

Joint Statement on Energy Poverty and Energy Pollution



Introduction

29% of Irish households are now estimated to be living in energy poverty, the highest number ever recorded.¹ Average household energy bills have increased by €1100 in one year. The rising costs of energy prices continues to disproportionately impact households in the bottom 20% of the income distribution who spend a larger percentage of their income on energy². This situation has the potential to deteriorate further during the coming winter. The ESRI have estimated that if energy prices were to increase by an additional 25%, it would drive 43% of all Irish households into energy poverty³.

It has never been clearer that the rapid decarbonisation of the Irish economy and society is an economic and social imperative as well as a moral and environmental one. Ireland does not currently have sufficient safeguards to protect against further price volatility as a result of the heavy role of polluting fossil fuels in home heating and in Ireland's energy mix. Ireland must also reduce emissions by 51% by 2030.

The civil society organisations who support this joint statement believe that current Government measures do not go far enough to support households and families most impacted by the energy crisis. Urgent action is now needed across Government in advance of next winter.

We call on Government to support the following measures:

1. Cost of Living:

- Increase rates of all core social welfare payments by at least €20 per week.
- Pay all social welfare recipients a Christmas Bonus-style double welfare payment, before the end of October at the latest.⁴
- Introduce a cost of disability payment of €20 per week.
- Introduce a system of [Refundable Tax Credits](#), allowing low income workers who do not earn enough to use their full credit to have the unused portion “refunded”, supporting their ability to deal with increasing living costs.⁵
- Raise the Increases for Qualified Children (IQCs) payment by €7 for children under 12, and €12 for children aged 12 and over.⁶

Energy Bills and Energy Poverty Response

Target support to those most affected by rising fuel costs.

- Extend the existing moratorium on disconnections during winter months to a full ban on disconnections until at least Spring 2023.⁷
- Double the Fuel Allowance rate from €33 to €66.⁸
- Widen eligibility for the Fuel Allowance by including those receiving Working Family Payment,⁹ removing the waiting period for those on Jobseekers, expanding eligibility to cover the specific living arrangements of Traveller families,¹⁰ and making it available to people on modest incomes in poorly insulated homes.¹¹ A partial-rate Fuel Allowance payment should be available so it is not all-or-nothing for people just outside the eligibility criteria.
- Introduce an [Energy Guarantee Scheme](#) for people in poorly insulated homes & those on low incomes. This payment should be indexed to the current cost of energy required to keep a person’s home warm based on a set quantity of units (kWh).¹² The transition to an Energy Guarantee Scheme could be progressed by modifying the Fuel Allowance as outlined above.
- Introduce a one-off tax on energy companies that have seen high and increasing profits as a result of the energy price crisis. Recycle this tax revenue to assist consumers to offset higher energy bills.^{13 14}
- Require energy suppliers to reduce standing charges on energy bills and automatically allocate existing customers to the lowest tariff rather than only new customers.¹⁵
- Update the expired Energy Poverty Strategy by immediately convening stakeholders to develop a renewed strategy. This should include requirements for up-to-date data on energy poverty to be collected and reported regularly and targets for energy poverty reduction.
- Many Traveller families did not receive the €200 electricity credit in April 2022. This credit should be applied immediately to Traveller families living on halting sites, sharing accommodation in group housing schemes, and/or living adjacent to the main home

Energy Efficiency:

Prioritise worst-performing buildings and low-income/energy poor households in national retrofitting efforts.

- Increase targets and prioritise deep retrofits and solar PV for local authority-owned social housing this year with a view to retrofitting all social housing to a B2 standard by 2030.
- The [Warmer Homes scheme](#) (free energy upgrades) should be expanded to include properties in the private rented sector if the tenant is receiving the Housing Assistance Payment. However, eligibility should be contingent on the landlord providing a long-term lease to the tenant.¹⁶
- Increase the [individual grants](#) available for low-cost, low-hassle improvements, such as cavity wall and attic insulation, from 80% to 100% for those at risk or suffering from fuel poverty.
- The Government should explore a sliding scale of grants and low-cost loans for deep retrofits based on an income assessment such that lower income households could avail of close to full funding for deep retrofit.¹⁷
- Deploy Local Community Energy Advisors throughout every local authority as well as community organised support programmes to engage and inform hard to reach energy users who would most benefit from energy efficiency upgrades.¹⁸ Convene stakeholders immediately to advise on this process.
- Target energy poverty in rural areas by setting up a dedicated retrofitting programme for households solely relying on solid fuel heating systems.¹⁹
- Commence preparation of a tailored retrofit plan for the private rented sector with clear milestones, targets and funding. Also introduce new grants for deep retrofits for landlords in the private rental sector on the condition that long-term leases are offered to tenants.²⁰
- Currently, Travellers in mobile homes cannot avail of any energy upgrades or SEAI grants, despite 77% of Travellers living in energy poverty before the current energy crisis began. SEAI support should extend to providing solar PV on year-round occupied mobile homes.²¹
- The current caravan loan scheme for Travellers should be replaced with a new caravan rental scheme to ensure mobile homes are built to a residential standard in terms of heating and insulation, with a rating system similar to BER being adopted.
- Cease installation of fossil fuel boilers in homes receiving energy upgrades as part of the Warmer Homes Scheme where possible, ensuring priority retrofitting and installation of heat pumps in the first instance. In order to prevent fossil fuel lock-in and prioritise rollout of deep retrofits, ban the installation of oil and gas boilers in new homes this year, with no fossil fuel-based boilers installed in renovated buildings by 2025 at the latest.²²
- Increase SEAI resources to collaborate with organisations who work with those at risk of fuel poverty to coordinate promotion of the Warmer Homes Scheme and support uptake with wraparound services for participating households.

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