Youth Work Ireland

our fair planet

YOUTH ACTIONS FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE

CLIMATE INJUSTICE REPORT 2020

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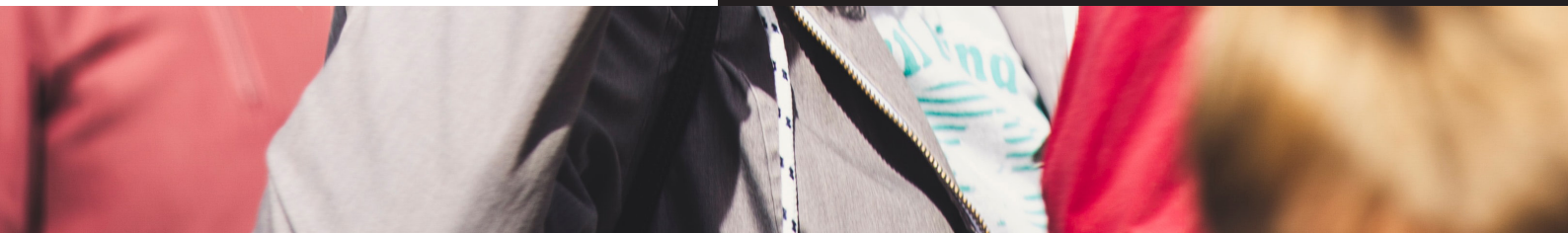

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report from Youth Work Ireland uncovers a range of injustices and inequalities in Ireland due to climate change. The report is part of the Our Fair Planet: Youth Actions for Climate Justice programme which aims to educate and empower young people around issues of Climate Justice.

The research is driven by young people and it found that 71% of landfill sites and waste incinerators in the country are located in areas that are below the national average of deprivation, as indicated by the Pobal HP Deprivation Index. Also highlighted is the closure of Peat fuelled power plants which has rendered entire communities unemployed, without providing alternative employment opportunities.

The report considers how communities whose livelihoods rely on climate-damaging industries are being left behind in the fight against climate change. It emphasises the need for "Just Transitions;" a concept that looks at how to support these communities as we move into more sustainable ways of living.

Small farms are especially at financial risk due to the worsening impacts of climate change. Poor weather in 2018 led to a fodder shortage which saw dairy farm incomes fall by one third. The adverse effects of extreme weather such as flooding causes damages and losses in holdings, crops, livestock and fodder.

The report emphasises the need for reducing agricultural emissions and ensuring a Just Transition for these communities, protecting the livelihoods and the way of life of rural Ireland.

"Our Fair Planet supports young people gain the knowledge and skills to carry out actions in their local communities that promote climate justice and become change makers and advocates for a fairer world. The evidence shows that climate justice is not an issue only happening on the other side of the world; poorer communities in Ireland are already disproportionately experiencing the effects of climate change." - Gina Halpin, Head of Information & Inclusion, Youth Work Ireland.

The programme commenced in September and is currently being delivered across 18 Youth Work Ireland member youth services nationally with over 350 young people participating.

"I didn't know before how climate change could be linked to human rights. I couldn't see the connection. I understand now, the statement that those least responsible are and will suffer the most from climate injustice." - Stephen, a young participant in the programme.

"The social and environmental consequences of climate change will not be felt by today's decision makers or by the heads of big businesses, but by future generations who will have to live with these consequences. Our Fair Planet considers climate change from a human rights and political perspective, rather than a purely environmental issue. We can't continue to develop policies without fully understanding how they will negatively impact communities, and we must be careful not to have a Dublin-centric view on the response to climate change. All communities that are affected by climate change policies must be consulted." - Gina Halpin, Head of Information & Inclusion, Youth Work Ireland.

The Our Fair Planet: Youth Actions for Climate Justice programme was developed by Youth Work Ireland and Dr Sue Redmond with funding received as part of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth Climate Justice Fund. Youth empowered actions will be showcased on a new website www.ourfairplanet.ie.

YOUTH WORK IRELAND'S OUR FAIR PLANET PROGRAMME

The Our Fair Planet: Youth Actions for Climate Justice programme was developed by Youth Work Ireland and Dr Sue Redmond as part of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth Climate Justice Fund.

The programme aims at educating and empowering young people around the issues of Climate Justice, Sustainable Development, Just Transitions, Human Rights and Equality. The programme commenced in September is currently being delivered across 18 Youth Work Ireland member youth services nationally with 350 young people participating.

The programme hopes to shift the focus of climate change from purely environment issues, to look at the injustices and inequalities that arise from climate change. The activities contained in the programme will support young people gain the knowledge, skills and learning to develop and carry out actions in their local communities to promote climate justice, and become change makers and advocates for a fairer world.

Through youth empowered actions, the programme support the voices of young people to be heard in developing new ways to ensure the burdens and benefits of a just transition to a greener world and ensure that young people are at the forefront (both visibly and practically) of innovation and change with regard to climate justice in their local communities.

These actions will be showcased on a new website www.ourfairplanet.ie

INTRODUCTION

In her Ted Talk in 2015, Mary Robinson said that climate change was an “issue much too important to be left to politicians... it is an issue for all of us, it is an issue for young people.”

The challenge of climate change is a decisive one for the world and it is young people who have been at WKH IRUH LQ WKH šJKW IRU FOLPDWH MXVWLFH DFWLRQ LVVXH RI RXU WLPH DQG thousands of young people across the globe take part in school strikes and protests to urge decision makers to take the issue seriously and respond. Granted, WKHVH LVVXHV DUH GLœFXOW EXW WKH HYLGHQFH LV FOHDU - time is running out! The world is on track towards global temperature increases way above safe levels, despite the provisions of international agreements such as the Paris Agreement which aims to keep long-term temperature increases under 2°C above pre-industrial levels and limit the increase to 1.5°C.

In reframing the term ‘Climate Action / Change’ to WKDW RI c&OLPDWH -XVWLFHd ZH climate change from a human rights and political perspective rather than purely an environmental issue. Changing the lens in which we look at climate change allows us to focus on how deeply inequitable it is for those who have contributed the least to carbon HPLVVLRQV WR VX™HU WKH PRVW GHYHORSLQJ QDWLRQV LQ WKH *O H™HFWV RI FOLPDWH FKDQJH WKH also the ones with the lowest carbon emissions and have contributed to the problem of climate change the least.

The social and environmental consequences of climate change will not be felt by today’s decision makers or the heads of big business, but by future generations who will have to live with these consequences, and by local and indigenous communities across the globe ZKR DUH EHLQJ LPSDFWHG E\ WKH global warming and climate chaos.

Another challenge associated with climate policies is how to support communities whose livelihood relies on climate-damaging industries such as fossil fuel extraction or certain types of farming – including in developed countries such as Ireland. The concept of Just Transitions looks at how to help those communities move into new areas of industry or business to support themselves so that they aren’t left behind as we move forward into more sustainable ways of living.

The programme will be delivered initially to youth groups in 18 Youth Work Ireland Member Youth Services across Ireland. The young people participating will get to organise their own community action to demonstrate their learning and VHHN WR LQ›XHQFH WKHLU ORFDO FR issues. Irrespective of where you live in Ireland or the world, climate justice is an issue for us all, and we need to come together to safeguard the rights of the most vulnerable and marginalised people by sharing WKH EXUGHQV EHQHšWV DQG RSSRU

Hannah, 17

Hannah is a wheelchair user living in a rural part of Kerry who has to be driven to school because the school bus is not wheelchair accessible. When a youth worker gave her a lift home this year, Hannah commented that it was the first time she had ever been dropped home by anyone other than her family and friends. Around the world, people with disabilities are more at risk of the impacts of climate change, like air pollution and unpredictable and extreme weather. They also face difficulties migrating. Environmental choices like cycling and using public transport aren’t accessible to many people with disabilities, and if carbon taxes were added, things would only become more difficult for Hannah.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DISADVANTAGE

It's important to understand how disadvantaged communities are defined and targeted by the Irish government. The Updated National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2015-2017 states that the government considers people to be living in poverty if they "may be excluded and marginalised from participating in activities which are considered the norm for other people in society." [1] Government departments and state agencies such as the HSE identify disadvantaged communities through the public Deprivation Index, created by Pobal on behalf of the Irish government. The index is based on data from the 2016 census and takes into account educational attainment, unemployment rates, lone parent ratio, housing tenure and age profile.

1. Updated National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2015-2017

"I think that people from poorer backgrounds cannot often afford to do the 'ethical' thing when it comes to buying stuff. Local hand made things are much dearer than the stuff I can afford to buy. We discussed political actions and we think people shouldn't suffer because they don't have enough money to buy handmade locally produced clothes etc. We think governments should give VAT reductions or something on local ethical industries so everyone can afford to be good to the planet."

Rachel, Young Participant

LANDFILLS AND INCINERATORS

Landfills, also known as rubbish dumps, are sites used for the disposal of mostly non recyclable waste materials. Landfills are proven to be harmful for the planet, resulting in the production of leachate and gases. Gas from landfill sites mainly consist of methane and carbon dioxide (greenhouse gases which worsen global warming), and landfills contribute to 20% of the global anthropogenic methane emissions. Landfills create toxic substances such as leachate which can leach into the earth and groundwater, creating further environmental dangers. [2]

Incineration or thermal treatment is a disposal method that involves the burning of waste material. It converts unwanted materials into heat, gas, steam and ash. Although incinerators have been presented as an effective and safe alternative to landfills, extensive research proves that incinerators release a wide variety of pollutants which leads to health deterioration and environmental degradation. [3]

The recent annual report of the Comptroller & Auditor General recommended that the Department of Environment should conduct a comprehensive review of governance of old landfill sites in Ireland and take steps to eliminate risks to the environment and communities. Although only three landfills remain in operation, the total number of identified landfill sites stands at 611. [4]

The report noted that while the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) monitors environmental risk factors on the 117 landfill sites it has licensed and regulated since 1997, it does not monitor environmental risk factors at the remaining 494 landfills that have been identified by the local authorities and are registered on an EPA-hosted database. Over half of the 280 sites operated by local authorities and subsequently closed between June 1977 and March 1997 have been assessed as of either moderate or high risk.

2. EPA: Landfill Methane Outreach Program (LMOP)

3. Science Direct: Incineration of Waste

4. Comptroller & Auditor General 2019 Annual Report

Abbey, 18, and Liam, 18

Abbey and Liam are both passionate about climate justice. They have been involved in initiatives around climate justice and have taken part in a river cleaning programme in their community. They've helped develop an eco-corner in their youth centre where they create ecobricks (a plastic bottle packed with used plastic that can serve as reusable building blocks).

Remediation plans have been submitted to the EPA in only 29 of the 280 sites. The report notes that neither the EPA, nor the department, nor the regional waste management planning offices were able to provide the examination team with complete information on the risk assessment status of the remaining 214 sites on the register as at December 31, 2019, which included pre-1977 local authority sites, private sites and illegal sites.

Sourcing the locations of all identified closed landfill sites has proven inconclusive, however the Environmental Protection Agency provides a list of 47 closed landfill sites in Ireland. As evidenced in Appendix A of this report, 71% of landfill sites and waste incinerators in Ireland are located in areas that are below the national average of deprivation - where more people in the area, as a proportion of the entire population, are in poverty.

"I didn't know before how climate change could be linked to human rights. I couldn't see the connection. I understand now, the statement that those least responsible are and will suffer the most from climate injustice." Stephen, Young Participant

CLOSURE OF PEAT PLANTS

Peat fuelled power plants are especially harmful to the environment. The draining of bogs and burning of peat produces huge levels of carbon dioxide - burning peat for electricity emits more carbon dioxide than coal and almost twice as much as natural gas. In 2016, peat generated close to 8% of Ireland's electricity but it created 20% of the energy sector's carbon emissions. Ireland is phasing out the burning of peat and encouraging the development of alternatives including wind farms, however this move has resulted in widespread job losses across the Midlands. [5]

"I liked doing the Our Fair Planet Programme. I think it is up to young people to change the way we live so that we can protect the planet. If we lead the way politicians won't think it is ok to make decisions that hurt the climate thinking they will get votes for doing it. Young people by our actions can show them that minding the planet can get you elected".

Megan, young participant

Rural communities whose livelihoods relied on this industry have been heavily impacted. For example, the community of Shannonbridge, Offaly, has demanded a 'Just Transition,' with hundreds taking to the streets to protest this year. [6] The concept of Just Transitions looks at how to help local communities whose livelihoods rely on climate-damaging industries to move into new areas of industry or business, so that they aren't left behind as we move forward into more sustainable ways of living. However there is currently no finalised plan to re-employ all 454 employees in Shannonbridge elsewhere.

Shannonbridge, Co Offaly and Lanesborough, Co Longford, are the most recent peat-powered generating stations to face closure, and they will stop generating electricity from December 2020. Both areas are classified as below average on the Pobal Deprivation Scale.

"One of the things I have been doing since I started this programme is saving my money by not buying fast food with all its packaging and the air miles that the food travels. Instead I am making my own treats and baked goods. I am enjoying this, and I am making a difference even if it's a small one".

Charlotte, young participant

5. A review of the use of peat in the horticultural industry. Key Issues Consultation Paper

6. RTÉ News: Hundreds protest over 'growing crisis' at Bord na Món