

GEN Z(ERO)

Creating a pathway to a greener, fairer future



Foundation

in partnership with Co-op

BASIS
SOCIAL

LIVITY



Acknowledgements:

This research has been conducted by Basis Social and Livity in partnership with the Co-op Foundation and the Co-op.

We would like to thank all the young people who participated in the research, discussed and expressed their views on the journey to Net Zero and achieving a just transition and how they would like to be involved in decision-making. Our thanks also go to the climate change experts and the TikTok influencer who were involved in creating engaging explainer videos providing stimulus for the young people's discussions.

With particular thanks to Ed Atkins, who helped frame the study and provided further advice and to Ann Finlayson for reviewing the report.

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Citation:

Basis Social (2023). Gen Z(ero): Creating a pathway to a greener, fairer future. Manchester: Co-op Foundation and Co-op.



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We are in the grip of a climate and nature crisis of humankind's making and urgent action is necessary. At Co-op, we are deeply committed to addressing the urgent reality of climate change.

We trace our roots as a business to 1844 and as the first successful member owned co-operative. As such, the values of equity and equality are core to our approach.

Our approach to reducing our carbon footprint is grounded by three principles: (1) we will follow the science, (2) we will work for a fair and just transition for people, nature and our planet, and (3) we will co-operate to drive systems change.

We were delighted – in collaboration with our charity, the Co-op Foundation – to commission this comprehensive research to explore the perspectives of young people throughout the UK on the journey to Net Zero. We wanted to understand their priorities, and their thoughts on how we can work towards a just transition – something for which we have been campaigning over a number of years. After all, it is young people who will eventually lead the pathway to Net Zero and inherit the planet that results from the success of our collective efforts; we must ensure they are included in building the plan to get us there.

It couldn't be clearer that young people from all backgrounds care about climate change, despite other challenges that they are experiencing at the moment.

While there will be many exciting opportunities as we progress towards Net Zero, there will also be challenges – and this report makes clear that our young people want to understand where there will be trade-offs, and how leaders in every sphere will ensure that fairness is a central consideration in the decisions that need to be taken.

Here at Co-op we will continue to play our part in working for climate justice, here in our UK communities as well as in the international communities from which we source.

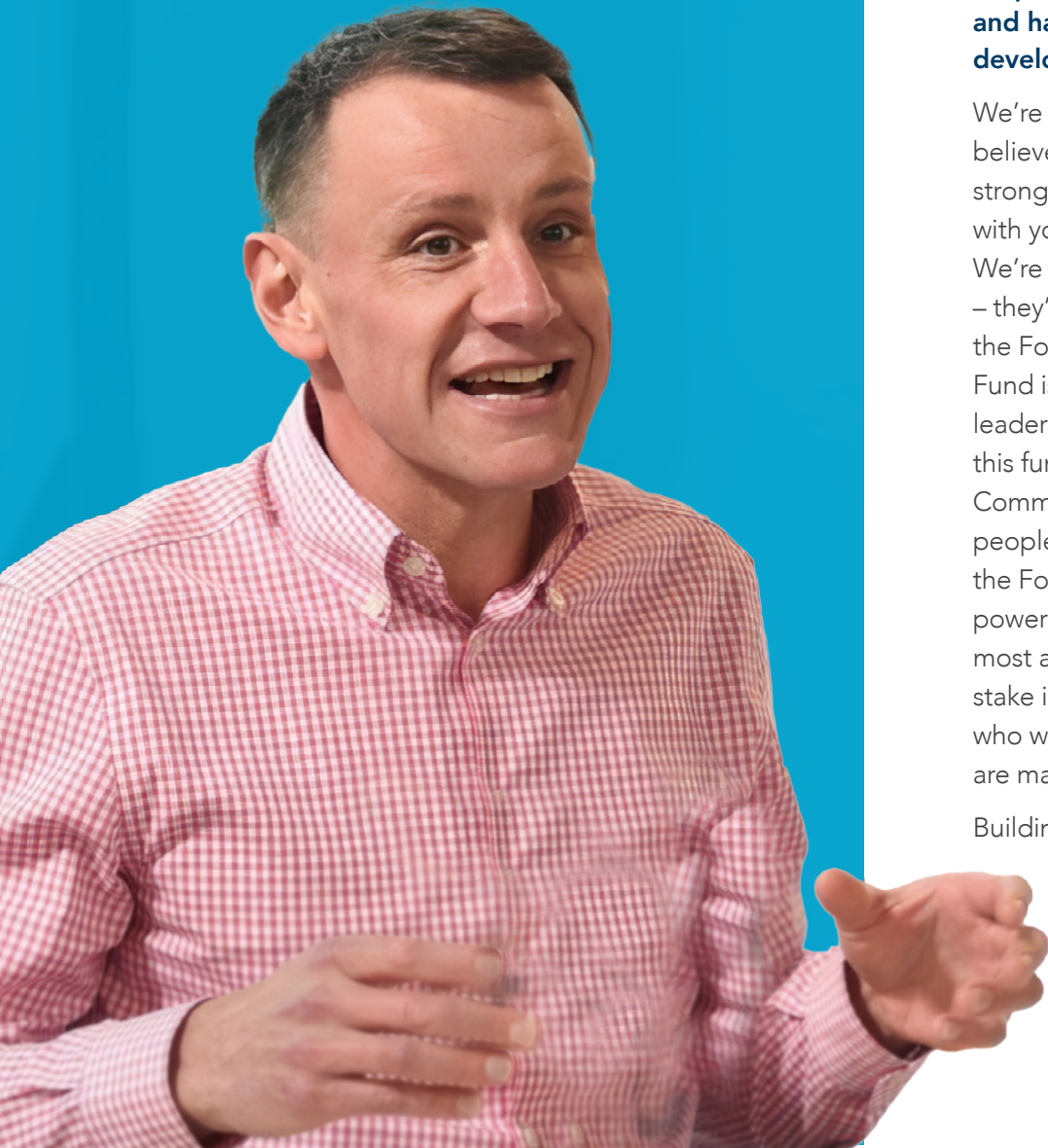
As we all share this one precious planet, none of us get to Net Zero until we *all* get to Net Zero, and as this report shows, the responsibility of ensuring we are all equipped and enabled to play our part in delivering a fair and just transition is one that is both significant and essential.

Shirine Khoury-Haq

CO-OP GROUP CEO

**We will follow the science.
We will work for a fair and
just transition for people,
nature and our planet.
We will co-operate to
drive systems change.**





The Co-op Foundation is the Co-op's charity and we're co-operating for a fairer world. This world will be one that is more sustainable, where young people take the lead on facing issues that affect them. They need to be involved with shaping the world they are inheriting and have a voice as climate policy is developed here in the UK.

We're a different kind of funder – we believe co-operation is at the heart of strong communities, and we're working with young people to make a difference. We're listening to and learning from them – they've shaped the vision we have for the Foundation. Our Future Communities Fund is supporting young people into leadership positions, and allocation of this funding was decided by our Future Communities Collective, a group of young people making funding decisions here at the Foundation. We unlock communities' power by focusing on those who have most at stake, and no one has more at stake in the future of the planet than those who will bear the brunt of decisions we are making now.

Building more sustainable communities is a strategic priority for us. Earlier this year we announced partners for the second round of our £3.5m Carbon Innovation Fund (CIF), which is also funding this report.

No one has more at stake in the future of the planet than those who will bear the brunt of decisions we are making now.

Our Carbon Innovation Fund is our largest environmental partnership with Co-op, through which we're working with funded partners who are striving to reduce reliance on soy-containing animal and synthetic fertilisers in the food, farming and aquaculture industries.

It is clear throughout this report that young people want to and should be heard, but to do this, they need to believe that they will be listened to.

I call on policy makers to ensure that this democratic deficit is closed as I firmly believe that by giving those who want an opportunity to be heard we will ensure a just transition towards Net Zero.

Let's build sustainable communities of the future together.

Nick Crofts

CO-OP FOUNDATION CEO

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of their commitment to building a fairer world, and in response to a growing interest in climate justice, The Co-op Foundation, in partnership with Co-op, commissioned Basis Social and Livity to engage with a cross-section of 16 to 24 year olds to understand more about the younger generation's attitudes towards Net Zero and the concept of a 'just transition'. Basis Social and Livity ran a week-long online community with 44 young people from diverse backgrounds recruited from across the UK as well as a survey of over 1,000 young people. Using creative approaches ranging from involving a TikTok influencer to help communicate information about Net Zero to the use of a chat-bot enabled survey, this research sought to involve young people who would traditionally not get involved in research, accounting for factors like income, ethnicity, region and disability.



The nationally representative survey of young people aged 16 to 24 years old found that while four-in-five report they know 'at least a fair amount' about climate change, this figure reduces to around one-third for 'Net Zero' and just over one-in-ten for 'just transition'. In fact, 42% of young people report knowing nothing about Net Zero and very few had any ideas around what current Government strategy here looks like. **This is not because of a lack of interest.** Having shared some information on Net Zero over three-quarters of young people said they were concerned about the UK meeting our Net Zero target. While views were consistent across different demographic groups, those who were more informed about Net Zero – which tended to be those from more of an affluent socioeconomic background – were more likely to be concerned.

Through discussions with young people it was clear that, while climate change was a pressing societal issue, for many people there were other more immediate concerns, often relating to financial pressures and/or work or educational pressures and commitments. This is reflected in the survey responses that highlighted an even split of views toward whether Net Zero is more important for Government to address than other matters, or vice-versa. Nonetheless, young people are eager to learn more. **Three-quarters of survey respondents wanted to learn more about Net Zero and this was a virtuous cycle with greater knowledge and awareness leading to a greater interest in finding out more, and more interest and concern in helping to address climate change.**



73%

of young people feel a personal sense of responsibility in helping achieve the Net Zero target

When asked to reflect on who is responsible for making sure the UK reduces its emissions, young people are most likely to say the Government (67%) followed by businesses (48%) due to the systems-level changes required. However, young people also recognize that the general public have a key role to play in reaching Net Zero (64%), and the majority (73%) feel a personal sense of responsibility in helping achieve the Net Zero target. While there is an expectation that there will be changes required in aspects of how they live their lives, **72% of young people were optimistic that Net Zero presented more of an opportunity than a threat to their generation.** Through discussions with young people there was a clear link made between the actions that might be taken to reach Net Zero and a greener, healthier and more equitable society.

A variety of actions are required for Net Zero to be achieved by 2050 ranging from systems level changes to renewables, transportation and planting of trees, through to individual changes in behaviour. **The actions perceived to be most important were seen to be those which were most easily connected to energy use/saving (e.g. greener jobs, energy efficiency, sustainable farming, sustainable transport) and which weren't seen to compromise personal choice or freedoms (e.g. taxing meat, dairy or flying, or reducing water use).** In considering the importance and desirability of different actions, young people spontaneously applied a fairness lens in our discussions with them. They were most critical of those actions that had the potential to directly or indirectly exacerbate inequalities.

Almost three-quarters of survey participants were concerned about disproportional impacts around the transition to Net Zero on different groups in society, with concerns highest amongst those with a disability or long-term health condition and those living in more deprived parts of the country. There is an expectation that Government will work to make Net Zero affordable to all.

This research has found that young people care about climate change and about fairness in the journey to Net Zero, which they'd like to understand better too. They recognise the responsibilities that they have to support the transition to Net Zero, but also want to have the chance to voice their views and shape this transition. Nine-in-ten (91%) think young people should be involved in decisions about how to reduce the UK's emissions to hit Net Zero. Climate change requires a systemic response and young people see themselves as forming a core part of that system, alongside other actors. However, there is a healthy level of scepticism at Government commitment to tackle climate change, as evidenced through both their perceived lack of engagement with environmental organisations and recent energy policy decisions. Young people said they were sceptical that Government will listen or take their views seriously and – through this research – are calling on Government to demonstrate their commitment through raising public awareness of the Net Zero agenda and creating different mechanisms through which young people can influence policy decisions.

PART 1

ABOUT THE REPORT

OVERVIEW

As part of their commitment to building a fairer world, and in response to a growing interest in climate justice, The Co-op Foundation, in partnership with Co-op, commissioned independent research agency Basis Social and creative agency Livity to engage with a cross-section of 16 to 24 year olds to understand more about the younger generation's attitudes towards Net Zero and the concept of a 'just transition'. Just transition refers to the actions that UK society should undertake when implementing carbon emission reduction measures, ensuring fairness and equity for all.¹

This report presents insights from the 1,000+ young people engaged through the research that took place between May-August 2023.

¹ The International Labour Organisation states that 'a just transition means greening the economy in a way that is as fair and inclusive as possible to everyone concerned, creating decent work opportunities and leaving no one behind'. [International Labour Organisation \(2023\) Frequently asked questions on a just transition.](#)



1,076

16 to 24 year olds took part in the research

Context to the research



Climate change is the defining crisis of our time. To limit global warming to just 1.5 degrees by the end of the century, national governments must commit to delivering far-reaching changes to their societal structures, reconfiguring sectors such as energy, transportation, industry, agriculture, land use and construction.

Implementing appropriate policies has the potential to achieve a 70% reduction in emissions by 2050.² However, a failure to act risks climate breakdown and global instability.

Net Zero³

is a term used to describe the balance between the amount of greenhouse gas emissions produced and the amount removed from the atmosphere.

In March 2023, the UK Government unveiled its updated strategy for decarbonising the UK economy and reducing emissions by 2050, called Powering up Britain.⁴ However, despite their crucial role in the future of our climate, the younger generation has largely been excluded from decision-making processes.

To bring their voice to the fore, the Co-op Foundation, in partnership with the Co-op, commissioned research to understand young people's views about the impact of the journey to Net Zero on their lives, what matters most to them as we decarbonise our society and how they would like to be involved in the process. Key within this is understanding their view towards a 'just transition', which aims to ensure the shift to zero emissions is implemented in a manner that promotes fairness, inclusivity and avoids disproportionately affecting more 'vulnerable' individuals and communities.

² IPCC. (2022) Press release "The evidence is clear: the time for action is now".

³ Fankhauser, S., Smith, S.M., Allen, M. et al. (2022) The meaning of Net Zero and how to get it right. Nat. Clim. Chang. 12, 15–21.

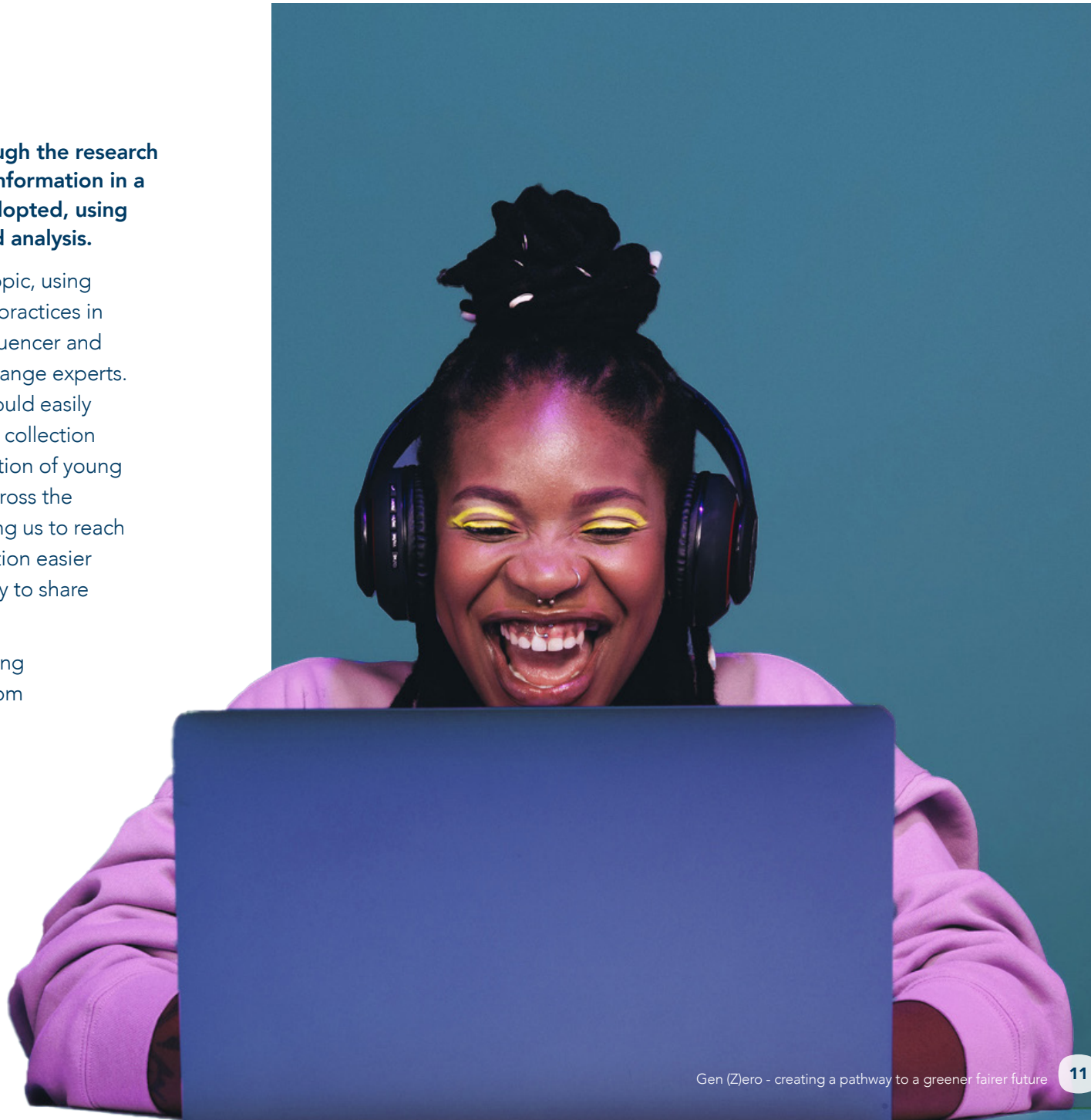
⁴ Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (2023) Powering Up Britain

METHODOLOGY

It has been important to involve young people through the research in ways that feel engaging and to convey complex information in a relatable manner. A mixed method approach was adopted, using both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis.

Qualitative methods helped us delve deeply into the topic, using creative and innovative techniques that align with best practices in youth research. This included working with a TikTok influencer and creating bespoke informational content with climate change experts. The selected methods made sure that young people could easily understand and relate to the subject. Quantitative data collection enabled us to speak to a large representative cross-section of young people to understand how views and attitudes differ across the population. The research was conducted online, allowing us to reach young people where they are quickly, making participation easier for individuals with access issues, and offering the ability to share information about Net Zero along the way.

The prevailing trend has been for discussions surrounding climate change in the UK to be dominated by voices from white, middle-class backgrounds.⁵ Accordingly, the research design was intentionally structured to gather views from a cross-section of young people from different communities across the UK, including those from ethnic minority communities, lower socio-economic backgrounds and those who have a disability or long-term health condition. More detailed information about the research methodology and the sample profile of young people engaged can be found in the appendix.



Overview of the five-step methodology

STEP 1

WHAT?

Literature review on Net Zero futures conducted in partnership with academic experts. Interviews with 10 UK climate and policy specialists.

WHY?

To ensure we had an accurate understanding of the opportunities and challenges for people in transitioning to Net Zero, including younger generations.

STEP 2

WHAT?

Partnering with communications specialists, Livity, and a leading sustainability influencer to create a series of TikTok style videos introducing the concept of Net Zero, the UK's strategy and the concept of the 'just transition'.

WHY?

Create educational content that distilled the Net Zero strategy into age-appropriate language for research participants to engage with, preserving nuance and accuracy.

STEP 3

WHAT?

A seven-day online community, moderated by Basis Social and Livity researchers, engaging 44 young people from diverse backgrounds recruited from across the UK.

WHY?

To inform participants about the key issues, and encourage discussion and debate in a flexible and supportive environment.

STEP 4

WHAT?

An online survey with a nationally representative sample of 1,032 16 to 24 years olds living in the UK.

WHY?

To test views emerging from the online community with a large representative sample of young people.

STEP 5

WHAT?

Two online focus groups, comprising 16 young people recruited from the online community.

WHY?

Involving research participants in the analysis and reporting process to validate interpretation of findings.

The research focused on exploring the following key questions across the five steps of the methodology

What do young people understand about Net Zero, and how do they think it will impact their future?

What challenges and/or opportunities do young people see in achieving Net Zero?

What steps do young people believe are needed to implement Net Zero in a fair way?

What roles do young people think communities, businesses and all levels of government in the UK should have in ensuring a just transition?

Do young people want to actively participate in policy making around Net Zero, and if so, what does this look like?

PART 2

KEY

FINDINGS

HOW DO YOUNG PEOPLE VIEW AND UNDERSTAND NET ZERO AND JUST TRANSITION?

Whilst climate change is a well recognised concept, the term 'Net Zero' and 'just transition' lack traction.

Most young people (81%) report knowing at least a fair amount about climate change (see Figure 1). However, their understanding of Net Zero is low: just one in three (34%) of 16 to 24 year olds surveyed say they know much about it. Knowledge of a 'just transition' is even lower: half of young people surveyed (48%) have never even heard of it.

Awareness about Net Zero is lower among certain groups: young women (50% have either never heard of Net Zero or have heard of it but know nothing about it, compared to 36% of young men), those from the most deprived areas⁶ of the country, and those living in North West and South West England.

Reflecting on discussions during the online community, those familiar with the concept of Net Zero had typically only heard of it in the news and lacked knowledge of what it actually meant. None of the participants mentioned learning about Net Zero in school.

There was some recognition among young people in work with a connection made to companies' Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives.

None of the young individuals who took part in the online community were familiar with the specific term 'a just transition'. However, those with a greater interest in climate change and climate activism were aware of the broader concept of climate justice. Usually, this was thought about on a global scale, focusing on how the CO2 emissions of more affluent countries affected the Global South. None of the participants spontaneously mentioned climate justice as something that relates to equalities within UK society.

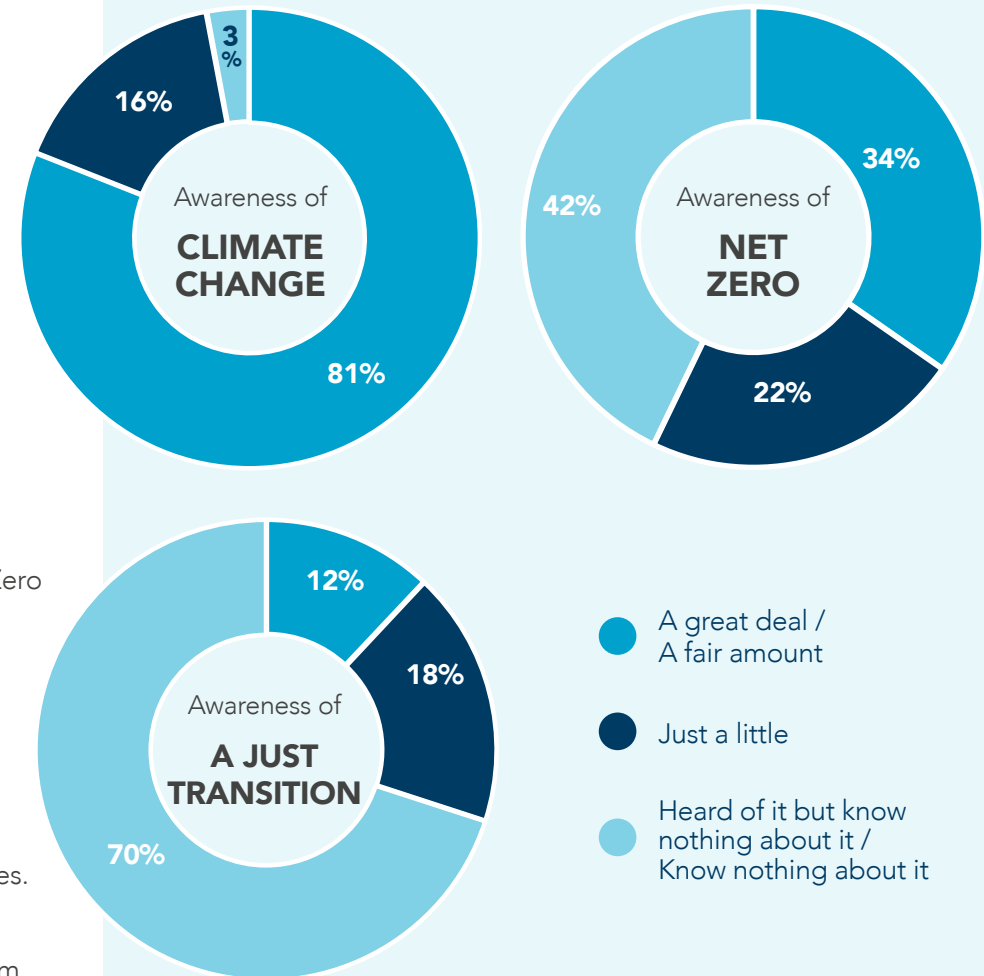


Figure 1 Awareness levels of climate change related concepts

SOURCE:

B1. We are now going to share a series of terms related to the environment. Please tell us how much, if anything, you know about each of them.

BASE:

All respondents (1032)

⁶ We have used the Index of Multiple Deprivation quintiles, which is a location-based measure for understanding relative levels of deprivation. It covers respondents in England only where full postcode was provided.

Concern for the climate appears to unite the UK at a generational level.

Over three-quarters (76%) of young people surveyed say they are concerned about the UK meeting its Net Zero target (see Figure 2)⁷. Views are consistent across different demographic groups, though those who reported more knowledge about Net Zero are more likely to be concerned.

From the online community discussions it is clear that, in the context of their everyday lives, addressing climate change is a background issue and one that many are not actively involved in thinking about. There are more pressing issues that are front-of-mind for young people, especially relating to the cost-of-living, work or school pressures.

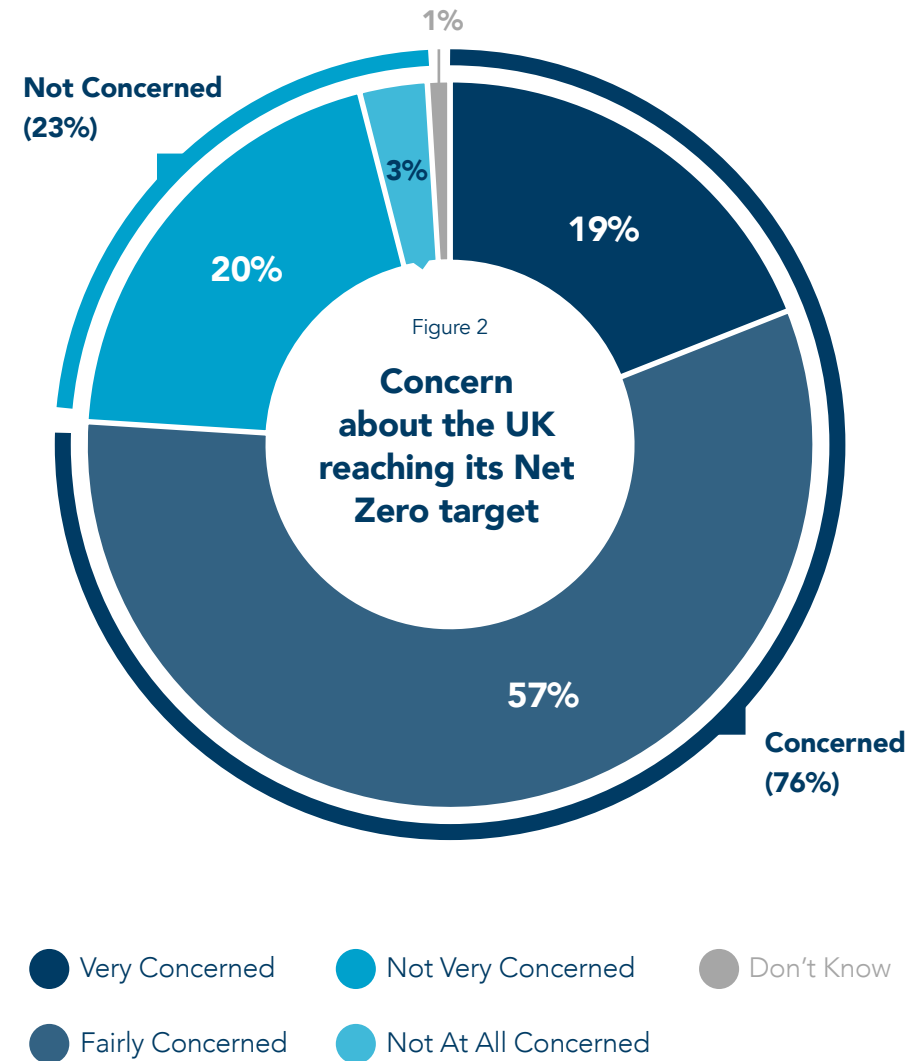
Indeed, the survey illustrates how split down the line young people are as to where Government should focus its efforts.

Whilst half (49%) think 'Net Zero is more important than other things for the Government to address', the same proportion also believe 'there are more important things for the Government to address than Net Zero'.

Few of the participants we spoke to appeared to be actively seeking out information on green initiatives or actions to address climate change. We found this was particularly true for participants from lower income communities. Conversely, those from higher income and more educated backgrounds described higher levels of proactive interest in climate change topics and involvement in climate activism. They were also more likely to confidently express their views on climate change. This finding is of particular importance, considering that populations from lower income backgrounds are more likely to be impacted harder during the transition to a Net Zero economy.⁸

⁷ Both in the survey and the online community participants were provided with information on Net Zero to enable them to provide informed views

⁸ The Young Foundation (2021) [Family and Community Vulnerabilities in the Transition to Net Zero](#).



SOURCE: C1. How concerned, if at all, are you about the UK reaching its Net Zero target?

BASE: All respondents (1032)

Figure 2 Concern about the UK reaching its Net Zero target

There is limited awareness of the Government's Net Zero strategy.

Aligned to their low knowledge of the term itself, few participants involved in the online community were aware of the UK Government's pledge to reach Net Zero by 2050. Given their concern over the issues, a commitment to mitigating climate change was strongly welcomed, however they struggled to imagine what might be included in the strategy.

Participants were confused about why specific details of the strategy were not discussed more publicly such as on the news. Some saw this as a missed opportunity to promote more sustainable behaviours, and the lack of visibility made others skeptical about the UK Government's commitment to the strategy.

Without information to connect aspects of the Government's plan to practical changes relevant to their lives, many struggled to form an opinion on Government strategy. Net Zero was perceived as 'abstract' and 'theoretical' which led some to believe that dealing with climate change was best left to the 'experts', rather than people like them.

At the outset of this research a number of the young people involved in the online community were quite disconnected from climate change and pessimistic about the feasibility of the Government's strategy to reach Net Zero.

As they became more familiar with Net Zero this group typically became more interested in its relevance to their lives. Nonetheless, for meaningful engagement, participants stressed the need to convince younger generations that achieving Net Zero was actually attainable.

"If the UK Government has a plan for dealing with climate change, you'd think they'd be talking about it more. I have not seen any details about this. You'd think it would be leading the news every night."

- Female, 18, Northern England



There is real appetite to learn more about Net Zero.

Despite having limited knowledge, young people want to learn more about Net Zero; both about the concept itself and the Government's strategy.

According to the survey, three-quarters (75%) of young people want to learn more about Net Zero (compared to 24% saying they don't). Over four-in-five (81%) agree they would like more education to understand how the UK can reach Net Zero. Interest is much higher for those young people already concerned about the issues of climate change and Net Zero. And it appears the more knowledge they already have, the more desire for further knowledge – those who already say they know something about climate change are more likely to express an appetite for more education.

Within the online community participants highlighted how increasing Net Zero education across society will be crucial for the success of the strategy. In terms of what this should

look like, participants would be interested in receiving information specifically tailored to their age group. This should communicate key Net Zero initiatives and the rationale for these. They were open to receiving information in a range of settings: via work (for example, through employee initiatives or training), through public awareness campaigns, and particularly through schools. On this latter point, they felt more should be done to include Net Zero in the national curriculum, enabling young people to develop informed viewpoints on climate change policy.

Participants also stressed the importance to their generation of hearing directly from policy makers about the implications of achieving Net Zero. They want to understand how Net Zero policies will impact their lives and future choices, as well as the role they can play in supporting its implementation.

“I think it’s fundamental that we’re not just made aware of Net Zero, but as a society we are properly educated on it because it’s hard to have a viewpoint on what needs to be done unless you understand how these changes come together to work. Yes, it’s most important for our generation as we’re going to have to live with this, but I think everyone should be educated because it will make it easier to implement.”

– Male, 20, Northern Ireland

81%

want more education to understand how the UK can reach Net Zero

NET ZERO - MORE OF AN OPPORTUNITY THAN A THREAT?

Young people recognise they have a role to play in meeting Net Zero, but Government is expected to lead the way.

When asked to reflect on who is responsible for making sure the UK reduces its emissions to hit the Net Zero target, young people are most likely to say it's the Government that is most responsible (cited by 67%). Around half (48%) also think businesses have a responsibility.

Within the online community, young people increasingly talked about the Government's critical role in lowering emissions as they began to appreciate the structural changes needed, the importance of business compliance, and the need to mitigate the negative effects of meeting Net Zero on specific groups within the UK population.

But, young people also recognise that there is a clear role for the public too, including their own generation. According to the survey, almost three-in-four (73%) feel a personal sense of responsibility in supporting the UK to achieve Net Zero. Many see their generation as uniquely positioned to help make Net Zero a reality too: on balance over three-quarters (77%) agree that people their age have more of a role to play in helping the UK to meet Net Zero compared to other generations (compared to 21% who agree more that it is for other age groups to lead).

Whilst the online community participants expressed a strong preference for intergenerational cooperation to lowering emissions, younger people were seen to have more energy and optimism to drive meaningful change. Some were skeptical about whether older adults, currently facing a cost-of-living crisis, had the capacity to take on more significant changes or responsibilities. The younger generation may ultimately be better positioned to lead the way in efforts to tackle Net Zero. The survey certainly demonstrates a degree of acceptance about taking on the challenge – on balance, over four-fifths (84%) of young people expect to have to change some aspects of how they live for the UK to meet its Net Zero target.

73%

feel a personal sense of responsibility in supporting the UK to achieve Net Zero

"As someone in their 20s, I do think it is fair to adopt and accept these changes. The impacts of climate change would obviously impact us and our children. Yes, everyone should respond by moving towards a more sustainable way of living, but I feel like the older generation is less likely to change their way of life so it will need to be down to us. I think we have accepted that."

– Female, 21, London

Young people are 'glass half full' about opportunities presented by Net Zero.

Young people view meeting Net Zero as more of an opportunity than a threat to their generation (72%, compared to 27% who see it as more of a threat)⁹. Through the online community we found participants already actively involved in the climate movement express positivity about a future aligned closely with their values, which felt much 'greener'. Meanwhile, young people living in urban areas connected greening initiatives to improved mental health and wellbeing. Some also saw the structural nature of meeting Net Zero, as it relates to transforming the UK economy and the infrastructure that supports it, as an opportunity to address historic imbalances and inequalities in society if implemented appropriately. For example, introducing more green jobs could help areas with traditionally lower employment rates, whilst the expansion of public transport could benefit areas traditionally underinvested in. This aligns with other conceptualisations of a 'just transition' as something that needs to be considered through a whole-systems lens.¹⁰

⁹ 1% say they 'don't know'.

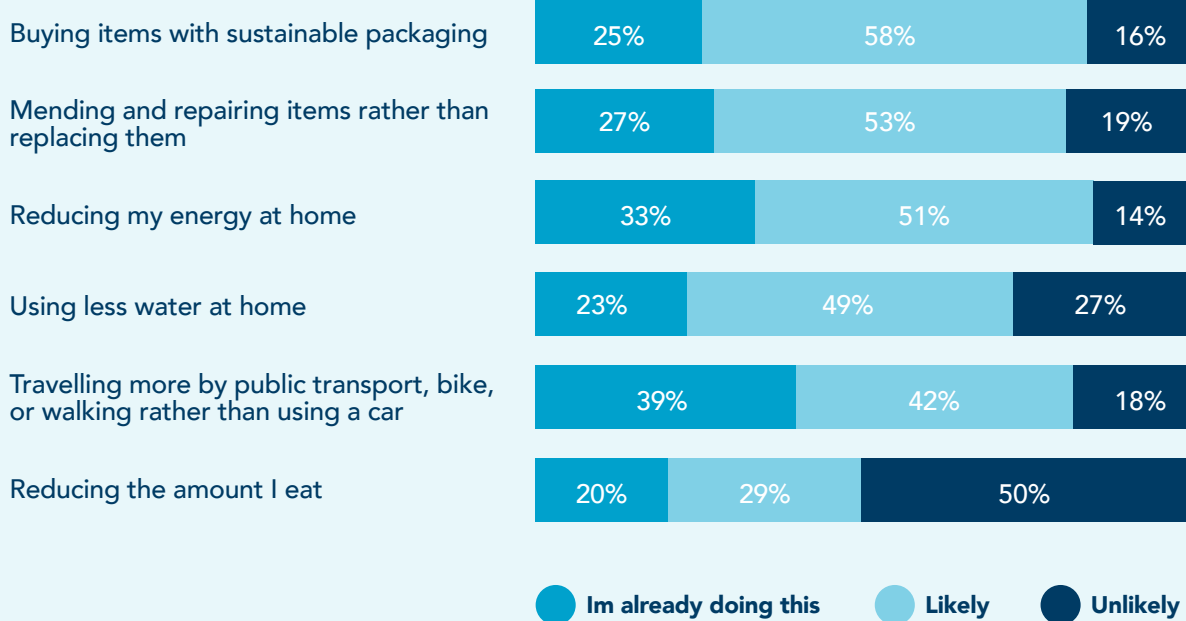
¹⁰ Abram, S., Atkins, E., Dietzel, A., Jenkins, K., Kiamba, L., Kirshner, J., Kreienkamp, J., Parkhill, K., Pegram, T. & Santos Ayllón, LM (2022) *Just transition: A whole-systems approach to decarbonisation*, *Climate Policy*, 22:8, 1033-1049



Young people are willing to make lifestyle changes to support Net Zero, but not at the expense of baseline needs or freedom of choice.

The research clearly shows that young people expect and are willing to do their bit to help meet Net Zero. Indeed, we found that many young people report already adopting more sustainable behaviours. For example, the survey revealed how one-in-four (25%) young people already buy items with sustainable packaging and mend and repair items rather than replace them (27%). Almost two-in-five (39%) already travel more by public transport, bike or walking rather than use a car (see Figure 3).

In thinking about actions, the UK Government or members of the public might take to try to reduce emissions, there were several policy areas or initiatives that young people thought would be important to helping the UK meet its Net Zero target, and some that they either felt were less important, or were less personally supportive of.



SOURCE: C6. We'd like you think again about some of the things the UK public can do to help reduce emissions in the UK. For each, how likely or unlikely, are you personally to do them.

BASE: All respondents (1032) Where figures don't add to 100% this is due to exclusion of 'Don't Know' responses and rounding.

Figure 3: Likelihood to personally take action that could help to reduce emissions in the UK

The online community highlighted two key factors that appear to most influence attitudes about which policies are preferred. Firstly, participants were concerned about initiatives that could be perceived as impacting their freedom and choice. This was defined in two ways. The first was their ability to still be able to make consumer choices that suit their personal preferences and tastes, such as food that suits their palette, or whether to live in the city or the countryside. The second came down to the question of affordability, and whether people would be limited or excluded by an expectation of financial penalty or contribution, such as having to pay additional taxes on certain consumer choices like flying or diet.

Furthermore, participants were less receptive to initiatives that might hinder individuals' access to basic essentials considered crucial for a satisfactory standard of living. These include affordable housing, stable income, nutritious food, clean sanitation, and opportunities for recreation and leisure.

In line with this thinking, those areas of the Net Zero strategy tested with young people, and which were more positively received, included: sustainable transport initiatives, promoting more renewable energy sources (including the installation of energy-efficient technology into homes), planting more trees and grasses, and the creation of more 'green' jobs. These actions would not only be genuinely impactful for the environment, but would not detract or restrict choice, enabling them to maintain (in their view) a good standard of living.

¹¹ Question wording (C4 and C5): We are now going to share a list of things the UK public can do to try to reduce emissions in the UK/ We are now going to share a list of things the UK government may do to try to reduce emissions in the UK. For each, please tell us how important or not you think they are for helping the UK to meet its Net Zero target.

Initiative/Policy	Important %	Not important %
The UK shifting to more renewable energy sources (e.g. solar, wind)	92%	7%
The UK planting more trees	91%	8%
The UK enabling more sustainable modes of transport (e.g. electric vehicles, public transport expansion, cycle lanes)	90%	9%
The UK creating more 'green' jobs (e.g. jobs relating to sustainability and Net Zero)	88%	10%
People installing energy efficiency measures (e.g. insulation, solar panels)	88%	11%
People travelling more by public transport, bike, or walking rather than using a car	87%	12%
The UK offering more support for sustainable farming and fishing	86%	12%
People reducing energy use in their homes (e.g. turning heating down)	86%	13%
People buying items with sustainable packaging	85%	14%
The UK setting minimum standards for energy efficiency in homes	81%	17%

Figure 4: Policies/initiatives most important for helping the UK to meet its Net Zero target (mentioned by at least 4 in 5 in the survey)¹¹

There were four key policy areas presented which sparked more controversy. Whilst the survey shows that some young people do still support these, there were significant proportions who saw them as less important.

Initiative/Policy	Important %	Not important %
The UK making meat and dairy more expensive through taxes	38%	59%
The UK making flying more expensive through taxes	46%	52%
People reducing the amount of meat they eat	50%	48%
People using less water in their homes	67%	32%

Figure 5: Initiatives/Policies least important for helping the UK to meet its Net Zero target

1. Restrictions on meat and dairy consumption:

This is the policy area that receives the least amount of support from young people surveyed (see Figure 5). It is also an action half of young people say they would be unlikely to personally do as a route to meeting Net Zero. In the online community discussions, switching to a plant-based diet was something the more climate-conscious participants (particularly those from higher socio-economic groups) were already considering. One-in-five young people in the survey also say they are already reducing the amount of meat they eat to help reduce the UK's emissions. But, others expressed strong opposition to any suggestion of imposing dietary changes on the public on the grounds of 'personal choice'. Food was seen as closely connected to an individual's body and dietary preferences/needs, making any element of Government control undesirable. There was also concern that such changes, especially if implemented through taxation, could disproportionately impact lower-income families. Participants were typically in agreement that whilst it was acceptable for the Government to encourage dietary change by reducing the price of more vegetable and vegan products, actions to restrict meat eating were unacceptable, especially if price rises were deliberately used as a deterrent.

2. Reduction of water usage:

The survey found over one-in-four young people (27%) are yet to be convinced about changing their own behaviours in using less water at home. Unlike energy, which young people could more easily connect to greenhouse gas emissions, water waste was harder to grasp as a problem in their own lives. Using less water was also seen to be unfeasible for larger families or those with young children in the household. The idea of introducing water usage restrictions raised concerns about hygiene practices, which were seen as an unacceptable compromise to their standard of living, as it could risk illness and disease. This indicates a need for further information and raising awareness on the systems that create climate change, the impact on the water resources and how reduction of water usage is an issue that requires changes beyond the individual level.

3. Restrictions on flying:

Young people understand that flying contributes to greenhouse emissions. However, they are fairly split on the role increasing taxes on flights would play in helping to meet Net Zero targets – just over half (52%) of young people surveyed felt it was not important. During the online community discussions, imposing limits on flying, especially through taxation or price increases, was seen to reduce freedom of movement for lower income families. Participants also thought it increase the isolation of people with family living abroad. They were more likely to stress that the onus should be on airline companies to increase the speed of fuel innovation rather than placing restrictions on consumers.

4. Limiting car ownership:

The survey results demonstrate that young people see the Government as needing to enable more sustainable modes of transport (90% see this as important to helping meet Net Zero), and the public in turn need to travel less by car. However, the online community discussions highlighted that any restrictions placed on car ownership were only considered acceptable if accompanied by significant increased investment in affordable public transport, and in all regions of the UK. Without such investment, penalties or taxes on car use were seen to pose a risk – for example, to job losses for those relying on private transport to get to work, or to people living in rural areas of the country who have to rely more on their cars.

Although the survey did not explore this topic, young people raised concerns within the online community about the potential impact of land use changes for achieving Net Zero on their generation's access to housing. For instance, plans to reforest or repurpose agricultural land might limit new housing projects. Participants expressed concerns about the ongoing difficulties in securing affordable homeownership or rentals. They emphasised the urgency of significantly increasing housing supply to address these challenges for younger generations as part of any future Net Zero plans.

A JUST TRANSITION?

Young people are concerned that Net Zero may disproportionately impact certain sections of society.

The research looked to explore young people's views as to whether any aspect of the UK's Net Zero strategy had the potential to unfairly impact certain groups within the population, leading to an increase in societal inequality.

As noted earlier, knowledge around the concept of 'just transition' is limited among young people. Just 12% of those surveyed reported knowing much about it, and almost half (48%) had never heard of the term. Among young people acquainted with the concept of climate justice, the focus is often on inequalities among different countries. However, as young people become more familiar with actions tied to the UK's Net Zero plan, they immediately recognised that the shift to Net Zero could impact specific groups more significantly than others. Almost one-in-four surveyed (73%) are concerned about this. Concern was more acute among young people with a disability or long-term health condition (81%) and those living in poorer parts of the country (84% in the most deprived IMD quintile¹²).

In conceptualising a just transition young people tended to define it as an approach to implementing Net Zero actions that ensures equitable adoption of green behaviours and access to green infrastructure across all segments of society. It avoids placing disproportionate burdens on any group, preventing some from making more sacrifices proportionate to others, and guarantees equal freedom of choice for all sections of society.

Participants in the online community raised concerns about the scope of the Net Zero strategy and its potential impact across various aspects of life - such as simultaneous changes to employment, housing, diet and land use. While they acknowledged the importance of comprehensive societal change in meeting Net Zero, they cautioned against overwhelming individuals with lots of changes all at once. This could put too much strain on people, reducing their capacity to adapt. Decreased resilience at the individual level could potentially worsen existing societal disparities, including regional and health inequalities.

¹² Indices of multiple deprivation (IMD) is a measure of relative deprivation for small, fixed geographic areas of the UK. IMD classifies these areas into five quintiles based on relative disadvantage, with quintile 1 being the most deprived and quintile 5 being the least deprived.



The concept of a 'just transition' to Net Zero is most strongly associated with income inequality.

The most significant concern shared by young people across the research regarding a just transition, was the impact of meeting Net Zero on income inequality. There was concern that the plan could further divide the rich and poor in society, especially relevant given the current cost-of-living crisis.

This view was influenced by the assumption that many Net Zero policies rely on consumer spending, such as adopting electric vehicles, retrofitting homes for energy efficiency, and changing of dietary habits – and that many households would struggle to afford this against such a challenging economic backdrop.

There was a question as to how a just transition to Net Zero will be inclusive of those communities less able to afford to make changes, and the extent to which mechanisms will be put in place to enable individuals and households with less money to participate, including through financial support. Among those we spoke to from lower-income backgrounds this evoked a sense of resignation: without support, will they end up being excluded or adversely affected by those policies designed to support Net Zero ambitions?

Income inequality was particularly relevant when thinking about key policies related to the shift to more renewable energy sources. The recent energy crises and rises in energy bills heightened young people's sensitivity to the idea that consumers may have to potentially bear further costs of transitioning to green energy.

Participants pointed out that raising the cost of flying through taxation was seen as unfair. They believed that wealthier individuals could absorb such costs without giving up their ability to fly. On the other hand, additional price hikes for flights would make air travel entirely unaffordable for poorer communities limiting their horizons and opportunities by reducing their ability to participate in foreign travel. As previously noted in this report, young people firmly regard travel as a universal right, signifying that it should be available to everyone, regardless of their background. For similar reasons, they were concerned about the impact of putting up the price of meat or dairy through taxation.



“My honest reaction is how can people afford this? People can’t even pay their bills at the moment let alone buy an electric car. That stuff can only be done by people with money. They can afford to buy a heat pump and they can pay extra to fly if they have to. Poorer people are either going to be left behind or accused of being not green which isn’t fair.”

– Male, 23, Scotland



Whilst recognising their generation will be affected, young people worry about other groups in society too.

While participants we spoke to were concerned about the potential disproportionate effects of Net Zero policies on the poorest in society, they didn't necessarily perceive their own generation as being financially worse off than older age groups. This suggests that young people do not strongly associate the idea of generational inequality with climate change at the moment.

Through the research, young people recognised that there were other groups who could be disproportionately affected by the transition to Net Zero, and who should be accounted for when implementing policies. These included people with disabilities or specific health conditions who would be more likely to have a need for accessible transport and to be able to heat their homes effectively. In addition, rural communities would be likely to need greater investment in public transport, together with financial support to farmers, to enable the adoption of sustainable farming practices and to accommodate re-greening initiatives. Furthermore, consideration should be given to supporting and re-training people working in industries likely to be impacted by the transition to Net Zero, such as farming, fishing, and industry.

Young people want the Government to intervene to ensure that Net Zero is affordable to all, working with businesses.

When asking young people about ways in which they could be supported to make changes to help meet Net Zero, 63% in the survey said offering cheaper (subsidised) public transport and 38% making it cheaper to eat more plant-based foods.



Transitioning to a vegan diet or using electric vehicles currently feels unrealistic for most. The idea of taxing individuals who don't comply with the proposed changes for meeting Net Zero is considered unfair. Instead, participants saw Government's role as providing subsidies or exerting pressure on businesses to reduce product prices, enabling people to afford to make the necessary changes.

They also urged Government to collaborate with businesses to swiftly make new technologies and solutions accessible to the wider market. If necessary, this could include Government subsidies and direct investment in green innovation.

Half of young people surveyed (50%) also want to make it easier to recycle or reuse products. Participants in the online community felt businesses selling directly to consumers should modify their manufacturing processes to enhance product durability and facilitate easier repairs for existing items. This emphasis was particularly notable in industries like fashion and technology, where products were perceived to have deliberately short lifespans.

While certain participants were receptive to the idea of the Government investigating legal measures to ensure Net Zero adherence in manufacturing, a portion of young people in the online community, particularly those with connections to businesses (e.g., family members employed in business), emphasised that smaller enterprises might need help to enact changes aligned with Net Zero objectives. This assistance could include financial support from the Government.

Young people emphasised the role of the Government and business as being responsible for affecting 'big enough' changes. This might indicate young people's feeling of lacking agency or lack of understanding that change can happen in many different ways and with different actors.

INVOLVING YOUNG PEOPLE IN NET ZERO POLICY MAKING

Young people strongly believed that the views of their generation should influence Net Zero decision making.

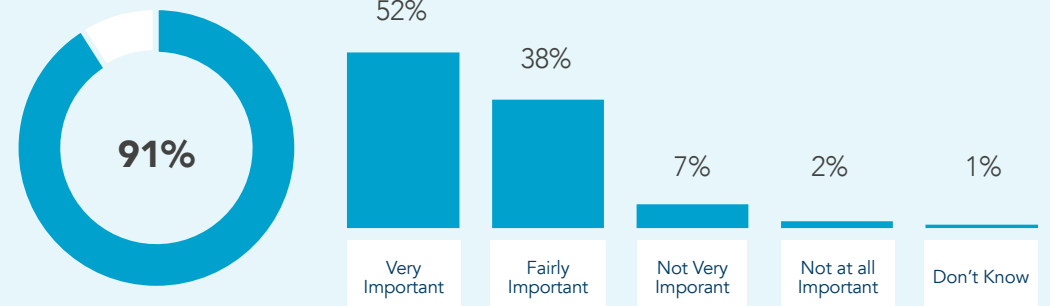
High levels of concern about climate change when coupled with increased familiarity with the Net Zero strategy and the scope of potential changes being considered, lead young people to feel their generation should contribute to the policymaking process. While young people continue to believe that the Government is best equipped to lead on Net Zero actions, nine-in-ten (91%) think young people should be involved in decisions about how to reduce the UK's emissions to hit Net Zero. Three-in-four (75%) are personally interested in getting involved in this process (see Figure 6) for example, as part of a consultation process.

The desire to contribute to Net Zero decision-making spans all demographic groups, underscoring the need to provide young people from diverse backgrounds with the chance to express their perspectives effectively. Interest is particularly high among those who are concerned about reaching Net Zero (82% are personally interested in being involved compared to 54% who are less concerned, though this is still over half among those who don't even see Net Zero as a particular issue).

Participants in the online community acknowledged their limited knowledge on Net Zero and the policymaking process restricted their ability to speak to specific mechanisms for involvement. However, it was felt that their generation could provide a unique viewpoint on societal issues and a sense of creativity that policymakers may find beneficial.

Generational Importance

% who think it is important for young people to be involved in decisions about how to reduce the UK's emissions to hit Net Zero by 2050.



SOURCE:

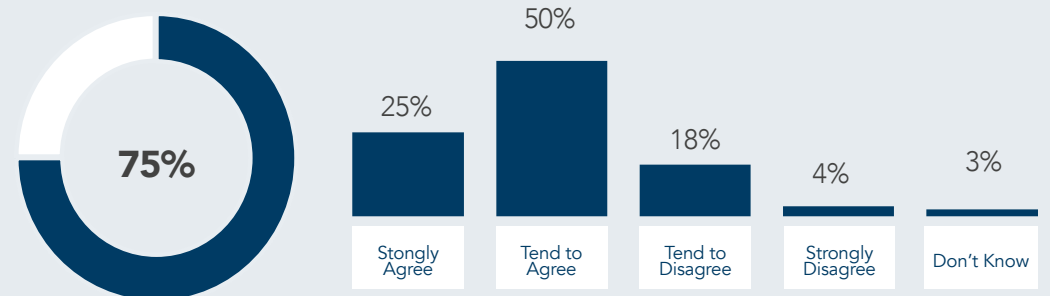
D6. How important is it for young people like you to be involved in decisions about how to reduce the UK's emissions in order to hit Net Zero by 2050?

BASE:

All respondents (1032)

Personal Interest

% who agree they would personally be interested in being involved in decisions about how to reduce the UK's emissions to hit Net Zero by 2050.



SOURCE:

D7.4. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about getting involved in the issue of Net Zero? I would personally be interested in being involved in decisions about how to reduce the UK's emissions in order to hit Net Zero by 2050.

BASE:

All respondents (1032)

Figure 6: Importance and interest for getting involved in decisions about Net Zero

But, they need to feel they will be listened to by policymakers.

Despite their enthusiasm to engage in the debate, young people don't feel confident their views will be heard. Four-in-five (79%) young people taking part in the survey think the UK Government doesn't listen to people like them when making decisions about Net Zero. And when asked what might stop young people from getting involved in decisions about how to reduce the UK's emissions, the top reason they give is 'not believing it would change anything' (cited by 57%).

This suggests targeted action is required from policy makers to build trust among young people as part of any future conversation and engagement process. Of note is that young people living in Scotland and Wales are most likely to think the UK Government doesn't listen (86% and 91% respectively).

The online community discussions suggest that this scepticism is rooted in a perception that Government has tended to lack interest in young people's experiences of other societal issues, such as education, the cost-of-living crisis or health.

There was also a view from some participants more involved in climate activism that Government negativity toward and reluctance to collaborate with grassroots climate organisations raises questions on whether their own opinions would be listened to in policy discussions. This suggests that the Government may need to make additional efforts to win the trust of young climate activists to ensure meaningful engagement in shaping policies and decisions.

Ultimately, young people want a clear understanding as to how their views will be used to shape decisions and the mechanisms through which they can expect to be actively involved.



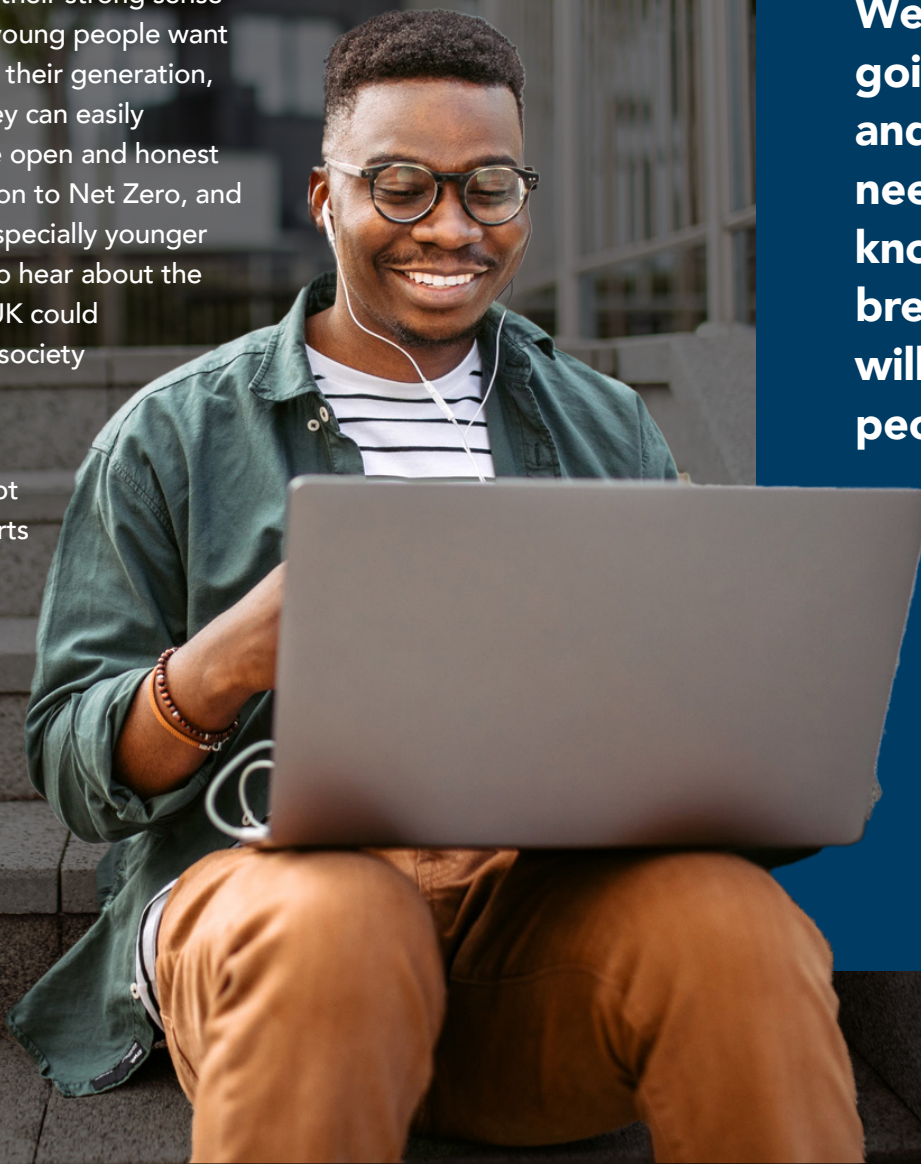
The survey suggests that young people want to be engaged in a variety of ways. Of the engagement mechanisms proposed, there was appetite for a mix of options, from taking part in surveys (of interest to 81%) and competitions (38%), to short and long group discussions (36% and 24% respectively), and will be important to account for individual preferences here – for example, the quantitative findings indicate that whilst surveys are more likely to be favoured by White young people (82%), competitions are more likely to appeal to Asian and Black young people (45% and 47% respectively).

Young people also told us that it's important they can engage in a meaningful way. For many, this means having a deeper understanding of the issues first. Currently, many young people feel that they lack sufficient knowledge about Net Zero to contribute confidently to the debate. As we set out previously, they want more information and education on the issues to help them here.

Young people want policymakers to speak more directly to their generation.

Given their optimism around Net Zero and their strong sense of responsibility in supporting its delivery, young people want policymakers to connect more directly with their generation, and to explain Net Zero using language they can easily comprehend. They want Government to be open and honest about the trade-offs involved in the transition to Net Zero, and the difficult choices UK society may face, especially younger generations. At the same time, they want to hear about the opportunities that systemic change in the UK could bring, which could include creating a fairer society with a better standard of living.

The message they want to deliver to policymakers is that they are willing to adapt their lifestyle to contribute to the UK's efforts to mitigate the worst effects of climate change, as long as these adaptations are reasonable and do not exacerbate inequality. They are highly receptive to working together with decision-makers to ensure that Net Zero benefits all in society, regardless of background, region or income level. However, for this collaboration to be successful, there must be a genuine desire from policymakers to listen to their views and those of other groups at risk of being disproportionately impacted by Net Zero initiatives.

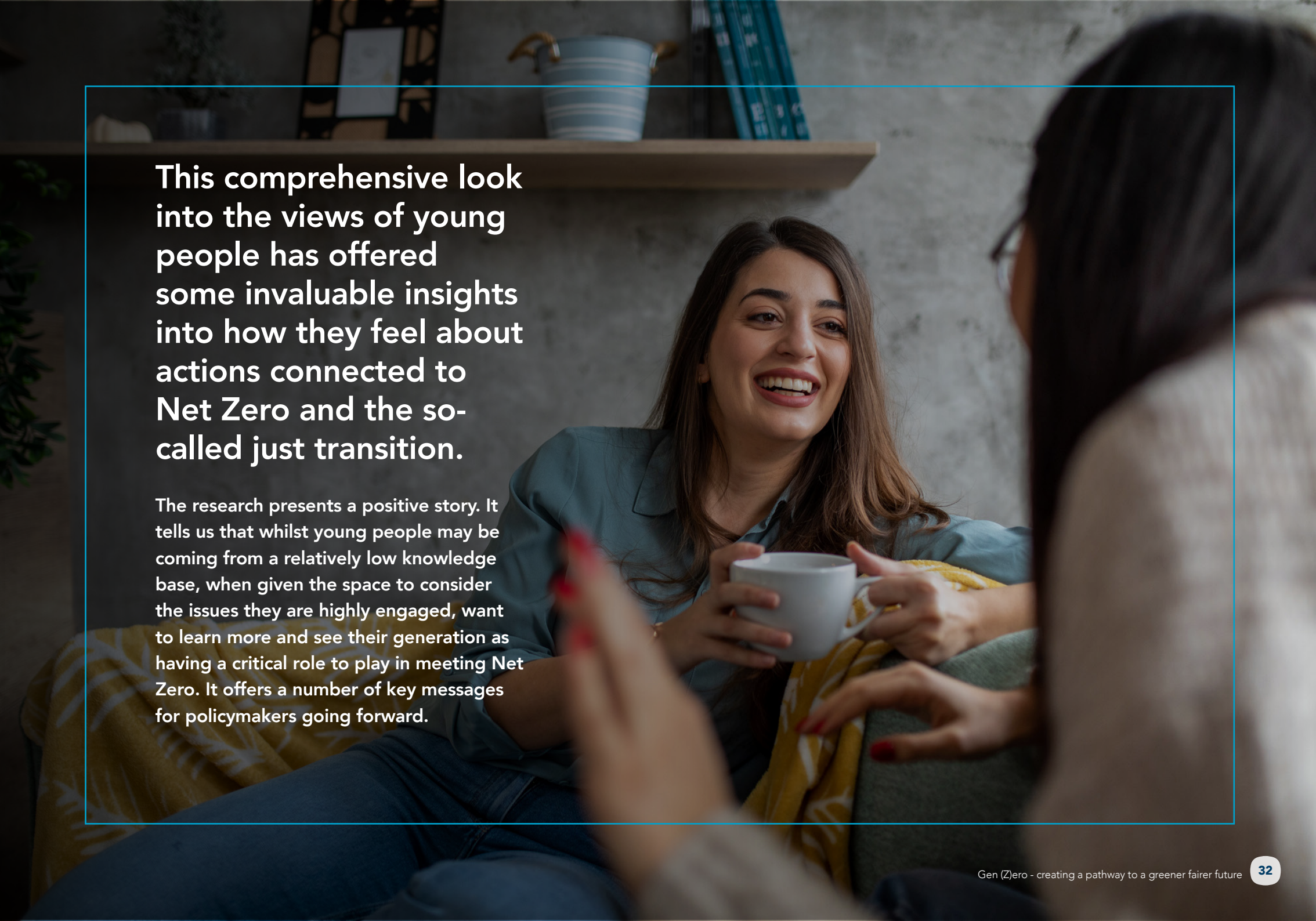


"I would like to see government reaching out more to young people. We understand this is going to impact our lives and we understand things need to change. You never know where the next breakthrough technology will come from and young people have lots of ideas to share, they are really creative and care about this issue."

- Male, 17, East Midlands

PART 3

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS



This comprehensive look into the views of young people has offered some invaluable insights into how they feel about actions connected to Net Zero and the so-called just transition.

The research presents a positive story. It tells us that whilst young people may be coming from a relatively low knowledge base, when given the space to consider the issues they are highly engaged, want to learn more and see their generation as having a critical role to play in meeting Net Zero. It offers a number of key messages for policymakers going forward.

Knowledge is power

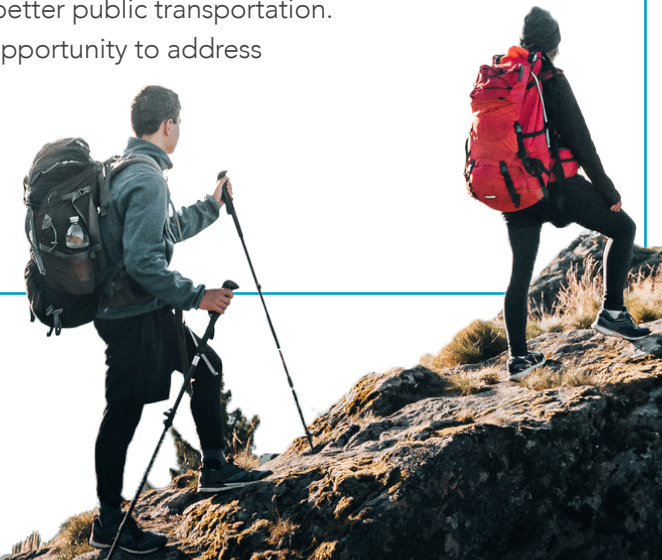
Many young people have limited knowledge about Net Zero, with this lack of understanding particularly evident among those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and more disadvantaged regions within the UK. Despite these disparities, young individuals from across communities are eager to learn more about the UK's Net Zero plans and actively participate in the decision-making process. This suggests a coordinated approach to education and knowledge sharing is key through both formal educational settings and more informal learning avenues. It is also important that both formal and informal education sources are trusted and allow young people to use their critical thinking to reflect on the information presented to them.

Suggestions from young people include integrating more climate-related issues into the school curriculum and providing information through workplaces, national broadcast and social media. To address the perceived complexity of Net Zero, information should be tailored to their age and presented in a straightforward manner, emphasising actionable steps.

This research has highlighted how young people can face difficulties in understanding the relevance of some of the actions needed to reach Net Zero and can resist certain changes due to their impact on personal freedoms. Helping provide information on the rationale for different actions and how these fit together to enable us to reach Net Zero and more systemic change will be vital for crafting a successful educational strategy. Equally important is clarifying how changes to behaviours and choices can lead to positive impacts on society more broadly (i.e. a 'just transition') and to help young people understand how change at the community or societal level can be created beyond thinking about individual needs, wants or perceptions of rights and freedoms.

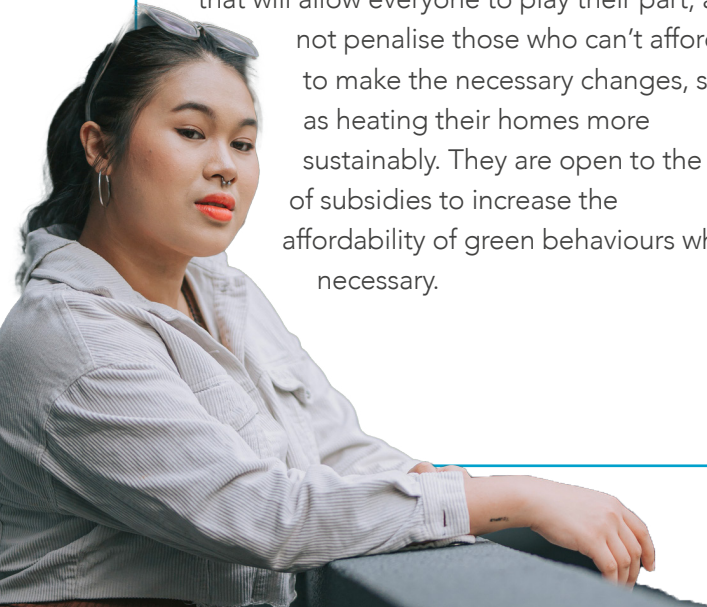
Be honest about the challenges and trade-offs, whilst presenting the positives

Young people accept they have a role to play in supporting the pathway to Net Zero, and are willing to adapt their lifestyles. But, they have concerns, especially where policies come at the expense of baseline needs or freedom and choice. They expect policy makers to be transparent with them about the trade-offs. If policies which restrict freedoms are to be taken forward, such as restrictions on flying or meat and dairy consumption, it will be important that these are seen to have been designed in a way that is equitable. At the same time, young people see the opportunities presented by Net Zero. They want to hear more from policymakers about the advantages, such as improved urban planning, enhanced access to green spaces, employment prospects through green jobs and better public transportation. This should include the opportunity to address historical regional inequalities and invest in underserved communities.



Fairness is key

While the concept of a 'just transition' was not something that many young people had heard of or engaged with prior to this research, young people spontaneously expressed concern that the shift towards Net Zero may risk exacerbating existing inequalities in society, impacting certain groups in the UK. Against a backdrop of a cost-of-living crisis, the potential impact on lower-income households is clearly front of mind. Young people want assurances from policymakers that the financial burden of Net Zero initiatives will not disproportionately affect those who are less financially resilient. They are likely to feel more encouraged where they can see policymakers actively working to find solutions that will allow everyone to play their part, and not penalise those who can't afford to make the necessary changes, such as heating their homes more sustainably. They are open to the use of subsidies to increase the affordability of green behaviours where necessary.



Government and business need to lead from the front

With affordability and accessibility front of mind, young people do not feel UK consumers will be able to tolerate further price rises. They believe Government should exert pressure on businesses to look at ways to keep the costs of products down, enabling people to afford to make the necessary changes for meeting Net Zero. While they are receptive to Government support and incentives to retain industry jobs, young people are also willing to consider legislative changes that ensure businesses prioritise more sustainable manufacturing practices.

Politicians need to build young people's trust in politics

Young people believe their generation's viewpoints should hold weight in discussions about Net Zero. They believe they have valuable insights to contribute. Yet they are skeptical about being heard and their perspectives being incorporated into decision-making. To establish trust, policymakers need to display genuine interest in young people's viewpoints; it can't feel tokenistic. This means offering a range of different ways for young people of all backgrounds to have their voices meaningfully heard. It also means ensuring a constant feedback loop so they can see how their involvement is genuinely influencing policy.

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APPENDICES

NOTE ON DATA INTERPRETATION

SURVEY SAMPLE PROFILE

COMMUNITY SAMPLE PROFILE

FOCUS GROUP SAMPLE PROFILE

Note on data interpretation

Qualitative research is illustrative, detailed and exploratory. It offers insights into the perceptions, feelings and behaviours of people rather than quantifiable conclusions from a statistically representative sample. In contrast, quantitative research with a nationally representative sample allows us to extrapolate to the wider population of young people about attitudes and behaviours relating to a just transition to Net Zero. It also provides a reliable means of comparing and potentially validating findings from the qualitative research. Throughout this report we have tried to make clear the evidence we have drawn upon from the relevant project phases in our interpretation.

We conducted a nationally representative online survey of 1,032 16 to 24 year olds living in the UK.

Quotas were set for age, gender, region, ethnicity, work status and disability, and were weighted accordingly at the back end using the latest available Census information. Broadly speaking, the survey data (assuming total sample) is subject to a sampling tolerance of +/-3 percentage points (ppts) at the 95% confidence interval.

Please treat answers with a base size of less than 100 with caution.

Where percentages do not sum to 100 per cent, this may be due to computer rounding, the exclusion of 'I don't know' responses or when questions allow multiple answers. An asterisk (*) denotes any value less than half of one per cent but greater than zero. For some questions, we refer to aggregate figures, e.g. 'agree' being an aggregate of those reporting that they 'strongly agree' or 'tend to agree'.



Survey - sample profile

	SAMPLE SIZE (WEIGHTED) N	SAMPLE SIZE (WEIGHTED) (%)
GENDER		
Male	512	50%
Female	491	48%
AGE		
16-20	561	54%
21-24	472	46%
REGION		
East Midlands	78	8%
East of England	85	8%
London	139	13%
North East	44	4%
North West	111	11%
South East	137	13%
South West	84	8%
West Midlands	98	9%
Yorkshire and The Humber	89	9%
Scotland	90	9%
Wales	48	5%
Northern Ireland	30	3%
ETHNICITY		
White	803	78%
Minority ethnic group	222	22%
WORK STATUS		
Economically active	467	45%
Economically inactive	554	54%
DISABILITY OR HEALTH CONDITION		
Disabled/ long-term health condition	145	14%



Qualitative community - sample profile

CHARACTERISTIC	QUOTA ACHIEVED (number of young people)
	41
GENDER	
Male	20
Female	21
AGE	
16-18	15
19-21	14
22-24	12
REGION	
England	20
Scotland	9
Wales	6
Northern Ireland	6
Lives in rural or non-urban location	6
ETHNICITY	
Asian, Asian British	7
Black, Black British, Black Caribbean, Black African	4
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	5
White British, White Irish	22
Other ethnicity not mentioned	3
SOCIAL GRADE	
AB	2
C1	15
C2	15
D,E	9
DISABILITY OR HEALTH CONDITION	
Total in sample:	14

Focus group – sample profile

CHARACTERISTIC	QUOTA ACHIEVED (number of young people)
	14
GENDER	
Male	6
Female	8
AGE	
16-18	5
19-21	5
22-24	4
REGION	
England	7
Scotland	3
Wales	2
Northern Ireland	2
Lives in rural or non-urban location	4
ETHNICITY	
Asian, Asian British	3
Black, Black British, Black Caribbean, Black African	2
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	2
White British, White Irish	5
Other ethnicity not mentioned	2
SOCIAL GRADE	
AB	0
C1	5
C2	5
D,E	4
DISABILITY OR HEALTH CONDITION	
Total in sample:	6

ABOUT CO-OP

Co-op is one of the world's largest consumer co-operatives with interests across food, funerals, insurance and legal services. Owned by millions of UK consumers, the Co-op operates over 2,500 food stores, over 800 funeral homes and provides products to over 5,000 other stores, including those run by independent co-operative societies and through its wholesale business, Nisa Retail Limited.

Employing almost 60,000 people, the Co-op has an annual turnover of over £11 billion and is a recognised leader for its social goals and community-led programmes. The Co-op exists to meet members' needs and stand up for the things they believe in.

Over the last two years Co-op has invested in extensive research including Ghosted Generation 2021 and Unfair Tales 2022 to understand the attitudes, life chances and aspirations of young people.



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ABOUT THE CO-OP FOUNDATION:

We're the Co-op's charity and we're co-operating for a fairer world. We believe co-operation is at the heart of strong communities and this makes us a different kind of funder. We work closely with communities, we listen and we learn. We unlock communities' power by focusing on those who have most at stake. We asked young people to shape our vision, and now we're co-operating with them and others to turn this into reality. Let's build communities of the future together.

www.coopfoundation.org.uk