

COP'26 - UN CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE UK 2021

ENPOR PROJECT AT THE SIDE EVENT "ENGAGING CITIZENS IN URBAN
CLIMATE ACTION FOR INCLUSIVE JUST TRANSITION PROGRAMS



PHOTO BY CLIMATE ALLIANCE

EMPOWERING VULNERABLE FAMILIES IN THEIR ENERGY-EFFICIENCY REFURBISHMENT

Tine Heyse

President of the Board, Climate Alliance and Deputy Mayor for
Environment, Climate, Energy and International Solidarity, City of Ghent,
Belgium

This speech addressed the participants of the UN Climate Change
Conference UK 2021, Glasgow at the Side Event "Engaging Citizens
in urban climate action for inclusive just transition programs" on the
4th of November 2021.

“Thank you for joining this session. I will focus on the importance of energy poverty. It’s a topic that is really close to my heart. It adds a social dimension to the climate crisis.

Let me start with a **personal story**:

I live and work in Ghent, a city in Belgium, in a region of which we like to think that is rather rich. Well, not. The majority might be. It just depends on whom you ask.

One day, I visited a second hand store in a neighbourhood in the city, called The Brugse Poort. On display in the shop were small parcels of wood, made from scrap material from broken furniture, and other old stuff. The personnel of the shop put those packets aside for people who couldn’t afford other fuels to heat their homes. Can you imagine? It really shocked me. You can never heat a house comfortably that way, let alone an old, uninsulated house.

This story is by no means isolated. Many people live in energy poverty. In **Belgium, about 1 in 5 families** have problems paying their energy bills.

Of course the numbers may vary according to the definition you use, but the conclusion is clear: **the challenge is big, very big.**

Before we continue, I want to clarify something. Fighting energy poverty is **not a mitigation measure**. It will not necessarily help to decrease CO₂ emissions. We need to do it, no doubt, to improve people’s lives. But we can’t and shouldn’t count on it to help us save the climate. Poor people are not big polluters.

In Ghent we tackle climate poverty with an array of measures. I will explain just a few of them. One measure is personal **energy counselling**. At first, people get simple tips and tools to save energy. But we use this contact to try to convince them to go for a deep renovation. We have several financial incentives to do so. Energy loans and subsidy retention are just two of them.

We have transformed our system of additional subsidies into a revolving fund. People are now able to receive a substantial low-rate long term loan from the city. Up to 30.000 euros.

This loan will be aimed at basic housing quality, insulation and investments in renewable energy.

Why did we decide this? Vulnerable people don't have the means to pay up front for energy renovation. They don't benefit from a subsidy-based system, because they can't afford the investments.

With this revolving fund, we will overcome this barrier. Interest rates are very low, and payments will stretch over a long period of time.

People will be able to cover a large part of their repayments with the savings on their energy bills.

Also, since it's a revolving fund, eventually the city will get the money back, and be able to help more people.

We have a specific, similar approach for the rental market. And we work with subsidy retention for the people who bought a very bad house – sometimes they do it because they are discriminated on the rental market – but have really no money to renovate it. Subsidy retention means they get a budget from 30 000 euro and they only have to give it back when the house is sold (for example because the owner died).

As a personal note, I want to add this. **Energy poverty is closely linked with housing policy.** If you want to address energy poverty, you need to fix the housing problem. All across Europe, there is a structural housing problem. Prices are too high, public investment in housing is falling, the quality of, mainly rental houses, is very low, with high energy use as a consequence.

The EU has no competence to legislate in housing matters. So that means that states but also cities have a mayor role to play.

Currently, as a deputy mayor of the city of Ghent, I am responsible for both policy areas. And in my experience, it's necessary to tackle both problems, energy poverty and the housing crisis, at the same time.

As Climate Alliance, as municipalities, as a society, we need to fight against energy poverty.

Climate solutions are often seen as elitist. Poor families cannot afford electric cars, solar panels, heat pumps or costly energy renovations.

So most of the advantages of climate policy, are not directed towards poor people. They usually don't receive the benefits of the climate transition.

But with the recent increase of gas prices, flooding, heat waves and drought, they do receive their share of the effects of climate change.

Climate policy should not enlarge social inequality, on the contrary, we need social corrections for all climate policies.

And that's why in Climate Alliance, in our new charter, **climate justice** got a central role. And that's why we are active in ENPOR and why CA is leading the EU Energy Poverty Advisory Hub. We, as **climate frontrunners**, also need to be **social frontrunners**. If we fail to do so, we fail a lot people that are already vulnerable. We can't afford that. We really can't.

Thank you."

Find out more on the ENPOR Project – Actions to mitigate energy poverty in the private rented sector: www.enpor.eu

Contact Eva Suba at Climate Alliance for more information:
e.suba@climatealliance.org

THE ENPOR PROJECT



Energy poverty is a critical factor for fair energy transition. Alleviating its impact in the private rented sector (PRS) is a challenge because it can be hidden. The ENPOR Project increases the capacity of the decision makers to mitigate its effects by co-designing and implementing ten policies in 7 EU Member States. ENPOR aims to make energy poverty in the PRS visible and test energy efficiency support schemes to address it. ENPOR examines in depth energy poverty policies for the PRS across the EU, monitors the dimensions of energy poverty in the PRS (via an Energy Poverty Dashboard), and supports tailored policies and will provide guidelines for other countries.

Project start: 01/09/2020 | Duration 3 years | Financed by: EU Call: H2020-LC-SC3-EE-2019 under the topic: "Mitigating household energy poverty"

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