EYEN contribution to the 15th Citizens' Energy Forum

8th of November 2023, Dublin

The European Youth Energy Network[1] welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the 15th Citizens' Energy Forum and appreciates the inclusion of a youth organisation in the Forum proceedings. **EYEN advocates for the consideration of youth[2] 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.

The Young Energy Consumers (YEC) Task Force originated at the 14th Citizens Energy Forum, aiming to address the often overlooked vulnerable group, youth, in energy consumer policies. This task force gives a voice to the next generation of energy conscious consumers, prioritising their involvement in energy dialogues and solutions.

The Task Force deepens our understanding of European youth as an energy consumer group, highlighting their unique challenges and **supporting the policy-makers in developing more inclusive policies**.

The current statement will be discussed in the plenary session "*Protecting consumers this winter and beyond*" and is divided in three main sections:

I. Young Energy Consumer Profile
II. Energy Poverty and Youth
III. Stakeholder Map for Youth
IV. Recommendations

[1] EYEN is the Federation of European energy-focused youth organisations. We reshape formal youth engagement, streamline the voice of young people and create the space for them to act towards a just, empowered and collaborative European energy transition.
[2] By "Youth" we refer to citizens between 18 and 35 years old

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Young Energy Consumer Profile

Young energy consumers, spanning from 18 to 35 years of age across Europe, form a unique demographic characterised by specific attributes and distinct challenges.

Occupation

A significant proportion of this demographic consists of students and young professionals who find themselves at crucial junctures in their educational and career pathways. However, it's noteworthy that only around 40% have reached the milestone of obtaining tertiary degrees[3], indicating a varying level of educational attainment within the group. Their primary occupations are predominantly within the services or tertiary sector[4], where they typically earn an average monthly salary ranging from 1,400 to 1,600 euros[5].

Accommodation

As they step into the realm of independence, these young individuals often make urban areas their new homes. This is where they typically start their journey of living away from their parents' homes, which frequently occurs at the age of 27. Urban life often translates into renting accommodations, with many opting to either live independently or share living spaces with peers.[6] However, it's notable that privately rented homes in the European Union often exhibit lower energy efficiency in comparison to properties owned by their occupants[7]. The majority of these rented homes fall within energy efficiency ratings between classes C to E[8], with E being the lowest on the scale. As a result, housing expenses typically constitute a substantial portion of their overall consumption expenditure, usually ranging from 25% to 40%.

Well-being

Youth is renowned for its vibrant and active lifestyle. These young individuals are often found frequenting libraries, gyms, bars, clubs, exploring new destinations through travel, dining out, and maintaining flexibility in their work and study arrangements. This dynamic way of life,

[3] Education at a Glance 2023
[4] Living and working in Europe 2017
[5] Average EU salary for youth people based on Eurostat data, 600-3.000 is the range EU, higher salaries are seen in Western/Northern EU
[6] Sixth overview of housing exclusion in Europe
[7] Employment and Social Developments in Europe
[8] Systematic review: Landlords' willingness to retrofit energy efficiency improvements

however, comes with some common challenges and frustrations. High costs associated with bills and rent place significant pressure on their financial well-being, further exacerbated by their relatively modest incomes and the quality of housing they occupy.

Moreover, this group is recognized by their tech-savvy nature and environmental consciousness, demonstrating a high willingness to embrace innovative, energy-efficient, sustainable technologies. Thus, this consumer group seeks comprehensive solutions that not only address their financial concerns but also improve the quality and sustainability of their housing arrangements, ultimately contributing to their overall well-being.

Energy Poverty and Youth

According to the Energy Poverty Advisory Hub (EPAH),

"Energy poverty is a situation in which households are unable to access essential energy services and products, i.e. adequate warmth, cooling, lighting, and energy to power appliances",

where the main causes revolve around three main factors: low income, high energy prices and low energy efficiency of both households and buildings.[9]

Challenges for Youth

As mentioned earlier, young individuals typically earn modest incomes, and those who do not reside with their parents are more likely to rent their accommodations. These challenges present a threefold predicament for this demographic. First, their disposable income is significantly limited. Second, they encounter a restricted array of options for accessing affordable energy services. And finally, they contend with inadequate housing conditions characterised by low energy efficiency ratings. These factors collectively make it challenging for young people to maintain a comfortable and healthy living environment. In doing so, these challenges can have profound repercussions on their overall well-being and the quality of their lives, rendering them a particularly susceptible and vulnerable group to energy poverty.

[9] Energy Poverty Advisory Hub

Policy Analysis

Through the analysis of energy poverty policy of the EU, currently, no country has implemented specific energy policies tailored to address the unique needs of youth.[10] Furthermore, youth are not officially classified as a vulnerable group, and data on youth experiencing energy poverty remains scarce in most countries.[11] This way, few of these countries have formed schemes or received external funding to support projects that directly target youth in energy poverty. Nonetheless, despite this, most countries do acknowledge that energy poverty among the youth is an ongoing concern that requires attention and action.

For instance, the existing energy poverty schemes primarily focus on assisting with energy bill payments and offering renovation vouchers to enhance the efficiency of households. It's important to note that these schemes, while beneficial, are often tailored to address standard vulnerable groups or homeowners, leaving a notable gap in directly supporting the specific energy needs of youth in precarious living situations.

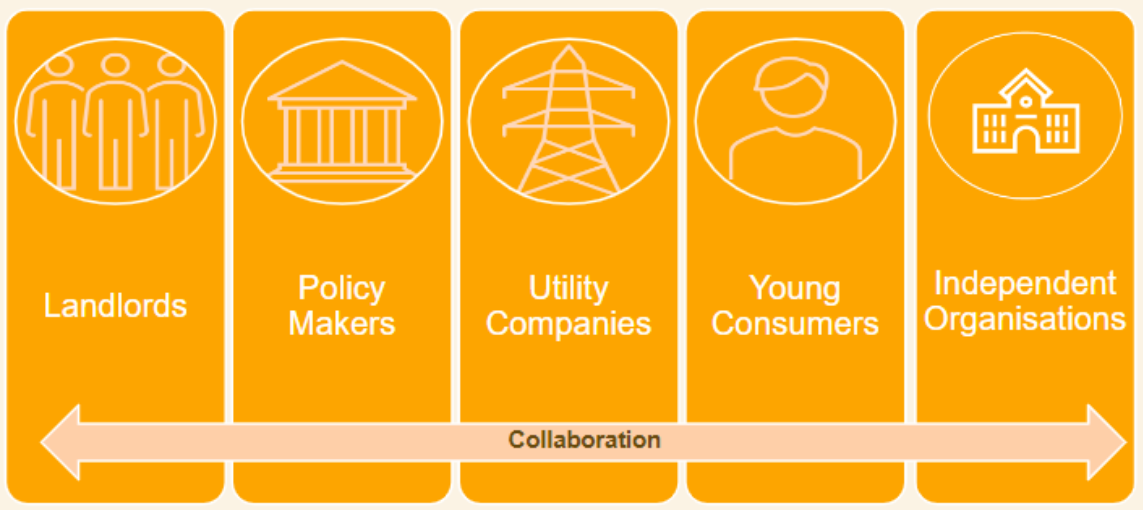
Stakeholder Map

To comprehensively address energy poverty among youth, it is essential to initiate with a thorough examination of the diverse and interconnected stakeholders who shape the energy landscape for this demographic. The stakeholder map portrays a complex web of actors, each playing a unique and pivotal role in crafting, influencing, and implementing policies and solutions related to energy accessibility and affordability for young consumers. This stakeholder map encompasses a diverse range of participants, including landlords, policy makers, utility companies, young consumers, and independent organisations. Each of these stakeholders plays a distinct and vital role in shaping the landscape of energy policies and solutions for youth. Landlords, for instance, are pivotal in providing housing options that directly impact the energy efficiency of accommodations. Policy makers hold the authority to craft and implement energy policies that can either support or hinder young consumers' access to essential energy services. Utility companies are at the forefront of supplying energy to

[10] EIA - Energy Poverty Policies Database

[11] SocialWatt Country Factsheets on energy poverty

consumers and can influence the availability and affordability of energy resources. Young consumers, as the direct beneficiaries of energy policies, represent a crucial voice in advocating for their needs and rights. Independent organisations contribute expertise, advocacy, and resources to drive positive change. By understanding the dynamics and interactions among these stakeholders, we can navigate the complex terrain of energy poverty and collaboratively work towards effective and sustainable solutions.



Recommendations

The insights derived from the research on young energy consumers and energy poverty topics have resulted in recommendations across five key domains, with the aim of establishing young energy citizens as significant stakeholders. These suggestions encompass the development of Tenant-Centric Housing Standards, the implementation of Incentive Initiatives, the active involvement of NGOs and Education, fostering Community Engagement, and advocating for a Systemic Shift in energy poverty alleviation strategies for Youth.

Tenant-Centric Housing Standards

Minimum Energy Performance Standards for Rental Properties: To ensure the energy efficiency of rental housing, a critical step is to establish a minimum energy performance standard, such as an EPC rating. This standard would be a prerequisite for legally renting out

properties. Landlords would bear the responsibility of upgrading their properties to meet this standard and providing certification to tenants. If the standard is not met, tenants should have the right to break the rental agreement without penalty. This policy encourages landlords to make necessary improvements and safeguards the comfort, health, and energy costs of tenants.

Early Lease Termination for Energy-Related Issues: Tenants should be granted the option to terminate their lease agreement prematurely if the landlord does not adequately address significant thermal performance or energy efficiency issues within the rental unit. Such issues could encompass problems like drafts, insufficient insulation, or malfunctioning heating and cooling systems. By allowing early termination under these circumstances, the policy incentivizes landlords to carry out essential renovations, ultimately protecting the well-being and energy expenses of tenants.

Subsidies for Energy Retrofitting: Providing grants or rebates directly to rental property owners, particularly for apartments in large urban cities, is a proactive approach to incentivize energy-efficient retrofitting of existing housing stock. These financial incentives, offered by local or national governments, could help cover a portion of the costs associated with upgrades such as high-performance windows, enhanced insulation, heat pump installations, or solar PV panels on rooftops. To further encourage investment in energy-efficient improvements, policymakers can link these subsidies to limits on future rent increases after retrofitting.

Tenant Choice in Energy Providers: Enhancing tenant autonomy in the realm of energy consumption involves giving them the freedom to choose their preferred energy provider. This empowers tenants with greater control over their energy costs and the ability to opt for green energy supply options, such as participating in a community solar bulk-purchase agreement. Empowering choice at the tenant level not only fosters financial savings but also contributes to a more sustainable and resilient energy landscape.

Incentive Initiatives

Energy Company Discounts: Targeted utility discounts can be a valuable tool in supporting young people and those living in shared arrangements. Student rates, for instance, can provide essential assistance to individuals pursuing education or training. Acknowledging shared living

situations with discounts is an effective way to recognize resource sharing. To maintain the integrity of such discounts, robust verification processes are essential to prevent improper access. As young people progress in their careers, discounts may phase out after they leave school, ensuring that support is directed towards those still developing their skills. It's crucial to pair these discounts with broader rate restructuring efforts to prevent the burden from shifting to other consumer groups. Combining these discounts with energy-saving advice can maximise both the social and financial benefits they provide.

Government Subsidies to Cap Bills: Introducing government subsidies to cap energy bills for all demographics is a promising approach to alleviate disproportionate hardship. Such support not only safeguards the education and career prospects of students but also ensures that assistance is universally accessible, eliminating any potential stigma and targeting assistance to those most in need. A key element of success is automatic enrollment with an opt-out option, ensuring broad participation. Long-term funding commitments are critical to sustain this initiative effectively. Additionally, pairing bill caps with efficiency incentives can promote responsible energy usage while keeping costs low, creating a win-win scenario for both consumers and the environment.

Green Job/ Education Incentives: To encourage youth involvement in the green sector through education and employment, a range of incentives can be introduced. These incentives might include special discounts on energy tariffs for individuals engaged in green sector education or employment, such as courses related to renewable energy, sustainability, and environmental science. Additionally, upskilling and training programs can be designed to bridge the skills gap and equip young individuals with the expertise needed for careers in the green industry. These programs could include apprenticeship schemes specifically aligned with the decarbonization and Net Zero realm, providing hands-on experience and opportunities for career development in environmentally conscious sectors. These incentives not only promote youth participation in the green job market but also contribute to a more sustainable and energy-efficient future.

NGOs & Education

Youth Engagement in Policy Making: Engaging youth in policy-making processes is essential for informed and effective decisions. Establishing youth advisory panels or councils can provide a platform for young individuals to actively participate in shaping energy policies. This involvement not only promotes inclusivity but also ensures that policies directly address the needs and concerns of the youth demographic.

Formal Roles in Governing Bodies: Another approach is to create formal roles for young representatives within governing bodies. These roles could be dedicated to advocating for youth-centric policies and energy solutions. By having a seat at the decision-making table, young individuals can influence the development and implementation of policies that directly impact them.

Knowledge-Driven Activism: Promoting knowledge-driven activism among youth is crucial. NGOs and educational institutions can collaborate to provide workshops, seminars, and online resources to empower young consumers with the information and skills needed to advocate for their energy rights effectively. This knowledge-driven activism not only informs youth but also equips them to engage in meaningful dialogues with policymakers.

Efficiently Integrating Dedicated Education into the Schooling System: Embedding energy-related education into the school curriculum is a proactive step. By integrating dedicated courses or modules on energy efficiency, sustainability, and consumer rights, young individuals can develop a solid foundation of knowledge from an early age. This educational approach prepares them to be informed and engaged energy citizens from the outset.

Communities Engagement

Active Participation as Prosumers in Energy Communities: Encouraging youth to actively participate in community energy initiatives, such as apartment owners' cooperatives for community PV generation and consumption, is a transformative approach. These initiatives provide young consumers with the opportunity to collaboratively generate and share their energy resources within their community. This hands-on involvement not only empowers youth but also fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility in the energy sector, promoting a more sustainable and resilient energy future.

Involvement in Local Government, Such as Municipalities or Neighborhood Councils: Empowering youth to engage in local government is another way to foster community engagement. By participating in municipal or neighbourhood councils, young individuals can influence decisions related to energy policies, infrastructure, and community initiatives. This involvement at the grassroots level ensures that youth have a direct impact on their local energy landscape.

Systemic Shift

Research to Cater to Young Consumers' Needs: Research initiatives should focus on understanding the energy challenges faced by youth, such as housing, affordability, and sustainability. This data-driven approach informs the development of targeted solutions that address their unique circumstances. For instance, research can explore models like shared ownership, 0-5% deposit options, government financial subsidies, rent-to-buy schemes, and retrofit incentives for apartment owners. These insights enable policymakers to tailor systemic changes that empower youth to navigate the energy landscape more effectively, promoting their energy security and well-being.

Facilitating Independence Through Accessible Housing Options, Like Shared Ownership: To facilitate independence among young consumers, providing accessible housing options is paramount. Shared ownership models, cooperative housing, and affordable housing initiatives can empower youth to secure their own homes and gain greater control over their living conditions. Such options reduce their vulnerability to energy poverty and foster self-sufficiency.

Providing Guidance on Energy-Efficient Housing and House-Hunting: Guidance and information on energy-efficient housing options and house-hunting strategies are vital. Educational programs and resources should be developed to help young consumers make informed choices when selecting their accommodations. This guidance ensures that they are well-equipped to choose energy-efficient and sustainable housing, promoting a systemic shift toward a more sustainable energy future for youth.

Next Steps

The next steps involve a comprehensive strategy. First, a multifaceted approach will be undertaken, starting with an exploration of employment, NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training), and housing issues impacting youth.

Following this, an open-access repository will be launched, serving as a platform for the dissemination of research findings and valuable resources to the public.

Collaboration will be strengthened through partnerships with universities and associations, facilitating collective efforts.

Additionally, funding opportunities will be actively sought to expand engagement and research activities within the task force. Furthermore, youth consultation will be facilitated, involving young individuals from across the EU to gain insight into their unique needs and build their capacity to become active energy citizens.

These coordinated steps aim to address the multifaceted challenges faced by the youth and drive positive change in the realm of energy poverty.