How to cover corporate sustainability

Climate Change Media Masterclass

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INTRODUCTION

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DCU Institute for Climate and Society

business.dcu.ie/
dcu.ie/climate

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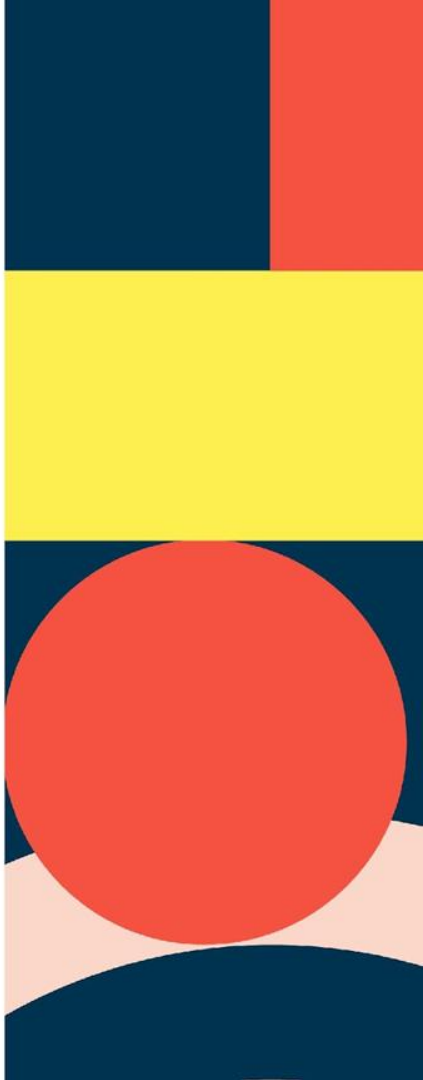
Agenda

- Climate change and business - introduction
- Key terms and concepts
- ESG reporting
- Greenwashing
- The future of corporate climate action



What is Ireland's most sustainable company?

Go to menti.com and use the code 2121 8463

Companies have embraced sustainability

Companies have embraced sustainability

Climate commitments and initiatives

World Business Council for Sustainable Development

UN GLOBAL COMPACT

CDP
DISCLOSURE INSIGHT ACTION

Alliance of CEO Climate Leaders

Climate Action 100+
Global Investors Driving Business Transition

Net Zero Asset Managers Initiative

Accelerate:
The Business Pact for Climate & Nature

RACE TO ZERO
Climate Ambition Alliance

CLIMATE GROUP
RE100

Since 1985, Patagonia has pledged 1% of sales to the preservation and restoration of the natural environment. We've awarded over $89 million in cash and in-kind donations to domestic and international grassroots environmental groups making a difference in their

SCIENCE BASED TARGETS
DRIVING AMBITIOUS CORPORATE CLIMATE ACTION

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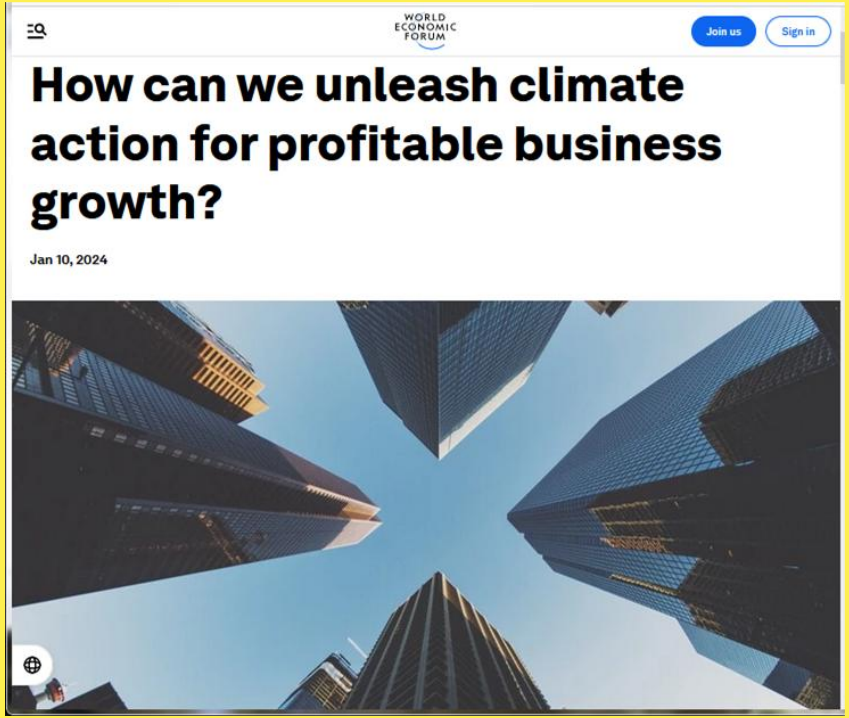

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WEF (2024)

Just 57 companies linked to 80% of greenhouse gas emissions since 2016

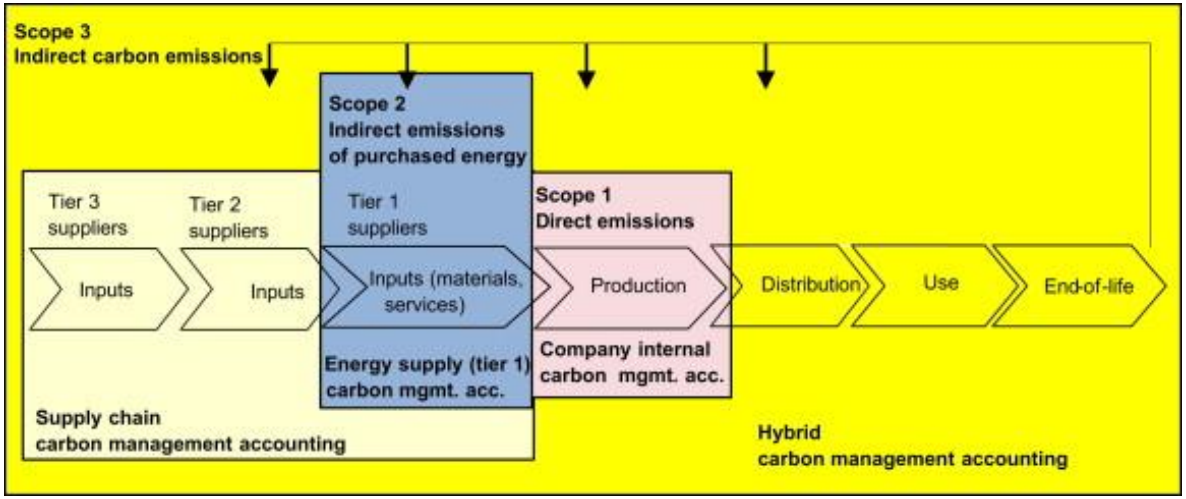
Analysis reveals many big producers increased output of fossil fuels and related emissions in seven years after Paris climate deal

The historical record encompasses 122 entities linked to 72% of all the fossil fuel and cement CO2 emissions since the start of the industrial revolution. Photograph: Nick Oxford/Reuters

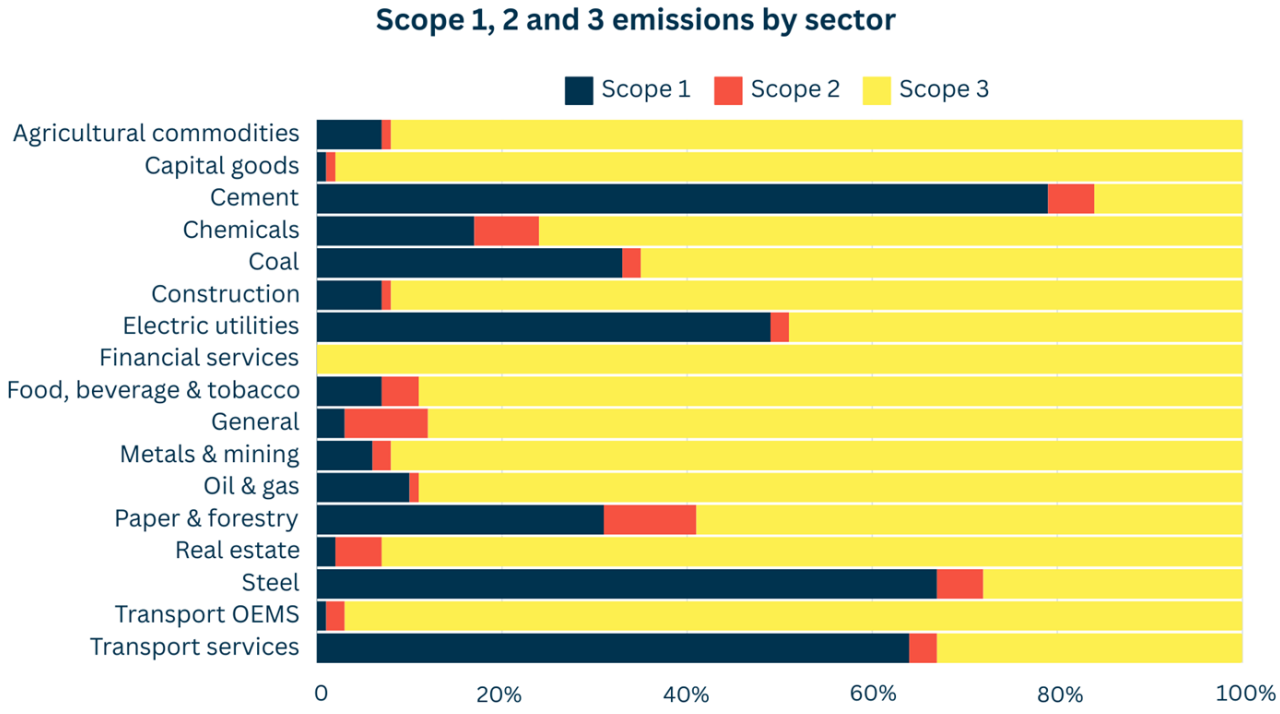
Carbon Majors (2024)

Corporate GHG Accounting

- GHG Protocol - GHG emissions calculation tool
- Scope 1, 2, 3
- **Absolute v. intensity**

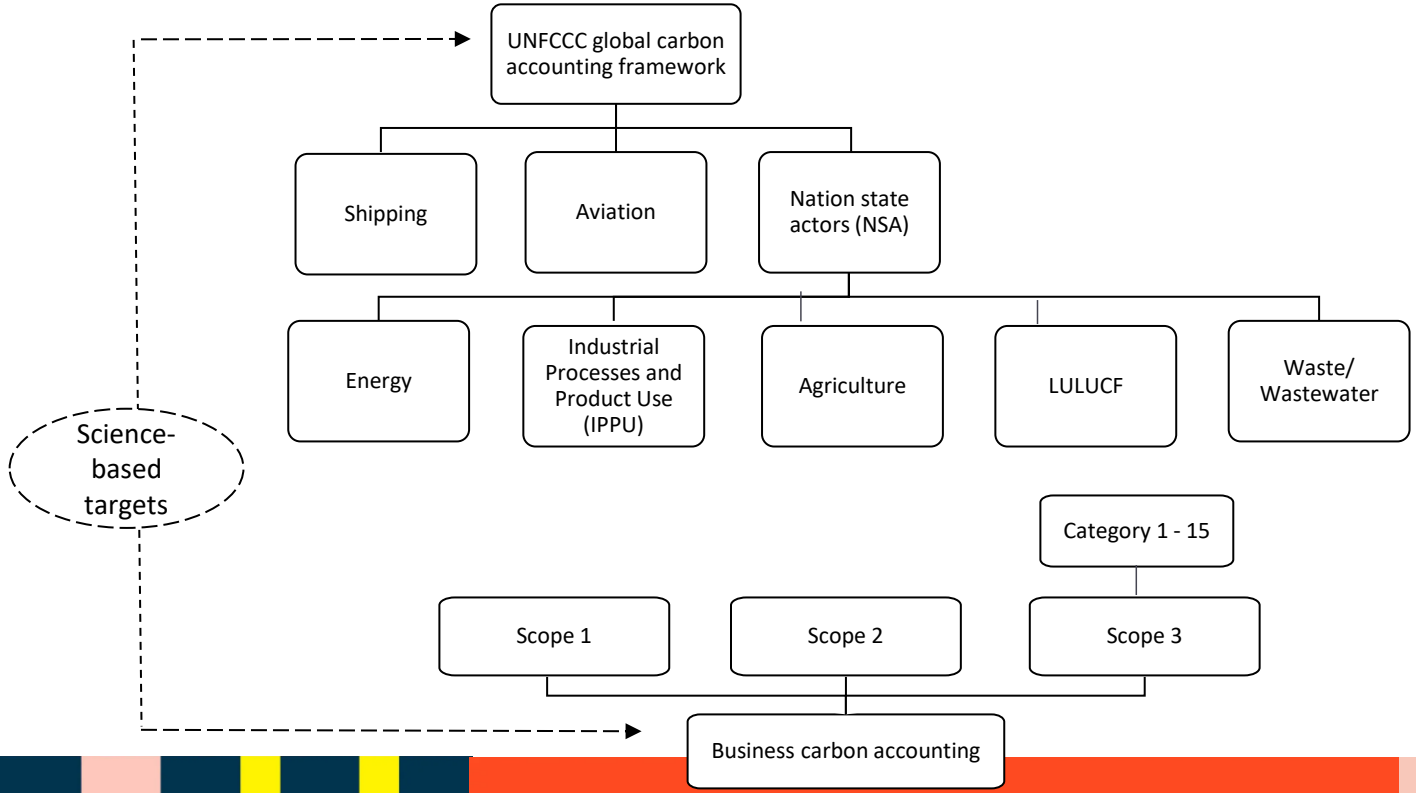


Schaltegger and Csutora 2012


Scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions by sector
Scope 1
Scope 2
Scope 3
Agricultural commodities
Capital goods
Cement
Chemicals
Coal
Construction
Electric utilities
Financial services
Food, beverage & tobacco
General
Metals & mining
Oil & gas
Paper & forestry
Real estate
Steel
Transport OEMS
Transport services
0
20%
40%
60%
80%
100%

CDP, 2023

Business v. UNFCCC GHG Accounting



Climate Change Targets

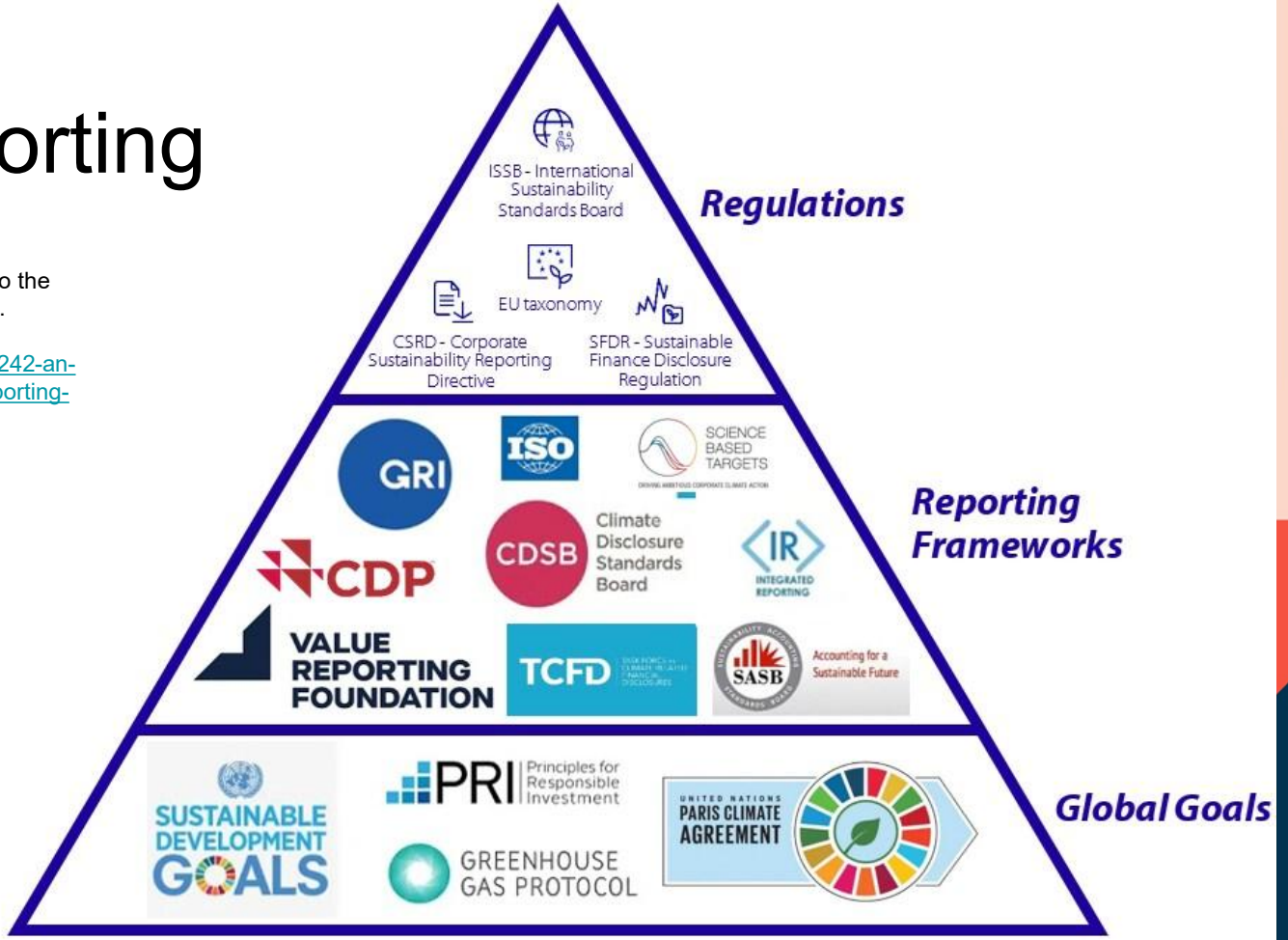
Firms increasingly setting
“Science-based” GHG emissions reduction targets

Do these targets translate into emission reductions?
(Dahlmann et al, 2019):

- No general relationship between firms having a climate change target and reductions in their emissions.
- Absolute, as opposed to intensity, climate change targets are crucial in the achievement of emissions reductions.

ESG Reporting

Poolen, D. (2022). An Introduction to the Sustainability Reporting Landscape. Available: rabobank.com/knowledge/d011294242-an-introduction-to-the-sustainability-reporting-landscape



Phase 1: Voluntary reporting

- Multiple voluntary frameworks - GRI, Integrated Reporting, SASB, ISO26000
- Different levels of comparability, consistency, reliability and relevance (Tschopp and Nastanski, 2014)
- Firms favour voluntary reporting but civil society favours mandatory reporting (Deegan and Shelly, 2014)
- Reporting-performance portrayal gap (Adams, 2004) e.g. no correlation between GRI reporting and reduced CO2 emissions (Belkhir et al, 2017)
- Language used to construct a narrative of the organisation's relationship with sustainability (Milne et al, 2006)

“Voluntary initiatives do *not* produce widespread, consistent and systematic practice. Only changes in organisational regulation can produce this”.

Gray, R. (2001). Thirty years of social accounting, reporting and auditing: what (if anything) have we learnt?. *Business ethics: A European review,* 10(1), 9-15.

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Phase 2: Mandatory reporting

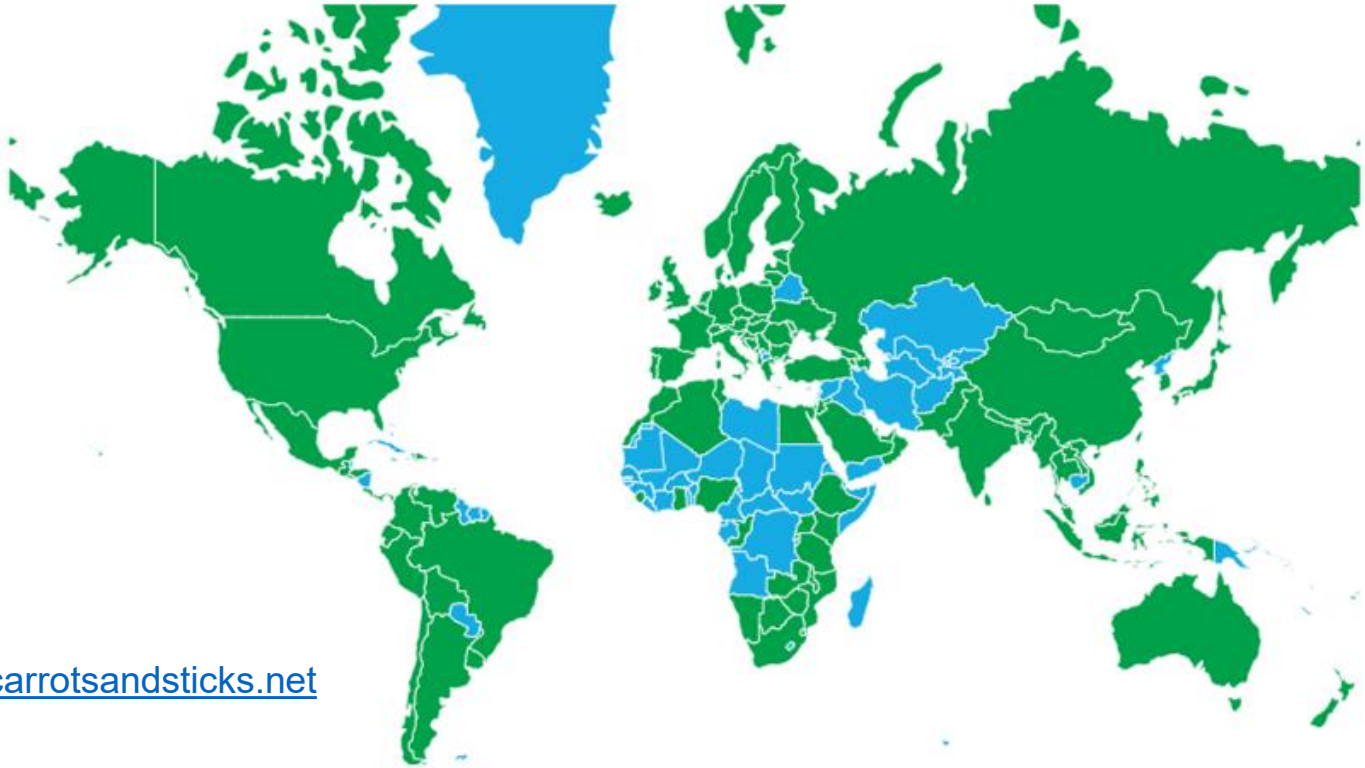
Carrots & Sticks

Home | Policies | About Carrots & Sticks | Methodology | Contact

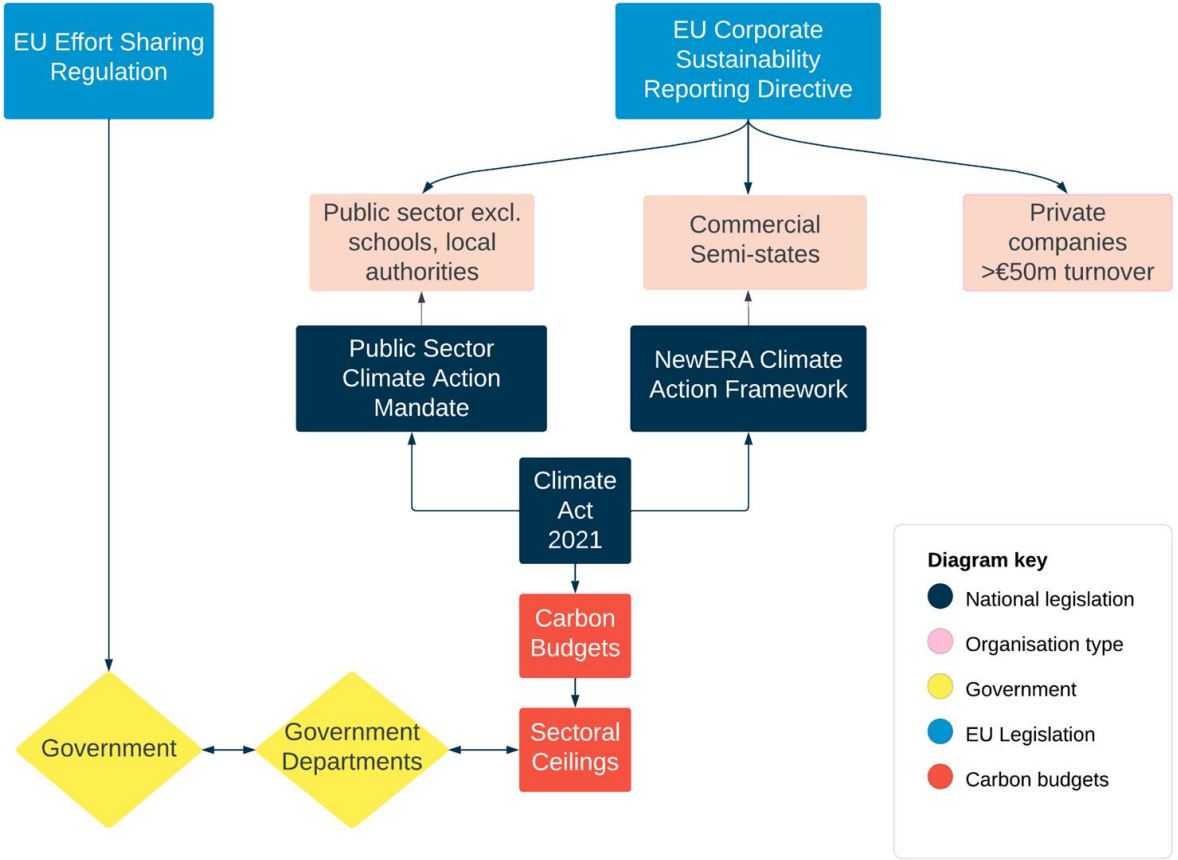
ESG & Sustainability Policy worldwide

Hover your cursor over a country to see the number of policies identified in that country. Click on a country to see a list of the policies identified in that country.

International Policies



carrotsandsticks.net

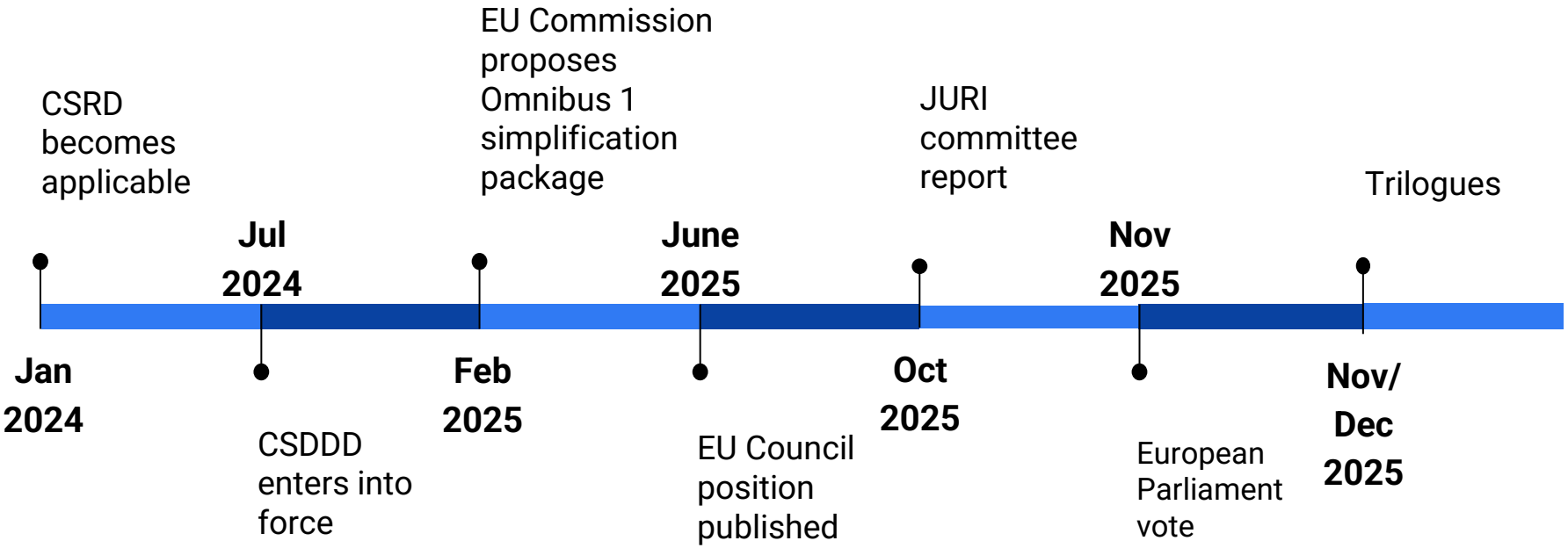


O'Dochartaigh and Pringle (2024)


Simplification
Single Market
Financing competitiveness
NW
W
SW
S
SE
European Commission
Commission européenne

	Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD)		Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD)	
	Original	Latest	Original	Latest
Scope	Two of: >250 employees €50m turnover €25m assets	Turnover €450m+ Employees 1,000+	Turnover €450m+ Employees 1,000+	Turnover €1.5bn+ Employees 5,000+
Timeline	First wave 2024	First wave 2026	First wave 2027	First wave 2029
Content	Value chain reporting Reasonable assurance ESRS E1 (Climate Change): Scope 1, 2, 3 & total GHG emissions	Value chain cap Limited assurance Scope 1, 2, 3 GHG emissions Less detailed explanation if climate change judged not material	Annual supplier DD* assessment Adopt and “put into effect” CTP** Best efforts to comply with 1.5C Harmonised civil liability	Risk-based DD Adopt CTP Member state civil liability Reasonable efforts to comply with Paris Agreement *Due Diligence **Climate Transition Plan

CSRD & CSDDD timeline



Disclosure, disclosure everywhere,
We shout with all our might;
Disclosure, disclosure everywhere,
nor any change in sight.

Dillard, J., & Vinnari, E. (2019). Critical dialogical accountability: From accounting-based accountability to accountability-based accounting. *Critical Perspectives on Accounting,* 62, 16-38.

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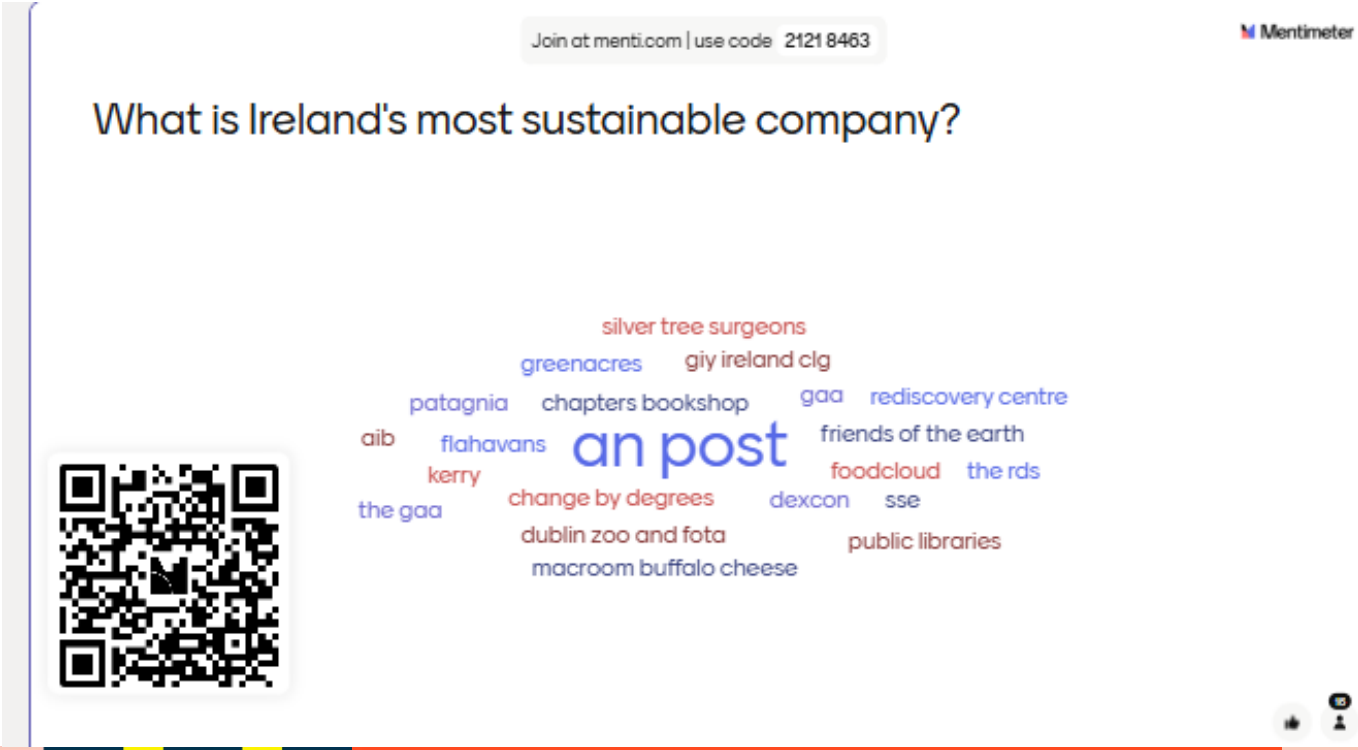
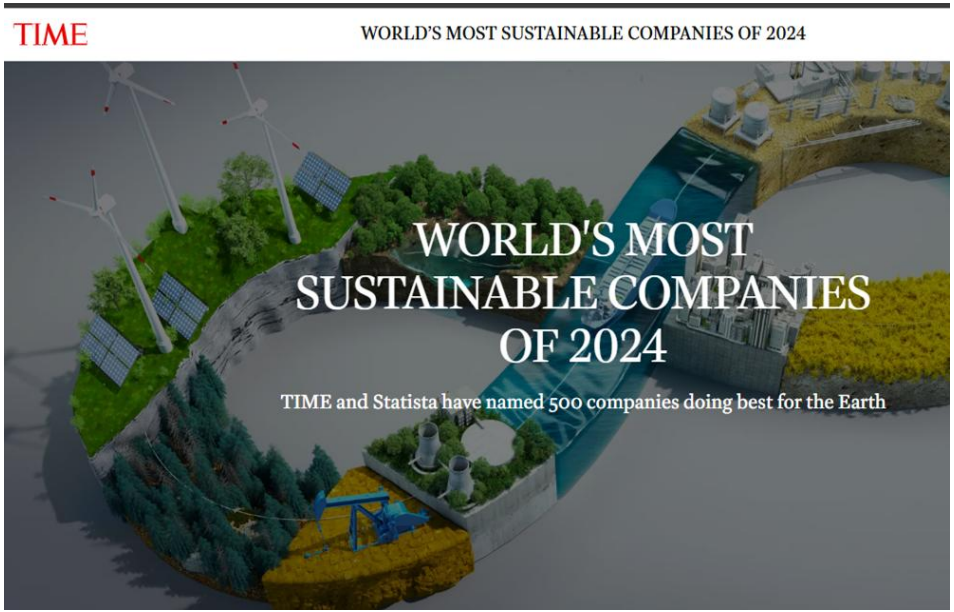
“..firms in countries that require non-financial disclosure adopt significantly more CSR activities. However, we also find that NFD [non-financial disclosure] regulation does not lead to lower levels of corporate irresponsibility.”

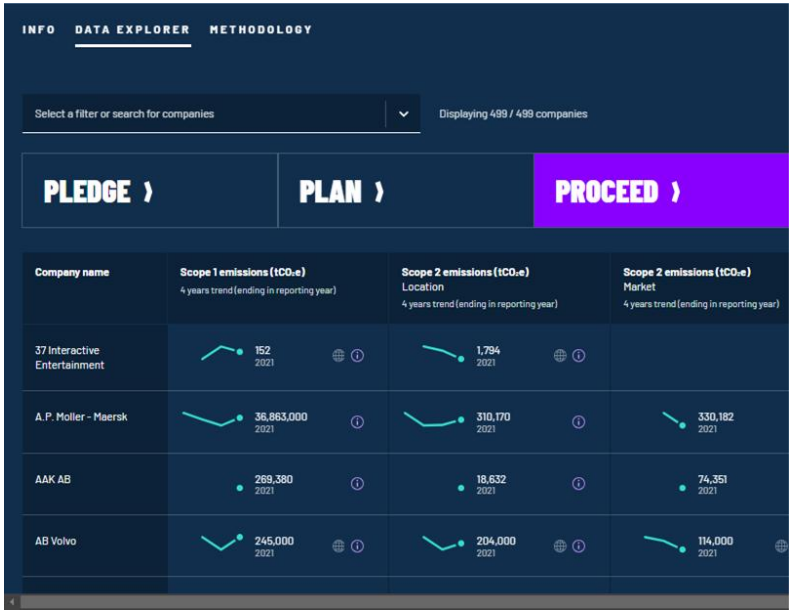
Jackson, G., Bartosch, J., Avetisyan, E., Kinderman, D., & Knudsen, J. S. (2020). Mandatory non-financial disclosure and its influence on CSR: An international comparison. *Journal of business ethics*, 162, 323-342.

What is the world's most sustainable business?



Aspiration v. Reality





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Emissions performance

UN Race to Zero Data Explorer - https://racetozerodataexplorer.org/proceed/

SEAI monitoring and reporting for public bodies - https://www.seai.ie/plan-your-energy-journey/public-sector/monitoring-and-reporting/public-sector-results/public-body-results

Sustainability reports and data tables

- Bus Éireann 2023 Sustainability Statement
- SSE Sustainability Data Tables

Voluntary Company Reporting to CDP

2013-2019 (tonne Co2eq)

Search...

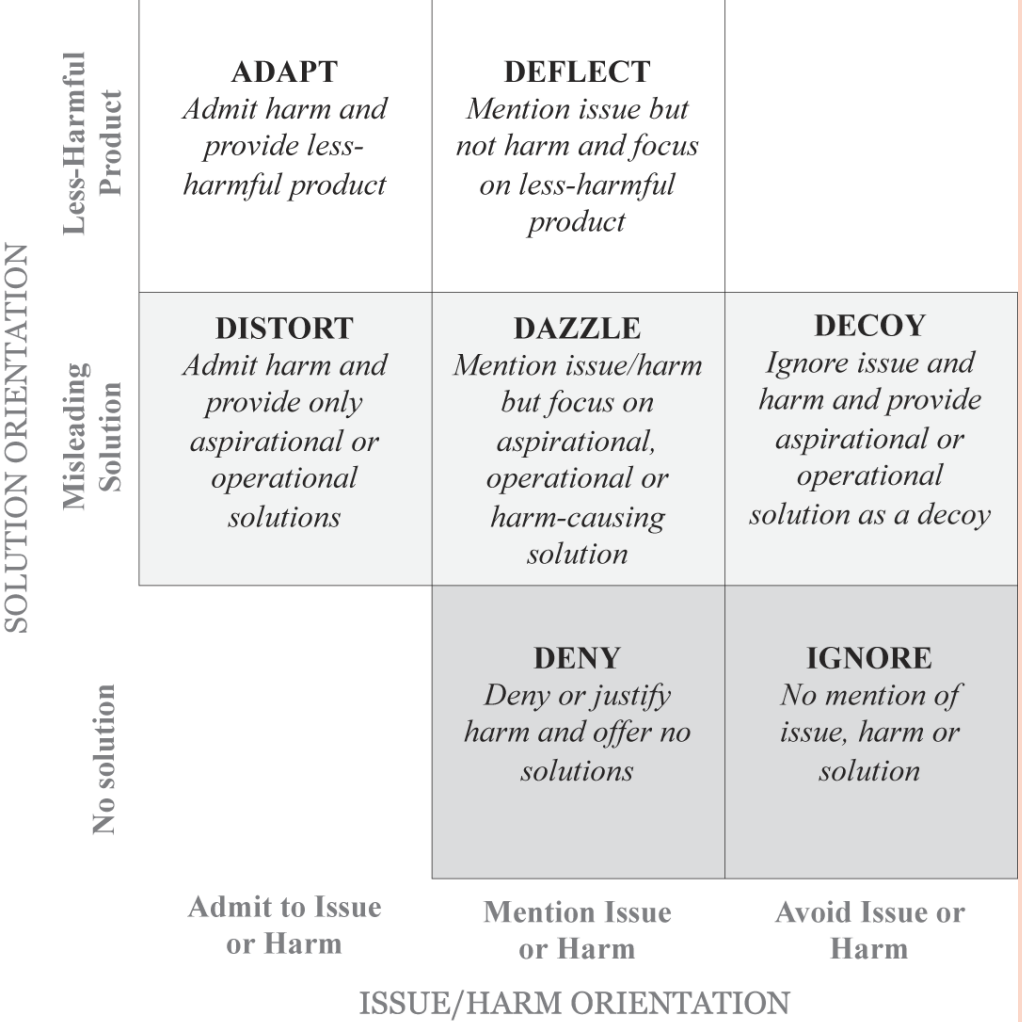
Company	Scope of Emissions	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Emissions Over Time
A.P. Moller - Maersk	Ireland					202.14	2726.29	24.30	
Abbott Laboratories	Ireland	55000.00	53000.00	53000.00	55000.00	31000.00	48000.00	47400.00	
Abbvie	Ireland	14762.31	16313.12	17705.45	6107.00	6287.16	7420.00	8368.00	
AIB Group	Ireland	24066.00	20051.00	18147.00	18161.00	18710.00	17765.00		
ALD SA	Ireland						87.00	61.00	
Allergan	Ireland	22482.00	21979.00	36329.00	11640.00	13708.00	14454.00	14893.00	
Alliance Data Systems	Ireland		4.90	16.20	38.20	46.10	38.93	26.20	
ALPS ALPINE	Ireland						2828.70	3194.03	
Amgen, Inc.	Ireland	14843.00	17591.00	20193.00	15166.00	3164.00	3492.00	4221.00	
An Post	Ireland				32036.00	30806.00	32023.00	30213.00	
Analog Devices, Inc.	Ireland					38987.00	45795.00	43550.44	
AptarGroup	Ireland	2693.94	2642.00	2830.21	2792.60	350.00	95.00	104.00	
Arista Networks	Ireland					108.54	104.02	141.15	
ARM Holdings	Ireland		20.90	41.20	33.00	60.63	13.24	12.73	
Aryzta AG	Ireland			17104.00	16093.30	12408.00	4620.00	4601.00	

1 / 11

Source: CDP / Voluntary Company Reporting • Only companies that reported specific Irish emissions were included in this table. Where available, Scope 2 market based emissions were used for emissions from 2015 - when it was added to CDP reporting - to give more accurate data for emissions at the electricity source.

Sargeant, 2021

Willis, J. (2023) The Greenwashing Hydra. Planet Tracker. Available: planet-tracker.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Greenwashing-Hydra-3.pdf



Source(s): Authors' own creation/work

Marshall, D., Rehme, J., O'Dochartaigh, A., Kelly, S., Boojihawon, R., & Chicksand, D. (2023). Reporting controversial issues in controversial industries. *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, *36*(9), 483-512.

How to spot greenwashing

https://thesustainableagency.com/blog/greenwashing-examples/

What next?

- 85% of CxOs have increased investments in sustainability in the past year and climate remains a top three issue for global C-suite (Deloitte 2024 CEO Sustainability Survey)
- E3G survey of 1,500 global business leaders suggests 97% support transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy (E3G, 2025)
- America is All In coalition - 74% of US GDP inc. 3,000+ businesses
- Investment in “clean power” is twice investment in fossil fuels (IEA, 2025)
- Number of companies setting SBTs grew 227% between Q4 2023 and Q2 2025 (SBTI, 2025)

Cohort stage	Definition	Signals observed	% of companies
RETREATING	Reduced sustainability efforts; public retractions or internal dismantling	Program cuts, coalition exits, reduction or removal of quantitative commitments, language modifications, shifting leadership rhetoric	13%
HOLDING PATTERN	No change, but no active public reaffirmation; neutral positioning	Static program levels, muted language, reduced external engagement, absence of sustainability PR	40%
REAFFIRMING	Public affirmation of commitments; strategy remains stable under pressure	Consistent messaging, board affirmation, program continuity	13%
ACCELERATING	Active, public expansion of strategy	New targets, increased investment, deeper operational integration, investor engagement	32%

Note: Percentages do not total 100%; one company included in the data has not made public the existence of a sustainability strategy and so was not included here.

Climate Change

Are Companies Actually Scaling Back Their Climate Commitments?

by Neil Hawkins and Kelly Cooper

September 23, 2025

Darya Ostrenko/Getty Images

[Hawkins and Cooper, 2025]

THANK YOU

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