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**EESC conference calls for a "coalition" of EU institutions and civil society organisations to fight energy poverty**

**The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) has warned at a high-level web conference that the pandemic has made energy poverty worse and that urgent measures are needed. All institutions at every level must rally around in a coordinated approach, with the active involvement of organised civil society.**

Tackling energy poverty can help achieve the climate neutrality targets, thereby reducing inequalities in the European Union and sustaining the recovery from the COVID-19 crisis. It must therefore be made a priority under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the European Green Deal and the European Pillar of Social Rights and all institutions at the EU, national and local levels have to join forces.

At the high-level online conference held on 20 April 2021, **Christa Schweng**, EESC president, sounded the alarm: "The recovery from the effects of the coronavirus crisis is an opportunity for a system reset to enhance EU society's resilience, increase energy efficiency for housing and address energy poverty at its core. To be successful, the EU and Member States have to work together. This is a unique moment to take coordinated action on climate neutrality, recovery from the crisis and social cohesion. Reducing energy poverty cannot be achieved without the active involvement of organised civil society."

On the same page was **Kadri Simson**, European Commissioner for Energy, who said that statistics showed how much of a challenge energy poverty was and that alleviating it was a priority for the Commission: "Europe needs to be an example of a successful transition that supports the uptake of renovation solutions by vulnerable groups. Full advantage must be taken of the potential to deploy Union funding programmes and stakeholder engagement. The municipalities, civil society and private sector entities know how to improve the use of local renewable energy resources and to make use of ways to reduce energy bills."

**Energy poverty is still an issue**

According to Eurostat data, in 2019 approximately 35 million people in energy poverty in Europe could not afford to keep their homes adequately warm. The COVID-19 pandemic is likely to increase the number of people experiencing poverty and is seriously risking to undermine efforts to fight energy poverty.

The EESC has already drawn attention to this issue on several occasions and is convinced that, in order to produce tangible results, the EU institutions will have to build a strong political "coalition" with the target of zero energy poverty in the EU by 2030 and set concrete objectives in existing and upcoming EU policies and financing tools.  Not a single European family must be cold at home.

Capitalising on the Commission Recommendation on energy poverty of 14 October 2020, the focus should be on the National Energy and Climate Plans and the Long-Term Renovation Strategies, as well as the National Recovery and Resilience Plans. In addition, metrics and indicators that allow EU, national and local policy-makers to understand and better address energy poverty should also be continuously developed.

Civil society organisations should play a key role in the framing and implementation of policies for eradicating energy poverty. Working on the ground, they are vital in providing direct assistance to the most vulnerable in the short as well as in the long term and ensuring the far-reaching renovation of the EU's building stock, which is crucial.

EU citizens, especially the most vulnerable ones, need one-stop shops so that they can benefit from unbiased information on renovation possibilities and financing at local level to tackle the issue at its roots.

**Joining forces with European civil society organisations**

At the event, high-level representatives of EU civil society organisations, as well as European, national, regional and local institutions and academia, discussed how they could work hand in hand to identify practical steps to be taken in future.

**Sarah Coupechoux**, from the Fondation Abbé Pierre in France, flagged up the fact that the health and social emergency was hitting people who were already living on the edge financially, while **Jeppe Mikél Jensen**, representing the new European Energy Poverty Observatory, highlighted the need for action at local level with grassroots initiatives.

**Thomas Pellerin-Carlin**, on behalf of the Jacques Delors Energy Centre, spoke of the health problems that energy vulnerability could bring about, not only physical but also psychological ones, such as depression, pointing to the importance of building renovation.

Echoing this view were **Jagoda Munić**, representing Friends of the Earth Europe, who emphasised that renovation required considerable investment and low income households had to be supported, and **Helder Ferreira**, from the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN), who expressed his concerns about the most vulnerable groups, arguing that they should be prioritised when adopting measures against social exclusion.

With reference to the upcoming EU presidencies, **Blaž Košorok**, Slovenia's State Secretary of Infrastructure, made it clear that a holistic approach to fighting energy poverty was needed, in which all social and environmental elements came together, so that nobody was left behind.

**Emmanuelle Wargon**, France's Minister Delegate for Housing, pointed out that the fight against energy poverty was at the heart of a strong and fair green transition and that the French government was working, on the one hand, on minimum energy performance standards for new housing and, on the other, on renovation financial aid and support.

On the side of the EESC group presidents, **Stefano Mallia**, president of the Employers' Group, reaffirmed that enterprises could play an important role in addressing energy poverty by generating innovation and the right technologies and that companies were instrumental in creating jobs and for a strong recovery. He underlined the fact that economic aspects were as important as social ones and they must go together.

**Oliver Röpke**, president of the Workers' Group, stressed that affordable access to energy was enshrined in the Social Pillar and the renovation wave, which envisaged the highest possible standards for workers, could play a key role. Social dialogue, collective bargaining and workers' involvement would be essential in ensuring its success.

Finally, **Séamus Boland**, president of the Diversity Europe Group, stated that no one should have to choose between eating, turning on lights or heating their home and that eradicating energy poverty by 2030 must be Europe's responsibility and purpose, through a dedicated "coalition", with civil society organisations bringing in their expertise and knowledge on the ground.

Concluding the web conference, **Cillian Lohan**, EESC vice-president in charge of Communication, reiterated that the EU now needed a comprehensive and consistent European political strategy, led by a "coalition" of all EU institutions and civil society organisations and determined to maintain a firm commitment to end energy poverty in Europe, with the objective of mobilising the necessary resources and regularly analysing the state of play.

For more information on the [event](https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/agenda/our-events/events/conference-energy-poverty-crossroads-european-pillar-social-rights-and-european-green-deal), its conclusions and recommendations, please visit our website.

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[VIDEO: The EESC from the inside](https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/avdb/video/eesc-inside)

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*The European Economic and Social Committee represents the various economic and social components of organised civil society. It is an institutional consultative body established by the 1957 Treaty of Rome. Its consultative role enables its members, and hence the organisations they represent, to participate in the EU decision-making process.*

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