



THE ITALIAN CLIMATE CHANGE THINK TANK

MY CAR, MY HOME, MY JOB

How to reconcile climate policies with people's needs and how to generate consensus

POLICY BRIEFING
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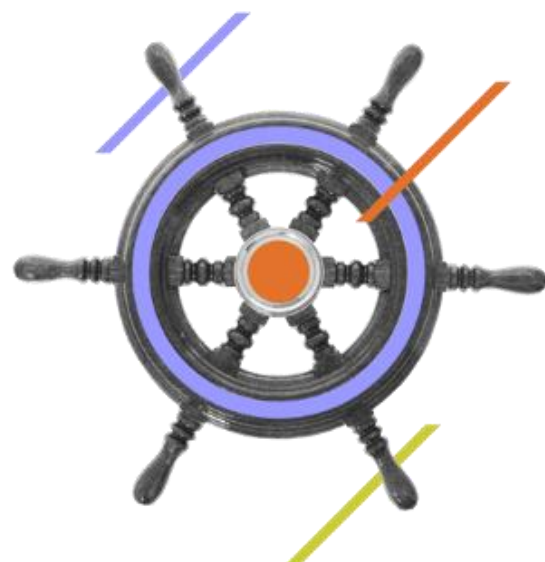


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OVERVIEW

- By 2030, the European Union must achieve a net CO2 emission reduction target of 55%, however, ambitious climate policy packages are still facing backlash at national level on specific policies.
- Climate change policies, de facto, have to deal with our development model, the way we produce and the way we consume. When it comes to consumption patterns, climate change policies directly affect our ways of living: the way we commute or travel, the way we heat our homes and keep them warm, our jobs.
- Therefore, ECCO felt it was necessary to study and evaluate social consensus around climate policies. Further, this project wanted to explore how consensus changes in relation to people's commitment to the fight against climate change, their perception of their everyday actions compared to climate impacts and their level of agency.
- Based on the project outcomes, a clear narrative and overall strategy (referred to as "framework of reference") based on common principles underlying people's perception and reality (coherence, cooperation, education...) ensures that such specific policies are understood and find space within the bigger narrative of a socially just green transition.
- Targeted policies are needed to respond to specific needs, which in turn demand working on tools able to show how and to what extent specific groups can contribute to achieving climate and social goals.
- There is an important space to foster smart and responsible communication around climate change and decarbonisation processes, by responding to people demand for reliable information on these topics.

BACKGROUND

Within climate issues lies a responsibility to go beyond the remits of its adaptation and mitigation objectives, and face society's most rooted problems and challenges (i.e. deep socio-economic inequalities). **Decarbonising our economies to face the threat of climate change is not an easy task, but we cannot shy away from tackling distributional issues and inequality, setting free from the strong interests tied to the oil and gas industry.** Subsequently, a political strategy is necessary to smoothly guide people when faced with the high costs of the transition, a tight timeframe and other barriers. **The project started in May 2024 and has resulted in a [policy document](#) with an in-depth analysis of the findings and this policy brief, both, a first contribution to finding the right tools to interpret the needs of our society and solve its structural problems along the process of transitioning away from fossil fuels.**

The objective of this project was to understand people's inclination and challenges to the public support of the transition process, starting from people's individual needs within key decarbonisation sectors (building, transport and employment) and understanding what consensus can be generated around the Green Deal and the Fit for 55 package. Recent studies confirm that people are mostly

aligned with the decarbonisation process and that they are not initially against climate policies¹. When it comes to engaging and implementing sectorial policies like phasing out technologies as, for example, ICE engines in road transport or gas boilers for heating purposes, these are met with scepticism and, at times, opposed. **Policies should be better equipped at translating individual needs into collective ones and increase political consensus.** On the other side, politicians might be interested in building a political proposal that would capture the attention of a bigger part of the electorate because it can answer to their needs. This project wants to share tools and recommendations with decision makers to build a political proposal that reflects people's needs.

The data collection has been conducted in Italy, Germany, France and Poland and consisted of two main parts: a quantitative and a qualitative data collection. Our analysis comprised more than 4000 written responses and screening of more than 7 million social media posts.

In particular, for what concerns the qualitative data collection the project tested the following:

1. People's acceptance of the overall transition process and how important climate issues are for them.
2. People's perception of how much their actions in specific sectors have an impact on climate.
3. How policies should support people with different needs.

OPPORTUNITIES

The work conducted by ECCO, which explores respondents' attitude towards the transition process, their sense of agency and their needs within key decarbonisation sectors, has provided valuable insights into the **"maturity" of each sector** (with reference to point 1 and 2 above) and **where action is most needed** (point 3). It has also highlighted where individuals feel **empowered to take action** versus areas where collective action is required. These findings can guide policymakers in targeting their efforts to support and amplify these dynamics.

One of the most notable findings is that **people feel most engaged in the transport sector**, as they are directly called on to make decisions about their daily movements. This sense of agency has led individuals to believe that even small changes—such as using public transport more frequently or driving less—can have a significant positive environmental impact. As a result, the transport sector has emerged as the most "mature" field in the decarbonisation process, with high levels of individual engagement and a clear understanding of its role in reducing emissions. **For policymakers, this presents an opportunity to build on this momentum, offering selective incentives, clearer regulations, and support for individuals making sustainable choices in transportation.**

When it comes to housing, there is a clear divide between homeowners and tenants. **Homeowners feel a stronger sense of agency and are more likely to take action toward energy efficiency or carbon-reducing measures in their homes.** However, concerns about the costs of upgrading homes, combined with a lack of clear regulations or incentives, can hinder their progress, leaving them feeling stuck. **Tenants, on the other hand, often see their opportunities for action as limited to basic energy-saving measures or advocacy.** For policymakers, this presents an opportunity to

¹ Abou-Chadi T; Jansen J.; Kollberg M.; Redeker N. Debunking the Backlash. Uncovering European Voters' Climate Preferences. Jacques Delors Centre. March 2024

create policies that support both groups more effectively. **Providing homeowners with financial incentives, clear guidelines, and access to affordable financing for retrofitting could help overcome the barriers they face. Meanwhile, renters could benefit from stronger tenant protections and incentives for landlords to invest in energy-efficient buildings.**

In the employment sector, respondents generally feel that responsibility for the transition is completely out of their hands, and that agency lies completely with their employers. However, there is a need to address the concerns of workers who may be most at risk due to the transition to a green economy. **Reassuring these individuals and offering support for those whose jobs may be displaced is crucial to maintaining public support for decarbonisation.** Developing a more effective communication strategy about the implications of the transition for the job market will be key. **Policymakers should focus on balancing environmental goals with economic stability, ensuring that policies provide retraining opportunities, job security, and support for industries affected by decarbonisation.** This could involve re-skilling and upskilling programs, targeted subsidies for green job creation, and policies that ensure job displacement does not leave people behind.

Overall, ECCO's work points to several opportunities for policymakers to target their efforts. Supporting individuals in the transport sector by creating the conditions for them to make sustainable choices according to their needs and means, providing incentives and regulations to help homeowners, and ensuring the stability of the job market are key areas where action is needed. By addressing these needs, policymakers can help drive a just and inclusive transition that empowers individuals while achieving ambitious climate goals.

CHALLENGES

In the **transport sector**, across countries and social groups, the main critical points primarily concern public transports and their insufficient coverage and efficiency, the inadequate infrastructure for alternative mobility solutions and poor mobility choices for people living in non-urban areas. Electric vehicles are understood to be the future of mobility, but currently they do not fully convince everyone².

In the **building sector**, despite a general, cross-country adherence to the idea of living in a comfortable home and to reduce their energy expenses, obstacles - mostly of a practical nature - also emerge, which may be a barrier for many. First of all, high initial investment costs are a barrier to people that do not have the financial means to meet initial expenses as well as the need to adjust the infrastructure of buildings to new technologies and difficulties stemming from reaching agreements with other homeowners, when living in building blocks.

When it comes to their **jobs**, respondents across countries have spontaneously highlighted trends related to home-office and co-working spaces, shortage of skilled labour, low and high salaries drifting more and more apart and increased pressure from competing markets to name a few. People mainly felt the impact that macroeconomic and political phenomena in the past few years

² This was particularly true in France. For more information, please refer to the [policy document](#) "My car, my home, my job. How to reconcile climate policies with people's needs and how to generate consensus".

had on the employment sector and on particular industries, however, they struggle to identify roots causes and solutions. Although the principles and concept of a Just Transition are predominantly unfamiliar, people relate to the spirit of social cohesion and dialogue to prevent division and social unrest within the transition process, implementation of new and high-quality jobs as well as opportunities for training and education.

POLICY CERTAINTY

Based on what respondents have shared during the qualitative analysis, a framework of reference for a political strategy should be built around the following guidelines and principles:

- **Cooperation** and **dialogue** across all stakeholders
- **Avoid inconsistencies** that risk demotivating citizens, especially the less involved in the topic, and those which nullify any kind of positive effort
- Increase **education** and **social awareness**
- Develop measures that are **socially responsible**, unifying and not further dividing society
- **Reassurance regarding financial efforts**, that should be within reasonable limits and ideally linked to fast amortisation
- **Reduce complexity**: easy and structured information, guidance and training

Further to this, according to our social media analysis, people ask for more and reliable information in order to understand and interpret the world but also to be able to make the best choices. From our conversations with respondents, across countries, we observed an electorate that can come together under the banner of ambitious climate policies, especially in the transport and building sectors. The latter are sectors where we found the highest awareness in relation to changes necessary both to mitigate the effects of climate change and to answer to social needs related to safety, health, economic development and fight against inequality. However, this awareness is mostly not supported by a clear and reliable stream of information from civil servants and some of the most important news outlets.

It is unmistakable that policies need tools able to bring to the front people's needs vis-à-vis the background ideological and interests-based "noise" that is watering down any attempt for climate and people friendly progress. To overcome this "noise", decision-makers will need to value people awareness towards the need of an ecological transition. This implies a huge effort from all stakeholders involved, to deploy new and available tools to give answers to people's real needs at all levels (information, education, communication, technical, fiscal ect.) and, therefore, increasing consensus for a political strategy able to encompass all of these dimensions.

Policy makers have the responsibility to build a framework of reference that resonate in its narrative with people requests for coherence, simplicity and responsibility. This comes in part from the EU overall political direction, but in part needs to be a national political proposal where people can contextualise their role in this transition and see themselves represented in specific political choices. Once this framework is consolidated, we need to start a serious investigation on how to organise society so that policy can be guided in better responding to people's needs.

A taxonomy of society can serve this purpose.

Creating a comprehensive taxonomy of society based on socio-economic and cultural indicators, and understanding how these categories align with political orientations and views on climate issues, is

crucial for building climate policies that are both effective and inclusive. **By categorizing society in this way, we can better represent the diverse groups that exist within it, especially those who have felt overlooked or abandoned by current political structures.** Many people across different sectors and communities may have unique concerns and needs, particularly when it comes to the climate transition. Understanding these nuances will ensure that policies are tailored to those who need them the most, while giving visibility to often-marginalised voices.

For example, the path to decarbonisation isn't one-size-fits-all. An electric car may not be an immediate solution for everyone—some people will continue using combustion engine vehicles for years to come, while others will have access to alternative means of transport. Some will receive incentives to transition to affordable electric cars, while wealthier individuals who can already afford the shift won't require public subsidies. **The goal is to create a transition that considers where people are at and provides solutions that match their needs, ensuring fairness and sustainability across the board.**

This is where the taxonomy comes in: it allows us to identify and categorize people based on their specific socio-economic situations, political views, and their unique needs related to sectors crucial for decarbonisation, such as transportation, employment, and housing. With this information, we can design policies that directly address these needs and gaps, ensuring that no one is left behind. If existing policies don't meet the needs of certain groups, we can use the insights from the taxonomy to develop new, more inclusive measures.

To complement this, a *Consensus Gap Index* will be a powerful tool to track and measure public support for climate targets both at the EU and national level. By understanding where consensus exists—and where it's lacking—we can adjust policies in real-time, ensuring they remain responsive and relevant to public sentiment. This index will also highlight areas where additional public engagement and education might be needed to build stronger support for the transition.

Together, the taxonomy and the consensus gap index will provide a clear, dynamic framework for developing policies that are not only well-informed but also responsive to the evolving needs and perspectives of society. This approach ensures that climate policies are more inclusive, equitable, and capable of achieving the widespread societal buy-in that is crucial for a successful and just transition.



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