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Fact check: Net Zero and UK jobs

Friends of the Earth's Sandra Bell cuts through the noise on one of the UK's most heated economic debates: is net zero killing jobs, or creating them? Drawing on fresh data from the CBI, TUC, and UK Steel, this analysis exposes how deindustrialisation began decades before climate targets, and why scrapping net zero policies could threaten 950,000+ jobs already supporting British workers. From Port Talbot steel to Scotland's oil industry, the evidence shows the real threat isn't decarbonisation - it's failing to invest in the transition.

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What is disinformation and misinformation?

Disinformation is the presentation of partial or false information with the **deliberate intention of misleading** someone.

Misinformation is incorrect or misleading information. It can exist **with or without specific malicious intent**. It is typically spread unintentionally, through lack of knowledge, misunderstanding or error.

The threat of halting action to mitigate the impacts of climate breakdown is already here. **Some councils under Reform UK control have already scrapped important climate plans and targets.**

This article looks at what's causing the decline of UK industry and job losses in energy, automobiles and steel, why this can't be blamed on support for renewables and recommends solutions to make the transition to clean energy fair and sustainable. This article also shows that the green economy is booming in the UK.

Examples of disinformation about the UK economy and jobs

[Reform UK Deputy Leader Richard Tice](#), referring to net zero policies, said *"We'd scrap the whole thing and save tens of billions of pounds... we don't need net zero. It's destroying jobs. It's destroying industries."* [Reform UK leader Nigel Farage has called net zero](#) *"the prime reason for the deindustrialisation of Britain."*

[Richard Tice said that Reform UK would gain support in Scotland](#) by *"scrapping 'net stupid zero' that is destroying tens and tens of thousands of great, highly skilled, well-paid Scottish jobs in the oil and gas industry, in the chemicals industry."*

[Zia Yusuf says that we are exporting manufacturing abroad](#) and seemed to link climate policies with closing coal mines. *"We destroyed our coal industry - tens of thousands of jobs lost with minimal opportunity for the people who lost those jobs,"* he added. In Port Talbot, in South Wales, [Nigel Farage demanded the reopening of the steel industry's blast furnaces](#). He also demanded [the reopening of the valleys' coalmines](#).

[John Mac, Reform UK candidate, Stockton-on-Tees](#) said that *"We're basically going through a deindustrialisation of the country at the moment and I think we're losing a lot of jobs...I know people are saying they're being replaced by jobs in the green industry, solar and the windfarms, but for every job there, we're losing more, probably in the typical industrial sectors,"*.

Deindustrialisation is due to globalisation, not net zero

Deindustrialisation in the UK – the decline in the relative importance of manufacturing for jobs and the economy - started after the second world war – way before the introduction of net zero targets.

Globalisation – not climate policies - is the key driver of the UK's decline in manufacturing.

Decarbonising the economy represents a further evolution of manufacturing in the UK. Done in the right way, it will have positive not negative impacts.

The problems in UK steel and the threatened job losses in the industry, aren't caused by net zero policies. But as global production shifts to cleaner steel, the UK industry needs more investment so we don't get left behind. [UK Steel sees an opportunity in the transition to net zero](#) - for example in the amount of steel needed for wind turbines and hydrogen infrastructure - saying, *"Now is the time to be bold and seize the opportunity to lead the world by building a Net Zero steel sector"*. The answer isn't clinging to coal-based steelmaking or scrapping renewables. It's investing in greener steel and protecting British manufacturing from high electricity prices and unfair competition to keep it in business (see below).

The green economy is booming, and net zero policies are creating jobs

[As Rachel Reeves the Chancellor of the Exchequer said in her speech in January 2025](#), *"There is no trade-off between economic growth and net zero. Quite the opposite. Net zero is the industrial opportunity of the 21st century, and Britain must lead the way."*

[The Confederation of British Industry \(CBI\)](#) reported that the UK's green sector is booming, growing 10% in 2024. That's three times faster than the overall economy. It found that the UK's net zero economy is now supporting over 950,000 jobs nationwide with employees in net zero businesses earning above average wages (an average of £43,076 per year). The benefits are felt across the UK with the fastest growth in green jobs (11.8%) taking place in the East of England. Net zero businesses included in the CBI study included those relating to renewable energy, waste management and green finance.

The CBI says that policy stability is important in underpinning the progress made and for future investment. It cites the Climate Change Act in helping to avoid short-term policies. The CBI also makes the case for a faster transition. For example, it calculates that a slow transition to electric vehicles could see a loss of jobs but, conversely if the shift is sped up, then new jobs will be created.

[The Aldersgate group](#), which includes some of the UK's largest businesses, has also said that industrial decarbonisation offers *"significant economic opportunities for the UK"*, and the government must put the right policy environment in place to ensure these are delivered.

Scrapping existing commitments on climate threatens British manufacturing jobs

In 2021, the TUC warned that 600,000 jobs in manufacturing and supply chains in the UK were at risk from government inaction on net zero. More recently [it has set out its priorities for the government's forthcoming industry decarbonisation strategy](#) – not calling for abandoning the transition to net zero but setting out a series of recommendations for a rapid and just transition. One that prioritises good jobs and worker participation (see below).

[TUC Cymru recently warned that the policies of Reform UK could put 40,000 manufacturing jobs in the country at risk](#), saying that “Reform’s current positions are the most likely to push Welsh industry over the brink, followed by those of the Conservative Party”. These include [Reform UK’s plans to rely on imported gas which will drive up electricity prices](#) for sectors like paper and metals. The TUC also says that Reform UK’s intention to slash public funding would hit the Welsh steel jobs that benefit from public procurement.

[The government’s new Clean Energy Jobs Plan](#) has promised 800,000 clean energy jobs by 2030 with new training programmes to help young people get the skills they need and measures to help workers in oil and gas make the transition. It would be perverse for Reform UK to scrap these opportunities as a result of their promise to scrap all net zero policies.

Industry and workers need the right support

Scrapping or going too slowly on decarbonising industry will do more harm than good, but, as in any significant industrial change, businesses will need support adjusting. This needs to include:

- More involvement of workers in decarbonisation plans. [The TUC says that the recent redundancies at Port Talbot steelworks could have been entirely avoided](#) if planning had been done well in advance, and the workforce was properly involved throughout the process. It points to the transition of more than 400,000 coal mining jobs in Germany **without a single compulsory redundancy**
- Reduce high electricity costs for businesses, because **high energy costs risk firms relocating or closing down**. It’s the high cost of fossil fuels driving the extraordinarily high bills that businesses and consumers face in the UK. The government’s climate plan reported it has already reduced electricity costs for 7,000 energy intensive businesses but that more support is on the way.
- Support transition in the car industry including a shift from making components for petrol and diesel cars to battery manufacturing for electric vehicles (EVs) and stimulate demand for EVs, as well as **help British manufacturers compete with cheaper imports**.
- Direct support for sectors like steel that are key to the UK and hard to decarbonise. This can be done via [the National Wealth Fund](#). **UK Steel production also needs protection from imported steel where countries are selling below the price of manufacture**, whilst ensuring such a system is fair to the least developed countries.

Oil and gas workers can transition to new jobs with the right support

Around 30,000 people in the UK are employed in the oil and gas industry, of whom around 85% are in Scotland, and around 100,000 more in the supply chain. It’s understandable that these people are concerned about their jobs. But the offshore renewables industry provides a huge opportunity for oil and gas industry workers. Much of the work will be in the same geographical areas and their skills and experience are highly transferable. **It has been estimated that 70,000 new jobs will be needed in offshore wind by 2030.**

Government, industry and unions must work together to make sure that the necessary transition away from oil and gas is fair, with workers getting support and training where needed. [The Clean Energy Jobs Plan](#) has promised to help workers in oil and gas make the transition.

Why this matters

Climate breakdown impacts on both business and livelihoods across all sectors. Reversing climate action is dangerous and unhelpful to UK businesses and workers alike.

[The Institute and Faculty of Actuaries](#), the body representing those who measure risk for the insurance industry, is clear that extreme weather resulting from climate change risks “catastrophic” global economic impacts.

There’s clear evidence that the impacts of climate change are already happening across the UK and the world and it’s often the people who’ve done the least to cause it who suffer. The transition to a low carbon economy will cost money but it can be funded fairly, by ensuring that the biggest polluters pay the most. Those with the most to lose are often the most vociferous opposition to climate action and who stand to benefit most when doubt is sown about the urgent need for it. **There are significant benefits to climate action that can improve the quality of day to day lives such as cleaner air, thriving nature, new jobs and warmer homes.**

We have to decarbonise the economy to cut harmful emissions and slow the progress of damaging climate breakdown. Halting transition won’t help create jobs or boost the UK economy – instead it will put the brakes on a thriving growth area and leave businesses more vulnerable to climate impacts. Business leaders and unions don’t support the right-wing call to scrap climate targets.

Fair solutions

The right-wing focus on scrapping climate policies and targets is irresponsible. It doesn't make sense to undo the actions that have already created a thriving green economy. Here are some of the ways that government can protect businesses and workers from the impacts of climate change and support them to make the transition to a successful decarbonised economy.

- **Invest in green jobs and training** to allow a fair transition for workers in sectors like oil and gas.
- **Support the transition of sectors that are hard to decarbonise** including cutting electricity costs for energy-intensive industries?to level the playing field and stop business moving abroad.
- **Involve workers in decision making about decarbonisation.**
- **Make Polluters Pay** to help support the decarbonisation that's needed.

Further Reading

[The Fairness Test: a mandate for bold climate policy | Friends of the Earth](#)