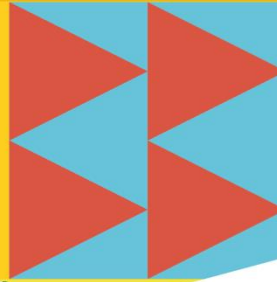


CLIMATE CONVERSATIONS SUMMARY REPORT

Independent summary report of responses from a series of public engagement activities - 'Climate conversations' to inform the design of Ireland's 'National Climate Action Plan' 2021



WELCOME TO THE CLIMATE CONVERSATION 2021



CLIMATE CONVERSATIONS 2021

Foreword from Minister Ryan

Scientific research is unequivocal in its view that the window of time to stabilise our climate is closing in. We need to take urgent action and deliver ambitious and effective emission reduction measures to achieve the objectives of the Paris Agreement.

Here in Ireland we recently passed the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development act 2021 which commits us to reaching net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 at the latest, and a cut of 51% by 2030 (compared to 2018 levels).

We will very shortly publish the Climate Action Plan 2021, which will set out the measures we need to take to reach our 2030 targets. This will require changes to many aspects of society and economy including the built environment, energy, transport, waste, and agriculture and a collaborative effort by government, business, communities, and individuals to deliver new and ambitious policies, technological innovations, new systems, and infrastructures.

The Programme for Government recognises that delivering on this legislation and the goals as set out in the Climate Action Plan is the responsibility of everyone in society. It is by working together that we can transform Ireland and help transition to a low-carbon, climate resilient, biodiversity-rich, environmentally sustainable economy in a way that delivers for all the people of Ireland in a fair and equitable manner.

To help us deliver this, we need a systematic means of actively engaging stakeholders and the public across sectors and regions promoting the mobilisation of every element of Irish society and realising our collective responsibility towards climate action. This will be challenging, but in doing so we will be able to improve the health, welfare, and security for everyone. The National Dialogue on Climate Action (NDCA) will be the primary vehicle through which this can be delivered.

This series of Climate Conversations are just the beginning of a broad and ongoing national dialogue on climate action. The NDCA will be an ongoing process of widespread engagement and activation on climate change across all of society in support of the national transition objectives and the Climate Action Plan. The NDCA will help everyone to contribute to our collective efforts to co-design policies and practices that help us meet our goals and deliver a sustainable future for everyone. This will be delivered through public engagement, participation, community action, supporting innovative ideas, promoting climate literacy, and networking and capacity building.

In my role as Minister for Climate, Environment and Communications I wish to thank everyone who has contributed to these conversations so far. I recognise the transition to a sustainable society will present challenges to many people across Ireland and that these challenges are different for each one of us. I assure you that these voices have been heard and encourage everyone in society to engage with us to help us design and deliver solutions that help us meet our targets in a fair, equitable, and just manner. In this way we can design solutions together that help us support our communities and improve the quality of life for everyone in society now and for generations to come.

INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS THIS REPORT ABOUT?

This report presents findings from a series of interlinked ‘Climate Conversations’ which took place in Spring 2021, with participation from members of the public and community groups across Ireland. These were designed to inform Ireland’s 2021 Climate Action Plan and are part of Ireland’s wider National Dialogue on Climate Action.

The Climate Action Plan is Ireland’s roadmap to becoming a climate neutral economy and climate resilient society by 2050. This means that the amount of greenhouse gases released into the atmosphere needs to be significantly reduced and be balanced by the amount removed by our land, forestry, or technology. Becoming a climate resilient society will help us to cope with the impacts of a changing climate. Our previous Climate Action Plan was created in 2019 and the government is now updating this plan to ensure its scope, ambition and impact is increased (see the [2019 Climate Action Plan](#)). Through the Climate Conversations, the people of Ireland were invited to provide their views on how Ireland could be transformed and how individuals and communities could be supported to take their own positive climate actions.

The Conversations reflect government commitment, as articulated in the Programme for Government, to develop of a new model of engagement which will embrace dialogue on a structured basis. They are part of the wider National Dialogue on Climate Action which is a forum for collaboration between citizens, communities, youth, the Government and relevant agencies on climate change. The Dialogue is a Government of Ireland initiative led by the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications with secretariat support provided by the Environmental Protection Agency.

Along with a ‘Call for Evidence’, the Climate Conversations adopted a multifaceted approach designed to give all of society ample opportunity to engage constructively with debate and policy on climate action. Specific stakeholders engaged included youth (via Comhairle na nÓg), community (via Public Participation Networks) and the general public targeting those who are not already environmentally active. The successful completion of the Conversations required strong coordination across government Departments. It involved hundreds of volunteers giving their ideas and time freely, along with significant input from PPN coordinators, Comhairle na nÓg, Youth Work Ireland, Foróige, and local authority staff. Participants were asked about their hopes and concerns for climate action, actions they are currently taking and would like to take, what supports would help them realise their ambitions, and what broader feedback they had for national climate policy reflecting what matters to them.

This report presents the feedback that was received through these interlinked Climate Conversations. The Conversations were a pilot process and will inform the design of a more enduring structure of engagement to increase awareness and give all of society the opportunity to fully engage constructively in climate action as part of the National Dialogue on Climate Action.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Climate Conversations engaged over 4,710 people through different means.

People who took part welcomed the process and had plenty to say around cultivating a transition that is attractive, inclusive and broad in scope.

The resounding feedback was that **urgent and ambitious action** is needed to address the climate crisis. People are **beyond needing to be convinced of the seriousness of climate change** and want to take action, but are facing structural, social and economic barriers. People expressed a high level of ambition for more climate action, by government, business and for themselves, as individuals. However, to accommodate these ambitions, they emphasised that simultaneous change at system and individual behavioural level is required.

People saw the need for “joined up thinking” between government departments and sectors. They want to see **national policy ambition reflected where they live** – e.g., through **rewilding of green spaces, development of sustainable housing and active mobility infrastructure**. They felt that Local Authorities needed greater resourcing with dedicated teams to develop policy and **facilitate grassroots action**.

A key theme was the need to view **climate and biodiversity crises as intertwined** and to increase action on climate adaptation, particularly through **nature-based solutions** to address flooding or sea level rise. Rather than make small tweaks, people called for more encompassing changes. Tighter **regulation was a key theme to ban unsustainable practices or products**. People felt that more supports were needed for **community-based solutions and social enterprises for example around renewable energy production**, upcycling centres, or food sharing. These would re-localise production and consumption, foster jobs, create more vibrant communities and a fairer transition. Education and targeted training was

suggested to create green employment opportunities for people, in particular those affected by the cessation of peat harvesting or closure of fossil fuel power plants.

People called for **sustainable lifestyles to be made more affordable, accessible and attractive** for all. In relation to travel, the resounding feedback was that public transport, walking and cycling infrastructure needs to be extended and improved. Cost barriers need to be addressed for the purchase of electric vehicles and use of public transport. For energy, most people want to take more action at home to reduce energy use. Barriers to action include cost, hassle, knowledge and quality control. Many individuals want to use renewable energy – either from a dedicated supplier, or to generate their own power. Many called for action to increase the amount of community-led renewable projects.

The individual behaviour that most people are adopting is to ‘consider the climate impact of what they buy’. People are using their consumer choices to affect system change. They want more regulation to remove unsustainable packaging, better information on impacts of goods and services, and increased action by producers to support sustainable products. Skills for reuse and repair need to be fostered.

There was a desire to make food consumption and production more local through supports for community growing projects and sale of produce through Farmers Markets. Many called for greater industry support to promote diversification and reward environmentally sensitive farming practices.

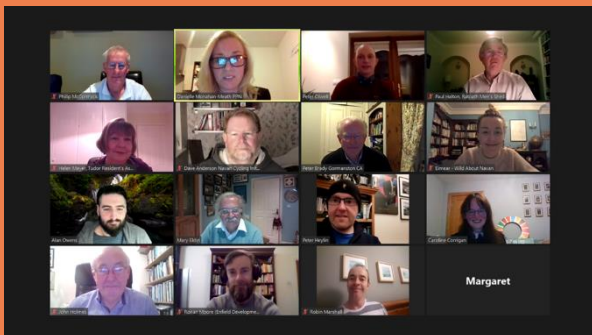
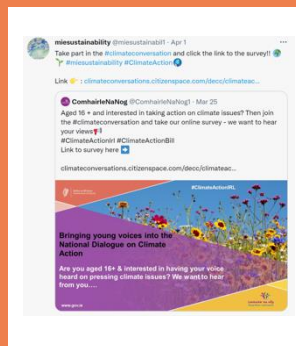
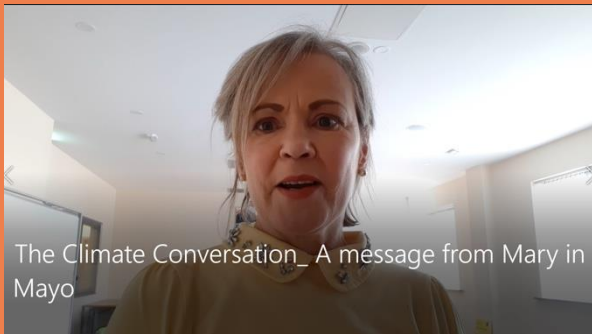
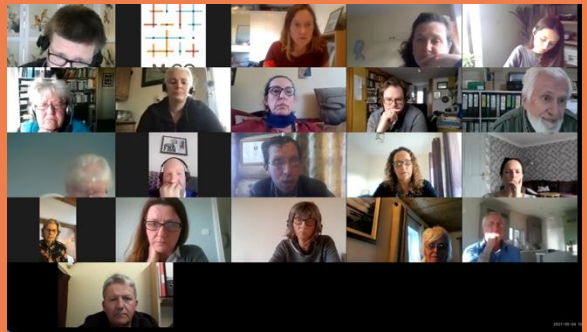
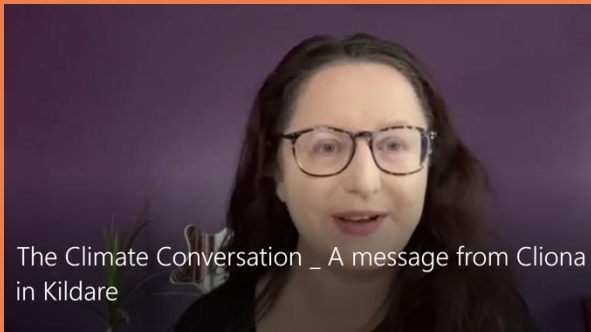
Overall, there was a strong **sense that a sustainable society can be one that is more vibrant, healthy and fair, however significant collaborative action is needed to get there**. Dialogue was considered vital, and participants emphasised the importance of acting upon feedback received through the Climate Conversations.

CONTENTS

The report presents feedback according to key thematic areas which broadly correspond to sectoral areas of climate action. Feedback from Conversations with different audiences – individual, community and youth - is typically presented separately unless otherwise stated. Notable differences between demographics or geographic locations are mentioned. The report presents a collation and summary of the main themes, comments and policy suggestions of those who participated in the Conversations. We have endeavored to capture a full and fair representation of those who took part.

Methodology & Participation	6
Snapshot of Findings	10
Travel	16
Energy	21
Food	26
Shopping, Reduce, Reuse and Recycling	31
Environment & Climate Adaptation	36
Just Transition	40
Youth Voices	43
Community Engagement	47
Next Steps	53

METHODOLOGY & PARTICIPATION



METHODOLOGY

The Climate Conversations took place between the 23rd of March and the 18th of May 2021. They consisted of four interlinked engagement processes blending surveys, with focus groups and workshops targeting different audiences. Given that these coincided with Covid-19 lock-down conditions, all of these took place online. As this was the first set of Climate Conversations, a parallel evaluation process was established to refine and improve future Conversations as part of the National Dialogue on Climate Action.

The four interlinked Climate Conversations were:

- 1. Individual Online Conversation** – an online survey targeting individuals with questions about Energy in the Home; Transport and Mobility; Food & Food Waste; Shopping, Reuse and Recycling; and Local Environment and Climate Action. The survey blended open-ended and quantitative questions. It explored actions people were currently taking and would like to take; what supports would be needed to enable them to take climate action; and what their broader policy recommendations were. Significant emphasis was placed on qualitative evaluation of people’s policy suggestions in order to establish a categorization of the kinds of policy actions government can take against the established “4 E’s of behaviour change” framework. This framework (ref), adopts a systems perspective and recognizes that a multitude of synergistic actions are needed to encourage, engage, exemplify, and enable behaviour change across society. The online survey was publicised in print, broadcast and social media and its design was intended to be accessible for those without specific environmental expertise. See the Appendix for a copy of this survey.
- 2. Community Conversations – 16 Local level Conversations via PPN networks** representing a geographical spread across the country with support from relevant local authority staff using a structured workshop process. PPN groups were trained and provided with templates and guidance to host and report on the Climate Conversations for their own PPN network. PPN Coordinators were encouraged to recruit a cross-section of between 10-20 participants from across Environmental, Community/voluntary and Social Inclusion pillars. The Community Conversations aimed to gain insight into local concerns, priorities and aspirations for climate action (drawing on relevant aspects of PPN Visions for Community Wellbeing where available); inform the design of the Climate Action Fund to make it easier for community-led action; and to obtain broader suggestions for the Climate Action Plan 2021, reflecting what matters locally. In addition, participant feedback forms were developed to provide input and ideas for future iterations of Community Conversations (feedback of which is presented within the Citizen Engagement section of this report). The Appendices contain each Report submitted by PPNs on their own Climate Conversation, along with a template of key questions which guided their structure.

-
- 1. Youth Conversations** - Youth Conversations across 12 Local Authority areas in cooperation with Comhairle na nÓg, Youth Work Ireland, Foróige and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. It was vital to design a way for youth to have their voice heard in these Climate Conversations given how critical the issue is for this demographic and because under 18's are excluded from formal voting processes. Participants were asked to share their concerns regarding climate change, their hopes for climate action, examples of what is working and how they expect to be engaged on climate change in the future.
 - 2. Individual In-depth Conversations** – Three in-depth focus groups to explore emerging feedback from the online Individual and Community Conversations and to discuss themes of Just Transition. Recruitment for these sessions was secured via PPN networks however, in contrast to 'Community Conversations' participants were asked to attend in a personal capacity as opposed to representing the viewpoints of their representative groups. The youth In-depth Conversation involved young people from Comhairle na nÓg, Ógras, Youth Work Ireland, National Youth Council Ireland Future Generations - Climate Justice Project, Localise, Eco-UNESCO, YMCA – Cork, Gaisce, ISSU, Crosscare, Scouting Ireland, SpunOut.

PARTICIPATION IN THE CLIMATE CONVERSATIONS

3,800

Online Individual Conversations

16

Community Conversations
with over 200 participants

12

Youth Conversations -
with over 100 participants

3

Individual in Depth Conversations -
Over 70 people of all ages,
from 12 years upwards

4,170

Total number people of people engaged in Climate Conversations

WHO PARTICIPATED IN OUR ONLINE INDIVIDUAL CONVERSATION?

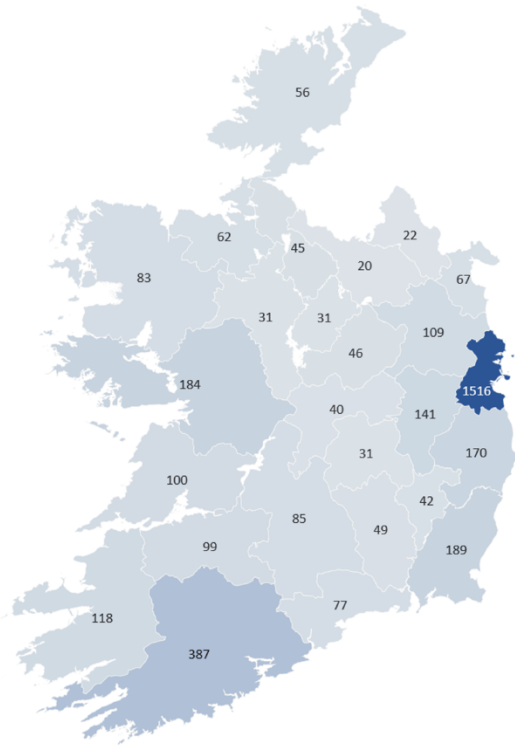
We had over 3,800 participants in our Online Individual Conversation – their profile provided a robust representation of population:

- All age groups contributed
- There was a balanced rural, urban and suburban response
- Participants represented a demographic

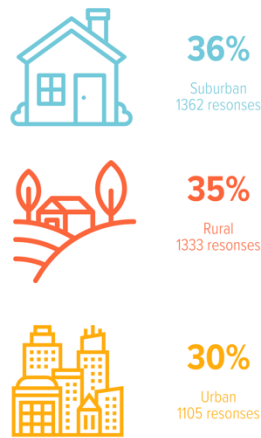
that was strongly concerned about environmental action. This is unsurprising for a self-selecting process.

- 44% of participants were not part of any formal community group – environmental or otherwise.

RESPONSES BY COUNTY



GEOGRAPHY



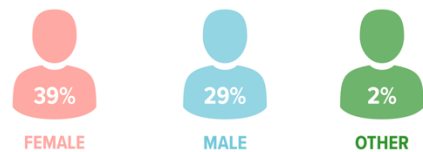
85%
Want to see a big increase in Climate Action

92%
See Climate Change as a serious threat

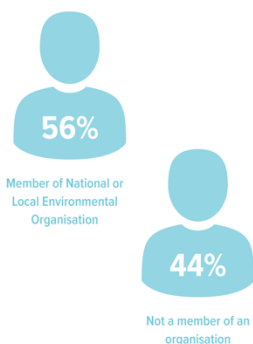
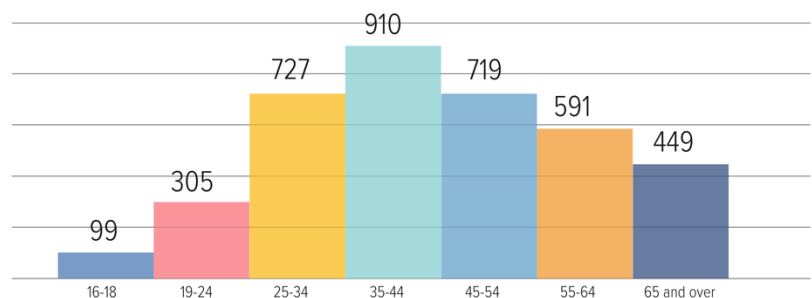
HOUSING



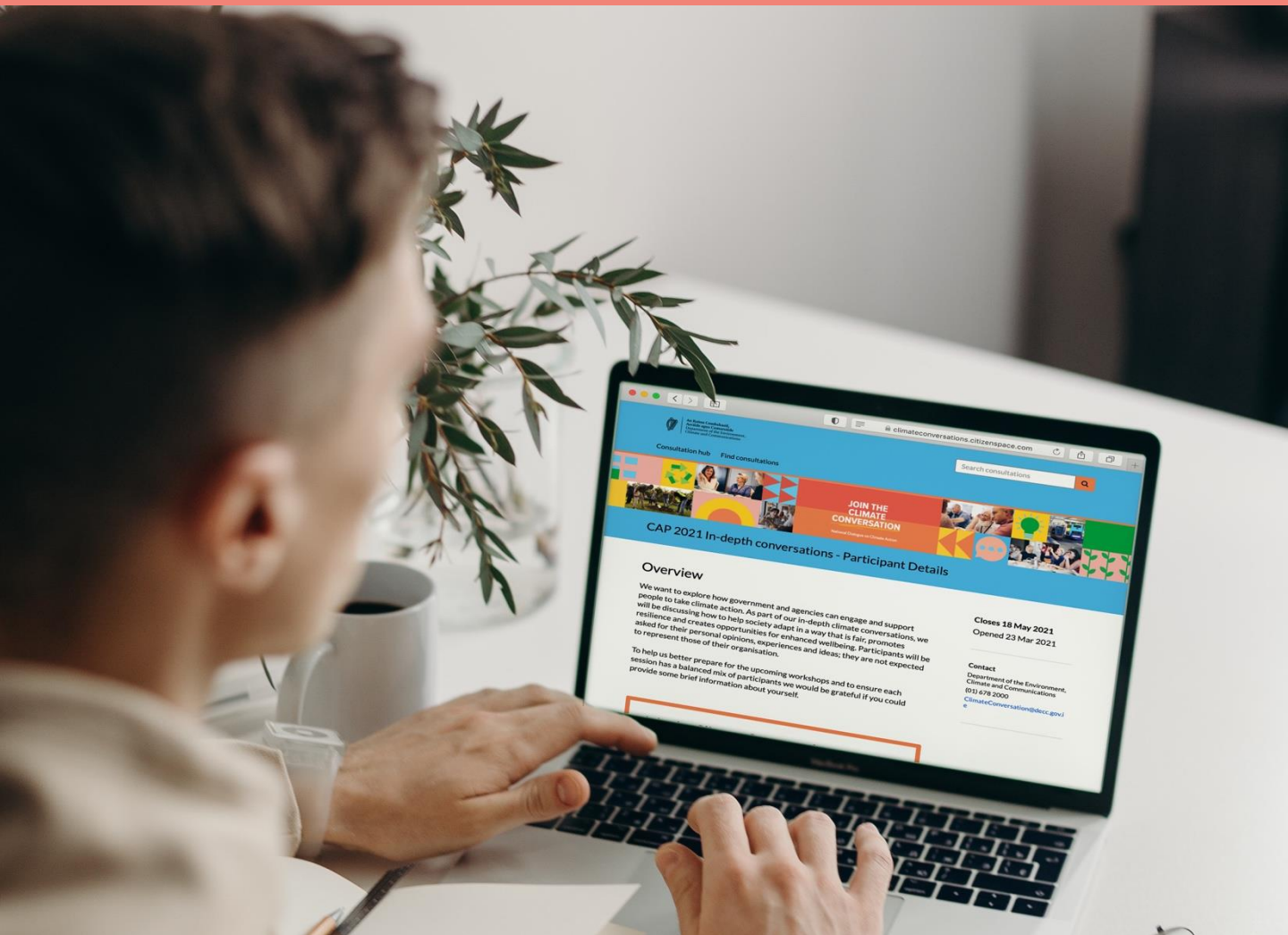
GENDER



AGES



— SNAPSHOT OF FINDINGS



HOPES & CONCERNS AROUND CLIMATE ACTION

Through the Conversations, people shared their broad hopes and concerns relating to how we respond to climate change. These cross-cutting themes are presented below and cover issues of justice, collaboration and the need to consider climate change as a systemic issue.

Urgent and ambitious action needed to address climate crisis.

92% of survey respondents ranked the seriousness of climate change between 8 and 10 on a scale of 1-10 and 85% called for a “big increase” in climate actions from Government. There was little difference in this sense of urgency between urban and rural population. Across Community and Youth Conversations, participants were unanimous that stronger leadership and ambitious action is needed and that climate change should be seen as a ‘crisis’ situation.

Collective responsibility to engage in climate action - system level change needed to support and enable individual and community action.

There was agreement that there is a collective responsibility for all parts of society to take climate action. Massive appetite was demonstrated for further action at individual and community levels – however key barriers were raised linked to broader structural issues like absence of suitable infrastructure or services, financial or bureaucratic barriers to action. Action is therefore needed to transform supply chains and ensure services and infrastructure is in place to enable action.

Coordination across policy sectors and continuity of action.

People saw the need for “joined up thinking” between government departments and sectors to ensure actions in one area aren’t undermined by opposing actions in another. They want to see policy ambition reflected where they live – e.g. green/blue spaces, sustainable housing, planning, public realm improvements.

Climate change and biodiversity crises are intertwined issues and must be addressed as such.

Widespread calls for nature enhancement and protection as a key climate adaptation strategy and also to address biodiversity loss. It was felt that the biodiversity potential of all public lands should be maximised as a strong signal of public sector action at local level and to make native, pollinator friendly planting the norm. Many called for nature based solutions to address challenges

of flooding or sea level rise and to act as carbon sink.

Equity and justice should be guiding principles of policy action.

A common concern was the need to make sustainable lifestyles **affordable**, accessible and attractive for all whether that be using public transport, insulating your home, or buying organic produce. Many commented on the importance of comprehensive supports to allow everyone the opportunity to benefit from jobs in the green economy. This was a particular concern for those employed in traditional polluting industries.

Collaboration, participation and new business models for societal transformation

There was a common perception that a ‘business as usual’ approach will not address the problem. Rather than relying on classic market-based instruments, people suggested that more regulation is needed, and social enterprise models should be fostered to deliver sustainable services and solutions while also promoting community benefit. Many also noted the influence of vested interests and imbalances of power in decision making around climate action. They welcomed the Climate Conversations and other mechanisms to encourage dialogue and collaboration. Participants also emphasised the importance of acting upon feedback received.

Focus on the opportunities for improving communities, individual health and local environment through climate action

Participants often commented on the benefits they had seen personally from adopting more sustainable behaviours, or from community-led climate action. These benefits need to be communicated and measured (in ways other than economic impact). They stressed that national policy needs to recognise the valuable contribution of community-led action by supporting them further and integrating community driven initiatives into wider strategic plans.

Enhanced capacity and resources across Local Authorities and the community sector

A persistent theme, especially in Community Conversations was the need to devote more resources to **Local Authorities** to ensure national climate policy is implemented at local level and to allow Local Authorities to foster and further support to community-led initiatives.

QUOTES

“Hope - that climate action is used as a driver for community wealth generation in all the areas of community activity and that the plans for communities are made by and for them.” - Community

“Between climate and biodiversity, I believe we have a very limited window in which to try and preserve a reasonable quality of life for future generations, with the damage that has already been done not yet fully apparent.” - Individual

“The concern is the government will be cowed and not do what it needs to due to capitalism/materialism and multinationals.” - Community

"I hope we can achieve systemic, broad-based change which yields a sustainable environment for all." - Individual

"The concern is that it is too late too little, and that until we can tackle the main emitters, we are just barely treading water."

- Community

“I am concerned that climate change will get to a point where it becomes irreversible. Flooding becoming common place in my area. Things need to be done sooner rather than later.” - Youth

"Hopefully we'll be able to maintain the natural beauty of our parks. I feel like nature makes a place look 10x better." - Youth

“I hope that a change of culture could take place whereby environment is placed centre stage, in all aspects of life.” - Community.

PERSONAL ACTION & AMBITIONS

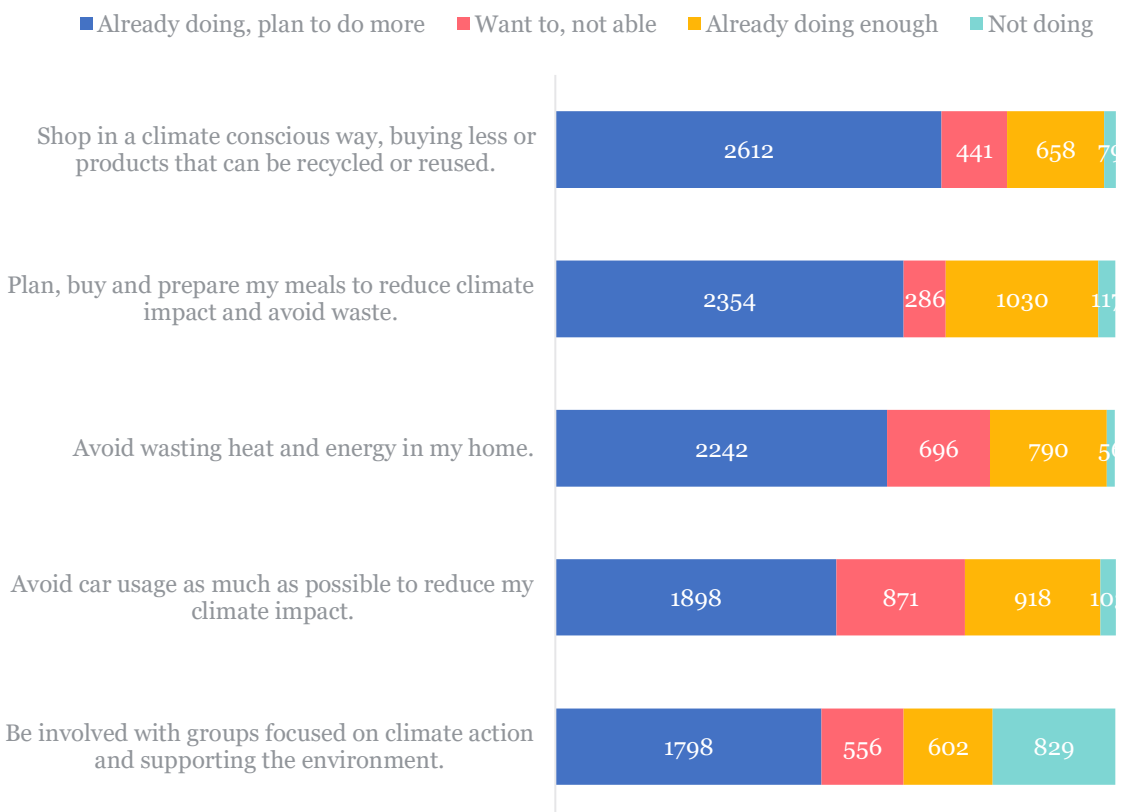
People expressed a high level of ambition for more climate action, by government, business and themselves - as individuals.

Our Online Individual Conversation showed that people want to take more action in all areas of their daily lives. However, they are facing structural, social and economic barriers. The conversation outlined key personal actions that people can take in relation to **travel, energy, food, consumption and local action**. For each action, participants could answer if they were “already doing, plan to do more”, “already doing enough”, “want to, not able”, and “not doing”

Results showed that **climate conscious consumption** is a leading action, particularly amongst young people. This includes **how we spend money on food and items and other forms of consumption such as reuse and repair**. There were high intentions to act in other

areas such as **transport and home energy, however these are areas where infrastructure and broader structural barriers exist**. This can be seen in the later sections of this report. A snapshot of findings across thematic areas of individual action is presented in the bar chart below.

In this report, a number of ideas and hopes are presented that give an indication of **what matters to the Irish public and where they would like to take action**. There is a strong sense that **protecting future generations, creating vibrant communities and a healthier society, protecting our landscapes and natural environment, and moving away from a throwaway culture** are issues that matter to the public. These issues that resonate widely can be connected and integrated to policies for climate action, depending on the approach taken by government.



POLICY PRIORITIES TO FACILITATE BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

Analysis of responses to the online Conversation clearly showed an expectation that the **government should facilitate system changes that help the public make behaviour changes** and to take climate action at an individual or community level.

A mix of policy interventions is therefore required across the following policy intervention types:

Enable – government needs to understand the practical and structural barriers that people face and enable people to take action by changing the systems in which they live e.g., investing in infrastructure and services, developing skills.

Encourage – government needs to consider the appropriate incentives and disincentives to encourage behaviour change alongside traditional measures such as regulation, legislation, standards or social marketing.

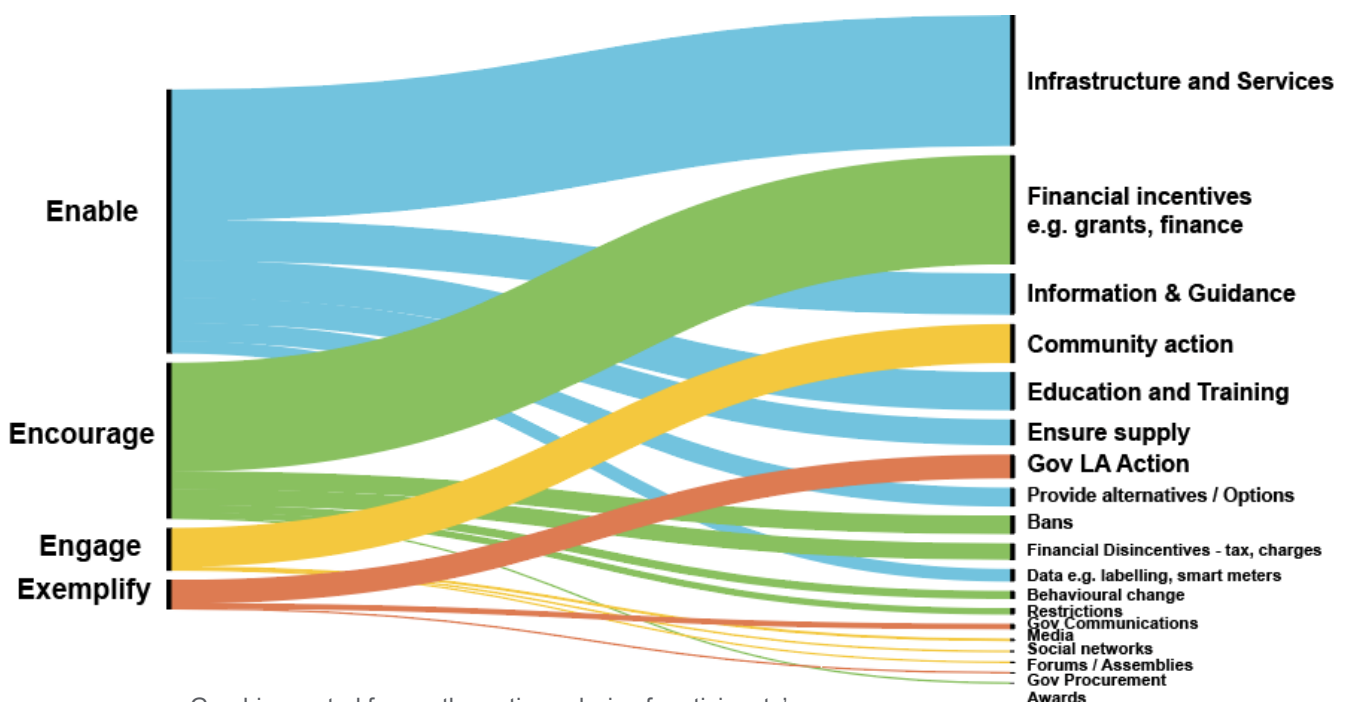
Engage – government needs to look at methods of engaging the public to explore what actions are socially

acceptable, what measures work, and to gain legitimacy for climate policies.

Exemplify – government needs to be seen to lead by example and ensure that there is consistency between policy and what the public sees through services, planning and development. This can involve ensuring messages are consistent across agencies.

Across these four areas, the most **dominant policy demands** were for:

1. Provision of **infrastructure and services** (e.g., Public transport and segregated cycle lanes)
2. **Finance and improving the affordability** of measures (e.g., Retrofitting finance)
3. Supporting **community action** (e.g., Building local capacity)
4. Providing **alternative options and ensuring supply** (e.g., Lower carbon food and products)



Graphic created from a thematic analysis of participants' qualitative responses in the Individual Online Conversation

COMMUNITY IDEAS FOR CLIMATE ACTION

PPN representatives in our Community Conversations spoke of the many different community-led initiatives and projects that had been developed in their areas. Some of the most frequently mentioned project types are visualised below while the Reports submitted for each Community Conversation contain more detailed project descriptions (See Appendix).

Participants emphasised the benefits of such initiatives in improving local job opportunities, enhancing community and individual wellbeing, and promoting more vibrant, greener spaces.

Together, woven into the fabric of our villages, these initiatives already represent key solutions to our climate crisis. They also build towards the 'Visions for Community Wellbeing' that many PPN's have created for their areas.

Participants stressed that national policy needs to recognise the valuable contribution that community initiatives can make by providing continued engagement and support and by removing administrative and financial barriers to action. A number of specific recommendations were made relating to how the government's Climate Action Fund can best meet community needs and enable their aspirations for action.



TRAVEL

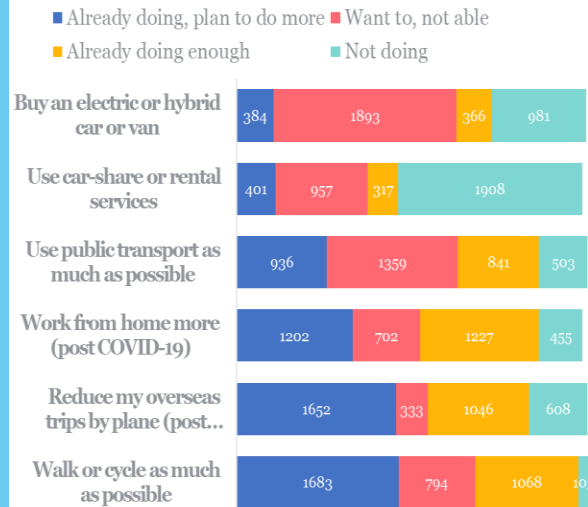


TRAVEL - INDIVIDUAL FEEDBACK

SNAPSHOT OF ACTION

- People intend to use active travel, reduce flights and work from home more.
- People want to purchase an electric vehicle and use public transport more but are unable to.
- Car sharing/ rental is not a viable or desirable option for many.

(Source: Online Conversation, n = 3,800)



ISSUES THAT MATTER

Most people want to travel in a more sustainable way and even see the benefit of designing active transport options such as walking and cycling. People want to take action but infrastructural and social barriers limit the move to electric vehicles or public transport.

The issues that mattered most were improved and affordable public transport options, increased access to electric vehicles (cars, bikes, public transport fleet) and safe infrastructure for active mobility.

There is a strong interest in adopting and increasing active travel. Increased infrastructure and improved safety were seen to be key as support

There are common concerns across urban, suburban and rural communities in terms of **availability, frequency and affordability of public transport.** Others mentioned that **lack of coherent route planning making it too difficult to use.**

Most people felt unable to move to electric vehicles, because of strong concerns regarding **affordability and supporting infrastructure** for electric cars. There was also concern that **EVs are being promoted at the expense of other solutions** such as

e-bikes, electrified public transport and public sector fleets. **Remote working and staycations were identified as key opportunities to decarbonise transport and to promote fewer flights.** There is a high degree of salience around these issues due to Covid-19. **Also mentioned, was the need to move towards a more sustainable approach for the transport and delivery of goods** and to encourage companies to introduce electric or biofuel fleets. **Some people commented on the power of better planning** both in urban and rural areas to reduce reliance on private vehicles. **'15 minute cities'**- where all facilities were located close together or to public transport were mentioned.

CHALLENGES

People see **reducing car use due to external barriers as the biggest challenge.** Understandably, people in **rural areas report barriers to reducing car use at higher levels** compared to people in urban and suburban areas. Importantly, they also **indicate they want to reduce car use at higher rates.** People are mindful of the potentially negative socio-economic impacts of measures to discourage car-based travel and need to be reassured that these are being considered.

TRAVEL - COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

ISSUES THAT MATTER

Across Community Conversations a key topic of discussion was the need for a massive increase in the provision of public transport and active mobility infrastructure. This was a particular concern for rural areas. The connectivity and freedom of movement that this would bring was seen as being key to enhancing individual and community wellbeing as well as promoting rural revitalization. Its role in fostering independence amongst young people was frequently noted. Active mobility and public transport initiatives are seen as vital to delivering on climate action at the local level and enabling individual behaviour change. Commitment in national policy was considered key to provide impetus for sustainable transport solutions to be delivered at local level. Novel community projects mentioned included bike training sessions, school cycling and walking buses, cycle skills training along with lobby work around active mobility.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM COMMUNITY GROUPS:

National policy should prioritise public transport and active mobility – Suggestions included expanding and electrifying rural bus fleets (including Local Link), a wider national rail network, provision of ‘park and ride’ facilities. Innovative solutions were also suggested including light rail, electric loop bus lines in small urban nodes, resurrecting old tram and rail routes and greenways on old railway lines.

Active mobility and public transport infrastructure should be a key constraint in planning for new developments –

Concerns over increase in new high-density developments in mature areas with high traffic volumes, and in areas inadequately serviced with public transport. **Poor planning seen** as an important factor locking in car dependency and thus needs to be addressed.

Expansion of critical active mobility infrastructure – Many calls for delivery of proposed greenways, cycle paths and supporting infrastructure to allow for off-road, active mobility. Many suggested that Local Authorities continue with changes to the urban realm and mobility infrastructure since Covid-19. A priority is to connect existing and new cycleways to schools and target these to local housing developments in the catchment area.

Walkability needs to be elevated in importance – Absence of paths and walkways particularly in rural areas is a challenge and safety issue. Some comments that local walking trails have become more popular during lockdown, and thus need better management to avoid negative environmental impacts.

Financial incentives and support to community and school initiatives that give people the confidence, skills and ability to cycle – Suggestions included broadening access to ‘Bike to Work Scheme’ (for those not in employment and for electric bikes), fostering bike repair/upcycling social enterprises, focusing resources on school initiatives such as walking school buses, bike training and School Streets which many felt have had a significant positive community impact. Schools seen as key site in which to affect changes in practices and attitudes around cycling.

Measure the benefit of public transport and active mobility on community wellbeing and local economy – Many groups noted such infrastructure can improve circulation and connectivity meaning people can maximise their enjoyment of local assets and services. Currently, many people are prevented from taking part in local activities or social events (youth in particular) due to limited transport alternatives. Also need to capture data on travel patterns and associated emissions and pollution.

TRAVEL - QUOTES

"Policies and funding in place to support and expand rural public transport networks and to minimise the development of roads." - Community

"There is limited public transport to go anywhere, so the family car is needed to transport youth to education and social events."

- Youth

"Legalise electric scooters and provide additional support (for example through cycle to work schemes) for those wishing to buy an electric bicycle - this can become a real solution, but they're still out of reach financially for many people."

- Individual

"Cycle infrastructure and the coastal mobility route [Dun Laoghaire] has shifted people out of their cars." - Community

"Reducing energy and car use are the most important local measures for addressing climate change."

- Community

"We don't know what the levels of transport related emissions are in Galway, there are no measurements and without measuring, you cannot set targets to reduce." - Community

"I live on a farm within easy cycling distance (7km) of Dunmanway. The West Cork roads are simply too narrow with heavy goods vehicle traffic to safely cycle." - Individual

"Need cycle pathways from apartment developments to schools, more designated paths."

- Individual

TRAVEL - POLICY PRIORITIES

Across the individual, youth and community responses, several key policy priorities emerged (represented in figure below). These include:

- Increase investment in and prioritisation of public transport and active mobility **infrastructure and services** in urban and rural areas.
- Develop safe, connected and segregated **infrastructure**, including greenways to promote **active mobility**.
- For electric vehicles, the primary demand is for more novel and **accessible options for finance (grants, low-cost finance)**.
- Develop standards and capacity at a **Local Authority level** that make active mobility and public transport infrastructure a key consideration in planning for new developments. Concepts such as 15-minute city emerging as a useful framing.
- **Develop incentives for remote working and “staycations”** but consider potential “rebound effects” from increased home energy and heating.
- Ensure **that alternatives to car-based transport will support an inclusive and just transition** and do not negatively impact lower-income households, rural communities, parents of young children, the elderly and people living with disabilities.
- **Develop and support community initiatives** such as walking school buses, cycle skills training and bike upcycling services.
- Target schools for new active mobility infrastructure and **behaviour change programmes**.
- Recognise and measure the benefits that effective public transport and active mobility can have on **community wellbeing and local economy**.



ENERGY

HOME, ENERGY PRODUCTION & CONSUMPTION



ENERGY - INDIVIDUAL FEEDBACK

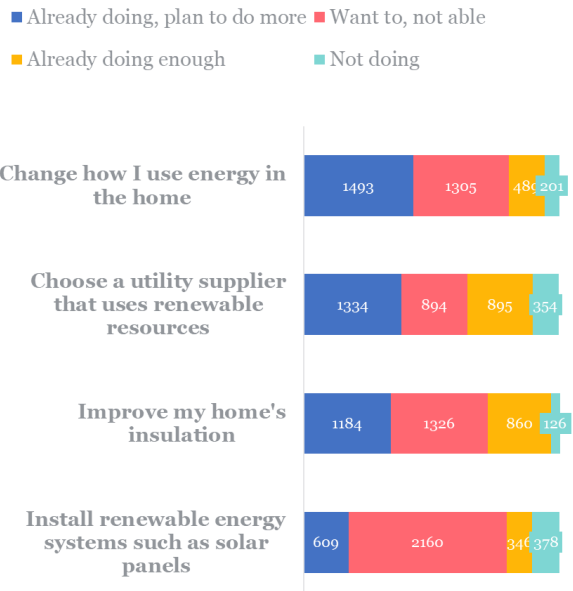
SNAPSHOT OF ACTION

Most want to choose a green utility supplier

The main area that individuals want to take action in, but feel they are unable to – is to install renewable energy systems.

This is closely followed by ‘improving my home’s insulation’ – and how they use energy in the home.

(Source: Online Conversation, n= 3,800)



ISSUES THAT MATTER

People were clear on the importance of reducing energy use in the home, and most were planning or wanted to do more. The source of home energy also mattered to people, and most wanted a renewable provider or even to generate their own energy. Of all the areas discussed home energy was the area where people felt most unable to change.

The source of home energy was a key topic for discussion. Many people were interested in generating their own energy, particularly solar for home energy, to take advantage of renewable energy and a low cost/hassle measure. In terms of green electricity, respondents focused on the need to decarbonise the grid and support micro-generation.

While people want to upgrade their homes and reduce energy usage, the key barrier is still the real and perceived affordability and the complexity of funding applications. The affordability is considered both in the upfront costs, but also in the potential savings. For recent purchasers it is also framed in the already high costs of property. Other issues identified were around lack of transparency in the cost and effectiveness of the solution.

The materials used for retrofitting and in construction in general were also identified by some as having a large impact on emissions. There was therefore a call for stronger regulations governing the sustainability of building materials. The public sector was also seen to have a role to lead by example both in new builds and in retrofitting key government buildings and offices.

The current energy rating system was seen as a way to show the value of retrofitting. Enforcement of current regulations was also seen as key to better and more passive buildings. Some saw a real role for innovation in creating more convenient and affordable options for retrofitting.

CHALLENGES

Significant barriers in terms of affordability, knowledge, guidance and supply of contractors. There are significant concerns around the complexity of finance, the hassle factors of existing funding schemes and mixed messages between contractors and government.

Renters/ apartment owners face a split incentive problem. There was a strong demand for measures to deal with this.

ENERGY - COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

ISSUES THAT MATTER

Across Community Conversations, a key topic was the need to rapidly decarbonize the energy system. Communities wanted to have a higher stake in how energy projects are developed and for it to be easier for them to be partners or owners in new renewable projects. Many had been involved in SECs which were seen as very successful, in particular, for driving wider health and community benefits although barriers were noted. Community groups see economic opportunities connected to renewable power or energy retrofitting and want supports to capitalize on these particularly incentives for alternative social enterprise models.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM COMMUNITY GROUPS:

Plan for, support and enable community-led renewable projects, in particular wind – Many want to see actions to make it easier and more financially viable to establish community-led renewable projects citing barriers in setting up, connecting with and selling back to the grid. Access to clean energy, at a fair price, developed in the right setting was seen as a citizenry right. Concerns appeared to be stronger in coastal counties (e.g., Sligo, Clare, Galway, Wicklow) or in areas near data centers (as some felt that they were the key beneficiaries of nearby wind farm developments). Others noted that a national strategy is needed with goals for percentage of renewable power from community-led projects instead of an ad hoc approach to development.

Training for jobs and support for social enterprise models connected to green energy and retrofit – Suggestions that training should be targeted at those looking to switch from polluting industries. Many mentioned that social enterprises should be supported in delivery of these services.

Promote a decentralized energy mix including solar, tidal and wind – a frequent comment was that the grid needs to be upgraded to allow for a decentralized network of power generation. Tidal and solar power was felt to be under-utilised and many wanted to see supports for solar panels on school, community and council buildings as a priority. In some discussion, people commented on the need to avoid technological lock-in and to use the best available renewable technologies.

Enforce and follow through on a smoky fuel ban – Some community groups - Monaghan and Offaly in particular, emphasised the need for education and awareness raising about the alternatives to peat and coal burning and for incentives to switch away from these fuels. A smaller number of groups commented that government should follow through on ending fossil fuel subsidies and banning oil and natural gas exploration.

Better guidance at local authority level and better tracking of energy data – Some groups suggested that 'County-level energy agencies' were needed nationally to track energy data and assist with funding and instigating local SEC and other community energy schemes.

Simplify Sustainable Energy Community process & provide greater supports – SECs were highly regarded. Suggestions for improving SEC scheme included: simplifying the process, greater technical support as it *"places too many demands on volunteers"* and more up-front financing. Some also recommended exploring other ways to encourage economies of scale for retrofitting schemes (e.g., group retrofit at housing development / street / area level).

ENERGY - QUOTES

“The cost of retrofit currently is too much, more funding needed when you have to do a large scale retrofit.” - Individual.

"We need to treat the issue of home retrofits as a national priority, identify and remove any restrictions to participation. Half measures will be ineffective and inefficient."

- Individual

“A credible roadmap to support the retrofit of Irish building to the level required, including the technical and financing requirements.”

- Individual

“Meaningful and lasting support for communities to enable them to deliver community energy projects that are context appropriate, in particular supporting their active participation in renewable energy generation schemes & to support individuals to undertake energy projects on their own home.”

- Community

“Need to focus on lower income homes and older people, unlikely to be convinced to make a significant investment ... as they simply do not have the resources or will not live long enough to see the long-term financial benefit.”

- Individual

"Reduce the use of concrete and steel. Promote natural, eco-friendly building materials and products." - Individual

“A plan for delivering the infrastructure required to accelerate the growth of offshore renewable energy in Ireland, particularly grid and ports.”

- Individual

"if every house, shed and community building could have pv panels on the roof, not only would they be able to use what they need, but would be able to export to the grid." - Community

ENERGY - POLICY PRIORITIES

Across the individual, youth and community responses, a number of key policy priorities emerged (visualised in the graphic below). These include:

- Make **retrofitting a strategic priority** and make it **cheaper and easier for householders and communities to achieve deep retrofits**.
- Develop easier to access **finance and financial incentives (grants, low-cost loans)** for energy efficiency upgrades.
- Provide easier to access information and guidance for household energy upgrades so householders can make informed decisions.
- Build capacity and quality assurance for retrofitting through **training & education** - increase employment potential from retrofit and renewable power.
- Provide resources to support and enable **community-led renewable projects**. Simplify and provide greater supports to **Sustainable Energy Communities**.
- Accelerate system change to greener energy production. Create **clear roadmaps for progress that are understood by the public**.
- Support **social enterprise models and target jobs training and creation in areas affected by phasing out of peat and coal fired plants** and in areas in need of regeneration.
- Expand access to the grid – make it **easier to connect with and sell back to grid** – for householders & communities.

Financial incentives
e.g. grants, finance
1356

Education and Training
313

Gov LA Action
299

Information & Guidance
196

Ensure supply
(market
mechanisms)
85

Infrastructure and Services
36

Community action
113

Provide
alternatives /
Options
22

Data e.g.
labelling,
16

— FOOD

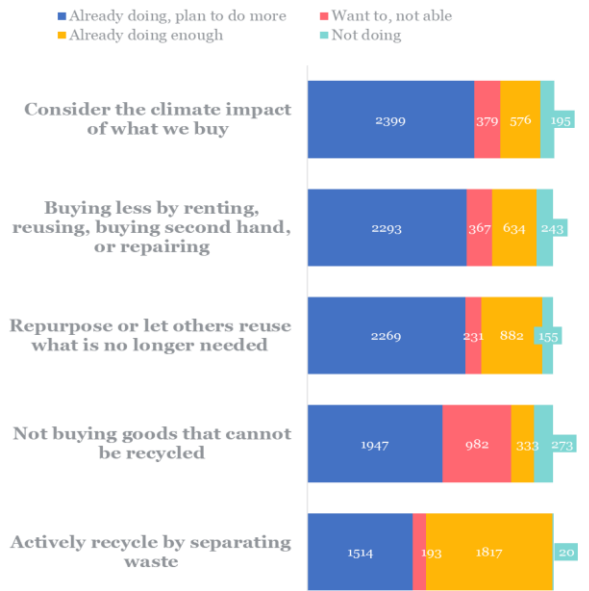


FOOD - INDIVIDUAL FEEDBACK

SNAPSHOT OF ACTION

- Most people plan to do more around buying food with less climate impact.
- In terms of consumption of food planning meals and choosing a more sustainable diet are also areas most plan to do more.
- Many already feel they are doing enough on composting, but an equal number plan or want to do more.
- There is a strong desire to grow more of their own food, but some barriers exist.

(Source: Online Conversation, n= 3,800)



ISSUES THAT MATTER

Farming and agriculture, food retail and food culture/consumption/diet were the food issues that emerged as the most important in our online Conversation.

The public wants to be better informed about the climate impact of food through **trusted data and knowledge, education and training**. There is a desire to improve the supply side with **improved standards among food producers and retailers, regulation around compostable packaging, clear information on climate impacts of food and a better economic approach to making sustainable food affordable**.

There was a strong emphasis **on supporting farmers and farming to diversify into lower carbon production, supporting the economic viability of farming and a just transition** (farm shops, fair prices), supporting smaller **farms with sustainable practices** and providing for the **community and individual growing**.

Planning meals was also a planned action, **with strong suggestions around labelling to help people plan more sustainable menus**.

While many people felt they were doing enough on composting, a lot of people planned to do more. **People want more options for composting, such as community schemes**. Some would like **more information on composting**. Some mentioned limitations due to where they lived, especially in apartments.

There was a **strong interest in accessing space and being educated in growing your own vegetables**. The communal nature of allotments was popular and helping to connect to the source of their food. Some mentioned that growing your own increased appreciation of the effort to produce food.

Affordability of more sustainable food, and current retailer pricing approaches were called out as limiting some peoples' options to move to more sustainable food sourcing.

CHALLENGES

The area that people are intending to do more of is to **buy food with lower climate impacts and from local suppliers**, but some **barriers remain, such as information, supply and affordability**. Space and access to land is a key challenge for growing your own food, which many would like to do.

FOOD - COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

ISSUES THAT MATTER

There was a broad agreement that we need a change in paradigm where farms are viewed as sites for biodiversity protection and enhancement, forestry and fuel crops - not just for food production. It was felt that this provides an opportunity, however training, incentives and subsidies were needed to help farmers to diversify. In addition, market interventions will be required to address negative externalities. Many called for more support for food sharing initiatives, better access to land for GIY and promotion of community supported agriculture. These were seen as successful models to re-localise production which was a key concern and to promote learning and connection with the environment.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM COMMUNITY GROUPS:

Valuing and incentivising environmentally sensitive farming – Many felt farmers should be paid for the nature-friendly work they do e.g., planting trees, or wildflower meadows. Many cited good work done by smaller local farmers in this area. They felt that a financial benefit should accrue for associated sequestration, biodiversity and ecosystem benefits.

Tighter regulation over harmful farming practices – many called for tighter control on use of fertilisers and pesticides and penalties for improper use and run-off together with better monitoring.

Easier to access environmental subsidies / rewards – A frequently made point, particularly from farmer participants in In Depth Conversation, was that subsidies (especially those linked with CAP) are biased towards larger producers. Participants stressed that financial

incentives should be made more accessible for smaller producers or community-led growing projects and to access any form of agriculture subsidies, minimum environmental criteria should be met.

Fostering skills for mixed farming – Widespread agreement that training and knowledge sharing is needed in order to move away from mono-culture and reduce reliance on cattle and dairy farming. This would help address issues of justice in transition of the agricultural sector.

Market interventions so that sustainable options become financially competitive – Local sustainable food businesses face challenges competing with supermarkets who drive down prices. Corrective market measures are needed so that “low-grade, mass-produced meat” and other unsustainable products cannot be sold at artificially low prices.

Retailer action to increase – Many community groups called for retailers to supply more local and sustainable products.

Improve access to spaces for growing projects – Several participants had been involved in community-led growing initiatives. They called for action to facilitate easier access to public lands, communal private green spaces (e.g., those owned by property management agencies), or derelict sites. People felt we should look creatively at all plots of land to maximise growing potential (e.g., orchard trees, or herbs in public spaces, rooftop gardens etc).

Support for community-led production and consumption models – A number of innovative models were mentioned, including food sharing projects, community gardens, Community Supported Agriculture and Farmer’s Markets. Further supports needed to scale these initiatives to improve accessibility of local and sustainable produce.

FOOD - POLICY PRIORITIES

Across the individual, youth and community responses, a number of key policy priorities emerged (visualised in the graphic below). These include:

- Policy measures to **ensure the supply of lower carbon food** and support farming to transition.
- **Financial incentives** to increase the affordability of lower carbon food (by rebalancing subsidies and taxes)
- **Financial incentives** for lower carbon food production and retail, with tighter regulation over harmful practices.
- Create an enabling environment for **community growing** and GIY, including easier access to land, fostering skills development.
- Provision of better **information** about the climate impact of foods and **guidance** on issues such as food waste.
- **Support community action such as Community Supported Agriculture and Farmer's Markets.**
- Fostering **skills** to move towards mixed farming and away from reliance on cattle and dairy.
- Easier to access and better environmental **subsidies** for producers who adopt sustainable practices.
- Financial support to build capacity among smaller, local producers (increasing competitiveness).
- **Retailer action** to increase the stock of sustainable and local products.
- Education and awareness raising on **lower carbon diets (purchasing and cooking) and food waste.**



FOOD - QUOTES

"Create farmers markets or other methods of enabling people to buy produce direct from Irish growers. This would work to the benefit of farmers and food producers too, who would get a fair price. Set up as many of these throughout the country as possible." - Individual

"Empowered and educated farmers are critical to protecting our biodiversity." - Community

" Establishment of community allotments/ rooftop vegetable/herb gardens /school yard food gardens." - Community

"Most farmers are working to care for the land and the difference between agribusiness and small farmers was highlighted."

- Community.

"Support access to land - sites as spaces for education, experiential learning and developing practical skills. Schools and marginalised communities to access lands."

- Community

"Agri-food strategy is being driven by the industry and does not serve small farmers or the environment."

- Community

"Farmers Markets in Birr, Tullamore. General consensus that Farmers Markets would be very welcome if rolled out across the county espically in rural areas."

- Community

"I think there should be more green areas within housing developments and encourage / support "grow your own veg" areas where people can get together and help each other." - Individual

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**SHOPPING,
REUSE &
RECYCLING**



SHOPPING, REUSE AND RECYCLING - INDIVIDUAL FEEDBACK

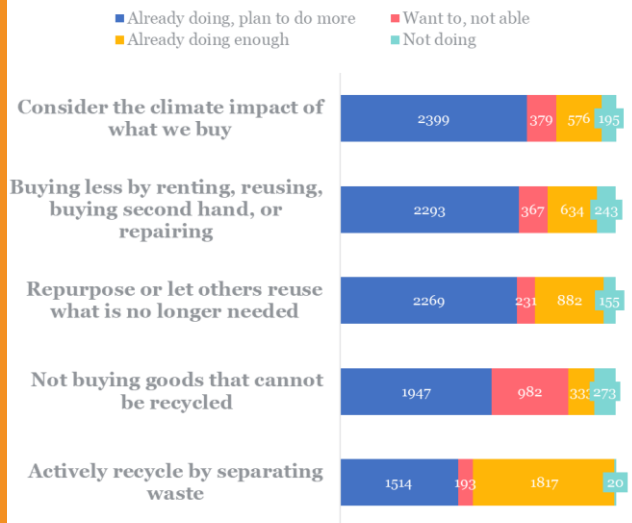
SNAPSHOT OF ACTION

Considering what we buy is the biggest action people are planning (across the survey)

Buying less and repurposing are also areas people plan to make a change, and very few not able to.

People are planning on not buying goods that cannot be recycled, but some unable to.

(Source: Online Conversation, n= 3,800)



ISSUES THAT MATTER

People are planning to use purchase power to reduce their climate impact. They are also looking to change their purchasing behaviour to extend the life of products and recycle responsibly. Most are actively recycling, but some external barriers exist to doing more. To support collective activity, people want acceleration of a circular economy.

Areas where people want more support are around: reducing waste in purchasing; better information on the climate impact; increase in provision of reuse and repair services; increased producer/retailer responsibility

The **most pressing issue that arose around shopping was plastics and non-recyclable packaging.** There was a strong desire to phase this out, and for retailers to take the lead in this and the introduction of disincentives. People want to **be better informed by retailers and government about the carbon impacts of products they are buying,** to trust the information they are receiving and ensure the supply of lower carbon options.

People see a circular economy as key to sustainable consumption. They recognise that a focus on product life extension through repair is key. People also mentioned a **necessary shift in consumer culture to buy less and better. Younger people mentioned the challenge of less sustainable goods are much more affordable** People feel the true cost is not reflected in the prices charged.

Many people want a circular economy that is more local- with both production and recycling being encouraged within Ireland. This would potentially benefit local communities. The focus is very much focused on products rather than service.

People were very positive about increasing opportunities to repair goods. The EU right to repair - increasing the reparability and life of products was mentioned by some. Most mentioned teaching and supporting the skills necessary. There was the sense that these were being lost. There were many suggestions on creating locations for repair, as well as building in reparability into goods

There was a strong commitment to recycling but **some criticism of recycling infrastructure- the location, times and products accepted by recycling centres.** Access for those without cases or physical challenges was mentioned. Others mentioned the limitation on what was accepted. Some also questioned what happened to the non-recyclable products and exporting waste.

CHALLENGES

The recyclability of products and packaging on the market.

Ability and availability of repair services

Access to recycling services-accessibility and affordability

Information guidance on relative impact of purchases.

SHOPPING, REUSE, RECYCLE - COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

ISSUES THAT MATTER

Communities across Ireland have been long-standing supporters and promoters of recycling initiatives. While it was felt that there is plenty of room for improvement regarding recycling services, the Conversation has moved on to a focus on community-led initiatives and policies that enable and encourage a reduction of consumption overall and value ‘waste as a resource’.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM COMMUNITY GROUPS:

Support local circular economy initiatives, particularly those that operate as social enterprises – A key theme in community conversations was that waste needs to be considered a resource for the creation of local value. Many groups referenced the need to provide greater support to innovative local social enterprises that enable an “environmentally friendly lifestyle, for example, ‘repair sheds’ and ‘upcycling hubs’ where items can get repaired or upcycled for a new lease of life diverting waste from landfill”.

Foster circular economy training and employment opportunities – The circular economy was seen as an area with great growth potential. It was felt that significant economic supports should be created to fully realise its potential, targeting those in long-term unemployment. The Rediscovery Centre - with its myriad social enterprises, learning and training facilities, was mentioned a number of times as a model to duplicate in communities across Ireland.

Improve accessibility of recycling centers – Many felt there was still plenty of room for improvement here with suggestions around improving their opening hours, locations, and widening the types of goods accepted. Accessibility was highlighted as an issue for those without cars and for people with disabilities.

More standardization of waste collection across local authorities – communities mentioned there was a confusing mix of approaches and providers. Some called for bringing back into LA control. Some mentioned that more frequent collections were needed, especially around bulky waste, and that in many areas municipal compost services are still unavailable.

Education within schools and local communities fostering skills to reduce, reuse and recycle. Many stated that we need more education and awareness to foster skills and norms of reuse and repair. Some participants felt that more Repair Cafes and community workshops were needed with a suggestion that each new retail development should be required to have a dedicated space for such activities.

Clearer and more uniform information on products regarding their sustainability and recyclability. Many commented that labelling is confusing and inconsistent and suggested that a uniform approach should be applied. Confusion was also still present around recyclability of materials with more awareness raising needed. Regulation is an issue preventing the upcycling and repair of some items.

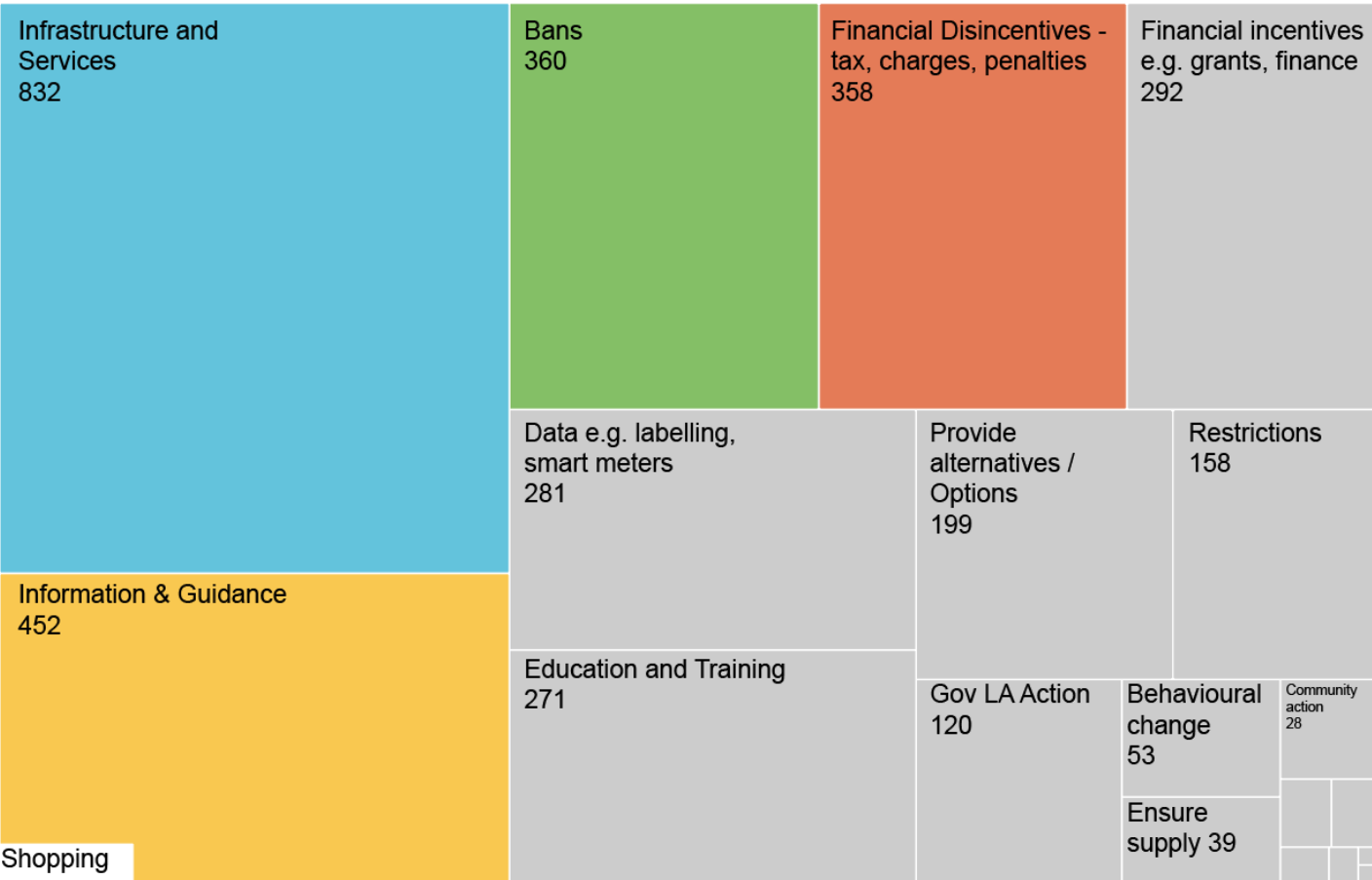
More support for zero waste initiatives and greater regulation on packaging. Small local zero waste stalls and shops were often mentioned. Participants felt they needed to be mainstreamed, and larger super markets more tightly regulated to ensure a faster transition to zero waste. Phasing out plastic was a core concern with calls for regulations to expedite this.

National policy to recognise the need to support cultural change around reduced consumption – Frequent topic of discussion was our “throw away culture” and that a large cultural shift is needed here amongst consumers, but also businesses to create a more circular economy.

POLICY PRIORITIES

Across the individual, youth and community responses, a number of key policy priorities emerged (visualised in the graphic below). These include:

- The provision of **infrastructure and services** that make sustainable products more readily available and allow people to reduce, reuse and repair items along with promoting a circular economy.
- **Physical infrastructure** such as enhanced civic amenity sites that facilitate reuse, community based repair cafes and libraries of things.
- **Institutional/regulatory infrastructure** such as “right to repair” regulation and creation of enabling environment in terms of insurance and other existing barriers to reuse.
- Improvements to the **coherence, accessibility and affordability of existing recycling services**.
- Tighter regulation of plastics and banning hard to recycle materials and packaging.
- Information on guidance, this includes **guidance on repair and reuse as well as improved guidance on recycling**.
- **Financial incentives, particularly in relation to deposit return schemes**.
- Foster circular economy training and employment opportunities, particularly supporting local hubs for social enterprises and others providing services and skills for repair and upcycling.



SHOPPING, REUSE, RECYCLING - QUOTES

"The stuff we discard or throw away should not be taken by private companies to incinerate or in some other way turn it into their profit, that stuff is a community resource which communities should use for their benefit. Let's not call it waste!" - Individual

"Education needed around packaging, consumer choices etc. Zero waste shopping, reducing packaging on food. Getting supermarkets on board." - Community

"Recycling centres need to be more accessible – currently, they don't consider people with disabilities." - Individual

"Paying for waste does not work in rural Ireland. A lot of backyard burning. Also, note no brown bin outside the town area." - Community

"Can we influence supermarkets to stop using so much packaging? try as I may, I cannot shop for food without having a heap of unnecessary plastic to dispose of." - Individual

"Create a culture around reuse and repair that is cool and fashionable by supporting key cultural events, groups or programs promoting these ideals." - Individuals

"More support for social enterprises focused on recycling, reuse and circular economy ...provide training and employment opportunities for people who are long term unemployed." - Community

"Recycling and upcycling, excellent example of this type of project in Castleisland "Revamp", education awareness and a new skills base developed and fostered in this project." - Community

ENVIRONMENT & CLIMATE ADAPTATION



ENVIRONMENT & CLIMATE ADAPTATION- INDIVIDUAL & COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

ISSUES THAT MATTER

A key focus of discussion across Conversations, was the need to enhance environmental protection at national and local levels. It was felt that a paradigm shift was needed whereby we view land as a resource not only for its use/ commodity value but for its ability to act as a carbon sink, create richer biodiversity and beautiful spaces to enjoy. Many spoke highly of local rewilding projects and commented that the visibility and tangibility of such initiatives were key to fostering public interest in environmental issues. Flooding and coastal erosion were key areas of concern, and many called for an increase in national action including greater funding and awareness raising to address this.

Nature-based solutions to address biodiversity and climate crisis – Many felt that a more comprehensive approach is required to valuing the environment as national capital. This would recognise the value of the environment being enhanced and protected to act as a carbon.

Increase resourcing around management and monitoring of biodiversity – Many groups mentioned the need for more funding for the **NPWS** to strengthen their powers and for the Biodiversity Data Centre. Proper adherence to European Directives and management and monitoring of SAC's and SPA's along with establishment of Marine Protected Areas were mentioned.

Increased and urgent action to address challenges of flooding and coastal erosion – Many community groups had been established to focus on responses to coastal erosion and sea level rise to address a stated void in action at national and local authority levels. They felt that more funding should be available for protection measures (nature-based and harder infrastructure)

so that the responsibility does not lie solely with private landholders to tackle flooding or sea level rise issues on their properties. There was concern over the protection of delicate dune systems from erosion and damage along with over-use from recreation (Fingal, Kerry, Clare and DLR?)

Local Authorities to change how they manage hedgerows and green spaces and have more sophisticated plans for rewilding – Groups were unanimous in their calls for bad practices of hedgerow cutting to end. Local authorities to lead by example by ending fertiliser and pesticide use. They should adopt the All-Ireland-Pollinator Plan, create *local biodiversity plans* – *one group suggested they employ create a bee corridor officer*"

Importance of balancing protection, with recreational use – especially since Covid communities, many groups noted that more people are enjoying the local environment, but protective measures were a concern – especially around dune ecosystems.

Training and communications on job opportunities associated with nature protection – focusing on bog restoration. Also upskill contractors managing local authority spaces on best practice.

Further empower and support Tidy Towns, Clean Coasts and other local environmental groups – Tidy Towns groups were often mentioned as being a locus for the development of novel ideas and forging community partnerships. Their evolution to adopt broader concerns such as those linked to Pollinator Plan lauded. It was noted that local beach and litter clean ups are having a key role **in increasing interest in environmental issues.**

Environmental education to be on the syllabus – some calls for formal integration of environmental education in school syllabus.

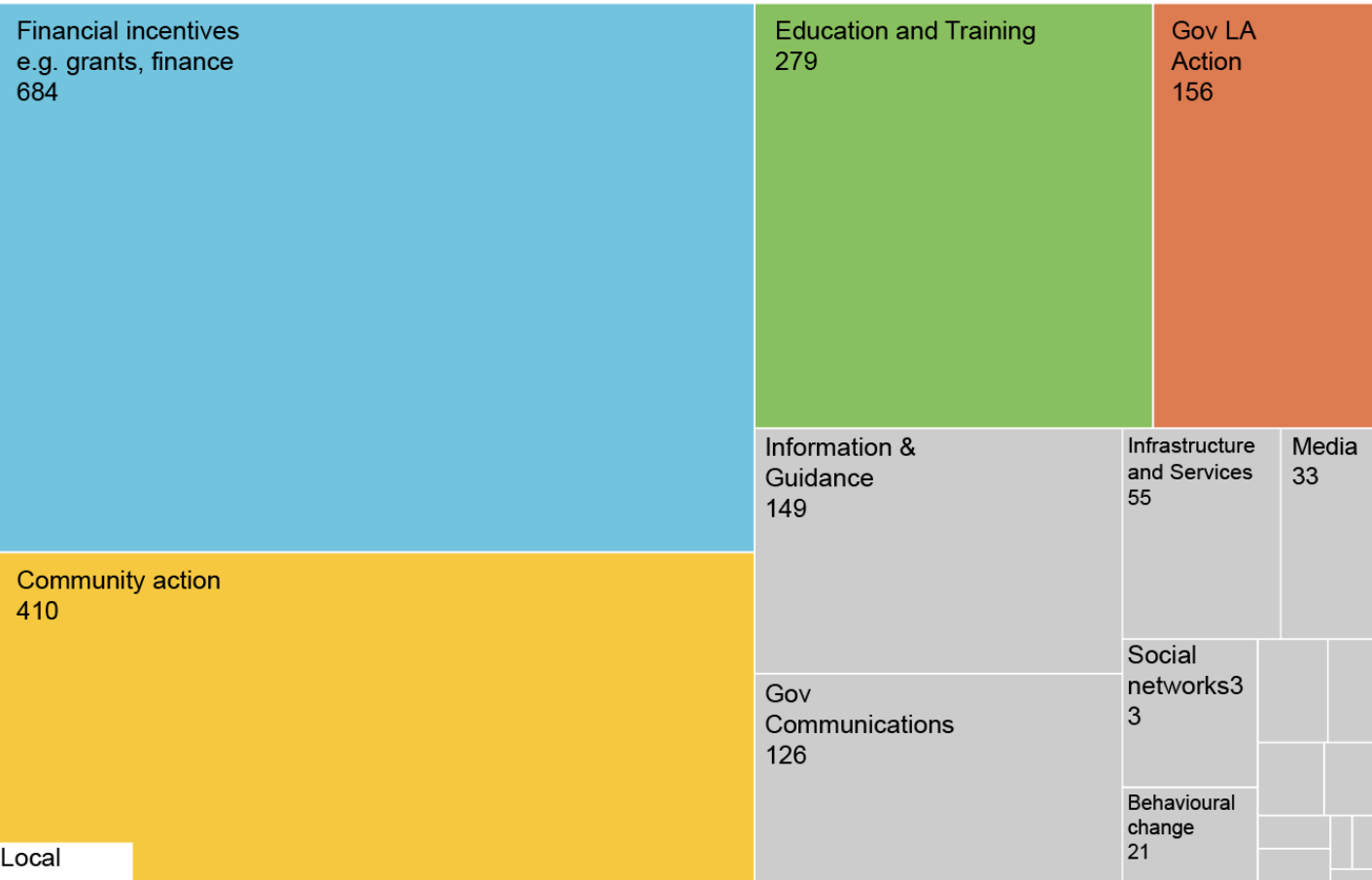
ENVIRONMENT & CLIMATE ADAPTATION - POLICY PRIORITIES

Across the individual, youth and community responses, a number of key policy priorities emerged (visualised in graphic below). These include:

- Provide **increased finance to community initiatives and structures**, and increasing capacity at a local authority level for climate adaptation and biodiversity.
- Providing practical support through **education and training to communities and Local Authorities** to increase biodiversity through planting, green and blue spaces, rewilding and set aside by local authorities.
- Ensure **planning provisions at Local Authority level** for rewilding and habitat protection through County Development Plans & implement All Ireland Pollinator Plan action also through County

Development Plans to zone land for rewilding and buffer zones around habitats.

- Increase policy action and funding for nature protection including **NPWS & the National Biodiversity Data Centre**. Adhere to European directives.
- **National landscape strategy to guide approach to managing land use and renewable projects** in a way that is sensitive to context and ensures protection of designated habitats.



ENVIRONMENT & CLIMATE ADAPTATION - QUOTES

“The OPW needs to make flood defence schemes equitable for the environment. When the flood defence scheme works started in Bandon it was detrimental to wildlife and ecosystem there.” - Individual

"Co Wicklow Tidy Towns groups have developed from planting and clean up work to environmental, biodiversity and heritage projects. Some of them have also developed sub-groups that have begun Sustainable Energy Communities.”
- Community

“Peatlands of Ireland should be evaluated in terms of their value and future potential climate resilience encompassing biodiversity, carbon storage and the alleviation of flooding.”
- Community

"People who are affected by flooding need immediate help, they aren't interested in how biodiversity will help them, as they are watching memories floating out of their house." - Individual

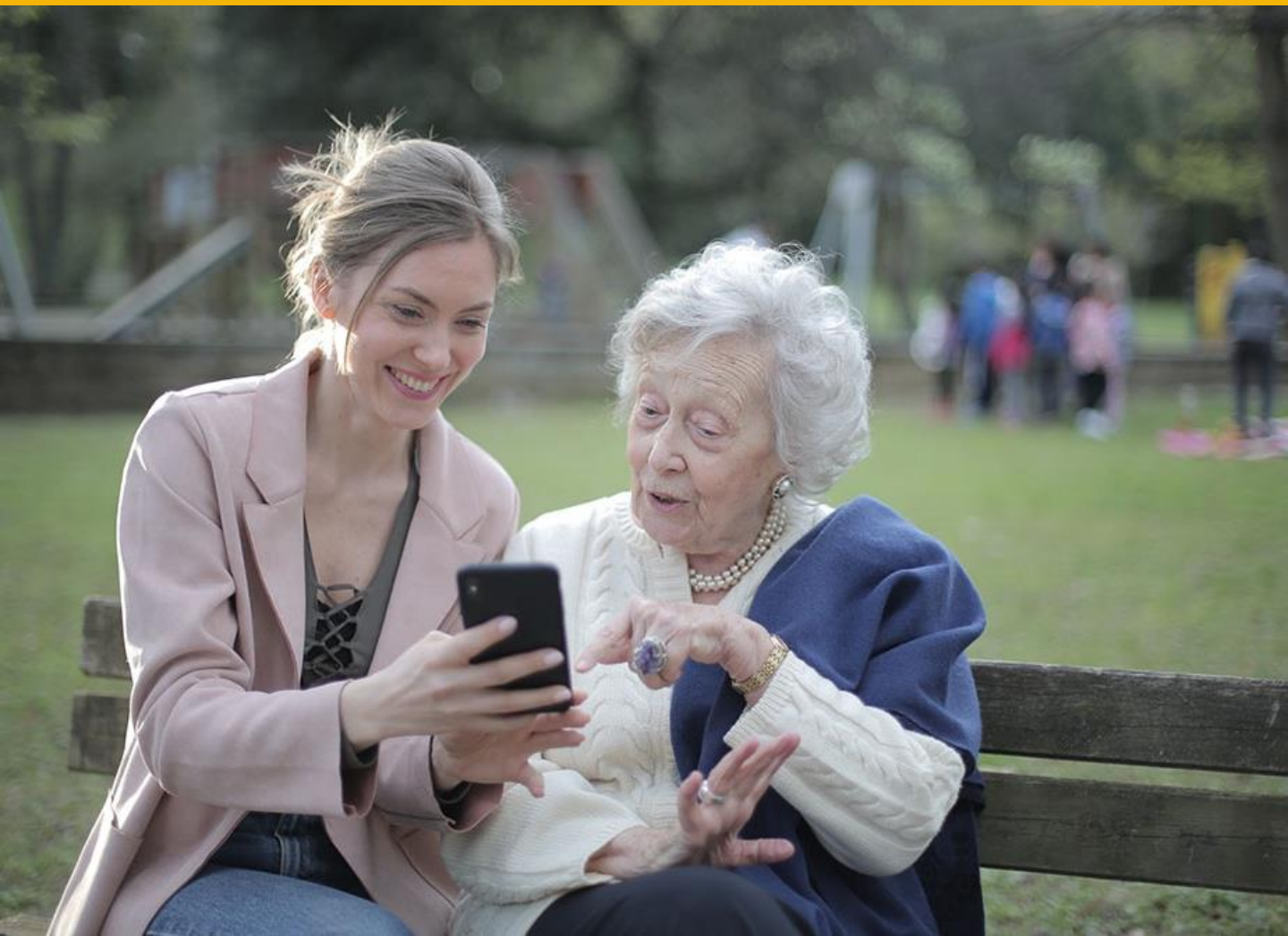
"Huge Concerns for biodiversity and habitat fragmentation. Creation of wildlife corridors both on land and sea needed.”
- Community

"Small, economically-deprived rural areas can be highly dependent on businesses and industries that are located close to a coastline. These are very vulnerable to climate change in terms of rising sea levels and coastal erosion. These are areas that already feel totally neglected by national government, and where education levels are not high; there is just no obvious incentive for anyone there to get on board with climate action." - Individual

"Nature-based solutions, utilising the biodiversity and carbon storage capacity of our wetlands and fens, of which Co. Clare has many under threat" - Community

“Engage with the coastal community network (CORI). Nature based solutions to protect from storms. Encourage students to be involved in planting etc. Awareness around avoiding sand dunes.” - Community

— JUST TRANSITION



EQUALITY & JUST TRANSITION

Themes of justice and fairness emerged across all Conversations and were specifically explored during In-Depth Climate Conversations. While the concept of a ‘Just Transition’ was mentioned specifically by some, most discussion was more general and centred around two key areas:

1) Ensuring that everyone can experience the benefits of the transition by having equal opportunity to:

- Take personal action to adopt a more sustainable lifestyle
- Access green jobs

2) Protecting people from potential negative consequences of :

- Economic restructuring as part of a sustainability transition
- Climate change impacts

1) Equality of opportunity to experience the benefits of the transition:

There was a strong sense that nobody should be excluded from taking personal action to improve the sustainability of their lifestyle for reasons linked to personal circumstances (including income and knowledge) or geography. It was often noted that green living can be seen as a ‘luxury’ for reasons of cost, or time. Many policy measures were suggested to ensure goods and services for sustainable living are accessible. Market instruments, grants and incentives were often proposed to ensure sustainable products & services are cheaper than alternatives (e.g., for EVs, certified sustainable products). A commonly mentioned point was fuel poverty and the need for targeted and extensive grant aid for lower income households. Many communities, particularly in rural settings, noted that they were excluded from adopting sustainable practices due to absence of critical services (e.g., public transport or waste services).

It was felt that greater attention should be

devoted to ensuring equal access to participate in green economy or nature-based jobs. Some worried that jobs in the green economy would accrue to those who are already highly educated in technical professions (e.g., engineering) or that these opportunities may be overstated.

2) Protecting people from negative impacts of climate change & the transition

There was a sense that the speed and scale of the negative impact associated with the closure of polluting industries had not yet been met with similar speed in creating replacement income generation. Amongst some, there was a perception that follow-through on promises linked to reskilling and new jobs hadn’t been delivered on. Speaking about the situation, one midlands participant from the In Depth Conversations referred to the “mythical Just transition”. Some participants emphasised that there will not be a “one size fits all” job alternative. Instead, tailored solutions should be found to match skillsets and job types sought. For example, casual and seasonal labour had been a strong dimension in peat harvesting and there was a question over what a suitable replacement might be. Some suggested jobs connected to rewilding while others spoke about renewable energy but noted that the switching career path would need significant support.

Concern about impacts connected to drought, flooding or coastal erosion as a result of climate change were frequently mentioned. It was noted that those with lower incomes can often be in geographically vulnerable positions with limited financial ability to protect themselves from such consequences.

A broader theme within these arguments was the need to engage with those directly impacted – whether from potential job losses, or extreme weather to develop solutions that best meet their needs.

EQUALITY & JUST TRANSITION - QUOTES

"All climate action measures should be equality proofed and assessed using Climate Justice and Just Transition principles. Socio-economically marginalised communities should not be disproportionately impacted by measures." - Individual

"There will be a big loss of jobs for those involved, directly and indirectly in the fossil fuel energy generation industries. The latest government policy, on feed-in tariffs, which was put to public consultation recently, just offered pathetically small amounts of opportunities for people to feed-in and didn't enable farmers to capitalize on all those empty cows shed roofs that could be covered in solar panels." - Individual

"That climate action is used as a driver for community wealth generation in all the areas of community activity, and that the plans for communities are made by and for them." - Community

"Encourage remote working through better local services to make rural communities more attractive and remote working hubs." - Individual

"The houses with the poorest energy ratings often house those with the lowest incomes. The people who are the least able to fund retrofits." - Individual

"Our local area has been affected by the closure of local power stations. People know about the climate issues but when there is a conflict with jobs and income - it makes it very difficult for people to buy into the change that is required, and it is going to be difficult for government and climate activists to win people over." - Individual

"Electricians/mechanical engineers in power stations etc could/should (?) be re-trained to convert petrol/diesel engines to electric engines and to repair/fix domestic machines. Jobs must be created in these areas." - Individual

"Work towards job creation in parallel with changes which need to be made." - Individual

YOUTH VOICES



YOUTH VOICES

More than 500 young people between 12 and 24 engaged with the Climate Conversation through the online survey, workshops and in-depth Conversation.

Young people are aware of and concerned about climate change, as well as other societal challenges such as inequality and mental health. Young people have shown that they have the capacity and skills to understand and analyse the challenges and to put forward strong cases for climate action.

Across the Conversations, young people expressed many **hopes and concerns** in relation to climate action. While their levels of concern were as high as the wider population, there were differences in how they expressed their concern.

Young people are not necessarily the decision makers at home, school or university in relation to energy, transport and other issues. Because of this, their **sense of agency can be limited**, and they **have high levels of expectation** that others will take climate action on their behalf.

There are **clear anxieties around locally specific climate impacts** (flooding, coastal erosion), local behaviours (littering) and in particular a fear of inaction by government and the wider population. Additionally, many young people expressed concern about climate justice and understand the possible trade-offs of climate action.

Young people are sensitive to issues such as “fake news” and social media and **expect honesty about climate change** in their education and communications from government.

Young people need to be engaged in ways that allow them to **express their views openly**.

Young people recognise the **critical role**

they have played in raising awareness and will insist that the right people in government really listen to them. They need to be shown that their input is valuable and is being acted upon.

Young people do not typically engage in traditional party politics, but they are often politically active through other means such as direct political actions, such as protests, boycotts and e-petitions. Young people also engage in political debates and activism on social media or through the range of youth organisations they engage with.

This means that future engagement of young people on climate action needs to be **meaningful, inclusive, impactful, long term and not “performative”**.

The engagement needs to consider a wider range of channels and platforms through which they can express their opinions and shape decisions beyond traditional public meetings and consultations.

There are a number of different spaces and channels through which young people’s voices can be heard. This includes:

- Formal statutory participation and decision-making structures (e.g. Youth Climate Council)
- Community and youth organisations (e.g. Youth clubs, sports clubs etc)
- Schools
- NGOs and charities
- Own home
- Informal and unstructured engagements

YOUTH VOICES

Any new models of participatory decision-making need to be co-created with young people and the youth organisations they engage with. They also need to adhere to commonly recognise framework of best practice, e.g. the LUNDY model.

While the engagement and participation of young people is often delivered through youth work organisations, they often do not have the resources to engage young people in broader regional/national decision-making processes.

Because of that, youth participation needs to be seen in a wider context of public participation with community development, local authorities and policy-makers actively involved.

YOUTH - QUOTES

"More youth involvement in planning for the future as we are the future."

"I'm concerned that we won't act in time to prevent warming reaching 1.5 degrees. I'm concerned that the older generation do not care as they will not have to face the consequences of climate change."

"Work with more youth groups to raise awareness or get ideas about what else we can do - base the climate action plan on what has worked well in other countries that have success in these areas."

"I hope that my area can lower its carbon footprint and like not just stop harming the environment, but also do things that are positive for it like planting trees etc."

"I hope that people will care for the world more, less littering, less hunting for fun and mass culling for fashion, meats, and the overproduction, which can be replaced by green materials."

"I'm worried that we lose things critical to our survival like bees, because they pollinate plants and plant produce oxygen etc. We live in a fragile ecosystem that is at a tipping point in regard to our ecosystem."

"We should have a government campaign like they did for the COVID 19 restrictions about climate change. This could include how you can help."

"As of now in my local community, effects of climate change are not really being seen. Which I feel is the biggest problem. As the effects are invisible no one is really doing anything other than young people! We need to educate everyone."

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



COMMUNITY ACTION COMMON THEMES ACROSS CONVERSATIONS

ISSUES THAT MATTER

Participants in the Community Conversations emphasised that many solutions to climate change are out there in the form of community-led initiatives which improve lives and localities and promote behaviour change and environmental awareness at the individual level.

Many participants had been involved in community action and experienced the challenges and benefits and were strong advocates of any supports to make it easier for community action.

Initiatives that have applied **social enterprise models** were frequently mentioned as being very promising given that they simultaneously address challenges of environment, employment and regeneration.

People **experience and understand climate change at a local, tangible level** and visible initiatives relating to the natural environment or infrastructure (such as cycle paths) are therefore high priority.

Biodiversity was the dominant issue raised in respect to local climate action reflecting the importance that people ascribe to framing the climate and biodiversity crises as interlinked. There were many calls for more support to communities for projects to increase biodiversity through planting, rewilding and enhancement of green and blue spaces.

Community energy initiatives were also a primary focus for participants, where discussions focused on issues with existing structures such as SECs, through to very early-stage initiatives on sustainable energy consumption or production.

Other core areas of discussion included community re-use and upcycling projects, initiatives connected to supporting and building skills for active mobility, community growing projects, lobby groups, and groups connected to environmental protection and clean-ups (See visual on page 22 which represents some of the more common

community initiatives mentioned.)

CHALLENGES

A primary concern is the ongoing **reliance on volunteers** to deliver community projects, particularly time-intensive and technically demanding energy projects. Connected to this was the challenge of securing continuity and commitment from volunteers to deliver long-term projects.

Many emphasised the need for more **technical support and guidance** around developing and managing initiatives and securing funding. The SEC structure, while challenging in some ways, provides a structured roadmap for groups which is valuable. Some called for similar approaches across other domains.

Lack of **knowledge on funding streams** and **challenges of completing complex funding applications** were mentioned frequently as major barriers to action.

There is a need for better **communications** with interested groups and individuals about what's going on in their local area and fostering the development of networks.

Some groups noted that the absence of **baseline environmental and emissions indicators** posed a challenge to developing initiatives that were strategically aligned with county-level challenges and Action Plans.

ENABLING COMMUNITY ACTION

CLIMATE ACTION FUND & POLICY PRIORITIES

CLIMATE ACTION FUND

Participants in Community Conversations were specifically asked for their feedback on how the next Climate Action Fund should be designed. Reflecting on community needs and challenges faced in relation to funding previously, their key recommendations are provided below:

- **Simplify the process:** Make it easier and less time-consuming to apply for CAF and avoid very short application deadlines. Simplify language in funding calls which can be very technical. Reduce paperwork once funding is secured.
- **Varied funding scales, longer term funding & accounting for application development :** provide varied levels of funding for smaller projects, through to larger projects that require significant financial investment. Remove the need for match funding. Reimburse time spent on application if funding is successful. Long-term funding to enable further impact.
- **Assistance with application and project management:** Dedicated CAF support staff or Climate Action teams in Local Authorities to assist in developing applications, formulating partnerships and in managing projects. Templates for projects to demonstrate successful initiatives.
- **Suggestions for types of projects:** Focus on climate justice and just transition; ensure strong link to impact (as measured by indicators, but also being cognisant of intangible social impacts); allow for cross-cutting projects (not just linked with single issue or theme).
- **Administration of funds-** A suggestion that Local Community Development

Committees could allocate the funding as they contain varied representation from local government and community sector.

- **Broaden types of groups eligible for funding and ensure inclusivity:** As an example, participants commented that sports clubs and schools have grounds but do not get funding for environmental projects. Funding should be available to individuals and community champions, as well as community groups. Attempts should be made to involve marginalised communities.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM ACROSS CONVERSATIONS TO ENABLE COMMUNITY ACTION

- There were numerous calls for a dedicated support team within Local Authorities to enable local groups to take further action and guide funding processes.
- Creation of county-level baseline data capturing status of natural resources (such as land, water, forestry) and on energy production and consumption. These would feed into local authority policy action and could inform community initiatives.
- Mechanisms to support enhanced knowledge sharing and collaboration between groups – to visualise innovative projects and show priority issues and opportunities for different communities.
- Clear commitment to building structures for ongoing participation and engagement with community groups.

COMMUNITY ACTION - QUOTES

“Community gardens, community allotments, improves the quality of life, connectiveness and inter-generational, but needs consistent support, both from a financial perspective and personal: it seems to be supported for a period of time by the LA, and then dropped without any continuing support, resulting in disappointment from the community and a lack of trust in getting involved in future projects.” - Community

“Lots of local led projects are very successful on the ground but there is a lack of knowledge at policy level on these projects. Example - Clifden Tidy Towns- active in biodiversity projects, however there is a lack of cohesive national plan coming from the top down.”

- Community

“The funders should be coming into communities and supporting the delivery and application stage.”

- Community

“A climate action support team in every LA to ensure that the enthusiasm, energy and commitment of local groups is harnessed and facilitated and supported where necessary by expertise, research and technical/planning supports.”

- Community

“Application processes need to be simplified and designed with the volunteer in mind.”

- Community

“Funding needs to be targeting initiatives that are regenerative and redistributive.”

- Community

“The Climate Action Fund needs to be thought about in a systems-based approach. Cannot think about this in silos. Funding calls often have themes – communities are designing projects to suit funding calls when they would prefer to spend money on other more pressing issues.”

- Community

“There are many examples of very good projects that preserve and protect our environment but they don't have the policy supports and mechanisms that would build them up to a significantly beneficial scale or be replicated elsewhere.” - Community

CLIMATE CONVERSATIONS PARTICIPANT PERSPECTIVES & A WAY FORWARD

Having robust, inclusive and impactful engagement processes were considered vital. For this reason, many were supportive of the Climate Conversations in general and were hopeful that they would represent a new chapter on government approach to public engagement. PPN participants felt it validated the work done by PPN groups, and how important their knowledge and engagement will be in finding and implementing solutions. Youth groups were enthusiastic about having a dedicated platform to share their hopes, concerns and ideas.

Participants from Community Conversations were asked for their feedback on the process via survey. There were 146 respondents, of which 83% stated the design was 'very good' or 'good', and 98% said it allowed them to express their hopes & concerns around climate action 'adequately', or 'partially'.

- A key feature that participants found enjoyable was the opportunity to meet and collaborate – several groups said it gave them the impetus to continue working together (with two groups using the workshop as a basis to start their PPN Strategic Policy Committees). They also appreciated the focus provided by the direct link between the events and the formulation of the Climate Action Plan and Climate Action Fund. Presence from relevant staff from Local Authorities and Climate Action Regional Offices and the Climate Conversation team was welcomed.
- Some practical challenges were faced by PPN coordinators and volunteers in running the online Conversations. These were connected to; the technical challenges of running an online event, the

varying levels of: knowledge of climate change and policy amongst participants, and differing levels of resources and capacity within the PPNs to host and evaluate the Conversations. Many were positive about the support and briefing provided by the Climate Conversations team – this would need to be built upon to provide consistent support if future Conversations of a similar format take place.

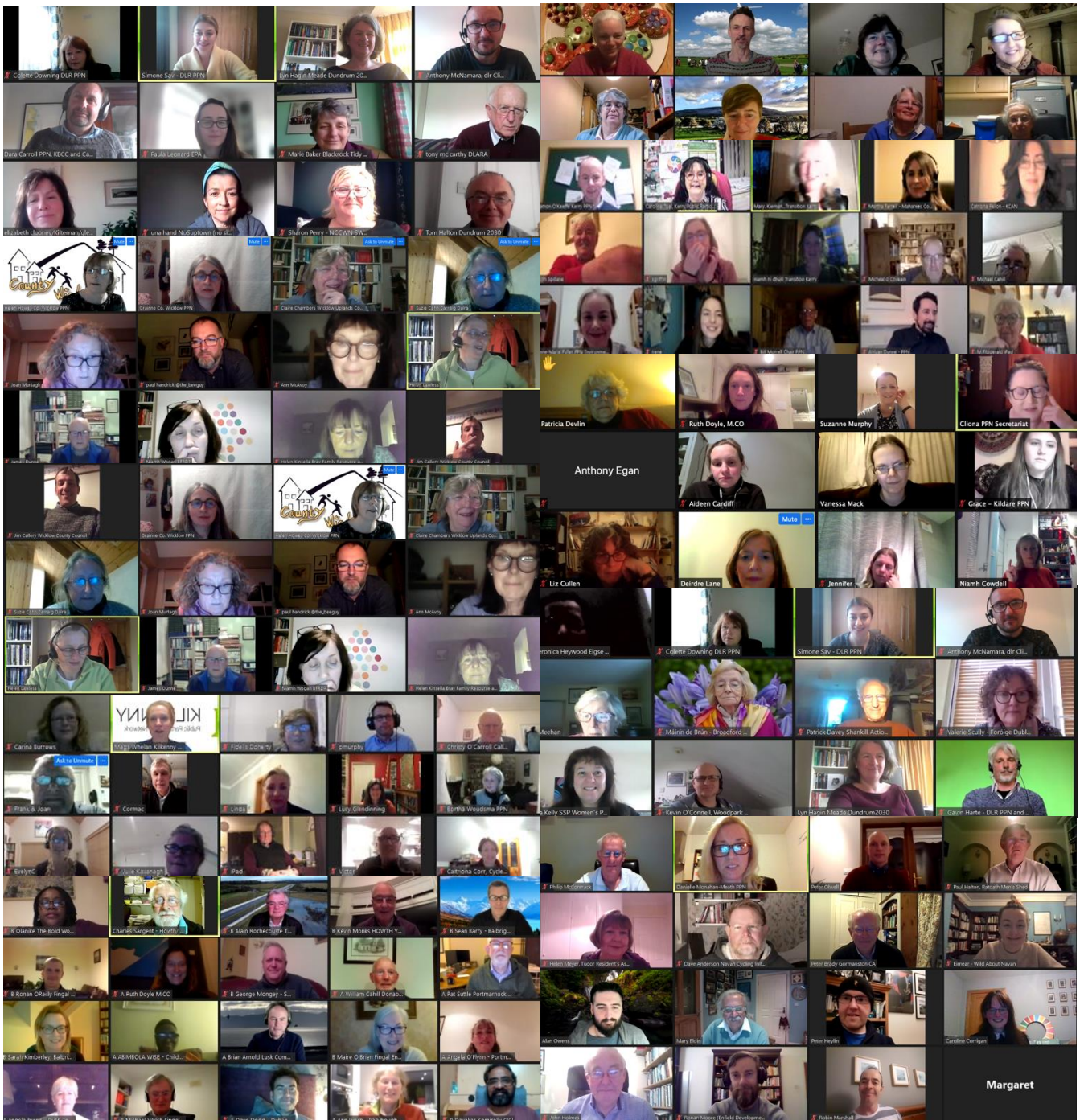
- Suggestions for future Conversation activities included: making Climate Action Plan Conversations an annual event, having issue-specific and collaboration focused meet-ups for local groups particularly around funding; capturing and communicating feedback from Conversations clearly to ensure forward momentum and transparency. Only 15% want to revert to in-person events in future with 62% wanting a mixture of both online and offline events.
- Some respondents felt that participants represented a good mix of interests and backgrounds, while others stated that a wider variety of voices could be included.
- A significant amount of effort and energy was invested by over 200 participants who took part in Community Conversations. They emphasised the importance of results being acted upon and need to be convinced of the impact and efficacy of the Conversations Consultation. Some had experienced previous disappointment of making submissions at local and national level and felt recommendations weren't acted upon.

NEXT STEPS

The Conversations showed huge appetite for more extensive and ambitious national policy action to enable and encourage individuals, businesses, and the public sector to take more climate action. Challenges to individual and community action were highlighted and specific suggestions for policy interventions were made to address these, along with proposals for ways of working and collaborating to achieve societal transition.

This feedback is being reviewed by the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC) and will inform the design of the Climate Action Plan 2021. The DECC will publish a response to the feedback online setting out how the Climate Action Plan responds to needs and issues identified.

The process applied for the Climate Conversations is being reviewed for its potential to become part of an enduring structure of engagement as part of the National Dialogue on Climate Action.



THANK YOU TO ALL
WHO TOOK PART IN
THE CONVERSATION.



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