



POWERPOOR

Empowering Energy Poor Citizens through Joint Energy Initiatives

POWERPOOR Key Results in Spain

Working on the ground with energy-poor households and policymakers to mitigate energy poverty.

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Energy communities empowering citizens

Enherkom is a Renewable Energy Community located in the municipality of [Hernani](#), in the region of Gipuzkoa. The energy community is part of a broader project called Hernani Burujabe, which was initiated by the citizens and the Municipality of Hernani, to support and create collective initiatives in different sectors such as energy, food, care, housing or the local economy. The energy community was established as a not-for-profit energy cooperative, and its main goal is to promote the energy transition in a participating, democratic, and collective way.

From the very beginning, Enherkom has had a strong social perspective, and it has maintained communication with the municipal social services and AMHER, an association that supports marginalised collectives. For that reason, Fermin, one of the members of the energy community, participated in POWERPOOR's training in October of 2021, and obtained the certification as a Mentor to further enhance his skills and be able to help more people within the community. Since then, more members of the energy community have participated in the trainings, to gain better understanding of the issue of energy poverty and to take actions to alleviate it.



As most of the energy communities usually do, one of the goals of Enherkom is to produce energy locally, and the energy community started working on a photovoltaic self-consumption system which will share the electricity among its members, including vulnerable households. However, they have further goals than to only produce energy,

and from the beginning they identified two other activities to start from. One of them is to provide a service to the municipality, with a close collaboration with the social services, to directly address energy poverty by improving the situation of the people who receive municipal grants. They intend to do so, by identifying the most vulnerable families through the social services, and advise them on how to lower their energy costs as well as how to improve their comfort at home, implementing the POWERPOOR approach. For that purpose, Enherkom is in close collaboration with the energy cooperative Goiener, who supports the whole process, through the POWERPOOR trainings and resources as well as the cooperative's own expertise on the topic. Through this service, the energy community will contribute to improving the situation of the vulnerable collectives, at the same time it will improve the municipality's capacity to support the citizens on the issue of energy poverty.



In the same line, POWERPOOR Info Days were organised in Hernani by Goiener, the project's local partner, in collaboration with Enherkom and the local municipality. The info day was held on the 22nd and 23rd of September 2022, and in total 75 people participated talking about, listening to, and reflecting on how to address energy poverty from different angles, focusing on energy communities and energy poverty alleviation offices. It is to mention that many of the speakers were POWERPOOR's certified Energy Mentors, and that very interesting discussions came up during the two days.



The third activity that Enherkom wanted to carry out was to establish an energy poverty alleviation office, to advise citizens about energy-related issues. In fact, that was the first activity of the energy community after its creation, as it is responsible of the energy poverty alleviation office that the municipality opened in November 2022. The response of the citizens was unexpected, as in its first 4 months of operation over 400 people attended, and all of them received support from the Energy Mentor. When it comes to the profile of the people attended, most of them were women 45 years old and older. Most of the enquiries have been related to lowering the energy bill, partly due to the increase of the energy prices on the last months, but they also inquired about energy communities, energy efficiency or renewable energy sources. Seeing the large interest of the citizens in the energy poverty alleviation office, several special sessions were organised in the different neighborhoods of the town and in a center for retired people to disseminate this action further.



When it comes to the location, the energy poverty alleviation office was first located in Iturola, a collaborative space for socioeconomic initiatives that works on social transformation, where the local energy community Enherkom is based. However, in order to get closer to citizens and specially to vulnerable collectives, the energy poverty alleviation office was moved to the Municipal Consumer Information Office, in the building of the municipal social services.



Looking to the future, the energy community is in communication with another cooperative that works in the care sector, to collaborate in a project that aims to improve the well-being of the elderly. The project will work with the elderly through the help of local volunteers, and Enherkom wants to bring its expertise on energy and community work to support this vulnerable collective.

Similarly, to Enherkom, there are many other energy communities that want to support citizens through energy poverty alleviation offices and that have participated in the POWERPOOR trainings to take steps in this direction. To mention some, Berener in the town of Bergara and Baleki in Balmaseda are some examples that are supporting the citizens in energy-related aspects, both being part of larger social transformation initiatives in their local context.

Municipalities can play a key role in mitigating energy poverty.

The municipality of [Vitoria-Gasteiz](#) is also making steps towards alleviating energy poverty in the city from several angles, with the initiative and involvement of two key departments of the city council: the Social Policy Department and the Department of Territory and Action for Climate. From one side, the municipality started to work on the energy poverty problem through the social services, as it is closely related to vulnerable individuals, and from the other side it is also supporting the creation of energy communities in different districts and areas of the city. But empowering citizens and tackling energy poverty is not an easy task, and it requires time and effort from the public administration as well as engagement from society towards a more democratic and just energy system.

From the first moment that the POWERPOOR project started to organise the trainings, representatives from the city council participated on them to know more about the topic and to start enhancing the municipality's skills to alleviate energy poverty. Three representatives of the Sustainability, Climate and Energy service as well as a

representative of the public rehabilitation agency participated in the trainings, in June and October of 2021. In addition, later one of the representatives participated again in a training, to get updated about the situation of energy poverty and how to tackle it.



At the same time, the municipality has been carrying out several activities in relation to energy poverty, thanks to the collaboration with Goiener, the local POWERPOOR partner. The activities were open to all citizens, but the focus was mainly on households that were receiving the support of the municipality through the social services, as they were the most likely to be identified also as vulnerable citizens. The main activity carried out were workshops to understand the energy bills (electricity and natural gas) and to optimise the energy contracts with energy providers so that consumers can lower their bills. These workshops were offered to the general public, but also specifically to professionals that work in the fields as well as to the vulnerable households identified in the region. In addition to the workshops, other activities were also carried out, such as home visits, sharing communication material or support through the one-by-one advising service about energy bills. Throughout all these activities, the POWERPOOR project, including its trainings, tools and home visits was promoted to the citizens as well as to the professionals, highlighting the relevance of collective initiatives, and giving them the opportunity to participate in the project.



In parallel, the city council carried out an awareness-raising campaign about energy communities, as part of its endeavors to support the creation of energy communities in the city. The campaign started on March 2022 in the Europa Conference Centre of the city, with around 300 participants that heard about what energy communities are, what kind of projects can they carry out or what kind of economic and social benefits they can bring to the local community, and the POWERPOOR project was mentioned as a good practice to tackle energy poverty. After this initial conference, the city council carried out over 15 events across the different neighborhoods in the following months, to get closer to the citizens and to promote the creation of energy communities. About 400 citizens participated in these sessions in total, and some material of the POWERPOOR project was used to introduce the topic of energy poverty as well as to promote the project's trainings.



As a consequence of the dissemination and promotion, many citizens participated in the POWERPOOR trainings, many other showed interest but could not participate, and

currently there are 13 certified Energy Supporters/Mentors in the city, many of them motivated to establish energy communities and to support the vulnerable citizens among their communities or neighborhoods. Besides, there are many other citizens and professionals that have not carried out or finished the certification process of POWERPOOR because of different reasons, but thanks to the project they know more about energy poverty and the different ways to fight it, including the project's tools, the notion of collective finance and energy communities.

Regarding the policy recommendations, the city council has received support by the POWERPOOR project from the beginning through several ways, for example through training seminars, emails as well as face-to-face meetings. In this regard, the project, through the local partner Goiener, provided support to the city council on the preparation of the Integrated Energy Transition Action Plan, as part of the SECAP 2030, making contributions on how to tackle energy poverty from the municipal perspective. In addition, the project has also contributed to include the energy poverty perspective on the service that the local administration provides to support the creation of energy communities.



It is also worth mentioning that synergies have also been created with an urban renovation project carried out by the municipality, which is focused on one of the most vulnerable neighborhoods of the city. In this case, besides the workshops and informative sessions about energy bills and energy communities in the neighborhood, the local administration has started to provide a direct advising service about the energy bills to the citizens, in coordination with the energy poverty alleviation office, staffed by Energy Mentors that support the citizens.

In addition to the city of Vitoria-Gasteiz, many other local or regional administrations have participated in the POWERPOOR project in a similar way, establishing energy offices or including the energy poverty perspective on the already existing offices, to support the local community and to empower citizens on tackling energy poverty and participating in collective initiatives. In this case, some of the examples are the region of Oarsoaldea, Lizarraldea or Tolosaldea, all of them part of a network of energy offices that was created with the support of the POWERPOOR project.

From one to many, local heroes in action.

Individual citizens can also lead the initiatives to tackle energy poverty by themselves, and that is the case of Nestor and Miren, two motivated and dedicated Energy Mentors. Both of them approached the POWERPOOR project thanks to the open calls that were

made to promote the trainings, and after they participated in the online trainings, they got certified as Energy Mentors.



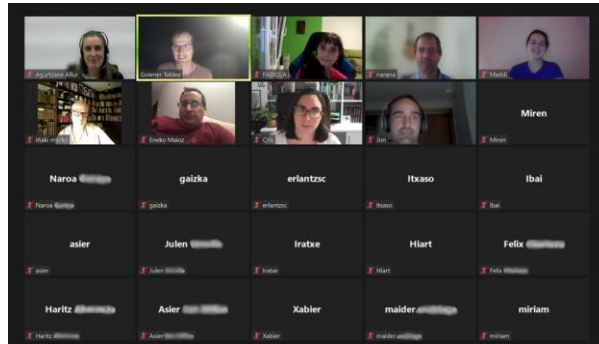
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Miren likes to work as a volunteer to contribute to the community, and she was aware of the multifaceted issue of energy poverty. So directly after she participated in one of the POWERPOOR trainings and got certified as an Energy Mentor, she started to help other citizens in energy-related topics. First, she contacted the people around her, mainly the people she already knew before, and quickly started to advise them on how to improve their situation to save energy and money. She did it through phone calls, online communication, and home visits, and she provided the support using the POWERPOOR toolkit as well as other resources and the knowledge she obtained in the trainings. She has supported more than 20 households in her hometown Ondarroa and in the city of Bilbo, mainly through advice about how to improve the energy contracts and behavioural changes optimizing the energy use. Her actions were featured in the local newspaper. She also helped to improve the energy efficiency in the different cases she encountered in the home visits, for example fixing windows that do not close well or putting timers on electric appliances.



Miren also collaborated with the Red Cross, participating in several sessions, and thanks to it she reached more vulnerable households to support them on their energy use and bills. To keep updated on the situation of energy poverty and to keep learning, she participated again in the POWERPOOR trainings, where she also shared her experience, which was enriching for the rest of the participants. In that way, she has been a very motivated Mentor, not only supporting households but also supporting other Mentors and Supporters. In addition, she participated a couple of times in the informal online

gatherings organised by POWERPOOR in Spain, where she could get answers to some of her questions and at the same time she shared her experience together with the rest of Supporters and Mentors participating in these events. She also has been eager to help other Supporters and Mentors in carrying out home visits, helping them to make the first step. In order to broaden the POWERPOOR network, she has been motivating people around her to participate in trainings, and also trying to get involved her municipality in alleviating energy poverty.



In the case of Nestor, he had initiated a group in his town, Eskoriatza, to work on collective self-consumption, and was interested in the creation of an energy community. That is why he joined the training courses of the POWERPOOR project; and he got more than what he was looking for, as he also got trained in other aspects such as energy efficiency, energy bills as well as improvement measures. With all he learned in the trainings and the support of the project's resources, he started to advise the people of his town in energy-related aspects, mainly by helping them on understanding their energy bills and on improving their energy consumptions and expenses with simple measures. He did it mainly through home visits or face-to-face communication, but he also used an online forum of the town to give advice.

In addition, he also organised several workshops and collective sessions with the support of the cooperative Goiener, that is the POWERPOOR partner as well as with the local group of Jauzi Ekosoziala, to inform and advise the citizens about energy-related aspects, among others the optimization of the energy contracts. Thanks to all these activities and advice, Nestor with the support of his local community, has contributed to empower the inhabitants of his town, and it is estimated that the total amount of economic savings has been about 20.000 €, to a large degree by optimizing natural gas contracts. As an example of a particular case, only by improving the habits of energy consumption in a household, it has reached a saving of 500 kWh per year.

