



LIVING SITUATIONS OF HIGHER ED STUDENTS

A study on the life and housing conditions of university students in Romania.



ABOUT THE STATE OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

The State of University Students is a partnership between 39 student associations from across Romania. This partnership aims to draw attention to the challenges faced by Romanian students, which are often overlooked by the institutions in charge. „Living Situations of Higher Ed Students” is the second research project conducted under The State of University Students initiative, following the [first study from 2022](#). This project is based on an extensive survey targeting students from all university centers in Romania, aiming to identify and understand their living conditions.

The „Living Situations of Higher Ed Students” study was conducted in collaboration with the Center for the Study of Democracy (CSD), a think tank founded in 2006 within the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Political, Administrative, and Communication Sciences, Babeş-Bolyai University (UBB) in Cluj-Napoca.

For more information, you can reach us at:

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The State of University Students began as an initiative of university student organizations, and it is a project done by the students, for the students. Their challenges cannot be solved by a single entity or a single university center; identifying solutions for their future requires the involvement of organizations from across the country. Below, you can see all the extraordinary people who have joined us as partners. If you have heard about us and would like to become part of our initiative, feel free to contact us via a message on Facebook or email.

Parteners



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FOREWORD

The publication of the first State of University Students study in 2022 confirmed that Romanian society genuinely wants to understand the issues faced by university students. That is why we are now putting forward the second study, titled Living Situations of Higher Ed Students.

This initiative is even more important because the world we live in has not become, as we had hoped, a simpler place after the pandemic. On the contrary, the pandemic has been followed by a war near Romania's borders and an increasingly complex economic situation. All these factors not only affect young people's living conditions but also their physical and mental health.

Living Situations of Higher Ed Students aims to provide a clear diagnosis of young adults' living conditions and overall well-being in Romania. More than 1,670 students from all of the university centers in the country participated in the survey. The conclusions of this study will be useful to any institution looking to develop

policies that support young people in Romania.

Like the 2022 study, this new research shows that students should not be seen solely through the lens of education. In reality, young people's problems are much more diverse—ranging from utility expenses to substance use and mental health issues.

Without a doubt, attending university is a time of newfound freedom in one's life, but it is also a period of intense displacement and loss of control. Thus, 65.9% of respondents share their sleeping space with at least one other person, while 37.3% are dissatisfied with overcrowding and the lack of personal space. Furthermore, a total of 55% of respondents cannot regulate their household temperature.

The issue of high living costs is a constant concern. A total of 32.7% of students cite utility bills and maintenance expenses as one of their primary concerns, along with rent or dormitory fees (29.9%). Nearly 10% of students cannot afford a decent standard of living, and 30.9% state that their income covers only the bare necessities.

Another worrying aspect is substance use. Cigarettes (25.1%) and alcohol (21.6%) are at the top of the list of substances that university students have consumed more of in the last 12 months, highlighting the shortcomings

of Romania's regulatory efforts in this area. A lower increase (17.7%) was recorded in the consumption of electronic cigarettes and heated tobacco products. The good news is that the increase in drug consumption remains very low (1.9%). Additionally, only 1.4% of electronic cigarette or heated tobacco users transitioned to conventional cigarettes, indicating that the „gateway effect” (where e-cigarette use leads to traditional cigarette use) is minimal among students.

Perhaps the most alarming conclusions are the ones regarding to respondents' mental health. A total of 78.4% report increased levels of stress and anxiety, while 9.8% have had suicidal thoughts. Although the most frequently cited problem by students is the rising cost of energy (48.9%), more than 31% have suffered verbal abuse, 10.5% have experienced online bullying, 6.9% have faced sexual harassment, and 4.1% have been subjected to physical violence.

All these findings show why we have a duty to make students feel that, despite their struggles, they are understood and supported. They should not be seen merely as a problem to be solved but as a major opportunity. Romanian society must not forget, regardless of geopolitical challenges, that its greatest asset is its youth. Living Situations of Higher Ed Students aims

to bring into focus the highest priority: young people. Understanding their problems and finding the best solutions will not only bring social stability but also create better-protected and happier generations—generations that will feel supported enough to stay and build their future in Romania and the European Union, for the benefit of us all.

Iulia Giț,
The State of University Students, Project Coordinator



We would also like to extend our gratitude to Emil Mesaroş, honorary president of Agora Debate, for his support in the development and communication of the project, as well as for organizing our public debating events.

TEAM

George Jiglău

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



Andra Literat

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



Cristian Andrei Ciornea

Cristian's work is defined by two passions: academic research and public debating, and both of them are a constant presence in his daily activities. He is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Bucharest and an associate lecturer at Babeş-Bolyai University. Additionally, he serves as the President of the BBU Debate Society and is actively involved in volunteer work.



Iulia Giţ

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



METHODOLOGY

Living Situations of Higher Ed Students is an online survey conducted with the participation of 1,670 respondents, students enrolled in universities across 22 cities in Romania. The survey was carried out between March 1, 2023, and September 15, 2023. Respondents who took part in this survey were required to answer three control questions about their living situation, followed by 25 questions regarding the quality of their housing and living conditions over the past 12 months. All survey questions were mandatory.

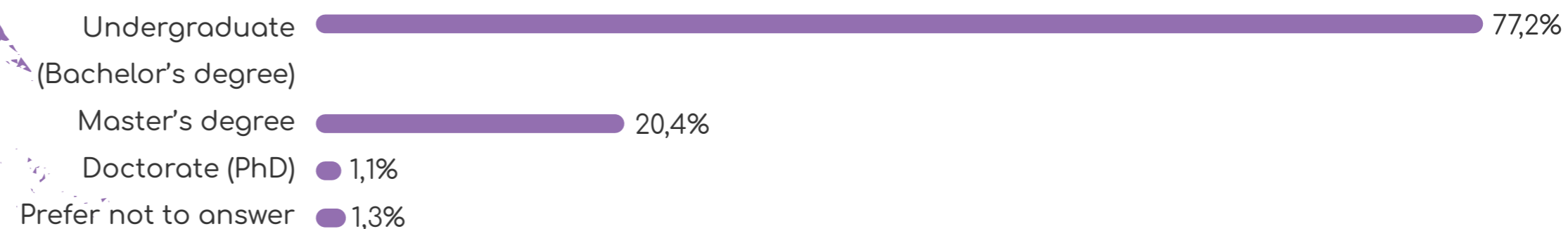
Some insights about the students who responded to this survey:

Gender of Respondents:



Although women constitute the majority of students in Romanian universities, their participation in this survey exceeds the usual statistical proportions. Such differences are common in online-administered surveys. Naturally, the higher representation of female respondents should be taken into account when analyzing the results. For instance, the survey data indicating that 43% of respondents faced difficulties covering health and well-being expenses is concerning, given that women traditionally spend more in this area.

Academic Level of Respondents

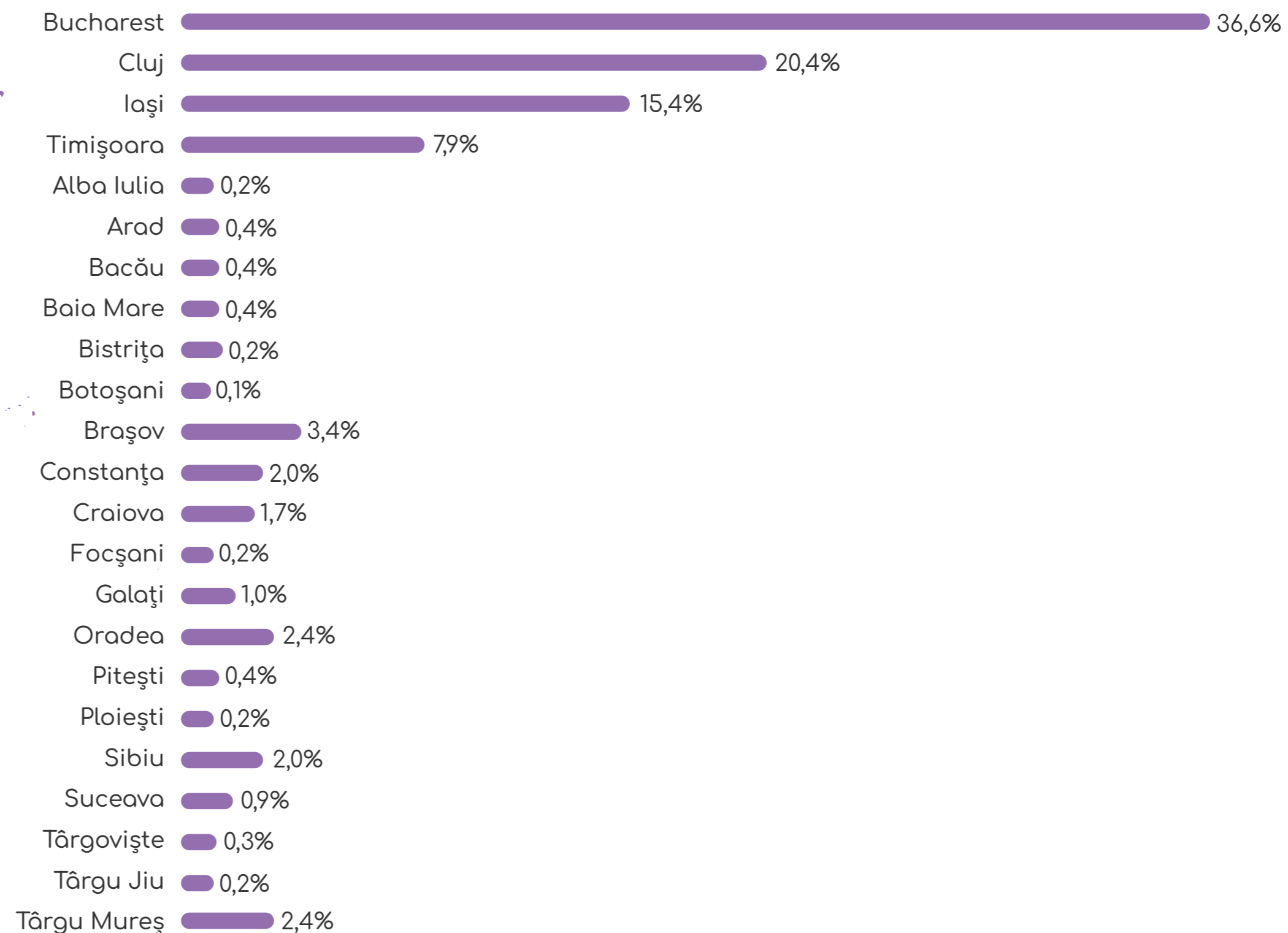


The proportion of undergraduate, master's, and doctoral students in this survey closely match those presented in official reports from the Ministry of National Education, such as the "Report on the State of Higher Education in Romania 2021-2022".

METHODOLOGY

Based on their topics, the survey questions were divided into four chapters: 1. Housing Conditions; 2. Energy Consumption – Costs and Usage Habits; 3. Quality and Cost of Living; 4. Mental Health and Well-being. In the „Final results” section of the document, you can find a detailed presentation of the results recorded for each question. At the beginning, the „Key findings” section provides a selection of the most important aspects. However, for a comprehensive understanding of the survey, we encourage you to read the entire „Final results” section.

University centers where respondents study:



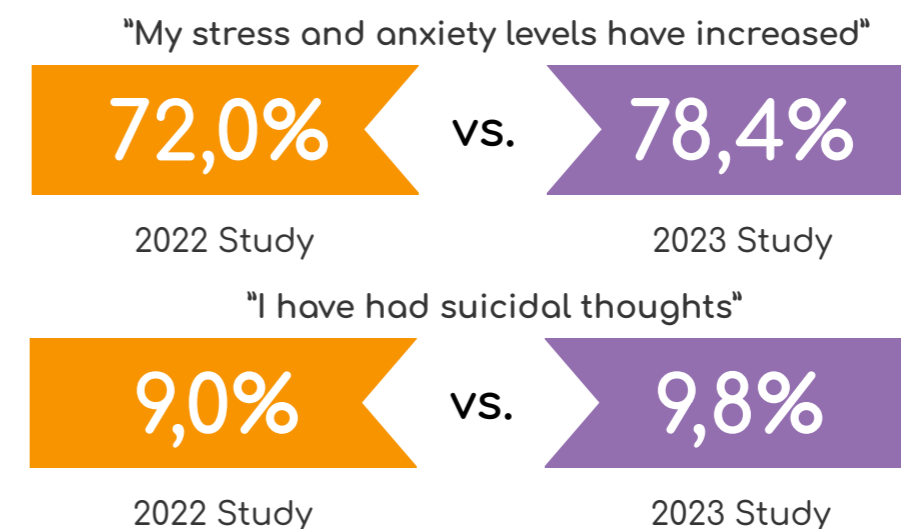
As expected, the majority of respondents come from Romania’s four largest university centers. However, a significant number of responses were also recorded from Brașov, Oradea, Târgu Mureș, Sibiu, and Craiova, along with various other cities across the country. This broad distribution ensures national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

KEY FINDINGS

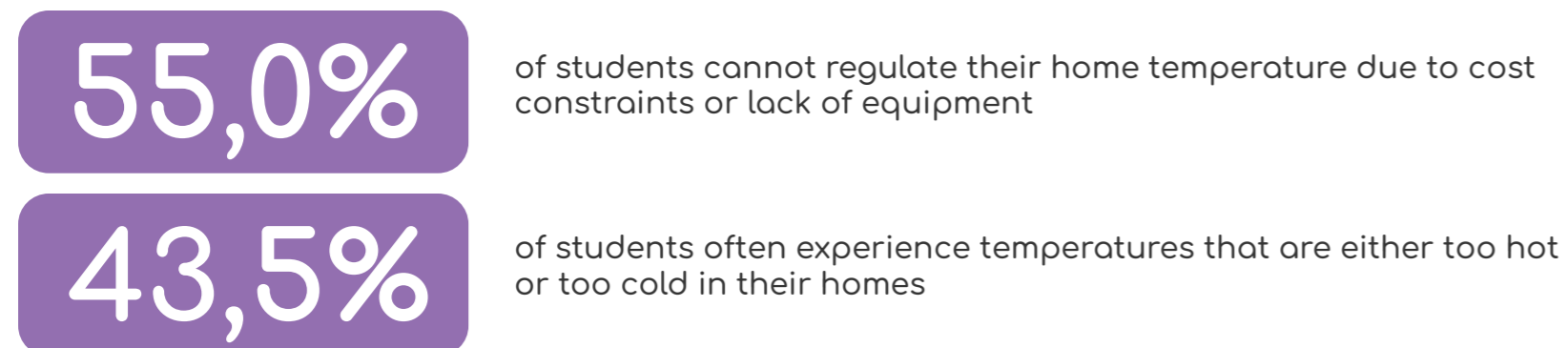
Romanian students face the most significant challenges with:



Their mental health appears to have worsened:



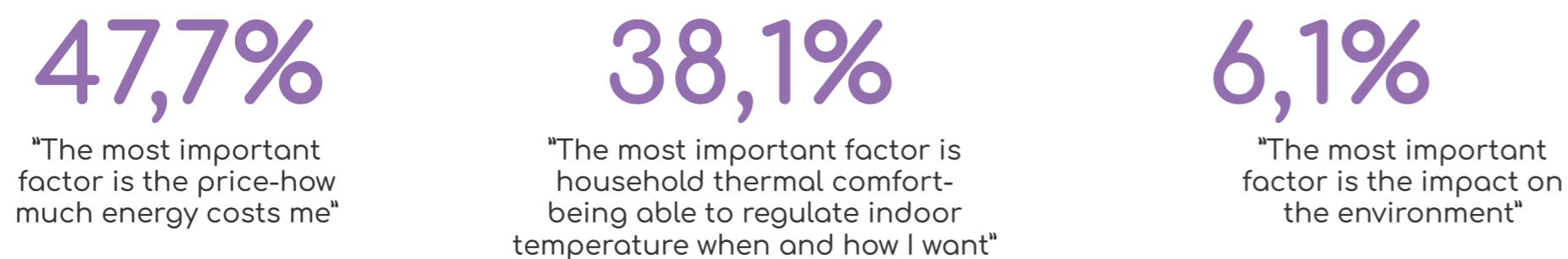
Given that:



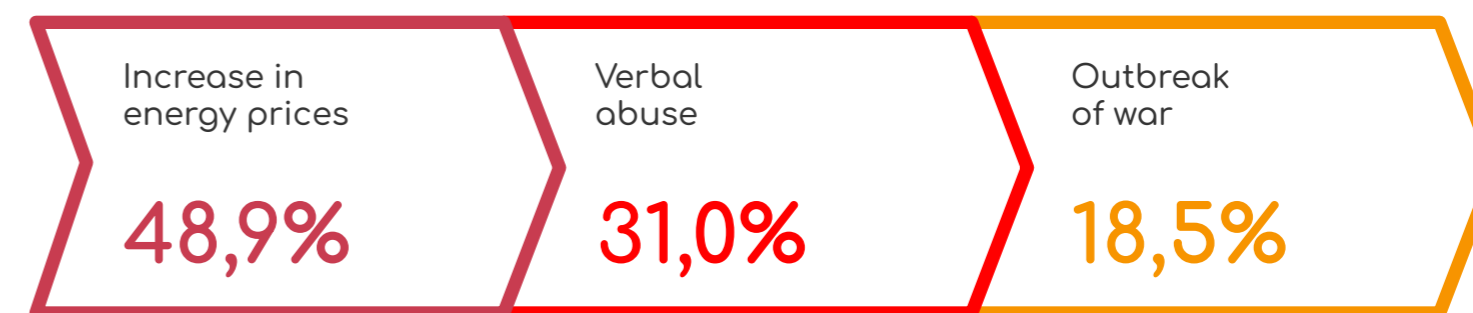
And they have numerous financial problems:



They prioritize energy costs and thermal comfort over environmental protection:



They mention energy prices, followed by verbal abuse and the outbreak of war, as the most significant factors affecting them:





LIVING SITUATIONS
OF HIGHER ED
STUDENTS

GENERAL
RESULTS

CHAPTER 1: HOUSING CONDITIONS

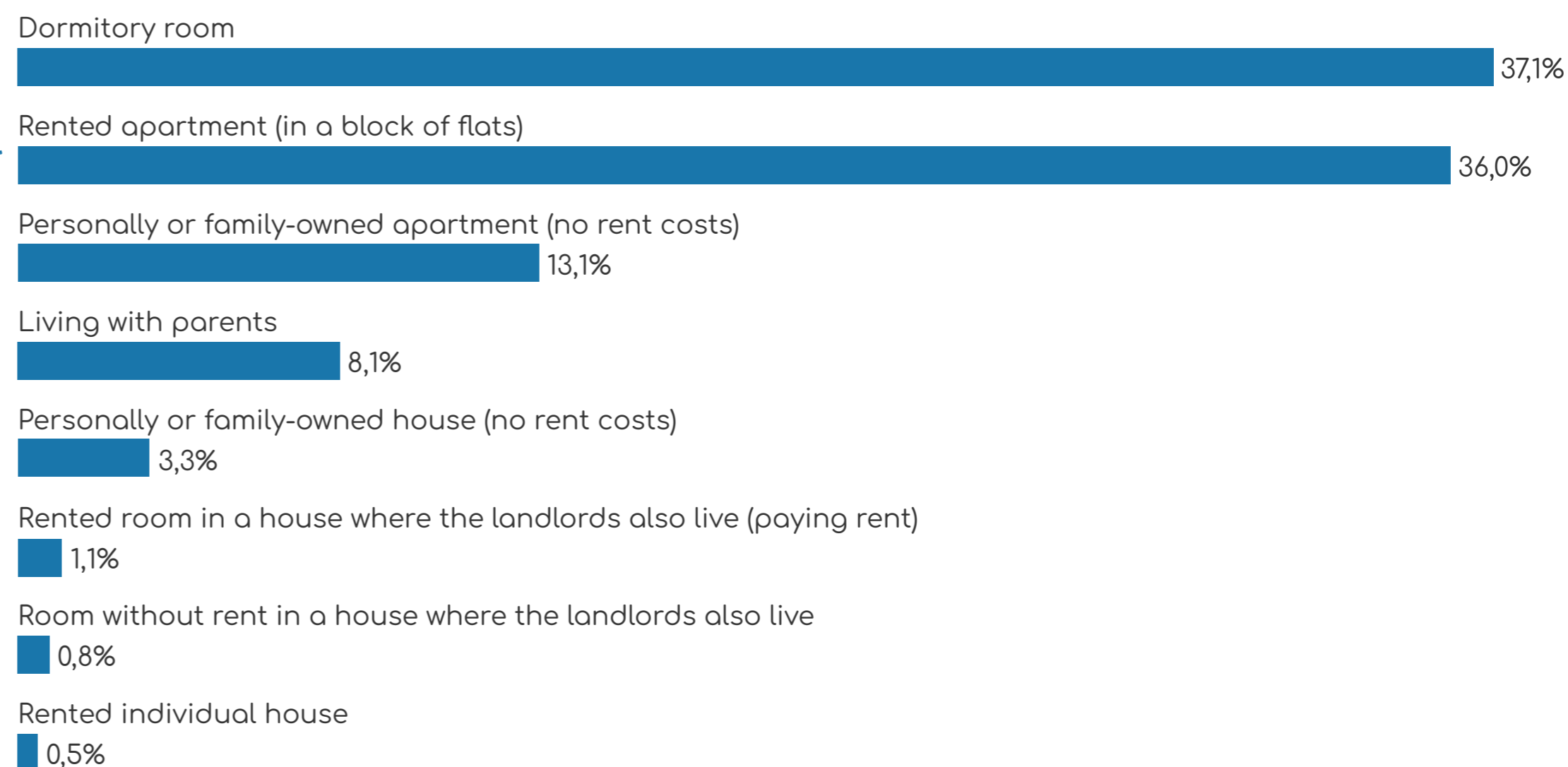


01

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

The majority of students live in dormitory rooms (37.1% of respondents) and rented apartments (36%). A total of 16.4% do not pay rent because they live in apartments or houses owned by themselves or their families, while 8.1% of students live with their parents.

1670 RESPONDENTS



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

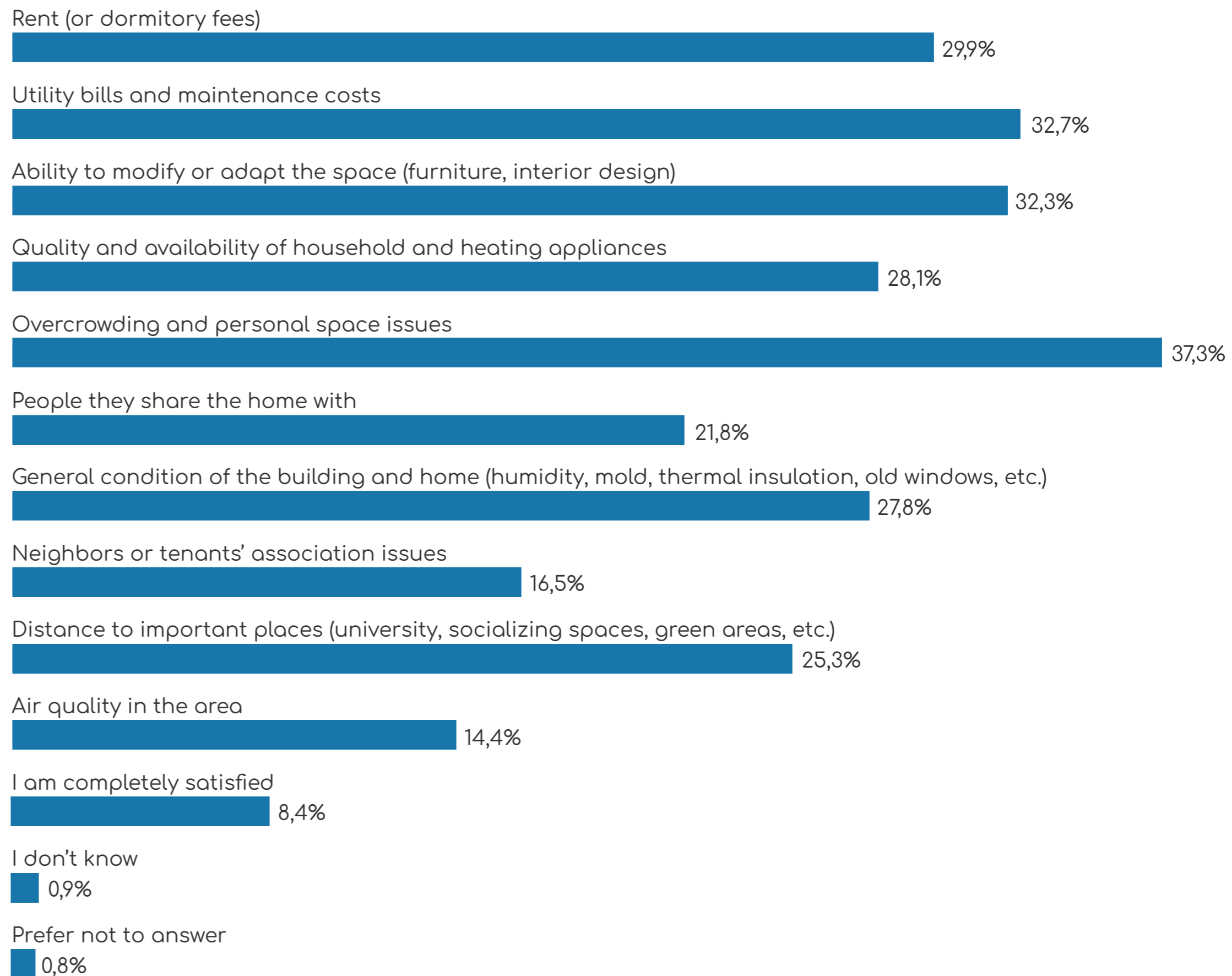
Single-choice question.

02

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

Only 8.4% of respondents state that they are completely satisfied with their living conditions. 37.3% are dissatisfied with overcrowding and the lack of personal space, while one-third cite utility bills and maintenance costs as a major issue. The cost of rent, location, and household amenities are also highly rated dissatisfaction factors.

1670 RESPONDENTS



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

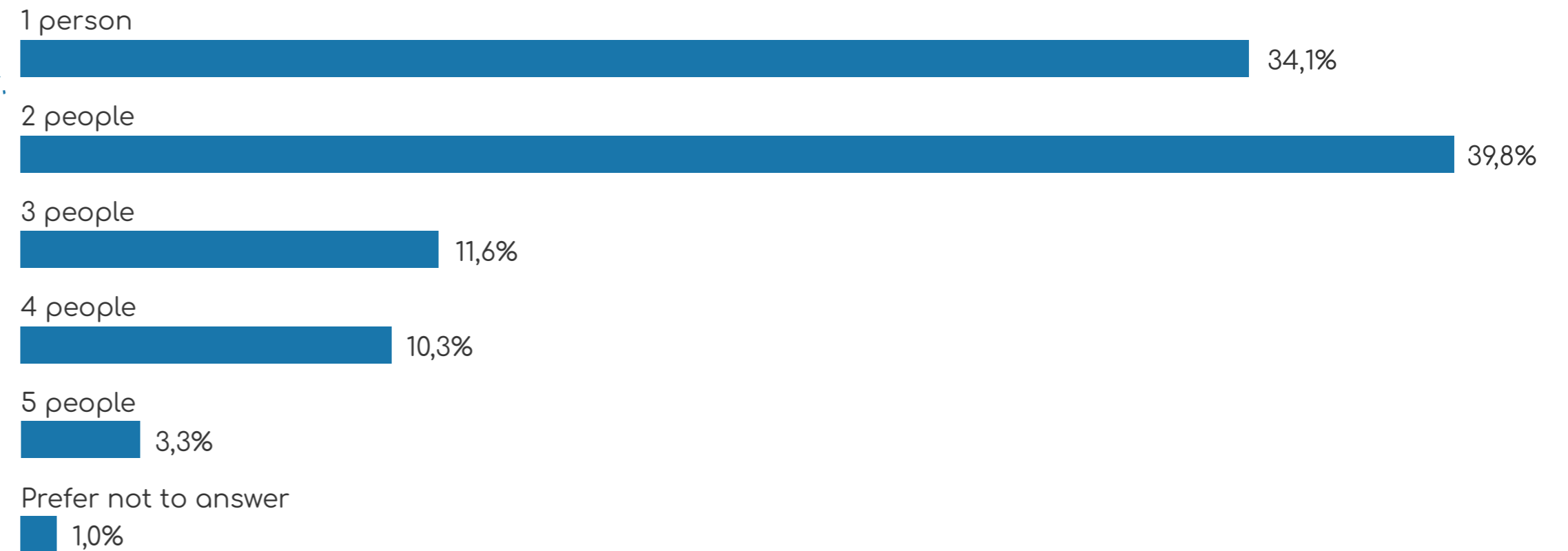
Multiple-choice question.

03

HOW MANY PEOPLE (INCLUDING YOURSELF) LIVE IN THE ROOM WHERE YOU SLEEP?

A total of 65.9% of respondents share their sleeping space with at least one other person, indicating a high level of overcrowding (which, as per the previous question, is the primary source of dissatisfaction for students). 39.8% share their bedroom with one other person, while only 34.1% of students sleep alone in their room.

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"3. How many people (including yourself) live in the room where you sleep?"

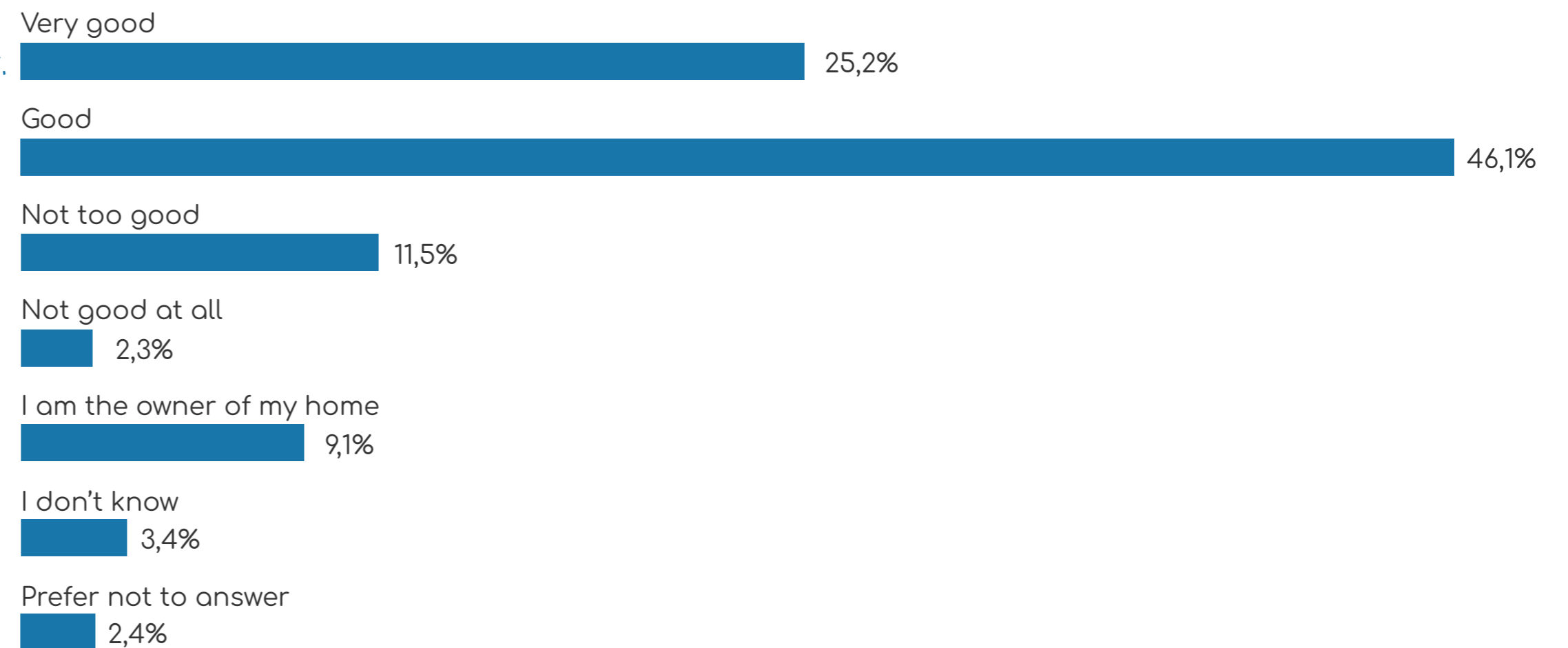
Single-choice question.

04

HOW WOULD YOU EVALUATE YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR LANDLORD OR DORMITORY ADMINISTRATION REGARDING HOUSING CONDITIONS?

A total of 71.3% of students state that their relationship with their landlord or housing administrator regarding housing conditions is good or very good. However, 13.8% report that their relationship is not good or very bad.

1645 RESPONDENTS



"4. How would you evaluate your relationship with your landlord or dormitory administration regarding housing conditions?"

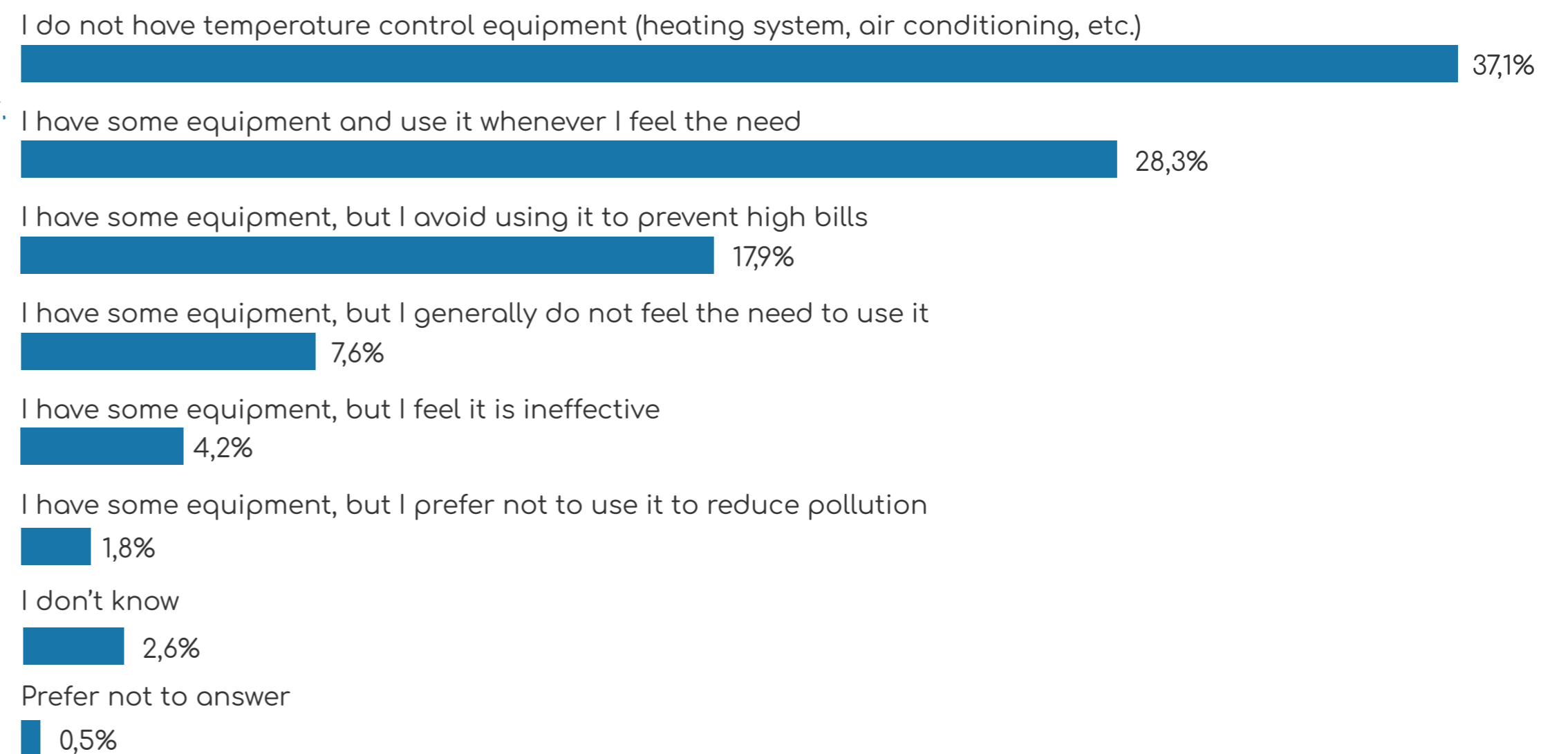
Single-choice question.

05

REGARDING YOUR ABILITY TO CONTROL THE TEMPERATURE IN YOUR HOME, WHICH STATEMENT BEST DESCRIBES YOUR SITUATION?

A total of 55% of respondents cannot regulate their home temperature, either due to a lack of heating or cooling equipment (37.1%) or because they fear high energy bills (17.9%). Only 1.8% of respondents reduce equipment usage for environmental reasons.

1666 RESPONDENTS



"5. Regarding your ability to control the temperature in your home, which statement best describes your situation?"

Single-choice question.

CHAPTER 2: ENERGY CONSUMPTION - COSTS AND USAGE HABITS

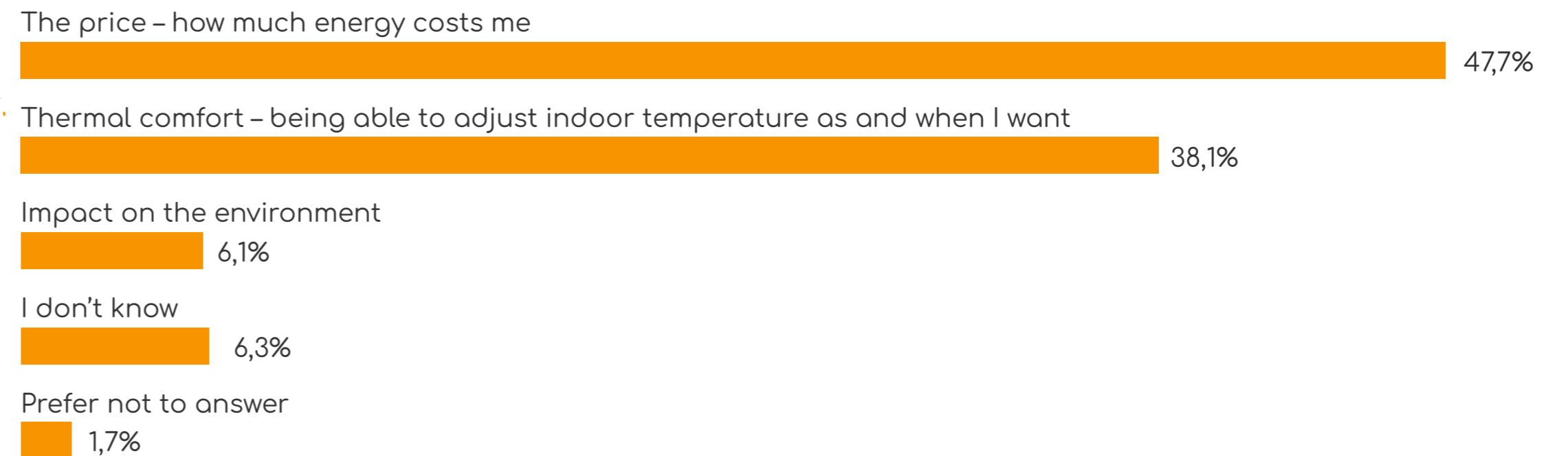


06

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

Almost half of respondents prioritize energy costs and utility bills prices, while 38.1% prioritize thermal comfort. Only 6.1% consider the environmental impact to be a major factor in their energy use at home, despite a later question (Question 13) showing that 84.7% of respondents agree that climate change is a real threat. 36.2% acknowledge that their household energy use has an environmental impact.

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

Single-choice question.

07

WHEN THINKING ABOUT THE THERMAL COMFORT LEVEL IN YOUR HOME, WHICH STATEMENT BEST DESCRIBES YOUR SITUATION?

Perceiving that household temperatures are inadequate (too hot or too cold) is one of the primary indicators of energy poverty. 43.5% of respondents report this perception.

1670 RESPONDENTS

Generally, the temperature at home is adequate



It is often too hot or too cold at home



I don't know



Prefer not to answer



"7. When thinking about the thermal comfort level in your home, which statement best describes your situation?"

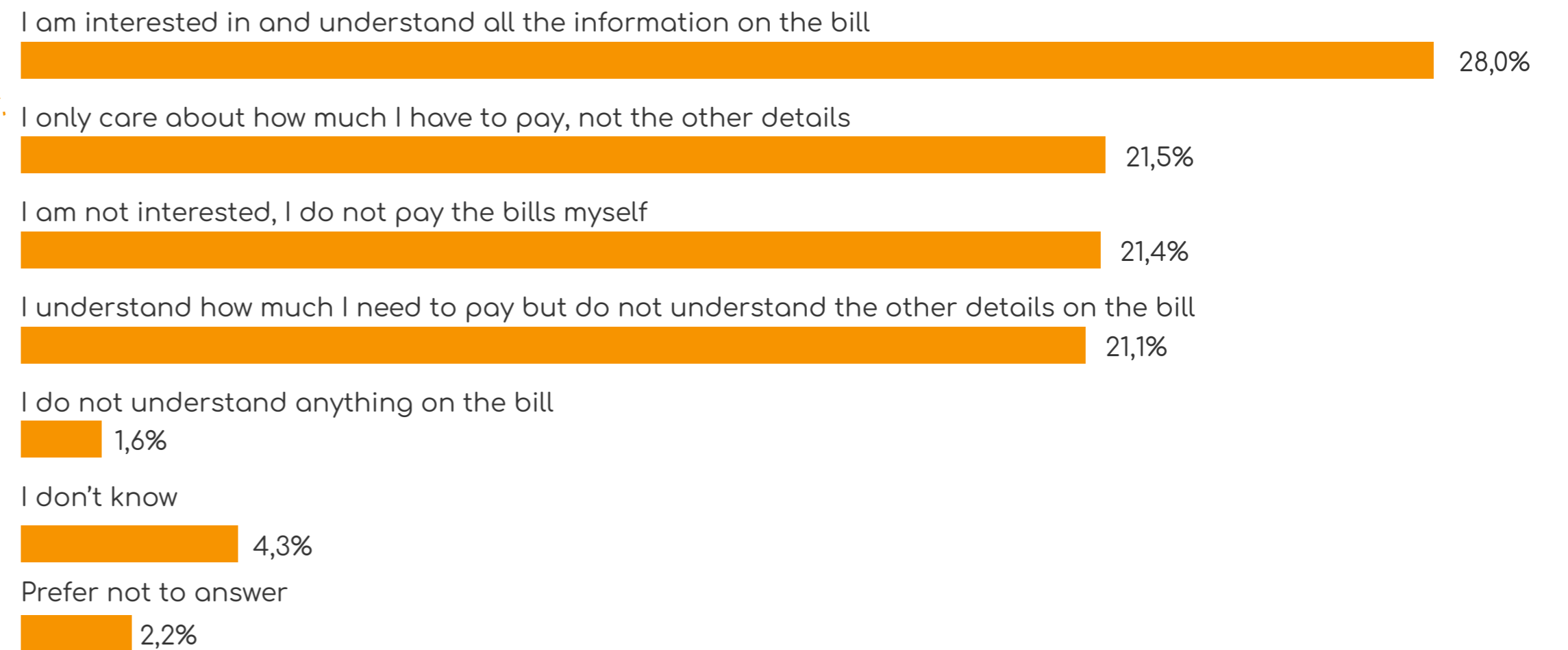
Single-choice question.

08

REGARDING ENERGY BILLS, WHICH STATEMENT BEST DESCRIBES YOUR SITUATION?

Almost one-third of respondents are interested in and understand all the information on their energy bill. However, 21.5% only care about the actual cost on their energy bill, while 21.1% do not understand any details beyond the price. Additionally, 21.4% of students do not pay their energy bills themselves.

1670 RESPONDENTS



"8. Regarding energy bills, which statement best describes your situation?"

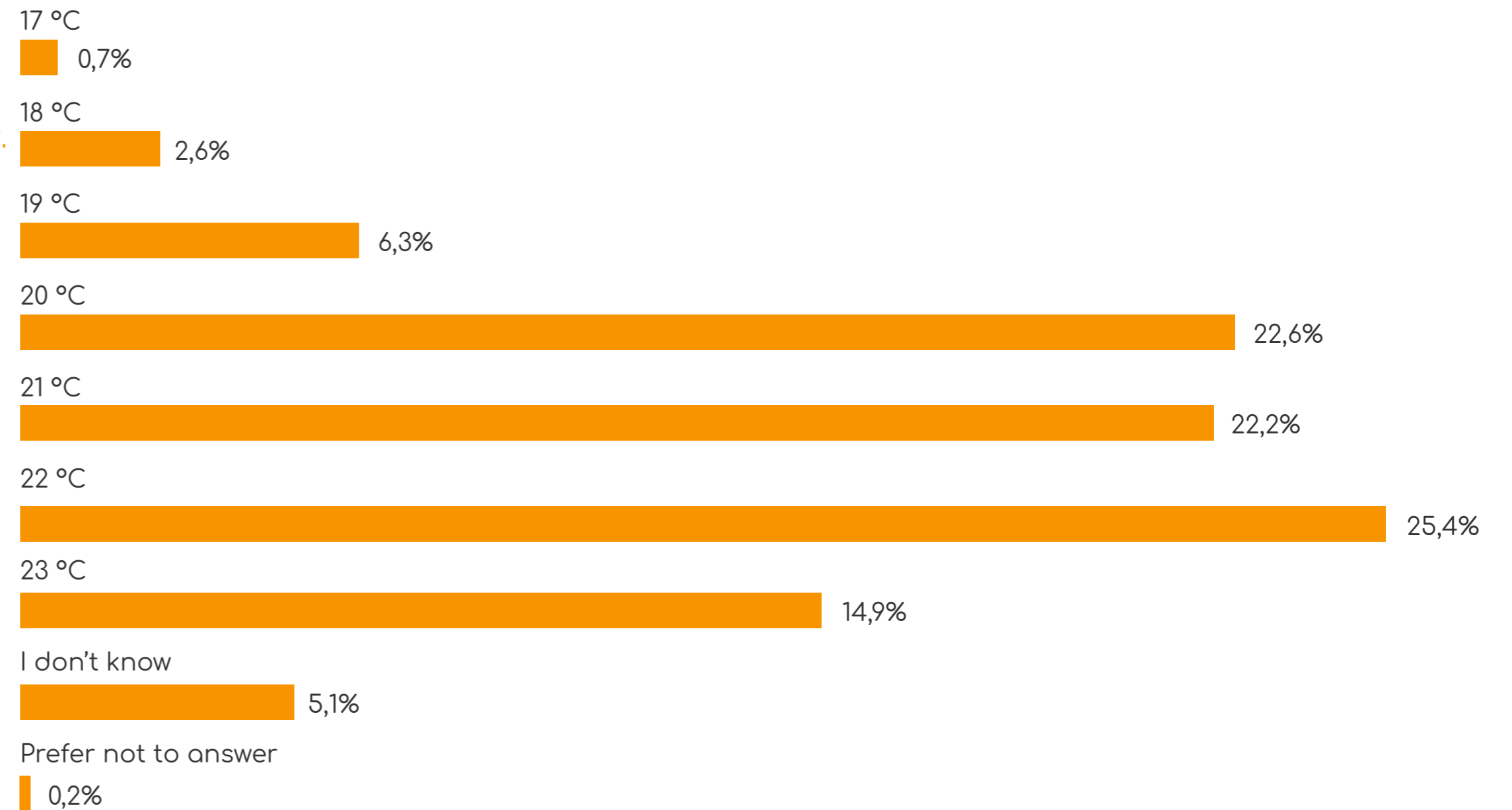
Single-choice question.

09

WHAT TEMPERATURE (°C) SHOULD YOUR HOME BE FOR OPTIMAL COMFORT?

For one-quarter of respondents, the optimal home temperature is 22°C. Another 22.6% prefer 20°C, while 22.2% favor 21°C. Only 9.6% of students consider a temperature below 20°C to be comfortable.

1670 RESPONDENŢI



"9. What temperature (°C) should your home be for optimal comfort?"

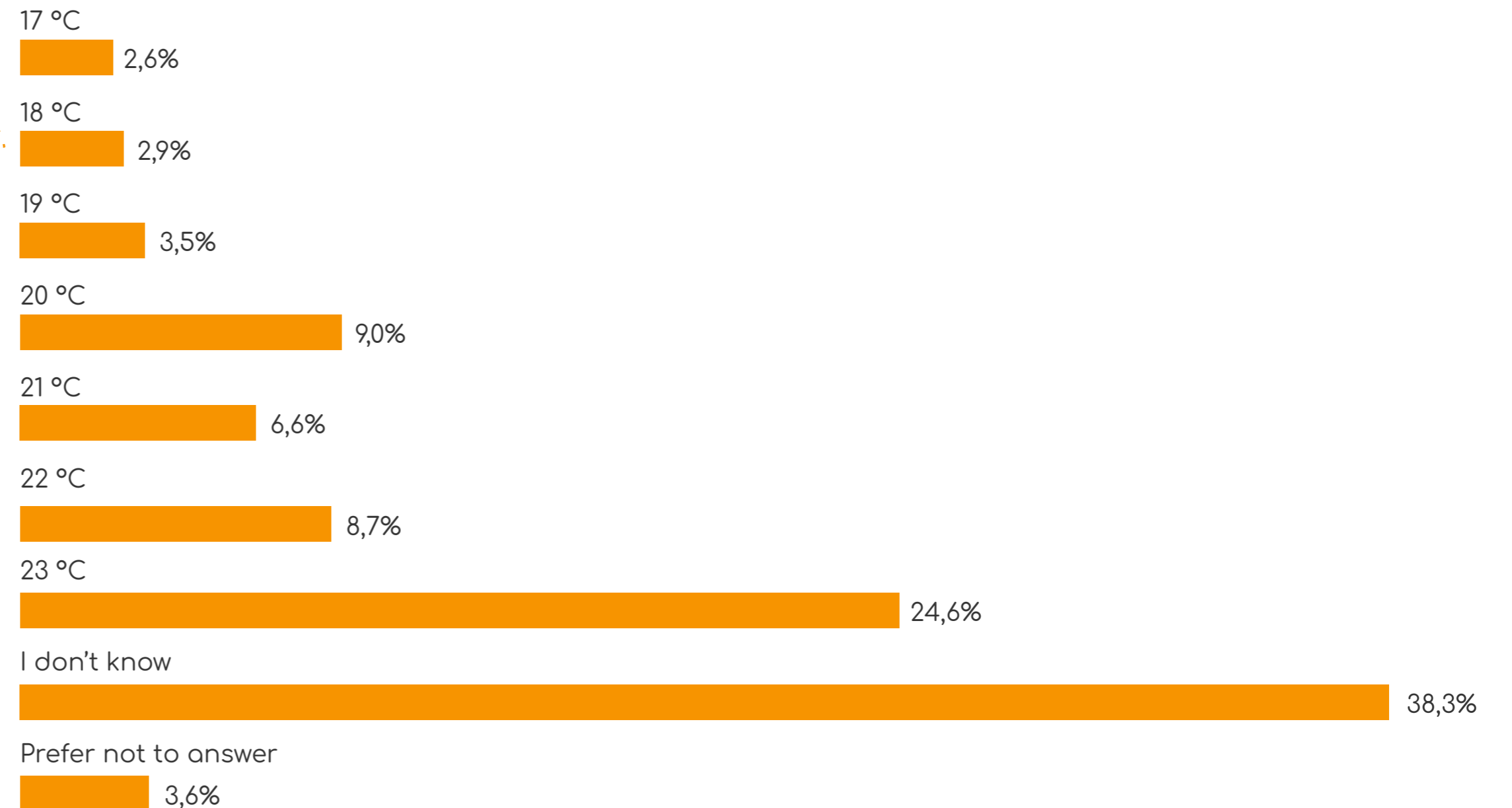
Single-choice question.

10

WHAT IS THE CURRENT TEMPERATURE (°C) IN YOUR HOME?

A total of 38.3% of respondents are not able to indicate the actual temperature in their home, most likely due to the lack of temperature regulation equipment (as indicated in Question 5). For 24.6% of students, the room temperature at the time of the survey was 23°C.

1670 RESPONDENTS



"10. What is the current temperature (°C) in your home?"

Single-choice question.

11

HAVE YOU HAD OVERDUE UTILITY BILLS IN THE PAST YEAR?

Another indicator of energy poverty is overdue utility bills- the bill hasn't been settled by the payment deadline. 14.1% of respondents report having overdue payments, despite utility bills traditionally being a priority. This situation can lead to cutbacks in other areas, such as clothing, technology access, socialization, and healthcare (see Question 16).

1670 RESPONDENTS



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

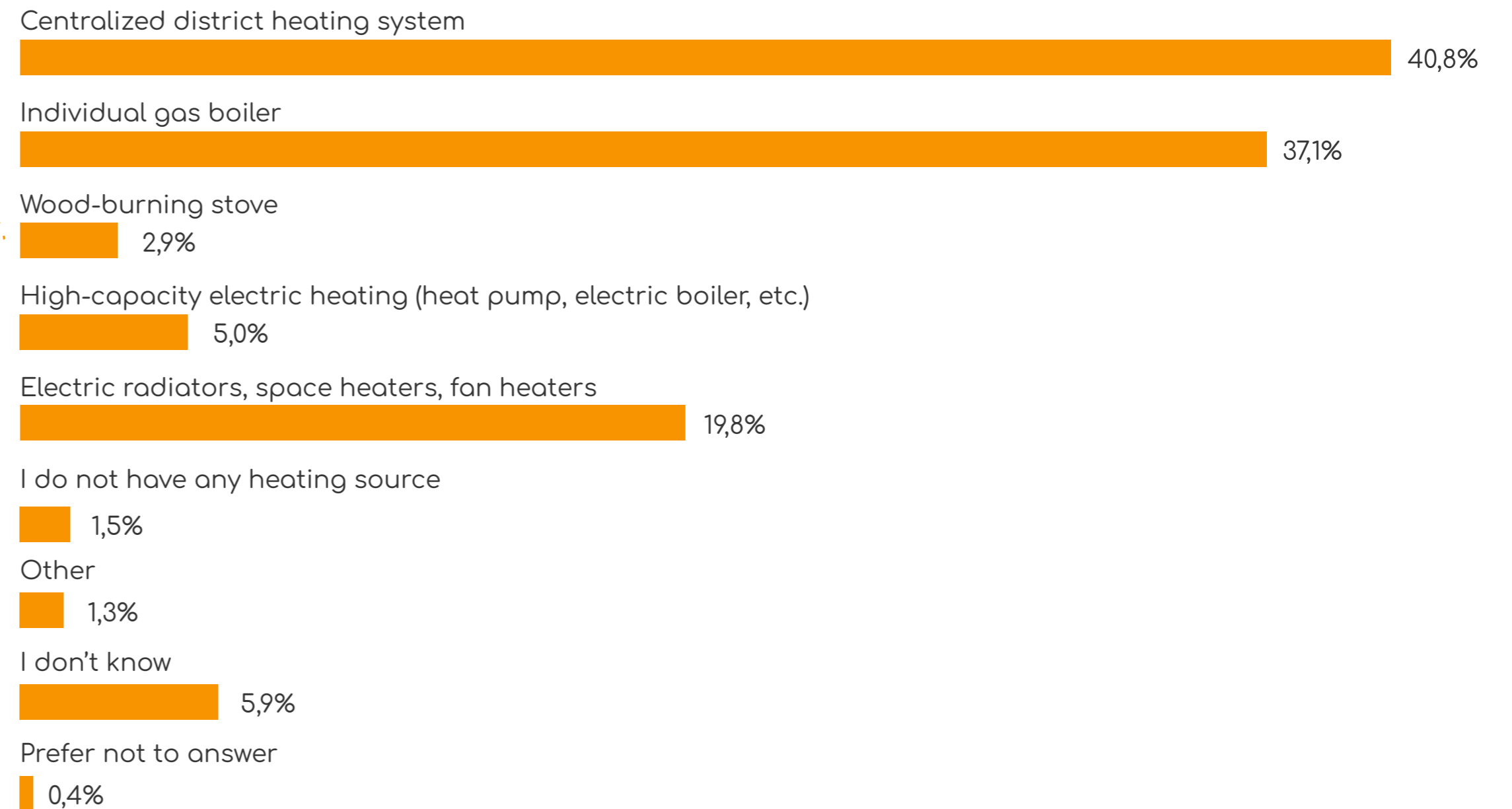
Single-choice question.

12

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING HEATING SOURCES DO YOU USE IN YOUR HOME?

District heating systems are the main heating source for students, with 40.8% using this type of centralized heating. Meanwhile, 37.1% live in homes with individual gas boilers. Nearly 20% rely on electric heating sources, which are known for high electricity consumption, even in the context of rising energy prices.

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"12. Which of the following heating sources do you use in your home?"

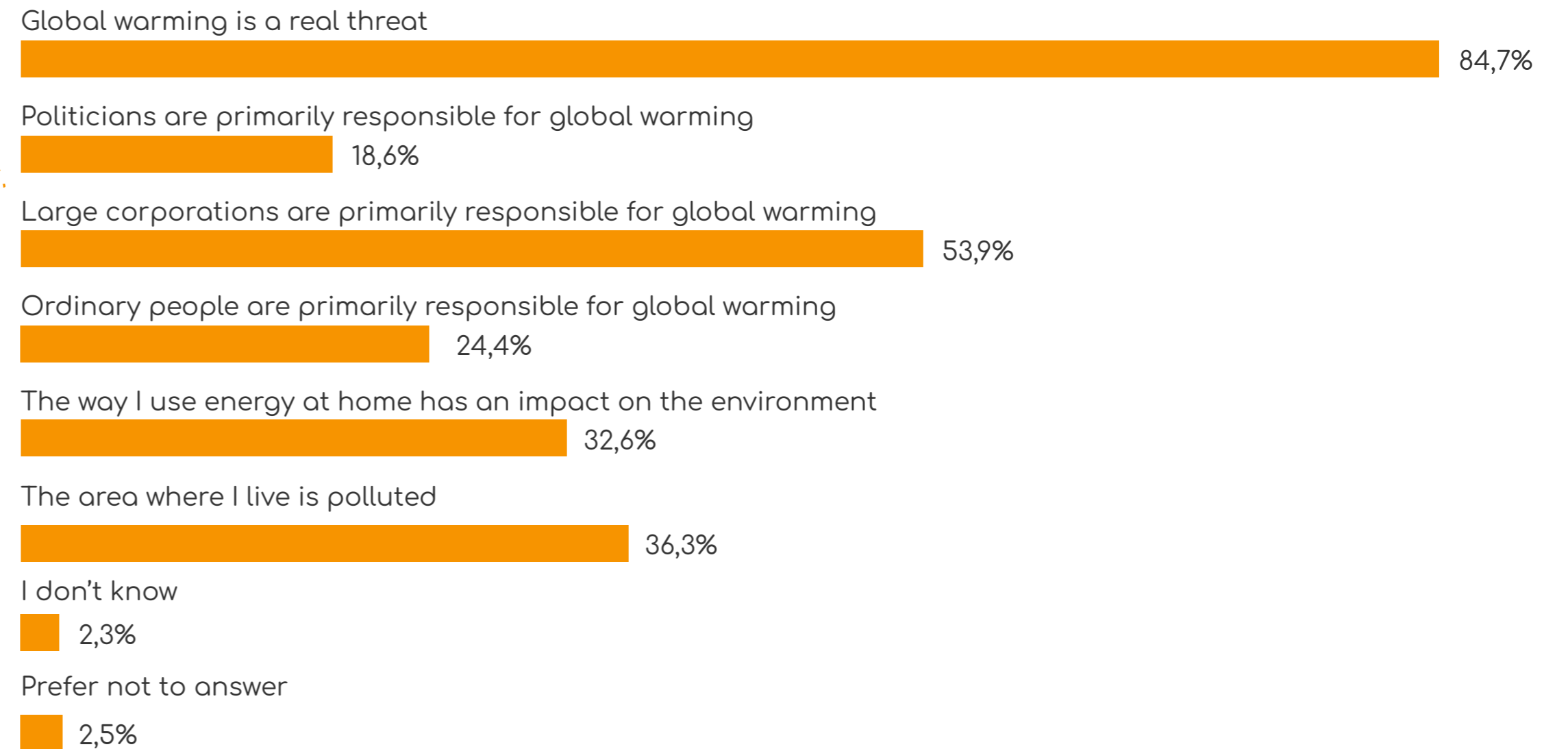
Up to 2 choices allowed per respondent.

13

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS DO YOU AGREE WITH?

A total of 84.7% of respondents agree that global warming is a real threat. However, only one-third acknowledge that their own energy consumption impacts global warming. Additionally, 36.3% state that the area where they live is polluted.

1670 RESPONDENTS



"13. Tell us which of the following statements you agree with."

Multiple-choice question.

CHAPTER 3: QUALITY AND COST OF LIVING

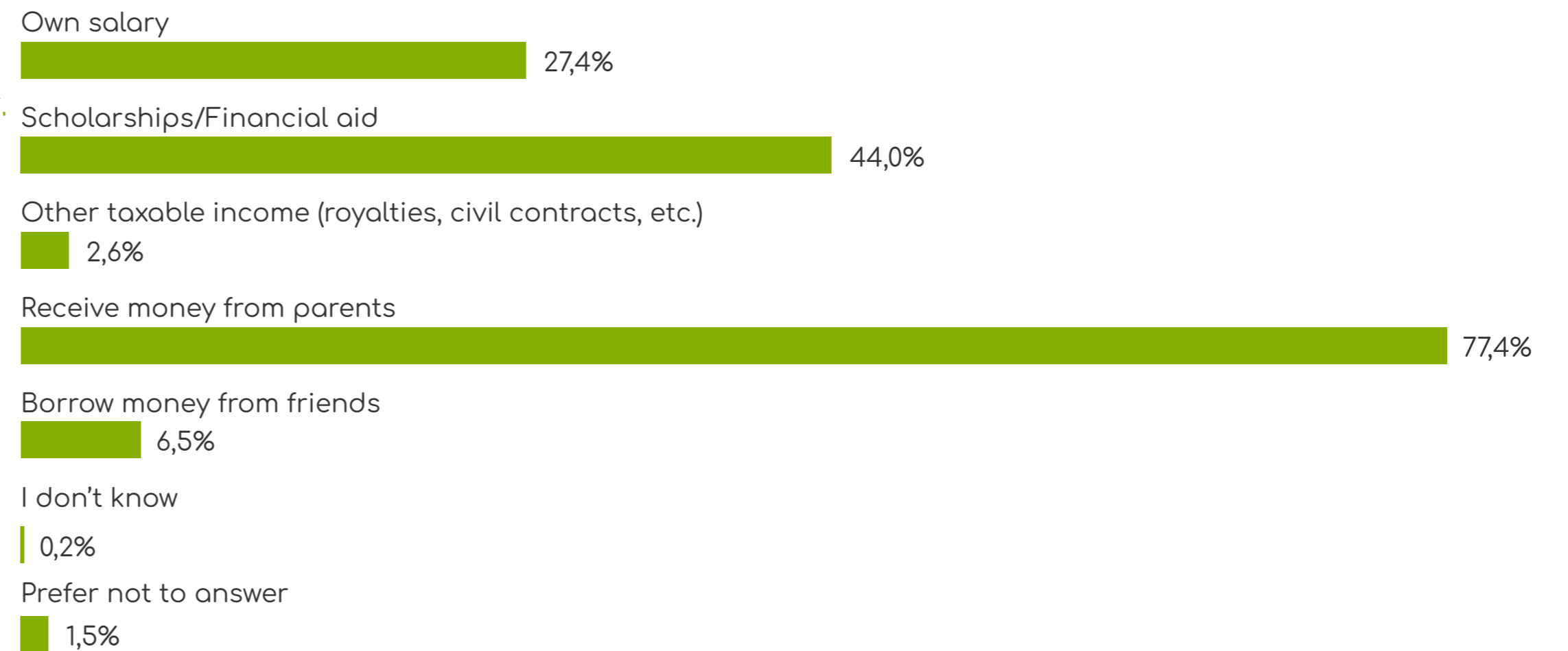


14

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

Family remains a major source of financial support for students, with 77.4% stating that they receive money from their parents. Meanwhile, 27.4% are employed and earn a salary, while 44% receive scholarships or other types of financial aid from their university. Additionally, 6.5% borrow money from friends to cover their expenses.

1670 RESPONDENTS



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

Multiple-choice question.

15

HOW DO YOU EVALUATE YOUR INCOME?

Almost 10% of respondents state that they cannot afford a decent standard of living, while 30.9% report that their income is only enough for basic necessities. The financial vulnerability of students is an obvious and visible issue.

1670 RESPONDENTS



"15. How do you evaluate your income?"

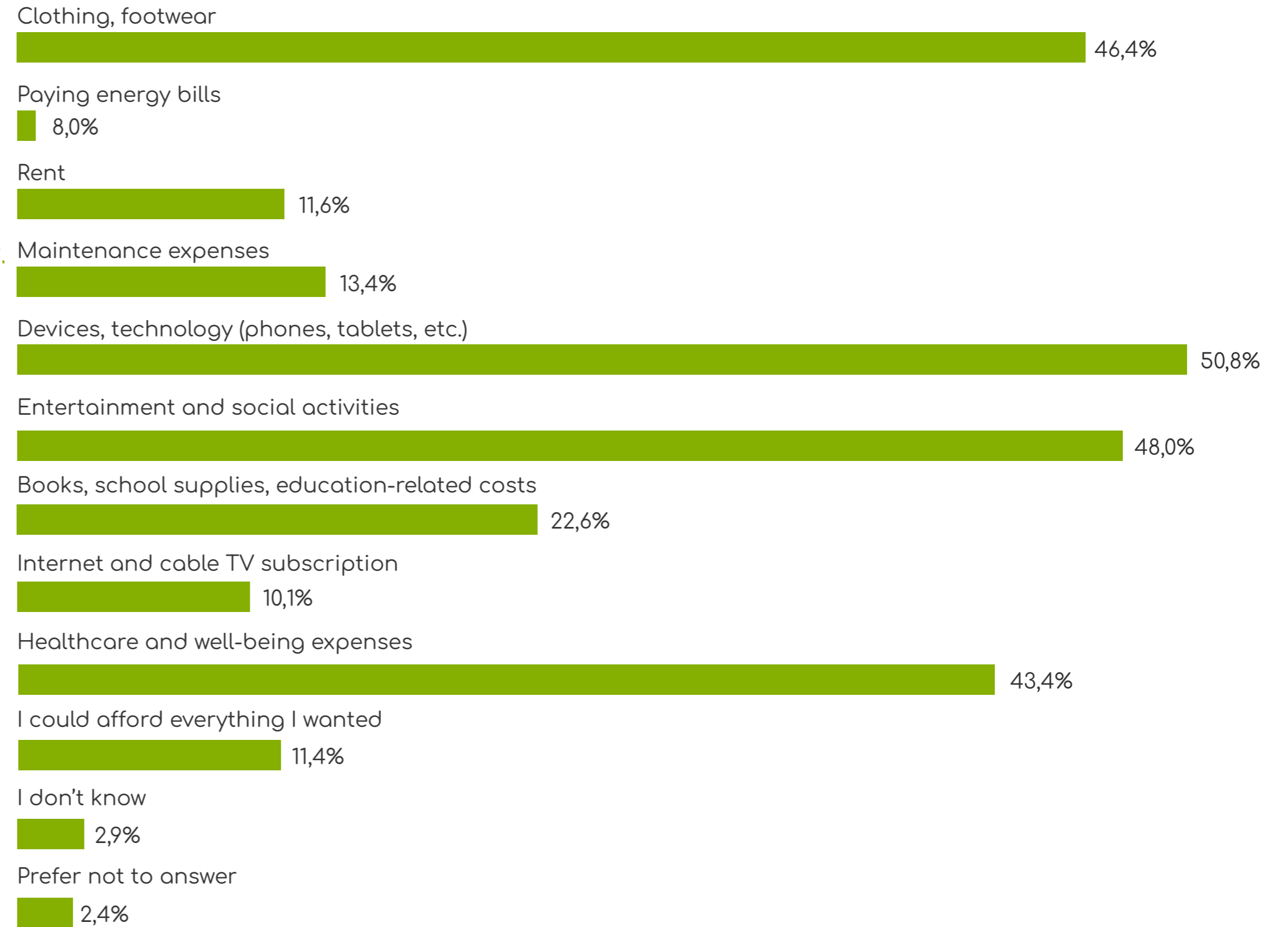
Single-choice question.

16

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING THINGS HAVE YOU STRUGGLED TO AFFORD IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS?

A total of 8% of respondents reported difficulties in paying utility bills, while 11.6% struggled to pay their rent, despite these being essential expenses. The prioritization of spending is also evident in the fact that students reported difficulties covering the costs of other goods and services associated with quality of life (e.g., technology, clothing, healthcare, and education). Only 11.4% of respondents stated that they could afford everything they wanted.

1670 RESPONDENTS



"16. Which of the following things have you struggled to afford in the past 12 months?"

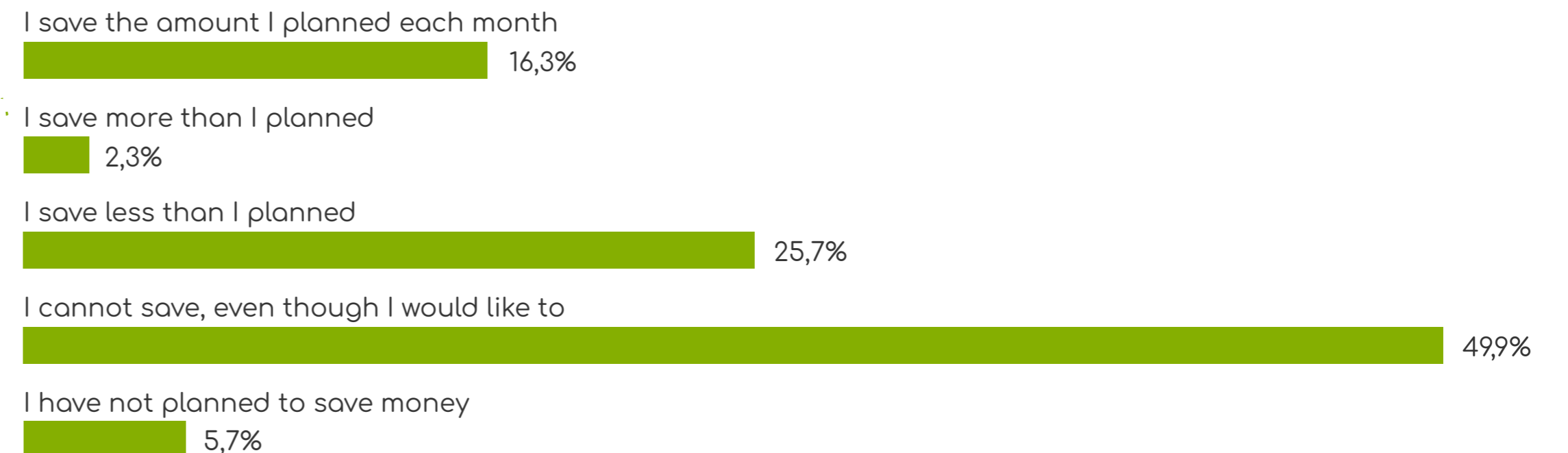
Multiple-choice question.

17

TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU MANAGE TO SAVE MONEY EACH MONTH?

Half of our respondents are unable to save any money, while one-quarter saves less than they would like. The inability to save is another indicator of financial vulnerability, as monthly savings are considered an essential part of the minimum “consumer basket”—an important indicator of quality of life.

1670 RESPONDENTS



“17. To what extent do you manage to save money each month?”

Single-choice question.

CHAPTER 4: MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL- BEING

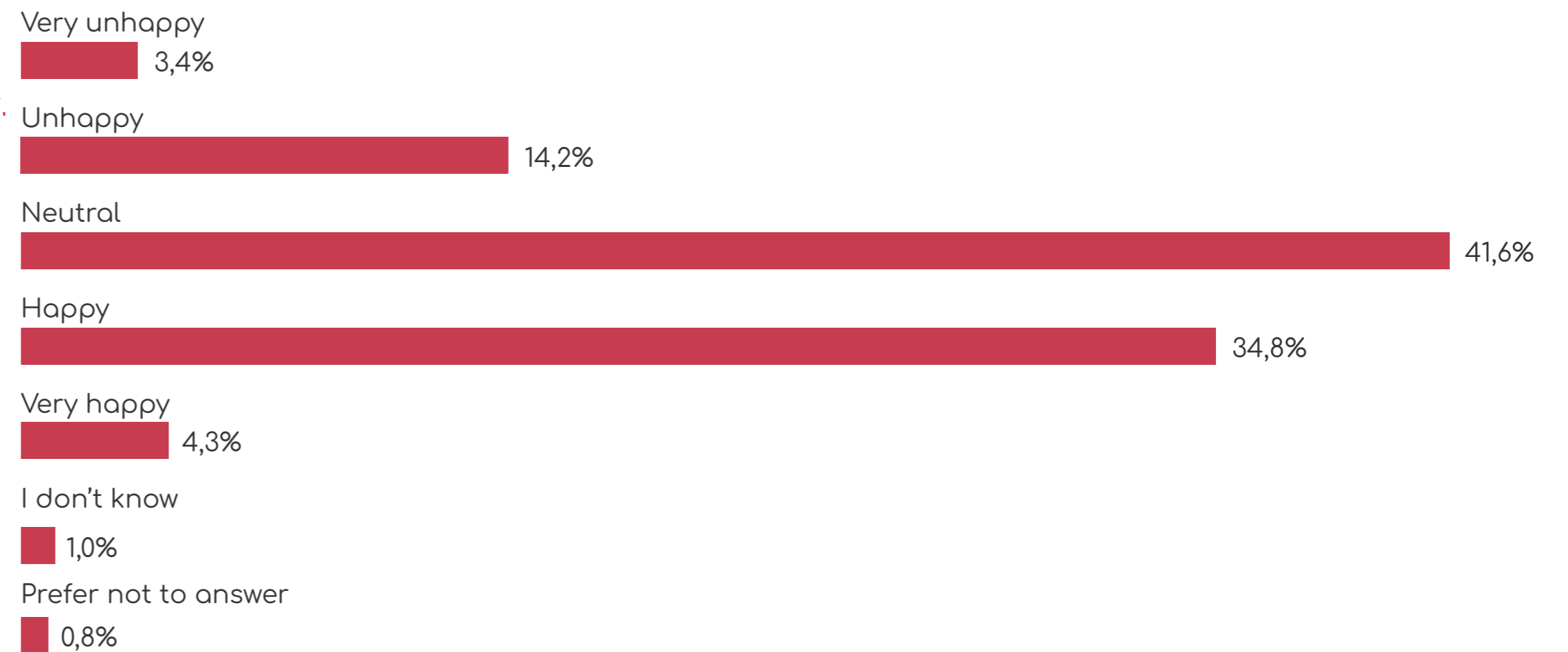


18

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

Compared to the 2022 study, the proportion of students reporting a neutral level of happiness has increased from 36.9% to 41.6%. Encouragingly, while 21% of students in 2022 felt unhappy or very unhappy, this proportion has dropped to 17.6% in 2023-possibly due to the fact that our previous study took place during the pandemic.

1670 RESPONDENTS



"18. Overall, all things and events considered, how happy do you feel?"

Single-choice question.

19

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

Even though the pandemic is over, 78.4% of respondents report that their stress and anxiety levels have increased over the past year, compared to 72% in 2022. Only 16.3% stated that their mental health had not suffered, a decrease from 21.6% in the 2022 report. More worryingly, the percentage of students who have experienced suicidal thoughts has slightly increased from 9.0% in 2022 to 9.8% in 2023.

1670 RESPONDENTS



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

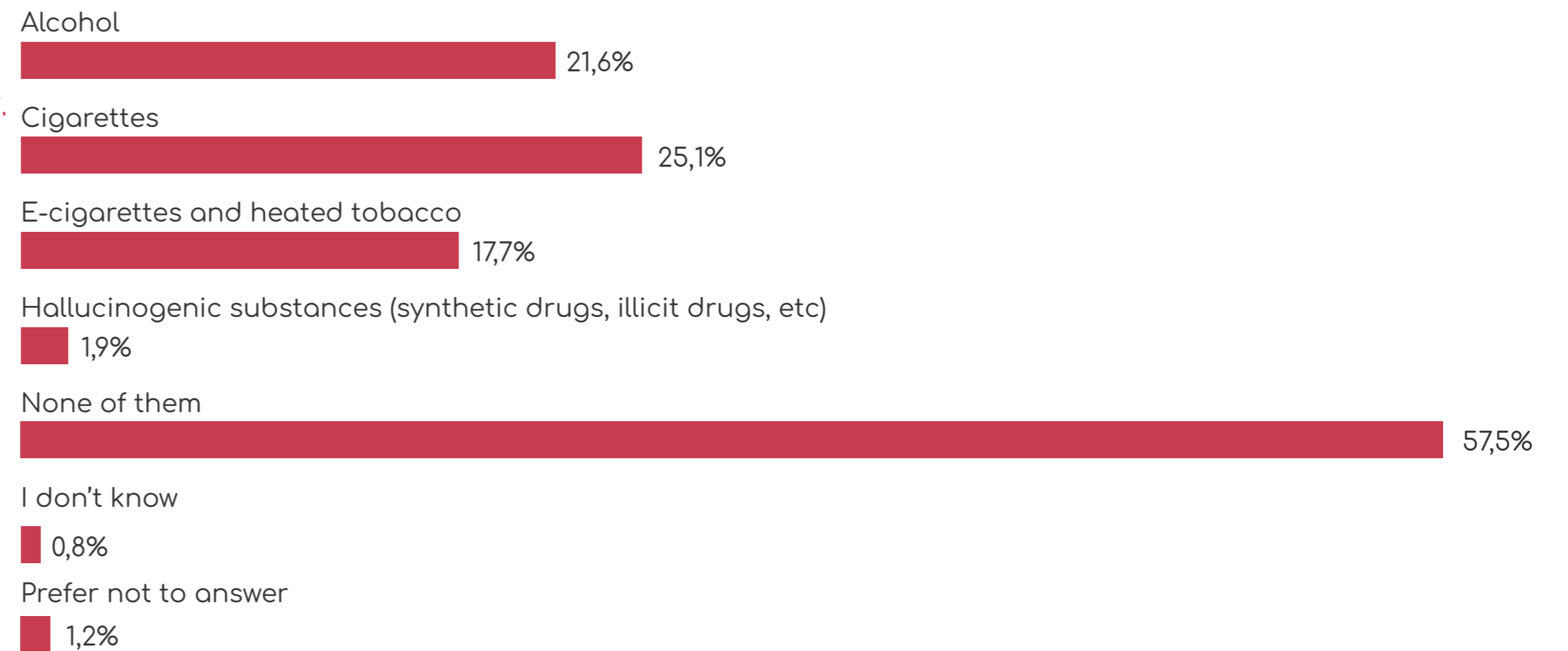
Multiple-choice question.

20

IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS, WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING SUBSTANCES HAVE YOU CONSUMED MORE THAN IN THE PREVIOUS PERIOD?

In the last 12 months, the most significant increase in consumption among young people was for alcohol and cigarettes. The use of e-cigarettes and heated tobacco increased to a lesser extent, while hallucinogenic substances showed only a minimal rise. More than half of respondents reported that they had not increased their consumption of alcohol, cigarettes, or hallucinogenic substances in the past year.

1670 RESPONDENTS



"20. In the past 12 months, which of the following substances have you consumed more than in the previous period?"

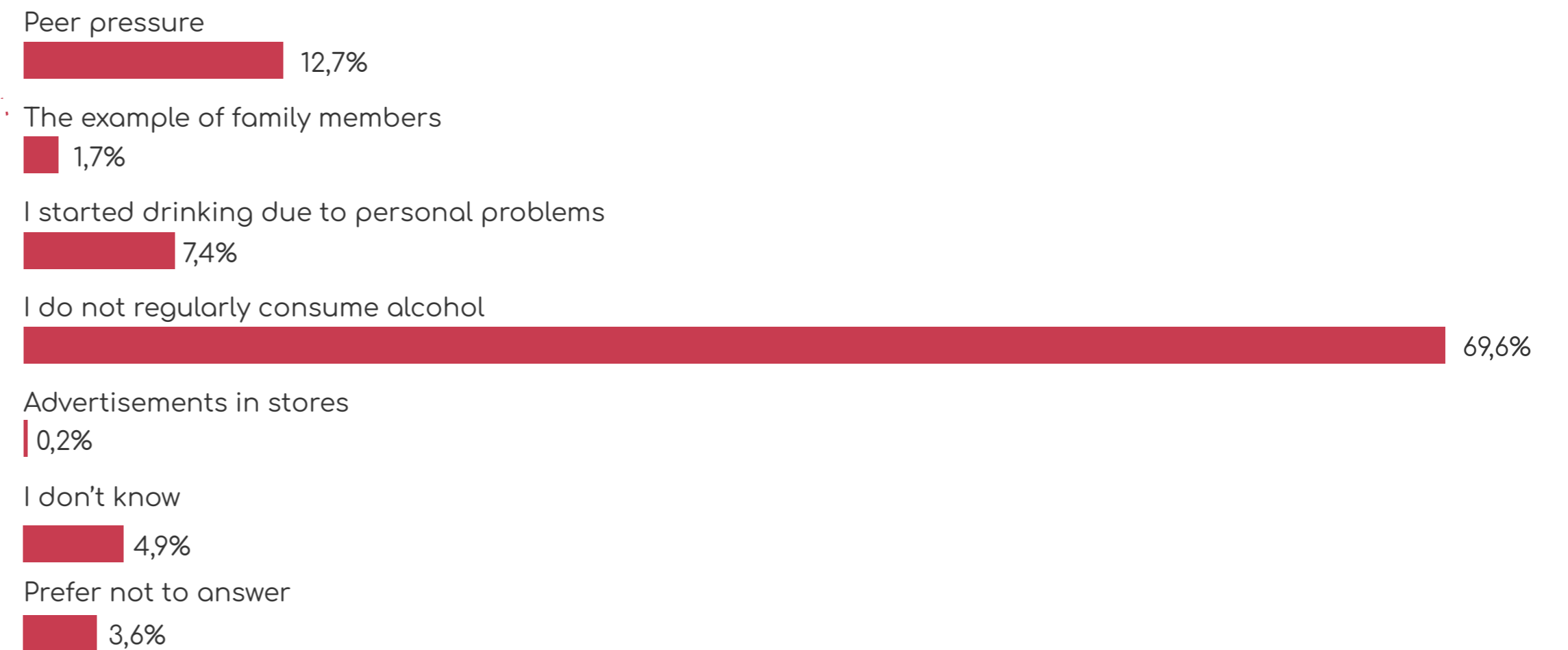
Multiple-choice question.

21

WHAT MADE YOU START DRINKING ALCOHOL?

The main reasons for starting alcohol consumption include peer pressure (12.7% of respondents), personal problems (7.4%), and family example (1.7%). A significant majority (69.6%) of students report that they do not regularly consume alcohol.

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"21. What made you start drinking alcohol?"

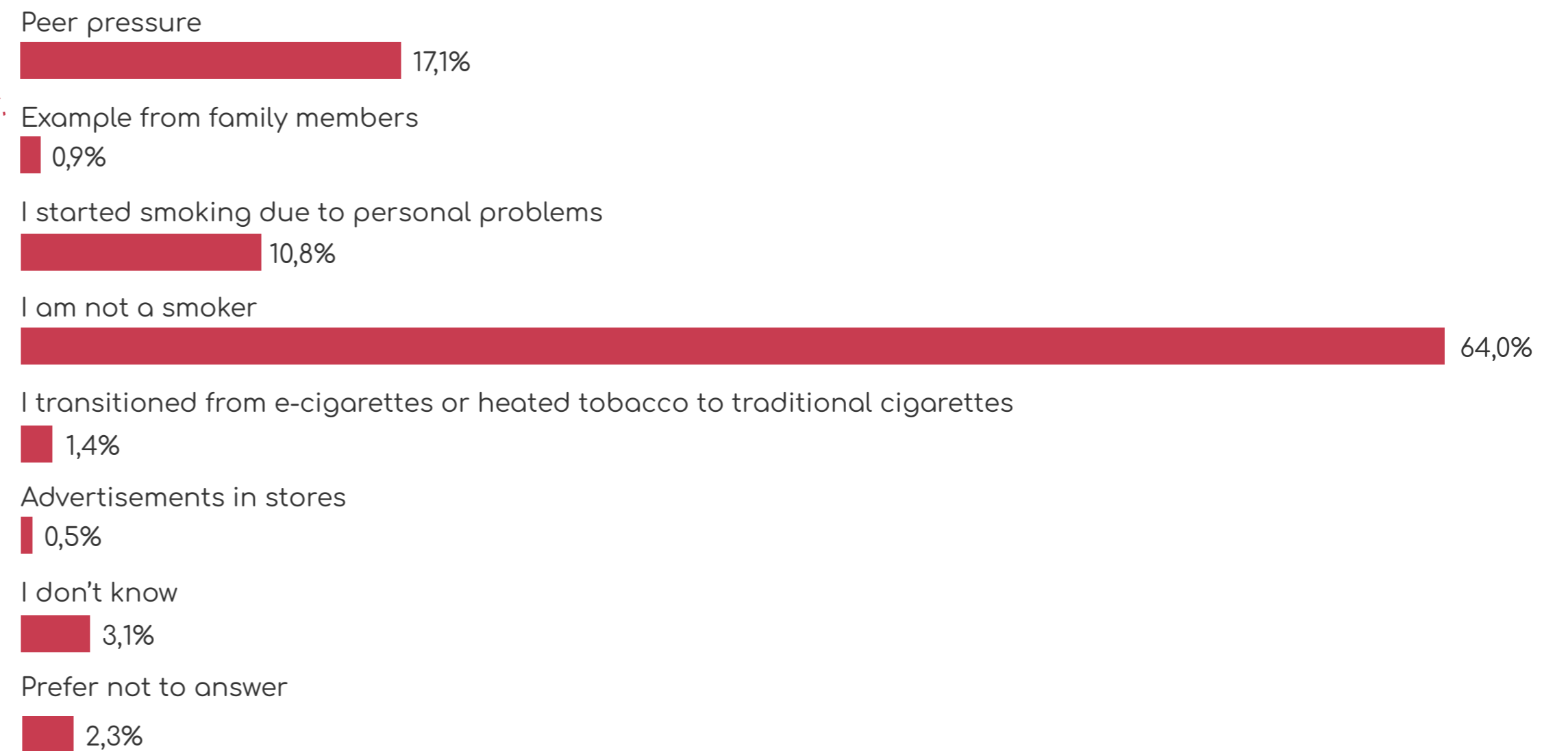
Single-choice question.

22

WHAT MADE YOU START SMOKING?

Although 64% of students are non-smokers, those who smoke were mainly influenced by peer pressure (17.1%) and personal problems (10.8%), with family influence (0.9%) and store advertisements (0.5%) playing a minimal role. Only 1.4% of students transitioned from e-cigarettes or heated tobacco to traditional cigarettes.

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"22. What made you start smoking?"

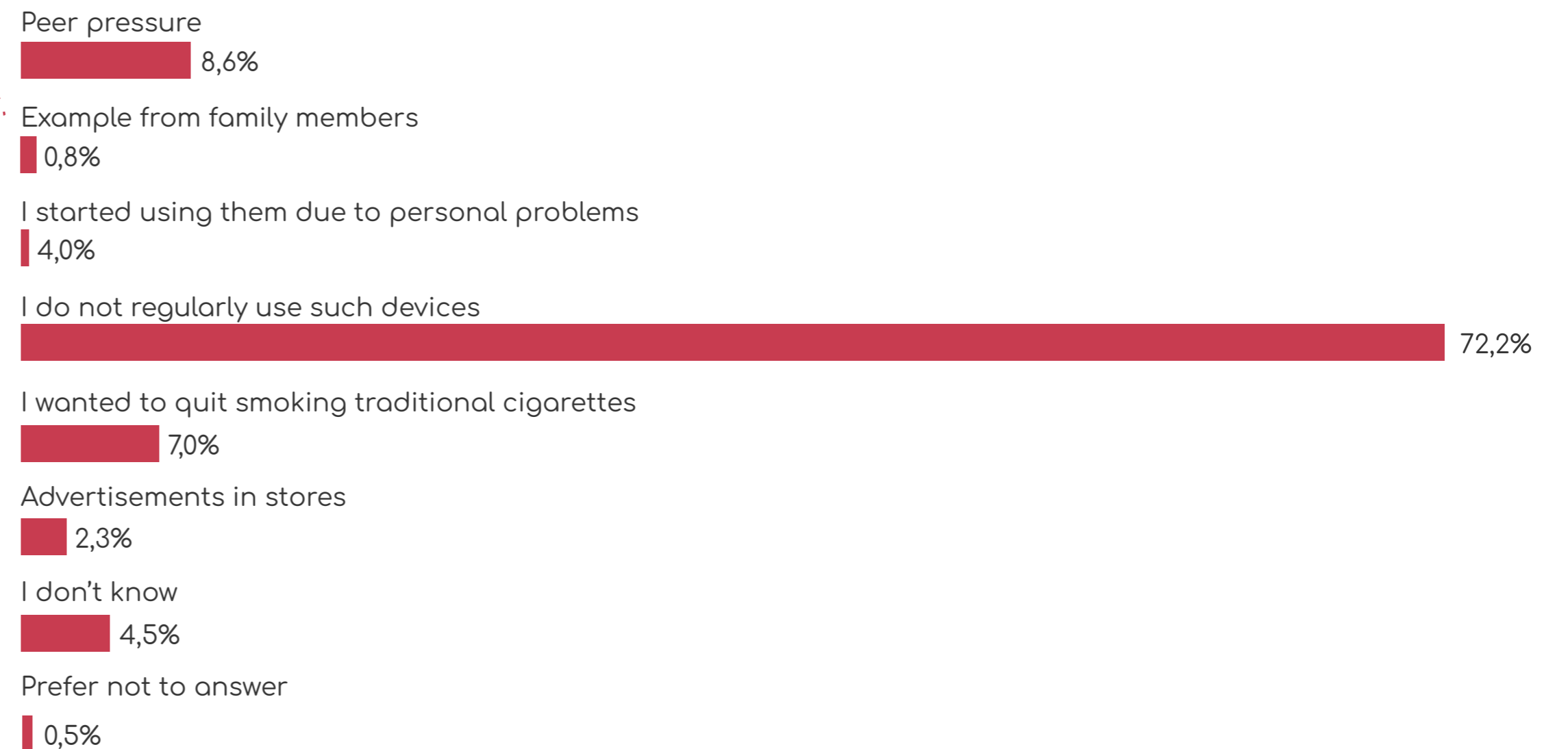
Single-choice question.

23

WHAT MADE YOU START USING E-CIGARETTES OR HEATED TOBACCO?

Unlike alcohol and traditional cigarettes, peer pressure is not the dominant factor for e-cigarettes, being cited by only 8.6% of respondents. Instead, a significant proportion (7%) reported using e-cigarettes as a means to quit smoking traditional cigarettes. 4% of students started using these products due to personal problems, while 72.2% do not regularly use e-cigarettes or heated tobacco.

1670 RESPONDENTS



"23. What made you start using e-cigarettes or heated tobacco?"

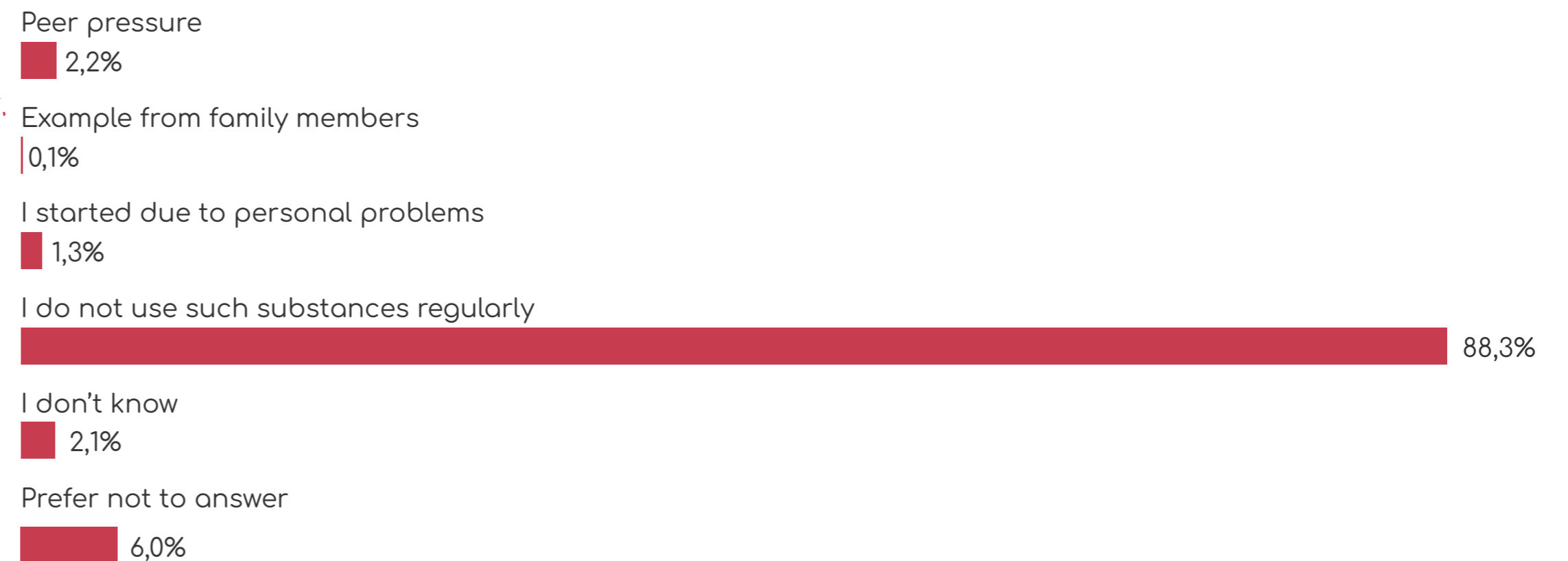
Single-choice question.

24

WHAT MADE YOU START USING PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES (SYNTHETIC DRUGS, ILLICIT DRUGS, ETC.)?

Although 88.3% of respondents do not use psychoactive substances, 2.2% started due to peer pressure, 1.3% due to personal problems, and 0.1% because of family influence. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, 6% of respondents chose not to answer.

1670 RESPONDENTS



"24. What made you start using psychoactive substances (synthetic drugs, illicit drugs, etc.)?"

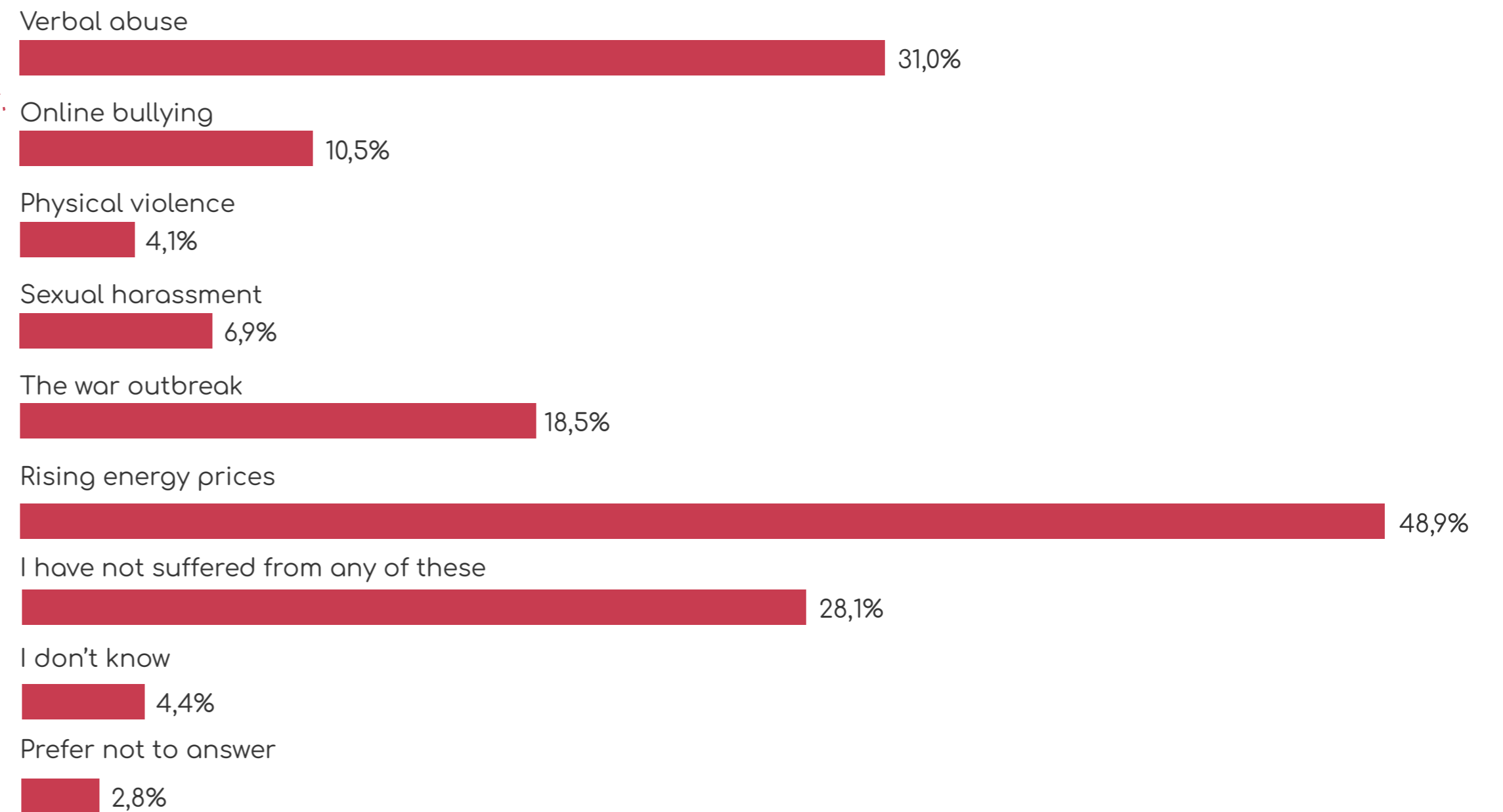
Single-choice question.

25

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

Half of the respondents were negatively affected by rising energy prices, significantly more than those affected by the war in Ukraine (18.5%). Additionally, 31% reported experiencing verbal abuse, 10.5% suffered from online bullying, 6.9% faced sexual harassment, and 4.1% encountered physical violence. All these figures increased compared to the 2022 study.

1670 RESPONDENTS



"25. Have you suffered from any of the following in the past 12 months?"

Multiple-choice question.

We extend our sincere gratitude to all our partners for their involvement. Here are some of their thoughts about this project:

Agora Debate

“We are extremely excited to be part of this project because we absolutely recognize the different ways in which the energy crisis and the war have impacted the lives of university students and the educational process as a whole. We want to offer much-needed support to these young people full of potential because we strongly believe that every student has a unique story and deserves to be supported during this challenging period.”

BBU DEBATE SOCIETY

“We support this project because we have seen how the most pressing societal issues—war, the energy crisis, inflation, data protection, and mental health problems—affect university students. The vulnerability of this social group deserves attention, as they are at an age where they are becoming independent, which involves taking on multiple risks. The importance of this transition to adulthood should not be overlooked. We are here to lend a helping hand.”

CSFD UBB

“As university student representatives, we constantly strive to support our peers in the face of the challenges they encounter. We all have a responsibility to be attentive to students’ needs, particularly their financial well-being, mental health, development, and education. That is why we believe that providing students in need with housing in university dormitories that meet high standards is a fundamental right that should be ensured for everyone.”

ASD

“We are aware of university students’ material and social needs, as well as the new challenges related to misinformation, legislative changes, stress, and anxiety. In this context, we believe it is essential to sound the alarm on the issues young people face in order to prevent undesirable situations. This project’s dedication to understanding the broader context in which students live is an achievement that should not go unnoticed. Congratulations to all the stakeholders involved, and we are pleased to have collaborated to support the future of our society—the students.”

OSD

„University students’ problems can only be solved through intense collaboration between the organizations that have taken on their representation in their respective fields. We support The State of University Students initiative and are pleased that it sheds light on the necessity of ensuring that students are housed in dormitories that meet high-quality standards.”

Political Science Students’ Society – SSSP Cluj

“We decided to join this project because we are firmly convinced of the vital importance of university students in society. In recent years, the pandemic, war, and energy crisis have posed real challenges for young people, who have had to adapt quickly to completely new and unforeseen circumstances. Civic and educational efforts must continue and be adjusted to meet students’ needs and technological progress while taking social issues seriously, as demonstrated by surveys like the one conducted in The State of University Students initiative.”

ELSA ROMANIA

“We were delighted to contribute to this project. As university students ourselves, we are well aware of the difficulties our peers face. Our support was also motivated by ELSA’s vision: ‘A just world based on respect for human dignity and cultural diversity.’”

Bucharest Pharmacy Students’ Society

“One of the missions of the Bucharest Pharmacy Students’ Society is to represent the interests of pharmacy university students. Therefore, we were very happy to participate in and support The State of University Students project, ensuring that the survey on students’ living conditions and quality of life is as relevant as possible through a high number of responses. We consider this project valuable and impactful for the civil society, especially in light of the upcoming public debates based on the survey results. We are glad to have been part of this project, once again proving that students’ voices matter and that it is important to express opinions.”



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