

SAVES2 Webinar Session 1

Energy poverty: findings, impacts and recommendations

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SAVES2 reduces student energy poverty

SAVES2 project aim: reduce energy poverty by ensuring students adopt energy saving habits and to seek out energy efficient properties when moving into private-rented sector.

- Currently no accurate measure as to how many students are in energy poverty.
- Tend to have high accommodation costs, low incomes and live in low quality accommodation.
- Often an under-reported and under-supported group of the population.
- Rarely recognised as a group vulnerable to energy poverty.
- Studies show that students tend not to realise that they live in energy poor conditions or seek support.

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We conducted energy poverty research

Aim: To understand, evaluate, and consequently reveal the experiences of students living in the private-rented sector, quantify their possible exposure to energy poverty and its impacts on their well-being.

Sample: We surveyed over 3,500 students across three years & over 400 landlords in 7 EU countries (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Lithuania, Romania, and the United Kingdom).

...And a further 51 students and 29 landlords participated in our focus groups so as for all views on the topic to be captured and documented

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Research Findings



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Good share of students have rather low energy efficiency awareness

- ❑ Convenience and financial factors are at the expense of energy efficiency, and as a result students look for affordable houses, or houses close to their places of study, instead of energy efficient houses.
 - The “**cost of rent**”, the “**location and convenience**”, the “**condition of accommodation**” and the “**size of accommodation**” are the most important criteria for students when house hunting
- ❑ A good share of students have not received an EPC in most countries (either upon or without request)
 - 60% in **Ireland**, 48% in **Romania**, 30-33% in **Cyprus, Greece, Lithuania and the UK** and 18% in **Bulgaria**
- ❑ Most of the landlords participating in the focus groups/interviews said that students renting their property never asked for the EPC
- ❑ An EPC was not provided by a number of landlords according to survey results
 - 67% and 31% of landlords in **Cyprus and Romania**, 33% in **Lithuania**, 20% in **Bulgaria**, 14% in **Ireland** and 8% and 5% in **Greece and the UK**, correspondingly.
 - In Lithuania 56% of respondents said that it was not applicable in their country

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Fair share of students put efforts to keep their energy costs down

- ❑ Some students said that their energy bills were high, even though they were making significant effort to use less energy
 - In **Ireland** this share is 30%, in **Greece** 29%, in **Cyprus** 23% and in **Lithuania** 15%. **Bulgaria** (6%)
- ❑ Students may turn the heating off even though they did not want to in order to keep costs down.
 - 45% of the respondents in **Ireland**, 43% in the **UK**, 37% in **Greece**, 29% in **Cyprus** and 17% in **Bulgaria**. In **Lithuania** this share is 6% however most of the students do not have control over their heating systems.
- ❑ There are occasions where students were in arrears on their energy bills in the last 12 months
 - **Bulgaria** (27%), **Greece** (15%), **Romania** (14%), **Ireland** (10%), **Cyprus** (9%), **Lithuania** (7%), **UK** (7%).

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Fair share of students live in deteriorated dwellings

- ❑ Damp or mould on walls or ceilings, as well as draughty windows or doors, are the most common problems faced by students
 - In **Ireland** 34% of students live in a house with draughty doors or windows and 30% live in a house with damp or mould on walls. In the **UK** 30% have draughty openings and 38% of students reported damp or mould on walls or ceilings. In **Greece** this share is 28% and 29% respectively. In **the rest of the countries**, at least 15% of students reported the same problems.

- ❑ In all countries, the majority of respondents had approached their landlord about the problems they faced with their accommodation.
 - However, in **Lithuania** (29%) and **Ireland** (24%) the percentage of students who did not approach their landlords for relevant issues is important. According to the results of the focus groups:
 - Lithuania: fear that their landlord will increase the rent if they approach him/her asking for any improvements,
 - Ireland: students are afraid of being evicted since there is a large demand for housing and therefore landlords can easily find new, less demanding tenants.
 - Greece and Cyprus: students feel that their landlords do not want to make any investments to improve their property, and are indifferent to their needs.

Financial incentives top driver for landlords to improve their properties

- ❑ Landlords don't easily take actions towards improving poor housing conditions of their property.
 - Questionnaire. None of the respondents from **Ireland** took any action to improve their rented property due to lack of funding. The same was stated by 13% of respondents in **Bulgaria** and 8% in **Greece**.
 - Focus groups. Landlords from **Cyprus, Greece, Lithuania** and the **UK** reported that they were not aware of any financial incentives or grants.
- ❑ Most of the focus groups participants regard **energy efficiency** important only as a means of decreasing the running costs of the property and, in addition, the majority of them consider existing or prospective grants and financial incentives as the most significant **driver** for energy efficiency improvements.

Impacts on students' wellbeing

- ❑ The undesirable living conditions and the low energy awareness have a severe impact on tenants' wellbeing.
 - Significant shares of students reported **feeling miserable** due to the poor housing conditions (44% in Bulgaria, 40% in the UK, 32% in Ireland).
 - Respondents from the UK, Ireland and Cyprus, 30%, 27% and 21% respectively, reported **feelings of anxiety or depression**.
 - A proportion of students reported that they **developed new health problem(s)** or existing health problem(s) became worse; 17% and 19% respectively in Ireland, 12% and 7% in Lithuania, 5% and 14% in Greece, 15% and 11% in UK.
 - In Bulgaria the percentage of students that reported **reoccurrence of existing health problem(s)** is alarmingly high (33%).

- ❑ Strains have been placed on social lives of students as a result of poor housing conditions: 21% in Cyprus, 17% in Ireland, 14% in Greece are **not at ease at inviting friends or family to their accommodation**. Moreover, notable proportions of students stated a **preference in spending as much time as possible away from their homes**; ranging from 6% in Lithuania to 20% in Ireland.

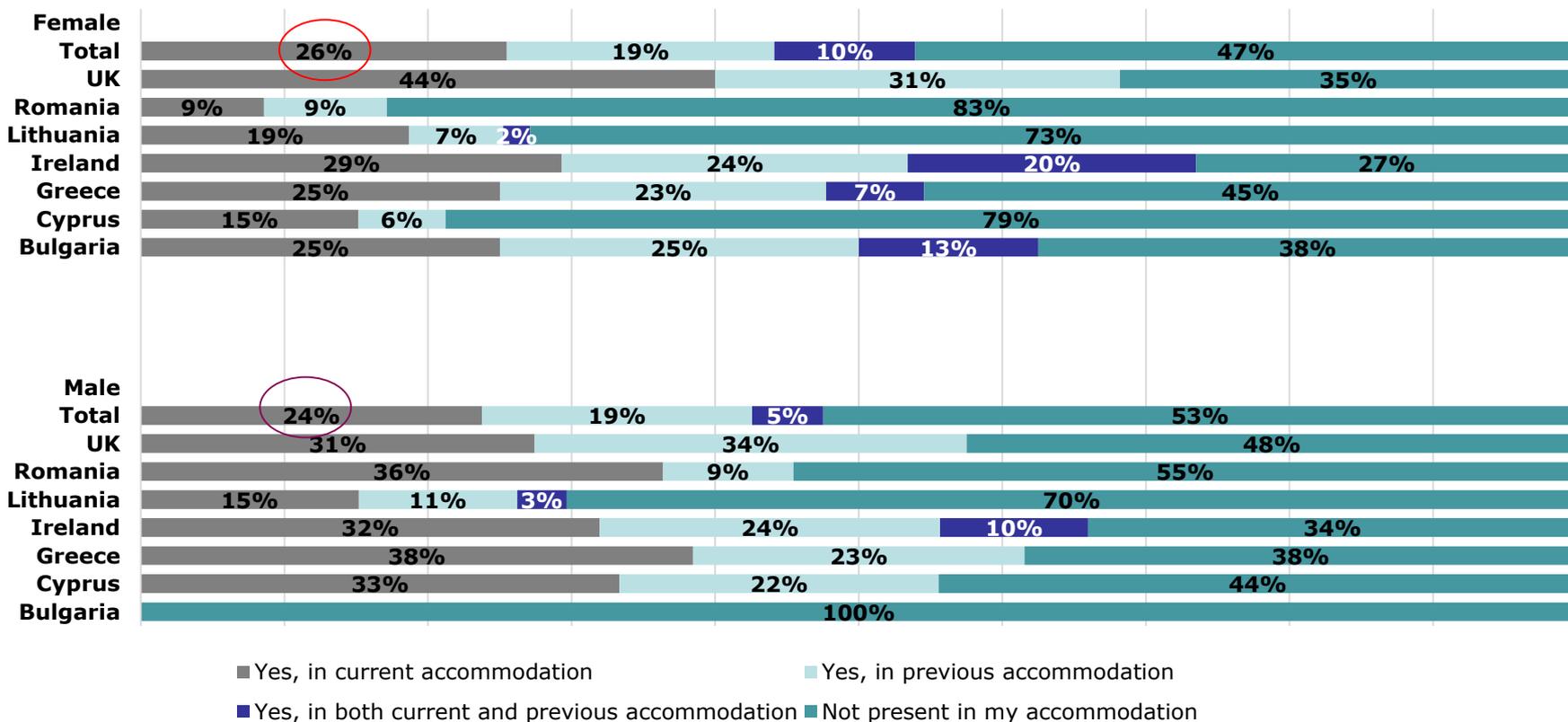
Gender Warmth Gap



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Women are more likely to live in poor quality accommodation

Damp or mould on walls or ceilings



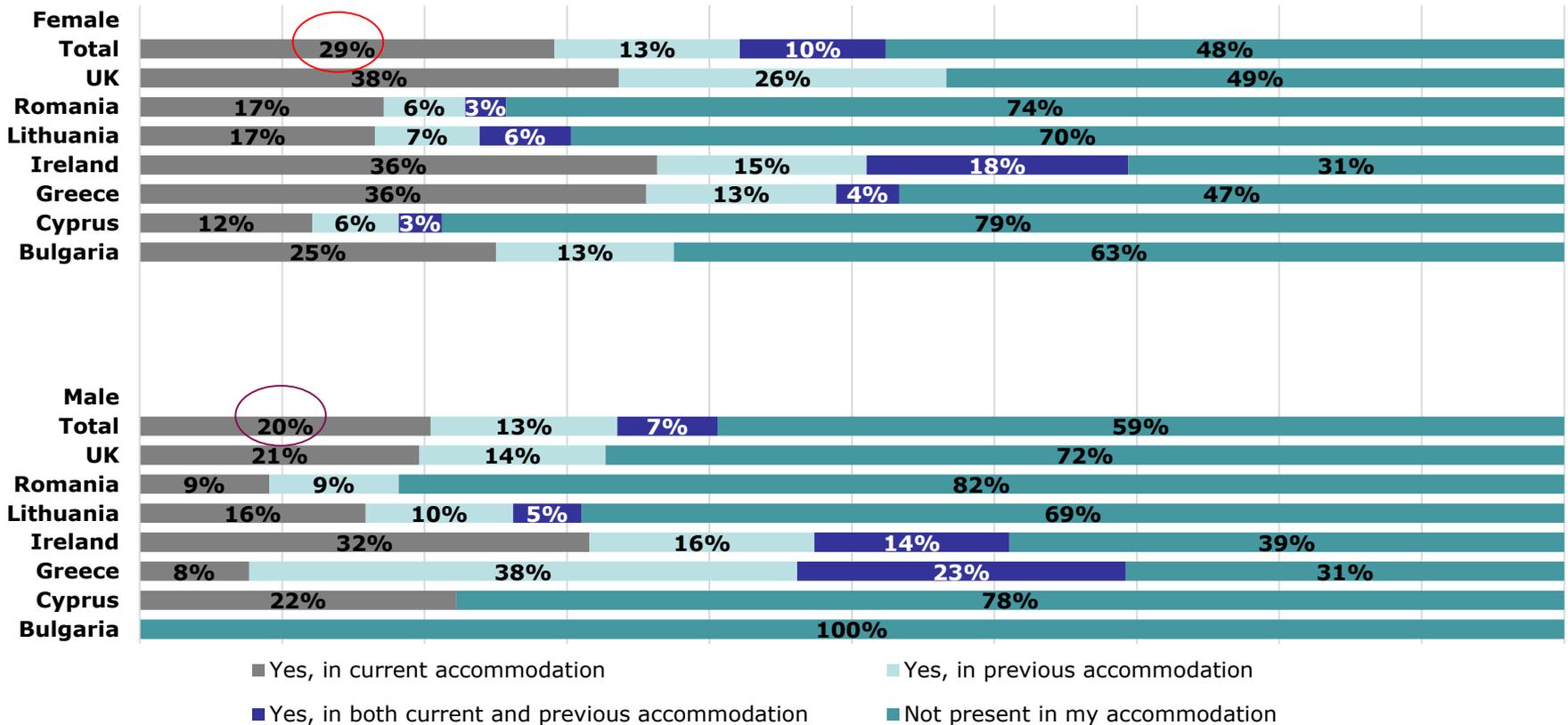
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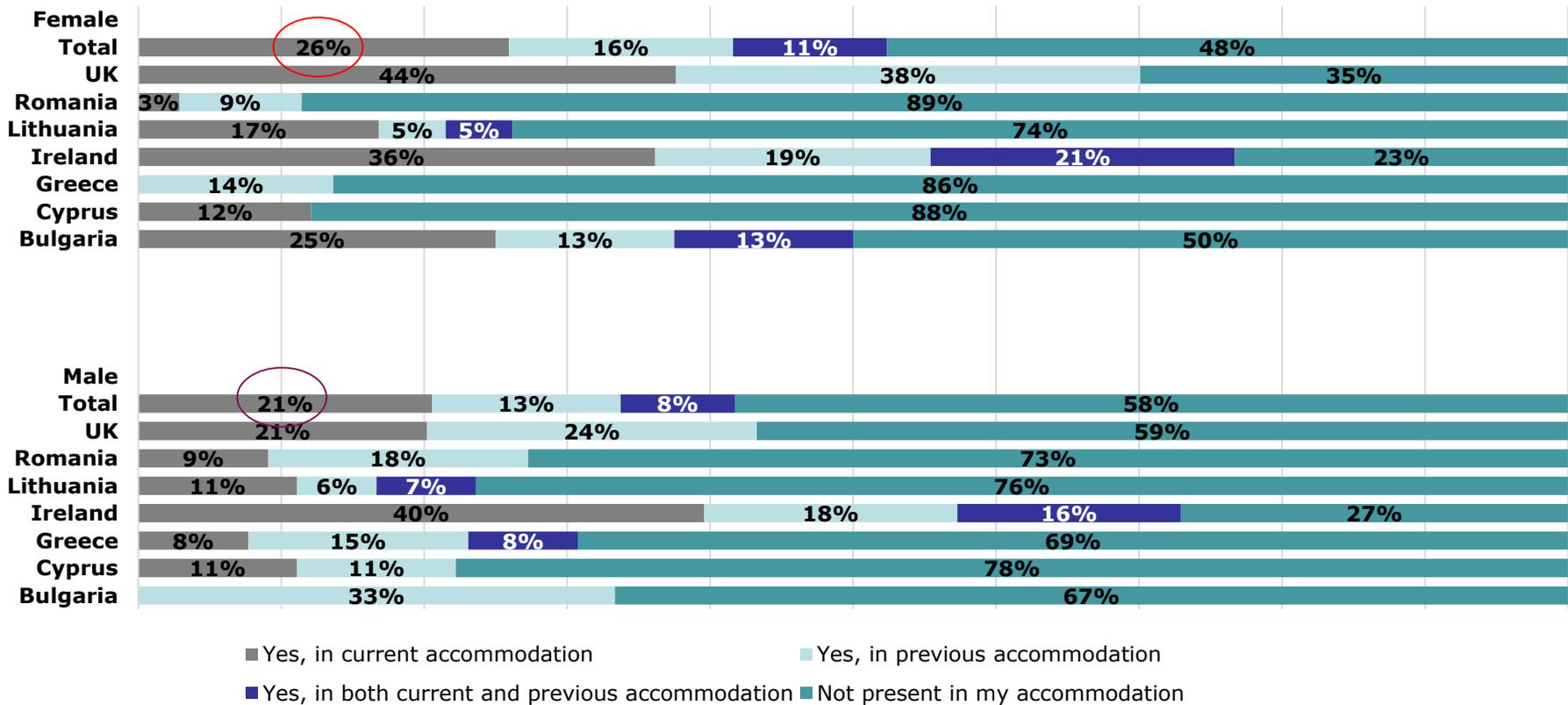
Women are more likely to live in poor quality accommodation

Draughty doors / windows



Women are more likely to live in poor quality accommodation

Condensation



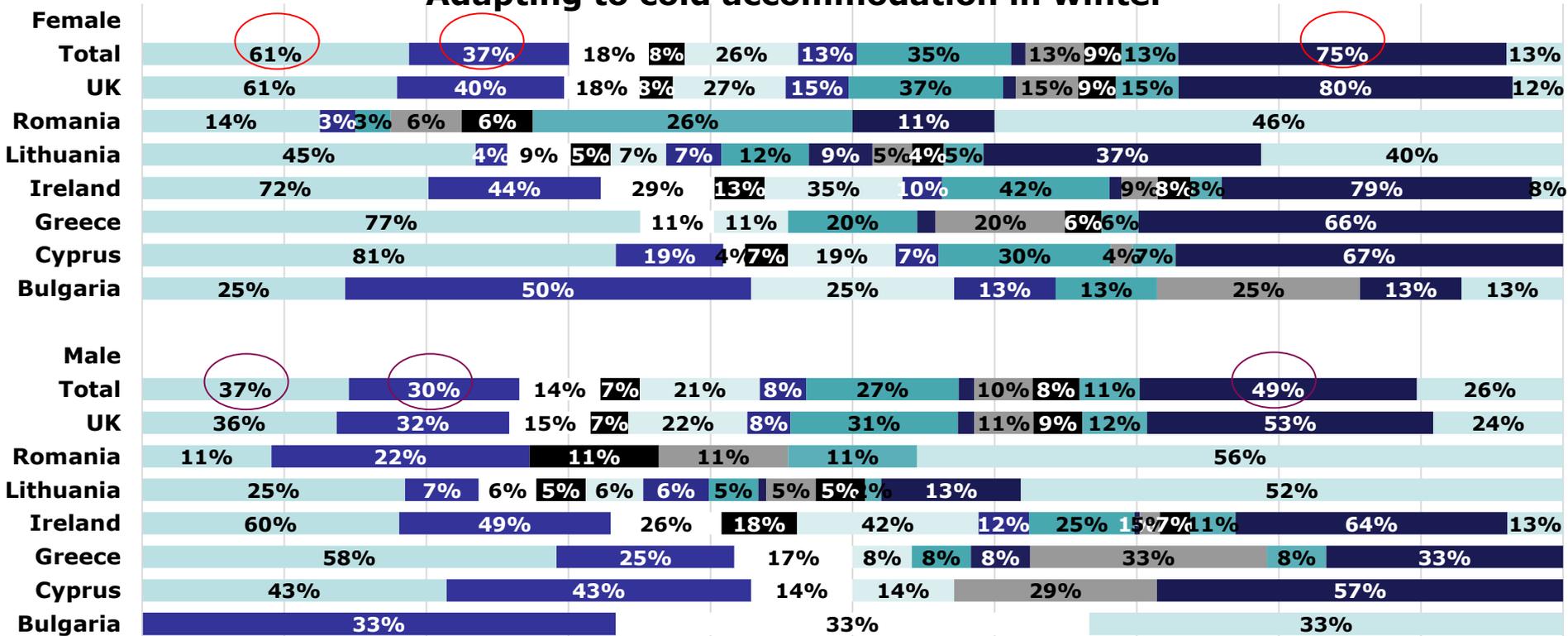
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Women are more likely to adapt to cold accommodation in winter

Adapting to cold accommodation in winter



- Worn more than one layer of clothes to bed
- Chosen to go out to socialise rather than stay at home
- Stayed longer in university / college buildings (library, class rooms/lecture theatres)
- Kept curtains closed all day to keep warmth in
- Used draught excluders
- Approached landlord to improve heating system
- None of these

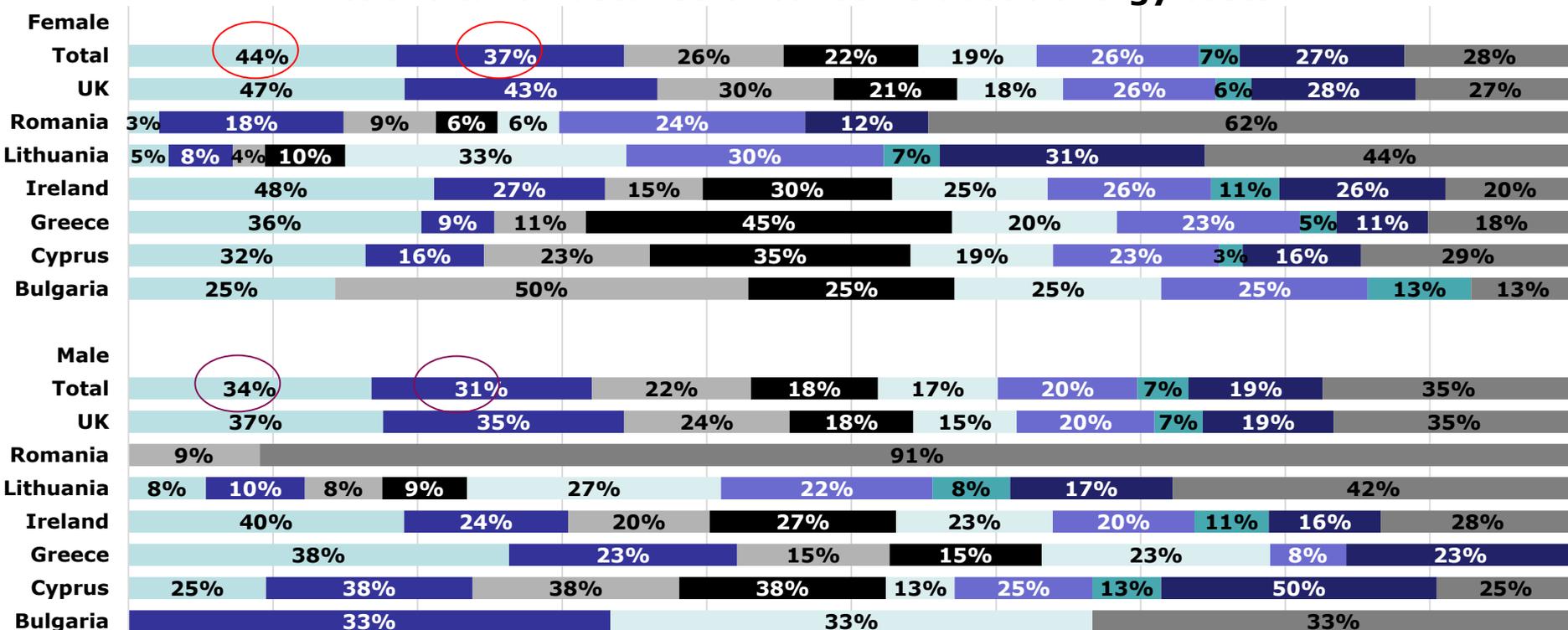
- Worn outdoor wear (e.g. hat/scarf/coat/gloves) in your home
- Stopped inviting friends or family to your accommodation
- Stayed elsewhere (e.g. with parents, relatives, partner, friends)
- Put plastic sheeting on the inside of windows
- Approached landlord to improve insulation
- Used blankets or hot water bottles



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Women are more likely to take energy saving actions

Actions taken because of concerns about energy costs



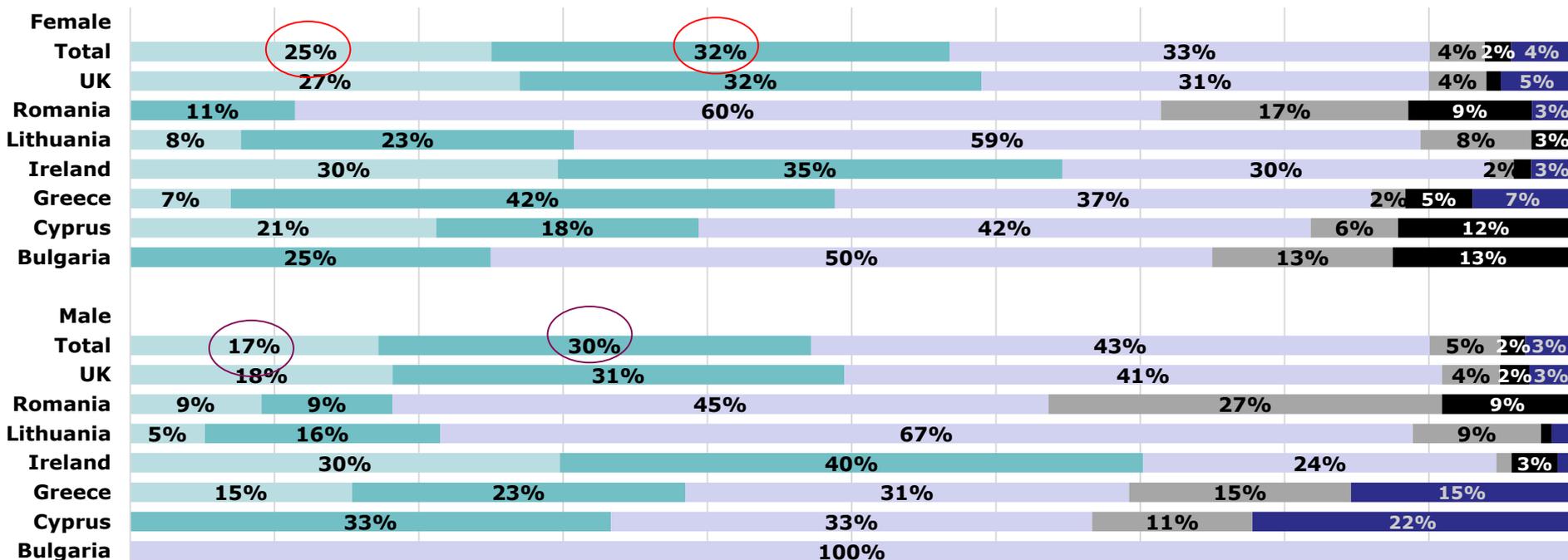
- Turned heating off, even though I would have preferred to have it on
- Turned the heating down, even though I would have preferred it to be warmer
- Turned the heating down or off in some rooms but not others, even though I would have preferred not to
- Only heated and used one room in my accommodation for periods of the day
- Used less hot water than I would have preferred
- Turned out lights in my accommodation, even though I would have preferred to have them on
- Had fewer hot meals or hot drinks than I would have liked
- Washed clothing/other items less frequently than I would have liked
- None of these



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Women are more likely to feel cold

Perceived overall comfort during winter



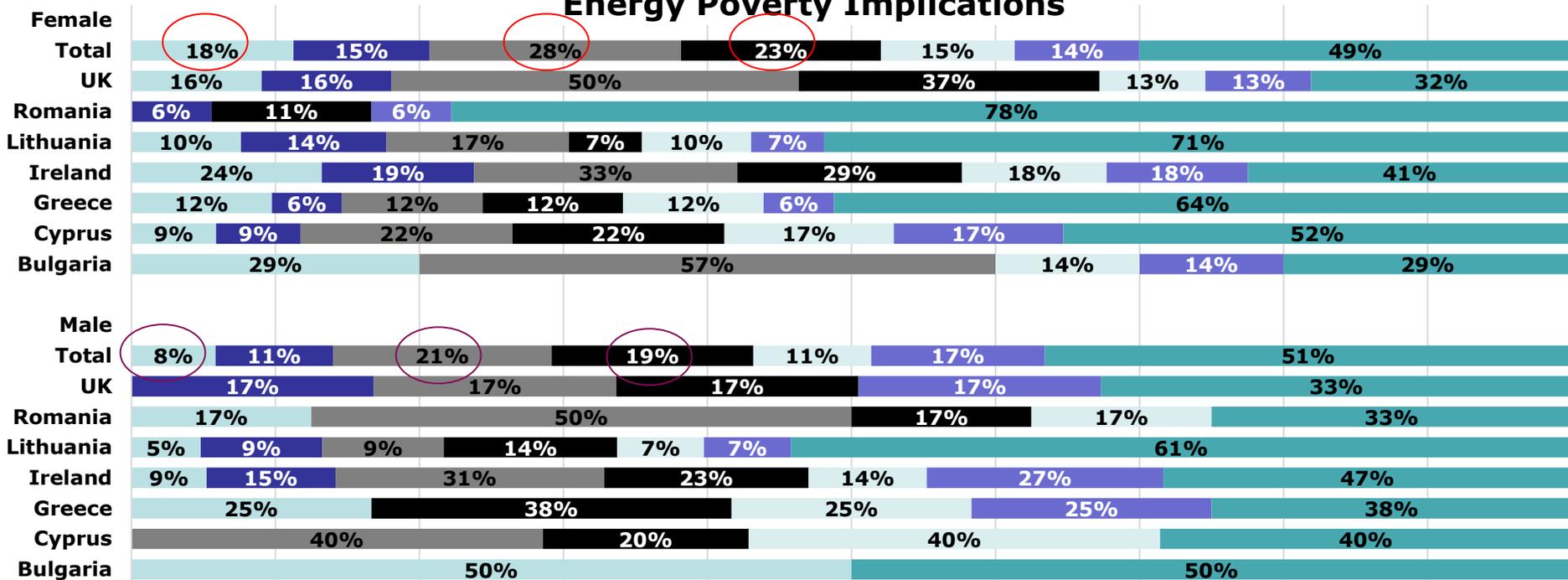
■ Much colder than you would have liked
 ■ A bit colder than you would have liked
 ■ About right
 ■ A bit warmer than you would have liked
 ■ A lot warmer than you would have liked
 ■ Both too warm and too cold



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Women are more likely to face health or mental problems

Energy Poverty Implications



- It has made an existing health problem/problems worse
- It makes me feel miserable
- I don't feel able to invite friends or family to the house
- None of these

- It has brought on a new health problem/problems
- It makes me feel anxious or depressed
- I have spent as much time as possible away from the house

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Student Vulnerability Factors



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Students are inexperienced energy users

Experience: for many it will be their first experience of renting and paying bills

- Rights as tenants
- Unsure of energy costs and budgeting
- Don't have experience of programming heating, managing bills and arrears, communicating with landlords

*"Our energy supplier is sorted through the letting agency so I don't think we can change it."
3rd year student, UK*

*"When we signed up [supplier] informed us would be roughly £30 a month and it's ended up being triple so we haven't always budgeted"
3rd year student, UK*

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Students can live in shared households

Shared households: shared responsibilities and different abilities to pay

- Disagreements over heating/cooling levels – with some having more income
- Managing bills as a household - getting flatmates to pay
- Inefficiency when responsibilities aren't clear – i.e switching off lights

"I feel stressed that its all in my name and my bank account, sometimes its only one person there for 2-3 weeks over breaks and they still rack up a huge bill. Makes me sad and lonely at times cause have to always be in my bedroom under duvet, find it difficult to concentrate"

3rd year student, UK

"We had the heating on an hour before we got up, an hour at 9 pm and an hour at 3pm. Our heating was agreed to be turned off permanently in January brrrrrr... One tenant really can't afford her bills, one has too much money so to save arguments we just turned it off entirely."

3rd year Student, UK

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High demand for student housing

Housing Affordability and competition:

- High demand for properties with many students looking for housing up to months in advance.
- Many students have little choice of properties and are rushed into decisions when competition is high.
- Low incomes result in cost of rent being the main factor.
- Inexperience results in energy efficiency often being overlooked.

"It was awful. Descriptions of properties were always so inaccurate. So many properties were way too expensive. Wasted so much money and time flat-hunting"
PhD student, UK

"We found it stressful as we were shocked at how early a decision had to be made"
2nd year student, UK

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Student Energy Poverty is difficult to measure

Difficulty in measuring student energy poverty:

Despite research showing that many students are vulnerable, have low incomes, high costs and poor quality housing we do not have figures on % of students in energy poverty.

- Complicating factors:
 - Rarely qualify for national assistance schemes
 - Transient population
 - Differences in income within households

= students are often not considered, included or helped with energy poverty.

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Recommendations



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Recommendations for landlords

Landlords

- Improve building efficiencies – consider any national incentive schemes for building improvements, retrofits and renovations.
- Participation in national landlord codes/accreditation schemes where applicable.
- Provide energy efficiency information (EPCs), openly, in advance and before tenancies are finalised.
- Provide move in information pack - heating/cooling controls, general energy efficiency guides, explanation of energy bills and responsibilities.

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Recommendations for policy makers

Policy makers/Governments

- Deployment of financial and other incentives for energy efficiency renovations and energy retrofits to existing buildings.
- Incentivise or enforce minimum efficiency standards in the private rented sector (EPC ratings).
- Inclusion of students as vulnerable group in energy poverty reporting and support schemes.
- Strategies to support efficient products and emerging technologies, such as smart metering, in buildings to increase market penetration.

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Additional Recommendations

Energy Companies

- Provide low cost student tariffs, recognising the market advantage of offering affordable energy to first time consumers.
- Trained customer advisors to adequately support vulnerable consumers and provide useful advice and information.

Universities and Unions

- Operate an approved landlord scheme
- Provide advice on bill management, costs, budgeting and efficiency
- Offer hardship support for the most vulnerable students

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Student energy poverty final remarks

Our research shows that many students, in particular women, feel uncomfortably cold, struggle to pay energy bills and experience negative health impacts as a result of their accommodation.

We know students are vulnerable due to low income, poor quality housing and factors such as experience, shared housing, demand etc.

Many organisations have a role to play in ensuring students are not experiencing energy poverty and the impacts this has on health, wellbeing and attainment

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Energy poverty: findings, impacts and recommendations

References

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Thank you!

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