

CEER

**Council of European
Energy Regulators**



Fostering energy markets, empowering **consumers**.

Advice on the Quality of Electricity and Gas Distribution Services

**Focussing on Connection, Disconnection and
Maintenance**

**Ref: C14-RMF-62-04
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INFORMATION PAGE

Abstract

This CEER document presents recommendations from a customer perspective on regulating the quality of distribution services by the DSO, with a focus on connection, disconnection and maintenance.

The recommendations relate to the quality levels of services provided to household customers. They do not focus on technical requirements.

The recommendations set long-term targets that are ambitious but remain realistic because they represent existing practices in some Member States. Implementation of the recommendations should take account of the costs and benefits incurred by DSOs or other market players which ultimately will be passed through to customers.

The core features include 16 recommendations classified into seven service areas. The areas are: connection to the grid; disconnection of energy supply; disconnection due to non-payment; information about planned energy interruptions; information during un-planned energy supply interruptions; information about connection and disconnection procedures; and safety and installation handling.

All recommendations apply to both electricity and gas sectors.

Accompanying this Advice is a document presenting the evaluation of the responses we received during the public consultation of the draft advice (Ref. C14-RMF-62-04a).

Target Audience

European Commission, customers, suppliers, distribution system operators, energy service companies, network owners, metering operators, National Regulatory Authorities, Member States, academics and other interested parties.

Related Documents

CEER/ERGEG documents

- Advice on Regulating the Quality of Distribution Services. Evaluation of responses. Ref: C14-RMF-62-04a
- [A 2020 Vision for Europe's energy customers. Joint Statement](#)
- [ERGEG, Final Guidelines of Good Practice on Regulatory Aspects of Smart Metering for Electricity and Gas. Ref: E10-RMF-29-05. 8 February 2011](#)



- [EREGG, Final Guidelines of Good Practice on Indicators for Retail Market Monitoring for Electricity and Gas, Ref: E10-RMF-27-03. 12 October 2010.](#)
- [5th CEER benchmarking report on the quality of electricity supply 2011.](#)
- [CEER Guidelines of Good Practice on Electricity and gas retail market design, with a focus on supplier switching and billing. Ref: C11-RMF-39-03. 24 January 2012.](#)
- [EREGG Guidelines of Good Practice on Customer Complaint Handling, Reporting and Classification. Ref: E10-CEM-33-05. 10 June 2010](#)

The documents above are available on CEER's website www.ceer.eu

We also have a special area dedicated to [customer information](#).

External documents

- [Directive 2009/72/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 July 2009 concerning common rules for the internal market in electricity and repealing Directive 2003/54/EC](#)
- [Directive 2009/73/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 July 2009 concerning common rules for the internal market in gas and repealing Directive 2003/54/EC](#)
- [Directive 2012/27/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 on energy efficiency](#)
- [The functioning of retail electricity markets for European Union customers, Final Report 2010. European Commission Staff Working Paper, Ref SEC \(2010\) 1409 final.](#)

Country-specific documents

France (documents in French):

- [Incentive regulation of the quality of service – gas and electricity network operators](#)

Portugal (documents in Portuguese):

- [Quality of Service Code for Electricity, for mainland Portugal, the Autonomous Region of Azores and the Autonomous Region of Madeira](#)
- [Quality of Service Code for Natural Gas](#)

United Kingdom

- [Gas transportation. Customers standards of performance](#)
- [Standard License Condition 15A Guidance Document, 8 September 2010](#)
- [Guaranteed Standards of Performance for Electricity Distribution, 2010/2011](#)



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From a customer perspective, connections, disconnections, activations and maintenance are very relevant processes as, in some cases, they represent the customer's first interaction with the energy market. If these processes are well designed and functioning efficiently, they will help to improve customers' perception of the energy market.

According to the Gas and Electricity Directives in the 3rd Package, specifically *Annex 1; Measures on Consumer Protection*, customers have the right to a contract with their gas/electricity service provider that specifies the services provided, the service quality levels offered, as well as the time for the initial connection and the types of maintenance services offered.

The recommendations presented here by CEER relate to the quality levels of services provided to household customers. They do not focus on technical requirements.

CEER places particular emphasis on customer issues, taking the initiative to build, with customer bodies and other stakeholders, a 2020 Vision for Europe's energy customers. This Vision is characterised by the RASP principles governing the relationship between the energy sector and the customers: reliability, affordability, simplicity, protection and empowerment. The present recommendations relate mainly to reliability.

The recommendations set ambitious target with a long-term view. These targets are realistic however, because they represent existing practices in some Member States. In our view, these long-term objectives are positive for operators because they attempt to provide regulatory stability which helps them in their long-term investment planning. The ambition of the targets should also prove beneficial for customers. . Implementation of the recommendations should take account of the costs and benefits incurred by DSOs or other market players which ultimately will be passed through to the customers.

Depending on the prevailing market model in different countries, the services covered in the recommendations are executed, most commonly, by a DSO or, in some cases, by another market player. The services may be communicated directly from the DSO to the customer, or through a supplier. CEER's aim is to ensure that customers have the right to these distribution related services (hereafter "DSO services"), regardless of which market player performs the task.

Summary of recommendations

The core features include 16 recommendations, classified into seven service areas. The service areas are: connection to the grid, disconnection of energy supply; disconnection due to non-payment; planned energy interruptions; information during un-planned energy supply interruptions; customer information about connection and disconnection; and safety and installation handling.

All recommendations apply to the electricity and gas sectors.



Service	Recommendations
Connection to the grid	<p>1. Time taken to respond to a customer request for a new grid connection The time taken to respond to a household customer request for a connection to the grid (major works) should not exceed two working days. The response should inform the customer of the process, the estimated schedule and requests for information required from the customer, including contact details.</p>
	<p>2. Time taken to provide a price offer for a grid connection Price offers for connections involving minor or major works should be provided to the customer within one week. If the connection is complex or requires specific studies, the time limit can be extended to two weeks.</p>
	<p>3. Time taken to commence work on connection to the grid (in the case of major works) Once the customer has accepted the price offer, the physical connection work should be initiated within one month, unless a later start date is requested by the customer. This time limit is not applicable in extreme weather conditions (like frozen ground) or when the beginning of works depends on administrative or legal processes, e.g. permissions or concessions. In this case, the DSO should inform the customer about such circumstances and the planned schedule of works.</p>
	<p>4. Time taken to connect to the network and activate energy supply (in the case of minor works) The time taken to connect a customer to the network (minor works) and activate the energy supply should not exceed two working days, unless a longer time period is requested by the customer.</p>
	<p>5. Time taken to activate energy supply The time taken to activate the energy supply (when the physical connection is already in place) should not exceed one working day, unless a longer time period is requested by the customer.</p>
	<p>6. Punctuality of appointments with customers For appointments with the customer for any type of onsite intervention, the time frame within which the DSO should arrive at the site should be fixed in advance and should not exceed two hours.</p>
Disconnection of energy supply	<p>7. Time taken to disconnect the energy supply following a customer request The time taken to disconnect the energy supply following a customer request should not exceed one working day, unless a longer time period is requested by the customer.</p>
Disconnection due to non-	<p>8. Notice of due payment before disconnection As a warning mechanism in the case of non-payment of the energy</p>



payment	bill, customers should receive at least one payment notice including the expected date of disconnection, 4 weeks before the disconnection date.
	<p>9. Time taken to reactivate energy supply after disconnection</p> <p>The time taken to reactivate the energy supply after a disconnection due to non-payment should not exceed one working day.</p>
Planned supply interruptions	<p>10. Minimum notice period for a planned supply interruptions</p> <p>In case of planned supply interruptions, the customer should be notified at least one week in advance. If the information is sent more than one week in advance, the customer should receive a reminder one week in advance.</p>
	<p>11. Maximum duration of a planned supply interruption</p> <p>A planned supply interruption should be as short as possible but should not exceed six hours for electricity and twelve hours for gas.</p>
Information during unplanned supply interruptions	<p>12. Provision of information to customers during an unplanned supply interruption</p> <p>In the case of unplanned interruption of the energy supply, the DSO should provide continuously updated information to customers on when it estimates that the supply will be reactivated. This information should be made available to the customer through a variety of channels, including via telephone and on the DSO website. On the basis of customer demand, updated information should also be provided through text message (SMS) or e-mail.</p>
Customer information about connection, activation and disconnection procedures	<p>13. Provision of information to customers on connection, activation, and disconnection</p> <p>The DSO and other relevant stakeholders should provide customers with information regarding connection, activation, disconnection and customer rights related to these. This information should be easily accessible and presented in a clear, user-friendly and comprehensible way.</p>
	<p>14. Customer communication channels</p> <p>The DSO or other relevant stakeholders should provide easily accessible customer communication on issues concerning connection, activation and disconnection through multiple channels, including at least two of the following: website, call centre, telephone, e-mail or text message (SMS).</p>
	<p>15. Response time for customer enquiries concerning connection/disconnection</p> <p>The response time for a customer enquiry (not covered by the other recommendations) to a DSO or other relevant market player regarding connection, activation and disconnection procedures should not exceed two working days.</p>



Installation handling	<p>16. <i>Providing information to customers on correct installation handling</i></p> <p>The customer has the right to easily accessible information on correct installation handling, including safety measures, for gas/electricity installations. Access shall be available via website, e-mail and by post.</p>
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1. Introduction

1.1. Customer focused DSO services

Well-performing services, as well as accessible and understandable customer information, are of key importance. The European Commission's 2010 study of retail energy markets¹ found that many customers do not have access to neutral, objective information that empowers them to take an active role in liberalised energy markets. In some cases information is provided, but customers have trouble accessing it.

The European Energy regulators work to create well-functioning and competitive EU energy markets so that customers receive fair prices, the widest choice of suppliers and the best possible quality of supply. In 2012, CEER placed particular emphasis on customer issues, collaborating with customer bodies and other stakeholders to build a 2020 vision for Europe's energy customers. The result was a Vision presented jointly with BEUC, the EU Consumers Organisation, to the Citizens' Energy Forum. It has been endorsed by 17 energy stakeholder bodies². This Vision is characterised by the principles governing the relationship between the energy sector and its variety of customers: reliability, affordability, simplicity, protection and empowerment (known as RASP).

Furthermore, an important call for the regulation of customers' rights arises from EU legislative measures. Directives 2009/72/EC and 2009/73/EC require that Member States take appropriate measures to protect final customers to ensure that they have a right to a contract with their electricity or gas service provider that specifies:

- The services provided and the service quality levels offered, as well as the time needed for the initial connection;
- Any compensation and the refund arrangements which apply if contracted service quality levels are not met, including inaccurate and delayed billing;
- Information relating to customer rights, including on complaint handling. All information referring to this point must be clearly communicated through billing or the electricity/gas service providers' websites.
- Benefits from transparent, simple and inexpensive procedures for dealing with their complaints. In particular, all customers shall have the right to a good standard of service and complaint handling by their electricity/gas service provider.

Regarding complaint handling, in 2010 ERGEG issued Guidelines of Good Practice on Customer Complaint Handling, Reporting and Classification³.

¹ [The functioning of retail electricity markets for European Union customers, Final Report 2010. European Commission Staff Working Paper, Ref SEC\(2010\) 1409 final.](#)

² [A 2020 Vision for Europe's energy customers. Joint Statement](#)

³ This document includes 15 recommendations on complaint handling, as well as a proposal for complaints classification. The whole document can be accessed with the following link: [ERGEG Guidelines of Good Practice on Customer Complaint Handling, Reporting and Classification. Ref: E10-CEM-33-05. 10 June 2010](#)



According to the *CEER-ACER Annual Report on the Results of Monitoring the Internal Electricity and Natural Gas Markets in 2012*, customer complaints about connections in electricity were the fifth most frequent case of complaints among the 12 areas considered, and the third most frequent case of complaints for gas.

In this Advice, CEER presents service areas that have not been the focus of previous CEER customer work. CEER regularly carries out Benchmarking reports on electricity⁴ quality of supply – which partly cover customer services. The latest edition (as of the publication of the present report) is the CEER 5th Benchmarking Report⁵ which serves as an important basis of knowledge for the development of these new recommendations.

During December 2013 and January 2014, CEER issued a public consultation on draft advice, identifying 22 core features of DSO services. The issues for recommendation were divided into electricity, micro generation units and gas, in order to reflect possible differences between the three sectors. We received 47 responses from the following stakeholder groups: DSOs (21 responses), energy supply companies (8 responses), industry associations (7 responses), consumer associations (5 responses), authorities (3 responses) and consultancy firms (3 responses). The accompanying *Advice on regulating the quality of distribution services – Evaluation of responses* (Ref. C14-RMF-62-04a) presents the comments received and CEER's opinions on them.

As part of its consultative process, CEER held a public hearing on 28 April 2014 (with 55 representatives from different groups of stakeholders: DSOs, energy industry, consumers organisations, energy ombudsmen, etc.) and a meeting with 5 European DSO associations on 31st July 2014.

As a result of the public consultation, the public hearing and the meeting with the DSO associations, we have incorporated several changes in these final recommendations, with the intention of taking account of important comments from respondents. The recommendations are now more specific than in the draft advice, and define better the types of customers, processes and environmental circumstances they address. Also, some closely related draft recommendations have been merged to facilitate clearer understanding. Finally, we decided to exclude micro generation and certain safety issues from the scope of this final advice. We found that the answers received were not robust enough to serve as a basis for long-term recommendations on micro generation. This does not imply that CEER regards micro generation as unimportant; it is a significant component of distribution services and we will address it in future work.

The 5th CEER Benchmarking Report on Quality of Electricity Supply (2011) has informed the analysis and recommendations that are put forward in the present document. However, the afore-mentioned benchmarking report contains information on electricity only. We have used other documents, listed in the “Related documents” section, to compile information about the gas distribution networks.

⁴ The next edition of the CEER Benchmarking (2015) will also cover gas.

⁵ [5th CEER benchmarking report on the quality of electricity supply 2011.](#)



This advice relates to customer services that are among the indicators developed by ERGEG in 2010⁶. These services are among the key processes where the customer interacts with the stakeholders in the energy market and are a key aspect of reliability and quality of service. The manner in which these services are defined and carried out is an important part of market design. Furthermore, in an internal status review on NRA monitoring duties, CEER found that very few NRAs monitor or define exactly what these distribution duties consist of. This advice constitutes a first step towards a European-wide harmonised view in which DSO services within connection, disconnection and maintenance would benefit from being defined and monitored by NRAs.

1.2. Scope

The aim of this Advice on Regulating the Quality of Distribution Services is to present recommendations on those electricity and gas services of high importance for energy customers; namely connection, activation, disconnection and maintenance.

The document focuses on commercial quality aspects from a customer point of view; it does not focus on technical requirements, but reflects potential cost-driving effects. The most frequent commercial quality aspect is the timeliness of services requested by customers and the access to clear information.

Where this report refers to 'customers', they are to be understood as household customers. A household customer means a 'customer purchasing gas or electricity for his/her own household consumption'. Outside the scope are commercial and professional customers, and hence also those connected to high voltage/pressure.

This advice focuses on the service levels which CEER expects to be provided by DSOs. The recommendations do not include services such as metering and switching, since they have already been covered by previous CEER documents. Data management is to be presented in a future CEER report, which is currently being produced.

Delivering real choice and benefits for European energy customers – in terms of efficiency gains, competitive prices and higher service standards – is the ultimate aim of the internal energy market. In general, the recommendations are based on best practices identified in CEER's Benchmarking Report, although not all recommendations provided here are within the scope of that report, as it contains information on electricity only. The recommendations presented here are ambitious, and should be considered as long-term objectives to be met by 2025, therefore corresponding with the ACER policy document *Energy Regulation: A Bridge to 2025*⁷.

Connection to the grid is related mainly to distribution and is therefore strictly related to the regulation of a monopoly activity, although in a few countries this activity can be performed by other companies, a fact which is recognised in our recommendations.

⁶ [ERGEG, Final Guidelines of Good Practice on Indicators for Retail Market Monitoring for Electricity and Gas, Ref: E10-RMF-27-03, 12 October 2010.](#)

⁷ [ACER Bridge to 2025 Conclusions Paper, 19 September 2014](#)



Commercial quality is directly linked to the communication between energy companies (either DSOs or suppliers, or both) and customers. It covers not only the energy supply and sale, but also various forms of contacts established between companies and customers.

A glossary of terms is found in [Annex 3](#).



2. Customer services and DSO performance

2.1. Customer contacts

CEER recommends that the general market model should have consumers' interests at its heart. Under such a model, the supplier will be the main, but not only, contact for the customer⁸. CEER believes that providing the customer with one main point of contact is convenient for the customer, especially as the energy market becomes more complex and the customer has multiple parties to deal with.

In this model, the supplier should be the main point of contact for the customer regarding the majority of the processes in the energy market, including the switching process, moving properties and billing issues.

However, the model recognises that there are circumstances when the customer should contact the DSO, for example concerning grid connections. In a few countries, these activities can also be performed by independent companies.

Depending on the prevailing market model in a country, the services covered in this paper may be performed by a DSO, a supplier or another market player. The aim of CEER is to ensure that the customers have the right to these services, regardless of which market player is responsible. In this model, the supplier serves as an intermediary between the customer and the DSO. Nevertheless, the DSO may be responsible for executing the services or, for example, for providing the supplier with the information needed for their communication with customers.

The appointed single point of contact⁹ should be able to provide the information and contact details of the market player responsible for the services covered by this paper as well as other customer related issues.

2.2. Service standards

CEER periodically surveys and analyses the quality of electricity supply in its member countries. These surveys and analyses are presented in the CEER Benchmarking Reports on Quality of Electricity Supply. "Service standards" for DSO services are used by most EU countries, therefore the Benchmarking Report recognises this term. "Service standards" are defined at national level.

⁸ [Guidelines of Good Practice on electricity and gas retail market design, with a focus on switching and billing, Ref: C11-RMF-39-03, January 2012](#)

⁹ Article 3 (12) in Directive 2009/72/EC and Article 3 (9) in Directive 2009/73/EC.



In CEER's 5th Benchmarking Report, it was observed that many quality indicators related to connection, activation and disconnection were only superficially defined. Differences in legal provisions or practices showed that standards (see below for explanation) needed to be defined in precise terms and supported with explanations and exceptions. The indicator "time from the notice to pay until disconnection" used in CEER's 5th Benchmarking Report can be used here as an example. The standard should precisely define the initial trigger and define the closing event. Otherwise, there could be ambiguity around, for example, whether a standard implies the time measured from the posting of the notice or from the receipt of the notice.

If DSO services are based on precise definitions, including the obligations of all market players responsible in the process, they will be easier to understand for all, especially the customer.

The most frequent commercial quality aspect related to connections and disconnections is the timeliness of services requested by customers. Today in several Member States, there are two main types of requirements for commercial quality standards:

- 1. Guaranteed Standards (GSs)** refer to service quality levels which must be met in each individual case, so it will apply to 100% of the cases (the company's performance towards the customer). Minimum quality levels are orientated to the protection of customers, and can be combined with compensations in case of non-fulfillment.
- 2. Overall Standards (OSs)** refer to service quality levels which must be met for a given service and take into account the wider activities of the company over a period of time. The Overall Standards are, by their nature, not directly customer orientated since they do not apply to all customers but to a percentage of the customers over a defined timeframe.

In some cases, if the DSO fails to provide the level of service required by the standards, the customer is entitled to receive a compensation payment subject to certain exemptions. This compensation can be paid automatically or upon request. Compensations might not apply in some cases, e.g., when the information provided by the customer is incorrect or incomplete, or when the DSO is not able to gain access to customer's premises.

Another possibility to ensure a sufficient level of service quality is the use of incentive regulation (incentives and penalties) of the revenues of network operators based on the performance of the service standards, or the possibility to impose sanctions where information and monitoring of a particular parameter allows it.

In the market, companies also compete in providing services and their performance in meeting customers' expectations.

The publication of performance and quality service indicators can further be used as a tool for making the DSO activities more visible, as well as a trigger and incentive to increase service performance.

CEER's customer recommendations should always be regarded as being applied to all customers. The customer has the right to understand his/her individual rights and options.



2.3. Time units

As a general rule for this paper, ‘hour’, ‘working day’, ‘day’, ‘week’ and ‘month’ are used as time units:

- Hours are used for shorter periods (e. g. supply interruptions or emergencies).
- Working day refers to a “business day” as it is understood at national or local levels, and what is applicable (e.g. including Saturdays or not).
- Day covers working days, days of a weekend, national holidays etc.
- Week is understood as a time unit consisting of seven days (whether they are working days or not).
- Month is recognised as a time period of 30 days (whether they are working days or not).

Regarding recommendations concerning time limits, as a general rule the time starts the next working day after the relevant stakeholder has received the customer request.

2.4. Universal service for electricity

Article 37.6 of Directive 2009/72/EC states that the regulatory authorities shall be responsible for approving the terms and conditions for connection and access to national networks, including transmission and distribution tariffs or their methodologies.

The Electricity Directive also stipulates that all *electricity* household customers enjoy universal service¹⁰, meaning the right to be supplied with electricity of a specified quality within their territory at reasonable, easily and clearly comparable, transparent and non-discriminatory prices.

The goal of the electricity universal service is to provide a baseline level of services to every resident of a country, including those in low income, rural, insular, and high cost areas, at rates that are reasonably comparable to those charged in urban areas.

However, it is important to note that the supply of natural gas is not defined by the Gas Directive in the 3rd Package as a universal service. It reflects the fact that the population covered by the natural gas network varies a lot in Europe, from more than 70% of dwellings in some countries (e.g. the Netherlands and Italy), to 20-40% in others (e.g. Spain and France) or even below 10% (e.g. Greece). For the same reason, the Gas Directive does not include the obligation to connect gas customers to the natural gas network.

CEER finds that the service standards for connections, activations and disconnections of gas and electricity supply can be treated in a similar way and therefore the services identified in this document are essentially the same for gas and electricity sectors.

¹⁰ Electricity Directive 2009/72/EC; art 3.3.



3. Recommendations on regulating the quality of services by the DSO

This chapter presents 16 recommendations on DSO services, classified into seven service areas:

1. Connection to the grid
2. Disconnection of energy supply
3. Disconnection due to non-payment
4. Planned supply interruptions
5. Information during unplanned supply interruptions
6. Customer information about connection, activation and disconnection procedures
7. Installation handling

The service areas represent the whole process for connection, disconnection and maintenance.

3.1. Connection to the grid and activation of supply

From a customer perspective, the network access conditions and timeliness of concrete connections are a high priority. Connection to the grid includes the following core features:

1. Time taken to respond to a customer request for a new grid connection
2. Time taken to provide a price offer for a grid connection
3. Time taken to commence work on connection to the grid (in the case of major works)
4. Time taken to connect to the network and activate energy supply (in the case of minor works)
5. Time taken to activate energy supply

A new connection to the grid is mainly related to distribution and is therefore strictly related to the regulation of a monopoly activity, although in a few countries this activity can be performed by independent companies.

The connection of a customer to the gas or electricity grid will depend significantly on the complexity of the work. A connection may vary from very simple and routine works to complex installations requiring street works and administrative authorisation.

In order to establish the recommendations, we have distinguished two types of connections without entering into the technical requirements of any connection:

Connections with minor works: a connection that requires no more than one day of work at the customer's premises. This is usually the case when the gas or electricity installation is already in place at the customer premises. However, depending on the circumstances and national regulation, connection of a new customer may involve several types of works such as:

- Checking the documentation
- Installing or checking the meter
- Installing or checking the power control switch
- Checking the security of the installation



- Checking the compliance of the installation with technical regulations

Connections with major works: connections to the grid that require more than one day of work at the customer's premises. This may be the case for connections that require street works or administrative authorisation.

3.1.1. *Time taken to respond to a customer request for a new grid connection*

The time taken to respond to a customer application for a new connection to the grid is considered as the time period between the receipt of customer's request by the DSO (be it written, by e-mail, phone, etc.) for connection and the written (by post, e-mail) response of the DSO (date of dispatch).

In the case of an application for connection to the gas grid, as this is not a universal service, the first step is to check whether or not the customer's premises are inside the area covered by the natural gas distribution network.

Recommendation 1: The time taken to respond to a household customer request for a connection to the grid (major work) should not exceed two working days. The response should inform the customer of the process, the estimated schedule and requests for information required from the customer, including contact details.

3.1.2. *Time taken to provide a price offer for a grid connection*¹¹

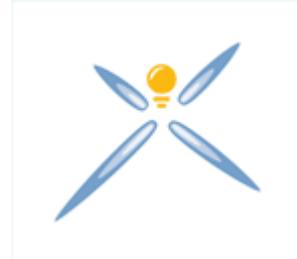
The time taken for providing a price offer for a new connection to the grid is considered as the time period between the receipt of the customer's relevant data needed for the DSO to execute a new connection to the grid and the written response of the DSO, including a price offer for the connection.

The time for providing a price offer depends significantly on the complexity of the works. In most cases, when the connection is normal and simply requires the completion of routine works for which the costs are known, the detailed price for a new connection can be provided within one week. In some cases, the connection requires specific studies which can require more time, especially in rural and mountainous areas.

In some countries, these offers are set by regulated tariffs (mostly in the case of connections with minor works), and therefore the price offer can be provided in a very short time.

¹¹ Reference to CEER's 5th Benchmarking Report:

The time to facilitate cost estimations for network connection is commonly used in electricity as a quality standard for 14 countries. In those countries, the median value to facilitate cost estimation is around 14 days, with a range between 5 and 35 days if no intervention is necessary in the public network. The countries that are below average or average are Hungary, Spain, Austria, France, Great Britain, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands and Slovenia. In three countries (Austria, Estonia and Portugal), the time to facilitate this service has to be met in 90% of cases. In five countries (France, Hungary, Ireland, Italy and Spain) it has to be met in 100% of cases. The average time for cost estimation for minor works does not exceed 10 days in the majority of countries and shows a decreasing trend between 2008 and 2010.



Recommendation 2: The price offers for connections involving minor or major works should be provided to the customer within one week. If the connection is complex or requires specific studies, the time limit can be extended to two weeks.

CEER recognises that in some countries the customers have the right to appeal (according to national law) if he/she finds the price offer unreasonable.

3.1.3. *Time taken to commence work on connection to the grid (in the case of major works)*

CEER deems it important that once the customer has received and accepted the price offer, the DSO should start the work as soon as possible. The customer should not need to wait longer than is necessary for the physical connection works to commence.

There can be cases where the works may be affected by environmental influences, weather conditions and other circumstances, e.g. snow, frozen ground. The effective beginning of works may also depend on administrative or legal processes. In these cases, the time limit is not applicable, but the DSO must be proactive in managing the permits. In these cases, the DSO should inform the customer about such circumstances and about the planned schedule.

Recommendation 3: Once the customer has accepted the price offer, the physical connection works should be initiated within one month, unless a later start date is requested by the customer. This time limit is not applicable in extreme weather conditions (like frozen ground) or when the beginning of works depend on administrative or legal processes, e.g. permissions or concessions. In this case, the DSO should inform the customer about such circumstances and the planned schedule of works.

3.1.4. *Time taken to connect to the network and activate energy supply (in the case of minor works)*¹²

The time taken for connecting a new customer to the network is the time period between the receipt by the DSO of the customer's request for connection including, when applicable, the acceptance of the connection price and the date when the customer is connected to the network. Time needed for administrative authorisation obviously has to be respected.

¹² *Reference to EU Directives:*

According to the 3rd Package, *Annex 1, Measures on Consumer Protection*, electricity and gas customers have a right to a contract with their gas/electricity service provider that specifies the services provided, the service quality levels offered, as well as the time for the initial connection.

Reference to CEER's 5th Benchmarking Report:

The time to connect new customers to the network is commonly used in electricity as a quality standard for 16 countries. In those countries, the median value for connect new customer it is around 11 days, with a range between 2 working days and 18 weeks. Vast majority of countries meet this average. In two countries (Austria and Latvia), the time to connect new customers for this service has to be met in 90% of cases. In seven countries (the Czech Republic, Great Britain, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Portugal and Spain), it has to be met in 100% of cases.



Activation of energy supply is the action of starting the delivery of energy to a point of supply. To request the activation of energy supply, the customer needs first to have a agreement with a supplier (a gas or electricity supply contract). Thus, in most countries, the market player who contacts the DSO for the service activation is the supplier.

As connection and activation activities are interrelated, in many countries the process for these services is identical or does not even distinguish between connection and activation services.

In some countries, before the activation of the energy supply, it is necessary that the customer installation passes an inspection or a security check that can be performed by the DSO or by another authorised market player. In particular for gas supply, a security check at the moment of activation of supply (usually made by the DSO) is prescriptive in some countries to avoid gas leaks at the customer's gas installation. If the result of the inspection is negative (i.e. a gas leak occurs), the DSO should not proceed to activation until the problem is resolved.

Recommendation 4: The time taken to connect a customer to the network (minor works) and activate the energy supply should not exceed two working days, unless a longer time period is requested by the customer.

3.1.5. *Time taken to activate energy supply*

The time taken to activate the energy supply (when the connection is already made) is the time period between the receipt by the DSO of the request for activation (from the supplier or the customer) until the date of activation of the energy supply at the customer's premises.

In some countries, activation of supply is carried out by a licensed electrician/gas fitter, or it is done by the suppliers.

Advanced smart meters with the functionality of remote communication can accelerate the time taken for the electricity activation, and also for gas, but under special circumstances. This would allow them to send or collect information directly from the meter, and the meter can be activated or deactivated by remote control by the DSO, and could even be programmed for a specified period of time.

Recommendation 5: The time taken to activate the energy supply (when the physical connection is already in place) should not exceed one working day, unless a longer time period is requested by the customer.



3.1.6. **Punctuality of appointments with customers**¹³

An appointment can be considered on time (punctual) when the personnel of the DSO appears on the customer site within the time range (period of hours) previously agreed with the customer. The time range does not include the duration of the works.

Appointments with customers are a very important issue for connections and disconnections of energy supply. Some operations (for example, access to the premises) require the presence of the customer. The DSO must offer and honour a scheduled appointment, proactively or when requested by the customer. NRAs can impose standards (mainly for DSOs) in order to ensure the punctuality of appointments with customers.

Recommendation 6: For appointments with the customer for any type of onsite intervention, the time frame within which the DSO should arrive at the site should be fixed in advance and should not exceed two hours.

This recommendation applies to any type of onsite intervention that requires an appointment with the customer.

3.2. Disconnection of energy supply following a customer request

Disconnection is defined as the action of interrupting delivery of energy supply to a point of supply (this could include the action of removing a physical connection of a gas or electricity installation to the network). The recommendation refers to a situation where the disconnection is requested by the customer.

3.2.1. **Time taken to disconnect the energy supply following a customer request**¹⁴

The time taken for disconnection following a customer request is the time period between the receipt of the customer's written (mail, e-mail) request for disconnection until the date of interruption.

¹³ Reference to CEER's 5th Benchmarking Report:

The punctuality of appointments with customers is commonly used in electricity as a quality standard for 11 countries. In those countries, the median value for the punctuality is around 2.5 hours, with a range between 0.5 and 4 hours. The countries that are below average or average are the Czech Republic, Estonia, Italy, The Netherlands and Portugal. In seven countries (Czech Republic, France, Great Britain, Hungary, Ireland, Italy and Portugal) the punctuality of appointments has to be ensured in 100% of cases. In some countries (Great Britain), the punctuality of appointments is measured by a customer satisfaction survey, a complaint metric and considers how well distribution companies have engaged with their stakeholders.

¹⁴ Reference to CEER's 5th Benchmarking Report:

The time response to a customer application for disconnection is commonly used in electricity as a quality standard for 8 countries. In those countries, the median value for the service disconnections is around 5 working days, with a range between 5 and 8 days. The countries that are below average or average are France, Ireland, Italy, and Latvia. In these four countries, the disconnection time has to be met in 100% of cases.



Recommendation 7: The time taken to disconnect the energy supply following a customer request should not exceed one working day, unless a longer time period is requested by the customer.

3.3. Warning mechanisms before a disconnection due to non-payment¹⁵

A minimum time period from the notice to pay before the disconnection due to non-payment is commonly used as a protection measure to the customers.

In most CEER countries, disconnection of energy supply to a point of supply can be requested by the supplier in case of non-payment of the energy bill by the customer. In some countries, this action can also be initiated by the DSO (the non-payment of access tariffs in countries with a two-bill model or in case of fraud, or in a situation with two-contract models). Apart from a few exceptions, all CEER member countries have warning mechanisms in place in order to allow sufficient time and notification before disconnection can take place.

CEER notes that the picture is largely the same in the gas sector as in the electricity sector.

Furthermore, the CEER Status Review of Customer and Retail Market Provisions from the 3rd Package¹⁶ (2012) reported that in addition to such warning procedures, an important number of countries reported having measures in place which prohibit the disconnection of gas/electricity of vulnerable customers at critical times, particularly in winter months¹⁷. CEER members typically mentioned certain conditions under which the prohibition of disconnection applies. Some of the most frequently mentioned groups that benefit from a general prohibition of disconnection are people with life threatening illnesses, hospitals or other specific population groups that are considered particularly vulnerable (e.g. elderly persons, households with children, cases in which there is a danger of severe property damage or residential customers dropped by their supplier).

In some countries, disconnection should also not apply where there is a claim formally filed against the company, related to the missed payment of the energy bill.

¹⁵ Reference to CEER's 5th Benchmarking Report:

Many CEER member countries have a defined procedure which stipulates the number and frequency of warnings that need to be delivered before a disconnection can take place. Most countries stated that this measure applied to all household customers at a minimum, if not to all customers. The time from notice to pay before disconnection is commonly used in electricity as a quality standard for 6 countries. In those countries, the median value for notice to pay before disconnection is around 15 days, with a range between 8 and 28 days. In one country (Austria), the time for notice to pay before disconnection has to be met in 90% of cases. In one country (Slovenia), has to be met in 100% of cases.

¹⁶ [Status Review of Customer and Retail Market Provisions from the 3rd Package as of 1 January 2012](#)
Ref. C12-CEM-55-04, 7 November 2012

¹⁷ According to Directive 2009/72/EC, Art 3(7) and 2009/73, Art 3(3), *each Member State shall define the concept of vulnerable customers which may refer to energy poverty and, inter alia, to the prohibition of disconnection of electricity [gas] to such customers in critical times. Member States shall ensure that rights and obligations linked to vulnerable customers are applied.*



3.3.1. **Notice of due payment before disconnection**

After a missed payment, customers should receive at least one payment notice, including the expected date of disconnection in case of non-payment before that date. The recommendation covers the time period between the customer's receipt of the payment notice and the disconnection.

Some countries may have additional measures in place which prohibit disconnection of the gas/electricity of vulnerable customers at critical times, particularly in winter months. The recommendation below is naturally not applicable in those cases.

Recommendation 8: As a warning mechanism in the case of non-payment of the energy bill, customers should receive at least one payment notice including the expected date of disconnection, 4 weeks before the disconnection date.

In countries that have more than one warning, the recommendation refers to the first notice. In this case, the last notice to pay is usually sent closer to the disconnection date.

In most countries, the warning is sent by the supplier. After the warning, if payment is still due, the supplier contacts the DSO to disconnect the customer. The CEER advice only states that the customer should receive a warning before disconnection, allowing different national practices (fixing responsibilities) for the process.

3.4. Reactivation of energy supply after disconnection due to non-payment

3.4.1. **Time taken to reactivate energy supply after disconnection**¹⁸

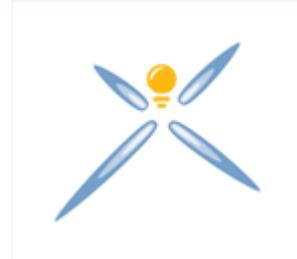
The time taken for the reactivation of energy supply following a disconnection due to non-payment is the time period between the notice of customer debt payment (after a disconnection due to non-payment) and the reactivation of the energy supply to the customer.

In most countries, customers who have settled their debts and paid all pending fees after a disconnection due to non-payment can request to be reconnected to the network as soon as possible.

Recommendation 9: The time taken to reactivate the energy supply after a disconnection due to non-payment should not exceed one working day.

¹⁸ Reference to CEER's 5th Benchmarking Report:

The time for reactivation of electricity supply after disconnection due to non-payment is commonly used in electricity as a quality standard for 11 countries. In those countries, the median value for restoration after disconnection has a range between 1 and 8 working days. In two countries (Austria and Sweden), the time for restoration of electricity has to be met in 90% of cases. In 4 countries (Czech Republic, Portugal, Hungary and Italy), it has to be met in 100% of cases. This is one of the most prevalently used indicators with a small (short) expected value.



The time should be measured from when the customer's notice of payment arrives.

Some countries may install prepayment meters for customers after non-payment experiences. The recommendation is also applicable when alternative meters (such as prepaid meters) are to be installed due to non-payment.

In some countries, the customers' internal gas installation should also meet the relevant security checks according to national regulation. The time limit to reactivate the supply is not applicable when the gas customer's installation does not meet the safety or security checks that may be applicable according to the national regulation.

3.5. Planned energy supply interruptions¹⁹

When the DSO carries out planned maintenance work from time to time it may need to interrupt the energy supply. In the case of a planned interruption, the DSO should provide customers with advance information on the date of the planned interruption, the expected duration of the interruption and the reason why supply needs to be interrupted.

It should be noted that quality levels regarding the continuity of energy supply (which may include compensation to affected customers for unplanned interruptions) are not treated in this document.

The effect of planned interruptions on customers varies depending on the type of customer, moment of occurrence of the interruption (e.g. day or night), interruption duration, frequency of occurrence, customer's geographic location, etc.

The aim of notifying a customer about an interruption in advance is to give the customer the possibility to implement proper measures in order to reduce the negative consequences of the supply interruption.

3.5.1. **Minimum notice period for a planned supply interruptions**

The notification of planned supply interruption is the time period between the customer's receipt of the notice of a planned interruption and the beginning of the planned interruption.

Recommendation 10: In case of planned supply interruptions, the customer should be notified at least one week in advance. If the information is sent more than one week in advance, the customer should receive a reminder one week in advance.

¹⁹ Reference to CEER's 5th Benchmarking Report:

The time for giving information in advance is commonly used in electricity as a quality standard for 13 countries. In those countries, the median value for giving customers information is around 2 days, with a range between 1 and 15 days. Hungary and the Czech Republic are above average, with their 15-day notification requirement. Countries that are below average or average are Austria, Estonia, Finland, the Netherlands, Slovenia and Spain. In five countries (Great Britain, Hungary, Ireland, Slovenia and Spain), this service has to be met in 100% of cases. Some countries have placed additional obligations for vulnerable customers in the event of planned interruptions, like the need to provide alternate heating facilities (Great Britain).



3.5.2. **Maximum duration of a planned supply interruption**

The maximum duration of a planned supply interruption is the time period between the interruption of supply and the reactivation of supply.

When the DSO executes planned supply interruptions, the maintenance works should be completed as quickly and efficiently as possible, thus avoiding a long duration of interruption for the customers.

Recommendation 11: The maximum duration of a planned supply interruption should be as short as possible but should not exceed six hours for electricity and twelve hours for gas.

3.6. Provision of information during unplanned energy supply interruptions

An unplanned interruption is an interruption about which the customer has not been informed in advance.

In general, unplanned interruptions are concerned with the continuity of supply and isare a key issue in terms of quality parameters. When a supply disturbance occurs, the DSO has to work to rectify the problem as soon as possible, and the customer should be informed of the estimated duration of the interruption through a variety of channels (e.g. telephone services and webpages).

For the purposes of this recommendation, it does not incorporate technical aspects or quality parameters of continuity of supply. However, the customer information that a DSO should provide during and after an unplanned energy supply interruption is an important aspect of commercial quality.

A recommendation on “Alert in case of non-notified interruption”²⁰ was also included in the CEER GGP on Regulatory Aspects of Smart Metering for Electricity and Gas (2011).

3.6.1. **Provision of information to customers during an unplanned supply interruption**

The provision of information to the customer during an unplanned supply interruption covers the start of the supply interruption and the availability of the information for the customer.

²⁰ [ERREG GGP on Regulatory Aspects of Smart Metering for Electricity and Gas:](#)

Recommendation E 10. Alert in case of non-notified interruption: If a customer so chooses, he/she can receive immediate information on non-notified energy interruptions at his/her connection point (e.g. by sms), and thus act upon it. This will help minimise the extent of the damage resulting from an outage when the customer is away from the home. This information will also help the customer when claiming for reimbursement because of outages. This information could be subject to a reasonable fee.



Recommendation 12: In the case of an unplanned interruption of the energy supply, the DSO should provide continuously updated information on when it estimates that the supply will be reactivated. This information should be made available to the customer through a variety of channels, including via telephone and DSO websites. On the basis of customer demand, updated information should also be provided through text message (SMS) or e-mail.

3.7. Provision of information to the customer regarding connection, activation and disconnection

3.7.1. Provision of information provision to the customer on connection, activation and disconnection services

The European Commission's 2010 study on retail energy markets²¹ found that many customers are poorly informed about the energy market. Having a single point of contact²² and providing neutral and objective information about the procedure for contracting DSO services is therefore important. It may also be reasonable that each DSO itself provides customers with information regarding DSO services on connection and disconnection, and customers rights related to those services. The information may be communicated through several means.

Recommendation 13: The DSO and other relevant stakeholders should provide customers with information regarding connection, activation, disconnection and customer rights related to these. This information should be easily accessible and presented in a clear, user-friendly and comprehensible way.

3.7.2. Customer communication channels²³

Effective communication with the customer is supported by a good communication interface with the relevant market player and in some cases between the market players.

²¹ The functioning of retail electricity markets for European Union customers, Final Report 2010. European Commission Staff Working Paper, Ref SEC(2010) 1409 final.

²² Directive 2009/72/EC, Art. 3 par. 12: "Member States shall ensure the provision of single points of contact to provide consumers with all necessary information concerning their rights, current legislation and the means of dispute settlement available to them in the event of a dispute. Such contact points may be part of general consumer information points."

²³ Reference to CEER's 5th Benchmarking Report:

The most developed area for standards traditionally relates to replying to customer letters (contact in writing). In addition, in some countries the customer contact between suppliers or DSOs and customers implies customer service through calls (the number of which is considerably higher than that of the contacts in writing) and customers' personal visits to customer centres. The latter is expected to be the highest quality level service. Some examples: France monitors the ratio of the number of calls answered/number of calls received as a quality indicator for DSO services. Portugal DSOs have an overall standard for phone calls to call centers and visits to customer centres with a maximum waiting time (60 seconds for call centres and 20 minutes for customer centres). In Great Britain, the number of unsuccessful calls each DSO receives during a service interruption will be taken into account in determining their overall level of performance.



The recommendation refers to every-day/ordinary communication about connection, activation and disconnection, not to emergency situations.

Recommendation 14: The DSO or other relevant stakeholders should provide easily accessible customer communication on issues concerning connection, activation and disconnection through multiple channels, including at least two of the following: website, call centre, telephone, e-mail or text message (SMS).

3.7.3. *Response time for customer enquiries concerning connection/disconnection*²⁴

A customer enquiry could be defined as follows: *A request for information or advice, other than a complaint, made by a customer to a complaint handling body, a service provider or any organisation delivering information to customers (e.g. single point of contact).* This definition was set out in ERGEG's recommendations on complaint handling.²⁵

If a customer makes an enquiry to a DSO, the DSO should respond substantively to the enquiry in a reasonable period of time. Since an enquiry is an explicit request for information or advice, the recommendation below is not a repeat or copy of the previous recommendations.

Recommendation 15: The response time for a customer enquiry (not covered by the other recommendations) to a DSO or other relevant market player regarding connection, activation and disconnection procedures should not exceed two working days.

3.8. Safety measures and customers guides

Electricity and gas bring benefits to millions of people, but they also must be treated with care and respect. The technical safety of employees, customers and the public is crucial. Customer access to information on safety measures could be of importance. This information can be provided in several ways and through a variety of channels. The information is not meant to encourage customers to make the installations themselves.

²⁴ Reference to CEER's 5th Benchmarking Report:

The data on the average performance time in response to customer complaints and enquiries in years between 2008 and 2010 clearly shows that although the performance of DSOs and universal service providers/suppliers is different in responding countries, customers receive a response to their queries within an average of 15 days. In Portugal, the average response time to customer enquiries in 2010 – 0.46 days for the DSOs – is very low because not only written enquiries but also all the phone enquiries (which are usually answered immediately or later in the same day) are considered. The average response time to customer complaints in 2010 was 8.5 days for DSOs.

²⁵ [ERREG GGP on Customer Complaint Handling, Reporting and Classification, Ref: E10-CEM-33-05](#). This document includes 15 recommendations on complaint handling, as well as a proposal for complaints classification.



3.8.1. ***Providing information to customers on correct installation handling***

The DSO could, for example, provide the customer with a guide designed to assist safety for the correct gas and electricity installation handling (not including gas or electricity appliances) with the objective of educating customers. The guide may include, as an example, the procedures to follow in the case of an electricity or gas emergency, and the relevant telephone numbers to use. This guide could be sent by mail or e-mail, published on the DSO website, given in person, etc.

As part of maintaining safety, some DSOs have the obligation to perform a safety inspection of the gas installation at the customer's premises every 4-5 years. The process of a natural gas inspection by the DSO consists of checking three main safety aspects:

- Check an installation for gas leaks.
- Check that the gas installation has correct ventilation and correct evacuating exhaust of combustion product.
- Check that the gas installation has the correct boiler combustion (without production of carbon monoxide).

In other countries, DSOs are required to develop a survey to measure carbon monoxide awareness in gas.

Recommendation 16: The customer has the right to easily accessible information on correct installation handling, including safety measures, for gas/electricity installations. Access shall be available via website, e-mail and by post.



Annex 1 – CEER

The Council of European Energy Regulators (CEER) is the voice of Europe's national regulators of electricity and gas at EU and international level. Through CEER, a not-for-profit association, the national regulators cooperate and exchange best practice within and beyond Europe's borders. CEER includes national regulatory authorities from 33 European countries (the EU-28, Iceland, Norway, Switzerland, FYROM, Montenegro and growing).

One of CEER's key objectives is to facilitate the creation of a single, competitive, efficient and sustainable EU internal energy market that works in the public interest. More specifically, CEER is committed to placing consumers at the core of EU energy policy. CEER believes that a competitive and secure EU single energy market is not a goal in itself, but should deliver benefits for energy consumers.

CEER works closely with (and supports) the Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators (ACER). ACER, which has its seat in Ljubljana, is an EU Agency with its own staff and resources. CEER, based in Brussels, deals with many complementary (and not overlapping) issues to ACER's work such as international issues, smart grids, sustainability and customer issues. European energy regulators are committed to a complementary approach to energy regulation in Europe, with the Agency primarily focusing on its statutory tasks related to EU cross-border market development and oversight, with CEER pursuing several broader issues, including international and customer policies.

The work of CEER is structured according to a number of working groups and task forces, composed of staff members of the national energy regulatory authorities, and supported by the CEER Secretariat.

This Advice was prepared by the Retail Market Functioning Task Force of the Customers and Retail Markets Working Group.



Annex 2 – List of abbreviations

Term	Definition
ACER	Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators
BEUC	The European Consumer Organization
CEER	Council of European Energy Regulators
CRM WG	Customer and Retail Market Working Group
DSO	Distribution System Operator
EC	European Commission
ERGEG	European Regulators' Group for Electricity and Gas
EU	European Union
GS	Guaranteed Standards
NRA	National Regulatory Authority
OS	Overall Standards
RMF TF	Retail Market Functioning Task Force
TSO	Transmission System Operators
USP	Universal Service Provider



Annex 3 – Glossary of Terms

The descriptions of terms listed here serve to provide a common understanding of the different subjects and apply to the issues addressed in this document. For any other issue of general importance or of common understanding, please refer to the definitions in the existing legal framework, including (EC) 2009/72 and (EC) 2009/73. Some differences with definitions already in use in other situations and/or specifications might be possible.

Activation of energy supply: the action of starting the delivery of energy supply. Connection of a customer and service activation can be done at the same time.

Connection: the action of connecting a gas or electricity installation to the network, leaving the installation ready for service activation. Depending on the circumstances and the national regulation, connection of a new customer may involve *minor work*.

Connections with major works: connections to the grid that require more than one day of work at the customer's premises. This may be the case for connections that require works in the street or administrative authorization.

Connections with minor works: a connection that requires no more than one day of work at the customer's premises. This is usually the case when the gas or electricity installation is already in place at the customer premises. However, depending on the circumstances and national regulation, connection of a new customer may involve several types of works, for example:

- Checking the documentation
- Installing or checking the meter
- Installing or checking the Power Control Switch
- Checking the security of the installation
- Checking the compliance of the installation to the technical regulation

Connection point: point in the network at which the grid user installation is to be connected; this point is defined and agreed upon by the TSO or DSO and grid user.

Customer: Where this report refers to customers they are to be understood as household customers.

Disconnection: the action of interrupting the delivery of energy supply. A disconnection can be done for example upon customer request or after a non-payment. This could include the action of removing a physical connection of a gas or electricity installation to the network.

Distribution System Operator: a natural or legal person responsible for operating, ensuring the maintenance of and, if necessary, developing the distribution system in a given area and, where applicable, its interconnections with other systems and for ensuring the long-term ability of the system to meet reasonable demands for the distribution of electricity or gas.



Household customer: means a customer purchasing gas or electricity for his own household consumption, excluding commercial or professional activities.