

LET'S ASPIRE

CEER-BEUC 2030 VISION FOR ENERGY CONSUMERS

Long-term Energy Transition for Sustainability and Climate Neutrality:

Affordability, Simplicity, Protection, Inclusiveness, Reliability and Empowerment



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The Council of European Energy Regulators (CEER) and the European Consumer Organisation (BEUC) have renewed our Vision for Energy Consumers with a horizon to 2030.

In 2012, CEER and BEUC launched a 2020 Vision for Europe's energy customers. Its core principles – reliability, affordability, simplicity, protection and empowerment – are timeless and universal. We are pleased that this consumer-centric lens is now reflected in Europe's energy laws.

Looking ahead to 2030 and the EU's 2050 sustainability and climate neutrality objectives, we envision a future where effective policies and frameworks ensure that consumer rights are promoted and protected, whilst delivering these objectives.

Our 2030 Vision for Energy Consumers includes our newest principle, inclusiveness, to ensure no one is left behind in the energy transition. The renewal and expansion of our core principles are driven by the deep transformation of our society and economy towards a decarbonised and sustainable future.

As governments, regulators, consumer protection and enforcement authorities, consumer organisations and companies build and implement together a sustainable economy that provides climate neutrality, let's aspire to ensuring that the energy sector delivers **Affordability, Simplicity, Protection, Inclusiveness, Reliability and Empowerment (ASPIRE)** for all consumers.

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AFFORDABILITY



PROTECTION



RELIABILITY



SIMPLICITY



INCLUSIVENESS



EMPOWERMENT

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CEER AND BEUC'S CALL TO ACTION TO ASPIRE

Our CEER-BEUC 2030 Vision for Energy Consumers is for a future where consumers understand the environmental impacts of their own energy use and are provided with clear and reliable information and tools to assess independently the climate properties of a certain energy product, action or behaviour, allowing them to make sustainable choices and to contribute to efficient and well-functioning energy markets.

Tackling climate change in an integrated way will involve a profound transformation of our economy and will significantly influence the way we use and interact with energy in our everyday life, such as to heat and cool our homes, cook our food and fuel our cars, and the way in which we engage with energy markets. For consumers, green transition policies should help reduce their carbon footprint, improve energy efficiency, especially in buildings, and speed up the transformation of energy markets by enabling the take-up of new technologies, sustainable energy carriers and new business models. At the same time, consumers stand to benefit from greater flexibility and digitalisation. This will contribute to a decarbonised system that can cope with a much higher degree of electrification and increased production of electricity from renewable sources, as well as one that allows them to take control of their own energy production.

Equally, it is important to ensure that the collective efforts of transforming our society and economy are not distributed inequitably, to the detriment of disadvantaged groups, for example, the less affluent or those with a lower level of digital literacy. Thus, market and policy solutions that emerge should be inclusive, taking into account the impact on vulnerable consumers and the continuing, and deepening, importance of protecting their needs and ensuring they have access to tailored support and trusted advice, for instance through government social and welfare services.

For the energy transition to be successful, consumers will need to be informed, supported and nudged throughout this transformation. It is, therefore, key that all relevant stakeholders (i.e. governments, regulators, consumer protection and enforcement authorities, consumer organisations, as well as companies) work closely and effectively, across sectors, to ensure that consumers engage with and benefit from the opportunities of the new developments. At the same time, they must remain sufficiently protected and have easy access to dispute resolution mechanisms, including alternative dispute resolution (ADR) schemes. Strong cooperation between all these different actors can help address any potential unintended consequences of the energy transition.

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Well-functioning markets complemented by a consumer-centric regulatory framework are the best way to ensure all consumers benefit from the energy transition, by engaging more confidently while also contributing to a stable energy system. Authorities must ensure that price signals can reach customers, thereby giving them information about the scarcity of resources as regards the fuel (gas/electricity) and its transport, providing incentives for energy savings and potentially attracting demand for green fuels. Transparent and market-based price signals reinforce trust in energy markets, offer protection against price manipulation and encourage consumers to be active players and flexible in their consumption in a way that contributes to reducing total system cost, which in turn creates reductions in the price consumers pay for their energy. This positive feedback loop should be encouraged.

Industry's role is to develop and market new products that consumers want to use and from which they can easily benefit,

for example, demand-response solutions. Meanwhile, the role of policy-makers and regulators is to put in place innovation-oriented frameworks that enable new products, services and business models to be introduced, whilst ensuring that they respect the principles in this Vision.

Securing people's acceptance and trust will be key, as this will lead to consumers engaging in the energy transition and, ultimately, in the transition's success. Throughout this process, consumer rights should be both safeguarded and fully explained to consumers. Consumers are willing to do their part, but they need assurances that the most cost efficient and sustainable solutions are chosen and implemented at a systemic level.

We call on governments, industry, regulators, consumer bodies and authorities to deliver **Affordability, Simplicity, Protection, Inclusiveness, Reliability** and **Empowerment** (ASPIRE) for all consumers.

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1. AFFORDABILITY

ENERGY EFFICIENCY FIRST

The energy efficiency first principle is implemented, and consumers rely on energy efficient technologies and systems. Energy efficiency allows consumers to reduce their bills and to limit the amount of wasted energy.

ALLOCATION OF ENERGY SYSTEM COSTS

The efficient costs for the development and maintenance of energy networks and for the sustainable energy transition are shared fairly and equitably among all users. The charges to consumers are clear and kept to reasonable levels, ensuring value for money at a level consistent with funding the investments needed to develop and maintain these networks.

DISTRIBUTIONAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Policy-makers regularly conduct a 'distributional impact assessment' of planned policies on consumers, to ensure that further actions to decarbonise the energy system do not put an unreasonable extra burden on certain consumer groups, particularly those in vulnerable situations.



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2. SIMPLICITY

TRANSPARENCY

The information provided to consumers is simple, readily accessible, comparable and makes it easy for them to make choices that are sustainable as well as climate neutral and right for them (price/consumption). “Transparency” means both transparency on the product and the contractual relationship. It also means clarity and transparency on how processes that affect customers operate (e.g. regarding customer service, points of contact, etc.) as well as moving, switching between suppliers, billing and dispute resolution.

CLARITY AND ACCURACY

Information is provided to consumers in an understandable manner, without overloading them. Wide-reaching campaigns are carefully designed and targeted to explain how to understand and apply the abundance of available energy data and information. In terms of consistency, the definitions and terminology used in the contract, offer and bill are the same, facilitating understanding. All information is up-to-date, correct, complete and comparable, allowing consumers easily to assess independently their choices and the implications of their decisions.

INNOVATIVE SERVICES

The information on tariffs of both traditional and innovative energy services (such as demand response, aggregation or bundled products) is kept simple and allows consumers to compare easily different offers also in terms of environmental impact (e.g. level of greenhouse gas emissions) and to choose those that are most convenient for them. There is a continuous effort to simplify bills.

ADVICE

Consumers receive reliable, clear advice on how to use energy sustainably to satisfy their needs, including heating and mobility, how to reduce their energy bills and which tariffs are most suitable for them (including dynamic pricing). Behavioural science helps to understand consumers and to identify solutions that best suit their needs.



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3. PROTECTION

CONSUMER PROTECTION AND REDRESS

Consumers enjoy the rights and protections included in horizontal consumer protection legislation, such as protection against unfair commercial practices, as well as sector-specific rules. In the implementation of these rights, the diverse needs of customers, particularly those of the most vulnerable in society, are recognised and protected. Consumer complaints are resolved in a transparent, fair and quick way through alternative dispute resolution (ADR) or judicial processes. Sector-specific rules reflect consumer issues and are adapted to developments emerging during the energy transition, such as explaining opportunities/risks of dynamic pricing contracts.

DATA PROTECTION

Consumers are protected against unlawful or unfair treatment of their data, for instance in relation to price discrimination. Companies are clear about what data is collected, who has access to that data, for which purpose it is used, how the data is protected and how the consumers' right to access their data is respected. In the development of smart energy technologies and services, companies follow the rules on privacy by design and privacy by default. Companies' practices in privacy protection go beyond mere compliance with the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

CYBERSECURITY

Companies developing and offering smart energy technologies and services ensure that consumers enjoy the highest level of protection from cybersecurity risks.

PROTECTION AGAINST PRICE MANIPULATION

Consumers are well protected against possible new forms of abuse of market power or algorithmic manipulation of prices that may result from energy companies or new providers having access to detailed information on consumers' energy consumption and an increasing use of artificial intelligence.

CONSUMER CRISIS MANAGEMENT

As COVID-19 illustrated, extreme situations may require the adoption of temporary and extraordinary measures. Protecting essential services such as energy, and mitigating the financial and legal impact of the crisis on energy consumers and the energy system, is a key concern for policy-makers, regulatory authorities and energy companies, in line with the Vision's ASPIRE principles. Contingency plans are in place to respond to such situations, including communicating with energy consumers on the measures applied. Sustainability goals are safeguarded and optimised, where possible, to support recovery policies to the benefit of consumers and society overall.



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4. INCLUSIVENESS

INCLUSIVE POLICIES

Energy policies at the EU and national level are redistributive and promote behaviour and practices that allow consumers to reduce their energy bills. Beyond energy policies, wider social policies have an important role to play, especially for the poorest and more vulnerable. Public authorities should promote cross-sectoral dialogue with key stakeholders to discuss the best policy solutions for vulnerable consumers.

INCLUSIVE PRACTICES AND ENERGY JUSTICE

Consumers in vulnerable situations and/or in energy poverty enjoy an increased protection, thanks to specific policies and regulations, such as energy efficiency schemes, targeted advice and protection against disconnection. No one should be left behind in the energy transition.

DIGITAL DIVIDE

The energy transition is not only an opportunity to tackle the energy divide but also the digital divide. Increasing consumer education and information on how to benefit from newly developed tools for better energy use is key – independent of consumers' technical equipment (e.g. internet access) or technical skills. If need be, consumers must be offered alternative tools in order to participate equally. These tools are affordable, easily accessible and provided by energy companies or social institutions to support consumers in vulnerable situations, including those with low digital literacy.

INTEGRATION

The transition towards a sustainable and carbon neutral society is achieved in an integrated way, meaning closer interlinkages between sectors, including energy, and how consumers interact with each of them. Consumers are themselves integral participants in this process.



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5. RELIABILITY

ENERGY SUPPLY AS AN ESSENTIAL SERVICE OF GENERAL ECONOMIC INTEREST

Whilst energy and energy-related services are goods traded on the market, the supply of energy is an essential service, distinguishing it from “conventional” traded goods. Energy suppliers are aware of their responsibilities and their public service obligations and act accordingly.

RELIABILITY

Consumers have access to reliable and secure energy supply as regards both technical processes and commercial practices. The commercial systems and processes that provide continuous access and affect customer service levels, such as billing, are dependable and stable, as are the processes that allow problems and disputes to be resolved transparently, fairly and quickly.

TRUST

For consumers to engage with and benefit from the energy market, they need to be able to find and trust relevant information. Information on the impact of energy consumption on the environment is correct, certified and verifiable, and is trusted by consumers. Consumers have access to energy offers which are proven to be sustainable. Methods are developed and evaluated which make switching to renewable energy and sustainable consumption the most sensible choice for consumers.



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6. EMPOWERMENT

LEVEL-PLAYING FIELD

The same level of protection is granted and enjoyed by all consumers with a contract for energy services, regardless of whether they have a traditional supply arrangement or rely on new energy services (such as aggregation, peer-to-peer trade, energy communities, etc.) and regardless of which company (national or from another Member State) provides them with the service.

ACTIVE ENERGY CONSUMERS

Consumers contributing to the stability of the grid through demand response and prosumers who help stabilise the grid by feeding in their electricity are rewarded economically for their active behaviour and benefit from the same standards of consumer protection, including when they have bundled contracts for selling and buying energy. Prosumers can easily sell the electricity they produce to the grid and to other consumers as the processes allowing them to do so are simple, while at the same time compatible with market design (i.e. do not create market distortions). For this to happen at a large scale, authorities need to ensure well-functioning markets with efficient price signals enabling consumers to fully participate in markets (e.g. no unreasonably high thresholds to enter the market).



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