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# The EU'S human security based approach towards energy poverty

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**Abstract:** The phenomenon of energy poverty shows that energy issues, traditionally linked with international, regional, and national levels of analysis, have wider economic and political causes that are being manifested at the community and individual levels as well. Latest energy crisis across the European continent, coped with some structural factors such as resource scarcity, energy transition, and war between Russia and Ukraine, emphasized individualistic consequences of the ongoing energy processes. The fact that approximately 42 million people in the EU are affected by energy poverty put the phenomenon of the energy poverty very high at the EU agenda. Clear connection of this topic with human security concept made the phenomenon of energy poverty justifiable to be analysed from the people-centred perspective. Therefore, the goal of this paper is to highlight human security approach as a solid framework for understanding and analysis of the energy poverty phenomenon in the EU. Review of the significant academic knowledge base on this phenomenon, secondary data analysis from the relevant European surveys related to this issue, and analysis of adequate EU policies and practices combating energy poverty will serve to outline *state-of-play* when it comes to the energy poverty and human security nexus at the EU level.

**Keywords:** human security, energy poverty, the European Union, energy and climate policies, energy transition.

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## Introduction

Energy is vital for everyday lives and functioning on both national and individual levels. Thus energy-related challenges vary depending on the level of analysis, but, in most cases, three major transformations that energy sector will face in the upcoming future are related to climate change, security of supply and energy poverty (González-Eguino 2015, 377). Although the first twos were analysed widely, academic interest for energy poverty came to the fore surprisingly late in compare with the first twos. Nevertheless, the undergoing international and national processes related to energy paradigm shift have helped in widening energy-related research agenda with those more individual energy challenges and threats, requiring major transformation of diverse sectors of the economy and society.

The phenomenon of energy poverty came to the fore with many energy-related challenges at the globe such are energy scarcity, climate changes, environmental protection, and security of supply. Securitization of international energy relations and state policies oriented towards securing affordable energy supplies put human security-dimension of energy problems at the top of national agendas beside those state-centric. Although revolutionary, United Nations Millennium Development Goals from 2000 did not mention energy-related issues as problems that need to be resolved, especially not those manifested all way down to the individual level. It came with the introduction of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (2014) and specifically with the goal 7 – “ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all” – where universal access to energy was elevated at the global level of urgency.

According to the SDG Energy Progress report for 2023, there were 675 million people in 2021 without access to electricity and 2.3 billion people without access to clean cooking, mostly in Africa and South Asia (*Tracking SDG 7 2023*, 8). Although these numbers decline in favour of accessibility in compare with previous years,<sup>2</sup> the phenomenon of energy poverty, especially in relation to the basic SDGs, still present one of the top human security challenges in the XXI century. Although it is “an inherently spatial phenomenon” (Bouzarovski et al. 2018, 2) naturally leading to the conclusion that mostly underdeveloped and developing countries are facing energy poverty, developed states are not excepted from those challenges.

In the EU context, the phenomenon of energy poverty has risen to the top of agenda during the last decade. With the introduction of green policies and explicit

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<sup>2</sup> In 2010, there were 1.1 billion people without access to electricity and 2.9 billion people without access to clean cooking (*Tracking SDG 7 2023*, 8).

commitment to energy transition and decarbonisation of economies, the energy poverty became accompanying part of European energy and climate policies. As an illustration, one of the key European initiatives – the European Green Deal – states that the energy transition must be “just and inclusive” i.e., “it must put people first” (EC COM[2019] 640 final, 2), especially those in risk to be most affected by the ongoing energy paradigm shift. Thus, the people-centred perspective became as equal important as (supra)national- in terms of providing necessary energy services. Bearing this in mind, the goal of this paper is to highlight human security approach towards energy poverty at the EU level. In doing so, the article is structured as follows: it starts by sketching human security-energy poverty nexus in order to contextualise the main research inquiry. The further section is dedicated to presenting characteristics of the phenomenon in the EU by sketching the data and EU policies combating energy poverty. It concludes with the notion that human security approach represents solid framework for understanding the issue of energy poverty since the energy disruptions reflect on individual and community levels, as well as on international or national levels.

## Human Security and Energy Poverty Nexus

Human security concept was enthroned as a reaction to widening and deepening security studies in the post-Cold period when many untraditional non-military threats entered research agenda.<sup>3</sup> This shift has brought community and individual levels of analysis as equally important beside international, national, and regional. The individual level of analysis emphasized the importance of an individual as a referent object of security that also calls for protection from different kind of threats, coming from economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political sectors (UNDP 1994, 24–25). Human security thus could be seen as “an expansive-non-military engagement and multidimensional approach to understanding different threats in different sectors of social activities that may jeopardize the human community” (Glamotchak 2015, 213). This recognition of a variety of threats opened the door for securitizing many issues which were not been understood as a part of security spectrum if not having

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<sup>3</sup> Although intellectual roots of human security roots could be found back to 60’s, 70’s and 80’s, resulting from rising discontent with hitherto understandings of security coming from the reports and analysis of multinational independent commissions composed of prominent leaders, intellectuals, and academics (Bajpai 2000, 4–5).

military nature. In other words, issues such as migration, climate change or energy scarcity gained the status of important security issues, beside the military ones.

The UNDP Human Development Report is considered to be the very first document that established formulation of human security concept. According to this Report, two main aspects of human security are “safety from such chronic threats as hunger, disease and repression” and “protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life – whether in homes, in jobs or in communities” (UNDP 1994, 23). Thus, two common understandings of human security include “freedom from fear” and “freedom from want” (Alkire 2003; Gasper 2005), making human security much more than merely freedom from violence (or human security in a narrow sense). According to some determinations, the objective of human security is “to safeguard the vital core of all human lives from critical pervasive threats, without impeding long-term human fulfilment” (Alkire 2003, 8; Alkire 2004, 360) where “the vital core” is “to be specified by appropriate procedures in context” (Alkire 2003, 8). Thus, the specific context needs to be the cornerstone that determines what is considered to be the referent object or what actions needed to be undertaken in the specific situation to affect causes of vulnerability. Within the EU context, human security was proposed through “A Human Security Doctrine for Europe” in 2004 at the Barcelona Forum which defined it as “the freedom for individuals from the harm caused by human right violations” (Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy 2007, 16). Nevertheless, the later events shaping international context will contribute to much wider notion of human security at the EU level.

The problem of human security becomes especially tangible when it comes to the disturbance of everyday life patterns. Energy, as crucial for people’s activity, mobility, and heat, presents one of the critical aspects of everyday lives. Moreover, it could be said that energy and key energy resources function bi-directionally: as necessity to survive and as a tool to prevent conflicts when observing their positive dimension, but also as an existential threat and as a means of causing conflict in deprivation condition, when observing human insecurity context. In addition, energy disruptions such as energy price shocks, supply disruptions or energy infrastructure destruction could have harmful effects on satisfying basic energy needs whether in homes, jobs, or communities. Nevertheless, the abovementioned Human Security Doctrine was still granting “the leading role to military rather than to civilian campaigns” (Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy 2007, 17) which could be explained by the prevailing international context events back then mainly coloured by the post-9/11 environment and invasion of Iraq. Later events emphasized by the European Union Global Strategy (such as hybrid threats, migration, climate changes, energy- and economic-related challenges etc.) put

more focus on “citizens’ interest” and their prosperity and recognized, among others, energy insecurity as one that endangers people (EU 2016, 9, 19) and energy security as one of the priorities of the EU’s external action (EU 2016, 22). Within the EU context, this especially came to the fore with some of the gas shocks occurred in Europe during the first two decades of XXI century<sup>4</sup> and with the introduction of climate policies based on Paris Agreement (Šekarić 2021), when some European energy policies started to include human-centric approach in satisfying energy and climate goals. While energy was always a matter of a state and one of the determinants of international relations, the ongoing energy paradigm shift towards renewable energy sources and climate responsible solutions called for more nuanced approach that will include more individualistic perspective at the operational level. Some of the running processes in energy, environmental and political domains thus resulted with the increased notion of those suffering from sketched shifts and led to a promotion of the approach where “no-one is left behind”.<sup>5</sup>

Since “... all people should have the opportunity to meet their most essential needs...” (UNDP 1994, 24), the energy ones are not exceptional from this notion. The endeavour to improve the quality of life and desire for better economic status are directly dependent on adequate access to energy (Katarzyna 2017, 175). Inadequate access to affordable energy and to some basic energy needs, such are heating, cooling, cooking and electricity, is closely intertwined with human health and well-being as one of the key human security concepts (Bhattacharyya 2013; González-Eguino 2015; Thomson et al. 2017; Simcock et al. 2018; Bouzarovski and Thomson 2020). While main causes of energy poverty could be found in insufficient household income, the quality of housing units, energy availability and its prices, the consequences are diverse and include rise of deaths in the winter period, impaired mental health, and social exclusion of the population, especially children coming from energy poor households (Koruga 2021). World Health Organisation (WHO) (2021) stressed out that the lack of access to modern energy sources subjects people to a life of poverty while the exposure to household air pollution will continue to contribute to millions of deaths from noncommunicable diseases, pneumonia, and Covid-19. In addition, different economic, social, and cultural

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<sup>4</sup> This refers to gas supply shocks during the winters 2005/06 and 2008/09 when came to the deterioration of Russian-Ukrainian (energy) relations which resulted with cutting down gas flows towards European countries.

<sup>5</sup> Since “the most vulnerable are the most exposed to the harmful effects of climate change and environmental degradation” (EC COM[2019] 640 final, 16), just transition concept put people in the centre of contemporary and future energy and climate policies.

circumstances affect people's ability to deal with those energy challenges. Indoor air pollution related to combustion of dirty resources, physical injury during fuelwood collection, and lack of refrigeration and medical care in areas that lack electricity resulted with an increased public health concern, while energy poverty is simultaneously affecting "both the gender roles within society and the educational opportunities available to children and adults" (Sovacool 2012, 272). Study issued by the European Parliament showed that there is "a significant gender gap in the number of women in positions to influence the energy transition, both in the corporate sector as well in the public energy sector and civil society initiatives" (EP 2019, 16, 38) with a general lack of awareness of the gender dimension of the energy poverty problem. In addition, gender is seen not only as a driver of energy poverty condition, but also as "a key element of energy injustices as they relate to everyday life" (Bouzarovski et al. 2021). As could be seen, diverse aspects of people's everyday lives are affected by the energy poverty which, in addition, could have a spillover effect on diverse society's sectors. This is why the latest energy crisis across the European continent, which escalated with the Russian invasion into Ukraine in February 2022, along with the impact of the Covid-19 crisis, put energy issues at the top of international and national agendas as one of the key issues that need to be addressed not solely from the (inter)national but from an individual level as well.

Energy poverty contains many dimensions and is conceptualised differently. More often, it configures as "fuel poverty" or "energy deprivation" in the literature, although includes more dimensions than solely affordability dimension characteristic for fuel poverty. Some define it as "the inability to attain a socially and materially necessitated level of domestic energy services" (Bouzarovski and Petrova 2015, 31). High energy prices, poor housing efficiency and low incomes as traditional causes of energy poverty are broadened with wider composition of factors such as cultural norms, socio-technical, political, and spatial issues shaping energy prices and housing efficiency (Bouzarovski et al. 2018, 2). The energy poverty is often conceptualised in relation with the vulnerability approach which stresses out that energy poverty is fluid condition *per se* meaning that "externally- or internally induced changes in housing, social, political, or economic circumstances" affect the status of being energy poor (Bouzarovski et al. 2018, 3). Put it differently, people could fall into energy poverty with the changes or degradation of wide range of different factors originating from diverse sectors of society. Nevertheless, as the thematic scope of this paper refers to the European countries, it should be noted that it is usually defined "in the relevant national context, existing social policy and other relevant policies" (EC COM[2021] 558 final, 75–76). It has been used to be conceptualised back to 1970s (Bouzarovski and

Petrova 2015; Obrenović 2022), but energy poverty is now an official accompanying component of many European Union policies, gradually becoming a part of local government programmes (Bouzarovski and Thomson 2020, 8).

The ways energy poverty influences people's everyday lives could be various. Rising energy prices are forcing end-users to pay more for fuel, heating, and electricity, thus affecting the overall purchasing power of consumers. Some estimations are showing that, on the global level, around 20–30% of annual income in poor households is directly expended on energy fuels, and an additional 20–40% is expended on some indirect costs associated with collecting and using that energy, such as health care expenses or injuries (Sovacool 2012, 275). Beside economic consequences, the phenomenon of energy poverty has strong societal and health dimension, affecting well-being and health of consumers in favour of choosing more affordable (and thus dirtier) energy resources in times of energy crisis. This especially put in risk those who are already at the risk of poverty. The health and well-being dimensions affected by energy poverty are probably most direct connection of the subject with human security concept – according to the WHO (2022), household air pollution, emitted from the use of polluting stoves and fuels, is a cause of some 3.2 million deaths annually. Thus, rising from some of the SDGs, such as “no poverty”, “good health and well-being”, “affordable and clean energy” and “reduced inequalities”, the connection between human security dimensions and satisfying basic energy needs becomes obvious.

Although the concept of human security has been criticized widely in the literature because of its “incoherence and theoretical incompleteness” (Glušac 2010, 83), it offers one important perspective on contemporary security challenges while the researcher has the obligation to analytically delimit the content of the phenomenon studied. This becomes important in the concrete case of the analysing energy poverty by pointing out at very significant consequences of the energy-related issues that were traditionally considered from exclusively state-centric perspective.

This short overview of the nexus between human security and energy poverty served to highlight that energy poverty need to be addressed from more human-centric approach than solely from the perspective based on some exclusively objective indicators. Moreover, by rephrasing the notion according to which “the vital core” is “to be specified by appropriate procedures in context” (Alkire 2003, 8), the energy poverty should be tackled considering different contexts where it occurs as well as complex processes as drivers of the energy poverty originating from the political, economic, and socio-technological sectors.

## Energy Poverty in the EU

Combination of international political and economic factors in the period after 2014, such as the adoption of Paris Agreement, Russian annexation of Crimea and the warfare in the East Ukraine (Tichý 2019, 2), inauguration of the Energy Union and the overall integration of European climate and energy policies (Mišík et al. 2021), have brought energy security issues at the top of the EU's agenda. This especially resulted with the increased notion on the energy poverty as an issue that needs to be addressed in the context of the ongoing energy transition in the EU; the uprising of significance of renewable energy sources on the global and national agendas in the context of energy transition (Šekarić Stojanović 2022b), brought them as a game changer for hitherto energy paradigms all way down to the community and individual levels. Within the EU context, the phenomenon of energy poverty thus gradually rose at the top of political agenda with the introduction of green policies, energy justice, and, more recently, with the deterioration of Ukrainian-Russian relations and start of the warfare between those two states in February 2022 that followed already existing energy crisis based on high energy prices. In addition, "unprecedented gas and power prices" in the EU in 2021 (EC 2022b) as result of those international circumstances highlighted the importance of addressing those individual consequences of the energy crisis.

The question of survival within this geopolitical context becomes very important: "If their survival depends on it, people will burn anything" while simultaneously being in danger to "be put in the position of having to choose between heating their homes or harming their health from pollution" (Dunai and Minder 2022). Clear connection between current geopolitical circumstances and the energy poverty phenomenon was emphasized by the Vice-President of the European Commission, Frans Timmermans, at the Prague Summit of Cities, where stated that "Our goal is to create steps to minimize the Russian influence and also face the reality of energy poverty the crisis creates" (Pact of Free Cities 2022). International environment thus accelerated efforts towards tackling energy poverty-related problems at the EU level. Considering energy security as a continuous "access to energy at reasonable prices" (EC COM[2006] 105 final, 4) and perceiving energy poverty as a manifestation of deprivation where "not even the basic needs of energy are satisfied" (Bhattacharyya 2013, 427), efforts to incorporate energy poverty issues into the EU's energy security policies were a logical choice of the European decision-makers.

As already mentioned, although anticipated, energy poverty is not phenomenon related to exclusively underdeveloped or developing countries, affecting thus those states that are commonly categorised as the developed ones.



This kind of nature of energy poverty “helps position domestic energy deprivation as a major human security issue that should receive urgent attention” (Bouzarovski et al. 2018, 3), overcoming thus traditional dichotomy on “Global North” and “Global South”. By recognizing energy poverty as universal human security issue, this gave the impetus for analysing the phenomenon within diverse contexts and geographical distributions. With just a few exceptions,<sup>6</sup> European-level studies on energy poverty thus saw significant surge in scientific and policy interest only in the last five to seven years (Bouzarovski et al. 2021). In the context of some of the latest energy crisis across the European continent and post-pandemic environment, the fact that almost 42 million people in the EU (or 9.3% of the EU population) were unable to keep their homes adequately warm in 2022 (EESC 2023) set the phenomenon of the energy poverty very high at the EU agenda.

European Commission proposal for a recast Energy Efficiency Directive defines energy poverty as “a household’s lack of access to essential energy services that underpin a decent standard of living and health, including adequate warmth, cooling, lighting, and energy to power appliances, in the relevant national context, existing social policy and other relevant policies” (EC COM[2021] 558 final, 75–76). In addition, the phenomenon of energy poverty in the EU is often coupled with factors such as low income, high expenditure on energy, and poor energy efficiency in buildings, while simultaneously having impact on health, well-being, social inclusion, and quality of citizens’ life (EC 2022a).<sup>7</sup> Yet, as many EU Member States have no official definition of the “energy poverty” term, it is often described as the inability to keep homes adequately warm. However, there is no binding definition of energy poverty on the EU level currently which complicates combating this phenomenon to some extent.

The ongoing energy transition is specifically targeted as challenge when it comes to the energy poverty phenomenon in the EU context. One of the European Parliament’s Resolution states that the energy transition “can have a disproportionate effect on people with low incomes and further increase energy poverty” and

“... calls on the Member States to assess the number of households in energy poverty in their integrated national energy and climate plans and to take follow-up actions, if necessary, as required by the Governance Regulation; calls on the

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<sup>6</sup> Such are, for instance, UK, Ireland, France, Slovakia, and Austria.

<sup>7</sup> The EU Energy Poverty Observatory (EPOV) reports are showing that life in “inadequately heated or cooled homes has detrimental implications on respiratory, circulatory, and cardiovascular systems, as well as mental health and well-being” (Bouzarovski and Thomson 2020, 8).

Member States to take forward-looking action to ensure a just energy transition and access to energy for all EU citizens” (Resolution P8 TA[2019]0217, 23).

As previously mentioned, the energy poverty is not easily measured by a single indicator. In addition, different energy needs of different countries vary across the globe so it is almost impossible to define consensual set of indicators that will capture all important dimensions of energy poverty. According to Culver (2017, 3–4), there are four ways of measuring energy poverty “categorized by whether the approach to measurement is based on energy access, the energy input, the outcomes of energy use, or the quality of energy delivered”. The energy access refers to access to the grid and to modern cooking fuels, while the energy input approach is based on economic indicators such as energy consumption or the amount of money spent on energy (Culver 2017, 6, 11). Outcomes of energy poverty could have diversity of impact on health, environmental, opportunity costs or absence of choice, while the quality of energy delivered approach to measure energy poverty entails prescribed attributes for each type of end use (Culver 2017, 12, 13). Since every of listed approaches have several strengths and limitations, the efforts to capture energy poverty dimensions resulted with developing some composite metrics that combine different indicators originating from different approaches, such as EDI (Energy Development Index), MEPI (Multidimensional Energy Poverty Index) or EPI (Energy Poverty Index).<sup>8</sup>

When it comes to the EU level, the worthiest of notion is the dataset developed by the EU Energy Poverty Observatory (EPOV). The EPOV developed a set of indicators to measure energy poverty based on “a screening of pertinent literature on the measurement of energy poverty” (Thema and Vondung 2020, 6). Identifying three main methods of measuring energy poverty (expenditure, consensual approach, and direct measurement), the EPOV’s approach combine expenditure and consensual based indicators to evaluate a country’s state of energy poverty, where each of them captures a different aspect of the phenomenon. As its dashboard states, there are four primary indicators – two based on self-reported experiences of limited access to energy services (inability to keep home adequately warm and arrears on utility bills) and two based on household income and/or energy expenditure data (high and low share of energy expenditure in income), while there are 19 secondary indicators that do not directly measure energy poverty but are closely linked to the issue (Thema and Vondung 2020, 6–7). It could be noted that this dataset incorporates both equally important subjective (consensual) and objective indicators on energy poverty at the EU level.

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<sup>8</sup> As Culver (2017, 18) stated, neither of these composite metrics “do not necessarily avoid shortcomings of the four approaches discussed” but aspire towards bridging their limitations.

Depending on dataset used for evaluating energy poverty at the EU level, some conclusions could be underlined: current energy poverty trends across the EU show that almost 9.3% of the EU population was unable to keep their homes adequately warm in 2022 (EESC 2023), while, according to the EU-SILC survey,<sup>9</sup> 6.9% of European citizens were unable to pay for utility bills during the same year (Eurostat 2023).<sup>10</sup> From the other hand, when considering expenditure-based indicators of the EU Household budget surveys (HBS), 16.2% of households in the EU spent more than twice the national median share on energy expenditure in income in 2015, while 14.6% had energy expenditure below half the national median (Bouzarovski and Thomson 2020, 42).<sup>11</sup> To compare, in the period of 5 years (between 2010 and 2015), the majority of EU countries (18 out of 28) witnessed reduction in the rates of households with very low energy expenditures, while 14 out of 28 EU countries saw reduction in the rates of households with a high share of energy expenditures in income for the same period (Bouzarovski and Thomson 2020, 43–44).

When it comes to the specific categories, vulnerable customers that are at the highest risk of failing into energy poverty include categories such as “retired people, those out of work or in poorly paid jobs, and those dependent on social security benefits” as well as “elderly, disabled or single parent families” (European Fuel Poverty and Energy Efficiency 2009 cited in: Bouzarovski et al. 2012, 76).<sup>12</sup> When considering spatial dimension of the energy poverty in the EU, it should be stated that the two consensual indicators (inability to keep home adequately warm and arrears on utility bills) are particularly widespread in Eastern, Central, and Southern Europe, where it tends to affect groups who are already vulnerable to income poverty. Similarly, a group of authors find direct connection between energy poverty, poor health, and poor well-being in the EU with the Eastern and Central Europe being the most affected (Thomson et al. 2017). Those parts of Europe were also identified as the riskiest in the case of possible energy disruptions such were those connected

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<sup>9</sup> Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) combines subjective measure on “inability to keep the home warm” with more objective data about the shares of each country’s population facing disproportionately high housing burdens, living in low quality dwellings, or having arrears on utility bills.

<sup>10</sup> Some estimations are that even more are experiencing inadequate levels of many other essential energy services.

<sup>11</sup> Newer data on the expenditure-based indicators are still pending so the latest (from 2015) are used. Although energy prices are more dynamic category, they are important for gaining insight in what burdens households expenditures in domain of energy.

<sup>12</sup> It is also important to note that energy poor households are not automatically those with low-incomes considering it aggregates many other dimensions, but many low-incomes households are categorised as being energy poor.

with gas shortages during the first decade of the XXI century (EC SWD[2014] 330 final/3). These data show that South-Eastern European countries i.e., post-communist transition countries are at the highest risk of energy poverty due to the combination of diverse political, economic, and social factors which are further complicated by the lack of regulatory capacities of those countries to support vulnerable households. Besides, unique combination of cold climates, above-average rates of inefficient residential buildings, insufficiently developed and/or decaying infrastructure, high rates of income inequality, and systemic issues in the management of energy, social welfare, and housing operations are common problems of those countries that need to be addressed a holistic manner and with a symbiosis of sectoral policies.

### ***Recent EU policies on reducing energy poverty***

As already said, energy poverty in the EU context emerged as one of the central challenges underpinned with some of the international circumstances coming from the political, economic, and socio-technological processes. Gas crisis from 2006 and 2009 rose the attention of energy disruptions' consequences on a more community and individual levels – one of the first European energy policies that tackled reducing energy poverty as one of the main goals was Green Paper – A European Strategy for Sustainable, Competitive and Secure Energy (EC COM[2006] 105 final, 4). Securitization of energy issues and activities aimed at reducing EU's external energy dependency while simultaneously working on achieving climate goals continued over the 2014 and Russian annexation of Crimea (Šekarić Stojanović 2022a) and culminated during the 2022 with the Russian invasion into Ukraine when the set of sanctions against Russia Federation and measures to strengthen European energy security were adopted. Within this geopolitical context, the attention to energy poverty dramatically rose which resulted with concrete measures to combat this phenomenon.

The Third Energy Package (2009) was the first legislation package which entered energy poverty on the European agenda with Directives 2009/72/EC and 2009/73/EC concerning electricity and gas supply in the EU. Those legislation introduced the concept of “vulnerable customers” – groups that are excepted from disconnection of electricity in critical times – recognizing significance of growing awareness on energy poverty in Europe. After introducing the concept of vulnerable customers, European Commission launched the Energy Poverty Observatory at the end of 2016, aimed at supporting “informed decision making at local, regional and national level by providing a user-friendly and open-access resource” (EC 2018) while providing “technical assistance to relevant government authorities and specialist institutions” (Bouzarovski and Thomson 2020, 8).

In order to name one generative notion which introduced energy poverty at the EU policy level, it could be said that green policies have brought this important step. As an illustration, the Clean Energy for all Europeans Package, proposed in 2016 and adopted between 2018 and 2019, saw energy poverty as one of the priorities that need to be tackled, mainly through promoting higher energy efficiency and energy performance of buildings (EC 2019). This legislative package put consumers and vulnerable citizens at the heart of the energy transition under the new energy efficiency rules; the Governance Regulation and the Electricity Directive together ask that Member States monitor energy poverty and introduce in their National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs)<sup>13</sup> specific national objectives on energy poverty, while the Energy Poverty Observatory will assist in this task (EC 2019, 13). The period after 2014 is generally seen as a playground for integration of energy and climate policies which gave EU's energy efforts more nuanced environmentally and human-centric dimensions in contrary to traditionally state-centric energy perspective. In the core of contemporary European energy and climate policies thus lies the concept of just transition which relies not only energy transition but such energy transition that, apart from clean energy, will also result in reducing energy poverty to a minimum (Šekarić Stojanović, 2022a, 116). In that context, it is not unusual that alleviating energy poverty is considered as a “key precondition for achieving just transitions towards sustainability” (Bouzarovski and Thomson 2020, 7).

At the end of 2019, European Green Deal was introduced by the European Commission, gathering key energy, environmental and societal goals under one initiative. Among many other goals,<sup>14</sup> this initiative aimed at promoting the well-being and health of citizens and addressing energy poverty by providing energy efficient buildings, cleaner energy, and reducing external energy dependency (EC 2023a). “No person and no place left behind” outlined in the Green Deal leads to a conclusion that key energy and climate goals need to consider all citizens, especially ones that are vulnerable or in risk to become vulnerable during the ongoing energy transition or potential energy disruptions. In other words, it sketches the necessity to reduce the risk of being energy poor for those households

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<sup>13</sup> NECPs are generally seen as main mediating tool between national states and EU for transposition of supranational energy and climate objectives to regional and local levels and *vice versa* – a tool for identifying relevant economic and environmental problems on regional and local levels in order to gain necessary help to be resolved.

<sup>14</sup> Making Europe the first climate neutral continent in the world by 2050 is seen as the primary goal of the Initiative, which incorporates many specific goals within energy, environmental and societal sectors.

“that cannot afford key energy services to ensure a basic standard of living” (EC COM[2019] 640 final, 6) through effective financial programmes aimed at renovation of houses and improving energy efficiency of residential buildings. In particular, a centrepiece of the Green Deal – strategy “A Renovation Wave for Europe – Greening our buildings, creating jobs, improving lives” – seeks to boost the structural renovation of private and public buildings, targeting 3 focus areas: tackling energy poverty and worst-performing buildings, public buildings and social infrastructure, and decarbonising heating and cooling (EC COM[2020] 662 final, 20), obviously connecting different sectors and stakeholders at national and local levels in order to combat against mutual challenge in a holistic manner. In addition, at the beginning of 2020, the Commission introduced “The Just Transition Mechanism” aimed at providing around €55 billion over the period 2021–2027 for the most affected regions and to alleviate the socio-economic impact of the transition where fighting energy poverty to achieve these goals is specifically addressed (EC 2023c).<sup>15</sup>

In 2020, Commission issued recommendation on energy poverty and highlighted the necessity of developing systematic approach in tackling this issue in accordance with the existing legislation and cross-sectoral policies as part of the above-mentioned Renovation Wave Strategy (Recommendation [EU] 2020/1563).<sup>16</sup> In 2022, the Commission Energy Poverty and Vulnerable Consumers Coordination Group was established in order to function as the “main platform for the exchange of information and coordination between the Commission and Member States on questions” regarding energy poverty (Decision [EU] 2022/589, L 112/69). The newest EU recommendations on energy poverty are issued in October 2023, proposing several long-term measures to tackle energy poverty, from legislative across structural, governance, energy efficiency to those connected to renewables (Recommendation [EU]2023/2407). As stressed out by the group of authors, the need for a pan-European strategy for tackling energy poverty has been advocated since 2015 at least (Bouzarovski et al. 2021).

However, it would be one-side story if not mentioned efforts conducted on the Member States level when it comes to combating energy poverty. Although EU significantly raised awareness of the problem, “policy action at the governance level of individual Member States” remains uneven and limited (Bouzarovski et al.

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<sup>15</sup> The support is primarily intended to the most carbon-intensive regions or with the most people dealing with fossil fuels so that carbon-neutral goals could be achieved on-time with “no-one left behind”.

<sup>16</sup> For instance, The Affordable Housing Initiative was launched as part of Renovation Wave Strategy in order to green buildings, create jobs and improve lives of EU citizens (EC 2023b).

2021). The analysis of the 2021–2030 National Energy and Climate Plans showed that as of 2020 most Member States are still lacking both a clear definition of and an approach on how to assess energy poverty (Bouzarovski and Thomson 2020). Considering 13 criteria, the EPOV pointed out that no Member State fully meets all the criteria needed to address energy poverty within the NECPs (Bouzarovski and Thomson 2020, 33). According to another study, among 27 EU Member States, only a few countries tend to have preventive approach to energy poverty meaning fully implementation of energy efficiency policies (Chlechowicz and Reuter 2021). Partially due to diverse capacities to combat this phenomenon, partially due to the ongoing period of energy transition which differs from one country to another, the assessment of the undertaken actions and their follow-on consequences could be done at the final stages of their fully implementation. Although reducing energy poverty remains significant challenge for the EU and Member States in the future, adequate legislative measures that need to be incorporated in the national frameworks, energy efficiency measures, GDP rises and strengthen employment possibilities are seen as fruitful in domain of resolving this phenomenon (Koruga 2021). Nevertheless, these objectives demand integration of sectoral policies and people-centred approach towards energy poverty in a holistic manner.

This summary of EU's energy poverty characteristics and policies aimed at reducing energy poverty served to outline the perspective based on human security approach that puts people and their everyday lives into centre of policies. Although it is largely oriented towards achieving energy and climate targets of the Member States, contemporary EU energy policy integrates human security dimension of energy-related issues and diverse sectors and stakeholders to combat energy poverty in a holistic manner. The period for evaluating the performance of those policies is relatively short, but it is expected the continuation of investing efforts in achieving outlined targets.

## **Concluding Remarks**

This paper envisaged clear connection between phenomenon of energy poverty and human security concept at the EU level. Although not novel challenge, energy poverty gained some new qualitative dimensions in the context of some new international (energy) circumstances related to energy transition process, introduction of green policies and the most recent warfare between Russia and Ukraine which accelerated EU's efforts to reduce its energy dependency from Russian fossil fuels. Period after 2014/15 is generally seen as a period that was

marked by the significant integration of energy and climate policies within the EU context where the problem of energy poverty is being noticeably tackled.

This paper also showed that energy poverty is largely generated by a set of international political and economic factors such as energy transition process, post-Covid recovery and the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine that, consequently, led to unstable energy prices and reduced capacities to combat individual consequences of energy crisis at the expense of those state-centric. In addition, it has pointed out that energy poverty, as a universal energy and human security problem, affects various aspects of the concept of human security, such as health, well-being, gender and educational opportunities, and is receiving increasing attention in all sectoral policies.

Energy poverty became very significant not only energy but wider social issue for one country because of its spillover effect – if prices are higher, it affects people's decisions not to spend more money on some other necessities, goods, and services. Citizens thus lack in meeting basic needs, while those at the risk of being (energy) poor could be easily “pushed” over the edge. This is why all energy, social and environmental policies need to tackle this issue in a holistic and in a human-centric manner. In other words, people-centred perspective seems necessary when resolving such multi-layered issues such as energy poverty that affect diverse sectors of a society.

The goal of this paper was to point out that human security represents solid framework for understanding the issue of energy poverty considering its integrating nature of diverse sectors that affect people's everyday lives. Energy poverty is understood as not only problem of the personal security, but as an issue that affects other human security dimensions such are health, economic and environmental ones. This spillover nature of the energy poverty thus calls for more nuanced approach that will take into account individualistic consequences of the phenomenon. Thus, it could be said that the human security perspective underpins EU's energy poverty-related policies. Undergoing energy paradigm shift and very dynamic process of energy transition have shown that energy-related challenges and threats could adequately be tackled if take people-centred perspective beside exclusively state-centric. This is where the human security concept finds its own place in addressing contemporary energy problems and serve as solid framework where “no-one is left behind”.

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Nevena ŠEKARIĆ STOJANOVIĆ

**PRISTUP EU ENERGETSKOM SIROMAŠTVU  
ZASNOVAN NA LJUDSKOJ BEZBEDNOSTI**

**Apstrakt:** Fenomen energetske siromaštva pokazuje da energetska pitanja, tradicionalno povezana sa međunarodnim, regionalnim i nacionalnim nivoima analize, imaju šire ekonomske i političke uzroke koji se manifestuju i na nivou zajednice i individualnom nivou. Aktuelna energetska kriza koja je zahvatila evropski kontinent, zajedno sa nekim strukturalnim faktorima poput oskudnih resursa, energetske tranzicije i rata između Rusije i Ukrajine, naglasila je individualističke posledice tekućih energetske procesa. Činjenica da je skoro 42 miliona ljudi u Evropskoj uniji pogođeno energetske siromaštvom postavila je fenomen energetske siromaštva veoma visoko na dnevni red EU. Jasna povezanost ove teme sa konceptom ljudske bezbednosti čini fenomen energetske siromaštva opravdanim za analizu iz perspektive pojedinca. Stoga je cilj ovog rada da istakne karakteristike pristupa zasnovanog na ljudskoj bezbednosti kao solidnog okvira za razumevanje i analizu fenomena energetske siromaštva u EU. Pregled akademske baze znanja o ovoj pojavi, sekundarna analiza podataka relevantnih evropskih istraživanja i analiza odgovarajućih politika i praksi EU u borbi protiv energetske siromaštva glavni su metodološki alati za mapiranje trenutnog stanja i analizu veze između energetske siromaštva i koncepta ljudske bezbednosti u EU.

**Ključne reči:** ljudska bezbednost, energetske siromaštvo, Evropska unija, energetske i klimatske politike, energetske tranzicija.