

Report: Over One Million Poor People in England at Risk From Cold



New figures suggest that more than a million people living with heart and breathing problems could be at greater risk of hospitalization or death owing to poverty leaving them more likely to be exposed to the cold.

LONDON (The Guardian) – More than a million people living with heart and breathing problems could be at greater risk of hospitalization or death owing to poverty leaving them more likely to be exposed to the cold, figures suggested.

The data published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) estimated that there are 1.3 million people with cardiovascular and respiratory conditions living in poverty, and that they are more likely to be older people, prompting calls for extra help to deal with the cold weather.

“What’s particularly concerning for those 1.3 million people is that we know ... they’re in a financial position where you’ve got to assume that they will potentially be struggling to afford to be adequately warm at home,” said Ruthe Isden, the head of health at Age

UK, which has produced a guide to staying warm and healthy this winter for older people.

She called on the government to extend help with rising energy bills beyond the current cutoff next March – and to ensure it is available to everyone living in poverty. In the longer term, she said, the government must invest in properly insulating people’s homes.

The ONS said the proportion of people who had cardiovascular or respiratory conditions and were living in poverty was particularly high in coastal areas and in the northwest of England, as well as in older age groups.

William Roberts, the chief executive of the Royal Society for Public Health, said people had already made any cut-backs they could and were now making choices based on affordability, which have had an impact on their health.

He said the government had to revisit the financial support being given to households and services, including “targeted support for those most in need and appropriate funding for local government”.

He added, “It is imperative that governments do all that they can, or we risk the health and wealth of our nation even more and a further leveling down.”

The ONS said its data did not demonstrate that there was a direct link between poverty and developing a heart or breathing condition, but cited research showing that people with these conditions who are poor are more likely to have adverse health outcomes, including those related to cold exposure.

The ONS data showed that a further 5.3 million people were living with cardiovascular or respiratory conditions, but were not living in poverty and therefore could not be assumed to have a greater risk of exposure to the cold.

The total number of people living in private households thought to be living in poverty is 10.8 million, according to the data.

A recent report by the UCL Institute of Health Equity suggested that living in a cold home, as many poorer people are forced to do, is associated with poor health.

Michael Marmot, a professor of epidemiology at University College London, wrote in September that being both cold and poor would result in “worse health and greater health inequalities”.

He warned of a “humanitarian crisis” unless the problem of fuel poverty was resolved in the longer term.

More Questions Than Answers as EU Corruption Scandal Unfolds

BRUSSELS (AP) – No one answers the door or the phone at the offices of the two campaign groups linked to a cash-for-favors corruption scandal at the European Union’s parliament, allegedly involving Qatar. No light is visible inside.

No Peace Without Justice (NPWJ), a pro-human rights and democracy organization, and Fight Impunity, which seeks to bring rights abusers to book, share the same address, on prime real estate in the governmental quarter of the Belgian capital.

The heads of the two organizations are among four people charged since Dec. 9 with corruption, participation in a criminal group and money laundering. Prosecutors suspect certain European lawmakers and aides “were paid large sums of money or offered substantial gifts to influence parliament’s decisions.” The groups themselves do not seem to be under suspicion.

Qatar rejects allegations that it’s involved. The Persian Gulf country that’s hosting the soccer World Cup has gone to considerable trouble to boost its public image and defend itself against extensive criticism in the West over its human rights record.

The lawyer for Fight Impunity President Pier Antonio Panzeri is not talking. He declined to comment about his client’s role in an affair that has shaken the European Parliament and halted the assembly’s work on Qatar-related files.

The secretary-general of NPWJ, Niccolò Figa-Talamanca, has left jail but must wear an electronic monitoring bracelet. On its Italian website, after he stepped down, the group praised his work, saying it hopes “the ongoing investigation will demonstrate the correctness of his actions.”

Charged along with them are Eva Kaili, who was removed as an EU parliament vice president after the charges were laid, and her partner Francesco Giorgi, a parliamentary assistant. Pictures they’ve posted on social media project the image of an attractive and ambitious Mediterranean jet-set couple.

Following months of investigations, police have so far launched more than 20 raids, mostly in Belgium but also in Italy. Hundreds of thousands of euros have been found in Brussels: at an apartment and in a suitcase at a hotel not far from the parliament.

Mobile telephones, computer equipment and the data of 10 parliamentary as-

sistants were seized.

Taking to Twitter, Belgian Justice Minister Vincent Van Quickenborne described what he calls the “Qatargate” investigation as a “game changer.” It was achieved, he said, “partly thanks to years of work by State Security,” the country’s intelligence agency.

According to what Italian newspaper La Repubblica and Belgian daily Le Soir said were transcripts of his Dec. 10 statements to prosecutors, Giorgi allegedly confessed to managing money on behalf of an “organization” led by Panzeri that dealt with Qatari and Moroccan representatives.

“I did it all for money, which I needed,” Giorgi told prosecutors, according to La Repubblica. He tried to protect his partner Kaili, a 44-year-old Greek former TV presenter with whom he has an infant daughter, asking that she be released from jail. Kaili’s lawyer has said she knew nothing about the money.

Giorgi arrived in Belgium in 2009. He made a career at the parliament with the center-left Socialists and Democrats (S&D) group. He met Panzeri, at the time an EU lawmaker, at a conference. “I asked him to give me an internship, and he did,” Giorgi said in his statement.

Tunisians Vote in Parliamentary Election Boycotted by Opposition

TUNIS (Reuters) – Polls opened on Saturday in a Tunisian parliamentary election that is expected to tighten President Kais Saied’s grip on power. The Ennahda party and other opposition bodies have called for voters to reject the ballot.

Taking place 12 years to the day after vegetable seller Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire in an act of protest that sparked the Arab Spring, the vote was boycotted by opposition parties.

People voted to choose members of a parliament whose powers have been largely undermined by a new constitution, which was approved in a July referendum and backed by Saied in an effort to shift Tunisia back towards a presidential system.

Saied, a former law lecturer who was a political independent when elected president in 2019, suspended the previous parliament last year, surrounding the legislature with tanks and assuming near-total authority.

The legislative vote appears to have stirred little interest among a population jaded by political dysfunction and still struggling with economic hardship.

With the main parties absent, a total of



Some 9.3 million registered voters were eligible to cast their ballot in Saturday’s elections.

1,058 candidates – only 120 of them women – ran for 161 seats.

For 10 of those – seven in Tunisia and three decided by expatriate voters – there was just one candidate. Another seven of the seats decided by expatriate voters had no candidates running at all.

The election was taking place against the backdrop of an economic crisis that is fueling

poverty, leading many to attempt the perilous journey to Europe aboard smugglers’ boats that often fail to make the crossing safely.

Saied’s opponents, including the Ennahda party, accuse him of a coup and say his actions have undermined the democracy secured through a 2011 revolution that ousted former leader Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and triggered the Arab Spring.

Russia: New Sanctions to Exacerbate Europe’s Economic Woes



Ukrainian firefighters work to extinguish a fire at a building destroyed in Kryvyi Rih by the Russian attack.

MOSCOW (Dispatches) – Russia says the European Union’s latest round of sanctions against Moscow will just exacerbate economic woes within the bloc.

The latest measures, which blacklist nearly 200 more people and bar investment in Russia’s mining industry, are part of the ninth wave of sanctions slapped on Russia since President Vladimir Putin ordered the launch of a “special military operation” in Ukraine on February 24.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Maria Zakharova reacted to the measures on Saturday. She said the “current ‘package’ will have the same effect as all the previous ones - exacerbation of socio-economic problems in the European Union itself.”

Zakharova also called on the EU to cancel all restrictions that are having a direct or indirect impact on Russian exports of grains and fertilizers.

Russia’s war on Ukraine started in late February with Moscow saying that it was aimed at defending the pro-Russian population in the eastern Ukrainian regions of Luhansk and Donetsk against persecution by Kiev.

Ever since the beginning of the war, Ukraine’s Western allies, led by the U.S., have been pumping the ex-Soviet Republic full of advanced weapons and slapping Russia with a slew of sanctions, steps Moscow says will only prolong the conflict.

So far during the military conflict, Moscow has seized around a fifth of Ukraine’s expanse in its south and east. It has conditioned negotiations on a possible end to the military campaign on Ukraine’s recognition of Russian rule over the seized territories.

On Saturday, Ukraine was working to restore electricity to hospitals, heating systems and other critical infrastructure in major cities after Russia’s latest wave of attacks on the power grid.

The volley of missiles unleashed Friday pitched multiple cities into darkness, cutting water and heat and forcing people to endure below-freezing temperatures.

In the capital, where the mayor

said only a third of residents had heat or water, people wrapped in winter coats crammed into underground metro stations after air raid sirens rang out in the morning.

“I woke up, I saw a rocket in the sky,” Kyiv resident 25-year-old Lada Korovai said. “I saw it and understood that I have to go to the tube.”

Ukraine’s national energy provider imposed emergency blackouts, saying its system had lost more than half its capacity after strikes targeted “backbone networks and generation facilities.”

Ukrenergo warned the extent of the damage in the north, south and center of the country meant it could take longer to restore supplies than after previous attacks.

Russia since October has pursued an aerial onslaught against what Moscow says are military-linked facilities.

But France and the European Union said the suffering inflicted on freezing civilians constitutes war crimes, with the bloc’s foreign policy chief calling the bombings “barbaric.”

Russia fired 74 missiles — mainly cruise missiles — on Friday, 60 of which were shot down by anti-aircraft defenses, according to the Ukrainian army.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said the strikes left the capital Kyiv and 14 regions affected by power and water cuts.

Oleksandr Starukh, head of the frontline Zaporizhzhia region, home to Europe’s largest nuclear power plant, said his territory had been targeted by more than a dozen Russian missiles.

Kyiv, meanwhile, withstood one of the biggest missile attacks since the beginning of the full-scale invasion.

Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko said only 40 percent of residents had electricity and that the metro had stopped running so people could take shelter underground.

With about half of Ukraine’s energy grid damaged, the national operator warned Friday of emergency blackouts.

Peru President Refuses to Quit, Demands Congress Speed Up Election

LIMA (AFP) – Peru’s embattled President Dina Boluarte said Saturday she would not step down in the face of violent protests over her predecessor’s ouster as she called on lawmakers to bring forward elections as a way to quell unrest.

“What is solved by my resignation? We will be here, firmly, until Congress determines to bring forward the elections,” Boluarte told Peruvians, a day after lawmakers voted against a bill to hold elections next December, more than two years early.

On Friday, House speaker Jose Williams said the vote could be revisited during a forthcoming session of Congress.

The South American nation has been wracked by violent unrest since then-president Pedro Castillo was impeached and arrested on December 7 after he attempted to dissolve Con-

gress. At least 18 people have been killed, including minors.

In a televised address to the nation, Boluarte expressed regret for the protests and the deaths, most of which came in clashes with security forces including the military, which has been authorized to impose order under a state of emergency.

If armed troops were on the streets, she said, “it has been to take care of and protect” Peru’s citizens because the protests were “overflowing” with violent elements that were coordinated and not spontaneous.

“These groups did not emerge overnight. They had tactically organized to block roads,” Boluarte added.

Protesters are calling for the release of the ousted former president Castillo, the resignation of Boluarte and closure of Congress, and immediate general elections.

News in Brief

BATANG KALI, Malaysia (AP) – Rescuers on Saturday found the bodies of a woman and two children, raising the death toll from a landslide on an unlicensed campground in Malaysia to 24 with nine others still missing. Selangor state fire chief Norazam Khamis told reporters the bodies of a mother and son were found buried under a meter of mud and debris. The body of a little girl was discovered later. He said there was hope of finding survivors if they clung on to piles or branches or rocks with pockets of air but that chances were slim. Authorities said 94 people were sleeping at the camp site on an organic farm early Friday when the dirt tumbled from a road about 30 meters above them and covered about 1 hectare. Most were families enjoying a short vacation during the year-end school break. The 24 victims included seven children and 13 women. Authorities were still carrying out autopsies and waiting for next of kin to identify the victims.

WASHINGTON (Al Jazeera) – While the use of the death penalty continues to decline in the United States, a new report found that “botched” executions reached a new high this year. In its annual report on the use of capital punishment in the country, the Death Penalty Information Center (DPIC) said that seven of the 20 attempted executions by U.S. states in 2022 were “visibly problematic”. That included a case in which Alabama officials struggled to insert an intravenous (IV) line into a man for three hours, said the report, which defined a “botched” execution as one that includes “executioner incompetence, failures to follow protocols, or defects in the protocols themselves”. “As lethal injection turns 40 years old this year, 2022 can be called ‘the year of the botched execution,’” the DPIC, a non-profit research group based in Washington, DC, said in a statement accompanying its findings, calling the proportion of problematic execution attempts “astounding”.

WASHINGTON (Anadolu) – Before Twitter was bought by billionaire Elon Musk in October, the FBI used to send it messages flagging tweets for suggested moderation, according to an ongoing release of internal documents by Musk. Among contacts with the FBI’s social media task force FTIF, staffed with some 80 agents, some were mundane, but “a surprisingly high number are requests by the FBI for Twitter to take action on election misinformation, even involving joke tweets from low-follower accounts,” said Matt Taibbi, a journalist who has been working with Musk to release the internal documents, which have been dubbed the Twitter Files. “The Twitter Files show something new: agencies like the FBI and DHS (Department of Homeland Security) regularly sending social media content to Twitter through multiple entry points, pre-slugged for moderation,” Taibbi said on Twitter late Friday.

DAKAR, Senegal (AP) – More than 25,000 people could face starvation in conflict-plagued parts of West Africa next year, a United Nations official has warned. Federico Doehnert of the World Food Program said violence and the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine are largely driving the threat to people in Nigeria, Mali and Burkina Faso. “One of the most striking things is that where we already had issues with severe food insecurity last year, this year we’re seeing a further deterioration” Doehnert said in Dakar while presenting findings from the latest food security report by regional governments, the UN and aid groups. The cross-border region between Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger is the epicenter of West Africa’s escalating humanitarian crisis, which is compounded by climate change, severe floods and droughts placing more than 10 million people in need of assistance, the UN said in a statement this week. Doehnert said nearly 80% of people facing catastrophic hunger - some 20,000 - are in Burkina Faso’s Sahel region, where militants linked to al-Qaeda and the Daesh group have besieged cities and cut off assistance. Residents of the city of Djibo have been blockaded for months, unable to access their farms.

NEW YORK (Dispatches) – The UN general assembly has for the second time approved postponing a decision on whether the Afghan Taliban administration and the Myanmar’s military junta can send a UN ambassador to New York. The decision that took place when the 193-member general assembly approving without a vote and rather by consensus, a decision by the UN credentials committee to delay the vote that also deferred a decision on rival claims to Libya’s UN seat. The nine-member UN credentials committee includes Russia, China and the United States. “The committee decided to postpone its consideration of the credentials pertaining to the representatives of Myanmar, Afghanistan and of Libya,” said Guyana’s UN ambassador Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett, who chairs the credentials committee. Ever since Afghanistan’s Taliban government came to power again and ever since Myanmar’s leader Aung Suu Kyi was removed from power, the void of a new envoy has not been filled yet.

JOHANNESBURG (Xinhua) – Heavy rains have killed 16 people in South Africa’s largest city Johannesburg in the last two weeks, an official said on Saturday. “Thus far, 23 people have been rescued by Joburg Emergency Medical Services and 148 people have been rescued by the police search and rescue,” Executive Mayor of Johannesburg Mpho Phalase said at a media briefing. The torrential rains have damaged property, fauna and flora, and essential infrastructure, particularly roads, traffic lights, buildings, substations, power stations and pipelines, she said.