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Citizen School for the Right to Energy

Turning energy poverty from an individual burden into a shared, community challenge

In València, energy vulnerability is often addressed through individual advice and emergency support. The Citizen School for the Right to Energy complements this approach with something different: a friendly, informal space where neighbours meet every month, learn together and support each other. It starts from one idea: energy poverty is a structural and collective issue, rather than an individual problem.

AT A GLANCE	
Initiative	**Citizen School for the Right to Energy (CSRE)**
Host organisation	València Sostenible / Energy Office
Location	València, Spain
Scale and size	City-level; each edition brings together groups of around 15–20 people from the same neighbourhood
Yearly budget	Integrated into the municipal Energy Office's services
Target groups and outreach	Mainly low-income households and people experiencing energy vulnerability and/or unwanted loneliness, reached through the Energy Offices' individual support and referrals from local social organisations
Current stage	Third edition being finalised; the next edition will take place in a different neighbourhood
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1. Context & background

What the School aims to do

The Citizen School aims to empower households experiencing energy vulnerability through a community-based approach. It reframes energy poverty as a structural and collective issue, rather than an individual problem, and creates spaces for peer learning, mutual support and collective empowerment.

The local challenge and the response

Energy vulnerability is often addressed through individual advice and emergency support. The **Citizen School for the Right to Energy (referred as school)** complements this approach by creating a community space where people can learn and support each other.

In practice, the school organises friendly, informal monthly meetings, usually including a shared snack. Each session focuses on a topic related to energy, sustainability or wellbeing. Participants also can share their own experiences and advice, while the energy situation of their households is followed throughout the programme.

How it started

The initiative started in 2022 through a European project that provided the resources to develop and test the first pilot. The experience showed the value of the community approach. This led to the integration of the School into the services offered by the municipal Energy Offices (the city's one-stop-shop energy services for citizens), alongside individual advice and home visits.

Key milestones

- Three editions implemented, creating three neighbourhood-based groups.
- Integration of the School into the municipal Energy Office service portfolio, reducing dependency on European project funding.
- Development of a methodology combining individual support, community learning and peer-to-peer exchange.

Where it stands today

The third edition is currently being finalised. The next edition will take place in a different neighbourhood, allowing the team to test the approach in a new local context.

2. Innovation

The main innovation is **methodological and social**: bringing a genuinely community-based approach into energy poverty interventions.

Rather than starting from predefined training needs, the school creates time and space to listen to participants and adapt the programme to their interests and experiences. Peer-to-peer learning is a central element: participants are not only recipients of information but also bring their own knowledge and solutions.

> **The initiative moves from "supporting individuals" towards "strengthening communities".**

3. Stakeholders involved

The school is run by public bodies, but relies on civil society to reach people and on participants themselves to shape its content.

Stakeholder / organisation	Type	Role in the initiative
València Sostenible	Public	Overall coordination and design of the initiative
Energy Office	Public	Day-to-day implementation, workshops and support to participants
Neighbourhood associations and NGOs	Civil society	Referral of participants, outreach and participation in selected sessions
Participants / local residents	Citizens	Active participation, co-design of topics, peer learning and mutual support

4. Target groups: who they are and how they are reached

How do they define and identify the target groups?

The school mainly works with low-income households and people experiencing energy vulnerability and/or unwanted loneliness. Participants have mostly been women and mothers, with a significant presence of people with migrant backgrounds.

Participants are identified through two routes. In the first two editions, they came from the individual support offered by the Energy Offices, having previously received individual advice and a home energy audit. Local social organisations, neighbourhood associations and NGOs also refer participants and support outreach. In the third edition, participation was opened more widely. The school has no specific eligibility criteria, it's open to all. However the outreach is target towards people experiencing energy vulnerability, particularly low-income households.

How do they reach out to them?

The team is aware of barriers such as mistrust, time constraints, stigma and language, and responds with four strategies:

- **Trusted community leaders** are identified and engaged to build credibility and foster participation.
- **One consistent facilitator** runs every session, to build trust.
- **A diverse, participant-driven programme** reflects participants' interests.
- **Tangible benefits**, such as shared meals, informal networking or access to other municipal programmes, strengthen engagement.

Communication is stigma-free, focused on the "Right to Energy" and "Healthy Homes" and avoiding deficit-based language. Information is clear, practical and linked to daily life. Trusted channels, such as phone messaging groups, are used for reminders and updates, and the team works with social organisations rooted in local neighbourhoods and close to vulnerable people.

Practical barriers are reduced as well: attendance, materials and refreshments are free, sessions are held near participants' homes and outside working hours, families, carers and friends are welcome, and child-friendly spaces are provided so parents can attend.

5. Representation and inclusion of vulnerable voices

How participants shape the school

The programme is not fully predefined. While some core topics are included in every edition (such as understanding energy bills or energy-saving measures at home) other topics are selected according to participants' interests and needs. Previous groups have chosen topics including emotional wellbeing, healthy eating and cultural activities. Participants also share their own experiences and practical solutions with the group.

What has worked and what remains a gap

- **What works:** informal elements, such as sharing a snack, have been particularly effective in creating a welcoming atmosphere and encouraging participation.
- **A current challenge:** ensuring that participation in the school connects with other forms of support. In the first two editions, participants had previously received individual advice and a home energy audit. In the third edition, participation was opened more widely, and fewer participants subsequently engaged with the individual home support.

6. Impacts

100 households supported annually through advisory services	**40** vulnerable households engaged in the school	**13.5 h** of group training per participant

Qualitative results reported:

- Improved understanding of energy bills and rights
- Stronger community ties
- Higher awareness of energy use
- Emergence of energy ambassadors

7. Key challenge: where the team would like peer advice

> **How can we turn the school into a more complete empowerment pathway?**

The team is currently exploring **how to connect the different elements of its intervention into a coherent pathway**:

Individual advice and home visits → **Community learning** → **Targeted home improvements** → **Community leadership / energy ambassadors**

The ambition is for the school to be more than a standalone training programme: a gateway through which vulnerable households can access personalised support, improve their homes when resources allow, build community networks and eventually become active multipliers of knowledge and experience.

Question for the FETA community: how have other initiatives designed similar pathways, and how have they balanced professional support, peer-to-peer learning and community leadership while keeping the model manageable and scalable?

8. Find out more



Testimonial video