



BUILDING A ZERO CARBON IRELAND

Government Policy Scorecard

IN 2022, THE IRISH GREEN BUILDING COUNCIL (IGBC) LAUNCHED BUILDING A ZERO CARBON IRELAND – A ROADMAP TO DECARBONISE IRELAND’S BUILT ENVIRONMENT ACROSS ITS WHOLE LIFE CYCLE.

The development of the roadmap was informed by a detailed carbon modelling report produced by the Building in a Climate Emergency (BIACE) Research Lab of UCD and by extensive stakeholder engagement. The roadmap includes recommendations for policy makers, industry, and education providers, but it’s a living document that will need to be updated on a regular basis. To support this process and ensure real progress is made, the IGBC is developing policy scorecards and industry progress reports every second year.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT

Progress has been made since the launch of the roadmap: Funding for the national retrofit programme has increased significantly and there is greater awareness of the need to tackle the global warming potential of buildings across their life cycle.

However, **given the scale of the challenge and the urgency to act, progress is often too slow**, with Ireland often acting as a follower at European level. E.g., on regulating embodied carbon emissions. More holistic and coordinated actions are needed to address all the emissions associated with the built environment, from operational to embodied and transport related emissions. In particular, more joined up thinking is required to

deliver on the National Development Plan without compromising Ireland’s climate targets. Programmes and policies could also often be better targeted to provide more additionality. Similar challenges exist at the local authority level but are often worsened by concerns around resourcing and a perceived lack of clarity on local authorities’ mandate on climate action, including energy renovation.

While we are moving in the right direction, addressing these gaps should be a priority as any delays in climate action implementation will also drive up the costs of reaching our 2030’s and 2050’s climate targets.



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NATIONAL LEVEL

ENSURING SUPPORTING POLICIES ARE IN PLACE



Real progress has been made on better supporting energy renovation and Green Public Procurement.

Unfortunately, policies, regulations and financial incentives are still not aligned enough to fully support reuse of existing buildings. Progress on actions to transition to a more circular built environment has also been limited. Achieving real progress in these fields will most likely require further discussion on housing and climate action to build a consensus around more contentious policies on how to meet housing need of an expanding population without increasing carbon emissions. With that regard, it's disappointing that the recommendation on a Citizens' Assembly on housing and climate action hasn't been acted on.

DEVELOP THE RIGHT REGULATORY FRAMEWORK



There is some progress in developing the right regulatory framework to reduce embodied carbon emissions and reduce waste.

However, based on current carbon modeling projections, these are too slow to reach our 2030's climate targets. With the current level of new development, simply disclosing whole life carbon emissions in 2027 is insufficient. Ireland must act as a leader at European level on this topic, whole life carbon limits must be introduced by then.

Although, some work has been done on reviewing planning and buildings regulations so that they better reflect Ireland's climate objectives, progress remains too slow in this area.

INVEST IN BUILDING A ZERO CARBON IRELAND



Additional funding was allocated to better support energy renovation, regeneration, and re-use of existing buildings. Investment in building baselines for embodied carbon and in the development of a national whole life carbon methodology, as well as increased investment in research, are positive developments.

A more holistic approach is now needed to fully address carbon emissions associated with the built environment – E.g., by introducing better links between grants for energy renovation are reuse of existing buildings. Perhaps, even more importantly, there are still no consistent reviews to ensure all government's expenditure and fiscal policies relating to the built environment are fully aligned with Ireland's climate targets. Existing schemes should also be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure they are well targeted and provide additionality. Furthermore, support for biobased solutions shouldn't be limited to timber. Ireland with a large agricultural sector has a strategic interest to identify, encourage, and develop other local low carbon biobased solutions.

RAISE AWARENESS AND MAKE SURE WE HAVE THE RIGHT SKILLS



Investments have been made to improve climate awareness within Ireland, and the strong focus on citizens' engagement in the Climate Action Plan 2024 is welcome. However, it remains unclear if the new National Campaign of Communication and Engagement on Climate Action will cover all emissions associated with the built environment, including embodied carbon emissions and transport - or only operational emissions.

Actions have been implemented to attract more people to the construction industry and to facilitate energy renovation upskilling. E.g., Establishment of a national network of NZEB/Retrofit Centres of Excellence. However, further actions are required to attract new workers to the energy renovation sector and to incentivise upskilling – e.g., through the introduction of a "sustainability pass".



LOCAL LEVEL

ENSURING SUPPORTING POLICIES ARE IN PLACE



There is now a greater focus on climate action at the local authority level. Besides additional funding having been made available for energy renovation, better tracking of progress towards the 2030 and 2050 targets, as well as the development of the first Local Authorities' Climate Action Plans, are all positive developments.

However, supporting policies are often not holistic enough to address whole life carbon emissions, and consistency in planning policies across local authorities remains an issue. Lack of resources at local authority level (including lack of control over their funding) also makes it difficult for them to be ambitious and to lead by example (e.g., on circularity).

INVEST IN BUILDING A ZERO CARBON IRELAND



A growing number of local authorities are now looking at higher sustainability requirements - including compliance with the EU taxonomy for sustainable activities - when developing new buildings.

However, there is a need for increased consistency across all local authorities, and the lack of resources at local authority level (including lack of control over their funding) remains a challenge to fully enforce climate policies and building control. This has also led to limited progress on the use of Green Public Procurement at local authority level and makes it challenging for local authorities to truly lead by example.

SUPPORTING ACTIONS



Although the introduction of decarbonising zones in local authorities is an important step forward, it is disappointing that they are not used yet to fully support innovation and capacity building. To date, most of them only focus on operational and transport related emissions and do so in a very siloed way. The lack of resources allocated to their implementation, and extremely limited progress on circularity, are also sources of concern.

RAISE AWARENESS AND MAKE SURE WE HAVE THE RIGHT SKILLS



Progress has been made in increasing inhouse expertise within local authorities. Government is resourcing specific roles in local authorities to support climate delivery on the ground, and training in carbon literacy has increased. However, it's unclear if these training programmes are always well targeted, and whether they cover topics such as the global warming potential of buildings across their whole life cycle, and low carbon construction and renovation.

Although in theory, local authorities could do a lot to raise awareness among citizens about the benefits and importance of tackling whole life carbon emissions and reusing buildings, this is not happening at scale. This might be partly explained by a lack of resources, and by the fact that local authorities' climate targets only relate to their own building stock and emissions.