Just Transition Commission

Recommendations for the next iteration of the National Dialogue on Climate Action

September 2025

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1. Background and mandate

The Just Transition Commission has a mandate and role "To provide strategic advice and engagement on just transition: the Commission will support the National Dialogue on Climate Action, as well as any dialogues on climate/just transition matters within individual sectors in engagement on the implementation of climate programmes agreed by Government"

In its Introductory Report, the Commission highlighted the potential of a just transition to climate neutrality as an opportunity to co-create a new vision for Ireland which aligns with climate action.

To support this, the Commission views the National Dialogue on Climate Action as a critical mechanism to listen, learn and reflect upon the public's perception of a just transition to climate neutrality. To support an all of society engagement on climate action, the Commission called for the overall purpose, inputs, outputs, and methods of engagement associated with the NDCA, and for the format and logistics of the NDCA to account for the most vulnerable.

To create fairer, more effective solutions that reflect the lived realities of all groups in society, the Commission also called for a balanced dialogue with the focus of individual actions shifting towards shared accountability, where government, industries, and institutions play their fair part alongside individuals.

Furthermore, to ensure inclusive policy design and to better reflect lived experiences, the Introductory Report recommended more regional, place-based discussions on climate action, with rural communities to be seen as a distinct group, separate from farming, coastal or Midland communities. The Report also recommended the NDCA explore the affordability of climate action, often a critical barrier to participation, and for the NDCA to close the feedback loops with stakeholders to foster trust and continued engagement with NDCA engagements.

As the next iteration of the NDCA is developed, the Just Transition Commission stands by the Introductory Report recommendations and builds on these points below.

The Commission view their advice and recommendations as an iterative and co-operative process with the NDCA, and look forward to providing continued advice to the NDCA on the matter.

2. Strategic Recommendations to the NDCA

Over the last number of years, the NDCA has provided a space for some positive and enriching conversations however, the Commission views the current iteration of the NDCA as lacking in diversity and does not engage with those who are vulnerable or impacted by the transition. To account for these, the Commission recommends the following steps.

Recommendations

1. To progress the next iteration of the NDCA and ensure all voices are heard, the Commission recommends that the NDCA develop a **strategic plan that defines the goals and purposes**

for each NDCA component, with measurable just transition outcomes identified throughout.

2. Within NDCA engagements, the Commission views vulnerable groups as being underrepresented. There is a need and an opportunity with the new iteration of the NDCA to develop a methodology for the evidence-based identification and inclusion of vulnerable and most impacted groups that can be replicated in all future engagements.

3. The NDCA need to engage in constructive local-level dialogue with communities and must consider the barriers faced by the most vulnerable in terms of engagement. The next iteration of the NDCA must take into account factors such as childcare, travel, languages and the accessibility of tools used. From these engagements, much more transparency is also required in terms of outputs from the process and how they are being used in the development and implementation of climate policy.

4. The Commission calls for the NDCA to incorporate the recommendations of the CCAC's 2024 Agriculture Review into the new iteration of the process and develop a just transition dialogue with farmers, rural workers and communities, as the appropriate departmental vehicle to progress this initiative.

3. Climate Conversations

The current iteration of Climate Conversations is cause for significant concern for the Commission. Based on the findings of the most recent Climate Conversations report[1], the public engagement was not reflective of the general public and did not engage with those most vulnerable or impacted by the transition. While just transition is mentioned in Climate Conversations, there is little clarity on its definition, interpretation, or level of understanding among participants.

Currently, the purpose of Climate Conversations remains unclear. It is unclear whether the insights gathered through Climate Conversations are intended to inform concrete policy measures, or whether their role is primarily consultative. This uncertainty weakens Climate Conversations potential impact on shaping a fair and effective just transition and risks a breakdown in trust.

Generally, Climate Conversations remain broad and aspirational, without concrete discussion of how to protect workers, regions, or vulnerable groups most affected by decarbonisation. Its overall purpose in shaping transition pathways is therefore unclear.

[1] Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment, Climate Conversations 2024 Report (2025): https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-climate-energy-and-the-environment/publications/climate-conversations-2024-report/

Recommendations

The Commission recommends the NDCA to **clearly define whether Climate Conversations is intended to raise awareness, shape policy, or both**, and show how public input is taken forward.

The Commission believe that Climate Conversations offers a real opportunity to move the NDCA towards **more specific and place-based dialogue on climate**, and doing so at scale. There is a need to go beyond the existing approach by providing clear, accessible explanations of what a just transition means, with space to explore practical measures to support workers, communities, and vulnerable groups.

Climate Conversations should **go beyond online surveys and ensure inclusive and accessible participation** through the utilisation of community workshops, local forums and creative outreach methods such as storytelling or visual tools. To ensure the genuine participation of those most affected by the transition, including workers, rural and low-income communities, and marginalised groups, these engagements should aim to reduce barriers to engagement and ensure supports such as translation, transport or childcare are provided.

Such place-based dialogues should **move from a single annual process to a continuous dialogue with touchpoints throughout the year**, including local pilots and sector-specific forums that feed into the national conversation. These dialogues should be evidence-informed with participants provided accessible data, scenarios, and examples so they can engage with climate action trade-offs and opportunities in a meaningful way.

Building and maintaining trust is also an important component of dialogue, and transparency mechanisms such as regular participant updates and clear reports outlining what was head, how it influenced policy, and where the gaps remain should be developed.

Embedding just transition into Climate Conversations

To normalise just transition and fairness as a core principle of climate action**, just transition should be framed as a cross-cutting theme** across all discussion topics (energy, transport, agriculture, housing), rather than a standalone add-on. Discussions should be anchored around local realities i.e. what the transition means for specific towns, regions, or sectors, so that participants can connect the idea of justice directly to their own lives and communities. Participants should also deliberate on real-world trade-offs e.g. the equitable cost of the transition, job shifts, land use choices, and weigh fairness considerations openly, rather than avoiding contested issues.

Local Authorities and communities should also be equipped with resources to run their own dialogue on just transition, feeding their perspectives into the national process. Indicators should also be developed to monitor whether vulnerable groups are actually benefitting from the transition, with place-based dialogues, local authorities and communities reporting back on these through the Climate Conversations platform.

Identifying vulnerable groups

To identify vulnerable groups in a just transition, the NDCA first need to **develop a definition of vulnerability and what is it measured against** - whether this is the impacts of climate policies (e.g. rising fuel costs, job losses) or the impacts of climate change itself (e.g. flooding, extreme heat, coastal erosion), or both. Once defined, vulnerability can be assessed by combining data on the particular policy or impact against socioeconomic data (income, energy poverty, housing quality, skills), demographic data (age, health, minority status), and regional data (sectoral employment, rural/urban profiles, climate risk exposure). This would provide a blueprint to all future engagements.

The accessibility of this data could be supported by the CSO, the ESRI, the Department of Social Protection, the Department of Rural and Community Development, and the Department of Children, Disability and Equality.

The role of rural communities

Rural Ireland has an important role to play in the transition, however Commissioners found that the role of rural communities is not sufficiently recognised or considered in the current engagement process. Many of the changes associated with the transition has different consequences for urban and rural populations, however there is a general overrepresentation of urban population in national engagements and initiatives.[2] This often results in 'national' findings that are not inclusive or reflective of the lived experience of people living rural areas. For example, Pobal's recently released report on renewable energy highlights the uneven impacts of the transition and the uneven ability of urban and rural households across socio-economic groupings to benefit from renewable energy.[3] Developing a more balanced national dialogue[4] that is inclusive of Rural Ireland is crucial going forward.

Geographic vulnerabilities is an important consideration to account for in order to ensure that those most impacted have the ability and capacity to participate. The vulnerabilities linked to geographic differences are multi-faceted and include considerations such as climate impacts, as well as infrastructural vulnerabilities (internet or transport) or skills gaps that prevent people from participating in engagements, and on a larger scale act as an obstacle that may prevent people from benefitting from the advantages the green transition has to offer. To establish vulnerabilities specifically linked to rural Ireland, a geographical analysis could be conducted.

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[2] Example: EPA's technical report 2023 with 2/3 Urban and 1/3 Rural participation. https://www.epa.ie/publications/monitoring--assessment/climate-change/climate-change-in-the-irish-mind-wave-2-report-1.php

[3] Pobal 'Renewable Energy and Deprivation: Investigating the Relationship between Household Renewable Energy Usage and Geographic Disadvantage' (2025): 250298-Renewable-Energy-Research-Report-2025-FINAL-190925.pdf

[4] UCD's Citizen Rural project provides useful resources on rural engagement at https://www.ucd.ie/citizenrural/projects/citizenrural/resources/

Pilot dialogues for the next iteration of the NDCA

With consideration for the Commission's recommendations for more specific and place-based dialogue on climate and based upon the Commission's discussions to date, the following just transition topics with associated groups or areas, have been identified as **potential pilot dialogues for Climate Conversations to examine and progress**:

- Transport poverty/ forced car ownership in a rural county, such as Donegal
- The impact of Storm Eowyn on forestry in Mayo or Galway
- Energy communities and the barriers they face – engaging directly with energy community leads

This list should not be viewed as definitive list but as a reflection of the Commission's first year of discussions which could help shape future engagements and act as a guide to what Climate Conversations could examine.

4. National Stakeholder Forum

Over the last number of years, the National Climate Stakeholder Forum (NCSF) has been the most high-profile element of the National Dialogue on Climate Action. It has provided a space for some very positive and enriching conversations and has been a constructive source of information on government initiatives, however a number of concerns have been evident. One is that it has been hard for participants to see the link between their participation and input and eventual policy decisions, while the sense of continuity and progress between one forum and the next has been variable.

The introduction of a structured dialogue with decision-makers similar to the National Economic Dialogue would be welcome as it involves the five pillars of social dialogue but also relevant state agencies, academics and a selection of wider stakeholders. The development of such a dialogue was highlighted in the Chair's Report on the National Economic Dialogue 2025[5], with the following noted:

> "A number of strong views were expressed that there are insufficient opportunities for engagement - the National Economic Dialogue is extremely welcome but it is not enough. The Just Transmission Commission was cited as a good example of broad engagement and there was a call for more such opportunities."
>
> "In particular, there was agreement on the need for a sectoral specific forum, such as a 'Sectoral National Economic Dialogue', specifically on climate in advance of the next Climate Action Plan. There was a general view expressed that the sectors have more in common than in disagreement and more opportunities for engagement are required to dismantle siloes. There are many processes which are frustrating individuals, businesses and sectors who

[5] Department of Finance, Chair's Report – National Economic Dialogue 2025 (2025): https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-finance/publications/chairs-report-national-economic-dialogue-2025/

want to do the right thing in relation to the climate and more opportunities for engagement are needed to identify challenges and work together on practical solutions. There was general agreement that a sectoral specific mini-NED should be a concrete action arising from this breakout session."

Recommendations

1. The Commission understands the future shape of the NCSF will be part of the wider review of the NDCA and, given our mandate and the presence of nominees of the five pillars of social dialogue, the Commission recommends that it should be actively involved in this review. Furthermore, **the review of the Forum should also include consultation with the stakeholders who have been participating in it.**

2. **To build trust and encourage the continued participation of sectoral stakeholders,** the Commission recommends the next iteration of the NCSF should include a cross-sectoral group of stakeholders who are actively involved in the co-design of the annual NCSF. A model for this already exists and is actively implemented in the Department of Rural and Community Development's National Civic Forum for dialogue with the community and voluntary sector.[6]

3. The Commission recommends the creation of a **structured dialogue with decision-makers on climate policy** which would be **similar in structure to the National Economic Dialogue**. The development of this structure is of particular importance as the Government finalises and adopts the next Climate Action Plan (CAP), which will be first CAP developed by this Government, and will need to lay out the detailed policies and measures to reduce emissions in line with the second Carbon Budget to 2030.

In the case of such a dialogue being developed, the Commission is keen to participate appropriately in its planning.

5. National Youth Assembly on Climate

As an integral part of the NDCA, the Commission expresses strong support National Youth Assembly on Climate (NYAC) and, in future, welcomes the opportunity to engage with the NYAC. The Commission would like to highlight the NYAC's best practice of cross-departmental engagement with the Department of Children, Disability and Equality, where proactive engagement with Departments who have the relevant expertise has led to positive engagements and outcomes. In conjunction to cross-departmental engagement, the application of the Lundy Model has also supported the

[6] Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht, National Civic Forum for dialogue with the community and voluntary sector (2023): https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-rural-and-community-development-and-the-gaeltacht/news/national-civic-forum-for-dialogue-with-the-community-and-voluntary-sector/

meaningful engagement with young people and should be considered as good practice for all right-holders.[7]

Recommendation

1. Reflecting on previous engagements with the NYAC, the Commission recommends the NDCA focus on **ensuring the voices of vulnerable youth groups are represented**, while there is also a need to move away long form, lecture style methodologies and encourage more interactive engagements with participants. As previously noted, the NDCA should also focus on communicating how NYAC outputs have influenced climate policy. Furthermore, the Commission noted there was no public launch and dissemination of this year's NYAC material, which undermines the perceived value of its output.

[7] Department of Children, Disability and Equality, Participation of Children and Young People in Decision-making Action Plan 2024-2028 (2024): https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-children-disability-and-equality/publications/participation-of-children-and-young-people-in-decision-making-action-plan-2024-2028/