

Energy crisis: from emergency measures to more sustainable social services



October 2022

The energy crisis and climate change are putting increasing pressure on societies, impacting especially elderly people, people with disabilities, children and other persons in vulnerable situations. This also has an impact on the services delivered and, in particular, on their energy budget.

Considering the current energy crisis, many European governments call for energy savings for next winter. Emergency measures that will have to be taken can be a chance to prompt longer-term changes, to move towards more sustainable social services in the future and to make social services contribute to the European Green Deal.

Becoming more sustainable can have crucial benefits on our climate, environment, economy, society, health and wellbeing. Every organisation and every individual has a role to play in reducing greenhouse gas emissions by adapting habits, homes, communities, workplaces and infrastructures.

The Social Employers hereby shares some measures that have been implemented by social services providers across the EU. These measures might help you take urgent and initiate long-term actions to fight against climate change and adapt to it.

Initiatives taken in social services

First of all: people

Social services are delivered by people, for people. Therefore, an energy policy needs to involve people to be effective.

This includes the employees but also the beneficiaries as well as the governance teams. It means all these persons must be convinced and involved in every step of the process from the assessment of the energy situation to the definition of the workplan, its follow up and evaluation.



1

Temperature and lights management

After a change of habits and behaviours, an assessment and potential adaptation of temperature and lights management can also be organised. It is well known, lowering the temperature by 1 degree reduces the energy invoice by 7 %.

Temperature and lights management can include small investments such as automatic lighting control (with sensors), through which lighting can be reduced or turned off. Thermostats can also help with heating and lighting reductions at certain time (especially at night or when the locations are not occupied). Replacing light bulbs by low consumption ones, such as LED, is a simple measure that needs only small investment.

2

Thermal insulation

Especially older infrastructure often lacks good insulation systems. Some basic works can help with energy savings, for example through thermal insulation of heating installations and of buildings themselves. Thermal insulation will make the building significantly warmer, reduce heating costs and limit the waste of energy resources by preventing heat gain or loss through the building envelope. An overall thermal insulation is to be preferred to partial insulation, but emergency measures can be a first step of a bigger renovation project.

Due to the current energy prices, a return on investment can be expected in a shorter term than previously.

3

Transportation policy

Transportation is one of the biggest sources of greenhouse gas emissions. In the social services sector, transport is also an important part of the energy consumption, especially in some services where workers navigate between service users' homes and/or transport service users. Often employees use their cars to go to work. To reduce the costs and the carbon output of commuting, a broad policy can be introduced to promote the use of public transport, car sharing, eco-friendly driving, cycling and walking, and telework for job positions that allow it, online meeting tools, etc.

4

Structural works

In the longer term, structural works on the insulation of the building can lead to a better energy management and to substantial savings (changing the windows, insulating the whole building, changing the heating system, protecting the building against sun rays in summer, etc.). Renewable energy can be part of the works. Of course, such works involve substantial funding and can be difficult to implement in a short time.

5

Funding

EU funding opportunities such as ESF+ and ERDF can help social services become more sustainable. New Calls for Proposals are expected to be launched within the next months, which will provide opportunities to seize.

Going further

As services of general interest, social services must promote sustainable development, including sustainable management of energy and goods, such as water and waste. There is also potential for the sector to produce its own goods and energy (e.g., solar panels). For services which provide food to their services users and staff, sustainable food supply, avoiding food waste, etc. are also key.

Social services can go further by initiating a societal and environmental responsibility process. For this the 17 United Nations Sustainable goals can be a good frame for reflection and action.

Final word: in times of **staff shortages**; being part of an organisation that works for the general interest with a broad sustainable management, in which the staff is involved, can also be an **efficient tool to attract and retain workers**, who more and more seek meaningful jobs.

Examples of initiatives and tool kits

- **EASPD Research on the European green deal and social services.**
- **European project on energy savings** in the ageing sector.
- Toolkit and recommendations to improve energy efficiency (in FR) from ANAP the French agency for health and social care efficiency.
- **Responsible societal and environmental policies** (in FR) from L'Adapei de Loire Atlantique.
- **BRUXEO Free support from energy advisors** for its members in Brussels to save energy and invest in the production of renewable energy. It also offers trainings and leaflets on how to limit waste in water heating and comparable initiatives. BRUXEO is a Brussels-based organisation for non-profit services .
- **Urgenda energy competition** (the Netherlands), focusing on changing behaviour in order to reduce energy consumption. As a result, an average of 18.3% less energy was consumed in the care home.
- The Social Employers member Actiz (the Netherlands) also makes available a set of **initiatives for sustainable care** on its website.
- The Association of Austrian social and health care provider Volkshilfe Oberösterreich, prepared a **life cycle assessment** including the goal to achieve climate neutrality and a **reduction plan** to achieve this goal.
- **Climate Action and the Social Care Collective** event report. The Scottish Care, the Alliance and the Academy (Scotland) co-hosted a serie of roundtable events and published a report to explore climate action in the context of social care.



Federation of European Social Employers

Handelsstraat/Rue du Commerce 72 1040 Brussel/Bruxelles
+32(0) 2 233 77 20 België/Belgique

 <https://socialemployers.eu/en/>

 [@SocialEmployers](https://twitter.com/SocialEmployers)

 [Federation of European Social Employers](https://www.linkedin.com/company/federation-of-european-social-employers/)

 [Presentation video](#)