

# Spain: National Strategy against Energy Poverty 2019-2024

ESPN Flash Report 2020/04

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MARCH 2020



## Description

*The National Strategy against Energy Poverty 2019-2024, approved in April 2019, contains structural measures that combine the right to energy with maximum energy efficiency. The strategy has been widely endorsed. It will be implemented on the basis of annual operating plans; its financing is public-private and its success will require the cooperation of the various public administrations. With the new government formed on 12 January 2020, the first operational plan for 2020 is pending approval.*

On 28 April 2019, the Spanish government approved the National Strategy against Energy Poverty 2019-2024 (NSEP 2019-2024) (Ministry of Ecological Transition, 2019). The strategy fulfils the mandate of Royal Decree-Law 15/2018. It builds on the UN Sustainable Development Goals, as well as European Directive 2009/72/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of the EU, the Winter Package and the European Pillar of Social Rights. It also contributes to the objective of fighting energy poverty set out in the National Strategy to Prevent and Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion 2019-2023 (see Marbán and Arriba [2019] for a short presentation of the strategy), the New Spanish Urban Agenda (2019) and the Strategy for Energy Renovation in the Building Sector in Spain (Ministry of Development, 2017).

Spain is in an intermediate situation in terms of energy poverty indicators compared to other EU Member States. Looking at the 2018 data from the EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions, we see that 9.1% of people in Spain live in a household which is unable to keep its home adequately warm (EU-28 average: 7.6%), 7.2% in a household unable to pay utility bills on time (heating, electricity, gas, water...) (EU-28: 6.8%). However, Spain suffers from low levels of energy efficiency, especially in the homes of the most vulnerable people.

The NSEP 2019-2024 takes up a double challenge:

- a) to provide a comprehensive response to energy poverty, including the protection of vulnerable consumers and an efficient housing environment; and
- b) to develop awareness of the need for energy efficiency in Spanish society, at the current time of transition to a clean energy system.

It develops four main priorities for action: improving the knowledge of energy poverty; improving the response to energy poverty; structural changes to reduce energy poverty; measures to protect all consumers and to improve societal awareness of the need for energy efficiency. These priorities are addressed in 9 lines of work and 19 concrete measures.

The objective is to reduce four energy poverty indicators by at least 25% or, if possible, 50% between 2017 and 2025, namely: excessive household spending on energy (from 17.3% down to maximum 12.9% and, if possible, 8.6%), hidden energy poverty (11.5%/8.6%/5.7%), inadequate housing temperature (8%/6%/4%), and late payment of bills (7.4%/5.5%/3.7%).

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Among the fundamental measures in the NSEP, three should be highlighted:

- a) In the short term: creation of a new social energy discount covering all sources of energy supply, which is to be automatic and managed in coordination with the Autonomous Communities; the establishment of a “minimum vital supply” of energy; and the express rehabilitation of low efficiency housing.
- b) In the medium term: promotion of social rental in public housing by subsidising energy supplies and improving energy efficiency.
- c) In the long term: support for structural change based on the Strategy for Energy Renovation in the Building Sector in Spain (Ministry of Development, 2017).

The NSEP 2019-2024 is based on a governance model that involves social, economic and institutional actors with an interest in the objectives of the strategy. It has been the subject of prior consultation and has been drawn up by an inter-ministerial working group, which also included experts and NGOs working in the field of energy poverty and environmental protection. In addition, a permanent Social Action Third Sector NGO Round Table has been set up. The Autonomous Communities participate through the Energy Sector Conference. NGOs and the regions will also be involved in monitoring the implementation of the strategy.

The development of the strategy will be based on Annual Operational Plans. A regular evaluation of the strategy is planned, as well as a final evaluation.



## Outlook and commentary

The NSEP 2019-2024 is necessary to move towards a new sustainable energy model and to guarantee the effective right of access to energy for all citizens, with particular reference to vulnerable and excluded groups.

The strengths of the NSEP 2019-2024 include greater visibility for the problem of energy poverty, the commitment to approve a minimum vital supply and the structuring of measures that connect a reduction of energy poverty with greater access to housing. The governance model, with broad stakeholder participation, has made it possible to adopt a broadly consensual strategy.

However, the operational development of the strategy suffers from a number of weaknesses. First, there are difficulties in coordinating with the Autonomous Communities in terms of management and financing. This needs to be addressed satisfactorily as the protection of vulnerable consumers is an issue not only dependent on the central state administration, but that is also regulated by the Autonomous Communities who are responsible for housing and urban planning policies as well as social services, in collaboration with local governments. Secondly, the strategy does not set out basic budgetary commitments. Although such commitments must be specified in the Annual Operational Plans and there is a timetable for achieving the objectives, no provision has been made for the cost of implementing the 19 measures set out in the Strategy, at least those of the central administration, which has full responsibility for ensuring that the

Strategy achieves the planned objectives by 2025.

With the new government formed on 12 January 2020, the first operational plan for 2020 is pending approval. It will be important that the plans take account of the need to address the weaknesses mentioned above.

### Further reading

Ministry of Development (2017) Actualización de la Estrategia para la Rehabilitación Energética en el sector de la Edificación en España [“Update of the Strategy for Energy Renovation in the Building Sector in Spain”], <http://bit.ly/2RLhql5>

Ministry of Ecological Transition (2019) National Strategy against Energy Poverty 2019-2020 (NSEP 2019-2024) <http://bit.ly/2Fw3agp>

Marbán, V. and Arriba, A. (2019) A new Strategy to prevent and combat poverty and social exclusion in Spain, ESPN Flash Report 2019/50, European Social Policy Network (ESPN), Brussels: European Commission, <http://bit.ly/30Ioa79>

New Spanish Urban Agenda, 2019, <http://www.aue.gob.es/>

Royal Decree-Law 15/2018, of 5 October, on urgent measures for energy transition and consumer protection, <http://bit.ly/2QjiltF>

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Quoting this report: Cabrero, Gregorio Rodríguez and Vicente Marbán (2020). Spain: National Strategy against Energy Poverty 2019-2024, ESPN Flash Report 2020/04, European Social Policy Network (ESPN), Brussels: European Commission.