



15th May 2021
GOAL Global Youth Network

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To those who have the power to make a change,

We appreciate and thank you for the opportunity to engage with you through the Climate Action consultation. We are writing on behalf of GOAL's Global Youth Network, a group of active global citizens based in communities across the world and connected through their work with the GOAL Global Citizenship team.

We submit this written response to outline recommendations for Ireland's path forward and to address the problems with the language and framing in public discussions on climate action and policy, which most often exclude and underestimate the majority of young people in Ireland. The Climate Conversation individual survey is a relevant example of this: it paints an unbalanced picture of individual responsibility to climate action, rather than emphasising the need for partnership between individuals, communities, policymakers, and the global community.

The survey also presents a limited view of everyday climate action applications in Irish society, overlooking the social, cultural, and practical aspects of how we live, work, and socialise. We strive to highlight how Ireland can speak to and collaborate with young people and communities to address this oversight and build an all-inclusive vision for the future.¹

We recognise the need for ownership of the climate crisis and the breadth of its impacts on the planet, including its landscapes, plants, animals, and peoples. It is essential that the Government of Ireland take on a leadership role in driving tangible and meaningful change locally, nationally, and internationally. As time passes, young people become increasingly anxious to find a shared vision for a fair and sustainable future.

We are hopeful that Ireland can achieve carbon neutrality and climate justice² through a Just Transition; by taking the time to listen to, trust in and consider how communities envision their own sustainable livelihoods.³ Through solidarity and a partnership approach, Ireland can carve out the path to the future: we can't wait any longer, we must act now.

Why is 'Climate Action' important to us?

Young peoples' livelihoods are fundamentally rooted in the planet's health⁴: from the spaces in which we live and work, to the food we eat, the air we breathe, the clothes we wear, and relationships with our peers across the world. Human beings are part of nature, and the current COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the mental, physical, and social benefits to spending time outdoors. We must provide communities opportunities to rediscover and reconnect with their local lands and waters.

It is vital to create and maintain local spaces for people of all ages and abilities to explore. Once connected, humans have the natural instinct to engage with and protect the spaces around them, evidenced by the response by local communities in Kenya to threats around the closure of Nairobi National Park.⁵

When working to protect the planet, we work to protect each other. In turn, when we exploit and disregard our planet, we cause rampant and often irreparable damage and suffering to ourselves and the wider biosphere. This illustrates our interdependent relationship with nature.

¹ It is important to acknowledge that despite our efforts, this letter will not be entirely accessible or meaningful for every young person in Ireland, such as those with less knowledge of climate change and its impacts, with difficulty reading in the English language, or with living conditions where more immediate survival actions need to be focused. We hope the spirit of our words still resonates with all people.

² Climate justice recognises how the worst effects of climate change are felt by those least responsible. NYCI offers a [climate justice skill-building resource](#) designed by and for young people. The [Mary Robinson Foundation](#) is also good for information.

³ [A Just Transition 2020](#) is a 2-minute video made by the Youth Team for Just Transition at NYCI. Their [Youth Manifesto on Climate Justice](#) was developed following a 400-large youth summit in Dublin in 2020.

⁴ Dr Maria Neira, WHO Director, "[Our lives depend on a healthy planet.](#)"

⁵ In [this interview](#), Nyandire Reinhard, a member of the GYN, explains how he enabled Nairobi's local communities to reconnect with the national park, and the benefits this had for the communities and landscape.

We see water scarcity affecting more than 2 in 5 people globally⁶, with 2 billion people (over 1 in 4 people) lacking basic sanitation facilities.⁷ In the worst affected areas, rising temperatures and increased incidence of natural disasters couple with human activity such as pollution and overuse of herbicides, pesticides and fertilisers. These combine to make basic use and consumption of water dangerous and even lethal for humans, plants and wildlife.⁸

In addition, climate-related displacement forces millions to flee their homes and livelihoods annually, with the first half of 2020 alone seeing 9.8 million people displaced by disasters.⁹ Ireland itself hosts 2 in 5 of its population within 5km of the coasts¹⁰, which are massively and increasingly vulnerable to sea level rise, coastal erosion, and greater storm and flooding intensity over the coming decades.¹¹

These examples offer a glance at the current consequences of neglecting our planet and highlight the impacts which inaction has had on young peoples' presents and futures. We hold a shared humanity across nations and generations, and it is our duty to implement urgent measures to address the current climate crisis and its injustices.

Ireland and the SDGs: The progress we have made, and the path we must take.

We are encouraged by Ireland becoming the second country in the world to declare a Climate and Biodiversity Emergency on 9th May 2019, though this did not include any legally binding commitments, and the follow-through has been stifled.¹² Ireland can be a global leader for climate action, but we need daring actions by those in power to champion the cause.

The results of Social Justice Ireland's Sustainable Progress Index 2021¹³ highlight areas in which we must focus our time, energy, and resources: ranked against the EU15, Ireland ranks 14 out of 15 in both SDG 7 'Affordable and clean energy' and SDG12, 'Responsible consumption and production'. While the entire EU15 has a poor overall score for SDG13, 'Climate action', Ireland is ranked 13 out of 15. There is hope, in that we rank 4 out of 15 on SDG15 'Life on land'. There is clearly significant work to be done, but it is manageable with the right leadership, coordination, and collaboration.¹⁴

Moving forward, we must prioritise sustaining the planet's environment and resources, and reframe social and economic progress as rooted in climate and social justice. This means recognising the urgency of informed climate action and following through with our commitments to previous, present, and future generations. The SDGs¹⁵, the European Green Deal¹⁶, and mechanisms such as the Climate Pact¹⁷ offer frameworks and tools to ensure meaningful participation across all walks of life in Ireland's path forward, especially in the immediate post-COVID-19 recovery planning.

In line with GOAL¹⁸, we fully support a partnership approach, where all governments coordinate action from the local to the global level, prioritising the empowerment and resilience of communities and vulnerable groups. We must acknowledge our part as individuals in a wider ecosystem. We rely on our planet for survival and this crisis makes clear the urgent need for harnessing our collective strength in working towards the common goal of climate action. The planet does not belong to any one person, group of people, or even to people at all. The conscious destruction of our planet is inexcusable, but the solutions to this crisis are available.

Our Recommendations:

With the above in mind, we have recommendations to share:

- **Follow-through with a complete Just Transition:** communities, local businesses, workers, and young people in particular feel the brunt of the impacts from both inaction and ill-informed decisions made. Listening to, trusting in, and standing alongside communities at local and global levels assures the path forward.
- **Preserve and expand our 'Emerald Isle' through green and blue spaces.** Focusing on **public access to and participation in nature through community-based initiatives** is key to giving people the knowledge and passion to protect our lands and waters.

⁶ [Key global information on SDG 6: 'Clean Water and Sanitation'](#).

⁷ WHO's 2019 [fact sheet on global sanitation](#).

⁸ 2015 Report "[Connecting Global Priorities: Biodiversity and Human Health](#)", page 31.

⁹ Migration Data Portal, "[Environmental Migration" data and statistics](#).

¹⁰ [Population Distribution data](#) from Ireland's Central Statistics Office.

¹¹ John Sweeney, 2020, "Climate Change in Ireland: Science, Impacts and Adaptation", in the book "Ireland and the Climate Crisis".

¹² Michelle Hennessy, 10 May 2019, "[What does the Dáil's declaration of a climate emergency actually mean?](#)"

¹³ Social Justice Ireland, 2021, "[Measuring Progress: The Sustainable Progress Index 2021](#)".

¹⁴ The [Citizens Assembly 2018 report on climate change](#) also outlines recommendations for climate action from deliberations and votes over two weekends of 99 people and 1 Chair, a broad representation of Irish society as per the census.

¹⁵ Find information on [the dedicated United Nations SDGs website](#). The government reports Ireland's progress on its '[SDG Hub](#)'.

¹⁶ European Commission, "[A European Green Deal](#)".

¹⁷ European Commission, "[European Climate Pact](#)".

¹⁸ See [GOAL Global, 2021, "Responding to the Climate Crisis" briefing paper](#).

- In addition to investing in **nature-based infrastructure** such as forests and boglands, young people need **infrastructure which facilitates more sustainable consumption and lifestyles**: high-quality public transport, cycling lanes and walkways. Policymakers must ensure we are not trading with states and companies which violate human rights and actively harm the planet, and instead create more opportunities and support for ethical businesses in Ireland and our neighbouring countries.
- **The COVID-19 recovery plan** provides a unique opportunity to ensure Irish society exits adversity with greater resilience and a clearer vision for a fair and sustainable future. Young people are among the most impacted communities, with life-long impacts on educational attainment, employment opportunities and income, and overall progression through life. The recovery plan can raise up the most affected people in Ireland through creating high-quality employment opportunities, investing in local businesses, and developing Irish communities' economic and decision-making power.
- **Promoting Global Citizenship Education (GCE) and inclusivity** within formal and informal education spaces is key to transforming how young people think about the world around them: from the surrounding landscapes to their local communities, to lands and communities globally, and the relationships between them all. With greater awareness, knowledge, and tools to identify problems and drive change¹⁹, young people will carry on a culture and tradition of a sustainable and just Ireland.
- **Listen to us.** We envisage a future with resilient communities and thriving social, economic, and environmental ecosystems, in which our actions are informed and equitable. Ireland has committed to the Paris Agreement and the SDGs, and before these the Millennium Development Goals and the Kyoto Protocol. Through successes and despite setbacks, we must follow-through and achieve a sustainable and just Ireland.

Hope, Determination and Resilience

A whole-of-government response to the climate emergency which embeds communities at the core of decision-making is essential for an equitable and just future for Ireland and for all nations across the world. Young people are eager to partner with their communities, organisations, and governments to make meaningful sustainable change, in line with the SDGs.

We possess a relentless amount of hope, determination, and resilience, and we invite you to share in the collective journey towards a balanced thriving planet. The post-COVID-19 recovery phase presents the opportunity to redefine meaningful and sustainable livelihoods in Ireland. Putting nature at the core will not only help build a social system that honours the dignity and well-being of global citizens in Ireland and beyond, but will also safeguard the country's social, environmental, and economic future.

We therefore call on the Irish government to give young people and communities the power and tools to achieve this future.

Signed,
The GOAL Global Youth Network



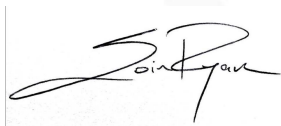
Criomhthann Morrison
Eoin Ryan



Niamh Flynn
Ross Boyd



Reinhard Bonke Nyandire
Joseph Kalimbwe




¹⁹ During GOAL's 2020 Global Youth Programme, participants developed the [Global Citizen's Journey](#) resource for developing critical thinking skills and exploring active solidarity at the local and global levels.