

Working to Address Energy Poverty: Current Challenges

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Society St. Vincent de Paul (SVP)

Energy Action Conference

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Society of St. Vincent de Paul

ABOUT SVP

- Largest charity of social concern in Ireland supporting households in need for 175 years.
- Volunteer led organisation with over 11,000 members working in 1200 local groups (conferences) across 8 regions on the island of Ireland.
- Three pillars:
 1. Providing friendship and support
 2. Promoting self-sufficiency
 3. Working for social justice
- Main activity: visiting people in their homes and providing support to those facing financial difficulties and social exclusion.
- Also provide homeless services, social housing, family resource centres, holiday schemes and shops.

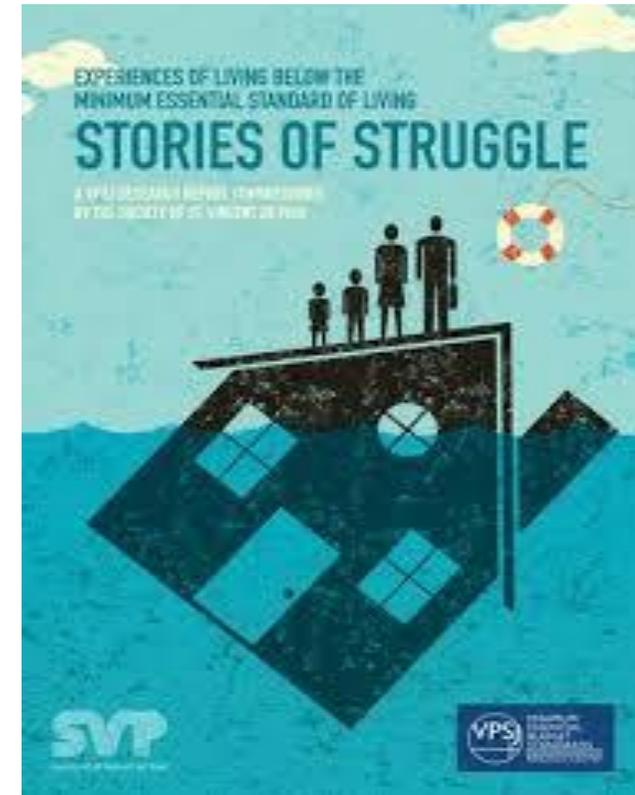
WHO DO WE ASSIST?

- Approx. 140,000 requests for assistance each year.
- Households on fixed & low incomes (social welfare & minimum wage employment).
- One parent families largest group assisted by SVP.
- Multifaceted issues & needs:
 - Energy poverty & utilities arrears
 - Educational disadvantage & education costs
 - Poor quality housing, unsustainable housing costs & homelessness
 - Unemployment and difficulties accessing social welfare
 - Food poverty



THE EXPERIENCE AND IMPACT OF ENERGY POVERTY

There are six of us with two bedrooms, living room, kitchen and bathroom. We have one small heater, and we move it from room to room.



Debilitating consequences of energy poverty, not just on individuals, but on society as a whole - excess winter mortality; increased rates of cardiovascular and respiratory diseases; impact on mental health and wellbeing

SVP'S RESPONSE

SVP's Response



€12.5m
on food



€5.1m on direct
financial support
to households



€4.3m on fuel
& electricity



€3.7m
on education



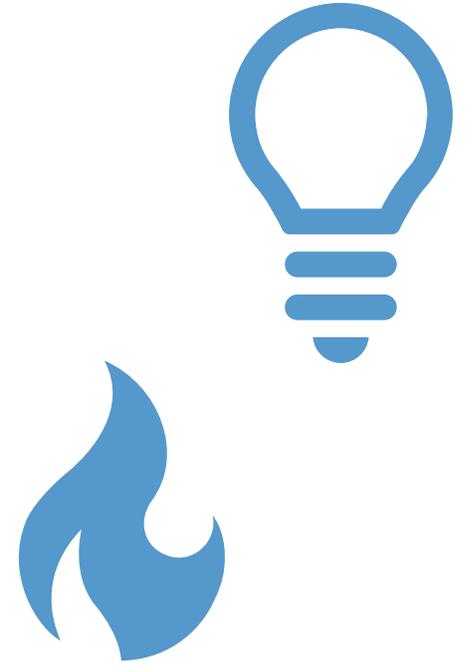
€1m
on clothing
& furniture



€0.6m
on holidays
& outings

SVP APPROACH TO ENERGY ARREARS

- SVP advocates PAYG meters to customers.
- Where PAYG is not feasible/advisable SVP will advise and support manageable Payment Plans.
- Refer to CWO and MABS.
- Conferences are encouraged to keep an on-going relationship during arrears payment period.



TRENDS IN SVP ENERGY SPEND

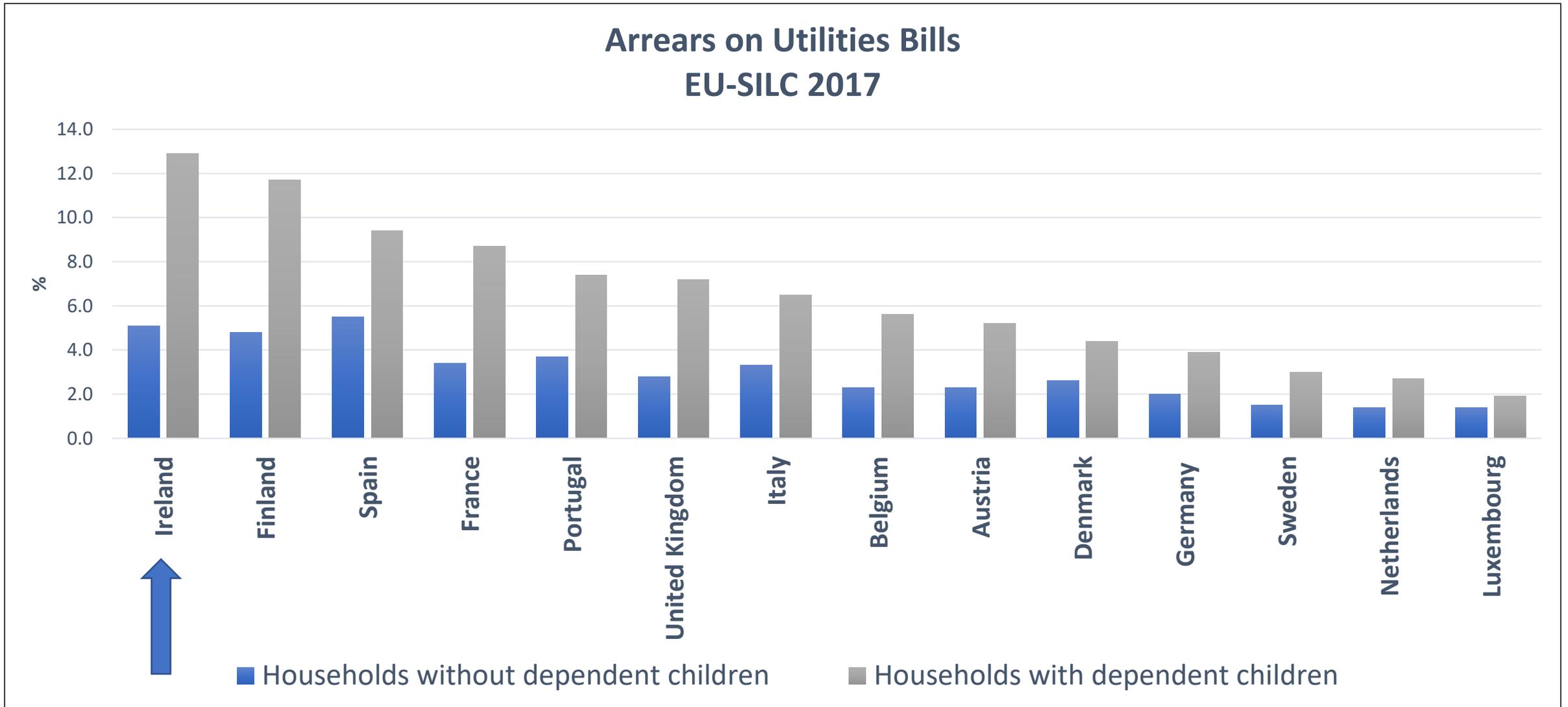
- Decrease in SVP spending on utilities from a high of over €11m in 2012. Disconnection decreased by 130% since 2011.
- **Why? Changing policy and practice can make a difference!**
- Energy engage code – voluntary commitments by providers and CER customer supplier handbook
- Rollout of Pay As You Go hardship meters
 - 80,000 electricity hardship PAYG meters
 - 78,000 gas PAYG hardship meters
- Repayment plans
- Moratorium on disconnections from time to time, e.g. cold weather, Christmas

BUT ENERGY POVERTY STILL AFFECTING THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE ACROSS IRELAND....

- Last year, almost 400,000 people in Ireland went without heating due to costs.
- SVP spend on fuel & utilities ↑ by 20% last year.
- Irish energy prices: highest cost for electricity & second most expensive for gas usage in Europe
- Poor quality housing stock: estimated over 1 million houses need to be upgraded.



HOW DOES IRELAND COMPARE TO OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES?



CURRENT ISSUES

- Increase in energy costs and **uncontrollable costs** (VAT, PSO, Carbon Tax & potentially increased Network Charges).
- Fuel Allowance is **20% lower than in 2010** in terms of purchasing parity & is **highly means tested**: not all energy poor households supported.
- “Poverty premium” on PAYG meters: **20%-30% more expensive** than direct debit. Switching not always an option.
- Unmanageable **payment plans** and issue of “**self disconnection**” for PAYG.
- **SEAI energy efficiency schemes** have **limited** coverage: private rented sector a challenge.
- Move to **smarter technology**: potential to leave some people behind?

SVP SOLUTIONS

1. Set an ambitious target to **eliminate energy poverty** by 2030.
2. Invest in **research to generate data** at an individual level which links income, energy expenditure, income support, dwelling type, BER rating and main heating fuel.
3. Introduce **minimum energy requirements** for the **private rented sector**.
4. Commence a deep **retrofit** programme of **local authority housing**.
5. Roll out **trusted energy advisors** at a community level.
6. Ensure that every household has an **adequate income** to meet their energy costs.
7. Examine the feasibility of introducing **social tariffs** for low income households into the Irish energy market.

**Thank you for
your attention**



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