

# PROTECTING CONSUMERS ON THE WAY TO NET ZERO: DELIBERATIVE RESEARCH ON THE JUST TRANSITION

Headline Report

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# INTRODUCTION

As part of our work to protect consumers we commissioned Ipsos to carry out research to explore consumer views on a Just Transition to net zero.

This headline report provides an overview of the key findings and accompanies the full report prepared by Ipsos. A copy of the full Ipsos report is available on our website.

We would like to extend our thanks to all who took part in the research, and Ipsos who conducted the research on our behalf.

## KEY FINDINGS



**CONCERNS ABOUT COST,  
PRACTICALITIES AND LACK OF  
INFORMATION**



**LACK OF TRUST IN GOVERNMENT  
AND THE NEED FOR GREATER  
TRANSPARENCY**



**THE BENEFITS OF THE  
TRANSITION WERE NOT  
ALWAYS CLEAR**



**PROTECTING THE MOST  
VULNERABLE IS A KEY ASPECT  
OF A JUST TRANSITION**



**A NEED FOR  
INDEPENDENT AND  
ACCESSIBLE INFORMATION**

## CONCERNS ABOUT COST, PRACTICALITIES AND LACK OF INFORMATION



Cost was the overriding concern for participants on the day. This largely related to upfront installation costs of new home energy systems, but also uncertainty about the reliability, effectiveness and running costs of heat pumps and newer technologies.

Financial support to help with the costs of transitioning to net zero was a key priority. Participants believed that while government, industry, and the public should share the financial burden of the transition, government should take the lead by funding a significant share of the costs. Suggestions of types of support included government grants and subsidies, interest free loans, or exemptions from charges.

Aside from cost, there were concerns about:

- the practicalities of changing heating systems and the level of disruption involved.
- being asked to change heating systems again as technologies developed or government expectations changed.
- the lack of information and certainty about the changes being expected or required, the options available, and the costs.

**“We went from oil heating, then we went to pellets and now we’re on the gas. And now we [need to get] the heat pump? That’s four sources of heating.” (Participant)**

## LACK OF TRUST IN GOVERNMENT AND THE NEED FOR GREATER TRANSPARENCY



There was recognition among participants that significant changes would be needed to reach Northern Ireland’s net zero target but a lack of trust in government to achieve this and ensure a Just Transition.

There were calls for greater transparency from government and the energy sector about the decisions being taken, how decisions are made, and about what the changes might mean for consumers. By providing this transparency government can build trust and demonstrate its commitment to a Just Transition.

**“There has to be clear and precise information available... Because when people can factor these things in [in advance], then it becomes more doable.” (Participant)**

Governance and accountability were expected, with participants calling for independent oversight of the transition in the energy sector. This would ensure that both public sector and private companies act in the public’s best interest.

## THE BENEFITS OF THE TRANSITION WERE NOT ALWAYS CLEAR



More information on the benefits of the transition is needed. While some participants recognised the environmental and financial benefits of the transition to net zero, discussions focussed more on costs.

There was a sense that the transition was being “done to” consumers. Some participants felt that consumers may be “forced” to make changes that they otherwise would not have chosen to.

**“The government is saying we must get to net zero and all, but they’re not telling us what progress has been made. They’re not giving any of that information out. There really is a huge lack [of information] from the top down.”** (Participant)

## PROTECTING THE MOST VULNERABLE IS A KEY ASPECT OF A JUST TRANSITION



The principle of a Just Transition was seen by participants to mean an “equal transition” and an “equitable” approach. Preventing disproportionate burdens, financial and non-financial, was seen as fundamental.

There was a clear desire to protect vulnerable consumers and support those who would be impacted the most by the transition to net zero. As a minimum this support should be provided to those least able to afford the actions through targeted financial support. More broadly it was felt that groups that were in vulnerable circumstances or had a greater reliance on energy, such as those with health conditions, should be protected.

Discussions on who should pay for the transition to net zero revealed the complexity of finding a fair approach.

**“I don’t think it’ll ever be fair because people’s incomes are all different... it’s going to hurt some people more than others.”** (Participant)

Suggestions were made to help make it fairer. These included:

- consideration of individual circumstances, potentially through a form of means testing based on ability to pay, not just household income.
- capping the level of charges or levies consumers were expected to pay and providing some exemptions for individuals that had already significantly invested in reducing their carbon emissions.
- providing clear and transparent information about how consumer costs are calculated and how any financial incentives are allocated.

# A NEED FOR INDEPENDENT AND ACCESSIBLE INFORMATION



Access to clear, accessible and unbiased information to help make informed decisions was considered crucial. Participants identified a desire for more information about:

- the options for more energy efficient or renewable energy sources.
- the costs and impacts of adopting new technologies and energy-efficient practices.
- the benefits and the choices consumers have.

Increased and better information was seen as essential to building trust and confidence and beginning to provide non-price-based protections.

Reliable sources such as independent government bodies or regulated agencies should provide this. A “one-stop shop” was suggested, or an independent body dedicated to providing impartial advice and support for consumers.

**“Imagine if you had the advice. You don’t need to go anywhere else, literally it’s a one stop shop – job done.”** (Participant)

## METHODOLOGY

In April 2025 we held a day long in-person deliberative workshop in Belfast with 49 participants from across Northern Ireland.

We chose this approach due to the complex nature of the topic. Deliberative research supports the development of informed opinions, uncovers what underpins people’s views, and demonstrates how views may change over time and in response to new information.

**“Listening to [the presenters] and to everybody else’s views here today has changed my opinion. I knew what net zero was, but I didn’t really understand it. So this session was really informative for me. I now understand it, and I get that we have to go that way.”** (Participant).

## NEXT STEPS

We will use the findings of this research to inform our work in protecting consumers on the way to net zero. This work forms part of UR’s Consumer Protection Programme. Further information on our Consumer Protection Programme for 2024 to 2029 (CPP24) can be found on our website.

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