



Civic council on energy costs

Summary



NARADA OBYWATELSKA
O KOSZTACH ENERGII

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Introduction

The Civic council on energy costs is a project that we started in November 2021. It is a, countrywide endeavor, undertaken with the goal of conducting multiple-stage conversations about energy poverty and, more broadly, energy costs. Apart from decision-makers and experts, the conversations also include people directly affected by energy poverty, namely the citizens themselves, unable to heat their apartments and to use electric devices to a sufficient degree. As representatives of the Shipyard Foundation, we believe that any good conversation, that aims to produce jointly agreed-upon solutions, requires the coming together of different perspectives: the opinions of experts, interests of the citizens, and the actions of the authorities.

Why do we need to talk about solutions to energy poverty? It is slowly becoming apparent to all, that the average cost of energy will continue to rise. This in turn will impact the economic condition of individuals and whole families, which will have to face the problem by spending more, modifying or limiting their energy consumption, or looking for alternative sources.

According to 2020 data from the Central Statistical Office, the energy poverty problem in Poland concerns about 1.3 M households (approx. 10%)¹. At present, nobody is able to estimate precisely the size of the phenomenon, but it is a belief held by all, that the issue will grow significantly over the next year. The indirect consequences of the problem – poor air quality or the burden on the healthcare system – apply to a much larger population in Poland.

Those affected by this issue must not be left to fend for themselves. The responsibility for coping with growing energy costs should be shared by all – energy recipients, public (local and state) administration, business (energy provider), organizations and institutions supporting those affected the most by the issue, etc.

We believe that the conversation we are proposing is purposeful, as its subject fits into a broader narrative. Energy, its type, cost, and controllers, especially in the face of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, is principal for our common safety. Energy costs, its quality and availability (not only in Poland), constitute one of the most significant elements of the growing uncertainty about the delivery of energy materials, which is definitely going to change. Are there alternative energy sourcing scenarios? How much, if at all, of the energy cost can we share in solidarity as a state, as local communities and individual recipients? How to prepare the country for saving energy and more rational energy management?

Our project, the Civic council on energy costs, aims to address all of these problems. Read more about the project and energy poverty on www.naradaoenergii.pl.

¹ Jak poprawić jakość życia osób ubogich energetycznie? (How to improve the quality of life of people in energy poverty?), Jan Frankowski, Jakub Sokolowski, (Instytut Badań Strukturalnych, 2021 (Institute for Structural Studies, 2021))

Today, we are halfway between the process of engaging the Polish in a conversation held on a local level, and a nationwide citizen's assembly, planned for Fall 2022. The final verdict" of the assembly (a catalogue of recommended solutions to energy poverty) will be delivered to all stakeholders that influence public policies on the local and state levels. This report serves as a summary of the little under 50 local conversations on how to individually prevent the consequences of growing energy prices and what systemic approach can help reduce energy poverty. Local councils took place in whole Poland between March and June, 2022.

We would like to thank every person involved in the organization of local councils and conversations held on them!

Organizer:



Main partner:



Council of experts:



45

local councils held in all of Poland



700 participants

almost **30** experts involved

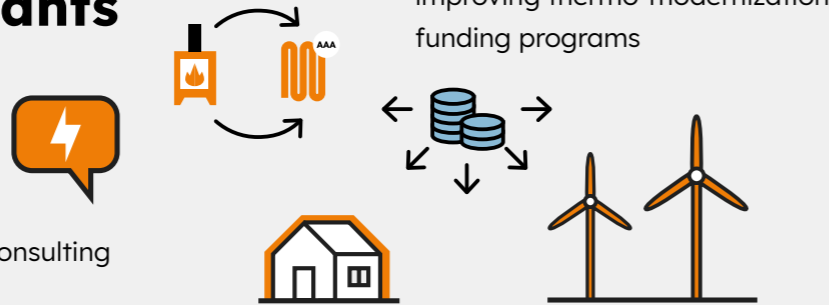
150 godzin rozmów

608 filled out survey questionnaires, **552** participants of councils and **56** non-participating (filled out questionnaire available online)

Solutions supported by councils participants

Local level (communes)

- replacing heating sources
- thermo-modernization of buildings
- communes producing renewable energy
- better and more comprehensive energy consulting



State level

- improving thermo-modernization funding programs

54% councils participants would not contribute financially to combating energy poverty

39% councils participants would be willing to contribute some of their incomes to this goal - 39 PLN per month on average

Preferred sources of financing for energy poverty solutions:

- 50%** European funds
- 46%** state or local government budgets

Participants first and foremost want the solutions to be

effective and eco-friendly!

Energy is a right, not a commodity, only it has to be clean!

38% heating homes in a way that casuses pollution should be prohibited, even if someone can't afford other solutions

60% everyone should have access to heating and electrical power, regardless of their financial situation



Energy poverty

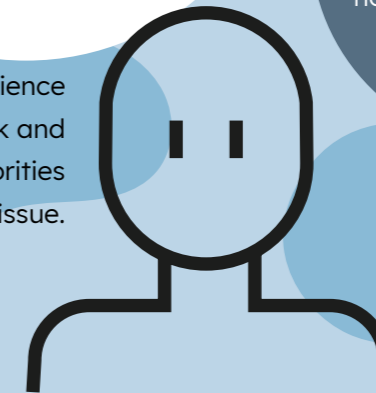
is a difficult topic that isn't thoroughly examined, but

75%

of participants believe that it is important in their area.



Even people who experience the problem find it hard to talk and decide about the direction authorities should take to solve the issue.



24%

of participants delcare that their apartments or houses are not sufficiently warm in Winter.

People feel helpless and lonely in the face of the problems experienced.

Feedback on the councils

It was worth it! - say the organizers of the councils:

"The council was a good moment to start the discussion and to get people thinking about the issue on a local level"

Organizer, Bydgoszcz

"An interesting and factually-rich discussion"

Organizer, Mińsk Mazowiecki

"The council was an eye-opener for me regarding the issue of energy poverty in Poland. It was valuable to learn the views of other communes and their problems"

Participant, LeadAIR council, Energy Forum

"It is a difficult subject to me, as a person living in the country, but the moderator explained things well"

Participant, Jugów



See video summary here:
<https://youtu.be/FcrYtrKBsBo>

! In Fall, we are planning to conduct the first nationwide civic assembly, on which we will attempt to develop a roadmap for systemic solutions to energy poverty.



Part I

THE COURSE OF
THE LOCAL COUNCILS

What were the councils?

The local councils consisted of several-hour meetings, during which the participants had an opportunity to talk about their situation, and to find solutions together, to counteract high energy costs.

The councils differed in terms of their scale, but their goal and structure remained the same – the conversations were held based on a pre-prepared script, with the goal of hearing out opinions and postulates of the participants. Any party could organize a local council, based on the materials developed by us. We particularly strongly encouraged local leaders (i.e. people from social organizations or informal groups) and representatives of local governments. The tools used during the councils, specifically the scripts, videos with solutions and ready-made documents for working during the meeting, as well as visual projects, are available for download on the project's website: naradaoenergii.pl/jak-zorganizowac-narade.

Where and when did the councils take place?

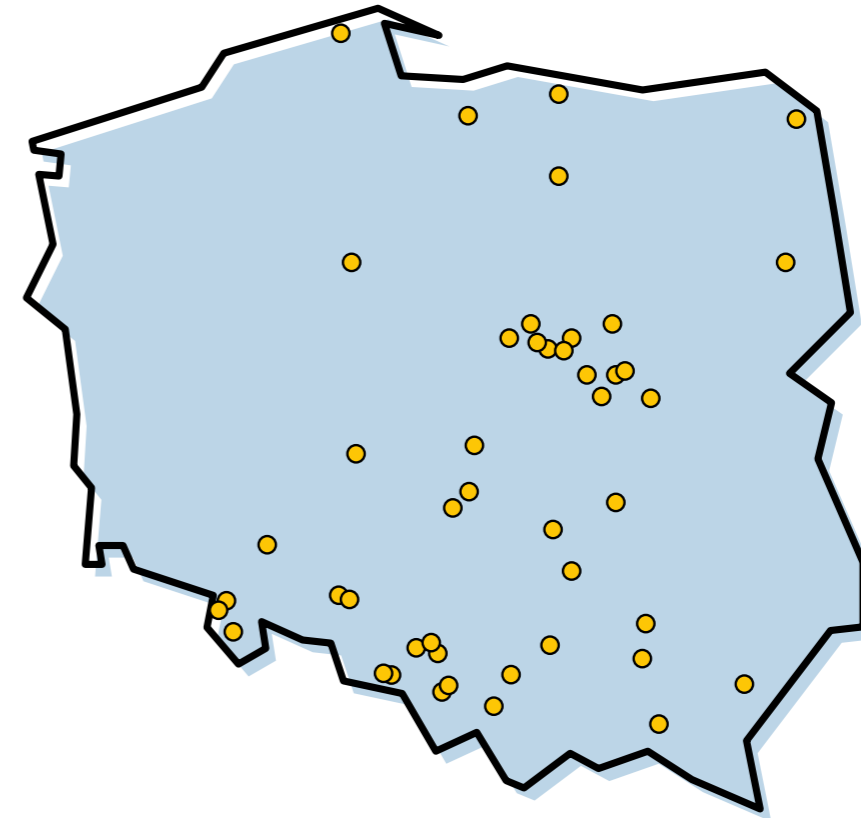
The cycle of local councils (and therefore also the whole project) was inaugurated by a meeting held on March 14th. On that day, we also began to encourage local governments and organizations to conduct councils of their own. One has to keep in mind, that during that time, many entities were involved in relief actions for Ukraine, and at the same time lacked the confidence in tackling the difficult subject matter that we were proposing. Potential council organizers declared that energy poverty is a very serious issue, but that holding such a meeting would be a challenge for them. This is captured well by one of the council's organizers:

This subject, albeit a difficult one, is an important matter, that urgently requires attention. I feel that few are taking it seriously on a local level, people most likely don't know how to get around to it. Such a council is a good opportunity to start the debate and to get people thinking about this issue on a local level".

With this in mind, we have decided to provide additional support to the willing groups and local governments, mostly providing financial assistance, expertise and moderation support. We have also received expert aid from partner organizations in the realization of the project. Ultimately, 45 councils were held in Poland between March and June, with almost 700 people coming together in conversations about energy poverty.

We kicked off the meetings with two pilot conversations – with seniors in Olsztyn, and the community and local government of the Warsaw suburb of Izabelin.

Energy poverty was talked about in the largest urban centers, as well as in towns and villages. Councils were held among others in Łódź, Rybnik, Wrocław, as well as Rydułtowy, Sejny, Jedlicze, Tyszuma, Choczewo and dozens of other towns; all listed at the end of the report.



Who conducted the councils?

Local governments or local leaders were tasked with organizing and conducting the meetings (there were two versions of the script available) and we – with the help of [numerous expert organizations](#) – developed all the tools necessary for conducting the councils. We also responded to any needs reported by the hosts of the meetings, providing support in the form of know-how, organizational, financial assistance, and sometimes also moderation support.

Of the 45 councils, 12 were organized by local governments, and the remaining 33 by social organization representatives, such as among others energy advisors (from the Consumers' Federation), women's associations (Stowarzyszenie Kobiety w Centrum – Women at the Center Association), as well as entities operating in the area of civic participation or climate. We also personally took part in 10 of the councils, co-organizing or moderating them.



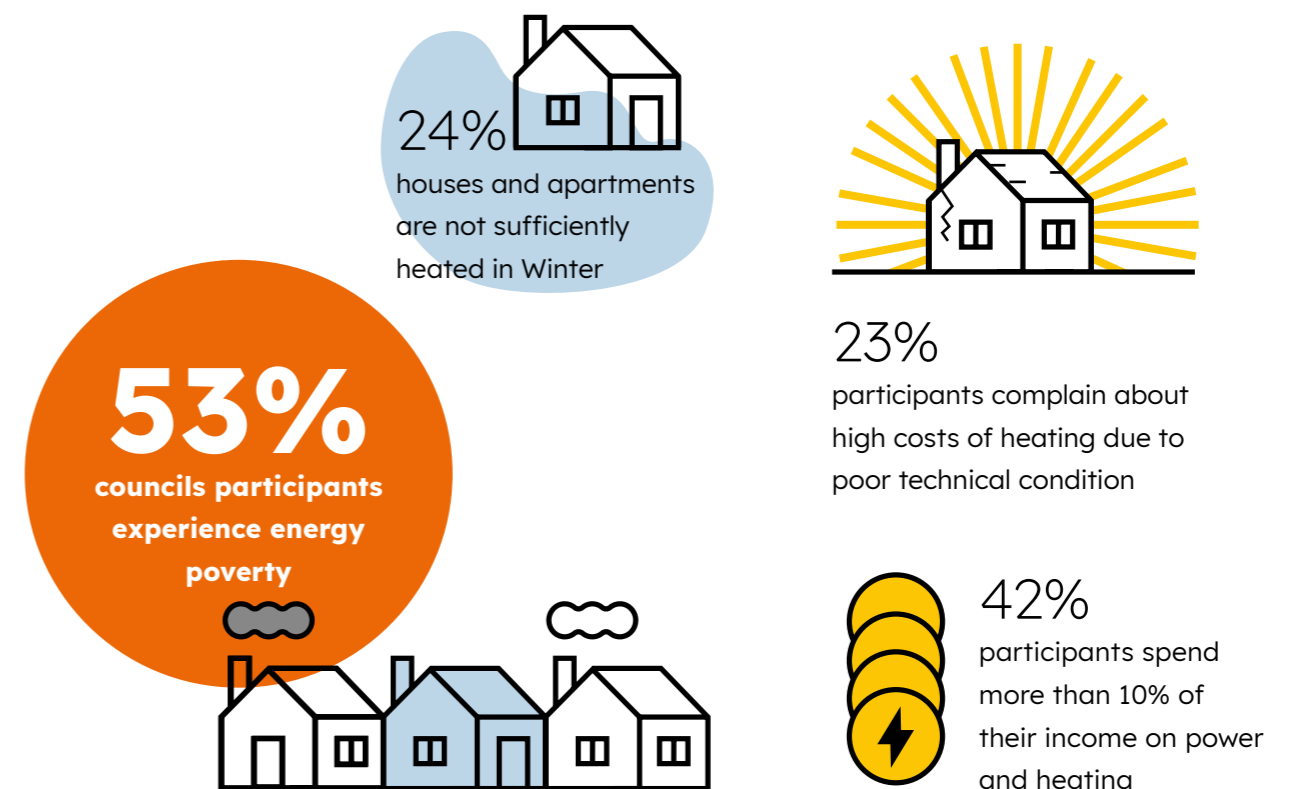
Who took part in the councils?

The councils were intended to constitute a blend of different perspectives and that goal was achieved in its entirety. Decision-makers, experts, climate activists and energy activists, as well as citizens, including people who are or may be affected by energy poverty all shared a platform. Some of the meetings were mostly attended by the elderly, others – by the young, but most were open to all members of the local community.

In total, almost 700 people participated in the meetings, on average 17 per council. More or less one third represented public institutions, administration offices and energy or climate organizations.

A typical participant of the council was a middle-aged woman from a small town or village, a university graduate. Women made up around 60% of all the people that took part in the councils. Many represented local social organizations and the local government. The numerical advantage of women on the councils was among other reasons due to their involvement in the Women at the Center Association project.

Participants represented different societal and generational groups (the youngest participant was 15, the oldest was 97), education levels, occupations, and income brackets. There were many pensioners (22%), entrepreneurs (8%) and very few farmers (3%) participating. Other participants included representatives of homeowner associations, aid institutions, religious organizations, as well as people representing voivodship-level institutions. Of this very diverse group, more than half (53%) experience at least one in a range of difficulties connected to high energy costs or poor technical condition of the building they are living in. 24% live in houses and apartments that are not heated sufficiently in Winter, meaning that they are affected by energy poverty. A nearly identical share (23%) believe that the poor technical condition of their households is what results in very high heating costs. Councils' participants were also asked about their income and energy spending, but they were reluctant to answer, even though the survey was anonymous. Only 255 people responded to the survey in a way that made it possible to estimate the energy poverty indicator as exceedingly high (over 10%) in the share of household energy costs. Of these, as many as 42% spent more than 10% of their income on electricity and heating. This means, that they are also included in the energy impoverished, according to the most common definition of this phenomenon².



² This often-used definition of energy poverty has been adapted from the British system, which assumes that a household that needs to spend more than 10% of their income on sufficient heating is suffering from energy poverty.

What was the course of the councils?



The organizers had a set of tools to use: a variety of scripts (for meetings lasting from 1.5 to even 10 hours, split over two days) and workshop materials that included educational boards and two videos. All of the materials are available on the project website: naradaoenergii.pl/jak-zorganizowac-narade. Furthermore, those willing to hold the council could listen to a webinar introducing the topic and familiarize themselves with two handbooks – one explaining the problem of energy poverty in detail, the other guiding the reader through the process of organizing a local council. The Shipyard Foundation team was also available for calls and emails in order to tailor the councils to individual capabilities and needs.

In most cases, the organizers chose the shorter script version – mostly due to their concern that residents would not show interest in a longer form, and because the events were held on weekdays. During the meetings organized with the help of local governments,

the hosts would usually present a diagnosis of the local scale of energy poverty and inform about their actions in this field. Meetings organized by grassroots leaders focused instead on raising awareness of the phenomenon, discussing it together, hearing out the participants and summing up their needs and ideas.

The councils usually took from 1.5 to 3.5 hours – not long enough for a sufficiently deep-dive into the subject matter, according to most speakers and hosts. Nevertheless, the councils created a space where key challenges and solutions were discussed. Most of the meetings included work in break-away groups, and also some time for roundtable discussions. Even though after the meetings many felt they haven't had enough dialogue, everyone believed that it was worthwhile. Holding this council was definitely the right thing to do because public meetings rarely go beyond the format of a standard debate or panel discussion. The participants themselves appreciated this. They acknowledged that this was the first time when they had a chance to discuss public policies matter-of-factly, looking for solutions, instead of problems” – stated a representative of a social organization, who moderated the council in one of the communes.

The meetings concluded with a verdict” of the participants, expressed in the survey they filled out.



ZASADY

dobrej narady

1 AKTYWIZUJEMY SIĘ, ŻEBY:

- DOBRZE ZROZUMIEĆ
- WYMYŚLIĆ ROZWIĄZANIA

2 KÓJEMY:

- POJEDYNCZO
- Z SZACUNKIEM

3 PRACUJEMY ZGODNIE Z PLANEM

CEL NARADY

1. ZAPOZNANIE z TEMATEM
UBÓSTWA ENERGETYCZNEGO

2. ZAPOZNANIE z DOSTĘPNYMI
ROZWIĄZANAMI
i WYPRACOWANIE NOWYCH

3.

Part II

CONCLUSIONS

FROM COUNCILS

The councils were summed up in two ways. On one hand, we asked the organizers to fill out a form after the meeting concluded (filled out by 32 of the 45 hosts). On the other hand, every participant was asked to fill out a survey which aimed to capture their individual perspective and ideas for solving the energy poverty problem. Presented below are conclusions from both of these sources. Let us start with the conclusions from the summaries sent to us by the organizers.

What conclusions were reached on the councils?

Summary from the perspective of the organizers

The answers presented below reflect the most important trends, threads and postulates observed by the organizers. They also reflect the dynamics of the meetings and their emotional charge.

Participants of the councils were largely aware of the issue and saw it as very serious, requiring immediate action. Some (mostly living in larger cities, also younger people who are less often affected by the energy poverty crisis) were surprised to learn about the scale of this growing phenomenon.

There was no shortage of emotions during the meetings – participants shared their fears about the unpredictability of the growing energy prices and mentioned they felt alone facing them. They pointed out that many of the problems were due to the state and local governments having not planned the aid properly. When commenting on the currently available support means, they would criticize the following:

- the Clean Air program – the first issue is that individuals are required to finance their own contribution to the investment (local governments very rarely provide support in this aspect). Another problem mentioned is the reimbursement mechanism itself - it assumes that the investment will be paid for in full by the individual, who is then forced to wait long to receive reimbursement. Other issues include red tape and lack of assistance from any advisors. In total, the respondents pointed out that the program is completely beyond the reach of people in a poverty crisis, whose situation may be the most dramatic and who may particularly need the support;
- lack of a consistent and comprehensive government policy on solving the energy poverty problem: low support for thermo-modernization and renewable energy sources, no dialogue with the local government about improvements to the system, energy advisors' low activity and low numbers;
- local governments lacking agency and too few employees working on aid programs, which translates into insufficient information and support for people who are the most in need.

As for the local governments, participants very often expressed the need for location solutions that address the demand for energy: creating energy communities and using renewable

energy sources. Another use issue mentioned by participants is the households' usage of inefficient heating sources. Persons from rural areas mentioned the issue of the inability to connect to the power grid, and the resultant need for using ineffective, single-household stoves. Many stories concerned the paradox of replacing heating sources and the resultant unexpected spike in prices: families chose to switch from coal to gas or better-quality fuels, but this meant a significant increase in the cost of heating their homes. Other people wanted that switch for environmental reasons or local requirements, but they were stopped by the concern about increased spending. Participants even declared they will go back to using their old stoves or burn poor quality and polluting fuel.

The above matter is tied to another aspect – low energy efficiency of buildings. The participants considered this one of the crucial challenges in their towns. Another problem raised in cities was the poor situation of downtown areas (with old tenement buildings inhabited by elderly people) and the limited capacity to renovate older buildings due to the monument preservation laws. During the councils, the participants also touched on the housing market, which is presently not suited to the needs of people experiencing energy poverty (among others due to the high costs and the size of the apartments available).

What solutions came up during the councils?

In short, the participants postulated the following:

- **investing in improving the energy efficiency of buildings;**
- **enhancing government aid programs;**
- **local investments in renewable energy sources (photovoltaics and wind farms), diversification of energy sources and enabling communities to produce energy locally;**
- **ad-hoc support (financial and by providing fuel) to help support people who are most in need;**
- **diagnosis and resultant actions informing on how to cut energy costs.**



Participants of the councils focused on a variety of topics, depending on who sat at the table: older people emphasized solutions that help in daily functioning, whereas younger people stressed innovations changing the energy sources

(switching to local sources, making use of renewable energy), whereas local government representatives postulated improving the state support system and enabling decision-making and allocating state-level resources for local initiatives. Generally, however, there was a strong focus on helping the elderly, who are perceived as the most affected by the energy poverty crisis.

The absolutely most important postulate of the councils were investments for improving energy efficiency of buildings: insulation (to prevent heat from escaping through leaky windows or thin walls) and effective, modern and financially reasonable heating sources. This is obviously connected to postulates concerning the financing of these investments – most people in really difficult situations are unable to handle it financially and need this to be paid for them. Participants also mentioned the need for comprehensive action. In one of the Silesia communes, important words were said: reducing the buildings' demand for energy is presently a higher priority than the different energy source types with their emissions". With regard to solutions for improved building energy efficiency (mostly thermo-modernization), participants mentioned private households on one hand, but also stressed the importance of not losing sight of council housing (especially in the central parts of cities, where more buildings have monument status).

Participants were looking for solutions for actions on the state level (for example governmental support programs). Their ideas concerned:

adding a thermo-modernization component to the programs;

- eliminating the requirement for an equity contribution;
- streamlining procedures (simpler forms for the residents and easier system for officials);
- state authorities' oversight over setting prices and subsidies to heating fuels;
- changing the system for calculating energy costs (i.e. sth. resembling the French progressive energy tariffs);
- developing a clear division of tasks and competences in administration and creating a multidisciplinary team tasked with this subject in the government (the team should include experts from the field).

In terms of local solutions, participants mentioned:

- enabling making investments into renewable energy sources (photovoltaics and wind farms);
- diversification of energy sources;
- enabling the communities to locally produce energy;
- ad-hoc support for people in need: heating fuel banks or social benefits, preventive actions (an idea came up in the Podlasie region to offer a reversed mortgage in exchange for building thermo-modernization and stove replacement);
- better identification of the needs of the commune and the people who require support, as well as intensification of information and advisory actions (perhaps also independent from the state and energy providers) for the residents.

Participants would very rarely comment on European Union policies, there were very few mentions of the Emissions Trading System and better application of these resources.

What are the conclusions from the councils?

Perspective of individual participant

Now let us move to the more detailed conclusions based on **survey** responses of the people participating in the councils.

The survey was filled out by 552 people. The same questions were also answered by 56 respondents, who did not participate in the councils but used the digital version of the questionnaire found on the project website.



We are aware that filling out the survey was a challenging task, due to the difficult subject matter that most participants were unfamiliar with. Therefore, we are glad to see how many people filled out the questionnaire. However, we believe that the quality of the responses could have been higher if they had more time for answering the questions.

In the survey, we asked the respondents about the best ways for combating energy poverty, as well as who should be responsible for solving the issue, questions about the role of the state government and local government, who should receive help first and whether everyone should be eligible for such aid. The survey also had questions about personal experiences of energy poverty and standard demographic questions, to help us better understand the distribution of the preferences of the participants.

The people taking part in the councils constituted an exceptionally diverse group based on their socio-demographic attributes, as well as their individual experiences of energy poverty (more about the participants in the first part on pages 12-13). The councils created an exceptional opportunity, for all these people to meet, share experiences, and then fill out the questionnaire to evaluate the already existing solutions, or perhaps to work out new ones. What have they found?

First of all, they established that energy poverty is a significant challenge. This perception is shared both in small towns and large cities. All participants from Kobyłka, in the North-East of Warsaw, population twenty thousand, agreed that energy poverty is an issue in the area. Two-thirds of the participants in Brzeszcze (20 km north from Bielsko-Biala) also held that belief. In Cracow and Radom, 75% and 73% respectively considered energy poverty a local problem. One exception was Elbląg, where it was only perceived as such by 20% of participants (many of whom were young which may explain their stance).

Almost 75% participants stated that energy poverty is an issue in their area, and 29% described it as serious.

What solutions would the participants back?

As we have stated in the previous part of the report, most of the local councils were organized by our partners in the field – the local governments and NGOs. All of these councils shared some similarities, but they also differed in significant ways. They all relied on handbooks provided by the Shipyard Foundation, describing the basics of energy poverty (videos, presentation and boards showing the profiles of people touched by energy poverty and possible solutions to the issue). We assumed that by the end of each council, participants would have learned the basics about the causes, forms and different ways to combat energy poverty. Most of the questions in our survey drew on that knowledge. They asked of the participants to present their own verdict”, point out a preferred level of intervention (i.e. local or national) and specific public policies to be put into place (i.e. fuel banks or building thermo-modernization). When answering questions about specific energy poverty solutions, participants could choose which of these should be undertaken by local governments (local level), and which by the state authorities (state level). We also asked the participants to provide a justification for their choices.

Local-level solutions

Participants were, first of all, asked to choose the best local-level solutions – for the commune they are residents of. They could also indicate their preferences by choosing a maximum of five of the fourteen solutions offered. There was also a space added for writing your own proposed method for fighting energy poverty.

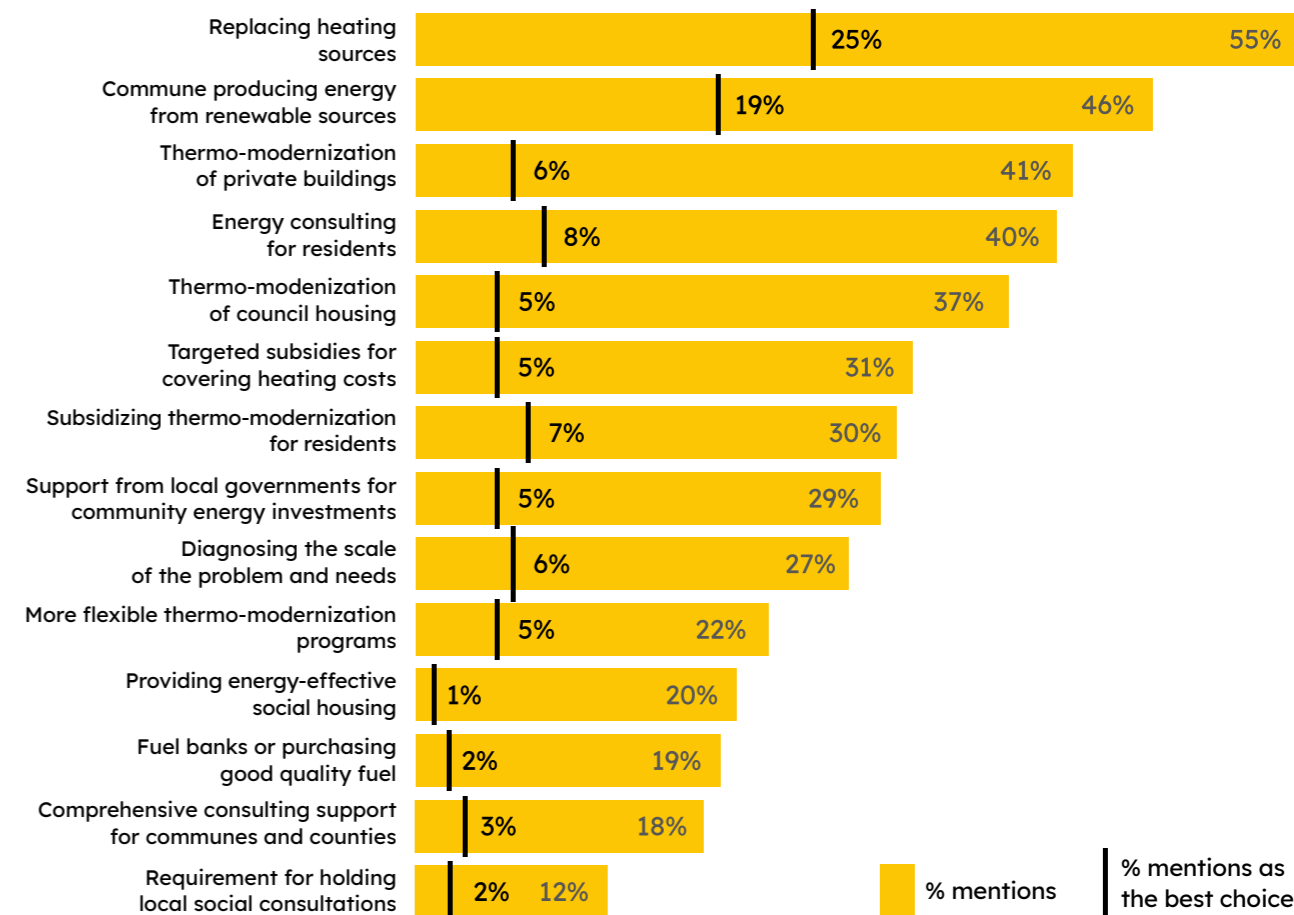
What solutions did the participants indicate as best on the local level? There were three clear leading solutions:

- **replacing heating sources (chosen by 55% of people),**
- **the commune producing energy from renewable sources (46%) and**
- **thermo-modernization of private buildings (41%) and council housing (37%), as well as energy consulting for the residents (40%).**

Most councils' participants believe that the problem of energy poverty in their municipalities can be solved by replacing inefficient heat sources or by producing renewable energy.

Chart I.

Content of ***In your opinion, what should be done to solve the problem of energy poverty in your commune?*** Maximum of 5 solutions can be chosen.



The replacement of heating sources and the commune producing energy from renewable sources were also mentioned most often as the most important solutions, when we asked the survey respondents in the next question to choose only one, most important answer for their commune. Replacement of heating sources and energy production by the commune were identified as most important by 25% and 19% of people respectively.

Respondents also relatively often chose other answers as one of the five most important solutions, although they were rarely their first choice. This was true for the following: energy consulting for residents (chosen by 40% as one of five, but only by 8% as the most important solution), thermo-modernization of private and social housing (important to four out of ten participants, but most important only to one in twenty) and targeted benefits (chosen by 31% respondents, but only 5% picked them as the most important solution).

When respondents were able to pick multiple solutions, they most often chose: local social consultations (12%), comprehensive support of the commune by the voivodship offices (18%), fuel banks or providing fuel to people

who need it most (19%) and giving access to energy-effective council housing (20%). However, one should not conclude on this basis that the Polish society does not want social consultations or better cooperation with government representatives in the field and local governments – rather when they could select only a limited number of survey items, they had to give priority to the solutions they consider best. Implementing the most popular solutions does not mean that the less often chosen ones are rejected or not worth taking into consideration. It is rather the opposite. For example, fuel banks can be an effective transitional solution during a process of energy transformation, which could help reduce its impact on the impoverished.

Afterwards, we asked the people filling out the survey to list reasons why they thought that a given solution was best. Participants most often provided such reasons as “effectiveness” (59%), “ecology” (45%) and “quick results” (35%)³. Only 10% were driven by low costs of the proposed changes, 16% by low burdensomeness for the residents” and – also 16% - were driven by the fact that the proposed action “fairly shares the costs and benefits of the changes”. Only 4% stated that they chose a given solution because such a decision was made on the council.

The solutions that were chosen most often for their effectiveness” are the ones that proved most popular: thermo-modernization of private buildings (82% of people who chose this solution as most important also consider it effective), commune producing energy from renewable sources (76%) and replacing heating sources (63%). On the other hand, the solutions described as most eco-friendly were production of energy from renewable sources” (71%), “supporting the local government for community energy investments” (68%) and “replacing heating sources” (59%). The list of solutions deemed fair” looks interesting. The group first of all includes “targeted benefits for covering heating costs” (35% of choices of this solution were justified this way), “subsidizing thermo-modernization for residents” (31%) and supporting community energy investments (28%). The catalogue of “low-burden” solutions is similar, although much like with “fairness”, it is a reason chosen by a small group of respondents.

Based on the chosen local strategies and the reasoning behind them, we see that councils participants view the problem through two lenses: effectiveness and ecology. Effectiveness is a default explanation, which the participants of the councils chose regardless of their solution. Its popularity is understandable – first and foremost, it is a safe choice (people don’t choose solutions they deem ineffective), but it can also have many meanings. Effectiveness could be the effective solution to the energy poverty problem at all costs, but it can also constitute effective protection of the environment (the combination of effectiveness” and “benefits for the climate” comes up in 31% of mentions), or effective defense of the disadvantaged groups (“effectiveness” and “fairness” – 8% mentions).

We are glad to see that the participants also drew attention to the need for solutions to be environment-friendly – as this aspect was mentioned by 45% of them. It is also positive that eco-friendliness was perceived rather as a reason complementary to efficacy.

³ Several justifications could be chosen for one solution.

State-level solutions

The conclusions that can be drawn from the state-level solution choices are similar to the ones above, although with some reservations. The clear winner, much like in the case of the local level, whether choosing multiple solutions or one, was thermo-modernization (62% chose a solution aimed at improving thermo-modernization financing programs as one of the most important ones).

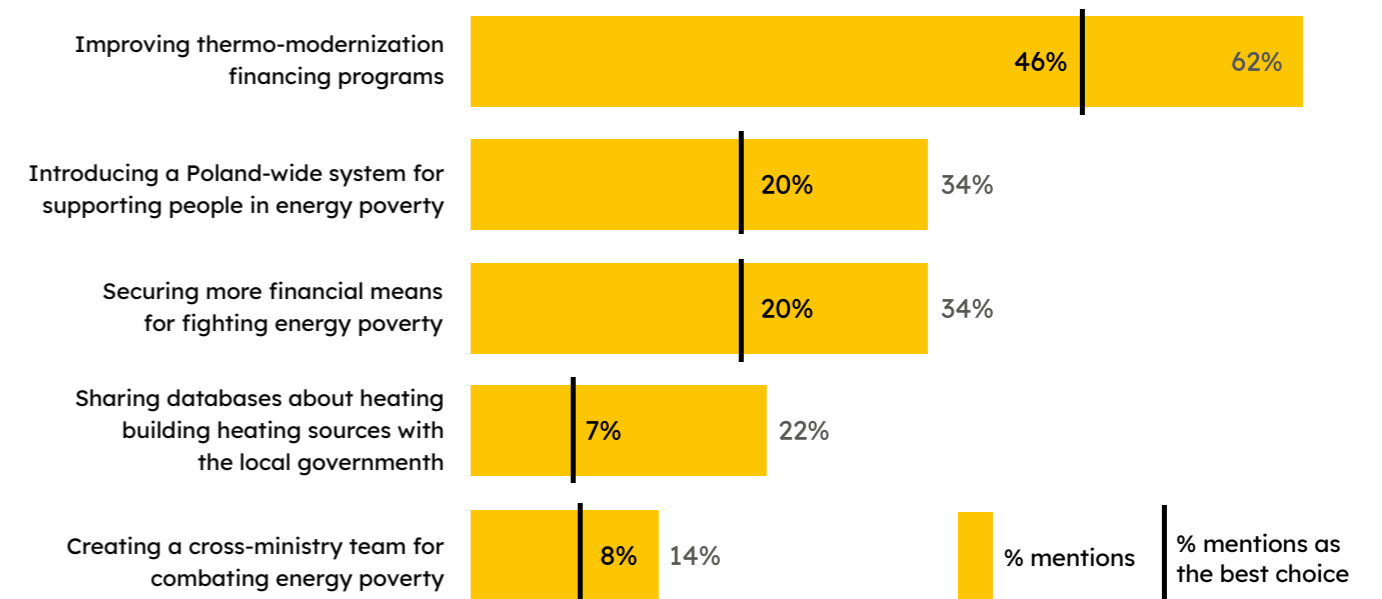


The other popular choices were securing more financial means for fighting energy poverty” (34%) and introducing a Poland-wide system for supporting people in energy poverty” (34%). Informing local governments on the sources of building heating in their commune” (such records are kept on a state level) or creating a cross-ministry team for combating energy poverty” were supported by 22% and 14% of respondents, respectively. Once again, respondents explained their choices with effectiveness” and benefit for the climate”, but the latter came up more seldom – probably due to the available answers, which are not as clearly associated with eco-friendly solutions. Once again, only very few participants mentioned the verdict” of the council as the reason for their choice.

Most councils’ participants believe that at the national level, the problem of energy poverty can be solved by improving programs that finance thermal modernization.

Chart II.

Content of question: **In your opinion, what should be done on the state-level to solve the problem of energy poverty? Maximum of 2 answers can be chosen**



The task for the people participating in the councils – choosing directions for the solutions, turned out to be very difficult. What makes us draw this conclusion? Among the participants, we don't see any groups with clearly specified preferences or any uniformity. Their answers, besides the two leading themes – choosing thermo-modernization as a solution and ecology as the rationale for their choices – are particularly diverse, or even contradictory. We have undertaken a range of attempts to identify some, statistical patterns in the responses. However, none of the techniques used allowed us to identify relatively consistent groups. Some pairs of solutions were chosen slightly more often than others (i.e. thermo-insulation of private and council buildings or special purpose benefits and fuel banks), but not often enough, to identify stable sets of preferences among the participants. There could be several reasons for this, i.e.:

- participants were unable to translate their values and beliefs (i.e. about fair redistribution of resources, the duties of the state and citizens) in the form proposed (questionnaire survey) to specific solutions to energy poverty; it is also possible that they did not understand fully the mechanism of action and consequences of specific solutions;
- in the case of the complex issue of energy poverty, different solutions may go against one another and – when there is limited time to fill out the survey – participants may have had difficulties with reconciling the contradictions. The effects of point one and point two may impact one another at the same time.

Our conclusions show that we need to be careful when considering the participants' answers. They constitute the first stage in the process of developing a consensus around solving the problem of energy poverty.

Many people participating in the councils, despite experiencing energy poverty on themselves, are still learning what it is as a social problem and public policy subject. As such, they don't yet have ready-made perspectives, interpretative frameworks or narratives that would help them understand its causes, effects and means of fighting it. If we want to develop solutions to the problem of energy poverty, which will be understood and accepted by the majority of society, the Poland-wide discussion of this problem needs to accelerate.

Dilemmas of the participants Whose responsibility? What solidarity?

The next stage for issuing an individual “verdict” about the local councils was the question about the dilemmas, which required participants to show how much they agree or disagree with two opposing claims about energy poverty. The list of questions is shown in the graph on the next page. This time, we did not ask about specific solutions, but rather the general directions for action in fighting energy poverty. The task was simpler than before, but many people still decided to refrain from giving their opinion, selecting neutral or “hard to say” answers.

As many as two-thirds of the participants of the councils were unable to decide who should bear the financial burden of the energy transformation. This may seem surprising, considering that we asked them to choose between “the richest” on one hand, and “the poorest” on the other. Even if the respondents' declared financial situation is much better than declared (in social research projects wealthier people are generally less willing to provide information on their financial situation than the poorer ones, and we see numerous refusals to questions about income⁴), nothing indicates that the participants are a particularly wealthy group. It is rather the opposite – the average per person income in the participants' households was only 1750 PLN⁵. In other words, the fact that only 29% stated that the wealthiest should be shouldering most of the costs of the energy transformation, cannot be explained by the participants' class interest.

When deciding about the other dilemmas, the participants also had problems making decisions. 55% had no opinion, on whether the energy transformation in Poland is fair, 43% did not know if people who can't afford other means of heating their homes, should have the right to use fuels that pollute the air, 41% were unable to say if energy poverty is a “key problem in Poland” and 39% - if they would agree to any additional taxes that would aim to reduce the energy poverty problem in Poland. We have recorded the fewest neutral answers in the case of the question about whether “everyone should have equal access to basic energy services (heating, electrical energy), regardless of their financial situation” - 60% of all people passing their personal “verdict” agreed with the statement, whereas 21% expressed the opposite opinion, that “access to basic energy services (heating, electrical energy) should be regulated by the market – available to people who can afford them”.

⁴ Question answered by 413 people (68%) who filled out the questionnaire

⁵ Questions that enabled calculating income per person in household were answered by 67% people (407) that filled out the survey.

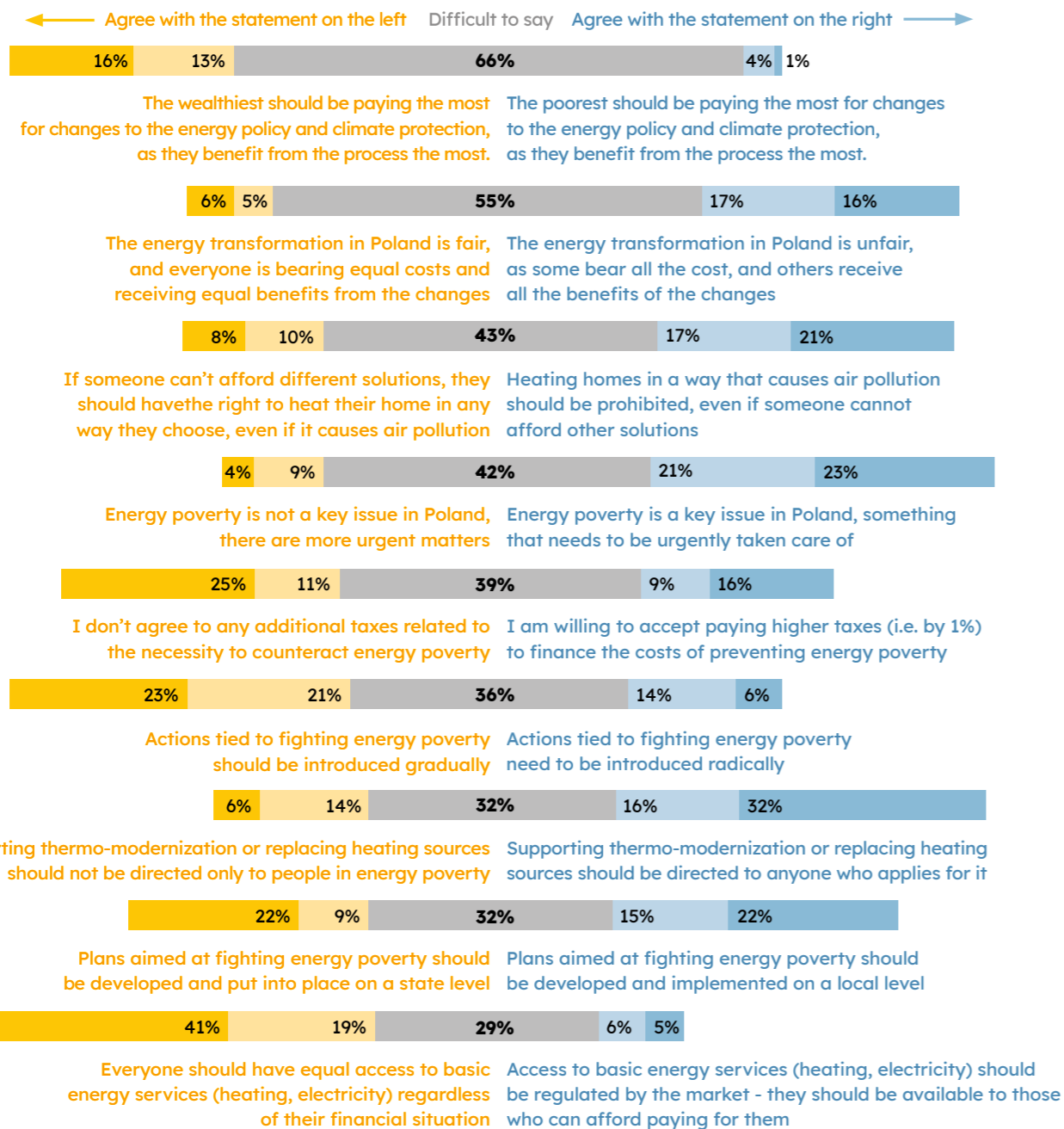
Chart III.

Councils' participants are hesitant about how to resolve key dilemmas concerning energy poverty - especially those concerning the issue of financial solidarity. Most, however, believe that "everyone should have equal access to basic energy services."

The chart shows pairs of opposing statements regarding solutions to energy poverty. The **dark yellow** and **yellow** bars represent the % of people who agree (strongly or rather) with the statement on the left, **dark blue** and **blue** % of people who agree with the statement on the right.



Content of question: **Combating energy poverty may bring many difficult dilemmas. Below you will find pairs of statements that describe some of these dilemmas. Which of these are closer to your beliefs?**



Despite their reservedness in expressing some opinions, the councils' participants were relatively consistent on several matters. Firstly, as noted before, most agreed that energy poverty is an issue in Poland (75%), and that everyone - including the poorest - should have access to basic energy services.

Their relative (not universal) agreement as to the weight of the problem, and recognizing access to energy as a civic right creates the hope, that it is possible to develop a political and social consensus, which will take into consideration the interests and needs of different social groups - including the underprivileged.

However, there is a range of challenges and dilemmas on the way to reaching this consensus. For example, 54% of participants of the councils would not be willing to bear any financial costs of fighting energy poverty (39% would agree to extra burdens, 6% did not answer the question). We also asked them, what amount they would be willing to spend on fighting energy poverty. On average - including the people who refuse to incur any cost (thus declaring 0 PLN), they would be willing to spend 39 PLN a month on fighting energy poverty. This amount is lower among people who experience low temperatures at home or their apartment in the heating period (16 PLN). The people who declared that they are freezing in the Winter are first of all poorer than the others, hence the amount they are declaring is also smaller. Secondly, such people may feel that it is rather they who need financial solidarity from others.



the average monthly sum that participants were willing to spend on fighting energy poverty

The share of people willing to participate in the costs of fighting energy poverty - nearly 40% - needs to be considered high, but it also has to be approached with care. Spending virtual money comes easy. On top of that, it is worth stressing that among the people willing to contribute financially to combating energy poverty, only half accept extra taxes for this purpose in another, but similar question ("I am willing to agree to paying higher taxes..."). Such a huge discrepancy in the responses serves as another proof that councils' participants don't have an established opinion regarding social solidarity. On top of that, the declared amounts are surprisingly high. Even after removing the extreme-end answers, they are close to about 2% of the respondents' monthly income. Some of the experts focusing on energy poverty propose an extra energy tax, but in most cases no larger than one percent of the monthly income.

The groups that were less willing to share the costs were the retirees (29%), people on disability pensions (25%) and farmers (27%). In contrast, among people working outside farming, the share of persons declaring their willingness to pay the extra cost is 48%.

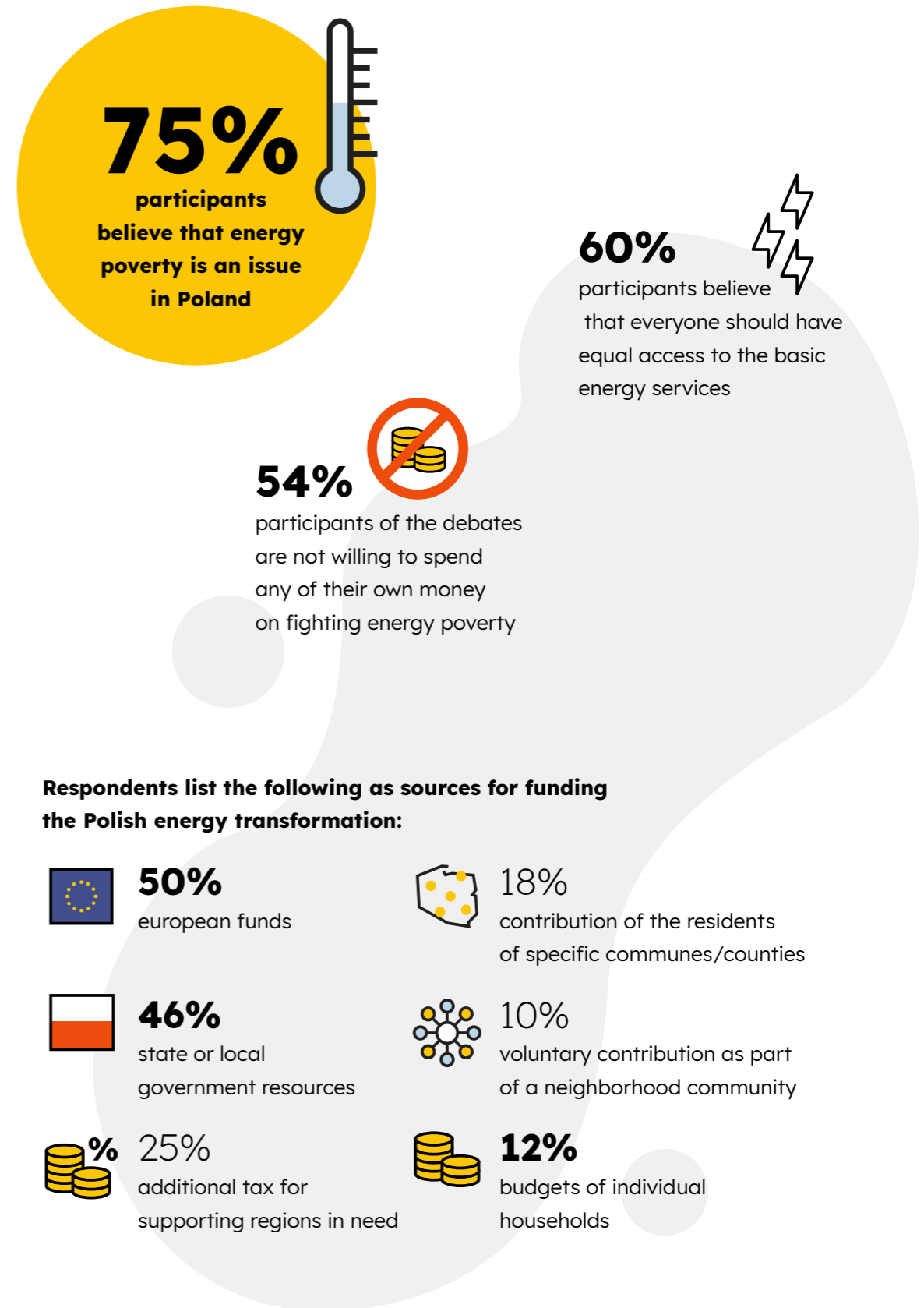


There are two main trends determining most participants' attitudes to solidarity. First of all, ecology trumps solidarity. Respondents mostly accept the questions that address only solidarity. As a reminder: 60% of people agreed that everyone should have access to the basic energy needs, 44% believed that actions aimed at fighting energy safety should be introduced gradually, to avoid tensions (only 20% had the opposing opinion), 33% believed that the energy transformation in Poland is not fair (13% had the opposing opinion). However, when solidarity solutions are weighed against the eco solutions, support for the former drops. For example, most of the participants believed that the impoverished should not have the right to use fuels that cause air pollution, and choices of specific solutions were much more often driven by ecological reasons, than social justice. It is also worth noting that the solutions that seem to simultaneously address social and

climate challenges – i.e. thermo-modernization of social housing, were more often chosen for their effectiveness, environment-friendliness, even swiftness more than fairness.

The second trend that we have seen with the participants, is their expectation they will rather be the object (“give to me”) than the subject (“I will give”) of solidarity. When asked about different ways of financing the Polish energy transformation, and with a maximum of two preferred solutions to choose from, most picked sources that are not clearly tied to increasing citizens' burdens. They select European funds (“European solidarity” – 50%) and the state and local governments (“authorities' responsibility” – 46%)⁶, and, less often, “state-level solidarity” (25%), which would be tied to a new tax imposed on the citizens⁷. Even fewer chose local solidarity, whether on the local government (18%)⁸, or neighborhood levels (10%)⁹. “Individual responsibility” and individual covering of thermo-modernization costs or replacement of heating sources was supported by 12%. This clearly shows that the participants tried to avoid “the threat of solidarity”, which they see above all as extra encumbrances and costs¹⁰. This is not the first time when Polish public debates show that people are aware of an issue, but lack the will and/ or capability to pay the cost of implementing solutions.

⁶ The proposition in the survey questionnaire: “Authorities' responsibility: the state or local government allocate funds for fighting energy poverty using the state/ local budget, without putting more burden on the citizens”
⁷ “State-level solidarity: the citizens pay a specific amount of tax on fighting energy poverty, and the money goes to the cities and regions, where the issue of energy poverty is largest”.
⁸ “Solidarity of local-government communities: people living in the commune or country pay a specific amount to fight energy poverty in this community”.
⁹ “Solidarity of neighbour communities; residents make voluntary contributions to support the local households that need it”.
¹⁰ One professional group that differs from the others, are farmers, but there were only about a dozen farmers on the councils. Of them, 40% were supporters of individual responsibility (for contrast, only 8% were working, 13% of retirees and 20% of entrepreneurs gave such a response). At the same time, the farmers who took part in the councils, were more willing than others to point out local solidarity (of the local governments and neighborhoods), but it was still a vast minority (only 20% in both cases). Much like the others, they most often chose the answer: “responsibility of the state”.



What solutions for lowering energy bills would the participants use?

Whenever respondents were asked to list solutions for lowering energy costs in their households, their answers clearly became more schematic and predictable. The most commonly chosen option out of the eight possibilities was “investing in renewable energy sources” – energy from solar panels or heat pumps would be gladly chosen by 65% of the participants, but their basic obstacle would be the cost of such a solution – 64% people who chose it, declared that they would need someone else to cover the cost of the installation. Some were also ready to use collective solutions (based on cooperating in a wider group or community), i.e. negotiating energy rates jointly (31%) or creating community investments in the local area (i.e. local renewable energy sources, also 31%).

Regarding the questions about energy cost-cutting strategies, we are able to differentiate relatively consistent groups of participants of the councils, who chose similar solutions – individual groups differ also based on their financial status and personal experience of energy poverty (or the lack thereof).



The first group (13% of all the participants) that we identified were the “self-sufficient”. They mostly did not see any need for improving their household’s energy efficiency; the few who declared that they are ready to implement some changes, would choose to install a renewable energy source or some minor improvements (thermostat, sealing windows, etc.). Compared to the other participants, they were relatively wealthy, with only 16% experiencing cold in the heating season and most not feeling the need for cutting energy costs.



Apart from the “self-sufficient”, we can also identify the largest group that includes half of the councils participants - the “eco-individualistic”. They notice the need for changes in their households and they more often have difficulty heating their households in the Winter (25%). Their preferred solutions were most often individual: investments in renewable energy sources and minor enhancements, and one-third would be willing to go a step further, and to choose building thermo-modernization. Very few (about a dozen percent each) considered collective solutions (previously mentioned negotiations of the energy rates and local energy investments).



The third group (25%) sees the appeal of both individual (thermo-modernization, renewable energy sources, improvements at home) and collective solutions. Much like the “eco-individualists”, they would most like to invest in renewable energy sources, or minor enhancements at home, but in contrast to them, they are more interested in such solutions as collective negotiating of energy rates or joining energy cooperatives (about half of the group participants would choose the solution).

More or less one in ten participants would be willing to do anything in his or her power, to change one’s situation, and would pick all of the offered solutions – the individual as well as the collective. This “determined” group, had the largest number of people experiencing low temperatures in Winter, and the absolutely highest share considered energy poverty a serious issue in their area (47%) – even 20 percentage points more than in other groups. They were also willing to spend the most on fighting energy poverty – on average 86 PLN a month.

Answers to these questions also show that the willingness to choose different solutions was tied to one’s personal experience of energy poverty¹¹ – the people whose apartments are not sufficiently warm in the heating season, were more willing to choose collective solutions, that require the cooperation of a larger group. Men were slightly more enthusiastic about collective solutions than women (considering also other variables, such as education or place of residence), whereas people with the lowest education and retirees were the least enthusiastic.

All in all, however, it was possible only to a limited degree to match the answers with the participants’ attributes, such as gender, education, occupation, or even experience of energy poverty. It could be difficult to explain the participants’ choices because the experience of energy poverty is deeply individual and differs significantly depending on many factors that we were unable to follow in the survey. Due to the limitations of the research tool, we were unable to take into consideration i.e. the intensity of the experienced issues tied to energy costs, how they translate into i.e. quality of life, health consequences and a range of other life circumstances. This does not necessarily mean that the answers of the councils’ participants are inconsistent or disorganized, but rather that we were unable to reach the conditions that drive their choices.

¹¹ r tet correlation coefficients even between 0.6 and 0.7.

Summary

What is ahead?

What conclusions can we draw from local councils for the citizen's assembly planned for Fall this year? The councils undoubtedly drew our attention to a range of challenges and questions that we will need to answer. One topic that is particularly challenging is the conversation about the costs of the energy transformation and – especially – who should shoulder them. Another challenge is to help the 110 assembly participants translate their values into concrete solutions and public policies and help them understand their consequences for different social groups. Finally, there is the matter of how to reconcile efficacy, environmental concerns, and, last but not least, social justice.

The participants' struggles to identify the best energy policies for the future also show us that a debate about energy poverty is very much needed. It would be best to have this pressing political debate before it becomes politicized. So far, no political party has yet put it on their banners, and most Poles have not yet formed an opinion on it. This means that an open conversation rooted in the experiences and expectations of the citizens, together with the knowledge of experts, may bring us closer to effective, climate-friendly and fair solutions.

List of local councils organizers:

- Białystok, Fundacja Laboratorium Badań i Działań Społecznych SocLab
- Brzeszcze, Federacja Konsumentów
- Bydgoszcz, Pracownia Zrównoważonego Rozwoju
- Choczewo, Stowarzyszenie Obrony Naturalnych Obszarów Nadmorskich „Bałtyckie SOS”
- Chorzów, Stowarzyszenie BoMiasto & Fundacja Agere Aude
- Częstochowa, Stowarzyszenie Kobiety w Centrum
- Drużbice, Stowarzyszenie Kobiety w Centrum
- Elbląg, University and Stowarzyszenie Kobiety w Centrum
- Elbląg, Stowarzyszenie Kobiety w Centrum
- Górowo Iławeckie, office of the commune, in cooperation with Shipyard Foundation
- Grójec, Federacja Konsumentów
- Izabelin, office of the commune Izabelin, in cooperation with Shipyard Foundation
- Jawiszowice, Federacja Konsumentów
- Jedlicze, office of the commune Jedlicze, in cooperation with Shipyard Foundation
- Jugów, Federacja Konsumentów
- Kalisz, Stowarzyszenie Kobiety w Centrum
- Katowice, Federacja Konsumentów
- Kielce, Federacja Konsumentów
- Kluki, Stowarzyszenie Kobiety w Centrum
- Kobyłka, office of the commune Kobyłka

- Kraków, Shipyard Foundation
- Lanckorona, Stowarzyszenie Ekologiczno-Kulturalne Na Bursztynowym Szlaku” and Lokalna Grupa Działania Gościniec 4 Żywiołów
- Łądek-Zdrój, Stowarzyszenie Kłodzka Wstęga Sudetów – Lokalna Grupa Działania
- Łódź, Office of the City of Łódź
- Mińsk Mazowiecki, Federacja Konsumentów
- Nowa Ruda, Federacja Konsumentów
- Olsztyn, Federacja FOSA, in cooperation with Shipyard Foundation
- Opole, Shipyard Foundation
- Padew Narodowa, Stowarzyszenie Kobiety w Centrum
- Pilichówko, Stowarzyszenie Kobiety w Centrum
- Pułtusk, Federacja Konsumentów
- Radom, Stowarzyszenie Radomianie dla Demokracji
- Rybnik, Miasto Rybnik and Miasto Radlin
- Rydułtowy, Centrum Rozwoju Inicjatyw Społecznych CRIS
- Sejny, Sejny Town Hall
- Skalmierz, Stowarzyszenie Kobiety w Centrum
- Suchy Bór, Shipyard Foundation
- Tuszyna, Stowarzyszenie Kobiety w Centrum
- Warszawa, Centrum Nauki Kopernik
- Warszawa, Fundacja Strefa Zieleni
- Warszawa, Forum Energii
- Warszawa, Klub Inteligencji Katolickiej
- Wołomin, Federacja Konsumentów
- Wrocław, Fundacja EkoRozwoju, Stowarzyszenie Eko-Unia in cooperation with the Instytut Rozwoju Terytorialnego
- Zabrze, Stowarzyszenie Kobiety w Centrum

ORGANIZER



MAIN PARTNER

**CENTRUM
NAUKI
KOPERNIK**

COUNCIL OF EXPERTS



About the organizer of the “Civic council on energy costs”

At the Shipyard Foundation, for the past 13 years, we have been developing and supporting effective solutions to social problems, including citizens in decisions about public affairs and helping organizations and local governments plan and carry out social activities. We develop and disseminate good practices, create tools for facilitating social work, conduct social studies, train and develop educational materials. The effects of our work are used among others by seniors, students and teachers, local communities, activists and local government officials from all over Poland. We believe that the best decisions are made as a result of open conversations. This is why we strive to give everyone a chance to discuss matters relevant to them, and to impact the decisions that are made. The projects we had conducted include among others public hearings concerning the National Restoration Plan, civic councils about education and citizen’s assemblies in Warsaw and Lublin.

The council of experts participating in the project: Instytut Badań Strukturalnych (*Institute for structural studies*), Forum Energii (*Energy Forum*), Instytut na Rzecz Ekorozwoju (*Institute for Ecodevelopment*), Fundacja Pole Dialogu (*Field of Dialogue Foundation*), Polski Alarm Smogowy (*Polish Smog Alert*), Client Earth – Prawnicy dla Ziemi (*Client Earth – Lawyers for Earth*), Stowarzyszenie WIOSNA (Szlachetna Paczka) (*WIOSNA association*), Stowarzyszenie Gmin Polska Sieć Energie Cités” (*Association of Communes The Polish Network “Energie Cités”*), Federacja Konsumentów (*Consumers’ Federation*), Wspólnota Robocza Związków Organizacji Socjalnych – WRZOS (*Working Community of Social Organization Associations*), Federacja FOSA (*FOSA Federation*), Instytut Zielonej Gospodarki (*Green Economy Institute*). Main partner: the Copernicus Science Center. The project is supported by the European Climate Foundation.



www.stocznia.org.pl | www.naradaoenergii.pl