

editorial

Welcome to ACHIEVE

We are pleased to send you this newsletter communicating the first news of the ACHIEVE project, which aims to identify households facing fuel poverty, and to work with them to implement appropriate measures to reduce their energy and water consumption and bills.



Energy is consumed in many forms, for example for heating water, cooking, use of electrical appliances and lighting. It represents an important part of household bills. To efficiently manage energy and water consumption, households must have appropriate knowledge. They can also be supported by having devices that enable them to actively manage their consumption but due to wider financial circumstances, the households facing fuel poverty are often those who have less opportunity to purchase such devices. They can be efficient light bulbs, thermometers and thermostats, weather stripping for windows and doors, transparent insulation foil for simple-glazing, tap aerators, dual-flow flush mechanism, and even shower timers...

One way to alleviate fuel poverty is to make these devices more accessible for households at risk, either by providing them, or by installing them. It is important that the tools fit the situations. The impact of these devices can be easily measured in kWh or litres of water, which are easily turned into euros.

Are the families facing financial and social difficulties the most "open" to such investments and behaviour change? Possibly not, or at least not more than the rest of the society. However, the most vulnerable households can benefit from receiving dedicated and tailor-made information and assistance on these topics and this is what ACHIEVE partners wish to bet on.

Experiences to disseminate energy and water saving devices exist throughout Europe, but are still few and links between them are not established. They have a "social" value, as well as an environmental and an economical value, through the savings directly generated on the lowest budgets. They help the concerned families feel supported while stepping out of the belief that "saving energy means deprivation."

This newsletter is the first in a series of six to be published every 6 months, in order to summarise the project's progression and results. The complete documents are available on the project website: <http://www.achieve-project.eu>. We would be pleased to welcome any comment or suggestion for future contents you would like to see in the coming newsletters of the project.

Marie Moisan, project coordinator

What is fuel poverty?

European definition of fuel poverty

Between 50 million and 125 million people in Europe are estimated to be fuel poor. This number is inevitably deemed to increase in the future, in line with rising energy prices. A household is said to be fuel poor when it meets difficulties or cannot afford its basic energy needs for housing. Households in fuel poverty have energy costs, which are excessive compared to overall household income. A common definition has emerged that any household that would need to spend more than 10% of its annual income on energy is in fuel poverty. However, also a slightly different definition – twice the median fuel expenditure as a proportion of income – is commonly used in the European Union¹.

Fuel poverty may be caused by the convergence of inter-related factors:

- ✓ Low income, which is often linked to general poverty
- ✓ High energy prices, including the use of relatively expensive fuel sources (depending on the country energy structure it can be electricity domestic fuel...)
- ✓ Poor energy efficiency of a home, e.g. through low levels of insulation and old or inefficient heating systems.

Heating is the first item that strains the global energy bill for a household (around 70% of the annual energy consumption). However, the running of appliances and the energy used for hot water consumption are also important: appliances account for a growing proportion of households' energy budgets (low income households tend to use older and more inefficient appliances), and water consumption is showing a general tendency to increase (amongst all categories of households).

Fuel poverty is not a term that households will apply spontaneously to themselves. Rather, fuel-poor households can be identified through a number of relevant indicators (EPEE project) including:

- ✓ the inability to pay energy bills,
- ✓ cold damp living conditions,
- ✓ disconnection from energy supply,
- ✓ self-disconnection (in some countries),
- ✓ debts owed to the energy supplier,
- ✓ health impacts associated with poor living conditions,
- ✓ disease,
- ✓ homes with low energy performance.

¹ Grayson Heffner, Nina Campbell, Evaluating the co-benefits of low-income energy-efficiency programmes, International Energy Agency, June 2011



Thus, the first challenge when setting up local action plans to tackle fuel poverty is to identify those households that are facing problems in affording their basic energy needs. The second step is to propose to them a range of solutions that can tackle fuel poverty in a durable way, while also addressing emergency situations. The last step is to find a way to finance fuel poverty abatement on a long term basis, and to widely disseminate such actions.

focus story

Transfer of German experience

ACHIEVE covers some countries where consulting households on how to abate fuel poverty is already ongoing (Germany, UK and France) and some countries where fuel poverty is hardly tackled at all (Slovenia and Bulgaria). This is why the starting step of the action was to present how energy efficiency measures and equipment are being introduced in German households.

Caritas Frankfurt has been running a program for empowering households to act on fuel poverty since 2005. The program is called *Energiesparservice* and it was developed as cooperation between Energy Department, Department of Social Services, JobCenter Frankfurt am Main and Caritas Association Frankfurt. The program started with 12 people who were long-term unemployed and has now developed into a national initiative called "Stromspar-Check" (energy-savings check initiative) in over 100 cities in Germany.

The program empowers households through two visits of energy saving advisors. First an appointment is set with the household (by phone). During the first visit, the advisors check the equipment in the household and energy bills of the household (if available). Based on the check, calculations are made on where to save energy most efficiently. A set of recommendations is made and during the second visit, the experts install easy to use energy saving devices like efficient bulbs, low water flow aerators or switchable power strips. They also provide advice on changes in behaviour to further save energy and water and if necessary, also refer the residents to other service offers (e. g. consumer advice centres). Annual savings of households can run up to 140 EUR and over 1100 EUR in the long run.

Linking project kick-off meetings with a real experience in how to reduce fuel poverty is not a common practice in IEE projects, yet it was a very useful one. Project partners had the opportunity to witness a real visit in the household, which was a valuable experience for the continuation of the project.

What is ACHIEVE about?

Practical and structural solutions helping Europeans in reducing fuel poverty

With the rising energy prices, more and more households across Europe are facing the challenges of fuel poverty. Although the problem is often a complex one, some solutions can be simple and cost-effective.

Objectives

The aim of ACHIEVE is to contribute to practical and structural solutions for reduction of fuel poverty in Europe. This overarching aim of the action is supported by the following specific objectives:

- ✓ to analyse the overall situation in pilot areas, in order to have a solid basis for further action through identifying and mobilizing existing knowledge, practices and skills,
- ✓ on this basis, to shape appropriate measures, tools and communication for working with the target groups and key actors in order to lead them on saving energy,
- ✓ to equip new groups of people with knowledge and skills for implementing visits at the households', and distribute them a set of free-energy and water saving devices together with tailor-made advice to decrease consumptions,
- ✓ to coordinate key actors into a concerted effort for formulating long-term solutions and develop a network for implementing those long-term solutions.

ACHIEVE partners

In France ACHIEVE work is shared across three organisations. CLER, the program co-ordinator, is an environmental protection association that manages a network of 200 organisations specialising in the field of rational use of energy and renewable energy all over France. IDEMU is a non-profit organisation that combines activities oriented towards qualifying training actions, socio-professional insertion, environment observation and energy consulting with the public and institutions. GERES is a non-profit NGO mainly focusing on environmental conservation, climate change mitigation and adaptation, reduction of energy poverty, and improvement of livelihood of the poor.

In UK, the project is run by Severn Wye Energy Agency, an independent not-for-profit company and registered charity. Severn Wye promotes sustainable energy and affordable warmth through partnership, awareness-raising, innovation and strategic action.

The German partner is CARITAS, the largest welfare association in Germany. The Caritas Association Frankfurt developed, in 2005 with the City of Frankfurt, the "Cariteam-Energiesparservice" as a concept for an employment promotion. At the same time this program assists low-income households by consulting them on energy consumption and installing energy saving devices for free.

In Slovenia, the project is managed by Focus Association for Sustainable Development. The priority issue in the energy program of FOCUS is advocating sustainable energy and energy efficiency.



The priorities of the Bulgarian partner, the Energy Agency of Plovdiv (EAP), are the energy efficiency of buildings, the development of sustainable energy communities, energy efficiency and renewable energy sources in SMEs, and energy/environmental education.



country focus

Fuel poverty in Bulgaria

The term fuel poverty has no concrete definition in Bulgarian legislation. For the purposes of the project, we define a fuel poor household as such that cannot afford its energy needs as evidenced by the fact that the household is applying for social aid for heating during the winter. The Social Ministry in Bulgaria gives out aid for heating during winter to selected households. The target group of ACHIEVE will be households applying for this kind of aid. An important target group is households that use coal for heating. As part of the project EAP will co-operate with the Ministry of Environment and Water and Ministry of Labor and Social Policy to propose and implement changes in the current legislation, so that the use of inefficient and polluting coal in heating is discontinued and instead, use of modern sources of biomass is stimulated.



Fuel poverty in Slovenia

Due to growing prices of energy the issue of fuel poverty is becoming an alarming issue in Slovenia. Roughly speaking, about one third of the households in Slovenia suffer fuel poverty (by the European definition). However, energy prices are not the only contributing factor. Also of relevance is the poor condition of buildings. 44,5% of low income families and 28% of families with higher income level live in humid and poorly maintained buildings (leaking roof, humid foundations, floor or walls, shattered windows). This means that in Slovenia fuel poverty could be widespread also in households that are not strictly poor. In the municipality of Ljubljana, where the Slovene ACHIEVE activities will take place, more than half of the buildings date between 1945 and 1990, which characterizes the flat fund as an energy inefficient one. Yet, there are many unresolved questions as to how to identify the households in need of support.

Fuel poverty in France

In France, it is assumed that between 4 and 5 million households are facing fuel poverty, whether because they spend more than 10% of income on total energy costs, or because they impose self-limitations on their energy consumption and suffer from cold at home. Despite a national plan and funding scheme starting in 2010, (aiming to help 300 000 occupying owners with low-incomes to improve the energy performances of their home from 2017) visits remain the very beginning step for any following action, whether it is on occupant behaviour or on the building itself. If they are not clearly organised, they are not implemented at all. It relies on the local actors and authorities to find a way to identify the concerned households in their territory, and to organise and finance these mass visits.

Several local initiatives are being implemented in France to fight energy poverty, echoing back ACHIEVE activities. The project activities will take place in Marseille and Plaine Commune (an agglomeration around Paris).

Within the frame of ACHIEVE, the French partners have set up a national task force with a range of structures for carrying out these type of projects with visits. Partners include local authorities, professional integration enterprises, and non-profit organizations. This task force aims to exchange and share each structure's experience, and to push forward the need and opportunities for public authorities to participate in such type of actions.

The final aim of the task force meets the ACHIEVE goal: to develop an economical and organisational pattern for mass visits that is urgently needed.



Fuel poverty in the UK

Project Achieve comes at a time when an unfavourable economic climate and rising energy prices have impacted on those groups who both traditionally and recently are, considered to be at risk of energy poverty. In 2009, the number of fuel poor households in the UK was estimated at around 5.5 million.

In the UK project ACHIEVE will be based in the county of Wiltshire, in the west of the county which statistically has a higher propensity towards energy poverty. Wiltshire has been working towards creating training and employment opportunities for its residents; a policy designed to mitigate the impact of the economic recession. ACHIEVE will work to address the training needs of residents in line with the 'Green Deal' a flagship energy efficiency policy for the domestic sector based on a 'Pay as you save' model. The government expects around 250,000 new jobs to be created as a result of this policy. Project ACHIEVE hopes to help advisors on the road to employment within this sector and to develop a local, skilled workforce.

Fuel poverty in Germany

In Germany, there is neither an official definition for fuel poverty nor is there statistical data about people who live in fuel poverty. The consumer protection association estimates that more than 800,000 households (2 %) per year are cut off from their power supply because they are not able to pay their bills.

The energy prices in Germany have gone up continuously in the past few years. After the liberalisation of the electricity market in 1998, the average price for electricity has risen from 15 Cent to 24 Cent per kWh in 2011. On the other hand, there is a lack of control because households only get a bill once a year, based on their yearly consumption. It leads to significant problems for low-income households if they have to manage additional payments at the end of the year.

For people with low income, e.g. people who get social welfare or long-term unemployment benefits, the costs for heating, water and water heating are paid by the municipality. Thus the main problem is how to pay for the electricity consumption for cooking, washing, cooling. Only 5 % of the German households use electricity for heating as well.



Saving gadgets

Small improvements making a significant impact

Project ACHIEVE will help households to reduce their energy consumption in a measurable way by installing energy and water saving gadgets in the home.

Spotlight on water saving showerhead



In the average home, heating water amounts to around 20% of annual energy use. Finding ways of reducing this can have a big impact on energy use. A water saving shower head can be fitted to most mains pressure showers. By reducing the flow rate of the water from between 10- 15 l/min to 7-8 l/min up to a 50% reduction in required heated water can be made. By adding a little air to the water mix very little difference is noticed. Previous use of this product has demonstrated an average saving of 500kWh and 17m³ of water per year (experience of the Cariteam Energiesparservice Frankfurt).

Spotlight on multi socket power strip



Often the best solutions are the most simple. Appliance use, combined with lighting accounts for around 20% of our energy use. However, with an increase in the amount of gadgets that we use this figure looks set to rise. Many of the appliances that we use have the option of leaving them on standby. While this can make them more user-friendly it means that they are consuming energy while they are not in use. For example, in the UK it is estimated that around £900 million is wasted every year by leaving appliances on standby. Having the option of turning all entertainment appliances (TV, Decoder etc) off at the same time can make saving energy easier for a household. This device has been demonstrated to generate average savings of about 83 kWh /year (experience of the Cariteam Energiesparservice Frankfurt).

latest from ACHIEVE

CARITAS guidelines, describing the concept of Cariteam Energy Saving Service and the procedure of introducing and implementing the project step by step, is now available in its English version on ACHIEVE website (under 'Materials'). This document proposes a voluminous amount of practical aids (various checklists and templates), as well as further useful information about the German project in the annexes.

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