



## United Kingdom

### BACKGROUND

- › In the UK 'fuel poverty' is used instead 'energy poverty', that was **officially defined** as early as in 2000 ([Warm Homes and Energy Conservation Act 2000](#)): "fuel poverty is expressed in the form of a person [who] is a member of a household living on a lower income in a home which cannot be kept warm at reasonable cost". The way to define and assess fuel poverty in practice has evolved over time. The current **official indicators** used to monitor fuel poverty are updated annually ([Bolton et al., 2022](#)):

  - In [England](#) the **Low-Income Low Energy Efficiency (LILEE)** metric is used: A household is energy poor (fuel poor) if their "fuel poverty energy rating" is below a specified level (Band D) and if their disposable income after housing and fuel costs is below the poverty line ([Government of the UK, 2022b](#)).
  - In [Scotland](#) a household is considered energy poor if they are required to spend **more than 10% of their net income** (after housing costs) for 'reasonable' fuel bills and if their remaining income is below 90% of the UK Minimum Income Standard ([Bolton et al., 2022](#)).
  - In [Wales](#) a household is in energy poverty if "they would have to spend **more than 10% of their income** on maintaining a satisfactory heating regime" ([Bolton et al., 2022](#)).
  - In [Northern Ireland](#) a household is defined as energy poor if it needs to spend **over 10% of their income** on fuel maintain a "satisfactory level of heating (21C in the main living room and 18C in other occupied rooms)" ([Bolton et al., 2022](#)).
- › In 2020, **3.16 million English households (13.2%)** were in energy poverty using the LILEE metric. Using this metric, the government estimates this number to have declined slightly for 2021 despite rising energy prices due to increasing energy efficiency of homes and slight increases in incomes ([UK fuel poverty statistics](#)). An estimated **613,000 households** were in energy poverty in **Scotland in 2019 (24.6%)** ([Scottish House Condition Survey](#)). In **Wales 196,000 households** were estimated to be in energy poverty in **2021 (14%)** ([Wales' fuel poverty estimates](#)). ([Bolton et al., 2022](#))
- › The UK has one of the **oldest housing stocks in Europe** with over a third of homes built before 1945 and less than a quarter built since 1980. One of the key targets of the fuel poverty strategy is therefore to improve the energy performance of the dwellings. The [UK fuel poverty statistics](#) monitor the **distribution of energy efficiency rating of low-income households's dwellings**: the share of low-income households living in a dwelling with a **E rating or worst** was **reduced from 35.4% in 2010 to 9.9% in 2020**. Whereas the share of low-income households living in a dwelling with a **C rating or better** was **increased from 14.6% in 2010 to 52.1% in 2020** ([Annual Fuel Poverty Statistics in England, 2022 \(2020 data\)](#)).



- › All nations in the UK have **strategies** in place to reduce energy poverty. With the first strategy dating back to 2001. The **devolved administrations / nations** are the key government bodies in charge of setting and monitoring the fuel poverty strategies. The current national strategies are as of 2021 for [England](#), [Scotland](#) and [Wales](#), 2011 for [Northern Ireland](#).
- › The [Committee on Fuel Poverty](#), a non-departmental body, advises the UK government on fuel poverty. Similarly, the [Scottish Fuel Poverty Advisory Panel](#) and [Partnership Forum](#) advise the Scottish Government. The [Energy Saving Trust](#) and various **NGOs and charities** are very active in providing information and support to energy poor households. **Energy companies** are also involved, especially through the Energy Company Obligation (see further below).
- › In addition to the energy efficiency schemes (see table further below), the measures to alleviate energy poverty also include aids to the energy expenses:
  - [Winter Fuel Payment](#) (since 1997, Great Britain): tax-free annual automatic payment (from €115 to 350) to help older people with their heating bills (11.4 million beneficiaries in 2019/2020).
  - [Cold Weather payments](#) (since 1992, Great Britain): special payments during periods of very cold weather Made (€29 for 7 days) to certain recipients of social welfare support (3.8 million eligible recipients in 2018/2019).
  - [Warm Homes Discount](#) (since 2011, Great Britain): rebate of €164 for the electricity bills provided by electricity suppliers to about 2.2 million eligible customers.
  - [Energy tariff cap](#) (since 2019, Great Britain): tariff cap for the 11 million customers for electricity and gas on default tariffs.

Following the energy crisis in 2022 the number of households in energy poverty has risen significantly. Despite the price guarantee instated by the UK government (see below), the charity National Energy Action estimates that up to 6.7 million UK households are in energy poverty. When the price guarantee ends in 2023 this could increase further to 8.4 million households ([National Energy Action, 2022](#)). In response to the crisis the national government has implemented a set of direct support measures, these include:

## MAIN RECENT MEASURES TO HELP HOUSEHOLDS FACE THE ENERGY CRISIS

- › [Energy Price Guarantee](#) (October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022- October 1<sup>st</sup> 2024: reduction of unit cost of gas and electricity so that a 'typical' household in Great Britain pays on average £2500 (€2909<sup>1</sup>) per year (electricity £0,34 (€0,4) per/kWh & gas £0,10 (€0,12) per kWh + fixed costs). From April 2023 this will be increased to £3000 (€3490) per year. The energy price guarantee is a temporary replacement for the existing dynamic price cap (Ofgem, 2022a).
- › [Help to Heat Funding](#) (2022): an extra £1,5 (€1,75) billion in budget for the renovation of over 130.000 homes of low-income households through the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund and other

<sup>1</sup> All prices have been converted using December 2022 price levels.

home renovation grant schemes (Government of the UK, 2022c).

- › **Alternative Fuel Payment** (2022): £100 (€116) one-off support payment to households not on the gas grid (Government of the UK, 2022d)
- › **Energy Bills Support Scheme** (Alternative Fund)/Northern Ireland Energy Bills Support Scheme (2022): £400 (€465) one-off support payment to households for winter 2022/2023 (Government of the UK, 2022d), another tranche will be provided in spring 2023.
- › **Council Tax Rebate** (2022): all households living in a home within EPC bands A-D got a £200 (€ 233) rebate on their municipal taxes (Robinson & Simcock, 2022).
- › **Cost of Living Payments** (2022): all people receiving the Winter Fuel Payment (pensioners) received a one-off £300 (€350) payment, all eligible welfare recipients received a one-off £650 (€ 756) payment, all people receiving disability benefits received a one-off £150 (€175) payment (payments are stackable) (Robinson & Simcock, 2022).
- › **Household Support Fund** (2021 – 2023): three tranches of £500 (€582) million have been distributed in small payments to vulnerable households through municipal governments (Government of the UK, 2022d)

## MAIN NATIONAL ENERGY EFFICIENCY MEASURES TACKLING ENERGY POVERTY

<p><b>Energy Company Obligation 4 (ECO 4)</b> (2022 – 2026; continuation of previous energy efficiency obligation schemes since 1994)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› The ECO 4 operates in <b>England and Wales</b> and <b>requires obligated energy suppliers to deliver energy efficiency and heating measures to households</b>. Households get the upgrades <b>for free</b>. Measures include heating system (gas boiler &amp; heat pump) and envelope (wall/window/roof) upgrades.</li> <li>› ECO 1 was launched in 2013. Between 2018 and 2022 the scheme was <b>100% targeted at low income &amp; vulnerable households</b>, with sub-targets for rural areas. The same will be the case for 2022-2026.</li> <li>› Between 2013-2018 ECO (2t) delivered 2.4 million improvements in around 1.8 million homes, 70% of which in low-income/vulnerable households (1.26 million homes). In the period <b>2018- 2022</b> ECO (3) delivered <b>1.04 million measures</b>, saving households over 8 billion on their energy bills. For <b>ECO 4</b> a <b>yearly budget of £1 (€ 1,16) billion</b> will be available. Total savings for all schemes amounts to up to 59MtCO<sub>2</sub> and 221.800 GWh (<a href="#">Government of the UK, 2022a</a>).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund Demonstrator</b> (2020 - ongoing)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› The <b>£3.8 (€4.43) billion</b> support innovative whole house and at scale <b>retrofit projects in social housing</b>.</li> <li>› Targets: Local authorities (with partners) can send in applications</li> <li>› £179 (€208) million has been invested in 69 projects for the first phase of the fund, allowing 20.000 social housing units to be renovate to EPC band C.</li> </ul>

<p><b><u>Domestic Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard (MEES)</u></b> (2018 – ongoing)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› In <b>England and Wales</b>, the MEES sets a minimum energy efficiency level for domestic private rented properties <b>as of April 1<sup>st</sup> 2020</b> (<a href="#">Government of the UK, 2020</a>).</li> <li>› The regulations target <b>all rented properties</b> that are required to have an EPC or are rented out using specific types of contracts. Properties with an EPC of <b>F or G can no longer be rented out</b>.</li> <li>› Property owners are required to make an <b>investment in energy savings of up to £3500 (€4072)</b> (including VAT). As lower income households tend to live in the worst performing homes, the MEES supports alleviation of energy poverty.</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Warmer Homes Scotland</u></b> (2015 – ongoing)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Scheme that offers <b>partially or fully funded (grants/loans) energy efficiency measures</b>, including heat pumps since 2015.</li> <li>› Targets: eligible homeowners and private tenants on welfare/that cannot afford to heat their home. Rural and island homes can get extra support.</li> <li>› <b>Over 29.000 households</b> have received support, on average £5000 (€5818) worth of measures per household. 8 out of 10 households do not have to provide co-funding. Most common measures installed since 2015 have been <b>new gas boilers and insulation</b>, but in 2022 targeted funding has been made available for <b>heat pumps</b> (<a href="#">Warmer Homes Scotland Funding &amp; Support · Home Energy Scotland</a>).</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Home Energy Efficiency Programmes for Scotland (HEEPS)</u></b> (2013 – ongoing)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› An <b>area-based scheme</b> that funds local authorities to design &amp; deliver energy efficiency programs in <b>areas with high levels of fuel poverty</b>.</li> <li>› Targets: all property types / ownership models in targeted fuel poor areas. Mainly funds <b>solid wall insulation</b>.</li> <li>› Since 2013, <b>over 100.000 households</b> have received energy efficiency measures as part of this scheme, and a total of <b>£482 (€ 600) million</b> has been made available to local authorities. This is complemented with funding through the Energy Company Obligation and investments by the building owners.</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Affordable Warmth Scheme Northern Ireland</u></b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Scheme that offers <b>grants to homeowners and private tenants</b> to address fuel poverty and energy inefficiency. It is delivered through the local councils</li> <li>› Targeted at low-income households in <b>areas where levels of fuel poverty are highest</b>. It only supports people living in <b>privately rented housing</b>.</li> <li>› The supported energy efficiency measures must be completed in the <b>order of priority</b> set in the scheme: 1) Insulation / Ventilation / Draught-proofing;</li> </ul>

	<p>2) Heating; 3) Windows; 4) Solid Wall Measures.</p> <p>› Northern Ireland also has a <a href="#">boiler replacement scheme</a> that supports the replacement of gas/lpg/oil <b>boilers older than 15 years</b>. The grant amount depends on the households income.</p>
<p><b>Warm Homes Programme Wales – NEST Scheme</b> (2009 – on-going)</p>	<p>› Offers <b>advice and support to lower income households</b> to improve thermal comfort and energy efficiency of their homes</p> <p>› Targeted to private tenants and homeowners living in <b>energy inefficient homes</b> and receiving specific benefits</p> <p>› Up to 2021 <b>over £394 million</b> has been invested benefitting <b>more than 67.100 homes</b> and 160.000 homes have received advice. To supplement the scheme the Welsh government has an “<a href="#">discretionary assistance fund</a>” that also supports minor repairs on boilers and oil and lpg purchases.</p> <p>› This programme previously included the area based <a href="#">Arbed scheme</a>, which ended in November 2021 and the demand led <a href="#">Nest scheme</a> expected to end in March 2023 (<a href="#">Welsh government 2021</a>)</p>

The table above is focused on the national EE policy measures tackling energy poverty. More initiatives exist at regional or local level, or led by stakeholders such as energy companies. As illustrated by the [schemes developed as part of SocialWatt](#).

## FOCUS ON ARTICLE 7 EED AND THE ROLE OF ENERGY COMPANIES

Through the ECO, energy companies in the UK play an **important role in delivering energy efficiency measures for energy poor households**. Especially as in England there are limited direct funding schemes from the government for energy savings measures. Since the beginning of the system in the 1990's there has been an indicative **ringfence for energy poor households** (around 40%). Over time specifications to ensure a good geographic spread and deeper retrofits were added. **As of 2018 the entire ECO scheme targets energy poor homes**, albeit with a reduction in funds.

Before leaving the EU, UK was reporting ECO (and the previous energy efficiency obligation schemes) to Article 7 EED, as well as other energy efficiency schemes aimed at alleviating energy poverty and described above, including Scotland's Home Energy Efficiency Programmes, and Wales' Warm Homes Programme.

In addition to the ECO, obligated domestic energy suppliers need to deliver support to low income, vulnerable, and energy poor households through the [Warm Home Discount](#). Households receive a £150 (€175) rebate ([Ofgem, 2022b](#)). Energy suppliers have also to keep a dedicated fuel priority register to provide vulnerable customers with non-financial services ([Priority Services Register](#)).



## INTERVIEW WITH PETER SMITH (Director of Policy and Advocacy, National Energy Action) in November 2022

### › Do you expect an increase in the number of households at risk of energy poverty due to the current energy crisis?

All European countries are struggling with the gas prices. But the UK is particularly exposed due to its dependency on gas for both heating and electricity. Both bills have absolutely sky rocketed... With harrowing effects on energy poverty, at NEA we provide frontline support to people living without energy in their home, and the mental and physical effects this has. For example, we see people foraging for wood and fuel and theft of energy and heat is going up. People are really in a bad situation, and winter is only just starting.

### › Have there been recent changes in the policy measures to tackle energy poverty?

The UK has mostly responded with ad-hoc measures and provided little targeted support for those in energy poverty.

Initially the response was awful, with a £200 loan to households and a council tax rebate. Luckily this has improved somewhat, with limited energy efficiency measure instated, benefit and entitlement checks and fuel debt relief provided, and advice & training given.

The instability in the UK government has slowed the response and policies keep changing. Early 2022 £400 grant was instated (energy bill reduction) and some local crisis funds to help worst off households through councils. And a price guarantee was instated to ensure average annual bill would be £2.500 over the 2022-2023 winter. However, the new government has already watered this down to limit costs. As targeted support, low-income households will receive another £400 in 2023.

### › Are energy efficiency schemes an important part of the national strategy or approach to tackle energy poverty?

The previous governments focused mainly on supply side policies, but with the current crises they have recognized that energy savings are also very important to bring down prices (due to EU integrated markets).

In the UK policy on energy poverty is devolved to the nation level. In England we have seen a move from price and income-based interventions towards more energy efficiency measures to tackle energy poverty. There used to be quite good national efficiency programs for all households, but this was flipped around to focus all resources on households in fuel poverty or at risk of fuel poverty (but with reduced budgets). There are also statutory fuel poverty targets based on efficiency (see MEES above). Also, some schemes to get homes with oil heating and solid walls off the gas network have been announced.

### › What is or should be the role of energy companies in the schemes to tackle energy poverty?

The statutory fuel poverty targets are connected to the Energy Company Obligation (ECO). Previously, the ECO supported all homes but now it is focused on those in energy poverty. National spending through the ECO expanded to £1 billion a year, and is fully focused on fuel poor until March 2026. Moreover, companies face prescriptions around targeting E-F-G label homes and minimum efficiency levels to achieve for each measure implemented. So, the statutory target has channelled funding to those people at greatest risk of energy poverty.



But, in England alone reaching the target means renovating over three million homes, that would take 150 years on current progress (80.000 homes/year). The government relies on ECO to meet the target, there are no supplemental schemes. But although the ECO system works quite well for single renovation measures and shallow retrofit, it struggles to deliver meaningful improvements to the worst housing stock.

To improve this, the system should encourage co-funding by private or social landlords to have the costs under the ECO scheme go down (proportionally). Moreover, to make sure hard to retrofit homes (e.g. with solid walls) also get some efficiency improvements suppliers should be able to deliver equivalent support up to what a solid wall insulation would have delivered in savings.

› **The ECO system in the UK has developed considerably over the years and has moved from a ringfence for energy poor to solely targeting those in energy poverty. What lessons can be drawn from this development?**

Initially, we were very concerned about companies having the incentive to cherry pick the cheapest measures. At NEA, we wanted them to support people that needed it the most, but the companies would focus on keeping the cost down. By now the companies have now recognized that they must deliver this support. For the bigger suppliers it has also switched around, they now see it as a business opportunity to offer energy services and start developing the market for home retrofits. So overall there is a positive story around the development of the ECO and it is supporting the development of a functioning market and service models for home retrofit.

Of course, there are still challenges to resolve,

especially around co-payments, as the requirement for self-investment by households still limits helping the households that have zero capacity to invest themselves. There should also be more transparency on how the obligated companies spend the money. We also need more prescriptions to ensure the E – F – G homes are renovated to at least C level.

› **Do you have any policy recommendations to governments wanting to instate a ringfence for energy poor households as part of their EEOS?**

The ringfence should be aimed at getting support those who need it the most and be balanced between prescribing the outcome, the people that should benefit, and having some flexibility for the obligated parties:

- Make sure through prescription that the system goes beyond low-cost and easy to install measures
- Have buy-out mechanisms to ensure an obligated party that does not want to be involved the energy poor market can get their share to other suppliers that are interested.
- Ensure good reporting on what measures are being delivered, by which obligated parties, and in what household/home types. This helps better targeting schemes and prevent interpretation problems.
- Focus on outcomes and showcase successes. There can always be negative sentiment because obligated parties are forced to do something. But good things are being achieved: money and energy saved, health benefits, savings on grid reinforcement.



## INTERVIEW WITH GILLIAN CAMPBELL (Communication and Public Affairs Lead, Existing Homes Alliance Scotland) in December 2022 – Focus on Scotland

### › Do you expect an increase in the number of households at risk of energy poverty in Scotland due to the current energy crisis?

Undoubtedly there is a significant increase in fuel poverty. The last statistics on fuel poverty in Scotland go back to 2019, then we had around 25% of households living in fuel poverty (>10% of income on energy costs). Estimates now are that around 900,000 households or 36% of Scottish population live in energy poverty. And this is even a conservative estimate, in rural areas it can be much higher with up to 57% in some remote areas where houses are large, old, and not connected to the gas grid.

Generally, people most at risk of energy poverty due to low energy efficiency of their home live in privately rented properties or are homeowners. Most households in social rented homes are in energy poverty due to low income, not bad energy efficiency, because the regulation is much stricter there.

### › Have there been recent changes in the Scottish policy measures to tackle energy poverty?

The emergency measures implemented by the UK government are short term and a drop in the ocean. It will not do enough to support people throughout this crisis. There are limitations on what the Scottish government can do as not all energy policy is devolved. They have increased some welfare payments where these are devolved but many are reserved to the UK government. Scotland does have more control over the energy efficiency/building

side of things. They increased the amount of funding going into advice services and energy efficiency/fuel poverty programs. Including increasing grants and relaxing grant conditions for installing heat pumps and energy efficiency measures.

### › Are energy efficiency schemes an important part of the national strategy or approach to tackle energy poverty?

The Scottish government has as goal to end fuel poverty, and published a fuel poverty strategy last year. The Fuel Poverty Act from 2019 set targets that, by 2040, no more than 5% of households should be in fuel poverty and no more than 1% in extreme fuel poverty. The Act also set interim targets, including no more than 15% and 5% by 2030. In their approach the government recognizes that the main factors of energy poverty are the income side, energy prices, and home efficiency. They explicitly take a fabric first approach in their strategy.

Scotland has relatively been in quite a good place over the past years when it comes to improving energy efficiency in homes. A key pillar is the area-based scheme where the government passes funding to local councils. They target funding to areas with high levels of deprivation for energy efficiency works. This is done in partnership with social landlords, homeowners, and private funders. They pool all the funding from the government, the energy efficiency obligation, and the co-payments by owners to large renovation works. Although these projects can be complex and time intensive, they do deliver deep(er) renovations than e.g., the ECO system by itself could deliver.





Warmer Homes Scotland is another key energy efficiency programme. In most cases it provides fully funded energy efficiency measures for people that are on welfare benefits. The government is also very much aware that they need to make it easy for people to access the information on doing works and installing heat-pumps. The umbrella energy efficiency body Home Energy Scotland provides information on home renovation and available support for households. And everyone can access that info, but it is still very complex for households to access the support they need, and many people do not know about it. Ideally, this should evolve towards an accessible one-stop-shop service, but for now it is still focused on advice. In remote areas it is even more difficult for households to access this information and support.

The government also developed a Heat in Buildings Strategy in 2021 that set out a target of more than 1 million households to be decarbonised (energy efficient & zero emissions heating) by 2030. This is just under half of the 2.5 million Scottish households. Over 80 percent of them currently using gas for heating. As part of this strategy, they are planning a large public engagement strategy and have set up a taskforce on financing. I am also expecting policy on boiler phase-outs where possible within the devolution framework.

So, the government is really aiming high but with only 8 years left much more needs to be done much more quickly.

### › **What is or should be the role of energy companies in the schemes to tackle energy poverty?**

It is not entirely clear yet how the new ECO plus is going to work in Scotland. But in the past councils would try to maximise the amount of ECO funding being accessed to reduce how much each homeowner would need to invest themselves in the area-based schemes. I do think energy companies should be playing more of a proactive role in enabling their customers to reduce their energy consumption through improving the energy efficiency of their homes and switching to zero emissions heating.

### › **Any policy recommendations you could give based on the experiences in Scotland?**

The Scottish government is trying hard, and its approach does feel a bit ahead of some other countries as it is trying to be holistic, by looking at communications, regulation, advice and financial support.

One of the big barriers in the area-based approaches is the level of owner contributions to the investment costs. There is a clear ceiling above which it becomes just unaffordable or undesirable for a lot of households to participate. So, you need to watch closely the level of self-funding required and have some flexibility built in to make sure affordability does not prevent area based renovations from going ahead.

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**SOCIALWATT**

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OBLIGATED PARTIES

TO ADOPT INNOVATIVE

SCHEMES TOWARDS

ENERGY POVERTY

ALLEVIATION

SocialWatt is a Horizon 2020 project that develops and provides **utilities** and **energy suppliers** with appropriate **tools** for effectively engaging with their customers and working together towards **alleviating energy poverty**.

SocialWatt also enables obligated parties under **Article 7** of the Energy Efficiency Directive across Europe to develop, adopt, test and spread **innovative energy poverty schemes**.

SocialWatt contribute to the following three main pillars:

- 1 Supporting utilities and energy suppliers contribute to the fight against energy poverty through the use of **decision support tools**.
- 2 Bridging the gap between energy companies and social services by promoting collaboration and implementing **knowledge transfer** and **capacity building activities** that focus on the development of schemes that invest in Renewable Energy Sources / Energy Efficiency and alleviate energy poverty.
- 3 **Implementing** and **replicating** innovative schemes to alleviate energy poverty.



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