EEAC

THE SOCIAL CLIMATE FUND & SOCIAL CLIMATE PLANS

2026

EEAC

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SUMMARY

The EEAC Secretariat aims to keep advisory councils informed of the latest developments in sustainable development and the environment in Europe and internationally. This briefing breaks down the context and contents of the European Commission's Social Climate Fund and Social Climate Plans, adopted in June of 2023, and their significance for the work of advisory councils.

Briefing by Zofia Mańka for the EEAC Secretariat, August 2026.
Any opinions expressed in this report do not represent the Network or its members.

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1. Introduction

The Social Climate Fund was established by the Regulation (EU) 2023/955 of the European Parliament and of the Council (SCF Regulation), on June 5, 2023. [1] Since the decarbonisation of buildings and transport must be accelerated rapidly across the continent for the EU to have realistic chances of achieving its 2030 and 2050 climate targets, it has been essential to recognise this structural burden on vulnerable citizens and subsequently adopt an instrument that would mitigate social impacts and fund an inclusive transition. [2] The Social Climate Fund, part of the EU's Fit for 55 package [3], is also the first EU financial instrument developed with the explicit purpose of mitigating energy and transport poverty potentially arising from the new Emissions Trading System (ETS). [4] The ETS2 will become fully operational in 2028 following an agreed one-year postponement. [5] It will apply a price on the carbon content of the fuel combusted in buildings, such as for heating and cooling, which may have significant financial consequences for households and businesses. [6,7] The Fund is intended to support measures for and investments in greater energy efficiency for buildings and lower-emission mobility in particular. [8] It can also be used to finance temporary, direct income assistance for particularly vulnerable households. The Fund is considered an important step towards a socially just transition. [9]

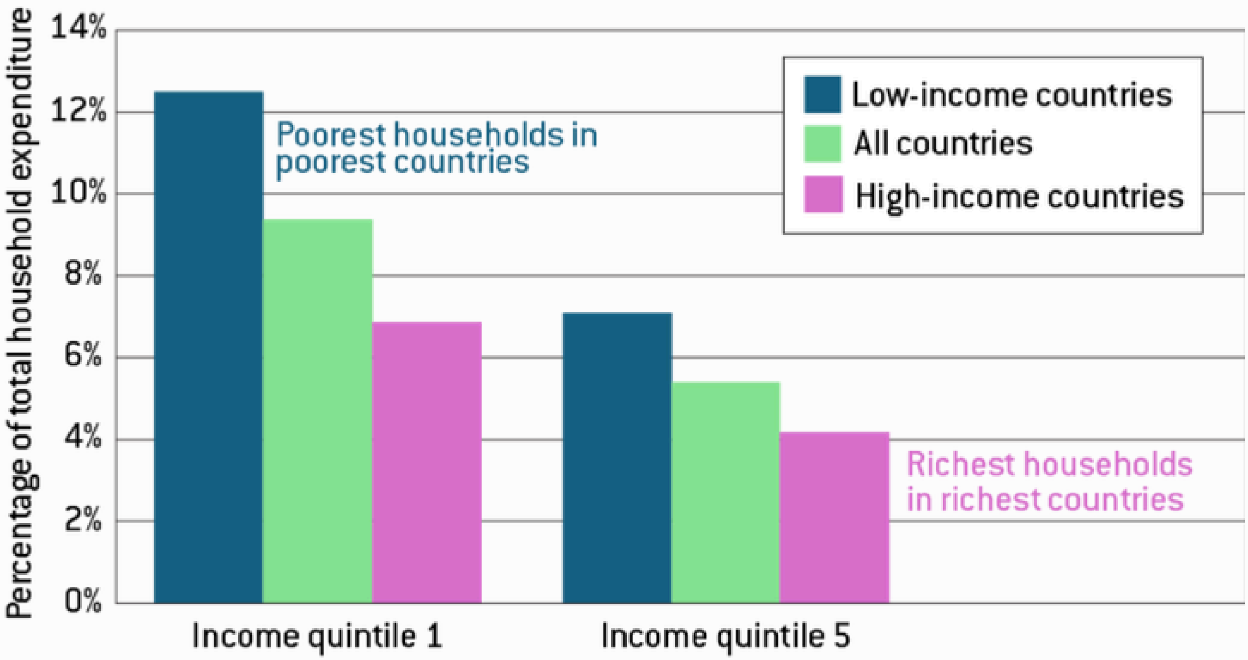

Figure 1: Household expenditure on heating energy by income quintile.
Source: Making the best of the new EU Social Climate Fund

2.The Social Climate Fund and Social Climate Plans

2.1. The Social Climate Fund and the ETS2

The EU's Emissions Trading System (EU ETS) follows a ‘cap-and-trade’ approach in which each year the EU will set a limit (a cap) on greenhouse gas emissions from firms in certain sectors.[10]The allowances (EUAs) decline each year in line with a tightening emissions cap, thereby compelling emissions reductions. The legislative framework of the EU ETS is regulated by the ETS Directive. [11] In 2023, the ETS regulatory framework underwent significant changes that included a revision of the ETS Directive. One of the key changes concerned tightening the cap to bring emissions down by 62 percent by 2030, compared to 2005 levels. [12]To achieve this reduction, the Linear Reduction Factor (LRF), which determines the annual rate at which the cap declines, was increased to 4.3 percent for the period 2024–2027 and to 4.4 percent from 2028 onwards. [13] In addition to these annual reductions, the cap was further tightened through two one-off reductions of 90 million allowances in 2024 and 27 million allowances in 2026. [14] Together, these measures progressively reduce the number of allowances available in the market, with the decision establishing that no new allowances will enter the market by 2039. [15].

Additionally, the 2023 reform introduced a new, separate emissions trading system for buildings, road transport and additional sectors, namely the ETS2 system. This reform is particularly relevant from a social perspective as it extends to the sectors directly connected to everyday living costs. ETS2 expands coverage to include upstream emissions, meaning that energy and fuel suppliers must track the emissions from the fuels they place on the market and buy allowances to cover them. [16]

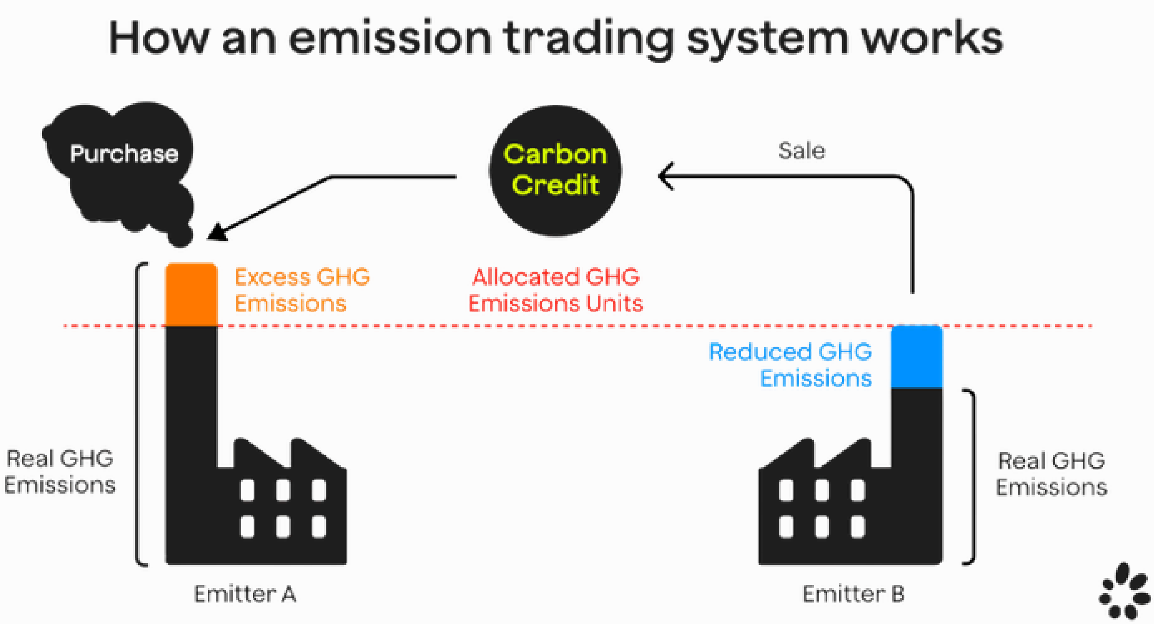

Figure 2: ETS system explained.
Source: EU ETS

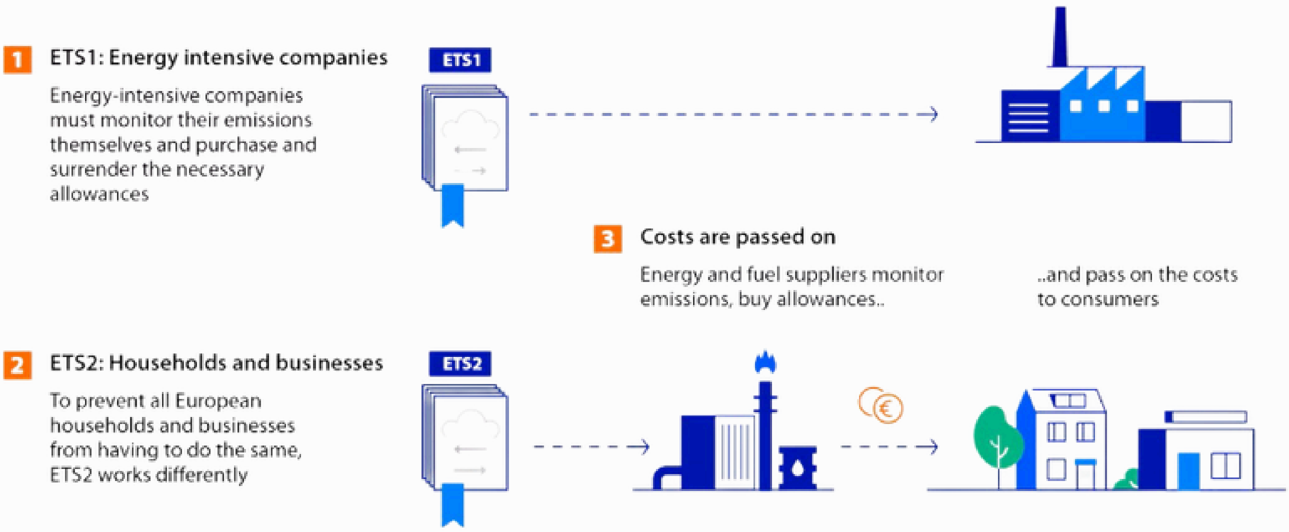

Figure 3: ETS vs ETS2 differences.
Source: ETS2: What is it and what impact will it have on households and businesses? - Rabobank

There are concerns that the costs of the allowances will be indirectly passed on to consumers through, for instance, higher prices for heating fuels and fuels used in buildings and transport. According to the European Commission's calculation, as of September 2024, between 8 percent and 16 percent of the EU population, corresponding to 35 to 72 million people, already face energy poverty. [17] Furthermore, it is presumed that the implementation of the ETS2 will be regressive, disproportionately burdening lower-income households and vulnerable groups who spend a larger portion of their disposable income on essential heating and transport costs. [18] As they spend a higher proportion of their income on energy and transport—and they usually have fewer resources to invest in energy renovation, cleaner heating systems or low-emission mobility—they will most likely be disproportionately more affected by the consequences of the new ETS system. In these circumstances, there is a need for an additional mechanism that would help complement the ETS2 and address the gaps in providing support to vulnerable households.

2.2 The Social Climate Fund as a compensatory mechanism

The Fund operates as a compensatory mechanism accompanying the introduction of the new carbon pricing mechanism. Its main role can be regarded as addressing the potential unequal distribution of costs that is likely to occur when fossil fuel prices start affecting households and businesses with unequal abilities to adapt. As the Social Climate Fund is focused on vulnerable groups that are more likely to be affected by the introduction of the ETS2, it seeks to provide focused financial help to people most impacted by the ambitious climate policies of the EU. [19] The financial contributions distributed through the Social Climate Fund have as an objective to introduce long-term structural changes and reduce the general dependence of society on fossil fuels, rather than providing one-time financial help that would not have further impact. [20] The Social Climate Fund is also expected to boost investments in energy-efficient building renovation and sustainable transport that will further reduce fossil fuel dependence. In financial terms, the Fund is expected to provide at least €86.7 billion between 2026 and 2032. [21] More specifically, up to €65 billion is allocated at EU level, while Member States are required to contribute at least 25 percent of the estimated total costs of their Social Climate Plans. [22] Therefore, for the Fund to effectively contribute to society, there must be a balance between immediate support and long-term transformation.

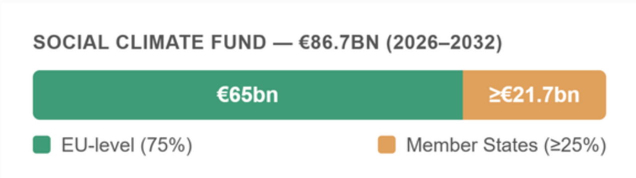

Figure 4: Social Climate Fund breakdown. Produced with Claude.

2.3 Social Climate Plans - national implementation tools

Social Climate Plans are national measures that are the main implementation tools of the Social Climate Fund, expected to ensure a balance between immediate support and long-term transformation. The Social Climate Plans determine key aspects such as how funds established by the Fund will be distributed in practice and which vulnerable groups will be prioritised. In order to receive financial contributions from the Fund, each Member State is required to prepare a Social Climate Plan that must detail specific structural measures and temporary compensations to support vulnerable households, micro-enterprises, and transport users. [23]

The National Plans are particularly important because the impact of ETS will vary across the bloc. [24] It is therefore essential to identify the specific challenges associated with the implementation of the ETS2, are that are most significant in particular national and regional contexts. For instance, vulnerable households living in energy-inefficient housing may be particularly exposed to rising heating costs, especially if they rely on fossil fuel-based heating. In rural or remote areas, vulnerability may be more closely linked to a high dependence on private vehicles combined with limited access to public transport. As mentioned above, the Social Climate Plans are also expected to include measures that would address these challenges over the long term. [25]

Another important aspect regards the preparation phase of the National Plans. As they directly concern topics closest to daily life such as energy bills, home heating, public transport, and living costs, in developing their Social Climate Plans, Member States are required to undertake "a public consultation with local and regional authorities, representatives of economic and social partners, relevant civil society organisations, youth organisations and other stakeholders". [26] Furthermore, in the final Plans, Member States are required to provide a summary of "how the input of the stakeholders who participated in the consultation is reflected in the Plan". [27] Public participation is particularly valuable because, among other things, it can lead to more robust and ambitious climate policy that reflects the interests, needs and attitudes of citizens, particularly those most vulnerable to the impacts of climate transition measures. [28]

3. Case Study - The Lithuanian National Social Climate Plan

As of July 2026, only four Member States have formally had their Social Climate Plans adopted, namely Malta, Sweden, Latvia and Lithuania. [29]

The National Plans of The Netherlands, Greece, Slovenia, Italy, Luxembourg and Croatia are currently undergoing assessment. [30]

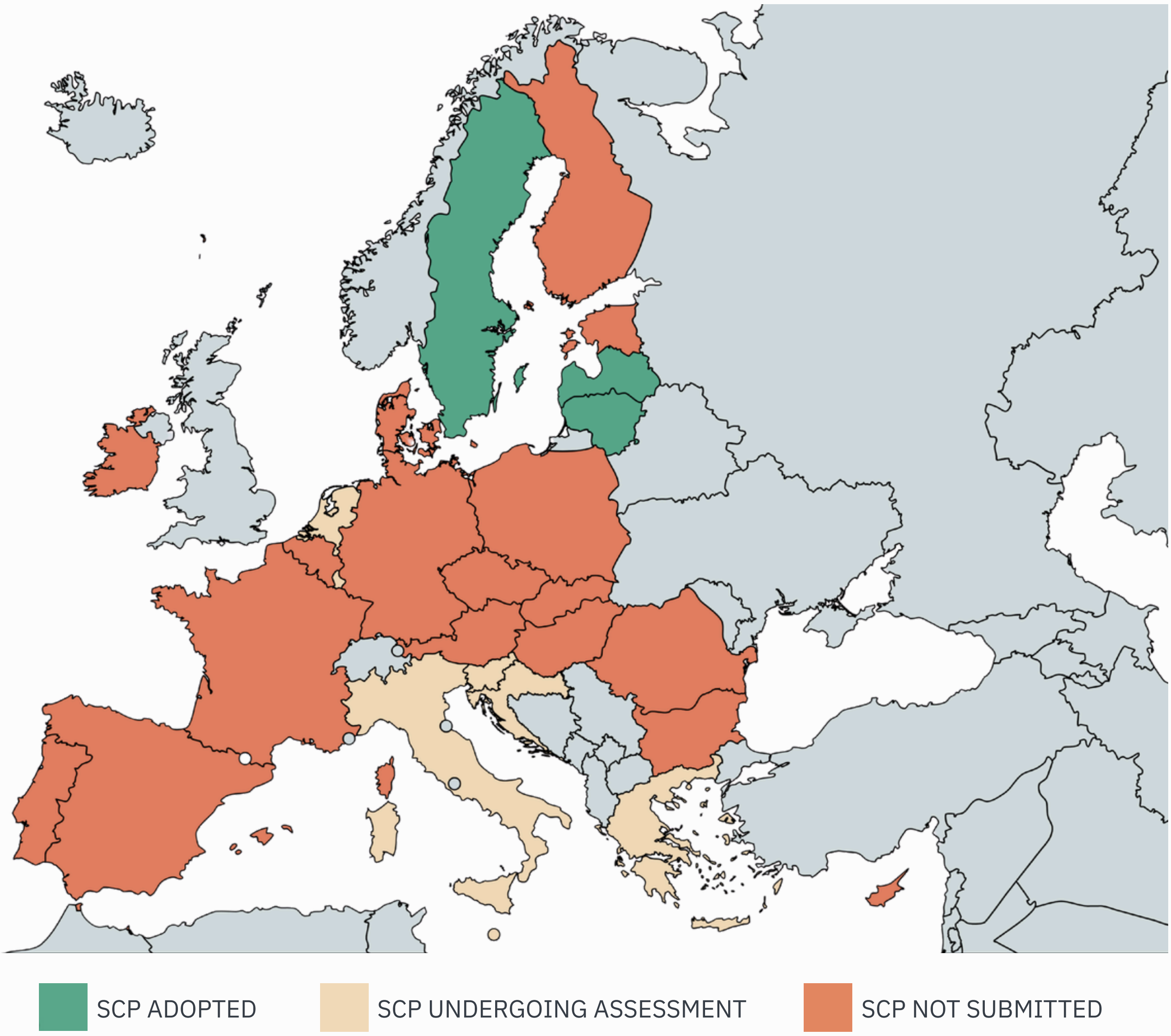

Figure 5: SCP developments as of August 2026.

As an early example, Lithuania's Social Climate Plan is particularly relevant because it adopts a broader and more integrated approach to the implementation of the Social Climate Fund compared to, for instance, the Swedish National Plan. Instead of focusing solely on one form of support, the Lithuanian plan combines measures that address various sectors, including energy poverty and transport poverty, while also targeting vulnerable micro-enterprises. On the contrary, the National Social Climate Plan of Sweden focuses on a single measure, a subsidy for electric vehicles for vulnerable households. [31]

Lithuania's Social Climate Plan will mobilise €884.2 million between 2026 and 2032. [32] The EU contribution will amount to €662.9 million. [32] Its measures and investments are broad and include support across three main areas:

- the buildings sector,
- the road transport sector,
- technical assistance for the administration and implementation of the plan.

The Plan describes in detail a wide range of measures under each of the mentioned areas. Firstly, in the building sector, Lithuania included renovation of single-, two-, and multi-apartment buildings; development of the social housing stock; and the establishment of energy-saving advisory centres. With regards to the road transport sector, the measures include, among others, support for the purchase of battery electric vehicles by vulnerable households, support for private and public recharging points, support for bicycles, including the development of new bicycle lanes, electric buses, transport-on-demand services in rural and less populated areas, and a national ticketing and trip-planning system with mobility wallets for vulnerable transport users in absolute poverty. [32]

Lastly, technical assistance was included in the Plan on the basis of Article 8(3) of the Social Climate Fund Regulation, allowing up to 2.5 percent of the estimated total costs for activities necessary for its effective management, implementation and monitoring. [33] In the case of Lithuania, this part of the National Plan provides support for the organisational and monitoring structures necessary to ensure the effective delivery of the Plan.

The Lithuanian National Social Climate Plan can therefore be seen as an example of the incorporation of both short and long-term objectives to mitigate the negative results of the ETS2 implementation. The Plan does not focus solely on temporary compensation but also seeks to address the causes of vulnerability. For instance, the discussed measures in the buildings sector are aimed at lowering the general demand for heating and its costs to address the issue at its source. Furthermore, the transport measures included in the current Plan can improve access to cleaner and more affordable mobility options for vulnerable groups, and in particular for vulnerable households that live in rural or remote areas with limited public transport options.

Finally, the technical assistance measures can strengthen the practical implementation of the Plan and ensure that sufficient assistance in the administrative and technical fields will be provided. In the case of Lithuania, technical assistance amounts to approximately 1.87 percent of the total estimated costs of the Plan, which is below the 2.5 percent limit allowed under Article 8(3) of the Social Climate Fund Regulation, while still remaining a meaningful allocation of funds.

Another important aspect of the Lithuanian plan concerns the public consultation process as required by the SCF Regulation. This aspect is particularly important from a just transition perspective. The consultation process was organised according to Article 5(1) of the SCF Regulation, which requires “the involvement of local and regional authorities, economic and social partners, civil society organisations, youth organisations and other relevant stakeholders.” [34] According to Lithuania’s participation reports, around 100 representatives were involved, representing almost 60 organisations, including municipalities, business organisations, trade unions, civil society organisations, youth organisations, environmental groups, research institutions and organisations representing people with disabilities.

In connection with the main focus areas of the Plan, the consultation process was also structured around the main vulnerable groups targeted by the Plan, namely vulnerable households, vulnerable transport users and vulnerable micro-enterprises. This enabled the discussion to focus on the specific problems that are faced by each group separately, and not treating vulnerability as one general category, improving the Plan’s effectiveness. Moreover, Lithuania also made consultation materials publicly available through the official Social Climate Plan website and the e-Citizen platform. [35] This increased the transparency of the process and made it easier for different stakeholders to follow the development of the national Plan.

Furthermore, the consultation process also had a direct impact on the contents of the Plan. According to the Lithuanian Plan, stakeholder input influenced, among other aspects, the definition of vulnerable groups and the targeting of planned measures. The official website provides publicly available responses to submitted comments. [36] This represents a strong example of good practice, demonstrating the use of public consultation as a meaningful tool to improve the Plan and not merely a formal requirement. This is also important from the perspective of advisory councils, as it illustrates how stakeholder involvement can have a real and practical impact on Social Climate Plans.

By contrast, Sweden’s approved Social Climate Plan is more narrowly focused on transport and particularly supports vulnerable rural households buying or leasing electric cars. [37] This makes Sweden an important but more limited example. On the other hand, Latvia offers a broader example of how Social Climate Plans can combine investment with short- and long-term just transition objectives. [38] However, the Latvian National Plan faced criticism regarding limited and insufficient public involvement. [39]

Figure 6: ETS2 and Social Climate Plans timeline. Produced with Claude.

4. Public Consultations and the Role of Advisory Councils

The public consultation phase of Social Climate Plans is not only an essential element of the National Plan preparation phase but could also be particularly relevant for national and regional advisory councils. As discussed above, the SCF Regulation requires Member States to consult a broad range of stakeholders during the preparation of their Plans. [40] Member States are required to explain how stakeholder input has been reflected in the final document. Therefore, this phase can be seen as an important entry point for contributing expertise for advisory councils working on climate, environment and sustainable development.

However, a formal consultation requirement alone does not guarantee meaningful public participation in the preparation of the plans. The first adopted Social Climate Plans demonstrate that the participation extent and quality can vary significantly between Member States. The consultation processes in Sweden and Latvia provide meaningful examples of how consultation processes can vary in practice.

Firstly, regarding Sweden, although the National Plan as a whole did not receive positive feedback, the public consultation phase received a more mixed assessment. Two consultation meetings were held during the preparation process, in November 2024 and April 2025, and Plan, stakeholder input influenced, among other aspects, the definition of vulnerable groups and the targeting of planned measures. The consultation period was relatively extensive and provided stakeholders with an opportunity to submit their views. On the other hand, concerns were raised regarding the actual influence of stakeholders on the direction of the Plan, as the consultation process was largely focused on the already selected electric vehicle subsidy. Stakeholders had very limited space to comment on the overall direction of the Plan. Moreover, there is no clear proof that feedback provided at earlier stages of the consultation process was in fact incorporated into the final Plan. On the contrary, public transport and active mobility were raised during the consultations and in submitted responses, but no measures were ultimately included.

Therefore, the Swedish example demonstrates that the quality of consultation also depends on whether stakeholders are able to influence the direction and content of the Plan, and not only whether sufficient time and opportunities for participation are provided.

Secondly, the Latvian consultation process and public engagement present a different example. Contrary to the Swedish National Plan, stakeholder involvement during the earlier stages of the Plan’s preparation was relatively extensive. The process of consultation included, among others, discussions with representatives of ministries, municipalities, social partners and civil society organisations.

However, upon publication of the Draft

Plan, purportedly only three working days were initially provided for submitting comments, insufficient time for stakeholders to meaningfully assess and respond to the proposed measures. Subsequently, more hearings and meetings were organised.
The final version of the Latvian Plan, officially approved on 20 July 2026, presents the process of consultations positively and states that numerous discussions had taken place before the draft was published and that comments received during the consultation and discussions were considered to further develop the Plan. Nevertheless, the Latvian example demonstrates that formal consultation alone does not guarantee meaningful stakeholder participation during the entire process.

The experience of Sweden and Latvia can serve as examples of stakeholder participation exceeding the frames of solely procedural requirement to become useful contributions to the National Plans. However, as discussed in detail above, stakeholders should be able to engage at early stages, and their input should be taken into consideration in drafting the final versions of the Plans.

From the advisory council perspective, this approach creates an opportunity to proactively contribute to the preparation of National Plans. Apart from responding to formal public consultations, advisory councils that seek to meaningfully contribute have opportunities to initiate dialogue with the competent national authorities by preparing independent evidence-based recommendations, organising stakeholder consultations or roundtable discussions to gather the views and consolidate these findings into policy recommendations.

Furthermore, advisory councils can monitor whether stakeholder feedback has been reflected in successive drafts of the National Plan, identify remaining gaps, and continue engaging with policymakers throughout the implementation phase. As public participation constitutes a formal requirement under the Social Climate Fund framework, the entire process should remain transparent, therefore, enabling advisory councils as well as other stakeholders to effectively monitor the process.

5. Key Takeaways

Overall, the Social Climate Fund constitutes an important step forward by the EU to ensure a just transition towards climate neutrality goals. Moreover, Social Climate Plans translate these objectives into national measures that provide both immediate support and long-term solutions. The first adopted Plans from Sweden, Latvia, Lithuania, and Malta demonstrate that approaches can differ significantly between Member States.

Importantly, their experiences also show that the existence of a formal consultation requirement alone does not guarantee sufficient stakeholder participation. Advisory councils could contribute their expertise during the preparation phase by proposing measures that address structural factors and take a longer-term perspective. This would ensure that these plans deliver a meaningful contribution for the just transition.

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