Talking Green:
The Irish Survey

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Acknowledgements

Executive Summary

This is the Irish instalment of the Talking Green research project exploring perceptions of climate action across Europe. It is based on a survey of 1,010 respondents conducted in summer 2021. The research attempts to understand how climate action is viewed by the Irish public when compared to other pressing priorities, the hopes or fears that climate action evokes and the most effective messaging to communicate the crisis and the necessary response. The survey also explored levels of trust, which will be essential for a stable transition to zero-carbon societies. Finally, the questionnaire sought to understand the appetite among the public for bottom-up initiatives that would be community-led.

The survey findings serve as important reading for those wishing to see transformative action on the climate crisis. For instance:

- **Climate change is not considered a top priority by the public.** Addressing climate change was most frequently ranked lowest by respondents - with 31% of respondents ranking climate as the least important priority of those given. **Only 6% of respondents ranked addressing climate change as their most important priority** and less than one in five respondents (18%) ranked climate change in their top three priorities.
- **Climate change is not the main priority for young people.** Only the youngest generation surveyed broke double figures (11%) when it comes to ranking climate action as their main priority. Other priorities such as housing (26%), improving healthcare (19%) and addressing homelessness (16%) outstrip climate action in terms of immediate priorities for this cohort.
- **There are class divisions in terms of prioritisation of climate change, but they are not very pronounced.** When considering results based by class categories, the upper-/middle-middle class cohort prioritise climate action more than the rest, however their ranking of climate is still very low.
- **The farming community show the most substantial de-prioritisation of climate action** with more than four out of every five respondents ranking it in the bottom half of their priorities. This highlights the uneasy relationship between the farming community and environmental action in Ireland.
- **Politicians suffer from a lack of trust on issues of national importance.** On the question of who to trust on issues of national importance like climate change, over half of respondents (51%) said they would trust scientists, academics or researchers, followed by 43% of respondents who said they would trust family and friends. Concerningly, respondents showed a significant distrust of politicians, both parliamentary and local, with only 13% indicating trust in Teachtaí Dála (members of parliament) and 12% indicating trust in local councillors.
- **A majority of respondents indicated that they were concerned that the policies implemented to tackle climate change would make their lives harder.** Sixty per cent of respondents over the age of 55 believed this to be the case.

These findings should not be interpreted as an argument to slow climate action, but rather to consider how it is designed. The low prioritisation of climate change, the distrust in politicians and the concern about the potential burdens of climate action indicate that climate action processes which do not consider the needs and priorities of the communities in which they are implemented, may not be socially sustainable and may further erode the social contract. Further analysis would be required to probe the causes for these perceptions, but it would seem clear that in order to succeed, climate action should address local development in order to deliver for people as well as the planet.

1. Introduction

To be fast, climate action must be fair. This was the underlying message of *The People's Transition: Community-led Development for Climate Action*, a report published in November 2020 by the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) and the Think-tank for Action on Social Change (TASC). The report proposed a model for participative climate action to enable a fast and fair transition, predicated upon three core assumptions. These assumptions, which were developed through extensive consultations with some of the professions most at-risk from climate action in Ireland, were:

i)   The urgent nature of the climate crisis means that action will need to be taken in the absence of widespread public support.

ii) Therefore, to be successful, climate action must proactively build public support as it is implemented.

iii) To build public support, climate action must address local needs and priorities because people care more about local development deficits than they do about climate change.

The publication of the People's Transition catalysed two new projects. The first, a series of pilot projects to test the proposed model in an urban and rural context in Ireland. The second, a follow up collaboration between FEPS and TASC – as well as the Fabian Society in the UK and the Institute for Social Democracy in Hungary – to explore public perceptions of climate action across Europe and test the underlying assumptions of the People's Transition. The latter project was given the name "Talking Green".

This report summarises the findings from a survey conducted in July 2021 as part of the Talking Green project. The survey had 1,010 respondents, 486 male and 524 female. A significant advantage of the survey is it provides the opportunity to interrogate responses based on the age profile of respondents, as well as other contexts which could play a role in shaping perceptions such as class, working status, region of the country and life stage.

The survey's five questions which sought to: (i) assess how climate action is prioritised when compared to other issues of concern to the public; (ii) assess who the public trusts on issues of national importance; (iii) assess how the public perceives climate action; (iv) assess the most effective communication approach for climate action; and (v) assess whether top-down or bottom-up climate action is viewed most favourably by the public.

2. Prioritisation of climate action against other issues of concern in Ireland

Efforts to understand the importance of climate action in the lives of citizens can sometimes flatter to deceive. This is perhaps most evident in the People's Vote, a massive survey of 1.5 million people conducted by the United Nations Development Programme and the University of Oxford. The Peoples' Climate Vote involved two "big picture" questions followed by six policy questions where the respondent could select up to three preferences per question[1].

The first "big picture" drove the headlines that the report generated around the world. It offered a binary yes, no response to the question "Do you think climate change is a global emergency?". 64% of respondents replied yes, and the Guardian ran the headline *UN global climate poll: 'The people's voice is clear – they want action'.* But is that true? Can we say anything about what the people want based on such a reductive question?

The reality of people's lives is complex – many competing priorities and challenges mean that it can be hard to focus on long term challenges, particularly challenges as vast as climate change. The purpose of the first part of the Talking Green Irish Survey was to understand how people perceive the importance of climate action in their daily life. To achieve this, addressing climate change was presented to respondents along with eight other issues of concern to Irish people. Respondents were asked to rank the issues by importance to themselves and their family, from 1 (being most important) to 9 (being least important).

Figure 1: How does climate change rank against other issues that Irish people care about?

Rank (1 = most important; 9 = least important)	Improving the health care system	Improving the education system	Addressing climate change	Tackling crime	Ensuring effective use of public funds	Addressing waste and protecting the environment	Ensuring economic recovery and employment	Addressing housing	Addressing homelessness and poverty
1	35%	4%	6%	8%	5%	2%	11%	17%	11%
2	19%	8%	4%	15%	7%	6%	11%	17%	14%
3	15%	9%	8%	12%	10%	8%	11%	13%	14%
4	11%	11%	8%	12%	11%	11%	13%	12%	13%
5	8%	13%	8%	13%	13%	10%	14%	12%	10%
6	5%	13%	9%	13%	15%	13%	12%	9%	11%
7	3%	14%	11%	10%	15%	17%	12%	8%	9%
8	2%	13%	15%	9%	13%	21%	10%	8%	10%
9	2%	14%	31%	10%	12%	11%	6%	5%	8%

The perception of the importance of climate change when compared to other areas of concern – all respondents. (Question: Looking at the below list of issues, please rank these from the most to least important to you and your family.)

Addressing climate change was most frequently given the lowest priority rank by respondents, with 31% of respondents ranking it as their lowest priority. Only 6% of respondents ranked addressing climate change as their most important priority and less than one in five respondents (18%) ranked climate change in their top three priorities. Based on the frequency of receiving a rank between 1 and 3, the main areas of concern for respondents were improving the healthcare system (69%), addressing housing (47%), and addressing homelessness and poverty (39%).

These responses point to two other major crises unfolding at the time of the survey – the COVID-19 pandemic and the housing crisis. This illustrates that climate action cannot be viewed in a vacuum. To

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[1] UNDP (2021) The People's Climate Vote, UNDP and University of Oxford. Available at: https://www.undp.org/publications/peoples-climate-vote#modal-publication-download

understand how its importance is perceived, it is necessary to understand other, potentially interrelated issues which occupy the public's attention. A element of this prioritisation could be down to what Seabrooke and Tsingou identify as fast- and slow-burning crises, where climate is viewed on a longer timescale than the pandemic or the housing crisis, the impacts of which are felt more acutely in the here and now[2].

The survey results present the opportunity to interrogate gender disaggregated responses and the age profile of respondents. Looking at the responses to the prioritisation of climate action by gender and age highlights some interesting findings. Firstly, there is little difference between how the priority of climate action is assessed by men and women.

Figure 2: Which cohorts prioritise climate change in Ireland?

Rank	Total	Male	Female	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
1	6%	8%	5%	11%	6%	4%	7%	5%	7%
2	4%	4%	5%	7%	5%	3%	5%	4%	3%
3	8%	7%	8%	15%	7%	9%	6%	6%	6%
4	8%	6%	9%	9%	7%	7%	4%	11%	9%
5	8%	9%	7%	10%	8%	9%	6%	6%	7%
6	9%	9%	10%	7%	15%	7%	8%	6%	13%
7	11%	10%	12%	14%	14%	8%	12%	15%	8%
8	15%	16%	14%	14%	13%	16%	18%	14%	13%
9	31%	30%	31%	13%	26%	37%	33%	33%	33%

The ranking of climate change as an issue of concern, broken out by gender and age. (Question: Looking at the below list of issues, please rank these from the most to least important to you and your family.)

Secondly, only the youngest generation surveyed broke double figures (11%) when it comes to ranking climate action as their main priority. This speaks to the greater awareness of young people of the climate crisis. However, the fact that just one in ten 18- to 24-year-olds saw climate change as their main priority indicates that even with the prominence of the youth climate movement, other priorities such as housing (26%), improving healthcare (19%) and addressing homelessness (16%) outstrip climate action in terms of immediate priorities for this cohort. Interestingly, only 4% of this age cohort saw environmental protection and reducing waste as their number one priority.

Figure 3: What are the primary concerns of only the youngest voters?

Rank	Improving the health care system	Improving the education system	Addressing climate change	Tackling crime	Ensuring effective use of public funds	Addressing waste and protecting the environment	Ensuring economic recovery and employment	Addressing housing	Addressing homelessness and poverty
1	19%	6%	11%	7%	3%	4%	9%	26%	16%
2	20%	3%	7%	8%	6%	8%	12%	18%	17%
3	14%	7%	15%	3%	9%	11%	12%	13%	17%
4	17%	8%	9%	5%	11%	11%	10%	13%	16%
5	10%	18%	10%	10%	11%	12%	16%	7%	5%
6	10%	13%	7%	11%	14%	15%	19%	5%	7%
7	4%	17%	14%	13%	16%	15%	7%	5%	10%
8	2%	16%	14%	15%	14%	17%	10%	6%	6%
9	4%	12%	13%	27%	17%	9%	6%	7%	5%

The perception of the importance of climate change when compared to other areas of concern – 18–24-year-olds only. (Question: Looking at the below list of issues, please rank these from the most to least important to you and your family.)

[2] Seabrooke, L & Tsingou, E (2019) Europe's fast- and slow-burning crises, Journal of European Public Policy, 26:3, 468-481, DOI: 10.1080/13501763.2018.1446456

Another interesting finding presented by the age profile of respondents on the issue of addressing climate change is that we see the lowest prioritisation from the 35- to 44-year-olds age category. This is a trend which we see across the data set more generally – that the most indifferent to climate action are not the older age groups, but rather this middle group who seem to have other focuses and concerns. This is possibly because this age cohort is grappling with some of the worst impacts of the current confluence of crises and has, in their relatively short professional lives, experienced significant interruptions in the Global Financial Crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. Of this cohort, 37% prioritised improving the healthcare system, 15% prioritised addressing housing and 13% prioritised economic recovery.

A core focus on the Talking Green study across all three countries currently involved is the intersection of climate concern with social class[3]. The breakdown of results by class shows us that it is the upper-middle and middle-middle class respondents that prioritise climate action highest, but as with the youth cohort in the age breakdown, even this group only shows one in ten respondents putting climate action as their highest priority.

There is however a clear difference between the prioritisation of climate action with upper-/middle-middle class cohort and the rest. There could be three possible factors driving this outcome. Firstly, the upper-/middle-middle class cohort could have access to better information and so an enhanced awareness of the climate crisis thus understands the existential risks more clearly[4]. Secondly, the lower-middle class and working-class cohorts may be more directly and repeatedly impacted by the more immediate priorities in the list of options and so deprioritise climate change accordingly[5]. Thirdly, the solutions to the climate crisis may seem more accessible or affordable to the upper-/middle-middle class respondents and may seem inaccessible to the lower-middle class and working-class respondents, as seems to be borne out by findings to be discussed later. More study would be required to ascertain the contribution of these drivers.

Figure 4: Socio-economic status and perceptions of climate change

Rank	Upper/Middle Middle Class (AB)	Lower Middle Class (C1)	Skilled Working Class (C2)	Working Class/Non-Working (DE)	Farmers (F)
1	11%	6%	5%	6%	8%
2	7%	5%	5%	3%	0%
3	11%	9%	4%	8%	3%
4	9%	6%	8%	9%	3%
5	12%	9%	7%	7%	3%
6	10%	10%	9%	8%	15%
7	8%	10%	9%	13%	24%
8	12%	16%	14%	17%	9%
9	21%	29%	40%	30%	35%

The perception of the importance of climate change when compared to other areas of concern – broken down by social class. (Question: Looking at the below list of issues, please rank these from the most to least important to you and your family.)

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[3] Demarcations can be found in the technical annex.

[4] Information inequalities have been given significant consideration with regards the digital divide, but only recently has attention been paid to its role in shaping perceptions of climate change. E.g. Toward Just Climate-Change Coalitions (2018) by Danielle Endres, Tracylee Clarke, Autumn Garrison and Tarla Rai Peterson. Found in Social Movement to Address Climate Change: Local Steps for Global Action.

[5] This has been evidenced by recent TASC research which has shown that that lower-middle and middle classes have been disproportionately affected by the rise in housing prices (Cherishing All Equally, Sweeney 2019) for example, or that as many as 6 out of 10 Irish persons have to borrow/use savings to cover essential bills (Exploring Household Debt in Ireland, Lajoie 2020).

Rank	Urban	Rural
1	7%	6%
2	5%	2%
3	8%	7%
4	8%	8%
5	8%	9%
6	8%	13%
7	10%	14%
8	16%	11%
9	30%	31%

The survey also breaks out the farming community respondents. These respondents show the most substantial de-prioritisation of climate action with more than four out of every five respondents ranking it in the bottom half of their priorities. This highlights the uneasy relationship between the farming community and environmental action in Ireland. Interestingly, the farming respondent's prioritisation does not seem to reflect rural Ireland more broadly, as the prioritisation of climate action among rural respondents is quite like that of urban respondents, with only a slightly greater de-prioritisation of climate action in rural areas.

It is very evident from the data around the prioritisation of climate action that there is not yet widespread public support for climate action. While more and more people across Ireland are coming to understand the importance of the climate crisis, there are still more immediate priorities for which they care more deeply. This would suggest that care must be given to the design on climate policies that intersect with these other areas of concern.

3. Trust in decision making

The People's Transition places significant importance on the promotion of trust between the public and decision makers if climate action is to be successful. To achieve this, the People's Transition attempts to describe a model that engages communities on their terms, in a representative manner, to distil their priorities and address them with solutions that both enhance community well-being and act to drive down emissions and build adaptive capacity.

It recognises, as is borne out by the previous section, that communities should not be expected to process the multifaceted challenges of understanding climate solutions that both reduce emissions and tackle inequality. However, those communities should be confident in having their voices heard and be able to trust in a bottom-up approach to policymaking that will respond to their needs in such a way that the systematic challenges presented by climate change are addressed.

As a proxy to understand the current level of trust between communities and decision makers, the survey asked respondents who they trust when considering issues of national importance and provide a list of nine potential sources of information.

The responses to this question are particularly illuminating. Over half of respondents (51%) said they would trust scientists, academics or researchers, followed by 43% of respondents who said they would trust family and friends. Concerningly, a significant distrust in politicians appears, both parliamentary and local, with only 13% indicating trust in Teachtaí Dála (members of parliament) and 12% indicating trust in local councillors. This does not bode well for the introduction of sweeping reforms required to tackle climate change.

Chart 1: Trust in various sources of information, by gender.
(Question: When considering issues of national importance, who do you trust?)
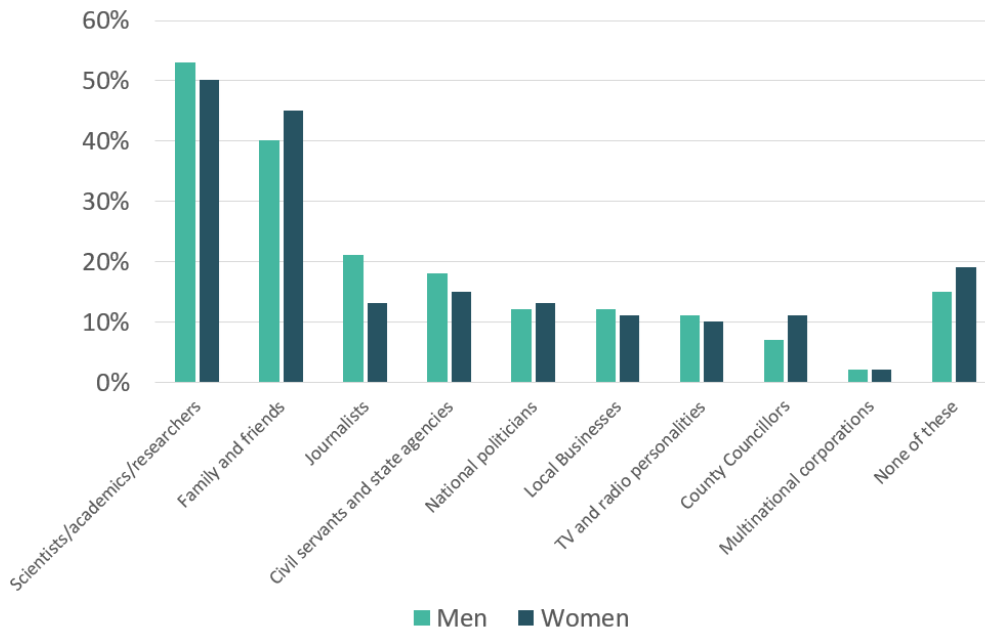
Similarly, respondents expressed a significant lack of trust in the media. Just 17% said they trusted journalists while 10% said they trusted TV and radio personalities when it came to issues of national importance. An oversight in the design of this survey was the failure to break out the media into local and national, as this may have presented a different picture. Finally, respondents across the board indicated a complete lack of trust in multi-national corporations, which should provide some food for thought when considering the means through which climate action is implemented.

Figure 6: Trust in various sources of information, by age group.

Source	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Scientists/academics/researchers	59%	47%	45%	46%	58%	57%
Family and friends	38%	38%	41%	45%	47%	45%
Journalists	21%	16%	18%	16%	19%	15%
Civil servants and state agencies	20%	13%	15%	17%	13%	22%
National politicians	17%	8%	12%	10%	12%	20%
Local Businesses	15%	12%	13%	10%	11%	10%
TV and radio personalities	13%	7%	12%	9%	14%	7%
County Councillors	12%	9%	8%	7%	11%	11%
Multinational corporations	5%	2%	2%	3%	1%	2%
None of these	7%	21%	19%	18%	15%	17%

(Question: When considering issues of national importance, who do you trust?)

When the respondents in this section are broken out by age, we see that the younger and older cohorts hold the opinion of scientists, academics and researchers in high regard. However, between the ages of 25- and 54-years old, the trust in expertise drops. Further research would be required to understand this, but it aligns with the lack of prioritisation of climate change seen in the last section.

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Chart 2: Trust in various sources of information, by class.
(Question: When considering issues of national importance, who do you trust?)
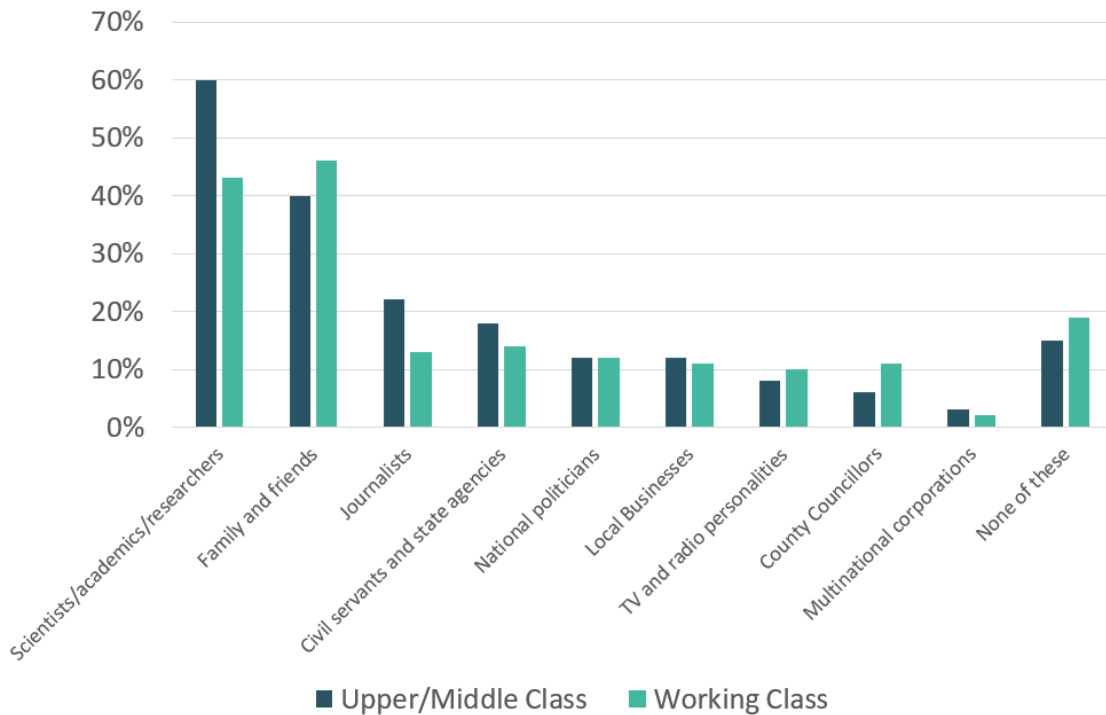
For information of national importance, we notice a significant difference between the trust held by upper-/middle-class respondents and working-class respondents in terms of trusting experts. While 60% of upper-/middle-class respondents indicate a trust in experts, just 43% of working-class respondents express a similar valuing of expert opinion. This again could present complications in delivering effective climate action in working class communities. That said, in terms of both cohorts, trust in experts outstrips trust in the media or politicians.

4. Perceptions of climate action

The People's Transition report points out that while it is often assumed that education or awareness of climate change serves as a key determinant of public perception, several studies contradict this[6]. These studies suggest that education and raising awareness may not be sufficient to build support for climate action. Not only does knowledge of climate change serve as a poor predictor of desire for climate action but it may also cause divergence in opinion based on people's political persuasion.

The socio-economic situation that a person finds themselves in is more likely to determine whether climate change is of immediate

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[6] Whitmarsh, L., (2011). 'Scepticism and uncertainty about climate change: dimensions, determinants and change over time.', Global Environmental Change, 21 (2), 690–700.; Lee, T.M., E.M. Markowitz, P. D. Howe, Ko, C.-Y., A. A. Leiserowitz, (2015). 'Predictors of public climate change awareness and risk perception around the world.', Nature Climate Change, 5 (11), 1014–1020.;

concern, with individuals who have achieved a certain standard of living more readily disposed to engage with concerns of a less immediate nature[7].

A recent study of the 23 European countries contained in the European Social Survey found that people who place themselves on the right side of the political spectrum have a lower level of education, and who prioritise self-enhancement over self-transcendence values, are more likely to be less concerned about climate change, hold climate sceptical views and perceive fewer negative impacts[8].

It would be fair to take from this that the underlying factors which determine the prioritisation of climate action are relatively inelastic and so will not be transformed in the timeframe necessary to avoid climate breakdown. Indeed, just as political support for climate change builds, so does political opposition. This polarisation is evident in the surge of support for right-wing populist parties across Europe, with many of the factors building support for climate action simultaneously boosting parties that hold positions of climate denial.

It is fair to assert that climate change has not become the key priority of electorates in time to secure political cover for the measures necessary to avoid dangerous climate change. Therefore, it holds that if catastrophic climate change is to be avoided, decision makers will now have to take the necessary decisions to combat climate breakdown without the assurance of a supportive electorate.

I don't believe in man-made climate change

Agree: 9%
Disagree: 77%
Undecided: 14%

To understand contemporary perceptions of climate action, the Talking Green Irish Survey presented respondents with a selection of statements about climate change and climate action and asked repondents to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the statement.

On a positive note, it appears the age of climate denial is mostly over in Ireland, with 77% of respondents disagreeing with the assertion that climate change is not real.

Similarly, almost half of respondents disagreed with the assertion that they did not have time to worry about climate change, given other competing priorities, compared to 28% who felt that statement was true.

I don't have time to worry about climate change, I have more pressing priorities

Agree: 28%
Disagree: 45%
Undecided: 27%

Perhaps the most interesting about this finding is that the breakdown remained constant across all classes – though a significantly higher proportion of farmers (40%) agreed with the statement than disagreed (36%). This is concerning given the potential impact of climate change on the farming community in Ireland.

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[7] Lo, A.Y., Chow, A.T. (2015) The relationship between climate change concern and national wealth. Climatic Change 131, 335–348. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-015-1378-2
[8] Poortingaa et al, (2019). 'Climate change perceptions and their individual-level determinants: A cross European analysis', Global Environmental Change, 55, 25-35.

Figure 7: Response to the phrase: "I don't have time to worry about climate change, I have more pressing priorities".

Agree or Disagree	Upper/ Middle Middle Class (AB)	Lower Middle Class (C1)	Skilled Working Class (C2)	Working Class/Non-Working (DE)	Farmers (F)
Strongly agree	8%	11%	11%	8%	19%
Slightly agree	21%	17%	23%	15%	21%
Neither agree nor disagree	17%	23%	27%	30%	18%
Slightly disagree	20%	24%	20%	19%	25%
Strongly disagree	33%	25%	18%	26%	11%

(Question: The following are a number of statements others have said about the topic of climate change. For each of these, please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree. Statement: I don't have time to worry about climate change, I have more pressing priorities.)

One of the most concerning findings of the Talking Green Irish Survey is that a majority of respondents are concerned that the policies implemented to tackle climate change would make their lives harder. Even more concerning was the finding that 60% of respondents over the age of 55 agreed with this assertion. On the face of it, older members of our society should be enthused by climate action. It should mean warmer homes and lower heating bills, more easily accessible transport options, and cities, towns and villages that are more people-centred and easier to navigate. Poor public transport options, particularly in rural areas, mean many older people are overly reliant cars.

The fact that older people are concerned about the potential negative impacts should pose serious questions about the implementation of people-centred climate action in Ireland. A similar sized majority agreed with the statement in the 35- to 44-year old category, continuing the trend of this age cohort apparently viewing climate action with more scepticism than their younger and immediately older counterparts.

Figure 8: How different cohorts view the assertion that climate change policies will make their life harder.

Agree or Disagree	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Agree	33%	40%	57%	49%	61%	59%
Neither agree nor disagree	29%	24%	21%	31%	19%	18%
Disagree	34%	28%	17%	14%	17%	20%

(Question: The following are a number of statements others have said about the topic of climate change. For each of these, please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree. Statement: I am worried that the policies to tackle climate change will make life harder.)

Applying a class lens to the assertion that climate policies will make life harder illustrates a similar but reversed breakdown to the sentiment around the prioritisation of climate action. The upper-/middle-middle class respondents were least concerned about the risk of climate action making life harder while the working-class respondents were significantly more concerned. Farmers were the most concerned, with 56% of respondents agreeing with the statement, 27% undecided and only 7% slightly disagreeing. Interestingly, no respondent from the farming community strongly disagreed with the statement.

I am worried that the policies to tackle climate change will make life harder

Agree: 51%
Disagree: 21%
Undecided: 28%

Agree or Disagree	Upper/ Middle Middle Class (AB)	Lower Middle Class (C1)	Skilled Working Class (C2)	Working Class/Non-Working (DE)	Farmers (F)
Strongly agree	15%	21%	25%	20%	38%
Slightly agree	32%	31%	25%	31%	18%
Neither agree nor disagree	21%	20%	31%	22%	27%
Slightly disagree	16%	12%	11%	10%	7%
Strongly disagree	14%	11%	5%	11%	0%

(Question: The following are a number of statements others have said about the topic of climate change. For each of these, please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree. Statement: I am worried that the policies to tackle climate change will make life harder.)

Respondents also seemed to agree strongly that two of the most cited climate actions – the use of electric cars or the retrofitting of homes – were beyond their reach financially.

In the survey, this was perhaps the most uniform answer with little variation in the responses across classes or across age cohorts and with the farming community.

I want to do more about climate change but buying an electric car or retrofitting my house is too expensive

Agree: 72%
Disagree: 9%
Undecided: 19%

There are numerous examples of climate policies that are accessible only to those who can afford it, even when some financial incentives are put in place, highlighting the role of economic inequality. For instance, in Ireland, the costs of retrofitting of homes can be more than €75,000 per house, with grants covering approximately 50% of that cost. This leaves a sizeable remaining cost on the homeowner and may account for low take-up rates — 120 homes were retrofitted in 2017 and 139 in 2018 under the grant scheme.

Another point where there was almost unanimous agreement among respondents of all backgrounds was with regards the responsibility of governments and big companies to lead in taking the steps necessary to combat climate change. Respondents also signalled their willingness to play a role in the transition to a zero-carbon society, three quarters agreeing with the assertation that individuals need to do more to combat climate change.

Proponents of climate action, and particularly of initiatives like the European Green Deal, are keen to stress the benefits that will come with the climate transition. The Irish Survey does not seem to indicate that these messages are being heard, with 60% of respondents unsure of, or disagreeing with, the assertation that the opportunities associated with climate action are a cause for optimism.

I am optimistic about the opportunities that come with climate action

Agree: 40%
Disagree: 20%
Undecided: 40%

5. Communicating about climate change

Understanding resonant messages on climate change can help tailor effective climate communications strategies. The Talking Green Irish Survey presented respondents with a set of statements and asked respondents to consider their effectiveness in communicating the urgency of the climate crisis.

The survey presented a mix of tangible and abstract messages to see which proved to have a greater resonance with the respondents. The tangible messages were grounded in issues of responsibility as well as social, environmental and economic benefits. The abstract messages centred on aspirational ambition related to the re-configuration of society and the moral obligation to act.

Table 1. Top three messages as ranked by respondents

Climate Message	Very Effective	Somewhat Effective	Not Effective
Tangible: We need all countries to play their part, but we must make sure that those most responsible for climate change, the big companies and the countries with the most historical responsibility, pay their fair share.	48%	32%	9%
Tangible: By acting on climate change now, we can make sure our economy is secure and we see long-term economic benefits.	41%	37%	10%
Tangible: We have a duty to protect our environment and tackling climate change means we can all enjoy the benefits of cleaner air and more green spaces.	39%	40%	12%

Interestingly, the top three messages as ranked by respondents are all from the tangible message deck and the bottom three messages are all from the abstract message deck, indicating that perhaps more concrete messaging related to lived experience is preferable to the public.

It is likely that additional focus group work would be required to properly interrogate messaging as the survey format does not lend itself to careful consideration of the difference between the messages. Also, it is possible that the survey posed too many messages to the respondents and thus diluted the efficacy of this section.

Table 1. Bottom three messages as ranked by respondents

Climate Message	Very Effective	Somewhat Effective	Not Effective
Abstract: Ireland should become a global leader in tackling climate change and use our global reputation to encourage action from other countries	26%	36%	25%
Abstract: A Green New Deal can revolutionise the economy and create thousands of decent, green jobs over the next decade.	26%	38%	19%
Abstract: As a developed country, we have to do our part to rapidly reduce our impact on the climate while helping developing countries to transition also.	29%	41%	18%

6. How should we act?

The final section of the Talking Green Irish Survey explored whether respondents felt that top-down or bottom-up climate action was preferable. It presented three pairs of statements about climate action – one top-down and one bottom-up – and asked respondents to position a slider at some point between the two to represent where they stood on the spectrum.

Interestingly, for all three sets of remarks, responses were relatively close on either side. In the first, which tested whether respondents believed climate action should be designed with the input of communities or whether it should be the remit of governments and experts only, given its complexity, more respondents (49%) wanted to see the inclusion of communities than not.

The second set of statements tested whether the implementation of climate action should be primarily the responsibility of the government or whether community groups, cooperatives and other community-led entities should be engaged in the implementation of climate action. While respondents favoured the former (54%), it is interesting to note that more than one in three respondents wished to see some level of bottom-up implementation. The final question tested whether respondents wished to be involved in implementation or whether this should be left up to local and national authorities. Again, a slim majority of respondents (51%) preferred the top-down option, but almost two in five respondents wanted to personally participate in the design and implementation of climate action. The figure in the grey is the proportion that were undecided.

TOP-DOWN

BOTTOM-UP

The plans required to tackle climate change are far too big for communities to tackle and so need to be designed by governments in conjunction with experts.

39% **12%** **49%**

Communities have valuable knowledge to contribute to planning for the future and should be listened to in the design and implementation of climate action.

We need governments to work with large companies to deliver climate action as it requires significant resources and expertise that are beyond the scope of communities.

54% **10%** **36%**

Communities should be given the resources to deliver projects through community groups, cooperatives, social enterprises, community businesses or local authorities, including projects to tackle climate change.

I trust local and national authorities to design and implement plans for my community that will lead to the best possible outcome.

51% **11%** **37%**

I want to take part in the design and implementation of plans that will impact on the future of my community.

7. Conclusion

The findings from the Talking Green Irish Survey would seem to indicate that there is still a long road ahead before climate change is a primary concern of the electorate. While recent years have seen a surge in attention paid to the issue, driven in no small part by the activism of children and young people, when it is stacked up against other issues of concern, it does not register as a priority.

This returns us to the central premise of the People's Transition – whether climate action will enjoy popular support or are governments now tasked with building that support proactively through the implementation of climate action. It is fair to say that in order to deliver enduring climate action, widespread public support must be secured.

What do the findings of the Talking Green Irish Survey tell us about the underlying assumptions of the People's Transition? Let us consider them one at a time.

> **i) The urgent nature of the climate crisis means that action will need to be taken in the absence of widespread public support.**
>
> This assertation would certainly seem to hold based on the survey results. Given the most recent report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, it would seem likely radical climate action will be required in the coming 4-6 years to maintain any chance of achieving the 1.5°C target set out in the Paris Agreement. The prioritisation of climate action in the Irish Survey indicates a lack of widespread public support for climate action. With the mutability of this opinion unclear, particularly over such short timeframes, it would seem unwise in the extreme for decision makers to wait for public support to grow before acting.
>
> **ii) Therefore, to be successful, climate action must proactively build public support as it is implemented.**
>
> The survey results suggest there is some cause for concern in terms of how current climate policy is viewed by the public. It is not the case that current measures are building public support but rather the survey results point to concern about the repercussions of climate policy and the cost of undertaking climate action. What's more, this is particularly true for cohorts who can exert disproportionate influence on political outcomes, such as older people and the farming community. These findings would suggest that more thought needs to be given to how climate action can proactively build support.
>
> **iii) To build public support, climate action must address local needs and priorities because people care more about local development deficits than they do about climate change.**
>
> There seems to be hope for this assumption to be achievable based on the survey findings. Firstly, the willingness of respondents to embrace bottom-up approaches to climate action is encouraging. Secondly, the multitude of issues ranked above the climate crisis by respondents as priorities provides fertile opportunity for climate actions that can help to solve other development needs – such as tacking the housing crisis, addressing inequality or supporting the economic recovery as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic. The challenge remains in how to design climate action such that the benefits flow into the communities most in need of local development actions.

Technical Annex

The survey underpinning this research was commissioned by the Foundation for European Progressive Studies from polling company RED C Research (www.redcresearch.ie). The questions below were included in the Red-Line Omnibus survey which was conducted between July 1st and 7th 2021.

a) Questions and Responses

Q1. **Looking at the below list of issues, please rank these from the most to least important to you and your family.**
- Improving the health care system
- Improving the education system
- Addressing climate change
- Tackling crime
- Ensuring effective use of public funds
- Addressing waste and protecting the environment
- Ensuring economic recovery and employment
- Addressing housing
- Addressing homelessness and poverty

Q2. **When considering issues of national importance, who do you trust?**

- Scientists/academics/researchers
- Family and friends
- Journalists
- Civil servants and state agencies
- National politicians
- Local Businesses
- TV and radio personalities
- County Councillors
- Multinational corporations
- None of these

Q3. **The following are a number of statements others have said about the topic of climate change. For each of these, please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree.**

- I don't believe in climate change
- I don't have time to worry about climate change, I have more pressing priorities
- I am worried that the policies to tackle climate change will make life harder
- I believe we all must do more as individuals to combat climate change
- I want to do more about climate change but buying an electric car or retrofitting my house is too expensive
- Governments and big companies must take necessary steps to combat climate change
- I am confident that enough is being done to fight climate change
- I am optimistic about the opportunities that come with climate action
- I would like to be involved in joining campaigns and local activities to fight climate change, but I don't have the time required

Q4. **There are several different messages people may communicate around climate change Looking at each of the below statements, how effective or not do you believe each of these would be in convincing other people that it is important to combat climate change?**

o By moving quickly to tackle climate change, we can protect and create real, decent jobs in rural and urban areas.

o By acting on climate change now, we can make sure our economy is secure and we see long-term economic benefits.

o Ireland should become a global leader in tackling climate change and use our cultural footprint to encourage action from other countries.

o We have a duty to protect our environment and tackling climate change means we can all enjoy the benefits of cleaner air and more green spaces.

o By acting now to tackle climate change, we can make sure that our children and grandchildren do not face an impossible burden of action and will live healthy and safe lives.

o We need all countries to play their part, but we must make sure that those most responsible for climate change, the big companies and the countries with the most historical responsibility, pay their fair share.

o By taking a community-led approach, we can tackle climate change while also making our communities stronger and improving standards of living.

o Tackling climate change means having warmer homes – through retrofitting and renewable energy we can reduce our heating bills and our electricity bills.

o Climate change is the biggest threat the human race has ever faced. We must transform the way we live and do whatever it takes to prevent catastrophe.

o A Green New Deal can revolutionise the economy and create thousands of decent, green jobs over the next decade.

o Ireland can play a lead role in the green industrial revolution, creating thousands of new green jobs.

o In the face of climate change, we need to ensure a just transition of the workforce, so that nobody is left behind.

o As a developed country, we have to do our part to rapidly reduce our impact on the climate while helping developing countries to transition also.

o Across the world, climate change is causing suffering for people in vulnerable situations - islands are going underwater, there are droughts, floods and famine in other countries. We must act now to stop this from happening.

5) People have differing opinions about who is best placed to fight combat change. For each of the statement pairs below, please align the slider to your preferred option.

Statement 1

The plans required to tackle climate change are far too big for communities to tackle and so need to be designed by governments in conjunction with experts.

VS

Communities have valuable knowledge to contribute to planning for the future and should be listened to in the design and implementation of climate action.

Statement 2

We need governments to work with large companies to deliver climate action as it requires significant resources and expertise that are beyond the scope of communities.

VS

Communities should be given the resources to deliver projects through community groups, cooperatives, social enterprises, community businesses or local authorities, including projects to tackle climate change.

Statement 3

I trust local and national authorities to design and implement plans for my community that will lead to the best possible outcome.

VS

I want to take part in the design and implementation of plans that will impact on the future of my community.

b) Composition of Respondents

Gender

	Total
Unweighted base	1010
Weighted base	1010
Male	495
	49%
Female	515
	51%

Age by Gender

	Total	Male	Female
Unweighted base	1010	486	524
Weighted base	1010	495	515
18-24	111	61	50
	11%	12%	10%
25-34	172	81	91
	17%	16%	18%
35-44	212	101	111
	21%	20%	22%
45-54	182	91	91
	18%	18%	18%
55-64	141	71	71
	14%	14%	14%
65+	192	91	101
	19%	18%	20%
Average age	46.19	46.26	46.13

Socio-economic group and social class by gender

	Total	Male	Female
Unweighted base	1010	486	524
Weighted base	1010	495	515
A	24	16	8
	2%	3%	1%
B	108	65	43
	11%	13%	8%
C1	313	167	146
	31%	34%	28%
C2	202	96	106
	20%	19%	21%
D	156	63	93
	15%	13%	18%
E	147	64	84
	15%	13%	16%
F	61	25	36
	6%	5%	7%

Definitions of categories

Grade	Social class	Chief income earner's occupation
A	Upper middle class	Higher managerial roles, administrative or professional
B	Middle middle class	Intermediate managerial roles, administrative or professional
C1	Lower middle class	Supervisory or clerical and junior managerial roles, administrative or professional
C2	Skilled working class	Skilled manual workers
D	Working class	Semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers
E	Non-working	State pensioners, casual and lowest grade workers, unemployed with state benefits only.
F	Farmer	