

September 2022

Dear Minister,

We, the undersigned organisations, are writing to you as we are increasingly concerned about the impact of the energy price crisis on households and communities in Ireland. We are jointly calling on Government to introduce specific tailored measures and supports as soon as possible and have summarised these below.

These measures are necessary as the context for energy customers has fundamentally deteriorated. 43% 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 energy. This situation has the potential to worsen further during the coming winter.

[1] ESRI (2022), Energy Poverty and Deprivation in Ireland
https://www.esri.ie/news/energy-poverty-at-highest-recorded-rate

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 undersigned civil society organisations 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 winter.

We call on Government to support the following measures:

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.
- 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.
- Raise the Increases for Qualified Children (IQCs) payment by €7 for children under 12, and €12 for children aged 12 and over.

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.
- Double the Fuel Allowance rate from €33 to €66.
- Widen eligibility for the Fuel Allowance by including those receiving Working Family Payment removing the waiting period for those on Jobseekers, expanding eligibility to cover the specific living arrangements of Traveller families, and making it available to people on modest incomes in poorly insulated homes. 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). 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.

- Require energy suppliers to reduce standing charges on energy bills and automatically allocate existing customers to the lowest tariff rather than only new customers.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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. 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

- 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.

Yours,

Afri	Afri
Age Action	Age Action Age Equality
An Taisce	An Taisce The National Trust for Ireland
BirdWatch Ireland	BirdWatchIreland protecting birds and biodiversity
Chime	Chime The National Charity for Deafness and Hearing Loss
Clare Public Participation Network	Clare Public Participation Network

Coastwatch	Coastwatch
Community Law & Mediation	Community Law & Mediation
Community Work Ireland	Community Work Ireland
Cork Environmental Forum	Cork Environmental Forum
Cyclist.ie, The Irish Cycling Advocacy Network	cyclist.ie the Irish Cycling Advocacy Network
Development Perspectives	development dp perspectives
Disability Federation of Ireland	dfi DISABILITY FEDERATION OF IRELAND

Dublin City PPN	Líonra Rannpháirtíochta Pobail Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath / Dublin City Public Participation Network
Dublin Friends of the Earth	Dublin Friends of the Earth
European Anti-Poverty Network Ireland	EAPN Ireland
Feasta: the Foundation for the Economics of Sustainability	feasta
Friends of the Earth Ireland	Friends of the Earth
Good Energies Alliance Ireland	GEAI Good Energies Alliance Ireland

International Presentation Association	
Irish Doctors for the Environment	
Irish Global Health Network	
Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed	
Irish Rural Link	
Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice	
Leave No Trace Ireland	

Mental Health Reform	Mental Health Reform Promoting Improved Mental Health Services
National Traveller MABS	National Traveller mabs Money Advice & Budgeting Service
National Women's Council	nwc National Women's Council
NCBI	NCBI Working for People with Sight Loss
Not Here Not Anywhere	NOT HERE NOT ANYWHERE FOR A FOSSIL FREE FUTURE
Oxfam Ireland	OXFAM Ireland

Pavee Point	PAVEE POINT TRAVELLER AND ROMA CENTRE
ShamrockSpring	
Social Justice Ireland	SOCIAL JUSTICE IRELAND working to build a just society
Sonairte	Sonairte Visitor Eco-Centre and Gardens
TASC	tasc Think-tank for action on social change
The Climate and Health Alliance	Climate+Health Alliance
The Irish Heart Foundation	Irish Heart Foundation

The Organic Centre	
Threshold	
UNICEF Ireland	
VOICE	
Zero Waste Alliance Ireland	
Monthly Cycles	