



# No debts for energy

## Almere, The Netherlands

### IN A NUTSHELL

*The municipality coordinates between different administrations and suppliers to prevent vulnerable households from getting into debt from their energy supply. People receive financial and energy counselling, and social housing units are equipped with solar panels to generate energy at a reduced cost.*

### Background

The project originates from the issue of unpaid electricity and heat bills and resulting disconnection. People who did not pay for their electricity or heat, be it heat from central heating (gas), their own boiler (individually) or collectively through the city heating network, would get cut off the electricity or heat grid. In addition to the health and wellbeing consequences of disconnection, cutting off consumers is costly for the energy supplier, and reconnecting is expensive for the citizen (about €750), especially when living on social benefits.

### Identifying households with arrears on their energy bills

With the start of the project 'Vroeg Eropaf', which means 'Get on It Early', energy suppliers have to notify a debt counsellor of every household that is more than two months behind in paying energy bills. The project started in February 2017 and is run by the debt care organisation PLANgroep, which is financed by the city of Almere. The system has been extended to debts contracted with Almere housing corporations, as well as the following organisations:

- ▶ NUON (one of many available energy companies, but the only provider of heating in some areas of the city);
- ▶ Menzis (one of many healthcare insurance companies);
- ▶ Vitens (the public and only water provider in the municipality)

If a household is found to have been in arrears with a housing corporation and two other organisations for two months or more, it receives the visit of a debt counsellor of PLANgroep, hired by the municipality, and a social worker without prior notice. The counsellor and social worker assess the situation of the households and the kind of support they need to start paying their fixed charges again. They also advise on how to address debt in the long run. The goal is to prevent rising debts and to restore regular payment terms.



Typical social housing unit equipped with solar panels

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ALMERE

<p><b>Population:</b> 206,650</p>	<p><b>Area</b> 248.77 km<sup>2</sup></p>
<p><b>Signatory to the Covenant of Mayors since:</b> 2013</p>	<p><b>CO<sub>2</sub> emission reduction target:</b> 20% by 2020</p>

Between February and November 2017, some 440 households were registered with the project by the housing corporations. Of these, 290 households have been reached. The costs of one visit, drawing up a plan of action and making sure these people end up in control of their finances, amount to approximately €625 per household. All other support is part of the regular services.

## Energy saving counselling and solar energy by 'Energy Ambassadors'

In the Netherlands, the state owns a lot of rental properties, many of which are social housing. In social housing, the monthly rent is set at a minimum of €711 and is only allocated to people who do not have an annual income exceeding €30,000.

In 2016, two of the social housing corporations in Almere, 'de Alliantie' and 'Ymere', started a project to lower energy bills in social housing units, which consist in small individual houses. The corporations work with energy coaches who come from a network of energy ambassadors started in February 2016 and facilitated by the municipality.

Energy coaches visit residents and inform them about energy saving behaviours or devices, ranging from spending less time in the shower or not using heating in the bedroom, to switching to LED lighting, or using thermostatic radiator valves. In addition, the corporations install solar panels on the roofs. Each house has four to six solar panels installed on its roof, and they supply two households. This yields the most favourable returns, since not all the roofs are fitted for solar panels. The housing corporation pre-finances the solar panels. The residents pay €14 per month, which equals €5 euros monthly savings compared to average electricity bills. The corporation also equips their appliances with energy meters and helps them install an app on their phone to turn off or on the light from distance. This app also indicates the energy generated by the solar panels. Through the app you are able to track how much you've earned back.

Thanks to the project, the residents are more aware of their energy consumption and their energy bill is lowered considerably. The project also contributes to CO<sub>2</sub> emission reduction.

Energy ambassadors are volunteers who may receive a maximum amount of €1,000 a year for travel expenses from the municipality. In 2018 approximately €10,000 has been spent on the total of 41 ambassadors so far.



**290** beneficiaries from debt counselling between February and November 2017

**1,200** households equipped with solar panels since 2016

**€35** monthly savings gained from solar energy, compared to average electricity bills



### FINANCING THE PROJECT

#### 'Vroeg Eropaf' project

- + **Financing source(s):**  
Municipality of Almere, through the PLANgroep organisation
- + **Cost:**  
€625 per visited household
- + **Energy counselling and solar energy**
- + **Financing source:**  
Municipality of Almere (Energy Ambassadors) and social housing corporations (solar panels)
- + **Cost:**  
€10,000 has been spent on the total of 41 ambassadors in 2018.
- + **Payback period for the solar panels:**  
10 years payback by the household

### USEFUL LINKS

- ▶ [www.almeerminder.nl](http://www.almeerminder.nl)
- ▶ [www.Almeregeeftenergie.nl](http://www.Almeregeeftenergie.nl)



### CONTACT

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