

# *Reports from Italy says energy bills will double in coming months*

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Rome, August 15 (RHC)-- Gas bills in Italy will likely double in cost beginning in October if gas prices continue to rise. The recent announcement by power regulator Arera has gone utterly unnoticed with the Italian media focusing on the electoral campaign, about a month away from the September 25th national elections.

A week ago the outgoing Italian government unveiled a 17 billion euros aid-package aimed at protecting families from surging energy costs and rising consumer prices. However Arera and some energy experts have warned that very little has been done so far to reduce energy consumption in the country.

Gas is central to Italy's energy systems, the country even produces over 50% of its electricity from natural gas. Rome has cut its reliance on Russian gas imports to 25%, from about 40% at the start of the year, a decision that has thrown the energy sector into uncertainty.

Some analysts have predicted annual gas bills could reach an average of 1800 euros next year, almost double the annual average of about 950 euros recorded this year. Many Italians are simply bewildered about how they can find themselves in the position of not being able to afford to heat or light their homes.

The outgoing government is planning to offset its dependence on Russian gas by signing new deals with African and Eastern Mediterranean countries and building new regasification plants in a number of Italian sea towns, a move that has met with staunch opposition from local residents.

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