



A Study on the Governance Logic and Operation Mechanism of Ireland's Green Skills Strategy

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Abstract. The industrial restructuring and employment risks caused by green transition have made skills matching a core issue of transformation governance. Regarding green skills strategy as a key governance tool to coordinate environmental goals, economic development and social equity, Ireland has formed a governance framework of transition pressure – policy embedding – operation mechanism driven by EU constraints and domestic carbon neutrality targets. It defines green skills as comprehensive capabilities integrating cognition, practice and value judgment, and institutionalizes them through goal translation, cross-sectoral coordination and skills supply regulation. However, the strategy faces structural tensions between long-term goals and short-term stability, high-skill orientation and low-skill adaptability, policy rationality and skills formation lag. Ireland's practice provides a reference for China to optimize skills policies under the dual-carbon goals.

Keywords: green skills; transition governance; institutional logic; operation mechanism

1 Introduction: Green Skills Strategy as a Key Governance Tool for Green Transition

1.1 Research Background

The global green transition has driven profound industrial restructuring. While fostering emerging sectors such as renewable energy and green buildings, it has also accelerated the transformation of traditional industries. Employment risks caused by skills mismatch have become prominent. As a frontier in EU green transition, Ireland has upgraded green skills strategy from a simple training tool to a comprehensive governance approach, providing a typical case for analyzing the governance function of skills policies.

1.2 Concept Definition

Ireland’s definition of green skills originates from the authoritative definition by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP): the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes needed to live, develop and support in an economy and society committed to reducing the environmental impact of human activities.^[1] This definition breaks through the limitation of technical skills and forms three core dimensions: environmental adaptability, focusing on reducing resource consumption and ecological damage; cross-sectoral universality, covering all economic sectors; and dynamic development, continuously expanding with technological iteration and policy renewal.^[2]

In local practice, Ireland further clarifies the institutional positioning of green skills: first, as a tool to achieve environmental goals, promoting emission reduction and consumption reduction in various industries through skill improvement; second, as a supporting carrier for economic transformation, providing human resources guarantee for green industries; third, as a safeguard mechanism for social equity, avoiding transition exclusion through inclusive skill access.^[22] Its conceptual features are universality (covering all occupations), practicality (fitting enterprise operational scenarios), and dynamism (integrating emerging dimensions such as digital skills).

According to application scenarios, green skills are divided into three categories: first, technical knowledge and skills, focusing on basic environmental awareness and compliance capabilities; second, highly specialized skills, targeting technology application and innovation in specific fields; third, cross-cutting skills, concentrating on sustainable thinking and action capabilities applicable to all industries. These three types of skills are applied in different work scenarios, forming a multi-level green skill supply system.^[3]

2 Analytical Perspective: Governance Logic of Green Skills Policy

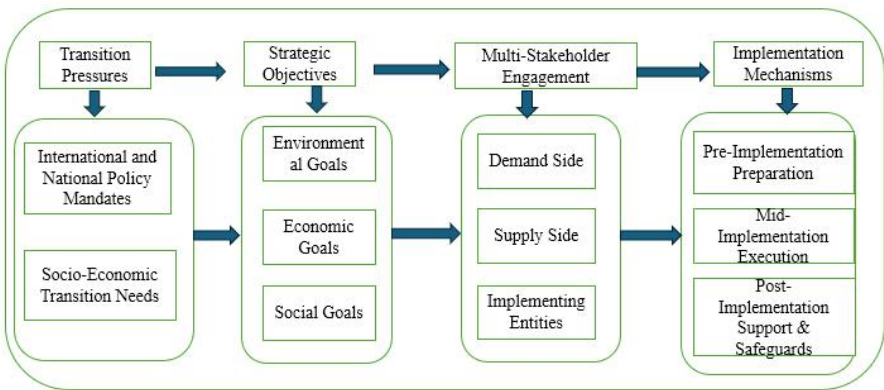


Fig. 1. Framework of Ireland’s Green Skills Strategy

Against the background of social green transition, skill policies have gone beyond the simple category of human capital investment and become an important governance tool for countries to address structural transition risks. Their core functions are reflected in three aspects: first, alleviating employment fluctuations caused by skill mismatch and ensuring social stability during transition; second, providing human resources support for green industries and enhancing sustainable economic competitiveness; third, avoiding the concentration of transition dividends through equitable skill distribution and realizing a just transition.^[22]

This perspective emphasizes the institutional embeddedness of skill policies, meaning that policy design must be deeply integrated with national transition development goals, national climate targets, industrial structure, labor market and education system, rather than being an isolated pile of training programs. The core issues concerned include how transition pressure is transformed into skill policy objectives; how multiple sectors coordinate to participate in skill governance; how skill supply dynamically adapts to labor market demand. Based on this, this paper constructs an analytical framework of transition pressure–policy embedding–operation mechanism (**Fig. 1**), treating green skills policy as an institutional arrangement embedded in national development strategy and governance system. Transition pressure includes international policy constraints and domestic development needs; policy embedding is reflected in the formulation and goal integration of green skills policies; operation mechanism focuses on the core implementation paths of policy delivery. Through this framework, this paper systematically analyzes how Ireland’s green skills strategy responds to transition challenges and achieves multi-objective coordination, providing theoretical and practical references for the optimization of China’s green skills policies.

3 Motivations for the Formation of Ireland’s Green Skills Strategy

3.1 Domestic Factors for the Formation of Green Skills Policy

Human Resource Demand Driven by Legal Climate Targets.

Ireland has incorporated 51% emission reduction by 2030 and carbon neutrality by 2050 into the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act, forming legally binding transition requirements^[14]. In the process of economic transformation, traditional energy, manufacturing and other industries need to shift toward green development, while emerging green industries require professional skilled personnel support^[15].

Severe Supply–Demand Imbalance in the Labor Market.

The skill supply–demand imbalance in the labor market highlights the urgency of policy intervention. Data from 2024 show that 75% of jobs in Ireland require green skills, with 400,000 green jobs, but only 12.3% of the labor force possesses green skills.^[5] The number of green job postings increased by 90% in 2022–2023, with

strong demand for skills such as environmental engineering and renewable energy engineering.^[15] Meanwhile, green employment shows significant structural characteristics: 68% male and 69% higher education holders, while workers in traditional industries, women and other groups face transition dilemmas, requiring skill training to ensure their equitable participation.^[5]

3.2 International Factors for the Formation of Green Skills Policy

EU Strategic Arrangements and Legal Constraints.

Strategic arrangements and legal constraints at the EU level constitute external pressure for Ireland's green skills strategy. The 2019 European Green Deal set the 2050 carbon neutrality target, included green skills training in priority action areas, and required member states to fully integrate green concepts into national education systems.^[9] EU Regulation 2018/1999^[11] further required member states to formulate 30-year long-term strategies, providing a legal basis for Ireland to develop its green skills strategy.^[13] In 2023, Ireland issued the Green Deal Industrial Plan, further strengthening the strategic status of green skills, proposing initiatives such as the establishment of a Net-Zero Industry Academy, and promoting the alignment of Irish skill standards with the EU framework.^[12]

EU Financial Support for Green Policy Implementation.

EU financial support provides safeguards for the implementation of Ireland's green skills strategy. In 2020, the EU planned to mobilize €1 trillion for green transition within a decade, with part of the funds earmarked to support member states' green skills training.^[10] Relying on policy tools such as the European Skills Agenda, Ireland actively participates in cross-border skill cooperation and experience sharing, promoting the alignment of domestic standards with the EU Sustainability Competence Framework.

4 Institutionalized Implementation Paths of the Green Skills Strategy

4.1 Goal Translation Mechanism: From Environmental Objectives to Skill Policy Objectives

Ireland translates macro environmental objectives into operable skill policy objectives through a three-level process. The first level is localization of international goals, converting the EU carbon neutrality target into the national quantitative indicator of 51% emission reduction by 2030 and clarifying key areas for skill support; the second level is industrialization of national goals, identifying specific green skill gaps in seven economic sectors including construction, energy and agriculture through research, such as energy-saving renovation skills in construction and carbon sequestration technology in agriculture; the third level is projectization of industrial goals, transforming green skill needs into specific training programs, such as

Residential Energy-saving Renovation Skill Certification and Offshore Wind Power Operation and Maintenance Training.

In the goal translation process, Ireland emphasizes multi-objective coordination, integrating environmental goals (emission reduction and consumption reduction), economic goals (industrial competitiveness improvement) and social goals (employment stability and inclusion) into skill policy design, forming a policy orientation unified by environment–economy–society triple objectives. For example, the Green Skills Fast Track program not only provides transition skills for workers in traditional industries (social goal) but also meets human resource demand in green industries (economic goal) and ultimately contributes to emission reduction targets (environmental goal).^[4]

At the stage of industrializing national goals, Ireland has implemented green skills training for seven major sectors including construction, energy, and agriculture. In the construction sector, 2,034 people participated in energy-saving retrofit training in 2022.^[24] In the energy sector, 1,149 trainees completed wind power operation and maintenance training.^[25]

4.2 Cross-sectoral Coordination Mechanism: Multi-stakeholder Skill Governance Structure

Ireland has built a multi-stakeholder coordination network of coordination–implementation–collaboration to realize division of labor and cooperation among environment, industry, employment, education and other departments. The National Further Education & Training (FET) Authority assumes the coordinating function, responsible for strategy formulation and resource integration; 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs) are responsible for specific training implementation; higher education institutions, enterprises, government departments and other entities participate in policy design and implementation as collaborators.^[22]

The core of the coordination mechanism is a demand-oriented decision-making model: industry associations feedback real-time demand through Skillnet Ireland, and Wind Energy Ireland participates in formulating wind power operation and maintenance training standards;^[23] enterprises deeply participate in curriculum design and practical training implementation, with the Electricity Supply Board (ESB) leading practical training for electric vehicle operation and maintenance apprenticeship programs;^[16] government departments are responsible for policy coordination and financial support to ensure precise matching between training supply and industrial demand.^[6]

Driven by cross-departmental collaboration, Ireland has launched 24 strategic actions and 71 sectoral actions covering seven major industries. In 2024, Skillnet Ireland served 24,000 enterprises and provided training for 90,100 participants.^[26] Currently, 75% of jobs in Ireland require green skills, with green employment reaching 400,000, demonstrating high efficiency in cross-sectoral governance^[27].

4.3 Skill Supply Regulation Mechanism: Retraining and Lifelong Learning

Ireland has established a dynamic supply regulation mechanism covering the cultivation of new labor force and the transformation of the existing labor force, with the core of building lifelong learning pathways.^[21]

Supply regulation is characterized by stratification and classification: at the regional level, 8 regional green skill centers have been built in weak areas such as the midlands and northwest to develop order-based training programs and narrow regional gaps;^[5] ^[7] at the group level, in response to the structural problem that women account for 32% of green employment, special empowerment programs have been launched to increase women's employment share in male-dominated fields;^[17] at the industrial level, in view of the weak technical capacity of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), green digital transformation training has been carried out to improve enterprises' skill application capabilities.^[6]

Meanwhile, Ireland has established a green skill certification system divided into junior, intermediate and advanced levels, forming a closed loop of training–certification–employment. Data shows that holders of intermediate certification earn an average of 18% higher than non-certified holders, effectively motivating workers to participate in skill improvement.^[20]

For new labor entrants, Ireland promotes greening of higher education by embedding sustainability courses in undergraduate programs, focusing on green transition topics in postgraduate research, and building industry-university collaborative laboratories^[5]. For existing workers, it implements the Green Skills Rapid Pathway, offering 4–8-week low-threshold reskilling courses with 80% of costs covered by government subsidies^[28]. The mechanism adopts stratified and categorized regulation: regionally, 8 regional green skills centers have been established to deliver tailored training and reduce regional disparities^[26]; socially, targeted empowerment programs are launched to address the gender imbalance where women account for only 32% of green employment^[17].

5 Monitoring Mechanism of Ireland's Green Skills Strategy

Ireland has established an institutionalized, regularized and quantifiable monitoring mechanism for its green skills strategy. Coordinated by SOLAS and implemented by the Skills and Labor Market Research Unit (SLMRU), it has formed a closed-loop system of indicator setting-data collection-regular reporting-effectiveness evaluation. Centering on the core dimensions of skill supply-demand matching, training implementation, equity and inclusion, and employment benefits, the monitoring adopts unified official statistical standards to realize dynamic tracking of the strategy's implementation outcomes.^[5]

5.1 Four Categories of Monitoring Indicator System

Ireland has set four categories of quantifiable core indicators. The first is skill demand and employment indicators, including the proportion of green skill positions, the scale and growth rate of green employment, and industry skill gaps^[5]. The second is training supply indicators, covering the number of participants in green training, project completion rate, and the number of qualification certifications obtained^[5]. The third is equity and regional coordination indicators, including the gender structure of green employment, the coverage level of regional skill centers, and the participation ratio of vulnerable groups in training^[31]. The fourth is economic and social effectiveness indicators, including the wage premium for certified personnel, the completion rate of strategic actions, and the supporting degree of training for industrial transformation and emission reduction goals^[32].

5.2 Official Monitoring Reports

Ireland establishes a regular release system. The authoritative reports include: Green Skills 2030: First National Further Education and Training Strategy for the Green Transition (October 15, 2024)^[5]: Ireland's first national green skills strategy, which sets baseline indicators and the monitoring framework. Green Skills 2030 Implementation Plan (2025)^[26]: Defines 24 strategic actions and 71 sectoral actions with a supporting progress monitoring tool. Quarterly Skills Bulletin (April 30, 2025)^[29]: The first quarterly monitoring bulletin on green skills, covering green employment data for Q4 2024. Spring Skills Bulletin 2025 (2025): Measures green skills intensity and job demand based on the EU ESCO framework. The Future of Green Skills: An Irish Perspective (January 2023): Released jointly by SOLAS and Deloitte, identifying emerging green occupations and skills gaps.

5.3 Official Monitoring Data

In terms of monitoring data, the authorities have released key findings:

Green employment scale: By Q4 2024, Ireland had approximately 400,000 green jobs, including 120,000 in agriculture and 280,000 in non-agricultural sectors. The average annual growth rate of green employment in the past five years was 6.4%, significantly higher than the national average of 3.4%^[29]. Green skills coverage: Data for Q4 2024 show that 75% of jobs in Ireland require some level of green skills^[5]^[30]. Strategic action implementation: By 2025, Green Skills 2030 delivered 24 strategic actions and 71 sectoral actions covering seven major economic sectors including construction, energy, and agriculture^[26]. Employment advantage of green skills: LinkedIn data for 2024 indicate that job seekers with green skills in Ireland had a 79.8% higher hiring rate than the overall workforce^[18].

6 Critical Analysis of the Green Skills Strategy

6.1 Tension Between Long-term Green Goals and Short-term Employment Stability

There is an inherent contradiction between the long-term nature of green transition and the short-term stability of the employment market. Workers in some traditional industries in Ireland (such as fossil energy and traditional manufacturing) face unemployment risks. Although programs such as the Green Skills Fast Track have enabled 42% of participants to successfully transition, some low-skilled and elderly workers still struggle to meet the requirements of green jobs.^[4] Green skills policies need to strike a balance between promoting long-term transition and ensuring short-term employment: avoiding over-protection of traditional industries that hinders the transition process, and preventing social instability caused by excessively rapid transition. This balance has become a core challenge in the implementation of green skills policies.

6.2 Tension Between High-skill Orientation and Low-skill Group Bearing Capacity

There is a sharp contrast between the demand for high-skilled talents in green industries and the skill-bearing capacity of low-skilled groups. Data from 2024 show that 69% of green jobs in Ireland require higher education qualifications, with a prominent proportion of professional technical and management positions. However, some groups in the existing labor force of traditional industries have low education levels and face great difficulties in skill upgrading.^[5] Although green skills policies have launched low-threshold training programs, gaps still exist between the high-skill-oriented industrial demand and the learning capacity of low-skilled groups, exacerbating the skill divide and social inequality to a certain extent.

6.3 Tension Between Policy Planning Rationality and Time Lag in Skill Formation

Ireland's green skills strategy is highly rational in planning, with early research to clarify needs, design plans and orderly implementation. However, the long-term nature of skill formation leads to a time lag in policy effectiveness. For example, higher education greening reform takes 4–6 years to produce qualified graduates, while the expansion of green industries has more urgent demand for green skilled personnel;^[19] skill upgrading of the existing labor force also requires a certain period and cannot immediately fill job gaps.^[8] In addition, green technology iterates rapidly, and policy planning may lag technological development, leading to disconnection between some training content and market demand.

7 Transferability of Ireland's Green Skills Strategy to China

Ireland's successful implementation of the Green Skills 2030 strategy relies on distinctive political-economic institutional conditions, including strong state capacity, EU-level binding targets and funding, a long-standing social partnership system, enterprise-led demand governance.

7.1 Core Political-Economic Enabling Conditions in Ireland

Binding Legal and Target Constraints.

Ireland has embedded climate and skills targets into legislation via the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021. These targets are directly translated into the Green Skills 2030 strategy, forming a legally enforceable chain from climate goals to skill policies^[14].

Strong and Specialized State Capacity.

A centralized governance structure supports implementation: SOLAS leads national strategy, resource integration, and monitoring; 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs) deliver training; and sectoral networks such as Skillnet Ireland coordinate industry demands. The system features clear division of labor, unified standards, and stable financial support.

EU Policy Drivers and Financial Transfers.

Ireland benefits strongly from EU frameworks, including the European Green Deal, Fit for 55, and NextGenerationEU, which provide both mandatory targets and substantial funding. For example, the EU allocated €114 million for construction retrofit skills training, supplementing national budgets and lowering fiscal pressure^[33].

Social Partnership and Enterprise-Led Governance.

A long-established social partnership model brings government, industry associations, trades unions, and training providers into joint decision-making. Enterprises, especially through Skillnet Ireland, participate directly in identifying skill gaps, designing curricula, and co-funding training, ensuring strong alignment between training supply and industrial demand^[34].

7.2 Availability of These Conditions in China

Legal and Target Binding Force.

China has elevated carbon peaking and carbon neutrality to a national strategy with clear legal and policy support, strong top-down enforcement, and detailed sectoral roadmaps. China's institutional advantage in unified national action supports the translation of climate targets into skill policies.

State Capacity and Governance Structure.

China has strong organizational and mobilization capacity, with a complete vocational education system and multi-level governance. However, coordination across education, human resources, industry, and environment departments is relatively fragmented. China can learn Ireland's coordination–implementation–collaboration model but needs to strengthen cross-departmental collaboration and professional monitoring institutions.

External Binding and Financial Support.

China lacks supranational mandatory targets and large-scale external transfer payments. Green skills funding relies mainly on domestic fiscal resources. China must rely on domestic fiscal and social investment rather than external incentives.

Social Partnership and Enterprise-Led Mechanism.

Chinese enterprise participation in vocational education is encouraged but remains inadequate due to weak motivation and incomplete incentives. China can adopt enterprise-led demand orientation but needs institutional innovations to enhance industry–education integration.

8 Conclusion

Ireland's experience is highly referential in goal translation, cross-departmental coordination, enterprise participation and monitoring systems. However, full replication is infeasible due to differences in external constraints, state–society relations and economic structure. China should adapt Ireland's institutional design to local context and build a green skills governance system suitable for dual-carbon goals.

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