



# Barriers to sustainability?

**Disabled and older people's experiences of being 'green'**

---

**Summary of online survey findings**

November 2021

**[www.ridc.org.uk](http://www.ridc.org.uk)**  
**@RIDC\_UK**

Company Registered in England: 2669868  
Registered Charity No: 1007726  
VAT Registration No: 577 8406 92

**RiDC**

# Background

**Making contributions to a greener world is fast becoming a part of people's lives. This short survey was designed to understand the contribution that disabled people would like to make towards reducing their impact on the environment and the areas that they are excluded from.**

## Survey details

- Overall surveys opened: 519
- Consent: 485 (no consent = 0)

## Total valid responses: 485

- Start: 05/11/21 (10:30am)
- Close: 08/11/21 (2.00pm)

# Summary

## 1. Concern about impact on the environment

1. Concerned or very concerned: **79%**
2. Somewhat concerned: **18%**
3. Not concerned at all: **3%**

## 2 Where disabled and older people make attempts to reduce impact on the environment

1. Home: **93%**
2. Clothing: **61%**
3. Food: **57%**
4. Transport: **42%**

## 3 Where disabled and older people feel excluded from taking action

1. Transport: **57%**
2. Food: **19%**
3. Clothing: **18%**
4. Home: **17%**

## 4 The types of barriers disabled and older people experience

1. **Affordability:** making the right choices is usually expensive
2. **Mobility:** public transport is too difficult to use, only option is to buy clothes online
3. **Medical equipment:** single use, overly packaged, non recyclable

## 5 What can businesses, governments and organisations do to help?

1. **Affordability:** make food, energy and green choices more economical
2. **Recycling:** stop single use plastic, clearer recycling schemes, braille labels
3. **Transport:** more electric charging points, "talking" buses, accessible for wheelchair users

# Who completed our survey?

A total of 485 respondents

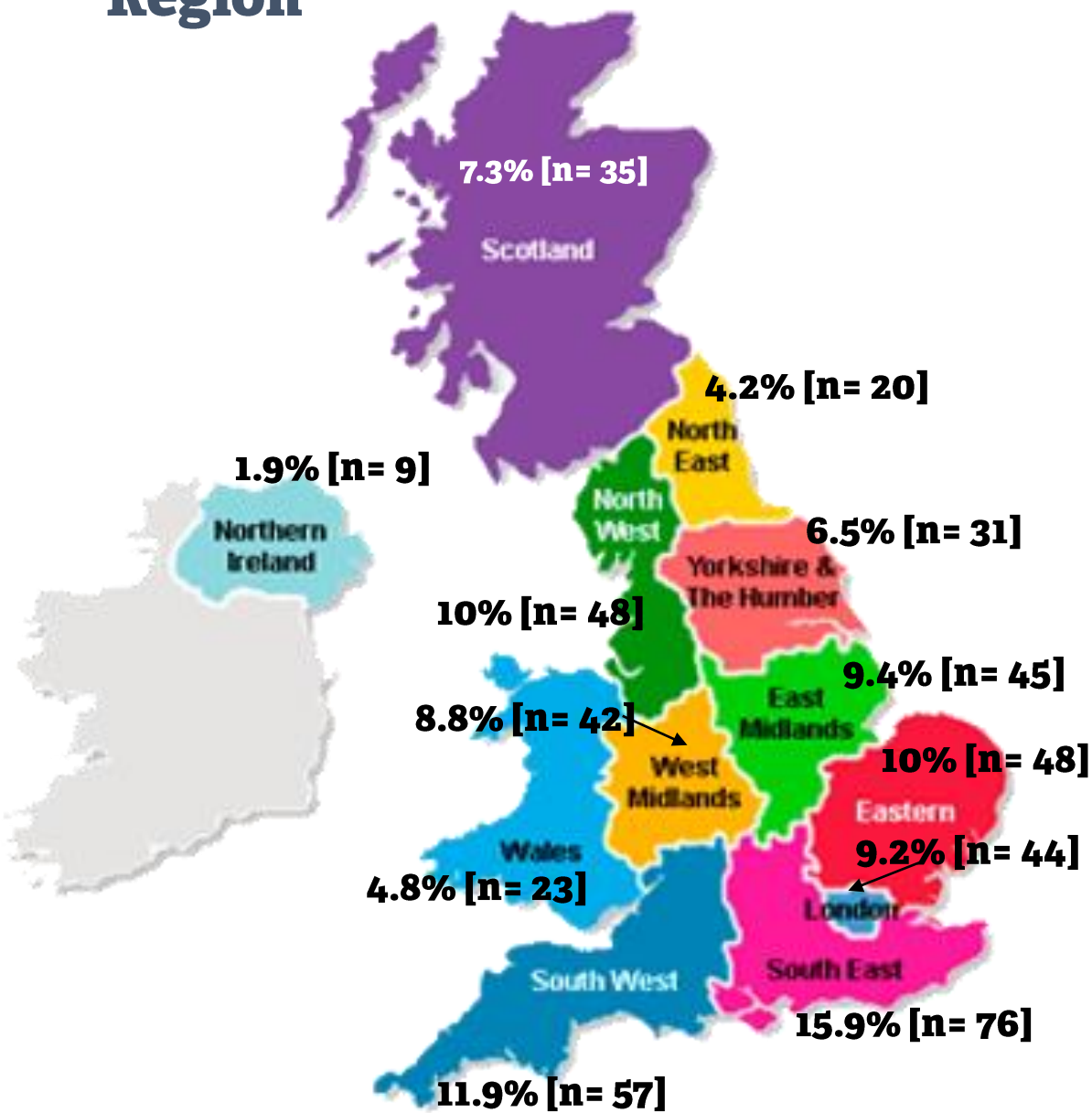
## Demographics

Age			Gender		
	n	%		n	%
18-40	36	7.6%	Female	265	54.9%
41-60	174	36.6%	Male	215	44.5%
61-80	242	50.9%	Other	2	0.4%
80 and above	23	4.8%	Prefer not to say	1	0.2%
Total	485	100%	Total	483	100%

## Disability

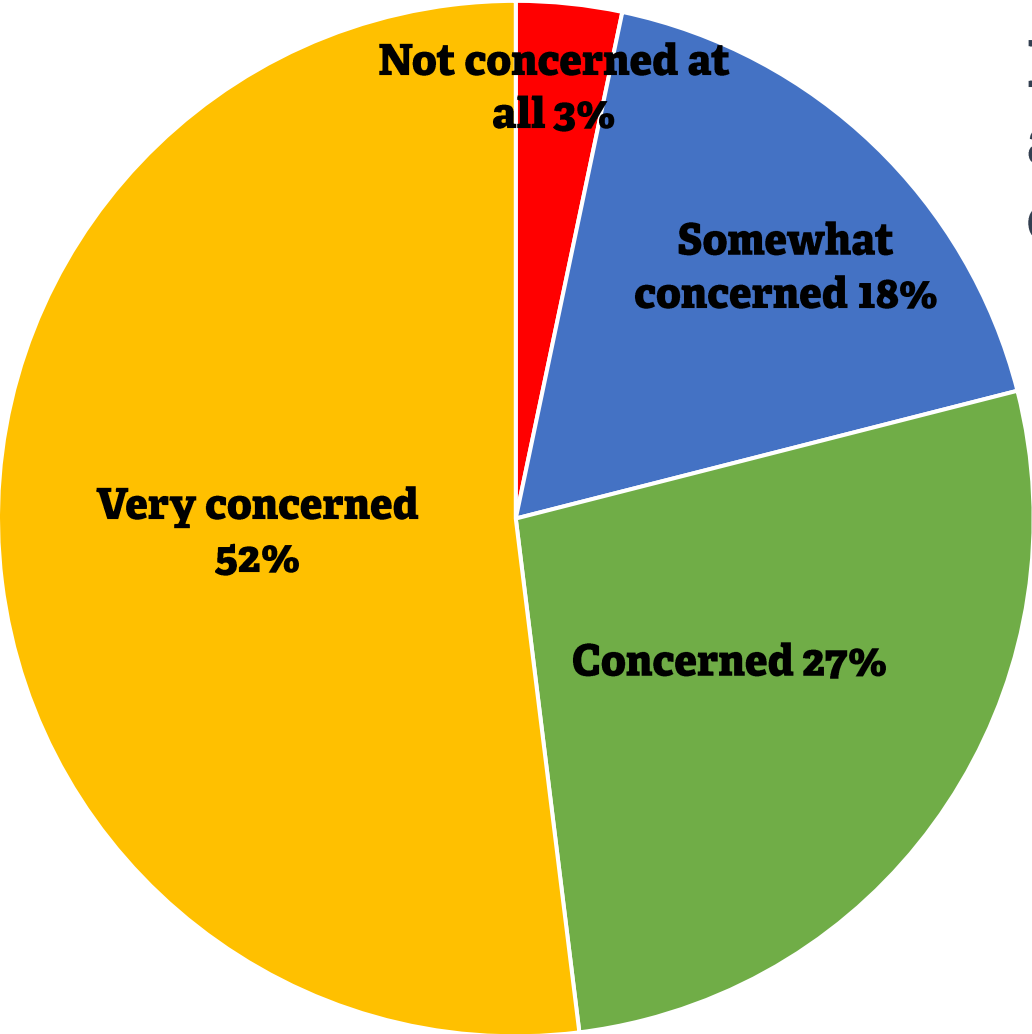
*multiple response	n	%
Mobility	427	88%
Physical	132	27%
Sensory	251	52%
Neurodiverse	115	24%
Behaviour & Communications	120	25%
Getting older	267	55%

## Region



n= total responding in each region.

# How concerned are you about the human impact on the environment?

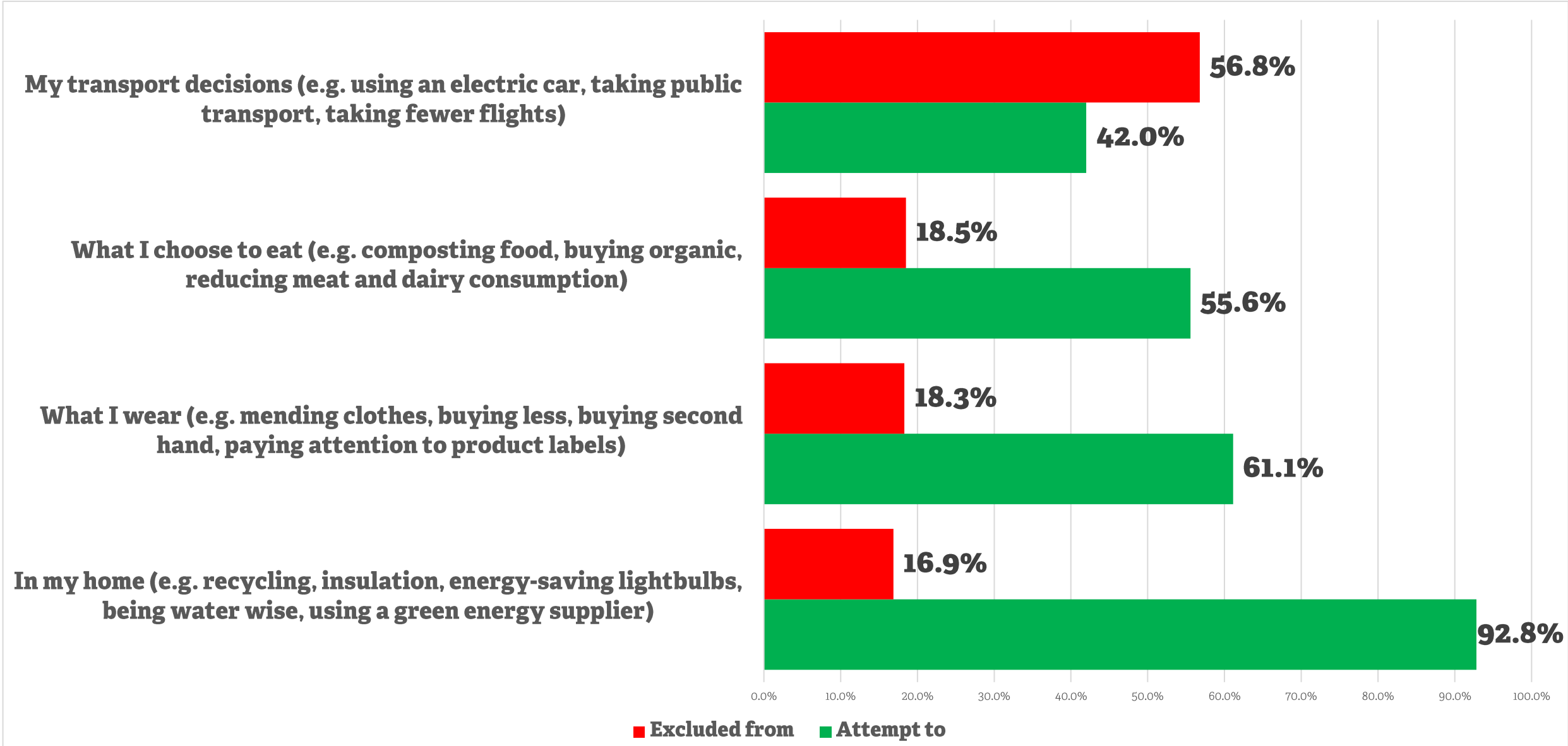


Concern about the environment by age group

	18-40	41-60	61-80	80 and above
Very concerned	55.6%	56.9%	49.2%	43.5%
Concerned	22.2%	25.3%	28.9%	30.4%
Somewhat concerned	19.4%	15.5%	19%	17.4%
Not concerned at all	2.8%	2.3%	2.9%	8.7%



# In which aspects of your life do you feel you attempt to reduce your impact on the environment and which areas do you feel particularly excluded from reducing your impact on the environment?



# In which aspects of your life do you feel you attempt to reduce your impact on the environment by disability group?

	Total	Mobility	Sensory	Non visible	Behaviour & comms	Neurodiverse
<b>In my home</b> (e.g. recycling, insulation, energy-saving lightbulbs, being water wise, using a green energy supplier)	92.8%	93.9%	93.2%	93.4%	93.2%	91.3%
<b>My transport decisions</b> (e.g. using an electric car, taking public transport, taking fewer flights)	42.0%	41.5%	46.6%	46.2%	53.4%	51.3%
<b>What I choose to eat</b> (e.g. composting food, buying organic, reducing meat and dairy consumption)	55.6%	56.0%	57.8%	56.1%	62.5%	62.6%
<b>What I wear</b> (e.g. mending clothes, buying less, buying second hand, paying attention to product labels)	61.1%	62.3%	61.0%	64.6%	68.2%	74.8%

# Within the following aspects of your life, are there any areas where you feel particularly excluded from reducing your impact on the environment by disability group?

	Total	Mobility	Sensory	Non visible	Behaviour & comms	Neurodiverse
<b>In my home</b> (e.g. recycling, insulation, energy-saving lightbulbs, being water wise, using a green energy supplier)	16.9%	15.7%	19.9%	16.5%	21.6%	20.0%
<b>My transport decisions</b> (e.g. using an electric car, taking public transport, taking fewer flights)	56.8%	60.7%	51.4%	58.0%	53.4%	58.3%
<b>What I choose to eat</b> (e.g. composting food, buying organic, reducing meat and dairy consumption)	18.5%	19.7%	21.1%	17.9%	22.7%	26.1%
<b>What I wear</b> (e.g. mending clothes, buying less, buying second hand, paying attention to product labels)	18.3%	19.0%	18.7%	18.4%	21.6%	21.7%

# You said you feel excluded from reducing your impact on the environment. Can you elaborate on the barriers you experience?

## Home

Providing information about reducing power usage and local renewable power generation.

Plastic packaging from manufacturers/retailers i.e. bread, fruit and veg, ready meals which \*cannot\* be recycled at home, and require to be taken to distant recycling centres. When you're disabled and have no independent transport, this is impossible to do.

**I have dexterity problem and crushing and removing labels is difficult. Clear, large signs on products saying if they are recyclable or not.**

It's a sighted world recycling is not easy to notice, council recycling systems are not accessible.

There are many areas that need to be remotely controlled in a disabled person's home all requiring electricity or alkaline batteries to operate. consumption of electricity and the numerous gadgets and their manufacturing and distribution costs (CO2 wise) is excruciatingly high.

**The cost of being disabled** also means most of my money goes on independence, heating and equipment so cheap food, clothing are necessary and buying second hand is not always disabled friendly in terms of collecting things etc..

**Recycling is very hard when your disabled - council boxes and collection sites aren't designed with disabled people in mind.**

**Cause I'm blind and they don't make it easy to know what bin and to put stuff into because it's coloured.**

The local authority will braille the bins but not in a way that the braille lasts the length of time it should do.

Unable to reduce water use due to disability.

Cost of making changes to home e.g. installing solar panels.

Even though we are meticulous in our recycling efforts at home, the councils tend to just dump our efforts into landfill.

## Transport

We would never been in a position to buy an electric car. We would never be able to charge an electric car in our neighbourhood. The government have not taken individual people's abilities nor locations into consideration. The cost of greener living is more expensive than non greener items and most people are not in a position to afford to change, nor for this reason, encouraged.

**As a wheelchair user I can't always use public transport and my electric wheelchair uses a lot of power.**

**I can't use public transport. It's too difficult with my disability. I need my car. Electric cars with charging cables look too hard too. If I dropped the cable, I wouldn't be able to pick it up.**

It is frustrating. It is partly about cost (e.g. an electric car, an electric bike) but also about poor planning with transport interchanges and public transport availability. It is also about lack of training of transport staff with assistance.

The electric option is too expensive. Disability means I have to use a car to travel.

It is harder to use public transport when you are disabled and so have to rely on cars more often.

My husband and I will never be able to buy an electric car with limited finances Unless of course they are done on mobility.

**I don't think car choice or move to electric would suit me. Charging points are not accessible.**

I recently renewed my lease with Motability and did seriously think about going electric/hybrid however I was put off by the lack of charging options available to me and also didn't fully understand the charging options as it seemed very complicated.

Electric cars on Motability are expensive and ranges/charging options make them unsuitable for my requirements.

I have recently had a pacemaker fitted, and now will not be able to have an electric car, as they have a large number of batteries in them.

# You said you feel excluded from reducing your impact on the environment.

## Can you elaborate on the barriers you experience?

### Food

Organic food, whilst better quality, is very expensive for pensioners as is changing the heating system.

**Having a disability means I have to purchase more expensive products like already chopped vegetables or already chopped meat to help prepare meals.**

Organic is still expensive and value is not clear.

**As I am registered blind and there is absolutely no tactile markings on labels, I cannot read them.**

Plant based eating is more expensive so I can't always afford those choices.

It is more expensive to buy greener products, i.e. organic costs more than non-organic.

**Use too much plastic due to requiring pre chopped foods.**

Due to increasing demand on funds I have to buy the cheapest food, clothes etc which may not be the most eco friendly.

Due to lack of ability to mobilise I often eat ready meals as these are accessible to me.

### Clothing

**I would like to buy less clothes and throw less away but due to heavy usage and needed particular types of clothes I get through them quickly.**

I buy fair trade clothes wherever possible but I would like to buy more second hand clothes. **I find charity shops impossible to negotiate on my own.**

I have compromised mobility so getting to shops to buy clothes is difficult but buying online often means more deliveries to get the right size and fit.

Synthetic fabrics cost less than natural fabrics.

The cost of fabric and materials to make and repair clothes can be very expensive.

**My disability means I am predominantly housebound so reduces my shopping opportunities despite what some may see as a huge array of options online. Receiving and returning items is not a green process.**

Due to lack of mobility I often have to use mail order shopping to buy clothes.

**Financially it is a challenge to source sustainable clothing, particularly as a lot of charity shops are not accessible in terms of the space.**

### Medical

**Making choices regarding medicines manufacturers and suppliers... it is not possible to choose which supplier my medication comes from - and they are on the whole over packaged, and unenvironmentally so. It is not possible to recycle pill popper packs.**

I feel I can contribute towards a greener world but not as much as I would like to because I use medical equipment and products that have throw away plastic.

Single use medical equipment that either isn't recyclable or is, but my council don't recycle it.

**I also need to use electricity for powering equipment and cannot avoid non-recyclable packaging of medical supplies and the supplies themselves, such as dressings and catheters.**

I have a Suprapubic Catheter. I have to use leg bags etc & they are mostly single use plastic. **I have no choice about the waste I produce.**

**Find sustainable alternatives to things like incontinence products.**

I would like to reduce water usage but need to use the washing machine more often and take longer showers due to medical conditions.



# What can businesses, governments or organisations do to help you reduce your impact on the environment?

## Affordability

Make the price of healthy and greener foods and clothing etc, more comparable to normal, or even cheaper than normal goods by subsidising or reducing taxes on those items.

As a disabled person living with double incontinence the cost of my energy bills are increasing year on year but my benefits are not increasing at the same rate. The government and energy suppliers need to consider this as one of the most vulnerable groups of the population are being seriously overlooked!

Make organic food cheaper and make renewable energy suppliers cheaper.

Reduce costs of alternative transport options. Broader provision of charging facilities. Concessions for the disabled.

Governments to roll out unconditional basic income so that disabled people have the necessary financial security to make a greater contribution to a greener world.

Lower the costs of greener items.

The UK government should be encouraging individual investment by giving tax relief on such domestic items as solar panel installations, heat exchangers, improving insulation etc.

Facilitate green alternatives to disabled people, who have to bear greater costs than the able bodied on a reduced income.

## Recycling

Stop using single use plastic!!!

Eventually not have any packaging that cannot be composted/recycled. This includes medications (I take quite a lot).

Reduce \*all\* plastics in packaging; use plastics which \*can\* be recycled locally; governments need to do more and \*stick to their promises\*; more use of wind and wave generated energy; local government needs to improve recycling facilities, reducing landfill.

The government should stand up to it's promise to use a deposit scheme for glass and plastic bottles and ultimately move away from plastic usage. There are a limited number of times a plastic bottle can be recycled, no matter how good the process so we need to stop using them now.

Councils need to standardise on what they will and won't recycle - there's too much confusing variability.

I would like to see it being made easier to recycle old clothing and household goods. I don't drive or have access to a car, so cannot access recycling depots, and previous collection services were stopped due to the pandemic, likewise for charity shops. I would like to see these types of services reintroduced and expanded.

As a blind disabled person they can source and supply braille labels that can last for years. They are made from aluminium and can easily be removed from bin to bin when required.

# What can businesses, governments or organisations do to help you reduce your impact on the environment? [continued]

## Retail

Produce items intended to last. It is frustrating to have to discard things only to buy new.

Roll out refill areas in supermarkets across the country that are already wheelchair accessible.

Most supermarkets still sell produce or chilled products in plastics that can not be recycled - all food packaging by law should be recyclable. All packaging by law should be recyclable.

Find sustainable alternatives to things like incontinence products.

## Information

If website creators ensure that images are properly described it would be hugely empowering.

Take responsibility and make it clear how I can easily be greener.

Clear and honest policies without greenwashing.

Offer more practical advice on what individuals can do and offer grants to help people insulate their homes.

## Transport

Transport, transport, transport this is the most vital connection. More accessible greener travel from place to place. More sustainable supply routes getting products to us in a greener way.

Make public transport more accessible and sustainable.

More electric points for cars, electric cars more affordable and longer range.

Buses would be easier if they were all 'talking' buses which announce the stops. Bus companies and transport ministers could do more to make this standard.

Encourage working from home for the majority of a working week where it is possible. This will reduce unnecessary travel.

Make more accessible charging points for electric cars. Encourage advancement in the electric car technology.

Make transport more available for wheelchair users.

Make transport disabled friendlier quicker and more reliable and safe especially for women and disabled people!

Make patient / hospital transport electric vehicles.

Public transport needs to be more reliable, user friendly, and covid- safer.

Invest in and subsidise public transport.

Make public transport more disabled friendly make better provision for deaf customers when contact is necessary.



# RiDC

[www.ridc.org.uk](http://www.ridc.org.uk)

@RiDC\_UK

Comments

Email: [hayleydawson@ridc.org.uk](mailto:hayleydawson@ridc.org.uk)

RiDC