Energy
Solidarity
Toolkit

Practical ways for energy
communities to tackle energy poverty

cees
COMMUNITY ENERGY FOR
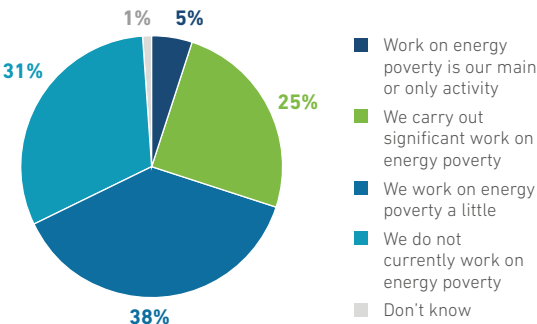ENERGY **SOLIDARITY**

Overview

Since 2020, the '1-2 hit' of the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine have shown how quickly external forces can deliver heavy impacts on individual homes. First, remote working and schooling drove up home energy consumption. Second, supply disruptions wreaked havoc on energy markets. In both cases, home energy bills spiked.

By 2022, 42 million EU citizens could not adequately heat their homes, a 1.6% increase in just one year.

In the context of a just, clean energy transition, the potential for energy communities (ECs) to become key actors in tackling energy poverty is increasingly recognised in theory and in recent changes to relevant EU legislations.

Community Energy for Energy Solidarity (CEES) sought to investigate what that means in practice. An early survey confirmed that most ECs are keen to improve the lives of people in their local areas. But relatively few currently do – and many indicated not knowing how to get started. The **Energy Solidarity Toolkit** aims to fill that gap.

At ~30%, the number of ECs currently taking significant action against energy poverty is quite low.

- 1%
- 5%
- 25%
- 38%
- 31%

- Work on energy poverty is our main or only activity
- We carry out significant work on energy poverty
- We work on energy poverty a little
- We do not currently work on energy poverty
- Don't know

Three key concepts

ENERGY POVERTY is the situation in which households are unable to access affordable energy services (such as adequate warmth, cooling, lighting, and energy to power appliances) that underpin elements of human flourishing (such as health and well-being, relationships, social inclusion, employment, recreation and education).

An **ENERGY COMMUNITY** (EC) generally refers to a legal entity that sets up local projects, based on democratic and cooperative values, to promote the transition towards energy systems that are more sustainable, efficient and socially fair.

ENERGY SOLIDARITY is present when actors willingly work in ways that align, on a shared goal of overcoming energy-related adversity that is experienced by one or more of the parties. Energy solidarity is inspired by empathy and/or a sense of justice, and may, but does not have to, involve reciprocal obligation. Stronger solidarity involves a more sustained commitment, and/or a willingness to incur a higher personal cost in pursuit of the shared goal.

(Day and Burchell, 2023)

Aligning community needs and EC capacity

A decision to practise energy solidarity will change many things about a given EC – from who it provides services to and what services it will offer to the entities it collaborates with. As CEES Partners found, it requires different resources in terms of materials and equipment, skills, and financing. Often, it will require more of such resources. In turn, local policy frameworks may help or hinder efforts. To secure financing and influence policy, ECs should be prepared to evaluate how their efforts benefit households in situations of energy vulnerability.

To help ECs determine their capacity to get started, CEES has mapped out the resources needed to carry out various energy solidarity measures across three areas (see over):

- how to **identify** and **engage** with households and collaborators,
- **actions** to alleviate energy poverty and
- **financing** options.

Organising Energy Cafés, delivering Cosy Kits and making home visits to offer energy advice are some of the ways CEES Partners put energy solidarity into practice.

Identify and Engage

Struggling to pay energy bills is a deeply personal matter, which many households try to self-manage by reducing consumption, cutting expenses, foregoing other necessities or developing various coping mechanisms.

In turn, lifting people out of energy poverty often requires intervention by many actors with diverse expertise.

CEES Partners quickly discovered that to identify and engage with vulnerable households, they often needed to seek out potential collaborators. While material costs are low for this work, ECs should be aware that the time commitment can be quite heavy. Hopefully, advice offered in the Energy Solidarity Toolkit will make it easier to replicate effective approaches.

	Material costs	Human resources	Ease of replicability
IDENTIFY AND ENGAGE			
Identify alert signals in the target community	$	⧖⧖	↻
Establish a referrals network	$	⧖⧖⧖	↻
Recruit community energy champions	$	⧖⧖⧖	↻↻↻
Set up an Energy Solidarity Task Force	$$$	⧖⧖⧖	↻↻↻

Act

Poor-quality homes are one of the biggest drivers of energy poverty. But personal habits and eventual energy costs also play important roles. For this reason, CEES Partners found it useful to take action across two approaches.

Overall, CEES Partners found that target groups are reluctant to accept help and extremely reticent to have home visits. Hosting events, such as Energy Cafés, can be a good way to begin establishing relationships and building trust. ECs should be aware that some energy solidarity measures carry heavy burdens for both costs and time and are difficult to replicate.

Soft measures focus on optimising energy consumption through low- or no-cost actions, such as switching to LED lighting, stopping cold draughts or adopting new habits.

Hard measures, such as energy efficiency renovations, aim to slash energy demand and energy bills over the long term. Often costly and disruptive, they can be difficult to implement.

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	Material costs	Human resources	Ease of replicability
ACT			
Hosting Energy Cafés	$	⏳⏳⏳	🔄
Distributing Energy Boxes / Cosy Kits	$$	⏳⏳⏳	🔄
Energy advice home visits	$	⏳⏳⏳	🔄🔄
Generating local energy supply	$$$	⏳⏳⏳	🔄🔄🔄
Shared and Supported Self-Renovation	$$$	⏳⏳⏳	🔄🔄🔄

Financing

Advancing the just, clean energy transition by involving communities in democratic and cooperative decisions and actions underpins the mission of ECs. Adopting energy solidarity mechanisms to help the most vulnerable households is a logical extension of their core activities.

As CEES Partners learned, however, the additional costs linked to building in-house capacity and implementing projects can be difficult to cover under original business models. Innovative financing mechanisms are critical to offering new services while remaining financially viable.

As ECs seek to claim their unique space in energy markets designed for much bigger players that prioritise profits, they will need to demonstrate the value of social impacts.

	Material costs	Human resources	Ease of replicability
FINANCING			
Donation-based crowdfunding	$	⧗⧗⧗	↻
Micro-donations	$$$	⧗⧗⧗	↻↻↻
Corporate donations, fiscal and others	$	⧗⧗⧗	↻
Community energy revenues	$$$	⧗⧗⧗	↻↻↻
Grants	$	⧗⧗⧗	↻
Cooperative loans and crowdfunding	$$	⧗	↻

Policy

The EU Clean Energy Package, which entered into force in 2019, gave all EU citizens the right to set up an EC or to become part of one. In 2023-24, the obligation for Member States to tackle energy poverty has been enshrined in multiple EU policies.

In testing various energy solidarity mechanisms, CEES Partners faced the reality that local contexts can help or hinder. This includes how national governments transpose EU directives, set targets and empower the local administrations that ECs interact with most directly.

Evaluate

As per CEES objectives, practising energy solidarity should move EU citizens towards having access to sufficient, affordable energy that enables 'human flourishing'.

Evaluation is vital to assessing the degree to which this is achieved. As measures can be relatively easy and low-cost or extremely time- and resource-intensive, 'SMART' evaluation can help project managers understand impacts relative to the resources invested. In addition to being critical to operations, these findings can be vital to securing the support of collaborators and of financial or policy actors.

Specific	**S**
Measurable	**M**
Achievable	**A**
Relevant	**R**
Time-bound	**T**

Capacity building

In Year 3 of the CEES project, 13 ECs from across Europe participated in a series of workshops to learn more about how to adopt energy solidarity measures into their own activities.

- Coventry Community Energy Champions (UK)
- Community Energy Colchester (UK)
- Telheiras Renewable Energy Community (Portugal)
- La Tonenca (Spain)
- INSTA - Serveis Jurídics Ambientals (Spain)
- Mine du Soleil (France)
- Ecopower (Belgium)
- Goiener (Italy)
- Ufficio Comune per la Sostenibilità Ambientale (Italy)
- FOCUS (Slovenia)
- Electra (Greece)
- Energy Community Ypsilanti (Greece)
- Troya Energy Community (Turkey)

Partners:

For more information, contact: info@energysolidarity.eu

www.enegysolidarity.eu

 @CEES_energy

 https://www.linkedin.com/company/community-energy-for-energy-solidarity/