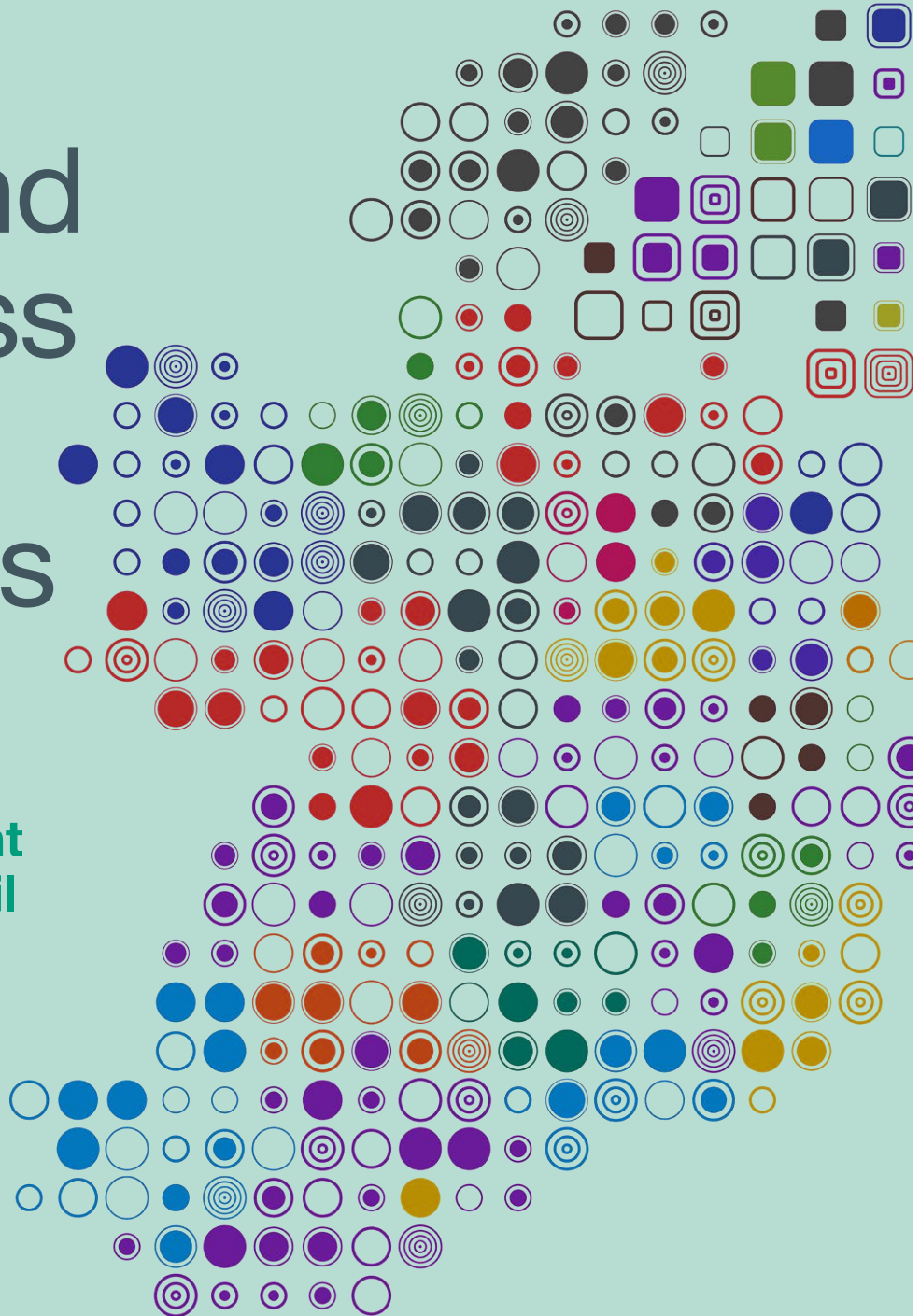




All-Island Business Policy Priorities 2025

An Ibec/CBI Joint
Business Council
(JBC) paper



June 2025



Introduction

The Ibec/CBI Joint Business Council (JBC) has been fostering constructive all-island economic discussions since the 1970s.

Last year we saw restored political stability in Northern Ireland and the re-emergence of a functioning North-South Ministerial Council (NSMC) which cleared the way for better co-operation across the island. This year new challenges have emerged with a rise in global uncertainty stemming from US trade and tariff policy and heightened geo-political disruption. Now more than ever, the all-island economy must focus on building resilience and strong co-operation. Businesses across the island are eager to see aligned policy support from both governments that enables economic opportunities and widens the benefits from cross-border cooperation.

The on-going UK re-set of post Brexit relationships with the EU and separately with Ireland as co-guarantors of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement are encouraging steps towards this goal. Further progress in both processes must also include underpinning support for business across this island. Already cooperation has been agreed by the UK with the EU on key issues such as energy and carbon reduction where EU/UK and Ireland-Britain and Northern Ireland must align to deliver optimum outcomes. How these parallel policy and regulatory processes are aligned from a trade and business growth perspective is a core JBC concern for 2025.

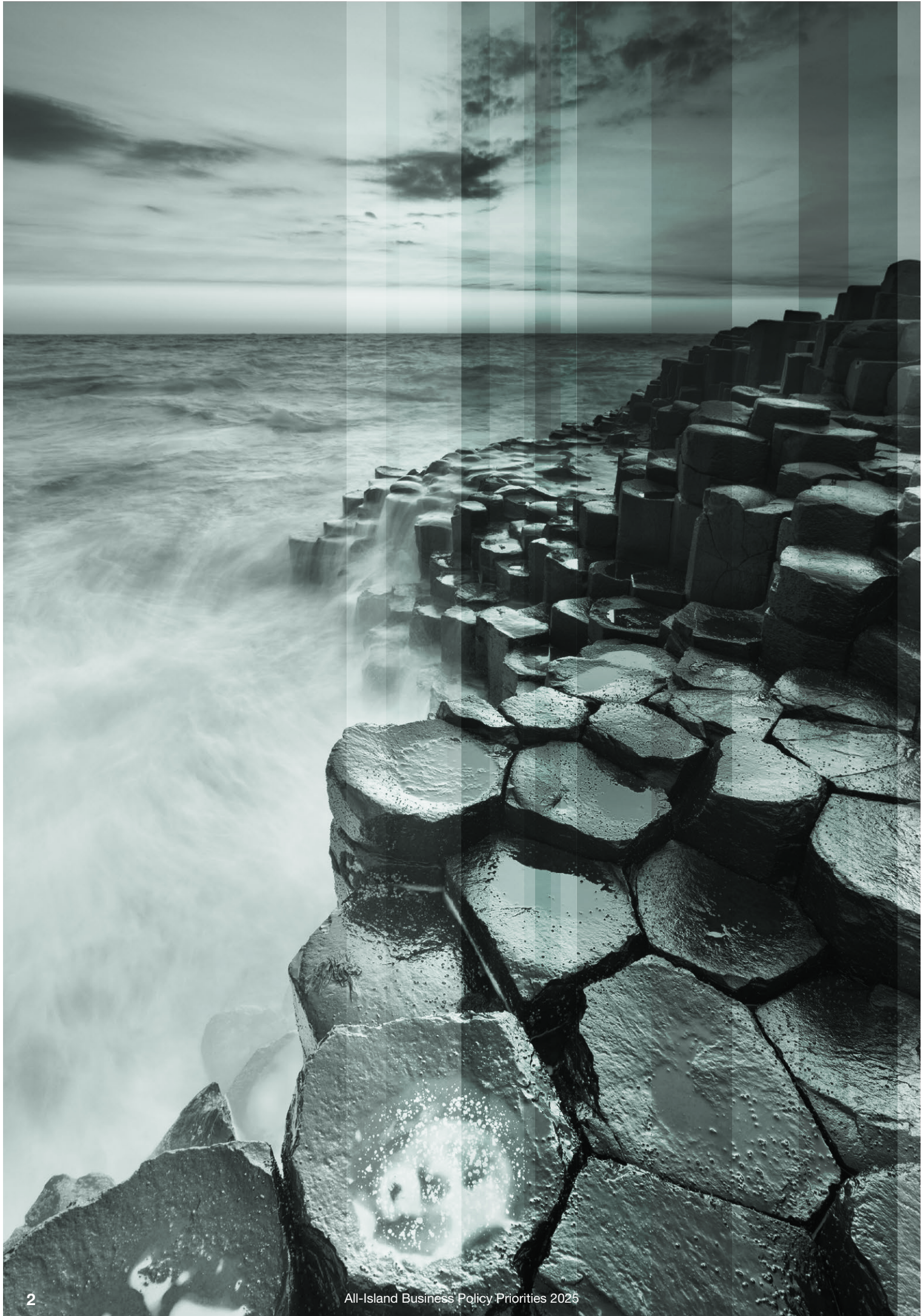
Ibec and CBI believe that constructive conversations and concrete actions are key to securing and propelling the all-island economy. Our business-led conversations are held on both sides of the border, and we are acutely aware of the political difficulties faced which add to the need for greater collaboration at a policy level and between the public and private sectors.

Our conversations and ongoing engagement with business across the island have identified the following key policy priorities for all-island firms:

- Protect and build on all-island trade and business success
- Invest in essential infrastructure and connectivity
- Build a low carbon reputation for the all-island economy
- Maximise the benefits of the all-island labour market
- Highlight the synergies for private sector investment in the all-island economy
- Prioritise long-term resilience of the all-island economy

This high-level summary of Ibec/CBI JBC priority policy asks is supported by more detailed discussion of these issues in our previous reports and consultation responses such as:

- **Ibec/CBI 'Connected' Report (2015)** describing the core transport infrastructure investment needed for a prosperous island with a population over 8m by mid-century.
- **Ibec/CBI 'Business on a Connected Island' Report (2018)** evidencing how Ireland and Northern Ireland benefit economically from the improvements brought about by peace, stability and an invisible border for goods, services, labour and finance
- **Sustaining the Benefits of All-island Business (2022):** CBI NI and Ibec members detailed the tangible benefits operating all-island is delivering for them.
- **Ibec/ CBI Response to the All-island Rail Review (2023)**
- **Ibec/CBI 'Shared Energy Futures' Report (2024)** highlighting the need for increased N/S co-operation and policy alignment on energy and net zero ambitions for the island.





1. Protect and build on all-island trade success

The island economy has experienced significant growth in cross border trade over the last 25 years. Trade has grown from €2 billion in 1998 (when the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement was signed) to €15 billion in 2023. Today businesses in both jurisdictions recognize the significance of peace and stability for investment, economic growth, and rising living standards.

The Belfast/Good Friday Agreement along with the UK's former EU membership facilitated the removal of borders, increased foreign direct investment, tourism, and trade flows across the island. However, the UK's departure from the EU in January 2020 has introduced a degree of complexity, and the implementation of the Windsor Framework to ensure all-island trade remains as frictionless as possible, is still underway. Nonetheless, business leaders across the island continue to report the benefits of operating on an all-island basis. These benefits include integrated supply chains, enhanced competitiveness, integrated production capacity, and better access to talent.

As firms across the island consider the impact of any newly introduced US Tariffs (and any potential retaliatory tariffs that the EU might impose) on global trading conditions, it is more important than ever that opportunities for pivoting supply chains closer to home, building resilience and enhancing competitiveness are seized. For this reason, CBI/Ibec call on the governments in both jurisdictions to:

- Adequately fund and support all-island institutions such as InterTrade Ireland (ITI) and Tourism Ireland which work to promote all-island trade and economic activity.
- Mobilise and utilise all the agreed North-South institutional architecture set up under the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement.
- Ensure the new UK/EU agreement setting out post-Brexit relations on areas including trade, incorporates policy coordination to help ensure the ongoing success of all-island trade
- Implement the Windsor Framework provisions enabling the NSMC and cross-border bodies such as ITI to make proposals that protect and support N/S trade and business to the EU/UK Specialised Committees established under the Trade and Cooperation Agreement.
- Ensure Northern Ireland achieves its 'observer status' regarding the UK-EU Joint Committee and that the priorities of the all-island economy are effectively represented in this process
- Enhance co-ordination on operational issues where the UK and EU diverge, such as the Carbon Border Adjustment Model (CBAM)



2. Invest in essential infrastructure and connectivity

Coordination

- Set up a Joint N-S Committee to monitor and prioritise all-island Infrastructure Projects.

Road and Rail

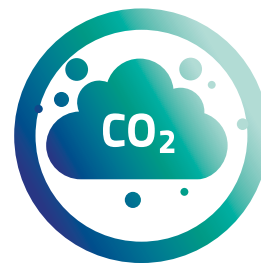
- Engage in regular N-S collaboration on spatial strategies and long-term development plans, such as for the National Development Plan and its regional implementation.
- Prioritise the delivery of all-island infrastructure projects that will deliver most economic benefit: such as the A5 North-west transport corridor, the North/South Electricity Interconnector and the train service along the N-S economic corridor.
- Ensure decisions taken today regarding the island's road and rail network are consistent with population projections and comparable in nature to competitive global regions.
- Complete an all-island core road network -including for electric vehicle charging- while supporting de-carbonisation targets

- Prioritise the Belfast/Dublin Enterprise rail service and ensure it has long-term flexibility to respond to market growth and commuter needs (frequency, capacity and speed). Examine the economic gains from having a high-speed hourly service.

- Collaborate on the delivery of a rapid EV charging point network across the island.

Water

- Set up an **all-island multi-stakeholder taskforce** to mobilise financing and strategic investment in all-island water infrastructure to leverage economies of scale and shared catchments to address shared issues and challenges of supply quality and resilience.



3.

Build a low carbon reputation for the all-island economy

- **Regional Collaboration:** Embrace new opportunities for North-South and East-West collaboration and policy alignment on energy and climate action.
- **Future Energy Scoping Study:** Undertake an all-island Energy Futures 2040 scoping exercise to plan for the future energy landscape.
- **Investment Mobilisation:** Enhance regulatory and policy co-operation and certainty to mobilize investment.
- **Transition Acceleration:** Accelerate the net zero transition through new research collaborations and knowledge transfers.
- **Electricity Market Support:** Ensure adequate investment in electricity infrastructure, reinforcing for greater capacity etc.
- **Single Electricity Market:** Protect and strengthen the all-island SEM, which has been integral to reinforcing energy security and integrating renewables.
- **Gas Security:** Strengthen gas security and decarbonisation efforts.
- **Widen scope of the all-island electricity market** to help tackle the immediate challenges and, looking to the future, **deliver a secure and self-sufficient Single Energy Market** on the island of Ireland.
- **Renewables Infrastructure Investment:** Invest in generation and network infrastructure to support renewables and address capacity deficits.
- **Align policy across the island for offshore energy:** Enable the opportunities identified in InterTrade Ireland's 2025 report "*Significant offshore wind and hydrogen opportunities for SMEs on the Island of Ireland*" to be seized upon and commit to addressing the bottlenecks through better all-island co-operation.
- **Crisis Co-operation:** Enhance energy crisis cooperation and planning between Great Britain, Ireland and Northern Ireland.
- **Address planning bottlenecks:** Urgently address delays in strategic energy and renewables infrastructure development due to planning and regulatory challenges.
- **Regulatory Certainty:** Provide clear policy signals and guidance for investors and businesses to support the net zero transition.
- **Align with Net Zero/Green Deal standards** across the island to adapt products and services.



4.

Maximise the benefits of the all-island labour market

- Use the compelling evidence base in the 2024 Labour Employment Economic Forum (LEEF) report¹ on the all-island labour market to urgently address bottlenecks and barriers to all-island labour mobility that are within the competence of both administrations to remove (e.g tax and social welfare treatment of cross-border workers, recognition of qualifications etc).
- Hold regular Ireland-UK bilateral conversations on all-island labour mobility issues such as to enable more remote cross-border working in the All-island Labour Market.
- Restore the all-island Expert Group on Future Skills to be a dedicated voice in support of the North-South alignment of course content and qualifications.
- Develop a labour mobility strategy for the island to ensure that the all-island labour market can meet the needs of industry over the next 25 years.
- Strengthen the all-island labour market by attracting the necessary talent to the island.
- Build the evidence base for introducing an “all-island work visa” to underpin labour mobility across the island.

1. LEEF (2024) “A study into the current conditions of the island of Ireland labour market, and challenges and opportunities for effective operation for workers and businesses across the island”.



5. Highlight the synergies for private sector investment in the all-island economy

- Explore the possibility of securing funding from the EU and other sources for all-island investment, particularly in a sustainability context.
- Approach Global Investors for additional investment across the island to support and sustain peace and prosperity underpinned by Belfast/Good Friday Agreement and supported by the EU UK and Irish Government.
- Consider the development of a new joint Strategic Investment Fund to mobilise critical infrastructure, network upgrades etc. and is additional to existing commitments such as Shared Island Funding or the EU/UK PEACEPLUS Programme



6. Prioritise long-term resilience of the all-island

- Ensure strategic planning to protect the All-island Economy in areas where lack of co-ordination or disruption could leave the island vulnerable to economic shocks, including: security, demography, food production, digital and AI and climate change.
- Support an evidence-based assessment of All-island Economy policy issues using AMNIE (a Macro-model of the Northern Ireland Economy) developed jointly by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) and the National Institute of Economic and Social Research.

Ibec/CBI would be delighted to discuss any of the above recommendations should you wish to explore further.

For further information

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