



YOU'RE NOT ALONE

ALONE Submission to Strategy 2025-2028
Department of Environment, Climate and Communications



11 April 2025

Dear Ms Buckley,

ALONE welcomes this opportunity to provide input to the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications forthcoming strategy. As an organisation who supported almost 44,000 older people across our services in 2024, and a partner of the Department in combating energy poverty among older people, we see the impact of the support provided by the Department on a regular basis. We would also like to voice our appreciation to the Department for your ongoing commitment to engagement with NGOs and particularly the work that goes into the annual Energy Poverty Forum.

As you will be aware, Ireland has an ageing demographic. The rising energy costs have significantly expanded ALONE's efforts in addressing energy poverty, because of the impact on the older people we support. In 2024, one-third of older people supported by our services reported financial challenges. Among these, 45% of concerns related to utilities. The majority of older people required support to access energy company hardship funds, while others sought help with payment issues, arrears, or setting up payment plans. Some also needed support to register as vulnerable customers with energy suppliers. A smaller number required help obtaining solid fuel or gas canisters, highlighting the impact of increasing energy costs. Among those who received support from ALONE with accessing benefits and entitlements, the most common request was for fuel allowance, which accounted for over 40% of concerns. This was followed by issues related to the Household Benefits Package (over 30%) and Exceptional Needs Payments (around 16%), further emphasising the growing impact of rising energy prices on older people.

ALONE has one key suggestion for an objective to be included within the Department's new statement of strategy, which is explained in further detail in this submission. This objective is to **reduce energy poverty, particularly among at-risk groups.**

We hope to continue to work with the Department throughout the lifetime of the next strategy. Should you have any queries about the recommendations in this submission, or any other aspect of ALONE's work, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Kind regards,

Aileen O'Reilly

Dr Aileen O'Reilly,
Head of Research, Evaluation and Policy

Gráinne Loughran

Gráinne Loughran,
Senior Policy & Advocacy Officer



CHY 8259
RCN 20020057

Submission from ALONE to the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications 2025-2028

1. Include a new strategic objective: “Reduce energy poverty, particularly among at-risk groups” in Strategic Goal 2

Based on the assumption that the new Strategy will be developed in a similar format to the strategy for 2024-2025, ALONE’s primary recommendation is that **a new strategic objective to reduce energy poverty** is included under what is currently Strategic Goal 2, ‘Transform our energy system for a secure and affordable net zero emissions future’.

ALONE has welcomed the Department’s work to combat energy poverty in recent years. Unfortunately, the challenges of energy poverty remain a significant issue and are likely to remain so during the ongoing transition to net zero, particularly for at-risk groups.

Addressing this in the Department strategy would involve reorienting Strategic Goal 2 to more explicitly reference energy poverty. Currently the outcome relating to this goal refers to availability of “affordable energy supplies for households, businesses, communities” and an “increasing level of energy efficiency in homes and buildings”. We suggest that given the level of work undertaken by the Department in this area, an explicit energy poverty outcome here could include the statement, **“We have warm homes which are energy efficient and affordable to heat, including for at-risk groups among the population”**. Similarly, the associated strategic objective could include the statement, **“Reduce levels of energy poverty among at-risk groups”**.

Inclusion of these points in the forthcoming Strategy would be a natural outcome of the ongoing work by the ESRI (as part of the previous *Energy Poverty Action Plan*) to propose a new metric for measuring energy poverty that combines expenditure and energy efficiency.

Associated Actions

ALONE are currently awaiting the publication of the next *Action Plan to Combat Energy Poverty* by the Department, which we recognise will contain relevant actions in this area. However, some actions which could be associated with this strategic objective include the recent commitments in the Programme for Government¹, listed below:

- Revise and improve the provision of grants and financing models for homeowners who wish to retrofit, enhancing energy efficiency and reducing costs.

¹ <https://assets.gov.ie/318303/2cc6ac77-8487-45dd-9ffe-c08df9f54269.pdf>

- Ensure all grants and schemes are accessible to older people in our community.
- Explore ways to use surplus renewable energy to help reduce energy poverty, ensuring that renewable energy benefits all communities.
- Explore mechanisms to incentivise households to adopt renewable energy sources for their homes.

In addition, actions recommended by ALONE (which have been included in our submission to the new *Action Plan to Combat Energy Poverty*) could be included here:

- **Enhance cross-departmental working with the Departments of Social Protection, Housing and Health to improve interventions and outcomes relating to energy poverty:** While the Department of Climate, Environment and Energy has responsibility for the *Action Plan to Combat Energy Poverty*, the Department of Social Protection distributes the Fuel Allowance and the Household Benefits Package. Further collaboration between the Departments would be welcome to ensure that social protection measures are adequately meeting the needs of customers in this area. In addition, improved collaboration with the Department of Housing in addressing housing standards, and the Department of Health in improving the response of the health system to those with health issues caused or exacerbated by cold homes, could make a significant difference in mitigating the impacts of energy poverty.
- **Take measures to increase the proportion of SEAI grants being delivered to energy-poor homes:** Figures from the SEAI's 2023 annual report indicate that just 12% of home energy grants supported energy poor homes (see page 9, "SEAI supported 47,900 home energy upgrades...almost 5,900 were energy poor homes"²). This could be achieved by providing additional access support to households most at risk of energy poverty.
- **Improve consumer protection measures and community supports for groups most at risk of energy poverty, including older people;** for example, by training frontline, NGO and community staff on energy poverty, following the example set by STEP in the EU³.

² <https://www.seai.ie/sites/default/files/publications/SEAI-Annual-Report-2023-Irish-and-English.pdf>

³ <https://energy-poverty.ec.europa.eu/discover-community/epah-atlas/step-solutions-tackle-energy-poverty>