

Key conclusions of the conference Energy Poverty in South East Europe

Adverse effects of energy poverty are particularly evident in South-East European (SEE) countries. It is estimated that in SEE countries 30 %, or more, of households, are struggling with energy poverty. Although it is commonly falsely assumed that energy poverty has the same characteristics everywhere, practice shows that regional and historical differences play a significant role in prevalence and characteristics of energy poverty. To raise awareness on specificities of energy poverty in SEE and to motivate key stakeholders from both SEE countries and EU level, conference has been organised in the European Parliament.

Conference has highlighted that it is of key importance to recognise the fact that we live in a time when energy is a basic need, not a luxury. We live in an energy dependent society and this fact needs to be broadly recognised by all relevant actors. In modern society energy access is crucial to all humans. Access to energy should not be a privilege, it is a necessity.

Apart from the specifics of energy poverty in SEE, identified by REACH project partners in document “Energy poverty in South-East Europe: challenges and possible solutions”, during the conference following aspects of energy poverty have been identified:

- Energy poverty is not an issue of expenditure as it is often interpreted; it is a development issue.
- Access to energy in many SEE households is not only a question of affordability, but in some cases it is also infrastructural issue.
- The SEE region has many low-income households that are energy poor, and also many working-class families who live in inadequate housing or who are trapped by district heating arrangement with no possibility to regulate heat consumption or to switch to alternative heating system.
- During the summer season households are not able to afford cooling.
- Housing policy is underdeveloped in the SEE region.
- Disconnection policy is inadequate leaving many at risk of being disconnected and left without necessary heating during the winter periods.
- Energy poverty is differently manifested in rural and urban settings.

To address these specifics it is important to keep them in mind when designing the definition of energy poverty and indicators which need to be monitored. Agreement on the definition of energy poverty is needed to increase the understanding of energy poverty and to enable monitoring energy poverty and measurement policy impacts across different timespans and between countries.

The conference stressed importance of energy efficiency measures which should always be given priority when discussing possible tools for tackling energy poverty, while financial support should only be used as a measure after all cost-effective energy efficiency measures have been implemented.

In EU member states of the SEE region it is an important opportunity for suppliers/DSOs (EED suppliers' scheme) to implement energy efficiency measures in energy poor households. It is also important to note that there is other funding sources available to tackle energy poverty in different i.e. through ETS scheme of EU funding mechanism it just needs to be defined whom to target and how to channel the funds more efficiently. As rural areas are a problem, the rural development fund could be a good one to use for targeting energy poor households; also European Social Fund could play a role. It was concluded that energy poverty should be identified as one of objectives for EU funding. Energy efficiency programmes for energy poor should be carefully designed so that they would be available and accessible to those in need.

The conference highlighted the need to link energy poverty to social, health, and environmental policies. Furthermore, it is important to link energy poverty to housing policy. It remains a challenge that social policy already includes energy poverty, but talking to social policy-makers they do not link those two issues – they see it as another form of poverty; this needs to be changed. Consequences of energy poverty in SEE are massive for the economy, health and environment. Energy poverty also has a large contribution to transmission of poverty between generations.

Immediate action is needed both on national and EU level to provide help and support to those in need and to alleviate adverse impacts of energy poverty while eradicating its causes.



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