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# Access to water and measures in case of non-payment

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Access to water is today a reality in all European Member States. Water services are providing safe and clean water to citizens and businesses. These services have a cost that is covered by the water bill. In case citizens (domestic households), cannot afford to pay their bill, laws or contract agreements foresee measures to allow both customers and water services to maintain the service provided. This document is summarising the procedures in place in EurEau members' countries.

This background document shows that

- ~ Some Member States have social tariffs in place, or social funds, but these are instruments of social policy. In some cases water operators are involved in designing them or contribute directly to them, but they are managed by the states or the local authorities.
- ~ Disconnections are generally allowed if consumers do not pay their bills. In some Member States they are not allowed for main residences (Austria, France, Hungary, Ireland, UK) and for hospitals and schools.
- ~ Disconnection rates are varying between 0,1% and 2%, they are generally below 1% of the total connections (this includes second houses, shops and industries) per year. The highest rates are usually because of multiple disconnections for the same customer.
- ~ Before resorting to disconnections, the process is long and it may take several months and different letters/calls/ visits by the operators. Disconnections occur also on the basis of a Court decision.
- ~ Companies try to avoid to operate disconnections, since they have to bear the costs associated with them.
- ~ In some Member States companies prefer to limit the flow (e.g. 20 litres/person/per day) or to install coin-insert water meters instead of disconnections. In Hungary and Switzerland flow reduction is the only option allowed.
- ~ Generally the disconnections last for few days (1-3) as it is a strong incentive for consumer to pay their bill. However, disconnections are means of last resort and the letters sent prior to disconnection are generally enough to make consumers rectify their situation.



## AUSTRIA

1. Disconnection policy for non-payment of water charges:

The water supplier may not cut off water supply to a domestic customer for non-payment. The flow might be reduced to the daily human need.

2. Legal position:

3. Cut-off conditions :

4. Number of disconnections per year :

None

5. Duration of disconnection:

6. Letters/phone calls before disconnection:

7. Visits before disconnection:

8. Absolute disconnection / minimum flow:

9. Possibility of "social tariffs":

It is not a responsibility of the water service utility to deal with affordability problems of households.



## BELGIUM

### Flanders and Brussels

#### 1. Disconnection policy for non-payment of water charges:

Water supply can be disconnected. Due to the federal system, regions are responsible for the water sector and there are three different regulations.

#### 2. Legal position:

In the Brussels Region, there is no general legal prohibition, but according to the law (08.09.1984) water companies need a judgement from the court to disconnect a resident consumer (before taking the matter to court, companies need local authority approval). Companies may disconnect a non-resident building without going through the law process.

In the Flemish Region, the Decree (regional law) of 20 December 1996 gives every customer the right to an uninterrupted delivery of a minimum quantity of drinking water. This means a legal prohibition of disconnection (at least of a complete disconnection). This decree has been changed in 2015 and this minimum delivery has been closed out. Complete disconnection is still possible for safety reasons and in certain cases of non-payment for the non-willing to pay (the procedure of complete disconnection is long and severe for the water supplier) or deceit of the customer (after a local committee decision).

#### 3. Cut-off conditions:

In Brussels, according to regional law, companies set their own disconnection procedures. Companies need court authorization before disconnection, which can take several weeks.

In Flanders cut-off can be done after a positive advice of a local committee of the city or a positive advice from the authorities for safety reasons.

#### 4. Number of disconnections per year:

In companies which responded to the survey, the rate is between 0.1% and 0.7% of total local customers (including industries, shops...).

In Flanders the average rate of disconnections is 0,15 % in 2014. Fluctuation between companies is between 0,05 to 1% of total customers in 2015.

#### 5. Duration of disconnection:

It depends on local condition, from 1 to 10 days.

In Flanders more than one third of the customers are less than 7 days disconnected. 15 % are disconnected for more than 10 days and less than 30 days and 12 % more than 30 days. The rest are connected by another customer.

#### 6. Letters/phone calls before disconnection:



By law disconnection is forbidden if the consumer has not been informed that the water supplier is going to proceed with disconnection. There is always a significant time delay between several contacts and the disconnection.

**7. Visits before disconnection:**

There are possibilities for staggered payments. Some companies inform and help client to obtain aid when necessary. A few companies visit bad payers to inform them about remedies.

**8. Absolute disconnection /minimum flow:**

Complete disconnection is possible (see above point 2) in Brussels and Flanders under strict rules, but there are no partial disconnections in Brussels.

**9. Possibility of "social tariffs":**

There are no specific tariffs in the Brussels region, but the price of water varies in function of the consumption: the low consumers have a lower rate. In some companies there are tariffs for those who benefit from budget-assistance programs from local social departments.

In Flanders there has been installed a social tariff from 2016 on. The rate is 20 % of the normal invoice.

## Wallonia

**1. Disconnection policy for non-payment of water charges:**

Water supply can be disconnected. Due to the federal system, regions are responsible for the water sector and there are three different regulations.

**2. Legal position**

In Wallonia, there is no general legal prohibition to disconnection of domestic customers for non-payment of water charges. Nevertheless, following regional legislation, drinking-water companies need a court decision to disconnect domestic customers. However, judges are more and more unwilling to do so due to the "right to water" principle. That is why water suppliers tend to use more often flow limiters.

**3. Cut-off conditions**

In Wallonia, disconnections couldn't be operated without court permission as explained in point 2. Disconnections are decided by a court judgement in exceptional situations, only when the normal procedure to recover the debt (through staggered payment plans or others instruments) has failed.

**4. Number of disconnections per year**

In Wallonia, the number of complete disconnection is very low. If we consider the 3 most important drinking water companies, serving around 1.3 million customers, 1465 complete disconnections have been executed in 2014.



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5. Duration of disconnection:

There is no rule on this point. Disconnections lasts until the consumer has paid his due.

6. Possibility of "social tariffs":

In Wallonia a social fund is established to which all households contribute with € 0.0250/m<sup>3</sup>.

This fund is devoted to helping the consumers in difficulties of payment after an assessment leaded by municipal social services. 80% of the collected amount is aimed at direct intervention in the water bills.

10% is aimed at interventions in the housing of families in difficulties in order for them to lower their water consumption as it was noticed that these families tend to consume much more than the average, even when taking into account the number of people living in the accommodation.

This fund is used only when all other means have been used such as payment facilities for instance.



## BULGARIA

### 1. Disconnection policy for non-payment of water charges

Disconnection is permitted by the law in Bulgaria, but in practice there is a technical limitation due to the system of individual billing of every consumer after the revenue meter (e.g. apartments in blocks of flats, individual properties in other type of buildings or any property situated after the revenue meter, if the owner or other lawfully entitles person requires the opening of an individual account). This system makes almost impossible the disconnection of customers living in condominiums, due to the lack of access to private property and interdiction to disconnect from the revenue meter the whole property if one or more customers after the revenue meter are good payers.

### 2. Legal position.

According to the **Ordinance 4/2012, on the conditions and order for connecting customers and using water supply and sewerage systems**, upon prior notification, the operators may interrupt fully or partially the supply and discharge of water when customers do not observe their obligations set in the General Terms and Conditions (GTC) and the contract. This is a reason for water supply disconnection.

In the GTC for the water supply and sewerage services (WSS), the WSS operator can disconnect bad payers with a 15 days previous notice. However, interruption of the provision of the WSS services is not allowed for customers in condominiums, provided that with its actions the operator may breach the right and legal interest of other correct customers in the building.

Even if the law permits the disconnection for non-payment, subject to prior notice, there is a practice of the Commission for the Protection of Competition, confirmed also by the Supreme Administrative Court, according to which the operator should exhaust all legal way to recover the debt, before disconnection of the domestic customers, based mainly on the ground that water is an essential right.

### 3. Cut-off conditions

The service can be cut-off based on a 15 days prior notice.

### 4. Number of disconnections per year.

Approximately 50 for Sofia.

### 5. Duration of disconnection.

It depends in each case, based on the customer request after paying the reconnection fees.



6. Letters/phone calls before disconnection.

One warning letter is always sent to the customer. Phone calls are also made to debtors, but the disconnection is always preceded by a written notice.

7. Visits before disconnection.

Door-to-door visits to debtors are also made, but they are not mandatory as prior condition for disconnection. Nevertheless, the disconnection notice can be handed on place by the door-to-door team if the customer does not pay and there is technical possibility to disconnect him.

8. Absolute disconnection /minimum flow

Total disconnection is allowed, under the conditions mentioned above.

9. Possibly of "social tariffs"

There are currently no social tariffs.



## CYPRUS

### 1. Disconnection policy for non-payment of water charges.

Consumers may be cut off from water supply due to non-payment

### 2. Legal position.

There is a provision in the Regulations approved by the Council of Ministers.

### 3. Cut-off conditions

Bills may be issued every 2 or 3 or 4 months depending on the district. If not paid within the due date (20-30 days from the date of issue) an additional fee of 10% is added on the amount due. Then a further notification is sent in order to avoid disconnection of the water supply. If the bill is still outstanding (after 5 days), the supply may be discontinued.

### 4. Number of disconnections per year.

The number of disconnections carried out-annually in Cyprus varies from district to district. In the three major Water Boards of Nicosia, Limassol and Larnaca the disconnections vary from 0.5% to 6.7% of the total number of customers. On average 3.5% disconnections are carried out in Cyprus. It is noted that these figures include multiple disconnections of same installations, since, in many cases, the same people habitually do not pay their bills.

### 5. Duration of disconnection.

Between 1-2 days. No disconnection occurs on the eve of a weekend or bank holiday, Christmas, Easter or summer vacations. Consumers that settle their bill are reconnected on the same day they settle their outstanding bill.

### 6. Letters/phone calls before disconnection.

A warning SMS/email/printed notification is sent 7 days before the actual disconnection. On the face of the bill consumers are informed of the fact that the water will be disconnected if the outstanding amount is not settled. The web sites of the Water Boards clearly describe the disconnection procedure in cases of non-timely settlement of the water bill.

### 7. Visits before disconnection.

Occasionally the consumer is visited by an employee before the disconnection, but there is no legal obligation for such an action.

### 8. Absolute disconnection /minimum flow

Total disconnection is permitted.

### 9. Possibly of "social tariffs"

Although there are not social tariffs as a general policy yet, recent Regulations which were passed by the House of Representatives requiring for the general application of social tariffs.



## CZECH REPUBLIC

### 1. Disconnection policy for non-payment of water charges:

Disconnection or restricted provision of services are addressed by the law setting down the reasons for which the water supply may be disconnected or restricted including the terms and conditions under which the disconnection or restriction may take place.

The legal provisions concern all consumers, i.e. there is no exemption for any of the groups, not even for the socially weak consumers, hospitals, schools etc. It then depends on the internal regulations and approach of each water utility how to handle the relevant situation with the specific debtor. As regards water supply disconnection due to non-payment of invoices, the consumer is not entitled to a free of charge emergency water supplies not even in a minimum extent.

### 2. Legal position:

In the CR, the operator has a right to disconnect or restrict not only water supply but also wastewater collection as per Act No. 274/2001 Sb., on water supply and sewer systems, as amended (with the latest amendment No. 275 from 2013). The reasons are listed in the Act under § 9 (6). One of them, listed under g) is an outstanding invoice for a period exceeding 30 days.

Quotation - § 9 (6) (g): „The operator is entitled to disconnect or restrict water supply or wastewater treatment until the reason for such a disconnection or restriction has ceased to exist:

g) if the consumer delays the payment as per the agreed payment method of settling water and wastewater tariff for a period exceeding 30 days.“

### 3. Cut-off conditions :

The law defines time limits for the operator during which the operator shall give notice to the consumer of the water supply or wastewater collection disconnection or restriction. As regards outstanding invoices, the minimum time-limit is 3 days beforehand.

### 4. Number of disconnections per year:

Approximately 0.2 % of the total number of consumption points – not in depth study made on that topic. This figure reflects the situation in one specific water company.

### 5. Duration of disconnection:

The duration of disconnection may last hours, days, months, as well as years (e.g. if the consumer stops using the consumption point). Usually the disconnection doesn't last more than few days.



6. Letters/phone calls before disconnection:

The physical water supply disconnection is usually preceded by out-of-court debt collection which is specific to each water company. Usually it consist of the following:

- ~ first reminder (letter or call)
- ~ second reminder (usually registered letter)

7. Visits before disconnection:

Depend on the Water Company but not usual practice

8. Absolute disconnection / minimum flow:

The water supply to the consumer is interrupted completely. There is no partial disconnection with a minimum flow rate.

9. Possibility of "social tariffs" :

There are no social tariffs in the CR. The water and wastewater tariffs are cost based. This means that they are not regulated by the market but they are based on generally binding price regulations (law + directive). Thus, the operator may not set the price at his own discretion, but he can only reflect the eligible costs and reasonable profit in the price. The regulations also define which costs may not be included in the price.



## DENMARK

### 1. Disconnection policy for non-payment of water charges:

Under certain circumstances the water supplier can cut off the supply. The primary demand is that the local bylaw (regulation on delivery terms for the relevant supplier) allows it. This bylaw is due the Water Supply Law drafted by the utility and approved by the relevant municipality.

In principle public owned water suppliers can choose to have a policy where they do not execute cut-offs as they prefer a solution with debt-collection done by the National Agency of Taxation. But in 2016 the most used practise is to cut-off.

All the private water utilities (owned by the consumers or funds) execute a cut-off policy based on the local bye laws (municipal approved delivery terms).

The mail rule is that the water supplier is obliged in regard to the owner of each estate. In regard to tenants there has been a decree since 1998 which obliges the water suppliers to settle directly with tenants under certain circumstances. The most conditions concern technical matters such as the possibility to cut-off the water outside the apartment, a separate water meter for the apartment and just one pipe to the apartment. If there is a direct settlement between the tenants and the supplier there can be cut off on a single apartment to ensure debts.

As the general rule is that water supplier is obliged in regard to the owner of an estate, it means that there can be situations where water supply disconnect for a whole building with several tenants/apartments as the owner of the estate is not paying. The tenants can ask the municipality to pay the debt.

### 2. Legal position:

The debt collection for the public owned utilities via the National Agency of Taxation is based on the law no. 29 of 12.01.2015.

The conditions for the suppliers to cut-off the water supply are based on local bylaws.

The possibility for the water suppliers to cut-off the water in regard to tenants is based on a statutory no. 837of 27.11. 1998.

The possibility for tenants to ask the municipalities to pay the debts which the owner of the estate has not pay is based on the law no. 227 of 09.03.2016 (§ 46)

### 3. Cut-off conditions:

Utilities define practical procedures, complying with general civil obligations. How to use disconnections for consumers is defined in the general terms of



contracts. Disconnection is used if the case is clear and if there are no relevant risks for damages.

4. Number of disconnections per year:

Once it was estimated that the number is less than 1 % of total customers (including industry, firms, ect.). Often the warning letter is enough to remind the customer of the invoice. There is no statistical information available at the moment.

5. Duration of disconnection:

The average disconnection lasts approximately 1-2 days.

6. Letters/phone calls before disconnection:

The water supplier has to wait at least for five weeks after sending a warning letter, before the cut off. The warning is often included in the reminder. In cases that the reason for non-payment is illness, unemployment, etc., the water supplier has to wait for 10 weeks from the first warning before disconnection. These rules are obligatory with domestic customers.

7. Visits before disconnection:

Sometimes the customer is visited by the water company.

8. Absolute disconnection / minimum flow:

Total disconnection is permitted.

9. Possibility of "social tariffs":

There are no specific tariffs



## FINLAND

The following refers mainly to water utility's possibility to disconnect service from domestic customers.

Disconnecting water services from industrial customers is sometimes more complicated due to risk of huge damages and subsequent indemnities that disconnection may cause in the case of industrial customers.

Disconnection of domestic customers is allowed by the Water Services Act in certain circumstances.

### 1. Disconnection policy for non-payment of water charges:

All customers can be cut off from water supply due to non-payment. Additionally, it is permitted to disconnect the customer from the network for waste water and storm water as well. Because of environmental problems and risks these two last-mentioned options are not normally used.

### 2. Legal position:

Water Service Act (119/2001), and the terms in the contracts that regulate the service between the supplier and the customer.

### 3. Cut-off conditions:

Utilities define practical procedures, complying with general civil obligations. How to use disconnections for consumers is defined in the general terms of contracts. Disconnection is used if the case is clear and if there are no relevant risks for damages.

### 4. Number of disconnections per year:

Once it was estimated that the number is less than 1 % of total customers (including industry, firms, etc.). Often the warning letter is enough to remind the customer of the invoice. There is no statistical information available at the moment.

### 5. Duration of disconnection:

The average disconnection lasts approximately 1-2 days.

### 6. Letters/phone calls before disconnection:

The water supplier has to wait at least for five weeks after sending a warning letter, before the cut off. The warning is often included in the reminder. In cases that the reason for non-payment is illness, unemployment, etc., the water supplier has to wait for 10 weeks from the first warning before disconnection. These rules are obligatory with domestic customers.

### 7. Visits before disconnection:

Sometimes the customer is visited by the water company.

### 8. Absolute disconnection / minimum flow:

Total disconnection is permitted.



9. Possibility of "social tariffs":

There are no specific tariffs.



## FRANCE

### 1. Disconnection policy for non-payment of water charges:

Disconnections for unpaid bills by households are prohibited for their main residence since the "Brottes" law of 2013.

### 2. Legal position:

Brottes law of 15 April 2013.

### 3. Cut-off conditions :

For other users, disconnections for unpaid bills are maintained: households for secondary houses, businesses, large water users, government offices.

### 4. Number of disconnections per year :

Very limited. No accurate data yet since the new law is recent. It is however important to note that the amount of unpaid bills has tripled since the law is in force.

### 5. Duration of disconnection:

### 6. Letters/phone calls before disconnection:

### 7. Visits before disconnection:

### 8. Absolute disconnection / minimum flow:

Debates are still ongoing as regards practices limiting flow in case of non-payment. (Recent court cases have forbidden such practices in particular cases.)

### 9. Possibility of "social tariffs":

The Brottes law provides for period of 5 years during which social tariffs for water services can be tested. 50 cities have declared their intention to test such innovative tariffs and a certain number of local authorities are already using social tariffs. Two good examples in this regard are

- ~ Dunkirk in the North of France, with a both environmentally-friendly and socially-inclusive innovative tariff (<http://www.suez-environnement.com/news/press-releases/dunkirk-official-launch-eco-social-water-tariff-scheme>)
- ~ The Ile de France region where 22.500 households have already benefited from "Eau solidaire" to pay their bills ([http://www.sedif.com/imageProvider.aspx?private\\_resource=19199&n=Eau%20solidaire\\_Difficultés-paiement\\_1212.pdf](http://www.sedif.com/imageProvider.aspx?private_resource=19199&n=Eau%20solidaire_Difficultés-paiement_1212.pdf))



## GERMANY

There are no changes in legislation since the 1998 report, but in the application of the law.

### 1. Disconnection policy for non-payment of water charges:

Water suppliers may disconnect every non-paying customer after a fixed time of two weeks if the disconnection is not excessively and if it can be deemed that the customer will not pay in the future.

In many cases the city welfare authority will pay for poor people.

### 2. Legal position:

The provision is part of the terms of the water supply contract. State law obliges all water suppliers that thus provision is a part of the supply contract. Therefore every supplier has the right of disconnection.

### 3. Cut-off conditions:

Companies have their own procedures complying with the above laws. Normally, water suppliers inform local authorities (e.g.: health and social departments) about possible disconnection. Because of contractual relations between landlords and companies, tenants sometimes have to take legal action against their landlords. Up to now, tenants are unable to claim against companies.

### 4. Number of disconnections per year:

Unknown.

### 5. Duration of disconnection:

Generally for a few days.

### 6. Letters/phone calls before disconnection:

Water suppliers have to prove that they urged the customers to pay and that they have threatened the disconnection.

### 7. Visits before disconnection:

Normally yes, but there is no obligation to do so.

### 8. Absolute disconnection / minimum flow:

Water suppliers have the right to disconnect completely. However some suppliers limit the flow or deliver water for preparing meals.

### 9. Possibility of "social tariffs" :

No special tariffs



## GREECE

### 1. Disconnection policy for non-payment of water charges:

Customers may be disconnected, whoever they are; however, there are some exceptions (e.g.: hospitals, schools and after the economic and fiscal crisis some cases of low income people such as unemployed people).

### 2. Legal position:

The contracts between the water company and the customer, and network regulation include the water company right for disconnection. But since the right for disconnection is not provided by the legal framework in some cases doubts have been risen.

### 3. Cut-off conditions:

Disconnection procedures are not usually applied when debtor owes less than three bills or a certain amount. It depends on the water company.

### 4. Number of disconnections per year:

There are not exact statistical data, but the number of disconnections has increased since 2010. However, the most water companies do not disconnect in cases of families with low income or unemployed members.

### 5. Duration of disconnection:

Usually, water is cut off for only 1 day. Disconnection never occurs on the eve of a weekend or bank holiday, Christmas, Easter.

### 6. Letters/phone calls before disconnection:

Before disconnection, companies get in touch with customers (sending them letters or SMS or mails) to inform them about possible aid and staggered payments.

### 7. Visits before disconnection:

Clients are not visited by a company employee before disconnection.

### 8. Absolute disconnection / minimum flow:

Total disconnection is permitted.

### 9. Possibility of "social tariffs":

There are reduced tariffs for retired persons, families with numerous members and families with low income and unemployed members. Also some companies have special tariffs for schools and hospitals (reduced).



## HUNGARY

### 1. Disconnection policy for non-payment of water charges:

Disconnection of domestic costumers for the non-payment of arrears is permitted and the utility company is allowed to restrict water consumption (tighten water flow at the tap for example) if the basic subsistence and sanitarian needs of the customer can be satisfied.

### 2. Legal position:

Act No. CCIX of 2011 on water public utility service

Government Decree No. 58 of 2013 (II. 27.) regarding the implementation of certain provisions of Act No. CCIX of 2011 on water public utility service.

### 3. Cut-off conditions :

Limitation of water supply may take place 60 days after the bill expiry date after the following situation is at stake:

- ~ the water supplier worn the consumer and called for the settlement of debt payment
- ~ the consultation with the consumer was not effective (instalment agreement, payment moratorium)

The provision of water in order to satisfy the basic public health requirements can be considered to be fulfilled if at least **20 litres/person/day** is provided by the utility company for examples from public hydrants, fire hydrants or water tanks. (Some utility companies use water flow reducer at the property of the customer to provide the prescribed 20 litres/person/day.

In buildings with less than four floors and equipped with elevators, access to water has to be provided within the radius of 150 meters. In the case of buildings with more than four floors the water source has to be provided within every four floors.

### 4. Number of disconnections per year:

According to estimations: a few thousand

### 5. Duration of disconnection:

It is not specified, usually until the payment obligation is not fulfilled. After the arrears and the reconnection fee are paid off, the service provider must reconnect the customer to the network within 3 days.

### 6. Letters/phone calls before disconnection:

The water supplier is obliged by law to send at least two formal notices.

### 7. Visits before disconnection:

Usually there is no visit, just in problematic cases.

### 8. Absolute disconnection / minimum flow:

**The utility company**, while ensuring the provision of potable water services



that are necessary for subsistence, health and childcare institutions and fulfilling the public health and fire protection regulations but excluding waste water management services - **has the right to limit the provision of water services in its quantity for a specific period of time.**

In addition to this, the utility company

- ~ has the right to tighten the flow of potable water, however in the case of **domestic consumers**, the provision of public water utility services can be suspended only if the utility company can provide **20 litres of water / person / day** from other accessible sources in order to satisfy the subsistence and sanitation / public health needs of the customer;
- ~ can install a prepaid consumption meter if this and details of the remaining debt payment are discussed with the customer in advance.

9. Possibility of "social tariffs":

There are no social tariffs.

The socially disadvantaged customer can request the following options:

- ~ payment in instalments
- ~ delayed payment

A customer with disabilities should be treated according to his / her special needs during the process of metering, reading off consumption and billing, moreover the disabled customer should be offered a mode of payment that suits best his / her condition.



## IRELAND

### 1. Disconnection policy for non-payment of water charges

See "Legal Position" There is no provision for disconnection of domestic customers.

### 2. Legal Position

The Irish Parliament passed legislation on late December 2013 – the Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 – which establishes a new National Water Services utility called Irish Water which is to take over the statutory functions in relation to drinking water and wastewater services from 1st. January 2014. The Local Authorities – which were the statutory water services authorities up to end 2013 – will continue to provide water services as agents of Irish Water, acting under a Service Level Agreement with Irish Water.

Irish Water is currently installing Domestic Water meters across Ireland. The Regulator for Water Services will be the existing Commission for Energy Regulation (CER)

The CER did come up with a charging mechanism in 2014 but, under political pressure from protestors etc. the Government introduced a flat charge in late 2014, rather than the planned metered charge with a free allowance. Also, whereas the intention was that Irish Water could reduce the flows for non-paying customers to a trickle the Government changed the legislation at end 2014 to remove this power. In effect, Irish Water now has no power to disconnect non-paying domestic customers.

### 3. Cut-off conditions:

Not Applicable (N/A)

### 4. Number of disconnections per year:

None

### 5. Duration of disconnection:

N/A

### 6. Letters/phone calls before disconnection:

N/A

### 7. Visits before disconnection:

N/A

### 8. Absolute disconnection / minimum flow:

N/A

### 9. Possibility of "social tariffs":

Capped at max €160 (1 person per household) or €260 (more than 1 person per household) to 2018. Children are not counted as a person in the household. Following recent election all domestic charges are now suspended

**26 August 2016**  
**Access to water and measures in case of non-payment**



for a minimum period of nine months, pending examination of the issue of water funding by a Parliament Commission.



## ITALY

(The Government/ Ministry of Environment and the National Regulator are dealing with this issue at the moment, and changes are expected shortly)

### 1. Disconnection policy for non-payment of water charges:

Disconnection for non-payment is normally permitted but public buildings such as hospitals, schools are never disconnected. Disconnection is only permitted when outstanding bills reach a certain amount of money.

### 2. Legal position:

In case of delay of payment there is a suspension of service. Operator indicates the means of notice. Such notice shall not be less than twenty days and shall be accompanied by a duplicate of the invoice unpaid.

Operator communicates methods and timing of restoration of supply which must take place within two working days of payment or as a result of the intervention of the competent Authority.

In the latter case it is up to the operator, communicating in writing to the user, to implement means for limiting the flow and pressure of the supply.

Operators identify the specific procedures for cases of erroneous action for non-payment.

Meter verification indicates conditions under which the user can ask to verify the correct operation of the meter during discussions with the technical.

Time of notice of the "suspension programmed" must never be planned less than 24 hours with a two-day notice.

### 3. Cut-off conditions :

Water companies have their own internal provisions. Those provisions usually fix that cut-off procedures must not begin before a period of several days following the bill expire date; the delay ranges from 30 to 40 days.

### 4. Number of disconnections per year :

In companies which responded to the survey, the rate is between 0 and 0.9 % of total local customers (including industry, shops...).

### 5. Duration of disconnection:

Roughly, from 12 to 24 hours. A disconnection never occurs on the eve of a weekend or a bank holiday.

### 6. Letters/phone calls before disconnection:

The usual procedure is:

- ~ a first reminder 30 to 40 day after expiry date,
- ~ a second letter demanding payment 7 to 10 days later,
- ~ a disconnection notice.

### 7. Visits before disconnection:



Normally a company employee visits or calls the bad payer, three days before disconnection, and informs the customer about available social aid.

8. Absolute disconnection / minimum flow:

Companies do not limit the flow when they disconnect customers, but give a minimum supply to bad payers in the case of unpaid water for domestic use.

9. Possibility of "social tariffs" :

The Italian water charge regulation specifies a reduced tariff for "essential domestic needs" from 90 to 100 m<sup>3</sup> a year and flat.

After a long discussion, the Italian Parliament introduced, at the end of 2015, a social tariff for water services for users in economic difficulty. It is waiting for a decree of the Government to implement it.



## Luxembourg

1. Disconnection policy for non-payment of water charges:

Water suppliers may disconnect (but not completely) every non-paying consumer.

2. Legal position:

State law obliges all water suppliers to supply water but the minimal quantity is not indicated in the law.

3. Cut-off conditions:

The water is cut off by the valve in the street.

4. Number of disconnections per year:

1-2 in the city of Luxembourg (110.000 inhabitants)

5. Duration of disconnection:

Thill the payment of the bill

6. Letters/phone calls before disconnection:

Water suppliers have to prove that they urged the customers to pay and that they have threatened the disconnection.

After many letters to ask the consumer to pay the water bill we sent a letter to inform that the water will be reduced to a minimum – not enough for the washing machine and the dishwasher.

7. Visits before disconnection:

Normally not.

8. Absolute disconnection / minimum flow:

We reduce to an absolute minimum

9. Possibility of "social tariffs" :

No special tariffs



## NETHERLANDS

### 1. Disconnection policy for non-payment of water charges

In principle, the drinking water company can cut off the water supply for non-payment, when the legal procedure has been followed.

### 2. Legal position

The right to disconnect is based on general civil law, specific department regulation and contract/general conditions. If disconnection outside is technically not possible, water companies need permission of the court to enter the house to disconnect.

### 3. Cut-off conditions

Since July 2012 the disconnection of drinking water is regulated. Disconnection is not permitted unless the company had taken prescribed steps like:

- ~ Payment reminder
- ~ a message on the payment reminder about the possibilities for debt settlement;
- ~ an offer on the payment reminder to pass on the personal data of the customer to organizations for debt settlement;
- ~ a message on the payment reminder that a medical certificate (of an independent physician) can prevent the disconnection for so called vulnerable consumers ;
- ~ the obligation to make an effort to establish personal contact with the defaulter;
- ~ the possibility to pass on the personal data of the customer to organizations for debt settlement without permission of the customer.

If and when an organization for debt settlement informs the water company that a demand for debt settlement is received and is going to be handled, the water company will/shall not disconnect, according to a private agreement with the branch organization of debt settlers.

### 4. Number of disconnections per year

Circa 8.000, this is 0,10 % (this includes households and companies)

### 5. Duration of disconnection

Unknown

### 6. Letters/phone calls before disconnection

At least one reminder after expiry date. Many companies send a second or third reminder. Finally a disconnection notice. The company has the obligation to make personal contact before disconnection. If a phone number is available, that is the most efficient way to make contact.

### 7. Visits before disconnection



Some companies have their own debt collectors to make visits. Others use debt collection agencies that make the visit.

8. Absolute disconnection / minimum flow

There are no regulations at this point. Total disconnection is permitted and always the case.

9. Possibility of "social tariffs"

There is no specific tariff for poor families, old people, etc. Compare the answer to question 3.



## NORWAY

### 1. Disconnection policy for non-payment of water charges

Disconnection for non-payment of water charges is permitted. There are two conditions for disconnection due to non-payment. First, the right to disconnect the water supply due to non-payment has to be determined in current local regulation for water and sewage fees. Second the disconnection has to be approved by the local authority for social health.

According to Act of 16 of March 2012 regarding Municipal Water and Sewage Fees § 7 debt due to non-payment of water charges is automatically secured by mortgage. Debt is recovered through the courts that can confiscate property to cover the value of the debt.

Since debt is secured by mortgage in real estate, very few suppliers use the opportunity to disconnect the water supply.

Non-payment of water charges is very rare, less than 0,1%.

### 2. Legal position

The possibility of disconnection the water due to non-payment is not regulated in any State Act.

However, the ministry of Environment has prescribed a set of regulation related to the estimation of the water and sewage fees. According to this regulation, and the preliminary work of this regulation, the water supply can be cut off due to non- payment if it is determined in local regulation.

### 3. Cut- off conditions

The Ministry of Environment has prescribed a set of regulation related to the estimation of the water and sewage fees. According to this regulation, and the preliminary work for this regulation, there are two conditions for disconnection due to non-payment. First, the right to disconnect the water supply due to non-payment has to be determined in current local regulation for water and sewage fees. Second, the disconnection has to be approved by the local authority for social health.

### 4. Number of disconnection per year

Non-payment of water charges is very rare, less than 0,1%. Since debt is secured by mortgage in real estate, extremely few suppliers use the opportunity to disconnect the water supply.

### 5. Duration of disconnection

Theoretically the disconnection of the water supply can be unlimited. Since the local authority for social health has to approve the disconnection, there is reason to believe that the duration in most cases will be for a shorter period of time.



6. Letters / phone calls before disconnection

The water supplier is obliged by law to send a written warning before the disconnection is made effective. The customer has a right to give his view on the disconnection before he is disconnected.

7. Visits before disconnection

8. Absolute disconnection / minimum flow

Theoretically, disconnection of water supply can be 100 %.

9. Possibility of "Social tariffs"

There are no social tariffs.

According to regulation prescribed by The Ministry of Environment, criteria's as private economy of the customer, the number of person equivalents, the number of bathrooms in the house etc., may not be used as a basis for the estimation of the fees.



## POLAND

### 1. Disconnection policy for non-payment of water charges

Households May be disconnected for non-payment of water charges, however, there is an obligation to provide them with substitute water source.

### 2. Legal position

The situation is regulated by Art. 8 of Collective Water Supplies and Collective Wastewater Collection Act of 8th June 2001.

The Act specifies the conditions of water disconnection (in case of non-payment of water charges but also in case of illegal connection to waterworks and wastewater system or introduction of wastewater of unacceptable quality to the wastewater system).

### 3. Cut-off conditions

The fulfilment of the following conditions is required:

- ~ The customer failed to pay the bills for two settlement periods;
- ~ The customer has received a writ-of-payment;
- ~ The customer has been notified of the planned disconnection and of the location and way of drawing water from the substitute source no later than 20 days before the disconnection;
- ~ The waterworks company has notified the District Sanitary Inspector, the Mayor and the Fire Brigade about the intention of disconnection no later than 20 days before the disconnection.

The bills are normally paid monthly with a due date within 14-30 days from the reception of the invoice.

### 4. Number of disconnections per year

Disconnection is seldom used (app. 0.2% of the total number of customers).

Usually the writ-of-payment proceedings bring satisfactory results.

### 5. Duration of disconnection

The disconnection by the company staff is usually done within 1-30 days from the planned date.

The duration of disconnection (remaining without water supplies) depends solely on the customer.

The reconnection is usually done within 24 hours.

### 6. Letters/phone calls before disconnection

The customer receives 1 obligatory writ-of-payment and 1 obligatory notification about planned disconnection.

Telephone calls depend on debt collection policy of a company. They are not obligatory.

### 7. Visits before disconnection



The customer is visited by the water meter reader during the reading.

There is no obligation of additional visits. The disconnection is performed at presence of the owner-customer.

#### 8. Absolute disconnection / minimum flow

It is acceptable in justified cases.

Upon an express request by recipient and in justified cases it is also possible to use coin-insert water meters, which let the amount of water depending on the amount paid by the customer.

In Poland water companies seldom use disconnection and only in seriously justified cases.

#### 9. Possibility of "social tariffs"

There are no social tariffs but there is a possibility of subsidies covered from the municipality budget for specific groups of recipients (subsidies are granted by a decision of the Municipality Council).

It is also possible for a Social Welfare Centre or other non-governmental organization, program or foundation to settle the water bills on behalf of a customer in a difficult financial situation. In bigger cities the water companies are often members of such aid organizations.



## PORTUGAL

There are no main changes in legislation since 1998, but there was an enlargement of advance for a mandatory notice in 2008 and 2013.

1. 1. Disconnection policy for non-payment of water charges:

The company can cut off the water supply for non-payment.

2. 2. Legal position:

The legal basis is Law 23/96 (1996.07.26), modified by Law 12/2008 (2008.02.26) and Law 10/2013 (2013.01.28). There are also specific acts and by-laws (local and utilities' regulations), which shall comply with the national rules.

3. 3. Cut-off conditions:

A mandatory notice with an advance of 20 days before the cut-off, sent by a formal letter, is a condition of the cut-off.

The water suppliers may define their own practical procedures, complying with the above rules.

Utilities accept usually instalment payments.

4. Number of disconnections per year:

Between 0.5 and 1.0 %.

5. Duration of disconnection:

1 or 2 days. There is no disconnection on the eve of a weekend or bank holiday.

6. Letters/phone calls before disconnection:

A mandatory notice with an advance of 20 days before the cut-off, sent by a formal letter, is a condition of the cut-off.

7. Visits before disconnection:

Usually there is no visit by a company employee before disconnection.

8. Absolute disconnection / minimum flow:

Total disconnection is permitted.

9. Possibility of "social tariffs":

There is a guideline from ERSAR (the national Water and Waste Services Authority) about social tariffs.

Most utilities have social tariffs for low income families and some of them have also specific tariffs for families with numerous children.



## ROMANIA

The relevant laws, currently in force, were adopted during 2006-2007.

### 1. The policy regarding the disconnection for non-payment of water bills:

In case of non-payment of the invoices issued for the supplied service within a maximum of 30 calendar days from the deadline of bills, the operator may disconnect from the public water supply networks the users for non-payment of bills and is entitled to claim by judicial procedures the recovery of debts.

According to the Concession Contract for Bucharest, the operator is not entitled to disconnect any Emergency Services as a consequence of non-payment of overdue Bills by any such Emergency Services.

### 2. Legal background:

Law on the provision of water and sewerage service no. 241/2006  
(republished in 2013)

Law on the public utility services no. 51/2006 (republished in 2013)

ANRSC Order no. 88/2007 for the approval of the Framework Regulations on the provision of water and sewerage service

Concession Contract no. 1239/29.03.2000 relating to the provision of water and sewerage services to the City of Bucharest, Romania

### 3. Cut-off conditions:

The disconnection from the public network, for non-payment of the bills, may be operated only 5 working days after the notification has been received by the concerned user.

The resumption of the provision of water service shall take place within a maximum of 5 working days from the payment; the justified expenses related to the disconnection, respectively the re-connection to the supply of service, shall be charged to the user.

If within 3 months from the disconnection it is not requested the re-connection to the supply, the quality of user is lost, and the resumption of the supply of service is made as for a new user, under a new contract for the supply of service.

According to the Concession Contract for Bucharest, the Concessionaire is empowered to disconnect a Customer from the Services, without authorisation or consent from the Municipality or any Regulatory Authority, for reasons of non-payment or partial non-payment of overdue Bills or amounts, without prejudice to any of its other rights at Law, or its ability to claim arrears, surcharges or interest, or any other penalties provided for by the Tariff, subject to the following procedures:

a Bill must, as a minimum, not be less than 2 (two) periods or 3 (three) months, whichever is the lesser, overdue from its due date where the Bill is in



relation to a multi-user Customer, such as a tower block, where there is no individual metering or no possibility of disconnection of individual Customers, and 1 (one) period overdue from its due date where the Bill is in relation to a single user Customer or multi-user Customer where individual Customers may be disconnected for non-payment of overdue accounts without affecting or interrupting the use or enjoyment of the balance of the Customers within the multi-user Customer, of the Services, whether metered or otherwise.

The Concessionaire must have previously demanded payment of the Bill, in writing to the defaulting Customer, on not less than 1 (one) occasion after the due date, provided that such occasion is not less than a minimum period of 21 (twenty-one) days from the due date.

In the last payment demand, the Concessionaire must give the defaulting Customer not less than 7 (seven) days advance written notice of disconnection.

The Concessionaire shall not be entitled to disconnect the Services when there is an agreement between the Concessionaire and a Customer over the late or non-payment of any due amount and the Customer is not in breach of such agreement or contract.

The cut-off of the provision of water, in order to carry out some upgrading, maintenance and repair works, is made by informing the users affected by the cut-off at least 10 days before the scheduled date for carrying out such works.

#### 4. Number of disconnections per year:

For Bucharest: the number of disconnections per year is of about 1500, representing 1.2 % of the total number of 126 770 water connections for approx. 2 000 000 inhabitants).

For Constanta the average number of disconnections per year is of 223, representing 0.66 % of the total number of users.

#### 5. Duration of disconnection:

For Bucharest only 27% of the disconnected users are requesting to be reconnected, after an average period of time of 66 days

For Constanta the average period of time between the disconnection and their reconnection is of 89 days.

#### 6. Letters/phone calls before disconnection:

There is a legal obligation to notify the users about the overdue Bills, before disconnection. Moreover, each bill mentions the fact that the user can be disconnected if the bill is not paid in due time.

#### 7. Visits before disconnection:

After completing of the legal notification procedure, the user who did not pay



the outstanding debt is disconnected without further visit/contact from any representative of the operator.

8. Absolute disconnection / minimum flow:

In case of necessary interventions to prevent some damages or to remedy them, which exceed 24 hours, the allowed cut-off duration is of maximum 72 hours.

The users who have remaining debts to the operator and who entered with it into agreements on instalments of the payment cannot be disconnected from the public network, unless they fail to comply with the terms of these agreements.

9. Possibility of "social tariffs":

The Operator is bound to invoice the tariff established according to the methodology provided by law and approved by the relevant regulatory authority, without a grid of social tariffs.

Although Law 51/2006 – the general legal framework of the public utility services indicates the possibility to grant some aids from the state or local budgets for certain categories of users, in the field of water supply service no such social measures were adopted.



## SERBIA

### Public Utility Naissus Nis – Serbia

*The questions were answered on the basis of the practice applied in Public Utility Company for water supply Naissus Nis. The Law on utility services is applied in the same manner in all utilities in Serbia, there are certain modifications concerning Municipal by laws. In general situation concerning disconnections is similar on the whole territory of Republic of Serbia.*

1. Disconnection policy for non-payment of water charges:

The consumers can be disconnected from water supply due to non-payment.

2. Legal position:

Law on utility services, Republic of Serbia, article 19.

3. Cut-off conditions:

The rules for disconnection are coordinated between the Law on utility services, RS and the decisions made by the City of Nis, the founder.

4. Number of disconnections per year:

1948 consumers were disconnected in 2013 because of non-payment (roughly 300 from the category of other consumers and the rest from the category Households).

5. Duration of disconnection:

Disconnection is effective until the debt is paid completely, or until the contract is signed between the customer and the Utility Company for debt payment through instalments.

6. Letters/phone calls before disconnection:

Notices are being sent out; the debtors are informed both through letters and phone calls.

7. Visits before disconnection:

Yes, consumers are visited by company employee before disconnection.

8. Absolute disconnection / minimum flow:

Total disconnection is permitted, and there are possibilities for the minimal flow but it is not being used.

9. Possibility of "social tariffs":

There are subventions for the consumers who receive social aid, according to the Law on utility services, Republic of Serbia, article 29.



## SLOVENIA

### 1. Disconnection policy for non-payment of water charges:

The water supplier may disconnect water supply to a domestic customer for non-payment.

### 2. Legal position:

According to the legal explication in Constitutional Court of republic of Slovenia no. Up-156/98, dated 15. 06. 1998 it is stated that disconnection of water supply is a measure for payment for water already supplied and that this measure is serving for balancing both parties (supplier and customer). Water supplier, with help of this measure, has also guarantees for regular financial inflow. At the same time is obligation of state/municipalities for continuous and undisturbed water supply as a public good. If considerable number of customers would not pay debts regularly, that could lead to disturbance in providing public water supply services. In that context water supply, disconnection is constitutionally admissible.

### 3. Cut-off conditions:

Cut off conditions are managed by general obligations rules.

### 4. Number of disconnections per year:

Data not available.

### 5. Duration of disconnection:

Data not available.

### 6. Letters/phone calls/visits before disconnection:

General obligation rules must be followed, but utilities offer information and support to customers and in some cases also different payment possibilities in order debt to be settled without disconnection.

### 7. Possibility of "social tariffs«:

Social tariffs are not applied. However, municipalities and governmental social services can apply other social policy instruments in case of need.

## SPAIN

### 1. Disconnection policy for non-payment of water charges:

In most supply systems there are regulations (of municipal competency) which enable disconnections for unpaid water bills.

Most of these disconnections are in commercial and business activities or in second homes (holiday homes) or due to fraud.



To prevent disadvantaged groups with economic problems to pay the water bill being subject to cut-offs, there are different mechanisms of social action that ensure water affordability.

Public authorities are responsible for ensuring social protection of citizens. Social services and various social entities are responsible for determining the beneficiaries of social policies in urban water, especially to individuals or households with economic needs as a result of the current economic situation. And so, they are responsible for determining which groups, households or individuals need help through social action mechanisms.

Statistically some errors are detected and these mechanisms may arrive late due to misinformation problems, and the cut-off is carried out. It is essential to continue improving communication strategies by the authorities and operating entities. It is essential that users with financial need know about the existence of the mechanisms of social action. Therefore, it must continue to be proactive and expand horizons.

Operating entities, social services, social institutions and competent authorities should optimize cooperation to further improve the agility and accessibility of mechanisms of social action. Cooperation between the parties involved is necessary to identify the affordability problems of the service, potential beneficiaries of the mechanisms of social action and to approve and administer aid. Optimizing this cooperation would facilitate the procedures for those households which cannot pay the bill to obtain the help in a flexible way, avoiding disconnections.

#### 2. Legal position:

There is a legal position for the action, Technical and Administrative Regulation of Water Supply Service, which is established at local level, being of municipal competency.

#### 3. Cut-off conditions :

The establishment of disconnections' conditions is of municipal competency (public authorities establish whether disconnections are possible or not). Very rarely, the local authority transfers this decision to operators.

As further explained in point 6, the process defends the consumer, having 2 reliable warnings before proceeding with the disconnection.

#### 4. Number of disconnections per year :

According to the extrapolated data for disconnections of our 2014 General Survey, we can estimate that disconnections have affected a percentage of between 1% and 2% of the contracts. Once the cause of the cut-off has been resolved (whether by payment, compensation, settlement of payments, implementation of social protection measures, etc.) most of these are reconnected.



Following the same methodology of national extrapolation to 100%, it is estimated that in 2014, 73% of the disconnections were reconnected, of which 98.4% were reconnected due to payment and just 1.6% was reconnected due to the application of social mechanisms, representing 0.02% of Spanish households.

**5. Duration of disconnection:**

We do not have representative information to give an answer to this topic. There is no disconnection on the eve of a weekend or bank holiday.

**6. Letters/phone calls before disconnection:**

Disconnections are carried out in Spain by regulated procedures, to which operators usually add additional steps with the aim of avoiding them.

The number of steps that are previously made to guarantee the supply before a cutting procedure should be highlighted, noting that just a 31% of first warnings are followed by a second warning and that only 7% of the total of the first announcements made end in a cut-off.

We have a guarantee system, regarding disconnections, which defends the consumer. Several phone calls and letters with acknowledgement are sent before disconnection is carried out, in order to avoid them.

**7. Visits before disconnection:**

There is no formal requirement for a visit by a company employee before disconnection, due to the method explained above.

**8. Absolute disconnection / minimum flow:**

In Spain, complete disconnection is possible. There is no minimum flow disconnection.

**9. Possibility of "social tariffs":**

In order to alleviate situations of poverty, inequality and social exclusion, there are different mechanisms of social action that ensure water affordability, which are processes or administrative tools through which special conditions are offered to certain groups or households.

In the past, aid and subsidies to water bills consisted in discounts for specific groups (such as senior citizens, large families, low consumption customers or similar). Due to the economic crisis of recent years, aid motivated by economic income has increased. These grants are provided for:

- ~ tariff structures (classic mechanism of social action), or through
- ~ Solidarity Funds, which are a mechanism not associated with the rate structure itself, responding to criteria of income.

These two mechanisms of social action are widespread. According to our survey among a sample of water services covering 15 million people, over 90% of this population lived in municipalities that had some kind of mechanism for social action. Of these, 63% lived in municipalities with



bonuses fixed in the tariff structure itself, 13% in municipalities with implementation of Solidarity Funds and 24% in municipalities that looked both mechanisms.



## SWEDEN

### 1. Disconnection policy for non-payment of water charges:

The water supplier can off the water supply to customers. See below, 3

### 2. Legal position:

The Public Water Supply and Wastewater Systems Act, 2006, article 43.

### 3. Cut-off conditions:

A condition for disconnection is that there is no risk for the health of the customer.

The water supplier is not allowed to disconnect customers when there is a risk for human health. In practice the supplier must find out if there are people in the household that would be caused health problems if they are disconnected. It is easier to cut off the water supply to factories and such premises.

### 4. Number of disconnections per year :

It varies between the suppliers. But not so many over a year. The threat of disconnection is usually enough.

### 5. Duration of disconnection:

A short time in most cases.

### 6. Letters/phone calls before disconnection:

The water supplier is obliged to send at least one written warning before the disconnection and wait for a response before the cut off.

### 7. Visits before disconnection:

There is no legal obligation to visit the customer.

### 8. Absolute disconnection / minimum flow:

Water suppliers may reduce the flow instead of a total cut-off, giving the customer just enough water for the essential needs.

### 9. Possibility of social tariffs:

There is no system for social tariffs



## SWITZERLAND

### 1. Disconnection policy for non-payment of water charges:

Disconnection for non-payment is exceptional. In any case, the water supply necessary for vital requirements must be delivered to bad payers.

### 2. Legal position:

The legal basis comes from the various cantonal laws. Furthermore, there are also specific municipal acts and bye laws.

### 3. Cut-off conditions:

After the bill expiry date, companies give formal notice of a further payment period. After this latter period, a lawsuit may be brought.

### 4. Number of disconnections per year:

There is no complete disconnection of domestic customers.

### 5. Duration of disconnection:

There is no complete disconnection of domestic customers.

### 6. Letters/phone calls before disconnection:

Companies inform customers before suing them.

### 7. Visits before disconnection:

Some companies visit customers.

### 8. Absolute disconnection / minimum flow:

There is no complete disconnection of domestic customers.

### 9. Possibility of "social tariffs":

Usually, there is no specific tariff for poor people



## UNITED KINGDOM

### England and Wales

#### 1. Disconnection policy for non-payment of water charges:

Since 1 July 1999, it is illegal to disconnect domestic customers. It is legal and practiced by water companies to disconnect non-domestic customers.

#### 2. Legal position:

Disconnection of domestic customers is banned by the Water Industry Act 1999, which amends the Water Industry Act 1991. The ban of domestic disconnection applies to principal homes only, not second homes. It also applies to hospitals, old people homes, nursing homes, children's homes, schools, police stations, fire brigade barracks and prisons.

#### 3. Cut-off conditions:

Does not apply anymore

#### 4. Number of disconnections per year:

Does not apply anymore

#### 5. Duration of disconnection:

Does not apply anymore

#### 6. Letters/phone calls before disconnection:

Does not apply anymore

#### 7. Visits before disconnection:

Does not apply anymore

#### 8. Absolute disconnection / minimum flow:

The ban of domestic disconnection extends to any "limiting devices" which could be used to reduce the flow of water to a property. It also prevents the use of pre-payment meters, which are commonly used for gas and electricity (about 4 million electricity customers out of 20 million domestic customers use pre-payment meters).

#### 9. Possibility of social tariffs:

### Social tariffs

Between 2015 and 2016 companies will have provided a package of measures worth more than £40 million to support customers struggling to pay or in debt, for example through trust funds, debt matching and write-off schemes, debt advice and water efficiency measures to help customers on meters reduce their bills.

By April 2015, 14 of 18 companies had social tariffs available for customers to reduce their bills. The other companies either intend to have social tariffs in



place in 2016 or are currently consulting their customers about introducing a tariff scheme.

All companies in England provide the national social tariff Watersure, which caps bills for more than 70,000 metered customers who are on means-tested benefits, and water companies will be carrying out further promotion to increase uptake. Some companies have had additional social tariffs for several years, providing assistance to many thousands more customers.

In Wales 54,000 households are either on the Welsh Water Assist tariff, which is based on the Watersure tariff but set at a lower rate and extended to unmeasured customers, or benefit from other forms of social assistance – and this total is planned to increase to 100,000 by 2020.

### Funds and other measures

Water companies regularly contribute to the independently-run social funds and charitable trusts that they have set up. Monies from these funds are used to help clear customers' water or sewerage debts and provide support and advice on how to manage debt in the future. These funds have helped hundreds of thousands of customers in need.

Many water companies also look to relieve the pressure on hard-pressed households and get them back on their feet by accepting payments as low as a few pounds, and with schemes to match customers' payments to reduce arrears by writing off some or all of their debts. Around 100,000 households are benefitting from these schemes and companies have proposed to increase this.

Companies are also spending millions of pounds to ensure customers are aware of the potential support on offer. Companies have invested in specialist staff and training so that they proactively seek customers who are struggling.

Companies also donate hundreds of thousands of pounds to Citizens Advice Bureaux and other regional debt and advice charities. Customers on water meters get extra help from companies to bring down their bills even further. For example, some companies install free water saving products such as dual flush convertors, tap inserts and shower adapters that help customers use less water so they save money. Companies also target and promote metering to the customers on low incomes whom they expect will benefit both from a lower bill and from greater control of their bill.

## Scotland

### 1. Disconnection policy for non-payment of water charges:

Disconnection of domestic customers for non-payment is not permitted, though non-domestic customers may be disconnected. Debt is recovered through the courts (or sheriff) who can confiscate property to cover the value



of the debt.

2. Legal position:
3. Cut-off conditions:
4. Number of disconnections per year:

None

5. Duration of disconnection:
6. Letters/phone calls before disconnection:
7. Visits before disconnection:
8. Absolute / minimum flow disconnection:
9. Possibility of social tariffs:

There are no specific tariffs for poor families, old people, nor any other form of positive discrimination

## Northern Ireland

1. Disconnection policy for non-payment of wafer charges:

Domestic customers do not receive water bills as the service is funded from general taxation. Nondomestic customers can be disconnected.

2. Legal position:
3. Cut-off conditions:
4. Number of disconnections per year:

None

5. Duration of disconnection:
6. Letters/phone calls before disconnection:
7. Visits before disconnection:
8. Absolute / minimum now disconnection:
9. Possibility of social tariffs: Not applicable.

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## About EurEau

EurEau is the voice of Europe's water sector. We represent drinking and waste water service providers from 28 countries in Europe, from both the private and the public sectors.

Our members are the national associations of water services in Europe. At EurEau, we bring national water professionals together to agree European water industry positions regarding the management of water quality, resource efficiency and access to water for Europe's citizens and businesses. The EurEau secretariat is based in Brussels, from where we coordinate the work of



around 150 experts from member organisations and utilities and advocate common positions with EU decision makers.

Our members are fully committed to the continuous supply of clean water and its safe return into the water cycle. As gatekeepers of Europe's water, we have a role in raising awareness of threats to the water environment. With a direct employment of around 500,000 people, the European water sector makes a significant contribution to the European economy.



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