Forward programme

Energy for all: what role should the EU play and what steps should it take?

How to help the most vulnerable face rising energy costs

27 November 2012
8.45 a.m. – 5 p.m.
Venue: European Economic and Social Committee
Working languages: English – French – Italian

Background

Energy poverty is spreading throughout the European Union's Member States, with between 50 and 125 million European citizens at risk. Constantly rising energy costs suggest that the situation will get worse in the coming years. The lack of a Europe-wide definition, indicators and shared methodologies must not stand in the way of discussion and cooperation on urgent and lasting proposals at European level. The Third Energy Package, a European Parliament legislative initiative (put forward in 2007 and adopted in 2009) includes specific measures to protect vulnerable consumers. This issue was a major feature of the 2010 Belgian Presidency priorities, which focused mainly on (i) the need to work towards a common definition and data so as to evaluate the situation across Europe more accurately and (ii) exchanging best practice. The European Economic and Social Committee's July 2010 opinion (TEN/420) on Energy poverty in the context of liberalisation and the economic crisis reflected this approach. In the opinion, the EESC called for energy poverty to be seen as a social priority, to be tackled holistically (covering issues concerning income, housing, health etc.), and to be mainstreamed into all energy policies. Current developments in Europe have opened up new prospects for energy policies, thanks in particular to the climate and energy package, the Energy Roadmap 2050 and the Europe 2020 strategy. The European Economic and Social Committee has made a substantial contribution to the debate with its opinion on Involving civil society in the establishment of a future European Energy Community (TEN/459, January 2012). It advocates setting up a European energy community and ensuring universal access to energy, and recommends that the problem of energy poverty be tackled forthwith, by means of a "European energy solidarity pact" for instance. In the light of these factors, it is crucial
to bring together all relevant stakeholders to thrash out proposals for sustainable and lasting solutions for people in Europe currently affected by or under threat of energy poverty.

Event objectives
- Promote mainstreaming of energy poverty into EU policies
- Share best practices to sound out new avenues for work at all levels of governance, tackling all aspects of energy poverty (housing, health and social exclusion) and encouraging experimentation in this area
- Propose solutions for more effective responses to the critical circumstances of the most vulnerable, and develop upstream policies geared to prevention/empowerment/action, while defining the rights of users and vulnerable groups more clearly
- Meet the energy challenges by giving people a bigger role as active consumers

Introducing Elisan
Elisan is an international non-governmental organisation set up on 28 January 2008 at the Committee of the Regions in Brussels. It has participatory status with the Council of Europe. The Elisan network is open to all European territorial communities that are experts in local social action. Its main aim is to ensure that better account is taken of the involvement of elected representatives in implementing an effective and coherent European social policy. Elisan adopts positions on strategic issues and contributes to European Commission consultations in order to defend the interests and increase the value of action taken by European territorial communities. Elisan also seeks to raise awareness of local social action in Europe, the issues involved and those actively engaged in it.

Introducing the European Economic and Social Committee
The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) is a consultative body set up by the Rome Treaties in 1957 and represents the various economic and social components of organised civil society at European level. It is made up of 344 members, divided into three groups: the Employers group, the Workers group and the Various Interests group. Through its opinions and other activities, the EESC (i) helps to ensure that European policies and legislation more closely reflect economic, social and civic circumstances on the ground by assisting the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission; and (ii) promotes the development of a more participatory European Union which is more in touch with popular opinion, by acting as an institutional forum representing, informing, expressing the views of and securing dialogue with organised civil society.

Publications for dissemination
- Involving civil society in the establishment of a future European Energy Community – EESC opinion TEN/459
- Energy poverty in the context of liberalisation and the economic crisis – EESC opinion TEN/420
- Issues with defining social housing as a service of general economic interest – EESC opinion TEN/484
- Bright Ideas: a guide to good practice – results of the European 2011 energy poverty prize
- Publications on energy poverty