

Maximum price for natural gas and electricity (social rate)



If you must make ends meet on a limited income, you may be eligible for a preferential rate for natural gas and electricity.

What does the maximum price for natural gas en electricity mean?

The maximum price (social rate) is cheaper than the regular rate. It is a preferential rate which corresponds to the lowest commercial rate on the Belgian natural gas and electricity market. The rate is set each quarter by the Commission for Electricity and Gas Regulation (CREG). Those who are eligible for the social rate are not required to pay rental for their electricity or gas meter.

This maximum price is the same for any supplier and applies to the single rate, dual rate and exclusive night-time rate. The social maximum price can also be applied for those using budget meters.

All suppliers or distribution network managers are obliged to allocate the social rate to those who are eligible, unless they have indicated, in advance, that they do not wish to have the maximum rate.

If you are eligible for the social rate for electricity and natural gas, you are regarded as a 'protected customer'. Suppliers must not charge any costs for sending reminders and default notices for failures to pay your electricity and gas invoices.

Protected customers in Flanders are also eligible for a free energy scan, a discount voucher for the purchase of an energy-efficient washing machine, fridge, airing cupboard or freezer; a premium from the network manager when installing a condensing boiler; social roof insulation projects for private rental properties; and higher premiums for investments for energy-saving measures.

Who is entitled to the social rate?

The social rate for natural gas and/or electricity is allocated to persons or families who belong to one of the categories below:

Category 1. One or more persons at the residential address receive the following from the Public Social Welfare Centre

- social security or
- financial support in line with registration in the register of foreign nationals with a permit to stay indefinitely but which, due to the person's nationality, cannot be regarded as an entitlement to social integration, or
- social support which is funded entirely or partially by the federal state, or
- an advance payment for: an income replacement allowance, an integration allowance, an elderly assistance allowance, or an income guarantee for the elderly.

Category 2A. One or more persons at the residential address receive the following from the Federal Public Service Social Security (FODSZ)

- an income replacement payment, or
- an integration allowance, or

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Heb je een klacht? Laat het ons weten via www.cm.be/klachten of contacteer een CM-medewerker. Met jouw reactie verbeteren we immers onze service. Wij garanderen een eerste reactie binnen de zeven dagen en de volledige behandeling van je klacht binnen de 30 dagen.

- an elderly assistance allowance (Brussels), or
- an allowance as a person with a disability on the basis of permanent incapacity to work of minimum 65% (old rules), or
- an allowance for providing assistance to third parties (old rules), or
- additional child support for children who are affected by a physical or mental health disorder of at least 66% (4 points on pillar 1 of the medical/social scale).

Category 2B (only in Flanders) One or more persons at the residential address receive the following from Flemish Social Welfare:

- a care budget for elderly people with a care need.

Category 3. One or more persons at the residential address receive the following from the Federal Pension Service

- an income guarantee for parents or a guaranteed income for the elderly from the old disability rules: a supplementary allowance, an allowance to top-up the guaranteed income or an allowance for supporting third parties.

Category 4. A social tenant in an apartment building

- For a tenant of an apartment in a building where the gas heating is guaranteed by means of a collective installation and the homes are rented for social purposes by a social housing association. The social rate only applies to natural gas.

Additional temporary category: from 01-02-2021 to 30-06-2023, customers with enhanced reimbursements were also eligible for this social rate.

There is **no right to the social rate** for a connection to:

- a second home
- collective areas in an apartment
- for a professional consumer
- for a temporary connection

Note: Kidney patients who have dialysis treatment at home may sometimes receive help for their electricity invoices. You should enquire with your energy supplier.

How to submit a request?

The social maximum rate for natural gas and/or electricity is automatically allocated by energy suppliers for the above categories 1, 2 and 3.

This right is valid from the first day of the trimester in which the decision is taken, consequently there are 4 possible starting dates per calendar year (01-01 – 01-04 – 01-07 – 01-10). This start date may therefore vary from the start date of the benefit that provides access to the social maximum rates.

Every certificate from the supplier is valid until the end of the calendar year.

Since 15-03-2019, decisions may trigger the retroactive application of the social rate.¹ This is possible for a maximum of 2 years - counting from the date on which the supplier was notified of the start date of the decision which led to the right being allocated - and only for the period that the supplier supplied the eligible individual.

Example:

- Application allowance starting on 01-09-2018, decision received on 14-04-2019, social rate retroactively applied from 01-09-2018 and not from 01-04-2019.

¹ Not applicable for care budget for elderly persons with a care need

- Application allowance starting on 01-07-2018, decision received on 01-02-2019, social rate applied according to old rules, with eligibility from 01-01-2019.

Note:

Sometimes you, as the eligible person, must take the initiative.

- If the social rate is not automatically allocated, you will receive a certificate from the competent social institution. This must be provided to the energy supplier.
- Because you do not want your personal details to be processed automatically. You must notify your energy supplier in writing. You must request the certificate each year from the social institution and then provide this to your energy supplier.
- Because you belong to category 4 and are a tenant of a social housing association. You must contact the social housing association to check whether the social rate is being charged.

Check your invoice to ensure the maximum rate is being applied. Most suppliers indicate the use of the social rate on the final bill. Sometimes, the advance invoices (interim invoices) show it too. Not sure whether the social rate is being applied? Then contact your supplier.

What should I do when changing my energy supplier or moving home?

You don't have to do anything. Check to ensure that the personal details on the energy contract match the official details in the State register. You may have to pay the regular rate for a few months when you change your energy supplier. This is due to the database that regulates the social rate, which is only updated once every three months. The amount that you have overpaid will be subsequently refunded (via a credit note or the annual final account).

What happens in supported housing?

The person eligible for the social rate is also the person whose name is on the energy contract.

The social rate is applied automatically.

The person eligible for the social rate is residing in the secondary dwelling while the energy contract had been concluded in the name of a person residing in the main residence.

There are three options:

- The social rate for gas and electricity is applied on the basis of a specific paper certificate.
- The person who is eligible for the social rate informs the FPS Economy about the fact that he is registered in the State register under the title 'care housing'. As a result of a manual link from the person eligible for the social rate and the energy contract, the social rate is applied automatically.
- The name on the energy contract is changed and replaced by the name of the person eligible for the social rate.

Need more information?

For more information, please contact:

- Federal Public Service - Social Energy: 0800 120 33, soc.ener@economie.fgov.be
- Commission for Electricity and Gas Regulation, www.creg.be
- Federal Pension Service (FPD), sfpd.fgov.be, 1765 (free number)
- Federal Government Service Social Security, 0800 987 99
handicap.belgium.be

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- At a nearby CM, www.cm.be
 - the consultants
 - de Zorglijn (*The Care Line*) – www.cm.be/zorglijn
 - Tel.: 02 204 32 34
 - Monday to thursday: 8.30 to 12 o'clock and 13 to 17 o'clock;
 - Friday: 8.30 to 12 o'clock and 13 to 16 o'clock;
 - E-mail: zorglijn@cm.be

You can check whether you are eligible for the social rate for gas and electricity on sociaaltarief.economie.fgov.be