

# Approaching and communicating with households affected by energy poverty

Training Module

2020 - WECF



EmpowerMed

# Approaching households - good to know

- Households do not necessarily want to be approached
- Fear of losing social, financial or other support
- Fear of stigmatisation
- Low level of trust towards various institutions or ,door-to-door salesmen‘
- Distrustfulness can remain present throughout the work with the households, but at the end they tend to be satisfied
- Solutions:
  - work with actors that already have trust of households, such as social workers (without commercial interest)
  - use existing networks that have trust of households (pensioner’s associations, local social clubs...)
  - word of mouth



# Ways to approach households

- Leaflets,
- Media,
- Posters,
- Cooperation with social organizations and institutions,
- Community events,
- Community ambassadors,
- Households that are already getting consultancy
- Word of mouth...



Vous souhaitez :  
Gérer et réduire vos consommations d'énergie et d'eau  
Améliorer votre confort  
Faire un geste pour l'environnement

Appelez le 00 00 00 00 00  
... et recevez la visite gratuite d'un conseiller pour :  
• Mieux comprendre vos consommations,  
• Faire baisser vos factures avec des gestes simples grâce à des conseils personnalisés  
• Bénéficier gratuitement de l'installation de petits équipements économes

**ÉCONOMISEZ JUSQU'À 100€ PAR AN !**



# Forms of communication

- There are three forms of communication:
  - Verbal: refers to all elements of speech (words, letters, sentences and numbers)
  - Para-linguistic: refers to manner in which we speak (intonation, speaking rate, pauses, laughing, singing)
  - Non-verbal: body language (posture, gesture and facial expressions) and external attributes (clothes)
- The effects of the messages we communicate consist of
  - 55 % body language
  - 38 % verbal capabilities
  - 7 % choice of words
- Confusion arises when our body language communicates something different than the spoken word



# The role of women in households

- Women tend to have more responsibilities managing the household, e.g. cooking, parenting, cleaning and other care work, due to sexual division of labour.
- Energy poverty (although not formally defined) disproportionately affects women!
- 85% of all single-parent households are headed by women.
- During household visits it might be more likely to encounter women and not men
- Due to social roles and social pressures, some women might be less confident to speak up and say their opinion, particularly in an unfamiliar situation or when encountering a stranger. Some women (and men) might also laugh when they feel uncomfortable.
- When people who fit into multiple minority categories (e.g. a young single mother with a disability) experience discrimination, some of the protective mechanisms put in place by our society often fail to meet the needs associated with the multifaceted nature of their

identities



# What is Intersectionality?

Intersectionality can be seen as a tool that helps to analyse and understand the different factors by which each person is shaped (e.g. race, gender, age, ethnicity, physical ability, class) and therefore may face multiple types of overlapping discrimination depending on their race, gender etc. (Collins and Budge, 2016)

- Gender?
  - Socio-economic factors (low education / income)
  - Age, e.g. pensioners, students, children
  - Special health conditions, e.g. disabled persons
  - Migration background, ethnicity
- may exacerbate existing inequality,  
e.g. energy poverty



# Tips on how to approach from a gender perspective

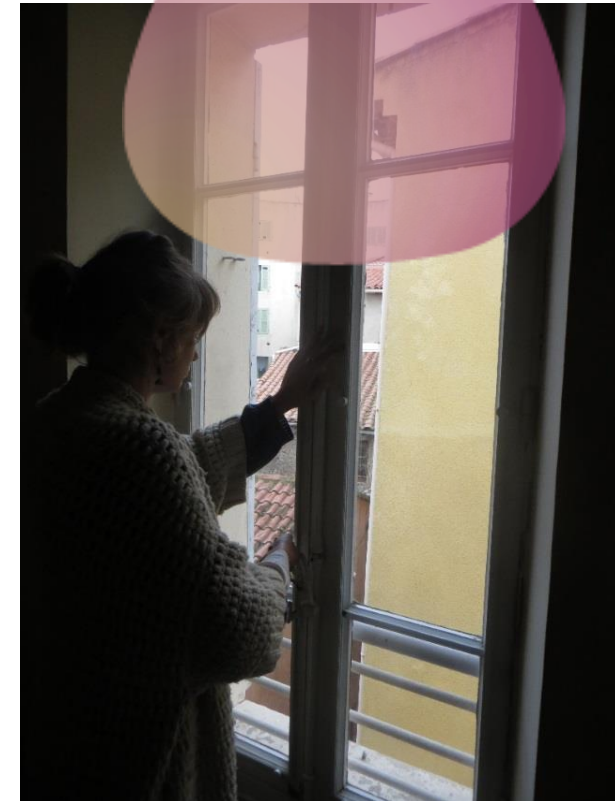
- Be aware of gender and intersectional differences when it comes to energy access, consumption and preferences in order to reach more people and achieve more sustainable & efficient project results
- Due to socialisation many women react more strongly to emotions and social aspects than to purely technical data → React to small gestures like nodding by asking twice
- The visiting team should consist of a male and a female consultant
- Invite all members (especially women) of the household to participate in the conversation. It might make it easier for women to engage if they are being invited directly
- Be aware of myths or stereotypes: e.g. if we say that women do not speak their mind, then this might indicate that they mean 'yes' when they say 'no' or vice versa and might be seen as an opportunity to push a woman to do something she might not want to
- Bring leaflets etc. so that the persons in the household can think about the project on their own in a relaxed atmosphere compared to a stress situation when someone comes to their home
- shy and self-conscious men?





# Code of ethical principles in social care

- Respect of human dignity and uniqueness
- Energy advisers must:
  - Protect people's dignity, privacy, autonomy and individuality of households
  - Respect people's culture and values
  - Strive to use understandable language and level of communication
  - Protect the confidential data and talk respectfully about them in their absence





# General behaviour and language

- Friendly and open behavior
- Treat person(s) just as you would wish to be treated
- Maintain visual contact with the other person(s)
- Patience in answering questions
- Appropriate choice of words
- Complete sentences
- Communication in 'advisory capacity'
- Explaining and demonstrating, use examples
- Address and include women and men in the same way



# Appreciative language

- The absence of recognition and appreciation demotivates the person addressed and results in resignation, anger, fear and refusal to cooperate
- Recognition and appreciation are expressed in one's inner attitudes and not merely in appreciative language

Belittling language	Appreciative language
If you don't listen correctly, then of course you won't understand anything.	Please help me. What exactly is still not clear about the matter?
Good heavens! That is certainly not the right way!	I have certain reservations about this proposal. Allow me to explain these briefly, perhaps these are unfounded.



# Active listening

Activity	Levels
Visual contact, nodding, sounds like mm, aha, yes.	Listening
I summarise what I hear in my own words in order to be certain that I have correctly understand the facts.	Understanding
I attempt to understand the feelings and requirements of the other person and to reflect my impressions.	Feelings



# Feedback

## Rules for giving feedback:

- Do not generalise and speak only in the first person: "I think..., I've understood..."
- Do not assess (good or bad...)
- Feedback means not only discussing negative responses, but also reinforcing positive responses
- Do not interpret and generalise. Describe only what is outwardly visible and indicate your own reactions or feelings
- Give concrete feedback that allows the person addressed to change behaviour
- Choose clear and precise formulations

## Rules for receiving feedback:

- Listen and digest. Think about what has been said!
- Do not defend yourself, reject, explain or "shoot back"
- Consider what is correct and what can help further
- However, one must not accept everything which the other person says



# I messages versus You messages

- Fundamentally different for expressing criticism
- You messages generate defence, opposition, anger, justification
- I messages generate concern, reflection and readiness for clarification

Examples of You messages	Example of I messages
You must always..	I notice that..
Why don't you...	I wish that...
Then you should...	It annoys me that..



# Forms of questioning

## Closed questions

- Demand a brief answer, often yes or no
- Advantageous when speaking with excessively talkative persons
- Important for explicit decisions

## Open questions

- Cannot be answered with yes or no
- Open questions are preferable when detailed answers are required
- Allow the person addressed greater flexibility for answering
- Encourage further thought about the matter in question

	Closed question	Open question
Question	Were you at the energy trade fair yesterday?	What was your impression of the energy trade fair?
Answer	yes or no	It was very informative for me. It dealt with the following subjects...



# Do's of communication

Do – typical discussion promoters	Expressions (examples)
Open questions	How do you see this?
Questions in response	What do you mean by maybe?
Targeted questions	How can we improve the situation?
Signalling attentiveness	Visual contact, sounds like ah, mm, or nodding
Summarising	So you mean....
Clarifying, emphasising the essential point	If I understand you correctly, this is a matter of....
Working towards wishes	So you're interested in...
Address emotions	You're disappointed... Do you feel ignored?
Addressing I messages / constructively addressing conflicts	You have already interrupted me three times. This annoys me, because I then lose the thread.
Addressing by name	Yes, Mister Maier...
Positive formulations	Yes, with pleasure, very well...
Signalling understanding	I can well understand that..
Signalling binding commitment	I'll take care of this immediately.





# Do not's of communication

Don'ts – discussion destroyers	Expressions (examples)
You messages	In any case you would have...
Irritating formulations	That's not my responsibility.
Playing down/bagatelling	That's not so bad.
Interrogating/accusing	Why didn't you contact me earlier?
Insinuations	You're only angry because...
Failing to respond to emotions	Please stick to the facts. Why are you so angry?
Assessing/judging	You're thinking false. We can't continue like this.
Commanding	I expect that you will... Do it this way.
Instructing	I already explained this to you earlier.
Warning/threatening	Think about the consequences.
Worldly wisdoms	No pain, no gain.
Irony/sarcasm	Well, what do you suggest then?
Killer phrases	We've always done it this way.
Softeners	Somehow, actually, could, would, perhaps, possibly, under certain conditions.



# Clothing

- You should feel comfortable in your clothing
- Clothing should be clean, neat and orderly
- Clothing should be appropriate for the situation
- In case of doubt, clothing should sooner be decent
- Jewellery and accessories should fit to the overall image
- Makeup and/or perfume should be decent and not exaggerated



# Posture

- Not too stiff, but not too careless. If you move about in a stiff posture, you give the impression of being unapproachable. A careless posture signals superficiality.
- An open sitting posture demonstrates interest (do not cross your arms)
- Maintain a friendly facial expression and smile occasionally
- Maintain visual contact
- Gestures: movements of the hands in support of the verbal presentation reinforce your words. However, excessive gestures can detract from the presentation and harm concentration
- While considering the points above to find a posture that is professional it also needs to feel natural too so you are authentic



# Manner of speaking

- Speak clearly, understandably, freely and calmly
- An exaggerated choice of words or the use of expert terminology creates mistrust and restraint. This can give the person the impression of being persuaded and not advised.
- Do not use slang expressions or strong language. These irritate the person and give the impression of incompetence. However, if possible, it is good to try to slightly adjust one's own speaking style to the style of the person(s) you are talking to. This helps to 'fit in' and creates trust. This being said, sometimes casual language is better than business language because 'similar' people seem more approachable / likeable. This also reduces hierarchies and the shame of not being knowledgeable on this topic.



# My home is my castle

The energy advisor should:

- Be aware that she is in someone else's home, therefore it is necessary to behave appropriately
- Maximum two persons/advisers
- Check for legal framework
- Use polite and respectful forms of greeting and departing, not slang or too casual
- Have a friendly and open approach
- Proceed in the way as the household member would want to be treated



# After ringing the doorbell

The advisor should:

- Step back at least one step
- Introduce herself with full name and surname
- Offer her hand – handshake should be firm and hard, as in this way we express positive intentions
- Ritual of greeting includes a smile
- Keep eye contact – when meeting other people our eyes are speaking
- Enter the dwelling and be seated only when invited
- Allow the resident person to go ahead



# Behaviour in the household

- In the introduction establish a comfortable atmosphere with chatting
- When starting with the 'advising', explain procedures and the objectives of advising; announce what is to be done
- Request person's approval when entering other rooms
- When doing measurements, explain what is going on
- In the end of the first visit, notify the person of the next visit
- Request the persons's approval before installing immediate aids
- When installing saving devices, explain its function and how it is used and request approval for installation
- When finishing 'advising', explain further procedure
- Leave contact information so the person can call if needed





# Behaviour in households with different cultural backgrounds

- Likely to visit families from a different cultural background
- Be aware of one's own prejudices and be informed about the cultural circumstances of the households
- People have prejudices against others and also against people from other countries, whose cultures and patterns of behaviour with which we are not familiar and which we do not understand.
- There may also be difficulties in communication due to different mother tongues
- In order to understand people from another cultural background it is important to be aware of and find out about their values and norms
- Respect the customs and habits of other cultures (e.g. if it is normal to leave one's shoes in the hallway you should respect this and take off your shoes)
- If you are unsure how to behave, simply ask what is normal - this gains the respect and sympathy of the other person and avoids immediate reservations on the part of the other person



# Overview of the phases of visit

Discussion phase	What is to be done	Goal
<b>Greeting and introduction</b>	Greet the person, arrange a date for visiting the household, small talk (weather, attractive flat, etc.)	Ensure a good atmosphere for discussions
<b>Transition to the advisory phase</b>	Explain the purpose of the advisory session exactly, in particular explain the procedure for the flat Work out arguments and advantages for the person	Inform the person, create assurance so that the person knows what he or she is facing
<b>Advisory phase</b>  <b>In case of problems</b>	Explain in detail what will be done and why Explain the device functions exactly When entering other rooms always ask permission Do not break off communication, ask questions, determine the nature of the problem Do not be overzealous and attempt to persuade the person, use convincing arguments Find a solution that takes account of the people's wishes	Assurance for the person Build up trust  Respect Find an acceptable solution for all Always recognise the person's requirements
<b>Concluding phase</b>	Summarise the results of the advisory session Discuss how to proceed further, clarify open questions Leave your telephone number Arrange a date for another visit Politely thank the person and leave	Clarify how to proceed further



# Handling criticism

- Listen attentively and determine what the actual problem is
- Do not defend yourself or justify your actions
- Encourage the person to frankly express his or her reservations and reasons for criticism
- Accept criticism, demonstrate your understanding and include the arguments of the person
- Take the wind out of the sails of the person criticising: I understand that this angers you. How can I help you?
- Helpful formulations for constructive criticism
  - When I speak with you I have the feeling...
  - I would very much like that
  - When you say that I feel.....
  - Please don't be offended, but I see it this way....
  - What would be your proposal?



# Difficult situations and conflicts

- Unresolved conflicts escalate. It is therefore necessary to intervene early on and act to defuse them.
- Conflict signals
  - Aggressiveness and hostility, such as verbal attacks and malicious glances
  - Disinterest: The other person is no longer listening, goes away or ignores your presentation
  - Rejection and resistance: constantly contradicts you, unwilling to speak with you
  - Escape: avoids contact, denies availability
  - Exaggerated adaptive behaviour: false friendliness
- Methods for the de-escalation of conflicts:
  - Allow the other person to speak and do not intervene before the other person has finished.
  - Do not counter accusations and charges with other accusations.
  - Ask further to determine whether the other person has correctly understood you.
  - Maintain visual contact.
  - Do not demonstrate arrogance by your body language (do not turn away, laugh derogatorily, raise your eyebrows...).
  - Do not react with threats and accusations.
  - Do not allow yourself to be swept up in the dynamics of the conflict.
  - Questions like: What will help you further? What do you suggest?
  - If after asking once what the person suggests or is not so happy about, the attacks / threats continue, ask the person if she or he would like the advisor to leave or speak with the advisor at another occasion.



# When we cannot resolve the conflict

- Recognise the difference of opinions and admit that you might not be right or politely express that the person might not be right
- If a partner in discussion does not want to continue the conversation and expresses the wish to finish the conversation this needs to be respected at all times.
- You should stop advising and either agree for a visit on another day or agree not to continue it anymore





THANK YOU !



EmpowerMed



# EmpowerMed

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