

# Recommendations to achieve a sustainable and socially inclusive society



## Introduction

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With the effects of the climate and nature crisis being clearly visible, coupled with rising social inequality and polarisation, everyone has a role to play to protect the planet and its people.

Business in the Community Ireland (BITCI)<sup>1</sup> supports its network of 120 member companies to embed all critical aspects of sustainability into their operations and supply chain, to lower emissions, protect nature and improve social cohesion. For 25 years BITCI are leaders in sustainability and social inclusion working with businesses, schools, governments and civil society. BITCI is a non-profit organisation.

While government policy supports sustainability at a macro level, there remains an absence of sufficiently ambitious co-ordinated government action including appropriate supports and tools to enable business to fully advance their sustainability journey. Business and government must work effectively together to ensure Ireland meets its mandated targets to ensure a net zero, nature positive economy and society, where no-one gets left behind – achieving the Just Transition.

## Current Challenges

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The key challenges facing Irish companies in adopting more responsible business practices include:

- Measuring and managing scope 3/indirect emissions and social/working conditions across supply chains.
- Assessing the impact of business operations on nature and defining action plans to manage negative impacts.
- Having the skills and data to ensure compliance with new regulatory frameworks including the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive.
- Future proofing skills across all industries to advance the sustainability agenda beyond mere compliance.
- The cost of decarbonisation such as building retrofit and equipment upgrade.
- Addressing systemic societal issues such as disproportionate unemployment affecting groups including migrants, people with disabilities, Travellers and those coming from DEIS schools.
- The cost-of-living and housing crises affecting recruitment and retention of staff.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.bitc.ie](http://www.bitc.ie)

# Recommendations

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With the aim of assisting the preparation of policy manifestoes and positioning on key issues, BITCI puts forward these recommendations which, if implemented, would ensure greater synergy and action between Government ambitions and business actions:

- Building on the National Implementation Plan for the Sustainable Development Goals and to address issues around policy coherence, Government must define a clear national vision for sustainability and social inclusion with specific sustainability objectives that cascade and underpin all related policies and actions ensuring unity across government departments. Adopting this holistic approach would position Ireland as a leader in sustainability, ensure collaboration across all stakeholders to achieve common objectives and attract new business investment due to our authentic sustainability credentials.
- Ensure the active participation of a broad range of business (various sectors, sizes, and ownership structures) is included in different policy fora including the Just Transition Commission as a key stakeholder that will enable sustainable growth, competitiveness, and an inclusive society.
- Empower SMEs to proactively decarbonise their operations through provision of holistic direction so more sustainable supply chains can grow, beyond specific current interventions that tend to be short-term and limited in scope.
- Expand the remit of the Department of Enterprise, Trade & Employment's Enterprise Forum to enable the effective application/implementation of sectoral carbon budgets by business as a tool to ensure implementation of decarbonising activities.
- Support the creation and implementation of a set of future skills needed across the economy to thrive in a decarbonised world. Create a skills action plan jointly with business, universities, vocational providers, and professional bodies to ensure Ireland is training people who can deliver sustainable practices. A sustainability apprenticeship be developed by Solas and industry partners to grow the jobs market for future-proof professions.
- Establish a Cross-Governmental Review Group led by the Department of An Taoiseach to coordinate resources of government, NGOs, and businesses towards social inclusion, monitor progress, shift focus as required and be accountable for performance. This will enable a systemic view of the issues and solutions available, avoid overlaps in provision and ensure best-in-class services are deployed aimed at social cohesion and leaving no one behind.
- Create more stability and efficiencies in the provision of services by working with current service providers to identify the most impactful interventions. Design multi-annual funding models to support exemplars of best practice (such as BITCI's employment programmes for vulnerable jobseekers) to deliver clear targets in a stable environment.

For further information: BITCI can provide more information, evidence, and insights to support these recommendations. Please contact Tomas Sercovich, CEO, Business in the Community Ireland [tsercovich@bitc.ie](mailto:tsercovich@bitc.ie) or 086 045 1697.