



# LIVING IN ENERGY POVERTY



**SENATOR LYNN BOYLAN**

Sinn Féin Climate Justice Spokesperson

## Do you need emotional help?

If you are worried about keeping the lights on or keeping your home warm, please know you are not alone. It is ok not to be ok. Please reach out and talk to someone you trust. You can also contact the Samaritans on 116 123 or Pieta House on 1800 247 247

## Do you need help with money issues or negotiating with organisations you owe money to?

You can seek financial advice and support confidentially from MABS (the Money Advice & Budgeting Service) through their helpline 0761072000.

Alternatively, your local SVP may offer help

## Do you need help saving energy?

MABS has provided some advice on how to save energy around the home [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

You may qualify for the SEAI's Better Energy Warmer Homes Scheme. For more information, visit [Citizen's Information](#) or the [SEAI](#) website.



## Foreword

Keeping warm is a basic human need. For some, it is a luxury beyond their reach. There are people going without heating on cold days because they cannot afford it. Others are filled with dread at the sight of an electricity or gas bill. In order to stay warm bills are bounced around and cutbacks are made on basics like food. This is energy poverty.

We are already feeling the impacts of climate change. However, the effects are not being felt equally across society. People who are experiencing poverty, social exclusion or inequality are feeling it the most. It is generally the people and the communities who bear the least responsibility for the changing climate that are least able to adapt to the new (ab)normal. If we are to have a just transition away from fossil fuels, then we must address energy poverty.

I am very grateful to the almost 300 people who took the time to take the Sinn Féin Cost of Energy Survey online survey. I am especially thankful to those who shared their own personal experience of living with energy poverty. The survey was carried out in November and December. The objective was to learn how people experience energy poverty.

Details about the methodology and respondents are visible on the next page. Next the key findings are highlighted. Then a more detailed breakdown of the survey results is presented before, finally, the open answer responses are set out.

The results reveal just how severe the struggle to cope with the cost of energy is. Their responses go a small way to highlighting the real-life impact of energy poverty – the stress, the hardship, and deprivation that it causes to families right across the country.

Too many people are being left in the cold. Is this the best our country can do?

One of the primary drivers of energy poverty is high energy prices.<sup>1</sup> People in Ireland are burdened by some of the highest electricity costs in Europe. People cannot meet their basic energy needs for staying warm, cooking and washing. Meanwhile the government advice is to reduce consumption and shop around for lower prices.

Sinn Féin believes more should be done to tackle high energy prices. Our most vulnerable people are being left exposed to the ravages of the free market for too long. The state must do more to intervene. To that end, Sinn Féin will be launching a policy document focused on reducing energy prices in 2021.

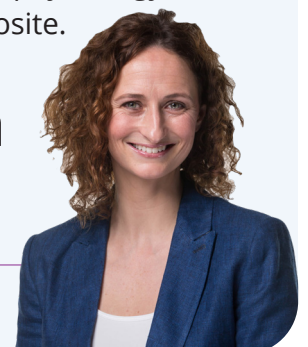
The insights gained through this survey allow us to understand the real life struggles of ordinary families and the measures they are forced to take just to get by. Sinn Féin is committed to addressing the cost of living. I am determined to represent the people who responded to this survey by continuing to push the Government to keep energy poverty on the agenda, and to put forward sensible, workable policies.

Finally, if you find yourself in a crisis with your mental health or your ability to pay energy bills, please know you are not alone. Find the resources included on the page opposite.



**Senator Lynn Boylan**

Sinn Féin Climate Justice Spokesperson



<sup>1</sup> Gretta Mohan, Young, poor, and sick: The public health threat of energy poverty for children in Ireland, Energy Research & Social Science, Volume 71, 2021.

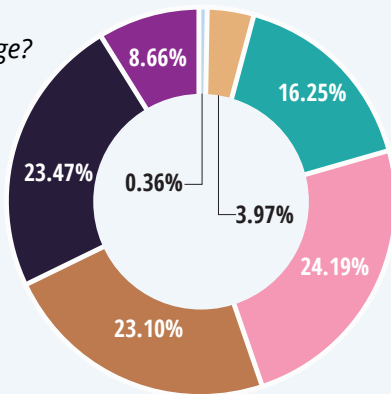
# Research Methodology

The survey was conducted online among nearly 300 respondents (n=291) open for response between October 26th and December 14th 2020. It was published on the social media channels of Senator Lynn Boylan, the Sinn Féin party, and other Sinn Féin representatives. The questions were modified from previous research. In questions where multiple answers were relevant, respondents could pick multiple answers. Therefore, on these occasions those results will come to more than 100 if added up.

## Age

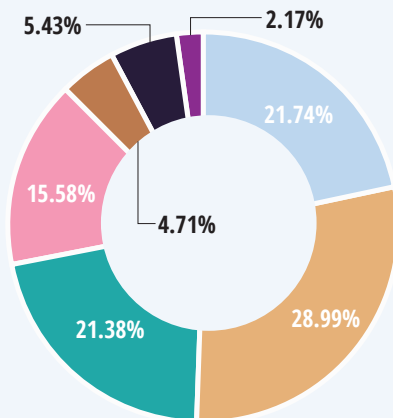
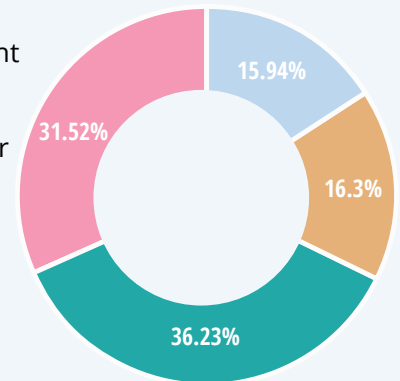
What is your age?

- Under 18
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65+



## Region

- Ulster/Connacht
- Munster
- Rest of Leinster
- Dublin



## Home ownership status

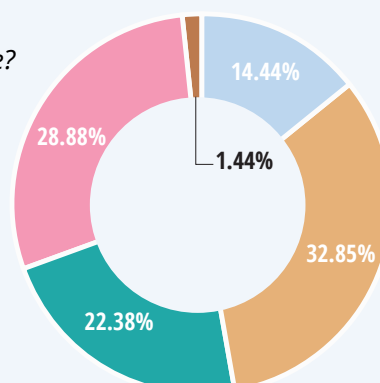
Which option best describes your living situation?

- I own my home outright
- I'm paying a mortgage
- I'm renting from a private landlord
- I'm renting from a council
- I'm renting from a housing association
- Living at home (Have moved back/have not moved out)
- Other (please specify)

## Type of home

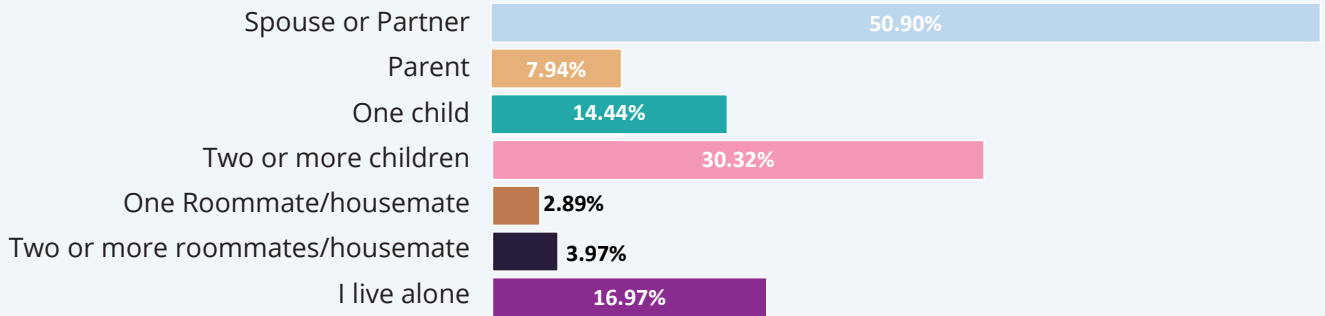
Which option best describes your home?

- An apartment/flat
- A semi-detached house
- A terraced house
- A detached house
- Other (please specify)



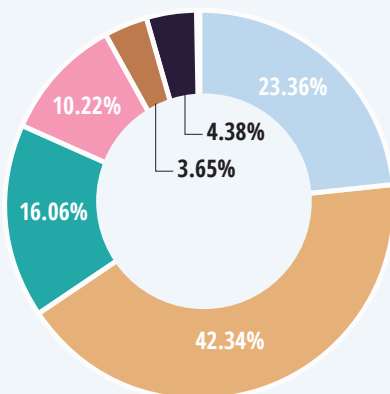
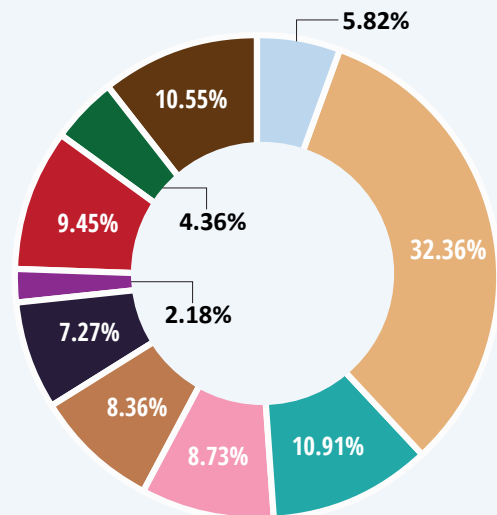


## Household members



## Employment status

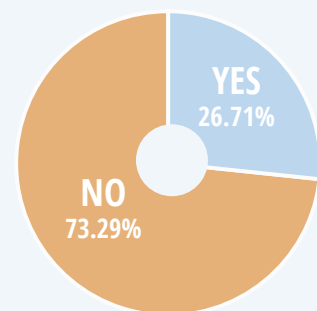
- Self employed
- Employed full time
- Employed part time
- Looking after the home or family
- Permanently retired from work
- Unemployed and seeking work
- At school
- Permanently sick or disabled
- Unable to work due to short-term illness or injury
- Other (please specify)



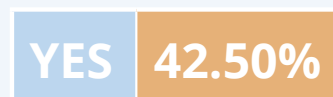
## Personal Income

- Less than €10,000
- Between €10,000 and €25,000
- Between €25,000 and €35,000
- Between €35,000 and €45,000
- Between €45,000 and €55,000
- More than €55,000

## Fuel Allowance



I have cut expenditure in other areas to afford energy costs



# Key Findings

## 1. Many are struggling to keep warm

Almost two thirds (64%) of respondents said it was difficult to afford fuel to heat their home. Only a quarter (27%) of people said their heating keeps them warm in the winter months. The majority (51%) are worried about the costs of energy.

*“I dread winter every year”*

## 2. There are some groups that are struggling badly

### ■ RENTERS:

Those paying mortgages are twice as likely to say their heating does keep them warm compared to people renting from (36% vs 17%). Those renters are three times more likely to say their heating never keeps them warm in winter compared to mortgage payers (27% vs 9%).

*“Our rental property does not retain heat”*

### ■ THOSE ON LOW INCOMES:

In terms of income, poorer people are less likely to say their heating always kept them warm enough. Of those who make less €35,000, only 22% said their heating was always warm enough in the winter. The figure rose to 47% for those making more than €35,000.

### ■ PEOPLE ON AVERAGE INCOMES:

Notably, those making €25,000-€35,000 were struggling a similar amount to people who earn less.

*“We earn too much for allowance, but don't earn enough not to worry”*

### ■ PEOPLE LIVING WITH DISABILITIES AND THEIR CARERS

One in eight live with someone who has had bad health because the home is too cold. Sometimes they have extra costs:

*“Our oldest adult offspring is disabled, and has very poor circulation - therefore we tend to have the house temperature, especially in her bedroom and bathroom, set quite high”*

### 3. Many can't afford energy costs

Almost half of respondents (47%) go without heat or electricity because of the cost some of the time. One in eight (13%) always go without heating or electricity.

Four in 10 people (42%) have cut expenditure elsewhere in their budget to afford energy.

#### ■ FOR SOME, IT'S A MATTER OF CUTTING BACK

*"It might mean skimping on food or putting off buying needed clothes for the kids till the following month"*

#### ■ FOR OTHERS, IT'S A MATTER OF GOING WITHOUT

Simply cutting back won't be enough to make ends meet. They are forced to go without basics.

*"We either go cold or go hungry"*

*"We can only heat our home for 3 days a week if we want to eat"*

### 4. They are going to extreme lengths to cover energy bills

Other than cutting back on necessities, they're taking other measures.

*"I ended up getting a high-cost loan to afford oil"*

*"I'm borrowing money to pay for fuel. It's hard to repay the loans"*

*"Just to live we sell our valuables"*

#### ■ OTHERS ARE CONSIDERING DROPPING OUT OF COLLEGE

*"Because of this I am struggling financially and am counting on a part-time job to fund rent, fuel, bills, and college fees. I know a lot of students like this. I especially have pondered and still am thinking about dropping out of college just so I could get my fees money back to pay my bills, fuel and rent etc"*

## 5. For many, hot water is a luxury, not a necessity

We asked people about affording hot water for cooking and cleaning needs as an indicator of energy poverty.

7% said they could never afford hot water, 58% said only some of the time while 34% said yes, always.

For people who earned below €35,000, only 27% could always afford hot water. This more than doubled for people who earned more than €35,000 to 69%.

For people living with someone who has bad health because of the cold, only 14% always had hot water.

## 6. The emotional toll of energy poverty

Many people talked about the impact energy poverty has on their mental health. Over half of respondents (51%) have been worried about the cost of energy.

### ■ PEOPLE ARE DEPRESSED

*“Being cold makes me feel miserable”*

*“I feel increasingly depressed and abandoned. I’ve worked hard all my life and raised a family. Things seem very unfair”*

### ■ PEOPLE ARE STRESSED

*“I’m afraid if we start to struggle and the school found out, my kids would be taken”*

### ■ PEOPLE ARE AFRAID

*“I’m really worried, and I’m so scared that prices are increasing again”*

### ■ PEOPLE ARE EMBARRASSED

*“It was so cold a few years ago that I would go out in the morning, walk around the country lanes and gather small branches I found. Shameful I know, but needs must sometimes”*

### ■ PEOPLE ARE LOSING HOPE

*“We are crying every night that there will be some light for us but my hope is fading fast”*



## 7. People take to bed to stay warm

Many see spending more time in bed was the only way to stay warm

*“I slept a lot to try and stay warm”*

*“On very cold days I just stay in the bed”*

They recognise the poor mental health consequences of spending more time in bed.

*“I feel like I have to stay in bed all the time as it’s the only warm place, not great considering I already really struggle with my mental health”*

*“I wrap myself in a duvet until it’s an acceptable time to go to bed. Then I can’t sleep and that leads to depression and irritability”*

People are being forced to choose between spending money on staying warm and meeting other basic needs like food and transport.

## 8. The pandemic is making things harder

People are spending more time at home and have to heat their homes for longer.

*“I don’t have central heating, and electricity price hikes are affecting my usage of electric heaters. Working from home is making this harder”*

*“Normally pre-COVID the heating would be off during the day for a few hours while she [our daughter with a disability] was at day services, but we are using much more now”*

## 9. People are very resilient

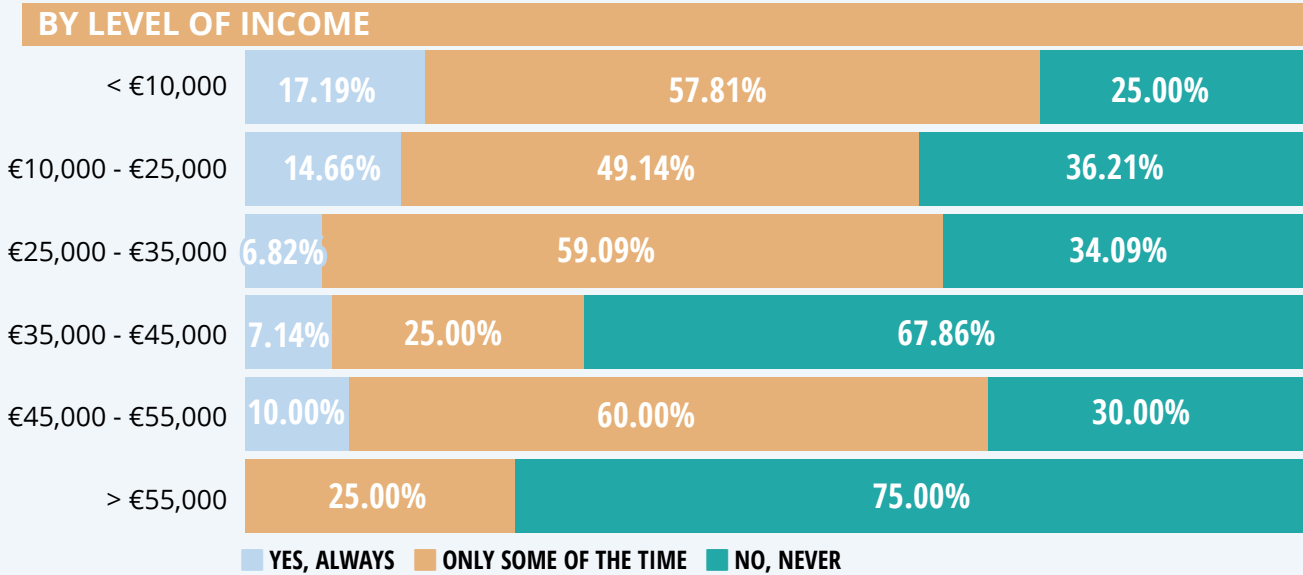
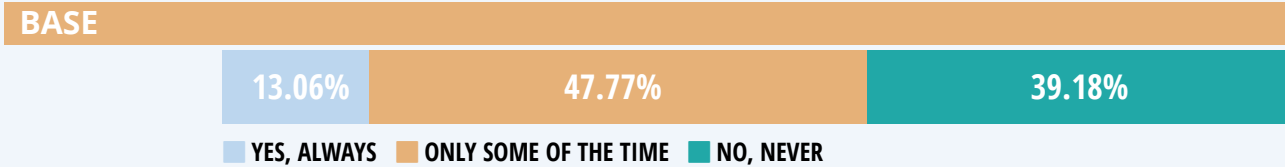
Although there is a pandemic, people are finding creative ways to stay warm

*“I live alone as do some of my friends. We spend alternate days in each other’s houses to spread the cost”*

## 10. Ban disconnections

There is overwhelming support (94%) for a ban on winter disconnections and more action to tackle energy prices

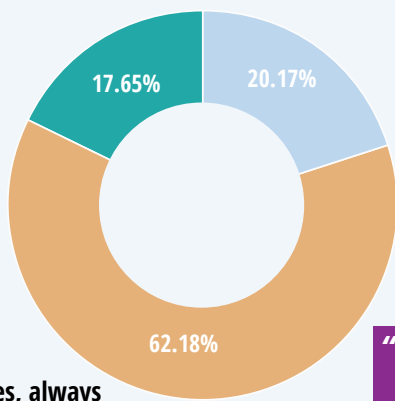
# Do you have to go without heating or electricity due to the cost?



**BY HOME OWNERSHIP STATUS**

Home Ownership Status	YES, ALWAYS	ONLY SOME OF THE TIME	NO, NEVER
Own my home outright	5	31	24
Renting from a private landlord	10	34	15
Renting from a council	8	22	13
Living at home (Have moved back/have not moved out)	1	6	8
Paying a mortgage	7	36	37
Renting from a housing association	3	5	5

Those who selected "I have cut expenditure in other areas to afford energy costs"



- Yes, always
- Only some of the time
- No, never

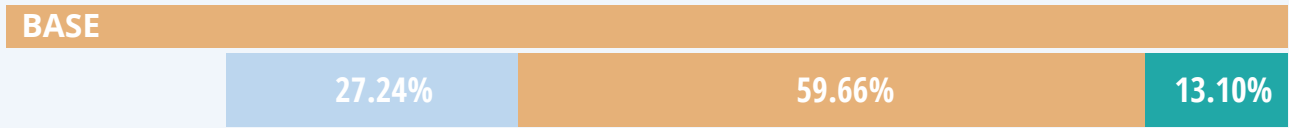
**BY AGE**

Age Group	YES, ALWAYS	ONLY SOME OF THE TIME	NO, NEVER
Under 18	0	1	0
18-24	1	5	5
25-34	6	26	13
35-44	8	28	31
45-54	6	30	28
55-64	9	34	22
65+	4	13	7

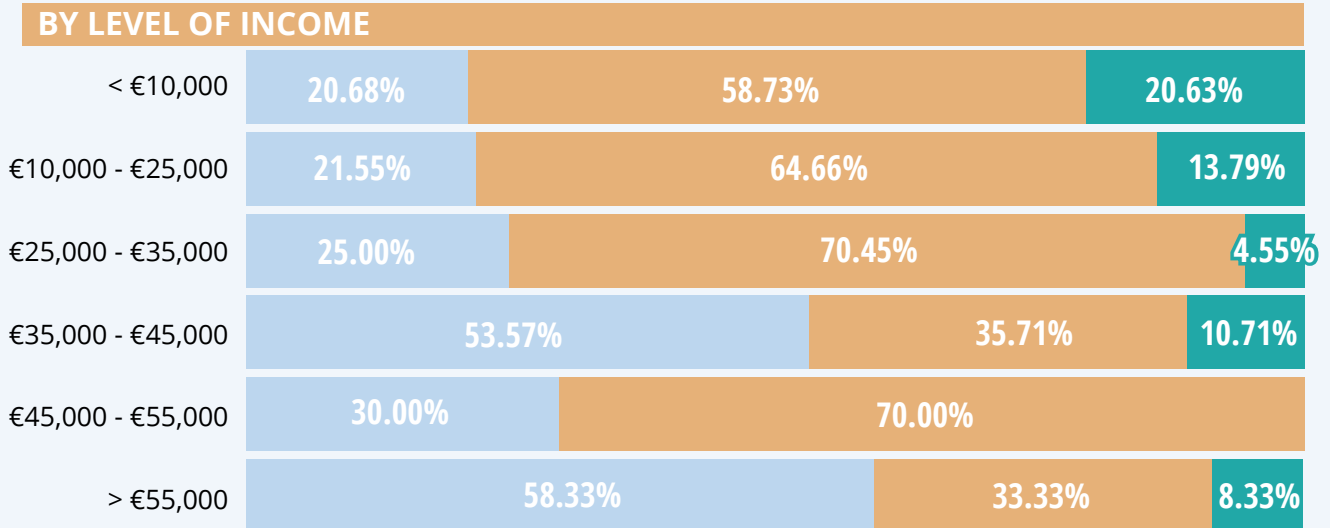
*"Now that my husband has passed away, I cannot afford to pay for oil as much with my heating."*

*"I often need to sit in one room that I can heat and use blankets when necessary. I'm 88yrs old."*

# During the winter months, does your heating keep you warm enough at home?



■ YES, ALWAYS ■ ONLY SOME OF THE TIME ■ NO, NEVER

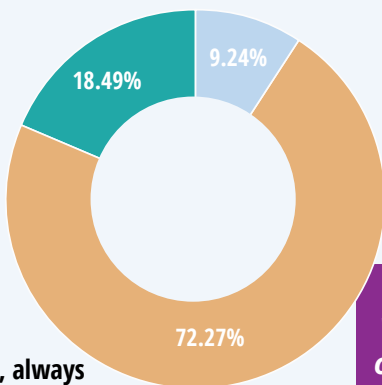


■ YES, ALWAYS ■ ONLY SOME OF THE TIME ■ NO, NEVER

**BY HOME OWNERSHIP STATUS**

Home Ownership Status	YES, ALWAYS	ONLY SOME OF THE TIME	NO, NEVER
Own my home outright	18	38	4
Renting from a private landlord	10	33	16
Renting from a council	9	28	5
Living at home (Have moved back/have not moved out)	2	13	0
Paying a mortgage	29	44	7
Renting from a housing association	4	7	2

Those who selected "I have cut expenditure in other areas to afford energy costs"



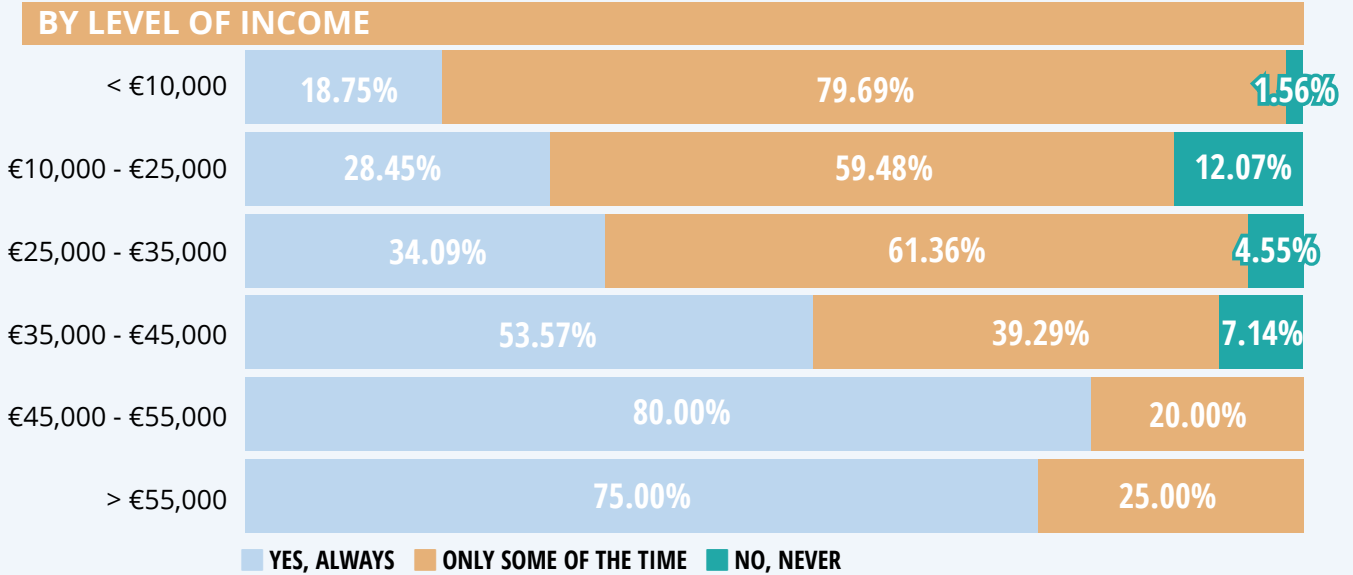
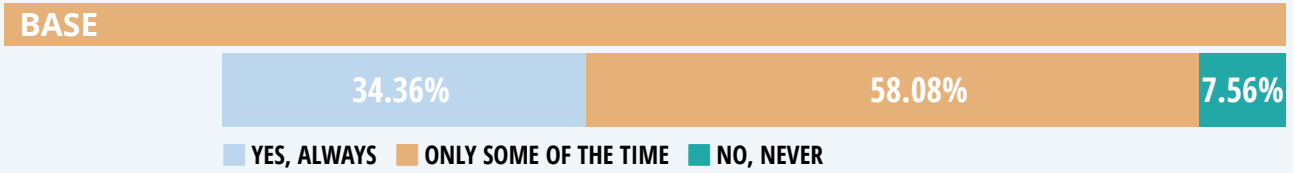
■ Yes, always  
 ■ Only some of the time  
 ■ No, never

**BY AGE**

Age Group	YES, ALWAYS	ONLY SOME OF THE TIME	NO, NEVER
Under 18	0	1	0
18-24	3	7	1
25-34	7	30	8
35-44	22	40	5
45-54	20	35	9
55-64	18	37	9
65+	5	16	3

*"The worst time was on the day the 'Beast from the East' hit where oil was nearly out. We didn't have money for any more oil, and by a twist of fate that same day I got a tax refund and we were able to get some. That fear of facing the storm with no heating and the risk of frozen pipes wasn't nice."*

# Do you feel that you can afford enough fuel/electricity for all your hot-water (e.g. showers, dishes) and cooking needs?



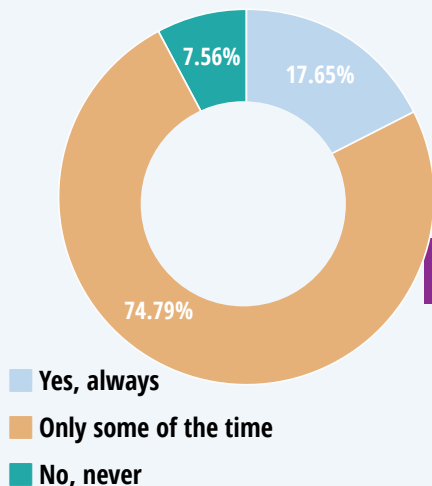
**BY HOME OWNERSHIP STATUS**

Home Ownership Status	YES, ALWAYS	ONLY SOME OF THE TIME	NO, NEVER
Own my home outright	25	31	4
Renting from a private landlord	16	36	7
Renting from a council	5	35	3
Living at home (Have moved back/have not moved out)	8	6	1
Paying a mortgage	34	42	4
Renting from a housing association	3	10	0

**BY AGE**

Age Group	YES, ALWAYS	ONLY SOME OF THE TIME	NO, NEVER
Under 18	0	1	0
18-24	7	4	0
25-34	15	25	5
35-44	25	41	1
45-54	21	36	7
55-64	19	42	4
65+	7	15	2

Those who selected "I have cut expenditure in other areas to afford energy costs"



"I only use gas to heat the water. I had spent summer adding to the gas bill so I'd be ahead in the winter. They used the money for standing charges €280 as I wasn't using the gas."

"We cannot afford oil for our heating and therefore have to keep the fire lit from early in the day even though I know how bad it is for the environment. WE DON'T HAVE HOT WATER BECAUSE of this and our fire doesn't have a back boiler so we just use the electric shower and use the electric dishwasher for our dishes."

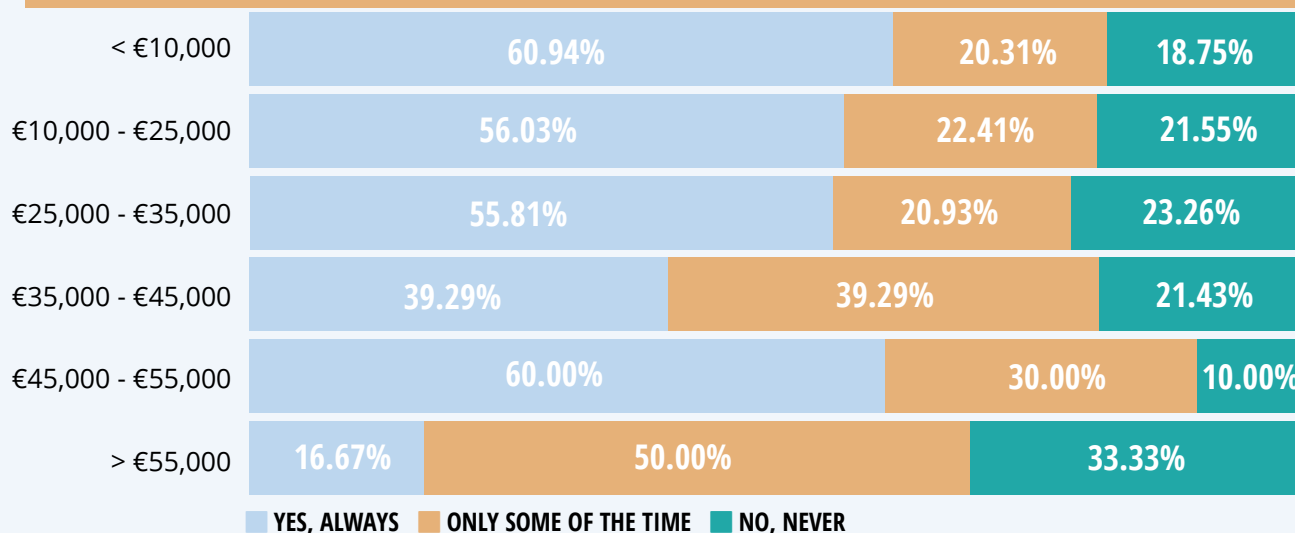
"The hot water takes an hour to heat which drains our electricity meter."

## Will the hikes in electricity prices make you use less electricity?

### BASE



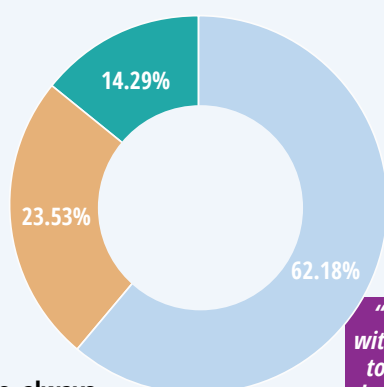
### BY LEVEL OF INCOME



### BY HOME OWNERSHIP STATUS

Home Ownership Status	YES, ALWAYS	ONLY SOME OF THE TIME	NO, NEVER
Own my home outright	39	11	10
Renting from a private landlord	30	18	11
Renting from a council	24	10	8
Living at home (Have moved back/have not moved out)	8	5	2
Paying a mortgage	36	20	24
Renting from a housing association	6	3	4

Those who selected  
"I have cut expenditure in other  
areas to afford energy costs"



- Yes, always
- Only some of the time
- No, never

### BY AGE

Age Group	YES, ALWAYS	ONLY SOME OF THE TIME	NO, NEVER
Under 18	1	0	0
18-24	6	4	1
25-34	20	14	11
35-44	33	24	10
45-54	29	14	20
55-64	43	8	14
65+	16	4	4

"I don't drink or smoke, I don't have friends, I live with and for my kids. I am very careful with money, we waste nothing. But we always struggle to heat the house in winter... I expect to have no electricity in the coming months, which means no heating because I have a back boiler and the pump can't run without electricity. So we will move back into the sitting room and rely on that fire again, which only heats that room. It's worrying, it's hard, it's stressful."

"I'm lucky. I just about cover my bills. It takes the slack summer months to help me catch up. I know people sitting at home wearing 3 jumpers rather than put on the heating"



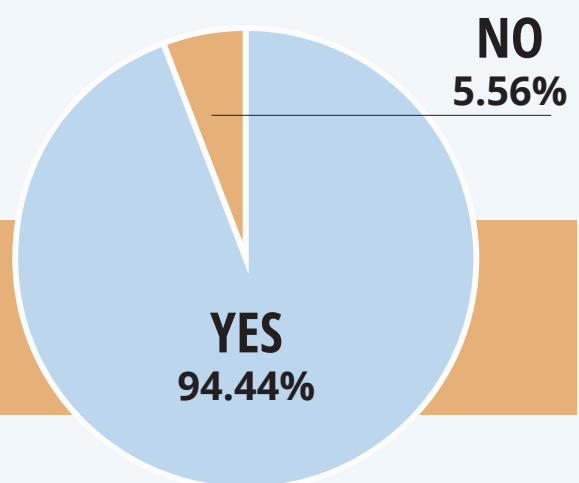
## Other survey responses

### HOW HAS THE COST OF ENERGY IMPACTED YOU?

I have been behind (in arrears) on my energy bill	17.50%
I have switched supplier to get a cheaper price	36.79%
I have been unable to switch supplier due to energy bill debts	3.93%
My electricity has been disconnected due to arrears in bills	3.21%
I (or someone in my house) has had bad health because the home is too cold	12.14%
I have moved to pre paid energy supplier	22.14%
I have been worried about the cost of energy	51.07%
I have cut expenditure in other areas to afford energy costs	42.50%

Electricity bills are going up by €90 in 2020 for two main reasons:

- (a) Companies are raising prices and
- (b) The PSO levy is increasing (a tax on electricity consumers) by more than double.



### WOULD YOU SUPPORT AN ELECTRICITY PRICE FREEZE AND A DISCONNECTION BAN DURING THE PANDEMIC?

### WHICH OF THESE THINGS, IF ANY, MAKE IT DIFFICULT TO HEAT YOUR HOME?

It is difficult to afford fuel to heat my home	63.57%
It is difficult to heat my home because of poor insulation, draughty, etc.	55.36%

# Quotes. How do people manage?

For some, turning on the heat is only a matter of flicking a switch when you feel a chill. For others, the decision to turn on the heating has to be balanced against their ability to pay the bills, taxing their car or affording food.

## BY CUTTING BACK ON FOOD, TRANSPORT AND OTHER NECESSITIES:

I have sometimes cut back in the past on things like food (buying cheap not healthy) and also Christmas presents to keep us warm.

Our family home is in rural Ireland. Fuel Poverty has always been a reality and throughout the winter period we have had to choose between paying for fuel and other essential purchases such as food. A further increase in Energy Costs would severely impact our family.

The cost is the problem. I am constantly watch the bank account to make sure the bills get paid and if that means going without something else, so be it.

I can't afford the price of electricity and heating oil. I have to cut back on food to pay for it.

I dread winter every year. I live in an old building that has no insulation and no heating in the bedroom or bathroom. I have to use plug-in heaters to stay warm and they are so expensive that most of the time I just have to put up with the cold. I am an artist and work a CE scheme to pay bills. The cost of living keeps going up and I have to prioritise eating over heat.

I cut back on my food bill or car tax, or I bounce the bills around so that way there is heating.

We wear jumpers and jackets because we can only heat our home for 3 days a week if we want to eat.

It means we have to cut back in other areas. We don't buy clothes. We cut back on food.

**It doesn't impact myself as much as it would my other family members. Older family or people more prone to illness really suffer from the cold. Heating is important but it can't be at a cost to all the other needs we have to pay for.**

**To keep my home warm I try to afford getting stick, coal, and oil for a few months while also trying to pay bills and groceries each week.**

**We either go cold or go hungry.**

**I can afford to heat my home, but it will be at the expense of something else. It might mean skimping on food or putting off buying needed clothes for the kids till the following month.**

**I am relying on portable gas heaters and electric blankets. I cannot use one bedroom during winter. I end up cutting back on food to pay electricity. I cannot afford oil to heat water, and limit baths to once a week. Due to house being draughty, it's a waste of money to use oil. I depend on solid fuel to heat sitting room and electric blankets to heat bedrooms at night.**

**I live in a flat. It's easy to heat but it is still expensive. I have budgeted more from my weekly money to stay warm. This means I will try to reduce my food shop bill by buying less meat or finding cheaper alternatives.**

**It's hard to make ends meet on illness benefits. You have to watch what you spend each week, making sure you have enough for bills for heating and groceries and anything else that comes up in the meantime.**

#### **BY GOING WITHOUT HEAT**

**I go without. I don't receive the fuel allowance.**

**I only heat my sitting room for an hour in the evening to get the real cold out of the room. I also only heat my daughter's bedroom in the evening before she goes to bed. I do not turn my heater on in my bedroom due to the cost. I just use extra blankets. It is 8.12pm and I have switched my heater off in my sitting room, my daughter is lying on the chair with 2 heavy blankets on her. Our apartment is damp and does not hold the heat for long.**

**I have done without heating very regularly.**

### **BY SPENDING MORE TIME IN BED**

**I just jump under the 2 duvets on the bed to keep warm.**

**We just live on plain basic food, and go to bed early.**

**I go to bed wearing more clothes and coats, and I wrap myself in blankets.**

**The kids are in bed early to keep warm.**

**I wear extra coats and go to bed early.**

**I stay in bed longer to keep warm.**

**I used cups of tea to keep warm and used a sleeping bag inside my bed. I slept a lot to try and stay warm.**

**I wear more clothes and go to bed earlier.**

**I go to bed early evening and on very cold days, I just stay in the bed.**

**We cut down on food shopping to be able to afford ESB, coal for the stove, and home heating oil.**

**I generally wrap myself in a duvet until it's an acceptable time to go to bed. Then I can't sleep and that leads to depression and irritability.**

**I go to bed early to keep warm.**

### **EMOTIONAL TOLL**

**I would like to not worry or feel guilty every time I need to put on the heat. Even when I do put on the radiator in my room it doesn't really heat the room which is odd considering how small it is.**

In a developed country no one should have to choose between food and fuel. Landlords should be made to maintain properties adequately and rents should be controlled fairly. No one should be homeless or at risk of homelessness. The constant poverty of 20 years single parenting in this country has driven me to suicidal ideation regularly- and in this country there is no help for mental health until a person reaches suicidal ideation- followed by months long waiting lists for help. Only the Vincent de Paul has saved me regularly from electricity and gas cut-offs.

I have only started getting the fuel allowance . It wouldn't cover heat and electricity. I am in arrears and don't know if I can catch up. I am stressed which is not helping.

I feel increasingly depressed and abandoned. I've worked hard all my life and raised a family. Things seem very unfair.

Being cold makes me feel miserable - I wear cardigans and jumpers and put a blanket over me on the couch and bring a hot water bottle to bed- sometimes I light a fire to save on heating.

It was so cold a few years ago that I would go out in the morning, walk around the country lanes and gather small branches I found. Shameful I know, but needs must sometimes.

I feel like I have to stay in bed all the time as it's the only warm place. Not great considering I already really struggle with my mental health.

It has a huge impact on my mental and physical health. It leaves me depressed, embarrassed, and physically I feel weak.

**Stressful**

I use extra clothes and a hot water bottle to keep warm when my son is not home. I discourage visitors as I feel embarrassed.

The central heating is on a timer for around 2 hours in the evening only. I boil my hot water in the summer when I need it to save on heating water all day. It can be embarrassing when anyone comes to stay because there isn't constant hot water or heating.

**It is soul destroying living like this!**



There are a lot of people who live in fuel poverty and keep quiet about it because it's embarrassing. The new carbon tax is not going to solve any climate issues. It will just make the poor poorer.

I'm always left worrying about the bill.

I got depression because of the cold. I wear all my clothes just like a cabbage has several layers.

I have to wear extra clothing. Heating normally causes slight stress and I worry about the costs.

### **NOT SCRAPING BY**

I'm really worried, and I'm so scared that prices are increasing again. I'm afraid if we start to struggle and the school found out my kids would be taken. I don't drink or smoke, I don't have friends, I live with and for my kids. I am very careful with money, we waste nothing. But we always struggle to heat the house in winter. I'm terrified of all these carbon tax things I hear about, I don't understand what they are for or how I'll pay it. I expect to have no electricity in the coming months, which means no heating because I have a back boiler and the pump can't run without electricity. So we will move back into the sitting room and rely on that fire again, which only heats that room. It's worrying, it's hard, it's stressful.

I borrow money to pay for fuel, and it's hard to repay the lends.

This government does not know what's going on in homes when the doors are closed. Just to live we sell our valuables so that the kids can have clothes so they don't get bullied by people looking down on us. We are crying every night that there will be some light for us but my hope is fading fast.

Once the weather gets cold, we usually wear extra layers of clothes. We pile extra blankets on the beds, and hang curtains around the bunk beds to stop the cold. It was so cold a few years ago that I would go out in the morning, walk around the country lanes and gather small branches I found. Shameful I know, but needs must sometimes. Worst winter we had, myself and my three kids all spent the entire winter sleeping in the living room so I could keep the fire going at night. I was lucky enough to have gotten a fuel voucher off St Vincent de Paul at the time, so I would stay up at night keeping the fire going with a few bits of coal to warm the room, and I'd sleep in the morning for a few hours while the kids were at school.

I ended up getting high-cost loan to afford oil.

At the moment I have no heating and can't afford to get it fixed. I also have the cyclinder leaking in the hot press.

As I have just finished on a Tus course I am really worried that I won't get my job seekers Christmas bonus as my claim will be seen as a new one and I won't have anything extra to keep my fuel topped up.

### **JUST SCRAPING BY**

I'm lucky. I just about cover my bills. It takes the slack summer months to help me catch up. I know people sitting at home wearing 3 jumpers rather than put on the heating

It's getting harder and harder to make ends meet

Because my partner works full time and claims the top up of WFP to provide for myself and 4 children, we are not entitled to fuel allowance. We live paycheque to paycheque, we get by but we struggle. By the time rent, electric, food shopping, clothes for the kids and the car costs are paid, there isn't much left for heating. We're even over the threshold to get help from SVDP. The current and past Irish government are a joke, they hike up the price of everything except the pay for the working people who have no choice but to struggle on while they line their own pockets. It's not even worth it for myself to get a job as our rent would increase and the childcare costs would leave us no better off.

Dreadful the way costs are going up in this country. I struggle to pay my bills, always and have bills waiting to be paid. My husband works. We're the working poor.

It's an old house and not well insulated, and we use oil which isn't cheap. The worst time was on the day the "beast from the east" hit where oil was nearly out. We didn't have money for any more oil, and by a twist of fate that same day I got a tax refund and we were able to get some. That fear of facing the storm with no heating and the risk of frozen pipes wasn't nice.

Keeping the home warm is always a problem. It costs so much each week to pay off bills and it's very hard to treat my children even every now and again.

We just manage because we have to. We have 3 kids in the house and they need to be warm.

# How people stay warm

## LAYERING UP

We use more blankets and more clothes. It's the only way to keep warm, otherwise we freeze.

I have to wear warm clothes.

I put on a jacket if it's extremely cold.

It means wearing a jacket around the house during the winter or on cold days.

I layer up in the daytime and I don't put heat on! I can't afford to not use electricity during the daytime while I'm working here now but mindful of reducing where possible

We layer up, have oversized jumpers, and blankets to wrap up. The house has no insulation so there's no point in heating. It's too expensive on 203 euro a week when rent is 60 euro to start with.

I bought a gas heater I can turn during the day so I don't have to put the gas heating on to keep my bills down in winter, and I use blankets and house gown over my clothes in the house during winter.

When my wife is at work and the children in school, I won't heat the house until they come home. I just wear extra layers.

We have to be efficient with cooking. We cook all in the oven, not using the hob. We don't use the dryer at all. We only put on heat when it's really cold and we don't light the stove.

I use lots of blankets and hot water bottles. I have in the past put bedsheets on the floor near the long windows to try stop draft getting in.

I live alone as do some of my friends. We spend alternate days in each other's houses to spread the cost.

In previous years we've had to ration turning on the heat but this year the price of kerosene is low so we currently have a full tank. 500litres used to cost us up to 400 euro. Earlier this summer it was just under half that. We have not noticed increases in carbon tax yet because oil prices have dropped a lot.

I cut down trees around my house to try and keep the heating going

I often need to sit in one room that I can heat and use blankets when necessary. I'm 88yrs old.

Insulation is needed badly.

It will be an issue when I retire.

I only switch on the heat when it gets cold.

I put extra blankets on beds, use hot water bottles, and wear extra nightclothes including nightgowns worn in bed and doubling up on socks. I burn anything that can burn in the fire for heat.

We just try to keep the heat off as much as possible & use warm clothes and blankets.

I wear more clothes and fluffy pyjamas and socks as much as possible. I ration oil use daily and if it's really cold in winter, I use an electric blanket for an hour before bed to warm my bed rather than heat the whole room using oil, so that I can go to sleep.

My home is very old and we're trying to improve the energy efficiency bit by bit as it's expensive. Until we can make the relevant changes, it's really hard to keep the house warm. I'm conscious of the cost over winter and so we try to minimise the use of central heating.

Sometimes if I can't afford to light a fire I'll just wrap myself in a quilt for the evening.

I put the heating on less, close all the doors, and pull blinds early to keep the heat longer in the rooms. I allow it on for an hour and a half each day and just put extra clothes on and blankets on the sofa etc. I will put it on longer if it's very cold but only downstairs.

We stay in and heat one room.

Instead of turning the heat on, we wrap up with blankets and hot water bottles.

I heat up using a stove. I can't afford gas heating or electric heating.

If I didn't have my older children living with me, I couldn't afford to heat my home.

I heat one room with a heater and spend most of the day in that room.

We use extra clothing and blankets to keep warm. Our pet dog also warms us.

We use blankets in the sitting room. We reduced spending on other necessities.

Only certain rooms warm up. As the evening goes on, my family tends to congregate in the heated rooms.

I use my bedroom mostly to watch tv and eat my meals on a tray as I don't turn on the central heating to heat my apartment. It is too costly as it is part of a centralised system. I use a gas fire to keep my bedroom warm.

I burn turf in my living room fire as heat rises and keeps the kids' rooms warm for a while until we get up for work and school. I'm first up at 430am to go to work. My wife and kids get up at 6.45 am. I turn on the heating when I get up

I can only live in one room, as I can't afford to heat the house.

More clothes, less exercise, staying indoors



I sit near the stove and put plenty of clothes on.

We wear warmer clothes indoors, and use extra blankets at night.

I heat the room in use.

I just have the heat on a timer to come on at 6pm to 7.30pm every day so I can keep it on longer when it's at its coldest.

I had no central heating for years and had only the sitting room coal fire to heat the house. We had extra blankets on bed and would turn on the electric air heater in the kids' rooms for about half an hour before bed

I wear extra clothes, and don't turn on the heating till as late as possible. I can light a fire but it only heats one room. Gas heats the whole house but it's on a timer.

I make sure that all lights are off and I only use the heating on very cold days. I wear extra clothes.

I don't put the heating on when children are at school. My partner has put insulation tape around a couple of windows. I contacted Tipperary County Council by phone about getting windows resealed and didn't get past 076 106 5000 number. I was told window maintenance was up to tenants, not the Council.

I heat up using a stove, I can't afford gas heating or electric heating.

I wear extra clothing. We don't put heat on during the day even though we are at home.

I'm afraid to put the heating on too early because of fear of the bill being too high, and during COVID I've been staying in more.

My sitting room is so cold every morning. In the evening it's warm with the oven on.

## CUTTING COSTS

I spare the usage of electricity. I watch the TV with no lights on, use energy-saving bulbs, and have A-rated appliances that eases the pressure on your bills.

I put the heater on a lot less than needed.

I rent, and my windows are from the 80's so it costs more to heat.

We have to put up with the house being cold sometimes, as the price of gas for the boiler is a lot.

Smokeless coal is expensive, so I don't light the fire until late.

I bought a cheap house without realising the only heating system was LPG. Prices are crazy even in summertime to heat water. My winter bill for 3 months is over €600.

I don't have central heating, and electricity price hikes are affecting my usage of electric heaters. Working from home is making this harder.

I live in a rural village and can only get tank gas. If we had natural gas we could get pre-pay

We light the fire later in the evening to save fuel costs, and we have stopped putting on oil heating because we can't afford it any more.

Now that my husband has passed away, I cannot afford to pay for oil as much with my heating.

I use blankets and only use gas to heat the water. I had spent summer adding to the gas bill so I'd be ahead in the winter. They used the money for standing charges 280 euros as I wasn't using the gas.

I have no heating oil, as it's too expensive. I only light the sitting room fire on really cold days.

I cannot afford to heat the house due to price of solid fuel costs, so usually I heat house for couple of hours in the night. It's not much good in a bad winter.

I have had no heating for 3 years now due to being cut off and not having the amount in full to reconnect. Bord Gais refused to take a payment plan.

Energy costs are too high.

### HOT WATER

We cannot afford oil for our heating and therefore have to keep the fire lit from early in the day even though I know how bad it is for the environment. We don't have hot water because of this and our fire doesn't have a back boiler so we just use the electric shower and use the electric dishwasher for our dishes.

### LIVING WITH A DISABILITY

More needs to be done to help carers keep their houses warm, like energy efficient homes. We need to retrofit homes.

I always have to buy 2 drums of oil a week out of my carers I can't afford to fill the tank.

Our oldest adult offspring is disabled, and has very poor circulation - therefore we tend to have the house temperature, especially in her bedroom and bathroom, set quite high. Normally pre-COVID it would be off during the day for a few hours while she was at day services, but we are using much more now.

I live in a very old house. The heating & hot water is done through a stove. It barely heats most of the house, if at all. Coal & briquettes to use the stove is expensive and I'm on disability allowance. The hot water can be done through the emersion but takes an hour to heat which drains our electricity meter. It's the same for any plug-in heaters, they drain the meter so it's too expensive to use them.

The government does not care about disabled people.

I would like to improve our house's eco-friendliness, by improved insulation, and whatever else would benefit both us and the environment - however, the costs are prohibitive, especially for people who are nearly at retirement age still looking after a disabled adult at home. We did apply for and were accepted on the Warmer Homes scheme, but have not heard from them in about 18 months. I also think the use of smart technology, for example smart as opposed to manual TRVs, would make a difference, but again the initial outlay is expensive.

I don't qualify for fuel allowance, even though my contributory pension is less than a full non-contributory pension, because the person who shares my house is in receipt of illness benefit as opposed to disability benefit. He's been off sick now since last February and is unlikely to ever work again, but the rules don't include illness benefit so fuel and electricity go up but no fuel allowance here. And he only gets €100 a week in illness benefit, due to another technicality in the rules. So yes we live in fuel poverty and we have no support from the state...none. We both really believe in climate change and do our best to minimise our carbon footprint but it's hard with prices rising, us getting older, and no support from the State.

#### WORKING FROM HOME

Working from home means we have to decide whether to heat the house all day or keep it warm in mornings and evenings as before

Our daughter who is studying from home because of COVID has to wear extra clothing because we can't afford to have the heating on all the time.

I manage with great difficulty. It was already very difficult before the pandemic. But now it's becoming even more stressful with the drop in temperature and being at home constantly! Our car has been off the road since March as we can't afford tax & insurance. We have to choose between having a car on the road or having energy for the house. This causes great difficulty for me personally as it has an effect on me being able to attend my hospital appointments amongst other things...I could go on and on.

I miss being too warm in the office.

As I have to stay at home, heating cost is much more. I dread the real cold months of January and February.

## RENT

I am in a house-share, so the cost is divided but even at that it is still a struggle keeping up with bills. We only turn on the heat for a little while each day. I can't sleep well when it's cold out because I'm so freezing. I wear extra clothes and layers around the house and in bed to try stay warm. I am a teacher, I have a good job, I work hard and this is still my life.

We because the landlord won't let us do anything to help

My housemate and I have been buying secondary heating items like electric blankets and warmer sweaters to deal with the cold more as our rental property does not retain heat.

I'm a renter so I can't install a heat pump or insulation.

I already use as little energy as possible in my home. I live in rented accommodation with little control over adaptations that would make the home warmer and more energy efficient. The house is so old that heating it feels like a waste as I can see daylight coming through the front and back doors despite draft exclusion efforts.

## POOR HEALTH

I have arthritis and M.E. I spent most of my time now in bed with hot water bottles.

I use hot water bottles and an open fire. I have 3 kids earning minimal €340 per week. Their father wouldn't contribute to anything even though he was living in the house. I had to sleep on the couch with rheumatoid arthritis.

I don't have central heating. I have an open fire in sitting room only. I was told I am too young (56) and not sick enough for a grant(17 X MIs 4x TIAs Haemodialysis X 4/week Double bypass Partially sighted Osteoarthritis Osteoporosis)

I have fibromyalgia. The cold in the winter gives me lots of flares and pain. I put extra socks, or sometimes I've to put my coat or a blanket on me. My daughter is in the attic bedroom and its freezing up there when the wind blows. Using a electric heater and radiator is costly. My son has Aspergers, ADHD, SPD, depression, and dyspraxia. And the gas press is in his bedroom. I've tried to get it moved to downstairs for 6 years by the council but they've refused. Any heat we put on it doesn't stay long as its draught. I also have kidney and liver disease.



## OTHER

I am often worried about the cost of my utility bills and am reluctant to turn on the heating due to fear about the price.

It is impacting me, as I have to buy a new heater for downstairs. The house is too cold, I have to constantly heat. I am renting and the landlord is not interested in any of my fuel costs. I cannot save on electricity as I am working from home, my child has to do her homework, play in a warm room, and sleep in a warm bedroom. I do not have a choice and no way out. All my salary goes to heating and electricity. Now petrol is more expensive, plus internet and bank fees. My salary has not risen since 2017.

I rely on solid fuel as oil is too expensive. I have only recently saved enough to be able to afford a plumber to fix broken central heating. We have only been able to heat the main rooms for last four years.

The open fire with back boiler is our central heating. We have no heat until evening regardless of outside temperature, as cleaning and lighting the fire is too cumbersome. It is very cold in the mornings and early daytime in winter. We cannot afford to switch to oil or gas.

I use a blanket when I am alone and only have heat when I have my kids.

I didn't know that the cost of electricity was set to increase. I thought I might be able to give up one of my part-time jobs to concentrate a bit more on college but can I realistically afford to now?

It would be good if there were full grants available for changing from kerosene oil heating, solar panels, etc. I can't afford the chip in amount.

## GRANTS

My house was built in the 1940s. I would like to upgrade to solar panels, and get wall insulation, but even with grants the cost is beyond me.

I would like to make more energy efficient adaptations to my home but the cost is too high.

## BURDEN PREVENTS PEOPLE REACHING POTENTIAL

Students who live independently from parents really struggle with these issues. I have been financially independent from my parents for 2-3 years now as they cannot afford 3rd level education for me and I don't qualify for the SUSI grant under them. Because of this I have paid for all of my education myself. I don't qualify as an independent from SUSI or the SAF either, as I was not 23 on the 1st of January (was 23 in April). Because of this I am struggling financially and am counting on a part-time job to fund rent, fuel, bills, and college fees. I know a lot of students like this. I especially have pondered and still am thinking about dropping out of college just so I could get my fees money back to pay my bills, fuel and rent etc.

## WORKING FAMILIES WITH MORTGAGES

Working families with mortgages I feel are the ones being hit all the time. We are in the middle, earn too much for allowance, but don't earn enough not to worry. We both work and pay a mortgage of 1550 for 2-bed apartment. We pay management fees of 1700 a year and have to pay property tax. We have two children age 6 and 3. We pay for childcare. We work to pay the bills and have very little left afterwards, yet we are constantly a target for governments to hit with higher taxes/new taxes. Really hope Sinn Fein get rid of the gangsters running the country at moment. Slán go foil.

Our house was built in 2005 to 2002 building regulations, but ESB meter was only put in the day we bought the house in 2006 so we cannot avail of the SEAI Warmer Homes scheme due to this. Builders and architects got away with murder of people's mental health.

Thank you for doing the survey. I feel we the poor are being sacrificed on the altar of sustainability. It feels like to be an environmentalist you need to be middle class when climate change affects the poor the most. I'm actually very angry at the GP.

If you are worried about the cost of energy, please know you are not alone. It is ok not to be ok. Please reach out and talk to someone you trust  
You can also contact:

The Samaritans on



freephone

**116 123** or

Pieta House on



**1800 247 247**

You can seek financial advice and support confidentially from:

MABS (Money Advice & Budgeting Service)



through their Helpline on

**0761 07 2000**



[www.sinnfein.ie](http://www.sinnfein.ie)

## **Senator Lynn Boylan**

Sinn Féin Climate Justice Spokesperson

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