



Antwerp's pledge to the European Pillar of Social Rights

Our commitment to principle 20 on access to essential services with a focus on reducing energy poverty

The city of Antwerp is composed of very different neighborhoods with regard to housing stock (quality, build, age, type of buildings, ...), socio-economic profile of its inhabitants, energy demand and supply, etc. A very high share of the housing stock is privately-owned. 70% of Antwerp's population lives in apartment blocks with in many cases split ownership. This makes large-scale energetic renovation, one of the key goals in Europe's recent policy, very challenging.

Insufficient access to affordable, reliable and clean energy and the principle of *just transition* to a greener society is also of major concern to our city's social policy. Today, Antwerp needs to accommodate a growing group of vulnerable people on its private and social housing markets. Limited access to essential services such as water, electricity or gas, reveals severe poverty, and intensifies it. It affects families in their most basic needs. In Flanders, 15% of all households suffer from energy poverty, 32.8% of single-parent families live in energy poverty and 30.4% in water poverty. Antwerp's city council is committed to tackle energy poverty in a holistic way. Therefore, the City council agreement of adopted a comprehensive approach to tackle the multifaceted challenge of energy poverty by focussing both on the renovation of the building stock as well as lowering the cost of energy for households and by guaranteeing a minimum supply for all citizens.

Antwerp is prioritising energy poverty on our city agenda from an integrated approach. The city council designated one deputy mayor to be responsible for both energy-related policies (energy, environment, climate) and social affairs, to be able to integrate the two policy areas in a comprehensive approach to addressing energy poverty in our city. The city of Antwerp developed specific tools to deal with the complexity of energy poverty:

1. [Ecohouse Antwerp](#) is a one-stop-shop for households offering all city services on sustainable building and living. Focusing on energy reduction and renewables, it showcases solutions (such as green roofs) and introduces them through workshops, while also offering individual advice on energy retrofitting measures. The service is complemented with the management of loans and grants for sustainable retrofitting. A dedicated policy is set up for vulnerable groups. Since 2008, Ecohouse Antwerp conducts yearly circa 2,000 so called 'energy scans' for vulnerable groups (the scans are available to residents with increased reimbursement from the health insurance fund for medication/doctor's fees, these include about 1/5th of the city population). During an energy scan, a free package of energy-saving materials is placed (such as LED lamps, energy-saving shower head, radiator foil, etc.), a cheaper energy supplier is sought for the customer and his/her behaviour is discussed with the customer. Carrying out energy scans saves vulnerable households around 447.000 euro a year in electricity, gas and water costs. The city of Antwerp is committed to do more; we are looking into new ways to add to this service a circular lease system for household appliances



(freezer, refrigerator, washing machine, etc.) for vulnerable Antwerp citizens in the Autumn of 2020/Spring 2021.

2. A dedicated 'Energy team' within the social affairs department helps citizens with an individual request for help related to energy or water. They act as mediator between energy suppliers and clients, e.g to negotiate feasible repayment plans and to prevent to cut off the energy or water supply (for water supply circa 1,500 files are initiated on a yearly basis, for gas/electricity in concerns circa 3,500 files yearly). For the most vulnerable households, the energy debts can be partially taken charged. Particular to the work of the Energy team in Antwerp is that they *proactively* track down these customers in different ways and reach as many customers as possible: by sending letters, calling, texting, whatsapping, emailing, and home visits. We are committed to ensure that as few energy or water closures as possible take place in Antwerp.

Intensive collaboration between these two services is key in detecting and tackling energy poverty on a household level. The energy team in social affairs identifies vulnerable households which are then helped in behavioural change and infrastructural improvements through the expertise of the Ecohouse.

In the following years, the city commits to continue this approach while strengthening our support for collective renovations of multiple apartment buildings (buildings with multiple ownership of apartments, mostly inhabited by tenants), and investigating third-party-financing of energy saving measures and renewable energy investments with on-bill repayment schemes to overcome a split-incentive hurdle for owners/tenants. As such, our city endeavours the access to essential services such as energy with a focus to keeping energy affordable and accessible for all citizens.

Continued EU funding in the domain of local energy transition is vital to realise this principle, notably to experiment with new technologies, methods for behavioural change, or to develop new methods of financing inclusive energy transition. In the period 2014-2020 the city of Antwerp benefitted from support in this domain from the Interreg projects Triple-A (Interreg 2 seas), on encouraging energy efficient home renovations and ACE retrofitting (Interreg North-West Europe) focussing on the legal, human and financial barriers to the energy retrofitting of condominiums. Our city is also involved as innovation partner in projects such as BE-REEL! (LIFE) experimenting financial instruments for vulnerable groups and encouraging energy investments in the rental market, and Horizon projects, such as SONNET, aimed at understanding how social innovation (energy cooperatives, funding schemes for retrofits,...) contributes to energy transition.

Our city supports the goals of the European Green Deal as well as the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights. Still, the ambition of a just energy transition and the Renovation wave initiative must be reinforced with explicit objectives to reduce energy poverty. Also, new beefed-up energy policies and the proposed inclusion of heating fuels in the Emission Trading Scheme may not lead to increased energy poverty. Revenues from emission allowances should be accessible to local governments to finance investments in local renewable energy communities accessible for all. We need due attention, financing and funding at all levels of government from local to national and EU level to address energy



poverty and prevent its escalation as we shift to green energy. We firmly believe that energy should be affordable for everyone, including the most vulnerable in our society.

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