

## **Climate Action Plan 2023 - Call for Expert Evidence**

This submission was prepared by graduates of Dublin City University's MSc in Climate Change: Policy, Media and Society. This submission does not necessarily represent the views of all graduates involved in the programme. September 2022.

Authors

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## Carbon Pricing and Cross-Cutting Issues

### Consultation Questions:

4. Are there any significant cross-cutting gaps not previously discussed in Climate Action Plan 21 that need to be addressed?

- Commission for future generations. As well as including the youth voices themselves there should be an office dedicated to future generations staffed and mandated to pursue an agenda set by young people. This commission offers a permanent commissioner and secretariat acting on behalf of future generations which can have a statutory placement in decision making. This allows for any young person to remain with a process as long as they wish without the process becoming dependent upon them should they need to leave it for any reason. Eco anxiety and grieving is part of the transition process and it is inhumane to expect young people to shoulder the burden for societal change without adequate state support and opportunity to withdraw when necessary.
- Appointment of Community Climate Action coordinators at county level, in every county, to support the implementation of the climate dialogue and help catalyse climate action at local level. With nine in ten Irish people trusting scientists as a source of information on climate change these positions would be best hosted by the EPA. <sup>1</sup> With a grounding in science, each CCA would collaborate with local authorities, the PPNs and other state and societal actors to deliver programmes to facilitate the public to engage in climate action plans at local level. The EPA would ensure a science basis and coordinated programme which can be adapted to suit the needs of individual counties.

5. Are there any other cross-cutting issues that should be considered in the development of the 2023 Climate Action Plan?

The continued growth of climate denial and misinformation must be acknowledged and counteracted. As the far right gather support their theories on climate change become a dominating source of information, or misinformation. This is a worrying trend. Most recently the far right have gained a strong footing in Sweden where they have been denying climate change. <sup>2</sup> Some social media platforms are beginning to take action to fact check but more

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<sup>1</sup> Leiserowitz, A., Carman, J., Rosenthal, S., Neyens, L., Marlon, J., Desmond, M., Smith, S., Rochford, M. F., O'Mahony, J., and Reaper, L. (2021). *Climate Change in the Irish Mind*. New Haven, CT: Yale Program on Climate Change Communication. <https://www.epa.ie/publications/monitoring--assessment/climate-change/EPA-Climate-in-the-Irish-Mind-REPORT-19.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Kjell Vowles & Martin Hultman (2021) Dead White men vs. Greta Thunberg: Nationalism, Misogyny, and Climate Change Denial in Swedish far-right Digital Media, *Australian Feminist Studies*, 36:110, 414-431, DOI: [10.1080/08164649.2022.2062669](https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2022.2062669)

needs to be done to compel all platforms to act. More could be done to ensure that every household is given factual information including what they can do.

**Cross cutting recommendations:**

Establish a Commission for Future Generations that can advocate for and pursue the agenda set by the young people thereby helping to shoulder the burden of the young people.

Resource the office of the Commission for Future Generations adequately so that it can support the participation of young people.

Appoint and adequately resource Community Climate Action coordinators in every county.

Take steps to eradicate misinformation including providing correct information to every household in the country to coincide with a national awareness campaign.

## Transport

### Rural Transport

1. What expectation or level of public transport service is appropriate in rural communities and what other key measures can support a transition to sustainable modes?

Ensuring that the existing services operate by their current timetables must be a priority. Resourcing the current timetables to ensure trust in delivery of the existing services will help form the basis for further development. Universal, heavily subsidised public transport offers an opportunity to address the lack of trust in public transport across rural communities. The €9 public transport ticket issued in Germany was a great success and may be considered necessary in rural Ireland to encourage people to use it. <sup>3</sup> However, given the lack of public transport in many rural areas and the level of unreliability where it does exist, it may be better to start with free, reliable public transport. <sup>4</sup>

2. What infrastructure or further measures are required to help improve the safety of rural roads and further incentivise the use of walking and cycling for shorter journeys in rural areas?

Short term: Increase signage to remind drivers of pedestrians and cyclists. Reduce speed limits on approach roads to all centres of population including villages.

Medium term: Introduce footpaths within all 60km speed limits. Outside of 60km zones introduce footpaths and cycle lanes where possible. The British model of Bridle Paths offers walkers and cyclists off road pathways. <sup>5</sup> Purchase land adjacent to roads and create alternative routes.

Identify infrastructure that can be integrated into ditches which ensures the integrity of the ditch and provides safe pathways for pedestrians and cyclists.

Assign national personnel to work with local authorities to identify pedestrian routes. This must be an intentional project and national oversight may be more successful than local management.

Improvements to public transport are vital to lowering emissions in rural Ireland but it will not eliminate the need for vehicles completely. Availability of interest free finance and affordable electric vehicles are vital to support the changes required. The infrastructure for EV charging must also be transformed as the number of EVs increases.

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<sup>3</sup> Spencer Feingold "Germany's €9 transit ticket cuts 1.8 million tonnes of CO2" August 2022  
<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/08/germanys-9-euro-transport-ticket-cut-1-8-million-tons-of-co2/>

<sup>4</sup> Social Justice Ireland "Social Justice Matters Policy Brief" July 2022  
<https://www.socialjustice.ie/system/files/file-uploads/2022-07/Policy%20Brief%20Other%20Public%20Services%20Final.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://footpathmap.co.uk>

**Rural transport recommendations:**

Introduce ample signage throughout the country to alert drivers to walkers and cyclists within 2km of towns and villages.

National management to research and introduce footpaths within all 60km zones with a view to expanding beyond that.

Provide interest free finance for the purchase of electric vehicles in rural Ireland.

Build the publicly available infrastructure required for EV charging immediately.

Increase the provision of safe storage for users vehicles on public transport - areas to store bicycles, scooters etc.

## **Public Sector Leading by Example**

### **Staff as Society**

The public sector employs over 13% of the Irish workforce. If every employee were committed to climate action, really understood the urgency of the situation and ensured that commitment was carried outside of work, then a web of commitment and actions could be spun. Public sector employees influence Irish society.

*Our Public Service* is an initiative of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.<sup>6</sup> It is a framework for innovation and continuous development in Ireland's public service that supports 370,000 public servants. Incorporating climate action as a core to continuous development will help ensure it is central to the public sector. DPER also coordinates the Civil Service Renewal 2030 Strategy - '*Building on our Strengths*' which includes the need to address climate change.<sup>7</sup> It is unclear whether these are related or stand alone initiatives.

A comprehensive communications strategy can ensure that all public sector staff are well informed about climate change, the national Climate Action Plan and steps being taken within their own department. Every department should host deliberative climate action workshops to prepare their local climate action plan and ensure that all staff are involved.

There should also be a dedicated space on the CSEAS, Employee Assistance Programme for Irish Civil Servants.<sup>8</sup> All staff should be supported to engage in climate action projects at work, home and within their communities.

### **Spending**

All public sector spending must be climate proofed. A checklist of criteria to ensure the least climate impact should be circulated throughout the public sector. No funding should be allocated if it has a negative impact on efforts to mitigate or adapt to climate change. Similar checks should exist for biodiversity.

All funding and grants packages administered by public bodies must be climate proofed and include commitment to climate action in the application process. This will serve a number of purposes as it demonstrates that climate change is a broad topic and that it is a serious issue.

### **Support society**

The change necessary requires a society wide shift in values. Every person in Ireland must be involved in the transition process and also given the opportunity to engage in the planning of the process. In 2003 NESC reported upon the need to support the development of social

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<sup>6</sup> Our Public Service <https://www.ops.gov.ie>

<sup>7</sup> Civil Service Renewal <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/efd7f-civil-service-renewal-2030/>

<sup>8</sup> Civil Service Employee Assistance Service <https://www.cseas.per.gov.ie>

capital:

*“Heavily top-down policy formation tends to operate in isolation from communities and citizens and can lead to a “one-size-fits-all” approach to public service whether in the areas of health, education, social support, etc. On the other hand, the greater policy-making is accountable, transparent and accessible to citizens and communities, the greater the possibility of increasing trust and drawing on the skills and potential of local communities. Highly-centralised and dependency related models of decision-making and delivery can limit the scope for engagement, flexibility and trust. Hence, subsidiarity, autonomy and partnership are key areas and concepts for developing social capital.”<sup>9</sup>*

Local authorities can play a part in that society-wide change by coordinating and facilitating the engagement of society in climate action. Considering the trust associated with scientists we propose that intermediaries be appointed to every local authority area that is coordinated by or operates in conjunction with a trusted science entity such as the EPA.

The public sector must support intermediaries, such as Community Climate Action coordinators, to deliver climate action at community level.<sup>10</sup> Local authorities could be best placed to lead at community level throughout the country but with almost 50% of Irish people not trusting the government it is probably best that the local authorities are not the lead actors as intermediaries.<sup>11</sup> Scientists are the most trusted source of information on climate and may be best to play a role as intermediaries to engage communities in climate action.<sup>12</sup> The EPA or similar scientific institution must play a role to ensure the scientific integrity of personnel employed within the local authorities to engage communities in climate action. A format similar to Heritage Officers would offer an alternative to EPA coordination.

The Public Participation Network should work closely with the aforementioned intermediary and other existing trusted networks of volunteers such as the Sustainable Energy Communities, of which there are over 600 across the country. As the PPNs are independent statutory bodies with a nationwide reach and direct access to communities, they are an invaluable resource in terms of disseminating information and raising awareness. They also provide a platform for community members to input into climate policy in each Local Authority area. This policy aspect of PPNs needs to be reinforced, with local authorities given clear direction around participation and inclusion.

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<sup>9</sup> National Economic and Social Council *“The Policy Implications of Social Capital”* June 2003  
[http://files.nesc.ie/nesc\\_archive/nesc\\_reports/NESF\\_28.pdf](http://files.nesc.ie/nesc_archive/nesc_reports/NESF_28.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> National Economic and Social Council *“Wind energy in Ireland”* July 2014  
[http://files.nesc.ie/nesc\\_reports/en/139\\_Wind\\_%20Energy\\_ExSum.pdf](http://files.nesc.ie/nesc_reports/en/139_Wind_%20Energy_ExSum.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> University College Dublin *“Nearly half of Irish public does not trust the Government to be honest or tell the truth”* May 2022  
<https://www.ucd.ie/newsandopinion/news/2022/may/25/nearlyhalfofirishpublicdoesnottrustthegovernmenttobehonestortellthetruthaccordingtonewucdstudy/>

<sup>12</sup> EPA *“Climate Change in the Irish Mind”* 2021  
<https://www.epa.ie/publications/monitoring--assessment/climate-change/EPA-Climate-in-the-Irish-Mind-REPORT-19.pdf>



The independent nature of PPNs needs to be cemented and its function as a voice of the community respected. Volunteer groups often have the capacity and time to implement climate action measures and are not as constrained by some of the bureaucratic barriers which exist within local authorities. These capacities should be recognised and utilised by local authorities. Increased participation leads to stronger democracy, greater trust in government and better decision making.<sup>13</sup>

Meaningful community engagement and participation is necessary to ensure buy in on the transition process. Representative deliberative democracy ensures engagement and participation with the process. A series of mini publics within each local authority should be coordinated by the intermediary. This model of participation has been used widely internationally to deal with complex issues such as the energy transition and climate crisis at a local level. The benefits of this type of local level participation are that, when implemented properly, mini-publics can 1) give the local and national government the social licence to make difficult policy choices, 2) enhance trust between the public and government 3) build support and trust with the wider public who are more likely to support a decision or recommendation if they see themselves reflected in the process. Significantly, research has demonstrated that if participants believe a participatory process to be fair and just, they are more likely to support an outcome that is counter to their own beliefs. Therefore, it is crucial that meaningful engagement such as local mini-publics are supported and resourced at a local level.<sup>14</sup>

Funding should be made available immediately to employ one climate action coordinator in every county connected to the EPA or PPN network. This must be supported by funding to operate an awareness raising and community engagement package.

Allocate positions for young people to actively participate in all decision making bodies including national entities, strategic policy committees and local community development committees in every local authority. These positions should be in addition to the adult representatives of youth already in place.

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<sup>13</sup> Gramberger, M. *Citizens as Partners OECD Handbook on Information, Consultation and Public Participation in Policy-Making* p. 18. OECD Publications. 2001

<sup>14</sup> Haf, S. and Robinson, R., 2020. How Local Authorities can encourage citizen participation in energy transitions. Ingham, S. and Levin, I., 2018. Can Deliberative Minipublics Influence Public Opinion? Theory and Experimental Evidence. Farrell et al, working paper 2019/5. Deliberative Mini-Publics: Core Design Features. Sanoff, H., 2000. Community Participation Methods in Design and Planning. Ferehjohn, J., 2008. Conclusion: the Citizens' Assembly model. Sanoff (2000) Fung, A., 2006. Varieties of Participation in Complex Governance. McCabe, S., 2020. The People's Transition: Community-led Development for Climate Justice. OECD (2020), Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the Deliberative Wave O'Neill, S. 2022. Environmental Justice in Ireland: Key dimensions of environmental and climate injustice experienced by vulnerable and marginalised communities. Sanoff, H., 2000. Community Participation Methods in Design and Planning.

**Public sector recommendations:**

Implement an intensive awareness programme throughout the entire public sector. Support ideas generated by staff that furthers the reach of the awareness and promotes their engagement in the wider societal transition.

Incorporate climate action within the continuous development framework of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform initiative *Our Public Service* and the Civil Service Renewal. Ensure a support framework to assist staff navigate the range of emotions and reactions associated with climate breakdown.

Design printed material to display in every office and public building throughout the country.

Devise criteria that ensures all spending does not negatively impact efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate breakdown.

The EPA coordinates a Community Climate Action coordinator in every county who works in conjunction with the local authority, the PPN and other bodies within the jurisdiction, to catalyse sustainable community development throughout the county.

Resource the climate action coordinators adequately.

Allocate positions for young people to actively participate in all decision making bodies throughout the country.

Resource local mini-publics as a meaningful participatory process at a local authority level.

## Just Transition

Just Transition does not have a universal solution and there can be no Just Transition without public participation in a deliberative process. As previously recommended, the engagement of communities with the process of climate action planning locally is essential to buy in. It also ensures that the plans provide for a Just Transition.

A recent study of poverty in County Clare highlighted the threat posed to farming communities in the county.<sup>15</sup> This realisation came about as a result of community engagement workshops carried out as research for the report. The study shows how Clare is disadvantaged as a result of regional development and that top down governance lacks the local knowledge necessary to ensure a Just Transition. It supports the need to localise Just Transition planning which must be done in conjunction with the public through facilitated, deliberative processes.

According to research conducted by DCU on Environmental Justice in Ireland, “understanding of both environmental impacts and social inequalities is limited by a major gap in information”. This insight, coupled with the need for a localised view of a Just Transition, highlights the opportunity for on-the-ground research at a regional level. There is no one-size-fits all approach to the transition away from fossil fuels. It is paramount to understand who the most impacted groups are at a county level and how they can be involved in the transition.

### **Just transition recommendations:**

The EPA coordinates an intermediary at each local authority or county level, who works in conjunction with the LA, the PPN and other bodies within the jurisdiction, to deliver sustainable community development throughout the county. The intermediaries must ensure that a Just Transition is the basis for all development plans and that comprehensive public participation, including deliberative democracy, is the foundation of the process.

Funding for local level research in relation to impacted, vulnerable and marginalised groups.

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<sup>15</sup> Dr Conor McCabe “Towards an Anti-Poverty Strategy for Clare”  
[https://clareppn.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Clare\\_Anti\\_Poverty\\_Report\\_Sept2022\\_web.pdf](https://clareppn.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Clare_Anti_Poverty_Report_Sept2022_web.pdf) September 2022