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TRANSFORMING THE MEASUREMENT AND MITIGATION OF ENERGY POVERTY

Executive Summary of
the European Union Energy
Poverty Observatory

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Executive summary

1. Introduction

This document summarises the results of all project tasks and deliverables completed by the European Union Energy Poverty Observatory (EPOV), a European Commission (EC) supported initiative to help Member States (MS) in their efforts to combat energy poverty and achieve a just and sustainable energy transition. When EPOV commenced its work in late 2016, the energy poverty challenge was associated with a relatively limited amount of policy and action at the European Union (EU) and MS level. Today, however, energy poverty is explicitly integrated in a number of EU directives and Member State policies, while gradually becoming a part of local government programmes. There is an active polity of practitioners, advocates and researchers committed to addressing the issue.

The dramatic shift can be attributed to a variety of factors – from the rising prominence of energy and climate concerns in government policy, to the follow-on consequences of energy market liberalisation across the EU. At the same time, a number of relevant stakeholders – including non-governmental organisations, regional associations and business groups – have argued in favour of integrating social, housing and infrastructure dimensions in energy policy making. In concert with the expanding body of experts in the energy poverty domain, EPOV has actively worked towards creating both a knowledge base and targeted decision-support toolkit to address the issue.

The challenges faced by EPOV upon its inception were formidable: there was a lack of agreement on which indicators could be used to address the issue, energy poverty data was specialised and difficult to access, and the multiple initiatives focusing on the project – from the local to the international scale – were disconnected and poorly visible. Having carried out extensive stakeholder and expert consultations, alongside data and information collection activities, EPOV defined a set of indicators that provide a comprehensive, detailed and authoritative overview of the structure and character of energy poverty, as well as the spatial and temporal variation of the problem. On its web portal (<https://www.energypoverty.eu>), EPOV also compiled and published the world's largest database of energy poverty-relevant publications, measures and training resources. EPOV worked closely with relevant stakeholders (particularly the Covenant of Mayors) to formulate effective urban policies, while offering technical assistance to relevant government authorities and specialist institutions. The Observatory consortium organised a series of conferences and workshops attended by an estimated 1,000 participants.

2. Overview of the EU Energy Poverty Observatory

The EPOV project was delivered via a consortium of six key partner organisations, all of whom are recognised as leaders in their respective fields, with a wealth of experience in addressing energy poverty: the University of Manchester (UK); Ecofys Germany GmbH (Germany); European Policy Centre (Belgium); Intrasoft International S.A. (Luxembourg); National Energy Action (UK); and Wuppertal Institut für Klima, Umwelt,

Energie gGmbH (Germany). The partners were supported by a range of subcontracted organisations, spanning the French and Greek national energy poverty observatories, and other organisations with expertise in research, policy, and practice on energy poverty: Asociación de Ciencias Ambientales (ACA) (Spain); Alphééis (France); Centre for Renewable Energy Sources and Saving (Greece); Energy Action Project (France); Energy Action Ireland (Ireland); Fundación Ecología y Desarrollo (ECODES) (Spain); Housing Europe (Belgium); and the University of Birmingham (UK).

3. A summary of EPOV's main contributions

Launching a comprehensive web portal

The first and major element of work involved the development and launch of the web portal. For most audiences and users, the portal is synonymous with the Observatory itself, particularly as it hosts the body of data and information that has been collected and produced by the observatory. The web portal had an average of about 1,400 sessions every month.

Advancing a standardised approach to measuring energy poverty

This element of work focused on preparing comparative and robust statistics on energy poverty for hosting on the indicator dashboard of the web portal, and in tandem preparing a [guidebook on the methodology](#) and data sources used. It formed an integral element of improving transparency, and has been essential for supporting Member States in their efforts to measure energy poverty rates. Overall, four primary indicators of energy poverty and 24 supporting secondary indicators were hosted in an open-access interactive [indicator dashboard](#) that was regularly updated with new data releases throughout the project period. A high level of data visualisation functionality was provided to users, with the ability to view data in line graph, bar chart, and map format, and to disaggregate the primary indicators according to income deciles, tenure type, urban density, and dwelling type.

An unprecedented collection of resources

Via its web portal, EPOV compiled and published the world's largest database of energy poverty-relevant publications, policy measures and training resources, spanning Europe and beyond. Careful consideration was given to the labelling and tagging of content. This enabled complex filtering options, whereby users can search by the type of measure, the target socioeconomic group, and more. In July 2020, the resources amounted to: a catalogue of over 300 policies and measures; more than 500 research publications in an evidence repository; over 60 practical training resources, including videos and toolkits; and a list of more than 100 relevant organisations. This knowledge database continues to grow organically, thanks to an active membership base of more than 800 members from 60 countries across the world, who regularly contribute new material to the portal.

State-of-the-art reports and case studies on energy poverty

EPOV's expert publications took the form of pan-EU and MS reports, and specialist case studies. They demonstrated the scale energy poverty across the EU, while demonstrating how the consequences of this condition affect macroeconomic development and political processes. The reports also showcased best practices.

The three sets of [pan-EU reports](#) offered state-of-the-art knowledge and evidence on ongoing efforts to address the problem of energy poverty, as well as its distribution and character across the EU. Each of them contained a policies and measures section, in which we examined the different energy poverty alleviation and mitigation policies and measures adopted at the EU, MS, regional and local level. The 3rd and final pan-EU report contains one of the hitherto most comprehensive and timely reviews of national and local-scale initiatives in this domain, including extensive analysis of National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs), and COVID-19 responses across the EU.

Two sets of [national MS reports](#) were successfully produced for all EU countries. These reports summarised the key aspects of the energy poverty situation in each MS, based on the key indicators, policies and publications we had gathered and published on the EPOV web portal, with clear signposting to available resources.

Our [case studies](#) complemented the above reports, and showcased successfully implemented energy poverty measures across Member States, by highlighting best practices that could be used as models for energy poverty action. Content was derived from across different regions of Europe.

Promoting EPOV resources and stakeholder network

Setting out ways and means to engage stakeholders in the EPOV project and encourage knowledge-sharing and networking was a continued line of work throughout the contract, in order to ensure that the learning, reports, training and other materials reached as many stakeholders as possible, and to raise the profile of energy poverty as a policy issue. Communication action was embedded in the project in various ways. EPOV was promoted through relevant partner and subcontractor networks, events and other dissemination activities (e.g. posters, flyers and articles for specialist magazines). Press releases were produced for key events, including the launch of EPOV and the web portal launch, which were picked up by national media channels. In July 2020, more than 800 members (organisations and individuals) were registered on the EPOV portal, mostly from the EU, but also beyond (more than 60 countries were represented in total).

Hosting annual events

The consortium successfully organised a series of three annual conferences to showcase EPOV's outputs, and receive critical inputs from end-users. The first annual event was a highly publicised launch of the Observatory on the 29th January 2018 in Brussels, entitled '[Stepping up the EU fight against energy poverty: The EU Energy Poverty Observatory](#)', which featured several high-level speakers and around 400 attendees from across Europe and North America. The second annual conference took the format of a closed-door roundtable event with MS energy attaches on the 27th June

2019, while the third and final annual conference was implemented via an online policy dialogue on the 25th June 2020. In addition to the required annual events set out in the tender specification, we chose to supplement the conferences with two smaller specialist workshops, in Madrid and Brussels.

Developing new training materials to support stakeholders

The production of three training material outputs stemmed from corresponding calls for evidence to assess current provision, gaps and opportunities for collaboration and sharing. Training outputs included a document on '[How to produce an Energy Poverty Action Guide](#)', [A guide for energy regulators and/or suppliers on energy vulnerability](#), and a Handbook and guide to the multiple impacts of energy poverty, as well as the multiple benefits of addressing it.

Extensive technical assistance

Technical assistance provided by the Observatory played a central role in extending the reach and significance of its support. There was tremendous demand for our services from across the European Union – from the local and regional level, to organisations operating at the national scale. We engaged with a diverse set of stakeholders, including government bodies, researchers, companies, advocacy groups, the media, and practitioners working on the ground. Some of our technical assistance activities involved working with relevant actors over a prolonged period of time, so as to develop a sustained engagement across different organisational scales, networks and settings. We also defined a pilot project at the municipal level, which was later successfully implemented in conjunction with the Covenant of Mayors, and assisted five municipalities. As a whole, technical assistance was provided to 19 EU MS and 8 Non-EU countries. EPOV supported the launch and development of national and regional observatories on energy poverty-related issues in Finland, Greece, Italy, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, and Mexico.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

Since its establishment EPOV has been at the heart of concerted policy action to address energy poverty, through a combination of measures in the energy, social, housing and health sectors. EPOV has succeeded in positioning itself as an authoritative and comprehensive source of data and resources, both within Europe and globally. In terms of technical assistance, there has been tremendous demand for our services from across the EU – from the local and regional level, to organisations operating at the national scale. This area of work will only increase in importance as the project moves into its second phase, and so the key challenge will be to define its scope in a streamlined and focused manner. The need for compiling and evaluating best practices at the local level also remains strong, particularly as a result of the implementation of both the Clean Energy Package, the European Green Deal and the Recovery Plan for Europe.

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