

Social energy measures in Ghent

Empowering Ghent's vulnerable families in their energy-efficiency refurbishment

A Covenant of Mayors 2016 Case Study

In a nutshell

In response to the growing issue of energy poverty, the city of Ghent is giving greatest attention to those who need it most. The Energiecentrale , through its guiding programme, is a unique example of how to support vulnerable families in tackling energy poverty.



Ghent in numbers

Numbers of inhabitants in Ghent: 248,242

CO₂ reduction target: 20% by 2020 (baseline 2007) and 40% by 2030

Signatory of the Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy since 2015

Covenant of Mayor Signatories in Belgium: 256

Background

With a population of 248,242 inhabitants Ghent is the second biggest city in Flanders and third biggest city in the whole Belgium. Ghent has a housing stock of more than 110,000 dwellings, all different in terms of age, types and qualities. Almost 90% of the housing is private property. Households' emissions account for more than 25% of all city emissions, meaning that a shift towards a sustainable housing system could save up to one forth of the city's total CO₂ emissions. In January 2009, Ghent was the first Flemish city to sign the Covenant of Mayors, and the first Belgium city to sign the Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy in November 2015. With it, Ghent committed to a reduction of its local CO₂ emissions by over 20% by 2020 compared to 2007, and by at least 40% by 2030. Ghent has recently renovated its commitments through its new Climate plan for 2014-2020.

Energy poverty focus in the new Ghent climate policy

Whit 15% of households facing energy poverty, Ghent city council made a very conscious choice for a social climate policy, trying to keep into consideration the vulnerable part of the society. This policy aims at empowering families, organizations, institutions, and companies against rising energy prices, by supporting structural energy-saving measures financed through additional resources earmarked for low income families. In the recent years the city has created a lot of space for initiatives coming from citizens, organizations, and companies for reducing energy consumption and making energy production more sustainable.

The climate policy is structured around three main pillars:

- Enthusiast: Inspiring Ghent families to implement a phased refurbishment of their residence reducing energy consumption below of 70 kWh/m², and even down to 30kW/m² in some cases.
- Easy: Making it easy for citizens to implement these refurbishment phases.
- Affordable: Making the refurbishments affordable.

Ghent climate city: De Energiecentrale

The city has a number of different measures to implement its climate strategy. In order to offer a comprehensive assistance to the residents, the city council has established an office, "De Energiecentrale", as a contact for all products and services offered by the City on energy efficient living and renovation of building.

Depending on the citizens' income, De Energiesentrale offers premiums up to 1,500 or 2,500 Euros (financed by both Flemish government and the city of Ghent), in order to ensure that refurbishment works become affordable for any Ghent resident. In 2015, 1,544 Ghent citizens applied for an energy grant for their home refurbishment. In particular, most the applications concerned roof isolation, isolating windows and façade isolation.

Other services, such as "Check je huis" (Check your house), an online tool that provides a personal step-by-step plan for making your own house more energy efficient, allows residents to access detailed information on the estimated investment cost for every intervention, as well as the available grants and the annual energy savings. In 2015, 13,000 Ghent citizens drafted a personal energy efficiency plan using "Check je huis".

The city administration also works to improve the energy efficiency of Ghent's social housing. Indeed the City Council provides financial support for energy refurbishments of social housing.

From energy scan to retrofit

De Energiecentrale provides intensive and high-quality support with extra attention for the vulnerable families of Ghent. Its action is threefold:

1. De Energiecentrale offers free energy scans. They include a full scan of the household to assess possible energy consumption reductions. During the four years from 2009-2012, 5,313 scans have been executed with an estimated energy consumption reduction of 8-10% per energy scan. 25% of the scans were targeting rented apartments or houses and 32% social houses.
2. De Energiecentrale offers support to find the most sustainable and affordable renovation solutions (tax information, financial advice, guidance during execution, etc.). Citizens can ask for help to find a constructor, to find and apply for subventions and to help filling tax papers. Examples include group purchase for rooftop and window insulation.
3. Through the rolling fund FROCE (Fund to Reduce the Overall Cost of Energy), De Energiecentrale provides low cost energy loans, up to a maximum of 10,000 euros, to help finance energy-saving investments in existing houses or new buildings. The loan is to be paid back over a 5 year period at an interest rate of only 2 per cent. For vulnerable families, the interest rate is even zero per cent. Last year (2015), 117 Ghent citizens asked an energy loan for energy-saving renovations.



Project numbers

5,313 scans have been executed from 2009-2012

Low cost loans at **2%** interest rate or (through FROCE) even at **0%**

Over **117** Ghent citizens asked an energy loan in 2015

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