

Utility Regulator



Cognisense

Domestic consumer views of electricity supply loss during severe weather events

August 2025

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1. Key findings

In July 2025, the Utility Regulator commissioned Cognisense to conduct an online survey with domestic electricity consumers in Northern Ireland, to gather their experiences of losing electricity supply during severe weather, their main priorities at this time and their views on the provision of a payment for the inconvenience caused by the loss of power during these weather events.

The findings from the research will be used to inform the UR's review of the Electricity Guaranteed Standards of Service (GSS) and Overall Standards of Performance (OSP) for the electricity distributor and electricity supply companies in Northern Ireland.

1,000 domestic electricity consumers participated in the survey. Some of the key findings from the research are as follows:

Experiences of losing electricity supply due to severe weather or a storm

- 57% of consumers had lost electricity to their home during severe weather or a storm, while 38% reported they had not and 6% were unsure.
- Of those consumers who had lost electricity to their home, 60% had lost supply due to Storm Éowyn in January 2025.
- Thinking back to the last time they were without power due to severe weather, 61% of those who had lost power were without electricity for less than 12 hours.
- 18% had lost their supply for more than 12 hours but less than 24 hours.
- 9% were without electricity for more than 24 hours but less than 48 hours.
- 11% of consumers reported they lost power for more than 48 hours while 2% were unsure how long they were without electricity.

Consumer priorities during power loss

- When asked to think about what was most important to them during the last time they lost electricity because of severe weather, 57% stated it was getting their electricity back on.
- 29% of consumers who had lost their electricity during severe weather or a storm considered being kept informed of when they could expect their supply to be restored as the most important factor.
- 6% reported the most important factor was being made aware of supports they could access in their area while they were without a supply at home.
- 2% stated receiving compensation for the inconvenience was most important.

- When combining their top three considerations, consumers felt that the most important factors were;
 - Getting their electricity back on (93%)
 - Being kept informed of when they could expect their supply restored (88%)
 - Being made aware of supports they could access in their area while without a supply at home (72%)
 - The least important consideration was receiving compensation for the inconvenience (28%)

Views on payments for loss of power

- 77% of consumers agreed or strongly agreed that electricity consumers who go without power due to storm damage for over 24 hours should be entitled to claim a payment in acknowledgement of the inconvenience caused.
- Across those who agreed, the vast majority (87%) believed all consumers affected by the outage (both households and businesses) should be entitled to claim the payment.
- 11% stated households only should be entitled to claim while only 2% felt businesses only should be entitled to claim.
- 45% stated Northern Ireland Electricity Networks (NIEN) should fund the payment, while 29% felt that the government should fund such payments.
- 11% considered all consumers (both households and businesses) should fund the payment, with 3% stating household consumers only and 1% mentioning business consumers only. Some 10% did not know who should fund the payment.
- If a payment was introduced, 62% stated they would be unwilling to pay extra on their future electricity bills to fund a payment for consumers who were without power during severe weather for over a certain period of time, while 17% were willing to pay extra and around a fifth (21%) were unsure.
- Across the 17% who said they were willing to pay extra;
 - 15% were prepared to pay £1 to £5 extra annually on future electricity bills
 - 39% were willing to pay £6 to £10
 - 21% were prepared to pay £11 to £20
 - 11% were prepared to pay £21 to £30
 - 11% were willing to pay £31 to £50
- In the event that they experienced a loss of electricity due to severe weather, over half of respondents (53%) stated they would be likely to submit a claim for a payment to acknowledge the inconvenience caused.

2. About this research

Background

Utility Regulator is the independent non-ministerial government department responsible for regulating Northern Ireland's electricity, gas, water and sewerage industries, to promote the short and long-term interests of consumers. They are not a policy-making department of government, but make sure that the energy and water utility industries in Northern Ireland are regulated and developed within ministerial policy as set out in their statutory duties.

As part of the Utility Regulator's Consumer Protection Programme 2024 – 2029¹, a commitment was made to review the electricity Guaranteed Standards of Service (GSS) and Overall Standards of Performance (OSP). The purpose of the review is to update the current electricity GSS Regulations and OSP Determinations for the electricity distributor and electricity supply companies in Northern Ireland, to ensure they are fit for purpose and provide an enhanced level of consumer protection to Northern Ireland consumers.

The electricity Guaranteed Standards of Service (GSS) set out prescribed service levels which domestic and non-domestic consumers can expect in individual cases from both their electricity distributor and electricity supplier. They include payments in recognition of poor performance, to acknowledge the inconvenience caused to the customer when company performance falls below the prescribed level. The payment values do not reflect or attempt to remedy the actual loss, either partial or whole, experienced by each customer in the unique circumstances of every case.

The electricity Overall Standards of Performance (OSP) set out general required standards that are not individual consumer specific and do not carry a payment if breached.

Due to the events of Storm Éowyn and the need to gather consumer views specifically on severe weather payments as part of this review, in July 2025 the Utility Regulator commissioned Cognisense to conduct quantitative research with electricity consumers in Northern Ireland.

The findings from the research will be used to inform the Utility Regulator's review of the GSS and OSP.

Methodology

An online survey of 1000 Northern Ireland consumers was administered in July 2025, as part of the Cognisense omnibus survey. Quota controls based on official population estimates were employed during fieldwork and corrective RIM (Random Iterative Method) weighting applied during data analysis to ensure that the final sample was representative of the Northern Ireland population in terms of age, sex, socio-economic group (SEG) and geographical area. Classification questions asked, as part of the omnibus survey, enabled the identification of disability and carer

¹ [Consumer Protection Programme 2024 – 2029 \(CPP24\) – Final decision paper | Utility Regulator](#)

status, as well as parental or guardianship responsibilities. An additional question was included to establish the proportion of the population reliant on their electricity supply for healthcare needs.

Subgroup analysis was completed by geographical area, disability status, socioeconomic group and for those respondents who were reliant on electricity for healthcare reasons.

The questionnaire used for the survey was developed by the Utility Regulator with advice from Cognisense.

All research was carried out in accordance with the Market Research Society's Code of Conduct.

When reading this report, please be aware of the following:

- SEG is a means of classifying respondents based on the employment status, occupation and working pattern (full-time/part-time) of the head of household. There are six socio-economic grades: A, B, C1, C2, D and E. For analysis purposes, these grades have been combined into the following groups: 'ABC1' (more affluent consumers) and 'C2DE' (less affluent consumers).
- As a result of the rounding of figures and the use of questions for which multiple answers could have been given, the sums on charts may not always total 100%.
- The relevant base sizes are detailed under each chart with 'n' representing 'number'.
- Where differences by demographics have been identified, these have been tested at a 95% confidence level. The margin of error on the total sample is +/-3.

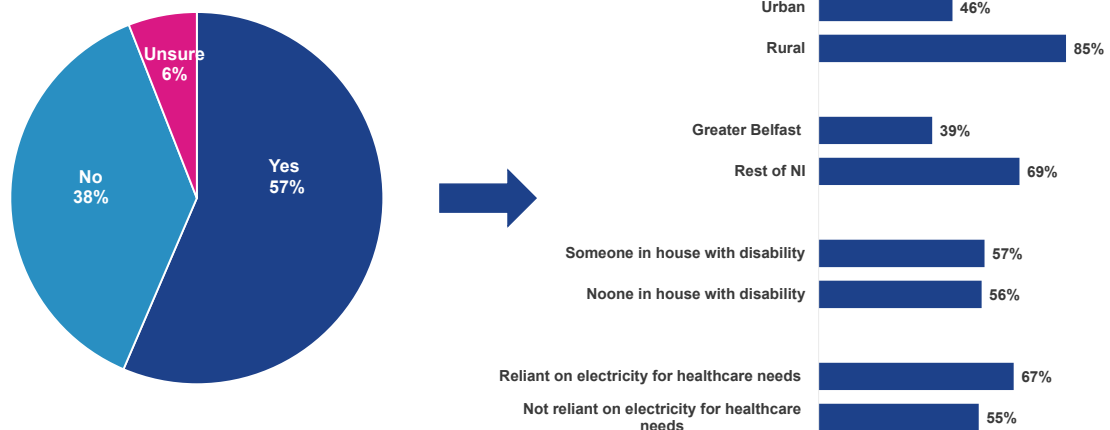
3. Experience of loss of electricity supply due to severe weather events

Participants were asked questions regarding whether they had ever lost electricity supply during a severe weather event, if they had lost supply during Storm Éowyn and how long they were without power for.

3.1 Ever lost electricity to your home during severe weather or a storm

57% had lost electricity to their home due to severe weather or a storm (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Have you ever lost electricity to your home during severe weather or a storm?



Base: all respondents (n=1000)

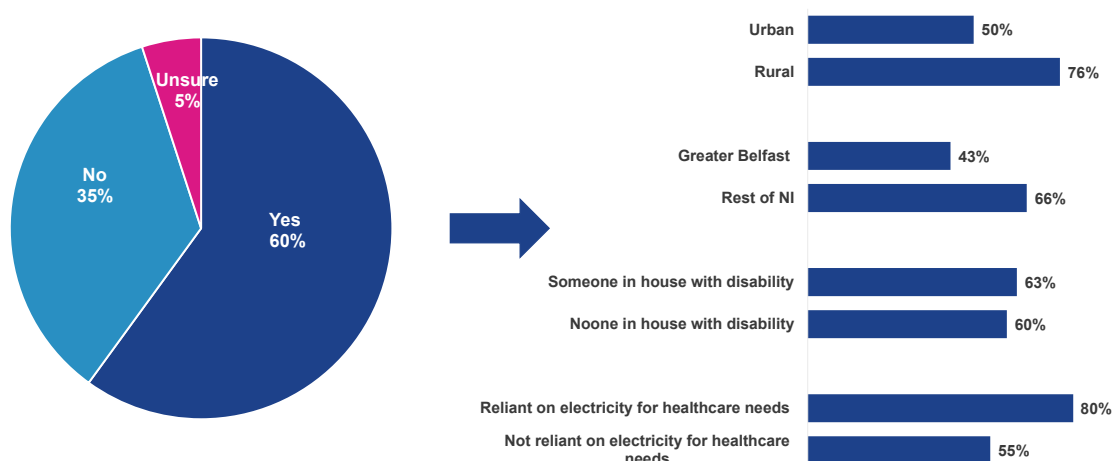
The loss of power was more prevalent amongst:

- Those living in more rural areas than those living in urban areas (85% vs 46%).
- Those living in rest of Northern Ireland (69%) compared to Greater Belfast residents (39%).
- Those reliant on electricity for healthcare needs compared to those who were not reliant (67% vs 55%).
- There were no significant differences between those living in a household with a person who had a disability, compared to those living in a household without a person with a disability (57% vs 56%).

3.2 Lost electricity due to Storm Éowyn in January 2025

60% of those who had lost supply to their home reported it was due to Storm Éowyn back in January of this year (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Did you lose electricity to your home as a result of the storm in January this year (Storm Éowyn)?



Base: all who had lost electricity during severe weather or storm (n=554)

The loss of electricity during Storm Éowyn was more prevalent amongst:

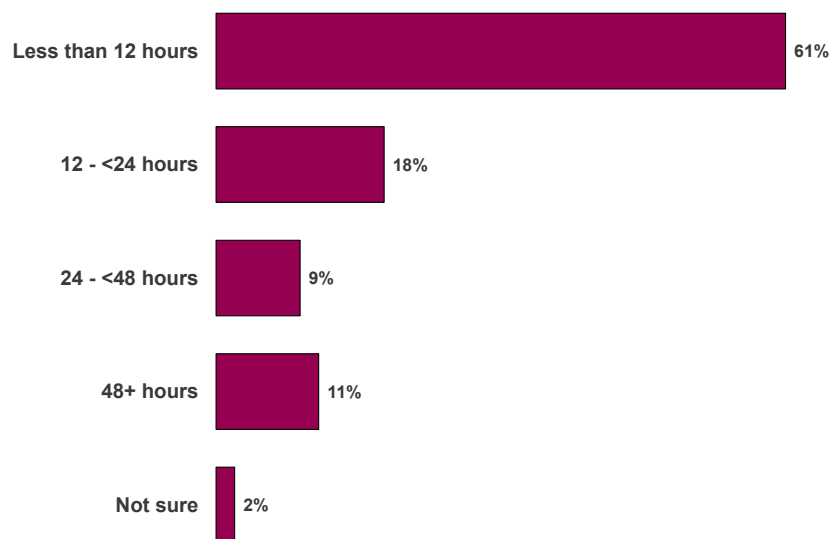
- Those living in more rural areas than those living in urban areas (76% vs 50%).
- Those living in rest of Northern Ireland (66%) compared to Greater Belfast residents (43%).
- Those living in a household with a person who had a disability, compared to those living in a household without a person with a disability (63% vs 60%).
- Those reliant on electricity for healthcare needs compared to those who were not reliant (80% vs 55%).

3.3 Duration of power loss

Of those who had experience of losing electricity supply, the majority (61%) were without power for less than 12 hours (Figure 3).

18% reported they were without power for between 12 – 24 hours. 9% were without supply for 24 - 48 hours, while 11% stated they were without electricity for more than 48 hours.

Figure 3: Thinking of the last time you lost electricity because of severe weather, how long were you without power?

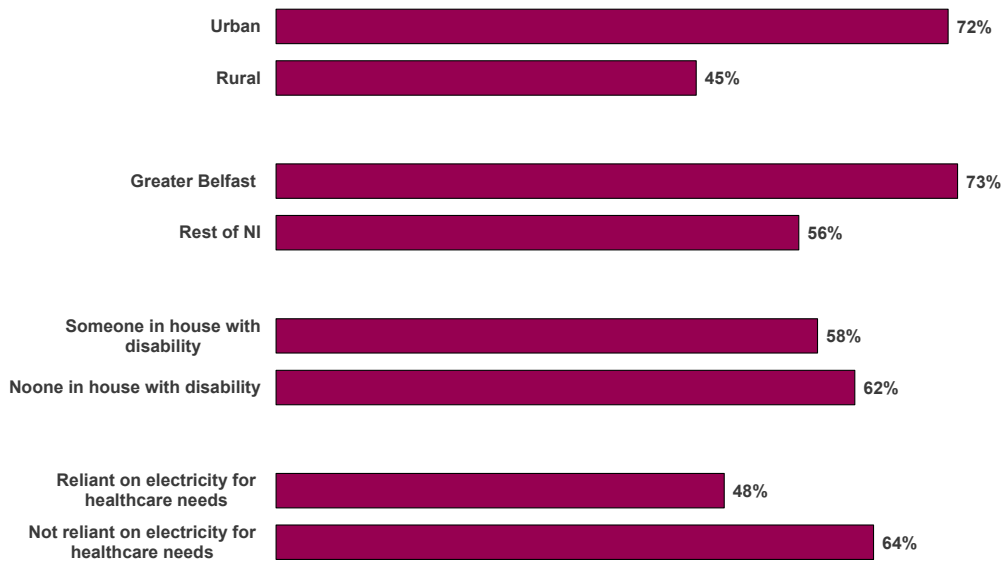


Base: all who had lost electricity during severe weather or storm (n=554)

Being without power for less than 12 hours was more prevalent amongst (Figure 4):

- Those living in more urban areas than those living in rural areas (72% vs 45%).
- Those living in Greater Belfast (73%) compared to those living in rest of Northern Ireland (56%).
- Those living in a household without someone with a disability, compared to those living in a household with someone who has a disability (62% vs 58%).
- Those not reliant on electricity for healthcare needs compared to those who were reliant (64% vs 48%).

Figure 4: Thinking of the last time you lost electricity because of severe weather, how long were you without power? Less than 12 hours



Base: all who had lost electricity during severe weather or storm (n=554)

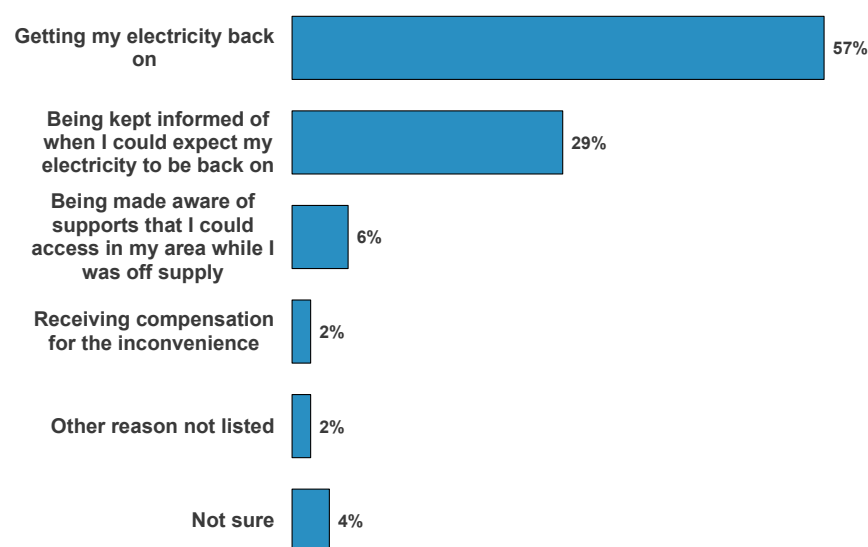
4. Consumer priorities during power loss

Participants were asked to rank what was most important to them during their time without electricity supply.

4.1 Most important consideration

For 57% of respondents the most important consideration during the period without power was getting their electricity back on. 29% of consumers who had lost their electricity during severe weather or a storm considered being kept informed of when they could expect their supply to be restored as the most important factor. 6% reported being made aware of supports they could access in the area while without a supply at home was the most important and only 2% stated receiving compensation for the inconvenience was important (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Thinking about the last time you lost electricity because of severe weather, what was most important to you during the period you were without power?

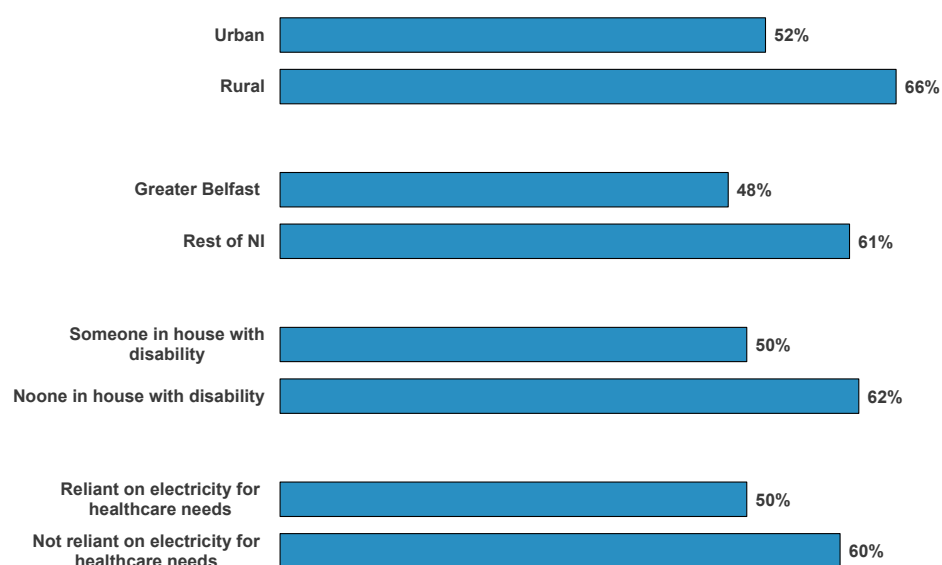


Base: all who had lost electricity during severe weather or storm (n=554)

Rural residents (66%) were more likely than urban residents (52%) to be concerned about getting electricity back on. More people living in rest of NI than Greater Belfast stated this was their primary concern (61% vs 48%).

Those living without a disabled person in the household (62%) were more concerned with when their electricity supply would be on than those living in a household with a disabled person (50%). More households not reliant on electricity for healthcare needs were concerned about getting their supply back on than those who were reliant on the supply for healthcare needs (60% vs 50%) (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Thinking about the last time you lost electricity because of severe weather, what was most important to you during the period you were without power? Getting electricity back on

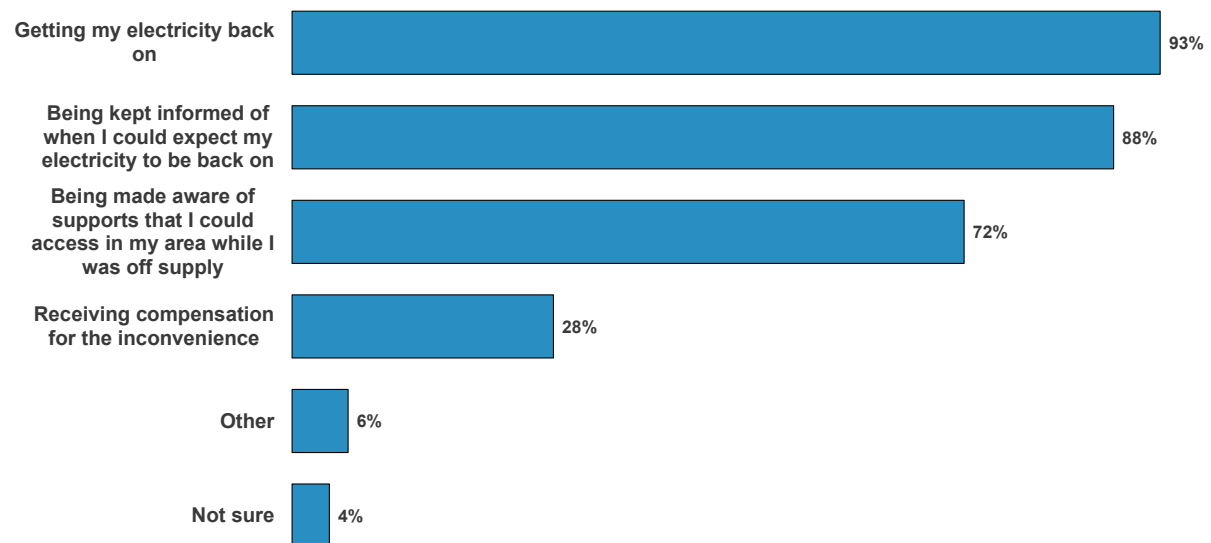


Base: all who had lost electricity during severe weather or storm (n=554)

4.2 Top three considerations

When combining the top three considerations, getting electricity back on remained the most important consideration (93%), followed by being kept informed when they could expect power to be restored (88%), then being made aware of supports they could access in the area while supply was off (72%). The least important consideration was receiving compensation for the inconvenience (28%) (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Thinking about the last time you lost electricity because of severe weather, what was most important to you during the period you were without power? Top Three



Base: all who had lost electricity during severe weather or storm (n=554)

Getting electricity back on was more of a consideration amongst (Figure 8):

- Those living in rest of Northern Ireland (94%) compared to Greater Belfast residents (89%).
- There were no significant differences between any of the other cohorts.

Figure 8: Thinking about the last time you lost electricity because of severe weather, what was most important to you during the period you were without power? Top Three – Getting electricity back on



Base: all who had lost electricity during severe weather or storm (n=554)

Being kept informed of when to expect electricity to be back on was more of a consideration amongst (Figure 9):

- Those living in a more rural (90%) than urban (85%) location.
- Those living in rest of Northern Ireland (90%) compared to those living in Greater Belfast (83%).
- Those living in a household with someone with a disability (93%) compared to those in a household without someone with a disability (86%).
- Those not reliant on electricity for healthcare needs compared to those who were reliant (90% vs 85%).

Figure 9: Thinking about the last time you lost electricity because of severe weather, what was most important to you during the period you were without power? Top Three – Being kept informed

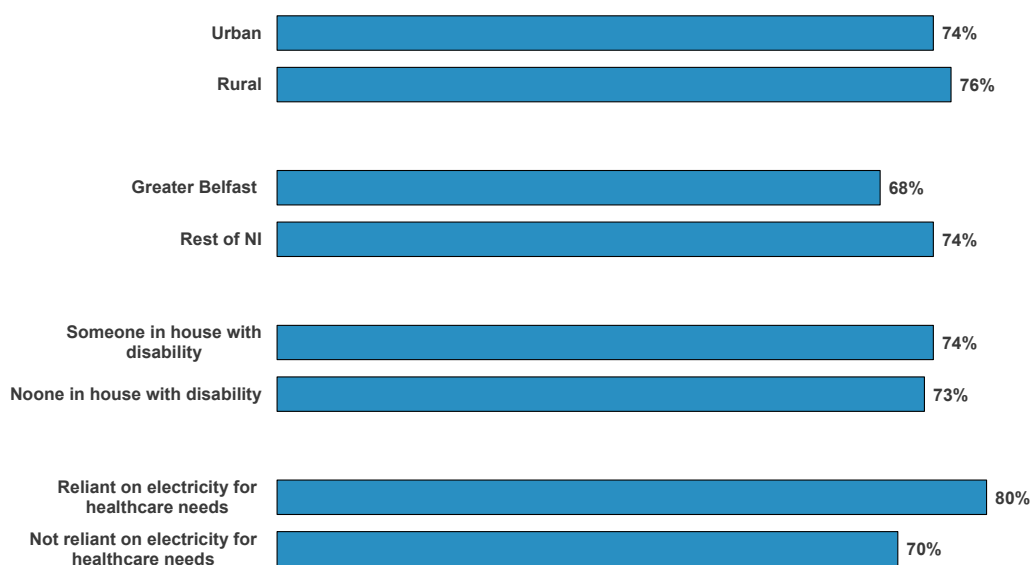


Base: all who had lost electricity during severe weather or storm (n=554)

Being made aware of support in the area was more of a consideration amongst (Figure 10):

- Those living in rest of Northern Ireland (74%) compared to Greater Belfast residents (68%).
- Those reliant on electricity for healthcare needs than those not reliant (80% vs 70%).
- There were no other significant differences across the cohorts.

Figure 10: Thinking about the last time you lost electricity because of severe weather, what was most important to you during the period you were without power? Top Three – Being made aware of support in the area



Base: all who had lost electricity during severe weather or storm (n=554)

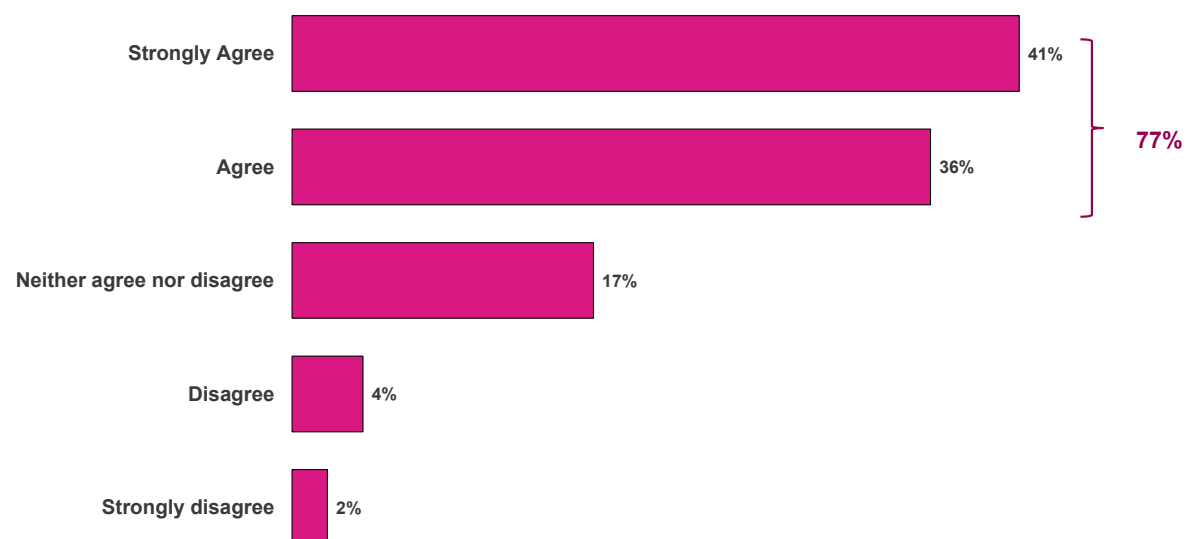
5. Payments for loss of power

Participants were asked for their views on whether those who were without power for over 24 hours should be entitled to receive a payment for the inconvenience caused. Questions were also asked to understand views on who they felt should receive these payments, how they thought such payments should be funded, whether they would be willing to pay more on their electricity bills to fund such a payment and whether they would claim such a payment.

5.1 Entitlement to payment for inconvenience

77% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that customers without power for over 24 hours, should be entitled to payment for the inconvenience experienced. Some 17% neither agreed nor disagreed while 6% disagreed (Figure 11).

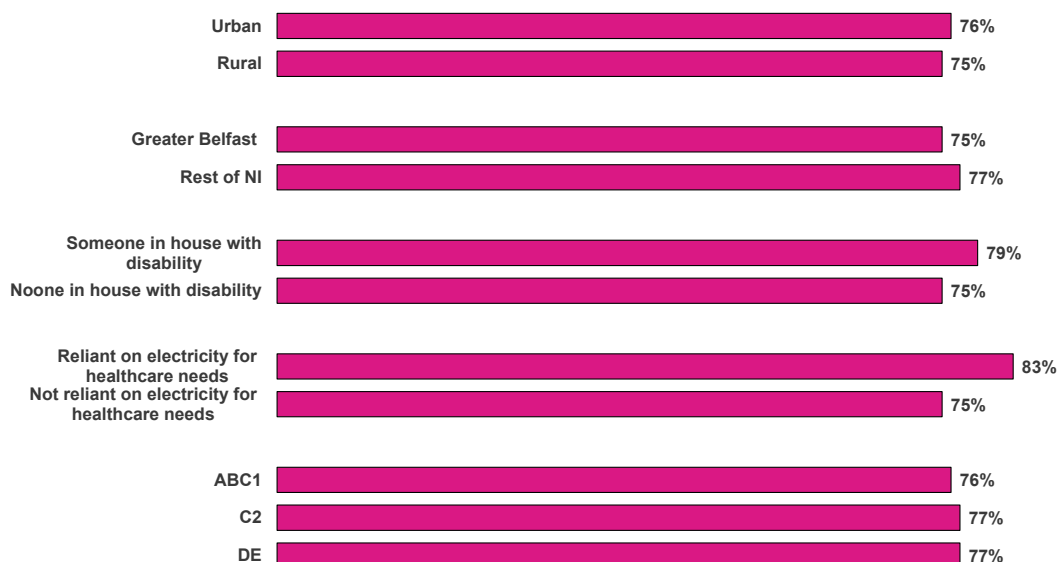
Figure 11: Do you agree or disagree that electricity consumers who go without power due to storm damage for over 24 hours should be entitled to claim a payment in acknowledgement of the inconvenience caused?



Base: all respondents (n=1000)

Those living with someone with a disability (79%) were more likely to strongly agree or agree than those living in a household without a disability (75%). Those reliant on electricity for healthcare needs (83%) were also more likely to agree than those not reliant (75%). There were no other significant differences (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Do you agree or disagree that electricity consumers who go without power due to storm damage for over 24 hours should be entitled to claim a payment in acknowledgement of the inconvenience caused? Strongly agree / agree

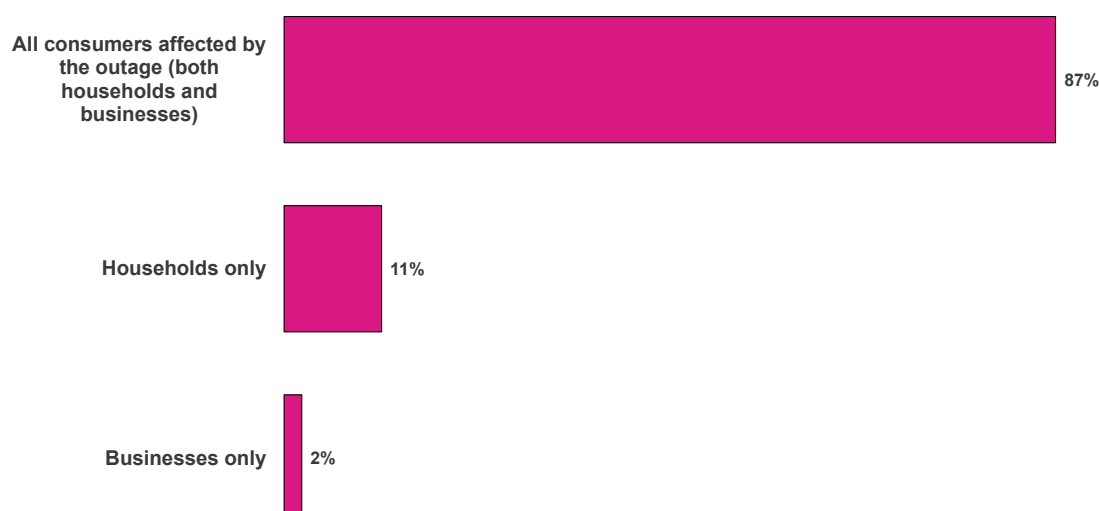


Base: all respondents (n=1000)

5.2 Who should be entitled to the payment

The vast majority (87%) felt that all consumers affected (both households and businesses) should be entitled to claim the payment, while 11% felt a claim should be for households only and 2% mentioned businesses only (Figure 13).

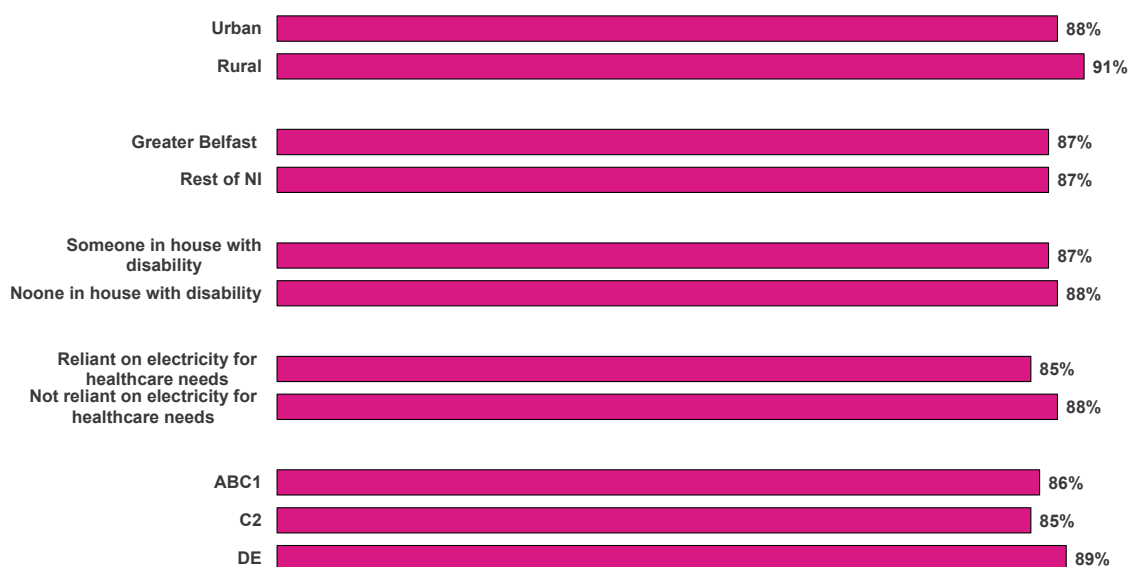
Figure 13: Who do you think should be entitled to claim the payment?



Base: all who agreed with payment for inconvenience (n=764)

Rural residents (91%) were more likely than those living in urban areas (88%) to state all affected consumers impacted by an outage (both households and businesses) should be entitled to payments. Those not depending on electricity for healthcare needs were more likely to consider all consumers impacted should be entitled to claim than those reliant on electric for healthcare needs (88% vs 85%). Those from a DE socio economic group (89%) were more likely than those from an ABC1 (86%) or C2 socio economic group (85%) to state all affected consumers impacted by an outage (both households and businesses) should be entitled to payments. No other significant differences were evident. (Figure 14).

Figure 14: Who do you think should be entitled to claim the payment? All consumers affected by the outage

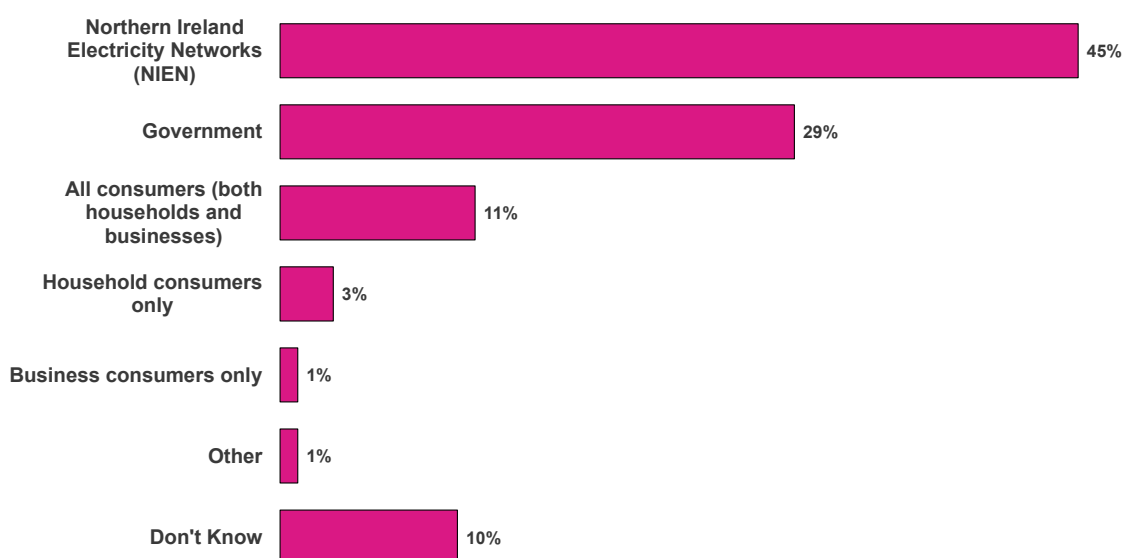


Base: all who agreed with payment for inconvenience (n=764)

5.3 Who should fund the payment

If a payment was introduced, 45% thought the Northern Ireland Electricity Networks should fund the payment, while 29% felt it should be the Government's responsibility. 11% considered it should be the responsibility of all consumers, while 3% stated household consumers and only 1% felt it should be funded by business customers only (Figure 15).

Figure 15: If a payment was introduced for those who had lost electricity supply because of severe weather, who do you think should fund this payment?

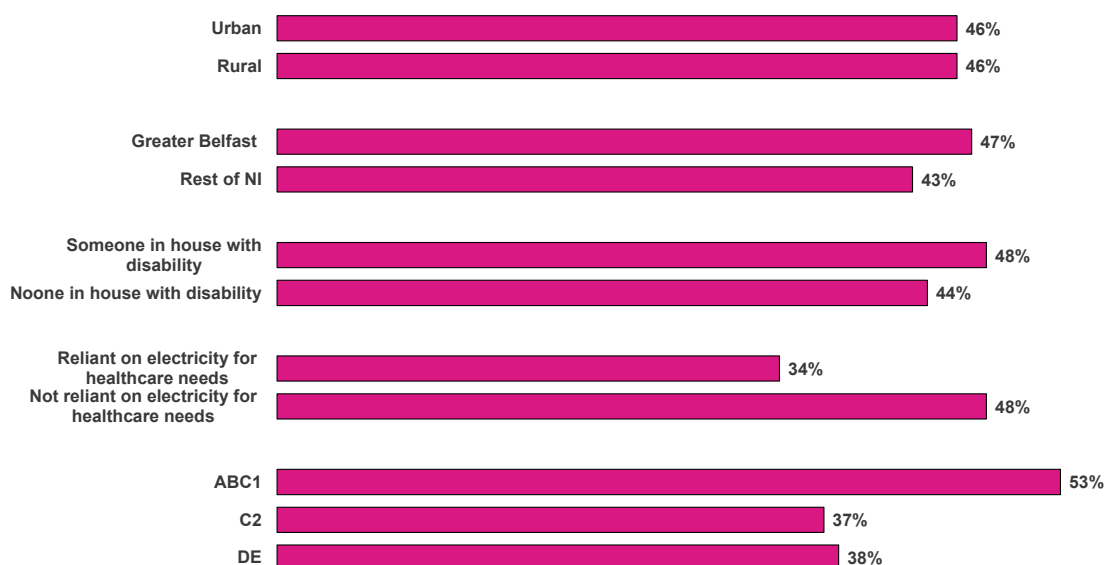


Base: all respondents (n=1000)

Those most likely to state funding should come from Northern Ireland Electricity Networks included (Figure 16):

- Those living in Greater Belfast (47%) compared to Rest of Northern Ireland (43%).
- Those living in a household with someone with a disability (48%) compared to those in a household without someone with a disability (44%).
- Those who were not reliant on their electricity supply for healthcare needs compared to those who were reliant (48% vs 34%).
- Those from an ABC1 socio economic group (53%) compared to those from a C2 (37%) or DE (38%) background.
- There were no other significant difference across the key segments.

Figure 16: If a payment was introduced for those who had lost electricity supply because of severe weather, who do you think should fund this payment? Northern Ireland Electricity Networks



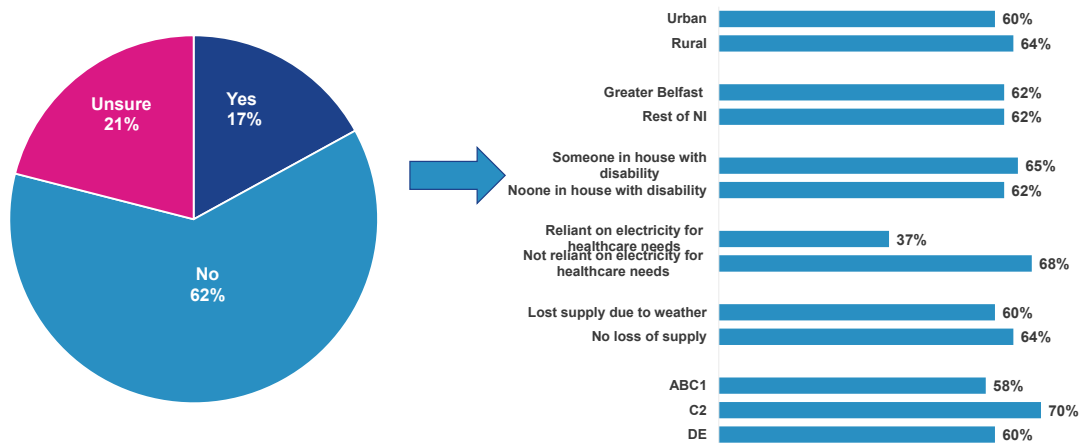
Base: all respondents (n=1000)

5.4 Willingness to pay extra on bills

62% stated they would be unwilling to pay extra on their electricity bills to fund a payment for consumers who were without power during severe weather or storms over a certain period of time. Some 17% were willing to pay extra, while 21% reported they were unsure (Figure 17).

Unwillingness to pay more was higher among those with someone in the household with a disability (65%), rural residents (64%), those not reliant on electricity to meet their healthcare needs (68% vs 37% across those dependent) and those from a C2 socio economic background (70%). There was no variation between those living in Greater Belfast compared to rest of Northern Ireland. Those who had not experienced a loss of supply were less willing to pay extra than those who had lost supply (64% vs 60%) (Figure 17).

Figure 17: If a payment was introduced, would you be willing to pay extra on your future electricity bills to fund consumers who are without power during severe weather for over a certain period of time to claim a payment?

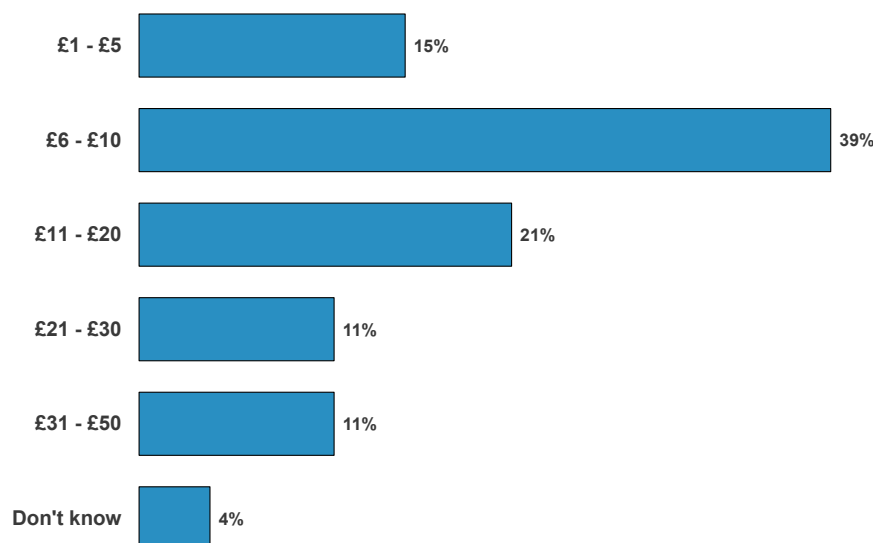


Base: all respondents (n=1000)

5.5 Amount extra prepared to pay annually

Across those willing to pay extra, 15% stated they would pay up to £5 extra annually, while 39% were prepared to pay between £5 to £10. 21% would pay between £11 to £20 and 22% would pay between £21 and £50 extra, on an annual basis (Figure 18).

Figure 18: How much extra would you be prepared to pay annually on your future electricity bills? (This would be an ongoing annual amount that would be spread across your bills each year).

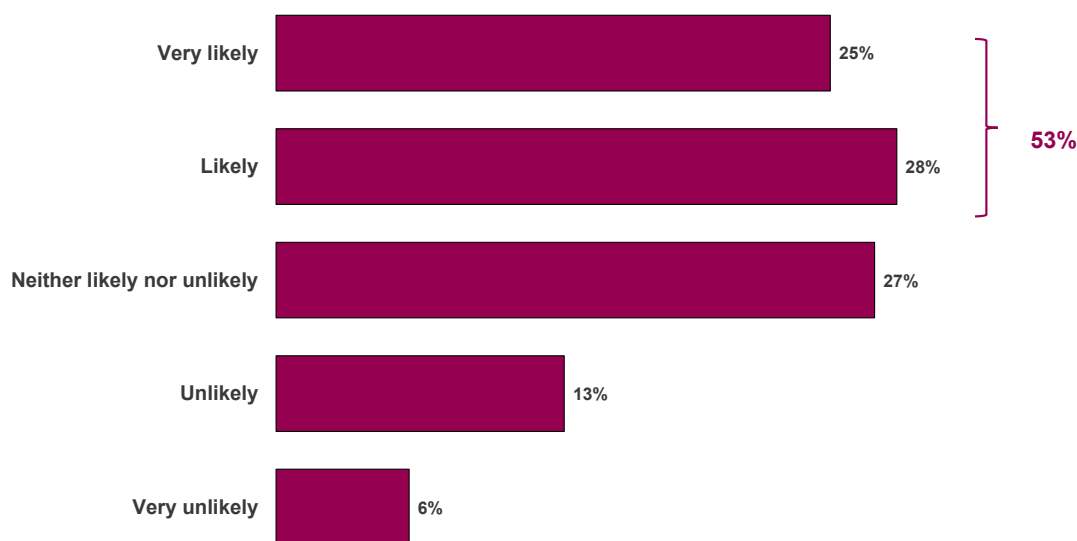


Base: all prepared to pay extra (n=183)

5.6 Likelihood of submitting a claim for a payment

53% stated they would be likely to submit a claim if inconvenienced by loss of electricity, within this, 25% were very likely to. 27% were neither likely nor unlikely to submit a claim while 19% were unlikely (Figure 19).

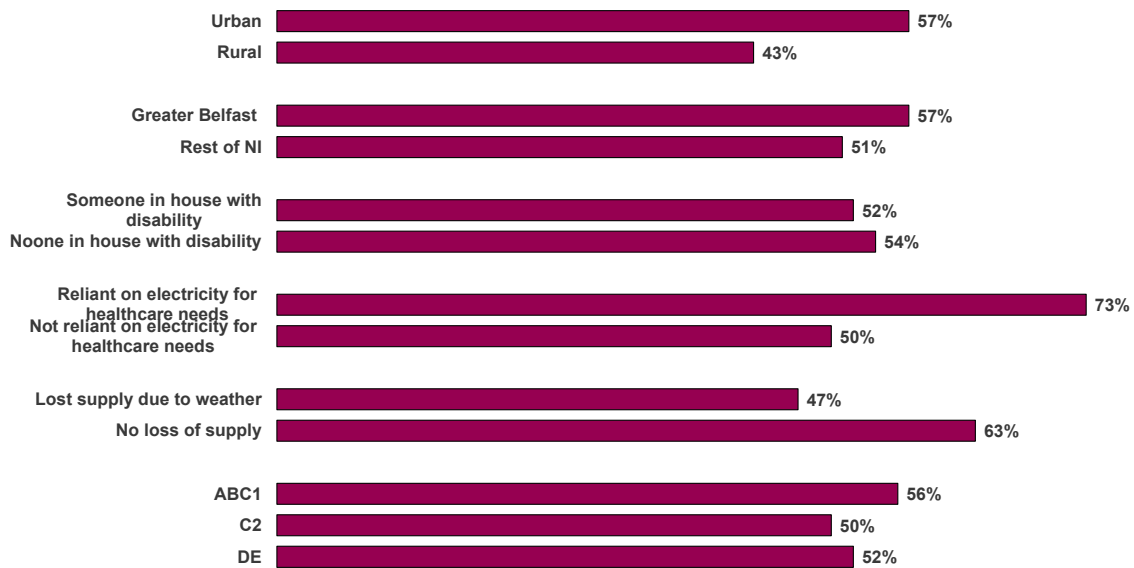
Figure 19: In the event that you experience a loss of electricity due to severe weather, how likely or not are you to submit a claim for a payment to acknowledge the inconvenience caused?



Base: all respondents (n=1000)

Likelihood was higher among those living in Greater Belfast (57%), urban residents (57%), those reliant on electricity for healthcare needs (73%), those who had not lost supply (63%) and those from an ABC1 socio economic background (56%). There were no significant difference relating to household with or without a disabled person. (Figure 20).

Figure 20: In the event that you experience a loss of electricity due to severe weather, how likely or not are you to submit a claim for a payment to acknowledge the inconvenience caused? Very likely / likely



Base: all respondents (n=1000)

6. Summary

Experiences of losing electricity supply due to severe weather or a storm

- 57% of consumers reported that they had lost electricity to their home during severe weather or a storm.
- 60% of these consumers who had lost electricity to their home had lost their supply during Storm Éowyn in January 2025.

Consumer priorities during power loss

- When asked to think about what was most important to them during the last time they lost electricity because of severe weather, 57% stated it was getting their electricity back on. 2% stated receiving compensation for the inconvenience was most important to them.
- When combining the top three considerations, getting electricity back on also came out top with 93% stating it was the most important priority.

Views on payments for loss of power

- 77% of consumers agreed or strongly agreed that electricity consumers who go without power due to storm damage for over 24 hours should be entitled to claim a payment in acknowledgement of the inconvenience caused.
- 45% were of the view that Northern Ireland Electricity Networks (NIEN) should fund the payment, while 29% felt that the government should fund such payments.
- If a payment was introduced, 62% stated they would be unwilling to pay extra on their future electricity bills to fund a payment for consumers who were without power during severe weather for over a certain period of time, while 17% were willing to pay extra and 21% were unsure.

Appendix – analysis of sample

Analysis of Sample	Sample size - absolute	% of overall sample
Gender		
Male	487	49%
Female	513	51%
Age		
18-24	142	14%
25-34	168	17%
35-49	233	23%
50-64	253	25%
65+	205	20%
Social Class		
ABC1	448	45%
C2	256	26%
DE	296	30%
Area		
Urban	586	59%
Rural	237	24%
Greater Belfast	408	41%
Rest of Northern Ireland	592	59%
Caring Responsibilities		
Parent of guardian of under 15	274	27%
Non parent or guardian of under 15	726	73%
Carer of an adult	150	15%
Non carer of an adult	850	85%
Disability Status		
Someone in household with disability	326	33%
Noone in household with disability	651	67%
Reliance on Electricity Supply		
For healthcare needs	165	16%
Not for healthcare needs	787	79%