

# 2GENDERS

## Generation and Gender ENergy DEprivation: Realities and Social policies

**DURATION**  
1/10/2013 - 31/12/2017

**BUDGET**  
635.913 €

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

- Context

The 2GENDERS project focuses on energy poverty in Belgium. Put simply, energy poverty can be understood as the inability to access adequate energy services in the home. Energy poverty is a real concern in current Belgian society, as economic inequalities and energy prices are on the rise. Price increases in housing and energy differentially affect the poorest sectors of society. Access to energy and the services it provides can become insecure, with very negative effects on wellbeing, threatening the dignity and decent existence that are named as fundamental entitlements in the 2010 Charter of fundamental rights of the European Union. Belgium has named energy poverty as an area for action in its federal plan to tackle poverty, but there is much work to be done to realise this aspiration.



- General objectives and underlying research questions

The project will describe the phenomenon and the populations affected, ascertain the wider associations, if any, between energy poverty and social relations, mobility and self-reported health, and design and deliberate possible interventions with a range of important stakeholders including the energy poor. Particular attention will be paid to gender and generational aspects of energy poverty because there is good reason to believe that energy poverty is not manifested equally between genders and generations – for example single mothers and older people may be more affected. The final aim of the project is to provide policy makers with a set of theoretically and empirically informed policy options and recommendations to alleviate both the occurrence of energy poverty in Belgium, and its effects.

- Nature of the interdisciplinarity

The team to undertake this project is multidisciplinary, which is appropriate as understanding energy poverty and its associated vulnerabilities well requires multiple lenses and the work involved will need numerous competencies (socio-anthropology, psychology, economics, demography and statistics, philosophy). Also involved is an international partner from the UK, where energy poverty has been on the political and research agenda for over two decades. The 2GENDERS project will therefore draw on the latest developments in conceptual understanding of energy poverty and build on international experience in its alleviation.



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## - Methodology

Defining energy poverty is not a simple matter and this project will consider the appropriateness of different definitions for the Belgian context, before working on the identification of the extent of energy poverty in the Belgian population. This identification will involve statistical analyses of large data bases including the SILC surveys and the Generations and Gender Programme Survey. Further understanding of the finer grain of circumstances leading to energy poverty will be provided by qualitative methods including in-depth interviews in the three Regions of Belgium and participant observation in two of them. Social workers will be involved as mediators and gatekeepers.

A major part of the programme of work will be to understand the multi-dimensional aspects of energy poverty, including for example vulnerabilities associated to social relations, to work and study, to mobility and to health. This approach is informed by current work from the UK and beyond, which is seeing energy poverty as a form of vulnerability associated to a number of essential capabilities. These may be different for different households for example older people, different genders or those with children. Work here will make use of further statistical analysis of existing data sets, in-depth interviews and immersed ethnographic work with a selection of energy poor households and social services dealing with this issue.



## - Potential impact of the research on science, society and/or on decision-making

The conceptual and empirical work will lead to identification of a range of options and opportunities for intervention to alleviate the occurrence and impacts of energy poverty, with rationales for each particular option. Options will be deliberated with energy-poor households and with other important stakeholders including policy makers, regulators, NGOs and social workers, using the Method of Analysis in Groups (MAG). The project will therefore be in a position to make strong final recommendations for specific courses of action that will be sensitive to the needs of different households, conceptually and empirically informed, and trusted by a range of actors involved.

In addition and before the end of the project, training courses in Dutch and French will also be organised for social workers dealing with energy-poverty issues in municipal services or in non-governmental organisations to provide them with the findings of this research project.

The research findings will be disseminated in national and international conferences as well as in scientific peer-reviewed papers.

Overall, the project will make a highly significant, concrete contribution to the wellbeing of Belgian society through the realisation of cutting edge, internationally informed research and in doing so will contribute to the wider understanding of energy poverty in Europe and internationally by the development of ideas worked through in the specific Belgian context.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

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