Playing my part

How to save money, reduce reliance on Russian energy, support Ukraine and help the planet

International Energy Agency

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INTERNATIONAL ENERGY AGENCY

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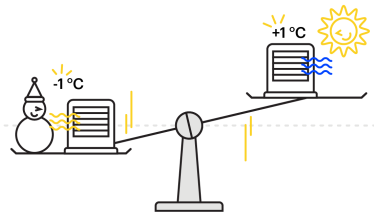
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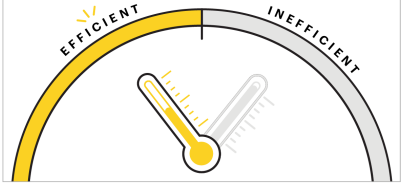
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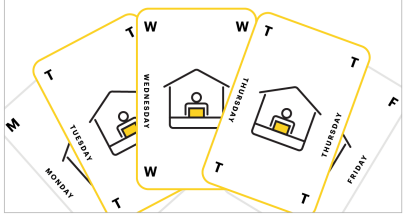
1 Turn down heating and use less air-conditioning



2 Adjust your boiler's settings



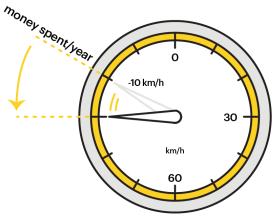
3 Work from home



4 Use your car more economically

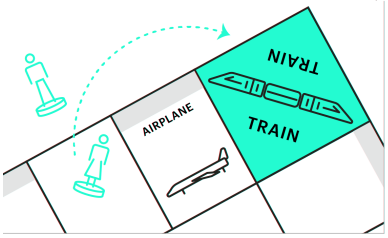


5 Reduce your speed on highways

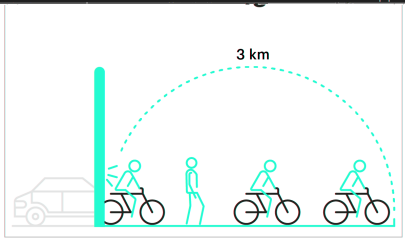


6 Leave your car at home on Sundays in large cities

7 Walk or bike short journeys instead of driving



8 Use public transport



9 Skip the plane, take the train...



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Playing my part: How to save money, reduce reliance on Russian energy, support Ukraine and help the planet

A collaboration between the European Commission and the International Energy Agency to raise European citizens' awareness of the benefits of energy savings and the importance of putting energy efficiency at the heart of planning and investments

People across the European Union want to take action to help Ukraine following Russia's invasion. Many are also experiencing higher energy bills because of the energy crisis exacerbated by the war. Using less energy is a concrete way for Europeans to reduce their bills, cut reliance on Russian fossil fuels, demonstrate solidarity with the Ukrainian people, and support climate action.

Citizens and governments can make major positive impacts if they act together and decisively. The International Energy Agency (IEA), in coordination with the European Commission, has therefore developed a series of simple steps citizens can take to save energy now, drawing on the IEA's recent 10-Point Plan to Reduce the European Union's Reliance on Russian Natural Gas and 10-Point Plan to Cut Oil Use. The new analysis also identifies actions that companies and national and local governments can take to support consumer action and unlock even more energy savings.

The IEA and the European Commission are also working together with key stakeholders – consumers, workers and leaders in national and local governments – to raise public awareness about the benefits of energy conservation measures.

Context

Many European citizens have already responded to Russia's invasion of Ukraine by making donations or by directly assisting refugees. But cutting energy use also supports Ukraine by reducing the need for Russian oil and gas, helping to reduce the revenue streams funding the invasion.

These messages will provide the foundation for further communications by the IEA and the European Commission to raise public awareness of the options for taking action.

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What European citizens can do

With small actions, you can make a big difference

By following all these recommendations, a typical household in the European Union could reduce, on average, its energy bill by more than EUR 450 a year[1]. If all EU citizens were to follow the recommendations below at home and in their workplace, it would save 220 million barrels of oil a year, which is enough to fill 120 supertankers, and around 17 billion cubic metres of gas, which is enough to heat almost 20 million homes. Citizens have the power to immediately cut their energy use and reduce their fuel bills. But it is government authorities – from the national to regional, city and local levels – that are ultimately best placed to incentivise energy saving actions.

1. Turn down your heating and use less air-conditioning

The average heating temperature within homes across the European Union is over 22 °C, but many could comfortably accommodate 19 °C or 20 °C. Turning down the thermostat in your home by just 1 °C would save around 7% of the energy you use for heating. For every degree you lower the heating on average, you could cut more than EUR 70 from your annual energy bill. If you live in a building with a centralised heating system, you can work with neighbours and building managers to explore the possibility of turning down the temperature of the communal boiler.

Setting your air conditioner 1 °C warmer could reduce the amount of electricity used by almost 10% and save you EUR 20 a year. You can also reduce heating and air conditioning temperatures when rooms are not in use or adjust the temperature according to the type of room (you don't need to have the same temperature in your bedroom and bathroom, for example).

Adjusting the thermostat not only makes a difference in homes but in all types of buildings – companies and public institutions should also consider applying this measure in offices.

2. Adjust your boiler's temperature

In many homes and workplaces, default settings on boilers can often be adjusted to increase efficiency and save up to 8% of the energy used to heat rooms and water if you have a condensing boiler. Setting up your boiler properly could save

[1] This number represents an average across all EU households at current prices and will vary according to your habits, job, location, the size and type of your home, the energy you use to heat it, the size of your car and the number of kilometres you travel each year. The energy bill savings mentioned for each measure correspond to the savings that can be achieved for representative households in each case, i.e. for households that can apply these measures (for example, working from home cannot be done for all jobs, thus savings related to this measure only apply to households for which it is possible).

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around EUR 100 each year. If you don't know how to do it, consult your boiler's manual or ask for advice during the annual servicing of your boiler.

3. Work from home

Commuting accounts for around a quarter of the oil used by cars in the European Union, and the average one-way car commute is around 15 kilometres. However, more than a third of jobs in the European Union could be done from home. Teleworking should be encouraged by employers: every time you work from home, you save money and avoid burning fuel. If your job allows it, working at home three days a week could reduce your household fuel bill by around EUR 35 a month, even after taking into account the increased energy use at home.

4. Use your car more economically

Most car trips in the European Union are made with just a single occupant. Pooling your car journeys with neighbours, friends or colleagues saves fuel and money. Setting your car's air conditioning 3 °C warmer will also immediately improve the car's fuel economy. These combined actions could save your household around EUR 100 per year.

5. Reduce your speed on highways

Driving too fast is inefficient for the car engine and wastes fuel. The average car in the European Union clocks up around 13 000 kilometres a year. By reducing your average cruising speed on motorways by 10 kilometres an hour, you could cut your household fuel bill by around EUR 60 a year.

6. Leave your car at home on Sunday in large cities

Cities should promote car-free Sundays and do them often. Car-free Sundays are already a regular fixture in many countries and cities. Brussels, Edinburgh, Milan, Paris have all used them to promote public health, community-oriented spaces and cultural events. More than 3 000 towns and cities registered for the European Mobility Week in 2021, which included a commitment to a car-free day. If you live in a large city, leaving your car at home every Sunday could save your household EUR 100 a year.

7. Walk or bike short journeys instead of driving

Leaving your car at home for short journeys, especially if it is a large car, saves a significant amount of fuel. On average, around a third of car journeys in the European Union are less than 3 kilometres. By using other means of transport, you'll help reduce air pollution and congestion in your area and potentially improve your health. And you can save money – over EUR 55 per household every year

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potentially – by walking, cycling or using micromobility (such as an electric scooter) for short journeys. Fourteen EU countries have at least one tax-incentive or purchase subsidy for bikes or electric bikes.

8. Use public transport

If you can commute to work on public transport rather than driving your car, it's worth doing so to reduce oil consumption. The spare capacity on public transport during peak travel periods differs depending on the system, and on the country and city. However, there is typically spare capacity in off-peak periods that can be used to "spread out" the peak if employers allow flexible working hours. Public authorities can play an important role through temporary incentives to reduce fares for public buses, metro systems and light rail.

9. Skip the plane, take the train

For distances under 1 000 km, high-speed trains provide a high-quality substitute for flying. Consider taking a train rather than a plane whenever practical and affordable. Employers should encourage train journeys instead of short-haul flights for employees' business travel or promote virtual meetings instead of travelling. Night trains are an option for travelling even longer distances and have the advantage of spreading traffic across different times of the day. Based on existing high-speed rail infrastructure, just under 5% of plane journeys in the European Union could be done by train instead, including both leisure and business travel.

There's more you can do

There are many ways to upgrade your home to make it more efficient and less dependent on fossil fuels. All around the European Union, there are a growing number of organisations offering energy advice for households through national programmes or local initiatives. Get in touch with these services to receive advice for low-cost action and long-term investments in order to save more energy, more money and reduce your carbon footprint.

- Installing smart controls and digital thermostats can save up to 15% of your energy consumption, allow you to control heating and cooling comfort more easily, ensure you use the cleanest electricity, and regulate your electricity consumption to benefit from the lowest electricity prices.
- Find out if your government or local authority offers financial support to install solar panels and/or to improve home insulation – these actions can pay for themselves through lasting energy savings. Simpler home upgrade measures such as draught proofing and roof, loft or attic insulation can bring significant benefits very quickly and with little inconvenience. Measures such as wall insulation or efficient windows may require more investment but will pay for themselves in long term savings.

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Opting for controlled ventilation can also save energy. Replacing your oil or gas boiler with a heat pump or another sustainable option can also make a big difference. Insulating your domestic hot water tank if the tank has limited insulation can also quickly make a difference to energy bills.

- Nearly all EU member states offer subsidies for purchasing an electric car, which consumes only a third of the energy used by a conventional car. When you buy new appliances or a new car, choose the most energy efficient ones – over their lifetimes, they will use less energy and save you money.

All of these actions will bring you lasting benefits.

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