

# Wien Energie Ombudsman service

Point of contact and counselling for „social hardship cases“

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***SO BUNT  
WIE MEIN LEBEN.***

# City of Vienna

## Facts and figures

Tenancy ratio  
primary residence

Austria 43%  
Vienna 78%

Statistik Austria 2017

Social assistance –  
recipients

Annual average

Austria 239.481  
Vienna 150.150

Statistik Austria 2017

Subjective heavy burden due to  
housing costs

Austria 1.023.000 (13%)  
Vienna 317.000 (18%)

Statistik Austria 2017

Social assistance

1 person € 885,47  
couple € 1.328,20

Vienna 2019

Risk of poverty in %  
in Vienna 18%

BMASK 2017

Wien Energie  
Private customers

950.000

Can't afford to keep house appropriately warm

in Austria 118.000 households (3%)  
thereof in Vienna 55.000 Haushalte (6%)

Statistik Austria 2017

Working poor

Vienna 87.000 (11%)

Statistik Austria 2017

# Wien Energie Ombudsman service

## Customer service

300 installations of **Pre-Payment meters** and continuous support on a voluntary basis

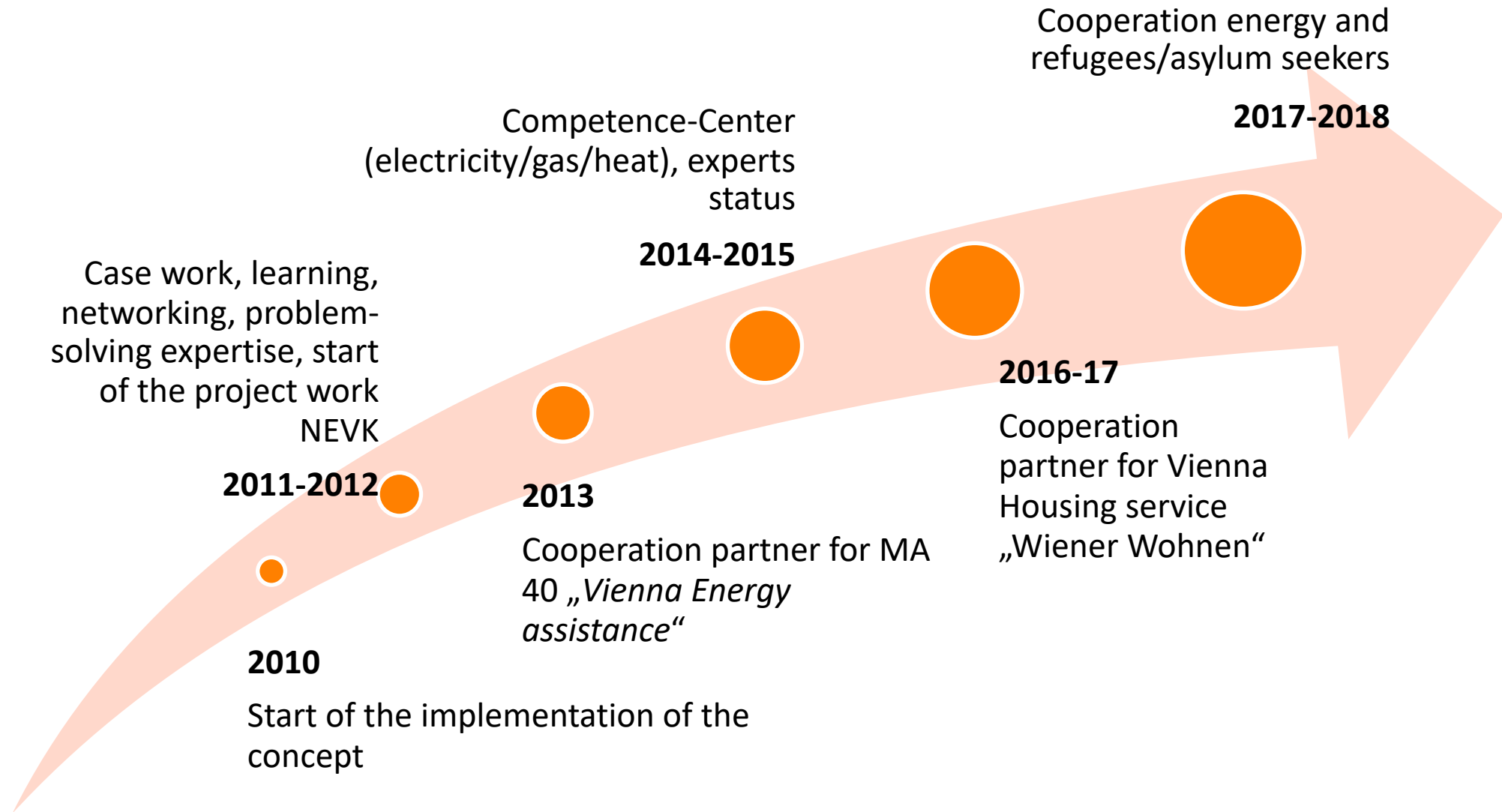
21.000 requests of social services and customers, **thereof 12.000 households** (since april 2011)

**Ombudsman service** is part of the Wiener Stadtwerke group's sustainability program

280 **Networking meetings** with public and private social welfare institutions

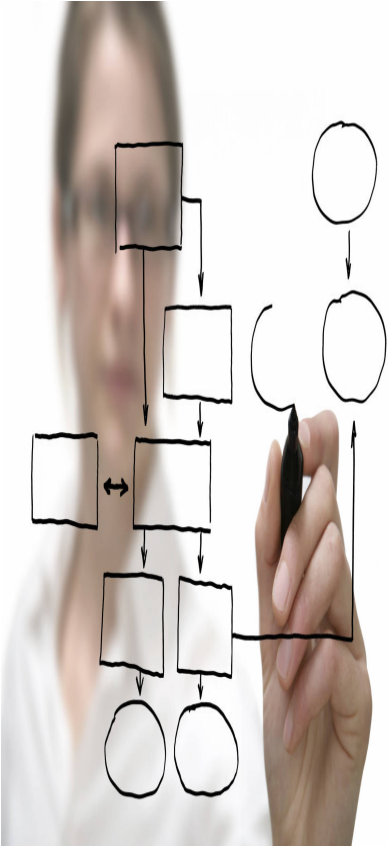
40 cases of supervision of customers with **life-sustaining measures** in their own household

# Development phases

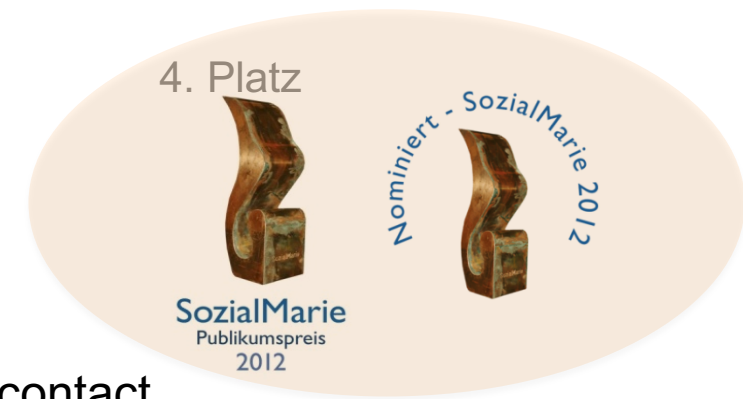


# Wien Energie Ombudsman service

## Portrait of a successful model



- Wien Energie extends the current customer support (contact in written, over the phone and in person in our customer service) in order to build a separate support unit with a focus on „*social hardship situations*“.
- Situated within the customer service of Wien Energie since 01/02/2011
- Under the lead of a certified social worker and 4 employees from the customer service (one with a social worker training)
- ✓ Overarching approach of electricity, gas and heating
- ✓ Toll-free telephone number
- ✓ Since 01/01/2018 Ombudsman service for the network operator (Wiener Netze)



# Wien Energie Ombudsman service

Which customers are considered „*vulnerable*“ or as customers in a hardship situation?

- Gender 58% female
- Adults in household 68% 1 person 28% 2 people
- Minors in household 40%

What is the financial situation of these customers?

- Total income of household
  - 40% max. 827 EUR
  - 18% above 827 EUR max. 1.000 EUR
  - 25% above 1.000 EUR max. 1.500 EUR
- Reminder 92% min. 1 reminder at the beginning of supervision
- Debts
  - 39% up to 500 EUR
  - 26% 501 to 1.000 EUR
  - 23 % 1.001 to 2.000 EUR
  - 8 % 2.001 to 4.000 EUR
- Criteria 46% debts, 30% income, 15% family, 12% illness, 8% life crisis, 3% living

Registered characteristics for 6.800 households (Last: 2016)

# Wien Energie Ombudsman Service

## Objective, 6-pillar-success modell and target group



### Target group

People or families, who find find themselves in difficult living situations such as...

income, illness, living situation, family situation, debts or life crisis

... find themselves in a **joint care situation** of public and/or private social institutions and Wien Energie. These people fall under the category of social hardship cases or vulnerable households and are affected by energy poverty.

Min. 3 out of these 6 categories must apply in order to be under supervision.

## Wien Energie Ombudsman service

### Extract from our customer service „social hardship case“

| Contact                                                                                       | Supervision                                                                                             | Approach                                                                   | Result                                                                                               |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Social institution in charge or customer establishes contact                                  | WE ombudsman service is the central point of contact for customers and the social institution in charge | Stop of overdue notices, deferment                                         | Longterm support with the solution of WE ombudsman service (depend on individual customer situation) |
| Evaluation of criteria as „social hardship case“                                              | Counselling on energy or network-related issues, information about applications, contact person...      | Lawsuits put to rest, if still possible                                    |                                                                                                      |
| Case review                                                                                   |                                                                                                         | Longterm instalment payments, adapted to one's income                      | Prevention of a suspension or termination of energy supply due to arrears                            |
| Overarching approach electricity/gas/heating/net operator                                     | If needed, suggestion for a house visit by the social institution                                       | Maintenance/ Re-installation of energy supply, inspite of existing arrears | Contractual relationship inspite of arrears                                                          |
| Consumption check during first contact                                                        | In case of social hardship, house visit by Wien Energie ombudsman service possible                      |                                                                            | Pre-payment meter                                                                                    |
| Joint coordination and approach                                                               | If needed, involvement of Wien Energie service in charge of consumption, counselling, recommendations   | Redemption of costs                                                        | No open debts                                                                                        |
| Decision on following supervision steps                                                       | Cooperation with Vienna Energy assistance ( MA 40 Wiener Energiesunterstützung)                         | Cooperation with trustee                                                   | Continuous and sustainable energy supply                                                             |
| Customer counselling via phone or personal consultation in the Wien Energie ombudsman service | Coordination on further measures                                                                        | Types of solution are divers and depend on a case-by-case analysis         | Customer is transfered to regular customer service                                                   |

# Wien Energie Ombudsman service

## Experiences and findings

- Since 2011, the Wien Energie Ombudsman service received over **21.000 requests** from social institutions und has successfully helped around **14.500 households**. A supervision might apply over several years, therefore an annual comparison is not appropriate.
- Requests - and consequently the reputation of our Ombudsman service - have risen over time
- People are not affected by poverty solely because of their energy (costs)
- **ENERGY** (Experts in utilities) + **POVERTY** (Experts in social institutions) = **cooperation** and **overarching approach**
- Only a cooperation with all the social institutions in charge can lead to reasonable solutions
- **Multi-problems** with people in difficult living conditions require an overarching approach
- Precarious living conditions precede energy related problems

# Wien Energie Ombudsman service

## Experiences and findings

- A lot of affected people need to clarify their **monetary entitlements** first (social assistance, housing assistance, etc.) before contacting energy suppliers in order to find a solution.
- Attaching „*energy poverty*“ solely on **exempting** vulnerable people **from costs** – which is an attempt for a nationwide definition – **does not depict the daily practise of our service**
- A harmonisation does only help a little part of our target group and misses the large number of **multi-problem cases**
- It is difficult to meet the needs of the demografic patterns and the status/network of the social institutions of the federal states in Austria.
- **No universal solutions** but rather individual and sustainable securing of energy supply
- The living conditions and the starting situations of the people are very individual – they need **support and supervision** which is very time-consuming

# Wien Energie Ombudsman service

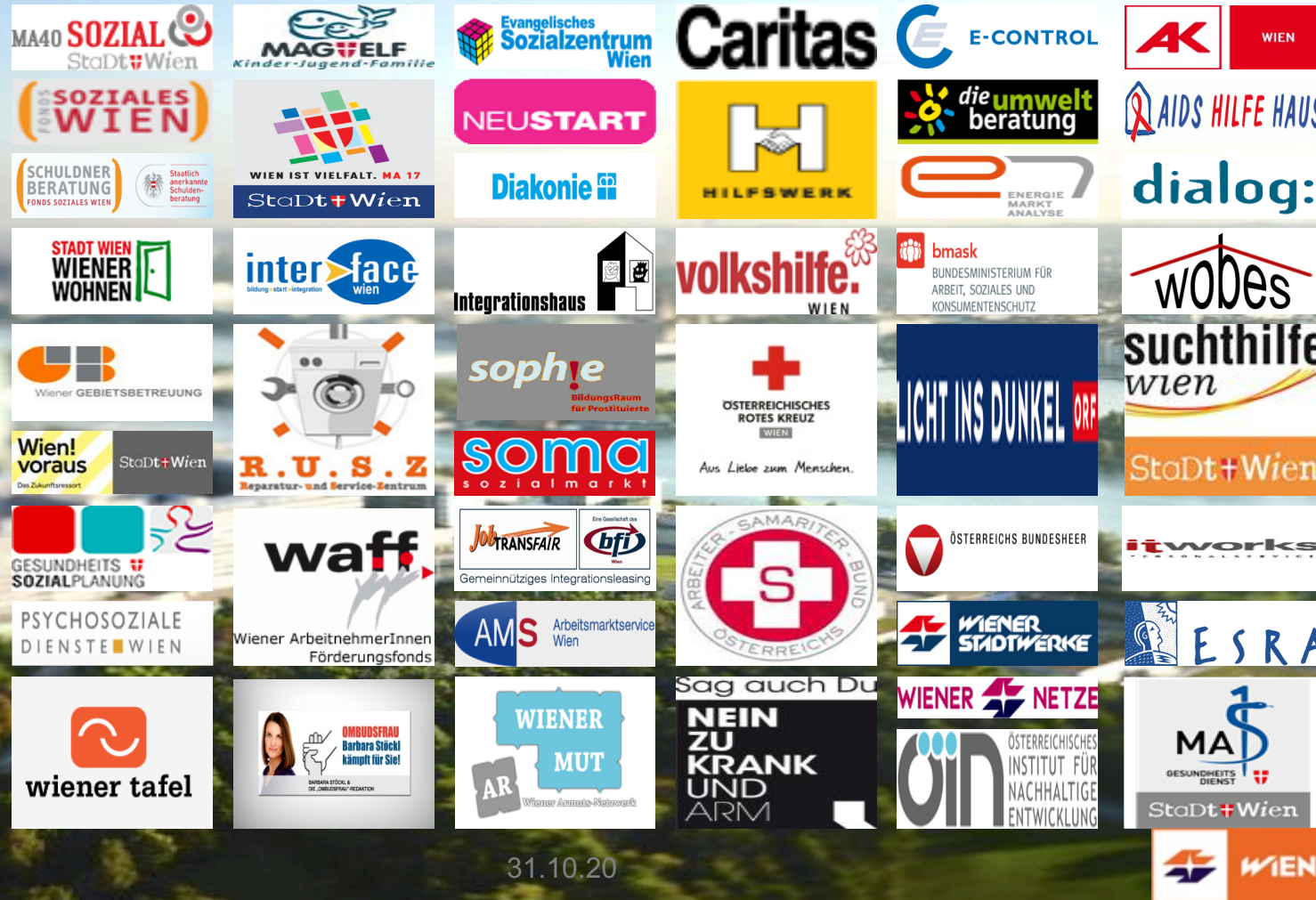
## Experiences and findings

- Energy suppliers are in an area of tension between the social perception, business management and the free market
- Energy poverty cannot be prevented for people without a job, an education, with illnesses and on social welfare, that merely cover the costs of living
- Common error: Vulnerable people cannot exit energy poverty by changing the energy supplier
- It is not always possible to find a solution to energy poverty
- Affected people cannot be „counselled“ out of (energy) poverty – energy counselling supports people with a focused approach but cannot solve underlying problems

# Wien Energie Ombudsman service

Very positive Feedback from our networking-partners

Extract



31.10.20

**Thank you for your attention!**

**Do you have any questions?**

