



Wise in 5: Governments strategies for retrofitting residential housing

Wise in 5 is a snapshot comparative guide to a public policy issue across the nations of the UK and Ireland. It helps you be PolicyWISE (Wales, Ireland, Scotland, England) in 5 (it takes just five minutes to read).

It includes a summary of the latest policy developments across the nations, as well as related research from PolicyWISE, The Open University and PolicyWISE's university partners.

PolicyWISE creates neutral and constructive spaces for policy professionals and academics across the nations to develop relationships, respect and knowledge. We support and nurture a common culture of developing and sharing insight, knowledge, ideas and context from across the nations in a comparative and collaborative way.



	Housing standards include retrofitting	Grants for social housing improvements	Declared a climate emergency
Northern Ireland			+
Scotland		+	+
Republic of Ireland			+
England		+	+
Wales	💡	+	+
Key	+ In effect - Yes	💡 Proposed	⚠️ Considered

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Overview

The [Paris Agreement](#) set out that to avert the worst impacts of climate change and preserve a liveable planet, emissions need to be reduced by 45% by 2030 and reach net zero by 2050 .

The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 commits Ireland to net-zero emissions by 2050, and to a 51% reduction in emissions by 2030. The Act provides the framework for Ireland to meet its international and EU climate commitments.

The nations of the UK and Ireland have some of the least energy-efficient housing stocks in Europe. All governments have set targets to reach net zero, including through the modifications of the physical structures of dwellings and increasing access to different and renewable energy sources (retrofitting).

The independent UK Committee on Climate Change estimated that approximately 24m homes across the UK need to be retrofitted with

carbon-saving technologies to meet the net-zero ambitions. 35% of all the energy in the UK is used in housing, with 20% of the carbon dioxide emissions. [If the UK Government is to deliver its targets of a 78% emissions reduction by 2035, and net zero by 2050, household emissions need to be addressed.](#)

Within the UK, legislation in this area is complex and cuts across jurisdictions. Regulation is often Great Britain-wide, while much housing policy is devolved.

The Energy Price Guarantee (E/S/W) was the UK Government's response to the surge in energy prices resulting from the cost-of-living-crisis and Russia's invasion of Ukraine and resulted in universal reductions in cost applied to energy used. The [ODI](#) highlighted their concerns that this focus on reducing costs will increase reliance on fossil fuels and missed an opportunity to invest in renewable sources of energy.



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RELATED RESEARCH FROM THE OPEN UNIVERSITY

The Retrofitting Society (open.ac.uk) project is a new Open Societal Challenge, connecting sustainability, energy equality and wellbeing for all.

Working across the four nations, the ambition is to generate pragmatic and trans-disciplinary approaches to everyday energy practices through citizen science methods highlighting research on energy practices in The OU academic and student community and using these insights to propose energy practices for the public.

International

The [Global Retrofit Index](#) assesses how well G20 states (and 2 non-G20 states) are meeting the challenge of existing buildings becoming zero carbon by 2050. The performance of these leading economies will to a large extent determine global success in decarbonizing buildings. The Index found that most retrofit policy and strategy is piecemeal and inadequate. However, EU states have adopted wide-ranging policies on building retrofits that other nations can learn from.

The Global Retrofit Index					
Rank	Country	Total score (/100)	Rank	Country	Total score (/100)
1	Germany	61.5	=9	Brazil	29.0
2	Netherlands*	56.3	=9	Canada	29.0
3	France	55.5	=9	Republic of Korea	29.0
4	UK	52.8	=12	Japan	28.8
5	Croatia*	52.0	=12	United States	28.8
6	Italy	51.8	14	Turkey	26.0
7	Australia	32.5	15	Saudi Arabia	23.0
8	Mexico	32.3	16	China	21.5

Inter-governmental bodies

The purpose of the [Net Zero, Energy and Climate Change Inter-Ministerial Group \(IMG\)](#) is to support effective engagement and collaboration in areas of shared interest between the portfolio Ministers leading on these issues within the UK Administrations. The IMG will aim to promote the decarbonisation of the UK economy and support the successful delivery of domestic targets and international climate commitments.

Nation by Nation

Scotland/Wales/England

Rebadged as the **GB Insulation Scheme** and launched 30 March 2023, **ECO+** is a £1 billion funded scheme established by the UK Government, to run to March 2026, with up to 70,000 homes expected to benefit.

The Heat Pump Investment Accelerator is designed to leverage private investment to boost manufacturing and supply of heat pumps. The UK Government – acting as a GB-wide government – also announced an extension of the Boiler Upgrade Scheme, incentivising the purchase of heat pumps.

Funding is targeted at low income and vulnerable households, including those with low energy efficiency – considered as an energy performance certificate (EPC) rating of D or below. It will also assist those in low council tax bands, depending on their location, on the following lines:

- Bands A–D in England, Bands A–E in [Scotland](#), Bands A–C in [Wales](#)

The scheme is intended to provide grants to those who haven't previously had any government funding towards the cost of improving their home's energy efficiency.

Scotland

In their national housing strategy, **Housing to 2040**, the Scottish Government committed to low-carbon, affordable homes which support people's needs. The **Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing** (EESH) aims to improve the energy efficiency of social housing in Scotland, by reducing energy consumption, fuel poverty and emissions.

[Retrofitting Dwellings for Improved Energy Efficiency](#) focuses on a whole house approach, applying the principle of "fabric first", making sure the building is well insulated and ventilated. The [Social Housing Net Zero Heat Fund](#) offers capital grant funding to support social housing landlords across Scotland to install zero-emission heating systems and energy efficiency measures.

Wales

Since the Senedd and Welsh Government declared a climate emergency in 2019, [Wales has legislated](#) to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions (also referred to as carbon emissions) to net zero by 2050.

The Welsh Government approach is focused through the [Optimised RetroFit Programme](#) (ORP) which is open to Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) and local authorities (LAs) to install a variety of home decarbonisation measures in existing social housing stock.

ORP supports the [Welsh Housing Quality Standard 2023](#) which encourages landlords to consider issues around affordable warmth and decarbonisation across their whole stock to produce a plan for each home undertaking retrofit. The Government have adopted a test and learn approach to decarbonising homes and the ORP seeks to understand the best value combination of fabric, space, water heating, energy, improvements for individual properties and set out a route to net zero for each home.

England

The [Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund and Home Upgrade Grant](#) will be used to fund energy-saving measures ranging from loft insulation to new windows. An additional £1.1 billion in match funding for social housing provided by local authorities, providers of social housing and charities, will bring the total investment to £2.5 billion to upgrade social and private homes in England.

Northern Ireland

The [energy strategy for Northern Ireland](#) sets a long-term vision of net-zero emissions and clean, renewable and affordable energy for Northern Ireland. 68% of homes use oil boilers for heating in Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland is a member of the all-island Integrated Single Electricity Market (I-SEM) with the Republic of Ireland.

The strategy sets out that all newly constructed homes should be zero carbon, with substantial improvement also required in the energy efficiency of existing buildings. By 2028, all heating appliances being installed should be zero carbon in properties off the gas grid, representing around 75% of homes in Northern Ireland. For those properties on the gas grid, **all heating appliances should be zero carbon by 2033**.

Republic of Ireland

The residential sector accounts for about [one quarter of the energy used in Ireland](#) and is responsible for 19% of the energy-related CO₂ emissions, with a gradual increase in the share of electricity, gas and renewables, and a decline in coal, peat and oil use.

[50% of houses in Ireland have a BER rating of D](#) or lower and require significant energy upgrades (A Building Energy Rating (BER) certificate rates the home's energy performance on a scale between A and G).

The **Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021** provides the framework for Ireland to meet its international and EU climate commitments, with retrofitting of housing stock a key element of the government's plans for economic growth.

Wise up – 5 policy points to takeaway

1. Retrofitting of current housing is essential to meet targets for net zero and to deliver energy efficiency for households across the UK and Ireland. Short-term objectives to alleviate financial hardships need to match longer-term aspirations to reduce carbon emissions.
2. Retrofitting residential dwellings will lead to improvements across many of the challenges facing communities across all nations: energy savings; poverty alleviation; job creation; improved human health; and greater energy security.
3. All governments have signed up to ambitious targets with differing strategies in place. Much of the focus is on tackling the physical aspects of retrofitting, but there also needs to be increased awareness amongst the general population of the benefits of dwellings becoming more sustainable, as a collective and household intervention.
4. All nations are developing strategies to retrofit at scale to meet targets for net zero, and there are clear benefits to cross-national learning through the opportunities to facilitate knowledge exchange. This should be a priority for inter-governmental relations.
5. There are opportunities for governments to work alongside each other, academics, and analysts to provide independent and robust data, to the extent to which existing government strategies will meet net-zero targets, and to facilitate understanding of how policy can influence lower emissions from housing stock.



Our focus and way of working makes us unique:

1. **Space:** We create and maintain neutral but constructive spaces for policy professionals and academics across the nations to develop relationships, respect and knowledge.
2. **Sharing:** We develop and support a common culture of sharing and developing insight, knowledge, ideas and context from across the nations in a comparative and collaborative way.
3. **Solutions:** We help governments focus on evidence-informed policy solutions for citizens and communities across the nations, informed by comparative and collaborative research and methods.

Our offer

The PolicyWISE team work with governments, researchers and partners to identify the opportunities for research and evidence to help solve policy challenges across the UK and Ireland. Utilising our distinct focus and skills we deliver impactful and dynamic training for any audience interested in learning how a comparative policy analysis can benefit their work.

We create the right circumstances for meaningful knowledge exchange between and within organisations, whether that is round-tables, seminars or conferences. We bring together thought-leaders from most areas of public policy, helping you find the solutions to the tricky issues you are looking to solve.

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Interested?

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