
CEER Customer Conference 2024

From Aspiration to Implementation: Delivering an Energy System Fit For All Consumers

11 April 2024, Brussels

Final Report

Welcome Address

In her welcome address, **Annegret Groebel, CEER President**, emphasised the need to have a consumer-centric approach in the collective implementation of the new legislations. Furthermore, regulators need to shift away from crisis management and return to fundamental regulatory principles, namely: predictability, credibility, and transparency in the process. The CEER-BEUC ASPIRE principles and CEER 2022-2025 strategy “Empowering consumers for the energy transition” can serve as guidance. Finally, huge investments will be needed and will require incentivising efficiency from investors and operators.

Keynote Speech

In her opening remarks, **Ms Baiba Miltoviča, President of the Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society (TEN) at EESC**, shared her views on energy affordability and consumer empowerment. She highlighted that the existing market structures were unable to keep prices manageable for consumers and therefore need to be revised in line with the energy trilemma. She later emphasised that prosumers could be the lever to promote the green energy transition. These solutions need to benefit from the full support of stakeholders in order to deliver on this ambition.

Conclusions of Session I: Reinforcing the Framework to Protect Consumers of all Shapes and Sizes

This session looked at the new measures agreed at EU level that are designed to reinforce consumers’ energy rights.

Mr Guillaume Joly, Senior Sustainable Buildings Officer at BEUC, welcomed the new EU definition of energy poverty and the much-needed structure of the Energy Efficiency Directive (EED) which will help to streamline policies, identify potential beneficiaries, and address barriers. He pointed to the failure of the banking sector to provide consumers with green offers to retrofit their homes. On-bills schemes (OBS) are simple and understandable to consumers but will require changes to regulatory frameworks. Engagement strategies and methodologies based on social and behavioural science can lead to better engagement by consumers. He mentioned the ban on disconnections, which, even if protective of consumers is also an indicator of policy design failures. He pointed to the synergies that need to be built both through regulatory frameworks and housing stock.

Ms Barbara Steenbergen, Member of the IUT Executive Committee, indicated that the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD) addresses gentrification, displacement, and renovations and offers protection to both tenants and residents. In the residential housing market, up-front renovation investments often result in rent increases but in most cases housing cost neutrality is not achieved. To demonstrate its feasibility, we must start with the social housing sector in a bottom-top fashion, including by empowering residents and tenants. Once the Directive is fully adopted, we must ensure the social safeguards included in the EPBD (Article 17) are implemented by EU member states.

Ms Liana Cozigou, Head of Legal and Consumer Affairs at CWaPE, said that lessons were learned from the different crises since the Electricity Market Design (EMD) Directive broadens the framework for consumer protection. But as the market complexifies, so do consumer profiles. So that no one is left aside, other measures are necessary such as the right to internet and digital education, the right to independent Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), and an obligation to market parties to take part in the ADR process. Some guidance on how concretely the EMD Directive should be interpreted would also be required. Additionally, access to accurate and transparent information and education is indispensable – for instance, one-stop shops should cover all matters to increase accessibility. Finally, regarding vulnerable consumers, an assessment of the new provision of the Directive will be necessary to assess its efficacy once entered into force.

Conclusions of Session II: Unleashing Consumers' Potential to Drive the Transition

Session II underscored the importance of consumer empowerment in light of the energy transition.

Ms Stavroula Pappa, Policy Advisor at REScoop, highlighted the potential of energy communities in shielding consumers from price fluctuations and future energy crises. She pointed to specific barriers that need to be tackled in order to yield the most return from energy sharing opportunities including access to grids and long permitting procedures for projects. With an example from Greece, she made the point that a level playing field should be safeguarded for all energy actors when transposing EU legislation.

Eurelectric Chair of Retail Market Design Working Group, Ms Rita Mota's remarks highlighted the need for a consumer-centric approach to decarbonisation efforts. For her, a major barrier in enabling the full potential of consumer participation in the energy transition is the knowledge gap and lack of awareness with regards to the availability of solutions for consumers. It is therefore key to make sure that consumers are made aware of all the possibilities that are available to them in order to fully enable their active participation in tomorrow's energy system. This should also come with a simplification of all the rules surrounding consumers' ability to take part in the transition.

Through the example of Norway's energy sharing model, **Ms Marit Hjerpseth, Sectional Engineer in Customer Affairs & Network Regulation at NVE-RME**, emphasised how equal opportunity for energy production allows for increased penetration of local renewable energy production. At the household level, the installation of PV solutions, coupled with cooperation between relevant stakeholders, allows for an efficient redistribution of surplus production which can be shared through a specific financial instrument.

Conclusions of Session III: Paving the Way for Decarbonised Households

Session III underscored the critical role of both national and local factors in shaping household energy dynamics.

CEDEC Secretary General Mr Gert De Block's insights pointed to the necessity for clear political decisions and local cooperation in navigating energy transitions. The call for integrated energy systems and sustainable technology adoption resonated as key strategies for progress. Notably, the imperative for supportive measures from both national and local authorities emerged, emphasising regulatory backing and investment facilitation. This presentation highlighted the multifaceted approach required to address energy challenges effectively, stressing the collaborative efforts needed across various levels of governance and sectors.

Ms Mélanie Bourgeois from Energy Cities highlighted the urgency of ceasing public investment in gas and fossil fuels infrastructure to mitigate potential cost burdens on consumers. Cities emerged as crucial actors in steering a collective shift away from fossil gas, capitalising on their ability to mobilise local stakeholders. The analysis of the new Article 25 of the EED obligation unveiled diverse approaches across European nations, highlighting the imperative of empowering local authorities with necessary mandates and support. Advocating for clear technology strategies over neutrality, a pressing call was issued for cities to promptly embark on their transition efforts, signalling a pivotal moment in sustainable energy action.

Ms Jane Dennett-Thorpe, Deputy Director for Net Zero Strategy at Ofgem, emphasised the urgent need for accelerated heat decarbonization, particularly through the deployment of heat pumps and networks, to align with emissions targets in the United Kingdom. The challenges ahead are viewed through the dual lenses of cost/affordability and the consumer journey, with progress evident, though more pronounced in cost reduction than in addressing consumer concerns. While strides have been made, there remains substantial ground to cover in advancing both affordability and consumer-centric approaches to effectively transition towards decarbonised heating systems.

Key Takeaways

Mr Alejandro Ulzurrun, Head of Unit B1 at DG ENER (European Commission), concluded that progress towards a consumer-centric energy framework has been made. Consumers are better protected and empowered for the green energy transition, with common objectives identified. Despite challenges like energy crises, collaborative efforts resulted in the Fit for 55 package and emergency measures. Regulators play a crucial role, especially in implementing the Energy Efficiency Directive. Multiple contract and business models offer new opportunities, though challenges remain in ensuring fair distribution tariffs and protecting vulnerable consumers. Overall, a solid regulatory framework is in place for our 2030 climate and energy targets, emphasising implementation and fairness for all citizens.

About CEER

CEER is the voice of Europe's national energy regulators at EU and international level. Through CEER, the national regulators cooperate and exchange best practice. The overall aim of the Council of European Energy Regulators (CEER) is to facilitate the creation of a single, competitive, efficient and sustainable internal market for gas and electricity in Europe. The CEER acts as a platform for cooperation, information exchange and assistance between Europe's national energy regulators and is their interface at EU and international level. On EU issues, CEER works very closely with the EU Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators (ACER). CEER also strives to share regulatory best practice worldwide through its membership in the International Confederation of Energy Regulators (ICER) which brings together similar associations from across the globe including NARUC (America), ERRA (Central/Eastern Europe) and MEDREG (the Mediterranean region). For further information, visit www.ceer.eu.

About EESC

The European Economic and Social Committee represents the various economic and social components of organised civil society. It is an institutional consultative body established by the 1957 Treaty of Rome. Its consultative role enables its members, and hence the organisations they represent, to participate in the EU decision-making process. For the well-being of European citizens and businesses the development of a sustainable energy system and effective services of general interest are essential. The Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society (TEN) covers all these issues. Follow our page to stay updated with our activities and events. For further information, visit www.eesc.europa.eu/en.