



Tionól Réigiúnach
an Deiscirt

Southern Regional
Assembly

Annual Report and
Financial Statements

2023



Cathaoirleach's Foreword

As Cathaoirleach it is my privilege to introduce the 2023 Annual Report and Financial Statements for the Southern Regional Assembly.

I was nominated as Cathaoirleach at the Annual Meeting in July 2023, and it has been a great pleasure to serve in the role. The functions of the Regional Assemblies have become increasingly important as the regional tier of government and a key champion of the regional perspective in economic and spatial development.

The implementation of the Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy for the Southern Region progressed with the support of key stakeholders, particularly the Region's local authorities. The Strategy is designed as a 12-year roadmap for strategic regional development to guide long-term change in the Southern Region. It is also an invaluable framework to advocate for regional support and development, which was the case when I welcomed the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Charlie McConalogue TD and Minister of State for Health, Mary Butler TD to Assembly House in July to meet with Members about the importance of the marine economy to the Southern Region.

I would like to thank my fellow Assembly Members for their valuable contributions during the year both at our monthly meetings and in representing the Southern Regional Assembly at various meetings and events. I also wish to thank Leas-Cathaoirleach Cllr. Noel Coonan for his support.

I extend my sincere appreciation to David Kelly and his team for their continued work across all functions of the Southern Regional Assembly.

Cllr. Terry Shannon

Cathaoirleach



Director's Introduction

I am delighted to present the Annual Report and Financial Statements of the Southern Regional Assembly for 2023. It proved to be another exceptionally busy year as we strived to deliver on our corporate plan objectives.

After securing approval from the EU Commission for the €663m ERDF co-funded Southern, Eastern and Midlands Regional Programme in December 2022 we quickly moved into implementation phase. During 2023 funding calls to the value of €340m were launched by our delivery partners.

The Assembly also continued its strong involvement in Interreg programmes, in particular by securing approval as a project partner in three new Interreg Europe projects; Talent4S3, FutureEcos and Proximities. Working with our European partners through these projects will help improve the delivery and implementation of our Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES).

2023 was also a very busy year in terms of progressing the implementation of the RSES. In the early part of the year, we launched the Smart Region Initiative and we continued to engage with the local authorities with regard to the Local Economic and Community Plans. Supporting the Department of Transport in delivery of the Sustainable Mobility Policy we developed and implemented, in partnership with the other two Regional Assemblies, the Smart Sustainable Mobility Accelerator Pathfinder Programme.

With review of the National Planning Framework commencing in 2023 the Regional Assemblies engaged with the National Expert Group and also participated in the Planning Advisory Forum providing input into the process.

We were delighted to partner with the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine to host the kick-off event for Bio-Economy Week in Assembly House in Waterford and we also hosted a number of ESPON information events.

I am also happy to report that the Association of Irish Regions held a very successful training



seminar in Monaghan to focus on regional development and challenges.

In June we held a very successful joint SPA Committee/Members workshop in Ballykisteen discussing the future role and structures for the Regional Assembly. I would like to thank the members and external experts from central Government and academia who attended and provided really useful input the discussion.

I would like to thank our Cathaoirleach, Cllr Terry Shannon for his time and input during the year. I thank the Assembly staff for their continued commitment and dedication to achieving the goals of the 2023 Annual Work Plan. I welcome the new staff who joined the Assembly in 2023 and thank those who have moved on.

Finally, I look forward to our continued engagement with key stakeholders including local authorities, government departments and agencies and the third level sector as the role of the Assembly continues to evolve to support our region.

David Kelly
Director

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A man with short brown hair, wearing a blue sweater, is sitting on a grassy cliff overlooking the ocean. The foreground is filled with yellow and white wildflowers. The ocean is a deep blue-green, with white waves crashing against dark, layered rock formations. In the distance, a small island or headland is visible under a sky with soft, white clouds. A large, red, cloud-like graphic overlay is positioned in the upper right, containing the word "Overview" in white text.

Overview

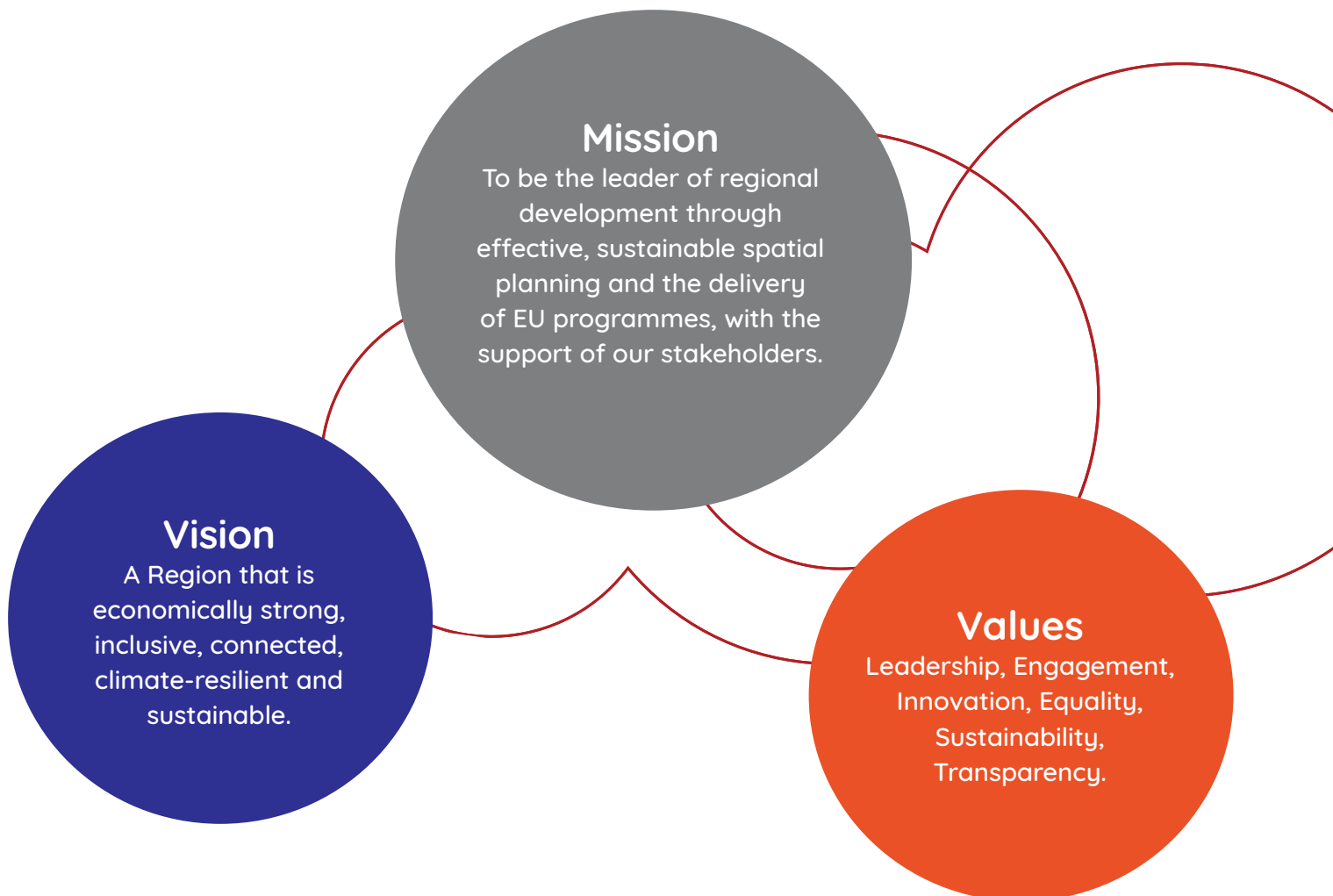
About the Southern Regional Assembly

Established in 2015, the Southern Regional Assembly is part of the regional tier of government in Ireland.

The Assembly forges links between the EU, and national and local levels through regional spatial and economic planning and European funding (particularly the European Regional Development Fund) for the benefit of the Southern Region. We are responsible for strategic regional and economic planning and supporting balanced, sustainable regional development.

- Regional tier of government, represented by elected representatives nominated by our local authorities and Committee of the Regions.
- Leading the implementation of the Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy.
- Promoting balanced regional development through the management of, support for, and involvement in European Regional Development Funded programmes and projects.
- Linking local, regional, national and EU policy goals through regional planning and EU regional development.

The Assembly interacts with national government, state agencies, local authorities, and stakeholders from the private and third sectors at local, regional, national and EU levels in relation to its statutory functions.



Assembly Membership 2023

The Southern Region is represented by thirty-three Local Councillors who were appointed as Regional Assembly Members for a five-year term following the 2019 local elections. The Region's ten local authorities nominate twenty-seven members, and the Government appoints six as Committee of the Regions representatives.



Cllr. Terry Shannon
Cathaoirleach
Cork City Council



Cllr. Noel Coonan
Leas-Cathaoirleach
Tipperary County Council



Cllr. Ken Murnane
Carlow County Council



Cllr. Thomas Kinsella
Carlow County Council



Cllr. Alan O'Callaghan
Clare County Council



Cllr. P.J. Kelly
Clare County Council



Cllr. Deirdre Forde
Cork City Council
CoR Member



Cllr. Gerard Murphy
Cork County Council



Cllr. Gillian Coughlan
Cork County Council
CoR Member (alt)



Cllr. Kieran McCarthy
Cork City Council
CoR Member



Cllr. Dan Boyle
Cork City Council
CoR Member (alt)



Cllr. Deirdre O'Brien
Cork County Council



Cllr. Garret Kelleher
Cork City Council



Cllr. Sean O'Connor
Cork County Council



Cllr. Joe Carroll
Cork County Council



Cllr. Sheila O'Callaghan
Cork County Council



Cllr. Robert Beasley
Kerry County Council



Cllr. Séamus Cosáí Fitzgerald
Kerry County Council



Cllr. Michael O'Shea
Kerry County Council



Cllr. John Brennan
Kilkenny County Council



Cllr. Andrew McGuinness
Kilkenny County Council



Cllr. Frankie Daly
Limerick City & County
Council



Cllr. Michael Collins
Limerick City & County
Council



Cllr. John Sheahan
Limerick City & County
Council



Cllr. Michael O'Meara
Tipperary County Council



Cllr. Siobhán Ambrose
Tipperary County
Council



Cllr. Michael Murphy
Tipperary County Council
CoR Member



Cllr. Conor D. McGuinness
Waterford City & County
Council
CoR Member (alt)



Cllr. Thomas Phelan
Waterford City & County
Council



Cllr. Tom Cronin
Waterford City & County
Council



Cllr. Maura Bell
Wexford County Council



Cllr. Pip Breen
Wexford County Council



Cllr. Oliver Walsh
Wexford County Council

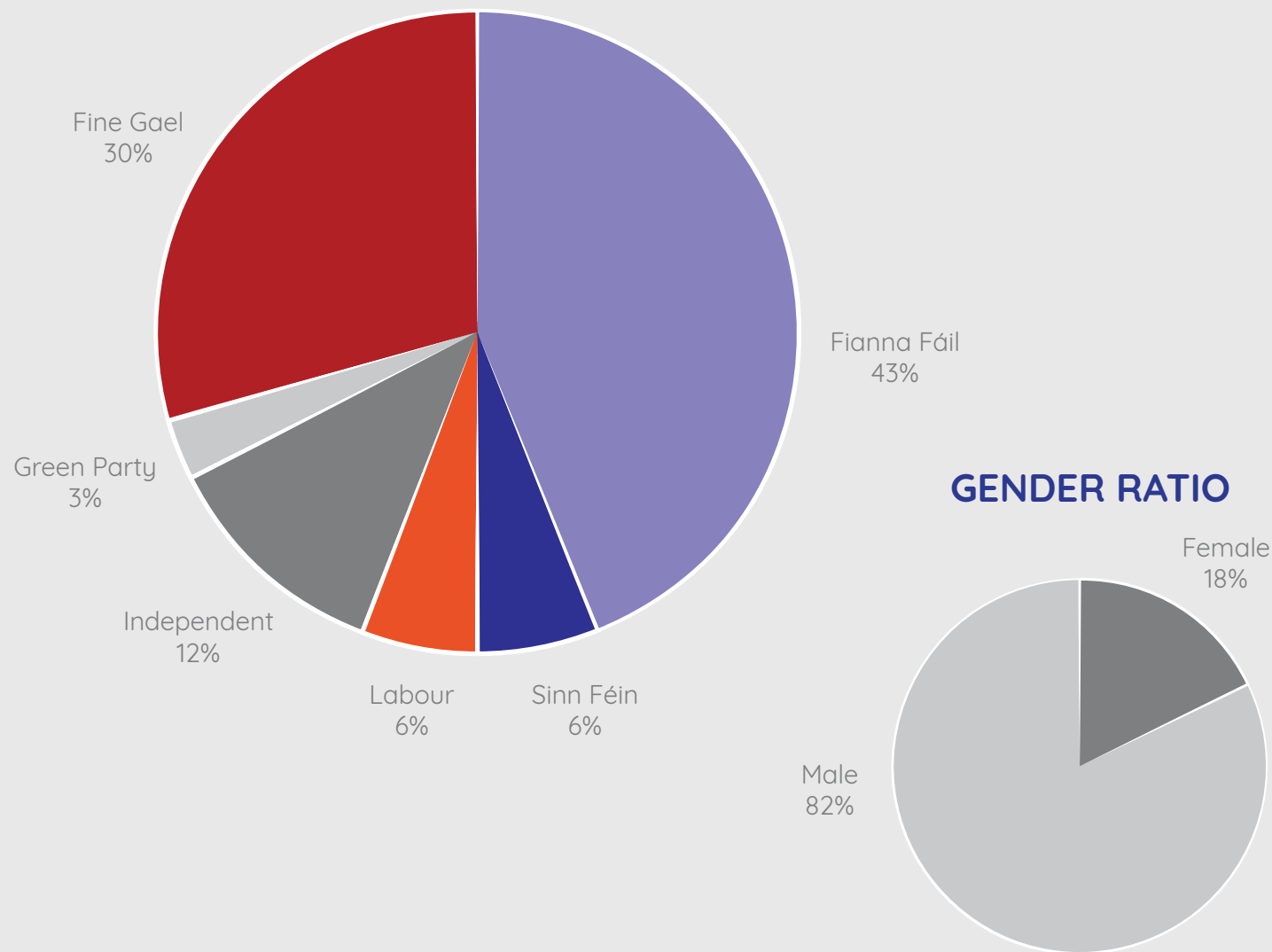
Cathaoirleach

January – July: Cllr. Oliver Walsh
July – December: Cllr. Terry Shannon

Leas-Cathaoirleach

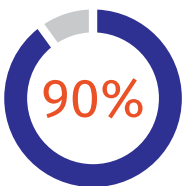
January – July: Cllr. Andrew McGuinness
July – December: Cllr. Noel Coonan

Political Affiliation and Gender ratio

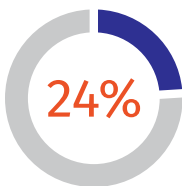


Meetings & Attendance

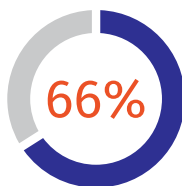
| | | | | | |
|------------------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|
| Ordinary Meetings 2023 | 13th January | 10th February | 10th March | 14th April | 12th May |
| 9th June | 14th July | 8th September | 13th October | 10th November | 8th December |



Average meeting attendance rate



In Person



Remote Attendance

External and Assembly Speakers at Assembly Meetings 2023

| MONTH | SPEAKER/ TOPIC |
|-----------|--|
| JANUARY | Update on Marine Planning by Karina Fitzgerald, Planning Advisor, Marine Planning Policy, and Legislation Division, DHLGH. EU Just Transition Fund for Ireland by EMRA |
| FEBRUARY | First URBACT IV call – Karl Murphy, EMRA ROBIN Project – Áine Whelan, Projects Officer SRA |
| MARCH | Update on IREO and Committee of Regions – Teresa Lennon, IREO RSES Implementation Update – Kevin Lynch, Senior Planner / Assistant Director SRA |
| APRIL | Draft Planning and Development Bill Kilkenny LECP Report - Dominic Walsh, Regional Planning SRA |
| MAY | 50 Years of Ireland’s Membership of the European Union Stephen O’Shea, Deputy CEO – Head of Policy and Research at the European Movement Ireland SMC Net Zero Project - Rebecca Walsh, EU Projects Officer SRA |
| JUNE | EU Competitiveness Index – Helen Leahy, Head of Regional Policy, IBEC |
| SEPTEMBER | Carlow LECP Report Wexford LECP Report |
| OCTOBER | Update on OECD study - Towards More Balanced Regional Attractiveness in Ireland: Michael Flood, OECD & Karen Kenny, DHLGH National Industrial Strategy for Offshore Wind – DETE Jack McDermott, Assistant Principal of the Offshore Wind Strategy Unit The Southern Regional Assembly in a Changing Ireland – Challenges and Issues - Kevin Lynch, Senior Planner / Assistant Director SRA Update on RSES Workplan - Kevin Lynch, Senior Planner / Assistant Director SRA |
| NOVEMBER | Draft Regional Water Resources Zone South-East – Mairéad Conlon, Uisce Eireann Tipperary LECP Report – Brigh Ryan, Regional Planning SRA Waterford LECP Report – Mary Molloy, Regional Planning SRA |
| DECEMBER | Presentation on Project Ireland 2040 - Prospects 2023/2024: Ireland’s Major Infrastructure Project Pipeline -Kevin Twomey, Executive Planner SRA |

Conference / Training Seminar Attendance 2023

| | | |
|-------------|--|---|
| 7-9/02/23 | AIR Regions In Focus, Monaghan | Cllrs. Seamus Cosai Fitzgerald, Andrew McGuinness, Pip Breen, Thomas Phelan, Ken Murnane, Garrett Kelleher, Robert Beasley, Tom Cronin. |
| 18-19/04/23 | IREO Conference, Athlone | Cllrs. Andrew McGuinness, Pip Breen. |
| 25/04/23 | ERDF Regional Programme Launch Event, Kilkenny Castle | Cllrs. Seamus Cosai Fitzgerald, Deirdre O'Brien, Alan O'Callaghan, P.J. Kelly, Robert Beasley, Pip Breen, Dan Boyle. |
| 13-14/06/23 | Cross Border Workers & Employers tax conf, Dundalk | Cllr. Michael Murphy. |
| 19-20/04/23 | Sustainable Mobility Event, Athlone | Cllr. Deirdre O'Brien |
| 27-30/06/23 | Southern Regional Assembly Member's Study Trip, Brussels | Cllrs. Terry Shannon, Pip Breen, Deirdre O'Brien, Michael O'Shea, Connor McGuinness, Michael O'Meara, Tom Cronin. |
| 24-26/11/23 | Modular Housing in Ireland, Carlingford | Cllrs. Andrew McGuinness, Garrett Kelleher. |

EU Programme Monitoring Committee Representatives

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| Southern & Eastern Regional Operational Programme 2014-20 | Southern Eastern and Midland Regional Programme 2021-2027 | Cllr. Oliver Walsh Cllr. John Brennan Cllr. Seamus Cosai Fitzgerald Cllr. Michael O'Shea |
| Ireland-Wales Programme 2014-20 | | Cllr. Ken Murnane |
| Rural Development Programme 2014-20 | CAP Strategic Plan (CSP) 2023-2027 | Cllr. Alan O'Callaghan |
| European Social Fund: Programme for Employability Inclusion & Learning 2014-20 | ESF+ Employment, Inclusion, Skills, and Training (EIST) 2021-2027 | Cllr. Gerard Murphy |

Committee of the Regions Representatives – Southern Region

Six Assembly Members are also Committee of the Regions representatives, three as full Members and three as Alternative Members.

Association of Irish Regions Representatives

The Association of Irish Regions is the national representative organisation of the three Regional Assemblies in Ireland, as a vehicle to ensure a collective opinion on matters related to Member functions and statutory responsibilities and to exchange information and experience between the regions. Southern Region representatives include:

Cllr Terry Shannon (Cathaoirleach)

Cllr Thomas Phelan

Cllr Noel Coonan (Leas- Cathaoirleach)

Cllr Michael O' Meara

Cllr Oliver Walsh (previous Cathaoirleach)

Mr. David Kelly (Director)



Members & Staff of the SRA at the Association of Irish Regions Conference, February 2023.

Joint SPA Committee and Members Workshop

The Southern Regional Assembly hosted a Joint SPA Committee and Members workshop at Ballykisteen Hotel, Limerick Junction, Tipperary in June 2023. The main topic for the event was 'Southern Regional Assembly in a changing Ireland – Challenges, issues and opportunities'.

The event was well attended, Cathaoirleach Oliver Walsh welcomed the attendees who included representatives from the Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage, Maynooth University, and TU Dublin. Director David Kelly set out objectives for the day to engage in an open discussion of the functions and role of the Southern Regional Assembly, the role of elected members on additional tasks expected of the regional tier, particularly in the context of climate action and the review of the NPF and to develop recommendations for improvement.

The event was based on three sessions relating to:

1. Democratic Mandate:
2. Linkage to National Level, and
3. Funding and structure.

Assistant Director, Kevin Lynch gave a briefing on each session based on the discussion paper which had been circulated and posed a number of questions on each topic which was then followed by input from the members and participants. There was significant constructive discussion between the elected members, staff and external representatives and the following recommendations were formed from the sessions, and subsequently agreed at the October Assembly meeting.

- **Recommended Action No 1:** Measures to ensure greater awareness of regional assembly initiatives at local authority level should be developed.
- **Recommended Action 2:** The Regional Assembly, together with EMRA/NWRA and the Department of Housing Planning and Local Government/OPR should prior to the 2024 elections set out a programme in relation to nomination of elected members to the Regional Assembly including briefing on role and responsibilities on the Regional Assembly, geographic/population balance.
- **Recommendation Action 3:** There should be a standing item relating to the Committee of The Regions on a quarterly basis.
- **Recommendation Action 4:** The issue of remote meetings should be discussed in more detail including consideration of national position, other regional assemblies, and measures to optimise participation.
- **Recommendation Action 5:** This issue of EU officers at LA level should be discussed in more detail including with Local Authorities/ DHLGH.
- **Recommendation Action 6:** The Regional Assembly should continue to press for greater structural integration with relevant government departments.
- **Recommendation Action 7:** The RSES implementation mechanisms should be improved, and communication of progress should be reported to the members.
- **Recommendation Action 8:** The role and nature of differing regional bodies should be reviewed to improve the effectiveness and coordination between these.
- **Recommendation Action 9:** The regional assembly staffing and financial structure should be reviewed in the context of its role and by reference to other similar public bodies.



Corporate Update

Annual Meeting & Election of Cathaoirleach

The Annual Meeting took place on 14th July and Members were invited to propose nominations for the position of Cathaoirleach and Leas-Cathaoirleach of the Assembly, to hold office until July 2024.

Cllr. Terry Shannon of Cork City Council was elected Cathaoirleach at the meeting. Cllr. Shannon is a member of Fianna Fáil since 1987, a former Lord Mayor of Cork, 2011 -2012, and a former Deputy Lord Mayor, 2009-2010.

Cllr. Noel Coonan of Tipperary County Council was elected Leas-Cathaoirleach. A member of Fine Gael, Cllr. Noonan was a Senator for the Cultural and Educational Panel from 2002 - 2007, and also served as a Teachta Dála (TD) for the Tipperary North constituency from 2007 -2016.

Members were invited to propose nominations to the Association of Irish Regions. The Cathaoirleach, Leas-Cathaoirleach and outgoing Cathaoirleach were automatically nominated, with Cllr. Michael O'Meara and Cllr. Thomas Phelan both retaining in their positions.



New Cathaoirleach Cllr. Terry Shannon with outgoing Cathaoirleach Cllr. Oliver Walsh

Southern Regional Assembly Highlights for 2023

- Assistance in the organisation and delivery of the Association of Irish Regions Training Seminar - Regions in Focus: Irish Regions Shaping Ireland's Regional Development.
- Developed and launched the Smart Sustainable Mobility Accelerator as one of the Pathfinder projects.
- Launch of Smart Region Initiative.
- Local Economic and Community Plan reports completed for Kilkenny, Waterford, Wexford, Carlow, and Tipperary.
- Joint SPA Committee and Members workshop 'Southern Regional Assembly in a changing Ireland – Challenges, issues and opportunities' held in Co. Tipperary, June 2023.
- Launched funding calls with a total value of over €340m under the ERDF Regional Programme, supporting research, development and innovation in universities and SMEs across the region.
- Launch event of Bioeconomy Ireland Week 2023.
- Celebrated 30 years of Ireland Wales Interregional Programme.

Online Communications 2023

Twitter / Facebook / Instagram / LinkedIn / Website



2,983 followers/ average 40k monthly impressions



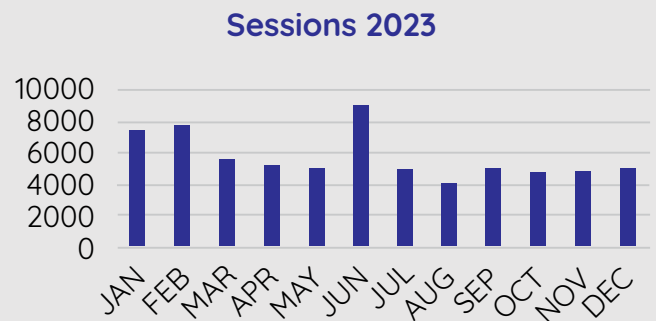
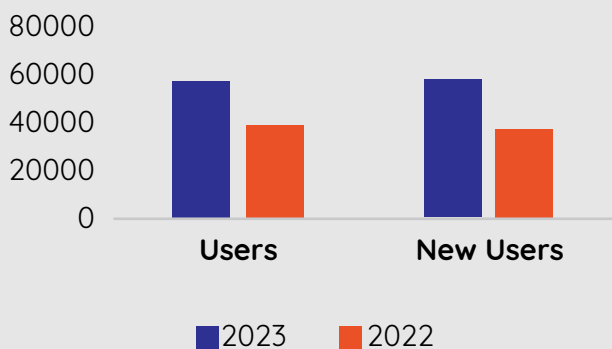
653 followers/ average post reach 370



397 followers/ average post reach 95



488 followers/ average 1300 monthly impressions



Climate Action & Sustainability

The Green Team

The Southern Regional Assembly established its Green Team in February 2023 with the initial remit of supporting organisational actions to meet public sector obligations in relation to Climate Action.

The Green Team is guided by the Southern Regional Assembly vision for “A region that is economically strong, inclusive, connected, climate resilient and sustainable”. It is important we understand that commitment to climate resilient, and environmentally sustainable decisions and actions is the foundation to achieving a strong, inclusive, and connected region. This applies to both the micro and macro levels of strategic planning and direction, policymaking, and everyday organisational activities.

However, to advance the organisational commitment to climate action and provide opportunities to cultivate the organisational core values of “Leadership, Engagement, Innovation, Equality, Sustainability and Transparency” we

are committed to supporting staff in climate actions beyond our statutory requirements.

Climate Action

The 2023 Climate Action Plan reaffirms two high-level targets for public bodies that had been originally introduced in previous iterations of the plan:

- The public sector must improve its energy efficiency by 50% by 2030. This target builds on the previous 33%-by-2020 efficiency target and is based on public bodies’ existing baselines, most of which are 2009 (or earlier).
- The public sector must reduce its GHG emissions by 51% by 2030. Every public body will be assigned a public-body-level emissions reduction target “based on an absolute tonnage of GHG emissions. The total tonnage target will be a 51% reduction of direct energy-related emissions (thermal and transport consumption), plus projected supply side reductions in indirect energy-related emissions from electricity. The baseline for the methodology is the period 2016 to 2018...”

Implementation in 2023:

- Monitoring and reporting of energy usage to SEAI as per statutory requirements.
- The Southern Regional Assembly embedded climate action in the organisation by establishing a Climate & Sustainability Champion and a Green Team in 2023.
- The Southern Regional Assembly Energy Efficiency Policy was completed in September.
- Work began on the Energy Efficiency Roadmap and the Climate Action Roadmap.
- GHG emissions in 2023 = 29.12 TCO₂e

Sustainability in 2023:

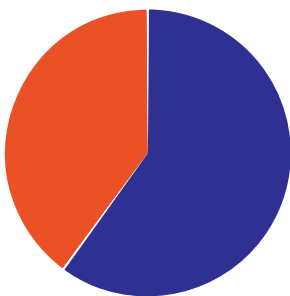
- A survey of CLIMATE AWARENESS among staff was carried out.
- The Southern Regional Assembly signed up to the ‘SEAI Reduce your Use’ campaign and reduced the number of hours that the central heating is on during the day in Assembly House.

In compliance with the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform Circular 01/2020 on Procedures for Offsetting the Emissions Associated with Official Air Travel, the Southern Regional Assembly records and monitors emissions incurred by staff during official air travel and contributes to the Climate Action Fund to offset those emissions.

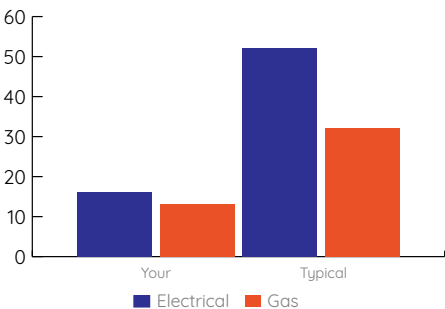
Displayed Energy Certificate

Based on the energy used and the GHG emission Assembly House had a DEC Rating of B3 in 2023.

Total Emissions TCO₂ (based on DEC)



Annual TCO₂ (SRV vs Typical Building)



Energy Usage 2023

| | |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| Full-time Equivalent Staff | 34 |
| Energy Sources | Electricity & Gas |
| Energy Consumed | 143.4 kWh/m ² /yr |

The Southern Regional Assembly is committed to playing its part in achieving the improvements in energy efficiency and decarbonisation across the public sector. Based on our reporting to SEAI the Southern Regional Assembly is ahead of the 2030 targets and will strive to make continual improvements.

Freedom of Information

The Freedom of Information Act 2014 provides that every person has legal right to access official records held by public bodies, have personal information held on them corrected or updated where it is incomplete, incorrect, or misleading, and be given reasons for decisions taken by public bodies that affect them.

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| Requests: | 3 |
| Granted | 3 |
| Part Granted | 0 |
| Refused | 0 |
| Withdrawn | 0 |
| Carried to 2023 | 0 |

Data Protection

The General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act both came into effect in 2018. The Assembly continues to review operations against this statutory requirement. There were no requests under data protection legislation during 2023.

Irish Language

The Southern Regional Assembly has a dedicated Irish Language Officer, and work to ensure compliance with the Official Languages (Amendment) Act 2021 has been ongoing throughout 2023. In line with provisions of the amendment to the Official Languages Act, all Southern Regional Assembly advertising and communication activities in the Irish language are being tracked with a view to achieving the goals of Section 10A of Official Languages Act where all public bodies will be required to do at least 20% of their annual advertising in Irish and 5% of their advertising in the Irish language media. The Southern Regional

Assembly monitoring process revealed that although just 12% of advertisements were in Irish, the requirement to spend 5% of the budget has been surpassed with 13% of advertising budget dedicated to Irish language media.

The Southern Regional Assembly logo update in 2023 took into consideration the Official Languages Act Section 9C requirement for logos to be in either Irish or both Irish and English.

Assembly Staff Changes

In 2023 the Southern Regional Assembly welcomed the following new staff to the team - Rebecca Walsh (Projects Officer), Omer Sunguroglu (Clerical Officer, Corporate Affairs), Claire Breen (Clerical Officer, Regional Planning), Eoin O'Connor (Executive Planner), Mary Molloy (Executive Planner), Kevin Twomey (Executive Planner), Denis Cotter (Assistant Staff Officer, Regional Planning), and Pauline Toomey (Assistant Staff Officer, HR & Finance).

There were also promotions for Catherine Connaughton (Projects Officer, EU Division), Marie Harnett (Administrative Officer, EU Division), and Breda Curran (Acting Senior Staff Officer, Corporate Affairs), while Oonagh Messette (Clerical Officer, Corporate Affairs) and Róisín Slattery (Clerical Officer, HR & Finance) returned to their original posts.

We wish the following colleagues who have moved to new careers the very best - Alice Byrne Kelly (Clerical Officer), Siobhan Rudden (Administrative Officer), and Robert Fennelly (Regional Planning Officer).

Health and Safety in the Assembly

Fire Safety Training and Home Visual Display Unit Training was provided for all the staff. The Fire Safety Training is undertaken on an annual basis to ensure the safety of Staff. The Home Visual Display Training / Audit is undertaken for all staff working from home.

Expert contractors were engaged to examine and revise where necessary the Safety Statement. A building safety audit was undertaken by the same contractors. All rectifications suggested were actioned. There were no accidents, incidents or near misses reported during 2023.

IHREC The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission

The Southern Regional Assembly is conscious of Human Rights and Equality across all its

work, and as an organisation. A Working Group (WG) was approved by Senior Management in September 2023, including representatives from each of the Southern Regional Assembly departments. The objective of the working group is to facilitate Southern Regional Assembly's fulfilment of statutory obligations in relation to the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Public Sector Duty of care; Assess, Address and Report on relevant issues for both staff and service users. During Q4, all WG representatives completed the eLearning module, Equality and Human Rights in the Public Service. The first WG meeting then took place in December 2023.

In parallel, the EU programme staff considered how Equality and Human Rights might be relevant for roll out of work with particular emphasis on partners who are due to receive funding under the ERDF Regional Programme, including SEAL, Enterprise Ireland and Higher Education Authority. Bernie Bradley, from IHREC's public sector duty team was a speaker at the Assemblies shared training day held in Athlone 10th-11th October 2023. The workshop considered how future programmes might integrate the EU Cohesion Policy Horizontal Principles of inclusion, equality, and human rights into their everyday work for the Southern and Eastern Midlands Regional Programme.



Cathaoirleach Cllr. Oliver Walsh, Miia Jouppi, DG Regio and Andrew Condon, Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform, at the official launch event of the Southern, Eastern and Midland Regional Programme 2021-27, Kilkenny Castle, April 2023.

Corporate Plan 2020 – 2024

The Southern Regional Assembly's Corporate Plan 2020 – 2024 is delivering against three high level goals.

Regional Leadership

Goal 1

- Regional Governance - A Region driving sustainable regional development and regional governance in Ireland.
- Strategic Collaborations - A Region that engages, collaborates, and forms partnerships to benefit the Region.
- Regional Representation - Support, foster and develop democratic regional representation.

Valuing Our People

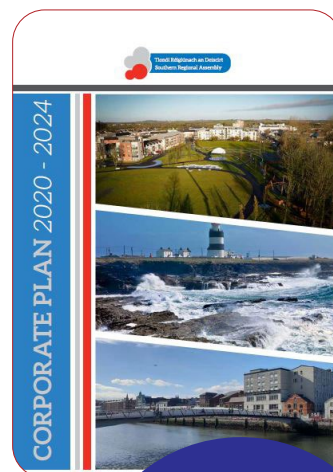
Goal 2

- Public Sector Duty - Ensure we are doing the right things in the right way for the people of our region and our employees, in an inclusive, open, and responsible manner, based on the need to eliminate discrimination, promote equality, and protect human rights of staff.
- Organisational Development - An innovative, adaptive, and responsive organisation.
- Human Resource Management - Value and Develop our Staff.

Promoting Sustainable Regional Development

Goal 3

- Deliver on the objectives of the RSES.
- EU Programmes and Projects - Harness the potential and opportunities for the Region.
- Research and Regional Data.



Progress 2023

11 statutory meetings of the Southern Regional Assembly

90% average attendance rate at statutory Assembly Meetings

1 Southern Regional Assembly annual report published

34 Implementation Actions of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES)

5 reports completed for Local & Economic Community Plans (LECPs)

128 EU Project Claims worth €11.7m by Irish partners audited by First Level Control (FLC)

Joint SPA Committee and Members workshop 'Southern Regional Assembly in a changing Ireland - Challenges, issues and opportunities' held in Co. Tipperary, June 2023.

Energy Efficiency Policy completed for the Southern Regional Assembly

Completion of the Ireland - Wales Programme

28 projects with Irish partners approved for funding through Interreg North-West Europe

Human Rights & Equality Working Group established

1 study trip to Brussels for selected Assembly Members & Staff



Regional Planning

Regional Planning & Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy

Overview

The Local Government Act 1991 (Regional Assemblies) (Establishment) Order 2014 introduced a strong role for the Southern Regional Assembly in relation to spatial planning and economic development of the Southern Region.

The Assembly's main strategic planning function involves the preparation, adoption, and implementation of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Southern Region. It also has an oversight role for the preparation of Local Economic & Community Plans (LECP) and the preparation of statutory submissions on City & County Development Plans (CCDP).

Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Southern Region

The RSES published in January 2020 is a 12-year strategic regional development framework for the way our society, environment, economy, and the use of land should evolve. It includes Metropolitan Area Strategic Plans (MASPs) for Cork, Limerick-Shannon and Waterford, and strategies for our Key Towns, towns, villages, and rural areas. The RSES aims to support the delivery of the programme for change set out in Project Ireland 2040, the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the National Development Plan 2018-27 (NDP). The main focus of work post publication has been on implementation.

Monitoring & Reporting

In September 2022, the Southern Regional Assembly published its first RSES Monitoring Report. Every two years, the Assembly will prepare a monitoring report on the progress in securing the objectives of the RSES. The report involved submission of reports from all ten local authorities and public bodies and has presented a valuable opportunity to examine the effectiveness of implementation to date as well as looking at the barriers to progress.

In 2023 work commenced on the second monitoring report. Key conclusions for the next implementation period are as follows:

- The positive impact of new initiatives and funding mechanisms by Government and Public Bodies in support of NPF and RSES objectives and the significant work undertaken within each Local Authority to progress Project Ireland 2040. There is now significant alignment between national, regional, and local policy.
- There is serious concern at the trajectory of continued population growth to the Dublin Region which undermines the NPF and RSES policy. Based on findings in the NDP Review, is unclear if the Project Ireland 2040 process will deliver the wider structural changes required to address the overall 50:50% split fundamental to Project Ireland 2040 and RSES, or commit to the services/infrastructure required to achieve the population targets for the Region fundamental to the overall delivery of Project Ireland 2040 and RSES Objectives for regional growth.
- Preliminary census results are also concerning and indicate that while all local authorities in the Region experienced growth it was much less than Dublin and adjoining counties which have experienced significant growth and there is no indication of a change in the trajectory of population growth to the Dublin area.

The RSES has 301 objectives: 229 Regional Policy Objectives (RPOs) together with specific objectives for the MASPs: 22 for Cork, 23 for Limerick-Shannon and 27 for Waterford. These objectives have differing targets and involve specific



actions to be taken by stakeholders - Regional, Instructive and Supportive.

The objectives address three over-arching pillars which correspond to the 11 Strategy Statements in the RSES:

- A Green Region
- A Liveable Region
- A Creative and Innovative Region

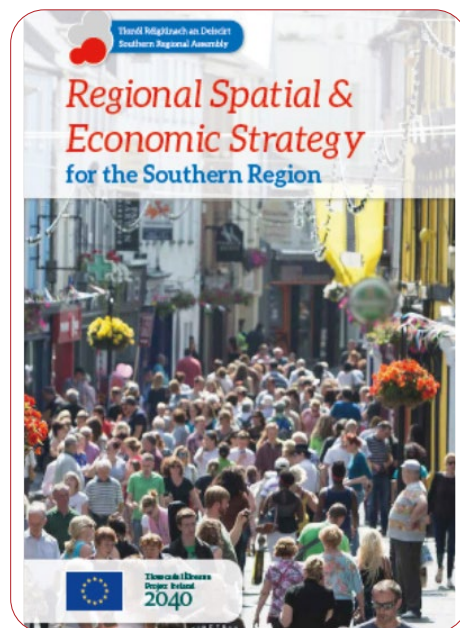
Activities, Progress and Milestones in 2023

The priority for 2023 was the continued achievement of RPO 226:

Within a year of the making of the RSES the Southern Regional Assembly will establish robust implementation mechanisms, plans, and structures, including cross sectoral stakeholder and cross boundary local authority steering group committees, to ensure the delivery of the RSES and the MASPs is specific measurable, attainable, realistic and time bound. The implementation phase will include action plans

that include time bound targets, progress indicators and a set project tracking plan to ensure effective and efficient delivery.

This objective was progressed through the 34 Implementation Actions as follows:



| | |
|-------------------|---|
| Task No. 1 | Ensure Delivery of NPF/RSES targets for the Southern Region including progressing NPO 1a – 50/50 Split and Implementation of Two-Year Report Recommendations and establishment of RSES Delivery Board. Engage fully in the NPF review process to ensure Southern Regional Assembly priorities delivered: |
| Progress | The Assembly has engaged concerted action in relation to NPO 1a including a review of capacity of regional structures to deliver on NPF, critique of structural underpinning of investment, engagement with the Expert Group on NPF review, engagement with NPF Planning Advisory Forum, engagement with Local Authorities and the Department. |
| Task No. 2 | Establish MASP Implementation Structures – Southern Regional Assembly Transformative Initiative: |
| Progress | Ongoing engagement with CASP. Limerick Mayor has formal MASP Structures – and this will have significant consequences. Ongoing engagement with Waterford and Kilkenny. The Southern Regional Assembly a key driver in proposing MASP structural change with Department and OECD. The Assembly facilitated the OECD in a range of workshops and presentations relating to balanced regional growth. |
| Task No. 3 | Establish and Agree Regional Indicators & Monitoring - Transformative RSES Initiative: |
| Progress | This is a key task and includes tracking of infrastructure delivery for the Region including the development of the Regional Assembly GIS capacity. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Preparation of the second RSES monitoring report commenced.• Tracking of Infrastructure delivery and analysis of key trends including the results of Census 2022, and the development of GIS capacity has been developed and will feed into the RSES 2-Year monitoring report and upcoming review of the National Planning Framework and RSES. |
| Task No. 4 | Scope Collaboration between Metropolitan Areas – Cork, Limerick – Shannon, Waterford, and Galway: |
| Progress | The Southern Regional Assembly is undertaking a range of activities to encourage, support and build a collaborative approach between Metropolitan Areas. |

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Task No. 5-15 | Ensure the RSES Programme for Change is Incorporated in the LECP Process: |
| Progress | Process commenced, briefing paper developed, and workshop held. Reports completed for Kilkenny, Waterford, Wexford, Carlow, and Tipperary. |
| Task No.16 | Ensure that all Local Authority Development Plans, Variations, and relevant LAPs (as they arise) are consistent with the Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy (RSES) in accordance with Section 27 of the Planning and Development Act (Development Plans): |
| Progress | Ongoing. |
| TaskNo.16:/17 | Prepare Learning Region Action Plan. Establish Waterford as a UNESCO Learning City. Transformative Southern Regional Assembly Initiative: |
| Progress | Implement Learning Region Action Plan. There has been ongoing engagement with stakeholders including HEIs and in the work of DFHERIS on the development of a Unified Tertiary System. Establish Waterford as a UNESCO Learning City. Application in 2023 led by the Southern Regional Assembly and SETU, this task was successfully achieved when Waterford became a designated UNESCO Learning City in February 2024. There is now ongoing engagement with Waterford City & County Council, SETU and other stakeholders on delivery of a programme for Lifelong Learning and related activity for Waterford. |
| Task No. 19 | Implement the Southern Regional Assembly Communications Strategy: |
| Progress | The Communications subgroup are constantly updating the Southern Regional Assembly's social media accounts and website about things that are happening in the region. The Southern Regional Assembly is currently in the process of getting a new website. The new website will replace the existing website and will provide information about the Southern Regional Assembly, upcoming events, and news items, among other details. |
| Task No. 20 | Development of a framework/toolkit to support a regional approach for Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) in the Southern Region. Smart Region definition and framework to facilitate Smart. Cities Driving a Smart Region. Transformative Southern Regional Assembly Initiative: |
| Progress | Progress on the Smart Southern Region (SSR) included implementation building on the launch of the SSR on the 18th of January 2023. This includes the development of a regional approach for Smart Specialisation (S3), development of the Smart Southern Region project mapping tool in consultation with Local Authorities and stakeholders, develop a Smart Southern Region Action Plan, and to establish a Smart Southern Region Network. The Assembly is also exploring potential EU and national funding pathways for specialist services to work with the Assembly on these actions. |
| Tasks No.21 | Establish Scope and Remit of Regional Freight Strategy, Ports and Harbour Strategy Regional Airport Strategy: |
| Progress | Action 24 of Ireland's Road Haulage Strategy 2022-2031 requires the Regional Assemblies, with the NTA, to lead the development of Regional-Level Freight Strategies in consultation with key stakeholders, consistent with the objectives of the RSEs. Action 23 further requires metropolitan level freight strategies to be prepared for Cork, Limerick-Shannon and Waterford. The Southern Regional Assembly has prepared a roadmap for the development of this strategy in consultation with the NTA. The process will commence in Q2/3 2024 following completion of the National Demand Management Strategy and improvements in data through Action 02, 03 and 06 of the Road Haulage Strategy. It is set to be completed by Q3/Q4 2025. |
| Task No. 22 | Develop Ports and Harbour Strategy for the Southern Region: |
| Progress | Following the completion of a Project Charter setting out the scope and aims for this work, the Assembly will continue to coordinate with the Department of Transport and |

engage with transport, the port companies, Local Authorities, and other stakeholders to prepare the Ports and Harbour Strategy for the Southern Region in 2023-2024. Specialist research services were secured in March 2024 to demonstrate the significance of the socio-economic impact and future growth potential of port and harbour activities and their associated enterprises and supply chains for the economy of the Region (as individual and combined regional assets), the opportunities for a lower carbon future and role of ports to enable offshore renewable energy development.

This analysis will also provide an evidence base to communicate the important future role of our ports and harbours to achieve balanced regional economic development. This work will input into the review of National Ports Policy targeted for adoption in Q1 2025 and other strategic plans for our Region's coastal and maritime areas.

Task No 23
Progress

Develop Airport Strategy for the Southern Region:

Following the completion of a Project Charter setting out the scope and aims for this work, the Southern Regional Assembly will continue to coordinate with the Department of Transport and engage with transport, airports, Local Authorities, and other stakeholders to prepare an Airport Strategy for the Southern Region in 2024-2025.

As part of this work, the Assembly intend to procure specialist research services to demonstrate the significance of the economic impact of airport infrastructure and associated services, enterprise, and supply chains to the economy of the region (as individual and combined regional assets), the opportunities for a lower carbon future for the sector and communicate the important future role of our airport assets to achieve balanced regional development. This work will input into a future review of national aviation policy scheduled to commence in 2024.

Task No. 24
Progress

Sustainable Mobility:

Progress the RSES Transport Strategy & National Sustainable Mobility Plan (SMP) including:

- Participation in SMP Leadership Team, SMP Delivery Team and the managing authority for National Pathfinder Project 30, the Smart and Sustainable Mobility Accelerator Programme in each of the three Regions to enable the design and implementation of smart and sustainable mobility projects and achieve greater levels of behavioural change and modal shift to reduce carbon emissions from the transport sector. The Southern Regional Assembly is the programme lead on behalf of the Department of Transport and three Regional Assemblies to deliver this 3-Year project. The Programme launched in 2023. Quarterly meetings are taking place for Track One stakeholders (Local Authorities). Training for Track Two stakeholders (Councillors) will take place in Q4 2024.
- Continued support for capacity building and actions to implement 15-10 Minute cities, towns, and neighbourhoods in action, building upon the publication of Southern Regional Assembly's 10 Minute Town Methodology and Framework Report.
- Preparation and implementation of Metropolitan Transport Strategies (CMATS, LSMATS and WMATS), Local Transport Plans and Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans.
- Coordination with the Department of Transport's Zero Emission Vehicles Ireland Division on the regional level implementation of the National Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Strategy 2022-2025.
- Liaison with DoT/NTA re Demand Management

Task No. 25
Progress

Developing Blue Green Infrastructure (BGI) and Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) for Placemaking. Transformative Southern Regional Assembly Initiative:

The Regional Planning Team have engaged on ongoing engagement with Local Authorities and other agencies to promote BGI and NBS including working with ESPON and Maynooth University on a joint seminar held in December 2023.

Further meetings of the Regional BGI and NBS Network are planned for Q2, 2024, which provides:

- (i) a supporting structure for Local Authorities, agencies and other practitioners involved in the practical application of BGI and NBS and

(ii) acts as a forum to discuss common issues/barriers and for sharing knowledge.
This task continues the work of the INTERREG EUROPE Blue Green City project.

**Task No.26,
27 & 28**

Progress

**Scope remit of Regional Renewable Energy Strategy (inclusive of the bioeconomy).
Scope the role, remit, and lead to develop a Regional Decarbonisation Plan:**

The Regional Planning team have together with the other Assemblies, SEAI and Government Departments (DECC and DHLGH) commenced development of a Roadmap for preparation of a Regional Renewable Electricity Strategies (RRES) by each Regional Assembly.

This Task is an Action of the Government's Climate Action Plan.

An ESPON RESEARCH PAPER 'Territories and low-carbon economy' has been prepared as part of the ESPON Locate Project and provides useful background research for the preparation of a Regional Decarbonisation Plan.

The South-East Energy Agency (SEEA) are also undertaking some preliminary work for a Regional Decarbonisation Plan (RDP) as part of the REGIO 1st Interreg Project.

Task No. 29

Progress

Co-ordination of Climate Action with Climate Action Regional Offices (CARO):

Ongoing.

Task No. 30

Progress

Identify the scope and role of the Regional Landscape Strategy for the Region:

This task is currently under review given resource constraints, the changed emphasis in terms of the Climate Action Plan and the need for clarity on the Landscape Strategy at national level.

Task No. 31

Progress

Support the development of the Eastern Corridor:

Preliminary research undertaken in 2023 has been followed in February 2024 by engagement with Assembly elected members from Wexford and a meeting with the Executive at Wexford County Council. Further engagement with Wexford County Council and other stakeholders will take place during 2024.

Task No. 32

Progress

Improve Capacity Building through developing bidding capacity:

This initiative is ongoing through submissions to Development Plan, development of workshops, engagement with Local Authorities and, ETC Network however it has not progressed as initially intended as a formal programme.

Task No. 33

Progress

Marine Spatial Planning:

Coordination with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage Marine Policy and Legislation Division on regional roles in future Designated Maritime Area Plan (DMAPS) processes with coastal Local Authorities, stakeholder engagement with the new Maritime Area Regulatory Authority, implementation of the National Marine Planning Framework and stakeholder engagement in the development of the Designated Maritime Area Plans (DMAP) for the Southern Coast (Offshore Renewable Energy).

Task No. 34

Progress

Regional Enterprise Plans:

Participation in the implementation of Regional Enterprise Plans, including taking the role of action leader and action partner to assist thematic working groups convened to implement the SW, SE, MW REPs as required, participation on implementation steering committees and networking with the three REP Programme Managers.

Representation of the regional view and engagement in ongoing relevant EU, national and regional policy implementation processes/ fora including:

NPF Review Advisory Forum

NPF Review Expert Group

Department of Transport – Sustainable Mobility Policy – Leadership Group

Project Ireland 2040 Board

National Climate Change Adaptation Forum

National Strategic Environmental Assessment Forum

Irish Water National Water Resource Plan and Regional Water Resource Plans

Regional Enterprise Plans; Steering Group participation for SW, MW, SE Regional Enterprise Plans

Regional Skills Forum (SW, MW, SE)

Midlands Regional Transition Team (MRTT)

Town Centre First

Steering group- Coastal Change Management Strategy

LECP Advisory Group

Planning for Climate Change Steering Group

Atlantic Economic Corridor

Consultation and coordination with DoT, TII and NTA for the implementation of the RSES Transport Strategy including preparation and implementation of Metropolitan Transport Strategies (CMATS, LSMATS and WMATS) and Local Transport Plans

All Island Strategic Rail Review -Department of Transport

National Rail Freight Strategy review with Iarnród Éireann

National Marine Planning Framework –consultation with DHLGH Marine Planning Policy Division

Engagement, research, and training through OPR Forum:

- Academic research with UCD (under the Irish Research Council Enterprise Partnership Scheme) on Achieving Regional Equality – Urban Rural Dynamics in Irelands Southern Region EU-Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) Policy
- International Transport Forum (ITF)

Irish Planning Institute (IPI) Marine Planning Committee.

Submissions made by the Southern Regional Assembly in 2023

Local Authority Plans

| Local Authority | Submission | Date |
|--------------------------|--|------------|
| Kerry County Council | Pre -Draft Killarney MD LAP | 10/03/2023 |
| Kerry County Council | Pre-Draft Tralee MD LAP | 10/03/2023 |
| Limerick County Council | Pre-Draft Issues Paper Newcastle West | 23/03/2023 |
| Clare County Council | Submission to the Draft Direction on the Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029 | 11/05/2023 |
| Clare County Council | Pre-Draft Issues Paper Shannon Town | 03/08/2023 |
| Wexford County Council | Pre-Draft Issues Paper Wexford Town | 03/08/2023 |
| Tipperary County Council | Proposed Material Alterations to the Draft Clonmel Local Area Plan | 18/12/2023 |
| Tipperary County Council | Proposed Amendments of the Nenagh Local Area Plan 2024-2030 | 18/12/2023 |
| Tipperary County Council | Proposed Material Amendments to the Thurles Local Area Plan 2024-2030 | 18/12/2023 |

Local Economic & Community Plans

| Local Authority | Submission | Date |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------|------------|
| Kilkenny County Council | Local Economic & Community Plan | 26/04/2023 |
| Wexford County Council | Local Economic & Community Plan | 11/07/2023 |
| Carlow County Council | Local Economic & Community Plan | 16/08/2023 |
| Waterford County Council | Local Economic & Community Plan | 27/09/2023 |
| Tipperary County Council | Local Economic & Community Plan | 13/11/2023 |

Government Departments

| Department | Submission | Date |
|--|--|------------|
| Department of Environment & Climate Change | Bioeconomy Action Plan Consultation | 27/01/2023 |
| Department of Environment & Climate Change | Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan II | 20/04/2023 |
| Department of Transport | Submission to Mid Term Review of the Regional Airports Programme 2021-2025 Consultation | 13/06/2023 |
| Department of Environment & Climate Change | Submission to the South Coast Renewable Energy DMAP Proposal Consultation | 06/10/2023 |
| Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government | Submission to Sustainable and Compact Settlements Guidelines for Planning Authorities - Draft for Consultation August 2023 | 05/10/2023 |
| Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment | Submission to National Industrial Strategy for Offshore Wind Consultation | 07/11/2023 |

Public Bodies

| Department | Submission | Date |
|-----------------------------------|---|------------|
| Regional Waste Management Offices | Draft National Waste Management Plan for a Circular Economy 2023-2029 | 5/07/2023 |
| Uisce Éireann | Submission to the Draft Regional Water Resources Plan- South East | 03/10/2023 |

An aerial photograph of a vast, dense forest in autumn, with trees displaying shades of green, yellow, and orange. In the bottom left corner, a small stone castle ruin is visible. The background shows a misty valley with patches of green fields and distant hills under a cloudy sky. A large red circular graphic is overlaid in the bottom right corner, containing the text.

ERDF Regional Programmes

ERDF Regional Programmes

The Southern Regional Assembly is the **Managing Authority for the Southern, Eastern & Midland Regional Programme 2021-27 and the Southern & Eastern Regional Programme 2014-20**. Both programmes are co-funded by the Government of Ireland and the European Union through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). The ERDF aims to strengthen EU economic, social, and territorial cohesion by correcting imbalances between regions.

Southern, Eastern and Midland Regional Programme 2021 – 2027

The Southern, Eastern and Midland Regional Programme 2021-27 is a €663 million package of ERDF and national funding for the Southern Region and the Eastern & Midland Region. It supports balanced regional growth within and between the two regions under three priorities – Smarter and More Competitive Regions, Low Carbon, and Energy Efficient Regions, and Sustainable and Integrated Urban Development.

- 1. Developing Smarter More Competitive Regions:** building RD&I capacity in the public research institutions in our regions, accelerating the translation of cutting-edge research into commercial

applications at a regional level, supporting innovation diffusion and strengthening regional innovation ecosystems in line with Ireland's Smart Specialisation Strategy and the Regional Enterprise Plans. The funding is targeted at universities and enterprise clusters in the programme area. The funding calls are managed by three Intermediate Bodies – the Higher Education Authority, Science Foundation Ireland, and Enterprise Ireland – working in close partnership with the Southern Regional Assembly as Managing Authority.

- 2. Creating Greener, More Energy Efficient Regions and a Just Transition:** scaling up investment in actions that improve the energy efficiency of residential homes, while targeting homeowners in, or at risk of, energy poverty. This investment is channelled through SEAL to support a fully funded energy upgrade service to qualifying homeowners.
- 3. Supporting Sustainable Urban Development in our Regions:** using an integrated strategic approach to the regeneration of key towns using a Town Centres First Framework. Funding calls will be managed by the Southern Regional Assembly and



Southern Regional Assembly team at the official launch event of the Southern, Eastern and Midland Regional Programme 2021-27, Kilkenny Castle, April 2023.

will support local authorities responsible for implementing the Town Centres First policy in key towns and cities in the programme area.

Following the formal adoption of the Regional Programme by the European Commission in November 2022, the programme team transitioned quickly from programme design in

2022 to programme implementation in 2023.

The team worked closely with colleagues in the European Commission, Member State, Intermediate Bodies, the Programme Monitoring Committee, and other partners to develop eight new schemes to address all of the actions identified in the Regional Programme.

| | |
|---|--|
| Developing Smarter More Competitive Regions | Technology Gateways KT Boost Innovators Initiative Smart Regions TU RISE SFI ARC Hubs |
| Creating Greener, More Energy Efficient Regions and a Just Transition | Warmer Homes |
| Supporting Sustainable Urban Development in our Regions | THRIVE Town Centre First Heritage Revival Scheme |

The work programme focused on call design, project selection, communications, management and control systems and evaluation planning.

Southern and Eastern Regional Programme 2014 – 2020

Funded activities under the Southern & Eastern Regional Programme 2014-20 came to an end in 2023 with the completion of the final projects under the Designated Urban Centres Grant Scheme. The Programme co-financed activities under six priority areas, including most recently a priority dedicated to the public health emergency due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Programme Priorities:

- Strengthening Research, Technology, Development & Innovation

- SME Competitiveness
- Low Carbon Economy
- Coronavirus Response
- Sustainable Urban Development
- Technical Assistance (programme management supports)

The focus in 2023 was on working closely with local authorities to finish out their projects under the Designated Urban Centres Grant Scheme and to prepare for programme closure activities in 2024.



Members & Staff of the Southern Regional Assembly celebrating Europe Day 2023.



European Territorial
Cooperation (ETC)
Network

European Territorial Cooperation Network

Overview

The ETC Network in the Southern Region is a forum for all those working on and/or interested in ETC projects. Members can benefit and learn from each other's projects, share experiences to build a meaningful platform and network with the aim of supporting the delivery of sustainable regional development (including RSES and other regional initiatives) to the benefit of the region.

There are currently nearly 300 members of the ETC Network in the Southern Region. Benefits of being a member include:

- Updates on EU Programmes and funding calls
- Annual Conference and events throughout the year
- Informational Sessions towards capacity building (agendas that are informed by members)
- Targeted interactions linking Local Authorities, Higher Education Institutions, SME's, and Civil Societies
- Networking opportunities

Many members are involved in Interreg Programmes (Interreg Europe, North-West Europe, Atlantic Area, Northern Periphery and

Artic, URBACT and ESPON) but there are also members who are involved other EU Funded Programmes (HORIZON, Erasmus+, Creative Europe, LIFE, Just Transition and more).

The Southern Regional Assembly facilitates the ETC Network with the support and participation of the ETC Network members. The ETC Network is owned by its members.

ETC Network Conference: "Spotlight on the Region"

A highlight of 2023 was the annual ETC Network Conference, "Spotlight on the Region", held on March 8th at Wexford County Council. Co-hosted by the Southern Regional Assembly and Wexford County Council, and in collaboration with the Celtic Routes project, this conference marked the Network's first in-person event since 2019.

The conference featured panel discussions with Interreg National Contact Points and showcased a selection of impactful projects from the 2014-2020 programming period. The event also aligned with International Women's Day, showcasing a study by ERNACT on women's experiences in European Cooperation Projects.



Members & Staff of the Southern Regional Assembly at the ETC Network Conference.

Autumn/Winter Series of ETC Network Lunchtime Information Sessions

Another significant activity in 2023 was the Autumn/Winter series of online ETC Network Lunchtime Information Sessions. Shaped by member feedback, these sessions covered crucial topics such as writing successful EU project applications, developing partnerships for EU projects, strategies for effective communication of EU projects and guidance for selecting the right EU Programme for your project idea.

Other Key Activities and Member Benefits

Networking and Collaborations: The Network facilitated valuable interactions linking local authorities, higher education institutions, SMEs, and civil societies, strengthening the collaborative fabric of the region.

Diverse Project Engagement:

Members actively participated in a variety of Interreg Programmes, such as Interreg Europe, Interreg North-West Europe, Interreg Atlantic Area, Interreg Northern Periphery and Arctic, URBACT, and ESPON, contributing significantly to the development of the region.

Future Outlook:

The Southern Regional Assembly remains committed to supporting and expanding the ETC Network. This entails providing ongoing opportunities for learning, participation, and networking, thereby enhancing the impact of European Projects in the region.

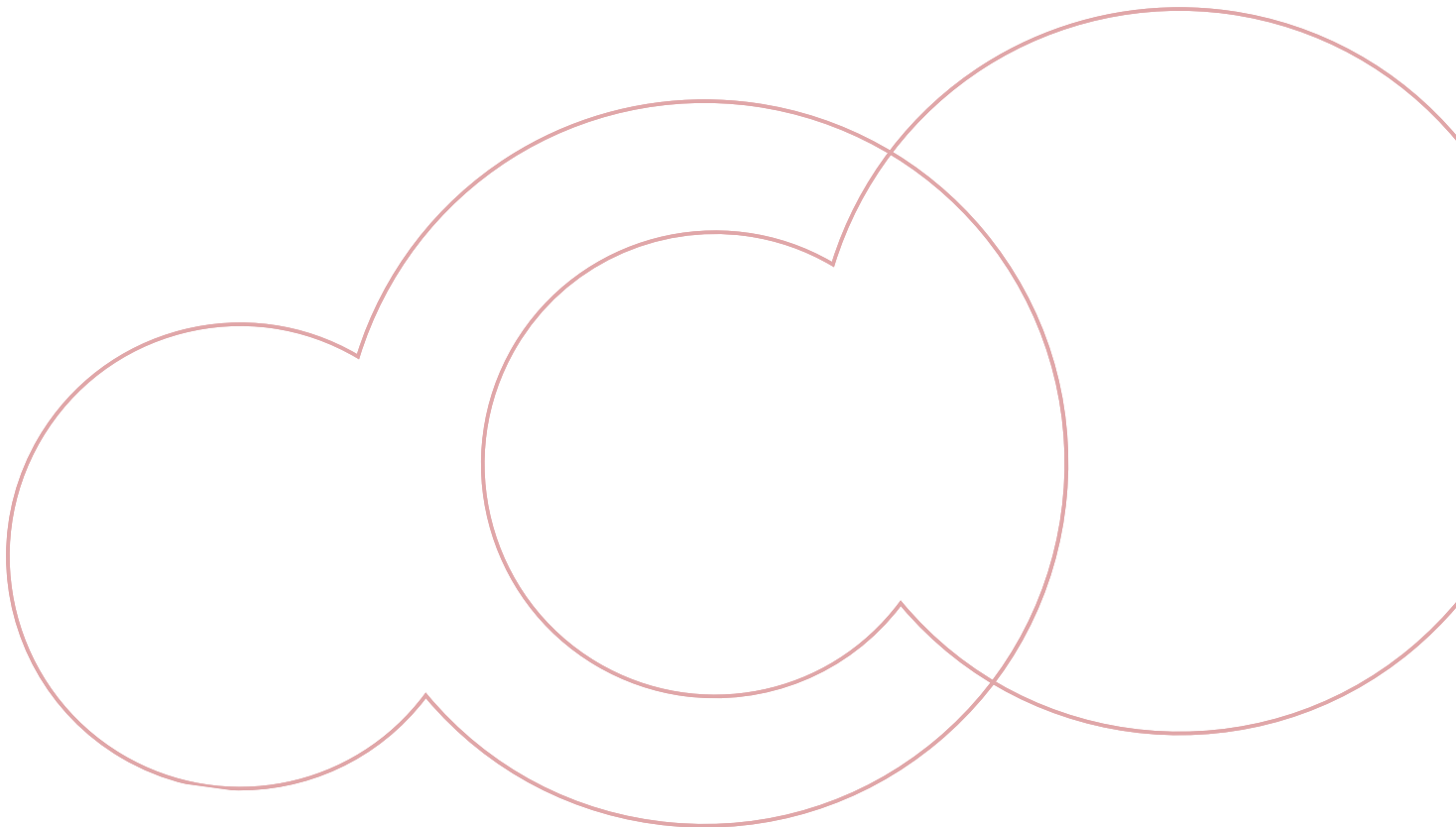
In 2023, the ETC Network demonstrated its role as a dynamic and effective platform for collaboration and regional development. Through its key activities like the ETC Network Conference and the Lunchtime Information Sessions, the ETC Network has made considerable strides in enhancing regional cooperation and development when it comes to ETC Projects. The Network's member-driven approach and diverse range of activities are set to continue contributing significantly to the region's progress.

For further information about the ETC Network or to Join the ETC Network:

Áine Whelan, EU Projects Officer:

awhelan@southernassembly.ie

Website: www.southernassembly.ie/etc-network



A photograph of a modern building with large glass windows reflecting the sky. In the foreground, several national flags are flying on tall poles. From left to right, the visible flags are: a portion of the German flag (black, red, and gold horizontal stripes), the Estonian flag (blue, black, and white horizontal stripes), the Irish flag (green, white, and orange vertical stripes), the Finnish flag (white with a blue cross), and the Spanish flag (red, yellow, and red horizontal stripes with the national coat of arms). A black street lamp is visible on the right side. A large red circular graphic is overlaid on the bottom right, containing the text.

European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) Programmes

European Territorial Cooperation Programmes

Overview

ETC, which is supported by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), provides co-funding to a number of Interreg programmes where Irish partners are eligible to receive funding for projects under the 2021-2027 programming period. These include:

Interreg North-West Europe
Interreg Northern Periphery & Arctic
Interreg Atlantic Area
Interreg Europe

Urban Innovative Actions and URBACT
ESPON
Peace Plus cross border

Note that the Interreg Ireland Wales programme has been discontinued under the 2021-2027 programming period due to the impact of Britain's exit from the European Union.

In 2023, the Southern Regional Assembly was actively involved in the monitoring and delivery of ETC programmes in Ireland.

| Programme | Southern Regional Assembly Role |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| Ireland Wales Programme | Programme Partner with Department of Public Expenditure & Reform and Welsh Government Contact Point in Ireland Designated First Level Control Audit for Irish partners |
| Interreg North-West Europe | Member State Representative on the Programme Monitoring Committee Contact Point in Ireland Designated First Level Control Audit for Irish partners |
| Interreg Northern Periphery & Arctic | Designated First Level Control Audit for Irish partners in the Southern & Eastern region |
| Interreg Europe | Contact Point in the Southern Region and most of the Eastern and Midland Region. Designated First Level Control Audit for Irish partners in the Southern Region and most of the Eastern and Midland Region |
| URBACT | Designated First Level Control Audit for Irish partners in the Southern Region and most of the Eastern and Midland Region. |
| ESPON | Representative on the Programme Monitoring Committee |

First Level Control Audit

First Level Control (FLC) involves checks or audits of project expenditure during project implementation before a payment claim is submitted. The Assembly's FLC team validates expenditure claims for five ETC programmes - Ireland Wales, Interreg North-West Europe, Interreg Northern Periphery & Arctic, Interreg Europe and URBACT.

The FLC team verifies and validates expenditure incurred by a project to ensure compliance with the relevant EU, national, regional, institutional and programme rules as well as with the provisions of

the subsidy contract and the approved application form. These controls provide a guarantee for the Managing Authority, the Certifying Authority and, most importantly, for the project itself, that costs co-financed under ETC funded Programmes are accounted for and eligible.

FLC covers 100% of all declared project spend. The FLC system consists of two types of verifications checks:

1. Desk based administrative checks on expenditure declared in payment claims,
2. On-the spot checks that take place at the project partner's office and carried out on a sample basis.

Activity Update 2023

During 2023, the Assembly's FLC team audited and validated 128 project claims worth €11,781,672.93 to Irish organisations participating as project partners on the five European Territorial Cooperation programmes.

The Controllers of the FLC Unit attended an online webinar on the Interreg Europe Portal on the 27th of June 2023. The webinar was organised by the Interreg Europe Secretariat.

Two Controllers from the FLC unit, Michael Buckley and Elayne McDonnell attended the Interreg Europe project training workshop and Network Meeting of Controllers from Partner States with Centralised Control Systems in Lille, France on the 25th to 27th of September 2023.

On the same dates, two Controllers from the FLC unit, Eve Hayden and Edel Hunt attended the national controller training session in Copenhagen, Denmark. This workshop was organised by the Northern Periphery and Arctic (NPA) Programme Secretariat.

Both events were organised to disseminate information on the new 21-27 Programme requirements (FLC system, on-the spot-checks, procurement, sampling methodology and simplified cost options) to Controllers who will be validating expenditure for both programmes, during the programming period.

Controllers in the unit were back out on the road from early January conducting on-the spot-checks in person at partner premises. There was a total of 34 projects with 58 Irish Partners to be spot-checked during 2023.

All projects were funded under the North-West Europe Programme and had an end date in 2023.

As it became apparent it would not be possible to spot-check all partners during the remaining timeframe before final project reports were to be submitted to the Secretariat. A decision was taken in conjunction with the North-West Europe (NWE) Secretariat to exempt certain project partners from the requirement to have on-the-spot-checks carried out on-site. Partners were selected for and granted an exemption from Article 125 (5), of Regulation (EU) No. 1303/2013. Only partners with capital expenditure, for example, Infrastructure and works and equipment expenditure were spot-checked during the second half of 2023.

In all twenty-three projects were spot-checked on-site during 2023.

During 2023, the new online resource on FLC was updated on the Assembly's website with

information on audit and programme-specific guidance for project partners, including programme guides to the new programme period 2021 – 2027. The link to the new section on the website is below.

For further information on First Level Control:

flc@southernassembly.ie

Website:

www.southernassembly.ie/first-level-control

Interreg VA: Cross-border Cooperation

Ireland Wales Programme



The Ireland-Wales Programme supported activities that facilitated cross-border co-operation between organisations in Ireland and Wales and came to a final close on the 31st December 2023. A maritime programme, it connected organisations, businesses, and communities on the west coast of Wales with the eastern and southern coasts of Ireland.

The final programme for 2014-2020 had an overall grant budget of €100m from the ERDF and a co-financing rate of 80%. The Welsh Government managed the programme with partners, the Southern Regional Assembly and the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform.

The Irish Development Officers were based at the Southern Regional Assembly, which was the designated First Level Control for payment claims from Irish partners.

The Programme had three priorities under which projects operate:

1. Cross-border Innovation
2. Adaptation of the Irish Sea & Coastal Communities to Climate Change
3. Cultural & Natural Resources & Heritage



Projects waving goodbye at the Ireland Wales Programme Closing Event, Portmarnock on 23rd June 2023, held to celebrate the achievements of the Programme and to reflect on the great work and impact the projects have made over its 30-year lifetime. Since 1994, the Ireland Wales Programme brought €382.1m of cross border investment in 320 extraordinary and innovative projects.

The Programme supported solutions to the shared challenges on both sides of the Irish sea. To improve the economic and sustainable development of Ireland and Wales in areas such as transport, environmental protection, community development, enterprise support,

education, training, culture, heritage, and tourism. Connecting organisations, businesses, communities, and academia on the west coast of Wales with the eastern and southern coasts of Ireland.



Back: Michael McGrath, DPER; Noel Farrell, EU Commission; Geraint Green, WEFO; Peter Ryland, WEFO; Enda Hogan, SRA; Cllr Thomas Phelan, SRA. Front: Breda Curran, SRA; Mike Pollard, WEFO; Mike Wallwork, WEFO; Suzanne Harte, DPER; David Kelly, SRA; Marie Harnett, SRA; Samantha Richardson, SRA.

Priority 1 - Cross-border Innovation

BRAINWAVES

Agri Prospecting
Archwilio Amaethyddol
Taiscéalaíocht Talmhaíochta



Brainwaves applied a circular economic approach to manage slurry and dirty water by developing technology to remediate these through duckweed to generate economically valuable feed to enhance the competitiveness of the beef and dairy industry in the target area. The Project closed in 2023.

Partners: University College Cork (Lead) and Aberystwyth University.

Funding: €1.16m ERDF.



Healthy Oats surveyed consumer attitudes to oat products and oat germplasm performance in current and future climate scenarios to help industry develop new products, demonstrate health benefits, and evaluate how policy can promote sustainable oat product production to the benefit of Irish and Welsh economies. The Project closed in 2023.

Partners: University College Dublin (Lead), Teagasc, Aberystwyth University, Swansea University.

Funding: €2.18m ERDF.



SELKIE established a cross-border network of ocean energy SMEs and supply chain companies, conducting industry-academic collaborative R&D projects, transferring R&D knowledge to wave and tidal industry/ SME stakeholders to advance the technology sector as whole. The Project closed in 2023.

Partners: University College Cork (Lead), DP Energy Ireland Ltd., Gavin and Doherty Geosolutions, Swansea University, Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum, Menter Môn.

Funding: €4.2m ERDF.



Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin



BANGOR
UNIVERSITY



Dŵr Uisce | Energy Efficiency in Water Services
Adennill Ynni yn y Diwydiant Dŵr

Dŵr Uisce Improved the efficiency of water distribution in Ireland and Wales was at the core of the project ethos. This was achieved by developing new low carbon, energy-saving technologies & services and building capacity for innovation in the water industry through the network of organisations interested in sustainability in the water-energy nexus. The Project closed in 2023.

Partners: Trinity College Dublin (Lead) and Bangor University.

Funding: €4.47m ERDF.



CALIN supported research & development programmes for SMEs in the life sciences sector. The Project closed in 2023.

Partners: Swansea University (Lead), Bangor University, Cardiff University, University College Dublin, Tyndall National Institute and National University of Ireland Galway.

Funding: €14.72m ERDF.



CATALYST supported Irish & Welsh businesses in the life science and food & drink sectors to develop new specialist products, research accessing new markets and ensure sustainably sourced and minimised product packaging. The Project closed in 2021.

Partners: University of Wales-Trinity Saint David (Lead), WRAP Cymru, Carlow Institute of Technology, Tipperary Co. Co., Carlow Co. Co. **Funding:** €1.35 million ERDF.



piSCES Smart Cluster Energy System worked with the fish processing industry to reduce operational costs and carbon footprint by developing and testing a new 'smart grid' electricity network. Project closed in 2021.

Partners: Waterford Institute of Technology (Lead), Cardiff University, Milford Haven Port Authority, Bord Iascaigh Mhara.

Funding: €1.8m ERDF.



More than a Club worked with local professional football clubs in Ireland & Wales to help set up stand-alone social enterprises delivering innovative programmes to address social needs in disadvantaged communities. The project closed in 2019.

Partners: Football Association of Ireland (Lead), Vi-Ability.

Funding: €1.03m ERDF.



The Irish Sea Portal (Pilot) cluster focused on a study of juvenile shellfish larvae and seabed settlement. The Project closed in 2019.

Partners: Bangor University (Lead), Bord Iascaigh Mhara.

Funding: €1.1m ERDF



Bucanier focused on increasing the innovation capacity within SMEs & social enterprises. The Project closed in 2021.

Partners: Pembrokeshire Co. Co. (Lead), Carmarthenshire Co. Co., Wexford Co. Co., Swansea University, Carlow Institute of Technology, Bord Iascaigh Mhara.

Funding: €2.35m ERDF.

Priority 2 - Adaptation of the Irish Sea and Coastal Communities to Climate Change



Acclimatise investigated the impact of climate change on bathing waters and developed technologies, incl. smart, real-time predictive tools, to monitor water quality to protect human health and the marine environment. The Project closed in June 2023.

Partners: University College Dublin (Lead), Aberystwyth University.

Funding: €7.4m ERDF.



Acclimatise investigated the impact of climate change on bathing waters and developed technologies, incl. smart, real-time predictive tools, to monitor water quality to protect human health and the marine environment. The Project closed in June 2023.

Partners: University College Dublin (Lead), Aberystwyth University.

Funding: €7.4m ERDF.



CHERISH aimed to increase cross-border knowledge & understanding of the impacts (past, present & near-future) of climate change, storminess & extreme weather events on the cultural heritage of reefs, islands, and headlands of the Irish Sea. The Project closed in 2023.

Partners: Royal Commission on the Ancient & Historical Monuments of Wales (Lead), Aberystwyth University, Geological Survey of Ireland, Discovery Programme Ireland. **Funding:** €4.9m ERDF.



BlueFish developed an understanding of the connectivity between shellfish, finfish and parasite and pathogen populations in the Irish Sea, and how this connectivity might be altered by predicted climate change effects on the physical, chemical, and biotic environment. The Project closed in 2021.

Partners: Bangor University (Lead), Swansea University, Aberystwyth University, University College Cork, Marine Institute, Bord Iascaigh Mhara.

Funding: €5.3m ERDF.



ECHOES addressed the challenges of climate change on the coastal bird habitats of the Irish Sea by promoting climate change understanding and providing monitoring tools to manage and adapt to its potential impacts. Working with Irish & Welsh stakeholders incl. those tasked with managing coastal habitats and bird populations and people who live within or enjoy the coastal environment. The Project closed in 2023.

Partners: Aberystwyth University (Lead), University College Cork, Compass Informatics, British Trust for Ornithology and Geo Smart Decisions. **Funding:** €2.6m ERDF.



STREAM addressed challenges in areas of vulnerability to the impacts of climate change through the development of a large-scale estuarine water quality monitoring system, improved knowledge flow through the provision of a web portal that reported live data on marine quality to national and local stakeholders and the general public. The Project closed in 2023.

Partners: Waterford Institute of Technology (Lead), Swansea University, Munster Technological University.

Funding: €4.3m ERDF.

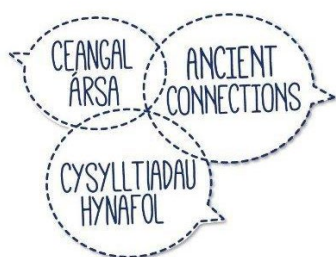


ECOSTRUCTURE raised awareness of eco-engineering solutions to the challenge of coastal adaptation to climate change by providing developers and regulators with accessible tools/ resources based on interdisciplinary research in the fields of ecology, engineering, and socioeconomics. The Project closed in 2023.

Partners: Aberystwyth University (Lead), Swansea University, Bangor University, University College Cork, University College Dublin.

Funding: €4.88m ERDF.

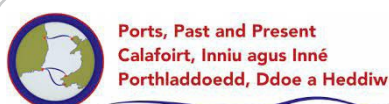
Priority 3 – Cultural and Natural Resources and Heritage



Rediscovering Ancient Connections - The Saints revived the ancient links between communities in Pembrokeshire and Wexford using shared heritage of St David and his pupil/ protégé St Aidan. St David is the patron saint of Wales, commemorated in St David's whilst St Aidan is closely associated with Wexford, in particular Ferns. The project aims to motivate both communities to rediscover their shared heritage, mentor each other, and to share knowledge, experience and skills and use this shared heritage to attract people to the cross-border region, specifically Wexford and Pembrokeshire. The Project closed in 2023.

Partners: Wexford Co. Co., Visit Wexford, Pembrokeshire Co. Co., Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority.

Funding: €3.08m ERDF.



Ports, Past and Present explored the cultures of the port areas of Dublin, Rosslare, Holyhead, Fishguard and Pembroke Dock to bring this heritage to public awareness, both within coastal communities and to increase and enhance visitor numbers and experiences to increase the capacity of coastal communities to utilise their natural and cultural heritage as a driver to economic growth. The Project closed in 2023.

Partners: University College Cork (Lead), Wexford Co. Co., Aberystwyth University, University of Wales Trinity St David.

Funding: €2.6m ERDF.



Celtic Routes encouraged visitors to explore new areas of Wales and Ireland enroute to their final tourist destination by enhancing visitor appeal through the development of new trails linking local culture, heritage, and the natural environment. The project transformed less well-known areas from transit zones to new touring sites to increase the time visitors spend in these regions and boost local economies. The Project closed in 2023.

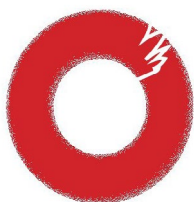
Partners: Carmarthenshire Co. Co. (Lead), Waterford Co. Co., Wexford Co. Co., Wicklow Co. Co., Ceredigion Co. Co., Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority.

Funding: €3.89m ERDF.



LIVE promoted tourism using the ecomuseum model and through co-operative marketing of natural and cultural capital assets to bring tourists into the regions outside of the traditional peak tourist seasons, enhancing the consequential socio-economic benefits to the coastal communities. The Project closed in 2023.

Partners: University College Cork (Lead), Bangor University, Gywnedd Co, South Kerry Development Partnership, Kerry Co. Co., National Trust. **Funding:** €2.66m ERDF



PORTALIS was a pilot project that explored the first connections between Ireland and Wales, dating back to the Mesolithic period, about 10,000 years ago. It piloted a cross-border visitor experience at Waterford Museum of Treasures (Ireland) and Ceredigion Museum (Wales) mapping the story of these crossings. The Project closed in 2023.

Partners: South East Technological University (Lead), University of Wales, Trinity Saint David, Ceredigion County Council and Waterford Chamber of Commerce.

Funding: €1.56m ERDF.

For information about the Programme:

Samantha Richardson, Development Officer: srichardson@southernassembly.ie

Breda Curran, Development Officer: bcurran@southernassembly.ie

Michael Buckley was responsible for the First Level Control Team: flc@southernassembly.ie

Interreg VB: Transnational Cooperation

Interreg North-West Europe

Interreg



Co-funded by
the European Union

North-West Europe

The Interreg North-West Europe (NWE) Programme fosters transnational cooperation to make North-West Europe a key economic player and an attractive place to work and live, with high levels of innovation, sustainability, and cohesion. Interreg NWE supports cooperation across borders in seven countries (Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, and Switzerland). Projects must involve partners from at least three different countries and apply a joint approach to tackle common issues. The aim is to reduce the disparities among regions and raise the overall level of performance across the whole area.

Thematic focus 2021- 2027

The Interreg North-West Europe programme document outlines the five priorities for the 2021-2027 programme to focus on: Climate and Environment, Energy Transition, Circular Economy, Innovation and Resilience, and Inclusive Society.

Southern Regional Assembly and the Interreg North-West Europe programme

The Southern Regional Assembly hosts the National Contact Point for Interreg North-West Europe in Ireland and holds a seat on the Monitoring Committee together with Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform and the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly.

The presidency of the Interreg North-West Europe programme was held by France in 2023, and all Monitoring Committee (MC) meetings were held in France. Preparations for the Irish presidency of the Interreg North-West Europe programme in 2024 were ongoing in Q3-Q4 2023 to identify suitable meeting locations and communications activities. A strategy meeting took place in Brussels on the 18th and 19th October 2023 where Member States discussed key messages for communications and future funding directions for the period of the Irish presidency in 2024.

Funding awarded in 2023

The programme had a busy year in 2023, with

several calls for proposals: Call 2 (Steps 1 and 2) Call 3 (small scale projects) and Call 4. The two-stage process under Call 2 allowed applicants to submit a shorter concept note at Step 1, and if successful they were selected to proceed to Step 2, giving applicants more time and leading to higher quality final proposals. Call 3 “small scale” aimed to allow project applications with a reduced scope, partnership size, and duration to apply to the NWE Programme, thus attracting smaller organisations and newcomers, an important consideration for balanced regional development.

A total of 46 projects were awarded funding in 2023 across the 5 priority areas: 14 projects from Call 1, 17 projects from Call 2 and 15 projects from Call 3 for small-scale projects. Throughout 2023, projects from the 2014-2020 funding period finalised their activities and prepared for closing. Call 4 was launched in October 2023 with a deadline of March 2024.



Monitoring Committee meeting, Nantes, France, November 2023.

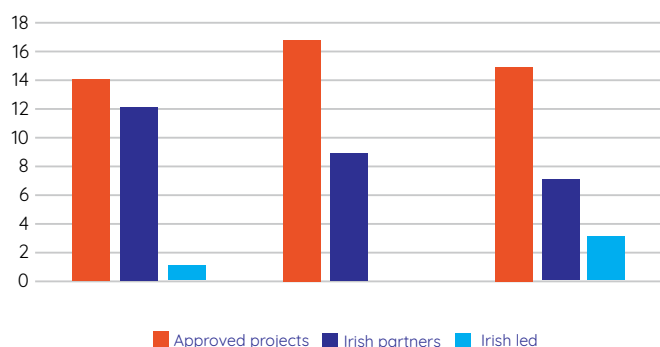
Irish performance in the first calls

Irish partners have performed very well in the first three calls for Interreg North-West Europe funding. Of the 46 projects approved for funding, 28 (57%) had Irish partners. Four had Irish Lead Partners: Ballyhoura Development, Ballymun Job Centre Co-op Society Ltd, National Botanic Gardens (OPW), and the Technological University of the Shannon. The projects cover a wide range of topics from renewable energy, access to the labour market, digitisation of biodiversity to technology for manufacturing development in the regions.

| Region | Total investment in the region | EU Contribution | % of total invested in the region |
|---------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Southern | €10,157,733 | €6,094,640 | 49% |
| Eastern and Midland | €6,386,357 | €3,831,814 | 31% |
| Northern Western | €3,990,897 | €2,394,538 | 19% |
| TOTAL | €20,534,987 | €12,320,992 | 100% |

Table 1: Interreg NWE investment by region.

Approved projects with Irish partners



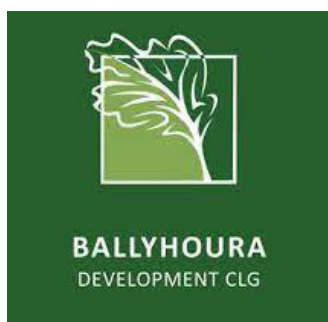
Interreg NWE Approved projects with Irish partners.

Case study AquaCom project

Interreg  Co-funded by the European Union
North-West Europe

AquaCOM

Awarded funding at Call 1, the AquaCom project kicked off in March 2023, it is led by Ballyhoura Development based in East Limerick and North Cork.



The €6.4 million project includes partners from Belgium, Germany, The Netherlands, and France, and focuses on Aquathermal energy (AT), which extracts heat or cold from water - surface water from rivers, canals, lakes, etc, heat pumps are then used to upgrade the thermal energy and provide it to heat networks.

The project will increase the number of energy communities engaged in AT energy projects and will include a learning network with visits to the pilot sites, a virtual AT energy competence centre and masterclasses.

Promotion and support to project applicants

Activities to promote open Calls 2,3 and 4 continued throughout 2023, with the National Contact Point as speaker aiming to reach wider audiences with the objective of increased participation of Irish partners, including those from the Southern Region. The CP work targeted different sectors to encourage applications; a wide range of events were leveraged - from the Association of Irish Regions Conference, targeting over 200 councillors in Monaghan to the Access Europe EU funding showcase at the RDS, Dublin, targeting civil society and local development groups. Throughout the year, a number of online and in person presentations targeted Local Authorities in the Southern Region, and the Southern Regional Assembly was invited to speak at the Oireachtas Committee on the topic of “Unlocking EU funding” together with other regional assemblies in October 2023.



Aine Whelan and Sarah Davoren, presenting at Access Europe Showcase, RDS, Dublin, November 2023

Further Information on Interreg NWE in Ireland:

Sarah Davoren, National Contact Point:
sdavoren@southernassembly.ie
Financial Control: flc@southernassembly.ie
Website: www.nweurope.eu

Interreg Atlantic Area

**Interreg
Atlantic Area**



Co-funded by
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The Programme's mission is to be at the forefront of the transition to a unique, carbon neutral and climate resilient Atlantic Area Region. The Programme fosters the integration of sustainable economic development, societal well-being, and the preservation of biodiversity. The Atlantic Area 2021-2027 covers the western part of the Atlantic Ocean and includes all regions of Ireland and Portugal, as well as several French and Spanish regions close to or on the Atlantic Ocean coast.



The Atlantic Area is an eminently maritime territory. The programme brings together stakeholders from different sectors and regions to work on innovative and pioneering ideas and create benefits for those who live and work in the Atlantic Area. The programme budget for 2021-2027 is €113 million from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

The Programme has four priorities under which projects operate:

- Priority 1:** Blue innovation and competitiveness
- Priority 2:** Blue/Green environment
- Priority 3:** Blue sustainable and social tourism & culture
- Priority 4:** A better governance for cooperation in the Atlantic Area

Approximately €53 million (ERDF) was allocated

to 27 projects in Call 1 of the 2021-2027 Programme during 2023.

In 2023 there was one Programme Monitoring Committee Meeting for the 2014-2020 programme and two Programme Monitoring Committee Meetings for the 2021-2027 programme.

For further information:

National Contact Point: todoherthy@nwra.ie
Website: www.atlanticarea.eu/

Interreg Northern Periphery & Arctic

Interreg



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Northern Periphery and Arctic

The Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme provides a framework for regions to work together with a focus on promoting sustainable development in remote and sparsely populated communities. Sparse population and extreme peripherality from the economic centres of the EU are defining characteristics that present a functional rationale for cooperation across the territory.

The Programme area covers Northern Finland, the West of Ireland, Northern Sweden, the Faroe Islands, Greenland, Iceland, and Northern parts of Norway. The Programme encourages effective cooperation, to maximise place-based development, builds on the strengths within sparsely populated communities, and to find innovative solutions to support links into larger markets and more populated areas.

The main focus of Interreg NPA projects is the transnational learning between project partners. The Interreg NPA Programme addresses the challenges and opportunities in the programme area through 3 Priorities:

- Priority 1:** Strengthening the innovation capacity for resilient and attractive NPA communities.
- Priority 2:** Strengthening the capacity for climate change adaptation, and resource sufficiency in NPA communities.
- Priority 3:** Strengthening the organisational capacity among NPA communities to make use of cooperation opportunities.



The Southern Regional Assembly sits on the Programme's Regional Advisory Group and is the designated First Level Control for all payment claims from partners located in the region.

In 2023 11 main projects and 16 Preparatory and small-scale projects commenced with funding amounting to €7,300,058 (ERDF) under 2021-2027 Programme.

In 2023 there were two Programme Monitoring Committee meeting held for the 2021-2027 programme and two Regional Appraisal Group meetings were organised.

For further information:

National Contact Point: todoherly@nwra.ie
First Level Control: flc@southernassembly.ie / info@nwra.ie
Website: www.interreg-npa.eu

Interreg VC: Interregional Cooperation Interreg Europe



Interreg Europe is an interregional cooperation programme, co-funded by the European Union. The European Union strives to reduce disparities in the levels of development, growth and quality of life in and across Europe's regions. This programme contributes to this objective by

helping regional and local governments across Europe to develop and deliver better policy and runs from 2021 to 2027. It is dedicated to capacity building through the exchange of experience and good practices in all priorities of the EU cohesion policy via:

- Interregional cooperation projects
- Policy Learning Platform services

The cooperation projects and Platform contribute to all priorities of the EU cohesion policy:



Following a very successful call 1 in 2022 where 134 applications where 72 applications were approved, including 36 Irish organisations involved in 27 projects, call 2 was launched in March 2023. The call closed on 31st of May with 146 applications submitted. This involved 96 organisations from all Partner States.

In December 2023 the Monitoring Committee approved 78 applications again with very good Irish participation involving 34 organisations participating in 25 projects.

There will be a further call in 2024.

Regional Contact Point for Southern & Eastern regions:

David Kelly, dkelly@southernassembly.ie
First Level Control: flc@southernassembly.ie / info@nwra.ie
Website: www.interregeurope.eu/

Urbact IV



The URBACT Programme seeks to enable and support towns and cities throughout Europe in transnational networking and the exchange of learning and good practice in pursuit of integrated and sustainable urban development. The Programme includes the 27 EU Member States, as well as Norway and Switzerland. For the first time, URBACT now includes the Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA) countries: Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia. The fourth programming period (URBACT

IV) covers 2021-27 and amounts to EUR 79 769 000 (ERDF), along with the IPA countries accounting for an additional budget of EUR 5 000 000.

The traditional Action Planning and Transfer Network types that Irish towns and cities have benefitted from under past URBACT programming periods continue under URBACT IV. There is also a new addition: the Innovation Transfer Networks, which sees the Programme apply its URBACT method with past projects completed under the Urban Innovation Action initiative (pre cursor to the European Urban Initiative) cities.

URBACT IV will speak to INTERREG Specific Objective (ISO 1): a better cooperation governance by enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders to implement urban territorial strategies. The Programme seeks to improve the ability of all urban stakeholders (as change agents) to design and implement sustainable urban development policies, practices and innovations in ways that are integrated, participative and place based. The Programme, through all its networks and activities, will further encourage full consideration and actions on the following three cross-cutting priorities: gender equality, green transition, and digital transition. These priorities have been identified as challenges for European towns and cities during the 2021-2027 programming period.

The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly is the National Contact Point for URBACT in Ireland since 2018 and was re-appointed for the new programming period. The Southern Regional Assembly provides the designated first level control for all Irish project partners.

An URBACT Ireland Info Day occurred at the Custom House, Dublin in January 2023. This saw the launch of URBACT IV in Ireland and the first call, for Action Planning Networks (APNs). Irish local authorities (6) were partners to 7 of the 30 APNs which began their activities in June 2023. These include Limerick City (2), Ennis, Clare (1), Ballymahon, Longford (1), Sligo Town (1), Navan, Meath (1) and, Balbriggan, Fingal (1). Fingal County Council became the first ever URBACT Lead Partner in Ireland. You can read more about the Irish networks [here](#).

In 2023, there were also two Programme Monitoring Committee meetings held: one in Umea, Sweden in May and one in Barcelona, Spain in November. The Programme was presented

multiple times throughout Ireland, among these at the AIR Conference in Monaghan, during the Southern Regional Assembly's ETC Spotlight on the Region event in Wexford, and at the Access Europe showcase event in the RDS. Upon the above seven APN project partners getting their activities underway in Ireland, there was a visit of the Lead Partner and or Lead Expert to each APN town and city. The purpose of this was to establish the baseline situation in determining the change that was being sought in each locality. Such visits occurred between July and December 2023, including in Limerick in early September and Ennis at Hallowe'en. Two of the Irish partners (Balbriggan and Sligo) hosted the visit of their whole transnational network (approximately 25 to 30 persons from eight to nine partners) in their towns in November and December 2023, respectively.

To learn more:

National Contact Point for Ireland:
Karl Murphy, Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly
urbactireland@emra.ie/kmurphy@emra.ie

ESPON 2023

ESPON



Co-funded by
the European Union
Interreg

The new ESPON 2030 programme, running for the period 2021-2027, bridges research with policy, ensuring policy is evidence informed. This is achieved through providing territorial analyses, data, and maps to:

- Support EU development policies – and particularly Cohesion Policy – with facts and evidence.
- Help public authorities to benchmark their region or city, identify new challenges and potentials and shape successful development policies for the future.

All 27 EU member states and four partner states (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland) participate in the ESPON programme and contribute to its co-finance.

As with every EU funded programme, ESPON is managed by a Managing Authority, which is the Ministry of Energy and Spatial Planning of Luxembourg. The Maynooth University Social Sciences Institute is the National Contact Point for

the ESPON 2030 programme while the Southern Regional Assembly sits on the Programme Monitoring Committee.

The programme is implemented by the ESPON EGTC (European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation), which is a structure, jointly created by Luxembourg together with the three Belgian regions of Flanders, Wallonia, and Brussels Capital. During 2023, the ESPON Monitoring Committee met on two occasions - June 2023 (Luleå, Sweden), & November 2023 (Cuenca, Spain) with the Managing Authority and EGTC to advance the roll-out of the programme, while the national Contact Points met on two occasions to consider its promotion and dissemination.

The total budget of ESPON for the programming period 2021- 2027 is €60m, whereof the EU contribution is 80% (€48m) and the contribution of the 27 member states is 20% (€12m). In addition, the ESPON 2030 Programme receives support of €1.685m from the four Partner States (Iceland, Lichtenstein, Norway, Switzerland). ESPON creates evidence and knowledge with a territorial focus. This is done in three key ways: (1) European Research Projects, (2) Targeted Analysis Projects, and (3) On-Demand Analysis. ESPON develop studies based on the needs of European public authorities at all levels. Any local, regional, or national authority as well as an EU institution can become an ESPON stakeholder.

A key innovation of the ESPON 2030 Programme is to take a more strategic approach to investigating territorial challenges through Thematic Action Plans (TAPs). To date, 8 TAPs are in operation, ranging from Climate Neutral Territories to Governance of New Geographies and Smart Connectivity to Living, Working and Travelling across Borders.

The past year saw all aspects of the ESPON 2030 programme rolled out. This included:

- The approval of the first European Research projects;
- Two open calls under Targeted Analysis;
- The publication of three issues of the ESPON Journal, *TerritoriALL*; focusing on Green Industrialisation, Small Cities – Big Expectations (which included articles from David Kelly of the Southern Regional Assembly and Cllr. Kieran McCarthy, Cork City Council), and Thriving Regions – Stronger Together;
- The hosting of two international seminars -

Territorial perspective of green industrialisation, held in June in Luleå, Sweden, and Small and medium-sized cities: drivers of sustainable development and urban-rural cooperation, held in November in Cuenca, Spain; and

- The publication of policy papers on functional rural areas and green industrialisation.

During the course of 2023, ESPON Ireland hosted three events. The first, held online on 28 September, focused on ESPON 2030 – Opportunities to Engage and Operational Insights from Previous ESPON Projects, and was designed to raise awareness of, and promote engage with, the ESPON 2030 programme across a diverse range of stakeholders. The subsequent two events, held in-person, were more closely aligned to the TAPs and demonstrating how ESPON research can provide a strong evidence-base and good practice examples for national, regional and local policy. On 28 November, a half -day seminar was organised focusing on Approaches to Ireland's Metropolitan Area Spatial Plans (MASPs) under the 'Governance of New Geographies' TAP. This was followed by an event on the 7 December which considered The Role of Blue/Green Infrastructure under the 'Climate Neutral Territories' TAP. Further details on all events are available here.

In addition, the ESPON 2030 programme was profiled as part of the Irish Regions Conference on Connecting, Communicating and Collaborating – Irish Regions Cooperating across the EU in April.



Delegates at the ESPON Seminar, Small and medium-sized cities: drivers of sustainable development and urban-rural cooperation, held in Cuenca on 15 November 2023.

For further information:

Caroline Creamer is the ESPON Contact Point (ECP): Email: caroline.creamer@mu.ie
Website: www.espon.eu
X Platform: @ESPON_IE



EU Projects

EU Projects

ROBIN



DEPLOYING CIRCULAR BIOECONOMIES AT
REGIONAL LEVEL WITH A TERRITORIAL APPROACH

The

Horizon Europe funded ROBIN project aims to empower Europe's regions to adapt their governance models and structures in ways that accelerate the achievement of their circular bioeconomy targets while promoting social innovation and accounting for different regional contexts.

The Southern Regional Assembly and Munster Technological University's Circular Bioeconomy Research Group (CircBio) are the Irish partners for the Southern Region on ROBIN.

Running from September 2022 until 2025, ROBIN will allow us to learn from and share knowledge with other European regions and partners, including Greece, Spain, Germany, and Slovakia, about their bioeconomy regional structures and strategies.

What is the Bioeconomy?

The bioeconomy covers all sectors and systems that rely on biological resources (animals, plants, micro-organisms, and derived biomass including organic waste), their functions and principals.

Benefits to the Southern Region

By taking part in ROBIN, the Southern Region will get access to deep knowledge about the motivations and perceived barriers of regional actors (clusters, local authorities, SMEs, citizens) to engage in the bioeconomy. The project will help to drive the implementation of the bioeconomy in the region by being presented with the most appropriate business models and social measures to this end. In addition to this, ROBIN provide shortcuts and improvements of the region's bio-based value chains, as well as working towards climate-neutrality and lowering the environmental footprint of our bio-based products and services. The Bioeconomy, as well as the circular economy is a significant policy focus for the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Southern Region. The RSES has several Regional Policy Objectives (RPO's) and visions which relate to the objectives of ROBIN.

ROBIN 2nd Project Partner Meeting- March 2023, Seville, Spain.

March 2023 saw ROBIN's second project partner meeting in Seville, hosted by the Technological Corporation of Andalusia and Junta de Andalucía. This event enabled partners to assess progress, engage with ROBIN's Advisory Board, and delve into the insights garnered from research. The focus was on customising governance models for the circular bioeconomy, setting a tone for future endeavours.

ROBIN Southern Region Co-Creation Workshop- May 2023, Cork, Ireland

A significant project milestone for the Southern Regional Assembly was the Co-creation Workshop at Munster Technological University, Cork, in May 2023.

Here, over 10 bioeconomy experts from various sectors undertook a SWOT analysis, identifying opportunities and challenges in the Southern Region's bioeconomy. This workshop was crucial in shaping the Circular Bioeconomy Governance Model Canvas, an innovative tool developed within the ROBIN Project.



ROBIN Co-Creation Workshop, Cork May 2023

ROBIN's 3rd Project Partner Meeting- October 2023, Cork, Ireland

In October 2023 Munster Technological University in Cork hosted the 3rd Project Partner Meeting for ROBIN.

This event was pivotal, transitioning ROBIN into its second year with a focus on developing and testing Regional Action Plans. Discussions revolved around governance models, the ROBIN toolbox, and the intricate task of shaping and finalising Regional Action Plans.

ROBIN presented as part of Bioeconomy Ireland Week- October 2023, Waterford, Ireland

Co-hosted by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the Southern Regional Assembly, the launch event for Bioeconomy Ireland Week 2023 took place in Assembly House, Waterford on Monday 16th October 2023. The event, titled Communities, Regions & Cities – The ‘Bioeconomy in Action’ in your Region, served to highlight ongoing bioeconomy research to support regional governance advancements; to examine ongoing policy, scientific and industrial efforts supporting the bioeconomy; and to discuss activities and actions which could address key challenges in scaling up the bioeconomy at a regional and local and community level.

The event was attended by over 40 delegates, including Martin Heydon T.D., Minister of State with special responsibility for Research and Development, Farm Safety and New Market Development at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, and Cllr. Terry Shannon, Cathaoirleach of the Southern Regional Assembly. Researcher and Project Officers from four, separate bioeconomy research projects gave insights into their work, including the ROBIN project. Rebecca Walsh of the Southern Regional Assembly presentation outlined why a territorial approach is followed with ROBIN, where the regional governance models will be deployed, and how the consortium plans to achieve project objectives.

For further information about ROBIN:

Colm Walsh, EU Projects Officer:

cwalsh@southernassembly.ie

Website: <https://robin-project.eu/>

Twitter: @robinproject1

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/robinhorizonproject/>

SMCNetZero



SMCNetZero is an 18-month Horizon Europe Project which aims to create and strengthen local innovation ecosystems in Small and Medium-sized Cities (SMCs) to achieve net zero through the collaborative efforts of local authorities, SMEs, academia, NGOs, and investors.

The Project commenced in March 2023 and the Southern Regional Assembly is part of a consortium of seven Project participants that also includes BABLE Smart Cities (Germany), ODRAZ (Croatia), the Smart City Cluster (Spain), BLOXHUB & We Build Denmark (Denmark), and Urban DNA (UK).

The objectives of SMCNetZero are to:

- Improve the knowledge base of SMCs and SMEs regarding decarbonisation solutions, adaptation strategies and funding opportunities to assist them on their journey towards net zero.
- Increase collaboration and networking opportunities among stakeholders, namely providers of zero-emission solutions and local authorities in SMCs, by creating a digital space and development of a net zero roadmap that is replicable in its implementation.
- Identify and engage innovation leaders from public and private sectors in different regions to ensure high-value content and participation in the project's activities.
- Ensure wide participation and maximum impact through engagement and knowledge-building activities, with a focus on underrepresented groups and organisations.
- Facilitate the implementation and scale-up of innovation projects in SMCs, by developing core common solutions and promoting demand aggregation to increase market attractiveness for SMEs and offer better value for SMCs.

Some of the ways that the SMCNetZero Project benefits participants are: access to a digital platform containing extensive decarbonisation resources and tools; networking opportunities

which allow for sharing of challenges, successes in your SMC's decarbonisation journey with other SMCs in the Project; showcasing of your city's achievements; access to knowledge and best practice from other SMCs; partnership opportunities, as well as capacity-building training and visits to exemplar decarbonisation sites.

SMCNetZero Progress 2023

In April, the Project kick-off meeting was held, giving each partner the opportunity to showcase their teams and responsibilities within the project. Detailed market analysis of stakeholders from SMCs, SMEs, and key innovation actors in the southern region involved in net zero was conducted, alongside research into resources on funding and best practice in the region. This involved a series of desk research, questionnaires, and interviews that has contributed towards our knowledge base.

In September, the Assembly hosted a webinar entitled 'SMCNetZero - Finding Solutions to Speed your Journey to Net Zero' - where participants learned more about the project and the common challenges and potential solutions for Small and Medium Cities (SMCs) and SMEs.

The Assembly also contributed to the SMCNetZero Digital Forum on the BABLE Smart Cities platform which acts as a virtual 'one stop shop', dedicated to connecting various innovation ecosystem actors in SMCs for knowledge share and collaboration towards decarbonization.

As part of the capacity-building objective of the Project to disseminate knowledge about existing

successful initiatives that transfer key knowledge, and promote funding and other resources, the Southern Regional Assembly contributed a series of blog posts on topics of direct relevance to stakeholders that can be accessed on the SMCNetZero website, as well as through our participation in the SMCNetZero podcast.

For further reading, resources, blogs and podcasts, please visit: <https://smcnetzero.eu/>
Colm Walsh, EU Projects Officer: cwalsh@southernassembly.ie



Européen | Europees Economisch
en Sociaal Comité
www.eesc.europa.eu



Irish Regions
European Office

Irish Regions European Office



Overview

The Irish Regions European Office (IREO) is a shared service provides a shared service for the three Regional Assemblies and 31 local authorities of Ireland (LRAs).

Operationally the office is part of the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly and with the support of the Department for Housing, Planning and Local Government, the focus is on bringing the EU closer to the wider local government sector and vice versa.

The three Regional Assemblies play a vital role in the management and delivery of EU Regional Policy funding programmes in Ireland. All three Regional Assemblies also act as National Contact Points for European Territorial Cooperation Programmes and participate on the monitoring committees of those programmes.

In 2023, the IREO continued to deliver on its strategy which aims to ensure that the office delivers timely, strategic advice and information on EU policy developments to the three Regional Assemblies and local authorities in Ireland

and that it coordinates and supports the Irish Delegation to the Committee of the Regions.

This strategy will be delivered by:

- Raising awareness and communicating the opportunities for participation in EU funding programmes
- Seeking opportunities for influencing EU policy developments
- Building capacity, networks and partnerships with other regions in the EU
- Signpost to the National Contact Points based in Regional Assemblies, highlighting their role in providing pre and post project development support
- Raising the profile of the strengths of local and regional Government in Ireland to European partners and to the EU institutions.

Raising Awareness and Communication

On 19th April 2023, the Irish Regions European Office (IREO), in conjunction with the three Regional Assemblies of Ireland and the Irish Delegation to the EU Committee of the Regions held an EU funding conference “Connecting, Communicating and Collaborating – Irish Regions Cooperating across the EU: How local authorities can engage in European Programmes”.

This one-day national conference was attended by over 130 delegates, and it aimed to communicate the opportunities for local government to participate in EU funding, particularly in the European Territorial Cooperation programmes, the Horizon Europe Missions and the LIFE programme.



Paschal Donohoe, Minister for Public Expenditure at the EU Funding Conference, Athlone.

Keynote speaker, Paschal Donohoe, Minister for Public Expenditure, National Development Programme and Reform noted that “INTERREG and other EU programmes play an important role in supporting the process of creating links, exchanging views, understanding differences, working together, and promoting and maintaining peace”.

Cllr Michael Murphy, Member of Tipperary County Council and Head of the Irish Delegation to the Committee of the Regions called on Government to support a strategy to enhance the engagement of local councils in EU funding, by enhancing the support for the Irish Regions European Office in Brussels and funding an EU officer in each local authority in Ireland.

The conference featured nine different EU funding programmes and concurrent information sessions were held during the afternoon. These sessions informed and guided potential participants through the application process for the Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme, the North West Europe Programme, the Atlantic Area programme, the URBACT, the ESPON and the INTERREG Europe programmes. One to one sessions were also held on several of the Horizon Europe Missions and the LIFE programme for protecting the environment and combatting climate change.

One of the highlights of the day was the launch of the IREO and Regional Assemblies interactive map which provides details of all ETC projects for the 2014 – 2020 period and further details of this map can be found on the Regional Development Monitor website: <https://rdm.geohive.ie/pages/our-regions-economy>.

The Southern Regional Assembly undertook a two-day study visit to Brussels. The study visit found the delegation of eight councillors and three Assembly staff undertaking a packed two-day itinerary with MEPs and European institute representatives.

Starting 28th June 2023, the delegation began their visit with a presentation from Micheál O’Conchúir, Secretary General of the European Alliance group who provided an engaging overview of the work of the European Committee of the Regions and the impact of the Irish Delegation.

This was followed by two presentations from Commission officials firstly from DG Regio official Kai Stryczynski, who offered an analysis of the role of Cohesion Policy in Ireland. This was

followed by an introduction to the New European Bauhaus from fellow DG Regio official Tatiana Gouveia Coelho de Oliveira.

In the afternoon the delegation met their regional representatives in the European Parliament. Starting with Sean Kelly MEP, the delegation would also meet Billy Kelleher MEP, Deirdre Clune MEP and Chris MacManus MEP.

The delegation began the second day of their visit meeting Grace O’Sullivan MEP to discuss the forthcoming Nature Restoration Law. This was followed by a meeting with Alessandro Giordani, Head of Unit at DG Communication, who introduced the delegation to the Network of EU Councillors.

The visit was rounded out with a presentation from Enterprise Ireland’s Grainne Ryan, Enterprise Ireland about the opportunities for local government in the Horizon Europe programme. Concluding the visit IBEC’s Neil Willoghby offered an overview of Irish business interests in EU policy.

In February 2023, the IREO presented at the annual Association Irish Regions training seminar which was held in Monaghan. Tadhg Browne provided an overview of the work for the IREO and updated delegates on the work of the Irish Delegation to the Committee of the Regions.

2023 saw the Irish Government launch a campaign EU50 to mark Ireland’s 50 year membership of the European Union. Throughout the year, the IREO played a role in this campaign by updating branding and making presentations on the benefits of EU membership to Ireland.

Influencing European Policy

In February 2023, the Minister of State for European Affairs, Peter Burke met with the Irish Delegation to the CoR recently in Brussels. Keen to learn more about the role of local and regional voices within Europe, Minister Burke held a meeting with the Irish delegation to hear about their work representing Ireland on the Committee of the Regions. At the meeting, Members updated the Minister and raised concerns on issues including EU UK relations, the EU Nature Restoration law, the Just Transition and urban initiatives. The Minister spoke about his appreciation for the role of local government in the EU and committed to continued support to the work of the Irish Delegation.

The IREO has held regular meetings with the Irish

MEPs and the Irish Permanent Representation to keep abreast of EU policy developments and has ensured to discuss the views of Irish local authorities and the regional assemblies. This has particularly been the case for cohesion policy, the potential Atlantic Area Macro Region, EU environmental legislation and nature restoration.

Building capacity, networks and partnerships

The IREO presented an update of its work and EU policy developments to the Southern Regional Assembly meeting on 10th March 2023 and has provided regular briefings on the work of the Irish Delegation to the CoR to the Southern Regional Assembly. The IREO continued to meet with a range of organisations in Brussels to promote the work of the Irish regions. The IREO has joined the Capital Cities and Regions Network (CCRN) and aims to ensure the views of Irish Cities and Regions is presented to the EU institutions, particularly on regional policy. The IREO is advising local authorities on a regular basis on the types and forms of networks that can assist with understanding EU policy and funding

programmes, as well as assist with building partnerships.

The IREO meets with counterparts from across the UK through attendance at regular events with the Welsh, Scottish and Northern Irish offices. This is to ensure that there is ongoing communication and exploration of any potential collaboration opportunities with local authorities and other stakeholders in the UK.

During 2023, the IREO worked with the Committee of the Regions to promote the Young Elected Politicians (YEP) programme across Ireland. This programme is a network of politicians who are no older than 40 and hold a mandate at regional or local level in the EU. A call for applications to join the programme is published each year and YEPs have the opportunity to get in contact with other young politicians through the YEP Community, to attend trainings on EU topics, and to participate in activities organised by the CoR, including meetings with rapporteurs, events and seminars organised by the CoR, and communication activities.





Committee of the Regions

European Committee of the Regions



European Committee of the Regions

Overview

IREO is the secretariat to the Irish delegation to the Committee of the Regions and co-ordinates the work of the members of the national delegation to the Committee of the Regions (CoR).

The European Union's assembly of local and regional representatives, the CoR has 329 members from across the 27 EU Member States, all of whom are democratically elected and/or hold a political mandate in their home country. The CoR's role is to inform the development of EU legislation and future European policies through the input of those most closely representing communities, with a focus on those EU policy areas and proposals that most greatly affect regions and cities.

The CoR mainly presents its views through written opinions or resolutions, which are developed in one of six thematic commissions covering the following policy areas:

- Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs (CIVEX);
- Territorial Cohesion Policy and EU Budget (COTER);
- Economic Policy (ECON);
- Environment, Climate Change and Energy (ENVE);
- Natural Resources (NAT);
- Social Policy, Education, Employment, Research and Culture (SEDEC).

Each Commission generally meets on five occasions during the year to prepare the opinions for adoption at the 5-6 plenary annual sessions. Commissioners, Presidency Ministers and MEPs regularly attend CoR meetings, and there is an ongoing exchange between the institutions on policy issues.

The Irish Delegation – Southern Region Representatives

The Head of the Irish Delegation is Cllr Michael Murphy, a Southern Regional Assembly representative from Tipperary County Council and below is a list of CoR representatives for the Southern Region for 2020 – 2025.

| Full Members | Council |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Michael Murphy | Tipperary County Council |
| Deirdre Forde | Cork City Council |
| Kieran McCarthy | Cork City Council |
| Alternate Members | Council |
| Gillian Coughlan | Cork City Council |
| Conor McGuinness | Waterford City and County Council |
| Dan Boyle | Cork County Council |

Further information on the Irish Delegation can be found at www.ireo.eu

Legislative Works

Irish Members continued to present opinions and make an impact in the Committee of the Regions.

Members of the Irish delegation to the Committee of the Regions (CoR) were again actively involved in the work of the Committee of the Regions in 2023.

Cllr Una Power (Dun Laoghaire / Rathdown, Green) was Rapporteur on ambient air quality, which supports the European Commission's proposed limit values to be achieved by 2030 and calls for full and binding alignment with the 2021 WHO guidelines by 2035, so as to protect citizens' health and to contribute to achieving the zero-pollution objective set to be achieved by 2050. It also supports the introduction of a regular review mechanism of the air quality standards in line with the latest scientific evidence. Achieving these targets will be possible only if the EU and Member States agree and implement ambitious policies to tackle the sources of pollution at all levels.

Cllr Dan Boyle (Cork City, Green) was Rapporteur on the European Consumer's



Protection Package which seeks to amend the European Commission's proposals for a right to repair to include a local and regional perspective. The aim of the proposal is to ensure that consumers are empowered to make better informed decisions and play an active role in the ecological transition. Cllr. Boyle asserts in the opinion that granting consumers the right to repair would be instrumental in advancing Europe's industrial transition and strengthening its resilience and open strategic autonomy. The opinion was adopted in the CoR Plenary in October 2023.

Cllr Kate Feeney (Dun Laoghaire / Rathdown, FF) was appointed Rapporteur on the SME Relief Package and by end of 2023 had her draft opinion approved in the ECON Commission. The package is made up of a series of measures designed to provide companies with short-term relief, boost their long-term competitiveness and ensure fairness in the EU Single Market. The Delegation continued to act as the key link between the Committee and the Irish Representation. The Delegation also held meetings with Irish MEPs as well as with the Irish Commission representatives to voice the needs of the Irish local government on the EU stage. In April 2023, the Head of the Delegation, Cllr Michael Murphy held a meeting with Commissioner Mairead McGuinness to provide an update on the work of the Committee of the Regions and the IREO.

The Delegation, assisted by the IREO, continued observing all relevant policy dossiers and

made interventions, via amendments as well as commission and plenary interventions.

Overview of the work of the CoR in 2023

The work of the CoR during 2023 again focused on the Russian war against Ukraine which has caused an unprecedented influx of displaced people, affecting cities and regions in the EU unevenly. Regions and cities in the EU are providing direct humanitarian relief to Ukrainian cities and regions and developing projects and partnerships to help with their future reconstruction. Despite stretched resources, local authorities focused not only on emergency measures (such as reception centres, housing and medical care for displaced people) but are also now turning their attention to long-term strategies for the socioeconomic inclusion of four million Ukrainian refugees (such as social welfare, language training and job-insertion).

Another important issue is the ongoing energy crisis which has hit all territories across Europe hard but has been even harder on regions and cities with a higher percentage of vulnerable people in or at risk of poverty: 40 million people were unable to keep their home warm in 2022. The ambitious goals of the European Green Deal require unprecedented changes at an unprecedented speed in the years to come, which need to happen largely at local and regional levels.

The CoR is seeking to ensure a multi-level governance approach to the energy transition. Only with increased EU funds can local and regional projects increase and improve their impact to meet the EU's climate ambition on the ground and strengthen acceptance for the green transition within local communities. European regions and cities are paying an increasing toll to disruptive heatwaves, draughts, flash floods and wildfires. Climate change will deepen existing inequalities: Southern and Eastern Europe, European cities, islands, coastal and peripheral regions will be most affected in terms of casualties among populations, damage to critical infrastructures and the disruption of tourism, industrial clusters and agriculture production. To protect its regions from the harmful impacts of climate change, the EU would need to invest about EUR 40 billion every year, if the global temperature stays within a 1.5°C increase. This amount would rise up to

EUR 120 billion and 200 billion per year to adapt to a 2°C or 3°- 4°C temperature increase. Only stronger investments in climate adaptation and mitigation can preserve cohesion among the EU and within Member States.

In relation to food safety, the CoR sought to support sustainable local agriculture and partner with local and regional authorities to help make European food systems more resilient and sustainable.

The CoR also placed a heavy focus on ensuring more support to implement the European Green Deal and the Sustainable Development goals at local and regional level. Without the commitment of European regions and cities, 105 out of 169 targets set out by the SDGs will not be achieved by 2030, such as the reduction of poverty and the greening of local infrastructures.

Another key priority for the CoR was calling for the unlocking of investments for the green and digital transitions, supporting people and reducing inequalities, while also fostering the industrial competitiveness of European regions. The green and digital transitions increase both costs and risks and put existential challenges to many European regions. Skyrocketing energy prices and foreign place-based industry policies threaten to exacerbate the situation. At the same time, households are facing the impact of inflation and strong inequalities remain across Europe. Close to 50% of regions and cities have had to set up food banks and food distribution programmes.

A cornerstone of the work of the CoR was to call for the reform of cohesion policy with a mission and place-based approach, applying

the principle of “do no harm to cohesion” across all policies. Prosperity is not distributed fairly among the EU core regions and periphery. The COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian war against Ukraine have made it even more challenging for peripheral regions to catch up with the rest of the EU. Cohesion policy as long-term investment contributes to a better performing single market, closing the development gap between regions by providing them with social resources and infrastructures. However, regional differences remain large. The future of cohesion policy needs to be designed as an inclusive strategy engaging all people and stakeholders at all levels, addressing the current policy fragmentation and complexity across several funds.

In relation to EU democracy, the CoR has been calling for the EU to take advantage of citizens’ trust in regional and local representatives to reinforce European democracy better and to a greater extent. Another important driver is the enlargement of the EU and the CoR has been actively calling for the greater involvement of local and regional authorities, with their experience and networks, to prepare for the next wave of enlargement.

Members of the Irish Delegation to the Committee of the Regions participate in many of the working groups of the CoR including the EU – UK Contact Group, the Brexit Inter-regional group, the Green Deal Going Local Working Group, the Digital Futures working group and the Broadband platform.

Annual Financial Statements

Income and Expenditure Account as at 31st December 2023

| | 2023 € | 2022 € |
|--|------------------|------------------|
| Income | | |
| Local Authority Contributions | 1,444,696 | 1,371,937 |
| Travel Recoupment EU Programmes | 14,733 | 7,220 |
| Salary Recoupment EU Programmes | 266,413 | 293,952 |
| General Recoupment EU Programmes | 7,395 | 158,178 |
| Interreg Recoupment | 6,107 | 1,154 |
| Technical Assistance Recoupment | 694,497 | 509,330 |
| Designated Urban Centre Grants Scheme | 2,500,000 | 3,524,730 |
| First Level Control (FLC) Fees | 103,289 | 117,211 |
| Association of Irish Regions (AIR) Event | 37,397 | 0 |
| Miscellaneous | 1,867 | 0 |
| Dividend (IPB) | 1,647 | 6,130 |
| Total | 5,078,040 | 5,989,843 |
| Expenditure | | |
| Payroll Costs | 1,865,913 | 1,556,677 |
| Additional Superannuation Contribution (ASC) | 60,554 | 55,603 |
| Superannuation SSP Scheme | 30,401 | 17,379 |
| Travel & Subsistence – Staff | 111,146 | 59,265 |
| Members Annual Allowance | 92,900 | 84,124 |
| Members SPA / Other Travel | 6,805 | 8,526 |
| Members Training / Conference Allowance | 32,212 | 4,625 |
| Conference Fees | 750 | 0 |
| Office Equipment & Supplies | 36,299 | 11,231 |
| Energy Costs | 21,416 | 13,602 |
| Post & Phone | 18,493 | 14,944 |
| Rates & Water Charges | 6,733 | 5,560 |
| Repairs, Maintenance & Office Costs | 26,231 | 11,848 |
| Consultancy/Professional Fees | 51,711 | 220,631 |
| Annual Contracts | 94,885 | 62,289 |
| Insurance | 14,441 | 12,733 |
| Annual Report | 10,803 | 5,617 |
| Information & Communications | 166,808 | 113,671 |
| Contributions/Fees/Levies (LGMA & Audit) | 14,147 | 8,721 |
| AIR Event | 47,397 | 0 |
| Bank Charges | 741 | 10,443 |
| Health, Safety & Wellbeing | 1,828 | 4,583 |
| Regional Planning RSES | 62,536 | 49,783 |
| Depreciation Charge | 5,154 | 4,242 |
| Gateway Grant Scheme – Project Payments | 2,500,000 | 3,524,730 |
| ETC Network | 1,481 | 0 |
| Miscellaneous | 16,507 | 3,227 |
| Inter-Account Transfer | 0 | -1,593 |
| Total Expenses | 5,298,292 | 5,862,462 |
| Excess of Income over Expenditure | -220,252 | 127,381 |

Balance Sheet as at 31st December 2023

| | 2023 € | 2022 € |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Fixed Assets | 1,004,445 | 1,004,080 |
| Current Assets | | |
| Cash at Bank | 2,020,153 | 2,203,645 |
| Debtors | 867,482 | 879,783 |
| Prepayments | 0 | 3,085 |
| | 2,887,635 | 3,086,514 |
| Current Liabilities | | |
| Creditors & Accruals | 126,060 | 103,193 |
| Credit Card | 202 | 1,142 |
| | 126,263 | 104,336 |
| Net Current Assets | 2,761,372 | 2,982,178 |
| Net Assets | 3,765,818 | 3,986,258 |
| Financed by | | |
| Balance at beginning of year | 3,986,258 | 3,859,637 |
| Previous Year Adjustment | -189 | -761 |
| Excess of Income over Expenditure | -220,252 | 127,381 |
| | 3,765,818 | 3,986,258 |

Staff of the Southern Regional Assembly 2023

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| David Kelly | Director |
| Kevin Lynch | Senior Planner / Assistant Director |
| Enda Hogan | Assistant Director |
| Dominic Walsh | Regional Planning Officer |
| Brigh Ryan | Regional Planning Officer |
| Sharon Murray | Administrative Officer - Finance & HR |
| Vincent Dunphy | Administrative Officer |
| Michael Buckley | Auditor |
| Karen Coughlan | Administrative Officer |
| Rose Power | Administrative Officer |
| Marie Harnett | Administrative Officer |
| Sarah Davoren | EU Executive |
| Breda Curran | Acting Senior Staff Officer |
| Eoin O'Connor | Executive Planner |
| Mary Molloy | Executive Planner |
| Kevin Twomey | Executive Planner |
| Catherine Connaughton | Projects Officer |
| Samantha Richardson | Development Officer |
| Lisa Moran | EU Projects Officer |
| Áine Whelan | EU Projects Officer |
| Rebecca Walsh | Projects Officer |
| Eve Hayden | Senior First Level Controller |
| Edel Hunt | Senior First Level Controller |
| Elayne McDonnell | Senior First Level Controller |
| Yvonne Cooney | Assistant Staff Officer |
| Pauline Toomey | Assistant Staff Officer |
| Denis Cotter | Assistant Staff Officer |
| Róisín Slattery | Clerical Officer |
| Anna Higgins | Clerical Officer |
| Oonagh Messette | Clerical Officer |
| Elaine Gallagher | Clerical Officer |
| Maria Murphy | Clerical Officer |
| Colm Walsh | Clerical Officer |
| Omer Sunguroglu | Clerical Officer |
| Claire Breen | Clerical Officer |

Southern Regional Assembly, Assembly House, O'Connell Street, Waterford, X91 F8PC

Appendices

1 Glossary of Terms

| | |
|---------|--|
| AIR | Association of Irish Regions |
| AT | Aquathermal energy |
| BGI | Blue Green Infrastructure |
| CCDP | City & County Development Plans |
| CCRN | Capital Cities and Regions Network |
| CEO | Chief Executive Officer |
| CircBio | Circular Bioeconomy |
| CIr | Councillor |
| CMATS | Cork Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy |
| CoR | Committee of the Regions |
| CPR | Common Provisions Regulation |
| DECC | Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications |
| DETE | Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment |
| DFHERIS | Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science |
| DHLGH | Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage |
| DMAPS | Designated Maritime Area Plan |
| DoT | Department of Transport |
| DPER | Department of Public Expenditure & Reform |
| EAFRD | European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development |
| EMFF | European Maritime and Fisheries Fund |
| EMRA | Eastern & Midland Regional Assembly |
| ERDF | European Regional Development Fund |
| ERNACT | European Regions Network for the Application of Communications Technology |
| ESF | European Social Fund |
| ESIF | European Structural and Investment Funds |
| ETC | European Territorial Cooperation |
| EU | European Union |
| FLC | First Level Control |
| GHG | Greenhouse Gases |
| GIS | Geographic Information System |
| HR | Human Resources |
| IBEC | Irish Business and Employers Confederation |
| IPI | Irish Planning Institute |
| IREO | Irish Regions European Office |
| LAP | Local Area Plan |
| LECP | Local Economic & Community Plan |
| LGMA | Local Government Management Agency |
| LSMATs | Limerick Shannon Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy |
| MASP | Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan |
| MC | Monitoring Committee |

| | |
|--------|--|
| MD | Municipal District |
| MEP | Member of the European Parliament |
| MRTT | Midlands Regional Transition Team |
| NBS | Nature-Based Solutions |
| NDP | National Development Plan |
| NGO | Non-governmental organisation |
| NOAC | National Oversight and Audit Commission |
| NPA | Northern Periphery and Arctic |
| NPF | National Planning Framework |
| NTA | National Transport Authority |
| NWE | North-West Europe |
| NWRA | Northern & Western Regional Assembly |
| OECD | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development |
| OPR | Office of the Planning Regulator |
| OPW | Office of Public Works |
| R&D | Research and Development |
| RDP | Regional Decarbonisation Plan |
| RD&I | Research, Development & Innovation |
| RDS | Royal Dublin Society |
| REP | Regional Enterprise Plan |
| RPO | Regional Planning Objective |
| RRES | Regional Renewable Electricity Strategies |
| RSES | Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy |
| SEAI | Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland |
| SETU | South East Technological University |
| SMC | Small and Medium-sized City |
| SME | Small and medium-sized enterprises |
| SMP | Sustainable Mobility Plan |
| SPA | Strategic Planning Area |
| SRA | Southern Regional Assembly |
| SEEA | South East Energy Agency |
| SSR | Smart Southern Region |
| SWOT | Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats |
| TAP | Thematic Action Plan |
| TEN-T | Trans-European Transport Network |
| TII | Transport Infrastructure Ireland |
| UCD | University College Dublin |
| UK | United Kingdom |
| UNESCO | The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation |
| WEFO | Welsh European Funding Office |
| WHO | World Health Organisation |
| WMATS | Waterford Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy |
| YEP | Young Elected Politicians |