

# Response ID ANON-W3ZQ-NNMZ-R

Submitted to **Call for Expert Evidence - Climate Action Plan 2021**

Submitted on **2021-05-18 16:55:06**

## About you

### 1 Name

**Please provide your name, or the name of the organisation you are representing.:**

The Wheel

### 2 Email

**Please include a contact email address if you would like to receive a copy of your submission.:**

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## Just Transition

### 1 Which regions, sectors, or industries do you believe will be most adversely affected by climate policy in Ireland and over what timeframe?

**Please provide details in the text box provided:**

Government policies and actions on climate will impact on communities across the country, both rural and urban. The Midlands in particular is being impacted by the closure of traditional industries reliant on fossil fuels. The swift change in the production of peat by Bord na Mona has resulted in major disruptions in the midlands. Despite a Just Transition commissioner being appointed to oversee the transition in the region and the establishment of a Just Transition Fund, there has been very little progress in terms of replacement jobs in the region or any diversification of the economy. It is imperative that the Just Transition for the midlands peat workers and communities is successful with positive changes observed within the coming months as the transition of the rest of Ireland hinges on this outcome.

There is also a need to identify industries, sectors and livelihoods that will be required to make substantial changes to existing practices in order to reduce GHG emissions in line with the 7% reductions per annum (agriculture, transport etc). Government must ensure that supports are in place so that livelihoods are not put in jeopardy or that households are given the Hobson's choice between continuing to undertake practices detrimental to the climate or choose a more sustainable practice at a cost to their livelihood.

### 2 What types of supporting interventions should be considered by the Government to address the specific areas identified?

**Please provide details in the text box provided:**

Just Transition has to go hand in hand with decarbonization. Government has to implement policies and actions urgently to address this in line with the Paris Climate Agreement.

Social dialogue and public participation is essential for just transition. An effective mechanism which allows local engagement with the Just Transition process will be vital. The state needs to take a leading role in this discussion.

Clear, effective mechanisms need to be put in place to support community participation in decision-making around shaping and implementing climate policies and actions. Existing structures for local decision-making, including the Public Participation Networks, need to be properly resourced to ensure the voices of communities, and the most vulnerable in those communities, are listened to.

### 3 What specific further measures should Government undertake in order to realise the benefits of the low carbon transition, including in relation to supporting the development of low carbon sectors of the economy, including employment in these sectors?

**Please provide details in the text box provided:**

People affected by inequality and rising fuel costs will benefit from a focus on improved public and shared services, especially in transport. It will be essential that realistic and affordable alternatives are provided for people who will be most affected by the rises in the carbon tax. For example, rural public transport should be expanded, alongside integrated mobility planning to encourage people with longer commutes to share rides or combine active travel with car driving.

The SEAI estimates some 4400 net jobs could be created in the wind energy sector alone.

The existing PSO levy for peat production could be diverted to help support solar power development and help create almost 11,000 jobs nationally in the sector. A national residential retrofit programme could create between 12,000 and 18,750 new jobs with many located in the Midlands region with retraining to be provided for existing Bord na Mona staff.

### 4 What specific investments should be considered to support a just transition in Ireland?

**Please provide details in the text box provided:**

### 5 How should the State finance just transition initiatives and investments?

**Please provide details in the text box provided:**

Carbon tax revenues should be ring-fenced to ensure they are being distributed in a way that targets the groups and households most vulnerable to rising energy and fuel costs.

Measures to address the effects of carbon tax rises on low-income households should be considered alongside broader tax and eco-tax reforms that remove the tax burden from labour and instead direct taxes at unearned or accumulated wealth, and environmentally harmful resource use.

The tax system should promote the circular economy, by focusing on increasing resource productivity rather than labour productivity.

SUVs that are not EVs should face prohibitive taxes, given their environmental impact per km and the threat they pose to other vulnerable road users.

## **6 What changes should be considered in Ireland's social welfare system to support population cohorts that might be more adversely affected by the low carbon transition?**

**Please provide details in the text box provided:**

Increases in the fuel allowance could be used to tackle increases in energy poverty caused by a Carbon Tax.

Target people in social housing for welfare benefits towards retrofitting. Interventions will also be required for the private rental market.

We also need to consider how we will address the subsidies for carbon intensive energy production and consumption that detrimentally impact the exchequer. Revenue offer a range of corporate welfare options in the form of preferential tax treatment. Social Justice Ireland estimate this cost us €2.4bn in 2018 (<https://www.socialjustice.ie/content/policy-issues/eu24-billion-revenue-forgone-fossil-fuel-subsidies>).

Finally, universal basic income could be considered as a possible welfare support. The Programme for Government committed to examining this support in the Irish context with a pilot for those working in the arts being trialled.

## **7 Are there specific issues for consideration in Ireland's further education, training and skills system?**

**Please provide details in the text box provided:**

ETBs, as the statutory FET provider, will play an important role in the Just Transition locally. Community and voluntary organisations are important sources of information about what people and communities require in relation to their training and support needs generally. Community and voluntary organisations are well placed to act as conduits to engage people and communities in shaping ETB policy and practice – we would encourage ETBs and ETBI to maximise engagement with The Wheel, local PPNs and other support and representative bodies for the community and voluntary sector to maximise the relevance of the ETB offering to the needs of local people and communities, especially in the context of the social and economic upheavals which will accompany the Just Transition.

Specific opportunities arise to support vulnerable workers to re-skill and join the nonprofit workforce, especially in areas of growing demand such as human services jobs, that will arise as result of aging demographics (eg. Local nonprofit social care & health care providers). There are also opportunities to align the Just Transition goals with the new Action Plan on Apprenticeship -specifically the development of apprenticeships in the social Circular Economy sector. Social enterprise/circular economy sector could develop targeted projects to engage workers from vulnerable industries with transferable skills.

Local community education providers, alongside statutory providers such as ETBs, have a key role to play in empowering communities to adjust, including the provision of training to vulnerable workers and those less likely to engage in formal education, or for those whose literacy, numeracy, digital literacy may make the transition to formal education more challenging. Funding should be provided for targeted programmes developed at local level by community providers to meet local needs, and empower communities to seek their own solutions.

## **8 What other issues should be considered by the Government to inform just transition policy in the 2021 Climate Action Plan?**

**Please provide details in the text box provided:**

We believe that just transition for communities, and a just recovery from the pandemic, is at the heart of sustainable climate action. We recommend adopting a definition of 'Just Transition' that supports environmentally and socially sustainable jobs, supports low-carbon investment and infrastructure, develops and maintains social dialogue with communities, wider civil society, workers and employers and others and that creates decent, fair and high-value work. Transition needs to be society-wide, ensuring that no-one is left behind.

## **9 What additional supports could be considered for regions that are most at risk from the physical impacts of climate change?**

**Please provide details in the text box provided:**

It is of huge concern to The Wheel and its wider membership of community groups that there has been no space given in this consultation process to input ideas and suggestions on Citizen Engagement and Community Leadership. In the 2019 Climate Action Plan in chapter 15 there was some acknowledgement of this area although we note, with regret, the follow on actions (actions 159 – 180) did not give any meaningful priority to a programme of community engagement and outreach to help communities take leadership and influence behavior change required at that community, peer-to-peer level.

There were some useful recommendations In the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action 2019 report:

Chapter 3: Citizen and Community Engagement (Section 3.6) The Committee recommends:

The Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment should enable each local authority to establish or designate a Climate Change Strategic Policy Committee (SPC... External representation on this SPC should be inclusive of all social, economic and environmental stakeholder groups. (Section 3.3)

“... to establish a one-stop-shop or other suitable structure, with appropriate resources and expertise. This should provide practical advice to households and businesses on significantly reducing GHG emissions ... This one-stop-shop must include a strategy for reaching out to all communities by the end of 2020 (Section 3.3).

“...The Public Participation Networks (PPNs) and Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) should be fully utilized and supported with additional resources to address climate change starting in Budget 2020 (Section 3.4) 8. The ‘National Dialogue on Climate Action’ should be further supported with additional resources to deliver its existing strategy of citizen engagement in climate action. (Section 3.5)

As the representative body for the community and voluntary sector The Wheel know how our members can mobilise and engage citizens, community groups their service users, employees, and volunteers. Community champions and leadership within society will be a huge driving force and influencer of behaviour change.

As one of the largest networks of community & voluntary organisations in the country, we also have a unique reach across the sector and the thousands of communities they represent. Our database holds over 56,000+ contacts within 20,000+ organisations across the Irish community and voluntary sector. Community and voluntary organisations have developed a proven effective community outreach model that makes real change in understanding and behaviour possible, as evidenced recently in the great community engagement and outreach effort that happened during Covid where those community groups got right into people’s homes with supports to ensure no one was left behind during lockdown. .

The community outreach work undertaken by The Wheel and its vast network is designed to engage individuals through trusted voices within their communities, i.e. local community organisations. We recruit community leaders to activate networks of community and voluntary sector staff and volunteers who are in touch with those in their communities. We have found that, for hard-to-reach groups, the usual approach of communications campaigns, helplines, and dissemination of information simply does not work. They need personal contact with a known and trusted source to be engaged, and this is something our sector is uniquely placed to provide. This model can, and has been, adapted for a wide variety of messaging and behaviour change; Covid Community Outreach, Eircodes Community Outreach, Digital Switchover Community Outreach.

Our community outreach model already has a network of local champions, who each have their own established contacts regionally and locally, through which community action can be mobilised very quickly. This network of local champions can:

1. Disseminate accurate information quickly and efficiently through their local community networks and field questions, feedback, and concerns from the ground up.
2. Marshall local effort to ensure resources and time is going where it is most needed.
3. Exchange best practice within the champion network itself to ensure that effective ideas can be disseminated and replicated across the country quickly.
4. Feedback to Government departments what is happening on the ground and what is working and not working
5. Connect with local stakeholders to ensure messaging is reaching those who need to hear it.

What sets apart this approach is how both communications and community outreach are combined to form a mutually reinforcing and much more effective strategy of engaging the public in behaviour change. Whereas ‘communications’ is an exercise in explaining something using mass media, community outreach is about one-to-one engagement through a collective effort. This approach is especially important when the goal of public communications is to stimulate behavioural change.

A “joined up” coordinated approach bringing together local authorities, partnerships and other stakeholders facilitating community groups to effect positive change is a potent formula where local experiences can be exchanged through national coordination.

It is our contention that the next Climate Action Plan should have a credible Citizen and Community Engagement & Outreach Plan reaching out to all communities, putting those communities at the heart of decision making and empowering them to take individual and collective action.

## **Additional Information**

**1 If you would like to submit some additional information as part of your response, you can now attach a PDF.**

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