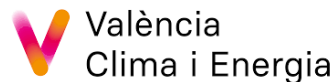




POWERUP

The catalyst for social innovation in the energy market

Promoting social energy services to fight energy poverty



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Executive summary and purpose of this report

The POWER UP project started in 2021 shortly before energy poverty became a highly political topic. It was launched with the premise that regional and local public authorities have a strong role to play in fighting energy poverty through long-term measures. That is why the overall objective of POWER UP is to push cities beyond their “firefighter” role in times like these. Public authorities, especially those closest to the citizens in need, need to sustain the creation of local energy market players with a social agenda. The mission of POWER UP is not only to show that this is possible, but also to encourage others to follow the steps of its five pilot cases.

In this short public report, we want to describe how we communicate and disseminate the social impact of energy services, whether they focus on energy efficiency or renewable energy. How did we try to bring the social aspect of energy services into the minds of law-makers, local leaders and citizens. This is not exactly a how-to guide as the actions taken are very specific to the POWER UP project. Nevertheless, we do hope that the communication processes and logic we’ve put in place can inspire others, notably people working in similar EU-funded projects.

ABOUT POWER UP

The 5 POWER UP pilots explore business opportunities for energy efficiency services and renewables that benefit people in energy poverty. We co-design those services together with the most vulnerable. The project is co-funded by the EU H2020 program and runs until 2025. The project is coordinated by Energy Cities and supported by University of Manchester, the Belgium cooperative Ecopower and business experts from Sinloc.

www.socialenergyplayers.eu



01

Framing the debate around social energy services

1.1

Objectives

Since the current energy crisis started, energy poverty is high up on the agenda of policy and media. Not one day is passing without us reading (or hearing) about high energy prices, people struggling to heat or cool their homes, the urgency of better protecting vulnerable consumers, addressing housing affordability and the challenge of fairness of the energy transition.

The POWER UP project started shortly before energy poverty became a highly political topic. It was launched with the premise that regional and local public authorities have a strong role to play in fighting energy poverty through long-term measures. That is why the overall objective of POWER UP is to push cities beyond their “firefighter” role in times like these. Public authorities, especially those closest to the citizens in need, need to sustain the creation of local energy market players with a social agenda. The mission of POWER UP is not only to show that this is possible, but also to encourage others to follow the steps of its five pilots..

1.2

The POWER UP pilot schemes

Five pilot schemes are about to be developed in five locations across Europe: Eeklo (Belgium), Heerlen (the Netherlands), in the Campania area (Italy), Rožnov pod Radhoštěm (Czech Republic) and Valencia (Spain). Their city-driven business schemes cover a broad range of energy activities: from an inclusive energy cooperative over municipal one-stop-shops to collective self-consumption on public residential and other buildings.

Furthermore, in North Macedonia, we are exploring the possibility of replicating these schemes and will build capacity around energy efficiency and renewable energy amongst local stakeholders. The innovative part of it is that these schemes will be co-created together with energy-poor households and local stakeholders (cities, social organizations, energy utilities, citizen energy communities etc.), leading to at least 2,5 million EUR investment in sustainable energy before the project ends and involving a total of over 55.000 consumers suffering from energy poverty. Supported by a European city network, a leading UK university, a Belgium cooperative and a finance expert, the consortium is increasing the skills of more than 185 people in local organizations. This will allow these players to either provide cheap energy to fuel poor households or reinvest benefits to carry out energy poverty mitigation measures.



POWER UP pilots located in different parts of Europe

1.3

Which debate do we want to influence?

“Leave no one behind” is the central, transformative promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals. The European Union has a critical role to play in achieving this overarching goal, at least in European Member States. The European Green Deal from 2019, a set of policy initiatives to make the EU climate neutral in 2050, stresses that the transition must be fair and inclusive, putting people first and paying particular attention to supporting those who will face the greatest challenges. On its way there and with an intermediate climate milestone for 2030, the EU has bundled the ‘Fit for 55’ package in 2021, a series of legislations to shape the green transition. Many of them do also – thanks to active lobbying from organizations like the ones involved in POWER UP- include social support mechanisms. It was updated and reinforced in terms of energy efficiency and renewable energy actions with the RePowerEU Plan, set out after the Russian invasion in Ukraine.

These policy developments of the last few years have been very present in the public debate. Much is still to be influenced as national governments have to take the next steps and make sure they create structural solutions to energy poverty. Since the energy crisis, many European nations have implemented emergency support measures, especially during winter. But these are band aids that won’t help Europe exit energy poverty in the long run.





Headlines from different media highlighting the energy poverty problem

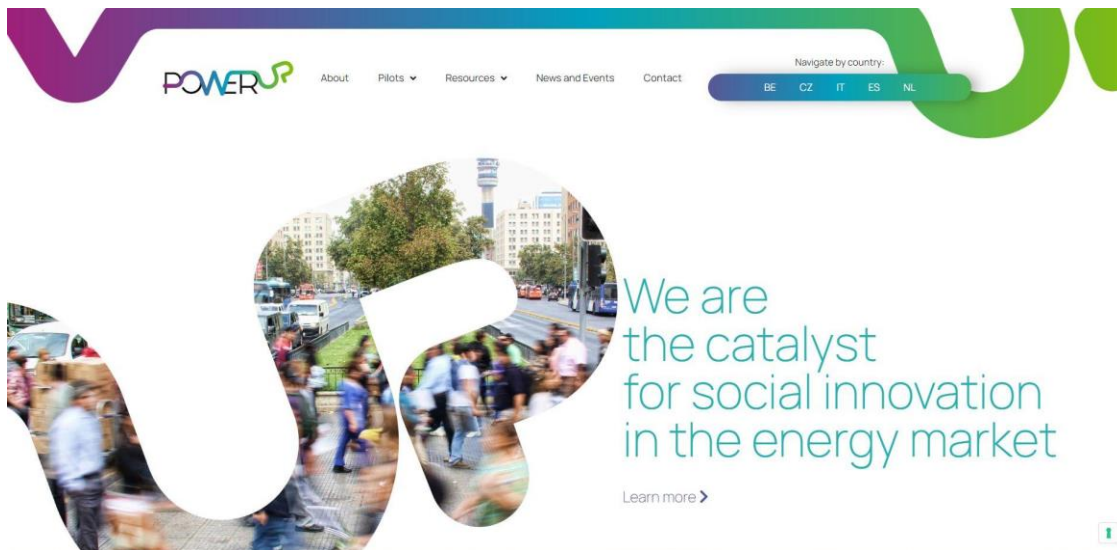
Many citizen energy cooperatives complain about a lack of diversity in their membership, retrofit housing programs are still not enough following the “worst first” principle and a collective self-consumption scheme is rarely launched by a group of people suffering from energy poverty due to other daily struggles.

Through strong, strategically planned communication and dissemination activities, the POWER UP team wants to provide evidence for very concrete, public-driven long-term solutions. The services that are being designed by pilots are innovative and truly pioneering. Even though it's been for years that we are talking about a “just transition”, it is still exceptional to hear about energy services that take the needs of vulnerable people into account as of the start.



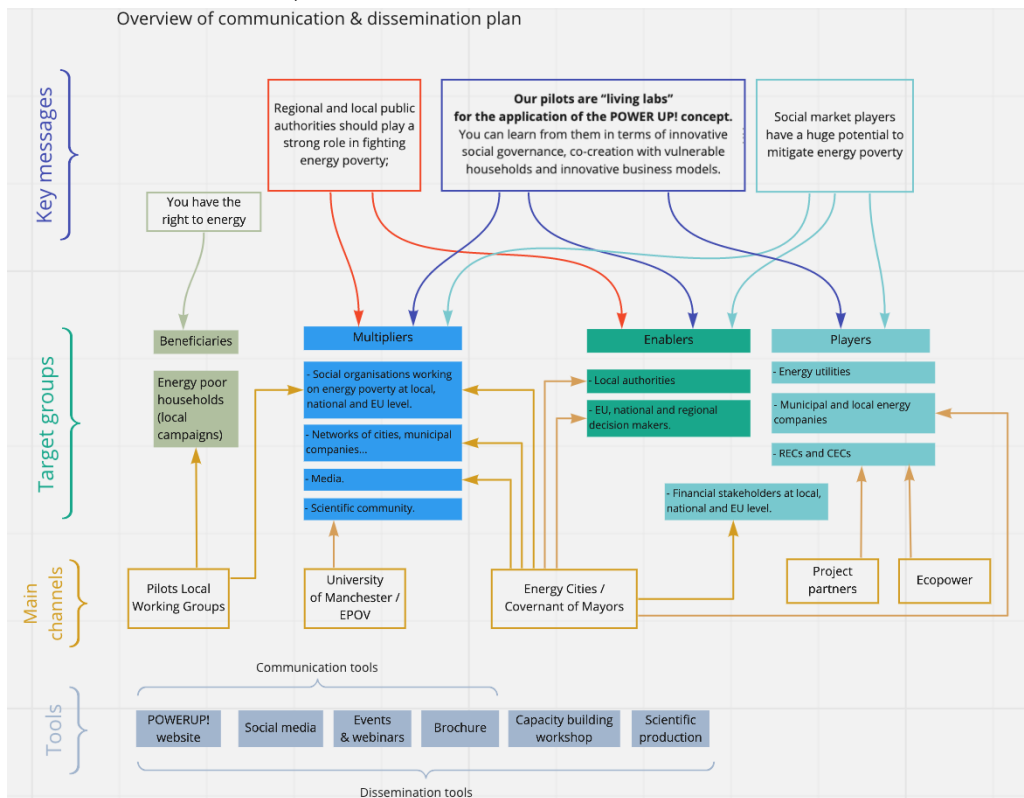
02

What messages did we send out?



Claim of the POWER UP project

The dissemination of results is a continuous process and will get more concrete as POWER UP pilots advance in implementing their scheme. Last year's emergence of the energy crisis due to the Russian invasion has increased the urgency for replicating business models like ours and has extended the number of potential multipliers and target groups interested in POWER UP outputs. Our Communication and Dissemination Plan prepared at the very start of the project in 2021 sums them up (see below).



Overview of the key elements that constitute the POWER UP communication & dissemination strategy

Promoting the pilots' work is a first, very important step to creating awareness for those social energy solutions. We, therefore, adapted the narrative to the new needs and burning questions that came up with the fierce energy crisis.

POWER UP positions itself through the claim: **"We are the catalyst for social innovation in the energy market!"**.

This statement comes with three more differentiated messages. Since 2021 we have widely shared them with enablers (e.g. local authorities), players (e.g. existing energy market players) and multipliers (e.g. like-minded advocates of our cause):

Social energy market players have a huge potential to tackle both the energy poverty and climate challenge: who are they and how do they do their business?

Regional and local public authorities should and can play a strong role in bringing together local people and organizations around RES and EE to fight energy poverty.

The POWER UP pilots are "living labs" for prototyping new social businesses: they experiment innovative social governance, co-creation with vulnerable households and the implementation of innovative business models.

As we want to create content of value to our audience, we put novel business models in the spot that could help households in energy poverty engage in energy efficiency measures and renewables production without bearing the financial investment risk. Despite the overall advancement and the beginning of the implementation of the schemes, the pilot cities have different maturity levels of their models.

Until now, in our communication we very much highlight the two advanced pilot schemes as they have the highest potential to stick in people's minds, to inspire and to be replicated: Valencia and Eeklo. Our message is: if they can do it, in two very different geographic and cultural contexts, your city can do it!

Eeklo, Belgium: Eeklo is collaborating with an energy cooperative to fight energy poverty. Eeklo grants access to vulnerable households to energy at cost price, supplied by citizen energy cooperative Ecopower. Thanks to their lower energy bill (up to €1000 a year) these families can pay off their debts (if any) and move out of energy poverty. To facilitate vulnerable households

becoming members of the cooperative, the city pre-finances the upfront costs of a share (250€) of Ecopower. The city lends this share to households. After the lending period, the households can stay as cooperative members indefinitely due to the savings on their energy bills over those six years. As a result of co-creation workshops, a first group of 20 households in energy poverty has been selected to take part of the project and the first 20 social shares are ready to be created.

Valencia, Spain: Valencia is promoting the Right to Energy for all citizens, mainly through its neighborhood-based one-stop-shops (Energy Offices) as well as participating and leading transformative projects tackling different aspects of a fair energy transition. Valencia plans to promote two different models: renewable energy communities (strictly following the definitions contained in European Directives) and a “public service of renewable energy self-consumption” built around PV installations fully financed and managed by the municipality. Regarding energy communities, a first successful case study has been developed in the city, which will be replicated in other districts. As for the second model, a first experience will be developed around the “Requiem in Power” project, through which the municipality is investing in several PV plants located on the rooftops of municipal cemeteries accounting for nearly 2.5 MW of installed power. The idea is to promote collective self-consumption schemes around these installations, involving different types of consumers: municipal buildings, vulnerable households and citizens (households and SMEs). To better define the needs and demands of the city with regard to these models, a Local Working Group was established, merging two existing working groups on Energy Poverty and Energy Communities, involving stakeholders from the public and private sector, the academia, research centers, civil society and NGOs.

The screenshot shows the website's navigation menu with 'News and Events' selected. A 'Navigate by country' dropdown is set to 'NL'. The main content area features four article cards:

- News:** 'Eeklo's social cooperative shares scheme recognised by European Social Innovation award' (September 13, 2023). Text: 'Eeklo is one of the 15 finalists of the European Social Innovation Competition who have been selected for their outstanding energy poverty program. This scheme, which has been developed and launched in the framework of the POWER UP project, will enable low-income households to become members of an energy cooperative.' Read more >
- News:** 'Coping with energy poverty during summer' (August 31, 2023). Text: 'Energy poverty has traditionally been defined by wintertime heating, but it is just as important during the summer months, and the devastating summer heat in 2023 proves this. About 19 % of households in the EU reported being too hot during the summer, and this share is constantly increasing in last decades. In this context, the EU-funded COOLTORISE project aims to establish a framework on summer energy poverty to define common solutions.' Read more >
- News:** 'Our contribution to Redistributing Power: How can Renewable Energy Communities relieve energy poverty'.
- Events:** 'October 18th in Modena (Italy): Energy for the invisible citizen – in search for lasting renewable & fair solutions' (October 18, 2023 - October 18, 2023).

Headlines of articles produced for the POWER UP website



03

How did we reach out to the world?

The POWER UP communication and dissemination is based on a multi-channel strategy and using content (social) marketing. Starting from our project-owned channels such as a [website](#) and partner social media and communication channels, we spread the pilots' experience (processes, challenges, successes) as much as possible, including events and dedicated advocacy activities. With each created content, we want to create value for the target group, provide them with evidence and concrete cases from the pilots. Ultimately – and that is the purpose of social marketing – we want to change their mindset when it comes to energy services and anchor one main call to action: switch from a purely profit-oriented and corporate philosophy to the idea that businesses can combine profit and people while alleviating energy poverty and increasing energy justice.

Between the website launch in March 2022 and first stock-taking in February 2023, we had achieved the following activities:

Published 29 articles

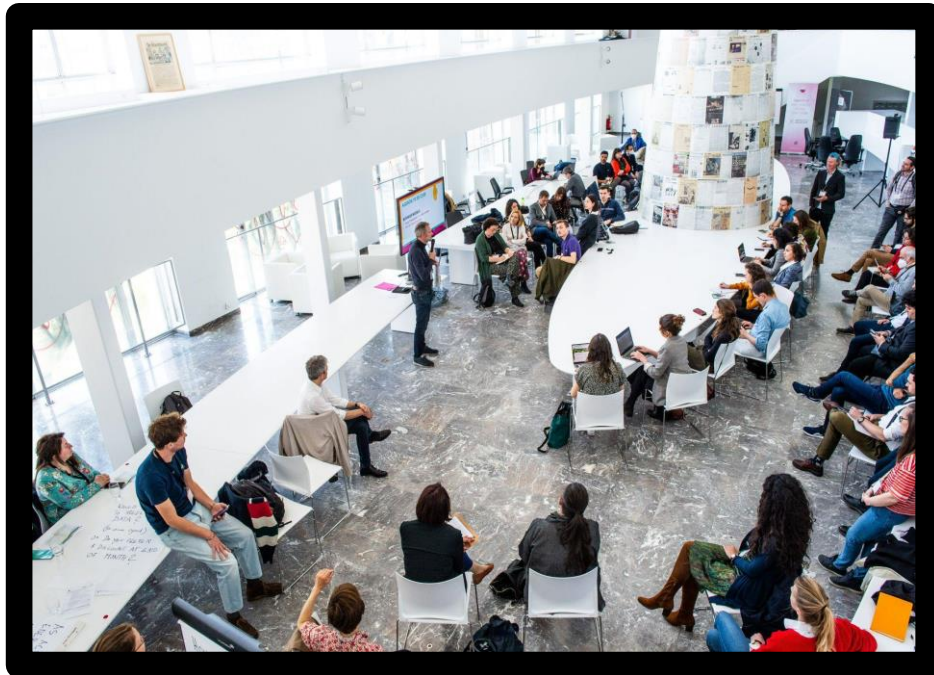
- 861 visits and 2007 page views on the project website
- 44 tweets with the project-related hashtag #EUPowerUp
- 10.826 impressions for POWER tweets posted on the account of project partner Energy Cities
- 91 events organized (workshops and engagement webinars)
- 17 presentations at third-party events

3.1

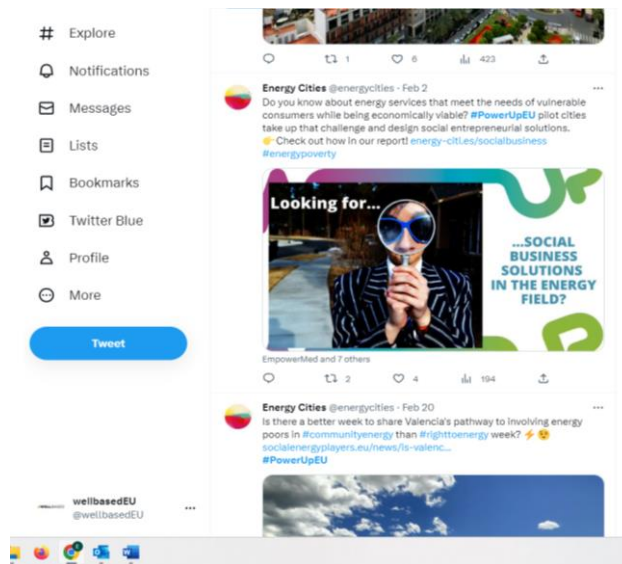
EU and national level

Since the start of the project, the POWER UP communication team has made considerable efforts to give visibility to the POWER UP project and to connect with like-minded initiatives at national and European levels. Whenever possible, the consortium is building synergies with other EU-funded projects to such dissemination activities, to increase the outreach. This is especially the case of like-minded projects such as WELLBASED, SCALE203050, CEES, SUN4All, Cooltorise etc.

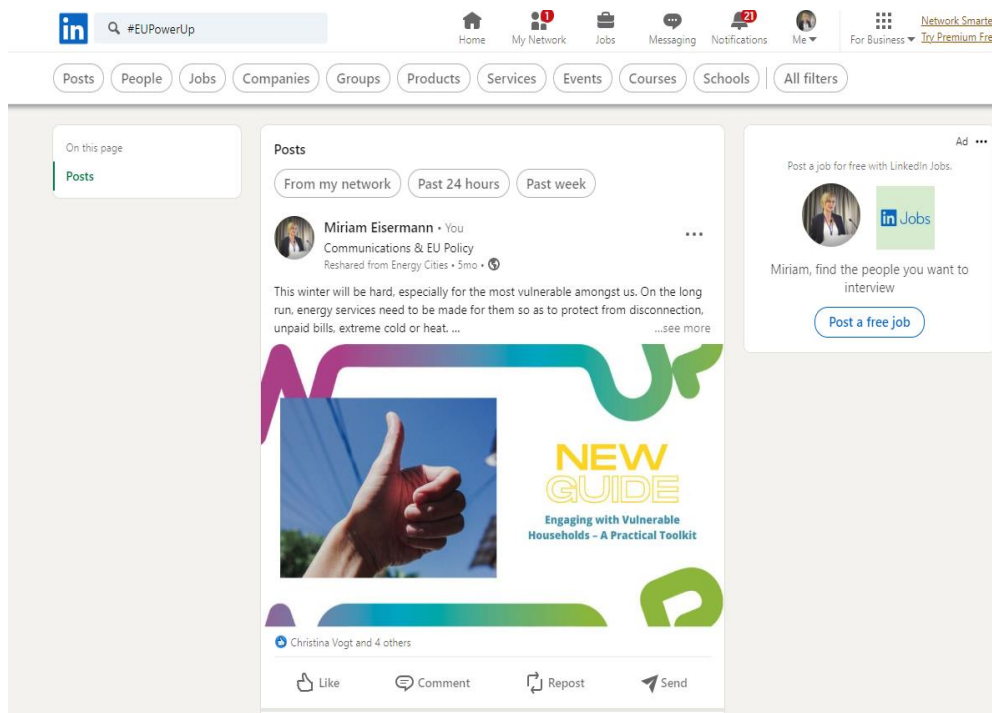
- The activities were diverse and included:
- **Regular website updates** with [8 articles](#) and events published and [6 project outputs uploaded on the library](#) during the reporting period.;
- Promotion of articles in Energy Cities' monthly **newsletter** as well as in the topical "Energy Community **bulletin**" (In July and October 2022);
- **Social media communication** via Energy Cities' and partner accounts on twitter and LinkedIn (some examples below and an overview on [Twitter](#)). ;
- **Workshop organization** during Energy Cities' Annual Forum - Session on "Co-designing energy services with/for vulnerable communities";
- **Info sharing (deliverables and events) with EPAH** for wider dissemination;
- **Presentation of the project in third party events:** congresses, festivals; meetings etc.



Jan de Pauw from Ecopower presenting POWER UP and the Belgian pilot during a dedicated workshop on "inclusive energy services" organized during Energy Cities Annual Forum in April 2022.



A POWER UP post by Energy Cities promoting the latest report in December 2022.



POWER UP dissemination on LinkedIn (example from December 2022).

To monitor relevant societal, policy and project developments on that issue, we've also created a [twitter list](#) with the most significant accounts covering our topic(s). Readers of the present document may be interested in connecting with those accounts.

National communication also included advocacy work:

Pilots and partners are already providing policy recommendations based on the first learnings of the project. Eeklo and Ecopower are engaged in discussions with the regional distribution grid operator Fluvius and the regional government to benefit from a regulatory sandbox to include households with debts towards their former electricity suppliers in the Eeklo scheme. This is legally not possible at the moment, as indebted households have to be supplied by Fluvius by law (and at a tariff higher than the one proposed by Ecopower). Ecopower is particularly active also via the Flemish association of citizen energy cooperatives REScoop Flanders into national discussions.

The partners from Valencia (Valencia Clima I Energia and Las Naves Foundation) also participated in working groups with national stakeholders on energy communities' legislations

and how to integrate energy-poor households. This has been discussed, for instance, in the national platform CitiES, gathering cities and national institutions to support the seven Spanish cities selected by the EU Climate-neutral and Smart Cities Mission to achieve climate neutrality by 2030.

Energy Cities used learnings from POWER UP to propose recommendations during the stakeholders' workshop organised by CINEA on energy poverty mitigation on 4-5 May 2022. We also used POWER UP pilots as key examples in our advocacy work, such as this [report](#), largely inspired by the [report](#) written by Energy Cities on the theme of just transition in the framework of the energy citizens forum.

Finally, dissemination for replication was also launched by contacting the pilot cities' sister organizations: In the framework of POWER UP's "sister organization" scheme, the city of Heerlen shared learning with their sister city Breda. UCSA is in close contact with Castellammare di Stabia. Eeklo presented their scheme for the town of Leuven, but also Mechelen and Ostende, which are very interested in the model and a collaboration with Ecopower to replicate it. In Valencia, LNV and VCE shared the pilot development with 6 cities close to Valencia: Gata de Gorgos, Elche, Oropesa, Vinaròs, Tavernes de la Valldigna and Algemesí.

Activities to support potential replication in sister organizations will be further developed once the pilot schemes are more advanced.

3.2

Local level

The local communications campaigns also started in the early phases of the POWER UP project. The pilots used the energy crisis as an opportunity to communicate about the project, as well as about strategies to alleviate energy poverty and promote energy efficiency.

In particular, Eeklo and Ecopower produced an energy guide to support energy-poor households in first accessing relevant information in an easy, centralized and accessible way. Five hundred copies have been printed, 300 have been distributed via organizations working with vulnerable households, among which most are in an energy poverty situation. Two hundred copies were distributed more generally among the public by the city services. A re-edition is already planned.

Information available in the guide is also published on the [city](#) website, which has been reorganized, with a dedicated [energy section](#), [energy poverty section](#), and a [webpage](#) on POWER UP pilot. Local communication campaign included the following activities between October 2022 and February 2023: publication of 5 articles (3 in a local newspapers, one in the city magazine, and one in city network dedicated to seniors), 3 posts on the city Facebook page and the community center Facebook page, and having one stand in a city event in November 2022. In addition to promoting good behaviors, increasing energy literacy and disseminating information about existing support schemes, these activities presented the POWER UP scheme being developed with Ecopower, especially to raise interest from potential beneficiaries.

In Valencia, 11 articles about the local pilot of POWER UP have been published in local newspapers (like 20 minutos, La Vanguardia, and ElPeriodic) and websites of media and consortium partners (VCE and LNV), reaching local inhabitants. VCE and LNV also published on their social media. Main messages focused on the energy community's potential and renewable energy to reduce energy bills and remind people of the right to access energy.

In Roznov, the local communication campaign was launched in January 2023 in parallel with the launch of the co-creation workshops with households and vulnerable households. It included 68 posters displayed in the public space, 2 TV spots broadcasted by a local TV, two articles on the city website, several posts via the Facebook city page, and one information meeting for inhabitants.

In the municipalities of UCSA and Heerlen, local level communication had not started by February 2023. Both pilot areas needed more time to define the business model that best involved people in energy vulnerability in the specific pre-selected intervention areas.

Through the creation of local working groups (in all pilots), relationships with local stakeholders were tightened. These partners also served, in some cases, as relays to communicate about the POWER UP project, its purpose, benefits and processes. In the Campania area in Italy, for example, four local working groups were created, one per municipality and people from the social departments of the different municipalities were involved in mapping and gathering data regarding energy poverty in the area. As the project advances, they will be reactivated and involved in local communication around the benefits of renewable energy and why cities and citizens should become part of it.



04

Conclusions

POWER UP is one of many EU funded projects. Our communication and dissemination strategy is limited by the resources that are available to the consortium. And still, knowing how much of a pressing social issue energy poverty is and how valuable the learnings from the pilot can be to others, we do our best to position the project's activities as good as possible in the public debate.

Communication is ongoing and the project runs until 2025, and this report will be further updated once the activities are concluded. Here are five points to sum up the way POWER UP has been communicated and disseminated since 2021:

1. **We embedded our project purpose into the ongoing debate(s)**, especially at EU level and highlighted the pilots' efforts to provide energy services with a positive social, environmental and economic impact.
2. **We highlighted the efforts made in the POWER UP pilots, talking about processes rather than results** to provide learning value to our target groups.
3. **We used the social marketing approach**, i.e. aiming for a change in mindset and attitude towards novel methods of tackling energy poverty.
4. **We had a main claim with differentiated messages**, emphasizing our quite unique solution portfolio that is being developed by the pilots.
5. **We used different channels to reach out to a wide range of target groups** and to increase our chances to be seen and heard in a moment where energy poverty was high up on the public agenda.



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