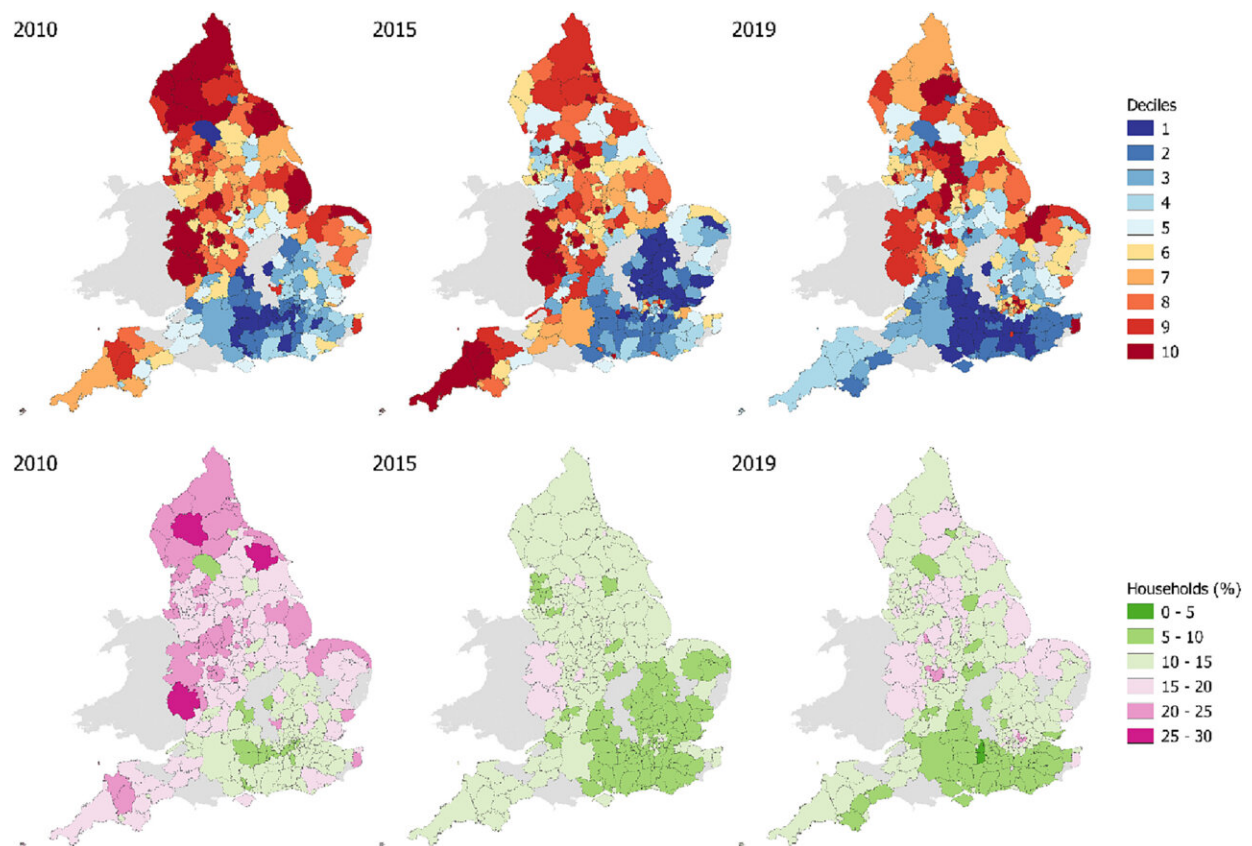


Homes hit hardest by fuel poverty not benefiting from government's flagship energy scheme

December 13 2023



Fuel poverty estimates mapped for 2010 (10 % indicator), 2015 (LIHC indicator) and 2019 (LILEE indicator). The maps in the bottom row show the percentage of fuel poor households in each Local Authority for the years indicated. The maps in the top row show the Local Authorities classified into deciles—effectively splitting the Local Authorities in the dataset into ten equal subsections, based on the proportion of fuel poor households in each area. Here

Local Authorities in dark blue are in the 10 % with the lowest proportion of fuel poor households, and those Local Authorities shaded in dark red are in the 10 % with the highest proportion of fuel poor households. Missing Local Authorities where boundaries have changed during the ten-year period are represented in gray, in addition to Wales for context. Credit: *Energy Research & Social Science* (2023). DOI: 10.1016/j.erss.2023.103139

Households in areas hit hardest by fuel poverty are not benefiting most from the government's flagship energy support scheme, a damning report has found.

Experts examining the impact of the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) showed it is not targeting the places in urgent need of support.

The scheme, which was launched in 2012, pledged to cut bills for [low-income households](#) by improving insulation and focusing support on those in [fuel poverty](#).

Academics from Southampton and Bristol universities [published](#) the [report](#) in the *Energy Research & Social Science*.

They also warned that [low-income homes](#) would be "further entrenched in energy deprivation" if the government decides to revise its plans to fund the program through fuel bills.

Report co-author Dr. Paul Bridgen, from the University of Southampton, said the ECO is supposed to be the government's flagship initiative to combat fuel poverty but the program is flawed.

He added, "Homes in locations which are suffering the most from rising energy bills are not being helped the most and, worryingly, richer

[households](#) are almost as likely to benefit.

"There is a sense that the fuel poverty crisis is finished but this is far from true."

Since it was relaunched in its new format last year, the ECO program has only upgraded around 65,000 households in the U.K., according to the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero.

Its critics have claimed it is too slow and could take nearly 200 years to improve eligible homes, or 300 years for the government to meet its own targets to abolish fuel poverty.

The Southampton and Bristol [social scientists](#) based the study on government estimates for fuel poverty from 317 local authorities from 2012 to 2020.

They ranked all areas of the U.K. into five groups based on the severity of their energy poverty, from lowest to highest, and tracked their performances across the decade.

According to the experts, the ECO had mixed results in targeting people in the most energy deprived group, with an average of just 71 households per 1,000 receiving any home installations or upgrades.

Co-author Dr. Caitlin Robinson from the University of Bristol said, "The scheme is not particularly effective at targeting areas of England that have been dealing with persistent fuel poverty.

"To properly address fuel poverty, the government needs to look at the extreme and long-standing issues of fuel poverty in certain places and then fund energy-efficiency home improvements using local councils.

"But first, ministers must indicate quickly that funding for the ECO does not return to household energy bills. If this happens, some of the most fuel-poor homes will be paying for a scheme from which they get no help."

More information: Paul Bridgen et al, A decade of fuel poverty in England: A spatio-temporal analysis of needs-based targeting of domestic energy efficiency obligations, *Energy Research & Social Science* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/j.erss.2023.103139](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2023.103139)

Provided by University of Southampton

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