European Commission

Final Recommendations

EUROPEAN CITIZENS' PANEL

Energy Efficiency

Recommendation No. 1

Increase the attractiveness of public transport for passengers
We recommend that the European Commission conduct regular studies to enhance the energy efficiency of urban and suburban passenger transport systems across all Member States. This study should include a comprehensive inventory and assessment of the electrification and attractiveness of public transportation systems. This approach shall enable the identification of gaps and shortcomings in existing systems and shall highlight exemplary practices that could be adopted by Member States. Based on the study results, the European Commission could establish a range of subsidies for Member States to invest in improving the attractiveness and electrification of their transport systems as needed. The study should serve as a benchmark for the current state of affairs and will assist the European Commission in setting targets for Europe as a whole. Regular monitoring shall facilitate continuous improvement of system performance and increases in energy efficiency.
Justification: This recommendation aims to enhance the quality of life by optimising public transportation, which is essential for daily activities and is more energy efficient than individual cars. Through this study, we anticipate practical outcomes that will facilitate the implementation of energy efficiency principles. Although public transport is more efficient than individual cars, its underutilization suggests that there are barriers that need to be addressed. The European Commission must investigate the reasons behind this underuse. By making public transport more efficient, convenient, and accessible, we can improve the quality of connections and reduce economic and CO2 impacts, thus encouraging more people to choose public transport over private vehicles. Additionally, considering the high population concentration in urban areas, the study could propose tailored transport combinations for the future that would improve energy efficiency that is urgently needed in face of climate change. The added value of this approach is that it takes into account individual and collective transport, as well as future evolutions of modes of transport. It offers insights into specific cases observed in different EU Member States.

Recommendation No. 2

Deliver the most energy-efficient transport across Europe: Get goods off the road, get people out of planes, and introduce a 'railway first principle'

We recommend incentivising companies and people to use the train in order to be more energy efficient. For this, we recommend to:

1. Electrify train lines to reduce carbon emissions.
2. Modernise the rail infrastructure.
3. Digitise journey planning and buying tickets to optimise the customer experience.
4. Standardise railways between Member States and integrate with local transport systems.
5. Adapt timetables to ensure faster journey times.
6. Promote train travel to compete with short-haul airlines and buses.
    - Faster journey times with high speed rail.
    - Better facilities, e.g. dining cars, wi-fi, sleeping wagons, etc.
    - Allow larger pieces of luggage and bicycles in all trains.
7. Fill trains through the use of affordable pricing.
    - Special ticket type promotions: tickets for families, students, senior citizens, people with disabilities, low-income groups.
    - Make freight pricing affordable.
8. Open up decommissioned rail lines: closed lines lie abandoned.
9. Connect EU peripheries.
10. To facilitate the implementation all of these suggestions, we recommend to increase investment and subsidies:
    - Encourage short-term private investment while maintaining overall public ownership and control.
    - Tax fossil fuels, including aviation fuel.

Justification:

This recommendation is important, because train travel and freight movement are key areas in which quick energy efficiency gains can be made. The future of our ecology, economy, and technology requires us to act. Therefore, we recommend making passenger and goods transport more attractive and efficient. To achieve this, we need to act at the European level.

Recommendation No. 3

Expand the implementation of energy efficiency in buildings
We recommend that the EU supports Member States to ensure that significantly more buildings undergo energy-efficient refurbishment. Focus should be on residential buildings. Member States should be supported to facilitate the renovation of residential buildings, in which low income people live. Competitions at national level could help to find good transferable solutions (model projects). EU Member States should be asked to offer tax relief for owners in which most of the tenants are below a certain income. This would be a good incentive to have houses renovated. It must be ensured that it is in the interest of both tenants and landlords. In particular, it must be avoided that tenants are evicted in order for higher rents to be charged. Every EU citizen (whether tenant or owner) should have the opportunity to obtain free advice on the specific energy situation in their home (a one-stop agency). The recommendation also includes support and subsidy options to improve the energy situation.
Justification: This recommendation is important, because: ● There are already numerous EU directives for public buildings (EED), for non-residential buildings (recently adopted EPBD) and also for new buildings of all kinds (EPBD). Hence the focus on residential buildings. ● The EU directives can only be effective if there is also national and local implementation that actually reaches individual homeowners. ● In many EU Member States, people with low incomes often live in houses with particularly poor energy standards, poor structural conditions and high energy costs.

Recommendation No. 4

Improve the state of skilled labour in the EU in the energy efficiency sector
We recommend an increase in training in occupations related to energy efficiency. The EU could issue the following measures: 1. Member States could provide subsidies for individuals to be trained in skilled green labour. The state should incentivise the worker to stay and work in the country for a certain amount of time afterwards. 2. The EU could support short-term exchange or rotation programmes similar to ERASMUS programmes for students and workers in the field of energy efficiency (skilled and in training). 3. Until the lack of skilled workers in the area of energy efficiency is solved, visas should be issued for skilled, non-EU workers to come work in the specific Member States that issue said visas.
Justification: This recommendation is important because having skilled workers on all levels of energy efficiency implementation is crucial for the success of all other recommendations that the European Citizens' Panel have worked on. Without a skilled workforce, Member States cannot hope to achieve the energy efficiency goals. We propose three measures, each answering to a different need connected to qualifications of workers and the job market. Measure 1: This measure is targeted at individuals who want to upgrade or get skills in areas connected to energy efficiency. National governments, by providing subsidies for training, can make them more accessible to everyone, especially people from poorer backgrounds, who otherwise might not be able to invest their time in upskilling or reskilling. However, we also propose that Member States take into consideration the risk of brain-drain (workers moving abroad for better pay). The workers who go through subsidised training should be encouraged in some way to use their new skills in the country that invested in their training. Accessible financing would make the courses more attractive, which could lead to more people seeking employment in the field. That means more experts who can plan, implement and audit energy efficiency related investments. Measure 2: This is an incentive for Member States to share their skilled workforce on short-term projects and make sure Member States lacking specialists can also develop energy efficient initiatives. This could lead to a cross-border exchange of information and skills through which green skills will be promoted. Measure 3: We acknowledge the fact that not all areas in which skilled workers are needed can be quickly filled by the local workforce. It will take time to create a market of skilled workers in Europe, so in the meantime it would be useful to find ways to invite qualified individuals from outside of the EU. In summary, the baseline condition is that without skilled workers, people cannot make the changes to become more energy efficient.

Recommendation No. 5

Secure the future through green education
We recommend more education on green and Energy Efficiency issues. This could be done by introducing the following measures: 1. A European certificate for energy efficiency, modelled after the International Computer Driving License (ICDL), to encourage a basic level of knowledge in energy efficiency. 2. Member states should ensure that a certain number of skilled green workers graduate from courses connected to energy efficiency each year in order to increase the number of green skilled workers in the country. This concept was adopted in previous years in the case of students attending universities. 3. The EU should introduce public awareness campaigns organised to emphasise the value of green skilled workers and show that these are the jobs of the future. It could be targeted especially to young people to show that manual work can be as attractive as an office job.
Justification: Quality education is the base of any meaningful change. We propose three measures, each answering to a different need connected to education: lack of general knowledge on Energy efficiency, young people not going into vocational training needed to support energy efficient initiatives and changing the perception on careers needed to support the energy transition, to make them more attractive. Firstly, the group agrees that more knowledge on energy efficiency is needed in general. Knowledge lowers the threshold to make Energy Efficiency choices on an individual and national level. This could work as a school subject, a required professional course or a university course. In general, we advise the course to be connected to an incentive for every level at which you can take the course. Secondly, in the past European university targets have shown that European targets incentivise Member States to put more attention on certain areas in education. Such targets in the field of Energy Efficiency training will eventually lead to an increase of the number of people that go into vocational training. In other words, by setting targets for Member States, the EU pressures them to increase the amount of people in Energy Efficiency related areas. This way the governments are directly responsible for developing a skilled workforce. Lastly, this recommendation is important because the way people perceive working in manual labour and technical areas needs to be changed for the better. The campaigns could show what different areas of work look like, showing that physical work is crucial, gives good future perspectives and does not have to be less interesting than work in an office.

Recommendation No. 6

Manage and monitor the implementation of EU directives
We recommend that the EU ensures the implementation of energy efficiency directives in Member States, as they are currently implemented differently. Aspects to improve implementation are: information, funding, and sanctions. Information needs to be accessible and audience-specific, e.g. addressing youth through social media or elders through television, and easily visible in public spaces. The EU only finances compliant Member States based on measurable progress. The financing needs to be just, proportional and fair, considering the different capacities of Member States. The sanctioning mechanisms already exist and the Commission can bring governments of non-complying Member States to court. To increase transparency, there should be a ranking of Member States according to their implementation efforts. Lastly, the EU should incentivise national governments to establish a "ticketing system" so that citizens can report energy waste and local authorities can act accordingly.
Justification: This recommendation is important because ensuring implementation of directives in all countries would impact all EU citizens and even offer them the possibility to contribute directly to the monitoring process. Furthermore, if there is more harmonisation among Member States, it will be easier to decide on new measures in the future. Specifically on information, finding new ways to include different strata of the population could enhance accountability of both the EU and the national governments. Only with effective implementation at Member State level, the transformation in the energy sector and advancing energy efficiency can be achieved at the necessary speed and intensity. If efficiency standards in every Member State are met, more EU citizens can enjoy the multiple benefits of energy efficiency.

Recommendation No. 7

Help EU citizens to develop energy communities focused on energy efficiency by providing information and financial support

We recommend:

1. To encourage information on energy efficiency and visibility of current energy communities. Specifically, we could make the information about energy communities understandable and accessible to all EU citizens or we could share good practices concerning energy communities within the EU.
2. To value economically energy savings achieved through the development of efficient energy communities. Precisely, we could develop currently inexistant mechanisms, or a system of energy efficiency certificates.
3. To help the local public authorities to financially support the development of energy efficient communities' initiatives. More specifically, they could use the funds that are coming directly from the EU (e.g. FEDER fund).

Once these communities are operational, the priority would be to make energy efficiency the main principle of the community. Specifically, we could insulate buildings, introduce new technologies, and develop communal heating and cooling systems.

Justification:

This recommendation is important, because an energy community is based on citizens' or local initiatives. However, the lack of precise information regarding the functioning and the funding of energy communities could discourage some citizens from developing such communities. Moreover, the existing energy communities are not *de facto* efficient and the geographical and financial circumstances of EU Member States are sometimes very different. Therefore, we need to make the relevant information accessible to everyone, as well as to enhance the cooperation between Member States, so as to eventually develop energy efficient communities.

One of the principles of an efficient energy community is to avoid energy waste. Today, the absence of energy distributors in the energy community systems is an obstacle to achieve zero waste. We need to make sure that private actors are encouraged to join energy communities. For example, the European Commission could encourage the Member States to deliver energy efficiency certificates to private companies if they are working with energy communities. We also need to focus on the economical positive impact of not consuming energy. We also consider that we need to fairly price the excess of the energy produced by the communities.

We consider that local public authorities are the most suitable actors to invest some of the EU funds they receive to support the energy communities, as we consider that citizens will trust more their local public authorities, than the national government. However, local public authorities should keep in mind that energy communities have to remain financially accessible to everyone, by distributing the funds to citizens based on their income. Moreover, the funds managed by the local authorities could help citizens access expertise to ameliorate the energy efficiency of their communities, instead of investing their own or the community's savings. Furthermore, we should also

give power directly to the citizens within the energy communities to obtain direct access and manage those EU funds.

Finally, once these three previous elements can be provided, we should ensure that energy communities place the energy efficiency first principle at the centre of their development, by insulating buildings and developing heating and cooling systems that could help reduce the amount of energy wasted.

Recommendation No. 8

Finance a fair right to energy related home renovation
We recommend the introduction of a more advantageous tax system for small property owners, so that tenants are not seen as an obstacle to renovating their homes. This should be achieved through tax relief on work and materials depending on people's income. The lowest incomes should receive the most help. Subsidy mechanisms should be provided in advance of the work or in instalments as the renovation work progresses. Governments need to invest in social housing using energy-efficient and sustainable materials. CO2 tax revenues should be earmarked, in part, for energy efficiency (including renovation work). Multinational companies that pollute more, should be taxed accordingly. Banks should facilitate access to credit for energy renovation with an interest rate tailored to income.
Justification: Social justice means having equitable access to energy and housing. Today, we face unacceptable situations: some people are living in severe energy poverty, and small homeowners from the middle class do not benefit from the aid and subsidies to renovate either their own homes or the properties they rent out. Tenants feel powerless to make a change. We find it intolerable that efforts are not equitably distributed and that for some, living in thermal comfort is inaccessible. Equitable access makes energy efficiency more affordable for everyone and will thus contribute to the collective fight against climate change. Today, financing models for renovation exist in all EU member states but are not always optimal and do not always meet the needs of the target audiences.

Recommendation 9

Achieve energy efficiency targets by strengthening everyone's ability to act

We recommend that the EU encourages support measures for the implementation of energy efficiency standards, either directly or through strong incentives to Member States. This will help to ensure that efforts are shared fairly between individuals and businesses, but also between regions, so that no one is left behind.

Key principles:

- Developing a culture of energy efficiency through better information to help us use less and better energy,
- Conditional incentives, help companies to integrate energy efficiency into their production, distribution and sales, taking care not to weaken SMEs,
- Guaranteeing a minimum energy amount for decent living conditions, and dedicating a large proportion of aid to the most vulnerable (e.g.: negative interest rate loans). The aim is to reduce social inequalities rather than perpetuate them,
- Provide incentives for all individuals, but in inverse proportion to their income, especially through progressive energy pricing and dependent on energy sources.

Justification:

This recommendation is important because while energy efficiency standards exist, their accessibility and implementation remain limited. Today, numerous energy efficiency standards exist on a European scale (construction and renovation of buildings, eco-design of products and appliances, fight against programmed obsolescence, right to repair, etc.).

They are ambitious, and are helping the market to evolve, but their implementation varies from one member country to another. They set technical requirements that have a financial impact, may exclude certain groups (not everyone can have their home energy-retrofit, or buy the most efficient household appliances), or give rise to situations of unfair competition (between European companies that respect these standards in their production processes and companies outside the European Union).

Energy efficiency shouldn't be a luxury, or an option that some can avoid. The EU could play a major role to ensure that energy efficiency improves the daily life of people, especially the most vulnerable households. We are aware that some of our

local authorities and administrations can play a major role in setting an example and driving the market forward.

We are aware that certain elements of our recommendation do not depend solely on the European Union and require strong alignment with the Member States. But a Citizens' Panel is the time to be bold, isn't it?

Recommendation 10

Increase energy independence and efficiency, becoming a global example
We recommend that the European Union invests in research and development of new energy technologies, including renewables, in order to achieve higher energy efficiency. This includes the areas of: 1. Energy production (hydrogen, nuclear fusion, etc.); 2. Energy storage (batteries); 3. Energy transfer; and 4. Reducing energy consumption. We also recommend that the EU promotes using country-specific competitive advantages in energy production, while facilitating the exchange of best practices and knowledge between Member States. Furthermore, we recommend prioritising the actions within the Energy Efficiency First Principle framework which contribute the most to energy independence.
Justification: Politically, the recommendation is important because it protects Europe and its citizens from potential geopolitical crises. It also helps protect European values and democracy by allowing the EU to cut ties with corrupt governments. At the same time, it can help EU legislation move quicker, as Europe would have more freedom to set its own standards. Knowledge exchange between Member States would also help improve relations between them. Socio-economically, it would increase the EU's competitiveness and enable redirecting the money used to pay the 61% in energy imports (data from 2019: https://ecrgroup.eu/campaign/energy_security) to internal investments that generate more value for the EU and its citizens. Less energy imports from third countries would also result in reducing exposure to price fluctuations and disruptions in the global energy markets, as well as creating more jobs within the EU. Environmentally, it could lead to reduced energy consumption, green growth and climate neutrality, which are all connected to the Energy Efficiency First Principle and the EU's sustainability pledges.

Recommendation 11

Develop energy-efficient communities for responsible consumption and increased local energy production
We recommend incentivising energy communities across Member States. The European Union and member states should collaborate to provide funding and expertise to support energy communities. Local authorities could be the drivers of this change. A key aspect of incentivising energy communities is the establishment of clear targets in the European Energy Efficiency Directive of 2030. Compulsory monitoring of energy production in energy communities can provide valuable data for monitoring progress and identifying areas for improvement, new legislation, and policy objectives. It is essential to diversify energy sources in each Member State based on their unique characteristics and resources. We recommend reducing consumption by using smart technology (e.g. LED lights, efficient heating systems). The EU should also focus on: ● Systemic changes that enable people to apply the Energy Efficiency First Principle, ● Promoting local and renewable energy, ● Incentivising awareness raising, education from an early age and citizen engagement.
Justification: This recommendation is important to protect our environment and preserve our planet, not only for us, but future generations. Relying on local energy communities will increase energy security and energy independence within Europe, fostering a different paradigm of production and consumption. This recommendation can ensure that everyone in Europe has the means to fight energy poverty with the help of energy communities. This recommendation could serve not only as an energy efficiency solution, but also as a way of flourishing life in local communities, fostering social participation and democracy for everyone included.

Recommendation 12

Empower consumers to become energy efficient
We recommend that information provided to consumers be made more accessible, transparent, and usable, to empower households and organisations to become more energy efficient. We therefore recommend: ● an online portal with a self-audit function to help consumers assess their needs regarding transport, home improvements, and low-costs tips. It would provide them with a solutions package, including next steps and contact information. ● a network of physical one-stop-shops at municipal level (city halls, libraries) where independent experts are available to follow up. The network should not discriminate between rural/urban areas, and social groups. The one-stop-shop should provide advice on legislative, financial, technical aspects, and local service providers. Local actors are called upon to spread awareness of the service. ● more accessible energy efficiency labels on products, understandable to everybody, including information on products' lifespan, and reference to the one-stop-shop-network.
Justification: This recommendation is important, because appropriate decisions can only be taken if we have proper information to base our action on them. This information must be understandable and accessible to all. While there might already be a lot of information available, it is often not known, let alone understandable by all. Consumers should be aware of their energy consumption and own their data, the options available to them, the costs of these different options, and the services and support available to them to help them become more energy efficient.

Recommendation 13

Optimise and develop the grid system from producer to the end-user in favour of renewable energy sources

We recommend that the EC prioritises the optimisation of the grid:

1. Improve energy security and reliability through investment in renewables, research on energy storage and implementation of smart management.
2. Draft an investment plan including guidelines for Member States towards improving the grid at the local and cross-border level.
3. Develop the grid considering possibilities and advantages of centralisation and decentralisation. The most energy-efficient option should be implemented on a case-by-case basis.
4. Implement mechanisms that monitor the adequate use of funding and enforce EU rules so that the end user can experience the full benefit of the investment and companies can comply.
5. Encourage Member States to assist citizens in using smart metres and energy-efficient sources, as well as implement financial incentives for suppliers and consumers to utilise energy-efficient practices; consider the possibility of creating the framework for citizens to store and produce energy.

Justification:

This recommendation is important because optimising the grid to accommodate renewable energy sources yields numerous benefits for both producers and end users. Optimising the grid systems enhances energy efficiency and promotes the adoption of renewables. Efficient energy transport, storage, and usage are ensured through this approach. Additionally, grid development fosters stable energy prices, encourages the use of smart appliances, and facilitates smoother energy supply.

Consumers and suppliers benefit from grid optimisation and development through smart management systems. Consumers can access valuable information about energy consumption, suppliers can better monitor demand and production efficiency, and storage systems can complement the modernisation process.

By incentivising energy efficiency and minimising energy loss, grid optimisation not only reduces costs but also promotes environmental sustainability. Empowering consumers and integrating them into the energy system helps to level the playing field and diminishes the influence of corporations. Shifting our mindset towards energy efficiency is imperative for widespread implementation and citizen engagement.

Moreover, modernising grids aligns with EU objectives of reducing emissions, combating climate change, and transitioning to a decarbonised energy sector. By implementing this approach, we will be producing more energy, be more efficient within Europe and less dependent on foreign sources. Finally, this new sector will lead to new job opportunities and improve the EU's position as a global player in a fairer energy system.

European Citizens' Panel on Energy Efficiency
Final recommendations

No.	Title of recommendation	Level of support	Approval rate
13	Optimise and develop the grid system from producer to the end-user in favour of renewable energy sources	5,25	96%
10	Increase energy independence and efficiency, becoming a global example	5,18	92%
7	Help EU citizens to develop energy communities focused on energy efficiency by providing information and financial support	4,96	91%
3	Expand the implementation of energy efficiency in buildings	4,89	90%
9	Achieve energy efficiency targets by strengthening everyone's ability to act	4,87	87%
1	Increase the attractiveness of public transport for passengers	4,83	91%
8	Finance a fair right to energy related home renovation	4,73	87%
12	Empower consumers to become energy efficient	4,71	84%
11	Develop energy-efficient communities for responsible consumption and increased local energy production	4,64	84%
2	Deliver the most energy-efficient transport across Europe: Get goods off the road, get people out of planes, and introduce a 'railway first principle'	4,55	79%
4	Improve the state of skilled labour in the EU in the energy efficiency sector	4,49	82%
5	Secure the future through green education	4,48	82%
6	Manage and monitor the implementation of EU directives	4,19	72%