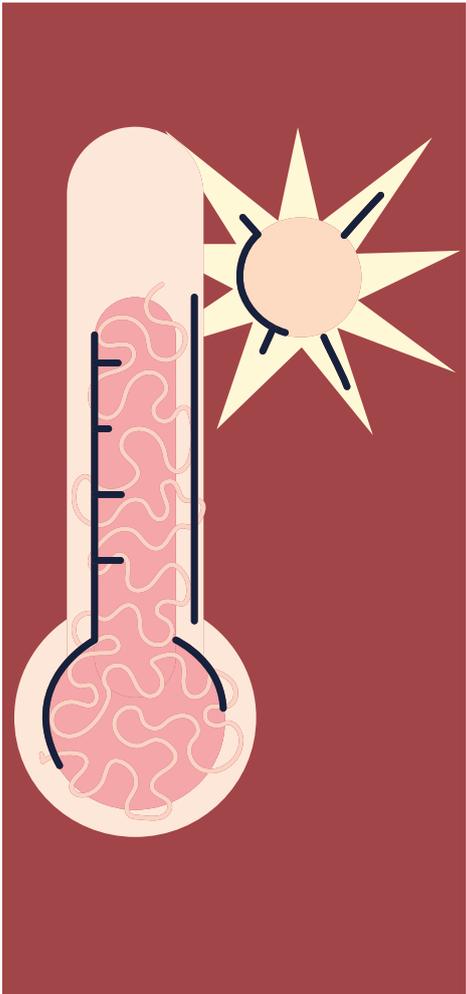
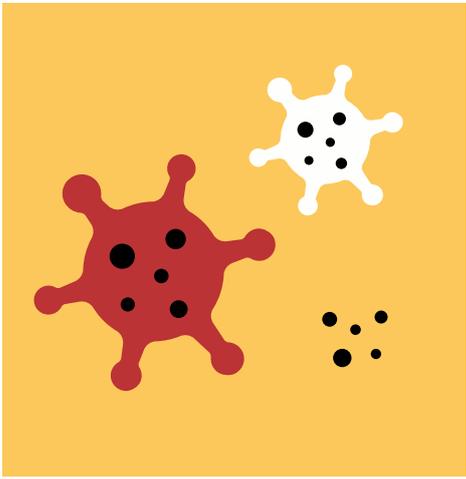


WE NEED A GREEN FISCAL PLAN TO BEAT TWIN CRISES OF CLIMATE AND COVID

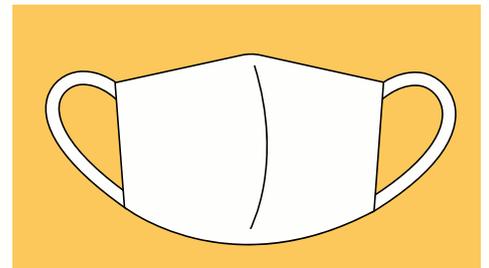


CASE STUDY

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A 'PLAIN-ENGLISH'
ECONOMICS
RESOURCE

Covid-19 and climate change have many similarities. One, they are both *'collective action problems'*, meaning that in order to be solved, they need many, many people to play a part. Two, they are both urgent. The situations of both are very, very bad, and without *swift action* they are likely to get much worse. Three, they are both *chronic*, meaning they exist for a long time in society. These are not issues that can be solved with quick fixes. Four, they are both *severe*. The impacts can be destabilising for societies. Five, they are both *invisible*, in that we can't easily observe them coming, making them harder to fight. Six, *scientific expertise* is needed to solve them both.

Scientists no longer debate on the seriousness of climate change. The situation is very bad, so much so that it has been called an 'emergency' in lots of countries around the world. The pollution released from burning fossil fuels is a huge part of the problem. Burning these fuels for energy heats the atmosphere (causing global warming) and this causes the global *climate* to change. Climate does not mean the weather; climate change can actually cause some areas of the world to become much colder! Climate means the weather conditions that tend to exist in an area over a *long period of time*. Weather, on the other hand, refers to a *short period* of time.

Fossil fuel emissions need to be reduced, because the global temperature is getting warmer every year and this is affecting the weather and ecological systems. Scientists say we need to *halve* carbon emissions by 2030 and reach *net zero* emissions by 2050 at the very latest. Net zero means that we might still be emitting some fossil fuels, but these emissions would be compensated for by things that suck up carbon dioxide from the atmosphere (*many people disagree about the net zero target, claiming that 'net zero is not zero'! This is something that is worth looking into yourself!*)

There is no doubt that rising temperatures will be disastrous. Indeed, they already are. For every one degree rise in temperature, another one billion people end up outside the optimal *'climate zone'* to live and work. Because of the way the Earth is shaped, the icy areas of the globe are warming faster than the rest...which is not ideal! What's more, these icy areas, the Arctic and Antarctic, are mostly white, meaning that they reflect sunlight back out into space; which we want to happen to prevent heat getting trapped in the atmosphere! But then what happens when these ice caps melt...? They reflect less sunlight, meaning more hot rays stay in the atmosphere! This makes the planet even warmer, melting more ice, reducing the ability of the ice caps to reflect sunlight. This creates a *feedback loop or cycle*. With a few more years of ice melting, sea level rise will impact cities like Dublin, Cork and Galway first, as most cities and densely populated areas are on coasts (people and cities like being near the sea!) This will result in *'displacement'* of people, in huge numbers.

However, this displacement won't affect everyone equally. The poorest countries will be the most impacted by climate change because they are the most vulnerable (and they did the least to cause it!) and therefore they are being *first* affected, and *worst* affected. If climate change gets much worse, Bangladesh will be totally uninhabitable and some 'small island developing states' (SIDS) will be totally under water.

But it's not just poor *countries* that will suffer first and worst. **Poor people in rich countries like Ireland will also shoulder the burden.** Why? Because they can't just up and move (*they also can't afford to pay one-size-fits-all taxes that might be placed on everyone to deal with the climate crisis. Additionally, they are often living in homes unfit for a changing climate, homes that cost a lot to heat and end up with mould and damp...which is bad for health as well as the climate.*)

So the situation is bad. But there is one thing that would really help: planting lots of trees! Trees suck up carbon dioxide, which is one of the most damaging greenhouse gases. Like a plughole in a sink that takes all the dirty water far away, trees suck carbon down into the ground and magically make it into oxygen again! **The Amazon rainforest acts like the lungs of planet Earth**, except it breathes in the opposite way to humans. It takes *in* carbon dioxide and *releases* oxygen, purifying our air, creating ecosystems for millions of species and creating rain that becomes water for lots and lots of people (yes, the Amazon creates its own weather!) Unfortunately, trees and forests are being chopped down all around the world, mostly to clear the way for cows to graze on grass, and to grow food for these cows. When trees are cut down and burnt, all of this carbon dioxide gets released *again, and* we lose one of our sinks! If we keep this up, rainforests will end up releasing *more* carbon dioxide than oxygen.

This is basically the same process for peatlands, those boggy places that give us turf for our fire. As lovely as turf is, we need to remember that **Ireland's peatlands are our Amazon.**

This is a snippet of what's in store if we don't get our act together to sort out climate change. It's a big problem, and therefore an expensive one (but not acting will be much more expensive!) **Either way, it will be costly.** But we have learnt one valuable lesson from the COVID-19 crisis that can be applied to climate change; *prevention is better than cure.*

We have to spend money to recover from Covid. We have to spend money to prevent climate disaster. So why not spend just one pot of money...? The key point to make is that **we have an opportunity to use the money to recover from COVID-19 to also prevent the climate crisis from worsening.** We can hit two birds with one stone, pull two weeds with one yank.

COVID-19 'recovery' plans should be green. Trends show the tide is going out of fossil fuels: the new US president is in favour of green recovery plans, the cost of solar and wind energy is falling (after all, the wind and sun don't send a bill!) and in the US at least, solar and wind technicians are the fastest-growing jobs!

And where has a lot of wind....? That's right. Ireland. **Ireland could be a leader on wind energy**, especially if we put wind turbines in the sea (this is called 'offshore'). If we did that, we could make money for our country by selling wind energy to other countries, so that they can also use less polluting fuels. But we need both public and private investment in this energy! And in order for that to happen, we need the government to support these programs, by investing in these projects too.

Our government could also lower the cost of renewable energy by giving *grants* to these industries (this is called 'subsidising'). They could subsidise electric vehicles, which are currently far too expensive for most people.

They could invest in more **charging points**, so people all over Ireland could be confident that they'll make it from A to B! They could make **public transport** central to the design of cities, towns and villages, instead of the private car. And in terms of **housing**, as we all need somewhere to live, they could make houses warmer and more efficient so we use less energy (this is called 'retrofitting'). Apart from making us healthier and warmer, this has the added benefit of preventing all that lovely renewable energy leaking out of cracks in old windows.

We could also create a **plan to create lots of jobs for solar and wind technicians**. We need people to retrofit houses and build new ones, to install solar panels on buildings and wind turbines off our coast. We could have a thriving eco-tourism industry, and much better fisheries (if you haven't noticed, we have a lot of coast!).

If the government did all this, they would be helping us reach our collective action goal to transform to a carbon free society much faster than we are at present. **We need to use what we have in order to get out of the hole we have dug for ourselves.**

But we are not there yet. The government has been dragging its heels, saying that people won't accept the changes we need. But the thing that COVID-19 has shown is that in fact, **people will (for the most part), change their behaviour in order to be part of solving a huge collective action problem like COVID-19!** People have been willing to accept lockdowns, to wear masks, to stop seeing people they love. These are all difficult things that we have done for the greater good. So who is to say we would not do the same to solve the climate crisis?

One important thing, however, makes the COVID-19 crisis different to the climate crisis: how much they are covered in the media. At the height of the COVID-19 crisis, you couldn't turn on the TV or walk down the street without seeing something pandemic related, asking us to 'work together to stay apart'. Everybody was given all the information they needed, often via leaflets through the letter-box telling us what we needed to know and what we needed to do, collectively *and* individually. The scale of the crisis was huge, but we were supported to rise to the challenge by those in power. This has shown us that, **for a collective action problem, the government must be clear in the changes needed at an individual and societal level.**

We have the technology to help us get out of the climate crisis (although of course it can't just be fixed by technology.) We also have the money. The European Union has given 10.5% of its annual income to this fight, and most of this has been as loans that countries were actually paid to take! When else could our country *make* money from taking out a loan!? If somebody had said this was going to happen a few years ago, they would have been laughed off the stage. **The fact is that the EU's lending rules have changed to help countries get out of the economic crisis that has arrived with the virus.** This needs to stay that way in order to tackle the climate crisis. So we can see that the money for crisis response is there, so the argument that it's too costly no longer holds.

What we do not have is a government willing to bring its country together to make the changes needed for the climate crisis. Debt and deficit on a national scale is sometimes necessary and the best option to take for a country. Perhaps someone should tell our government that when it comes to climate change, as with COVID-19, **prevention is less costly than a cure...!**

Follow up reflection questions:

Can you think of any examples of how governments have spent money to prevent disaster during the COVID-19 crisis?

If you were part of the government, which industries and businesses would you give money to to survive COVID-19? Which industries and businesses would you **not** give money to? Explain your reasoning.



Follow-up activity:

NAME: WHAT A WEB WE WEAVE!

PURPOSE:

TO PROVIDE AN OPPORTUNITY FOR STUDENTS TO IDENTIFY AND ILLUSTRATE LINKS BETWEEN THE COVID-19 CRISIS AND THE CLIMATE CRISIS USING CONCRETE MATERIALS AND AN INTERACTIVE PROCESS.

MATERIALS:

- LARGE CLEAR SPACE
- LARGE BALL OF WOOL / STRING
- A4 SHEETS OF PAPER (ONE FOR EACH GROUP OF STUDENTS)
- WRITING MATERIALS

METHODOLOGY:

1. STUDENTS POSITION THEMSELVES AROUND A CLEARED SPACE IN THE ROOM.
 2. THE BALL OF WOOL IS PLACED IN THE CENTRE. PAPER AND MARKERS ARE GIVEN TO EACH STUDENT.
 3. STUDENTS ARE INVITED TO WRITE ONE LEARNING FROM THE CASE STUDY ON THE PIECE OF PAPER PROVIDED, AND PLACE IT ON THE FLOOR BESIDE THEIR GROUP WHERE IT CAN BE SEEN.
 4. STUDENTS ARE INVITED TO CONSIDER THEIR LEARNING AND HOW IT MIGHT BE LINKED TO ANY OF THE OTHER LEARNINGS FROM THE CASE STUDY.
 5. IF A STUDENT IDENTIFIES A CONNECTION, THEY PICK UP THE WOOL AND, WHILE KEEPING HOLD OF ONE END, THROW THE BALL TO THE PERSON WITH WHOM THEY SEE A CONNECTION, AND EXPLAIN THE CONNECTION THAT THEY SEE.
 6. THIS PROCESS CONTINUES WITH STUDENTS EXPLAINING THE REASON FOR THE CONNECTIONS MADE.
 7. INFORMAL DISCUSSION ENSUES AS THE ACTIVITY PROGRESSES.
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