

EU Energy Poverty Observatory Case Study

Energy Advice Points

Being cold at home is not normal. Access to necessary energy services is a right

Case Studies of the EU Energy Poverty Observatory (EPOV) showcase successfully implemented energy poverty measures in the Member States that can be used as models for energy poverty action. This case study focuses on a project in Barcelona that involves large-scale efforts to help people to manage their energy bills and avoid disconnection, as well as trainings and workshops.

KEY RESULTS:

- 8,462 people received advice in 2017 about how to manage their energy bills and avoid disconnection
- 40 people employed under the project, of which 80% had been long-term unemployed and trained in a pilot project in 2016
- 1,639 people attended workshops in 2017 to better understand their energy bills

CHALLENGE

In Barcelona, roughly 10% of the 1.6 million inhabitants live under conditions of energy poverty. These people are cold at home, unable to cook food or use their oven. Although there is work to be done at the political level – for example, electricity and gas are still taxed as luxury services – there are still opportunities under the current energy systems to support vulnerable consumers understand their bills and their rights.

The Catalan law (Llei 24/2015) prohibits companies from disconnecting vulnerable households from electricity and natural gas supply and obliges them to maintain energy services while the household is in a situation of economic difficulty. However, in 2017 people still had their energy supply cut in Barcelona. The main challenge is the lack of information citizens have regarding their energy rights as well as how to reduce their bills without sacrificing comfort.

In order to tackle this problem, the City Council of Barcelona has developed a project called Energy Advice Points (EAPs) that offers information and guidance to people enabling them to exercise their energy rights to ensure companies do not deny them access to basic supplies. It also teaches vulnerable households how to reduce their energy bills so they can afford adequate energy.

The project also aims to tackle another challenge: long-time unemployment of citizens, in particular those at risk of exclusion (older than 45 years). Employment has been a significant issue in Spain since the financial crisis, and the establishment of Energy Advice Points should provide jobs to those groups after they have received appropriate training and education.

Energy Advice Points AT-A-GLANCE

Type of measure: Disconnection protection, information and awareness, energy audits

Duration: 2017 - ongoing

Location: Barcelona, Spain

Target socioeconomic group: vulnerable households

Energy carrier: electricity and natural gas

Type of organisations involved: NGOs, Local government

Funding method: Public funding - Local

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Additional Benefits:

- No.1: Civil society empowerment
- No. 2: Reduction of social support requests
- No. 3: Provide employment to citizens at risk of exclusion (unemployed 45+ year-old)

Measure on EPOV website:

<https://www.energypoverty.eu/measure-policy/energy-advice-points>

About the EU Energy Poverty Observatory

The EU Energy Poverty Observatory (EPOV) is an initiative by the European Commission to help Member States in their efforts to combat energy poverty. It exists to improve the measuring, monitoring and sharing of knowledge and best practice on energy poverty. EPOV has been developed by a consortium of 13 organisations. This report was produced by Ecofys.

Contact us:

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OBJECTIVES

Energy Advice Points have three main objectives:, namely to (1) tackle energy poverty (2) guarantee the energy rights embedded in legislation and (3) improve the energy efficiency of homes, especially for the most vulnerable households. In order to achieve these objectives, the project has three lines of action, each with their own specific objectives:

- **Line of action 1 - Energy rights and energy efficiency:** (1) Ensure access to basic supplies through defending energy rights; (2) Detecting energy poverty situations and preventing them from happening and (3) increase energy efficiency of houses
- **Line of action 2 - Employment:** (1) Provide specialized training to unemployed citizens who have difficulties accessing the labour market so that they can work as energy agents and (2) Improve the skills and career perspectives of the already employed energy agents who are part of the project team.
- **Line of action 3 - Prevention at the community level:** through workshops and seminars promoting community work and cooperation to tackle energy poverty and actions to empower citizens.

DESCRIPTION

The Energy Advice Points were initiated after two successful pilot projects. The first was called *Energia la Justa* (Fair Energy) and trained 100 unemployed vulnerable citizens and employed them for 6 months as energy advisors. The pilot project reached 3,000 vulnerable households from social services of the city of Barcelona. The energy advisors focused on helping energy poor households to reduce energy bills and implement low cost energy efficiency measures directly in their homes. This pilot started with a synergy with the H2020 EU funded project "SMARTUP" with the objective to give support to vulnerable consumers to manage their electricity bills through the smart meter. SMARTUP provided manuals, guidelines and know-how to enhance both projects.

The second pilot, *Punts d'Atenció a la Pobresa Energètica* (Energy Attention Points) established 4 contact points in the city of Barcelona where citizens could go to get energy-related information. The aim of the Energy Attention Points was to detect vulnerable consumers, give advice and if needed provide interventions at the home of households, including installation of low cost energy efficiency measures. The Energy Attention Points project lasted 4 months and reached 993 people.

The Energy Advice Points project was organised as a public tender on two levels: city management and district management. The city was divided in five areas. The project was awarded to different NGO's on the municipal and district level.

The Energy Advice Points project is organised in three main lines of action:

Line of action 1 - Energy rights and energy efficiency: This line of action provides three types of services. The first service is provided at the 11 Energy Advice Points around the city where citizens can ask information about energy (and water) supply related information. Each **energy information agent** spends around 20 minutes asking energy-related questions in order to detect whether the citizen is energy poor and provides, when possible, tools and information to support them. Agents are trained to identify people that are energy poor but that social services or charities would otherwise not be able to detect.

When a potential energy poor case is detected, it is referred to one of the 5 Back Office Points where an **energy assessment agent** spends 1 hour assisting the person with specific administrative procedures. These agents can support to reduce energy consumption, reduce their energy bills or access financial support for energy bills, such as the Spanish social tariff.

In certain urgent cases, such as unexpectedly high energy bills, the person can be referred to the third service, the **in-home energy agents**. These agents will conduct in-house visits to identify energy poverty conditions such as mould, provide information about energy efficiency and install low-cost equipment such as material to insulate windows and doors.

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DESCRIPTION CONT.

Line of action 2: Employment and employability: The Energy Advice Points employ 40 people of which 32 are long term unemployed who were trained during the pilot project *Energia la Justa* in 2016. This line of action now focuses on providing training and employment opportunities to 20 citizens every 8 months. Specifically, the project trains long-term unemployed citizens that are over 45 to work under the first line of action as energy information agents, energy assessment agents and in-home energy agents.

Line of action 3: Prevention at the community level: In the third line of action, the goal is to identify civil society organizations and NGOs where the EAPs team can share information. Through talks and workshops citizens can get a better understanding on how to reduce energy and water consumption while maintaining or improving living comfort and improve their housing through the installation of low-cost energy efficiency measures. These talks also make more people aware of the EAPs service and detect additional cases that might need support.

SUCCESS FACTORS

The success factors for each line of action (2017 data) are:

- **Line of action 1 - Energy rights and energy efficiency:** 8,462 people received information at the EAPs in 2017. 32.6% of these people had received warnings for the disconnection of electricity or water supply. In addition, the project provided energy efficiency material to 821 households, managed to apply 1,260 households for the Spanish social tariff and reduced the power connection of 1,428 households. The satisfaction degree of participating households was 92%.
- **Line of action 2 - Employment :** 42 people were trained, of which 40% had been long-term unemployed. From the 20 agents that finished the training in 2017, seven are currently employed.
- **Line of action 3 - Prevention at the community level:** The EAPs team managed to give 117 workshops and 325 hours of informational seminars. The satisfaction degree of participants was 89%.



Photo credit: Barcelona city council



**Ajuntament
de Barcelona**



LESSONS LEARNED

The lessons learned from the Energy Advice Points are:

- Providing information to vulnerable people (instead of only to those that are energy poor) allows to prevent future energy poverty cases.
- Establishing information points where all citizens can go allow for a better identification of energy poor households than targeted programs.
- Employing advisors that have been in a similar situation facilitates the building of trust.
- Training through workshops, seminars and giving specific printed information is key to empower energy poor households and prevent future energy poverty cases to happen.
- Facilitating in-home assessments to those that cannot leave the house is crucial to provide information to vulnerable consumers that otherwise would not have access to such services.
- Reaching all citizens can best be done through a flexible approach; for example, in some cases households can be reached better by having their neighbours provide the information.
- Placing the EAPs in housing offices help people know about this service and not relate it with poverty, in order to avoid stigmatization.

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TRANSFERABILITY & SCALABILITY

Since the main causes of energy poverty are universal, and energy poverty can affect potentially every city in Europe, the practice can be transferred to other EU cities, either at national or subnational level. The transferability in practice would vary depending on city size. Therefore, two scenarios should be considered:

Transferability for smaller municipalities:

- Manage the project from the city council and use the same offices as the housing office because of the direct relation between housing and energy supply.

Transferability for larger municipalities:

- Make use of a public tender to manage the entire project on municipality level and multiple publicly open tenders to implement the project at the neighbourhood level. It is recommended to incentivize partnerships to apply to the call, especially partnerships between social and environmental organisations.
- Involve local environmental and social organisations to enhance community engagement and trustworthiness



Photo credit: Barcelona city council

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HOW TO GET INVOLVED

There are two possibilities to get involved in the project: at a local scale by helping with the implementation and the project goals, and at a European or international level by replicating the project in other cities.

At the local level you can be involved by helping to create awareness and communicating about the Energy Advice Points and the talks and workshops provided under the third line of action. To get involved further in the project you can directly contact Ecoserveis by sending an email or by telephone (see contact info).

At the EU and international scale, you could use the experience of the Energy Advice Points to create a similar project in your own municipality. Further information on the project is available from Ecoserveis (see contact info).

SOURCES

1. Statistics Department Barcelona (2018). *Población por distritos*. Available at: <http://www.bcn.cat/estadistica/angles/dades/tpob/pad/ine/a2016/edat/edata02.htm>
2. Tirado Herrero, S. (2018). *Indicadors municipals de pobresa energètica a la ciutat de Barcelona*. Barcelona: RMIT Europe. Available at: <http://habitatge.barcelona/sites/default/files/documents/indicadors-municipals-de-pobresa-energetica-a-la-ciutat-de-barcelona.pdf>