

# Plugging the gap between energy poverty management and the lived experience: five principles

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# Introduction

- Linking lived experience and policy on energy poverty (credit also to Ross Gillard and Victoria Pellicer)
  - **Lived experience of energy poverty:** the perspective of those actually experiencing an inability to afford adequate energy services
  - **Policy on energy poverty:** in a very different state in different European contexts (see <https://www.energypoverty.eu>).
- We propose: 5 principles to link the lived experience and energy poverty policy and practice.



# Today's talk

- Energy poverty in the Netherlands (lived experience and policy)
- Energy poverty in England (lived experience and policy)
- Using lived experience to inform policy: 5 principles.

# Energy poverty in the Netherlands

# Introduction

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- In the Netherlands **at least 750.000 households** struggle with energy poverty.
- The project ECN worked on focussed on the **effectiveness of interventions** aimed at increasing energy efficiency and reducing energy poverty.
- Average potential savings for a household struggling with energy poverty can be **100 euros per year**.
- Benefits are threefold:
  - CO2 reduction
  - Cost reduction for households
  - Potential job creation



# Researched interventions



	Energielegioen	Flex Prepaid	Energiebank NL	Vroeg Eropaf	Doe mee bespaar slim energie
Location	Rotterdam	Nationwide	Arnhem	Amsterdam	Utrecht
Scale	165 households	(confidential)	45 households Phase 1	25 households	2000 households
Information & Education					
Monetary incentive					
Non-monetary Incentive					

# Research Methods

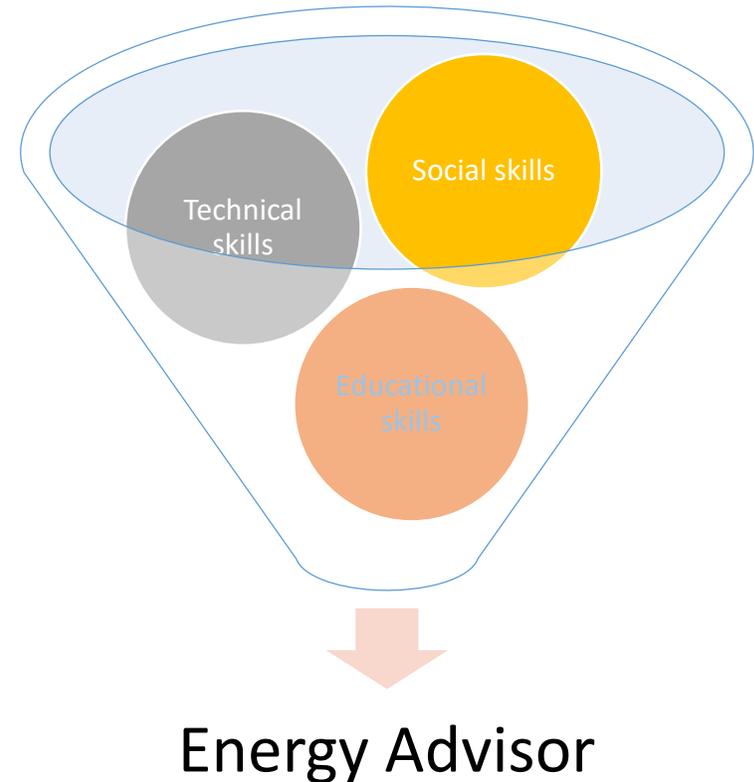
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- ECN developed a generic monitoring and impact assessment tool **for four local pilot projects** aimed at combating energy poverty.
- A comparative analysis based on quantitative research and performance indicators:
  - Participatory observations
  - In-depth interviews
  - Online surveys
  - Focus groups with coaches

# Results

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- Tackling energy poverty is done through energy advice given by an advisor with **social, technical and educational skills**, preferably in multiple visits.
- Advice should be **practical, and related to personal motivations** for changing routine energy behaviours.



# The perfect energy advice

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- Structured and **clear list** of energy saving tips
- Advice given by an **experienced, well trained energy advisor**
- Right **amount of advice** on an understandable level
- It is related to the **intrinsic motivation** of a household
- The advisor **helps installing energy saving products**
- Show the **smart phone app** of the utility company so a household can see and track its own energy use
- **Create repetitive feedback** of the advice, after the actual visit has been finished.

# Fuel poverty in England/UK

(note Fuel not Energy – but mostly amounts to the same thing)

# National context (UK)

- **Austerity** (since 2010), substantial public sector cuts, including cuts to benefit entitlement.
- **Reform of disability benefit system**, resulting in less people categorised as disabled, and lowered disability benefits.
- Housing stock is poorly maintained and **energy inefficient**.
- Energy **bills increasing** (doubled between 2005 and 2011), energy **consumption decreasing**.
- Fuel poverty is a **national issue** and has had associated policy since it was raised by Brenda Boardman in 1991



# Depth of the problem

“It were so bad my neighbour said to me ‘look, I’ve got a spare room, just come and sleep here for the winter and keep warm.’ How can you live like that? You know, going to their house like that. They are two old people, in their 70s but they were quite willing to do that. I can’t do that, just move in like that.”

Jan, single person household, Leeds resident, 60s



# Nature of the problem

“It’s a bit harder with them like the Playstation ... it does my head in. You know, they are on it and there’s not a lot I can do about that ... I do 7 days so to be honest most of the time I’m not here. And if I says to them you can only go on ‘t Playstation three hours a day I’m wasting me breath.”

Sally, Leeds resident, single woman in 40s living with 4 children and 1 adult child



# Characterising FP from the bottom up

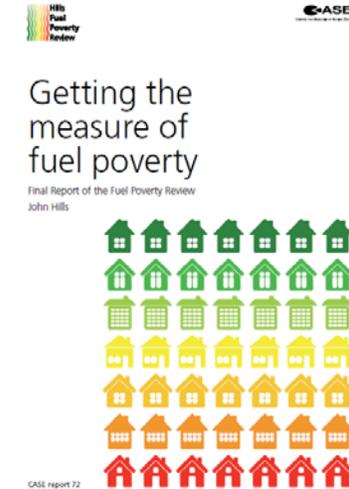
## Challenges to Energy Vulnerability:

- quality of dwelling fabric
- energy costs and supply issues
- stability of household income
- tenancy relations
- social relations within the household and outside
- ill health

(from Middlemiss and Gillard, 2015)

# The new politics of fuel poverty in England

UK Coalition government:  
Conservatives and Liberal Democrats,  
2010-2015



**Pre-coalition (England):**  
Households that spend more  
than 10% of income on fuel

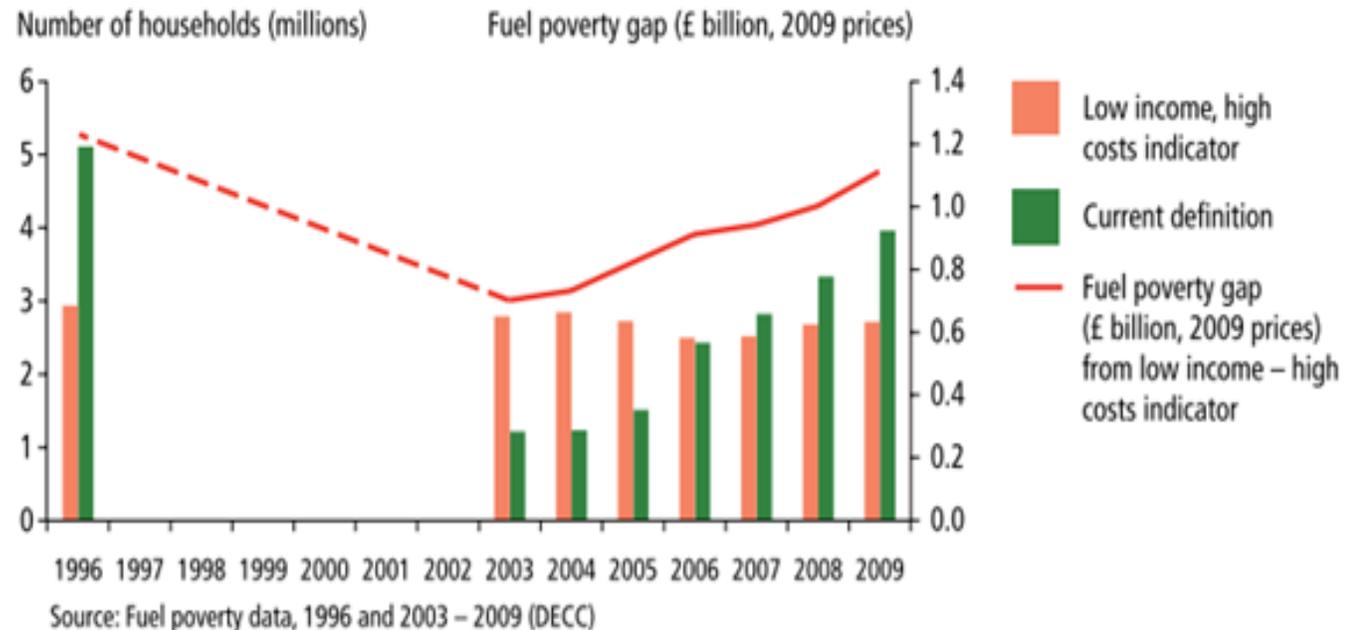


**Coalition(England):**  
Below average income  
households with above  
average fuel costs (Low  
Income, High Costs: LIHC)

# Consequences of change to LIHC

- Less people classified as fuel poor (10% vs. 20%)
- Population of fuel poor is constant (measurement based on averages)
- Emphasis on energy efficiency as THE problem (rather than poverty or the energy market)

*Comparison of numbers of households in fuel poverty under 10% indicator ('current indicator') and LIHC indicator from Hills review*



# Recommendations: connecting policy with the lived experience

From a book chapter on this topic written collaboratively with Ross  
Gillard (UK) and Victoria Pellicer (Spain)

# Five principles *for policy and practice informed by the lived experience*

So how might the understandings we have from *multi-disciplinary work on the lived experience* translate in to *policy at a national, subnational or supranational scale*? In order to *facilitate policy design* which builds on the lived experience, we offer five guiding principles and a brief example evidencing their importance.

# 1. Consider opportunities for **joined up, and integrated policy**

- a multi-disciplinary understanding of the lived experience of energy poverty necessitates a clear commitment to coordinated action across multiple policy domains.
- Energy poverty vs health challenges.
  - It is frequently *difficult to separate out policy domains and the impact they have on people's lives*. In the UK there is a *growing emphasis on the cross-over between health and energy poverty policy goals*.
- Policy support is increasingly being targeted at households with long-term health conditions and partnerships with the health sector are being developed to help avoid costs to the health care system because of energy poverty.



## 2. Building momentum through networks and partnerships

- The requirement for *joined up, integrated policy* is always a challenge, given that governments and non-state actors might not have a history of working together on these matters. As a result there is *a need to build momentum* through advocacy in a variety of directions.
- There are also *opportunities to make alliances across nations*, through transnational networks of local authorities and energy justice campaign groups for instance.
- The *current enthusiasm at the EU level is also helpful* for this agenda, providing a top-down pressure for member states and policymakers to address the issue.



# 3. Expecting the unexpected

- This is a *complex, and multi-faceted problem*, policymakers and practitioners need to be alert to the possibility of intersecting challenges and unintended consequences.
- Actors need to be equipped with the skills and resources to support households in the most appropriate ways.
- Organisations working on energy poverty find themselves dealing with complex mental health needs, helping households claim benefits they are entitled to, or overlapping with social services in providing family support – all of which require significant amounts of personal skills, professional competence and resources.



## 4. Measuring progress holistically

- Where national policy does exist, governments approach measurement of progress in a number of ways.
  - England: governments are inclined towards a simple indicator for energy poverty
  - France: opt for a 'basket' of indicators
  - Ireland: more inclined towards an open approach
- *Measurement must be holistic*: in practice this means drawing on multiple indicators which relate to the various facets of energy poverty (e.g. income, housing, health, social isolation, mobility, climate change) to give a fuller picture of the problem, and to allow unintended consequences to be observed.
- We should acknowledge *the wider positive impacts of tackling energy poverty*, such as improvements to infrastructure and housing, more community activity, local economic benefits and avoided costs to public services.

## 5. Just get on with it

- Remove power from dominant actors.
- Instigating public control.
- Could mean a clash with national government interests, which are focused on maintaining control of the energy market.

→ Faced with this barrier, progressive initiatives do not stay paralysed, but *look for alliances in new or powerful actors*, such as the European Commission or a new body of energy cooperatives which have recently emerged.



# Thank you for listening

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