Each GLODEP student comes into contact with at least three foreign languages, as the program is taught at three universities in different countries. Additionally, they are surrounded by various languages of fellow students. Learning a new language is crucial for the socio-cultural adaptation to the host country. That is why the next question asked was whether they had learned any new language. Of the 23 respondents, 17 answered positively. 50% learned Italian, 27% learned French, and 23% learned Czech. Some respondents commented that they had not learned the language at a communicative level and had only picked up a few basic phrases. That is understandable since their time in each country is limited to a maximum of five months.

As found in the literature review, prior experience of living or studying abroad may positively impact future stays abroad (Taušová, 2016). Thus, a corresponding question was included in the research. Fourteen respondents had studied or lived abroad before studying in the GLODEP program. 50% have studied or lived abroad for 6 months or less, 33.3% for precisely one year and 16.7% for 3 years or more. The most mentioned destination was Europe. However, out of all respondents who have lived or studied abroad before, only 21.7% of them found the adaptation to a new society and culture *Not challenging*; therefore, the claim that previous experience of living abroad can positively impact future stays might not be valid in every case. The questionnaire also included a question about how the experience of studying in the GLODEP program prepared the respondents for future stays abroad, with most of the respondents predicting it prepared them *Well* or *Fairly well* (see Chart 2).

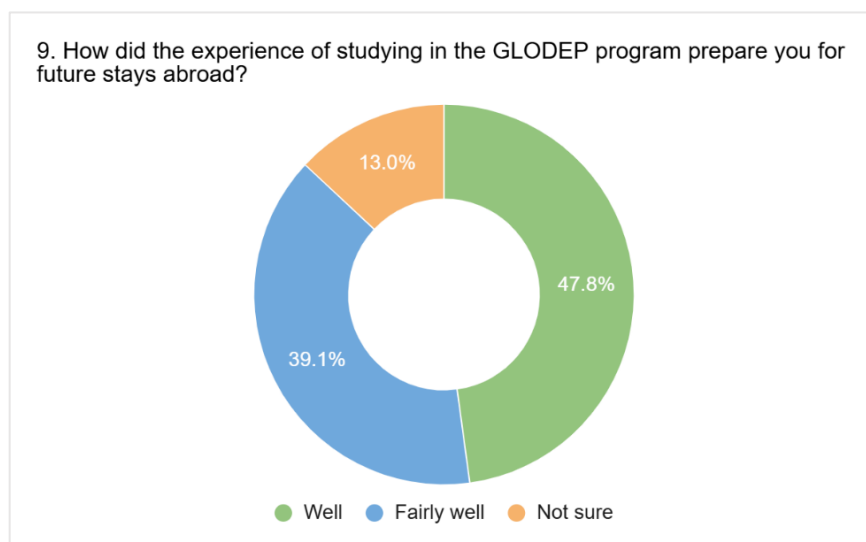


Chart 2 – Preparedness for future stays abroad after studying in the GLODEP program (own research data)

## 5.2 Socio-cultural adaptation experience

This chapter aims to address the first two special research questions defined in the research methodology, focusing on different types of socio-cultural challenges faced by GLODEP students and the role of different cultural backgrounds in adapting to the culture and society of the Czech Republic. The data were analysed from questions 6, 7, 8 and 8.1 of the questionnaire (see page 73 for the complete questionnaire).

The personal experiences of the students presented in the following analysed data aim to answer the first special research question: **What socio-cultural challenges do GLODEP students face in the Czech Republic?** The question regarding the specific aspects of socio-cultural adaptation that were the most difficult for respondents provided insightful answers. During the data analysis, the responses were divided into four categories based on common themes, sorted by the most frequent responses: language barrier, academic expectations, social interactions, and others.

The most prevalent difficulty faced by GLODEP students was a language barrier, reported by 69.6% of respondents. This barrier hindered their social interaction because Czech people are usually unwilling to speak English, which was already established in the author's bachelor's thesis in 2023. One respondent elaborated: *"I think [the most difficult was] the language barrier, and because Czech Republic doesn't tend to be very diverse, people can be a bit cautious or conservative. But once you get to know them, they're lovely."* Engaging in any kind of social interaction can be challenging, especially when dealing with public, medical, and social services, as some respondents highlighted. Czech social customs and the distant nature of Czech people were difficulties that many respondents pointed out.

Seven respondents (30.4%) felt that the academic expectations were the most difficult for them, mainly referring to the workload, which was significantly different and higher in quantity than what they were used to in their home country. One respondent had trouble adjusting to the academic requirements, and it led to social isolation and a decline in their mental health: *"Academic expectations [were the most difficult] since we had to study all the time. I felt like I was living in a bubble back then, and I rarely had a chance to leave Olomouc given the workload we had back then. It was the most depressing semester I had had throughout the whole journey. Part of the experience was due to the fact that I had not been living away from my family before I moved to CZ and navigating my way throughout my wholly independent life was hard. The weather during winter in CZ was really gloomy as well. We barely saw the sun, and everything was just dark and it affected my mental health a lot."* Another difficulty that hindered one respondent's socio-cultural adaptation was shared accommodation in the dormitory: *"The shared student accommodations were very challenging for me. I wasn't used to this type of environment."*

Thirty per cent of respondents shared their experiences with cultural misunderstanding, shock, or conflict in the Czech Republic in the following question. There were various stories submitted. For instance, one GLODEP student was the target of some offensive comments about their culture, which they ultimately found amusing rather than offensive. Another respondent had an unpleasant encounter with a rude and unhelpful service worker. There were also instances of racism, particularly in the Czech Republic, compared to the three countries in which the respondents studied. Some of the experiences were milder, such as the difference in sanitary and feminine hygiene product disposal, which the respondent became accustomed to during their stay. Another example of a cultural misunderstanding was the need for extensive planning with Czech people, even for casual activities, which contrasts with the spontaneity typical in the respondent's home country.

Given the diversity of the respondents' countries of origin, there was a corresponding variety in the subjective perceptions of the adapting process. As illustrated in Chart 3, 69.6% of GLODEP students found it *Slightly* or *Moderately challenging* to adapt to the new society and cultural environment in the Czech Republic. Respondents who chose *Extremely* or *Moderately challenging* were not from Europe, which would explain their difficulties with adapting. On the contrary, respondents who selected *Not challenging* were entirely from Europe, where each country typically shares a similar culture and societal norms with the Czech Republic. This finding positively addresses the second special research question: **Do different cultural backgrounds play a role in socio-cultural adaptation in the Czech Republic?**

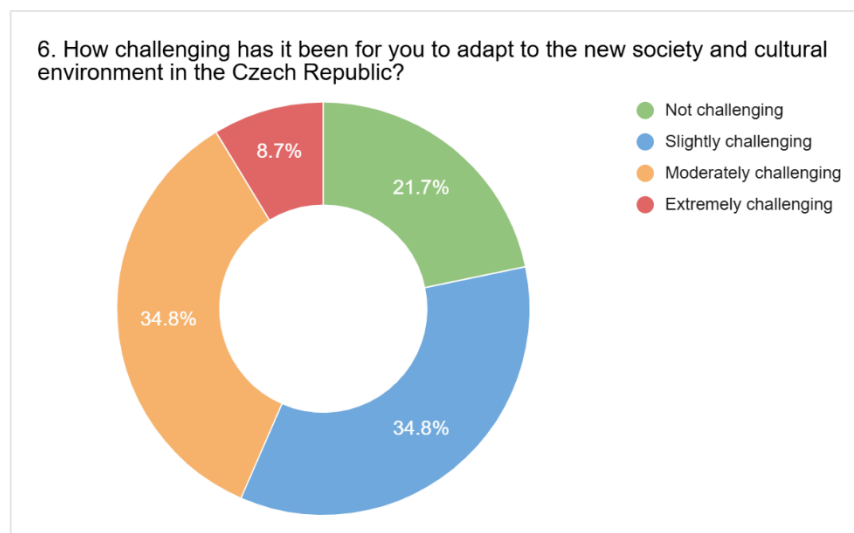


Chart 3 — Representation of the level of difficulty for GLODEP students' adaptation (own research data)

### 5.3 Identified mental health issues

According to the self-mental health assessment, it is evident that 56.5% of the respondents' mental health was not in a good state as they chose either *Fair* or *Poor* answer. Only 13% of respondents assessed their mental health as *Excellent* or *Very Good* (see Chart 4). This assessment serves as an answer to the third special research question: **What is the state of mental health of GLODEP students?**

Two respondents, who found their mental health in a poor state, experienced stress, depression and anxiety. However, they reported their socio-cultural adaptation as not challenging. The reason was that their mental health declined due to the high academic expectations, not because of poorly adapting to a new environment. On the contrary, two respondents who reported that their mental health was *Very good* found their socio-cultural adaption slightly to moderately challenging. One of them even noted an improvement in mental health in regards to socialising: *“I think [the process of adapting to a new culture and social life has] impacted me both in a good and a bad way, but in my particular case, mainly good since my mental health back in my country was not in the best shape. However, I have experienced many stressful situations during the master. Moving countries and dealing with legal paperwork by myself has been challenging. Regarding social life, I believe I’ve been lucky because my cohort is super friendly and easy to interact with, in addition, I made a nice group of friends that are my support system abroad.”*

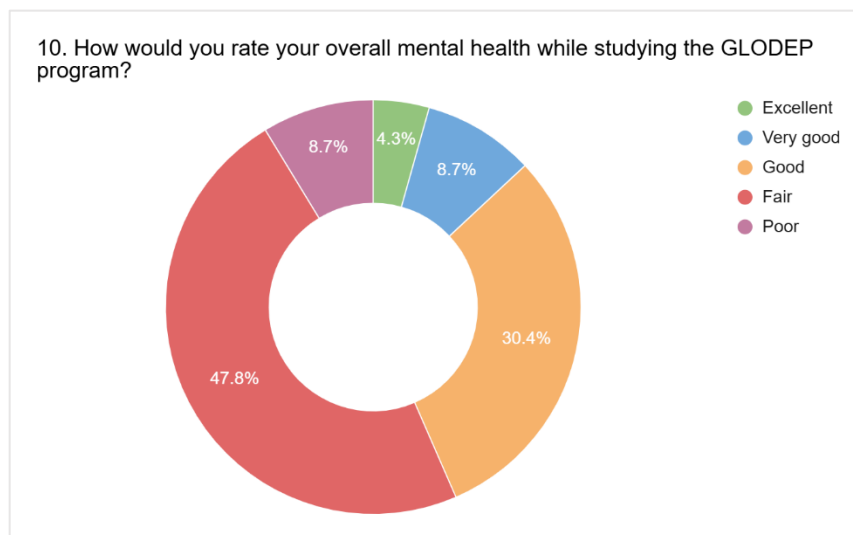


Chart 4 – The state of mental health of GLODEP students (own research data)

As predicted in Chapter 3.1.1 *Stress*: GLODEP students did not spend enough time at Palacký University to successfully adapt to the new environment, hence why there were 18 respondents experiencing stress during this period. The same number of respondents also experienced anxiety (see Chart 5 on the next page). 52.2% of respondents experienced homesickness, which

corresponds with the theoretical review’s findings, stating that homesickness is often manifested during the first three months of moving to a new place. Neither depression nor social isolation was very common among the respondents, as these factors are closely linked.

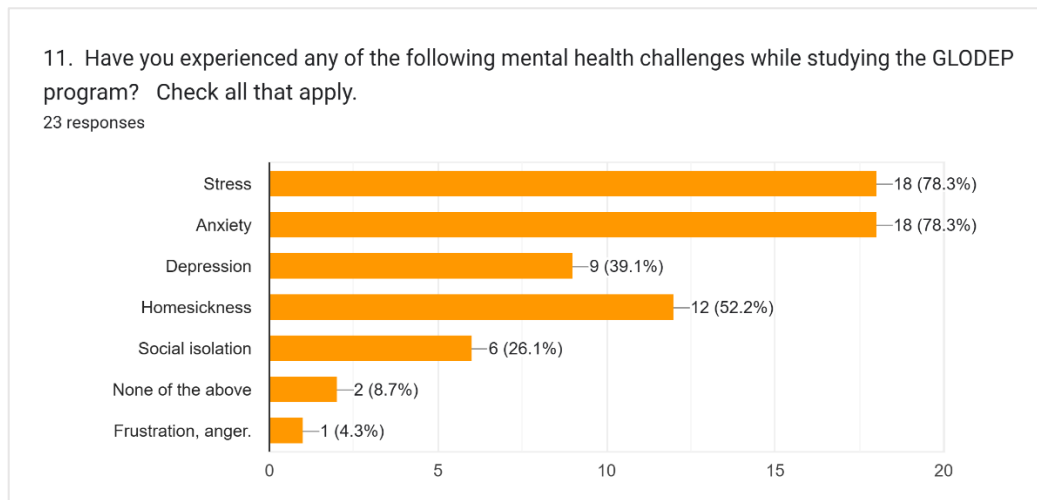


Chart 5 – Mental health challenges of GLODEP students (own research data)

One respondent submitted their own mental health challenges, which were frustration and anger that coincided with their extremely challenging process of adaptation—not with a new culture or society, but rather with the academic struggles: *“To be honest, for me, I didn’t feel it was the adaptation to a new culture and social life that impacted my mental health, but more the challenges of the GLODEP program itself. They were academic in nature, but also related to poor administration or bureaucracy steps to take.”*

As discussed in the literature review, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the mental health of international students, who have experienced significant social isolation and mental health difficulties. Three respondents studied in the GLODEP program during the pandemic and had to attend online classes. In contrast to students studying during a regular semester and not during the pandemic, the three individuals from the “pandemic cohort” reported that their mental health was excellent, fair, and good. Two of them experienced no mental health challenges. They also did not find adapting to a new society and culture challenging, as there were limited opportunities for socialising during that period. However, this is inconclusive evidence as the sample of respondents studying during the pandemic was too small.

## **The impact of socio-cultural adaptation on the mental health of GLODEP students**

The open-ended question about how adapting to a new culture and social life impacted their mental health came with numerous insightful responses. During the data analysis, the responses were categorised into five groups based on common themes, sorted by the most frequent responses: unimpacted mental health, a lack of sense of belonging, social isolation, reliance on peer support, and the role of personality.

Seven respondents reported that the adaptation was not a problem that would impact their mental health at all, and three of them responded that their mental health suffered because of the academic pressure and expectations that were placed upon them. One of the responses was already mentioned on a previous page, where the academic challenges of the GLODEP program most impacted the respondent's mental health. For the second respondent, the socio-cultural adaptation *"...wasn't an issue. I was an overachiever back home. Once I joined GLODEP, the studies were harder than what I was used to. After a while of trying to catch up, I gave up. Not getting straight A's made me anxious, stressed, and depressed."* A third respondent reported that there were *"academic expectations for nothing."*

One respondent noted that the adaptation did not impact their mental health at all because they were *"very eager to experience the new cultures. Despite religious differences and sticking to my core values, I found it easy to socialize and have a good time."* This respondent proves how mindset and personality traits play a significant role in the process of adapting to a new environment, as discussed in Chapter 3.2.2 *Internal factors*. Another respondent, whose mental health was in a good state, noted that while adapting to a new culture and society, students need to be open-minded, as it is a good chance for them to go out of their comfort zone.

The missing sense of belonging played a significant role in the impact on respondents' mental health and as an obstacle to better adaptation to the culture and society:

*"It primarily influenced the sense of belonging I felt every day, and it caused me at times to feel lost. This, I believe, is partially due to the need to redefine and explain my identity and choices much more often than in a place where my existence does not require justification or explanation. At times, this constant redefinition and search for words left me empty."*

*"There were times when I felt vulnerable as an outsider, especially when dealing with the public services, and the administration of the masters and other aspects of public life."*

*"It was challenging. It's hard to enter local social circles being an international, and people can be a bit taken aback if you don't know or don't immediately get used to their customs."*

*“The differences in culture and experiences of other Black students gave me some social anxiety and isolation which were especially palpable during the winter period.”*

A valid point made by one of the respondents was that adaptation in the Czech Republic was more challenging, as it was the first semester in a country out of the three universities of the consortium: *“I would say it depends. It will be quite hard in the very beginning, like in Czech Republic. I think I would have felt the same if the first country I moved to had not been CZ, but France or Italy. But the truth is, only in CZ did I feel so hopeless about my studies because the things we learnt and the way we learnt them were just so different from what I had experienced previously. It was just hard in multiple ways. I don’t think I had any social life when I was in Czech Republic in the 1st semester. However, when I came back there for my graduation ceremony and thesis defence, it was a completely different experience. I think with all that I had been through before that, I was becoming a more confident and mentally stronger person. And the weather during summer also helped. And I changed my way of thinking about CZ completely after the last week we had for GLODEP.”*

Another respondent had a similar experience: *“I arrived a week before everyone else, so I was completely alone. I honestly felt lost and wanted to go back home as soon as possible. But when my classmates arrived, everything became easier, and I knew I was not alone. Also, I think I was putting a lot of pressure on myself regarding coursework, and in the end, it didn’t matter, honestly. So, I feel like I didn’t enjoy culture as much. But specifically for the question, I think that given that I was not alone, I felt I could thrive and tackle any difficulties.”*

Many other respondents shared the same sentiment about peer support, which proves the significant relationship between socialising and the sense of belonging, as well as mental health. As one respondent noted: *“My classmates helped me get through this process and kept me sane. I can’t imagine doing this alone as my mental health would have been worse.”*

The unique nature of the GLODEP program, which is studying at three universities in two years, led many respondents to observe that they struggled with mental health because of moving every six months, adapting to another environment and seeking new routines. As discussed in Chapter 2.1.2 *U-curve model*, the students cannot truly adapt since they do not experience all the stages of the adaptation based on the model. As soon as they start to reach the adaptation stage, they need to relocate and start all over, which can be frustrating and stressful. *“...the constant moving within GLODEP, constant need to adapt to new governance systems and bureaucracy related to daily life but also academic planning was stressful and at times overwhelming.”* Another responded: *“It led me to isolation and the stress of leaving for another country soon.”*

## 5.4 Coping mechanisms

In response to the fourth special research question **What coping strategies do GLODEP students employ to manage stress?** 82.6% of GLODEP students reported that the role of peer support and socialising was the most significant, which is a type of coping mechanism known as social coping, as described by Folkman and Moskowitz (2004). One respondent remarked: *“I think spending time around people definitely helped. I got a chance to talk to new people, sharing stories (we did that a lot during the third semester when I was sharing a house with other 5 Erasmus people and I was never bored).”*

Another type of coping mechanism identified was emotion-focused coping, with some elements of problem-focused coping. 30.4% of respondents used travel as a way to cope with the unfamiliar and demanding environment. *“Traveling somewhere was also a good idea. I just love spending time with my friends, and we are like a family now.”* The respondent who struggled the most with studying reported: *“The constant pressure of school performance did not make it very feasible to do some activities for our mental health; therefore, my coping mechanism was to constantly leave Olomouc and the dorms. I was almost every weekend out travelling or visiting family, friends and partner abroad or somewhere in Czechia.”* A respondent who did not take remarks about their cultural background seriously (mentioned in Chapter 5.2 *Socio-cultural adaptation experience*) was also employing an emotion-focused coping mechanism as previously described.

Other emotion-focused coping mechanisms included physical activities, such as attending Zumba classes, going to the gym, practicing daily meditation, and going for walks and running. One respondent noted that participating in these activities helped them stay connected with more familiar aspects of their culture. Two respondents employed meaning-focused coping, reinterpreting the situation in a more positive light. *“Be open-minded... it’s a good chance for students to go out of their comfort zone.”* As one respondent—mentioned in the previous chapter— noted, being eager about new experiences is a good predictor of a successful adaptation process and its impact on mental health.

Maladaptive coping mechanisms were mentioned minimally, highlighting unhealthy eating and drinking alcohol. Only two respondents did not adopt any coping mechanism for the reason that it was easy for them to cope with both adapting to the environment and managing the academic demands of the program.

## 5.5 Institutional and program support

As mentioned in the literature review, external support is essential for adapting to a new university environment and ensuring a smooth transition. This chapter aims to answer the fifth special research question: **How supportive are the institutions in providing mental health support?**

Starting with the initial help provided during orientation in the new environment to the continuous availability and offer of help throughout the studies, the GLODEP website is a great source for initial guidance before being accepted into the program. However, while studying, students need to seek help themselves. Palacký University offers many counselling services, but they are difficult to find. Below are two charts comparing the support of UP in addressing the mental health needs of international students and the helpfulness of the GLODEP team in providing information about available mental health support. The results are fairly similar, with respondents mostly finding both UP not very supportive and the GLODEP team not really helpful. These results can serve as a suggestion for improving both services in the future.

16. How supportive do you find Palacký University Olomouc in addressing the mental health needs of international students?

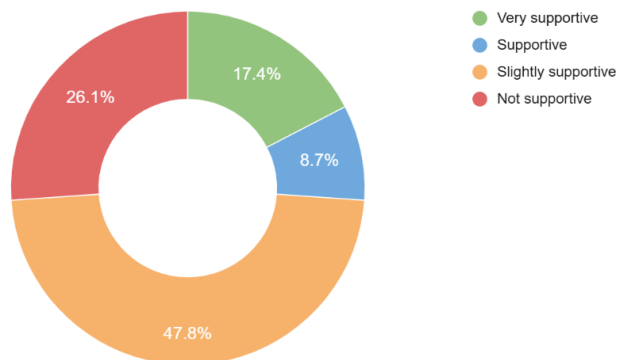


Chart 6 — Mental health support of Palacký University (own research data)

17. How helpful was the GLODEP team in providing information about available mental health support?

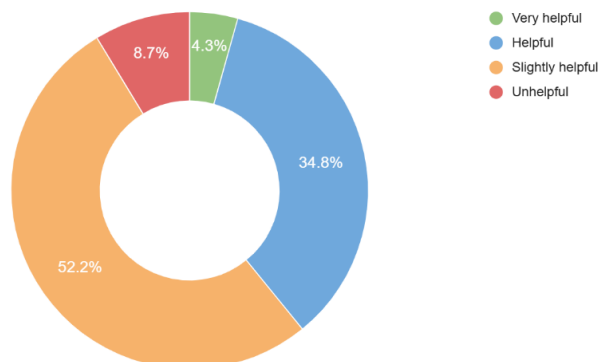


Chart 7 — Information about mental health support by the GLODEP team (own research data)

When asked about using mental health counselling services, only two GLODEP students reported using these services—specifically, Welcome Office and the University Psychological Counseling Centre of the Faculty of Education. 91.3% of respondents did not use any of the services offered by UP, and 19% of them reported that they were unaware of these services even existing. The lack of information was the most mentioned reason in the question about barriers to accessing the mental health support GLODEP students needed, followed by cost and language barrier.

Some respondents relied on their friends instead of therapists, and one preferred their online sessions with a therapist from their country. Another respondent shared their unpleasant experience with The University Psychological Counseling Centre and the buddy system: *“There was no English speaking therapist available. I’m autistic and when I told the office about how anxious I’m feeling in an alien environment, they told me that they could send a student who will follow me around in public places? As if this is an alternative to therapy. I had to contact the student myself and they’d join me only if they were available. With the chronic anxiety that I have, of course I never contacted the student. The office never bothered to follow up or check up on me. I had a very bad depressive episode following that. Now I have to get therapy online, but it takes away most of my monthly budget.”* This respondent’s experience can serve as an incentive to improve the centre’s services in the future to have a more sensitive approach, especially considering neurodivergent individuals<sup>4</sup>.

Besides mental health support, it would be ideal to take into consideration the diverse cultural backgrounds of GLODEP students and adjust the teaching styles to enhance their academic experience rather than hinder it (more on Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Chapter 3.2.1). One respondent mentioned that they felt *“...the program’s courses in general seem not to consider any non-European/North-American academic perspective worth of mentioning, and sometimes professors even reproduce outdated colonialistic views as truth.”* Another respondent agreed: *“I think the teaching methods and assessments could benefit from more inclusivity so that students from different backgrounds could shine in different aspects. For instance, a good assessment will have a good combination of MCQs [multiple choice questions], short form answers, long form answers, and participation in class or activities. This will help capture every student’s strengths more equitably.”* There were also other remarks about the teaching styles,

---

<sup>4</sup> *“Neurodivergent is a nonmedical term that describes people whose brains develop or work differently for some reason. This means the person has different strengths and struggles from people whose brains develop or work more typically. While some people who are neurodivergent have medical conditions, it also happens to people where a medical condition or diagnosis hasn’t been identified.”* (Cleveland Clinic, 2022)

such as not repeating academic content in different semesters, teaching more market-oriented skills, and making the lesson less formal and more engaging on the part of the professors.

## 5.6 Evaluation of the GLODEP program

To conclude the questionnaire, respondents were asked to rate their overall experience studying the GLODEP program. The average rating was 7.41 stars, with most of the responses rating 8 out of 10 stars. The rating did not fall below 4 stars for any respondent. This rating was purely informative and had no relevance to the research results.

Respondents provided information on improvements to various topics to answer the final sixth special research question: **What improvements can be made to the GLODEP program to enhance international students' experience?** The question did not suggest an answer regarding mental health, which might be the reason why there were only two mentions of better mental health support. This absence of suggestions for improvement in the provided mental health support does not correlate with the responses to the previous question regarding Palacký University support in addressing the mental health needs of international students. In response to that question about mental health support, six respondents found the institution to be not supportive, and another eleven respondents found it to be only slightly supportive.

The reason for not mentioning the improvement of mental health support at the GLODEP program might be due to the belief that, as it is the last question, it does not fully relate to the previous questions and perhaps not even to the overall topic of the questionnaire. Therefore, respondents tended to focus on other aspects they thought needed improvement. However, it can also point to a different issue, such as stigma associated with psychological help (Corney et al., 2024), as 56.5% of the respondents reported their mental health to be in a poor or fair state but did not decide to seek help on their own.

Besides better mental health support, a frequently suggested change in the GLODEP program was a change to the curriculum. Many respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the coherence between universities and the related semesters, stating that the courses were repetitive and that the professors' approach could be more engaging, less formal, and inclusive for students from different backgrounds, as well as oriented towards specific skills (as mentioned in the previous chapter).

There were also mentions of a few job offers after graduation, either because of the limited supply of jobs the institution provided or because students were simply unprepared. The reasons for not feeling prepared were, for instance, a lack of skills or expertise in one specific field, as the programme is very multidisciplinary. The official GLODEP website claims that career days are an integral part of the curriculum each semester, providing students with opportunities to make

contacts that will benefit them in their future careers. However, one respondent disagreed; when asked what they would change, they responded: *“The most important thing for me is regarding the post-GLODEP life. The program doesn’t provide any support with the employment, not even in a format of networking. Since the program is too multidisciplinary, I believe it makes it harder for graduates to get hired, since we know many things in different fields but not on an ‘enough’ level to be an expert in at least one of them.”*

As stated in Chapter 1.1 *International students*, the duration of stay for GLODEP students at Palacký University is limited, thereby restricting opportunities for meaningful interactions and proper social and cultural immersion. This is reflected in some of the responses to the final question, where respondents suggested that more social events could be organised so students can learn more from each other within the cohort. One respondent would like to improve the experience by: *“...team building, safe space creation for sharing struggles and learn from each other. The biggest gift of GLODEP are the people in it! We should have taken more advantage of being together and learning from each other.”* Another respondent felt they did not fully take advantage of their multicultural cohort to socialise with their classmates and learn about other cultures.

Lastly, four respondents expressed the need to change one of the hosting universities, mostly mentioning the University of Pavia in Italy. The primary reason was the lack of student support. Thankfully, that will not be a problem for future students, as the new accreditation has excluded the University of Pavia and added a new member to the consortium—the University of Göttingen in Germany. There is no information available online about the reasons for the change. However, it seems to be a good decision based on the responses to this questionnaire.

## 6. Discussion

The aim of this research thesis was to examine the impact of socio-cultural adaptation on the mental health of international students studying in the Global Development Policy master's program. Using both quantitative and qualitative data derived from questionnaires, this research explored the experiences of twenty-three GLODEP students with their cultural and societal adaptation, mental health issues, coping mechanisms, and their awareness and use of mental health support services at Palacký University. The research also provided suggestions for improvements to the GLODEP program to enhance international students' experience. This chapter answers the six special research questions and the general research question by discussing the research outcomes of GLODEP students' mental health impacted by socio-cultural adaptation compared to other research and publications.

### 1. What socio-cultural challenges do GLODEP students face in the Czech Republic?

To answer the first special research question, the research outcomes indicate that the most prevalent socio-cultural challenge faced by GLODEP students studying at Palacký University in the Czech Republic was *a language barrier* (69.6%), which hindered their social interactions and led to feelings of isolation. The second most mentioned challenge was *academic expectations* (30.4%), which presented a significantly higher workload and different learning techniques compared to what the GLODEP students were accustomed to in their home country. Other mentioned challenges included *differences in societal norms* (21.7%), *social isolation* (8.7%), and *racism* (4.3%).

The language barrier can be overcome by attending language courses, which are offered at every university where the GLODEP program is taught. Although 73.9% of respondents learned a new language while studying the program, only 23% learned Czech. Given that a semester is a relatively short time to learn a language thoroughly, it can be assumed that language barriers will continue to pose challenges for GLODEP students in the future, hindering their socio-cultural adaptation.

Academic expectations placed upon GLODEP students can be particularly prevalent, especially in the first semester at Palacký University, as the workload is the highest among all universities. Given that it can also be the first contact with a different culture beyond the student's culture of origin, it is crucial to adapt teaching methods accordingly by using Culturally Responsive Pedagogy to reduce the stress of academic requirements (Khoo & Huo, 2022).

## **2. Do different cultural backgrounds play a role in socio-cultural adaptation in the Czech Republic?**

Based on the responses in the questionnaire and the cultural backgrounds of the respondents, the connection between respondents' country of origin and the level of challenge in socio-cultural adaptation certainly exists. It was found that cultural backgrounds play a significant role in socio-cultural adaptation. The respondents who did not find adaptation challenging were entirely from European countries. However, even though they might not perceive adapting to society and culture as challenging, some of them found the academic expectations and requirements the most challenging, which also impacted their mental health.

Prior experience living abroad in different cultures did not prove to positively impact GLODEP students' adaptation at Palacký University, as pointed out by Taušová (2016). However, students felt that their experience studying in the GLODEP program has helped them to prepare for future stays abroad.

## **3. What is the state of mental health of GLODEP students?**

To determine the state of mental health of GLODEP students, their self-assessment showed that 56.5% of respondents found their mental health to be poor or fair, mostly experiencing stress and anxiety. As several studies have explored (Mahmood & Galloway, 2018; Ching et al., 2014), a correlation between socio-cultural adaptation and acculturative stress exists, indicating that the longer individuals spend in a new environment and the more profound their adaptation becomes, the lower their stress levels tend to be. However, GLODEP students spend only a few months of one semester in a new environment before moving into a new country; therefore, their stress levels are expected to be high.

The other prevalent mental health issue was homesickness, with 52.2% of respondents experiencing it, which corresponds with the literature review's findings, stating that homesickness is often manifested during the first three months of moving to a new place (Onallah, 2024). Additionally, other mental health issues were mentioned, i.e., depression, social isolation and frustration combined with anger.

Only 8.7% of respondents reported that they did not experience any mental health issues during studying the GLODEP program. Those respondents studied during the COVID-19 pandemic and had no problems adapting to a new society and environment, as there were limited opportunities for socialising. The sample of respondents studying during the pandemic is too small to draw any concrete conclusions; however, it does not correlate with the studies stating that international students' mental health significantly declined during the pandemic (Jamshaid et al., 2023; Ma et al., 2025).

#### **4. What coping strategies do GLODEP students employ to manage stress?**

GLODEP students reported employing various coping strategies to manage stress related to their adaptation. They most commonly chose adaptive coping strategies (Pinarbasi, 2023), such as turning to their peers for support (82.6%), travel (30.4%), engaging in physical activities (21.7%), and staying in contact with their cultural heritage (4.3%). Maladaptive coping strategies (Compas et al., 2017; Sánchez et al., 2010) occurred only with 13% of respondents, including behaviours such as eating unhealthy food, playing video games and drinking alcohol.

Depending on the mental state of the respondents, travelling and over-exercise may be considered signs of avoidance coping strategies. Smith and Khawaja (2011) mention the importance of social support from friends, family and local communities and cultural learning to successfully manage acculturative stress and adapt to the new socio-cultural environment. They also emphasise the role of host countries in recognising their crucial role in international students' acculturation.

#### **5. How supportive are the institutions in providing mental health support?**

A substantial portion of respondents (91.3%) did not utilise the mental health support services available at Palacký University, indicating that only two GLODEP students accessed any form of mental health support. The low utilisation rate may be due to a lack of information about these services or a reluctance to seek help due to stigma. Additionally, 56.5% of respondents rated their mental health as poor or fair, yet they still did not take action to improve it. They relied on various coping mechanisms, which included socialising, engaging in physical exercise, or avoiding issues by isolating themselves and consuming entertainment, along with unhealthy eating and drinking alcohol. Theoretically, if they sought the necessary support, their experience with the entire study program would be significantly more pleasant. However, the actual reasons behind their reluctance to seek help would be more apparent if interviews were conducted to discuss their mental health in greater depth.

An intriguing article was published in the *Journal of International Students* in 2023, in which Clarke examines the mental health challenges, diagnoses, and support utilisation among international and non-international graduate students in Canada. Using data from the 2019 Canadian National College Health Assessment, Clarke identifies significant differences between the two groups' mental health conditions and help-seeking behaviours. The result is that international students experience unique stressors, such as financial and acculturative stress, career uncertainty, and homesickness, yet are less likely to seek mental health support due to barriers like lack of awareness and perceived stigma.

## **6. What improvements can be made to the GLODEP program to enhance international students' experience?**

As already mentioned, 30.4% of GLODEP students felt that the academic adaptation had more impact on their mental health than the new society and culture they moved to, therefore the suggested improvements were mainly about the change to the program's curriculum, coherence between the consortium universities and more social events for the students of one cohort to socialise more. With just two mentions of improving mental health support, it can be assumed that the reason for GLODEP students not using the mental health support services is not only the lack of information provided from the institution but also their perceived stigma around seeking the support that would benefit them (Corney et al., 2024).

### **How does socio-cultural adaptation impact the mental health of international students in the GLODEP program at Palacký University Olomouc?**

The general research question and, therefore, the aim of this research thesis was to determine the relationship between the socio-cultural adaptation of international students and the level of their mental health, furthermore stating the impact that the adaptation has on their mental health. Based on the research outcomes, it was found that the mental health of GLODEP international students was not only impacted by the socio-cultural adaptation but also the adaptation to a new academic environment played a significant role. 30.4% of respondents felt their mental health was not impacted by the socio-cultural adaptation at all, but their mental health suffered because of the academic pressure that was placed upon them. The students' unique personality traits play a role, as one respondent with a positive mindset about experiencing new cultures did not feel impacted either by the socio-cultural adaptation or by the academic pressure.

The outcomes of the research call for broader research into the personal experiences of international students, possibly longitudinal research comparing their adaptation over the three semesters that they study the GLODEP program, and possibly comparing data from a larger sample. For future research, a mixed-method approach should be implemented, combining data from questionnaires and interviews to ensure deeper insight into this area of research. Furthermore, longitudinal research could be conducted comparing GLODEP students' mental health throughout their studies at the three different universities and after graduating.

## Limitations

The first limitation was found during the literature review on various concepts of socio-cultural adaptation. Many of these models and theories do not apply to the target group of this research, as the concepts are used on individuals who spend extended time abroad. The GLODEP program is designed for students to study for two years in three different countries (or four if they pursue a scholarship). Therefore, their stay in a foreign country is limited to only one semester before they have to move to the following country. The frequent relocation can pose a significant impact on their adaptation process and also on their mental health, as moving itself is very stressful. Combined with the various academic requirements of the consortium universities, GLODEP students are a vulnerable group at risk of experiencing worsened mental health.

The Socio-Cultural Adaptation Scale by Ward and Kennedy (1999) is used to measure the degree of adaptation during a period of six months to a year using a 41-item scale. These items were not a part of the questionnaire data collection since this qualitative research thesis is inductive with the aim to explore the impact of socio-cultural adaptation on the mental health of GLODEP students, not the level of adaptation itself. This scale calls for quantitative research focused on a large sample of international students. However, based on the responses from the open-ended questions, it is clear that respondents mention at least nine items from the SCAC. Namely *making friends, getting used to the pace of life, dealing with someone unpleasant, cross or aggressive, dealing with people in authority, dealing with bureaucracy, dealing with unsatisfactory service, dealing with climate, understanding the local accent/language and understanding what is required of you at university.*

The U-curve and W-curve models are also not ideal for assessing the phases of GLODEP students' cultural adaptation. The former is due to the fact that the duration of time it takes individuals to enter each phase is much longer than the target group of this thesis staying in a foreign country. The latter is for the reason that this research does not follow GLODEP students after they return to their home country after graduation.

Another limitation is the focus on the adaptation process during the first semester of the GLODEP program, which is the students' first contact with a foreign country combined with the new academic environment. Therefore, students have to face adaptation in several aspects simultaneously, which is very challenging. For future research, it would be beneficial to employ more extended research that would focus on their socio-cultural adaptation and mental health in each semester of the program, comparing their progress over a longer period of time.

## 7. Conclusion

The aim of this master's thesis was to examine the relationship between the socio-cultural adaptation of international students in the GLODEP program and their state of mental health. The data collection was conducted by online questionnaire combining quantitative closed-ended and qualitative open-ended questions, where twenty-three respondents shared their experiences studying for a semester at Palacký University.

The respondents were from various countries worldwide, providing the findings with diverse perspectives. Cultural background played a role in the differences in adapting to the culture and society in the Czech Republic—the adaption process was more challenging for non-European students, contrary to European students, who did not find the adaptation challenging at all. As the literature review predicted, GLODEP students faced challenges such as language barriers, cultural adjustment, and academic pressure. Financial struggles were not mentioned at all, probably because fifteen students from each cohort usually receive EMJM scholarships. Two respondents even mentioned choosing the GLODEP program because of the scholarship opportunity.

Over half of the GLODEP students' mental health was not in a good state; however, only two of them reached out for any kind of institutional support. This can be attributed to the lack of information on provided mental health support by Palacký University or to the personal reluctance to seek needed support. It was found that socio-cultural adaptation is not the only factor influencing the students' mental health, as many of them reported academic expectations and requirements to be a significant source of their stress. GLODEP students used various coping mechanisms to endure the stress, mostly turning to their peers for support. The students' personalities and attitudes also played a role in their adaptation process.

The importance of institutional support, as well as peer support, was highlighted to help with the mental health issues that are part of adapting to a new cultural and societal environment. The utilisation rate of psychological services was very low, considering 56.5% of GLODEP students reported their mental health in a worse than good shape. The consultation service offered by the Faculty of Education seems to be the best place to accommodate international students' needs. However, there is still room for improvement, mainly regarding promoting these services, as 19% of students were unaware of these services.

The aim of the master's thesis can be considered accomplished, as the general and special research questions were answered, providing insight into the experiences of GLODEP students at Palacký University.

## REFERENCES

### Articles:

- ALSHAMMARI, M. K., OTHMAN, M. H., MYDIN, Y. O., MOHAMMED, B. A. 2023. *The Effect of Social Isolation on the Mental Health of International Students*. Information Sciences Letters—An International Journal. Inf. Sci. Lett. 12, No. 4, 1235-1240. <http://dx.doi.org/10.18576/isl/120438>.
- BERRY, J. W. 1997. *Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation*. Applied Psychology: An International Review, 46, 5-34. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1464-0597.1997.tb01087.x>
- BLACK, J., MENDENHALL, M. 1991. *The U-Curve Adjustment Hypothesis Revisited: A Review and Theoretical Framework*. Journal of International Business Studies. 22. 225-247. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/5222549\\_The\\_U-Curve\\_Adjustment\\_Hypothesis\\_Revisited\\_A\\_Review\\_and\\_Theoretical\\_Framework](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/5222549_The_U-Curve_Adjustment_Hypothesis_Revisited_A_Review_and_Theoretical_Framework).
- CHING, G., CHAO, P., LIEN, W. 2014. *Acculturative hassles and strategies: Relationship between study abroad related depression, anxiety, and stress*. International Journal of Research Studies in Psychology. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/286701698\\_Acculturative\\_hassles\\_and\\_strategies\\_Relationship\\_between\\_study\\_abroad\\_related\\_depression\\_anxiety\\_and\\_stress](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/286701698_Acculturative_hassles_and_strategies_Relationship_between_study_abroad_related_depression_anxiety_and_stress).
- CLARKE, K. 2023. *International Graduate Students' Mental Health Diagnoses, Challenges, and Support: A Descriptive Comparison to their Non-International Graduate Student Peers*. Online. Journal of International Students. 2023, Volume 13, Issue 3, p. 280-304. ISSN: 2166-3750. Available at: <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1407731>.
- COMPAS, B. E., JASER, S. S., BETTIS, A. H., WATSON, K. H., GRUHN, M. A., DUNBAR, J. P., WILLIAMS, E., THIGPEN, J. C. 2017. *Coping, emotion regulation, and psychopathology in childhood and adolescence: A meta-analysis and narrative review*. Psychol Bull. 143(9):939-991. Available at: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7310319/>.
- CORNEY, T., DU PLESSIS, K., WOODS, B., LOU, C., DEWHURST, A., MAWREN, D. 2024. *"If you are feeling alone and you are not feeling safe, it impacts everything": a mixed-methods exploration of international students' accommodation, subjective wellbeing and mental health help-seeking*. BMC Public Health, vol. 24, no. 1, pp. 1–10. Available at: <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=fd256b05-535e-3513-9cd0-04e86fc10885>.
- FOLKMAN, S., MOSKOWITZ, J. T. 2004. *Coping: pitfalls and promise*. Annu Rev Psychol. 55:745-74. Available at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/14744233/>.
- FORBES-MEWETT, H. SAWYER, A. M. 2016. *International Students and Mental Health*. Journal of International Students. 6. 661-677. Available at: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1100336.pdf>.
- GULLAHORN, J. T., GULLAHORN, J. E. 1963. *An Extension of the U-Curve Hypothesis*. Journal of Social Issues, 19: 33-47. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1963.tb00447.x>.

- HUNTER, L. LEAHEY, E. 2008. *Collaborative Research in Sociology: Trends and Contributing Factors*. *The American Sociologist*. 39 (4): 290–306. doi:10.1007/s12108-008-9042-1.
- JAMSHAD, S., BAHADAR, N., JAMSHED, K., RASHID, M., IMRAN AFZAL, M., TIAN, L., UMAR, M., FENG, X., KHAN, I., ZONG, M. 2023. *Pre- and Post-Pandemic (COVID-19) Mental Health of International Students: Data from a Longitudinal Study*. *Psychol Res Behav Manag*. 16:431-446. <https://doi.org/10.2147/PRBM.S395035>.
- JENSEN, K. D. 2022. *Key components contributing to student development and cross-cultural adaptation during an international internship*. *Educational Research: Theory and Practice*, 33(1), 22-28. Available at: <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1352028>.
- KHOO, E., HUO, X. 2022. *The Efficacy of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy for Low-Proficiency International Students in Online Teaching and Learning*. *Journal of Teaching and Learning* Vol. 16, No. 2, pp. 67–85. <https://doi.org/10.22329/jtl.v16i2.7022>.
- KIM, Y. (2017). *Cross-Cultural Adaptation*. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication. Available at: <https://oxfordre.com/communication/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228613-e-21>.
- KRSMANOVIC, M. 2020. “*I Was New and I Was Afraid*”: *The Acculturation Strategies Adopted by International First-Year Undergraduate Students in the United States*. *Journal of International Students*. Volume 10, Issue 4 (2020), pp. 954-975. Doi: 10.32674/jis.v10i4.1160ojed.org/jis.
- LIU, C-C, HUANG. Q., CHEN, AC-C, LIU, C., LIU, Y. 2024. *Interventions to enhance mental health and wellbeing among international college students: A systematic review and meta-analysis protocol*. *PLoS ONE* 19(9): e0310645. Available at: <https://research.ebsco.com/c/hlrac6/viewer/html/edfid6kxeb>.
- MA, J., SAITA, K., KANEKO, F. OKAMURA, H. 2025. *Stressors during the COVID-19 pandemic in international students: a qualitative study*. *BMC Public Health* 25, 1166 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-025-22380-5>
- MAHMOOD, H., GALLOWAY BURKE, M. (2018). *Analysis of Acculturative Stress and Sociocultural Adaptation Among International Students at a Non-Metropolitan University*. *Journal of International Students*, 8(1), 284–307. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v8i1.166>.
- MESIDOR, J. K., SLY, K. F. 2016. *Factors that Contribute to the Adjustment of International Students*. *Journal of International Students*, 6(1), 262-282. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v6i1.569>.
- MOUSSA-CHAMARI, I., FAROOQ, A., ROMDHANI, M., WASHIF, J. A., BAKARE, U., HELMY, M., AL-HORANI R. A., SALAMH, P., ROBIN, N., HUE, O. 2024. *The relationship between quality of life, sleep quality, mental health, and physical activity in an international sample of college students: a structural equation modeling approach*. *Front Public Health*. Available at: <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/public-health/articles/10.3389/fpubh.2024.1397924/full>.

- OLAGUNJU, O. D., ASSUMANG, D. K., BOANSI, S. O., ACHUMBA, U. OLAIYA, O. P., ADESOGA, T. O. 2024. *Cultural adaptation and its impact on the academic success and well-being of international students in U.S. higher education*. GSC Advanced Research and Reviews, 21(01), 203–208. <https://doi.org/10.30574/gscarr.2024.21.1.0371>.
- OPPEDAL, B., KELES, S., CHEAH, C., RØYSAMB, E. 2020. *Culture competence and mental health across different immigrant and refugee groups*. BMC Public Health 20, 292. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-020-8398-1>.
- PERRY, C., JENSEN, Ø. 2001. *Approaches to Combining Induction and Deduction In One Research Study*. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Chad-Perry-4/publication/255654388\\_Approaches\\_to\\_Combining\\_Induction\\_and\\_Deduction\\_In\\_One\\_Research\\_Study/links/5b47b02745851519b4b465a3/Approaches-to-Combining-Induction-and-Deduction-In-One-Research-Study.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Chad-Perry-4/publication/255654388_Approaches_to_Combining_Induction_and_Deduction_In_One_Research_Study/links/5b47b02745851519b4b465a3/Approaches-to-Combining-Induction-and-Deduction-In-One-Research-Study.pdf).
- PINARBASI, G. 2023. *International Students' Sociocultural Adaptation Experiences: Their Perceived Stress and Coping Strategies*. International Academic Social Resources Journal, (e-ISSN: 2636- 7637), Vol:8, Issue:55; pp:4059- 4080. Available at: <https://asrjournal.org/files/asrjournal/910c7a5d-b67b-48a5-9f1a-6fcfa4966729.pdf>.
- SAVICKI, V. 2010. *Implications of Early Sociocultural Adaptations for Study Abroad Students*. Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad, 19(1), 205–223. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.36366/frontiers.v19i1.283>.
- SÁNCHEZ, M., RICE, E., STEIN, J., MILBURN, N. G., ROTHERAM-BORUS, M. J. 2010. Acculturation, coping styles, and health risk behaviors among HIV positive Latinas. AIDS Behav. 14(2):401-9. Available at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC2835805/>.
- SMITH, R. A., KHAWAJA, N. G. 2011. *A review of the acculturation experiences of international students*. International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 35(6), pp. 699-713. Available at: <https://eprints.qut.edu.au/46481/>.
- SÜMER, S., POYRAZLI, S., GRAHAME, K. 2008. *Predictors of Depression and Anxiety Among International Students*. Journal of Counseling & Development, Vol 86, 429-437. Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/j.1556-6678.2008.tb00531.x>.
- VENNER, M. 1988. Adjustment, coping and defence mechanisms-deciding factors in the therapeutic process. Z Gesamte Inn Med. 15;43(2):40-3. Available at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/3358307/>.
- WARD, C., KENNEDY, A. 1999. *The measurement of sociocultural adaptation*. International Journal of Intercultural Relations. Vol. 23, No. 4, pp. 659±677. Available at: [https://www.academia.edu/124539039/The\\_measurement\\_of\\_sociocultural\\_adaptation](https://www.academia.edu/124539039/The_measurement_of_sociocultural_adaptation).
- WATTANACHAROENSIL, W., TALAWANICH, S., JIANVITTAYAKIT, L. 2020. *Multiple qualitative procedures to elicit reverse culture shock experience*. MethodsX, Volume 7, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mex.2019.12.007>.

- WILSON, J., WARD, C., FETVADJIEV, V. H., BETHEL, A. 2017. *Measuring Cultural Competencies: The Development and Validation of a Revised Measure of Sociocultural Adaptation*. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*. 48. DOI: 1475-1506. 10.1177/0022022117732721.
- XIONG, W., RADUNZ, M., ALI, K., KING, D. L., KYRIOS, M., ZHAO, Y., FASSNACHT, D. B. 2024. *Comparing the mental health and wellbeing of domestic and international tertiary students: A systematic review and meta-analysis*. *Journal of International Students*, 14(4), 702-740. Available at: <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/comparing-mental-health-wellbeing-domestic/docview/3091182671/se-2>.
- YILMAZ, K., TEMIZKAN, V. 2022. *The Effects of Educational Service Quality and Socio-Cultural Adaptation Difficulties on International Students' Higher Education Satisfaction*. *SAGE Open*, 12(1). Available at: <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=ac500842-f09f-3d85-b402-485c905fecc0>.

#### Dictionaries:

- APA Dictionary of Psychology. 2018. "anxiety." Available at: <https://dictionary.apa.org/anxiety>.
- BRITANNICA, T. 2024. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "stress." *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/science/stress-psychology-and-biology>.
- MERRIAM-WEBSTER. 2024. *Consortium*. Available at: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/consortia>.

#### Guides:

- BROWN, S. 2010. *Likert Scale Examples for Surveys*. ANR Program Evaluation Iowa State University Extension. Available at: <https://www.extension.iastate.edu/documents/anr/likertscaleexamplesforsurveys.pdf>.
- MILES, M. B., HUBERMAN, A. M., SALDAÑA, J. 2014. *Qualitative Data Analysis. A Methods Sourcebook*. Arizona State University. Third edition. Available at: <https://www.metodos.work/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Qualitative-Data-Analysis.pdf>.

#### Publications:

- BERRY, J.W. 2006. *Acculturation: A Conceptual Overview*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers (p.13–22). <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780415963589-2>.
- COX, T. 1975. *The nature of management of stress*. *New Behaviour*, September 25, 493-5.
- BUDYTA-BUDZYŃSKA, M. 2021. *Integration or assimilation? Strategies of becoming a member of a new community: case of Polish immigrants in Iceland*. Chapter 3. *Adaptation, integration, assimilation—an attempt at a theoretical approach*. Collegium

Civitas. Available at: <http://migracje.civitas.edu.pl/migracje/index.php/en/adaptation-integration-assimilation>.

FARRUGIA, C., BHANDARI, R. 2020. *Global Trends in Student Mobility*. Published in: Teixeira, P.N., Shin, J.C. (eds) *The International Encyclopedia of Higher Education Systems and Institutions*. Springer, Dordrecht. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-8905-9\\_231](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-8905-9_231).

FERENCZ, I., KUPRIYANOVA, V. 2024. *20 years of Erasmus Mundus: Beyond borders and boundaries*. European Commission: European Education and Culture Executive Agency. Available at: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/fa2067a3-18cb-11ef-a251-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>.

FLEKAČ, P. 2024. *Welcome to Well-being: A Journey to Your Mental Harmony*. Welcome Office. Palacký University Olomouc. Available at: [https://www.upol.cz/files/users/322/Welcome\\_to\\_Well-being](https://www.upol.cz/files/users/322/Welcome_to_Well-being).

GREENE, J. M. 2024. *Mental hygiene*. Salem Press Encyclopedia of Health. Available at: <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=beda8e28-3427-366a-bf90-8471b29c68b4>.

#### Reports:

WORLD MIGRATION REPORT. 2024. International Organization for Migration. Available at: <https://worldmigrationreport.iom.int/what-we-do/world-migration-report-2024-chapter-2/international-students>.

UNESCO. 2022. *Higher Education Global Data Report, 2022*. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000389859>.

#### Theses:

HALADOVÁ, E. 2021. *Psychologické aspekty kulturního šoku u vysokoškolských studentů*. Online. Master's thesis. Olomouc: Palacký University Olomouc, Faculty of Arts. Available at: <https://theses.cz/id/wtt1px/>.

ONALLAH, Klára. 2024. *Homesickness a způsoby vyrovnávání se s jeho prožíváním u expatriantů žijících v České republice*. Online. Bachelor thesis. Olomouc: Palacký University Olomouc, Faculty of Arts. Available at: <https://theses.cz/id/97lfzh/>.

ŠILDOVÁ, A. 2023. *Jazyková integrace cizinců v České republice*. Online. Bachelor's thesis. Olomouc: Palacký University, Faculty of Science. Available at: <https://theses.cz/id/p7pl39/>.

TAUŠOVÁ, J. 2016. *Vliv vybraných osobnostních charakteristik a vnějších proměnných na míru prožívání akulturačního stresu u zahraničních studentů*. Online. Dissertation thesis. Olomouc: Palacký University Olomouc, Faculty of Arts. Available at: <https://theses.cz/id/uv9363/>.

### Websites:

- APA — American Psychiatric Association. 2024. *What is depression?* Available at: <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/depression/what-is-depression>.
- BISHOP, R. 2023. *The W-Curve Model: Understanding a new college student's experience*. Mayo Clinic Health System. Available at: <https://www.mayoclinichealthsystem.org/hometown-health/speaking-of-health/the-w-curve-theory>
- CAMPUS FRANCE. 2025. *Scholarships for foreign students in France*. Available at: <https://www.campusfrance.org/en/bursaries-foreign-students>.
- CLEVELAND CLINIC. 2022. *Neurodivergent*. Available at: <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/symptoms/23154-neurodivergent>.
- COMMISCEO GLOBAL CONSULTING. 2022. *The Czech Republic - Culture, Etiquette and Business Practices*. Available at: <https://www.commisceo-global.com/resources/country-guides/czech-republic-guide>.
- CORE — Cultural Orientation Resource Exchange. 2020. *U-curve of cultural adjustment*. Available at: <https://www.coresourceexchange.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Cultural-Adjustment-U-Curve.pdf>.
- DAAD. 2025. *DAAD Scholarships - An Overview*. Available at: <https://www.daad.de/en/studying-in-germany/scholarships/daad-scholarships/>.
- DIVISION FOR INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION. 2025. *Palacký University Olomouc*. Available at: <https://international.upol.cz/en/exchange-programmes/im-a-up-student/study/other-aktion-daad/>.
- ERASMUS MUNDUS. 2020. *Cost and scholarships*. Available at: <https://www.emhrpp.com/costs-and-scholarships>.
- Erasmus+ Students and Alumni Alliance (ESAA). 2024. *Mindful Mundus: Empowering Erasmus Mundus Students' Wellbeing*. Available at: <https://www.esaa-eu.org/news/latest-news/detail/mindful-mundus-empowering-erasmus-mundus-students-wellbeing>.
- Erasmus Student Network UP Olomouc. 2025. Available at: <https://esn.upol.cz/>.
- EUROGUIDANCE. 2024. *International mobility*. Available at: <https://euroguidance.eu/international-mobility>.
- EUROPEAN COMMISSION. 2024. *Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters (students)*. Available at: <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/opportunities/opportunities-for-individuals/students/erasmus-mundus-joint-masters>.
- EACEA — European Education and Culture Executive Agency. 2024. *Erasmus Mundus Catalogue*. Available at: [https://www.eacea.ec.europa.eu/scholarships/erasmus-mundus-catalogue\\_en](https://www.eacea.ec.europa.eu/scholarships/erasmus-mundus-catalogue_en).
- GLODEP. 2024. *Consortium Universities*. Available at: <https://glodep.eu/consortium/consortium-universities/>.

- HIDALGO, D. R. 2018. "Foreign students" vs "International students". English Language and Usage. Available at: <https://english.stackexchange.com/questions/433559/foreign-students-vs-international-students>.
- CHOVANCOVÁ, Š. 2022. *Miroslav Syrovátka: GLODEP is a successful programme*. Palacký University Olomouc. Available at: <https://www.upol.cz/nc/en/news/news/clanek/miroslav-syrovatka-glodep-is-a-successful-programme/>.
- LAB OUSHI. 2022. *Co nabízíme?* Available at: <https://laboushi.cz/page/co-nabizime>.
- MIGRATION DATA PORTAL. 2024. *International Students*. Available at: <https://www.migrationdataportal.org/themes/international-students-trends>.
- MINISTRY OF EDUCATION YOUTH AND SPORTS CZECH REPUBLIC. 2022. Data o studentech. Available at: <https://msmt.gov.cz/vzdelavani/skolstvi-v-cr/statistika-skolstvi/data-o-studentech-poprve-zapsanych-a-absolventech-vysokych?lang=1>.
- MINISTRY OF EDUCATION YOUTH AND SPORTS CZECH REPUBLIC. 2025. *Government Scholarships - Developing Countries*. Available at: <https://msmt.gov.cz/eu-and-international-affairs/government-scholarships-developing-countries?lang=2>.
- MINISTRY OF EDUCATION YOUTH AND SPORTS CZECH REPUBLIC. 2024. *Výzkum: Cizinci mají o studium v ČR zájem, cení kvalitu vzdělávání i života*. Available at: <https://msmt.gov.cz/ministerstvo/novinar/vyzkum-cizinci-maji-o-studium-v-cr-zajem-ceni-kvalitu>.
- MONTARE BEHAVIOURAL HEALTH. 2024. The 4 Pillars of Mental Health. Available at: <https://montarebehavioralhealth.com/blog/4-pillars-of-health/>.
- MULLER, R. T., PhD. 2023, April 5. *A look at the difficulties international students face*. Psychology Today. Available at: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/talking-about-trauma/202304/the-mental-health-challenges-of-studying-abroad>.
- OUSHI. 2024. *Homepage*. Available at: <https://oushi.upol.cz/en/>.
- PALACKÝ UNIVERSITY OLOMOUC. 2024. *Psychological and psychotherapeutic counselling*. Available at: <https://www.upol.cz/en/counselling/psychological/>.
- PORADNA PdF UPOL. 2024. *Welcome to the website of the University Psychological Counseling Center of the Faculty of Education of the Palacky University in Olomouc!* Available at: <https://poradna.pdf.upol.cz/english>.
- SCHARFENBERG, J. R. 2023. *Contrasting Culture: My Observations*. Foreigners.cz Blog. Available at: <https://blog.foreigners.cz/my-observations-contrasting-culture/>.
- TRUSTY, W. T., CHUN-KENNEDY, C. 2024. *International Students Are More Socially Isolated than Domestic Students, and the Gap Is Growing After COVID-19*. Available at: [https://ccmh.psu.edu/index.php?option=com\\_dailyplanetblog&view=entry&year=2023&month=09&day=07&id=44:international-students-are-more-socially-isolated-than-domestic-students-and-the-gap-is-growing-after-covid-19](https://ccmh.psu.edu/index.php?option=com_dailyplanetblog&view=entry&year=2023&month=09&day=07&id=44:international-students-are-more-socially-isolated-than-domestic-students-and-the-gap-is-growing-after-covid-19).
- UNESCO Institute of Statistics. 2024. Definition — Internationally mobile students. Available at: <https://glossary.uis.unesco.org/glossary/en/home>.

WELCOME OFFICE. 2024. *Health & Well-being*. Palacký University Olomouc. Available at: <https://www.upol.cz/welcome-office/health-well-being/>.

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION. 2022. *Mental health*. Available at: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response>.

ZHENG, J. 2025. *How many days does it take for respondents to respond to your survey?* SurveyMonkey. Available at: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/curiosity/time-to-respond/>.

# APPENDICES

## 1. Socio-Cultural Adaptation Scale

Table 2 — Socio-Cultural Adaptation Scale (Ward & Kennedy, 1999)

<b>Items from the Sociocultural Adaptation Scale</b>	
1.	Making friends
2.	Using the transport system
3.	Making yourself understood
4.	Getting used to the pace of life
5.	Going shopping
6.	Going to social events/gatherings/functions
7.	Worshipping in your usual way
8.	Talking about yourself with others
9.	Understanding jokes and humor
10.	Dealing with someone who is unpleasant/cross/aggressive
11.	Getting used to the local food/finding food you enjoy
12.	Following rules and regulations
13.	Dealing with people in authority
14.	Dealing with the bureaucracy
15.	Making yourself understood
16.	Adapting to local accommodation
17.	Communicating with people of a different ethnic group
18.	Relating to members of the opposite sex
19.	Dealing with unsatisfactory service
20.	Finding your way around
21.	Dealing with the climate
22.	Dealing with people staring at you
23.	Going to coffee shops/ food stalls/restaurants/fast food outlets
24.	Understanding the local accent/language
25.	Living away from family members overseas/independently from your parents
26.	Adapting to local etiquette
27.	Getting used to the population density
28.	Relating to older people
29.	Dealing with people of higher status
30.	Understanding what is required of you at university
31.	Coping with academic work
32.	Dealing with foreign staff at the university
33.	Expressing your ideas in class
34.	Living with your host family
35.	Accepting/ understanding the local political system
36.	Understanding the locals' world view
37.	Taking a local perspective on the culture
38.	Understanding the local value system
39.	Seeing things from the locals' point of view
40.	Understanding cultural differences
41.	Being able to see two sides of an intercultural issue

## 2. Questionnaire

Hello,

I am a student of International Development and Environmental Studies at Palacký University Olomouc. I would like to ask you to fill in a questionnaire that will be part of the research for my master's thesis. The thesis deals with the impact of socio-cultural adaptation on the mental health of international students, specifically focusing on students of the Global Development Policy program who have studied a semester at Palacký University Olomouc in the Czech Republic.

The questionnaire data will be completely anonymous and used only for research purposes in my master's thesis. Your responses will not be shared with any of the GLODEP program administrators.

Thank you in advance for completing this questionnaire. I am looking forward to learning about your experience!

If you would like to discuss this topic further, contact me at [aneta.sildova@upol.cz](mailto:aneta.sildova@upol.cz)

### **Background information**

Gender: \*

Age: \*

What year did you finish the GLODEP program, or what year do you expect to graduate?

1. What is your country of origin?
2. What language(s) do you speak fluently? \*
3. Did you learn any new language throughout your studies? \*

3.1 If yes, what language(s) did you learn?

- Czech
- French
- Italian
- Other...

4. Did you study or live **abroad** before joining the GLODEP program? \* (Yes/No)

4.1 If yes, where and for how long?

5. Why did you choose to study the GLODEP program? \*

### **Socio-cultural adaptation experiences**

*Socio-cultural adaptation is the process of adjusting to the social norms, behaviours and expectations of a new culture.*

6. How challenging has it been for you to adapt to the **new society and cultural environment** in the Czech Republic? \*

- Not challenging
- Slightly challenging
- Moderately challenging
- Extremely challenging

7. Which **aspects of socio-cultural adaptation** have been the most difficult for you? \*

(e.g., language barrier, social customs, academic expectations, etc.)

*Please elaborate on your response.*

8. Have you experienced a situation of cultural misunderstanding, cultural shock or conflict in the Czech Republic? \*

- Yes
- No

8.1 If yes, could you describe at least one **experience** and the way you handled it?

9. How did the experience of studying in the GLODEP program prepare you for future stays abroad? \*

- Well
- Fairly well
- Not sure
- Fairly poorly
- Poorly

## Mental Health

*Mental health is important when adapting to a new culture in a foreign country. It is more than the absence of mental disorders—it is a crucial part of overall health and well-being. Good mental health helps people handle challenges like culture shock, isolation, and stress. It helps develop resilience, build relationships, and prevent burnout.*

10. How would you rate your **overall mental health** since starting the GLODEP program? \*

- Excellent
- Very Good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

11. Have you experienced any of the following **mental health challenges** since joining the GLODEP program? \*

*Check all that apply.*

- Stress
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Homesickness
- Social isolation
- None of the above
- Other...

12. How did the process of **adapting to a new culture and social life** impact your mental health? \*

*Please elaborate on your response.*

## Coping Mechanisms

Coping means using thoughts and actions to handle stress from inside or outside ourselves (e.g., exercise, socialising, counselling, meditation, etc.)

13. How did you cope while studying the GLODEP program? \*

14. Did you rely on **peer support** from other GLODEP students to cope with cultural adaptation challenges? \*

15. Did you develop any **new habits** while studying the GLODEP program? \*

## Institutional and Program Support

Examples of support offered by Palacký University Olomouc:

- **The University Psychological Counseling Center** focuses on study related stress, adaptation to the university as well as personal problems
- **Welcome Office** prioritises the well-being of students, recognising that a healthy mind and body are essential for academic success
- **OUSHI** offers psychotherapeutic counselling, coaching, crisis intervention, stress measurement and management

16. How **supportive** do you find Palacký University Olomouc in addressing the mental health needs of international students? \*

- Very supportive
- Supportive
- Slightly supportive
- Not supportive

17. How helpful was the GLODEP team in **providing information** about available mental health support? \*

- Very helpful
- Helpful
- Slightly helpful
- Unhelpful

18. Which one of the **mental health counselling services** did you use? \*

- I did not use any services
- The University Psychological Counseling Center
- Welcome Office
- OUSHI
- Other...

18.1 How effective were they in helping you cope with mental health challenges?

- Very helpful
- Helpful
- Slightly helpful
- Unhelpful

19. Were there any **barriers to accessing the mental health support** you needed? \*  
(e.g., language, availability, cost, lack of information)

**Reflections and Suggestions**

20. How do you rate your overall experience studying the GLODEP program? \*

(1 = the worst, 10 = the best)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆

21. If you could change anything about the GLODEP program to improve the experience for international students, what would it be? \*

\* Required question