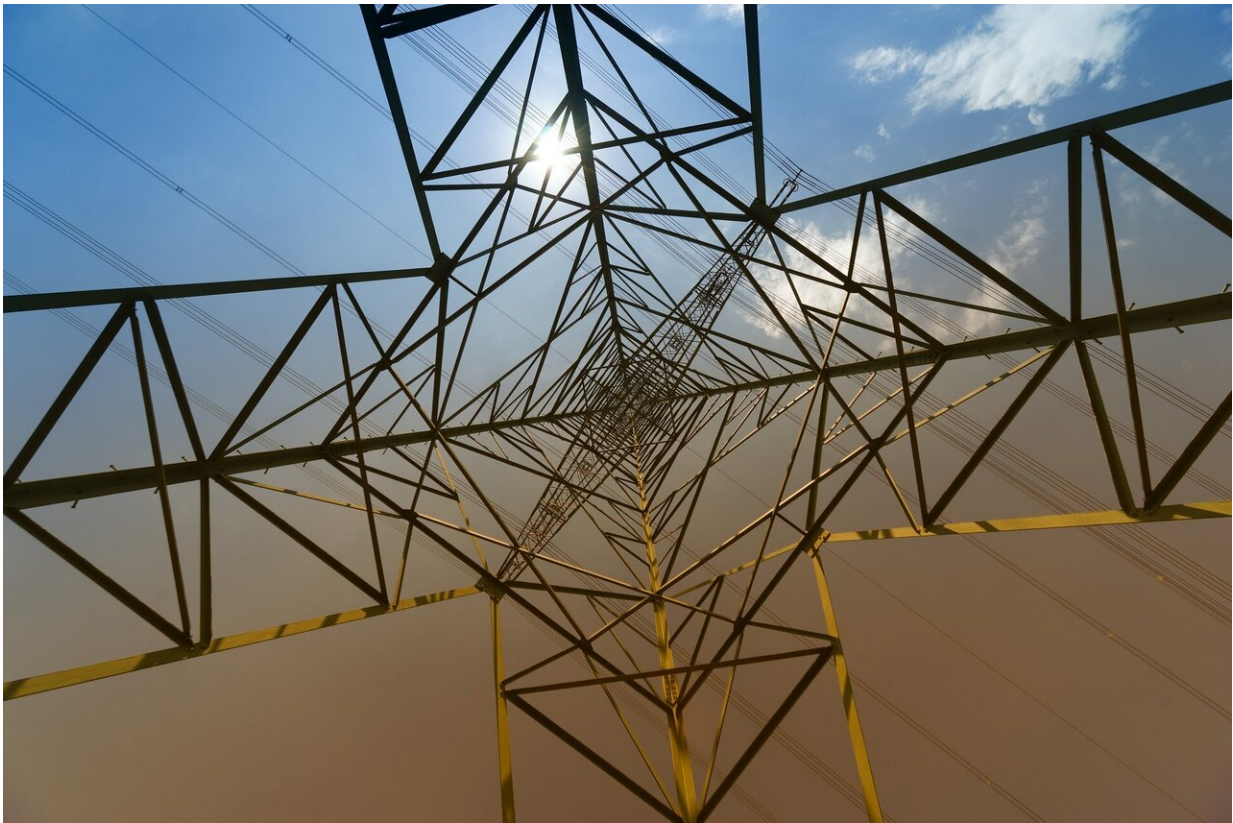


Disabled people risk being left in the cold in a sustainable energy future

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A new study reveals that disabled households in the Europe Union currently consume 10% less energy than other households, as well as being 5% more likely to experience energy poverty.

University of Leeds researchers warn that disabled people in the EU are already [energy](#) disadvantaged and therefore need greater consideration in planning for [energy policy](#) aimed at tackling the climate crisis.

The study, published today in *Nature Energy*, provides a comprehensive analysis of the energy use of disabled households in the Europe Union—including England—in various [energy consumption](#) areas, such as transport, leisure, food and [health services](#).

Using consumption data from 19 countries in the EU in 2010, Dr. Diana Ivanova and Professor Lucie Middlemiss of the Sustainability Research Institute, show that while disabled people use less energy, it is not necessarily through choice and potentially it is at the cost of disabled people not having their needs met for energy and other resources.

Professor Middlemiss said: "Disabled people are largely invisible in environmental policy and practice, and rarely discussed as having particular needs or facing particular challenges. This is a glaring oversight as we try to move towards a more sustainable future.

"Following the Glasgow COP26 climate change conference, we are all thinking more about how our energy consumption should change but that cannot come at the cost of people with different needs.

"It is critical to understand how disabled people are consuming their energy, and if their current needs are being met. This will enable us to reduce energy consumption safely and in a way that allows disabled people to live decent lives."

Disabled household energy use for basic needs and services, such as food, energy at home, water, and waste, is similar to other households. However, disabled households have [lower energy use](#) for leisure services, such as recreation, hotels, restaurants and travel services.

Disabled households also have lower energy consumption for mobility, both in air transport and motor fuel, and lower energy spend on education than other households—suggesting lower opportunities to access education.

It is notable that disabled households tend to under consume transport and leisure activities even when compared to households with similar incomes.

Disabled households' limited consumption of leisure services highlights an important inequality, suggesting that disabled people have fewer opportunities to engage in fun and relaxing activities that require energy consumption.

The similar consumption of energy for basic needs between disabled and non-disabled households of the same income is also a concern. Often, disabled people have a greater need for energy in the home: for life-supporting machinery or to keep warmer, or wash more frequently than others.

In the light of these greater needs, the similar [consumption](#) levels to other households suggests that energy in the home might be being under-consumed by disabled households.

To date there is very limited research on the needs and experiences of disabled people in the environmental literature. This is despite the fact that disabled people are regularly supported by governments in developed nations (including EU nations) and seen as important targets of social policy.

Professor Middlemiss said: "Disabled people may also be more vulnerable to climate change consequences such as extreme temperatures or emergency relief being inaccessible.

"When we consider that of the 446 million people living in the European Union, around 100 million are believed to be disabled, disability is a topic that merits more attention from environmental scholars and policy makers.

"These findings also supports our earlier call to [include the energy poor](#), in all their diversity, in energy transition planning."

The paper "Characterizing the energy use of disabled people in the European Union towards inclusion in the energy transition" is published in *Nature Energy* 13 December 2021.

More information: Diana Ivanova, Characterizing the energy use of disabled people in the European Union towards inclusion in the energy transition, *Nature Energy* (2021). [DOI: 10.1038/s41560-021-00932-4](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41560-021-00932-4). www.nature.com/articles/s41560-021-00932-4

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