

## **Energy Poverty: the Greek case**

**by Spyros Psychas**

1. Throughout the decade 2010-2020 Greece faced very high rates of poverty. The risk of poverty or social exclusion had reached 36% in 2014 and has since decreased slightly each year to reach 28.9% in 2020. Constantly 1/3 of the population experiences conditions of risk of poverty or social exclusion and deprivation of basic goods and services.
2. The average citizen has lost more than 25% of their income in the last 12 years due to the prolonged economic crisis. The situation has been equally problematic in the last two years due to the Covid 19 pandemic, the reduction of job opportunities and the shrinking of the social services provided.
3. Greece has the most expensive energy prices, especially of electricity and gas, from almost all European countries. In the last year, on average, the cost of gas doubled, electricity increased by 45% and heating oil by 34%. In recent years, more and more apartment buildings do not operate with central heating, because owners and tenants are not able to pay the cost of heating and the utility costs.
4. The effects of the increases in energy on the consumer but also on the producers are strong and the prices of the produced goods increase daily while the wages are low. Inflation in January 2022 was 5.5% and is growing.
5. The poorest groups of the population try to replace the heating of their house with any fuel that is cheaper even if it is unsuitable, polluting and unsafe. The result is a large number of accidents and a very high number of victims of domestic fires, due to faulty heating appliances, fumes, etc. In 2020, 68 people died from fire in their homes and in 2021 there were 83 deaths for the same reason, more in December. This is a new phenomenon for Greece.
6. Until recently, most of the electricity was generated from polluting lignite, which exists in the center of the Peloponnese and in North Western Greece, where the local economy for the last 70 years has relied almost exclusively on lignite mining and the operation of large power plants. The Greek government has recently announced an overly ambitious and short-term plan to switch to cleaner forms of electricity generation and has announced the closure of lignite power plants and the complete abolition of lignite use. This has created intense insecurity in these two areas of Greece, which have high unemployment, low incomes and a high poverty rate.
7. The transition to cleaner forms of energy production should not lead to greater poverty for the already poor and greater energy poverty for those who can no longer heat their homes. We do not agree to increase the "green" taxes for the production of carbon dioxide, without the parallel support of the vulnerable social groups.

8. There are also all the issues of how the local economy is being redesigned in transition and how the working population will be retrained to acquire new professional skills and to respond to new energy production conditions and the production of environmentally friendly products and services. We cannot have changes in the local economy without the people and in the absence of the local community.
9. The issues of energy poverty are crucial for most European countries and the EAPN and EPSU initiative is very positive because it contributes to the cooperation and mutual understanding of social and environmental organizations.