



WARM HOMES FOR ALL

Tenants for Climate Justice Campaign Toolkit



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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the campaign toolkit on fighting for warmer homes for all! This toolkit is geared towards those looking to get active in our campaign of Warm Homes for All: Tenants for Climate Justice. The intended target audience for this guide is people organised into groups, particularly in the Friends of the Earth network. Other groups with a passion for climate and/or housing justice will still find this useful.

You might be renting from a landlord, be a council tenant, or just care about climate justice in your community, and not be part of a group. In which case check out our Nuts and Bolts guide¹ on how to start forming a group and campaigning. This whole toolkit can be considered a supplement to those core fundamentals!

For Friends of the Earth, we see the housing crisis in Ireland and the climate crisis globally as linked. Poor quality housing is everywhere in Ireland, particularly in the private rental sector and social housing, which has severe impacts on people's health, and their bills. Tenants are at higher risk of energy poverty compared to homeowners. According to the CSO, one in five (21.8%) people living in rented or rent-free accommodation went without heating at some point in 2023, compared with 6.0% of people in owner-occupied housing. Similarly, 15.3% of those in rented or rent-free and 3.6% in owner-occupied

accommodation were unable to afford to keep their home adequately warm.

This is due to both the high cost of rent (particularly for private renters), and the low energy efficiency of their accommodation, forcing people to consume more electricity, gas, or solid fuels. And most unfairly, tenants have no access to grants for improving the conditions of their homes that homeowners have.

Energy-efficient renovations are a fast and easy way to slash emissions, reduce fossil fuel use, lower energy bills and improve people's homes! They also create lots of green local jobs. Renovations like this are often referred to as "retrofitting". At the moment there are several barriers to retrofitting in Ireland which need to be identified and addressed so that we can dramatically scale up the number of energy efficient homes in Ireland, starting with those in energy poverty.

Because of this, we at Friends of the Earth Ireland are calling for the implementation of minimum Building Energy Ratings (BERs) in the private rental sector, and for the government to step up its ambition in line with fast and fair climate action to retrofit all social housing by 2030.

Tenants are not just locked out of current retrofitting schemes, they also have the

power to come together and change this. More people are renting in Ireland than ever before and the housing crisis is still a key point of concern for voters and one the government will be very conscious of. In situations where large numbers of people have the same landlord, be it the council, a company, or otherwise, they are able to come together and make collective are already examples of people collectively organising for retrofits from the local

This is an issue affecting all parts of the country. Whatever your city or town, there are likely people dealing with leaky or damp housing. Maybe this is something impacting you that you would like to see change.

demands to improve their conditions. There authorities and winning them.

This toolkit will provide you with:

The facts about the issue and how to address common arguments

The skills to map your area and take the campaign into **your community**

The vision for the campaign and how to keep the pressure up nationally

⁵⁵⁰ 500 450 450 359 300 259 200 150 2022 2023 2024 Illustration by Eoin Whelehan

^{1.} https://www.friendsoftheearth.ie/get-involved/resources/nuts-and-bolts-our-new-campaign-guide/

Warm Homes for All: Tenants for Climate Justice



What is climate justice? Climate justice is the idea that those who have done the least to cause the climate crisis are most affected by its impacts. Globally, the effects of climate change in extreme weather events affect more people in the Global South. in countries that have historically burned less fossil fuels and are less developed, than in regions such as Europe or the United States. Such Global North countries have colonised and plundered regions like Africa and Latin America, in part using fossil fuels to drive this exploitation, and now leaving less developed countries to foot the bill of their extraction and emissions. Both globally and nationally, climate justice means that we need to make sure that action against fossil fuels is both fast and fair. In Ireland, this means that the ability to live in safe, warm homes with clean air should not just be open to those who can afford it while the rest of us are left burning dirty fossil fuels to keep our damp, leaky homes heated. Image credit: Iris Aghedo

What is the link between housing and the environment?

10% of national greenhouse gas emissions come from the residential sector. Within this, tenants are more likely to be living in leaky homes which require burning more fossil fuels to keep them warm. The vast majority of private rental properties have a BER below a B rating. This is particularly bad in HAP (Housing Assistance Payment) tenancies where 50% of homes have a BER rating of a D, E, F or G rating. Similarly, local authority housing (owned by city or county councils) is more likely to be leaky with over 80% with a BER of C or lower and nearly 40% with a D, E, F, or G.

This is a significant and growing cohort of the population. The private rental sector has <u>over 330,000 tenancies</u> and the number of registered tenancies is <u>increasing</u>. There are also <u>180,000 local authority or Approved Housing Body tenancies</u>.

Overall, 900,000 people in Ireland are living in enforced deprivation, in part due to high housing and energy costs. However, tenants in private rental and social housing are much more likely to be facing energy poverty due to low energy efficiency and therefore higher bills.

Ireland has one of the <u>highest rates of excess winter deaths</u> in the EU, many of which can be attributed to fuel poverty and cold housing. Cold homes also impact our children the most.

Children living in cold homes are <u>over twice as likely to suffer from</u> <u>respiratory problems</u> than those living in warm homes.

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Children living in cold homes are

OVER TWICE AS LIKELY

to suffer from respiratory problems than those living in warm homes.

In our research with Cairde on Roma Communities and Climate Justice in Ireland² we found that energy poverty and housing conditions were a core point of concern for people, the majority of whom lived in privately rented accommodation.

One contributor said:

"The windows are in very bad condition, the cold comes in, in winter I have to put blankets so my children don't get cold."

We know that retrofitting and energy efficiency upgrades massively improve quality of life in previously leaky homes. Many homeowners are <u>delighted</u> with the impact of improving their housing. Why should tenants not be able to live in comfortable, warm homes too?

As it stands, tenants cannot avail of these schemes and suffer from the 'split incentive' dilemma where landlords have no incentive or punishment for failing to upgrade their tenants' homes. Given the transient nature of the rental market in Ireland and the short

supply of affordable housing, people are afraid to ask their landlords for upgrades for fear of eviction.

One contributor to our <u>research with</u> Bohemians FC on retrofitting³ said:

"It's like, why would I spend my money on a place I might not be in next year? And if I ask my landlord to do it, he'll probably throw me out!"

Meanwhile the government is lacking ambition in terms of retrofitting properties that are already state-owned and could deliver a win-win both to tenants and our environment.

Retrofitting homes, focusing on those most left out in the cold by current policies, shows an example of positive climate action that can generate buy-in for other measures to address the crisis we are facing, and ultimately build a movement for a <u>radical</u> <u>system change for an economy</u>⁴ that favours our planet and the people who share it.



- Illustration by Eoin Whelehan
- $2. \ https://www.friendsoftheearth.ie/publications/roma-communities-and-climate-justice/publications/publications/roma-communities-and-climate-justice/publications/roma-climate-justice/publicati$
- 3. https://www.friendsoftheearth.ie/publications/levelling-the-playing-field/
- 4. https://friendsoftheearth.eu/publication/7-sparks-to-light-a-new-economy/

Why focus on this now? Government promises & gaps

In 2021, the Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, and Green Party government released Housing for All, the national housing policy to last until 2030. Included in this is the commitment to introduce minimum BERs in the private rental sector from 2025. This also contains the intention to retrofit 36,500 Local Authority properties to a B2 BER by 2030. This is just over a quarter of local authority housing.

Recently, the Economic Social and Research Institute (ESRI) released a report⁵ on the cost of retrofitting in the private rental sector in line with the Housing for All plans. They found that 80% of rental properties have a BER below B, and 45,000 rental properties are E-G rated, meaning many tenants face the worst living conditions. They also found that the total investment required by property owners to retrofit the rental sector to a BER of B1-B2 is estimated to be between €7 billion and €8 billion. Meanwhile, retrofitting only the lowest efficiency rentals with current BER of E1 or below is between €1.7 billion and €2.3 billion. They identified that landlord reluctance to upgrade homes is due to financing gaps and above mentioned split incentives.

At Friends of the Earth, we believe that the targets for social housing retrofitting are too low, and the state should be ambitious and aim to retrofit all of its stock by 2030 for the benefit of people and the planet. In terms of progress, by the end of 2023, 5,766 units had been retrofitted to B2 (or cost optimal equivalent) standard leaving over 30,000 to retrofit by 2030. This is made challenging as funding for local authority retrofitting varies yearly. For example, for South Dublin County Council, in 2022 the council was allocated €5.1 million with a target of retrofitting 146 homes. In 2024 this was cut to €2.822 million with a target of only 83 homes. Is this ambitious enough to meet our housing needs and climate targets?

On an EU level there are several pieces of legislation that need to be implemented in an Irish context that could make this a strategic time to campaign.

The revised **Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD)**, effective from May 28, 2024, aims to enhance the energy efficiency of buildings across the EU. A significant aspect of this directive is its focus on protecting tenants during the transition to more energy-efficient housing. Member States are mandated to implement safeguards for tenants, which may include measures such as rent support or caps on rent increases.

Meanwhile, the European Union has established the Social Climate Fund (SCF)6 to address the challenges of energy poverty and support vulnerable groups during the transition to climate neutrality. The SCF aims to mitigate the social and economic impacts of the Emissions Trading System (ETS2) whereby the cost of fossil fuels

for buildings and road transport will be increased. This is meant to ensure that households affected by energy or transport poverty receive direct support and are not left behind in the green transition. Each EU member state is required to draft a Social Climate Plan to prepare for this.

What is the solution?

We have 3 key demands:

Go further where the state already owns the stock: 100% of social housing should be retrofitted by 2030, starting with the worstperforming homes, and providing greater and multi-annual funding for local authorities to ramp up their retrofit programmes.

Don't leave renters in the cold: Minimum energy efficiency standards for private rentals, targeting the worst performing first.

Address the most leaky homes: Extend the Warmer Homes Schemes eligibility to include HAP tenancies, on the condition of a long-term lease (5+ years) being offered to the tenant.

These must also come with protection from 'renovictions' where people are evicted on the grounds of substantial renovations, and from rent hikes. This needs to be firmly enshrined in the legislation.

5. https://www.esri.ie/news/new-esri-research-explores-investment-requirements-for-energy-efficiency-upgrades-in-the

6. https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/eu-emissions-trading-system-eu-ets/social-climate-fund en





What about vacancy and housing supply?

In many places across the country, vacancy and dereliction is a massive eye sore and immediate way for people to connect the housing crisis to the environment. There are estimated to be between 102,000 to <u>164,000</u> vacant or derelict properties in the country. That's a huge untapped resource that could help solve both the housing and climate crises if we bring those homes back into use sustainably. New construction is carbon-intensive. Refurbishing vacant homes is a greener solution, saving emissions and reducing the environmental cost of housing expansion. Plus, it's faster and often cheaper than building from scratch.

While some vacant or derelict homes are in rural areas lacking infrastructure, urban vacancy is a major problem in many towns and cities and addressing it has added benefits—like avoiding urban sprawl, protecting green spaces, and reducing car dependency. Reusing existing buildings in cities helps create compact, climate-friendly communities. There is the Vacant Homes Tax — however only about 3,750 homes were taxed in 2024, generating just €2.2 million. Other incentives exist such as grants to renovate derelict properties, however vacancy remains endemic for a variety of reasons - from speculation to ownership disputes. More robust measures are needed to unlock this housing stock and use

things like the Vacant Homes Tax to fund improvements like retrofitting.

Given the scale of the housing crisis it is often argued that imposing any minimum standards will reduce supply further by forcing landlords to flee the market. Simultaneously, high rents are a result of limited affordable alternatives, and Ireland's growing population means we need lots more housing to become available to tackle all of these issues. This can be done by the state stepping up its role in supplying public housing. Beyond rent control, expanding energy efficient public housing delivery is one of the best ways to reduce market rents. It challenges the dominance of private landlords and offers better alternatives to low-quality, expensive rentals, which disproportionately affect tenants who are already on lower incomes and would be eligible for public housing.

While some landlords claim they'll leave the market if stricter energy standards are enforced, ultimately this risk can be offset if the state increases its role in directly providing public housing and properly tackles vacancy. That way, tenants aren't left choosing between poor-quality, inefficient homes and nothing at all.

While these are not core focuses of the campaign, it is important to understand the issue as a whole to better connect retrofitting to other concerns people may have about housing, and to build alliances with other local groups and campaigns.



Energy for who?

While it might not be immediately obvious, this campaign goes hand in hand with our work on data centres⁷. Large energy users such as data centres are using up an ever-increasing amount of our national electricity grid. This is anticipated to be over 30% of our grid capacity by 2030 under current projections. They are already using more energy than all urban housing combined. This increased demand for energy is driving up costs currently, and encouraging the government to invest more in dirty fossil fuel infrastructure like importing fracked gas from the United States. Data centres also use a large amount of water to cool themselves, and require construction materials and labour to build.

To return to our theme of climate justice we need to ask who benefits from our current system. Can Ireland's outdated water system manage the strain put on it by data centres when we also need the infrastructure for new housing? Why do we have the labour in the country to build gas-guzzling corporate data centres but not insulate people's homes? We already have some of the highest energy costs in Europe, why should people already at risk of energy poverty have to foot the bill as data centres increase costs for consumers?

Ultimately we need to look towards ideas of system change that tackle the idea of economic growth for growth's sake in ways that only benefit a wealthy elite at the expense of everyone else. We need to fight for an economy within Earth's limits with increased collective and public ownership. and a guaranteed basic quality of life, instead of prioritising big corporations using our data to advertise to us or to develop algorithms to promote hateful content on social media. Our work on warm homes for all and against the corporate capture of our energy grid goes together in this way.

7. https://www.friendsoftheearth.ie/data-centres/





Campaigning to win

Much of this section is a brief introduction to running a campaign. A lot of this is sketched out in more detail in our <u>Nuts and Bolts campaign guide</u> which I recommend you check out to deepen your understanding and application of these ideas.



What do we mean by organising?

Organising is about building power to create lasting change. It focuses on structured, strategic action to bring people together, identify leaders, and develop collective strength.

Organising is not about just reaching those who are already engaged—it's about identifying somewhere that includes those most affected by an issue, even those who may not see themselves as activists. This could be a workplace, or a housing estate for example. It is a space where people may have to work with others even if they don't have a shared ideology or passion for the same issues.

Real change happens when large numbers of people are engaged in sustained, strategic action. A campaign should aim for high participation, not just symbolic actions. The more people affected by an issue who actively participate, the harder it becomes for decision-makers to ignore the demands.

Mobilising is about getting people to show up for a specific action (e.g. a protest), while organising is about building long-term relationships and structures to sustain engagement. Organising focuses on capacity-building, ensuring that the campaign doesn't rely on just a few individuals but has many leaders driving the work forward. Mobilising and advocacy are important and have their place, but if we really want to build the environmental and climate justice movement we need

to be reaching new people on issues that affect them. None of us were born climate activists, and we need to consider how to bring more people over to our way of thinking by showing people coming together can win! It is in part about winning real changes that improve people's lives. This requires a credible plan, clear demands, and an understanding of power structures.

Winning on our national level demands means we need to create an issue that will not go away, and that is only made possible by coordinated local campaigning in communities, and creating buy-in from people with small victories along the way.

So, to do all that you will need to know where to focus your efforts to leverage the greatest change. In the case of this campaign this means mapping your area, deciding on a focus based on reaching those most affected and with the power to fight for change, and getting out there to talk to people.

Organised tenants have won commitments on retrofitting recently, such as Davitt House in Dublin 12 which is in the process of installing new windows, doors, and insulation, and seeing energy bills plummet as a result.

In France, minimum energy efficiency ratings for rented buildings were won under their national climate law, however tenants are continuing to organise to ensure these are implemented and for interventions in some of the worst hit areas and buildings.

These can serve as models for us all.

Mapping your community

The first place to start with any local campaigning is to identify the people who are going to be involved. There are a number of ways to do this, from looking at high level data, to using local knowledge. This is both to find out the most impacted areas but also where already existing community infrastructure and potential allies might be.

If you feel you lack the local knowledge, check out our Appendix on tools you can use to map your area.

When you have settled on an area, then is a good time to start mapping out what other community facilities, groups (from environmental groups to residents' associations or tenants' unions), or campaigns are in place. Through a combination of internet research, walking around the area, and discussions with other locals you may know we can get a pretty good initial understanding to be added to as the campaign develops.

Lastly we have two maps. One for all elected TDs who signed our <u>climate pledge</u>⁸ for the general election, as well as another for local councillors who signed our climate pledge for local elections. These might be useful for leveraging political support at a local or national level as the campaign develops.

8. https://www.friendsoftheearth.ie/-councillors-and-tds-who-signed-the-climate-pledge

How to doorknock

A key way of getting out talking to people in an area you want to focus on is knocking on doors. This can be time consuming but often results in richer, deeper conversations than, for example, leafleting.

Structure:

- 1. Introduce yourself and/or the group you are speaking on behalf of. It is best to keep this short and to the point as you want to learn about the other person as opposed to talking about yourself.
- 2. Figure out what people care about. A good rule of thumb is you should spend 70% of your time listening and only 30% talking. Ask open ended questions and follow up. Try to enter without any preconceived notions about people's motivations and don't interrupt. Try to assess how widely or deeply felt an issue is. If there is a common issue coming up amongst people you speak to or you are already campaigning on a specific issue, try asking directly about others' opinions on it.

For example: 'If you could change one thing about your housing situation what would it be?" or 'A lot of your neighbours have brought up the cold and damp in their homes. Is that something that affects you too?"

- 3. Identify who is at fault. A core part of motivating people to do something about an issue is for them to realise who is the target of their anger or upset. Figure out collectively who is the person or persons responsible for the issue they care most about and who has the power to change it. See the section below for the roles certain decision makers hold. However often people will have an idea who is responsible so try to tease that out.
- 4. Discover what needs to be done to fix the issue by regular people. This is where you would ask if they think it is better to tackle the issue collectively or individually. If you have an active campaign on the issue this is where you explain your plan to win.
- 5. Ask them to get involved! If the response is positive now is when you take the step of asking for people to join your group or campaign. If this is the case - great. Make sure you explain any upcoming events or activities and make sure to integrate people quickly while they are still enthusiastic about it.
- 6. Don't be upset if people don't say yes immediately. Don't be afraid to ask them about their hesitation. If it seems like someone might be on the fence, at least try to get contact details so you can follow up with them later.

From people to issues

Once we have identified who the people who are being organised through the campaign and where they are we need to think of our next steps.

The best way to do this is through identifying what the issues people are experiencing are and will motivate them to action. There are lots of ways we can do this for example:

- Noting what has been said in 1-1 conversations and seeing what has been coming up most frequently
- A survey or petition to test how widely or deeply felt these issues are. Check out our petition guide9.
- A public meeting for people to come and develop collective demands on their issues.

For basic issues regarding cold, damp, and ventilation, legislation covered in The Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2019 may already be being violated. Under this, all tenants whether in social housing or renting privately are entitled to:

- A property free from damp and in good structural repair.
- All rooms having adequate ventilation and heating, which you as a tenant(s) can control.
- Bathrooms that must be properly insulated and contain separate ventilation

Other more structural changes such as a demand to access retrofitting or energy efficiency upgrades may not be covered by rights under legislation and require putting pressure on the people responsible for this collectively.



9. https://www.friendsoftheearth.ie/act-local/act-local-resources





Who is responsible?

Coming up with issues or demands for change is one thing, but figuring out who has the authority to make a difference is key to winning. Due to Ireland's system of political representation this is not always easy to figure out!

In local authority housing:

- Overall retrofitting is often the remit of Senior Executive Officers or senior architects depending on the local authority.
- This depends on the budget set by the national government however, this is annual and varies on a yearly basis.
- Local councillors technically approve
 the local budget but have little say on
 it. Councillors also do not have much
 authority but can be useful to advocate
 in the council, to pass motions, or to ask
 questions of management in support of
 your campaign.
- General maintenance such as leaky windows or broken doors (which are still issues of climate justice!) is the responsibility of a local authority area manager and ultimately the Director of Housing.

In private rental or Approved Housing Body housing:

 Landlords (here meaning both private individuals and organisations/companies) are responsible for maintaining a property including repairing things which may cause the home to be leaky or damp.

- The Residential Tenancies Board (RTB)
 is responsible for holding landlords to
 account on this and other things such as
 illegal evictions.
- Local Authorities are responsible for enforcing the minimum housing standards for homes in their area. In particular Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) properties are supposed to be inspected within 8 months of the payment starting.

For the more far-reaching policy changes we are calling for, this is the remit of the government, primarily the **Department of Housing** and the **Minister for Housing**. For this reason TDs can be useful to target as part of your campaign, not only to keep the pressure for national change, but also to highlight your campaign locally and make the link between the two. It is worth seeing if you can talk to **government TDs**, or party housing spokespeople in particular.



Illustration by Eoin Whelehan

From issues to action

The below is also all covered more in our <u>Nuts and Bolts guide</u> so check that out for more details!

In planning any action and escalating our campaign we need to think about:

Who is responsible for the issue we want to see change?
- see the section above on this

What are their interests (political, reputational, social, economic) that we can utilise to put them under pressure?

What tactics can we use to affect their interests given our numbers and situation?

How do we promote our actions and campaign?

How do we escalate so we are building the numbers involved in our campaign and gaining momentum?

How do we publicise our campaign activity? Check out our how to do a press release guide¹⁰. For instance using your own social media or engaging and sharing FoE Ireland's content

10. https://www.friendsoftheearth.ie/act-local/act-local-resources

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Staying part of the wider campaign

- Signing up to campaign updates on the website to learn about what other groups are doing and our advocacy progression.
- Sharing your stories and wins with the wider movement
- Joining strategy calls once every 2 months with others working on the campaign to plan next steps collectively.
- What kind of support we can offer:
 - o Organising training and educational opportunities
 - Policy briefings
 - Updates from local and national levels
 - Cross group coordination and 1-1 organising support
 - Opportunities for cross group collaboration and days of action

Contact aaron@foe.ie for more information or to get support.

Appendix 1: Tools for Mapping

There are a number of tools that might be useful for looking at statistical data in your area:

- The Central Statistics Office (CSO) has data from its 2022 census broken down by geographical small area which allows you to get super detailed information about everything from how many houses in an area use gas, the tenancy type, the age range of residents and much much more.
- Pobal also has census data used in its deprivation maps which shows how affluent certain areas are.
- Codema has used this deprivation data for Dublin and cross-referenced it with energy efficiency ratings for homes to determine areas it has determined as at higher risk of energy poverty. See p.105-106 of the "Full Report - Dublin Region Energy Master Plan" on their website¹¹.
- For private renting, How Much Rent¹² is a site that scrapes publicly accessible data from the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) and Daft (a commonly used site for finding places to rent) in order to report many things including reported BER, rent increases over time, and much more.
- Land Direct is slightly less user-friendly and is locked behind a paywall for some information but can tell you who owns nearly any individual property in Ireland.
- The Maynooth research project, Just Housing, has mapped <u>retrofit rates</u> across the country.13

11. https://www.codema.ie/our-work/dublin-region-energy-master-plan/

^{13.} https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/ a1125eaaee11494c85a5536f307ab4c3/page/ED-initial-analysis



^{12.} http://HowMuchRent.com