Case Study:
French National Energy Poverty Observatory (ONPE)

EU Energy Poverty Observatory Case Study
French National Energy Poverty Observatory (ONPE)
A tool for measuring energy poverty and monitoring policy

Case Studies of the EU Energy Poverty Observatory (EPOV) showcase successfully implemented energy poverty measures in the Member States. They highlight best practices that can be used as models for energy poverty action. This case study focuses on the development of the French National Energy Poverty Observatory aiming at effective monitoring of the energy poverty situation in France.

KEY RESULTS:

- Raising awareness of energy poverty
- Measuring energy poverty
- Monitoring the effectiveness of energy poverty policy

CHALLENGE

Households that live in energy poverty are unable to afford basic energy needs. Members of households that do not have an adequate energy supply are at risk of social exclusion and of physical and mental health problems. Addressing energy poverty is therefore an important **social policy objective.**

Moreover it is also an **energy policy objective**. A wide consensus for the energy transition can only be reached if energy poverty is adequately addressed. Otherwise social and political resistance can prove to be a major hurdle for energy policy initiatives as recently seen in France.

Before the establishment of the French National Energy Poverty Observatory (ONPE), the scale and impacts of the problem were unclear. Furthermore, the impact of energy poverty policies was not measured. ONPE was founded to close this **data and knowledge gap** and to **address energy poverty** more effectively.

The ONPE addresses the following challenges:

- Little awareness of energy poverty.
- Lack of frequently updated comprehensive data sets to measure energy policy impacts.
- Insufficient evaluation of existing energy poverty policies to identify knowledge gaps and understand how energy poverty measures can be improved.
- Lack of coordination between stakeholders leading to uncoordinated and inefficient efforts that do not reach their full potential.

French National Energy Poverty Observatory (ONPE) AT-A-GLANCE

Type of measure: Information and awareness

Duration: 2012 - ongoing

Location: France

Type of organisations involved:
- National Agencies
- Energy suppliers
- Grid operators
- Energy ombudsman
- Social housing organisations

Funding method: Public and Private Funding

Contact: contact@onpe.org

Additional Benefits:
- Helping to create a common understanding of energy poverty for all stakeholders.
- Facilitating learnings from past energy poverty programmes.

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 Navigant.

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The main objectives of ONPE are:
- Carrying out a **monitoring mission** on energy poverty in France. The ONPE publishes the results annually on an energy poverty dashboard.
- **Raising awareness** for energy policy by distributing the results of its programme through its website, publications and ONPE events.
- Providing a **platform for stakeholders** to connect and discuss the problems and solutions in energy poverty.
- **Evaluating public policies** by gathering and analysing reliable and comprehensive data on energy poverty and on policies preventing energy poverty.
- **Participating in the national debate** by providing key insights into the problem of energy poverty and proposing policy initiatives.

DESCRIPTION

The observatory's strategic direction and its work programme is set by a **strategy committee**. The committee decides on the budget, controls the quality of the data collected from ONPE members and ensures that commitments are fulfilled and the ONPE constitution upheld.

ONPE has a **president,** appointed by the Environment and Energy Management Agency (ADEME), and a **vice-president**, appointed by the National Observatory of Poverty and Social Exclusion. They are assisted by the ADEME secretariat to lead and coordinate the work of ONPE.

A **committee of partners** brings together all relevant stakeholders. It oversees the work of the ONPE in dedicated working groups, formulates proposals for studies to be carried out, and develops notes, opinions and recommendations.

The **committee's four permanent working groups (GTs) as well as ad hoc working groups** are responsible for monitoring the work of ONPE. The four permanent working groups are:

- Household GT: Addressing the impact of energy poverty on households through surveys and develops best practices to overcome the issue.

- Data GT: Overseeing the collection and presentation of data, creates the annual energy poverty dashboard and key figures.

- A Territorial Diagnostic GT: Developing and operating the ONPE tool GEOVHEM to map the regional distribution of energy poverty throughout France.
- A Decency GT: Exemplifying best practices and studies in the fight against poor living conditions in France and Europe

Committee of partners

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DESCRIPTION CONT.

For its annual publication on the energy dashboard, the ONPE gathers data for four sets of indicators:

- **Quantification indicators** quantify the number of households that live in energy poverty.
  E.g. in 2018, 11.6% of the French people spent more than 8% of their income on housing bills. They are considered energy poor, as the share of their income spent on energy bills is significantly higher than for the average household.
- **Context indicators** describe the environment that contributes to energy poverty.
  E.g. for 40% of households that live in energy poverty, poor insulation of homes is the main driver behind the energy poverty situation.
- **Difficulty indicators** describe the concrete difficulties of households that live in energy poverty.
  E.g. In 2018, 572,440 households were contacted by their energy supplier due to energy bill arrears to arrange a reduction or suspension of energy supply.
- **Monitoring indicators** quantify the impact of energy poverty policies.
  E.g. 3.6 million households received an energy cheque in 2018; 230,000 households are ineligible for any national financial assistance; households that renovated their homes through the Living Better programme saved 300 TWh of energy between January 2016 and November 2018.

In its publications, ONPE also analyses energy poverty policies. For example, it notes that except for the "Living Better" programme, none of the policies focus on improving the energy efficiencies of households, but only provide short-term financial assistance to the recipients.

METHODOLOGY

The most comprehensive dataset to use for analysing energy poverty is the National Housing Survey. However, the last survey was conducted in 2013 and the next one will not be conducted for another few years. In the meantime, the ONPE monitors the development of energy poverty annually with two indicators:

- The **energy stress indicator**, based on the ratio of household energy expenditure and income. It is estimated by the Office of the General Commissioner for Sustainable Development.
- The **indicator on the ability to keep the home adequately warm**, based on responses to the question "Was your home uncomfortably cold for a timespan of at least 24 hours during the last winter?", in the survey for the Energy Info Barometer of the National Energy Ombudsman covering 40,000 households.

The data used to calculate these indicators and used in other ONPE publications are obtained through publicly available datasets and provided by the following ONPE partners:

- **Energy Ombudsman:** ability to keep home adequately warm, information on unpaid bills and disconnections
- **Energy Regulatory Commission**: energy prices
- **Ministry of Energy**: household energy consumption
- **Energy suppliers:** energy cheques (a subsidy for energy costs for poor households)

Additionally, the Ministry of Housing, the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies and the National Agenda for Housing monitor the effect of various energy poverty initiatives.

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SUCCESS FACTORS & LESSONS LEARNED

- The ONPE is widely accepted, because **all essential stakeholders are included.** This also allows the ONPE to easily get input and support from all relevant stakeholders.
- The data collection for the energy dashboard is successful as there is a **comprehensive collection plan** and a clear communication with partners when they have to deliver what kind of data and in which format.
- The ONPE has both an **annual report** tracking the development of energy poverty as well as **ad-hoc initiatives** that can respond to new developments.

TRANSFERABILITY & SCALABILITY

Establishing an energy poverty observatory is an important measure for countries and municipalities that are trying to reduce the energy poverty of their population. The experience of the ONPE demonstrates that the following aspects contribute to an effective creation and operation of an energy observatory.

- When establishing a new observatory, it is crucial to have a **clear plan**, including a good understanding on the aim of the observatory, what definition of energy poverty will be used, and how to acquire the necessary data.
- The establishment of an observatory requires the **cooperation of many actors** in order to agree on a country wide approach to energy poverty and collect, process and analyse the required data. While establishing the ONPE, the following stakeholders proved relevant: representatives of the national government, energy suppliers, grid operators, energy ombudsman and social housing organisations.

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HOW TO GET INVOLVED

To get involved, you can:
- participate in ONPE Symposiums (every second year)
- visit the weekly updated ONPE website
- read ONPE publications (symposiums, guides, …)
- subscribe to the ONPE e-mail-newsletter

SOURCES

- www.onpe.org
- www.ademe.fr
- www.anah.fr
- www.developpement-durable.gouv.fr
- www.logement.gouv.fr
- www.energypoverty.eu

The EU Energy Poverty Observatory provides a collection of case studies from the Member States. Click here for more information.

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