

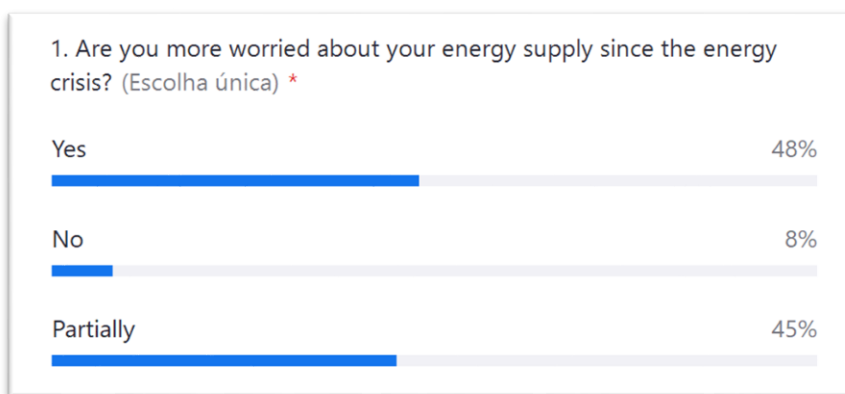
International Energy Poverty Action Week: what have we learned?

Actions to tackle energy poverty are vital: although access to affordable and clean energy is a key sustainable development goal, about 3 billion people in the world do not have access to modern energy sources for cooking, heating or cooling their homes. At the end of February, the second edition of the [International Energy Poverty Action Week](#) (IEPAW) brought together different stakeholders in the field of energy poverty.

At the policy session, experts discussed how different countries are enduring the global energy crisis and addressing energy poverty in their population. The LIFE project [JUSTEM](#) was represented by its coordinator, **Diana Süsser**, who moderated a round table with **Michelle Hallack** (Executive Consultant at Mercados- Aries International), **Karla Cedano** (Head of Innovation and Futures at Instituto de Energías Renovables), **Florencia Zabaloy** (Assistant Professor, Universidad Nacional del Sur), [Marco Peretto](#) (Junior Expert at IEECP), and **Christos Tourkolias** (Expert in Energy Policy Analysis at the Center for Renewable Energy Sources and Saving, Greece / [ENPOR](#) project).

Here are 10 takeaways from the session:

1. The global energy crisis aggravated concerns about energy supply



A poll among the session attendees showed that 92% worry more about their energy supply since the global energy crisis. As the political context threatens the energy security in all countries, the worry of not having electricity to cook is no longer an exclusive trait of those living on low incomes.

2. The concept of energy poverty is still subject to interpretation

Energy poverty does not mean the same thing to everyone, as there are different definitions of it. While Christos Tourkolias explained the complex calculations used in Greece to decide whether a household is in energy poverty or not. Michelle Hallack compared France with Brazil to demonstrate that the meaning of “energy poor” varies according to geographical region: “If you look at the 5% lowest income households in France, they spend more electricity than the average household in Brazil”.

The conclusion? The inconsistency in the definition of energy poverty has an impact on energy policy, making it less universal and more local or regional.

3. Being energy poor does not feel the same everywhere

While energy-poor families in the north of USA may struggle to keep their homes warm, their counterparts in Mexico may dream of keeping their homes cool. Depending on where one lives, energy poverty may be felt very differently.

This raises the need for regionally-adjusted policies that focus on the specifics of populations, buildings, and even weather conditions – thus bringing yet another challenge into play: not only the definitions of energy poverty vary, but so do the consequences of that poverty.

4. Cutbacks in energy consumption don't always stem from efficient policies

Even though energy consumption is declining in many households, Marco Peretto is only cautiously optimistic. In many cases, he explained, the energy reduction is happening because rising energy costs are pushing regular consumption above the available family budget: when families can no longer pay for the energy they used to consume, the only way out is to consume less.

5. Informal energy networks hide energy-poor households from statistics

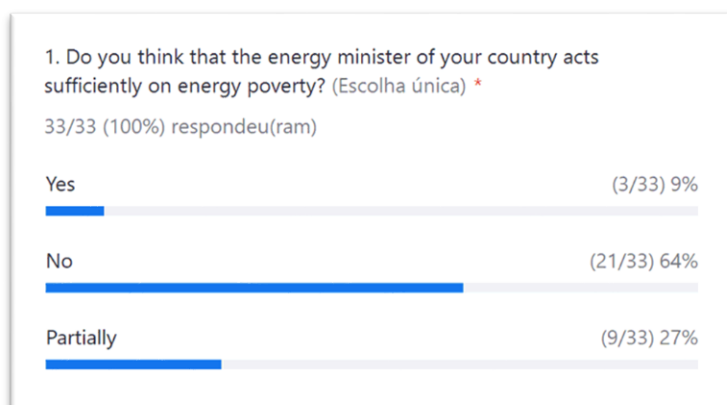
Karla Cedano used the Mexican example to prove how informal energy networks hide the energy poor in two ways.

On the one hand, households whose energy supply comes both from formal and informal networks appear as “normal” in official statistics, as energy bills do not eat up a relevant portion of their income. However, if these families had to pay in full for the energy they consume, they would live in energy poverty.

On the other hand, too many households depend on informal energy supply to have access to energy at all. They do not live in energy poverty - they have refrigerators and stoves -, yet they would be unable to afford energy if they had to pay for it.

This is a big challenge for governments. Should they shut down the informal energy networks, leaving hundreds of families without access to electricity? And if not, how can they accurately measure energy poverty in their country?

6. Governments are called upon to do more about energy poverty



Despite acknowledging that the battle against energy poverty faces major obstacles, most attendees place responsibility on their governments for not doing enough. Florencia Zabaloy gave the example of Argentina, where despite the country being a producer of natural gas, a high number of households do not have access to natural gas and are forced to resort to more expensive (and not subsidised) energy sources.

7. Reducing energy poverty in rented buildings remains a hurdle

Is it fairer to make tenants pay for a renovation in a house they do not own, or to make landlords pay for a renovation in a house where they do not live? Christos Tourkolias proposed a fifty-fifty scheme where tenants and landlords share the responsibility of increasing the energy efficiency of rented buildings. Marco Peretto claimed that a 100% financing rate for low-income households “could be a gamechanger”.

In the end, everyone agreed that a solution to this conundrum must be found, as tenants risk being more vulnerable to energy poverty because they have no say in interventions or energy efficiency measures in their house.

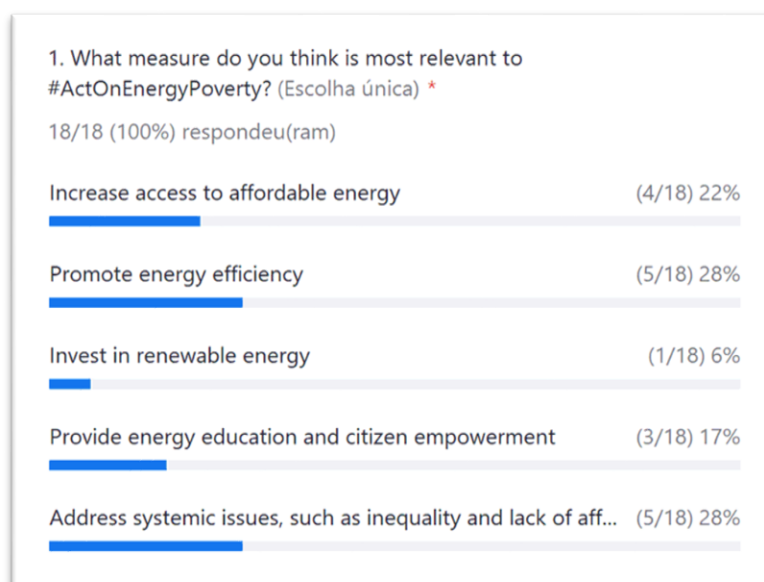
8. Social networks can bolster the uptake of energy efficiency measures

Energy poverty is not necessarily linked to financial poverty. According to Marco Peretto, too many homeowners still do not see the benefits of energy efficiency renovations, even though they could afford them. This problem, he argued, is usually easier to solve in rural areas and small communities: all it takes is one neighbour to do something in his house to get others interested; from then on, everyday chats and interactions will help spread information and encourage other homeowners to improve their buildings as well.

9. Intercontinental knowledge transfer is a win-win

The implementation of a global energy policy is no less than utopia; yet Marco Peretto advocates for intercontinental knowledge transfer. The discussion at IEPAW proved him right: one country's solution can be another country's inspiration, and sometimes the challenges are similar even though there is (literally) an ocean between them.

10. There is no (single) silver bullet to tackle energy poverty



Single solutions, such as renewable energy investments alone, are not enough to tackle energy poverty. Instead, attendees called for different and more holistic measures such as promoting energy efficiency across national building stocks and addressing systemic issues like inequality and lack of affordable housing. In fact, socially sensitive policies like access to affordable energy and citizen empowerment were voted as a higher priority than the investment in renewables.

On this topic, Michelle Hallack stressed the urgency of putting citizens' interests at the centre of energy policies. "I have never seen a universal subsidy that focuses on energy poverty" she acknowledged, adding that these measures "always meet other interests". "People are not the main beneficiaries", she added.

In summary, the global energy crisis threatens to exacerbate energy poverty and push new communities into vulnerability. Governments are called upon to care for their citizens, to look at energy poverty beyond the numbers and to build socially-sensitive energy policies that put people first. Systemic changes in energy demand and supply are needed to tackle energy poverty in the long term and provide affordable and clean energy for all.