



TALKING GREEN IN EUROPE

LESSONS ON RE-FRAMING THE PUBLIC DEBATE ON THE CLIMATE CRISIS FROM THREE SURVEYS

SUMMARY

This policy brief asks how progressive actors can communicate about the climate crisis in a way that resonates with people from different backgrounds. The brief argues that policy proposals for a just transition do not automatically garner public support, but instead must be accompanied by a re-framing of the public discourse. Drawing on the results of three surveys carried out by FEPS and its partner organisations in the UK, Ireland and Hungary in 2021 as part of the Talking Green project, this policy brief argues that an effective and inclusive framing of climate actions needs to fulfil two conditions. The first condition is that a progressive narrative should emphasise the links between climate change and climate policies, and the lived experiences of people. Linking climate change and climate policies to more immediate concerns like healthcare, housing or energy, and improvements in quality of life more generally, emerges as a promising communication strategy. The second condition is that a progressive narrative must dispel fears that the costs of climate action will be imposed on vulnerable groups. Messages about the 'just transition' or 'green jobs' are already addressing those concerns. Progressives, however, need to ensure that those messages remain concrete and relatable.



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This policy brief benefitted greatly from the analytical work performed by the authors of the Talking Green project in the UK, Ireland and Hungary. In addition, specific thanks go to Luke Raikes, Sean McCabe, Elisha Winkel, Kevin le Merle and Guillaume Beaumier, all of whom provided valuable feedback in the drafting process of this policy brief. Any errors and omissions remain the responsibility of the author.

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This Policy Brief was produced with the financial support of the European Parliament. It does not represent the view of the European Parliament.

Stories matter!

With each year of rising or constant greenhouse gas emissions, the necessity of drastic action and increased ambition in mitigating climate change becomes greater. If drastic policies are, however, adopted without consideration of inequalities and people's concerns, they risk exacerbating existing unfairness and fears of being left behind, thereby entrenching resistance to climate action. In the past years, the policy debate about climate change has increasingly recognised the importance of paying attention to the social aspects.¹ While this is a crucial step, this shift in emphasis does not necessarily solve, however, the problem of lacking public support for climate action.

Rather than assuming that support for ambitious climate policies will automatically arise if we calibrate the effects of climate policies in a materially fairer manner,² progressive policymakers must also pay attention to creating a shared narrative that manages to build trust in climate action across a broad spectrum of the population.

Yet, to date we have little information about whether people are convinced by messaging that

emphasises the combination of the green and the social transformation.

The fact that a narrow focus on policy design might fall short of galvanising public support has recently been illustrated in a longitudinal study in Canada and Switzerland, which found that a correlation between material benefits from a carbon dividend and the support for carbon pricing is largely absent. Instead, political alignment remains the most powerful predictor of support for such policies.³ While these results should be interpreted with care in light of the broader literature on both the central role attributed to carbon pricing⁴ and public support for different revenue-recycling options,⁵ they nonetheless provide a powerful illustration of the fact that **socially just climate action remains a political as much as a policy issue.**

Cynical voices might argue that such results illustrate that climate policy – just as other policy fields – has reached the ‘post-factual’ stage, where neither the findings of climate science nor seemingly obvious material benefits are able to challenge deeply entrenched political convictions. This policy brief starts,

1 This shift is illustrated by the increase of references to a ‘just transition’ in documents like the cover declaration of COP 26 in Glasgow as well as in the proposal of policy initiatives such as the Social Climate Fund in the European Union.

2 For a recent analysis on how to ensure the progressive distribution of carbon pricing revenues, see Gore, T. (2022). Can Polluter Pays policies in the buildings and transport sectors be progressive? Assessing the distributional impacts on households of the proposed reform of the Energy Taxation Directive and extension of the Emissions Trading Scheme. Research report, Institute for European Environmental Policy, [https://ieep.eu/uploads/articles/attachments/7a9ac44a-fa75-4caf-9db5-76d55110217c/Can%20polluter%20pays%20policies%20in%20buildings%20and%20transport%20be%20progressive%20IEEP%20\(2022\).pdf?v=63813977582](https://ieep.eu/uploads/articles/attachments/7a9ac44a-fa75-4caf-9db5-76d55110217c/Can%20polluter%20pays%20policies%20in%20buildings%20and%20transport%20be%20progressive%20IEEP%20(2022).pdf?v=63813977582)

3 Mildemberger, M. et al (2022). Limited impacts of carbon tax rebate programmes on public support for carbon pricing. *Nature Climate Change*, 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-021-01268-3>; https://www.volts.wtf/p/do-dividends-make-carbon-taxes-more?r=281cj&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=email (for news coverage).

4 For arguments emphasising the centrality of carbon pricing, see amongst others Stiglitz, J. E. et al (2018). Report of the High-Level Commission on Carbon Prices. Carbon Pricing Leadership Coalition. For critical takes that start from a different, evolutionary conception of the economy see for instance Patt, A., and Lilliestam, J. (2018). The Case against Carbon Prices. *Joule*, 2(12), 2494-98. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.joule.2018.11.018>

5 On the generally low support for environmental taxation and factors impacting it see eg Bachus, K. et al (2019). ‘No taxation without hypothecation’: Towards an improved understanding of the acceptability of an environmental tax reform. *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning*, 21(4), 321-32. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1523908X.2019.1623654>

however, from a less drastic and more nuanced interpretation of the politicisation of climate change. As long recognised in experiments in behavioural economics, and in contrast to the assumptions of neoclassical economics, humans are not rational automata that base their decisions solely on narrow financial benefits.⁶ Relatedly, social scientists from various disciplines have long emphasised the importance of narratives and so-called ‘frames’ in interpreting and making sense of complex situations.⁷ And it is through these frames and narratives that the political rather than the policy aspect enters the debate about climate issues.

Framing matters politically, as it opens up the possibility of parties, policymakers and other actors making certain pieces of information more salient while downplaying others. Notably, the process of framing covers both the diagnosis of a problem and the proposed solutions that are often already implicit in the diagnostic step.⁸

When it comes to climate politics, framing does not, however, start in a political vacuum, where all discourse participants have equal access to the ‘market of ideas’. Instead, frames operate in a historically laden context that reflects past

interventions from policymakers, academics, business representatives and civil society.⁹ The historical context of the debate is also shaped by power asymmetries and material interests among the discourse participants. Recent research has, for instance, mapped strategies by special interests to deliberately (and against better knowledge) downplay the effects of climate change and overemphasise the costs of political action.¹⁰

In light of the importance of frames for public opinion regarding climate action and the fraught terrain that has historically marked the debates on climate action, progressives are confronted with the question of how to develop an effective frame that enables us to deliver a radical and socially just climate transition.

This policy brief argues that instead of exclusively focusing on policy design and decrying the precedence of narratives over (seemingly) unmediated factual information, progressives also need to engage in framing processes. When doing so, they need to strike a careful balance between changing the policy discourse to garner support for socially just and effective climate policies and telling a story that remains relatable to a broad range of people.

6 Henrich, J. et al (2001). In Search of Homo Economicus: Behavioral Experiments in 15 Small-Scale Societies. *The American Economic Review* 91(2): 73-8.

7 See for example Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*. Northeastern University Press; Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51-8; Shiller, R. J. (2017). Narrative economics. *American Economic Review*, 107(4), 967-1004.

8 Cf Entmann 1993.

9 On the evolution of the discourse of ‘environmentalism’ see eg: Bothello, J., and Salles-Djelic, M.-L. (2018). Evolving Conceptualizations of Organizational Environmentalism: A Path Generation Account. *Organization Studies*, 39(1), 93-119.

10 Eg Bonneuil, C. et al (2021). Early warnings and emerging accountability: Total’s responses to global warming, 1971–2021. *Global Environmental Change*, 71, 102386. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2021.102386>; Lamb, W. F. et al (2020). Discourses of climate delay. *Global Sustainability*, 3. <https://doi.org/10.1017/sus.2020.13>

The latter condition is essential since the structural and disruptive policy shifts¹¹ that need to be undertaken to address the climate crisis will require the support of a broad coalition that

includes groups that have not been historically at the forefront of campaigning for climate action, such as the working class, the elderly or farmers.

In search of a progressive story

Progressives have already begun to develop messages reflecting their analyses, solutions and values concerning the climate crisis. **While there have been variations of progressive messages across different places and actors, a common thread has been the foregrounding of economic messages.** One example of such a narrative is the focus on 'just transition' and 'green jobs'. This type of communication has come out of analytical and political work by actors like the trade union movement or the International Labour Organization (ILO).¹² A second example of economic framing that has gained prominence among some progressive actors in the years following the financial crisis of the late 2000s centres around a 'Green New Deal'.¹³ The latter framing of a Green New Deal has notably been somewhat more

radical and emphasised the necessity of radical redistribution of economic power.

While these and other frames have been used by progressive activists themselves to make sense of the climate crisis and find responses to it, to date, little has been known about how they resonate with other parts of the population. This is a significant omission. As Rein and Schön (1993) note in their essay on framing, the success of framing and re-framing is interlinked with the context in which a frame is situated.¹⁴ Hence, the re-framing of a policy debate cannot be undertaken at will but needs to take into account the current state of the debate. This does not mean that a progressive frame needs to engage on the ground that has been established by purveyors of discourses of climate denial and climate delay.¹⁵ It does, however, mean

11 On the emerging consensus for structural changes that go beyond 'greening' existing practices see for example: Geels, F. W. et al (2019). Sustainability transitions: policy and practice. Brussels: European Environmental Agency. Available online: <https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/sustainability-transitions-policy-and-practice>, accessed 24 January 2021. A similar assessment can also be found in the IPCC special report on global warming of 1.5° from 2018, which notes 'Pathways limiting global warming to 1.5°C with no or limited overshoot would require rapid and far-reaching transitions in energy, land, urban and Infrastructure.' <https://www.ipcc.ch/2018/10/08/summary-for-policymakers-of-ipcc-special-report-on-global-warming-of-1-5c-approved-by-governments/>

12 Guidelines for a Just Transition towards Environmentally Sustainable Economies and Societies for All. International Labour Organization, 2015, www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/-ed_emp/-emp_ent/documents/publication/wcms_432859.pdf

13 For a publication from the time of the financial crisis cf Elliot, L. et al (2008). A Green New Deal: Joined-up policies to solve the triple crunch of the credit crisis, climate change and high oil prices. New Economics Foundation & Green New Deal Group; more recently the Green New Deal frame has been championed by members of the US Democrats eg <https://www.congress.gov/bills/116/congress/house-resolution/109/text>

14 Rein, M., and Schön, D. (1993). Reframing Policy Discourse. In F. Fischer and J. Forester (eds), *The Argumentative Turn in Policy Analysis and Planning* (pp. 145-66). Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822381815-007>

15 Climate delay refers to a series of discursive strategies that acknowledge the reality of climate change, but justify inaction. This is achieved amongst other by highlighting the costs of action, favouring non-transformative incremental actions or fatalism. Cf Lamb, W. F. et al (2020). Discourses of climate delay. *Global Sustainability*, 3. <https://doi.org/10.1017/sus.2020.13>

that a frame cannot purely be designed in a top-down and deductive way. Instead, information about the resonance of a frame beyond the groups that readily communicate on its terms is required. Moreover, information on people's wider opinions on climate change, climate policies and its relations with other areas of concern can provide useful background for the crafting of new frames in a less top-down and more inclusive manner.

The Talking Green project, the results of which are presented in this policy brief, fills the need for information about the context in which progressives communicate. The project consists of a series of surveys that investigate attitudes towards climate change and climate policies in the UK, Ireland and Hungary. Different socio-economic backgrounds and political alignments were explicitly accounted for in the surveys. Moreover, the surveys address questions of framing head-on as respondents' reactions to different frames and messages were tested.

The results of the surveys thus provide information on two important questions related to a progressive narrative on climate policies. First, the reactions of survey participants to existing frames provide a 'reality test' for the messages and policies that progressives have communicated in the past. Second, a broader assessment of opinions on climate change

and climate policies can help progressives to assess the state of the debate and come up with new communication strategies. In other words, understanding the context of the current debate and the priorities and attitudes of a broad range of people can enable progressives to adapt existing messages and, if needed, craft new messages, which convey the need for the socio-economic transformation that progressives have identified while also taking the concerns, priorities and values of a wide array of different people into account.

The remainder of this policy brief is organised into three sections. The following section discusses the results of the surveys carried out in the three countries studied. The country case studies all begin with a short description of the political context in which the surveys were carried out. Subsequently, country-specific aspects of the methodologies and polling questions are outlined. This is followed by a discussion of the key findings obtained from the polling data with regards to attitudes on the importance of climate change, the assessment of the impacts of climate policies and the resonance of different frames and messages.¹⁶ The third section draws some general lessons from the surveys in the three country cases and proposes an analytical framework to interpret them. The concluding section summarises the findings and makes recommendations for future messaging and policy design and research.

¹⁶ Only original findings from the respective surveys are presented in this section. Readers who want to explore the literature reviews on which survey design and questions were built are directed to the respective country case studies, which can be accessed at <https://www.feps-europe.eu/articles/36-project/93-talking-green.html>

The Talking Green surveys: UK

Context

In 2021, the political conversation in the UK was arguably most dominated by the Covid 19 pandemic and the implications of the UK leaving the EU. Both issues had already been at the top of the agenda in the previous year.¹⁷ In addition, the UK faced more secular trends such as the prevalence of insecure and low-paid jobs, the decline of certain parts of the country following deindustrialisation, the fallouts from the financial crisis, and the long term effects of austerity measures.¹⁸

In terms of climate policies, the UK government described itself as a global climate leader in the run-up to COP 26 in Glasgow. Indeed, territorial greenhouse gas emissions have fallen considerably in the UK (by over 48.8 percent between 1990 and 2020¹⁹), and comparative assessments mark the country's climate policies and targets in the upper range, attributing it an 'almost sufficient' compliance with the goals of the Paris Agreement.²⁰ However, the track record of the government on climate action has also been questioned in recent times. One notable controversy was the approval of plans for new fossil fuel exploration in the North Sea by the UK government just after COP 26.²¹ Moreover,

some observers have pointed out that the UK's strategies for further decarbonisation lack detail.²²

Survey and methodology

The Fabian Society and FEPS commissioned YouGov to survey 5,005 people across the UK. Fieldwork was undertaken between 1 and 10 October 2021, and responses have been subsequently weighted to ensure representativeness. This survey was conducted at a time shortly preceding COP 26 when climate change issues were in the news more than usual. It was also a time when waste water was in the headlines, and energy prices were a major concern. A particular difference between this and the other polls is that the UK survey places a comparatively higher emphasis on questions of class. This emphasis reflects the persistence of class as a relevant socio-economic and discursive category in the UK. For instance, class-based voting has historically been more dominant in the UK when compared to other countries, and class remains a prominent feature in media debates.^{23 24}

The survey questions investigated respondents' perceptions of how relevant climate change

17 Cf Middleton, A. (2021). United Kingdom: Political Developments and Data in 2020. *European Journal of Political Research Political Data Yearbook*: 1–11, 2021, doi: 10.1111/2047-8852.12328

18 See for example <https://www.ft.com/content/7204c062-1047-11ea-a225-db2f231cfeae>

19 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/976298/2020_UK_greenhouse_gas_emissions_provisional_figures_statistical_summary.pdf, accessed 23 April 2022.

20 <https://climateactiontracker.org/countries/uk/>, accessed 21 April 2022.

21 <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/mar/24/uk-government-to-allow-new-north-sea-oil-and-gas-exploration>, accessed 21 April 2022.

22 <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/jan/12/net-zero-climate-strategy-uk-government-sued>, accessed 21 April 2022.

23 Cf Evans, G. (2017). Social Class and Voting. In *The SAGE Handbook of Electoral Behaviour*.

24 Eg <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20160406-how-much-does-social-class-matter-in-britain-today>, accessed 21 April 2022.

is when compared to other policy issues, particularly the economy – and jobs specifically. In addition, opinions on particular policy measures were queried. But the core of the survey was an analysis of people’s reactions to different frames and narratives. To this end, split testing (in broad terms, observing the effect of the ‘treatment’ by asking the opinion on a question before and after reading a message), MaxDiff (picking favourite and least favourite statements) and free-text response methods were applied.²⁵

Views about the importance of climate change and climate policies

Survey results show that climate change is a concern for the UK public, but it is not the top priority.

When asked to rank priority issues for the UK, the economy, the Covid 19 pandemic and health more generally were selected as priority topics by 40 percent, 34 percent and 29 percent of respondents, respectively. ‘The environment’, meanwhile, was deemed to be among the most important issues by 26 percent, thus ranking fourth. This finding indicates that, while environmental concerns are visible, seemingly more immediate crises take priority in public opinion.

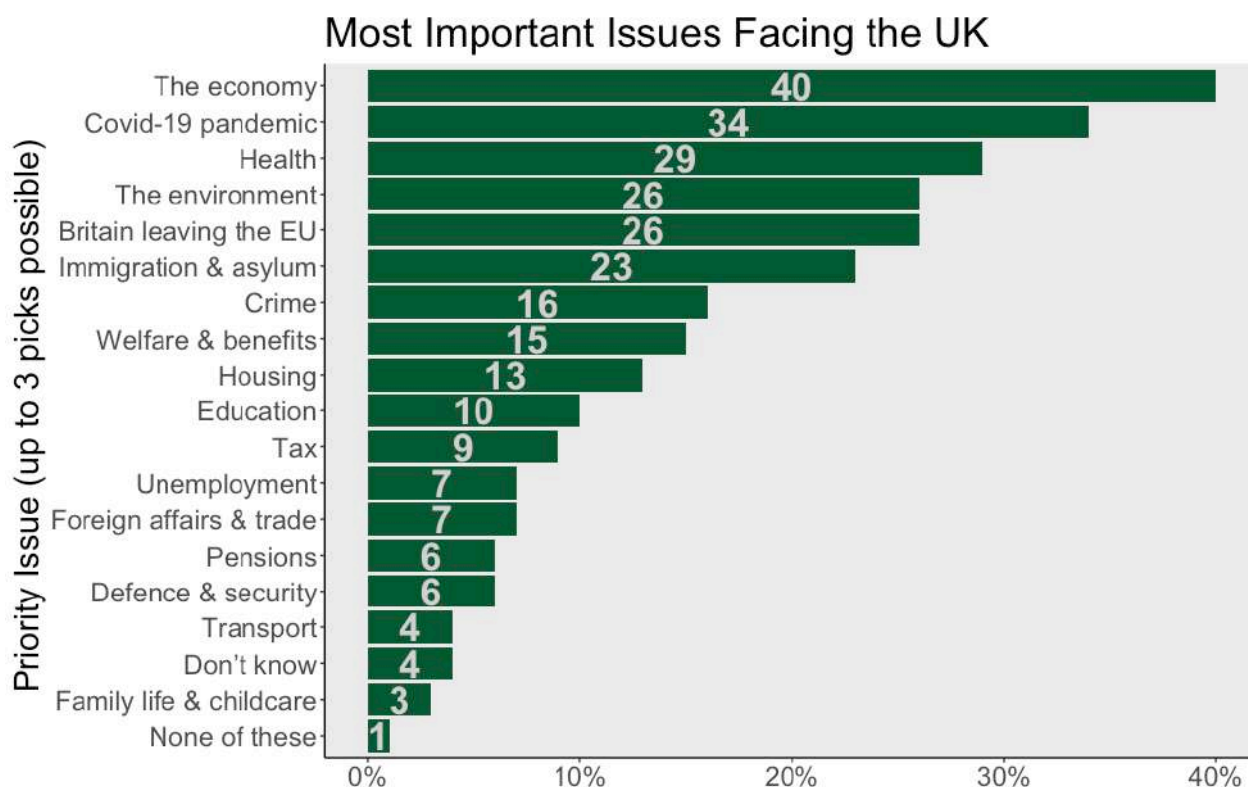


Figure 1. Which of the following do you think are the most important issues facing the country at this time? Please tick up to three (N = 5,005)

²⁵ For a more detailed description, see Talking Green: The UK Survey (2022). p. 37ff, <https://www.feps-europe.eu/articles/36-project/93-talking-green.html>

When it comes to the ranking of different environmental issues, the 'waste we produce' was the most frequently selected response (49 percent) while climate change was relegated to second place (43 percent). This finding suggests that climate change is still seen as less tangible than the seemingly more visible issue of waste.

Importantly, the selection of 'the environment' as a priority issue co-varies with partisanship, age and education. Supporters of the Labour party, people who voted to remain in the EU, younger people (18 to 24 years) and degree-holders ranked the environment higher.²⁶

Expectations on opportunities and the costs of climate policies

With regards to the expected outcomes of climate change, a large percentage of respondents considered climate action to be an opportunity to create jobs (44 percent). Only very few people thought action on climate change would threaten job creation (14 percent). However, a significant portion of respondents answered that they 'don't know' (20 percent) or selected 'neither' (22 percent). Again, higher education levels as well as support for the Labour party and the Remain position in the Brexit referendum were

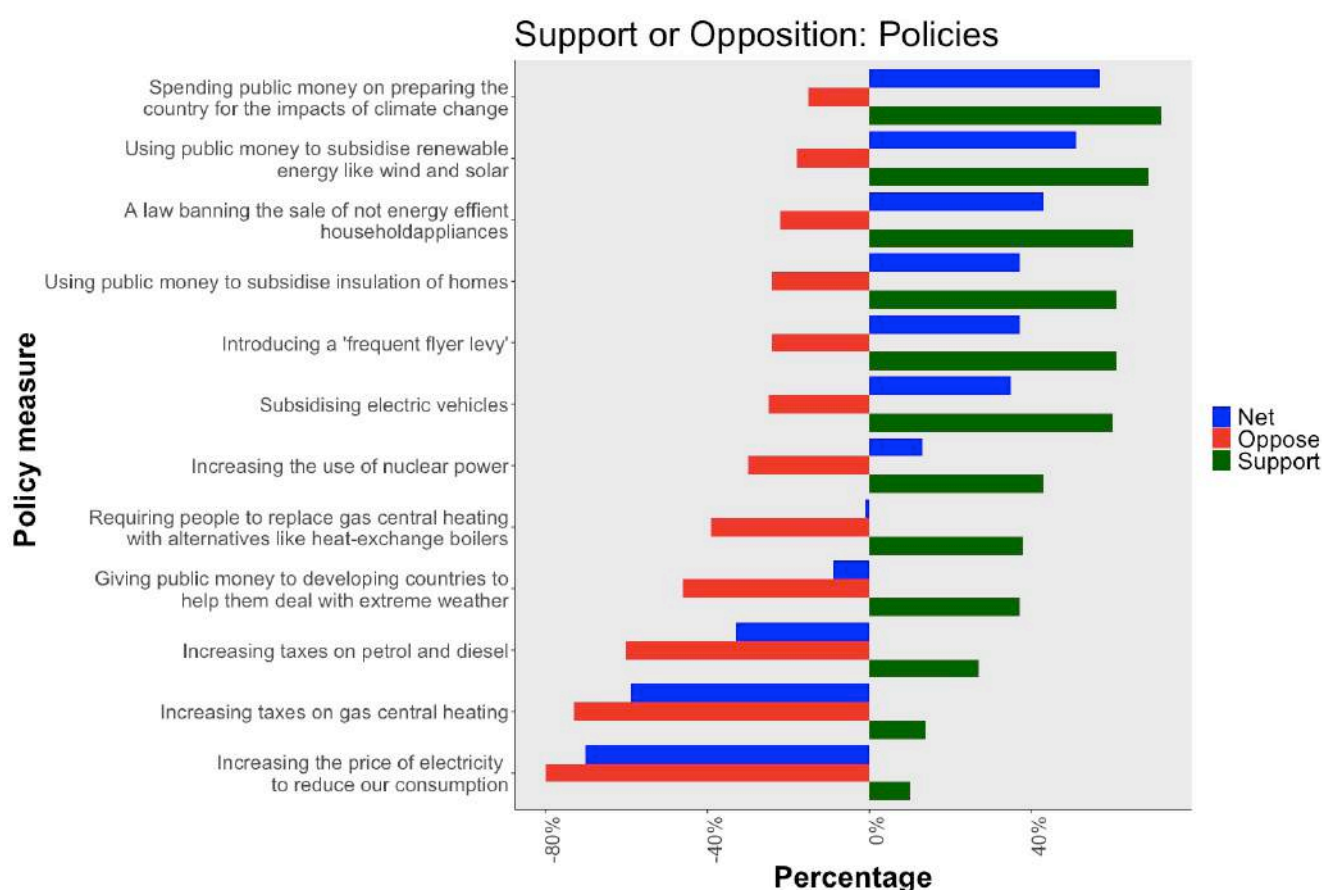


Figure 2. To what extent would you support or oppose the following policies in the UK designed to reduce climate change? Net = Support – Oppose

26 Talking Green: The UK Survey (2022). pp. 21-2 <https://www.feps-europe.eu/articles/36-project/93-talking-green.html>

associated with stronger optimism regarding the impact of climate change on jobs.

In addition to their expectations of future job impacts, respondents were also asked whether they supported or opposed specific climate policies. Consistent with previous research,²⁷ people preferred public investments in climate-friendly infrastructure while remaining opposed to tax increases. Obligations for people to update their heating systems (presumably at their own cost) were unpopular as well. Perhaps more surprisingly, regulations banning energy-inefficient household appliances and the introduction of a frequent-flyer levy also received considerable support.

Effectiveness of frames and messaging

In the context of the survey, respondents were randomly assigned to read two out of four messages telling a story about climate

change and climate policy. These stories were developed to test people's reactions to different frames that have been employed to make certain aspects of climate change and the policy response to it more salient while de-emphasising others.²⁸

The frames offered a diagnosis of the problem and a course for action. Four frames were designed against the background of an extensive literature review and alongside expert input. The frames covered three economic messages and one message focused on quality of life, local environment and nature, for comparison. The frames also incorporated statements pertaining amongst others to energy security, fairness, national leadership, and responsibilities to future generations.²⁹

The full texts of the frames can be found in the Policy Study *Talking Green: The UK Survey*, but the box below provides a high-level summary of each of them.

Frames from *Talking Green: The UK Survey*

- **Industrial decline:** Emphasis on UK manufacturing past and its decline. Clean technologies are presented as a continuation of that past industrial legacy, which will bring back good jobs and will give people pride in what they do.
- **Jobs first:** Emphasis on jobs as the top priority. Taking action on climate change is presented as an opportunity to create jobs, eg for builders or plumbers in renovation.
- **Green New Deal:** Emphasis on the dysfunctional properties of the current economic system and attribution of the climate catastrophe to elites. System change is presented as a solution to provide decent living and employment conditions.
- **Quality of life:** Emphasis on a good life and a healthy local environment. Climate action is presented as a way to safeguard the possibility of living in a healthy and green world.

27 For a discussion of the issue of 'tax aversion' in environmental policy cf Bachus, K. et al (2019). 'No taxation without hypothecation': Towards an improved understanding of the acceptability of an environmental tax reform. *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning*, 21(4), 321-32. in particular pp. 322-4. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1523908X.2019.1623654>

28 See the section 'Stories matter!', above, for a discussion of frames.

29 Talking Green: The UK Survey p. 34ff., <https://www.feps-europe.eu/articles/36-project/93-talking-green.html>

In general, the three economic messages fared worse when compared to the quality-of-life frame. This finding holds true across the different methods that were employed to assess their resonance with survey participants. In so-called split tests, almost all respondents displayed greater agreement with a 'test statement' that argued that climate actions by the government would have more benefits than costs after reading the quality-of-life message. The quality-of-life frame was also found to be more convincing, appealing, realistic or close to peoples' values for broad swathes of the population, when compared to the economic messages. Finally, when asked to pick their favourite stand-alone single sentences from various frames, respondents overwhelmingly picked statements from the quality-of-life frame.³⁰

While the quality-of-life frame resonated across the sample, the economic frames led to more divisive outcomes. Economic frames mostly 'preached to the converted', reinforcing the support for climate action amongst those who were already supportive (ie middle-class degree-holders, younger people, Labour and Remain voters).

By contrast, economic frames remained ineffective in persuading groups that are sceptical about the benefits of climate policies, such as working-class non-degree-holders, older people, and Conservative and Leave voters. For some of these groups, the exposure

to economic messages even had the opposite effect and reinforced negative attitudes.

The positive and negative reactions according to groups were broadly consistent for all three economic frames, but it is also instructive to look at the differences in attitudes towards single sentences. The heatmap in Figure 3 shows the rank received by 20 individual sentences, with a score of 1 indicating the favourite sentence of a group.

The ranking of popular sentences displayed in Figure 3 below confirms the results regarding the positive reception of quality-of-life messages. Accordingly, sentences emphasising quality of life, nature and values were overwhelmingly both the most popular overall and the most unifying across different groups (sentences at the top of the heatmap).

With regards to the economic sentences, a sentence emphasising concrete jobs in clean industries as well as national leadership in offshore wind generation was amongst the five most popular sentences. Moreover, an economic sentence taken from the 'industrial decline' frame that emphasised past industrial capacity and jobs in the UK was particularly popular with Leave voters, 50- to 64-year-olds, those aged 65+, working-class non-degree-holders, middle-class non-degree-holders, working-class under-50s, and working-class over-50s, but less so with others (Remain and Labour voters).

³⁰ The phrase that received the most favourable reaction was: 'We all deserve a good life, with green space, trees and clean air. We need to be in balance with nature, giving everyone the change to live in a beautiful and healthy world'. Talking Green: The UK Survey, p. 40.

	Total	Male	Female	Con	Lab	Remain	Leave	Blue Wall	Red Wall	18-24	25-49	50-64	65+	AB	C1	C2	DE	Working Class, Degree	Working Class, Non-degree	Middle Class, Degree	Middle Class, Non-degree	Working Class, Under 50	Working Class, 50+	Progressive Activists	Civic Pragmatists	Disengaged Battlers	Loyal Nationals
We all deserve a good life, with green space, trees and clean air. We need to be in balance with nature, giving everyone the chance to live in a beautiful and healthy world.	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
We must act to improve green space, clean up our air and take care of our local natural environment, giving everyone the chance to live in a beautiful and healthy world.	2	2	2	3	2	2	3	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	2	2	3	2	2	2	3	2	2	2	3
A healthy environment soaks up pollutants and shields us against extreme weather, like flooding. If we don't protect nature, it can't protect us.	3	3	4	5	4	4	4	4	2	6	4	3	3	4	3	3	3	3	5	4	3	3	5	4	4	4	4
As we tackle climate change, we have the chance to create a new generation of decent, secure jobs in clean industries like electric cars, home insulation and renewable energy. We are already the largest producer of offshore wind energy in the world.	4	4	2	5	3	3	6	3	5	3	2	4	4	3	4	5	3	5	4	3	4	3	4	3	3	5	7
Britain was at the heart of the industrial revolution and then led the world in manufacturing cars and steel. Communities around the country had good secure jobs that provided work for generation after generation.	5	6	8	2	16	17	2	15	4	14	8	5	6	13	10	2	5	16	2	14	8	5	2	19	14	9	2
If we act on climate change, we can provide jobs which give people pride in what they do, especially in parts of the country that need it most.	5	11	5	9	7	7	8	5	12	5	5	10	11	8	5	6	8	8	8	5	10	6	10	7	7	6	9
We will need an army of builders and plumbers to fit insulation or better heating systems in our homes, and we will need people to work in manufacturing – building electric vehicles, wind turbines or solar panels.	5	8	7	7	10	10	6	8	7	13	11	5	4	7	9	8	6	9	7	9	6	9	6	14	5	12	6
To survive and rescue the world from climate change, we have to forge a new path for our economy to protect and build the things people really care about: things like health, fairness and community.	5	9	6	10	6	5	9	6	8	7	6	8	9	5	5	10	8	6	9	5	7	10	8	6	6	8	8
Jobs are our top priority, especially for our young people living in towns across the country, where there often aren't many jobs and opportunities.	9	5	10	3	15	13	5	12	8	7	9	7	7	9	10	6	6	12	6	12	5	7	7	17	12	6	5
The world is at risk of climate change because for decades we've been following just one path, a path guided by rules written by people who do not have our interests at heart – CEOs, politicians, and the elite defending their own wealth and power.	9	6	12	16	4	6	13	9	5	4	7	12	11	10	7	8	8	4	10	8	10	7	9	5	9	2	9

Figure 3. The favourite ten sentences for all respondents from a total of 20 sentences (N = 5,005)

The Talking Green surveys: Ireland

Context

Similar to the other surveyed countries, the timing of the Talking Green survey also coincided in Ireland with the Covid 19 pandemic. Hence, concerns about public health as well as the ramifications of the pandemic on people's economic livelihoods were very present. With regards to the latter issue, the recession and austerity Ireland experienced following the

financial crisis starting in 2008 have also meant that a generation of workers still struggling with the implications of the last crisis is now experiencing a second disruption to their lives within a ten-year timespan.³¹ Moreover, the implications of Brexit for the border with Northern Ireland and the associated political and economic consequences have been frequently featured in the political debate.³²

31 Cf Stories of the Pandemic: The experiences of Millennial and Generation Y workers in Ireland (2020). https://www.tasc.ie/assets/files/pdf/stories_of_the_pandemic_millenialsgeny.pdf

32 Arlow, J., and O'Malley, E. (2019). Ireland: Political Developments and Data in 2018. In *European Journal of Political Research Political Data Yearbook*, 58: 136-42.

Another factor that has particular importance in the current setting of the Irish political debate is the ongoing housing crisis. House and rent prices have risen massively over the past years. Affordable housing remains scarce and the housing market has been described as dysfunctional and catering to the needs of institutional investors over those of people seeking housing.³³

In terms of climate policies, Ireland declared a climate emergency in 2019 and is also bound by the policies at the EU level. As of 2021, Ireland introduced a Carbon Act, setting emissions reductions into law, including a 51 percent reduction target relative to 2018 and net zero emissions by 2050. However, unlike much of the rest of Europe, Irish emissions have been rising compared to 1990 levels³⁴ and Ireland has the second-highest emissions per capita in the EU (17 percent above the average for the EU27). Thus, Ireland requires emission reductions of greater than 70 percent by 2030 against a 2018 baseline to meet the EU target of at least 55 percent by 2030 compared to 1990 levels, as was adopted in the European Climate Law.

Another recent development in Irish climate politics is that in January 2022, during a parliamentary committee on the topic of the

sectoral carbon budgets included in the Carbon Act as a means of achieving the required reductions, a panel of four independent scientists repeatedly called for more ambitious carbon budgets and stressed that Ireland needs to be doing much more to address the climate crisis.³⁵

Apart from the predominance of fossil fuels in energy production,³⁶ Irish agriculture stands out as one of the major contributors to emissions. The agricultural sector, which is based on the industrial rearing of livestock, accounted for 37.1 percent of emissions in 2020. This means that in relative terms, emissions attributed to agriculture are more than three times the EU average (10.55 percent in 2019).³⁷

Notably, the extractive, high-emissions and nature-disrupting system of agriculture currently in place in Ireland is a reflection of past policies that were underpinned by the idea that holds that ever-increasing efficiency is the best solution to lift farmers' income. The promotion of this model of capital and resource-intensive industrial farming has, in turn, created lock-in effects such as high indebtedness of farmers. Meanwhile, the demand for low-cost industrial agricultural products is upheld by people

33 <https://www.nesc.ie/news-events/press-releases/https-www-nesc-ie-p3002previewtrue/; on housing financialisation see http://extranet.greens-efa-service.eu/public/media/file/1/7461>

34 Irish CO2 emissions rose by 5.15% between 1990 and 2022, whereas all greenhouse gas emissions rose by 6.1% between 1990 and 2020. The period between 2008 and 2014 as well as between 2017 and 2020 saw a decrease in emissions, whereas in the years 2015 and 2016 emissions increased, <https://www.iea.org/countries/ireland>, <https://www.epa.ie/our-services/monitoring-assessment/climate-change/ghg/latest-emissions-data/>, accessed 23 April 2022.

35 <https://greennews.ie/key-takeaways-oireachtas-climate-committee-jan-2022/>

36 According to the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, only 11% of its gross energy consumption is from renewable sources. (<https://www.seai.ie/publications/2020-Renewable-Energy-in-Ireland-Report.pdf>)

37 <https://www.epa.ie/our-services/monitoring-assessment/climate-change/ghg/latest-emissions-data/> <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/society/20180301STO98928/greenhouse-gas-emissions-by-country-and-sector-infographic>

working in precarious employment and the gig economy.³⁸

Survey and methodology

The Talking Green Ireland survey was undertaken by the polling agency RedC at the request of FEPS and TASC. The survey was conducted in July 2021 and had 1,010 respondents. Respondents were segmented into subsamples based on their gender and age profiles, as well as according to other categories such as class, working status and region of residence.

The survey included questions on the ranking of climate change vis à vis other priorities and on the perception of climate action. In addition, reactions to narratives about climate change and climate policies as well as the degree of trust in public institutions were queried. A final set of questions analysed whether respondents

preferred bottom-up or top-down policy measures.

Views on the importance of climate change and climate policies

When compared to other priority fields, climate change ranks remarkably low among Irish respondents.

As illustrated in Table 1, only 6 percent selected it as the top priority when attributing ranks to a list of nine issues. By contrast, 31 percent of respondents even ranked it as the least important issue. This result constitutes the lowest level of concern with climate change across the three country cases. While climate change ranked low, health care and housing, which are topics linked to more immediate crises, were perceived as more important.

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%

Table 1. Question: Looking at the below list of issues, please rank these from the most to least important to you and your family (N = 1,010)

38 The People's Transition (2020). TASC and FEPS, p. 31ff, <https://www.feps-europe.eu/resources/publications/762:the-peoples-transition-community-led-development-for-climate-justice.html>

In terms of differences between groups, the ranking of climate change's significance is influenced by age and class, while gender differences do not account for significant variations. Eleven percent of 18- to 24-year-olds selected climate change as their top priority (and 13 percent chose it as the least important issue). Meanwhile, among the age cohort between 35 and 44 years, only 4 percent ranked climate change as the most important issue (and 37 percent selected it as the least important issue), thus making them the least concerned age group.

As to class differences, upper-middle-class and middle-middle-class respondents are more inclined to attribute greater importance to climate change. Eleven percent of respondents from this group chose climate change as their top priority issue and 21 percent singled it out as their lowest priority. By contrast, other socio-economic groups did not differ much from the complete sample in terms of selecting climate change as the top priority. Farmers, however, stick out when it comes to the de-prioritisation of climate change, with more than four out of every five respondents ranking it in the bottom half of their priorities and 35 percent choosing it as their bottom priority.

Expectations on costs and opportunities of climate policies

Fifty-one percent of respondents agreed with the statement that they were worried that climate policies would make life harder, while 21 percent disagreed and 28 percent neither agreed nor disagreed. This shows that fears seem to outweigh optimistic assessments. However, there is also a significant margin of undecided respondents.

When breaking down the answers to this question by age group, it becomes apparent

that while agreement and disagreement are evenly matched for the younger cohort of people aged between 18 and 24 years, older respondents are much more worried about the hardships of climate policies. Moreover, the farming community can be singled out as the one group that is particularly worried about climate policies making life harder (56 percent) when compared to other social classes.

A different question from the survey suggests that the effect of ill-designed policies could be a possible reason for these concerns as 72 percent agreed with the statement that they would like to do more about tackling climate change but deem buying an electric vehicle or retrofitting their house (which notwithstanding subsidies involves considerable investment from households in Ireland) as too expensive.

Effectiveness of frames and messages

The Talking Green Ireland survey presented respondents with six narratives and asked them how effective they were in communicating the urgency of the climate crisis. The narratives centred around: (1) making sure that every country plays their part while taking into account historical responsibilities of developed countries and corporations; (2) the economic benefits from tackling climate change; (3) the duty to protect the environment and create green spaces; (4) Irish global leadership on climate action; (5) the job impacts of a Green New Deal; and (6) emphasis on Ireland's need to reduce its emissions while helping developing countries to transition.

Importantly, the first three frames were formulated in a tangible way using a more active tone, while statements 4 to 6 were written in a more abstract style.

When gauging the resonance of the frames,

respondents clearly preferred the active statements, which were deemed as very effective by between 39 percent and 48 percent. The abstract messages were seen as very effective by 26 percent to 29 percent of respondents.

In terms of the efficacy of the individual statements, the first one that emphasises the need for everybody to play their part while accounting for historical responsibilities was deemed as the most effective. Meanwhile, the statement on Irish global leadership had the

highest proportion of respondents marking it as ineffective (25 percent).

The efficacy of economic messages (2 and 5), meanwhile, seems to be subject to the same distinction between tangible and abstract. Whereas the message on long-term economic benefits is deemed very effective by 41 percent and seen as ineffective by 10 percent, the corresponding numbers are 26 percent and 19 percent for the Green New Deal statement.

Talking Green survey: Hungary

Context

The Talking Green survey in Hungary was conducted against the backdrop of the campaign for the parliamentary elections that took place on 3 April 2022.³⁹ As in the other country case studies, the disruptions associated with the ongoing Covid 19 pandemic also influenced the context of the survey.

Hungarian politics has been dominated by Victor Orbán and the Fidesz party since 2010. Taking an economically liberal stance in terms of economic policy, the government has encouraged foreign direct investment, not least through the artificial depression of wages and workers' rights.⁴⁰ Moreover, government initiatives have also often benefited the upper middle class. Looking at the broader political

developments, the governing party has turned to strong nationalist and extreme right-wing populist messaging over the past years. In this regard, the government has rallied and enacted policies on migration, opposition to LGBTQI+ rights, and taken a hostile stance against the EU more generally. The latter is also reflected in an ongoing stand-off relating to the distribution of EU funds being conditional on the rule of law as multiple allegations of corruption have been raised against the Hungarian government.⁴¹

The Hungarian government is committed to climate policies and has adopted the net zero target by 2050 in law. Territorial CO2 and overall greenhouse gas emissions have decreased by over 30 percent since 1990.⁴² More recently, however, issues related to climate and environmental politics have been portrayed

39 For a detailed analysis of the victory of incumbent Victor Orbán and the policy environment that the campaign took place in, see <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/06/opinion/viktor-orban-hungary-election.html>, accessed 21 April 21 2022

40 The discussions about the so-called 'slave law' in 2018 being an illustration, cf Varnagy, R. (2019). Hungary: Political developments and data in 2018, *European Journal of Political Research Political Data Yearbook* 58: 123–31.

41 Ibid.

42 Emissions have, however, increased in recent years with 2013 marking the low point for overall emissions and 2014 for CO2 emissions. <https://www.iea.org/countries/hungary>, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EN.ATM.CO2E.KT?locations=HU>, accessed 23 April 2022.

by the ruling party as a Western or EU fad that imposes costs on ordinary households.⁴³ In addition, some observers have raised doubts over the willingness of Hungary to implement more ambitious climate policies in the future in light of the fact it has sided with countries such as Poland, a country that sought to delay decarbonisation policies such as the phase-out of coal at the European level in the past.⁴⁴

Survey and methodology

The Hungarian Talking Green project was carried out by FEPS, the Institute for Social Democracy and the Progressive Hungary Foundation and is based on an opinion poll by Publicus Institute. The poll was carried out between 24 and 30 September 2021 through telephone interviews and an online questionnaire. The sample included 1,022 respondents and the resulting database is representative of the adult population in Hungary by gender, age and education.

The survey included questions on the importance of climate change, the assessment of climate policies in Hungary and the opportunities and costs that people expect from a green transition. In addition, respondents' opinions with regards to the priorities of environmental actions were surveyed. Finally, their attitudes to the slogan a 'just green turn' were queried.

Views on the importance of climate change and climate policies

There is overwhelming concern about climate change as 96 percent of respondents identify it as a serious problem with 69 percent of respondents saying it is a very important problem.

Fifty-four percent of respondents, furthermore, indicated that they strongly or somewhat agree that climate change is the most serious problem we face. This overwhelming concern with climate change singles out the Hungarian case when compared to the survey results in the UK and Ireland. When interpreting the data, it should, however, be noted that the Hungarian poll did not ask respondents to rank climate change in relation to other crises.

Expectations on opportunities and costs of climate policies

When it comes to the costs and opportunities of climate action, a majority of respondents (72 percent) expects positive economic impacts of a more ambitious climate policy in Hungary in the short term. This assessment is even more pronounced (83 percent) when considering long-term impacts.

However, the picture becomes more mixed when possible impacts of climate policies are further broken down. Seventy-four percent of respondents believe, for instance, that new sustainable jobs will be an outcome of a green transition and 67 percent expect cost reductions

43 <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/utopian-fantasy-hungarys-orban-dismisses-eu-climate-policy-plans-2021-10-21/>, accessed 21 April 2022.

44 Sources: Policy Solutions (2022). Hungarian Politics in 2022 https://www.policysolutions.hu/userfiles/Policy_Solutions_Hungarian_Politics_2021_web.pdf, <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/ungarn-wahl-viktor-orban-fidesz-steuergeschenke-inflation-opposition-1.5506309>, accessed 21 April 2022; Climate Change News June 2020, <https://www.climatechangenews.com/2020/06/04/hungary-sets-2050-climate-neutrality-goal-law-issues-green-bond/>, accessed 21 April 2022.

due to improvements in energy efficiency. At the same time, fears of negative impacts of a green turn such as significant increases in the cost of living (61 percent), higher taxes (40

percent), lower social support (34 percent) and job losses (31 percent) are also expressed by either a majority or a non-negligible minority of respondents.

**According to you, how probable are the following impacts?
(as % of all respondents)**

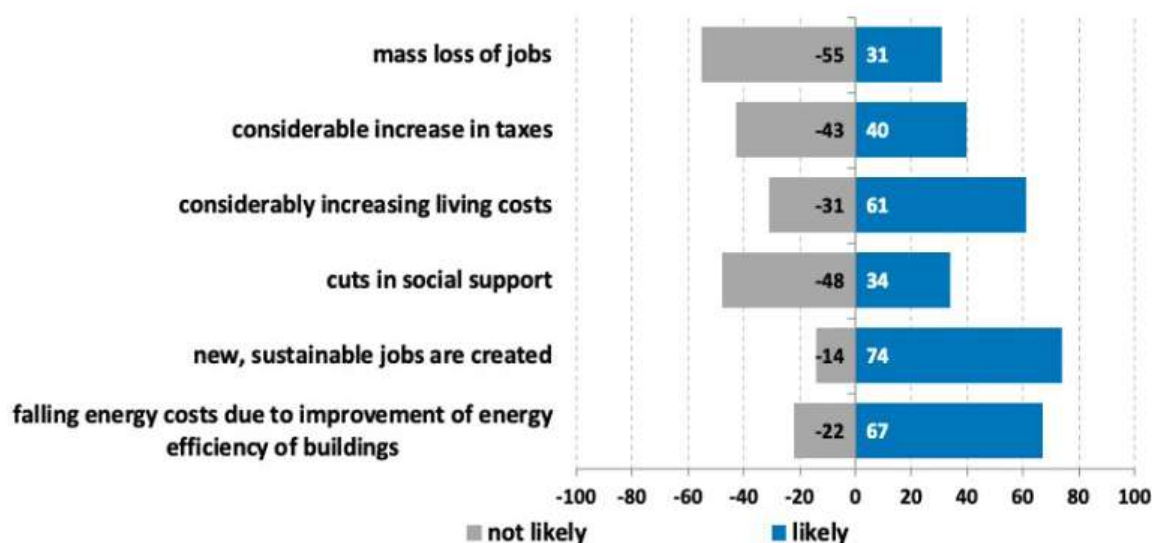


Figure 4. Perception of likelihood of positive and negative impacts related to a green transition (N = 1,022)

In this context, it is noteworthy that expectations of opportunities and costs of climate policies vary with partisanship as well as with education, wealth levels and regional divides. Government supporters are more inclined than opposition voters to highlight negative consequences, which is illustrated by a 4 to 8 percent difference between the two groups when it comes to assessing the likelihood of the negative impacts mentioned above.⁴⁵

In addition, fears of negative impacts are a greater concern for those with lower education

levels. Fewer people from this group expect positive impacts. By way of illustration, 67 percent of high school diploma-holders fear an increased cost of living whereas only 52 percent of respondents with a university degree share the same view. Similarly, 36 percent of skilled workers think that mass lay-offs due to a green turn are likely (51 percent of them think that this is not the case). While overall this reflects an optimistic view about the green turn, the fears of skilled workers are still much higher than those of university degree-holders where only 24 percent fear mass lay-offs and 65 percent

⁴⁵ Public perception of a just green transition in Hungary, p. 6, <https://www.feps-europe.eu/articles/36-project/93-talking-green.html>

think this to be unlikely. Finally, people in the capital of Budapest hold a more positive view on the green transition when compared to other parts of Hungary.

Effectiveness of frames and messaging

With regards to framing, respondents were asked to signal their level of agreement with messages highlighting different aspects of environmental

actions. The results show that the protection of the national heritage (93 percent) and involvement of local communities (88 percent) are met with overwhelming agreement. Green jobs are also seen favourably by a majority (64 percent). From a just transition perspective it is also important to note that the overwhelming majority (73 percent) believes that the costs of the climate transition should be offset by significant social transfers.

According to you, how characteristic are the following to the expression of a 'just green turn'? (as % of all respondents)

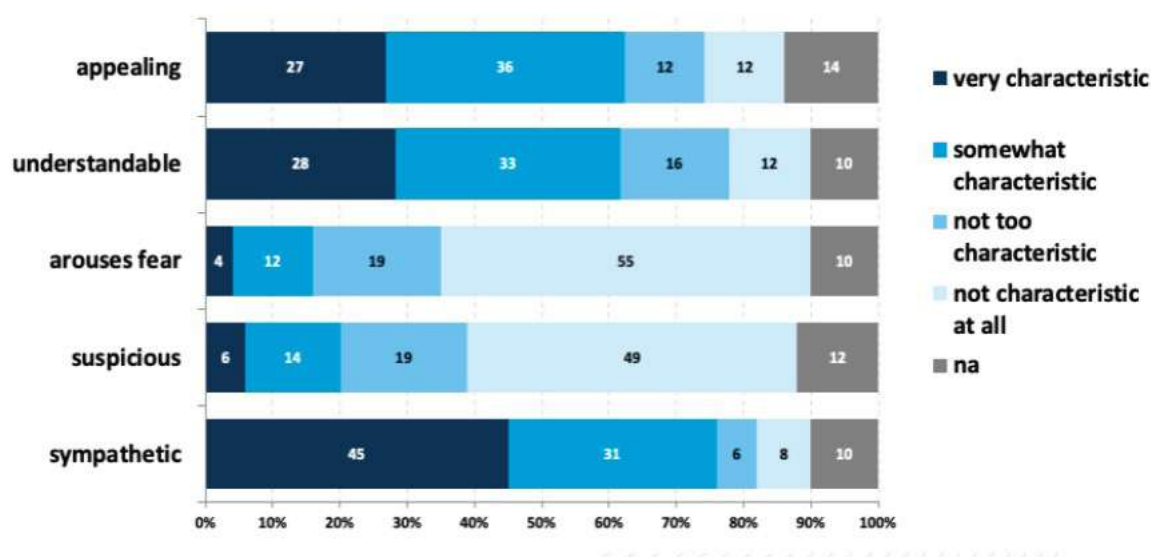


Figure 5: Associations related to the slogan 'just green turn' (Hungarian: *igazságos zöld fordulat*)⁴⁶ (N = 1,022)

46 Note that the two rows of 'appealing' and 'arouses fear' do not add up to 100% due to rounding errors.

In order to test the reactions of respondents to specific frames and slogans, the survey included a question that assessed the attitudes towards the slogan 'just green turn'. Overall, the slogan is associated with positive feelings, as 61 to 75 percent of respondents chose terms like 'appealing', 'understandable', 'sympathetic' to describe it. By contrast, only 16 to 19 percent chose negative descriptions, saying it arouses fear or suspicion. This positive attitude is broadly consistent across the main demographic variables, with no significant differences by

age, education, place of residence or other characteristics.

In addition, the comprehensibility of the term is relatively – although not overwhelmingly – high, with a majority of 61 percent indicating that they find the term understandable. Notably, the age cohorts 18-29 and 45-59 consider the slogan to be more comprehensible when compared to the whole sample.

Interpreting the results, or how to talk green?

What do the results of the three Talking Green surveys in the UK, Ireland and Hungary tell us about the state of the public debate in European climate politics? Despite the surveys being limited to three countries, the depth of the questions as well as the explicit testing of framing means that the survey results can serve as a starting point for understanding aspects of the public discourse about climate change that are not captured by conventional cross-country polling.

Understanding the state of the public debate,

in turn, permits progressives to reflect on the conditions that must be met for the development of frames that relate to the current discourse while also transforming it in the medium term. In addition, the testing of the frames themselves provides direct feedback on how the (re) framing strategies that progressives have employed have fared so far. When assessing the effectiveness of existing frames it has to be noted, however, that the specificities of the national discourses as well as slight differences in the survey methodologies make it difficult to arrive at general conclusions.

State of the public debate: a nuanced picture of the prioritisation of climate change

The findings from the surveys show the importance of nuance when assessing the public debate on climate change. The Irish and UK surveys show, for example, that while people might agree that climate change is a global problem, they often privilege other more immediate issues when it comes to

questions of national politics or personal priorities. Moreover, there seems to still be some confusion with regards to the scale of the climate crisis and the required measures to address it. This latter point is visible in the findings in the UK survey, where people seem to be more attentive to more tangible

concerns such as the reduction of waste.⁴⁷

The surveys point out that concerns do not always translate into support for policies addressing climate change.

Climate policies often remain associated with fears of increases to the cost of living, especially among people from lower socio-economic strata (Hungary, Ireland, UK) as well as among older age cohorts (Ireland, UK) and farmers (Ireland).

The nuanced findings on the perception of climate change matter because they can caution us against taking two opposite but equally simplistic interpretations. The first interpretation is that the overwhelming majority of people are actually already demanding ambitious climate action and that it is only up to politicians to act. This interpretation has been supported by surveys finding that a majority of people consider climate change to be a global emergency.⁴⁸ However, the findings of the Talking Green surveys indicate that this abstract concern does not automatically translate into assigning high priority to climate change and climate action at the national level.

The second interpretation that should be resisted is the fatalistic assessment that stipulates that the debate on climate change has entered a post-factual stage. According to this interpretation, the politicisation of climate

science and climate policies has reached a stage in which the discursive context is characterised by the existence of fundamentally opposed camps and where a re-framing of the debate seems impossible. While there is evidence that special interests purporting climate delay have indeed tried to achieve such a state of the debate in order to dampen the lack of public support for climate action,⁴⁹ the results of the Talking Green surveys suggest that the picture is more nuanced and that the discourse is less closed than a fatalistic account would suggest. The UK and Hungarian surveys found, for example, that political alignment is a significant marker of difference when it comes to the importance assigned to environmental issues and the assessment of climate policies. In the UK survey in particular, the support for and disapproval of messages centring on the economic impact of a climate policies was strongly tied to political positions. Yet even so the survey found that messages on the 'quality of life' were positively received by very different groups. **This shows that even in a highly politicised context it is possible to come up with inclusive frames that can bridge political divides.** A similar observation can be made for the Hungarian case, where the framing of a 'just green turn' also had universal appeal. And while the Irish survey showed that climate change is not a priority concern, it also pointed out that climate denial is a fringe position, with only 9 percent responding that they do not believe in man-made climate change.⁵⁰

47 This finding does not deny that empirically climate change and other forms of environmental degradation are closely related. However, findings from the surveys indicate that this perception might not be very prevalent amongst respondents.

48 European Commission and European Parliament (2021). Special Eurobarometer 517, Report on the Future of Europe, p. 84; see also: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/jan/27/un-global-climate-poll-peoples-voice-is-clear-they-want-action>, accessed 21 April 2022.

49 Lamb, W. F. et al (2020). Discourses of climate delay. *Global Sustainability*, 3. <https://doi.org/10.1017/sus.2020.13>. For a recent taxonomy on claims aimed at thwarting climate action that includes a category on supposedly lacking public support, see also: Coan, T. G., Boussalis, C., Cook, J., and Nanko, M. O. (2021). Computer-assisted classification of contrarian claims about climate change. *Scientific Reports*, 11(1), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-021-01714-4>

50 Talking Green: The Irish Survey, p. 10, <https://www.feps-europe.eu/articles/36-project/93-talking-green.html>

Two demands for a progressive frame

Instead of either being too optimistic, in assuming widespread support for ambitious climate action, or too pessimistic, in assuming a closed and polarised debate, progressives should embrace the nuance and complexity of public opinion on climate issues when developing ways to communicate about it.

In this regard, it is instructive to recapitulate two core findings from the Talking Green surveys. The first finding is the missing link between climate change as a global crisis and its understanding as a top priority at the national or local level. This finding has been especially pronounced in the Irish and UK surveys, where other seemingly more tangible crises were privileged. The second finding that comes across all three surveys is that climate policies are linked to fears of increases in the cost of living. While it is particularly pronounced in the Irish survey, where a majority has considerable fears over increased hardships in their lives, it is noteworthy that across all three surveys fears of negative impacts are more strongly felt by groups such as the working class, older age cohorts and farmers. Connecting these two findings to the development of a progressive frame leaves us with two demands.

A progressive frame must:

- 1. link actions limiting climate change to other more immediate concerns of a broad range of people; and*
- 2. shift the conversation away from fears about the costs of climate action in general and from the association with regressive distributional outcomes in particular.*

While the second issue is not only about framing but also about the design of policy, this policy brief is first and foremost concerned with how to communicate on these topics. As illustrated by the puzzling findings on failure of material benefits from carbon dividends to increase the political support for such policies (see introduction to this policy brief), such questions on narratives should not be taken lightly. Frames are often 'sticky' and people might not be convinced by scientific evidence and the promise of material benefits alone if the message conveying these issues fails to inspire trust.

The two demands enable us to evaluate the frames that progressives have so far adopted in light of the state of the public debate. Frames focusing on the just transition, green jobs or a Green New Deal have tried to address the second demand in the sense that they aim to dispel fears about increased costs and regressive distributional outcomes. These frames employ economic messaging that emphasises the positive effects of climate and environmental actions on, amongst others, employment and income.

There are good analytical reasons for privileging economic messages. The enormous levels of carbon inequality⁵¹ as well as the fundamental transformation of work arrangements that are associated with the decarbonisation of the world economy are only two examples that give testimony to the fact that climate action is first and foremost a matter of socio-economic policy.⁵² **However, the surveys reveal that concrete messaging on how climate change and climate policies are linked to**

51 Chancel, L. (2021). Climate Change and the Global Inequality of Carbon Emissions 1990-2020. <https://wid.world/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Chancel2021CarbonInequality-Study-Online-22-12-21.pdf>

52 https://www.ilo.org/skills/WCMS_732185/lang-en/index.htm, accessed 22 April 2022

people's lived experiences is just as important as communicating the 'big issues'.⁵³ When thinking about a frame that connects with lived experiences, the positive reception of the quality-of-life messages provides a valuable starting point. One promising strategy to connect the quality-of-life frame with the big issues of climate change would be to communicate more explicitly on the links between climate change and the local environment. In addition, a more explicit emphasis on the interactions between fast-burning crises⁵⁴ such as health, housing or energy and climate change could be adopted. While the links between, for instance, climate change and health⁵⁵ are visible to scientists and policy experts, the survey results suggest that this might not be the case for the general public.

Notably, communication should not only highlight that inaction on climate change leads to other crises. Using concrete measures that can address the climate crisis as well as the more immediate crises could be a relatable and thus powerful starting point for re-framing the discourse. Such examples are present in all the important socio-economic systems. In the food system, for instance, the dire situation of often indebted farmers struggling to make ends meet as well as of exploited seasonal workers coincides with the erosion of biodiversity

and the high emission intensity of industrial agriculture. Shifting the emphasis of production to high-quality healthy and sustainably produced food rather than quantity as well as addressing power asymmetries in the food supply chain could constitute a strategy that addresses the concerns of farmers, consumers and the environment at the same time.⁵⁶

A similar approach that starts from local concerns to build a broader narrative linking the solutions to different crises could be applied to the energy system. Here, messaging could emphasise how local renewable energy communities can address the energy crisis and enable decentralised decision-making. Finally, the socio-economic system of the built environment, which from a life-cycle perspective is accountable for about 40 percent of global CO₂ emissions,⁵⁷ also serves as a case in point for combining the responses to different crises that can be exploited discursively. In this context, addressing the housing crises that affects countries like Ireland can be linked with climate action through building energy-efficient social housing and renovating and refurbishing the existing building stock in accordance with environmental and social needs.⁵⁸

53 The resonance with lived experiences has also been emphasised as a key component in effective reframing of the debate around migration, cf Neidhardt, A. H., and Butcher, P. (2022). Fear and Lying in the EU: Fighting disinformation on migration with alternative narratives, p. 31. <https://www.epc.eu/en/Publications/Fear-and-lying-in-the-EU-Fighting-disinformation-on-migration-with-al~39a1e8>

54 On the concept of fast-burning crises cf Seabrooke, L., and Tsingou, E. (2019). Europe's fast- and slow-burning crises. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 26(3), 468–481. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2018.1446456>

55 See for instance <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-and-health>, accessed 21 April 2022.

56 For a deeper elaboration on how such a structural reform in agriculture could be implemented in Ireland in accordance with the capabilities approach pioneered by Amartya Sen, cf The People's Transition (2020). TASC and FEPS . P. 28ff , https://www.feps-europe.eu/attachments/publications/feps-tasc_the_peoples_transition_-_2020.pdf

57 <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/press-release/building-sector-emissions-hit-record-high-low-carbon-pandemic>, accessed 22 April 2022.

58 Indeed, there is a long list of policy proposals developed by different actors that address social and environmental crises jointly. For a list of proposals that connects the multiple crises see for instance, https://www.der-paritaetische.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Schwerpunkte/Klima/doc/Broschuere_Zukunftsagenda_BUND-PARITAET.pdf, accessed 22 April 2022.

What emerges from this list of proposals is that the separation of climate change and other more tangible crises that can be observed in the survey data is more about interpretation, or in other words framing, than about some

inherent distinction. This again reflects the importance of stories and the possibility for progressive actors to re-frame the public debate by appealing to the lived experience of people.

Support for economic frames varies. Quality of life and concrete messages are the most inclusive

While the previous section put forward some principles for an 'ideal' frame, the data obtained from the surveys also allow us to test how existing frames have so far fared. **In this regard, the findings from the surveys paint a mixed picture for the economic messages that have been employed by progressive actors.**

In Hungary, the socio-economic slogan of a 'just green turn' found support across different respondent segments. Meanwhile, in the UK study, messages that emphasise economic issues tended to fare worse than alternatives. In some cases they even reinforced existing political and social divisions. This was the case with messages about green jobs and a Green New Deal that were supported by educated, middle-class, left-leaning and younger respondents, whereas working-class, conservative and older people remained unconvinced, sceptical and with regards to some slogans ('green industrial revolution') outright hostile.

By contrast, the UK study suggests that quality-of-life messages emphasising balance with nature, green space, clean air and the responsibility of securing a good future for our children resonate with a much broader segment of respondents. The protection of the natural

heritage also scored very high on the priority list in the Hungarian survey.

With respect to economic messaging, the UK survey also found messages about concrete jobs that are associated with climate policies (eg plumbers, construction workers) to be more convincing than abstract slogans about 'green' jobs and industrial revolutions. Similar observations can be drawn from the Irish survey, which found that tangible messages outperform abstract arguments.

A final finding worth highlighting is related to the comprehensibility of the frames and the general communication on climate issues. In the Hungarian case, the slogan 'just green turn' is associated with a high degree of comprehensibility. By contrast, the UK survey recorded a significant amount of 'Don't know' responses when asking about what participants think of terms such as 'green jobs' or 'net zero'.⁵⁹ This finding suggests that considerations of relatability should not only apply to the overall narrative but also to the selection of individual words. Moreover, discursive history matters as language that might be considered jargon in one country might be considered neutral or appealing in another context.

⁵⁹ See Briefing: Talking Green: The UK Survey: Public reactions to key climate change terms (2021), <https://www.feps-europe.eu/articles/36-project/93-talking-green.html>

Conclusions

'Stories matter' was the starting assumption of this policy brief. Derived from this assumption comes the need for progressives to not only think about how policies for a just ecological transformation should be designed, but also about how they talk about 'green' issues. Ultimately, such a progressive narrative should be able to change the conversation on how we talk about environmental and socio-economic policy. One lesson emerging from the surveys is that an effective frame cannot be solely derived from abstract academic or policy analysis. Nor can an effective frame merely consist of communicating ready-made policy solutions. Instead, it needs to relate to the current state of the debate and to the concerns of people from different walks of life. **Only frames that combine arguments for transformative change with inclusiveness and relatability will be able to build trust among a broad coalition of people.** Such a broad coalition is, in turn, required to enact a socially just green transition of the required magnitude and scale.⁶⁰

To develop and communicate via such a frame is not an easy task. It implies that one truthfully communicates about the depth of the economic transformation that is required to address the climate crisis and stay within the planetary boundaries. Yet at the same time a progressive frame needs to go beyond 'preaching to the already converted'. **While progressive activists must not make compromises on the ambition of the transformation and should call out misinformation purveyed by special interests, they equally have to leave their comfort zones and engage with the priorities, worries and discourse of people for whom climate action**

and environmental policies are not a top concern. The results of the three Talking Green surveys in the UK, Ireland and Hungary that have been presented in this policy brief provide a starting point for the development of such a progressive frame. The findings highlight that abstract concerns for the climate crisis on a global level do not necessarily translate into people attributing it high priority at the domestic level. Instead, more localised and seemingly more fast-burning crises in fields like healthcare, housing or the economy are foregrounded.

A progressive re-framing of the climate discourse could benefit from highlighting the connections and shared root causes of these multiple crises.

In addition, common solutions to the different crises could be emphasised. A second observation that can be derived from the surveys is that fears about climate action leading to increased costs of living are especially prevalent among working-class respondents, older generations and farmers (the latter in the Irish case).

A progressive frame must be able to shift the sometimes deeply entrenched narrative that suggests that the costs of addressing climate change will be borne by people who are already struggling in the current situation.

Progressives have already emphasised this aspect of climate policies by developing the concept of a just transition and by foregrounding distributional questions. **However, an additional consideration that emerges from the discussion**

⁶⁰ The need for accelerated and profound actions was again highlighted in the IPCC's 6th Assessment Report. Cf <https://www.ipcc.ch/2022/02/28/pr-wgii-ar6/>

of the surveys is that a progressive re-framing should highlight that climate action will contribute to better living conditions and mitigate the effects of future crises that are linked to climate change. In this context, a promising re-framing strategy could be focused on concrete changes that enhance quality of life and less on how radically different such changes would be from the status quo. For instance, moving away from an extractive food system that is focused on quantity and efficiency and puts farmers, nature and consumers in a precarious situation is, indeed, a radical break from past orthodoxy in agricultural policies. Yet rather than emphasising the disruptive aspects, a message that argues for a reform of food production could interpret such a shift as a means to increase the quality of life and wellbeing of people and communities.

Indeed, a combination of fair climate policies with an emphasis on quality of life emerges as a promising framing strategy. By contrast, progressives should exercise some caution when employing economic messages centred on abstract terms like 'green jobs'. As seen in the survey, such terms have in some cases already entered polarising political debates and as such have lost their appeal to parts of the population. Messages that are linked to more tangible experiences like the protection of the local environment or the creation of specific jobs in the community are arguably less likely to be abused by political contestants, who aim to create opposition and cynicism with regards to climate action. This makes them a

better candidate for an inclusive, trust-building narrative.

While this policy brief has emphasised the common points found across the different country cases, significant divergences persist. It thus remains imperative that frames resonate in the local context. The limited coverage of the Talking Green surveys also means that findings cannot be easily generalised. Another caveat in interpreting the results is related to the limited time-coverage of the surveys, which only allows for a snapshot analysis. This aspect is particularly important to keep in mind since disruptive emergencies like pandemics or wars can (but do not have to) upend the balance of what constitutes an effective and what constitutes an ineffective frame.⁶¹ In this context, the Russian invasion of Ukraine that is ongoing at the time of writing is likely to have a lasting impact on European politics and the public debate. While there is still too much uncertainty to pass a definitive judgement on the impact of the war for the framing of climate policies in Europe, it has certainly already contributed to the opening of a window for re-framing discussions in energy politics.⁶²

As this window of opportunity emerges, one of the most important contributions of this policy brief is perhaps to recall that 'stories matter' and that progressives are well positioned to re-frame the public debate in a way that builds trust and support for ambitious and just climate action. The capacity to engage with the scientific and expert discourse on climate policies while

61 See Boin, A. et al (2009). Crisis exploitation: Political and policy impacts of framing contests. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 16(1), 81-106. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501760802453221>

62 Some early indications of the reopening of the discursive space can be found in the redefinition of renewable energies as 'freedom energies' by the liberal finance minister of Germany, the endorsement of energy demand reduction strategies by the International Energy Agency and the reopening of the debate on the merits of nuclear energy. See eg <https://www.rnd.de/politik/lindner-zu-krieg-in-der-ukraine-erneuerbare-energien-sind-freiheitsenergien-lauterbach-stimmt-zu-ZQGHVBLMTJFJHBB3F3HLNE63NA.html>, <https://www.iea.org/reports/a-10-point-plan-to-cut-oil-use>, https://www.lemonde.fr/economie/article/2022/03/21/en-belgique-le-nucleaire-prolonge-de-dix-ans_6118421_3234, accessed 22 April 2022.

maintaining a connection and an open ear to the lived experiences of people arguably sets progressives apart from other actors. **Rather than exploiting simplistic narratives for short-term and opportunistic political gain or refusing to participate in the public debate**

from a position of arrogance, progressives have the capacity to re-frame the debate in a way that actually enables transformative policy change and wellbeing for all. The findings from this policy brief might make a small contribution towards how to go about this important task.

About the author



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Andreas Dimmelmeier is a Policy Analyst on Climate and Environment at FEPS. He holds a PhD in Political Science and Political Economy from Copenhagen Business School and the University of Warwick. His doctoral research focused on the expert networks in the emergence of sustainable finance, the role that economic ideas played in this process, and how socio-technical tools such as standards, metrics and scenarios have made sustainable finance governable. Andreas has published on the interactions between finance and financial regulation and the transition towards a sustainable economy in international peer-reviewed academic journals and edited volumes. In addition, he has contributed to policy reports and policy briefs on these topics.

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