



AN INNOVATIVE CAREER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME THAT ENABLES TALENTED,
INTERNATIONAL RESEARCHERS TO WORK ON INDUSTRIALLY FOCUSED
SUSTAINABILITY RESEARCH PROJECTS

Sustain-FIT: A Guide for Companies

An Enterprise Ireland initiative, co-funded by European Union's Horizon Europe programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No. 101177663.



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What is Sustain-FIT?

Sustain-FIT is designed to help companies turn sustainability ambition into real commercial advantage. It provides direct access to cutting-edge research talent and deep technical expertise - all focused on addressing the sustainability challenges most relevant to your business. Sustain-FIT enables industry-academic partnerships that deliver practical, applied solutions across areas including clean energy, circular manufacturing, sustainable food systems, low-carbon construction, and digital innovation.

The programme is an Enterprise Ireland initiative, co-funded by the EU's Horizon Europe Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions and supports Irish-based companies in collaborating with leading higher-education or research institutions on targeted sustainability projects.

Through Sustain-FIT, your company partners with a Higher Education Institution (HEI) or a Research Performing Organisation (RPO) to host a postdoctoral researcher - a Sustain-FIT Fellow - who works on a clearly defined sustainability challenge tailored to your business and aligned with the EU Green Deal.

Sustain-FIT can enable your company to;

- Collaborate with world-class researchers - access leading academic expertise to accelerate your sustainability strategy.
- De-risk sustainability innovation - explore new ideas, technologies, and processes with structured support and reduced risk.
- Translate [EU Green Deal](#) goals into business outcomes - advance solutions aligned with Europe's climate and circular-economy priorities while delivering measurable commercial impact.

Benefits to your company

- Sustain-FIT is structured to deliver outcomes that matter in real commercial environments, including:
- Practical, applied research tailored to your company's needs
- Access to international research talent and specialised expertise
- New or improved products, processes, services, or intellectual property (IP) aligned with sustainability and climate objectives.

Guide for companies

This guide to Sustain-Fit for companies provides essential details on eligibility, partnership models, funding levels, application steps, and how to shape a high-impact sustainability project tailored to your company. It is a guide for Irish companies;

- operating on a for-profit basis (SMEs, scale-ups or larger enterprises) interested in sustainability-driven innovation
- willing to host a 6–12 month secondment of a Sustain-Fit Fellow at an appropriate point during the lifetime of the 3 year project.

Companies do **not** apply alone. Instead, they participate as a **Secondment Enterprise** within a joint application led by an academic researcher and host institution.

What type of projects does Sustain-FIT support?

Sustain-FIT projects are industry-driven, challenge-led and aligned with the EU Green Deal. They typically focus on solving a real business problem while contributing to climate, environmental or sustainability goals.

Successful projects typically:

- Address a real commercial or operational challenge
- Have clear sustainability and climate impact
- Show strong commitment from the company mentor
- Demonstrate realistic pathways to exploitation or adoption
- Balance academic excellence with business relevance
- Align with at least one of the thematic areas of the EU Green Deal;

EU Green Deal Thematic Areas

Clean Energy

Solutions that support the decarbonisation of Europe's energy system, including increased renewable energy deployment, modernised and digitally enabled electricity grids, and the development of low-carbon fuels. These initiatives help integrate higher shares of renewables, empower consumers, and strengthen energy system resilience in line with EU 2030 and 2050 climate targets.

Sustainable Industry

Technologies and processes that advance a low-carbon, resource-efficient industrial base. This includes innovation in circular manufacturing, bio-based and recycled materials, waste reduction, and emissions-reducing production methods that align with the EU Circular Economy Action Plan and industrial decarbonisation strategies.

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Building and Renovation

Approaches that improve the performance, sustainability, and energy efficiency of Europe's buildings. This includes circular construction methods, low-carbon materials, renovation solutions that reduce energy use, and innovations that support the decarbonisation of heating and cooling—advancing the aims of the EU Renovation Wave.

Sustainable Transport

Projects that contribute to cleaner and smarter mobility systems by enabling modal shift, enhancing active travel and public transport, reducing private car dependency, and supporting data-driven mobility planning. These efforts align with EU goals to cut transport emissions and build more equitable and sustainable mobility networks.

Sustainable Food Systems

Innovations that advance a circular and climate-responsible food system. These include the upcycling of biological residues, green processing technologies, bio-based product development, improved supply-chain efficiency through digital tools, and solutions that enhance plant and ecosystem resilience while reducing environmental impacts.

Eliminating Pollution

Technologies and methods that reduce harmful emissions and contaminants in line with the EU Zero Pollution Action Plan. This includes advanced materials for removing PFAS and other persistent pollutants, enhanced environmental monitoring systems, and solutions that protect water quality and ecosystems.

Biodiversity

Addressing environmental protection, promoting bioeconomy and the issue of species and ecosystem loss. The main principle of this pillar is to build society's resilience to the impacts of climate change such as forest fires, food insecurity and disease outbreaks.

Climate Action

At the heart of the Commission's European Green Deal is the objective to become climate neutral by 2050. The aim is to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions and use technology or natural carbon sinks, such as forests to deal with the remaining emissions.

Digitalisation for Sustainability

AI-driven tools, intelligent monitoring systems, and digital optimisation technologies that enhance efficiency, reduce waste, and improve resource use across sectors. These solutions strengthen supply-chain transparency, support real-time decision-making, and act as key enablers of sustainability and competitiveness.

What is the company's role?

As a **Secondment Enterprise**, your company plays a central role in shaping and delivering the project.

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Your responsibilities include:

- Defining a clear business challenge aligned with sustainability and the Green Deal
- Hosting the Sustain-Fit Fellow for 6–12 months during the 36-month fellowship
- Appointing a Secondment Mentor to supervise and support the Sustain-Fit Fellow
- Providing access to relevant data, facilities, expertise or operational environments
- Contributing to knowledge transfer, exploitation and potential commercialisation

The Fellow remains employed and funded by the academic host, not by the company.

What does the company gain?

Participating companies benefit from:

- Access to high-calibre international research talent
- Applied research tailored to your commercial and sustainability needs
- Reduced R&D risk and cost (salary and core costs are funded)
- New Intellectual Property (IP), prototypes, processes or data insights
- Stronger links with Ireland's research and innovation ecosystem

Sustain-FIT is particularly attractive for companies that want to:

- Advance sustainability without building large internal R&D teams
- Explore new technologies or markets
- Strengthen ESG and regulatory readiness

Funding & costs: what should companies know?

- The Sustain-Fit Fellow's salary, mobility and research costs are funded through Sustain-FIT
- Funds are administered by the host research organisation
- Companies are not required to pay the Sustain-Fit Fellow's salary
- Companies typically contribute in-kind support (mentorship, facilities, data, expertise)

Any additional financial arrangements are agreed separately between the company and host institution and must comply with programme rules.

Intellectual Property (IP)

Intellectual property arising from a Sustain-FIT project is managed by the Host Higher Education Institute (HEI) or Research Performing Organisation (RPO) in accordance with Ireland's National IP Protocol 2019 and the Horizon 2020 Marie-Curie requirements.

Enterprise Ireland does not claim any ownership of resulting IP. A written agreement between the Host Organisation and the Company partner must be completed to address IP management, confidentiality, publication, and secondment arrangements. Adherence to this

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written agreement on IP between the Host Organisation and the Company partner ensures companies can exploit or commercialise results while respecting academic and EU obligations.

For more information visit:

National IP Protocol: <https://www.knowledgetransferireland.com/Reports-Publications/Ireland-s-National-IP-Protocol-2019-.pdf>

Enterprise Ireland guidance for companies working with RPOs: <https://www.enterprise-ireland.com/en/Research-Innovation/Companies/IPP-Putting-public-research-to-work-for-Ireland.pdf>

How the application process works - from a company perspective

Stage 1: Project formation

Begins: Monday 2nd March 2026

Ends: Thursday 30th April 2026

1. Identify a Sustainability Challenge

Define a problem or opportunity aligned with your business strategy and the EU Green Deal.

2. Connect with a Host Organisation (Higher Education Institute / Research Providing Organisation)

Work with a Higher Education Institute or Research Performing Organisation with relevant expertise. A list of participating HEIs and RPOs is available from the Sustain-Fit team.

Email: sustainfit@enterprise-ireland.com

3. Agree the Project & Secondment Plan

Co-design the research objectives, work plan and secondment structure. At this point, an international post-doc academic researcher must be identified as the third party to the project.

The academic researcher must complete the application form.

Your HEI / RPO partner can assist with identifying suitable candidates. If you need assistance please contact Sustainfit@enterprise-ireland.com

Stage 2: Application submission – application portal opens Friday 1st – Friday 29th May 2026

4. Confirm Your Commitment

Nominate a secondment mentor and formally support the application.

5. Application & Evaluation

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The international post-doc academic researcher submits the application. Companies may be involved in interview preparation and project clarification.

Stage 3: Project evaluation phase 1 (June, July, August. Interviews with prospective candidates in September (dates subject to change).

How projects are evaluated - what companies can expect

Applications go through a competitive, independent evaluation process managed by Enterprise Ireland. Communication will be between Enterprise Ireland and the international post-doc research applicants.

Following a rigorous evaluation process by a panel of international independent evaluators, eligible applicants will be interviewed in September. The final decision on each application will be made in Q4 2026.

Next Steps

If your company is interested in participating:

- Identify a sustainability challenge you want to explore.
- Contact a participating Host Organisation. To receive a list of Sustain-Fit contacts in participating Irish Higher Education Institutes and Research Providing Organisations contact the Sustain-Fit team Email: sustain-fit@enterprise-ireland.com
- For further details on the EU Green Deal visit [The Environment: Ireland's Green Deal - European Commission](#)

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