

Solar for All

A Five Point Plan for
Affordable and Secure Energy

Social
Democrats



Contents

Introduction.....	1
Our Five Key Proposals.....	3
Free Solar Panels on the Warmer Homes Schemes	3
Double Solar Grants for all other Households.....	3
Reinstate the Battery Grant Scheme	4
Cut the Red Tape around 'Plug-in Solar'	4
Supports for Businesses.....	4

Introduction

The current energy crisis is showing us that those who are reliant on fossil fuels are most vulnerable to fluctuations in home energy costs. **We need to make energy affordable and secure.**

Government must focus on making individual families and businesses more resilient to energy price and supply shocks. Long term solutions are required that see us using government spending responsibly, to move us away from our reliance on fossil fuels as a society.

One way to do this is by greatly accelerating the rollout of solar panels, so that more households and businesses can benefit from the ongoing energy revolution. Ten solar panels on the roof of a typical house could save a family around €450 per year on their electricity bill.

It is estimated that there are approximately one million homes in Ireland that are suitable for the roof installation of solar panels, but that have not yet availed of this possibility. Rolling out solar panels to the full extent possible would produce around a quarter of all residential electricity demand, and around 8 per cent of Ireland's renewable electricity target.

One major benefit of solar installation is that it is quick and easy to do, and most homes can be fitted in a matter of hours.

The Social Democrats have previously called on government to create goal of ramping up installations to where 100,000 homes per year are having solar panels installed. This should be part of a sustained state-led effort to harness the power-generating capability of this technology.

Our Alternative Budget 2026 called for an initial €100m fund to provide grants to households to install solar panels, reducing household emissions and cutting electricity bills by an average of up to 40 per cent over the course of a year.

Going big on solar has always been a no-brainer and in the context of the current crisis, a huge expansion of mitigation measures is warranted. The government could easily expand existing schemes by ringfencing all the carbon tax that is raised annually, instead of just 60 per cent of it as currently happens. If the entire fund was ringfenced it would provide around €300 million each year.

Given the benefits of solar, it beggars belief that the government has cut the grants available for families in recent years, from €2,400 to €1,800. This has made installation unaffordable for many people. Instead of cutting supports for solar installation, they should be ramped up so workers and families who are struggling with sky-high energy costs can finally get long-term relief.

Solar panels should not be only for those who can afford the upfront cost.

The Social Democrats' *Solar for All* plan will mean:

- Free Solar Panels for all Warmer Homes Scheme-eligible homes.
- The Solar Grant for all other households is doubled from €1,800 to €3,600.
- A €1,000 grant for battery storage systems.
- Reduced red tape for Plug-in Solar Panels.
- Greater supports for Businesses to avail of solar technology.

Our plan will mean:

- More homes availing of sustainability grants.
- Reduced energy costs for more households.
- Fewer low-income families and vulnerable people at risk of energy poverty.
- More sustainable and secure energy generated here, in Ireland.
- Small business will get the help they need to deal with energy costs.

We all deserve secure, sustainable, affordable energy. We need *Solar for All*.

Our Five Key Proposals

Free Solar Panels on the Warmer Homes Scheme

Government should make solar panels available for free to households eligible for the Warmer Homes Scheme.

To be eligible for the Warmer Homes Scheme:

- You must be own and be living in your own home.
- Your home must have been built before 2006.
- Your home must have a Building Energy Rating (BER) of C, D, E or F.
- You must be in receipt of one of a number of social welfare payments¹.

The rollout of free solar should prioritise low-income families and vulnerable groups. By supporting those at risk of energy poverty, we can reduce their energy costs and promote 'energy equality'.

Each home would receive eight to ten solar panels (depending on the suitability of the roof), with up to a 4kWp² system for ten panels, at a cost of approximately €7,000 including installation.

The benefits of solar panels cannot just be for new build estates or people who have enough money to pay up front for the work.

Double Solar Grants for all other Households

Government should double the existing solar grant to other households (i.e. those who do not qualify under the Warmer Homes Scheme) to a maximum of €3,600 for a 4kWp system.

This additional grant would be available to all households up to a maximum household income of €120,000. (We do not propose to change the rules for accessing the current grant for households over this threshold).

¹ These payments are the Fuel Allowance, Working Family Payment, Jobseeker's Allowance, Disability Allowance, Domiciliary Care Allowance, One Parent Family Payment, or Carer's Allowance.

² kWp stands for kilowatt-peak, and is unit measuring the maximum potential power output of a solar PV system under ideal conditions. It indicates the capacity of solar panels, rather than daily output. It is often referred to as 'peak power', 'rated capacity', or 'installed capacity'.

Reinstate the Battery Grant Scheme

Government should provide a €1,000 grant towards the cost of installing a battery storage system. This would involve simply reinstating a scheme that Government abolished in 2022.

Batteries are a useful way for households to save money if they have solar panels, especially where the home has low occupancy throughout the day. By allowing for the storage of energy created during the day, it reduces peak demand on the grid and reduces costs to the homeowner.

It also allows households to avail of cheaper nighttime tariffs by using that time to charge the battery.

Cut the Red Tape around 'Plug-in Solar'

Government must develop streamlined regulations for 'Plug-in Solar' products for renters and apartment dwellers, whilst ensuring safety standards.

'Plug-in Solar' (sometimes referred to as 'balcony solar') refers to small-scale solar PV systems – typically one to four panels – that plug directly into a standard household wall outlet, via a microinverter³.

Government must work with manufacturers to fast-track plug-in solar.

The United Kingdom has recently lit the green light for plug-in solar panels to be in shops within months, offering households an opportunity to significantly cut their energy bills. As well as this, half a million homes in Germany currently avail of this technology.

Supports for Businesses

Government should increase microgeneration grants for business.

At present, businesses⁴ can receive a grant towards the installation of solar PV for their business. The Non-Domestic Microgen Grant (NDMG) provides financial

³ The microinverter converts DC energy from the panels to AC electricity for immediate home use, lowering energy bills without the need for more complex installation by professionals.

⁴ This also applies to the agricultural sector, public sector bodies, schools, community centres and non-profit societies.

assistance to help businesses install solar panels, allowing them to generate electricity on site.

This technology reduces commercial electricity costs and increases security of supply, while enhancing environmental sustainability.

Grant funding is available for systems up to a maximum of 1,000kWp, depending on a number of conditions.

Solar PV System	Current Grant Value	Soc Dems Proposal
1 kWp	€900	€1,350
2 kWp	€1,800	€2,700
3 kWp	€2,100	€3,150
4 kWp	€2,400	€3,600
5 kWp	€2,400	€3,600
6 kWp	€2,400	€3,600
7 kWp – 20 kWp	€300 per kWp	€450
21 kWp – 200 kWp	€200 per kWp	€300
201 kWp – 1000 kWp	€150 per kWp	€225

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