

COVID-19 IMPACT ON EUROPEAN RESIDENTIAL ENERGY MARKET PRICES

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Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly influenced our lives and the global economy over the past months. As a result of the measures taken to prevent the spread of the virus, a large drop in electricity and gas demand was at least temporarily noticed across the European markets as of March-April 2020, especially in those that underwent strict lockdown measures. A shift of demand towards residential also resulted from the increased time spent at home (including home-working). Politically, national energy affordability measures were subsequently taken. In parallel retail prices for both electricity and gas followed a substantial downward trend. But what really happened to prices and what was the impact of COVID-19?

This article, the first in a series, reports on a detailed analysis conducted by the VaasaETT data team, of the initial impact of COVID-19 on electricity and natural gas retail prices during the first half of 2020 (H1). A later article, the second in the series will look at the impact during H2. The analysis, which uses among other sources historical retail price data from the Household Energy Price Index (HEPI)¹ project, represents Europe’s first extensive analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on prices households pay for their energy.

Large Price Changes

The 2020 February to April changes² in both electricity and gas markets, for EUR15, EU27 and European³ (EUR) average price are significantly larger than the corresponding 2019 ones.

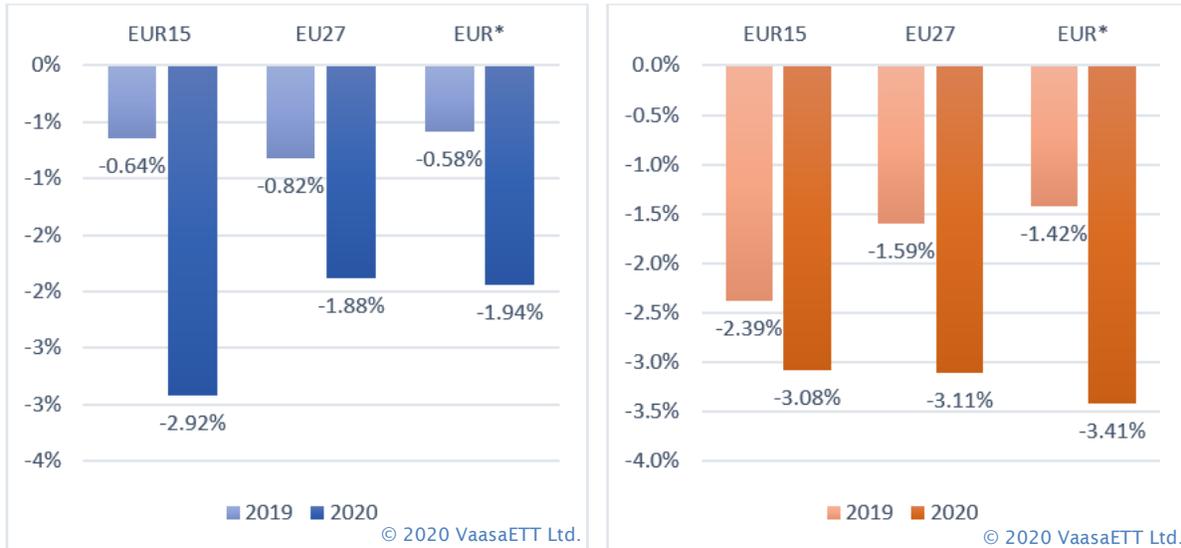


Figure 1: Average electricity (left graph) and natural gas (right graph) retail price change between February-April (2019 versus 2020)

¹ Household Energy Price Index by Energie-Control, MEKH & VaasaETT. For more information on HEPI methodology or for getting access to latest month’s prices you can visit <https://www.energypriceindex.com/>

² The effect of COVID-19 on prices has started at different time periods between 1 March – 1 April depending on when the virus reached each one of the analysed countries, thus in this analysis we have calculated the February-April change to make sure the full impact is taken under consideration.

³ The European average considers all countries included in HEPI project, i.e. EU27 and Great Britain, Montenegro, Serbia, Switzerland and Ukraine.

In fact, the April 2020 average residential retail price decrease - for both electricity and gas - was the largest April decrease during the past decade (2010-2020) for the EUR15 markets and during the past five years (2015-2020) for the EU27 markets and EUR. Moreover, the period between April to June 2020 saw average monthly price changes (reductions) beyond, and in some case far beyond, the change ranges observed in the past for those corresponding months.

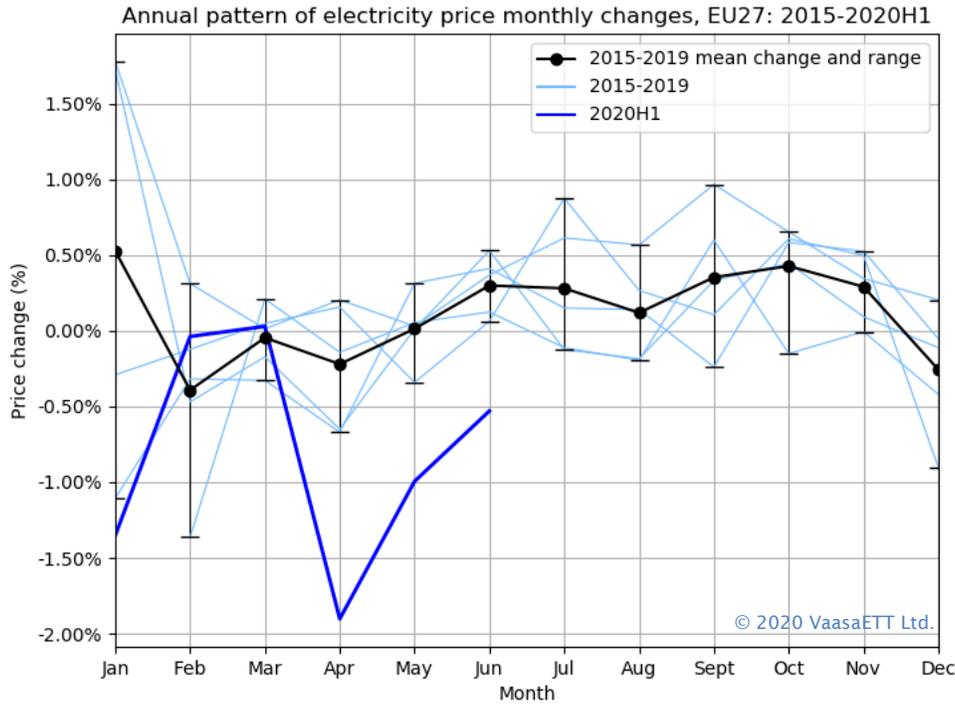


Figure 2: Annual pattern of electricity price monthly changes, for EU27 average price, bold blue line indicates 2020H1 changes

Overall, when looking at the monthly change distribution (Figure 3), the April 2020 average price decrease was among the top 5% of largest monthly changes in any month within the 2015-2020 period for EU27, for both electricity and gas.

Political Measures

Additional to the price falls apparently resulting from the pandemic, a set of measures were taken by the energy industry to alleviate the burden experienced by energy customers suffering economic hardships. The measures were either determined by local governments, regulatory authorities or were the direct initiative of energy market players (suppliers and in some cases DSOs). Figure 4 summarises the most commonly taken measures in various European countries⁴. Only the retail price reduction measures and some measures in the ‘Other’ category, have a direct impact on retail price.

⁴ The analysis was based in publicly available sources and public announcements as complementary material to the reports published by the European Commission (4), (5) and the Council of European Energy Regulators (CEER) (6). The country to country analysis and used sources can be found in the report’s last section “Analytic presentation of measures per country”.

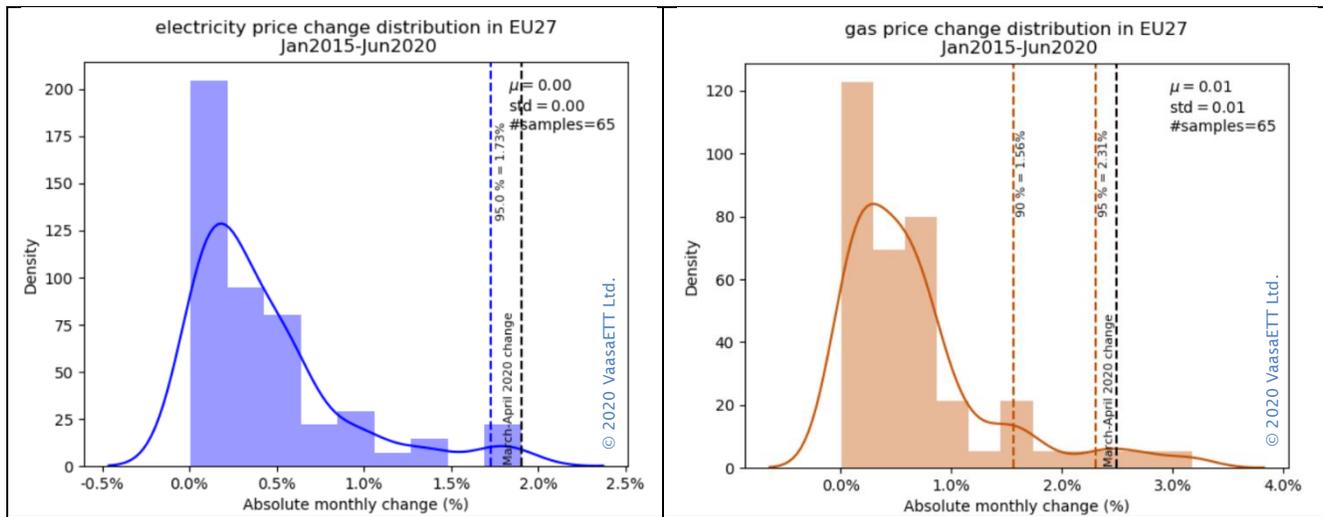


Figure 3: Distribution of 2015-2020H1 monthly price change, for average EU27 electricity (left) and natural gas (right) price. In both graphs, the April 2020 change is indicated with the vertical black dotted line.

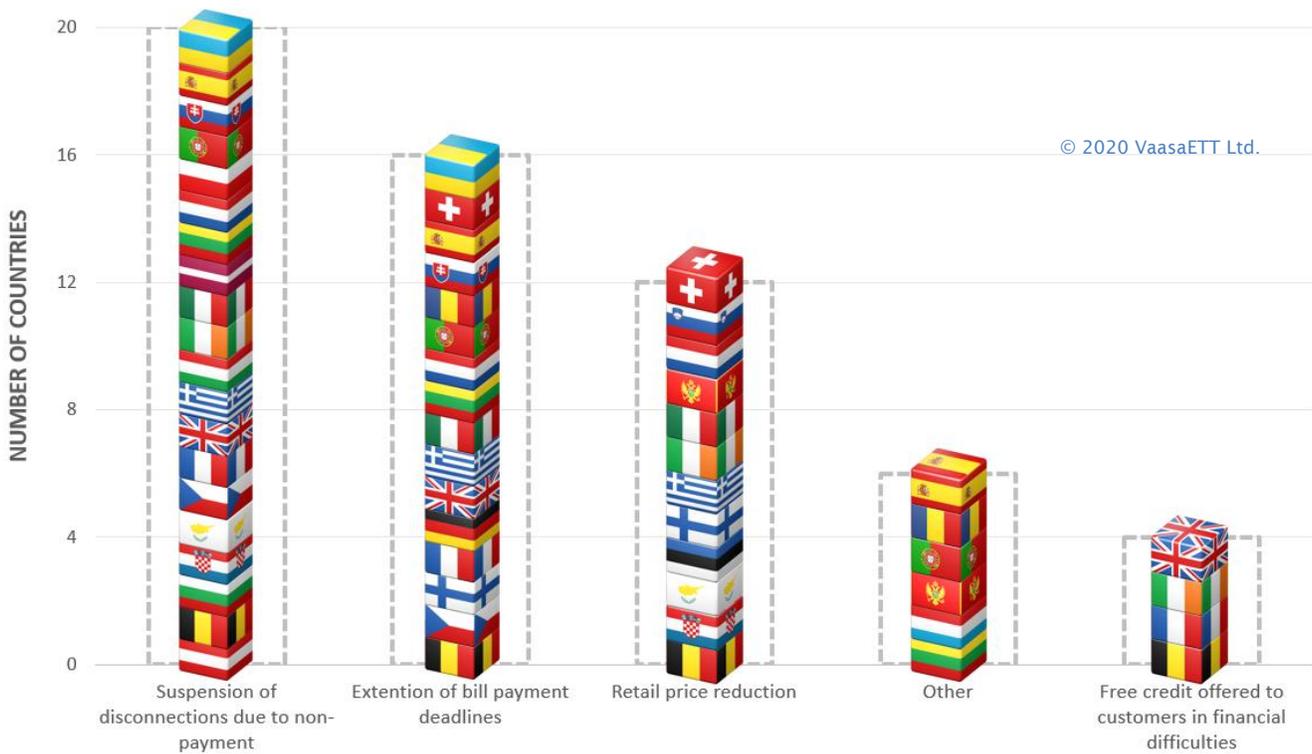


Figure 4: Summary of supportive measures taken by the energy industry during the COVID-19 pandemic in Europe (2020, H1)

Wholesale vs Political Impact

It can be clearly seen that retail prices were also impacted by reductions in wholesale prices. In fact, the comparison of the wholesale electricity price changes versus changes in the energy price component of the

retail electricity price (Figure 5), shows that Poland is the only outlier to the decrease trend⁵. However, in a few cases (Denmark, Finland and Great Britain), the decrease that took place in the countries' retail market (energy component) electricity price was even larger than the decrease (in c€/kWh) in the wholesale electricity price, indicating that the political measures had at least a significant additional impact.

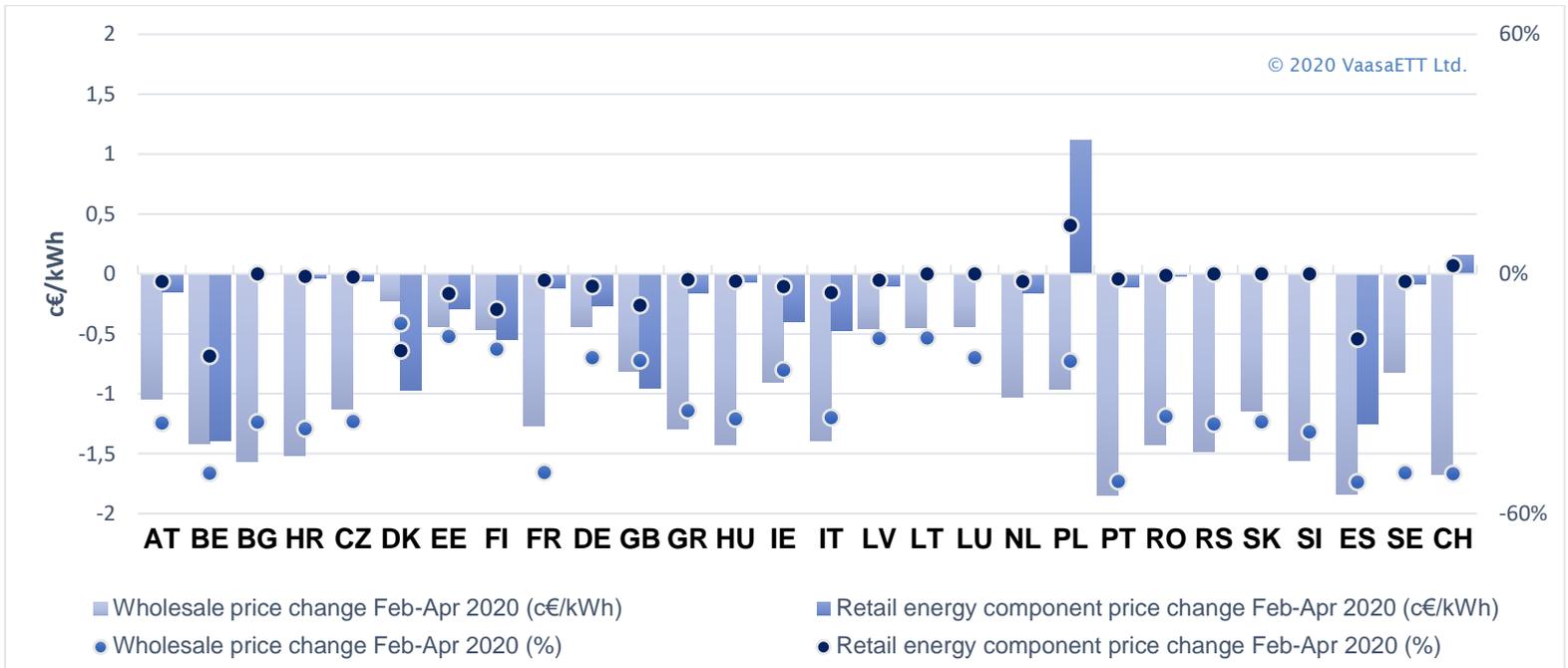


Figure 5: Wholesale vs residential energy component price change between February-April 2020 in €/kWh (left axis) and in % (right axis)

COVID-19 vs Other Trends

As shown by Figure 6, which depicts the historical trend of wholesale electricity versus end-user prices in EU27 since the beginning of 2019, average EU27 electricity wholesale prices had, prior to COVID-19, already been following a decreasing trend that became more intense after November 2019, while average end-user prices only started falling after March 2020. The pattern is very similar when comparing EUR15 average retail and wholesale prices. A closer look at the averages shows that electricity wholesale prices have been following quite closely the longer-term trend of other fuels (including crude oil and European natural gas), while retail prices have – as they usually do – been following the same but more diluted and less volatile trend. It could even be argued that the COVID-19 period retail price fall has been, in part at least, an already overdue increased response to the prevailing market changes that had been occurring prior to COVID-19.

⁵ Poland increased its residential electricity price by 12% between February and April 2020. The increase took place during March and was a consequence of the increase of carbon dioxide emission allowances, since coal consists a big part of the country's generation mix. The compensation measures had been already been announced before COVID-19.



Figure 6: End-user retail versus wholesale EU27 average electricity price, Jan 2019 - Jun 2020

The Impact of COVID-19

It is easy to presume, from a short-term view of retail price changes during the H1 COVID-19 period, that COVID-19 related impacts and measures were the key driver of retail price reductions. While an indisputable impact of COVID-19 on retail prices has been observed, however, it is important to see the bigger picture and the longer-term trends within which the price changes have taken place. Separating the two influencers is at least not yet statistically possible, but what is apparent is that the energy market has arguably shown surprising resilience to even the largest of external short-term shocks to its fundamentals.

What happens next is anything but certain and will be dealt with in our following papers which will continue the analysis into the successive periods and in so doing build an interpretation of the complete picture.

Introduction

During the first half of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has taken a toll on our lives and global economy. In most countries people have stayed at home and industries and large energy consumers were forced into lockdown. As a result, a large drop in the electricity demand has been noticed across the European markets (1), especially in those that underwent strict measures due to the COVID-19 spread. As a consequence of the demand drop, the prices have followed a downward trend during the last three months of 2020 H1, starting from April 2020 and continuing until June. Similarly, in the case of natural gas, the decreases reached a 2-year record low in April and continued their decreasing trend until the end of summer.

The drop in the electricity and natural gas prices was welcome from the residential customer's side, since spending the great majority of their time at home - especially in countries that took strict quarantine measures - has resulted at an increase in the residential consumption. According to Shell Energy Retail the home electricity usage during the lockdown in the UK (data are based on 24,000 smart meters and are referred to April 2020) showed a 15% increase, which would correspond to a 7% increase in the average annual dual fuel bill, due to the standing charge not changing (2).

In this report, Household Energy Price Index (HEPI) (3) historical price data were analysed in order to assess the changes that were caused by COVID-19 in the residential electricity and natural gas prices paid by typical households. The study is a public research covering 32 European capitals⁶, collecting and publishing prices with a monthly granularity. In HEPI, as well as in the current research, we are using three different types of European averages:

- EUR15: It includes the countries that used to be part of EU15 and was renamed after Great Britain left the European Union; Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden. Even though EU15 has stopped existing, the EUR15 average is still insightful as it happens to include some of the most active energy markets in Europe.
- EU27: It includes all countries that are part of the European Union.
- EUR: It is calculated as the average of all countries that are included in HEPI research project, i.e. EU27 and Great Britain, Montenegro, Serbia, Switzerland and Ukraine.

HEPI prices were also analysed in relation to wholesale prices, in an attempt to identify changes associated with wholesale price drops as opposed to changes associated with support measures.

Finally, the report contains an analytic collection of measures taken by the energy market actors (i.e. including regulators, retailers, DSOs etc.) to alleviate the burden off the energy customers who are going through economic hardships.

⁶ Please note that the number of countries is reduced for natural gas analysis, as countries with underdeveloped or no gas markets are omitted from the analysis. Those are: Cyprus, Finland, Malta and Montenegro.

Analysis of impact of COVID-19 on residential energy prices

In this section, the behaviour of electricity and natural gas prices before and after COVID-19 reached Europe has been analysed, aiming to identify the pandemic’s impact on energy prices.

As a first step of the analysis, the average price decrease between February and April 2020⁷ has been calculated for EUR15, EU27 and EUR and compared with the corresponding 2019 figures.

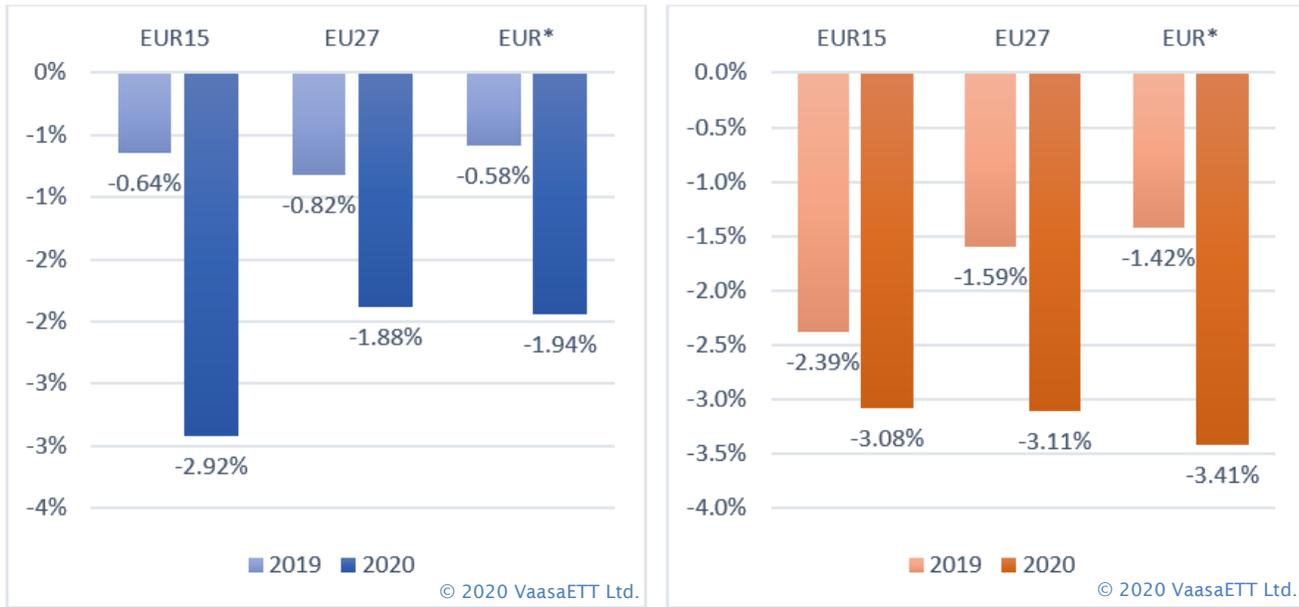


Figure 7: Average electricity (left graph) and natural gas (right graph) retail price change between February-April (2020 versus 2019)

The purpose of the comparison with 2019 figures is to separate the normal decreasing trend that has been observed between February-April during the years with the exceptional 2020 situation. Looking at Figure 7, the 2020 Feb-Apr electricity price decrease (blue graph) is more than 2 times larger than last year’s one for EU27 and more than 4 times larger for EUR15. In gas (orange graph) the differences are smoother since April is associated with the end of the heating season and so large changes. Nevertheless, the 2020 February-April change is still 2 times larger than the 2019 one for EU27 and EUR and 1.2 times larger for EUR15. In fact, the February-April 2020 average price decrease is the largest of the last decade (2010-2020) for EUR15 and of 5-year period (2015-2020) for EU27 and EUR, for both electricity and natural gas residential retail markets.

In greater detail, when looking at the average monthly changes and change range, the April 2020 average price decrease is the largest of the last decade (2010-2020) for EUR15 and of 5-year period (2015-2020) for EU27, for both electricity and natural gas residential retail markets. The same applies when looking at the two months onwards the beginning of the pandemic in Europe, i.e. the May and June 2020 decreases.

⁷ The effect of COVID-19 on prices has started at different time periods between 1 March – 1 April depending on when the virus reached each one of the analysed countries, thus in this analysis we have calculated the February-April change to make sure the full impact is taken under consideration.

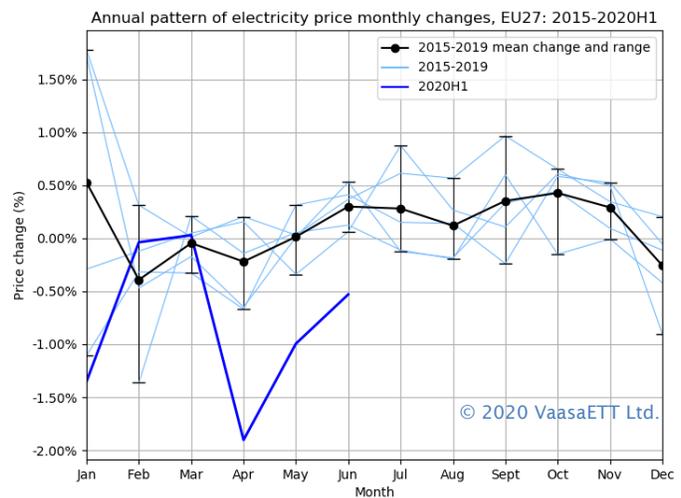
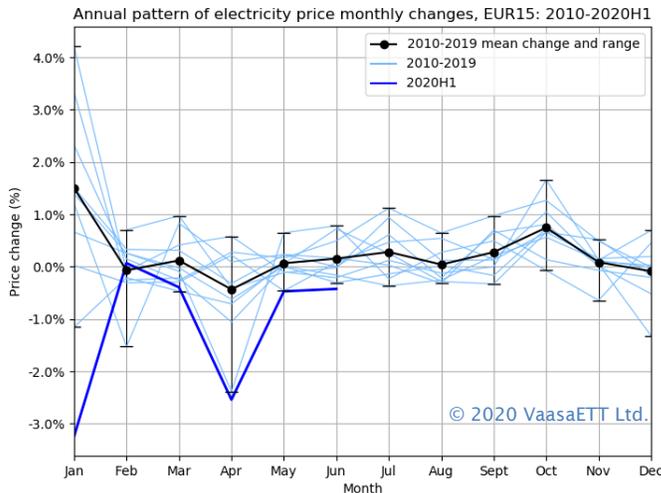


Figure 8: Annual pattern of electricity price monthly changes for EUR15 (left, since 2010) and EU27 (right, since 2015) average price, bold blue line indicates 2020H1 changes

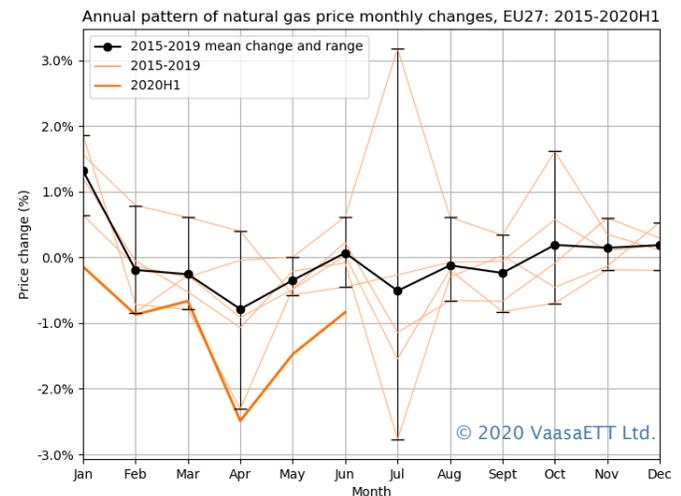
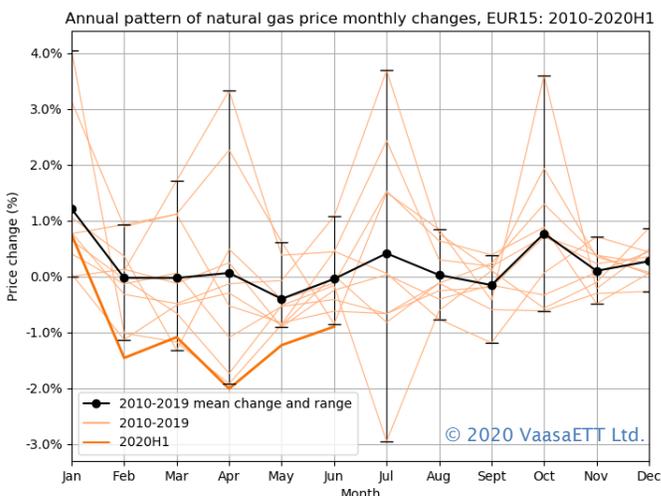


Figure 9: Annual pattern of natural gas price monthly changes, for EUR15 (left, since 2010) and EU27 (right, since 2015) average price, bold orange line indicates 2020H1 changes

The April 2020 electricity change in the monthly change distribution is shown in Figure 10. The absolute value of changes has been considered in the current analysis, ignoring whether it is an increase or decrease. We can see that the April 2020 decrease (black dotted line) is within the 5% of biggest changes (indicated by blue dotted line) for both EUR15 and EU27 averages. Actually, this April's change is the biggest in EU27 and EUR average electricity price. For EUR15, it is the only one of the 5% biggest changes that has not occurred in January, which is usually the month associated with largest price updates which are sometimes associated with policy changes. For the history, the largest changes correspond to January 2011 (3.34% increase), January 2013 (4.21% increase) and January 2020 (3.24% decrease).

It is noticeable that the change range for EUR15 is larger than for EU27. One explanation for this is that the number of markets averaged in EU27 is almost double that in EUR15 (27 versus 15), thus the average is less sensitive to exceptional fluctuations of individual countries. Additionally, the markets within EUR15 are generally more competitively active and less price-regulated, and therefore more responsive to wholesale price fluctuations and other external factors. The relationship between the wholesale and residential retail price is further discussed in the upcoming subsection.

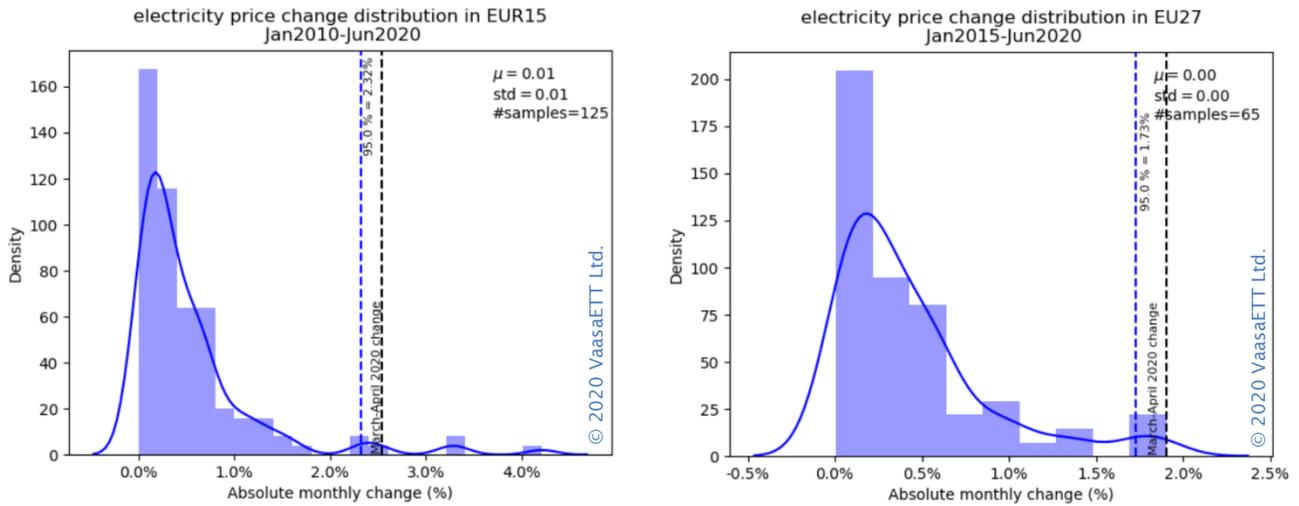


Figure 10: Distribution of monthly price changes, for average EUR15 (left, Jan2010-Jan2020) and EU27 (right, Jan2015-Jun2020) price. In both graphs, the Apr 2020 change is indicated with the vertical black dotted line.

When looking at the gas monthly price change distribution, April 2020 change is also within the 5% of biggest changes for EU27 (right graph) and within the 10% for EUR15 (left graph).

When comparing the electricity (Figure 10) and gas (Figure 11) price change distributions we can see that gas price tends to fluctuate more. The majority of big changes though are related with big increases; thus, the April 2020 decrease is the second biggest decrease in the time range January 2010 – June 2020 in EUR15 and in the time range January 2015 – June 2020 in EU27, following the one that took place in July 2019.

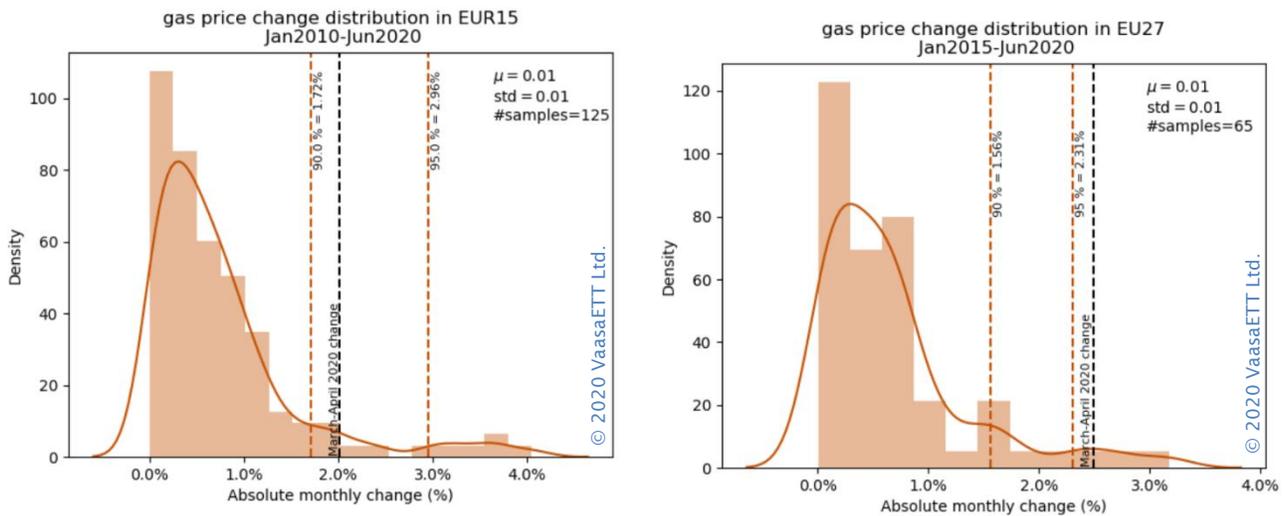


Figure 11: Distribution of monthly price changes, for average EUR15 (left, Jan2010-Jan2020) and EU27 (right, Jan2015-Jun2020) price. . In both graphs, the Apr 2020 change is indicated with the vertical black dotted line.

Wholesale vs retail price comparison

Although the previous section clearly showed a distinctively downward trend on residential electricity and natural gas prices during March – June 2020, it is hard to tell with certainty to what extent this is associated with the decreased demand and in what extent it is the outcome of supportive measures for the end -customers. The examination of the wholesale price evolution in comparison with the retail prices that is presented in the current section can serve as a good indication of this.

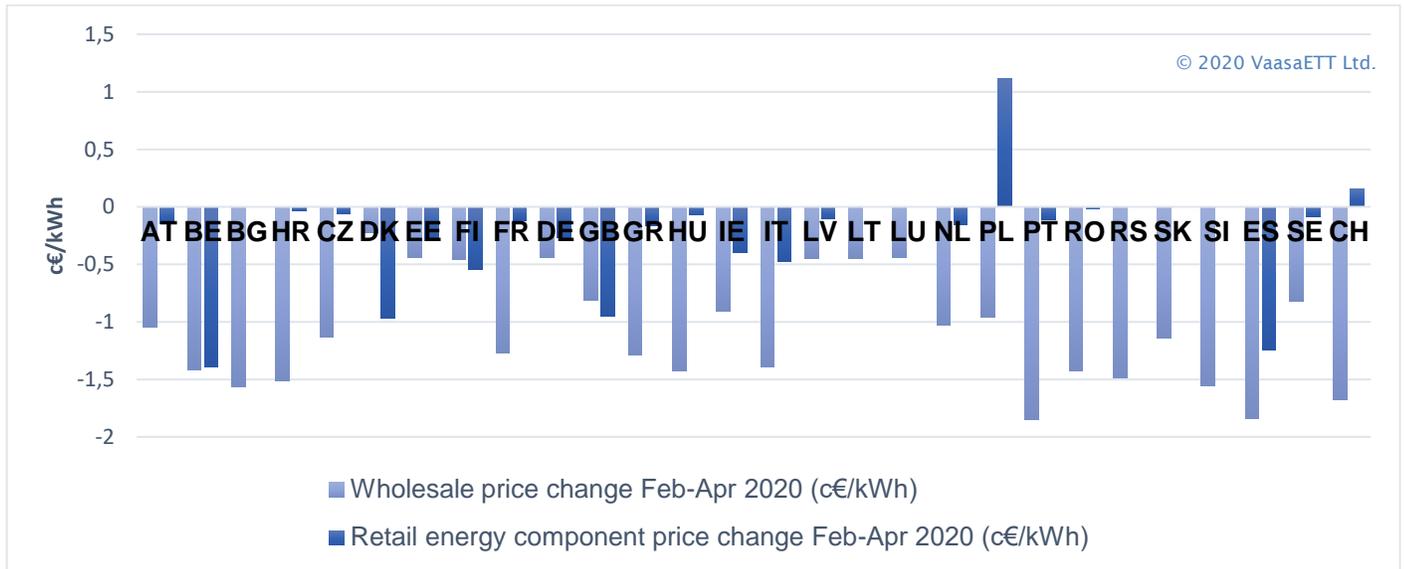


Figure 12: Wholesale vs residential energy component price change between February-April 2020 in €/kWh

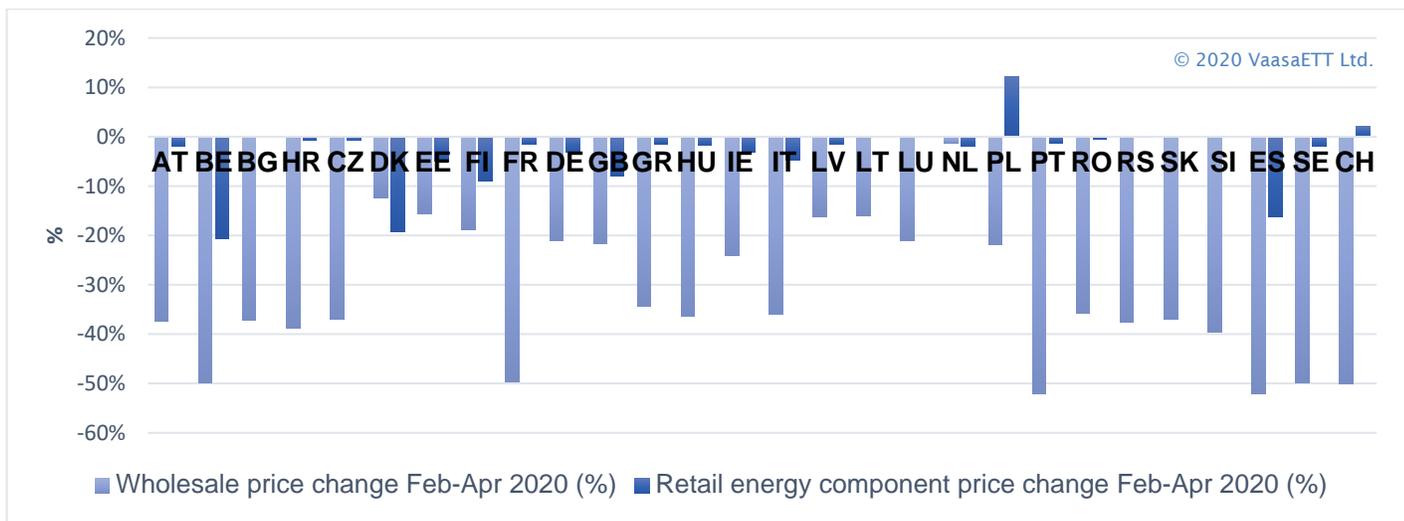


Figure 13: Wholesale vs residential energy component price change between February-April 2020 in %

In Figure 12 and Figure 13, the February - April 2020 wholesale⁸ and retail price changes per European country are compared; the comparison is both done looking at the absolute change in c€/kWh (Figure 12) and the change in % (Figure 13)

Looking at both figures, Poland is the only significant outlier to the decreasing trend, having increased residential electricity price by 12% between February and April 2020. In fact, the increase took place during March and was a consequence of the increase of carbon dioxide emission allowances, since coal consists a big part of the country’s generation mix. Nevertheless, even before COVID-19 threat, compensation measures had been already announced in early March in order to balance the increase’s impact for low-income households and small companies.

Another interesting observation is the fact that in some countries the absolute decrease (in c€/kWh) in wholesale electricity price was equal or even lower than the decrease that took place in the countries’ retail market price, indicating that the political measures had at least a significant additional impact. Such examples are Belgium, Finland, Great Britain and Spain.

Figure 14 and Figure 15 look into the historical trend of wholesale versus end-user price since the beginning of 2019, in EU27 and EUR15 respectively. The same axis range has been used in both figures in order to facilitate comparability. In general terms the pattern captivated in both graphs is similar; the average wholesale price has been following a decreasing trend that becomes more intense since November 2019, while average end-user price, after a drop in January 2020, only started falling again after March 2020. A more careful comparison of the two graphs shows that the EUR15 average end-user price is following a slightly more intense decreasing trend and fluctuates more than the corresponding EU27 one. Once again, this might be related with the larger number of markets in EU27 average, making it less sensitive to big country-specific changes. Additionally, the markets within EUR15 have been proven to be amongst the most active ones and thus, more responsive to external factors.

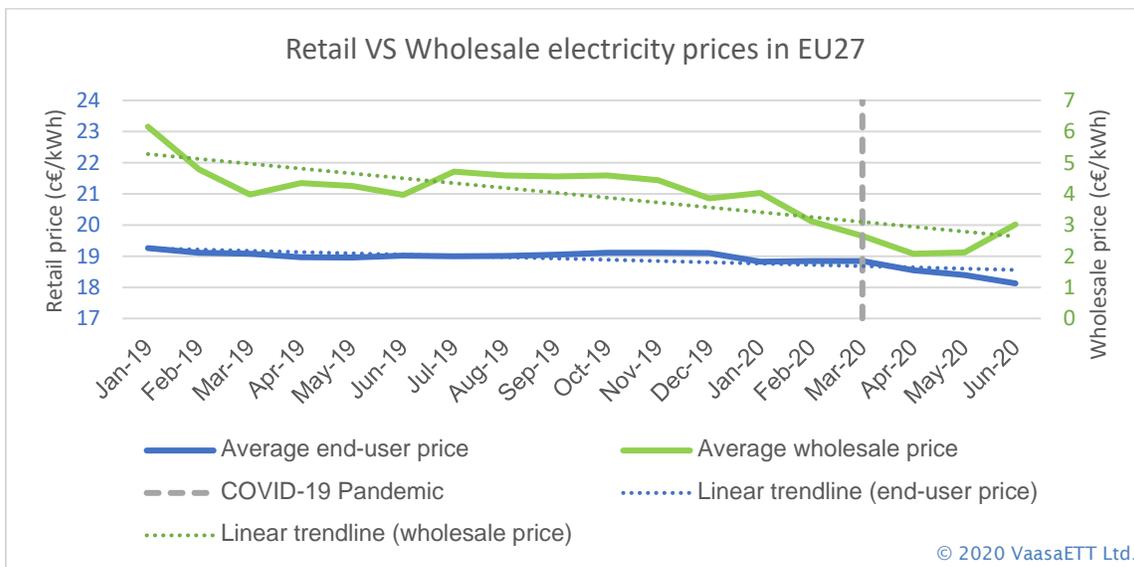


Figure 14: End-user retail versus wholesale average electricity price in EU27, Jan 2019 - Jun 2020

⁸ Countries with no wholesale market were excluded from this analysis, i.e. Cyprus and Malta.

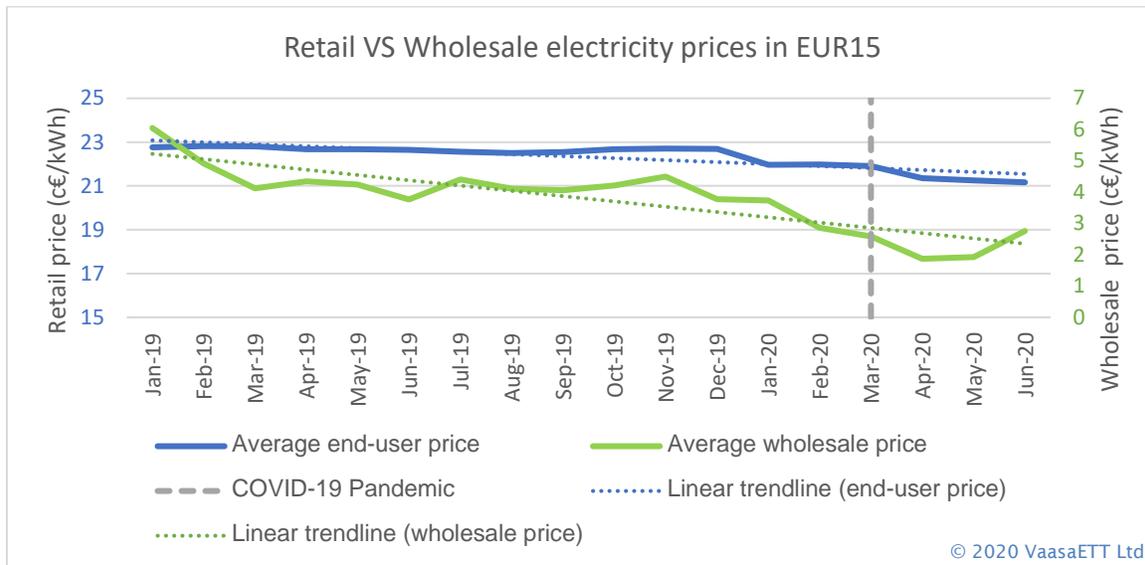


Figure 15: End-user retail versus wholesale average electricity price in EUR15, Jan 2019 - Jun 2020

Finally, Figure 16 illustrates the relationship between wholesale prices (EUR15 and EU27) and fuel prices: natural gas - Europe, liquefied natural gas - Japan and crude oil - Average. It can be seen that wholesale prices closely follow the decreasing trend of crude oil and natural gas, a trend which rapidly accelerated from December onwards.

Looking at the decreasing trends of fuel and electricity prices it would appear that their trend during COVID-19 was at least to a substantial degree, a continuation of the prior trend and the retail price fall was largely a realignment of retail prices with wholesale prices. Nevertheless, the extent of the fall and the current price level in comparison with the historical trend, indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic clearly affected those prices, especially in the short term where wholesale prices were dramatically impacted over the period of several months.

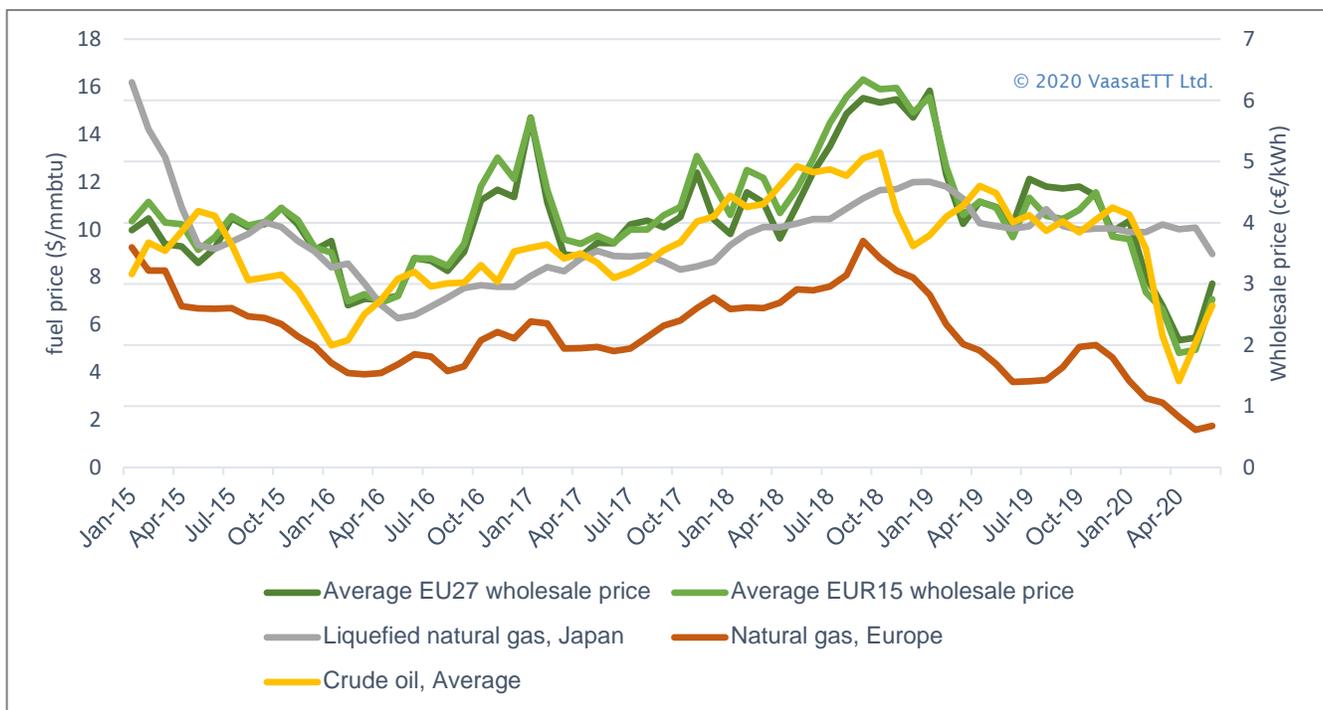


Figure 16: Wholesale electricity price (in EUR15 and EU27) versus fuel prices, 2015 – 2020H1

Analytic presentation of measures per country

There aren't many upsides to a global pandemic, but it seems that there are many cases where measures have been taken to alleviate the burden off the energy customers who are going through economic hardships. A collection of the country-specific measures can be found below. European Commission's reports on policy measures (4), (5) and Council of European Energy Regulators' (CEER) analysis of the Covid-19 pandemic effects on the energy sector (6) serve as the basic sources for the collection below, together with complementary material coming from local sources; the country-specific complementary sources are referenced next to each country.

- In Austria (7) the representatives of the energy industry (Austria's Energy, Gas Heat Association, Association of Austrian Electricity Works) and the responsible Federal Ministry (BMK) agreed to forbid any electricity and gas cut-offs taking place due to late payments during the critical months.
- In Belgium (8), individual suppliers announced measures for helping their household consumer deal with consumption increases during the quarantine. Lampiris started charging all consumption with the night tariff regardless of the customers' current plans, while Engie offered payment plans for managing delayed payments for all customers that need it. In Brussels (9), the "winter period" was extended by one month, meaning that customers being cut-off from their suppliers were supplied by the network company SIBELGA with social tariff prices, until 30th April. In the region of Wallonia (10), (11) from 18 March up disconnections were suspended until the end of the confinement period -except for safety reasons- including prepaid meters even if they empty. The energy consumed during this period was decided to be paid at the end of the crisis. Also, support credit (75€ and 100€ per household) was provided to electricity and natural gas customers with pre-paid meters that experienced financial difficulties. Finally, the Flemish government (6) issued a moratorium on disconnections for residential and low consumption customers, from March 20 to July 17 and provided one-off support (12) credit of 202.68€ to temporarily unemployed customers due to the COVID-19 outbreak, to compensate for one month's energy and water bills.
- In Bulgaria (13), the Minister of Energy decided upon an extension of the deadline for the payment of residential electricity bills from 20 to 30 days.
- In Croatia (6), despite the absence of an official decision on moratorium, there were voluntary decisions of DSOs to suspend electricity and natural gas supply cuts. Furthermore, electricity customers that were previously disconnected (from 1 January 2020) due to debt accumulation were reconnected without having to pay their debt. Finally, energy supplier GEN-I (14) announced in April a 15% price decrease for its household customers under the standard contract and organized a campaign for new customers offering lower tariffs until the end of June.
- In Cyprus (14), the Energy Regulatory Authority (CERA) announced a 10% reduction in the electricity tariff starting from 1 April and valid for the three following months. The reduction was applied to all components of the end-customer price excluding the VAT and RES charges. Furthermore (15), the Electricity Authority of Cyprus (EAC) decided in March to suspend electricity supply cuts for customers unable to pay their bills.
- In Czech Republic (16), since in many apartment units the readings of electricity, gas and water meters cannot be performed remotely, the billing was postponed by four months until 31 August 2020. At the same time, CEZ Prodej (17) stopped disconnecting customers who were not able to pay in time due to the pandemic and offered an interest-free repayment schedule.
- In Estonia (18), the Ministry of Finance announced a significant drop in the price of excise duty for electricity and natural gas, as of 1 May. For gas, the decrease was about 5%, while for electricity it

was as high as 78%, currently standing on the lowest possible value allowed by the European Union (1 €/MWh). The new values will be valid until the end of April 2022.

- In Finland, Kokkola Energy Networks decided to halve electricity transmission fees for April and May (19). The discount was only applied to the energy fee for electricity transmission (not the fixed part). The network company challenged large electricity companies to follow their example. At least two DSOs accepted the challenge and halved their distribution prices for 6 months (Turku Energia (20)) or 2 months (Vatajankosken sähkö (21)) for all their customers. Additionally, many DSOs announced a willingness to negotiate prolongments to payment times if requested by customers before the due date of the invoice.
- In France (22), (23), the winter suspension of energy disconnections for households took a two-month-extension, until 31 May 2020. The payment deadlines for electricity and gas bills were also extended for professional customers in sectors whose activity was interrupted from lockdown measures. Meanwhile, the government announced a state aid called “Chèque Energie” (24) to help low-income households pay their energy bills. It was expected that almost 5.5 million households would be eligible for this state aid. Finally, Engie (25) - one of the largest energy suppliers - announced an electricity subscription reimbursement for 2 months (April and May) for its about 600,000 vulnerable private customers.
- In Germany (26), a law was passed in late March in the Bundestag with the scope to alleviate the consumers and small businesses from the pandemic consequences. The law came into force on 1 April and it stipulated that consumers with payment difficulties due to COVID-19 could ask for an up-to-three months suspension of payments.
- In Greece (27), consumers stopped paying interest on delays in electricity payments during the lockdown. At the same time, the incumbent supplier, PPC - that still supplies the great majority of residential customers - announced some emergency consumer support measures: free fixed fee for low-voltage consumers, 5€ discount to e-bill customers and 8% discount on vulnerable customers and low-voltage consumers with annual consumption over 2,000 KWh. Many more market suppliers announced discounts while the Minister of Environment and Energy of Greece announced that no disconnections of electricity to vulnerable customers will be allowed (28).
- In Hungary (29), NKM (the state supplier) and E.ON announced the suspension of electricity and natural gas supply disconnections for all their customers accumulating debts.
- In Ireland (30), several measures were taken from the Commission of Regulation of Utilities in Ireland, including a moratorium of energy disconnections until mid-June (31) (6) due to non-payment and provision of emergency credit to pre-payment customers (10€ to 100€) experiencing financial difficulties. Price reductions (32) were applied from some of the biggest energy players (e.g. Electric Ireland, Bord Gáis, PrePayPower.ie, SSE Airtricity) starting from 1 April, while more started in the beginning of summer (e.g. Energia, Pinergy).
- In Italy (33) (34), the Authority for Energy, Networks and the Environment (ARERA) extended the deadlines for all beneficiaries to submit the application for renewal of the bonuses. Additionally, it put on hold the procedures for the suspension of energy supply in the event of unpaid bills (until 3 May). In the 11 most affected towns, the payment of water and energy bills got postponed until after 30 April and their amount got spread over the next monthly payments. Non-household customers (6) (connected to low voltage with capacity greater than 3kW) also benefited from the measures by facing a reduction in their electricity bills, from May until July, through a decrease in transport and distribution components. According to ARERA, the potential reduction for customers in this category reached 70%, for entities that were forced to remain closed during this period and in any case between 20% and 30% for them reopened.

- In Latvia (35), due to the state of emergency and its potential impact on customers, Latvenergo /Elektrum continued to provide supply of electricity without power outages in cases of delayed payments during the critical months.
- In Lithuania (6), a moratorium on electricity and natural gas disconnections was decided for residential and non-residential customers accumulating debts, from mid-March to mid-June. Furthermore (36), the State Energy Regulatory Council (VERT), considering the situation that has developed since 16 March 2020, when quarantine was announced, they provided coordination of proposed changes to accounting separation and cost allocation for companies in regulated sectors. The proposed changes covered cases with inability to pay bad debts by consumers included in the list of taxpayers affected by the unfavourable epidemic of COVID-19 and provided for exception to the short-term loan interest costs. What's more, electricity and gas provider "Ignitis" (37) announced preferential payment terms for all its customers, who were facing financial difficulties, during the quarantine and up to 30 days after. Businesses affected by the pandemic were eligible to apply for deferral of payments or adjustment of the payment schedule.
- In Luxembourg (38), temporary measures were upvoted in the electricity and natural gas sectors in the context of the fight against COVID-19. The law of 1 August 2007 on the organization of the natural gas market was amended. Regarding the electricity market, the validity of the default supplier designation was extended by decision of the Luxembourg Regulatory Institute.
- In Montenegro (39), the government approved the 2nd package of economic measures on April 24 including an exemption of the fixed part of electricity bills for April, May and June, for businesses that were forced to stop their activity due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, the state electricity supplier Elektroprivreda Crne Gore AD (EPCG), implementing government's measures, doubled its subsidies for vulnerable household customers during the pandemic.
- In Netherlands (40), commercial consumers receiving a monthly invoice were not charged for renewable energy storage or VAT, until June 2020 and additionally were eligible to an extended payment deadline for energy tax and Sustainable Energy Surcharge (ODE). Customers not eligible for a deferment, but facing financial difficulties, could opt for specific payment arrangements or temporarily adjust the collection date.
- In Poland (41), the government announced on April 1, 2020 the suspension of disconnections of electricity and natural gas supply due to non-payment, until further notice.
- In Portugal (42), the regulator extended the information period preceding the interruption of supply by a further 30 days. Consumers who would have difficulties paying their utility bills and would accumulate debts were encouraged to request payment plans free of charge from their supplier. In the same direction, suppliers facing difficulties could settle their debts by fractioning access billing to the network operator. In another important measure approved by the regulator, there was also the possibility for customers to request power reduction in the form of contracted capacity step down for the smooth implementation of the above-mentioned modified electricity payment plans.
- In Romania (43), the government announced a pause in the increase of the energy and gas prices for the 30 days of the declared state of emergency to offset the economic effects of the coronavirus outbreak. Additionally (6), according to an emergency ordinance issued by the government in March, SMEs which activity was affected by the pandemic could defer their utility services payments.

- In Slovakia (6) (44), the government decided on a moratorium on disconnections for 2 months to ensure household and non-household vulnerable (sales decreased at least 40%) customers' uninterrupted supply during the emergency. In addition (45), the state-owned company SPP (Slovenský plynárenský priemysel) announced it will accept affected household customers' requests for a deferment (up to 3 months) of advanced payments for electricity and natural gas bills.
- In Slovenia (46), the government decided upon reductions in energy and network price components of both residential and business customers, resulting to about 20% reduction in electricity bills, to mitigate the impact of the ongoing coronavirus crisis. For instance, energy group GEN-I reduced electricity prices for households and small businesses by 15%. Additionally (6), household customers were exempted from paying the fixed part of the network charges and saw a reduction on their contribution to RES support, following a decision by the national regulatory authority. The aforementioned measures and reductions were valid for the three critical months: March, April and May.
- In Spain (47), an extension until September 15 of eligible recipients of the "social coupon" (on electricity) was announced, including the self-employed who have seen their monthly income diminished by over 75% from the previous semester's average. According to the regulator (48), the supply of electricity and natural gas channelled to natural persons in their habitual residence would not be suspended, although this possibility is stated in the supply contracts. Another state measure (49) announced in March was the automatic extension of the electricity social discount "bono social" until 15 September 2020 for beneficiaries whose right to the discount expired prior to that date.
- In Switzerland (50), according to Elcom, exceptional reductions in the 2020 energy tariffs of the tied end-users have been applied, to alleviate the tense economic situation. Furthermore, it announced the option of extending payment deadlines or defer payments for consumers in financial difficulties.
- In Ukraine (51), in order to ensure the proper functioning of the power system, as well as to stabilize its financial situation, the Parliament adopted the Law No. 530-IX of 17 March 2020. The law stipulates that for the entire duration of quarantine or other restrictive measures imposed to limit the spread of coronavirus, and for 30 calendar days after the suspension of such measures, certain actions are prohibited: actions such as collection of fines for delayed payments for housing and utilities services, suspension of utilities services, forced eviction and forfeiture of housing during enforcement of court decisions regarding debt collection for housing and utilities services.
- In the United Kingdom (52), the government agreed on emergency measures with the energy industry to ensure vulnerable people would remain supplied during the quarantine. The measures included reduction or pause of debt repayments/bill payments, offering pre-loaded top up cards to customers with pre-payment meters and complete suspension of disconnections. The regulator, Ofgem, encouraged vulnerable households to register on their provider's Priority Access Register (53) to benefit from legal support and guarantees to deal with this situation.

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