

EDITORIAL

Energy Literacy and Energy Poverty in Austria, Bulgaria, Greece, Italy and Lithuania: Insights from the E-lit Adults Project

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For millions of Europeans, access to energy is not only a matter of comfort, but also of security and dignity. In 2022, over 41 million EU citizens were unable to keep their homes adequately warm, while an even larger number expressed concern about unpaid utility bills (Eurostat, 2023). These statistics reflect the lived realities of families forced to choose between heating and food, older adults reluctant to use heating out of fear of unaffordable costs, and parents striving to maintain a safe environment for their children.

The Erasmus+ project *Energy Literacy for Adults* (E-lit Adults) undertook a comprehensive study in five partner countries—Austria, Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, and Lithuania—to gain a clearer picture of the situation across Europe. The consolidated report presents a comparative analysis of energy-related knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors, based on survey data from nearly 700 adults at risk of energy poverty and a review of relevant documents (E-lit Adults, 2024).

Survey findings across countries

The survey revealed notable differences between countries, reflecting differences in housing infrastructure and socioeconomic conditions.

Austria: approximately 70% of the surveyed had favorable opinions about conserving energy, and 65% planned to implement efficiency improvements. The discrepancy between intention and practice is evident in the fact that only 55% of respondents reported actual behavioral change (E-lit Adults, 2024).

Bulgaria: although 60% of respondents reported positive attitudes and 55% expressed intentions, only 40% actually engaged in energy-saving practices (E-lit Adults, 2024). This gap is closely linked to affordability issues and limited awareness of efficiency measures.

Greece: although 62% of respondents said they planned to save energy and about 65% said they had positive attitudes, actual behavior was still lower at 45% (E-lit Adults, 2024). It was also clear that people had neutral opinions about renewable energy when it came to higher prices.

Italy: about 68% of respondents said they had positive attitudes and 66% said they planned to save energy. However, due primarily to inefficient housing and regional disparities, only 50% actually put this into practice (E-lit Adults, 2024).

Lithuania: displaying the highest percentage of positive attitudes (72%) and intentions (70%), Lithuania demonstrated a high level of awareness. The fact that only 48% of respondents claimed to regularly save energy, however, is a sign of structural barriers like expensive heating and antiquated building stock (E-lit Adults, 2024).

The findings show that attitudes/intentions and actual behaviors consistently differ by 15–25 percentage points across all nations. One of the main obstacles to tackling energy poverty is the “intention–behavior gap,” which occurs when people understand the value of energy efficiency but lack the resources, information, or motivation to make changes in their daily lives (Martins et al., 2020).

Toward energy literacy as empowerment

The results emphasize the importance of adult education as a means of addressing energy poverty. To enable citizens to understand efficiency concepts and apply them in everyday life, educational programs must bridge the gap between awareness and practice. Drawing on Jacques-Aviñó et al. (2022), the project identified blended learning approaches, mobile applications, storytelling, and cooperation with local stakeholders as examples of effective practice.

By strengthening energy literacy across different demographic groups, households can reduce costs, adopt renewable energy sources, and make informed choices about energy use. More broadly, this knowledge enables individuals to contribute to the European Green Deal's objective of a just and sustainable energy transition (EC, 2023).

The E-lit Adults project demonstrates that knowledge and skills are as important in tackling energy poverty as subsidies and infrastructure investment. By equipping adults with the means to take action, the project helps build communities across Europe that are more resilient to energy poverty. As a practical outcome, the consortium has developed an online educational course and training program, freely accessible to all interested learners: <https://elitadults.eu/educational-course/>.

Policy recommendations

- 1 Bridge the gap between intention and behavior by linking knowledge to practical resources and incentives.

Educational programs should integrate not only theoretical knowledge but also actionable guidance, such as detailed energy audits, budgeting tools, and behavior change strategies (Martins et al., 2020).

- 2 Prioritize vulnerable groups—such as low-income households, elderly residents, and migrants—by providing tailored resources and support, recognizing that their literacy levels and needs differ significantly (Jacques-Aviñó et al., 2022).
- 3 Strengthen community-based initiatives by involving municipalities, non-governmental organizations, and energy advisors to localize training and support real-world implementation (EC, 2023).
- 4 Expand access to blended and digital learning, offering flexible opportunities for adults with varying schedules and levels of digital competency, while also ensuring offline alternatives for those with limited internet access (Martins et al., 2020).
- 5 Incorporate energy literacy into national strategies to build long-term resilience, complementing financial support measures with empowerment and education (EC, 2023).

Energy poverty is not only an economic or technical challenge, but also an educational and social one. By equipping adults with knowledge and skills they need, the E-lit Adults project shows that energy literacy can serve as a powerful driver of both equity and sustainability.

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