

Power to the people



PUBLISHED APR 15, 2026
BY [EUROCITIES](#)

War in the Middle East has – again – shown how vulnerable Europeans are to volatile global oil and gas prices, and none more so than those with the least cash to spare. Renewable local power offers a way out, yet too many of those who struggle to pay their bills fear that Europe’s clean energy transition is unaffordable, unfair and out of reach.

Today, however, from Poland to Porto, people and communities are overcoming serious social and economic disadvantages and engaging in programmes that show how we can all benefit from healthier homes and cleaner, happier neighbourhoods; they’re working together to cut energy waste and switch to low-carbon heating and cooling.

Ten projects from seven countries, selected by expert-guided panels drawn from disadvantaged communities, will now have the chance to grow further and to share what they have learned. That’s thanks to the Escalator programme launched by FETA– Fair Energy Transition for All – an initiative led by the King Baudouin Foundation in partnership with the Schneider Electric Foundation. Since 2020, FETA has been listening to people from Europe’s most disadvantaged communities to design strategies and policies for an affordable clean energy future that improves lives for everyone.

To spread and develop robust practices, in this new phase of its work FETA will work with these 10 community-led teams to scale up their activities, connect them to each other and to a wider community of knowledge and expertise, and aim to replicate their successful models more widely around the continent. With the European Union driving to decarbonise housing in order to meet its climate goals, more than one in ten EU citizens cannot afford to heat their homes. FETA’s goal is to ensure the climate transition brings people together, that it helps heal, not deepen, Europe’s social divides.

The selected projects target low-income households and differing social groups, including young people, the elderly, disabled people, migrants, and women and gender minorities in a variety of settings,

from inner city Brussels to rural villages on Crete. Their actions range from installing solar panels and wind turbines, to sharing energy-saving tips, from training for the jobs required for eco-transformation to insulating homes. But what they all have in common is that vulnerable and disadvantaged people are at the heart of every decision and empowered to collaborate on solutions that work for them.

Too often, the move to clean energy is framed as a costly inconvenience that creates fear and opposition among those Europeans least able to afford additional demands on their limited resources; FETA has already demonstrated that, offered full information and a chance to help design solutions that truly work for them, people on low incomes can become enthusiastic drivers of Europe's ecological transition.

This work is powered by a trusted network of operational partners, GENIO, ifok, Energy Cities, Eurocities, and the Social Platform, bringing diverse expertise and reach.

In FETA 2, Eurocities plays a key role in connecting the ten initiatives with the EU policy level. Building on its advocacy work with EU institutions, Eurocities will gather and synthesise the challenges, lessons learned and success factors emerging from these innovative projects, and bring them into the European policy debate.

In particular, Eurocities will help ensure that these initiatives, ranging from the renovation of social housing to energy communities and training programmes, are recognised as concrete, scalable models to tackle energy poverty among vulnerable groups, including low-income households and people with disabilities. By feeding this evidence into EU discussions, the aim is to influence policy design so that future frameworks better reflect on-the-ground realities and support the replication of effective approaches across Europe.

Press release distributed by Wire Association on behalf of Eurocities, on Apr 15, 2026. For more information subscribe and [follow us](#).

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