

CLIMATE ACTION AND CLIMATE JUSTICE: A GUIDE FOR COMMUNITY WORKERS



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**An Roinn Forbartha
Tuaithe agus Pobail**
Department of Rural and
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Introduction

In 2022, CWI and AIEB introduced a Continuous Practice Development (CPD) initiative to create opportunities for community workers to build on their skills and knowledge in areas of relevance to community work practice. CPD refers to ongoing opportunities for community workers to develop and enhance their knowledge and skills throughout their careers so that they remain informed and in a position to respond to new and emerging issues.

This initial series of workshops explored community work methods and approaches to addressing key issues with a focus on the application of the learning to community work practice. Toolkits to accompany each workshop were developed of which this is one.

Community Work Ireland

Established in 1981 as the Community Workers Co-operative, Community Work Ireland (CWI) is a national organisation that promotes and supports community work as a means of addressing poverty, social exclusion and inequality and promoting human rights. We have a membership base of almost 900 community workers and community work organisations working with the most marginalised communities throughout the country.

All Ireland Endorsement Body for Community Work Education and Training

The All Ireland Endorsement Body for Community Work Education and Training (AIEB) is the body that promotes and ensures standards in community work practice and in community work education and training. We do this through the development and delivery of inclusive endorsement frameworks, processes and procedures for community work education providers; the development of standards and support for education and training at all levels and the development and maintenance of standards for practitioners, community work organisations, for programmes and policy makers. The board of AIEB includes professionally qualified and experienced community work practitioners, education providers, employers and funders.

CPD 2 – Climate Justice and Community Work Responses to Climate Change

The second workshop, delivered by Jamie Gorman, focused on Climate Justice and Community work Responses to Climate Change. At the time of the workshop, Jamie was a lecturer in Community Work and Environmental Justice at the Department of Applied Social Studies, Maynooth University. Jamie has a Masters in Community Work and is a Doctor of Social Science. He previously worked with Galway City Community Network, is a former chairperson of Friends of the Earth and convened the Community Work Ireland Climate Justice Working Group.

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What is the climate crisis?

The climate crisis refers to the impact on our ecosystems and societies of our changing climate. This climate change is the long-term shifts in temperatures, seasons and weather patterns which have been driven by the activities of human society, such as the burning of fossil fuels like coal, oil, gas and peat.

From the 18th century onwards, global empires and economic powers like Britain, Germany and the United States used fossil fuels to unleash a revolution in industrialisation, industrial agriculture, global trade and military expansion. As industrial societies expanded, more and more fossil fuels were burned (see box 1 for an explainer on how fossil fuels cause climate change).

Climate change is being felt with more frequent and intense droughts, storms, heat waves, rising sea levels, melting glaciers and warming oceans, all of which are wreaking havoc on people's livelihoods and communities. As the crisis worsens, dangerous weather events are becoming more frequent and severe. However, unlike COVID, the response to which was rapid and comprehensive because the impact was immediate and visible, the impacts of climate change, until recently, were hard to grasp and easy to ignore because they required complex scientific modelling of how invisible gases are changing the atmosphere.

While the climate has changed naturally in the past, such as through variations in the solar cycle, the pace and scale of change in the past 200 years is unprecedented. The global scientific consensus of the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change demonstrates that this change is caused by human activity¹. It is now known that top scientists in the oil and gas industry were predicting the oncoming crisis with remarkable accuracy by the 1970s. The industry not only hid what they knew, but actively lied to the public about fossil fuel industry's impact on the atmosphere and sought to discredit the climate science to protect their profits.² As a result, we lost decades to denial and inaction.

The impact that humans have had on our planet has been so great over the past two centuries that scientists suggest that we have entered a new geological era, known as the "Anthropocene" (named after *anthropos*, the Greek word for human). Evidence of human activity is now found in soils and rock strata of the earth, for example through nuclear waste particles. Today, the impact of collective human action on the planet threatens to exceed the 'safe operating space' across nine 'planetary boundaries', which also include biodiversity loss and chemical pollution.³

But, as a climate justice perspective highlights, not all communities and countries have impacted equally on the destruction of the planet and the consequences of the crisis are falling disproportionately on those who have done the least to cause it. As economist Dr Kate Raworth renowned for her theories on doughnut economics points out, it is the wealthiest few who are destroying the planet:

'The biggest source of planetary boundary stress today is the excessive consumption levels of roughly the wealthiest 10 per cent of people in the world, and the production patterns of the companies producing the goods and services that they buy'.⁴

What are fossil fuels?

Fossil fuels were formed in the earth's crust from decomposing plants and animals 100s of millions of years ago. This decomposing organic material was covered by sand and rock which compressed it and trapped its carbon. Different types of fossil fuels were created by the length of time, pressure and heat which the material is exposed to, thus increasing the proportion of carbon in the fuel. The more the material has been compressed, the greater its energy properties ("calorific value"). For example, coal can be divided into **bituminous coal, lignite (brown) coal and peat depending on the amount of compression and carbonisation it has been subjected to.**

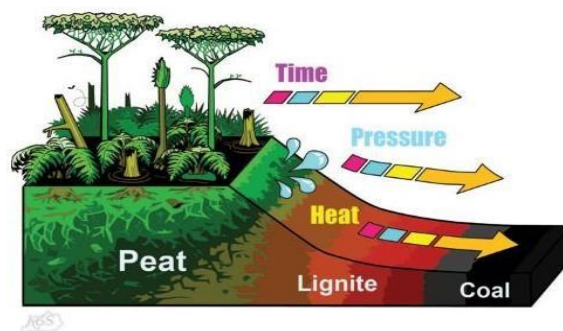


Figure 2: Fossil fuels forming over time

We burn these fossil fuels in all aspects of our lives, releasing the trapped carbon to harvest and cook our food, run our transport systems, heat our homes and power our devices. Burning fossil fuels releases the trapped carbon and methane which were previously trapped deep in the earth's crust. These are known as "greenhouse gases" (GHGs) because they replicate the effect of a greenhouse, acting like a blanket that traps the sun's heat in the earth's atmosphere, instead of allowing it to radiate back into space. This trapped heat is what is creating change in our climate, leading to disrupted seasons and extreme weather events.

To mitigate the climate crisis, we must eliminate fossil fuels as much as possible from our energy, industry, transport, construction and agricultural systems. This process is known as emissions reduction or "decarbonisation". Clearing land (such as wetlands and forests) can also release carbon dioxide which has been stored through those habitats. Trees and bogs are "carbon sinks" which safely store huge amounts of greenhouse gas. This is why habitat conservation and restoration are also important in addressing climate change.

A Focus on Women and Gender

Community development values of social justice and sustainable development highlight that ‘Promoting a just society involves promoting policies and practices that challenge injustice, poverty, inequality, discrimination and social exclusion, and valuing diversity of identities and approaches. Promoting a sustainable society involves promoting environmentally, economically and socially sustainable policies and practices⁵ In this context it is essential that the differential impact of climate change on women and girls is acknowledged, as well as the contribution that women make to sustainable development and just climate action.

[SHE Changes Climate](#), a campaign founded in 2020 in the UK to call for equal gender representation in climate negotiations, notes that **“Lack of female leadership in climate decisions affects our economy, our social structure, our ability to innovate and create solutions,”**⁶

At COP 27 in November 2022, UN Women Executive Director Sima Bahous noted that; *‘Climate change and gender inequality are interwoven challenges. We will not meet the 1.5 degrees Celsius goal, or any other goal, without gender equality and the full contribution of women and girls’*⁷. This basic truth she said. is demonstrated time and again. Countries with more women in leadership, in the labour force, in peacemaking and more, do better. The full participation of women brings better management of conflicts, humanitarian responses, pandemics, economic matters, climate solutions, and much more.

In 2022, the UN Commission on the Status of women, considered for the first time questions of gender equality and climate change. They noted that women are increasingly being recognized as more vulnerable to climate change impacts than men, as they constitute the majority of the world’s poor and are more dependent on the natural resources, which climate change threatens the most. However, despite increasing evidence, there is still hesitancy in making the vital connections between gender, social equity and climate change⁸.

A community work approach to climate justice must therefore ensure that the impact of climate change on women is consistently highlighted and that the voices of women, especially those from marginalised communities are at the centre of climate negotiations, policy making and practice.

A Climate Justice Lens

Climate justice is a lens that can help community workers to respond to the climate crisis by starting with the lived realities and everyday concerns of the people we work with. It is a principle that highlights the impact of the climate crisis on the most marginalised communities locally and globally. Taking a climate justice lens can support community workers to address the ways in which the climate crisis impacts directly on our daily lives. For example:

- **Fuel poverty** in the community, exasperated by poorly insulated dwellings and energy price hikes;
- **Air pollution** from major roads, congestion and reliance on solid fuels;
- Communities living in areas prone to **flooding and coastal erosion**;
- Vulnerability to drastic temperature changes (**heat waves, severe cold**), particularly amongst children and older people.

In addition to these negative environmental impacts on communities, climate justice focuses on ensuring that policy responses and sustainable solutions are fair, inclusive and benefiting all, including the most marginalised in society. A climate justice lens helps community workers to attune to how climate policy responses can exasperate inequalities if they:

- Neglect to consider the **effect of policy measures** on marginalised and disadvantaged communities, such as carbon taxation, or turf cutting bans without supports for renewable energies.
- Fail to ensure that sustainable energy, transport and home **solutions are affordable and accessible** to all, such as grants for electric cars instead of investing in better public transport.
- Focus on individual responsibility and action, **placing the burden on individuals** and scapegoating/blaming those who can't afford it, rather than holding governments and big polluters accountable, such as the marketing department of British Petroleum invented the "carbon footprint" to encourage individuals to feel responsible for fossil fuel pollution⁹.
- Engage in greenwashing that **masks the pollution of industry** and promotes false environmental solutions such as in 2019 when McDonalds introduced paper straws which were not in fact recyclable.¹⁰

Key Policy Concepts

Climate policy is an extremely wide-ranging field which addresses every aspect of our lives and societies. Community workers don't need to be experts in every aspect of this but familiarity with some key terms can help practitioners to navigate the field. There are several excellent organisations and networks listed in the resources section who may be able to provide additional support to workers regarding climate policy.

Adaptation means anticipating the adverse effects of climate change and taking appropriate action to prevent or minimise the damage they can cause or taking advantage of opportunities that may arise. Examples of adaptation measures include large-scale infrastructure changes, such as building defences to protect against sea-level rise, as well behavioural shifts, such as individuals reducing their food waste. In essence, adaptation can be understood as the process of adjusting to the current and future effects of climate change. In Ireland, local authorities, Climate Action Regional Offices and the Office of Public Works are primarily tasked with adaptation.

Mitigation means human intervention that reduces the amount of greenhouse gases (GHGs) in the atmosphere. Mitigation is achieved either by reducing the sources of these gases, by, for example, increasing the share of renewable energies, establishing a cleaner mobility system or by enhancing the storage of these gases in carbon sinks by, for example, increasing the size of forests or restoring wetlands where carbon is stored.

Climate justice seeks a decent environment for all, with a fair share of the earth's resources for all and for future generations. Climate justice calls attention to the ways in which different groups and communities experience environmental burdens (such as pollution or fuel poverty) or enjoy environmental benefits (such as access to green space and fresh, local food). It considers the social and political drivers and implications of climate change.

Many voices have contributed to the development of climate justice, particularly from indigenous and global South movements. Former president Mary Robinson offers a helpful summary of the principles of climate justice¹¹:

- Respect and Protect Human Rights
- Support the Right to Development
- Share Benefits and Burdens Equitably
- Ensure that Decisions on Climate Change are Participatory, Transparent and Accountable
- Highlight Gender Equality and Equity
- Harness the Transformative Power of Education for Climate Stewardship
- Use Effective Partnerships to Secure Climate Justice.

Just Transition

The concept of just transition is closely allied to climate justice. The idea first emerged in the trade union movement in the 1970s as a principle for protecting workers when industries close down. Today it is used to place a focus on the social interventions needed to secure workers' rights in the shift away from carbon intensive industries. The concept is supported by the International Labour Organisation and recognised in the 2015 Paris Agreement.

A just transition emphasises justice and equity in climate policy making, placing the rights of workers and the most marginalised front and centre in the energy transition. The current Irish Climate Action Plan uses the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) definition of just transition that extends beyond a sole focus on the rights of workers and suggests that a just transition is one which seeks to ensure transition is fair, equitable, and inclusive in terms of processes and outcomes.

Sustainable Development

Sustainable development is an important policy concept related to climate justice. It is concerned with the impact of industrial development on the environment and the human community. The concept emerged from the 1970s onwards, as the impacts of air and water pollution, mining, deforestation and other effects of industrialisation were increasingly felt.

The classic definition of sustainable development comes from the 1987 World Commission on Environment and Development report *Our Common Future*¹²:

"Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

This definition has been critiqued for a lack of focus on justice, equality and welfare. To address this gap, Julian Agyeman proposes the concept of 'just sustainability'¹³:

"to ensure a better quality of life for all, now, and into the future, in a just and equitable manner, while living with the limits of supporting eco-systems".

In his 2013 publication, *Community Development in an Uncertain World*, Australian Jim Ife reminds us that sustainability is a powerful idea that if properly understood 'requires a radical transformation of the existing, blatantly unsustainable order [including] growth and capital accumulation.'¹⁴ However just like greenwashing, sustainable development has at times been applied to the 'green growth' approach. This suggests that technological advances, free market efficiencies and the incentivising of green consumer choices can offset the negative effects of industrialisation without the need for any meaningful systemic change. This green growth approach is the most dominant policy response to environmental issues including climate change. Yet it stands in contrast to the climate justice approach that points to the need for fundamental change to unjust and unsustainable systems.



Gro Harlem Brundtland, Chair, World Commission on Environment & Development

Policy context

The international and national policy landscape for climate change and climate action reflects an understanding that there is a need to undertake universal action. The policy context is rapidly changing as governments ramp up responses to the crisis in line with the scientific consensus. Irish national and local climate policy is shaped by the state's global and European commitments and so these are important to be aware of.

International Policy

At the 1991 Earth Summit in Rio Di Janeiro, the UN designed a mechanism for responding to climate change known as the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Crucially the “UN F triple C” enshrined a principle of global justice and equity known as ‘Common but Differentiated Responsibility’. This principle acknowledges that every state has a responsibility to address environmental unsustainability and climate change. It recognises however, that responsibility is not shared equally because the industrialised states of the global North have a greater historical responsibility to act, as well as an ethical responsibility to support global South states to adapt to the crisis.

Member states have met every year since 1994 in an annual Conference of the Parties (COP) with the aim of agreeing a plan to address the climate crisis. At COP21 in 2015, state parties reached the Paris Agreement, setting out a roadmap for action to:

- substantially reduce global greenhouse gas emissions to limit the global temperature increase in this century to 2 degrees Celsius while pursuing efforts to limit the increase even further to 1.5 degrees
- review countries' commitments every five years
- provide financing to developing countries to mitigate climate change, strengthen resilience and enhance abilities to adapt to climate impacts.

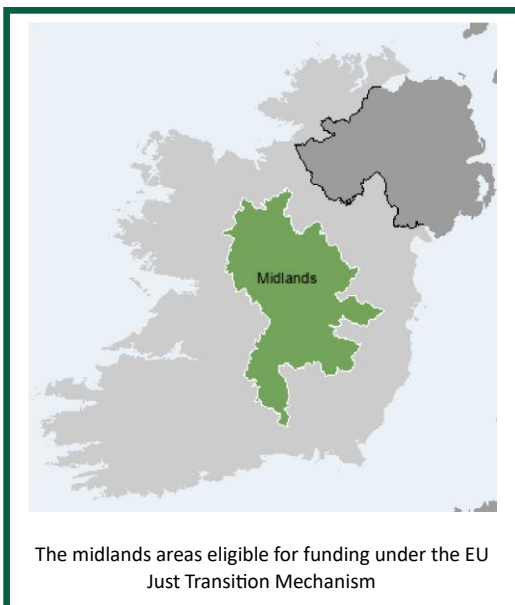
The Paris Agreement also emphasises the intrinsic relationship that climate change actions, responses and impacts have with equitable access to **sustainable development and the eradication of poverty**. It recognises the fundamental priority of safeguarding food security and **ending hunger**, and the particular vulnerabilities of food production systems to the adverse impacts of climate change. It states that it takes into account the imperatives of a **just transition of the workforce** and the **creation of decent work and quality jobs** in accordance with nationally defined development priorities. It acknowledges that climate change is a common concern of humankind, and states that Parties should, when taking action to address climate change, **respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights**, the right to health, the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations and the right to development, as well as gender equality, empowerment of women and intergenerational equity.



European Policy

From the 1970s onwards, the European Union played a leading role in setting environmental standards to protect waters, habitats and biodiversity. From the mid-2000s, the EU also adopted goals for greenhouse gas reduction, renewable energy production and energy efficiency. In 2019, it launched the European Green Deal, a comprehensive policy framework and plan to make Europe the first carbon neutral continent by 2050.¹⁵ This plan also includes policy goals for agriculture, construction, transportation, industry and the just transition.

On the road to 2050, the EU established a target of 55% reduction of GHGs by 2030 through a combination of emissions reduction and ramping up renewables and energy efficiency. A 2040 target will also be set. These targets are legally binding on member states under the 2021 European Climate Law¹⁶. Internationally at the UNFCCC, EU member states tend to agree collective positions and targets, and the European Commission is present at the negotiations.



Climate policy at EU level also has a strong focus on just transition and a socially fair transition that addresses inequalities in the green transition.¹⁷ This has catalysed Ireland to take a more proactive role in this area.

The EU has established a Just Transition Mechanism to distribute €55 billion from 2021-27 to alleviate the socioeconomic impact of the transition on communities and regions reliant on fossil fuel related industries.¹⁸

In Ireland, the midlands is receiving support under this mechanism as Bord na Móna peat extraction ceases. Additionally, the EU has agreed to establish a Social Climate Fund from 2026 with €86 billion to combat energy and transport poverty.¹⁹

Irish Policy

The Programme for Government, *Our Shared Future* commits to achieving a 51% reduction in Ireland's overall Green House Gases (GHG) emissions from 2021 to 2030, and to achieving net-zero emissions no later than 2050. These legally binding objectives are set out in the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021, the enactment of which was a key priority in the Programme for Government.

The Climate Act supports Ireland's transition to net-zero and the achievement of a climate neutral economy no later than 2050. It establishes a legally binding framework with clear targets and commitments, to ensure the necessary structures and processes are in place to deliver national, EU and international climate goals and obligations in the near and long term.

An independent comparative assessment of the Irish Climate Act was commissioned by Friends of the Earth²⁰. The study's lead researcher, Dr Diarmuid Torney, assessed the extent to which the new Climate Act delivers eight core components that have been identified as key features of national framework climate laws. His analysis found that Ireland's Climate Act is broadly in the realm of international best practice, although there are some exceptions and remaining shortcomings.

The ***Climate Action Plan 2021: Securing Our Future***²¹ was published on Thursday November 4th, 2021. The Plan outlines the likely impacts of climate change here and across the globe, stating that the impact of climate change will be felt by every individual, household, and community in Ireland. It sets out an overall target for achieving a reduction on Green House Gas Emissions and assigns sub-targets to a range of sectors:

- Electricity 62-81%
- Transport 42-50%
- Agriculture 22-30%
- Buildings 44-56%
- Industry 29-41%
- Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) 37-58%

The Plan outlines the governance arrangements in place to ensure implementation of the Plan, which has a legislative underpinning. These will include:

- The Climate Action Delivery Board, which will ensure that each department and public body is held to account for the delivery of actions set out in the Climate Action Plan. The Board will also review key strategic projects and areas of work.
- The Cabinet Committee on Environment and Climate Change, supported by the associated senior officials' group, will be central to climate policy formulation and implementation on a whole-of government basis.

The Plan suggests using the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) definition of just transition - "A just transition is one which seeks to ensure transition is fair, equitable, and inclusive in terms of processes and outcomes". The Plan states that a just transition can, therefore, refer both to the broader policy framework of climate action to support individuals and communities in the transition, as well as the process of ensuring that individuals and communities have a voice and a role in informing and shaping these supports.

The Plan outlines a just transition framework that is made up of four principles:

1. An integrated, structured, and evidence-based approach to identify and plan our response to just transition requirements. This will include the establishment of a new Just Transition Commission at a national level to manage the long-term agenda of a just transition to a climate-neutral economy and society.
2. People are equipped with the right skills to be able to participate in and benefit from the future net zero economy.
3. The costs are shared so that the impact is equitable and existing inequalities are not exacerbated, including:
 - a. A commitment to ensuring that the costs associated with transition are shared so that the impact is equitable and that existing inequalities are not exacerbated.
 - b. Ensuring that the impacts of increasing carbon tax will be balanced by a targeted package of social protection supports that offset impacts on lower-income households.
 - c. Considerations around costs and equity will also apply to other fiscal measures, as well as to the provision of grants or other supports to assist the implementation of climate policy.
 - d. A commitment to ensuring that people experience the benefits of a greener future and are not hit with disproportionately high costs if they wish to participate, to include government supports for low income households to participate in schemes.
4. Social dialogue to ensure impacted citizens and communities are empowered and are core to the transition process. The Plan provides examples of how climate considerations are to be integrated into policy development, including:
 - Integration of community participation mechanisms in the Renewable Electricity Support Scheme.
 - Provision of 100% grant funding for retrofitting to lower income households under the Warmer Homes Scheme.
 - A new Connecting Ireland Rural Mobility Plan to reduce reliance on private cars.
 - Integration of just transition into national rural development policy, Our Rural Future, as an essential building block to achieve a sustainable, resilient and climate neutral economy and society.
 - Inclusion of climate change and just transition actions and associated themes in the **new Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme**, and support for the provision of training and capacity building in relation to climate change with a focus on just transition, social inclusion and anti-poverty for Local Community Development Committees and Local Development Companies.

Strategy and Action

The climate crisis requires a fast and fair response at multiple levels of governance from the local to the global. For practitioners, the key question is how to adapt the existing knowledge and skills base of community development to respond to these issues. Community work values emphasise the importance of social justice, equality and human rights in climate action. A community work approach can support the collective participation and empowerment of communities in climate action, making an important contribution to ambitious, equitable climate action.



Community Work Values and Climate Justice

Community Work Value	Values in Action
 <p>Participation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring the right of communities to meaningfully participate in climate policy making at all relevant levels, including their right to say no to polluting industries such as mining. • Supporting people to build community resilience and mitigate their community's risks to climate change.
 <p>Collectivity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting communities to advocate for just, equitable climate policy responses. • Building community capacity for a just transition locally through community food, energy, economic and other initiatives. • Developing community action plans to respond to environmental crises (flooding, heatwaves) and protect the vulnerable. • Fostering alliances and networking between communities, climate justice movements and other allies.
 <p>Community Empowerment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitating education and consciousness raising that connects the climate crisis to people's lived realities and concerns. • Supporting communities' ability to understand the crisis, analyse the options and take collective action. • Building collective psychological resilience by addressing climate anxiety and despair.
 <p>Human Rights, Equality and Anti-discrimination</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Framing the climate crisis as a symptom of global inequality and oppression. • Linking local climate and environmental concerns to human rights frameworks and mechanisms. • Focusing on the protection and realisation of the human rights of marginalised communities in the climate crisis and climate policy responses. • Emphasising the intersections and linkages between the climate crisis and other issues from a human rights perspective.
 <p>Social Justice and Sustainable Development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting nature connection and experiential, nature-based learning in communities. • Promoting the development of policies that are environmentally, economically and socially sustainable and socially just. • Emphasising global climate justice, solidarity and strategically co-ordinated action through alliance building and networking between communities.

Consider developing a strategy at:

Community level

- Organise a local climate conversation where people can ask questions, express their concerns and explore options for action.
- Support the community to undertake an assessment of the climate associated risks they may be exposed to in their community.
- Engage with Local Environmental Networks and ensure that social inclusion is on their agenda.
- Assess supports for transition from agencies such as the Sustainable Energy Association of Ireland (SEAI).
- Support the emergence of community initiatives such as community gardens, community energy initiatives, local cycling initiatives and social enterprises.
- Organise exchanges or visits to innovative community projects.
- Develop an understanding that climate is linked to other global challenges and that climate justice intersects.
- Create opportunities for collective action to voice concerns and seek change from government or corporations.
- Join existing movements, show solidarity with organisations and causes seeking social justice.

Organisational Level

- Organise internal discussion on climate and organise capacity building sessions if required.
- Develop a sustainability policy for the organisation starting with an organisational assessment of energy, waste, water, transportation etc.
- Upgrade the organisations infrastructure using available supports to ensure energy efficiency.
- Review the organisations supply chain and adopt a policy to use local and ethical products and services as much as possible.
- Join local and national environmental organisations and networks (eg; Friends of the Earth, CAIM – Community Action against the Injustice of Mining²²)
- Promote a climate justice agenda – with local, national and international movements and events.
- Create spaces for young people to participate meaningfully (see the work of NYC's future generations project)²³

Policy level– local and national

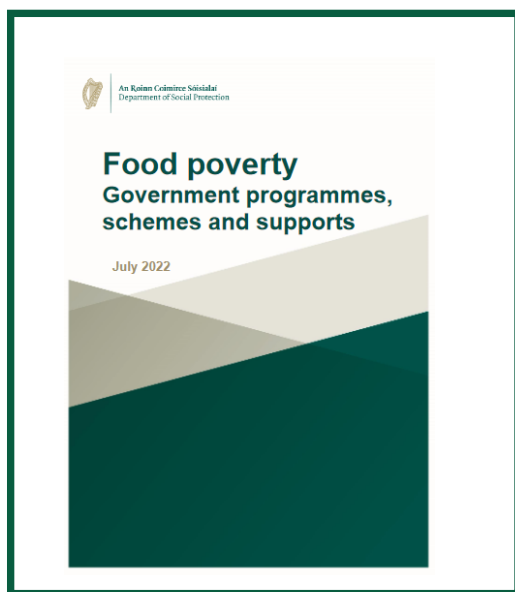
- Encourage individual community workers in your organisation to join CWI and engage in the climate justice campaigns. Ensure your community has a say in climate policy consultations locally and nationally.
- Explore creative means to develop and share the community's vision for a just transition with policy makers.²⁴
- Engage with the State's climate conservation initiative.

Strategic and Structural Action

To be meaningful and effective, local climate justice action should connect with the concerns and lived experiences of the community. Through conversations and listening, community workers can identify how climate justice issues affect and connect with local people. The rising cost of fuel may be a source of anger, affecting home heating and transportation. Access to good quality organic and local food could emerge as an issue, with people experiencing food poverty. Air pollution could be the issue that generates concern, with heavy traffic running through the community. Whatever issues emerge as a common concern can be used to catalyse collective analysis and action.

Community workers can support community members to analyse the issue and identify pathways for meaningful change. When it comes to climate justice, local action is essential. But it is also important to think strategically and act structurally – linking local action to broader efforts for change. Identifying the relevant policies, exploring good practice examples and working with others to scale up action are helpful strategies to ensure local climate action has structural impact.

Action Example – Food Poverty



The Government's Food Poverty Working Group was established in 2021, under the Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020 – 2025

Food poverty is an issue in many local communities in Ireland¹, where people lack access to good quality, nutritious produce.

This issue connects with the broader climate crisis because climate change is disrupting our food systems and driving up grocery prices. Furthermore, the food system is also often extremely unsustainable and is a driver of climate change. Additionally, agriculture globally is reliant on cheap migrant labourers who have poor workers' rights. Industrial agricultural practices contribute to pollution and global food supply chains mean that out of season produce is transported long distances and sold across the globe from where it was grown.²

Let's imagine a scenario where practitioners in a community notice that food prices and access to quality food is an issue for many people. A local charity has set up a food bank to address the immediate needs of families, but how could a community work response work towards changes that are more strategic and structural?

Here are some steps they could take:

¹ The first report of the Government's food poverty working group was published in July 2022. See *Food poverty: Government programmes, schemes and supports* (2022) for more details: <https://assets.gov.ie/230064/065ff541-d304-4bd6-8f4b-16ceb0b67fdb.pdf>

² For more on our food systems and fair, sustainable alternatives, see Tallamh Beo: <https://talamhbeo.ie/>.

Step	Detail	Examples
Creating space for local dialogue <i>How are people experiencing the issue? What are the common concerns?</i>	When workers begin to hear community members concerns about food poverty, they might create spaces where people can share and reflect with each other about the issue. They could support people to voice concerns, listen to one another, explore options and begin to develop a plan of action.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A community food sharing event. • A coffee morning. • A trip to a local community garden.
Map policies, actors and drivers <i>What current policies address this issue? Who are the key players in this issue? What are the drivers and root causes?</i>	Workers might then support community leaders to identify the current policies exist in this area and map the key policy and political actors. Tools such as the spectrum of allies tool ³ and iceberg mapping could be helpful here. ⁴ This would enable the community workers to build a better understanding of the drivers, root causes and key actors around the food poverty they are experiencing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The work of the Government's food policy working group • Recent research on food poverty in Ireland⁵ • The "Social Determinants of Health" framework and Healthy Ireland⁶
Identify local actions <i>What can the community do locally to address the issue?</i>	Workers might then support the community to identify practical collective action they can take locally to address food poverty. The community might visit and learn from other communities and projects to share knowledge, get inspiration and feel empowered.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Starting a community garden or a Community Supported Agriculture project⁷ • Community cooking and food sharing events
Build alliances to work for structural changeup action <i>How can we make our voices heard and create political and policy change? How can we work with others to have a bigger impact & influence change?</i>	With local collective action giving the people a sense of agency, workers might then help the community to build alliances with other communities, NGOs and campaigns. Here the mapping of policies, actors and drivers could guide the community to develop a campaign for political change. Through this networking and campaigning, the community would continue to learn and deepen their analysis of the issues of food poverty.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging with the Healthy City & Counties Network. • Attending the annual National Social Inclusion Forum. • Joining Tallamh Beo and campaigning for a fair food system. • Raising issues through the PPN or Local Environmental Network. • Joining (or starting) a local Food Policy Council⁸

³ Spectrum of Allies tool: <https://commonslibrary.org/spectrum-of-allies/>

⁴ Iceberg mapping tool: <https://commonslibrary.org/iceberg/>

⁵ Drew, M (2022) *Uncovering Food Poverty in Ireland: A Hidden Deprivation*. Bristol University Press: Bristol.

⁶ Healthy Ireland: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/030396-healthy-ireland-outcomes-framework/>

⁷ Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) projects are partnerships between farmers and communities to supply fresh produce to the local market. There are many springing up around Ireland. See the CSA Facebook page for more: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/245019725582313/>

⁸ Cork city has an active local Food Policy Council and in the UK Edinburgh and Bristol are great examples (See resource list for links).

Resources

- Air Quality: <https://communitylawandmediation.ie/centre-for-environmental-justice/what-is-environmental-justice/>
- *Community Development Journal* special issue on Climate Justice: <https://academic.oup.com/cdj/issue/57/1>
- Karen Bell on working class environmentalism:
- <https://www.unrisd.org/en/library/blog-posts/including-working-class-people-in-thetransition-to-sustainability>
- Environmental Justice, Popular Struggle and Community Development by Anne Harley and Eurig Scandrett: <https://policy.bristoluniversitypress.co.uk/environmental-justicepopular-struggle-and-community-development>
- The Irish Environmental Justice Manual: <https://envjusticemanual.com/>
- Short Inspirational Read: The Michigan Urban Farming Initiative - focusing on food insecurity and community investment, Available at: In Detroit, A New Type of Agricultural Neighbourhood Has Emerged - YES! Magazine (yesmagazine.org)
- Toolkit/Sessions – Irish Context: Action for Community Transformation - Community Facilitators Toolkit, Available at: Action for Community Transformation - Global Action Plan
- Research/current news: Mary Robinson Foundation – Climate Justice | (mrfcj.org)
- Research/events: Research | Development Perspectives
- Activism: Extinction Rebellion | Join The Fight Against Climate and Ecological Collapse
- Activism: Fridays For Future is an international climate movement active in most countries and our website offers information on who we are and what you can do.
- 5 Ways You Can Take Climate Action | UNFCCC Action - United Nations Sustainable Development.

References

- ¹ The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is the United Nations body for assessing the science related to climate change. It was created in 1988 to provide policymakers with scientific assessments on climate change, its implications and risks, as well as to put forward options for action. See <https://www.ipcc.ch/> for more on their work.
- ² <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.abk0063>
- ³ www.stockholmresilience.org/research/planetary-boundaries/planetary-boundaries/about-the-research/the-nineplanetary-boundaries.html
- ⁴ *A safe and just space for humanity* (2012, p. 19): https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file_attachments/dp-a-safe-and-just-space-for-humanity-130212en_5.pdf
- ⁵ <https://www.cwi.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/All-Ireland-Standards-for-Community-Work.pdf>
- ⁶ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/bonniechiu/2021/10/30/cop26-why-are-women-still-missing-at-the-top-climatetable/?sh=5dee8c41519d>
- ⁷ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/speech/2022/11/speech-focus-on-gender-equality-as-central-to-climate-action-with-concrete-solutions>
- ⁸ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/in-focus/2022/03/in-focus-un-commission-on-the-status-of-womencsw66>
- ⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/aug/23/big-oil-coined-carbon-footprints-to-blame-us-for-their-greed-keep-them-on-the-hook>
- ¹⁰ For more examples of greenwashing see: <https://thesustainableagency.com/blog/greenwashing-examples/>
- ¹¹ See the [Mary Robinson Foundation: Climate Justice](#)
- ¹² <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/139811>
- ¹³ <https://julianagyeman.com/books/introducing-just-sustainabilities/> ¹⁴ See Ife (2013) *Community Development in an Uncertain World*, p. 52.
- ¹⁵ European Green Deal: https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-greendeal_en
- ¹⁶ European Climate Law: https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/european-green-deal/european-climate-law_en
- ¹⁷ Socially fair transition factsheet: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/fs_21_3677
- ¹⁸ The EU Just Transition Mechanism: https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-20192024/european-green-deal/finance-and-green-deal/just-transition-mechanism_en
- ¹⁹ European Social Climate Fund: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20221212IPR64528/deal-on-establishing-the-social-climate-fund-to-support-the-energy-transition>
- ²⁰ [https://www.foe.ie/assets/files/pdf/comparative assessment of the climate action act 2021 dcu october 20 21 1.pdf](https://www.foe.ie/assets/files/pdf/comparative%20assessment%20of%20the%20climate%20action%20act%202021%20dcu%20october%2021%201.pdf)
- ²¹ <https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/2f87c-climate-action-plan-2021/?referrer=http://www.gov.ie/climateaction/>
- ²² CAIM Network: <https://www.facebook.com/CAIMnetwork/>
- ²³ National Youth Council's climate justice work: <https://www.youth.ie/climate-justice/>
- ²⁴ TASC's "People's Transition" project is an example of this: <https://www.peoplestransition.ie/>
- ²⁵ The first report of the Government's food poverty working group was published in July 2022. See *Food poverty Government programmes, schemes and supports* (2022) for more details: <https://assets.gov.ie/230064/065ff541d304-4bd6-8f4b-16ceb0b67fdb.pdf>
- ²⁶ For more on our food systems and fair, sustainable alternatives, see Tallamh Beo: <https://talamhbeo.ie/>.
- ²⁷ Spectrum of Allies tool: <https://commonslibrary.org/spectrum-of-allies/>
- ²⁸ Iceberg mapping tool: <https://commonslibrary.org/iceberg/>
- ²⁹ Drew, M (2022) *Uncovering Food Poverty in Ireland: A Hidden Deprivation*. Bristol University Press: Bristol.
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- ³² Cork city has an active local Food Policy Council and in the UK Edinburgh and Bristol are great examples (See resource list for links).