PRESS RELEASE

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Connecting obligated parties to adopt innovative schemes towards energy poverty alleviation (SocialWatt)

The SocialWatt project (www.socialwatt.eu) was launched on 26-27 September 2019 in Athens, Greece, where the kick-off meeting took place. SocialWatt aims to enable obligated parties under Article 7 of the Energy Efficiency Directive across Europe to develop, adopt, test and spread innovative schemes to alleviate energy poverty. The appropriate tools developed within the framework of SocialWatt aim to help utilities and energy suppliers effectively identify energy poor households, as well as develop and monitor schemes that focus on increasing the energy efficiency of these houses.

Energy poverty is broadly understood as the inability of households to maintain adequate levels of energy services at an affordable cost. Energy poverty has a wide range of negative effects, for example it can lead to energy rationing (both through temperature reduction and partial heating of the home), energy bill debt, disconnection and debt or rationing on other areas of the household budget. Energy rationing and the inability to keep a home warm can lead to unhealthy indoor environments, for instance, low indoor temperatures, damp and mould that all contribute to cardiovascular and respiratory health impacts. Energy poverty has also been linked to negative impacts on social inclusion, educational attainment and mental health.

Under the Energy Efficiency Directive - EED (2012/27/EU), EU countries must set up an energy efficiency obligation scheme that requires energy companies to achieve yearly energy savings in terms of annual sales to final consumers (Article 7). As such, energy companies need to design and implement measures that help final consumers improve the energy efficiency of their dwellings. A share of measures are required to be implemented as a priority among vulnerable households, including those affected by energy poverty, and where appropriate, in social housing.

Besides planned capacity building activities, SocialWatt is developing appropriate tools to help utilities and energy suppliers effectively identify energy poor households as well as develop and monitor schemes that focus on increasing the energy efficiency of these houses. Energy efficiency interventions at the household level are being facilitated and the increased use of renewable energy (RES/EE investments) is being fostered, by promoting innovative financing options. In this way, SocialWatt supports utilities and energy suppliers to fulfil energy efficiency obligations, as well as improve public relations, enhance Corporate Social Responsibility strategies, reduce debt and overhead in managing debt and enhance public image.

The SocialWatt project is coordinated by Institute of Communication and Computer Systems (ICCS) - Greece and consists of 14 consortium members from eleven countries. The consortium consists of:
- Multinational energy companies and leading energy suppliers (EDF - France, NATURGY - Spain, ESB - Ireland, PPC - Greece, CEZ - Romania, HEP ESCO - Croatia, FORTUM - Latvia and EVISO - Italy).
- Technical organizations (ICCS - Greece, IEECP – the Netherlands, RAP - Belgium, E7 - Austria and ISPE - Romania) with experience in designing and implementing energy efficiency interventions, energy poverty alleviation actions and innovative financing schemes, as well as successfully engaging with consumers.
- An experienced organization on humanitarian aid and social services (CARITAS AUSTRIA).

On the 28th of May 2020, the first SocialWatt capacity building workshop on alleviating energy poverty took place virtually. The workshop focused on how utilities, energy companies and social services can help alleviate energy poverty. Experts on energy poverty and representatives from utilities and academic institutions presented their experience and knowledge. The SocialWatt project, its objectives, target groups and key outputs were also presented. The first SocialWatt newsletter can be accessed here: **https://preview.mailerlite.com/b3t4o4**.

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