Customer Protection in times of crises: main messages from the DSO

In a world marked by times of uncertainty, inflation, and persisting volatile energy prices, the Distribution System Operators (hereinafter: DSOs) remain ready in their commitment to safeguard the rights and well-being of European energy customers. **DSOs are deeply involved in a consumer-centric approach of the energy system and convinced by its necessity**.

We acknowledge the pressing need to protect customers from the adverse impacts of these challenging times. **We assume the responsibility of ensuring that customers can place their trust in a reliable energy distribution and security of energy supply**. We certainly endorse the existing policy measures and the implementation of relevant legislation, both on the national and European level, with the sole purpose of providing customers with the support they deserve. Our mission is clear and unequivocal: customer protection is paramount.

We advocate for customer protection measures that specifically target the most vulnerable households. **Our commitment extends to the adoption of energy-efficient, innovative, and flexible energy solutions, with the aim of empowering consumers and reducing overall energy demand.**

DSOs continue to introduce smart and digital measures to help customers gain insights into their electricity consumption and saving opportunities. DSOs are at the core of the digital transformation of the energy system too. Technology is one of the best ways to innovate and to constantly improve our engagement with customers. Digital solutions, which are already rolled out, have proven to be effective in maintaining the link between DSOs and their customers. **DSOs also support the development of schemes like energy communities that facilitate local energy sharing, increased consumer participation, and possibly local solidarity between customers.** Our journey towards a better energy future is one filled with determination, innovation, and focus on customer well-being.

In the face of the ongoing crisis, we are committed to **providing comprehensive, transparent, and tailor-made communication**. We understand that it is our duty to alleviate concerns experienced by our customers. Through efficient messaging and close collaboration with various stakeholders, including, retailers, suppliers, regulatory authorities, and policy makers, we ensure that our customers have access to essential information concerning their energy use, energy bills, installment plans, and customised solutions.

DSOs are dedicated to empowering customers by providing access to data on energy consumption. Aligning with the Regulatory Roundtable on EU consumer policy during the 2023 Citizens' Energy Forum in Dublin (Ireland), we continuously work on the progress of smart meter rollout, ensure the

interoperability of data and upscale our digital infrastructure, in compliance with the applicable EU regulatory framework on customer protection, data, and digitalisation.

In our commitment to foster customer empowerment, we are actively involved in facilitating demand response schemes. These schemes aim to encourage essential energy savings while supporting customer engagement and empowerment. Embracing the insights from the Roundtable, we remain committed to evaluating and evolving these schemes to better meet the needs of our customers.

Many of the DSOs represented by E.DSO have voluntarily introduced measures and practices designed to support our customers. These examples are demonstrated in the table below.

Table 1. E.DSO Membership best practices in addressing customer empowerment and alleviating energy poverty

Company [country]	Best Practices by E.DSO Membership
E.ON [Slovakia]	E.ON is implementing **customer friendly pre-paid meters** with special tariffs for customers in high energy debts with systems of "emergency credits.
Enedis [France]	Enedis engages in different partnerships, such as the French National Observatory on Energy Poverty (ONPE), PIMMS, FACE and other mediation structures throughout France, to support the French government with their **ambitions to combat energy poverty through public policy and regional planning**. A few concrete examples here below: Enedis **provides data-based solutions for territorial diagnosis of energy poverty**. On request, annual data relating to displacements due to unpaid bills – in an anonymous way down to the IRIS level (meaning the aggregated units for statistical information) - is made available to local authorities to enable them to objectify the phenomenon and quantify it. **The "Géodip" solution - an energy poverty mapping tool** developed by the ONPE. Enedis has been a partner of ONPE since 2016 and plays an active role in the Observatory's work and working groups. Géodip provides a pre-diagnosis of energy poverty in housing and mobility and is a complementary but broader solution to the poverty diagnosis mentioned above. A new version of Géodip is due to be released in 2024 with updated data. **Prioréno Logement Social**, an **artificial intelligence and data analysis service** designed to use data to boost the renovation and decarbonisation strategy for social housing. This tool has been developed for social landlords by the French Banque des Territoires, in partnership with the French state, Union Sociale de l'Habitat, Enedis and the gaz distribution service operator GRDF with the aim to make a link with energy renovation and, more specifically, with the challenges associated with renovating social housing.

Company [country]	Best Practices by E.DSO Membership
	As a partner of the **Unis-Cité** association, Enedis is helping young people recruited as part of the 'Solidarité Energie' civic service programme (developed by Stop Exclusion Energétique) to **learn more about the challenges of the energy transition and the opportunities smart devices**, such as Linky can offer when it comes to controlling electricity consumption.
Fluvius [Belgium]	Our Belgium member from Flanders implements different consumer protection measures. We collected a few concrete examples here below: Fluvius offered a system called "Prepaid" to protect vulnerable energy consumers from being disconnected during the energy crisis. Should energy suppliers terminate contracts, and no substitution be found, Fluvius jumped in as social supplier immediately activating the "Prepaid" function. This function was used to pay energy used in advance, at the same time, allowing consumers to monitor at all times what has been consumed. This way consumers had increased transparency on the cost of their consumption and reduced the risk of skyrocketing energy bills. Above that, it serves as encouragement to reduce energy consumption, whenever possible. Another initiative to protect customers was the **social maximum price**. It was created to protect the most vulnerable energy consumers. Only 'protected customers' were eligible to receive the social maximum price. This status of 'protected customers' was awarded to individuals and families receiving specific allowances or benefits and was determined by the federal government of Flanders. Fluvius is continuously collecting customer feedback via the **data collection tool "DSO Boost".** DSO Boost is addressing the customer's need for intuitive and easily accessible ways to access and receive data. Not only is this continuously adding value, but also it is empowering customers and gives them full control over the exposure of their individual data[1].
i-DE (Iberdrola) [Spain]	i-DE is actively helping customers to **reduce energy bills by connecting collective photovoltaic installations**[2]. By facilitating connections to the network in an accelerated manner, i-DE is supporting customers who participate in such projects to reduce pressure on their energy bills.

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[1]See more in our Customer Empowerment Brochure here:
https://edsoforsmartgrids.eu/images/publications/Brochure-E.DSO_2022.pdf
[2] See more here: https://www.europapress.es/economia/energia-medio-ambiente-00183/noticia-iberdrola-conecta-mas-400-autoconsumos-colectivos-red-distribucion-espana-20230718121140.html

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Company [country]	Best Practices by E.DSO Membership
E-REDES [Portugal]	E-REDES implements a broad and extensive programme to empower customers. One distinctiv examples is the **Digital Balcony** or **Balcão Digital",** which **promotes and enables digital experience in a transparent, responsible and inclusive manner**. This direct and digital connection between the customer and DSO facilitates the exchange of information and the submission of requests.[3]

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