



Chambers Ireland Statement to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Environment and Climate Action on the Sustainable Development Goals

March 2023

Chambers Ireland Perspective on the Sustainable Development Goals

As a network, Chambers Ireland, strongly welcomes the increased interest which is being shown in the Sustainable Development Goals by the Oireachtas, Departments and Government agencies. Chambers Ireland have been supporting the Sustainable Development Goals from their inception, we are members of the International Chambers of Commerce which has Permanent Observer Status in the United Nations as a result of our support for the Sustainable Development Goals. In 2019 our member chambers came together to sign a pledge to support the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals and since then we have put the Sustainable Development Goals at the core of all our activities.

We have used the Goals as tools for creating coherence across our policy proposals and when it comes to developing greater awareness of sustainability issues within the business community.

Our first action when it came to the Goals was to identify those that were most relevant to our network, while acknowledging that there would be opportunities to promote the other Goals, we selected five that would be our highest priority. Our members throughout the network went through their own processes to determine which would be most relevant to them, and broadly we landed upon (and in no particular order):

- Climate Action (SDG 13)
- Industry Innovation and Infrastructure (SDG 9)
- Gender Equality (SDG 5)
- Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 13)
- Sustainable Cities and Communities (SDG 11)

While we have these foci, we have found that the great strength of the Goals, as a policy tool, comes in lending a holistic perspective on the issues our members face. Our members outline the problems that businesses are experiencing in their area, and we then use the goals to help identify what solutions we should be pushing for.



We find that their greatest utility emerges from highlighting novel angles, insights and opportunities when seeking out solutions to problems.

One of the things that we do when making a submission, or lobbying about an issue, is to ask ourselves what other goals are relevant here? How does policy action pertaining to this issue impact, directly and indirectly, other goals that we want to achieve? How can our advocacy for other Goals reinforce what we are trying to do in this instance? Can it help us identify new allies?

A case in point is our advocacy for better public transport. This is a key concern of our network because quality of life issues are making it harder for businesses to attract and retain staff across the country. We are looking for better infrastructure, which immediately has us thinking about Industry Innovation and Infrastructure, and if you know our Chambers you will know that for many of them Infrastructure can be seen as an end in itself. However, Climate Action also comes in here, because we can see that Transport is an enormous component of our Green House Gas emissions, which has led us to more advocacy for sustainable transport, and public transport, so that people have an alternative to using cars. It has led us to consider the impact that cars have been having on our town centres and how they have been undermining the economic potential of our cities and towns. The long commutes that have been normalised impact quality of life further, damaging households and communities. This has led us to advocate for the activation of vacant and underutilised properties, because if people are living in town centres we can, on the one hand, offer them better public services more efficiently, and on the other we are bringing customers to our members' doorsteps. Looking at transport issues, from a Gender Equality perspective, highlights things that most of us in this room are going to be oblivious to; the lighting at public transport stops and the frequency with which trams and buses arrive are what stop women using public transport, and it keeps them in their cars, and so makes Gender Equality a Climate Action issue too.

There is a naive way to look at this, a chicken and egg perspective, that this is all so complicated that we don't know where to start. But the fact is that we have already started. We know what our shared goals are, we just need to remind our colleagues that these are their goals too. If we can get our colleagues in Health to emphasise the savings that active travel brings to the health

service when they are in budget discussions with Finance; if the Department of Justice can come to see vacancies as the huge public order problem they have become, then we can start acting on the widespread calls for joined up government, the Goals, when used well, are a tool for de-Siloing public policy.

In addition to the solutions, the Goals also help us identify where the problems are. Our Chambers are deeply concerned that, as things stand, Ireland will not be able to meet our Climate Action targets, our National Development Plan, nor our Climate Action Plan. Currently, it seems likely that we will not be reaching our targets for offshore wind energy, despite the increased ambition for this. We fear that our country is unlikely to be able to upgrade our energy networks to admit the quantity of renewable energy that is available to us. Without alternative means of transport and without the decarbonisation of our energy infrastructure it does not seem possible that we will be able to meet our 2030 targets, nor our Climate Action Goal. And the issue here is our planning system. Our planning system has become the single greatest hurdle to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

We are more than halfway towards 2030, when we are supposed to be achieving our goals, but on Climate Action it seems as though the attainment of that Goal is further away than ever.