

# EYEN contribution to the 14th Citizens' Energy Forum

15 November 2022

The [European Youth Energy Network](#) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the [14th Citizens' Energy Forum](#) and appreciates the inclusion of a youth organisation in the Forum proceedings. **EYEN advocates for the consideration of youth as a relevant stakeholder**, to be proactively engaged and informed across the entire decision-making cycle at organisational, community, local, regional, national and European levels.

EYEN's presence in this Forum marks the start of meaningful inclusion and fruitful participation of youth in a crucial roundtable addressing energy consumer issues in the current energy crisis.

Our role is not just the one to bring a different perspective, but also to report best practices across Europe and to **support the policy-makers in developing more inclusive policies**. In this paper we will elaborate how young people are impacted by the current energy crisis and on the role of youth in supporting consumers.

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The current statement will be presented in the breakout group *"Rethinking communities and the way we produce and consume energy"* and it is divided in three main sections:

1. **Challenges for young energy consumers**
2. **How to facilitate access to alternative energy solutions for young consumers**
3. **The role of youth organisations**

## Key messages

- There is a general **lack of data** to properly assess the impact of the energy crisis on youth (e.g. challenges for young consumers, exposure to energy poverty, etc.). Collecting accurate data is crucial to develop targeted and effective policies in support of marginalised groups
- Youth organisations can build and maintain much more **efficient and inclusive communication channels** with the citizens than other stakeholders, providing access to information and insights that would be difficult to access. However, their value and efforts must be recognised and properly supported

- Governmental institutions play an essential role in tackling the challenges of young energy consumers from different aspects. Overall, a **more meaningful youth participation in decision-making processes** would lead to more effective and inclusive measures to tackle energy poverty among underrepresented and marginalised groups

## Challenges for young energy consumers

EYEN has indicated three levels of issues faced by young energy consumers:

### 1. Lack of education

**It is wrong to assume that all young people obtain a basic level of education:** according to [Eurostat](#), in 2021 only 41% of the EU population between 25-34 years old had completed tertiary education whilst 15% of the EU population between 20-24 years old had not completed at least an upper secondary level of education.

Many young people do not have the knowledge on how to deal with high energy prices, how their energy bill is affected and on how to implement alternative energy efficiency solutions at the least cost.

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Furthermore, upon signing the first energy contract, many young people do not know how to select or change providers and they are not financially experienced to properly handle their financial resources. On top of this, they are often unaware of the functioning of subsidies (e.g. energy efficiency, renewable energy, etc.) and how to access them.

### 2. Lack of resources

In its opening statement on the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, European Commissioner Nicolas Schmit for Jobs and Social Rights highlighted the strong correlation between risk of poverty and for younger generations:

*"The at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rate for children remains higher than the rate for the general population. This is a real challenge, as children growing up in poverty or social exclusion are less likely to do well in school, enjoy good health and realise their full potential later in life. In addition, **young people are generally less well covered by social protection systems, resulting in a higher risk of poverty or social exclusion for 16–29-year-olds.** They often face job precariousness and lack of affordable housing."*

Euractiv reported that “People aged 15-29 represent 17% of Europe’s population and a third of them are living in poverty”. In fact, they are more likely to not have a steady income (in September 2022, almost 15% of people under 25 years old were unemployed, according to Eurostat) and also students and professionals at the beginning of their career as interns or trainees have often lower and precarious incomes. Even if they have access to greater financial resources, their earnings might not yet be enough to sustain increasing energy prices.

Therefore this situation creates a great pressure on the financial independence from their families and on their psychological well being, fueled by insecurity about the future volatility of prices. These aspects place young people at very high risk of falling into energy poverty. In May 2021 (long before the current energy crisis), Euractiv shared that in France, 66% of young people in France had to cut back on their heating to reduce their bills and therefore exposed to energy poverty.

#### **How to define and calculate energy poverty**

Energy poverty is broadly understood as “the inability of households to maintain adequate levels of energy services at an affordable cost”, however there is no official EU-wide definition.

The Commission identifies energy poverty through its Energy Poverty Observatory (EPOV) by using four primary indicators: i) Arrears on utility bills; ii) Low absolute energy expenditure; iii) High share of energy expenditure in income; iv) Inability to keep warm adequately warm and 19 secondary indicators.

Energy poverty has a wide range of negative effects, for example it can lead to energy rationing (both through temperature reduction and partial heating of the home), energy bill debt, disconnection and debt or rationing on other areas of the household budget. Energy poverty has also been linked to negative impacts on social inclusion, educational attainment and mental health.

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### **3. Lack of opportunities**

Even if educated and financially well positioned, young people are often not permitted to take correct actions to respond to the current energy crisis. For example, they are less likely to own the place where they live as energy consumers. For the people born in the 1980s, only half owns the house where they live by 35 years of age.

This leads to restricted freedom of choice when it comes to a long-term response to the energy crisis and the global energy transition: young renters often cannot decide on energy efficiency measures for the house and do not have a say in changing its energy source.

The barriers identified above clearly leave young people seriously unprepared against the energy crisis

and forcing them to reduce their energy consumption even up to dangerous and unhealthy levels, in order to tackle the increasing or unforeseeable costs.

## How to facilitate access to alternative energy solutions for young consumers

Once identified the main challenges faced by young consumers, EYEN suggests the following actions to be taken in order to improve access to alternatives for young people in terms of energy saving practices, but also energy efficiency solutions and access to alternative clean energy sources:

### 1. Promote education on energy topics

The primary focus of legislators should be to provide further education to young people on topics like energy efficiency, energy saving practices and alternative energy comunitary realities; but also to provide them basic knowledge of household finance and service contracts. In a complex and extremely bureaucratized society, it is often not enough to be well educated in order to make the right decisions.

The building of an aware mindset starts in the early years of our life and it is pivotal that right communication in educational environments like school, but also recreational and sport centres, are supported and fostered by governmental institutions.

While EYEN understands that the reform of educational and formative systems in Europe will not be changed overnight, it stresses the importance of prioritising these topics in the political agenda. In the meanwhile, local activities, even lead by youth organisations, should be acknowledged and fostered. Independent organisations, even partly sponsored by the local or regional governments, could play a decisive role in providing advice and support on energy policies and energy-related decisions for households, via didactical activities, informative sessions or individual consultation.

### 2. More inclusive regulations to access alternative energy solutions

In parallel with effective education of young consumers, regulations should be designed in such a way to ensure access to renewable energy in the short and long term for a more diverse group of consumers. In the case of young energy consumers, as already presented, policies that stimulates transition to alternative energy sources via savings in the electricity bills are not very effective: young renters that pay the energy bills do not have power to decide on their energy source, as this decision is only of the house owner, which instead is often not affected directly by the energy price. This creates an artificial demand inelasticity.

What regulations are more in favour of young consumers? Policies that provide direct financial support (tax discount, subsidies, net metering, feed-in-tariff, etc...) for the transition to more sustainable energy solutions are the most effective. It goes without saying that packages of such regulations need to be accompanied by others focused on other aspects of young renters' support and protection, but these fall out of the current scope.

### 3. Link youth to energy communities

The concept of energy communities is often able to ensure the implementation of the above two aspects. On the occasion of the [EU Sustainable Energy Week 2022 \(EUSEW2022\)](#), EYEN provided recommendations on the engagement and education of youth in local energy communities summarised in the slide below:



**Community spirit**

**YOUTH POTENTIAL**

- Youth naturally unite and form communities
- Socially mobile and interactive

**BARRIERS**

- Resistance from older generations
- Limited dedicated time and spaces for youth involvement

**HOW TO SUPPORT**

- Provide recognition & cooperation opportunities (company related)
- Increase safe spaces for dialogues



**Hungry for knowledge**

**YOUTH POTENTIAL**

- Increased access to education & information
- Higher interest in sustainability issues

**BARRIERS**

- Misalignment of formal education with real-world needs
- Lack of applied knowledge development

**HOW TO SUPPORT**

- Foster collaboration between educational institutions and energy communities



**Agents of Change**

**YOUTH POTENTIAL**

- Ambassadors for Sustainable living
- Energy Community Assistants/Managers

**BARRIERS**

- Lack of asset ownership
- Low levels of trust

**HOW TO SUPPORT**

- Co-participation on assets risk and benefits
- Create dialogues and feedback within communities to foster change

*Source: EU Sustainable Energy Week 2022 – EYEN intervention: «The role of youth in energy communities»*

In particular, EYEN advocated for a **closer collaboration between educational institutions and energy communities** including internships and thesis projects, and an increased safe space for dialogue between different segments of the community.

## **4. Increase participation of youth in decision-making processes**

**Youth is significantly underrepresented at European level:** only 1 out of 5 (20%) Europeans is aged between 18 and 35, while just 1 out of 15 (7%) of Members of European Parliament is in the same age group.

Given the political underrepresentation of youth, it is crucial to meaningfully include relevant youth organisations in other spaces in order to develop more inclusive and effective supporting measures for energy consumers. This is of course not applied to youth only, but to any underrepresented and marginalised group.

EYEN welcomes a further democratisation of the EU law making processes and initiatives such as the European Citizens Panels included in the [Commission Work Programme 2023](#), where it is expressed the willingness to put citizens at the heart of European democracy. However, we also believe that these fora should be organised in such a way to ensure a meaningful participation for youth: youth organisations and young citizens from different backgrounds should have a dedicated space in such decision-making processes and be allowed to organise and cooperate across sectors and borders to strongly represent the next generations of the European Union.

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## **5. Facilitated access must be provided not only to renewable energy, but also to energy efficiency measures**

It is important to mention on this forum the fact that many other and more effective solutions than renewable energy sources are present and should be taken into consideration when looking at the climate and energy crisis. Improvement of energy efficiency and demand response are the most important technical solutions that would favour even small households.

Poor efficiency of buildings (public and private) must be seriously tackled as the first priority to help eradicate energy poverty in Europe. This needs a wide-ranging approach involving not only the energy sector but also the world of construction and renovation and the world of urban regulation. It is in the role of legislators and leaders of the sectors to take up the responsibility and the challenge.

In addition, small energy consumers (such as households and young people among them) found themselves incapable of reacting to high prices as there is no real energy demand elasticity for households. Demand response programs like the one recently launched by NGESO with the name of Demand Flexibility Service (DFS) are very good examples of innovative thinking.

However, despite the positive impact on households that these programs can have (NGESO foresees a max of 100 pounds of yearly savings with the DFS program), they are not yet fully inclusive. In order to exploit their role as elastic consumers, citizens need to be equipped with knowledge (on the functioning of the market and on effective actions) and proper tools (smart metres and smart

electrical appliances). The priority of governmental institutions should be to remove these barriers in order to fully untap the potential of consumers' participation in the market.

## The role of youth organisations

In order to be impactful in supporting the solution of the challenges mentioned above, youth organisations are missing several tools and resources. Among the major obstacles observed in Europe we acknowledged that youth organisations are lacking: i) Access to funding; ii) an effective exchange of know-how and best practices; iii) connection with relevant stakeholders (e.g. governmental institutions, think tanks, etc.). This results in a structural inefficiency in the origination and realisation of meaningful activities and small organisations with limited resources often end up *"reinventing the wheels"* with less impactful results.

The role of EYEN is to provide governmental institutions and other stakeholders in the energy transition with a starting platform to improve communication and collaboration with their young citizens.

By working with us, governments obtain a streamlined bilateral channel to engage with young citizens and obtain information, data and inputs that would be otherwise hardly accessible for them. This is achieved by the creation of a strong network where youth organisations are better coordinated and are able to transfer knowledge of successful practices between each other. By becoming our Members, youth organisations are empowered, connected and coordinated and we advocate for their meaningful inclusion in the energy transition.

## Examples of best practices

According to the European Youth Portal, there are 250 youth organisations currently active in Europe. **Only a few of them are focused on the energy sector only.** Their activities can have a significant impact on supporting young consumers and further empower them. Therefore they should be made known in order to spread best practices and increase awareness. The following examples include EYEN's Members and other youth organisations, but also government who engaged in meaningful initiatives regarding youth inclusions and participation:

- **Young Leaders in Energy and Sustainability (YES-Europe)** was founded through an initiative of the EPFL University of Lausanne in Switzerland in 2016. YES-Europe has built a European community for youth - young professionals and students - to discuss and form informed opinions, develop ideas, take responsibility, build local communities and act for change. One example of their numerous initiatives are the *"Energy Apéros"*, for which they bring together experts to debate a controversial and current topic in the energy sphere, such as hydrogen and nuclear power.

- **Future Energy Leaders Portugal (FEL.PT)** is based on the World Energy Council's FEL-100 program. FEL.PT provides a platform for the energy leaders of tomorrow to build a rich professional network and to interact with senior energy leaders in Portugal and across the world. To name a specific initiative towards accelerating the energy transition, they organise a cycle of events called "Energia em Debate" with the aim of demystifying "hot topics", such as energy poverty and energy access in the residential sector.
- The **Student Conference "Energy Efficiency and Sustainable Development" (SCEESD)** organised by North Macedonian students aims to raise awareness and develop potential on issues concerning energy efficiency and sustainable development. Its main target group are undergraduate and postgraduate engineering students, academic members and companies working in close relation to these topics. As a key activity, the organisation celebrated its 10th student conference which was held physically in October 2022. The conference offered opportunities for collaboration between university students from North Macedonia and abroad, eminent professors and young professionals.
- The **European Youth Energy Forum (EYEF)** has its first annual event in Lisbon between the 19th to the 23rd of November 2022. This year, the forum is organised in partnership with EnR (European Network of Energy Agencies), with the sponsorship of ADENE (Portuguese Energy Agency). 45 young Europeans from more than 20 countries were selected to build a position paper on the role of youth in the future of the European energy transition. They highlighted best practices from governments around Europe such as the Youth Climate Council in Poland, the work-studies at energy companies in French, the Youth Survey & Strategy led by the German government and the Youth Task Force for Stockholm+50 conference in Sweden. The participants at the forum also indicated bad practices among governmental institutions and companies that should not progress. The detailed report can be found on the EYEN website once it is published.
- **Local Energy (Linkedin)** is a youth organisation based in Potenza, Italy, and aims to give support to those who want to start a local energy community in order to save on energy bills. It also provides general advice on how to make local business activities more sustainable, from both an environmental and social point of view. The vision of the organisation is to strengthen the connection between business and human activities with the autochthonous territory and to enable a fair economic development, including the energy transition, with the use of digital technologies.

## What youth organisations need from the European Institutions

1. In order to ensure a sustainable participation of youth in the decision-making processes, **young people need to be granted permanently designated spaces** founded on a right-based approach. These spaces should be created in all parts of young peoples' life: at school, in sport centres, at university, at different governmental levels, in companies, etc.
2. The **value of youth in bringing urgency, disruptive ideas and critical mindset in the energy transition needs to be acknowledged and trusted** by ensuring meaningful and secure employment with plentiful development opportunities in the energy sector, education tailored to both the needs of youth and to those of the energy transition, and appropriate rewarding of youth involvement in decision-making fora.
3. **All types of youth need to be included in decision-making for the energy transition** with inclusive processes of participation that take into consideration language, financial, geographical, cultural, organisational and gender barriers.
4. Youth engagement should be undertaken solely in a meaningful and impactful way. **Any type of tokenism needs to be avoided**, such as for institutional image, achievement of diversity indicators or fulfilment of corporate social responsibility commitments. In order to avoid this, youth should be represented by accredited organisations that can bring a real and legitimate overview of young people's positions.
5. Dissemination of **opportunities should be transparent and accessible** without discrimination against young people. This needs political and financial support by decision-making institutions that must decide to seriously invest in youth civil society.