

Working Group on vulnerable consumers in the area of Energy (WG VC) Terms of Reference

Following the mandate by the 4th Citizens' Energy Forum, the WG will focus on:

Overarching aims

- support the implementation of the 3rd Energy Package in areas of relevance to vulnerable consumers
- review factors that impact consumers' energy poverty and their ability to access and understand information about energy bills, energy consumption practices, or energy supply and service providers
- assess the differences in the impact of such factors on various consumers/groups, and identify drivers of vulnerability
- develop key characteristics of vulnerable consumers and what differentiates them from the typical customer base
- consider the effect of energy sector evolution, and in particular rising energy prices, on the affordability of energy and the number of vulnerable consumers, taking into account future socio-demographic trends, their implications for vulnerable consumers' situation, and their dynamics
- consider energy policy measures (such as energy efficiency) and non-energy instruments (e.g. social policy, consumer solidarity schemes, etc.) that can be used for greatest positive impact in addressing vulnerability, seeking synergies between them

Status analysis

- assess the state of play in the implementation of the provisions of the 3rd Energy Package concerned with vulnerable customers and energy poverty
- explore cultural differences related to energy consumption, energy efficiency and energy poverty
- assess impact/contribution of different fuels on energy poverty: what share of costs are for electricity, gas, heating, transport
- assess industry practices/corporate social responsibility measures which impact on consumers' vulnerability and on the availability of advice and/or third party assistance e.g. by telephone (freephone) helpdesks and face-to-face contact to better manage vulnerable consumers' energy bills and improve energy efficiency, and explore how specific solutions can address specific cases
- consider infrastructure challenges (outside and inside the household)
- assess the impact of the current state of the economy on vulnerability

Concrete outcomes and deliverables

- establish a qualitative and quantitative mapping of various aspects of vulnerability and measures which can contribute to addressing the issue and at what level in the energy field
- provide recommendations for defining vulnerable consumers in the energy sector, based on current state of play in MS

- highlight good (national) practices and appropriate non-policy solutions with long-term potential to better target vulnerability

How:

1. Collect and assess existing illustrative practices (e.g. national mandatory schemes, company-specific actions and sector-wide initiatives such as voluntary agreements by energy companies, "gentlemen's agreements");
2. WG members (consumers, 'social' NGOs, regulators [energy and other relevant public bodies involved in the process], industry) to work together for recommendations and actions needed to improve the situation of vulnerable consumers;
3. Review wide range of data (R&D results, reports, surveys etc.) and take informal contact with organisations unable to participate in the WG; interaction with and recommendations to price transparency WG

WG VC – Composition

Representatives from consumers, social NGOs, regulators and other relevant public bodies and industry

Consumers: members of the ECCG sub-group on Energy

Regulators: European energy regulators; national ombudsmen and dispute resolution instances; other national consumer authorities or social authorities

Social NGOs: representing interests of disabled, carers, elderly

Industry: Eurelectric, Eurogas, GEODE, CEDEC, EDSO

Chair: European Commission

Involved Commission Services: DG Energy (ENER); DG Health and Consumers (SANCO)