

Press Release

ERSE adopts extraordinary measures to avoid energy supply disconnections during COVID-19

In view of the international public health emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, ERSE (the Energy Services Regulatory Authority) has adopted exceptional conditions for the provision of energy supply in Portugal, in order to avoid disconnections of electricity, natural gas and piped LPG (liquefied petroleum gas).

Electricity, natural gas and piped LPG are considered essential public services, and as such, their supply can only be interrupted following prior notification, except in situations of force majeure or accident.

Regulations for the electricity and gas sectors require that supply disconnections due to non-payment or other consumer responsibility, can only take place following prior written notification, at least 20 calendar days before the disconnection (excluding cases where the disconnection must be done immediately for safety reasons).

Taking into account the contingency plans that have been adopted by essential public service providers and anticipating consumers' possible difficulties in paying bills, due to social isolation, not having access to alternative payment methods from home or the abrupt and unexpected loss of income, ERSE has established that the **prior notice period for supply disconnections for household customers (at low voltage) is extended by an additional 30 calendar days**. ERSE may decide to extend this period further, according to the evolution of the situation.

ERSE has also established exceptional rules regarding the payment by instalments of debts generated during this exceptional 30-day period. Consumers with payment difficulties who generate a debt with their energy suppliers **may request to pay back this debt in instalments, without any interest, for the additional 30-day period**.



With the exception of proven urgent situations and as regards priority customers, ERSE dictates that the distribution network operator, suppliers of last resort and commercial suppliers must avoid situations that imply physical movements or entering into contact with consumers at their homes. They must also reinforce their means of remote communication, for meter readings, clarifications or the preparation of payment plans.

ERSE **calls on consumers to communicate their meter readings** to the energy companies, in order to avoid consumption estimates.

ERSE also rules that, in their actions, network operators must **prioritise guaranteeing the supply of energy to priority installations**, in particular hospitals and other health centres, including facilities that may be mobilised for this exceptional situation, as well as public safety and civil protection facilities.

ERSE coordinated the adoption of these measures with the distribution network operators and with the supplier of last resort, in order to ensure that they are applied as rapidly as possible.

These rules enter into force on the day following their publication in the Republic's Official Bulletin, taking effect as of 13 March 2020.

For full details, consult the [ERSE Regulation establishing extraordinary measures for the energy sector due to the epidemiological emergency COVID-19](#) (PT version).

Lisbon, 17 March 2020

