



Tackling energy poverty at the heart of the ecological and energy transition

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=== European Economic and Social Committee Conference ===

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

In 2019, over 35 million Europeans claimed to be unable to afford to keep their homes warm enough. In 2020, this problem concerned 8% of the EU population, i.e. over 36 million people. While Europe is still grappling with the pandemic and its far-reaching economic and social impacts, the current situation in Ukraine led to an energy supply crisis and an unprecedented increase in energy prices in the EU. In this context, energy poverty deepened.

In order to find solutions to tackle this major challenge, the EESC organized a conference on “Tackling energy poverty at the heart of the ecological and energy transition” with the support of the French Presidency of the Council. In a context in which the EU is striving to implement an ecological and energy transition, tackling energy poverty must be at the heart of the strategy.

Tackling energy poverty must be made an absolute priority among EU policies, in particular, it must be at the heart of the ecological and energy transition. Without social justice there will not be Green Deal. This means that the EU should define and implement an EU strategy against energy poverty.

The EU should set up a body of legislative proposals that suits and encourages the fight against energy poverty, and provides the means to support financially those in need, and especially the most vulnerable ones.

The large-scale renovation of buildings in the European Union is now an absolute necessity, given the structural long-term under-investment in this area and the climate, environmental, economic and social consequences involved.

The Renovation Wave Strategy should support lowest-income groups, by making sure that vulnerable people have money to invest in energy efficiency, prioritising the worst performing buildings and in doing so addressing housing exclusion. Building renovation is also a direct source of job creation at local level.

A substantial increase in EU funding, especially for actors on the ground, should be destined to renovation of buildings and to a decentralised production of renewable energy. The priority recipients should be vulnerable households. To this end, sufficient funds need to be provided under the Social Climate Fund in order to compensate the extension of the Emission Trading Scheme.

At national level, engagement and responsibility of public authorities in the fight against energy poverty should be further improved. With the main cause of energy poverty being high energy costs, inefficient buildings, and low incomes, the mission of national public, cooperative and social housing providers should be even more explicit than ever.

Member States should be further encouraged to improve their National Recovery and Resilience Plans by enhancing cross-references and links between measures, exploiting complementarities with other EU funding sources.

Only eight Member States have set up energy poverty observatories so far. Other Member States should also be continuously encouraged to develop similar monitoring and reporting. In this way, common metrics and comprehensive indicators can be developed that will facilitate targeted strategies, tailor-made measures and social protection schemes addressed to the most vulnerable.

At local level, technical assistance and more accessible information on how to have access to funds should be provided to the municipalities, so that capacity can be built locally. Single stop shops providing access to information and technical support are to be placed, based on the idea of proximity to citizens, local communities and consumers. They would have the added advantage of making the energy transition socially accepted by enlarging participation and involvement in decisions to be taken locally.

The creation of energy communities and cooperatives should be encouraged to give citizens, including the most vulnerable, an active role in producing clean energy for themselves. Community energy ownership plays a crucial role in shifting power from fossil-fuel companies to consumers, who become prosumers, and are best placed to engage with energy-poor households and to understand their needs.

Tackling energy poverty cannot be achieved without the strong involvement of **civil society organizations to facilitate dialogue between citizens, business, workers, consumers and decision-makers**. Thanks to its expertise and networks on the ground, civil society organizations are best placed to help in the definition, implementation, and monitoring of strategies fighting against energy poverty in Europe.

Defining an EU strategy and implementing measures to tackle energy poverty requires a double condition: a strong political will and an even stronger coalition among all actors on the ground. Therefore, the EESC reiterates its support to the **creation of a coalition against energy poverty between civil society organizations and actors at national and European political levels**.

The EESC is ready to play an active role in this coalition, which should also involve the work of the Energy poverty and Vulnerable Consumer Coordination Group established by the European Commission.