

COP26

Tackling the
**Climate
Crisis**



SINN FÉIN ENERGY POLICY

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A JUST TRANSITION TO A GREENER FUTURE

COP26 is an opportunity to send a clear message on the actions that will be needed to be taken by government's globally to tackle the climate emergency; it must not be missed.

The following paper summarises Sinn Féin's strategy for ambitious decarbonisation of the energy system in the North of Ireland. In essence, the climate targets and policy recommendations outlined in this document speak to Sinn Féin's ambition to lead a Just Transition to a net zero carbon society on the island of Ireland by at least 2050.

We urgently need to decarbonise our economic activity and society to confront climate breakdown. Earlier this year the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report was described as a 'code red for humanity' and highlighted that we are at imminent risk of hitting the Paris Agreement target of 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels in the near term.

The only way to prevent exceeding this threshold, is by urgently stepping up our efforts to decarbonise.

Sinn Féin's approach is bound by the principles of a Just Transition. Irish society has suffered chronic inequalities in wealth, housing, access to transport, economic regional imbalance and a proliferation of low-paid and precarious employment.

The approach of establishment parties and big corporations is to put the burden of fixing this onto the shoulders of those who can least afford it. We reject this.

Instead, Sinn Féin's approach is one of advancing social and economic justice side-by-side with climate justice. Not only is this the ethically and economically correct strategy, it is also the only one that can secure the support of the Irish people for the transformative changes needed.

This is especially true in view of the tragic and unprecedented health and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. We can improve all of our lives, creating a greener, fairer and healthier society and economy, while building resilience against future pandemics and confronting climate breakdown.

This document lays out in broad terms Sinn Féin's approach to beginning a just energy transition, that will create warmer homes, good green collar jobs, healthier and more efficient means of travel, cleaner and cheaper energy, and decent public transport for all.



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SINN FÉIN'S SUSTAINABLE ENERGY STRATEGY – PRINCIPLES & TARGETS

Principles

The following are Sinn Féin's principles to underpin a just energy transition:

- **Just Transition** – As we confront the climate crisis, we must also reshape our economy to create a more democratic, equal, and sustainable society. This is the Just Transition. As a necessity, the transition must be meticulously planned, and must involve direct and constant dialogue with workers, citizens and businesses in order to implement it effectively and equitably. Sinn Féin will propose the principles of Just Transition are enshrined in climate legislation and a Just Transition Commission is established to plan for the transition of all sectors.
- **Public and community ownership of energy and renewable resources** – Communities and citizens should benefit directly from the structured ownership of our abundant solar, tidal, and onshore and offshore wind resources.
- **Rural and urban equality** – The economy in the north of Ireland is highly regionally imbalanced. Our approach to a Just Transition must take account of the specific issues facing rural areas that result in more carbon-intensive lifestyles. The dependence on private cars, sparse connections to the gas grid resulting in reliance on dirtier fuels, and poor investment in renewable infrastructure or public transport, must all be remedied as part of the Just Transition for rural areas.
- **A Green New Deal** – The North has vast economic potential to harness renewable resources, alongside opportunities for high-skilled green collar jobs, high-value research and innovation, and green infrastructure. In confronting climate breakdown, we must pursue sustainable, jobs-rich economic development in green sectors and decarbonising activity.
- **All-Ireland cooperation** – Climate change doesn't recognise borders, and to be effective the island of Ireland must operate together where possible to ensure maximum efficiency gains and the most appropriate use of resources.
- **Modernisation** – A Just Transition should, to the greatest possible extent, harness the opportunities of modern technologies to assist in achieving our decarbonisation goals. For example, a programme of installation of smart meters is essential across the North. Smart metering and the effective collection and usage of data can lead to energy efficiency improvements, and a more effective distribution of energy.

Targets

The overall target must be to achieve a net-zero carbon society by at least 2050.

Climate legislation with sectoral targets must be the benchmark against which targets for the decarbonisation of energy are set.

Interim targets for reduction of greenhouse gases should also be set. The Committee for Climate Change (CCC) requires at least a 35% reduction by 2030 to contribute to the Fifth Carbon Budget, but have modelled for a reduction of up to 45%. Given the abundance of renewable resources and the short-term emissions reductions opportunities that exist in the north a 45% reduction should be the lower limit of ambition. It is vital that the British Government ensures that finances are made available to achieve this.

The principles of Just Transition must be applied, ensuring that communities are involved in developing sectoral plans to meet targets set within climate legislation.

Governance

For these targets to be achieved the Government must first put in place the right bodies to oversee their delivery and, crucially, ensure that they have the powers to do so.

- **The Utility Regulator** currently has a mandate to monitor and regulate the energy market, including prices of key inputs (like gas or electricity, for instance) and significant market actors. It should also have a much more significant role beyond simply price stability and supply-side concerns, and have a remit to promote decarbonisation.
- **A 'one stop shop' climate agency**, similar to the role of the SEAI in the south of Ireland, is essential. Its functions would include climate data management, policy advice to the government, advice to citizens, provision and delivery of grants and loans to take up renewable technologies and electric vehicles, and assisting with other policy implementation.

Changing how we produce and use energy

Energy use in Ireland can be broadly split into three different sectors; **power, transport and heat**.

Notwithstanding the progress made in the generation of power from renewable sources, we are largely still reliant on fossil fuels. Sinn Féin believes that we need to pursue ambitious decarbonisation. There should be no new exploration for fossil fuels. Sinn Féin is bringing forward legislation to ban fracking in the north.

These are the three sectors where the vast majority of energy we produce is used and as such, these are the industries that will require the most radical change. However, these changes also bring with them exciting opportunities for job creation, technological advancement, cheaper energy and greater individual and community involvement in energy production.

Power

Getting the power decarbonisation puzzle right is fundamental to the Just Transition. As heating systems move away from fossil-fuel guzzling technologies, and transport technologies advance away from fossil fuel combustion engines, they will be replaced by new electricity-powered technologies. In the short and medium term, this will place a huge increase in demand on electricity that must increasingly be met with renewable power.

Large Scale

Sinn Féin's Just Transition proposals to rapidly expand the total of on-stream, large-scale renewable power are as follows:

- Create an agency that would build and manage publicly owned renewable energy assets, where the government owns at least a controlling 51% stake. Public profits that return from this majority stake can be reinvested into energy infrastructure to increase grid capacity, into communities, and into policy areas needed to decarbonise, based on a similar Scottish model.
- Introduce a scheme similar to the Renewable Energy Support Scheme (RESS) active in the south of Ireland, bound to a clear and codified renewable power target (80% by 2030). This approach should also set sub-targets for diversification, focusing on enhancing tidal and offshore wind capacity, for example, to improve power supply and dispatchability.
- 'Repower' and upgrade existing large scale renewables infrastructure that has become out-dated, or not operating at its maximum efficiency. This is a cost-effective investment approach that can extract efficiency and power generation improvements at a much lower capital cost than constructing new infrastructure.
- Large-scale private renewables projects should contribute to the public good. In this regard, obligations on large scale renewables generators to provide contributions to upgrade local grid infrastructure, or to create community funds for the benefits of local areas, should be examined and evidence collected.
- Ensure the public sector and local councils lead from the front in the decarbonisation of energy, and develop Power Purchase Agreements directly with renewable energy suppliers to bring down their carbon-intensive power usage.

Small Scale and Community Energy

As part of the Just Transition, more active participation from citizens in creating and using their own energy is essential. Not only does this improve energy democracy but it is technically and economically beneficial. It can also help create a strong sense of community generally, resulting in more cohesive, vibrant and resilient places to live.

- **Grant schemes** should be introduced for installing domestic and non-domestic renewable micro-generation systems.
- **Minimum tariff obligations** must be placed on electricity providers to ensure price stability and a secure return for those microgenerators exporting surplus power back to the grid. Sinn Féin has introduced a 'Small Scale Green Energy bill' in the Assembly to achieve this.
- **A community energy funding and advisory body** in the style of the SEAI should be created to providing funding and assistance to community energy projects and to guide climate action generally.
- **Investment in domestic renewable energy projects should be increased.** We should also explore the potential of renewing the mandate of the NI Investment Fund and other financial mechanisms available to the Assembly, to take a greater role in developing and supporting such projects.

Transport

We also need a suite of policies and interventions designed to deliver a radical modal shift in our transport habits and systems. At present, the island of Ireland is a society embracing the least healthy and least efficient form of transport, defined by the predominance of private cars.

A new, ambitious, and climate-resilient transport strategy must include: increasing access (in price and location terms) and coverage of public transport; encouraging walking and cycling as a mode of travel; supporting people to switch to vehicles powered by renewable energy for private drivers; and investing in the infrastructure needed to achieve these aims.

This approach is reflected in the policy solutions identified below. We must:

- **Reduce the cost of public transport** by increasing public subsidies, particularly for young people to encourage lifetime behavioural change. We must also increase capital investment in public transport infrastructure.
- **Replace private petrol and diesel cars** with vehicles powered by renewable energy. Supporting this aim will require investment in infrastructure, and a host of grant and low cost loan schemes to provide sufficient financial incentives for drivers to make the switch.
- **Encourage active travel** through greater capital investment in cycle lanes, greenways and walkways to make active travel safer and more enjoyable.
- **Improve the connectivity of rural areas** and any future transport strategy should fully take account of the unique needs of rural areas.

Heating

Decarbonising our heating systems appears to be one of the more complex challenges in tackling the climate emergency. Heat is used in a variety of ways and is essential to many domestic and industrial processes. Among the three main fossil-fuel based energy categories, it may also be the most 'locked in' and hardest to transition away from. Therefore, we must:

- ▶ Set **ambitious energy efficiency targets** to improve the efficiency and reduce the carbon intensity of new-builds.
- ▶ Set **higher energy standards in new buildings including homes ensuring low or near zero heating systems**, such as heat pumps or hybrid heat pumps.
- ▶ Put in place **retrofitting programmes** across the Housing Executive, Housing Associations and private homes to lower emissions while stimulating economic activity for a construction industry struggling with the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic. Retrofitting should involve enhanced insulation to improve energy efficiency but should also involve retrofitting of fossil fuel heating systems, primarily oil boilers.
- ▶ Implement **regulatory changes for rental properties** to ensure all rental properties are of high-quality warmth and energy efficiency standards.

Just the beginning

The recent record highs in wholesale energy prices, particularly gas prices highlight the need to end our reliance on fossil fuels and fluctuating costs that go with them.

In this paper, Sinn Féin have offered a suite of radical and realisable long-term policy solutions to decarbonisation challenges facing the power, heat and transport sectors in the North. It acts as a framework on which a broader just transition from fossil fuel dependency and towards a fairer and greener society must be based.

Much more must be done by at least 2050 to achieve a just transition towards a net zero carbon society.

This strategy outlines only the beginning of a radical transition towards an economy that is in harmony with our ecological boundaries, respects the intrinsic value of the natural world, and seeks to create a more socially just society.

