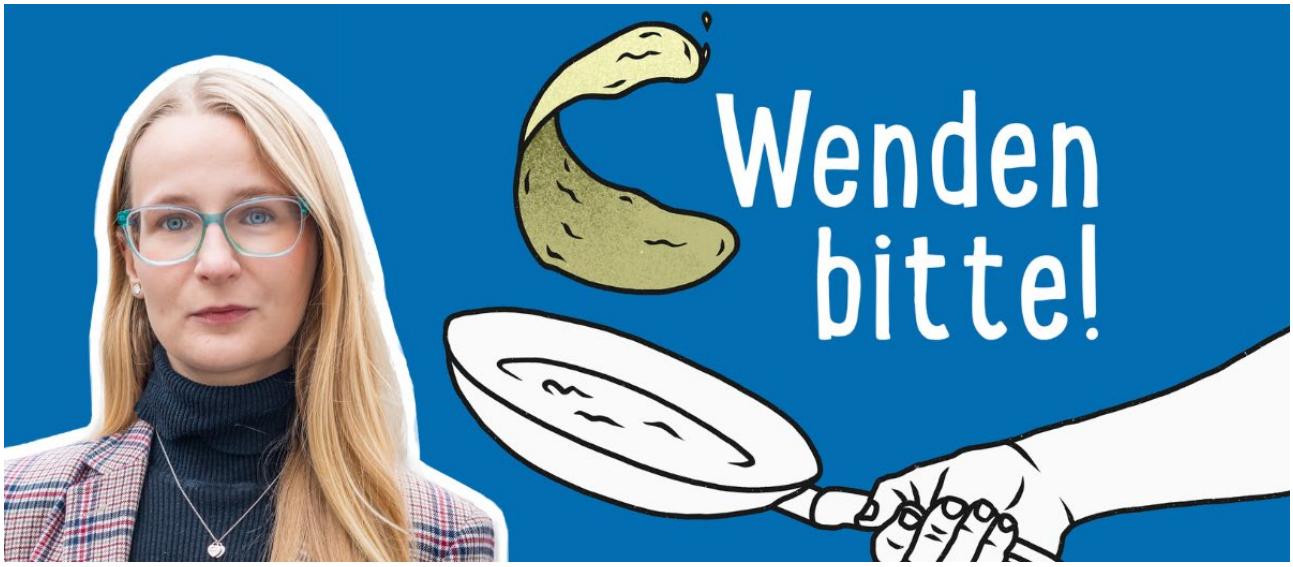


# Transcript of the *Wenden bitte!* podcast: Can we still afford energy and mobility?


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## General introduction

**Mandy Schossig:**

Welcome back to *"Wenden, bitte!"*. The podcast for science and sustainable transformations from the Oeko-Institut. We're here today in a new constellation. You know my colleague Hannah Oldenburg from an earlier episode. She stood in then for me. And now she's standing in for Nadine. Hannah is our social media expert at the Oeko-Institut. Hello, Hannah. You've been involved in the podcast from the outset.

**Hannah Oldenburg:**

Hello, I'm pleased to be here once more, now in front of the microphone again and not just behind the texts. Yes, and the voice you heard just now is that of Mandy Schossig, who you know well. We're going to talk today about energy poverty and transport poverty.

**Mandy Schossig:**

Precisely. That means about situations in which people can no longer afford their mobility, their electricity or their heating. I've invited Viktoria Noka as expert for this topic. Viktoria is a Senior Researcher with the Energy and Climate Division at our Berlin office, where she researches the distributional effects of energy and climate policy, among other things. Energy poverty is one of the issues. Hello, Viktoria, great that you're here.

**Viktoria Noka:**

Hello to both of you.

**Hannah Oldenburg:**

Hello, Viktoria, I'm also really glad you could join us. In a preliminary conservation with us you mentioned that you lived in Germany, but then grew up mainly in Singapore, and studied in Scotland. So you got around a bit before returning to Germany. Tell us: did all this time abroad prompt you to take a more international perspective on research? You also work a lot on the European side of things, don't you?

**Viktoria Noka:**

Yes, I do indeed. In fact, I work much more on the EU and on what is going on in various EU member states and what it all means for Germany, than on projects at the national level within Germany. I reckon this certainly has to do with my having grown up in an international setting, and feeling very comfortable communicating in English. And this international perspective is important, especially for the issues we're going to talk about today. That concerns not only households in Germany, but households in general. What happens at EU level is important for Germany too, and that's why I like it so much. I enjoy working in a more international setting.

**Mandy Schossig:**

I recall that when you starting writing your doctoral thesis you presented it at the Oeko-Institut. That was about something quite different, namely the Gorleben nuclear repository and the Wendland movement against it. What made you take up this subject? I certainly found your presentation fascinating. And now you've just completed your thesis, am I right?

**Viktoria Noka:**

Right, I finally completed it at the end of last year.

**Hannah Oldenburg:**

Congratulations.

**Viktoria Noka:**

Thank you. Yes, on the one hand it is a quite different subject. I focused closely from a political science perspective on Gorleben and all the protest movements that arose in the region. My initial interest was: What does it mean for energy policy if we phase out nuclear power? And how did we get in this situation in the first place? That was my initial motivation, partly because I was already working at the Oeko-Institut at the time and realised: “This institute has this history and it’s totally interesting.” That’s how this subject came about for me, and I continued to work at the same time at the Oeko-Institut and take up topics more on the social policy side there.

**Hannah Oldenburg:**

Right, that’s really interesting. Let’s move for a moment from your history to our topic for today. As always, we start off with a brief subject overview.

## Sound clip (brief subject overview)

Having a warm heating in winter and enough electricity for the refrigerator are essential basic needs. But prices for mineral gas and heating oil doubled within three years up to 2022, and electricity prices rose by one third over the same period. If a household doesn’t have the money it would need to pay its bills for heat and electricity, energy poverty looms. Beside access to enough energy, access to mobility is also a basic need and a precondition to taking part in social, political and economic life. A person who is not sufficiently mobile can be affected by transport poverty. For this, too, there are various reasons. But for whom precisely does this fate loom, and which measures can prevent it? What differences are there in the definitions and indicators of energy and transport poverty in other European Union countries? What needs to be done so that people can still afford their heating, electricity and mobility in future?

## Definitions

**Mandy Schossig:**

Yes, let’s do that. Before we delve into the details of the whys and wherefores, please tell us once more in quite general terms: what exactly is energy poverty, Viktoria?

**Viktoria Noka:**

Well, energy poverty means in the broadest sense that households are unable to meet their heating or electricity costs, that they can’t keep their homes adequately warm or cool or that they must make restrictions on their spending because they can’t afford to meet their basic needs.

**Mandy Schossig:**

We also talk about transport poverty. What is that, in contrast?

**Viktoria Noka:**

The situation with transport poverty is a bit more complex. As said in the sound clip, that's about participation in society. It is made up of four components. For one thing, the question is: Are mobility options available at all? Do I have a car? Can I use public transport? The second question is: Can I use it to reach the important things? Job, hospital, cultural venues. This is about accessibility. Third, affordability: Can I afford this? And fourth, the adequacy of mobility options: Do I feel safe? Am I mobility-impaired? Can I utilise this option? It is a highly complex phenomenon that is made up of diverse aspects.

**Mandy Schossig:**

Complex indeed, but I'd say you explained it clearly, would you agree, Hannah?

**Hannah Oldenburg:**

Yes, we had a question on Instagram by eleven- and thirteen-year-olds. They wanted to know what energy and transport poverty are exactly. If you're listening, I hope you got a good idea. While I listened, my first thought was how energy or transport poverty can come about at all. Which factors lead to this kind of poverty?

**Viktoria Noka:**

Energy poverty is a well-researched field. There are three components once again. One is that when income is low it becomes a problem to afford the energy, the electricity and the heating. The second point is energy prices. The higher the prices the more difficult it is to meet basic needs. And low energy efficiency is one of the most important points. If I live in an inefficient building it may be that I have to turn up the heating enormously, regardless of having a good income and prices being stable. So those are the three core causes of energy poverty.

**Hannah Oldenburg:**

And mobility?

**Viktoria Noka:**

Yes, with mobility it's all a bit more complex again. It is more of an infrastructural problem. It is about poor transport infrastructure, poor connections. It is about poor access to essential services. One can't get to the places where one needs to get to. And it depends a lot on where one lives. Transport poverty is tied much more to where in Germany I live than to the building in which I live, as it is with energy poverty. And all this is joined again by the aspects of income and prices.

**Mandy Schossig:**

All that sounds fairly sober. And that's totally okay, you're a scientist, you deal with facts and figures. But to start out with, I'd say it is also a hugely emotional topic. People who are poor can't drive out to the countryside on the weekend, or they save on heating and then freeze. How do you personally view such aspects? Do they play a role in your scientific work?

**Viktoria Noka:**

Yes, that's definitely a part of the reason why I chose to work on these issues. When I was looking for a job it was vital to me that I do something that feels meaningful, and that it feels important to examine these aspects. And as I come from the field of social policy, I find it essential that we ask: What happens to these people? What's it like for them when prices rise due to carbon pricing? And it is very important to join this up with the questions of what we do in energy policy and climate policy. And to show that these two aspects need not be in conflict. Rather if we put the spotlight on these

poverty problems and what really happens to people, explore this in depth and tackle the issues in tandem, we can link them up with the things we're doing at the scientific, climate policy level.

**Hannah Oldenburg:**

Okay, right, thanks. Then let's go straight back to the facts. You touched on it just now, that prices, for instance for heating, are rising. You mentioned carbon pricing. Can you explain exactly what is becoming more expensive and what leads to the steep price rises.

**Viktoria Noka:**

Yes, I think we've all realised that there can be a variety of reasons why prices rise. Geopolitical events are one cause. But of course climate policy concerns also make us want prices for fossil fuels to rise. We want certain things to become more expensive in order that market forces drive a switch to renewables. That is the effect of carbon pricing, that certain things become more expensive. But that also entails that not everybody can make the switch directly. Not everyone can afford to handle these high prices or can keep step with this transition. So the question arises of how to handle things when prices rise and this is intended.

**Mandy Schossig:**

Exactly, that's something we'll be talking about, it clearly sounds problematic in terms of social policy.

**Viktoria Noka:**

It certainly is. And it is particularly so when these price hikes have no particular immediate impact on certain people who have lots of money, and some of whom consume a lot of energy. But instead impact most on the people who don't consume much energy and are not very mobile.

**Mandy Schossig:**

Yes, we'll be exploring how those people can receive support. We're talking about energy poverty and transport poverty all the time. Why don't we simply talk about poverty?

**Viktoria Noka:**

That is a very good question and was a topic of debate for a long time. This debate arose particularly in the context of energy poverty. The key argument there was that it is not just a matter of income. As I explained just now, income, prices and the element of energy efficiency all play a role. This means that if we only look at this income element we're only addressing one cause of the phenomenon. We then miss opportunities to address other points and devise other actions that could also help these households.

Secondly, while many poor households are affected, it is not only them. We're seeing that many households that are in a medium-income bracket and would call themselves middle class are also affected by these aspects. Not by all of them, but by various ones. And when prices rise due to carbon pricing, these groups suddenly slide into this energy poverty group. So if we only focus on poverty as such, we're missing the most important groups.

**Hannah Oldenburg:**

Right. Now some listeners are perhaps wondering about the differences between energy poverty and transport poverty. You've pointed them out repeatedly. Why are we talking nonetheless about both topics in unison today?

**Viktoria Noka:**

That has a lot to do with what is happening currently at European Union level. As I've mentioned, there will be a $CO_2$ price that will apply to both the buildings sector and the transport sector. This means that prices will rise in both. Households will experience additional burdens. This was debated hotly at EU level. There was the proposal to set up a climate social fund which would provide dedicated funding to reduce burdens on households. In this context, the issue of energy poverty naturally arose and the wish to define these households, to say: "Who are they? How are they affected? And what can we do to relieve them?" But the same thing needs to happen in the mobility sector. That is why these two topics, as different as they are, are debated in unison. Energy poverty has been a topic of debate at EU level for a long time, while transport poverty is very new. This makes it so important to always discuss transport poverty at the same time, so that it gains the status of the debate on energy poverty. For it is just as important.

## Indicators of energy poverty

**Mandy Schossig:**

Then let's get concrete. You mentioned that one takes a close look at: how, what, who and so forth. My first question is: How does one find out who is affected by energy poverty?

**Viktoria Noka:**

Yes, we work with indicators. We consider which data we can collect, who is affected by these two phenomena. We take the definition and the causes and try to build indicators from this which use available data. And that's not so simple at all when one has such multi-layered issue areas, integrating them all. Then there are various quite different approaches to building these indicators. And different reasons why one might prefer one indicator over another in a given situation.

**Mandy Schossig:**

Which would those be, for instance?

**Viktoria Noka:**

We have come very far in the case of energy poverty. At European Union level, for instance, there are four commonly used indicators. Two of them address income and expenditure, and two others cover other dimensions. For example, the favoured indicator is based on an EU-wide survey. Households are asked: Can you keep your home adequately warm? Two answers are possible: yes or no. If the household answers this question with "no", it is energy-poor. That's an example of an indicator that is simple and is well understood, I'd say. But it is also subjective.

We're also seeing that households with very high incomes say: "No, I can't keep my home adequately warm." So one has to introduce an income cut-off point. And that indicator only captures one dimension. The advantage of four indicators, and the initial idea why one had four indicators, is that one considers them all side by side to then get a complete picture.

**Hannah Oldenburg:**

To clarify: When this survey is made, are basically all four indicators queried directly with each household, or do queries take a broader form?

**Viktoria Noka:**

Two indicators are based on this survey. The first question is: “Can you keep your home adequately warm?” The second is whether the electricity or gas supply was cut off at some time in the past year. That provides a second indicator if the answer is “yes”. The other two indicators are based on a different data source that is unfortunately a bit old and not so good. But we work with what we have – there, household income and expenditures are captured, and a slightly more complex indicator is built which we call M2M. The questions there are: How high is my expenditure for energy as a proportion of my income? And what is the relation to the rest of the population? This integrates many components and one has to be very careful how one performs the calculations. It’s a bit more complex, but gives us a good picture of who has relatively high expenditures.

**Mandy Schossig:**

It’s complex, I’ll take that up. So tell us in concrete terms, who is poor? According to the various definitions which you evidently have.

**Viktoria Noka:**

Well, if we look at the first indicator I mentioned: “Can I keep my home adequately warm?”. Then in Germany about 6.5 percent of all households answer the question with “no”. There are some 40 million households in Germany. So in 2022 it was 2.6 or 2.7 million households, give or take, who said: “I can’t keep my home adequately warm.”

**Mandy Schossig:**

That’s a lot.

**Viktoria Noka:**

It certainly is.

**Mandy Schossig:**

And if we take income versus expenditure as the basis?

**Viktoria Noka:**

Then the number is actually even higher. In 2020 it was 16 percent of all households. That translates into 6.5 million households.

**Hannah Oldenburg:**

Well that’s no small figure by any means.

**Mandy Schossig:**

To make this a little more concrete. If you say 2.7 or 2.6 million households, what kind of people are these? I mean what form of household. Please give us a picture of the people.

**Viktoria Noka:**

We’re coming back to the people behind the numbers. The households do differ. One can’t narrow it down to one type of household, such as “these are now households receiving government transfers.”

**Mandy Schossig:**

You mean people receiving the citizen’s benefit known as *Bürgergeld*.

**Viktoria Noka:**

Exactly. It is rather mainly low-income households, but also medium-income ones. We're also seeing that older people tend to be more affected. We're partly seeing that people in rural regions are more affected, but this is not such a marked distinction in the case of energy poverty. The households affected by energy poverty are just as broadly varied as the households that don't have much income. Particularly due to these structural factors. What they all have in common is that they live in energy-inefficient housing. That is probably the one common factor.

## Indicators of transport poverty

**Hannah Oldenburg:**

Okay, then let's put the spotlight on transport. What's the situation there? Which indicators are there to measure this kind of poverty?

**Viktoria Noka:**

Yes, as said, we haven't got quite as far in the field of transport poverty or rather there isn't yet such a broad consensus on the indicator matrix. We're currently working on a project for the European Commission on the issue and have put some thought to potential indicators. I can give a few examples based on these four aspects of transport poverty. On the one hand there are again surveys that are used to develop indicators, and there are geographical data. About availability, for instance. There are certain surveys in which one can ask: "How far away is the next bus stop?" And one can then say that if the response is more than ten minutes, then that is an indicator of transport poverty. If we're talking about accessibility, such as: How far away is the next hospital? Or: How far do you travel to work? Then those responses also provide indicators that could be built by means of a survey.

Then again, geographical data are really great. They show: What does the mobility network look like? Or the means of public transport? How well developed are the road networks? Where are the next hospitals? How far do people travel on average? And if we had these data we could build very interesting indicators. In Great Britain they do that, for example, and have excellent, detailed maps. The next question is once again affordability.

Indicators answering that question are similar to those used for energy poverty. For instance: Is more than six percent of income spent on mobility? That would be an indicator of transport poverty. Finally, there is the aspect of adequacy, to be queried by surveys: How safe do you feel when you take the bus? How well can it be reached by mobility-impaired people? Those are indicators that could be built if one had these data.

**Mandy Schossig:**

I notice you're saying "could, perhaps, would". Do we have neat numbers with so and so many millions and so and so many percent or don't we?

**Viktoria Noka:**

Unfortunately we don't. But I have a few figures that are relevant to the issue nonetheless. I've been talking up to now mainly about public transport. But one has to say that for transport poverty, ownership of a car is one of the best indicators of whether a person is mobile or not. We know that people who have no car can't participate as much. That's the way it is. We know, for example, that

22 percent of households in Germany own no car. That figure is on a relevant scale. So the question is: Why do they own no car? We know that in this group about one in three says it is too expensive.

We then assume that if they say it is too expensive, they would in fact prefer to have a car. That's an example of an indicator that one could build. It is known as "enforced lack of a car". That captures people who are forced to own no car but would prefer to or would need a car to meet their daily requirements.

**Hannah Oldenburg:**

Right, then this is a fitting point to mention a myth which we probably hear often: That transport poverty is essentially only an issue affecting poor, rural people who are dependent on a car in that setting. You said just now that 22 percent have no car and for one in three out of these it is too expensive. I'd think here in Berlin there are plenty of people who have no car but are totally fine with it. What would you say, is the myth true or is transport poverty an issue for city dwellers too?

**Viktoria Noka:**

Well, yes and no. On the one hand it is certainly true because for people without a car the means of public transport are the alternative. And we know that 27 million people live in municipalities in which stops are served less than once an hour. This means that if you live in a rural area and you have no car, your mobility options are extremely restricted. But we also know that the phenomenon can also be found in city centres. The question of affordability has nothing to do with a spatial component. It is equally relevant for people living in cities. And we see further from other studies that there are regions in inner cities that are not well connected to public transport services. These are peripheral regions or the places where subway and rapid rail transit lines end. And the people there, some of whom furthermore live in socially disadvantaged neighbourhoods, are also affected by transport poverty because they can't afford it, because public transport is not available, because they need longer to get to the hospital or to their workplace or to reach cultural venues.

So it is true on the one hand that one should place a particular focus on rural regions and their inhabitants, but we can't limit ourselves to that. We needn't imagine that if we provide fully fledged support for e-mobility in rural areas we'll have solved the problem.

## A comparative look across the European Union

**Mandy Schossig:**

It's probably worth taking a look across the EU, I expect? Compared with Germany. How poor is Germany exactly in comparison to other European countries?

**Viktoria Noka:**

That depends entirely on how one measures energy and transport mobility. I can say that in terms of the indicators emerging from the surveys we don't do so badly at all. With our six percent of households unable to keep their homes adequately warm we're towards the lower end of the scale of poverty. The figures are substantially higher in countries such as Greece, in Central and Eastern Europe, but also Portugal and Spain have relatively high percentages. On the other hand, if we look at this expenditure and income indicator we're quite high up on the scale with our 16 percent, to be honest.

Those are mostly countries in which there is great reliance on a welfare state, on households being supported with their income, through a citizen's benefit or other transfer payments such as housing

allowance – that's also the case in Denmark and Sweden. It doesn't balance out the relation of low expenditure but high proportion of available household income, though, because that's a relative indicator.

## Actions to tackle energy poverty

**Mandy Schossig:**

Good, you've now arrived directly at the actions. That's naturally where we want to get to, we want to ask: What can we do to prevent poverty? Right away as first question to you. Let's look first at energy poverty.

**Viktoria Noka:**

The line in Germany was always: The households that are affected have a lower income. We have our welfare benefits, these support the households. We also cover the heating costs of households receiving a citizen's benefit. But in this way we only address one of these three dimensions; we have this poverty approach and not a holistic approach. That also means that it is a short-term solution. It entails ongoing costs for the state. And actually we want to reduce burdens for these households and make them more resilient over the long term.

We also want them to participate in the transformation that we are experiencing in this field. And a further point is that many households which are in energy poverty, which have little money, don't necessarily claim transfer payments. Not all those eligible, notably for a housing allowance, make use of this option. This brings us to a point at which we would need to go a step further.

**Mandy Schossig:**

And what would the step be? What would this holistic approach be?

**Viktoria Noka:**

The best thing I could dream up would be an investment programme that helps low-income households to carry out measures to improve energy efficiency. That's not so simple, though. If it were simple it would already be in place. What is particularly important is that we would have to replace heating systems, upgrade and improve the insulation of building envelopes, replace windows and provide financial support to all these households as well as possible. If people have to think from month to month "What do I spend on? Can I afford to heat at all?" then they don't just need a bit of financial assistance, they need a lot.

**Hannah Oldenburg:**

Now you've mentioned financial support. You've noted that energy efficiency is the factor that would need to be tackled here. Could you briefly take a step back and say what the current situation is in terms of measures for improved energy efficiency, but also in terms of transfer payments and welfare benefits?

**Viktoria Noka:**

In terms of energy efficiency, these are structural measures on the one hand. But on the other hand we all know that we could indeed consume less energy. It's also about changes in behaviour. We have a really great project up and running there, the energy-saving check. Here, former recipients of transfer payments come into the households of people receiving citizen's benefit and say on site:

“This is how you need to heat, that is what you could change with your ventilation behaviour”. They can install new electricity sockets and talk to the household and to the people concerned. One-on-one: What are your problems? What’s your behaviour at present? How can we help you? How could you help yourselves to take better care of how much electricity and heat you consume?

But we also know from the data that this myth of the recipients of citizen’s benefit who heat an unusual amount and throw the window open without care is not true at all. We don’t see any unusually high consumption among these groups. In fact we know that the opposite is true, that these groups take great care how they behave, how much money they spend on it and try to keep this in check. So it is more a matter of tackling structural measures, particularly for these vulnerable groups.

**Mandy Schossig:**

This means it is partly about all these payments, such as housing allowance, citizen’s benefit et cetera. And about advice on energy-efficient behaviour. The structural things are still a bit unclear to me. What would measures to tackle energy poverty look like? What are you thinking of specifically?

**Viktoria Noka:**

Well, for instance: If a grant programme was extended so that property owners who own a house and want to replace the gas-fired heating system with a heat pump but don’t have the money for it receive grant funding from the state to do it. And those who have particularly little money get more money from the state. That is a classic grant programme. It’s fine to have that for this group of people who are property owners, but that’s only a really small group. Most people who own a house are not in energy poverty. There is such a group, but it is not really the core of the problem.

Most of the energy-poor households in Germany are tenants. And doing something actively for them, replacing a heating systems, upgrading the thermal envelope, has nothing at all to do with the tenants, but with the owners of these buildings.

And there comes the big problem: We don’t really want to support the big housing companies with grant funding to carry out these energy efficiency measures to then see them possibly raising the rent. We have a classic tenant-landlord dilemma in Germany. It is very difficult to identify who the energy-poor or needy tenants are and who rents to this group. And whether there is a group of not so wealthy owners who can’t afford to upgrade an entire building.

**Hannah Oldenburg:**

Is there a solution? How do we reach the households affected?

**Viktoria Noka:**

Well, in the ideal case we have an investment programme under which buildings inhabited by energy-poor households receive special support. Ideally, we would know where these people live and could then deploy earmarked grant funding there. In that case it wouldn’t matter who owns the building. It is essential in such an approach to cap rents in order to prevent situations in which landlords evict tenants after the building was upgraded in order to then raise prices. The second part is that we have a grant programme for the lower-income property owners who rent their buildings, in order that this group also receives enough funding from the state to carry out this major energy performance improvement work.

**Mandy Schossig:**

Listening to you, I get the impression that these are really complex, small groups that first need to be analysed and for whom specific actions then have to be devised. And you said just now that if it was so simple we'd possibly already be doing it. What stands in the way? Which barriers remain? Apart from it being totally complicated.

**Viktoria Noka:**

The main barrier is that we don't know precisely where energy-poor households live and we don't know precisely which energy performance standard the buildings have. In other countries, such as France or Ireland, there is a central register where the energy performance certificate is stored for each building in the country. As a result, they know in spatial terms where the problematic regions are. In that way one can say in a much more targeted manner: Let's start there. On the one hand we do know it a bit. Everyone working in any way in a public authority or in a municipality knows where these regions are, but they're not recorded systematically. That means we don't know the size of the problem. This makes it hard to say to what level the funding programme would need to be resourced.

## Learning from countries across Europe

**Hannah Oldenburg:**

Now a question about where we can learn from other European countries – you've already mentioned the register of buildings as one example. Are there further things that would make it worthwhile to look beyond our borders and learn a lesson?

**Viktoria Noka:**

Yes, certainly. That's the favourite part of my work, when one can look around and see what the others are doing. I've mentioned Ireland, which is a really great example because they have excellent grant programmes. They have three different ones. One is for individual measures, when one wants to replace the heating system or the windows. Building owners can access that one. Then there's a programme designed exclusively for energy-poor households. Under that one, you have to furnish evidence of your income, and then you get a full energy performance upgrade financed. You have no costs to bear, you need pay nothing in advance, you don't have to cover any share of the costs yourself. If you're really energy-poor, the state takes care. I find that absolutely great because precisely that sort of thing is needed, with full financing.

In France there's a similar programme. Depending on household income and size, a certain limit is set and up to that limit you get X percent of certain measures financed. That's graduated. The less money you have, the more you receive, because you need it. And the great thing about these two programmes is that you have somebody who supports you from the outset. They come in your flat, in your house, and check out: What's the situation? Then they issue, first of all, a new, current energy performance certificate. Then they sort out: What must absolutely be done? Who does it? How much does this cost?

These households are usually already very challenged – we've talked about that: Who are they? What's the underlying situation? These are people who are faced with a great number of problems every day, who are under various levels of financial pressure and really don't have the time to delve into the complexities. To grasp at all: Which types of assistance can I get? Where do I get them from? And if you have somebody who supports you in this process from start to finish, that's incredibly helpful in making sure such things work out.

## Actions to tackle transport poverty

**Mandy Schossig:**

Yes, I can imagine that very well. To be honest I don't think I could cope, if one has various other problems, one really doesn't want to concern oneself with energy efficiency. Then let's take a look at our second side of the medal, transport. What's the situation there? What ideas are there to combat transport poverty?

**Viktoria Noka:**

Actually quite a bit is happening there, even though the measures in place are not necessarily conceived of as actions to tackle transport poverty. They work nonetheless.

**Mandy Schossig:**

Okay, let's get going.

**Viktoria Noka:**

Well, for one thing there is targeted support for low-carbon modes of transport, in other words the classic electric car, with purchase price rebates for e-mobility when one is bought. Such things can work well, especially if they are socially graduated. However, if a rebate scheme is in place but you can't afford a car in any case, then the scheme isn't particularly helpful. This means that as soon as it is socially differentiated it is totally excellent.

There's another interesting approach, a new programme in France called social leasing. There is a state-subsidised leasing programme for electric cars, and low-income transport-poor households can lease at specially reduced rates, which puts them in a position to afford a car. We don't want everyone to drive a car, but as I've mentioned, having access to a car is important for households' mobility, for their participation. So that's an important first step and a rather interesting programme.

Then there are the classic social tariffs, meaning that certain groups can use public transport at reduced ticket prices or even free of cost. Schemes such as the 49 euro ticket or the 9 euro ticket in Germany are also great for these groups. But naturally we find targeted actions better, meaning that students, older persons, people living in rural areas, people receiving citizen's benefit are eligible for certain tariffs and this is not across the board for everyone. Usually, however, it is the major infrastructural measures that make a difference. And there I find the idea quite interesting in connection with mobility guarantees for rural regions that one would have a guaranteed minimum number of trips by bus and rail throughout Germany. That would make a huge difference, but is a massive undertaking. It means more infrastructure, more money. One would first have to consider: How can we implement this at all? It'd be an interesting approach, though.

**Hannah Oldenburg:**

Is our transport minister already thinking about this?

**Viktoria Noka:**

Hard to say.

**Hannah Oldenburg:**

Then let's take a closer look at the EU and the comparison, because we did this just now too and found we could learn from other countries. Where does Germany stand here in comparison, looking at actions to tackle transport poverty?

**Viktoria Noka:**

Looking at what is going on in other EU countries, the picture is similar on the one hand. No country really stands out in terms of doing a great deal to combat transport poverty. It is a totally important topic in Great Britain. That goes a bit beyond the classic EU perspective, now, but we're seeing that in Central and Eastern Europe, for instance in Poland and Romania, there are many good ticket systems designed to be socially responsible. That there are social tickets in inner-city areas is extremely important there and much more widespread. And then we're seeing this social leasing in France. In Portugal and Spain, too, there are examples of small bus transfers and carsharing schemes in rural areas.

My impression is that more or less similar things are happening everywhere. It's about e-mobility, it's about social tickets and it's about availability, about the connection to certain important regions. All of this has a great deal to do with the priorities of rural regions and that's similar almost everywhere.

**Hannah Oldenburg:**

That's to say that in the best case all countries look around a bit here and a bit there and copy the best parts of each and then they all develop in a good direction. Is that the way it goes?

**Viktoria Noka:**

Yes, the question is actually: Where are financial resources available and where is political will present? In France, for instance, there is already more debate on transport poverty than in Germany. I could imagine that this has to do with the presence of this social leasing programme there. The greater the awareness of the issue, the greater the willingness to establish effective actions. This political will can vary widely across the EU countries. We simply don't know where we'll stand in Germany in ten or 15 years.

## Status quo: What is already being done?

**Mandy Schossig:**

Right, then let's look a bit more closely at political will. One question: Is the topic already on the policy agenda today? I mean in Germany, you've already expanded on the European Union. What's being done?

**Viktoria Noka:**

In Germany energy poverty is higher on the agenda while transport poverty is a buzzword that is starting to be explored more actively. As I mentioned, that has a lot to do with what happens at EU level and what is coming our way from those quarters. The new carbon pricing and emissions trading system starting in 2027 will have a major impact on us and we can no longer duck away from it.

There will be a Social Climate Fund out of which funds will be disbursed to buffer these negative impacts. In Germany we will receive, if I recall correctly, 5.3 billion euros from 2027 to 2032. That is far from enough to tackle all the measures that we need, but it's a start. A part of the conditions for

receiving this money is that we compile a Social Climate Plan, which must already be submitted to the EU next summer.

This plan must contain definitions of energy poverty and transport poverty. We need indicators for these two phenomena. We must record who is potentially vulnerable, in other words not yet energy- and transport-poor, but can potentially fall into that group when carbon pricing comes. And we must propose measures, both new ones and ones already in place, that are financed by the Social Climate Fund.

**Mandy Schossig:**

By when do we have to do that?

**Viktoria Noka:**

Next summer.

**Mandy Schossig:**

And are we on track?

**Viktoria Noka:**

There is now a realisation that we need this. We've already done a lot of research on definitions and indicators, particularly for energy poverty. I think that if this political will is given, then we will have no other course than to do it. However, these measures must be developed in a very targeted way, they must address these groups. That will be an extremely difficult process, for we will need to work out in a very short time what is possible and effective and what one can do with the money that we get, and what additional financial resources we can deploy to balance these impacts.

**Hannah Oldenburg:**

I see, and what's the situation in other EU countries? They'll also have emissions trading.

**Viktoria Noka:**

Yes, we're currently concluding a project in which we looked at other EU countries. The countries which have already addressed these issues are a bit further ahead. France, Italy and Greece, for instance, already have a definition and already have indicators which they've been monitoring for many years. This puts them ahead.

But developing measures that need to meet certain conditions is not so simple for other countries either. The plan in Ireland is to use the funding to expand the measures in place which already function excellently. This means that all those countries which already have good measures in place can invest even more money in them, and that's a good thing. While other countries such as Germany must think hard about what they're going to do.

## Policy recommendations

**Mandy Schossig:**

Right, we'll have to think hard and debate hard, surely? The ideas for measures are negotiable in the policy-making arena. What's your assessment of the political situation in Germany?

**Viktoria Noka:**

I think the difficult thing about it is that it has to happen across two sectors and that many ministries have a say. It is not just an environmental issue, nor is it a purely social policy issue. The difficulty is rather to get everyone to sit down at one table. And the more people are at the table, the trickier the discussions could become. On the other hand, the input of ideas is then diverse and numerous, and that can have positive effects. But it does mean that different people, diverse stakeholder groups encounter each other and have to talk things through. But we absolutely must come up with something by next summer. I can well imagine that there will be a good financial support programme in the buildings sector, and in the transport sector there will probably be e-mobility offers.

**Hannah Oldenburg:**

That is to say, Viktoria, if you were now the chancellor of Germany – our regular favourite question to conclude – you would get the right people around the table and discuss everything with them? Or what else would be your first to-do, what would you do as chancellor to eradicate energy and transport poverty in the best possible way?

**Viktoria Noka:**

Yes, pretty much that, I'd get everyone around a table. I think I'd use elements of the approaches taken in Ireland and Spain. I'd like an energy poverty action plan and a transport poverty action plan. This would set out exactly: What do we already have? What do we already know? And what don't we know? And what do we still need? I'd like to appoint a commission that produces an updated report each year and looks exactly at where we stand. The issues would then be definitely on the political agenda. That's the first, super-important thing.

The second thing that I find essential is that we monitor regularly. I would introduce an observatory in which we collect in one place the indicators that we've discussed, of which there are many different ones, so that everyone interested can look at them so that they understand: What is it all about, why is that important, what is the scale of this problem. We would then have come a good bit further, would be at a level similar to that of many other EU countries and could then, after my term in office of one day, move on to debating specific measures. I wouldn't necessarily need to take part at that policy level.

**Mandy Schossig:**

We'd give you two days if you want. Then you could at least outline the measures. Many thanks. That sounds like quite a good programme. We always also ask our guests whether they have a few tips for our listeners, what they could read or whether there's an interesting film, study, podcast. Do you have a tip for us?

**Viktoria Noka:**

I can certainly recommend browsing the Stromspar-Check pages. That's full of well-presented information, not just about the programme itself, but also concerning what one can do as an individual to save energy. That makes it particularly interesting. And the second website I would recommend, although perhaps not so very interesting to everyone, is that of the Energy Poverty Advisory Hub. That's an EU initiative on action against energy poverty. They have excellently prepared information material showing how to take action as an individual or municipality. The Hub's goal is to equip people and local authorities directly with expertise. Both these sites are very good sources of information material.

**Hannah Oldenburg:**

Good, we'll definitely be putting these links in the shownotes. Then you, dear listeners, can go over all this again in more depth. Well, now I'll say warmest thanks, Viktoria, for this wide-ranging and detailed overview.

## Conclusion and goodbye

**Mandy Schossig:**

Yes, thanks from me too. I've certainly learnt a lot. Not just numbers but also ideas. It was really exciting. Thanks a lot.

**Viktoria Noka:**

Thanks to both of you.

**Mandy Schossig:**

In the next episode we'll be looking at an entirely different topic. We'll be talking about artificial intelligence. We all know ChatGPT, but AI is encountered in many other fields. Think only of the chatbots when you place orders on online shopping platforms. But there are many other fields of application too. AI was a big issue at Republica in late May. I can really recommend very much that you look at a few panels or listen in post-event. For us here at *"Wenden, bitte!"* that is a further reason to take a closer look and seek answers to questions such as: What's the interplay between AI and climate action? What's the carbon footprint of the megacomputers needed by AI? Can AI contribute at all to climate action, and in what respects is it rather counterproductive?

And we're researching a really exciting question right now in a donation-funded project, namely whether ChatGPT and co. give answers to questions about sustainability issues that are true to fact, or whether one should rather check the purported facts over and again. That's another thing we'll be talking about next time. And now we're at the end of the current episode.

**Hannah Oldenburg:**

Exactly. And as always you can of course send in your questions about this exciting topic in advance to podcast@oeko.de. You can also send us your proposals for topics or your concerns of all kinds at any time. Or of course you can use social media channels, wherever you are, on X, Mastodon, Bluesky, Instagram or whatever, look in any time. We're to be found everywhere. Let me note again here that we always present your questions and the topics of the next episodes in advance via these social media, and collect your questions. So do follow us there and look in so you don't miss anything.

**Mandy Schossig:**

And as Nadine always says so nicely at the end: Leave us a few stars.

**Hannah Oldenburg:**

Yes, we'll be really pleased about a few stars or a rating.

**Mandy Schossig:**

We will indeed. Goodbye and join us next time.

**Hannah Oldenburg:**

All the best. So long.