

Havana solar energy market

"It's a little noisy, the fuel is expensive, but I can tolerate one and solve the other. What is intolerable is for my family and I to spend nights and early mornings without electricity, without rest, suffering the heat and mosquitoes, and with the risk of the food in our fridge spoiling," the barber, who lives in the eastern city of Holgu n, said.

Marileydis P rez, a homemaker in Bataban  south of Havana, received a 900 W generator from her son, who sent it from his home in the United States, "to run the fans, the television and turn on the lights on blackout nights."

P rez said that although the government created a system of shifts for the sale of gasoline, "just five liters" for those who have registered generators, "I have only been able to buy it that way once in two years." As a result, she resorts to the black market for gasoline.

Highly dependent on fuel imports, Cuba consumes more than eight million tons annually, of which almost 40 percent is covered by heavy domestic crude oil with a high sulfur content, used mainly in thermoelectric generation.

During the last five years, along with the deterioration of the domestic economic situation, the fall of the main sources of foreign currency and the tightening of the U.S. embargo, the authorities have faced increasing difficulties in meeting fuel demand.

The price of a liter of regular gasoline climbed from 25 to 132 Cuban pesos (equivalent to 1.10 dollars at the official rate). The same was true for regular diesel.

On the black market, a liter of regular gasoline costs 250 to 300 pesos, or 0.70 to 0.85 cents on the dollar, taking into account the exchange rate parallel to the governments.

In this country of 11 million inhabitants, the average monthly salary is equivalent to about 40 dollars, which amounts to around 14 dollars in the informal reference market for a significant number of products, goods and services to which families have access in order to satisfy their basic needs.

The problems facing the energy supply have fuelled the importation of generators, as well as their sale on the black market. Government-owned stores that only take foreign currency also sell them at very high prices, far beyond the reach of most families.

They pointed out that they are not always placed outside the houses or in ventilated rooms so that toxic combustion gases can escape and overheating can be avoided.

When asked about the possibility of solar panels, Pérez said that "in addition to being very difficult to find outside Havana, they usually come without batteries, and if they are brought in, they cost half a million pesos (about 4200 dollars at the official exchange rate)."

When the public corporation Copextel, in charge of marketing and after-sales services, began to sell them in late 2021, "they were at 55,000 pesos" (2,300 dollars at the official exchange rate at the time), unaffordable for anyone who depends on their wages or on a pension," said Rodríguez.

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