

Consultation follow up on the public consultation on the EU climate target for 2040

The Commission recently published its summary report of the questionnaire responses received as part of the EU 2040 target public consultation.

POW was among 879 respondents to the consultation which ran from the 31st of March to the 23rd of June. The objective of the consultation was to gather views from a wide range of citizens and stakeholders. 55% of responses were made by individuals and 45% by organisations.

Missing the 1.5°C Paris Agreement goal would lead to “severe additional and irreversible” damages to all global ecosystems, not just to our forests and our wetlands but also our cities, our mountain villages and everything in between - EU climate targets should be based on risk assessments which consider how to avoid these worst possible outcomes and increase the likelihood of limiting warming to 1.5°C. The impact assessment should consider emissions reduction pathways that would allow the EU to achieve at least -65% gross emissions reductions by 2030.

POW echoes the call by CAN Europe for an intersectional approach assessing the impact of action and inaction will have on human rights and fundamental freedoms of current and future generations.

Short summary of main points from POW’s response

The EU has committed to reduce its net GHG emissions by 55% compared to 1990 levels by 2030. POW was among the majority of respondents who called for a greater than 90% reduction in net GHG emissions by 2040 to reach this target and put the EU on track for climate neutrality by 2050.

Working together with CAN Europe, our response continued to select the most realistic ambitious options for the EU 2040 climate targets. Some key asks are included below:

Accelerating the transition to climate neutrality rather than continuing at current pace or slowing down the transition

Using three separate targets for GHG emissions reductions, nature-based carbon removals and industrial removals to accurately represent carbon removals in the sum of ‘net emissions’ (GHG emissions + carbon removals)

Support of policy proposals which help to reduce personal footprint such as ensuring that the price of goods and service reflects their impact on climate change and labeling climate impact on such goods and services so that consumers may make climate friendly choices more easily

Using a carrot and stick mechanism to reduce emissions from agriculture by putting a price on agricultural emissions while simultaneously providing payments for carbon removals, incentivising a move to more sustainable farming methods

Prioritising nature-based removals from LUUCF (land use, land-use change and forestry) sink over industrial carbon removals

More detailed view of questionnaire responses

General Section:

Level of ambition for the climate target for 2040

The majority (73%) of respondents proposed accelerating the EU's climate transition to 2040. 91% of civil society organisations backed acceleration while SME's and large companies were less ambitious here with only 51% and 28% respectively, choosing acceleration over remaining at current pace or slowing down the progress of the climate transition.

Carbon Removals in the climate target for 2040

The EU's 2030 climate target is expressed in 'net' emissions, meaning the sum of both GHG emissions and carbon removals. Carbon sinks in the form of forest, soil and ecosystem management and large-scale capturing of atmospheric and biogenic CO₂ are both expected to play a considerable role in reducing net emissions.

Most respondents (54%) were aligned with POW's recommendation in advocating for three separate targets separating GHG emissions reductions, nature-based carbon removals and industrial removals. Notably, 70% of respondents both from academic/research institutions and from civil society organisations supported separate targets.

Contribution of individual sectors to the EU's climate ambition

In recognition of the fact that it will be easier for some sectors to reach climate neutrality than for others, the questionnaire asked respondents to rank from 1 (being first to become climate neutral) to 6 (last to reach neutrality) the sectors of the economy listed as follows; buildings, production of electricity and district heating, aviation and maritime transport, agriculture, forestry and other land use, industrial processes and waste, road transport.

The majority of respondents viewed the electricity and district heating sector as most likely to reach climate neutrality first. POW's view aligned with others with ranking the aviation and maritime transport sectors as needing to step up emissions reductions. POW also ranks this sector as slowest to reach climate neutrality.

Personal contribution to the climate

Among respondents most claimed to be aware of climate change's reality and expressed readiness to change their behaviour (68%). However, only a low number of responses from citizens indicated that from their perspective the same awareness persists throughout society (8%).

POW was among other respondents who agreed with the statement that society is most likely aware of the reality of climate change. However POW also indicated a lower likelihood that society is ready to implement actions to reduce GHG emissions.

The impact of the climate crisis

Scientists have time and time highlighted that without a significant reduction of GHG emissions, climate change and the impacts it brings will accelerate in the coming years and decades. Of many effects listed on the questionnaire, loss of biodiversity and natural habitats (62%) and damage from natural hazards (58%) were ranked of highest concern among respondents.

There was a strong consensus that local and or national authorities should do more to prepare regions for climate change.

POW also pointed to an overall decrease in the quality, safety and availability of outdoor recreation.

Expert Section:

General Policy framework

Respondents mostly agreed (48%) when it came to support for covering all fossil fuel uses and non CO₂ emissions in emissions trading in the EU. When it came to questions about the role of the carbon border adjustment mechanism (CBAM) answers were less definitive yet respondents suggested prioritising sectors with the highest absolute emissions for inclusion under CBAM (28%).

Mitigation of emissions from the land sector and policy options

37% of respondents agreed that ambitious sectoral standards should exclude unsustainable farming practices and that a carbon price in agriculture if introduced should be set at the level of food companies (37%) of fertiliser companies (32%).

POW did not align with the unfavorable view of setting the carbon price at the farmer as setting a carbon price at farm level would aid in the sector's transformation to more sustainable practices and

if placed equally would not lead to competitive disadvantages. POW highlights the argument that waiting for the results of a carbon price introduced further along in the supply chain would not produce solutions fast enough to reverse the biodiversity and climate crisis.

The role of carbon removals

The role of carbon removals split opinions in the questionnaire. Academic/research institutions (53%), public authorities (61%), SMEs (63%) and large businesses (73%) all leaned towards an important role. Concerning nature based or industrial removals, EU citizens and civil society organisations preferred a higher reliance on nature-based removals, while SMEs favoured a higher reliance on industrial ones.

POW indicated a preference for a stronger reliance on nature based solutions in the land sector.

Technologies

Today the energy system is responsible for around 75% of the EU's GHG emissions and is currently undergoing rapid transformation. Renewable energy was considered to be the most relevant technology (70%).

POW aligns with this view yet also makes up a percentage of the 54% of respondents who rate energy efficiency as just as important.

Engagement and social impacts

Only 10% (58) of respondents agreed that local, regional and private sector players are sufficiently involved to support the green transition.

POW aligns with this view and goes further to indicate that after 2030 there will be greater need to support vulnerable communities who must cope with the costs associated with the green transition. POW was also among the 55% of those who gave the highest importance to ensuring that intergenerational fairness is woven into policies to limit the burden on young people and future generations.