

# 2014 Annual Convention of the European platform against poverty and social exclusion

## Energy Poverty and Vulnerable Consumers Workshop

### *Key Messages*

- 1. Energy poverty is a door to social exclusion and poverty, but also a fundamental right. You can't effectively tackle energy poverty without addressing inequality.** Specific measures are therefore needed on energy policy, but also more general policies to ensure access to rights, resources and services to fight poverty and promote fairer distribution.
- 2. Framing the debate: is the focus on vulnerable consumers/vulnerable citizens the right one? Current agreements protecting vulnerable 'citizens are a clear step forward but run the risk of a restricted approach, targeting only last resort.** A more comprehensive approach should see energy poverty as a structural problem ensuring universal affordable access to **Services of General Interests** and the **right to affordable, energy for all.**
- 3. Multidimensional causes need integrated strategies: building consensus on the causes/drivers. Widespread agreement on the multiplicity of drivers, although differences over which elements are drivers of vulnerability – market conditions, living conditions, social and individual or 3 pillar approach - inability to heat your home to an adequate level according to WHO definitions, dependent on 3 factors: adequacy of disposable income, fair prices, and reducing energy consumption/efficiency. Clear need for integrated strategies, with a mix of regulatory and non-regulatory measures covering economic, social, energy and housing policy.**
- 4. What has been the role of the EU policy framework? Some important steps forward but more focus on implementation with social impact assessment focusing on consumer needs.** Progress made with the Third Energy Package including national action plans, cut-off guidelines, vulnerable consumers, but limited implementation. Concern raised of the need for more transparent monitoring of the impact of liberalization/privatisation on prices/services. The Energy Efficiency Directive offers new opportunities, but needs careful social impact assessment to ensure fair transition, and that the poor are not penalized.
- 5. EU Monitoring is key to making progress, but depends on common definitions and data/indicators.** Interest expressed in EESC proposal for *EU Energy Poverty Observatory* which could develop this work, together with stakeholders and the institutions, with a clear focus on consumer needs rather than only the better functioning of the energy market.
- 6. Comprehensive energy efficiency strategy with social and affordable housing at the centre.** Energy efficiency offers clear social/environmental win-win, but needs to focus on affordable housing and ensure effective ex-ante social impact assessment to prevent unfair increase in financial burden for those who have least control over their energy consumption and can least pay. Particular focus on private housing to provide guarantees against unfair rent increases. Good practices of innovative, bottom-up housing efficiency programmes engaging users could be supported through Structural Funds and as part of 300 bn investment package.
- 7. Meaningful Participation of Stakeholders –** engagement of consumers, but particularly tenants and people in poverty is essential for credibility, and key to develop effective integrated strategies. This should be at regional and local level as well as EU and national. Key opportunity to link to other forums on poverty eg Platform against Poverty/Europe 2020.