

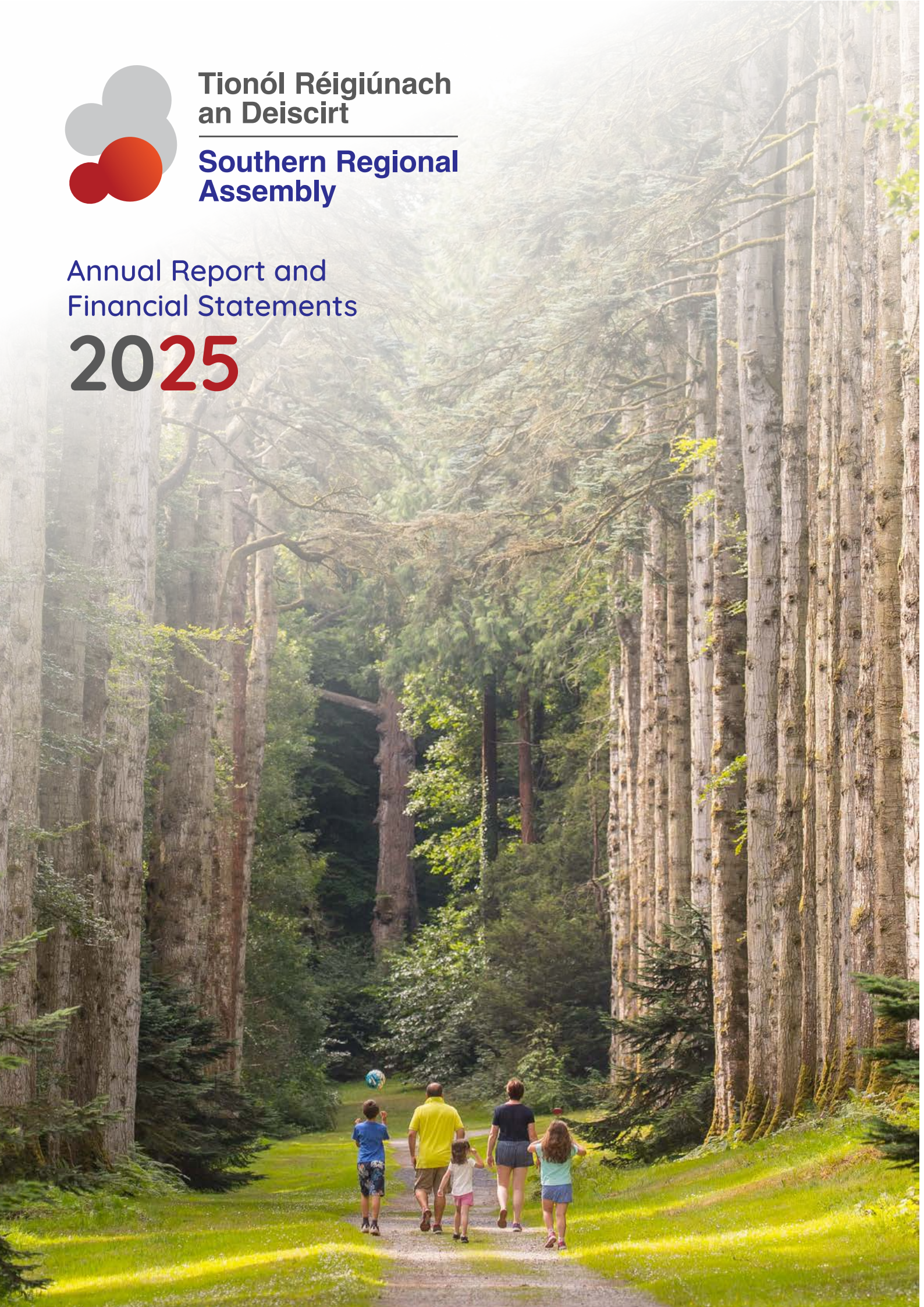


Tionól Réigiúnach
an Deiscirt

Southern Regional
Assembly

Annual Report and
Financial Statements

2025



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Assembly House

Cathaoirleach's Foreword

As Cathaoirleach I am pleased to introduce the 2025 Annual Report and Financial Statements for the Southern Regional Assembly. As an Assembly we provide a regional platform through which national, local, and regional organisations can collaborate within the context of national policy. This report highlights how our work enables this collaboration and allows us to perform our functions.

2025 was the year that the Assembly celebrated its tenth year and this was showcased through a special event in Waterford on Europe Day. The event featured an exhibition space with some of the standout projects and initiatives led or supported by the Assembly throughout its ten years on display.

A new Corporate Plan was adopted, which allows the Assembly to continue to shape a region that is connected, competitive, sustainable, and inclusive. We were delighted to welcome Minister of State for Local Government and Planning, John Cummins TD, to formally launch the new Corporate Plan, and discuss the challenges faced in our region through population growth, housing delivery, and provision of quality infrastructure.

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. 2025 saw a review of the National Development Plan and the Assembly, through its submission, highlighted significant disparities that persist in capital investment across the regions.

Assembly Members also attended Strategic Planning Area meetings in locations across our region to discuss the review of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy.

I was honoured to address the European Network of Heads of Managing Authorities when



they met Kilkenny for a major EU funds event to engage with peers on a range of strategic issues, inspiring ideas, and common solutions in pursuit of more effective Cohesion Policy outcomes.

It was also a privilege to attend the official launch of Waterford as a UNESCO Learning City. This global recognition celebrates Waterford as a centre of lifelong learning and innovation and demonstrates exceptional progress in promoting quality lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Our statutory monthly meetings continue to be a key forum for discussion and collaboration, with debates on Energy, Infrastructure, Climate, Housing, and EU Projects, just some of the important topics presented in 2025.

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 Assembly at various meetings and events. I also wish to thank Leas-Cathaoirleach Councillor Peggy Ryan for her 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. Andrew McGuinness
Cathaoirleach

Director's Introduction

I am delighted to present the Annual Report and Financial Statements of the Southern Regional Assembly for 2025. This year, we celebrated ten years of the Southern Regional Assembly and launched a new Corporate Plan for the period 2025 – 2029, a clear reflection of our ambition to be a driving force in sustainable, connected, and competitive regional development.

The Assembly launched two new Interreg projects – SMOOTY and S3Adapt. SMOOTY supports improved intra-regional mobility, accessibility, and sustainable transport solutions in rural and low-density regions, while S3ADAPT integrates Smart Specialisation with climate adaptation, supporting the Corporate Plan's priorities of climate action, resilience, and evidence-based policymaking.

With the first revision of the National Planning Framework in place and the commencement of the Planning and Development Act 2024 the Regional Assembly is now preparing for the Review of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Region. This will formally commence in early 2026 and will provide an opportunity to update and renew the strategy out to 2040.

The second call for applications opened under Strand 2 of THRIVE – the Town Centre First Heritage Revival Scheme, focusing on the renovation and adaptive reuse of vacant or derelict heritage buildings, and delivery of pilot and pathfinder projects to reduce town centre vacancy and dereliction.

Six Assembly Members and two staff took part in a two-day study trip to Brussels which gave valuable insight into how regions can participate in Cohesion Policy, EU legislative processes, the functions of EU institutions, and the role of the Committee of the Regions. In the European Parliament, the delegation met four Members of the European Parliament from the Ireland South constituency and discussed a wide range of topics.



The midterm review of the ERDF Regional Programme was finalised in 2025 resulting some amendments to the programme including a proposed scheme for affordable housing. This responded to the new priorities proposed by the Commission, aligns with national priorities and for the first time allows us to fund housing projects through our ERDF programmes. A call for proposals will be issued in 2026.

I wish to express my gratitude to our Cathaoirígh, Councillor Andrew McGuinness and Councillor Ken Murnane, for their time and valuable contributions throughout the year. I also extend my thanks to the Assembly staff for their commitment and dedication to the successful delivery of the 2025 annual programme of work.

I welcome the new staff who joined the Assembly in 2025 and thank those who have started new opportunities.

I look forward to continued engagement with key stakeholders, including local authorities, government departments and agencies, and the third-level education sector, as the Assembly's role continues to grow in supporting the region.

David Kelly
Director



Overview

Background

In 2014, the Government undertook a significant reform of the [Local Government](#) Act and rationalised the regional level by abolishing the eight Regional Authorities (primarily responsible for planning matters) and two existing Regional Assemblies (primarily responsible for EU matters), and replacing them with three Regional Assemblies with enhanced responsibilities:

- Southern Regional Assembly
- Eastern & Midland Regional Assembly
- Northern & Western Regional Assembly



Members of the Southern Regional Assembly

Responsibilities

The Southern Regional Assembly must have regard for the general welfare of the region which the order specifies as including:

- The physical, economic, social, demographic, infrastructural, and environmental situation of the region, its economic and other development potential, and the protection or improvement of its environmental, heritage, amenity, and cultural resources.
- The programmes, plans, policies, proposals, and objectives of the Government and of any Minister of the Government and of local authorities and other public authorities, as appropriate, and the need to promote coordination of and/or consistency with them.
- The resources that are available, or are likely to be available, for the performance of their functions.
- The specific need for coordinated action to promote effectiveness in local government and public services, to promote consistency with the programmes, plans, policies, proposals, and objectives of the Government or Minister of the Government, and to ensure coherent spatial planning and sustainable development within and between regions.

Functions

The Southern Regional Assembly provides the regional tier of government in Ireland and links EU, and national and local levels through regional spatial and economic planning and European programmes for the benefit of the Region.

The Assembly engages 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.

The Assembly has responsibilities with a democratic mandate set down under the terms of [Statutory Instrument Number 573 of 2014, the Local Government Act, 1991 \(Regional Assemblies\) \(Establishment\) Order, 2014.](#)



Southern Regional Assembly staff at the Annual Meeting, July 2025

The formal functions of the Regional Assemblies include:

- The formulation, adoption, and implementation of the statutory Regional, Spatial, and Economic Strategy and Metropolitan Area Strategic Plans for Cork, Limerick, and Waterford. These strategies provide the framework to integrate city and county development plans and Local Economic Community Plans.
- Management of EU regional operational programmes, participation in European Territorial Cooperation programmes, supporting the Irish national delegation to the Committee of the Regions, EU project participation, and other EU regional focused actions.
- Facilitation and provision of assistance to local authorities in engaging with EU institutions on matters related to regional, and local development.

- Providing a regional platform through which national, local, and regional public bodies, and other agencies can be coordinated within the context of national policy.
- Regional Assemblies can also undertake research studies, surveys, or the collection of information, data, or statistics, in relation to any of its functions or on any matter to which the functions of the [National Oversight & Audit Commission](#) apply.



A high-angle, wide shot of a modern building's atrium. The space is characterized by its clean, minimalist design, featuring light-colored stone or concrete flooring and walls. Large windows on the upper levels allow natural light to flood the space, creating bright patches on the floor. In the center of the atrium, a large, dark, geometric sculpture resembling a star or a cluster of cubes stands prominently. To the left, a row of potted plants adds a touch of greenery. On the right, blue and white benches are placed along the wall. A few people are visible in the distance, providing a sense of scale to the large space. A red circular overlay is positioned in the upper left quadrant, containing the text "Corporate Update" in white, sans-serif font.

Corporate Update

Assembly Membership



Cllr Andrew McGuinness
Cathaoirleach
Kilkenny County Council



Cllr Peggy Ryan
Leas-Cathaoirleach
Tipperary County Council



Cllr Ken Murnane
Carlow County Council



Cllr Ben Ward
Carlow County Council



Cllr Clare Collieran Molloy
Clare County Council,
(Committee of the Regions)



Cllr Tony O'Brien
Clare County Council



Cllr Bill Slattery
Clare County Council



Cllr Dan Boyle
Cork City Council,
(Committee of the Regions)



Cllr Fergal Dennehy
Cork City Council,
(Committee of the Regions)



Cllr Joe Kavanagh
Cork City Council



Cllr Kieran McCarthy
Cork City Council,
(Committee of the Regions)



Cllr Terry Shannon
Cork City Council



Cllr Anthony Barry
Cork County Council



Cllr Alan Coleman
Cork County Council



Cllr Gillian Coughlan
Cork County Council,
(Committee of the Regions)



Cllr Deirdre Kelly
Cork County Council



Cllr Kay Dawson
Cork County Council



Cllr Sheila O'Callaghan
Cork County Council



Cllr Norma Moriarty
Kerry County Council



Cllr Niall Botty O'Callaghan
Kerry County Council



Cllr Bobby O'Connell
Kerry County Council



Cllr John Brennan
Kilkenny County Council



Cllr Michael Collins
Limerick City &
County Council



Cllr Frankie Daly
Limerick City &
County Council



Mayor John Moran
Limerick City &
County Council



Cllr John Sheahan
Limerick City &
County Council



Cllr Joe Hannigan
Tipperary County Council,
(Committee of the Regions)



Cllr Máirín McGrath
Tipperary County Council



Cllr Michael Smith
Tipperary County Council



Cllr Jim D'Arcy
Waterford City &
County Council



Cllr Thomas Phelan
Waterford City &
County Council



Cllr Pip Breen
Wexford County Council



Cllr Barbara Anne Murphy
Wexford County Council



Cllr Bridín Murphy
Wexford County Council,
(Committee of the Regions)



Cllr Oliver Walsh
Wexford County Council

Cathaoirleach & Leas Cathaoirleach

Cathaoirligh

January: Cllr Garret Kelleher

February – July: Cllr Ken Murnane

July – December: Cllr Andrew McGuinness

Leas-Cathaoirligh

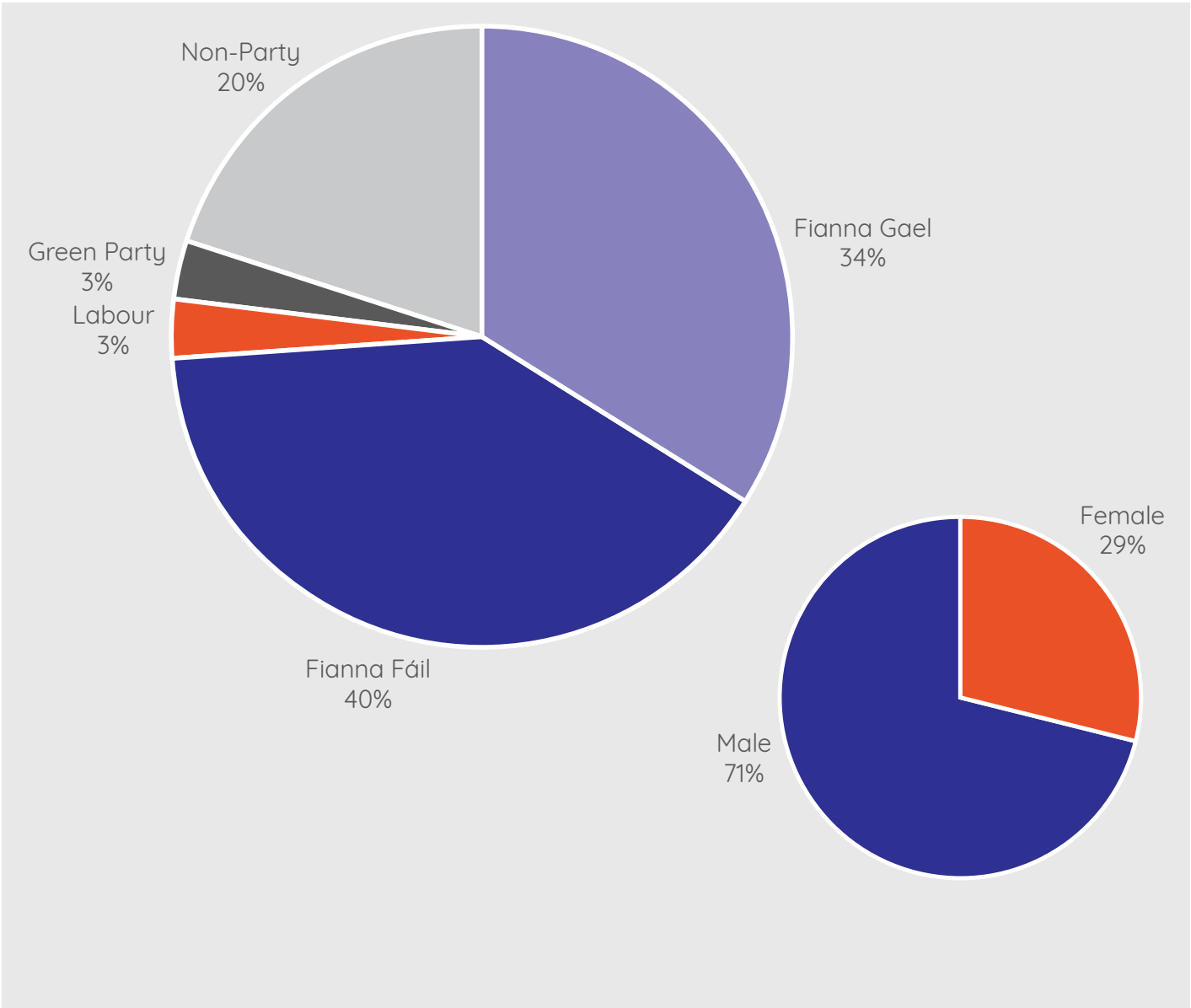
January – July: Cllr John Sheahan

July – December: Cllr Peggy Ryan



Southern Regional Assembly Staff at the launch of the Corporate Plan, May 2025

Political Affiliation & Gender Balance

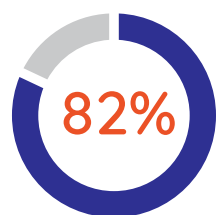


Meetings & Attendance

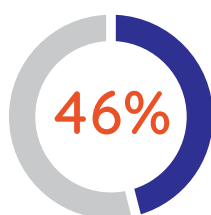
The Southern Regional Assembly meets on the second Friday of every month (except August) for its Ordinary meetings. The Annual meeting takes place in July.

Ordinary Meetings 2025	10 January	14 February	14 March	11 April
	09 May	13 June	11 July	12 September
	10 October	14 November	12 December	

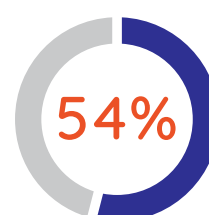
Meeting Attendance Rate



Overall



In Person



Remote

External and Assembly Speakers at Assembly Meetings 2025

DATE	PRESENTATION TITLE
10 January 2025	- THRIVE Call 2 – Rose Power (Southern Regional Assembly) - ERDF Regional Programme Update – Enda Hogan (Southern Regional Assembly) - Regional Planning Update – Kevin Lynch (Southern Regional Assembly)
14 February 2025	- State of the Environment Report - Andy Fanning, Environmental Protection Agency - Smart and Sustainable Mobility Accelerator - Eoin O'Connor (Southern Regional Assembly)
14 March 2025	- Smart Regions Update – David Minton, Enterprise Ireland - Housing Delivery in the Southern Region – Kevin Twomey (Southern Regional Assembly) - Glossary of Planning Terms – Denis Cotter (Southern Regional Assembly)
11 April 2025	- Irish Rail – Barry Kenny, Iarnród Éireann - Regional Development Monitor Demonstration – Justin Gleeson, All-Island Research Observatory
09 May 2025	Kerry Local Economic and Community Plan - Eoin O'Connor (Southern Regional Assembly)
13 June 2025	- National Development Plan Review 2026-2035 – Kevin Twomey (Southern Regional Assembly) - Planning Act & The Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy Overview – Kevin Lynch (Southern Regional Assembly) - Southern Regional Assembly Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy Consultation Process Overview – Denis Cotter (Southern Regional Assembly)

DATE	PRESENTATION TITLE
11 July 2025	- Kerry Variation No.2 Kerry County Development Plan – Pdraig O’Shea (Southern Regional Assembly) - Eurobarometer Summary – Anna Sellars (Southern Regional Assembly)
12 September 2025	Housing Infrastructure Services Co – Niall Morrissey, Housing Infrastructure Services Company
10 October 2025	- TALENT4S3 – Rhiannon Carey Bates, (Southern Regional Assembly) - Irish Regions European Office – Teresa Lennon, Irish Regions European Office
14 November 2025	- The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Dr Una Murray - Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy Review – Kevin Lynch, (Southern Regional Assembly)
12 December 2025	- Tonn Nua Windfarm – Moira Walsh, Electricity Supply Board - ERDF Regional Programmes – Enda Hogan, (Southern Regional Assembly)



Cllr Bridín Murphy & Cllr Barbara Anne Murphy at the Annual Meeting, July 2025

Conference, Seminar and Training Attendance 2025

Association of Irish Regions Training Seminar

Cllr Andrew McGuinness
Cllr Jim D'Arcy
Cllr Niall O'Callaghan

Cllr Bill Slattery
Cllr Ken Mourane
Cllr Pip Breen

Cllr Clare Coleman Molloy
Cllr Máirín McGrath
Cllr Thomas Phelan



Mayor of Limerick, John Moran addressing attendees at the Association of Irish Regions Seminar, February 2025

Smart and Sustainable Mobility Accelerator Training

Cllr Anthony Barry
Cllr Norma Moriarty
Cllr Thomas Phelan

Cllr Sheila O'Callaghan
Cllr Ken Murnane
Cllr Joe Hannigan

Cllr Peggy Ryan
Cllr Niall O'Callaghan

Strategic Planning Area Meeting – Mid-West

Cllr Clare Collieran Molloy
Mayor John Moran
Cllr Máirín McGrath

Cllr Tony O'Brien
Cllr John Sheahan
Cllr Michael Smith

Cllr Bill Slattery
Cllr Peggy Ryan



Assembly Members at the Mid-West Strategic Planning Area Meeting

Strategic Planning Area Meeting - South-East

Cllr Andrew McGuinness
Cllr Thomas Phelan
Cllr Bridín Murphy

Cllr Ben Ward
Cllr Pip Breen

Cllr Jim D'Arcy
Cllr Barbara Anne Murphy

Strategic Planning Area Meeting - South-West

Cllr Dan Boyle
Cllr Sheila O'Callaghan

Cllr Anthony Barry
Cllr Norma Moriarty

Cllr Kay Dawson

Europe Day & Assembly @10

Cllr Anthony Barry
Cllr Alan Coleman
Cllr Jim D'Arcy
Cllr Joe Hannigan
Mayor John Moran
Cllr Barbara Anne Murphy
Cllr Sheila O'Callaghan
Cllr Terry Shannon

Cllr Dan Boyle
Cllr Clare Colleran Molloy
Cllr Kay Dawson
Cllr Joe Kavanagh
Cllr Norma Moriarty
Cllr Tony O'Brien
Cllr Bobby O'Connell
Cllr Oliver Walsh

Cllr Pip Breen
Cllr Gillian Coughlan
Cllr Fergal Dennehy
Cllr Máirín McGrath
Cllr Ken Murnane
Cllr Niall O'Callaghan
Cllr Peggy Ryan
Cllr Ben Ward

IPB Annual General Meeting

Cllr Ken Murnane

Members Study Trip to Brussels

Cllr Barbara Ann Murphy
Cllr Michael Collins

Cllr Ben Ward
Cllr Máirín McGrath

Cllr Fergal Dennehy
Cllr Niall O'Callaghan

In April 2025, six members and two staff from the Southern Regional Assembly took part in a two-day study trip to Brussels. The programme opened at the Permanent Representation of Ireland to the EU, where Tadhg Browne, EU Support Officer at the [Irish Regions European Office](#), outlined the work of the office and the role of the Irish Delegation to the [European Committee of the Regions](#). He also demonstrated how the office continues to support and engage the local authority sector across Ireland.

The group then met with Stéphanie Gantzer-Houzel, Programme Manager for EU Cohesion Policy Post 2027. Stéphanie provided an overview of how regions can participate in Cohesion Policy and highlighted key funding opportunities for Irish local authorities, including the [European Regional Development Fund](#), the [European Just Transition Fund](#), and the [European Urban Initiative](#).

Philip Grant, Director of Institutional Affairs and EU Staffing at the [Permanent Representation](#), concluded the morning sessions with a briefing on the functions of EU institutions and the Committee of the Regions' interaction with them. He also discussed opportunities in the lead-up to Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the EU in 2026.

In the [European Parliament](#), the delegation met four Members of the European Parliament from the Ireland South constituency - Cynthia Ní Mhurchú on rural challenges, Billy Kelleher on energy policy, Sean Kelly on trade issues, and Michael McNamara on the future of Cohesion Policy.

Day two began with a presentation from Open and Agile Smart Cities on the European Smart Communities Programme, followed by a briefing from Directorate-General Research on the Climate Neutral and Smart Cities Mission. The visit concluded with Noel Regan, Counsellor for Environment and Energy Policy, who reviewed EU legislative processes and upcoming environmental and energy challenges.



MEPs Billy Kelleher and Cynthia Ní Mhurchú with Members and Staff from the Southern Regional Assembly and Irish Regions European Office, April 2025

EU Programme Monitoring Committee Representatives

31st December 2025

Southern Eastern and Midland Regional Programme Monitoring Committee	ClIr Andrew McGuinness ClIr John Brennan ClIr Gillian Coughlan ClIr Bill Slattery
Common Agricultural Policy Strategic Plan Monitoring Committee	ClIr Sheila O'Callaghan
Employment, Inclusion, Skills, and Training Programme Monitoring Committee	ClIr John Sheahan

Committee of the Regions Representatives – Southern Region

31st December 2025

Full Members	ClIr Gillian Coughlan (Head of Delegation) ClIr Clare Collieran Molloy ClIr Bridín Murphy
Alternate Members	ClIr Dan Boyle ClIr Fergal Dennehy ClIr Joe Hannigan ClIr Kieran McCarthy

Association of Irish Regions Representatives

The Association of Irish Regions is the representative body of the three Regional Assemblies in Ireland (Eastern and Midland, Northern and Western, and Southern Regional Assemblies). Under [Project Ireland 2040](#), and specifically through the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies, the three Regional Assemblies play a leadership role in supporting the delivery of national objectives and are at the forefront of best practice across a number of areas in this regard.

The Annual Association of Irish Regions Training Seminar was held in Athlone in February 2025. The theme of the event was “Driving the Future of Regions: Governance, Sustainability, and Place-Based Impact.”



Leas Cathaoirleach of the Association of Irish Regions, Cllr Niall O'Callaghan touring exhibits at the AIR Training Seminar, February 2025

Annual Meeting & Election of Cathaoirleach

The Annual Meeting of the Southern Regional Assembly took place on 11 July 2025, and Members were invited to propose nominations for the position of Cathaoirleach and Leas-Cathaoirleach of the Assembly, to hold office until July 2026.

Cllr Andrew McGuinness of Kilkenny County Council was elected Cathaoirleach at the meeting. Cllr McGuinness is a member of Fianna Fáil and has been an elected representative for twenty-two years serving as Mayor of Kilkenny three times: in 2014, 2021, and most recently in 2024.

Cllr Peggy Ryan of Tipperary County Council was elected Leas-Cathaoirleach. Cllr Ryan is a Fine Gael Councillor for the Thurles Municipal District.



Newly elected Cathaoirleach Cllr Andrew McGuinness at the Annual Meeting, July 2025

Southern Regional Assembly Highlights for 2025

Members study trip to Brussels

In April 2025, six members from the Assembly took part in a two-day study trip to Brussels. This was an important opportunity for members to engage and develop a further understanding of the relationship between Europe and regional governance.



Cllr Michael Collins, Cllr Ben Ward, Cllr Máirín McGrath, Cllr Fergal Dennehy, Cllr Barbara Anne Murphy, Cllr Niall O'Callaghan at the European Parliament

Smart & Sustainable Mobility Accelerator Training for Elected Representatives

Members of the Assembly took part in a Smart and Sustainable Mobility Accelerator training programme in Athlone, Co. Westmeath. The key aim of the programme was influencing culture change in the approach to sustainable mobility, focusing on the local benefits that can be achieved through this transition.



Members at the Smart and Sustainable Mobility Accelerator Programme in Athlone

Europe Day and 10 years of the Southern Regional Assembly event

In May 2025, the Assembly commemorated a decade of regional leadership and European collaboration with a series of events to mark Europe Day and ten years since the Assembly's establishment. One of these events was a showcase of some of the standout projects and initiatives led or supported by the Assembly over the previous decade. The exhibition was held at the Tower Hotel in Waterford.



Cllr Gillian Coughlan, Cllr Dan Boyle, Cllr Peggy Ryan and Colm Walsh at the Assembly Exhibition in the Tower Hotel, Waterford

Launch of Corporate Plan 2025 – 2029

May also saw the official launch of the Assembly's Corporate Plan 2025 – 2029, a forward-looking strategy that outlines the Assembly's vision for the Southern Region over the next five years. The Plan was officially launched by Minister of State for Local Government and Planning, John Cummins TD, who reflected on the Assembly's role in shaping balanced regional growth and Ireland's deep connection with the European Union.



Minister of State for Local Government and Planning, John Cummins TD, launching the Assembly's new Corporate Plan

ETC Network Showcases “EU Funding in Action”

Over sixty participants were welcomed to Assembly House in November for the annual European Territorial Cooperation Network Event “EU Funding in Action.”



€63.84 million to accelerate commercialisation of research across Ireland

In February, a multi-annual ‘Accelerating Research to Commercialisation’ Hub investment programme to fast-track the commercial potential of scientific research across Ireland was announced. The Hubs are co-funded by the Government of Ireland and the European Union.



THRIVE Call 2 Awards Announced

€63 million Government & EU co-funding awarded to restore ten derelict heritage buildings in urban areas in the Southern, Eastern and Midland Regions through THRIVE - Town Centre First Heritage Revival Scheme.

Joint Oireachtas Committee for EU Affairs

In October, the Joint Committee on European Union Affairs met with Ireland's three regional assemblies to discuss EU cohesion policy and European Regional Development Fund management. The meeting highlighted the need for regional input in EU funding decisions.



European Regions Meet in Kilkenny for Major EU Funds Network Event

Around 90 Heads of Managing Authorities, together with colleagues from the European Commission and the OECD, met in September in Kilkenny for the fourth meeting of the Heads of Managing Authorities Network. The setting was historic, but the conversation was focused on the future.



Waterford officially launched as a UNESCO Learning City

Waterford's designation as a [UNESCO](#) Learning City is a proud moment which will promote access to education and learning opportunities. Waterford joins Limerick and Cork as the third UNESCO Learning City in the Southern Region and is a significant milestone towards our strategic vision for the Southern Region to become a UNESCO Learning Region.



Nature-based Adaptation to Climate Change

In December, the Assembly co-hosted a seminar on Nature-Based Adaptation to Climate Change: The Potential of Blue/Green Infrastructure with ESPON Programme and Maynooth University in Limerick City. The event gave interesting insights into harnessing the potential of Blue/Green Infrastructure in Nature Based Adaptation.

Reimagining Places: A European Urban Initiative capacity-building event under THRIVE

Staff from 29 of Ireland's 31 local authorities, alongside other relevant stakeholders joined this European Urban Initiative capacity-building and training in November. The event was organised to support local authority staff including, but not limited to, THRIVE beneficiaries in integrating preservation, conservation, and sustainable adaptive reuse approaches.

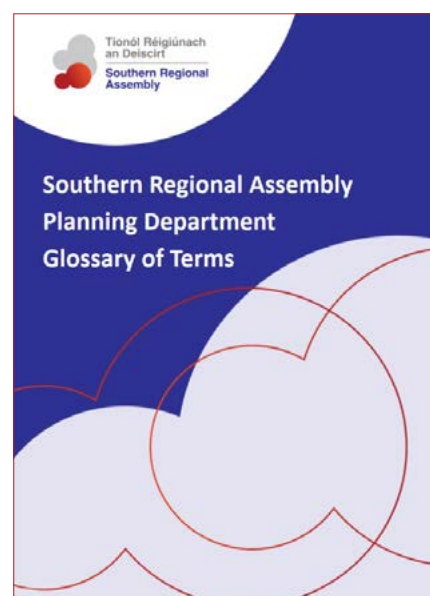
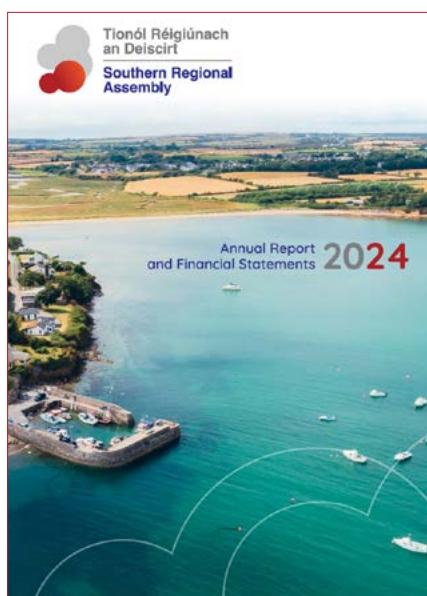
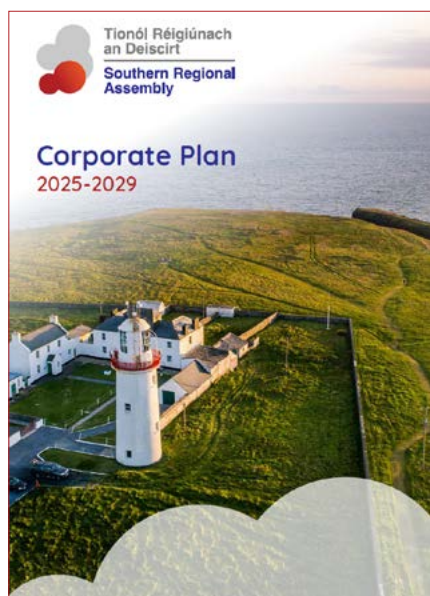


National ARC Hub for Therapeutics launch

The Accelerating Research to Commercialisation Hub for Therapeutics, a new national research initiative dedicated to fast-tracking biomedical innovation into real-world therapies and companies, was officially launched in December at Trinity College Dublin. The Hub for Therapeutics is co-funded by the Government of Ireland and the European Union.



2025 Publications



Online Communications



2,884 followers / average 41,000 monthly impressions



734 followers / average 21,000 monthly impressions

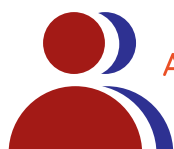


552 followers / average 39,000 monthly impressions

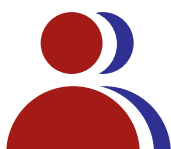


1,427 followers / average 55,000 monthly impressions

Website Stats 2025



Active Users
68,000



New Users
66,000

Notes

LinkedIn has become our most impactful social media channel.

Website activity peaked in early October. The most visited webpages were, in the following order: Home, REGIONAL SPATIAL AND ECONOMIC STRATEGY and Careers. Average engagement time per user was 29 seconds.

Climate Action

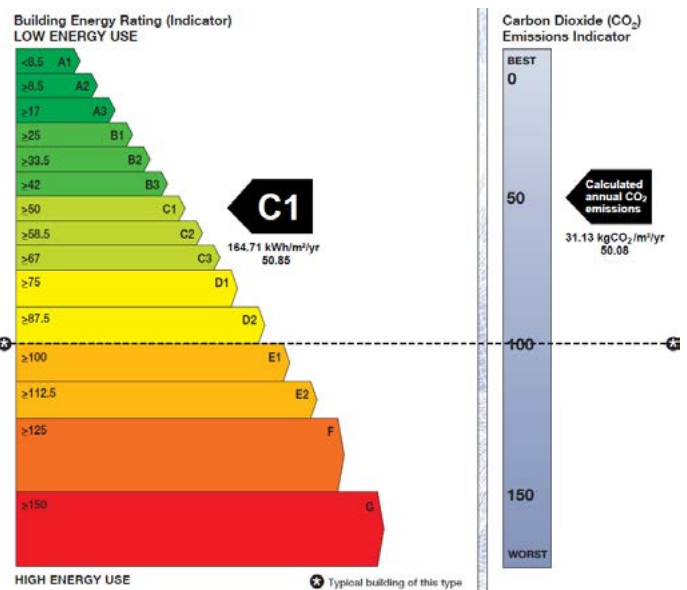
The [Climate Action Plan 2025](#) reinforces and updates the Public Sector Climate Action Mandate, which all public bodies must comply with, including energy efficiency responsibilities. The Southern Regional Assembly updated and published its [Climate Action Roadmap](#) in September 2025.

The 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 the [Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland](#), the Assembly is ahead of some 2030 targets and will strive to make continual improvements to exceed targets, through projects like the retrofitting of Assembly House.

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

Based on the energy used and the greenhouse gas emissions, Assembly House had a Display Energy Certificate Rating of C1 in 2025.

The following key performance indicators show progress towards our energy and greenhouse gas emissions targets. They also show how our emissions and energy efficiency have changed over time.



Fossil CO₂ emissions

In 2025, fossil CO₂ was 31.5% above the baseline of 7,717 kgCO₂.

2025: 10,145 kgCO₂
2030 target: 3,782 kgCO₂

To achieve this target, fossil CO₂ must reduce by 62.7% from 2025 level within 5 years. If planned energy-saving projects are implemented fossil CO₂ could reduce by 70.6%, by 2030*.



Total CO₂ emissions

In 2025, total CO₂ was 70.7% below the baseline of 52,111 kgCO₂.

2025: 15,277 kgCO₂
2030 target: 13,020 kgCO₂

To achieve this target, total CO₂ must reduce by another 14.8% from 2025 level within 5 years. If planned energy-saving projects are implemented total CO₂ could reduce by 103.2%, by 2030*.

Energy efficiency

By 2025, energy performance had improved by 90.5% since the baseline.



If energy performance is maintained at this level for another 5 years, the efficiency target will be achieved. If planned energy-saving projects are implemented performance could improve by 7.1 percentage points, by 2030*.

Fossil CO₂ target

kgCO₂

10,000

5,000

0

2009

2010

2011

2012

2013

2014

2015

2016

2017

2018

2019

2020

2021

2022

2023

2024

2025

2026

2027

2028

2029

2030

Transport

Thermal

Baseline

Trajectory to target

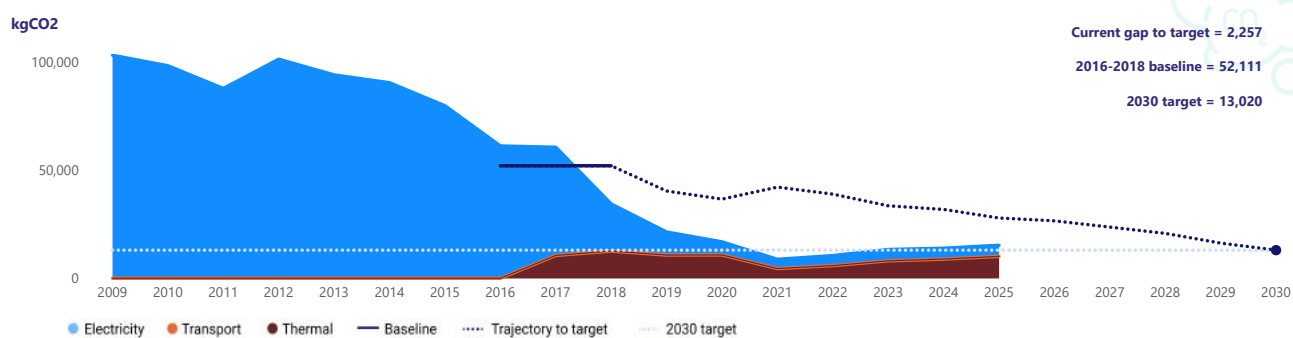
2030 target

Current gap to target = 6,363

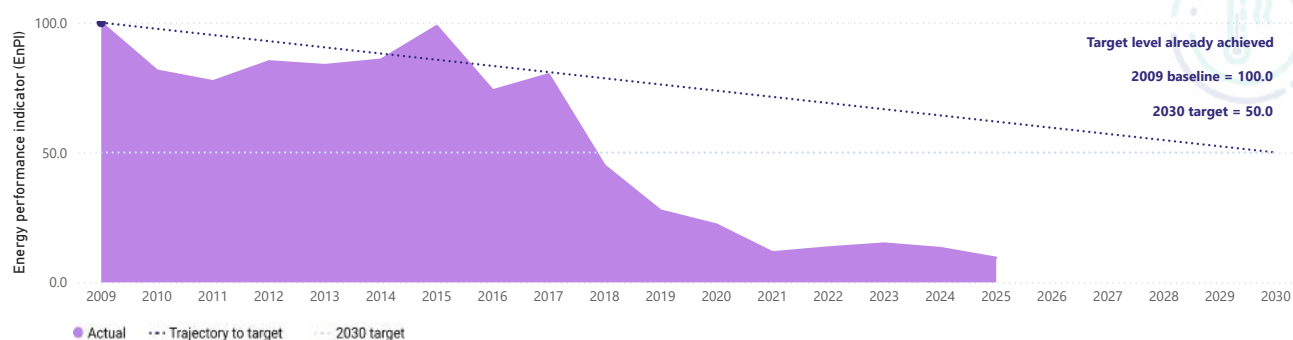
2016-2018 baseline = 7,717

2030 target = 3,782

Total CO2 target



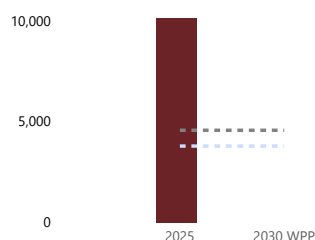
Energy efficiency target



Projected impact of planned energy-saving projects reported via SEAI's monitoring & reporting (M&R) system

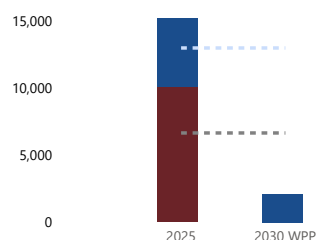
*Note that the projected future impacts of planned projects are calculated from the data reported to SEAI by the organisation. The projections assume that the organisation will not grow its energy footprint between now and 2030, e.g. through expansion, new capacity etc.

Fossil CO2 target, kgCO2



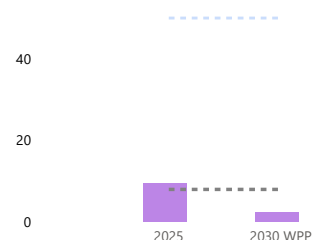
If planned projects are implemented fossil CO2 could reduce by 70.6%, which would bring emissions below the 2030 target level*.

Total CO2 target, kgCO2



If planned projects are implemented total CO2 could reduce by 103.2%, which would bring emissions below the 2030 target level*.

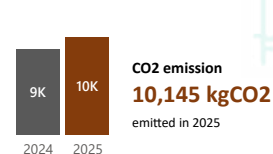
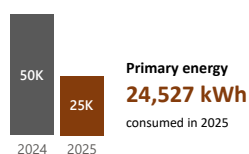
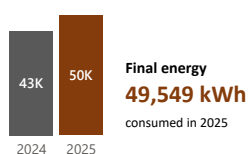
Energy efficiency target, EnPI

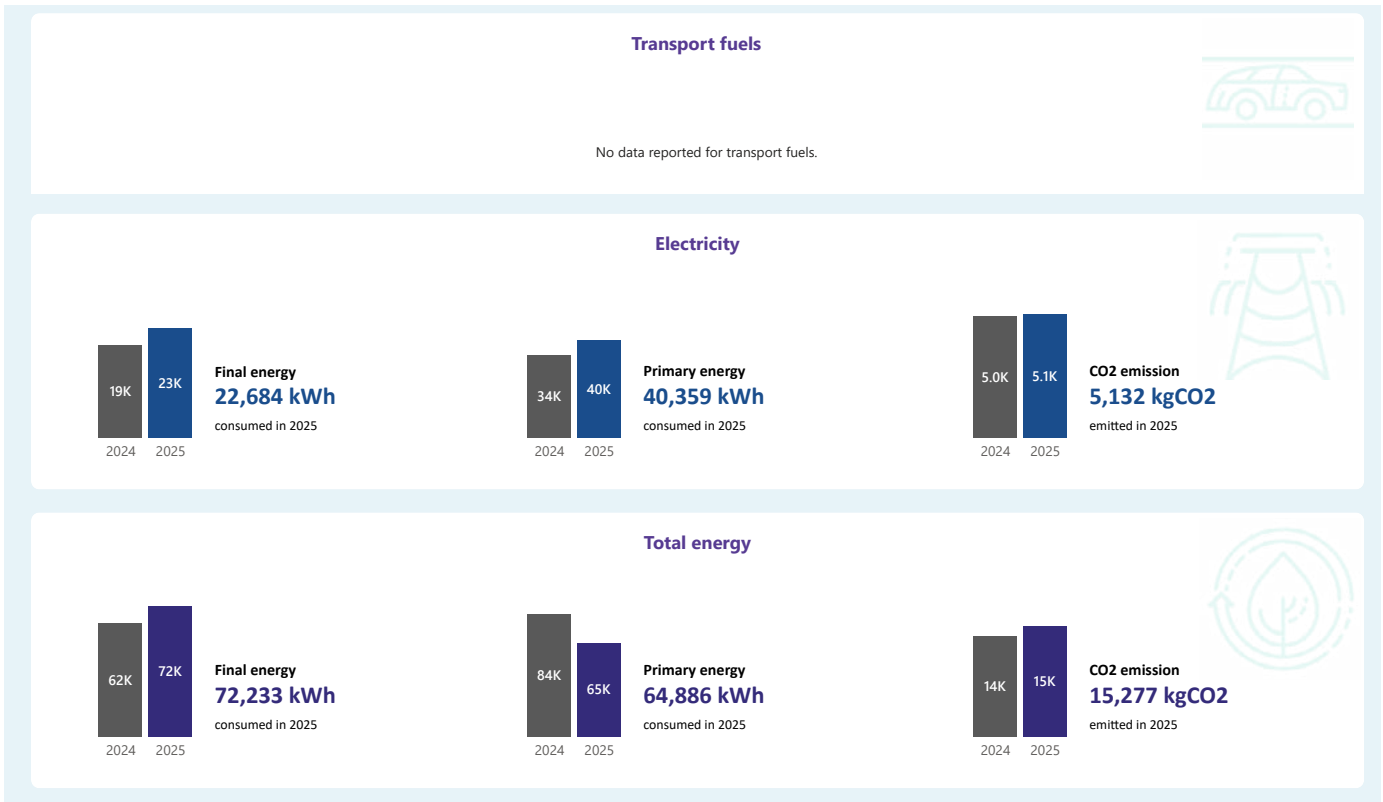


If planned projects are implemented energy performance could improve by 7.1 percentage points, which would bring 2030 performance within the target level*.

Thermal CO2 Transport CO2 Electricity CO2 Energy performance indicator 2030 business as usual 2030 target

Thermal energy





The Assembly Green Team was reformed in December 2025 with the aim of continuing and building upon the work of the previous Green Team. It includes staff from all sections of the Assembly.

Waste Statistics 2025



Climate Action & Sustainability Highlights 2025



Clean Air Together Waterford

Participated in the Clean Air Together citizen science project in Waterford City. Committed to the Climate Pledge for Business through Waterford Council. Launched a Food Waste campaign in Assembly House. Completed a full review of Gas and Electricity suppliers for Assembly House. Commenced application for the Smarter Travel Mark.

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.

The following Freedom of Information request relates to 2025:

Requests:	1	Granted	1	Part Granted	0
Refused	0	Withdrawn	0	Carried to 2026	0

Data Protection

The [General Data Protection Regulation](#) and the [Data Protection Act 2018](#) 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 2025.

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 2025. In line with provisions of the amendment to the Act, all Assembly advertising and communication activities in the Irish language are being tracked with a view to achieving the goals of Section 10A of the Act, where all public bodies must ensure that at least 20% of all yearly advertising shall be in the Irish language, and that at least 5% of their yearly advertising spend shall be in the Irish language and published in Irish language media.

The Assembly monitoring process for January - December 2025 revealed that most advertising in 2025 was related to EU programmes, promotion, and recruitment processes. The spend in Irish language media was 12%, surpassing the target of 5%. In terms of print media, spending was concentrated on advertisements in Irish but placed in English language publications. The number of advertisements in Irish, across all media types represented 2% of the total, some margin below the target of 20%. The Assembly continues to promote the use of Irish language media for advertising and dissemination of information.

Human Resources Update

The Southern Regional Assembly enjoyed a busy and exciting year in 2025.

We welcomed eight new members of staff, nine promotions including acting posts, four resignations and one retirement.

Our new members of staff in 2025 were:

Johanna Kavangh, Clerical Officer, Corporate Affairs.

Gary Burke, Graduate Placement, Corporate Affairs.

Anna Sellars, Economic/Policy Analyst, Regional Planning.

Cormac Laphorne, Assistant Director, Corporate Division.

Laoise Doyle, Clerical Officer, EU Projects.

Richard Jordan, Clerical Officer, Corporate Affairs.

Naomi Flood, Administrative Officer, Regional Programmes

Elizabeth Howard, Projects Officer, Regional Programmes.

We would like to wish our very best wishes and a warm thank you for their service to our four members of staff who resigned in 2025.

Karen Coughlan, Administrative Officer, Regional Programmes.

Sharon Murray, HR Officer, Human Resources/Finance.

Johanna Kavanagh, Clerical Officer, Corporate Affairs.

Richard Jordan, Clerical Officer, Corporate Affairs.

Sadly, very shortly after his retirement in 2025, our colleague Vincent Dunphy passed away, and his lengthy service at the Assembly is very fondly remembered.

The recruitment and promotion of staff align with our corporate goal of 'Empower our People.' The new staff members exemplify the commitment the Assembly has to ensuring resources are put in place to meet our goals and objectives.

2025 saw our Human Resources section recruiting a graduate from the WAM (Willing, Able, Mentoring) programme facilitated by [AHEAD](#) (Association for Higher Education Access and Disability). This was a great opportunity for the Assembly to gain a diverse talent pool and helps strengthen our inclusive recruitment practices. The Assembly also gained expert support and disability awareness training.



Vincent Dunphy

The Assembly were selected as the first organisation to participate in the RESET Pilot Wellbeing Programme for Teams, a new initiative to address workplace well-being. Developed by international coach and author Doug Dane, RESET is based on his acclaimed book *Mistaken Identity*. The program helps individuals and teams break free from limiting beliefs, strengthen resilience, and align who they are with how they live and work.



Launch of the RESET Programme with Cormac Laphorne (Southern Regional Assembly), Pauline Twomey (Southern Regional Assembly), Doug Dane (Creator of RESET), Eoin Morrissey (Healthy City and County Coordinator), Linda Barry (Project Lead & Workplace Well-being Facilitator)

The pilot is being delivered in partnership with Healthy Waterford (an initiative within Waterford City & County Council). Key insights into the Waterford business landscape were initially provided by the Waterford Chamber of Commerce.

Following an application process, the Assembly was selected as the first organisation to host the pilot.

2025 saw the creation of the Assembly's Wellbeing team. This team is comprised of staff members from various departments with a view towards enhancing employee physical, mental, and social health, driving better performance and retention.

The Wellbeing team's aim is to introduce a supportive and positive culture, and to help the Assembly to become an employer of choice. A monthly wellbeing newsletter has been created, staff surveys have been conducted, and social events have begun to take place.

The Human Resources section organised over thirty training and development courses ranging from continuous professional development to certificates and right up to level nine degrees. We are strongly committed to facilitating training and development amongst our staff as we see this as an opportunity for staff to increase their skills, knowledge, and productivity. We wish to foster a sense of achievement and pride whilst also boosting performance and reducing staff turnover.

The Assembly submitted our Strategic Workforce Plan 2025 in Quarter 3.

Public Sector Duty

The Southern Regional Assembly is conscious of Human Rights and Equality across all its work, and as an organisation. The Assembly's Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty Working Group formed in 2023 continues its work. The Working Group is chaired by a member of the Senior Management team, and includes representatives from each Department (Planning, EU, Corporate, Human Resources), and works to ensure compliance with the statutory obligations of the Irish [Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty](#).

Since 2024, all staff – both incumbent and new starters, completed the introductory eLearning module on the Public Sector Duty of Care, and gained a certificate. Completion of this training is now mandatory for all new staff.

Since June 2025, the Assembly has taken steps to ensure compliance with the [European Accessibility Act](#) to ensure digital information and services are accessible to every user. Any new content shared on our website meets EU and Irish accessibility standards, including webpages, images, videos, and downloadable documents.

The [National Disability Authority](#) 2024 Annual Monitoring report gave our website an accessibility score of 2%. During 2025, we transformed the site, and after an initial internal score of 49%, continued with significant work to make it significantly more accessible. This work resulted in the website achieving a 90% accessibility score in the National Disability Authority monitoring report, reflecting strong performance across key digital accessibility criteria. This indicates that the website is highly usable for people with disabilities, including users of assistive technologies, and demonstrates substantial alignment with recognised accessibility standards. The result supports our continued focus on inclusive design, regulatory readiness, and continuous improvement in digital user experience.

Health & Safety

The Southern Regional Assembly established a new Safety Committee to review and implement health and safety actions in 2025. Safety training was provided for Assembly staff during 2025. This training covered topics such as manual handling, first aid, and fire warden training. One Fire Drill took place.

There were no accidents, incidents or near misses reported during 2025.

Corporate Plan 2025 – 2029 Update

Introduction

A new Corporate Plan for the period 2025 – 2029 was formally adopted by Members of the Southern Regional Assembly in March 2025. The plan sets out four high level goals that strategic objectives are mapped against. The primary reporting vehicle for progress of Corporate Plan objectives is through the Annual Report.



Members and staff of the Southern Regional Assembly at the launch of the Corporate Plan, May 2025

Goal 1

EMPOWER OUR PEOPLE

We will foster a culture of continuous learning and development, evolving skills through capacity building for our staff and Members.

Goal 2

ENRICH OUR ENVIRONMENT

We will adopt a focused approach to the protection and enhancement of the environment, integrating climate and sustainable actions into all aspects of our work.

Goal 3

HARNESS REGIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

We will encourage and nurture economic growth in our region with equitable and innovative policies.

Goal 4

STRENGTHEN REGIONAL GOVERNANCE

We will strengthen our position in a multilevel democracy to be leaders in regional development through strategic planning and programmes. We will coordinate collaboration and dialogue with our stakeholders, enhancing transparency and accountability through regional policy making.

Progress in 2025

Strategic Objective 1.1

Ensure we are doing the right things, in the right way, for the people of our region and our staff, in an inclusive, open, and responsible manner, based on the need to eliminate discrimination, promote equality and protect human rights of staff.

- Recruitment of a graduate through the WAM (Willing, Able, Mentoring) programme through AHEAD, on a twelve-month contract.
- Roll out of Closed Captions for Assembly Meetings on MS Teams.

Strategic Objective 1.2

Supporting our staff through continuous development and learning, providing training opportunities and creating innovative ways of working.

- Provision of safety training (Manual handling, first aid, and fire warden) to staff.
- Commencement of review of digital processes with the Walton Institute.
- Launch of new Intranet hub for staff resources and information.
- Supporting staff membership of relevant professional bodies including Irish Planning Institute.
- Continued provision of training and educational opportunities for staff including attendance at training and third level education courses.

Strategic Objective 1.3

Develop and sustain a dynamic, healthy, and safe workplace centred around staff welfare and wellbeing that consistently attracts and retains top-quality people and enables them to perform at their best.

- Formation of staff Wellbeing group.
- Roll out of wellbeing [RESET](#)
- Creation of staff Safety Committee.

Strategic Objective 1.4

Create a Strategic Workforce Plan that reviews and identifies the resources required to deliver our functions and builds a resilient organisation that can adapt to new challenges.

- Strategic Workforce Plan created following staff consultation.

Strategic Objective 2.1

Foster a greener low carbon, climate-resilient and sustainable society built around planned, infrastructure-led development and sustainable mobility for our Region.

- Hosted Smart and Sustainable Mobility Accelerator training for Assembly Members.
- Hosted ESPON Blue Green Infrastructure Conference training.

Strategic Objective 2.2

Continue to work towards our obligations for a 51% reduction in energy-related greenhouse gas emissions, and 50% improvement in energy efficiency in our workplace by 2030.

- Completed Monitoring and Reporting to Sustainable Energy Authority Ireland for 2025.
- Completed full review of electricity and gas supply.
- Initiated new temperature control and timing to central heating system.
- Officially launched the deep retrofit project for Assembly House.

Strategic Objective 2.3

Promote and support environmental awareness and resource efficiency practices to ensure a healthy workplace environment.

- Reformed Green Team.
- Took part in Business Pledge for Waterford.

Strategic Objective 2.4

Coordinate Regional Planning & Sustainable Development across our terrestrial and maritime areas to support positive action in the area of climate change and biodiversity loss.

- Commenced preparation for Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy review including hosting Strategic Planning Area workshops for Assembly Members.

Strategic Objective 3.1

Create a Liveable Region that supports sustainable transport, renewable energies, inclusive communities, and places, and improves our quality of life and regional attractiveness.

- Hosting of PROXIMITIES interregional study visit in Cork in May 2025, showcasing sustainable housing, community-led regeneration, and inclusive urban development.

Strategic Objective 3.2

Promote social cohesion, diversity, inclusion, and regional development, while improving health and wellbeing for all.

- Hosting of International Women's Day webinar in March 2025 through the European Territorial Cooperation Network, promoting gender equality and inclusion in European projects.
- Developed and implemented the Regional Planning component of the Planning Fundamentals Course for Local Authorities.

Strategic Objective 3.3

Support the move towards a sustainable circular economy, encouraging innovation and strong collaboration in our Region.

- Commenced preparation for Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy review including hosting Strategic Planning Area workshops for Assembly Members.

Strategic Objective 3.4

Actively promote and support participation in EU programmes and projects for the delivery of sustainable regional development for the benefit of the Region.

- Secured Southern Region location for ESPON Week

Strategic Objective 4.1

Support the Members of the Regional Assembly in their leadership and representative roles, to ensure democratic accountability and effective regional governance.

- Completion of Members study trip to Brussels.
- Participated in Local Democracy Taskforce stakeholder engagement.
- Made submissions to various County Development Plan variations.
- Participated in Association of Irish Regions Conference.

Strategic Objective 4.2

Continue to strengthen our governance and corporate planning processes, including the development and monitoring of our Corporate Plan.

- Launch of new Corporate Plan 2025 - 2029.
- Commenced review of internal Corporate policies.

Strategic Objective 4.3

Improve our communications and engagement with our stakeholders to raise awareness of the role and functions of the Assembly.

- Launched media campaign for elected Members in their constituencies.
- Installation of new Audio system in Assembly Chamber.

Strategic Objective 4.4

Foster and cultivate strong collaborations and partnerships to support the delivery of better regional development.

- Launched Interreg S3ADAPT and SMOOTY projects.

Strategic Objective 4.5

Drive the regional agenda by ensuring ongoing and meaningful engagement with stakeholders to ensure coherence of regional development and shape policy-making.

- Made statutory and non-statutory submissions including:
 - Carlow County Development Plan (Variation)
 - Kilkenny City and County Development Plan (Variation)
 - Local Democracy Taskforce Targeted Stakeholder Consultation Process
 - Our Rural Future Consultation
 - Cork City Development Plan (Variation)
 - Kerry County Development Plan (Variation)
 - Water Supply Project Eastern and Midlands Region - Non-Statutory Consultation
- Made submission on Our Rural Future consultation.
- Made submission on Water Supply - Eastern and Midlands Region, Uisce Éireann project.

Strategic Objective 4.6

Conduct business in a way that is professional, trustworthy, ambitious, collaborative, responsible and accountable.

- Participated in Local Government Management Agency audit.
- Published contract and purchase order details to our website.

Regional Planning



Overview

The Assembly's main strategic planning function involves the preparation, adoption, and implementation of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Region. It also has an oversight role for the preparation of Local Economic & Community Plans.

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 [Planning and Development Act 2024](#) strengthened this role through enhanced provisions for revisions to the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Region and constituent Metropolitan Area Strategic Plans for Cork, Limerick – Shannon and Waterford. A key development in 2025 was the publication in April of the National Planning Framework First Revision. This reiterated the government's commitment to a Shift in Regional Balance by:

- Increased growth in the regions - '50:50' target to address the spatial, societal, and environmental issues facing Ireland.
- Supporting ambitious growth of the four main regional cities to enable them grow as viable alternatives to Dublin and Improvement to Dublin.
- Structural change through Regional Growth Centres and Key Towns and rural areas.
- Compact growth, quality development, placemaking.

In 2025, the focus of the Regional Planning Team changed to include preparation for the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy and Metropolitan Area Strategic Plans review. This included developing scoping papers on relevant themes and hosting Strategic Planning Area Briefing Workshops with Assembly Members in September 2025.

Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy for the Southern Region

The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy, 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 for [Cork](#), [Limerick-Shannon](#) & [Waterford](#), and strategies for our Key Towns, towns, villages, and rural areas.

The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy aims to support the delivery of the programme for change set out in [Project Ireland 2040](#): the [National Planning Framework](#) and the [National Development Plan 2018-27](#). The focus of work post publication has been on implementation.

Implementation Actions

The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy has 301 objectives: 229 Regional Policy Objectives, together with specific objectives for the Metropolitan Area Strategic Plans: 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 Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy:

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



Activities, Progress and Milestones in 2025

The priority for 2025 was the continued achievement of Regional Policy Objective 226: Within a year of the making of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy, 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 that the delivery of

the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy and the Metropolitan Area Strategic Plans 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	Key Area of Progress/Main Issue impeding progress
Task No. 1	Ensuring Delivery of National Planning Framework/Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy targets for the Southern Region including progressing Regional Policy Objective 1a - 50:50 Split and Implementation of Two-Year Report Recommendations. Relevant Regional Policy Objective 226: Implementation Mechanism for the Strategy and Metropolitan Area Strategic Plans.	The Southern Regional Assembly has engaged in concerted action in relation to Regional Policy Objective 1a of the National Planning Framework, including conducting a review of the capacity of regional structures to deliver on the National Planning Framework and a critique of structural underpinning of investment. The report identified that housing delivery in the Southern Region was behind targets in adopted Development Plans, and that the rate of under delivery in the Southern Region was more pronounced than in Dublin and the Mid East region. It identified key issues at a regional and local level which impact upon housing delivery, including market conditions and viability, barriers to brownfield land activation, infrastructure constraints. An overarching recommendation was that government interventions aimed at increased housing supply nationally must be tailored to take account of different circumstances across regions and local areas. In June 2025, the Assembly made a submission to the public consultation on the Review of the National Development Plan. The submission highlighted analysis undertaken by the Assembly identifying that planned capital expenditure on infrastructure under the National Development Plan is not aligned with the spatial objectives of the National Planning Framework, particularly with regards to Regional Policy Objective 1, and fails to address the more pronounced infrastructure deficiencies that exist in the Southern Region. It highlighted the strategic priorities the Assembly considered critical to support the National Planning Framework’s objectives for our region. Building upon this, the Assembly also made a submission to Governments consultation on Accelerating Infrastructure Delivery. The submission highlighted key structural issues that the Assembly has identified as stalling investment and infrastructure delivery, and the issues faced in delivering projects of regional significance outside of the Greater Dublin Area. It highlighted the challenges represented by the centralised nature of Ireland’s governance and put forward recommendations for how these could be addressed through alternative funding and implementation mechanisms.

Task No. 2	Establishment of Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan Structures Relevant Regional Policy Objective 226: Implementation Mechanism for the Strategy and Metropolitan Area Strategic Plans.	• There has been ongoing engagement with the Cork Area Strategic Plan Steering Committee for the Cork Metropolitan Area. • Participation in the new Directly Elected Mayor Limerick 2040 implementation structures. • The Southern Regional Assembly prepared an agreed approach – ‘A Unified Voice’ for the Waterford Metropolitan Area which seeks to establish a formal coordination/delivery mechanism linking Waterford City and County Council, Kilkenny County Council, the Southern Regional Assembly, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, other relevant government departments, and relevant stakeholders, all with the purpose of providing a unified voice for development of the Metropolitan Area. There is ongoing engagement about the establishment of these new structures. The Southern Regional Assembly has been a key driver in proposing Metropolitan Area Strategic Plans structural change with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and as part of the OECD work on the National Planning Framework review.
Task No. 3	Developing Regional Indicators and Monitoring Relevant Regional Policy Objectives: 68 Regional Investment; 71 Shared Evidence Base; and 226 Implementation Mechanism for the Strategy and Metropolitan Area Strategic Plans.	This is a key task and includes tracking of infrastructure delivery for the Region including the development of the Assembly’s Geographic Information System capacity. Tasks included: • Tracking of infrastructure delivery and analysis of key trends including the results of Census 2022, recent data on housing delivery, as well as the development of Geographic Information System capacity, has been successfully implemented. This work has been a key part of the reports and submissions highlighted in Task 1, and has supported the Assembly’s wider engagement with Members, local authorities, national agencies, and other key stakeholders. It also enhances the evidence base for the upcoming review of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy. • The Regional Development Monitor Hub has been continually updated and developed. This is a collaborative project between the three Regional Assemblies, the All-Island Research Observatory at Maynooth University and spatial infrastructure partners the Ordnance Survey Ireland via the GeoHive platform. It collates and visualises a range of relevant socio-economic and environmental indicators to present the performance of each of the three regions in terms of achieving the objectives outlined in their respective Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies. It provides a series of new national mapping and visualisation infrastructures to assist Government Departments, Regional Assemblies, Local Authorities, Planners, Policy Makers, Researchers, and members of the public in gaining a greater insight into social, economic, and environmental trends to aid better decision making. It also focuses on indicators related to the Regional Strategic Outcomes/Strategy Statements of the Regional Spatial and Economic

		Strategies along with their appropriate socio-economic and environmental variables and will be categorised into four key principles: Our People and Places, Our Green & Sustainable Future, Our Region's Economy, and an All-Island Perspective. - The "National Census Atlas," is hosted on Regional Development Monitor platform was launched by Minister Peter Burke on 6 February 2025 in Athlone. It provides an interactive map viewer that presents detailed results from Census 2022 at the Small Area geographic level. - Appointment of consultants (Arup) for the Strategic Environmental Assessment for the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy Review.
Task No. 4	Collaboration between Metropolitan Areas: Cork; Limerick-Shannon; Waterford; and Galway. Relevant Regional Policy Objective 6: Collaboration between Metropolitan Areas.	The Regional Planning team has facilitated a dialogue between the three Metropolitan Areas of Cork, Limerick-Shannon and Waterford in the Region, focusing on the practical issues including meetings between staff of the Southern Regional Assembly and Local Authorities to support implementation of Blue Green Infrastructure and Nature-Based Solutions. This work is linked to the wider Regional Nature Forum providing a platform for sharing of good practice and knowledge in this area.
Task No. 5-15	Ensure the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy Programme for Change is incorporated into the Local Economic and Community Plan Process.	The Southern Regional Assembly engaged with all the local authorities in the Region as part of their Local Economic and Community Plan processes, as required under Section 66 of the Local Government Reform Act. In 2025 a Statement of Consistency between the Local Economic and Community Plans and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy issued to the Kerry Local Economic and Community Plan thus completing the process.
Task No. 16	Implement Learning Region Action Plan.	There has been ongoing engagement with stakeholders including Higher Education Institutions, Education and Training Boards and local authorities on development of a Learning Region Network. The Assembly has also participated in events organised through the all-island Irish Network of Learning Cities.
Task No. 17	Establish Waterford as a UNESCO Learning City. Relevant Regional Policy Objectives: 39 Economic Opportunities and Choice for all our Citizens; 63 Skills and Talent; 186 Lifelong Learning; 187 Education and Training; 190 Lifelong Learning and Healthy Cities Initiatives; and Waterford Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan Policy Objective 23: Lifelong Learning and Skills.	Following an application in 2023 led by the Southern Regional Assembly, Waterford City and County Council, and South East Technical University, this task was successfully achieved when Waterford became a designated UNESCO Learning City in early 2024. The Assembly is represented on the Waterford UNESCO Learning City Working Group with ongoing engagement and participation in Learning City events in Cork, Limerick, and Waterford.

Task No. 18	Implement Southern Regional Assembly Communications Strategy. Relevant Regional Policy Objective 73: International Branding of the Region and Reputation.	The Assembly's social media accounts and website are continuously updated on events happening and matters of relevance in the region. As of 2025, the Assembly is committed to making our website and social media accounts more accessible, in accordance with EU Regulations. We are working to continually review and update our efforts to ensure digital accessibility.
Task No. 19	Develop the Smart Southern Region Action Plan. Relevant Regional Policy Objective 134: Smart Cities and Smart Region.	The Assembly is progressing implementation of the Smart Southern Region initiative, building on its launch on the 18 January 2023. Developments include: a regional approach for Smart Specialisation (S3); the Smart Southern Region project mapping tool in consultation with local authorities and stakeholders; 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. They are engaged with the EU Preparatory Action 'Innovation for place-based transformation' to support the next steps in the development of a smart region. The Assembly was designated as a Regional Innovation Valley in June 2024 as part of the New European Innovation Agenda (NEIA) by the European Commission.
Task No. 20	Develop Regional Freight Strategy. Relevant Regional Policy Objective: 141 Regional Freight Strategy.	Action 24 of Ireland's Road Haulage Strategy 2022-2031 and Action 11b of Moving Together – A Collaborative Approach to Systems Change in Transport (2026-2030) requires the Regional Assemblies, with the National Transport Authority, to lead the development of Regional Level Freight Strategies in consultation with key stakeholders, consistent with the objectives of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies. Action 23 further requires metropolitan level freight strategies to be prepared for Cork, Limerick-Shannon, and Waterford. The Assembly has prepared a roadmap for the development of this strategy in consultation with the National Transport Authority. The process will commence in 2026 following improvements in data through Action 02, 03 and 06 of the Road Haulage Strategy. It is set to be completed by Q4 2027.
Task No. 21	Develop Ports and Harbour Strategy for the Southern Region. Relevant Regional Policy Objective: 145 Ports and Harbour Strategy for the Southern Region.	Following the completion of a Project Charter setting out the scope and aims for this work, the Assembly continues to coordinate with the Department of Transport and engage with transport stakeholders, port companies, local authorities, and other stakeholders to prepare the Ports and Harbour Strategy for the Southern Region . Specialist research was commissioned by the Assembly and 'The Economic Impact of Southern Region Ports' report by Menon Economics was published in September 2024. This report assessed 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 provides 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, the next consultation phase for this document is due in Q2/Q3 2026 and other strategic plans for our Region's coastal and maritime areas.
Task No. 22	Develop Airport Strategy for the Southern Region. Relevant Regional Policy Objective 149: Airport Strategy for the Southern Region.	This action has been deferred for consideration as part of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy Review.
Task No. 23	Sustainable Mobility. Relevant Regional Policy Objectives: 151-174 and Regional Policy Objective 176 for sustainable mobility, enhanced regional connectivity and a low carbon, climate resilient and sustainable society.	Progress on the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy, Transport Strategy and National Sustainable Mobility Plan includes: • Participation in National Sustainable Mobility Plan Leadership and Delivery Teams, 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 Assembly is the managing authority on behalf of the Department of Transport and three Regional Assemblies to deliver this 3-Year project. The Programme was launched in 2023. Quarterly meetings took place with Track One stakeholders (local authorities) over 2024. Training for Track Two stakeholders (Councillors), Track Three (Innovation Actors and Academics) and Track Four (Community Representatives) took place in 2025. The pilot concluded in 2025, but capacity building will continue to be delivered through the Department of Transport, National Transport Authority, and Transport Infrastructure Ireland, taking on board the lessons learned from the pilot. • Continued support for capacity building and actions to implement 10-15-minute cities, towns, and neighbourhoods in action, building upon the publication of Assembly's 10 Minute Town Methodology and Framework Report. • Preparation and implementation of Metropolitan Transport Strategies (Cork, Limerick-Shannon and Waterford), Local Transport Plans and Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans. • Liaison with Department of Transport, and the National Transport Authority, on Demand Management and submission to Demand Management consultation via workshops.
Task No. 24	Implement Blue Green Infrastructure and Nature-Based Solutions for infrastructure provision. Relevant Regional Policy Objective: 124 Green Infrastructure.	There has been ongoing engagement with local authorities and other agencies to promote Blue/Green Infrastructure and Nature Based Solutions. In December 2025, ESPON Maynooth University and the Assembly held a joint seminar held in December 2025 on Nature-based Adaptation to Climate Change: The Potential of Blue/Green Infrastructure. The seminar formed part of the Regional Assembly's Programme

		of Regional Nature Forum meetings held to provide a supporting structure for Local Authorities, agencies and other practitioners involved in the practical application of Blue/Green Infrastructure and Nature Based Solutions. In February 2025, the Assembly's Planning Team participated in a transnational peer learning session as part of the Biodiverse Cities Interreg North Sea Project where the Assembly presented their work on promoting Blue-Green Infrastructure and Nature-based Solutions in the Southern Region. In June 2025, the Assembly's Planning Team participated in a peer review for the Municipality of Alba Iulia regarding policy challenges on river restoration and blue-green infrastructure. Ongoing actions under this task continues the work of the INTERREG EUROPE Blue Green City Project.
Task No. 25	Develop Regional Renewable Electricity Strategy Roadmap. Relevant Regional Policy Objective: 98 Regional Renewable Energy Strategy.	Along with the other two Regional Assemblies, the Regional Planning team has taken part in consultation meetings with the Sustainable Energy Authority Ireland and Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment and Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage on development of a Methodology for preparation of Regional Renewable Energy Strategies by each Regional Assembly. This task is an action of the Government's Climate Action Plan and a National Policy Objective (Regional Policy Objective) in the First Draft Revised National Planning Framework.
Task No. 26	Regional Decarbonisation. Relevant Regional Policy Objective: 90 Regional Decarbonisation.	Research on Territories and Low-carbon Economy has been carried out as part of the ESPON Locate Project and will provide useful background research for the preparation of a Regional Decarbonisation Plan. The South-East Energy Agency undertook some preliminary work for a Regional Decarbonisation Plan as part of the REGIO 1st Interreg Project.
Task No. 27	Co-ordination of Climate Action with Climate Action Regional Offices. Relevant Regional Policy Objectives: 87 Low Carbon Energy Future; 88 National Mitigation Plan and National Adaptation Framework; 89 Building Resilience to Climate Change; and 90: Regional Decarbonisation.	The Regional Planning Team continues to engage in quarterly Steering Group meetings with the CARO Southern Seaboard South, on matters related to Climate Action and the Local Authority Climate Action Plans.

Task No. 28	Identify the scope and role of the Regional Landscape Strategy for the Region. Relevant Regional Policy Objective: 129 Landscape.	Progress on this task has been delayed pending the development of the National Landscape Strategy.
Task No. 29	Support the development of the Eastern Corridor and on-going support to the Atlantic Economic Corridor initiative. Relevant Regional Policy Objectives 41: Atlantic Economic Corridor and 42: Eastern Corridor.	Details of implementation for the Atlantic Economic Corridor is outlined in Chapter 4, A Creative and Innovative Region. Preliminary research on the Eastern Corridor was undertaken in 2023 has been followed by engagement with Southern Regional Assembly elected members from Wexford and a meeting with the Executive at Wexford County Council. Further engagement with Wexford County Council and other stakeholders is taking place with substantive engagement with this process being developed through the FutureECOS project.
Task No. 30	Develop capacity and strengthen the bidding capacity of local authorities, government agencies, and regional stakeholders. Relevant Regional Policy Objective: 70 Bidding Capacity.	Implementation on this is ongoing through submissions on Development Plans, development of workshops and engagement with Local Authorities and the ETC Network.
Task No. 31	Marine Spatial Planning. Relevant Regional Policy Objectives: 76 Marine Economy; 77 Marine Spatial Planning – Consistency and Alignment; and 78: First Mover under the National Marine Planning Framework.	Coordination is ongoing with the Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment - Marine Policy and Legislation Division on regional roles in future Designated Maritime Area Plan processes. The Southern Regional Assembly participated in a stakeholder for the National Designated Maritime Area Plan. Participated in a stakeholder forum for the National Strategic Plan for Sustainable Aquaculture Development. The Southern Regional Assembly made submissions to the public consultation on the Marine Planning Policy Statement and supported the Maritime Area Regulatory Authority in providing training to Coastal Planning Authorities in the Region on Marine Planning.
Task No. 32	Regional Enterprise Plans. Relevant Regional Strategy Statement: 5 A Strong Economy.	The Southern Regional Assembly continues to participate 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 South-West, South-East, Mid-West Regional Enterprise Plans as required. Participation on implementation steering committees and networking with the three Regional Enterprise Plan Programme Managers also takes place.

Task No. 33	Develop Bioeconomy through the ROBIN Project. Relevant Regional Policy Objectives: 57 National Policy Statement on Bioeconomy; and 58 Bioeconomy and Rural Areas.	Led by the EU Programmes Division, the Regional Planning team has been involved in the ROBIN project , which 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 territorial contexts. The project has developed ROBIN Support Actions for Bioeconomy Governance concluding with the production of a ROBIN Toolbox Environmental Protection Planning Tool.
Task No. 34	Develop Southern Regional Assembly's role in Placemaking and Sustainable and Compact Settlements. Relevant Regional Policy Objectives: 31 Sustainable Place Framework; 34 Regeneration, Brownfield, and Infill Development; and 35 Support for Compact Growth.	The Southern Regional Assembly is a partner in an Interreg Europe project titled PROXIMITIES , which promotes the concept of good place-making and the compact growth approach in peripheral locations of the Region's 3 Cities- Cork, Limerick, and Waterford. Study visits to Manresa in Spain and Riga in Latvia in Italy took place during 2025. The Assembly hosted the study visit to Cork in May 2025, highlighting its good practices, which included Arus Mhuire Housing Scheme on Skehard Road, and Ballincollig Urban Development and Regional Park. It continued to engage with Stakeholders, including the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, local authorities, and other public bodies to further knowledge and engagement in developing the role of place-making in the Region.

Representation of the regional view and engagement

Representations were made in ongoing relevant EU, national and regional policy implementation processes/fora including:

[Local Authority Services National Training Group](#) – The Southern Regional Assembly developed on behalf of the three assemblies the Regional Assembly module of the new national planning training course.

Department of Transport – [Sustainable Mobility Policy](#) – Leadership Group.

[Project Ireland 2040](#) Board.

National Climate Change Adaptation Forum.

National Strategic Environmental Assessment Forum.

National Appropriate Assessment Forum

Irish Water National Water Resource Plan and Regional Water Resource Plans.

Regional Enterprise Plans; Steering Group participation for Regional Enterprise Plans.

Regional Skills Forum.

Midlands Regional Transition Team.

Town Centre First.

Steering group - Coastal Change Management Strategy.

Local Economic and Community Plans Advisory Group.

Planning for Climate Change Steering Group.

Atlantic Economic Corridor.

Consultation and coordination with Department of Transport, Transport Infrastructure Ireland, and National Transport Authority for the implementation of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy Transport Strategy including preparation and implementation of Metropolitan Transport Strategies 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 Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage Marine Planning Policy Division.

Engagement, research, and training through the Office of the Planning Regulator Forum.

Academic research with University College Dublin (under the Irish Research Council Enterprise Partnership Scheme) on Achieving Regional Equality – Urban Rural Dynamics in Ireland's Southern Region EU-Trans-European Transport Network Policy.

International Transport Forum.

Ministerial Action Plan on Planning Resources Steering Committee.

National Mirror Group for Mission Cities.

Decarbonisation Zones Steering Group.

Presentation at OECD Conference – Moncton – Canada

Submissions 2025

- Proposed Variation No. 3 to the Kilkenny City and County Development Plan 2021 - 2027 – 16.01.2025
- Proposed Variation No. 1 - Carlow County Development Plan 2022-2028 – 04.02.2025
- Consultation on the Water Supply Project Eastern and Midlands Region - Submission of the Southern Regional Assembly – 04.03.2025
- Proposed Variation No. 4 to the Kilkenny City and County Development Plan 2021 -2027 – 07/03/2025
- Proposed Variation No.1 of the Kerry County Development Plan 2022-2028 – 21.03.2025
- Draft Kerry Local Economic and Community Plan Framework Document 2025 - 2030 (Draft Local Economic and Community Plan) – 14.05.2025
- Proposed Variation No. 2 (Cork Docklands) to the Cork City Development Plan 2022- 2028 – 27.05.2026
- Proposed Variation No. 5 to the Kilkenny City and County Development Plan 2021 -2027 – 16.06.2025
- Submission to National Development Plan Review Consultation – 25.06.2025
- Material Alterations to Proposed Variation No. 1 to the Kerry County Development Plan 2022-2028 – 03.07.2025.

- Southern Regional Assembly Response to Marine Planning Policy Statement Consultation – 10.07.2025
- Proposed Variation No. 2 to the Kerry County Development Plan 2022-2028 – 11.07.2025
- Proposed Variation No. 2 – Carlow County Development Plan 2022-2028 – 28.07.2025
- Proposed Variation No. 6 to the Kilkenny City and County Development Plan 2021 -2027 (draft Ferrybank/Belview Framework Plan) – 18.09.2025
- Proposed Draft Variation No. 1 of the Waterford City & County Development Plan 2022 – 2028 – 18.09.2025.
- Consultation on the National Territory Mapping for Renewable Electricity – 10.10.2025
- National Transport Authority Statement of Strategy – 22.10.2025
- Proposed Material Alterations To: Proposed Variation No. 2 of the Carlow County Development Plan 2022-2028 to incorporate the Muine Bheag/Royal Oak District Town Plan – 22.10.2025.
- Consultation on Social Climate Plan – 22.10.2025
- Material Alterations to Proposed Variation No. 2 to the Kerry County Development Plan 2022-2028 – 30.10.2025.
- Consultation on Circular Economy Strategy – 05.11.2025
- Public Consultation on the Development of the Priorities and Policy Programme for Ireland’s Presidency of the Council of the European Union 2026 – 12.12.2025
- Our Rural Future 2026-2031 – Public Consultation Document Final Written Consultation – 12.12.2025

Submissions can be found on the [Resources and Publications](#) section of the Southern Regional Assembly website.

ERDF Regional Programmes



Overview

The Southern Regional Assembly is the Managing Authority for the ERDF co-funded [Southern, Eastern & Midland Regional Programme 2021-27](#). The Regional Programme supports balanced regional development through an investment of €663 million across the two NUTS2 regions in the programme area – the [Southern](#) Region and the [Eastern & Midland](#) Region – under the following three strategic priority areas:

Smarter More Competitive Regions: Building Research, Development & Innovation capacity in regional, public research institutions, accelerating commercialisation of cutting-edge research at regional level, supporting innovation diffusion and strengthening regional innovation ecosystems in line with [Ireland’s Smart Specialisation Strategy](#) and [Regional Enterprise Plans](#).

Greener More Energy Efficient Regions and a Just Transition: Scaling up investment to improve energy efficiency of residential homes, targeting homeowners in or at risk of energy poverty.

Sustainable Urban Development in our Regions: Supporting an integrated strategic approach to the regeneration of towns using a [Town Centres First Framework](#)

Programme Delivery

The Assembly’s Regional Programme team worked closely with three Intermediate Bodies – the Higher Education Authority, Research Ireland, and Enterprise Ireland to accelerate programme delivery in 2025. The projects awarded funding in 2024 ramped up their activities and new projects came on stream under new funding calls. By the end of December 2025, funding had been awarded to over ninety multi-annual projects under eight funding schemes.

Strategic Priority	Schemes
Developing Smarter More Competitive Regions	ARC Hub, Technology Gateways, Inno-vators Initiative, KT Boost, Smart Re-gions, TU RISE
Creating Greener, More Energy Effi-cient Regions and a Just Transition	Warmer Homes
Sustainable Urban Development	THRIVE - Town Centre First Heritage Re-vival Scheme

ARC Hub: Led by Research Ireland, this scheme supports the creation of two regional smart hubs to drive research commercialisation and regional innovation. Two new ARC Hubs – the ARC Hub for Therapeutics and the ARC Hub for ICT – commenced activity in 2025, both classified as Operations of Strategic Importance under the Regional Programme and aligned with Ireland’s Smart Specialisation Strategy.

Technology Gateways: Led by Enterprise Ireland, this scheme supports personnel in Technological Universities and Institutes of Technology whose role is to increase their engagement with and support of local industry. The 16 co-funded Gateways, each with their own expertise, act as a bridge between industry and a defined research group who will carry out the technical work for the client company.

Innovators’ Initiative: Led by Enterprise Ireland,

this scheme is supporting the next generation of entrepreneurs and innovation leaders through dedicated needs-led immersive learning. As the first set of entrepreneurs were progressing through the Cyber-Innovate, DigiBio (digital health) and FAST-IP (agri-tech) Innovators Initiative programmes in 2025, recruitment had already commenced for the second group. Each programme features a strong focus on market opportunity using design thinking methodologies and a period of immersion for the participants in organisations at the coalface of the relevant sector.

KT Boost: Led by Enterprise Ireland, this scheme aims to deliver skills sets that will support an increase in research commercialisation outcomes within the higher education sector and develop a consistent operational quality across the Knowledge Transfer System. The specialist roles supported under KT Boost will continue to

develop and new resources to place a focus on knowledge and technology transfer activities including IP Management and prospective licensing, and spin-off creation. With eleven beneficiaries in the programme area, the scheme ensures Ireland's higher education sector has the capacity to commercialise research effectively.

Smart Regions: Led by Enterprise Ireland, the aim of the Smart Regions (Enterprise Innovation) Scheme is to accelerate economic growth across all regions with a focus on enterprise development. It supports the development of innovative services through local infrastructure, innovation clusters, services to Small and Medium Enterprises, and early-stage feasibility and priming research. This will lead to the establishment of modern innovation infrastructure, research facilities, organisations focused on disseminating knowledge, and innovation clusters. Twenty-four projects were awarded funding by the end of 2025.

TU RISE: Led by the Higher Education Authority, this scheme supports enhanced research and innovation capacity in six Technological

Universities and Institutes of Technology across the programme area, fostering collaboration with regional enterprises and advancing national and regional strategic goals.

Warmer Homes: Led by the Southern Regional Assembly, this scheme supports fully funded home retrofits for owner-occupiers at risk of fuel poverty, improving energy efficiency and living conditions, through Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland's Warmer Homes.

THRIVE: THRIVE, the Town Centre First Heritage Revival Scheme, supports the revitalisation of vacant and derelict heritage buildings and town centres in key towns, strategic growth centres, and cities, fostering vibrant, sustainable communities. The second funding call took place in 2025 leading to the award of ten further capital grants. By the end of 2025, THRIVE was supporting fifteen Strand 1 projects and fourteen Strand 2 projects. THRIVE is aligned with Town Centre First and New European Bauhaus values and principles. This scheme is managed by the Southern Regional Assembly with 100% funding available to local authorities.



Launch of Smart Regions AI Navigator Programme at RDI Hub - Minister Norma Foley launches the Smart Regions AI Navigator programme in February 2025

Mid-term Review and revised Regional Programme

The Common Provisions Regulation required that all Managing Authorities carry out a mid-term review of their programmes in 2025 to review progress and to assess whether any revisions to the programme design might be required.

The European Commission recognised this as an opportunity to respond to new strategic challenges for Europe and brought forward a proposal in 2025 to revise the EU's cohesion policy to strengthen competitiveness, accelerate the energy transition, enhance defence, ensure affordable housing, and improve water resilience. This resulted in a Regulation (EU) 2025/1914 which gave managing authorities additional scope and incentives to redesign programmes and in doing so, to address new strategic priorities in the context of the mid-term review.

The Southern Regional Assembly carried out a mid-term review and submitted a revised Regional Programme to the Commission in December 2025. The revised programme introduces two new strategic priorities, Sustainable and Affordable Housing, and Strategic Technologies for Europe.

Further Information

Further information on the Regional Programme, including detailed descriptions of the schemes, the funding calls, and the operations selected, is available on the Southern Regional Assembly [website](#).

The Southern, Eastern and Midland Regional Programme 2021-2027 is co-funded by the Government of Ireland and the European Union through the European Regional Development Fund.

Southern and Eastern Regional Programme 2014 - 2020

The Southern Regional Assembly was also the managing authority for the [Southern & Eastern Regional Programme 2014-20](#). While funded activities under this programme came to an end in 2023, formal programme closure activities continued in 2025, working alongside colleagues in the certifying authority and audit authority. This work included responding to national and EU audits, preparation of final accounts and final control report, and submission to the Commission of the final implementation report. This work was completed in December 2025.



CyberInnovate Group - Participants in the 2025 Cyber Innovate programme at MTU, all of whom gained a deep understanding of proven innovation methodologies, such as Design Thinking and Lean Startup

European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) Programmes



Overview

European Territorial Cooperation (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 and Arctic

- Interreg Atlantic Area
- Interreg Europe
- Urban Innovative Actions and URBACT
- ESPON
- Peace Plus cross border

In 2025, the Southern Regional Assembly was actively involved in the monitoring and delivery of European Territorial Cooperation programmes in Ireland.

Programme	Southern Regional Assembly Role
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 and Arctic	Designated First Level Control Audit for Irish partners in the Southern and Eastern Region
Interreg Europe	Contact Point in the Southern and Eastern Region Designated First Level Control Audit for Irish partners in the Southern and Eastern Region
URBACT	Designated First Level Control Audit for Irish partners in the Southern and Eastern Region
ESPO	Representative on the Programme Monitoring Committee

First Level Control (FLC)

First Level Control (FLC) involves checks and audits of project expenditure during the implementation phase of a project before a financial claim is submitted to the programme authorities for payment. The Assembly's FLC team validates expenditure claims for four European Territorial Cooperation programmes: North-West Europe, Northern Periphery and Arctic, Interreg Europe, and URBACT.

It is the responsibility of each member state to set up a control system in its country.

The FLC team verifies and validates expenditure incurred by a project partner/lead partner 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 European Territorial Cooperation funded programmes are accounted for and eligible for funding.

Previously, FLC covered 100% of all project expenditure declared, however, for the 2021 to 2027 programming period, Interreg has established a risk-based sampling methodology that will be implemented in accordance with the criteria set out by the European Commission.

Controllers will not automatically check 100% of the expenditure declared by the project partners but may decide to check 100% if errors are detected in the sample selected.

The FLC system consists of two types of verification checks:

1. Desk based administrative checks using the risk-based sampling methodology on expenditure declared in financial payment claims.
2. On-the-spot checks that take place at the project partner's office and carried out on a sample basis (checking a sample of all certified expenditure over the life of the project).

Activity Update 2025

During 2025, the Assembly's FLC team audited and validated 201 project claims worth €9,426,818.80 to Irish organisations participating as project partners and lead partners on the four European Territorial Cooperation programmes.

The Controllers of the FLC Unit attended a number of events during the year.

Details are as follows:

- National Controllers – Support Webinar organised online by URBACT and held on Wednesday 15 January 2025.
- A Controller from the FLC unit, Eve Hayden attended the Interreg Europe Project Training in September and October 2025, in Lille, France.
- A Controller from the FLC unit, Michael Buckley attended the Northern and Western Regional Assembly Interview Board for First Level Controller Grade V Interviews in August 2025.
- Controllers from the FLC unit, Michael Buckley, Edel Hunt and Elayne McDonnell attended the joint Regional Assembly staff training at the Hodson Bay Hotel, Athlone, County Westmeath on 2 – 3 October 2025.
- Controllers from the FLC unit, Michael Buckley, Edel Hunt, Eve Hayden and Elayne McDonnell, attended the European Territorial Cooperation Network Annual Event – EU Funding in Action organised by the Southern Regional Assembly and held at Assembly House Waterford on Tuesday 4 November 2025.

- The team from the FLC Unit organised and participated in a number of First Level Control clinics, which were pre-booked one-to-one sessions with First Level Control for project partners, wishing to discuss various queries regarding eligibility and documentation required for validation of claims.
- The various events as outlined above were organised to disseminate information on the 2021-2027 Programme requirements (FLC system, on-the spot-checks, procurement, sampling methodology and simplified cost options) to Controllers who are validating expenditure claims for four ETC programmes - North-West Europe, Northern Periphery and Arctic, Interreg Europe, and URBACT during the 2021-2027 programming period.
- Controllers from the FLC unit, Michael Buckley, Edel Hunt, Eve Hayden and Elayne McDonnell attended the Assembly@10 event; Corporate Plan Launch and Europe Day at the showcasing event in the Ardmore Suite of the Tower Hotel on 9 May 2025.
- During 2025, we continued to update the new online resource section on FLC 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.

For further information about First Level Control:

Email FLC@southernassembly.ie

Website:

www.southernassembly.ie/first-level-control.



FLC Team Members Edel Hunt, Eve Hayden, Michael Buckely, and Elayne McDonnell

A woman with blonde hair, wearing a black dress with a large white bow at the neck, stands at a wooden podium. She is smiling and looking towards the right. Her left hand is on a laptop on the podium, and her right hand is holding a white card. In the background, another woman in a red top is seated at a desk with a laptop. A banner with the 'Interreg' logo and a map of Europe is visible behind her. A small Irish flag is on the podium. In the foreground, the back of a person's head and a table with papers and a cup are partially visible.

European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) Network

Overview

The European Territorial Cooperation Network is a collaborative platform facilitated by the Southern Regional Assembly to support stakeholders across the Southern Region in engaging with European funding programmes. The Network brings together over four hundred members from local authorities, higher education institutions, state agencies, small and medium-sized enterprises, and civil society organisations.

The Network supports knowledge exchange, peer learning, and partnership development, contributing to sustainable regional development, and supports delivery of the Corporate Plan 2025–2029, particularly objective 3.4 (participation in European programmes) and objective 4.4 (collaboration, stakeholder engagement, and regional governance).

Members benefit from regular updates on European Union funding opportunities, targeted networking, and capacity-building activities designed to support successful project development. The Network also plays an important role in connecting regional stakeholders with national contact points and European programme experts.

Key Activities in 2025

In March 2025, the European Territorial Cooperation Network hosted a webinar to mark International Women’s Day, focusing on the theme “Accelerate Action.” The session explored the role of women in European cooperation projects, highlighting challenges, opportunities, and supports available through European funding programmes. Contributions from speakers provided insights into research,

leadership experiences, and practical funding pathways supporting gender equality in European projects.

In November 2025, the Assembly hosted the annual European Territorial Cooperation Network event, “European Union Funding in Action,” in Waterford. The event brought together over sixty participants from across the region, including local authorities, higher education institutions, community organisations, and enterprise representatives.

The programme included presentations on upcoming funding opportunities, practical guidance on accessing European funding, and updates on future policy developments. An interactive session encouraged engagement and knowledge sharing among participants.

A dedicated project showcase highlighted the impact of European cooperation projects across the Southern Region, demonstrating their contribution to innovation, sustainability, and community development. The event also included one-to-one First Level Control clinics, providing tailored support to project partners on financial management and compliance requirements.

Impact and Next Steps

The European Territorial Cooperation Network continues to play a key role in increasing awareness, participation, and capacity in relation to European funding across the Southern Region. It supports organisations at all stages of project development, from initial awareness to project delivery and financial management.

Future work will focus on expanding network engagement, strengthening support for project



Annual ETC Network event, “European Union Funding in Action,” Waterford, November 2025

development, and continuing to provide targeted capacity-building opportunities. The Assembly will also continue to connect stakeholders with European partners and funding opportunities, supporting the delivery of sustainable and innovative projects across the region.

For further information about the ETC Network:

Áine Whelan, EU Projects Officer:

awhelan@southernassembly.ie

Website:

[ETC Network | Southern Regional Assembly](#)

Interreg VB: Transnational Cooperation



The Interreg North-West Europe 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 North-West Europe 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 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, National Development Plan Delivery and Reform, and the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly. The Southern Regional Assembly

is responsible for the financial control of this programme, analysing, and authorising claim payments to Irish partner organisations.

Interreg NWE projects in the Southern Region

Currently there are over 40 partner organisations from the Southern Region working on a wide range of projects funded by Interreg North-West Europe. Some examples include the [AquaCom Project](#) – led by Ballyhoura Development in Limerick and North Cork, where the consortium is developing community-based aquathermal heating systems. The [Better-Calf](#) was awarded in 2024, led by Teagasc, this international project designs sustainable dairy-beef farming systems, and works across Ireland through national farm networks and pilot farms. The [ClimASed](#) project is led by Munster Technological University, it develops climate-adaptive sediment management strategies, focusing on the River Shannon catchment.



Irish partners attending Interreg NWE event in Luxembourg, December 2025

Funding awarded and Irish performance

Interreg North-West Europe has awarded over €100 million across all 7 countries since 2021. With this final Call – Irish partners have been awarded €30,544,099 in EU funds from the Interreg North-West Europe programme. Each partner must bring cofinancing of 40% to match the EU funds, resulting in a total investment of €51,125,785 towards projects on topics of Regional Development in Ireland.

Of the €30.5 million EU funding awarded, €12.4 million was awarded to partners in the Southern

Region. The funding has been invested in projects across a wide range of topics from renewable energy, access to the labour market, digitisation of biodiversity to technology for manufacturing development in the regions.

The final open Call from the 2021-2027 programming period was finalised with twenty-one projects from Call 5 step 2 approved at

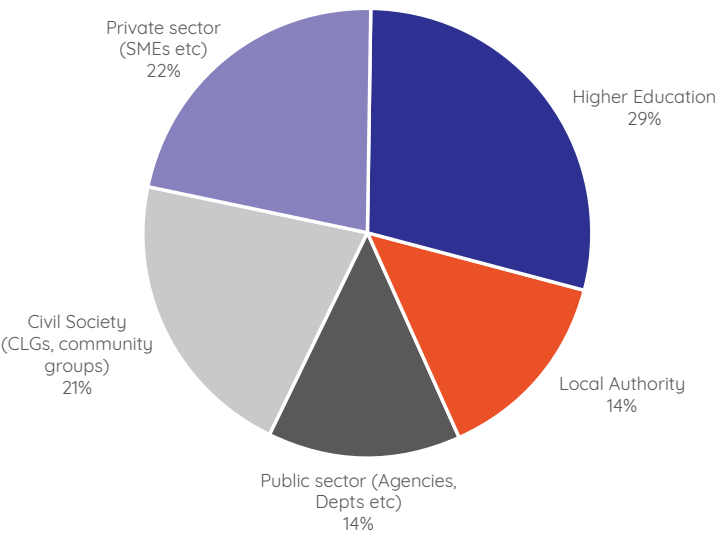
the Monitoring Committee meeting in Basel, Switzerland on 18 November 2025.

In 2025, Call 5 saw €3,313,894 of EU funding allocated to the Sothern Region due to the success of Irish organisations involved in projects – either as project partners or as Lead Partners. Of the twenty-one projects approved, eighteen projects had Irish partners (86%).

Region (Calls 1-5)	Total investment in the regions	EU investment	%
Southern	€20,704,043	€12,422,426	41%
Eastern and Midlands	€18,101,200	€10,829,257	35%
Northern and Western	€12,320,542	€7,292,416	24%
Total	€51,125,785	€30,544,099	100%

Interreg NWE investment by region

Types of Irish partner awarded funding Calls 1-5



Interreg NWE Type of Irish partner awarded funding

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 Financial Control: flc@southernassembly.ie
 Website: www.nweurope.eu



The Interreg Atlantic Area programme aims to develop a more prosperous, sustainable, and connected Atlantic Area. As a maritime territory, the Atlantic Strategy published in July 2020 ([the Atlantic Action Plan 2.0](#)), has been considered in the Programme design. The Interreg Atlantic Area 2021-2027 supports transnational cooperation in the Atlantic regions of four countries: Portugal, Spain, France, and Ireland.



Interreg Atlantic Area program area map

The programme budget for 2021-2027 is 113 million euros from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). The co-financing rate for projects approved is up to 75% of the total investment.

The Atlantic Area programme consists of four Priority Axes and associated objectives – projects must fall under these categories if they are to be eligible for consideration:

- **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

In 2025, a total of twenty-five Interreg Atlantic Area projects were approved, with a total funding amount of €59 million under the 2021-2027 Programme.

In 2025, there were two Programme Monitoring Committee Meetings.

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Northern Periphery and Arctic

The Interreg 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.

The Programme area covers Northern Finland, the West of Ireland, Northern Sweden, the Faroe Islands, Greenland, Iceland, and Northern parts of Norway.



Interreg Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme area map

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 eligible counties in Ireland are Donegal, Leitrim, Cavan, Monaghan, Sligo, Mayo, Roscommon, Galway, Clare, Limerick, Tipperary, Kerry, and Cork.

The main focus of Interreg Northern Periphery and Arctic projects is the transnational learning between project partners. Grant funding rates of up to 65% are provided. The Interreg Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme addresses the challenges and opportunities in the programme area through 3 Priorities:

- **Priority 1:** Strengthening the innovation capacity for resilient and attractive Northern Periphery and Arctic communities
- **Priority 2:** Strengthening the capacity for climate change adaptation, and resource sufficiency in Northern Periphery and Arctic communities
- **Priority 3:** Strengthening the organisational capacity among Northern Periphery and Arctic 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 2025 a total of five clustering projects were approved, with a total funding amount of just under €600,000 in the 2021- 2027 Programme.

In 2025 there were two Programme Monitoring Committee meetings.

For further information about the Interreg Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme:

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Website: www.interreg-npa.eu



Co-funded by
the European Union

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:



Call 1 was launched in 2022 where 134 applications were received and 72 applications were approved, including 36 Irish organisations involved in 27 projects. Call 2 was launched in March 2023 with the Monitoring Committee approving 78 applications again with very good Irish participation involving 34 organisations participating in 25 projects.

The third, and final open call, was launched in 2024 with the Monitoring Committee meeting in December approving 112 projects, with 17 Irish Organisations participating in 21 projects.

The first call for pilot operations opened on 14 March 2025 and closed on 15 April 2025. It targeted the 72 first-call projects approved by the monitoring committee in December 2022. Out of 45 pilot actions requests submitted, 42 were recommended for approval under conditions for a total Interreg funds budget of €3.1m. One pilot action is taking place in Ireland under the CITICISS (Citizen Centred Social Services) Project by Ballyhoura Development.

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URBACT is a European programme which promotes the exchange of learning and good practice between European towns and cities with a focus on sustainable urban development. The Programme seeks to improve the capacity of local authority staff to design and implement policies, practices and innovations in ways that are integrated, place based, and highly participative. The [Eastern & Midland Regional Assembly](#) acts as the National URBACT Point for Ireland.

During 2025, there were fourteen Irish project partners active in ten transnational networks, including seven Action Planning Networks, two Innovation Transfer Networks, and four new Transfer Networks with the latter getting their journey underway in November.

The seven Action Planning Networks concluded their 30-month project journey in December 2025 with the finalisation of their respective Integrated Action Plans. The plans were co-designed locally having engaged in continued peer review during visits to their European partner cities and towns. The partners will showcase their local actions during a European City Festival in Nicosia in 2026.

The two Innovation Transfer Networks involving Dublin City Council and Sandyford Business District continued their transnational journey towards their respective Investment and Continuity Plans during 2025.

In November and following a 2024 European-wide call for Good Practices, twenty-five new Transfer Networks got their journeys underway, with four of these containing Irish partners. Limerick City and County Council, Galway City Council, Monaghan County Council and Dublin City Council were all part of successful applications.



Sharon Lynch and Carmel Lynch (both of Limerick City and County Council) receiving their URBACT Good Practice award at the URBACT City Festival in Wrocław, Poland in April 2025

A meet up of the active Irish URBACT network partners occurred in Sligo Town in March 2025. The day saw project updates from each partner, followed by a peer-support session with feedback to the National URBACT Point on challenges and the discovery of solutions from within the group. A networking lunch was followed by site visits around Sligo Town.

In April 2025, Cork City Council, Limerick City and County Council and Dublin City Council joined the National URBACT Point in Wroclaw, Poland to showcase their 2024-awarded Good Practices. In addition to the marketplace of Good Practices, the three cities participated in thematic workshops and site visits.

The second annual joint URBACT and European Urban Initiative info session was held at the Custom House in May 2025. The day focused on the open URBACT call for Transfer Networks, as well as the European Urban Initiative capacity building offer.

During 2025, a number of transnational visits of URBACT networks occurred in Ireland. These

included visits to Dublin City, Limerick City and County Council and Sandyford. The National URBACT Point also travelled abroad with Meath County Council for a transnational visit to Dąbrowa Górnicza in Poland in May 2025.

The National URBACT Point attended the Southern Regional Assembly's European Territorial Cooperation Network event in Waterford (November), which heard from Limerick City and County Council's Sharon Lynch who gave an URBACT testimonial on her involvement in the project [BiodiverCity](#).

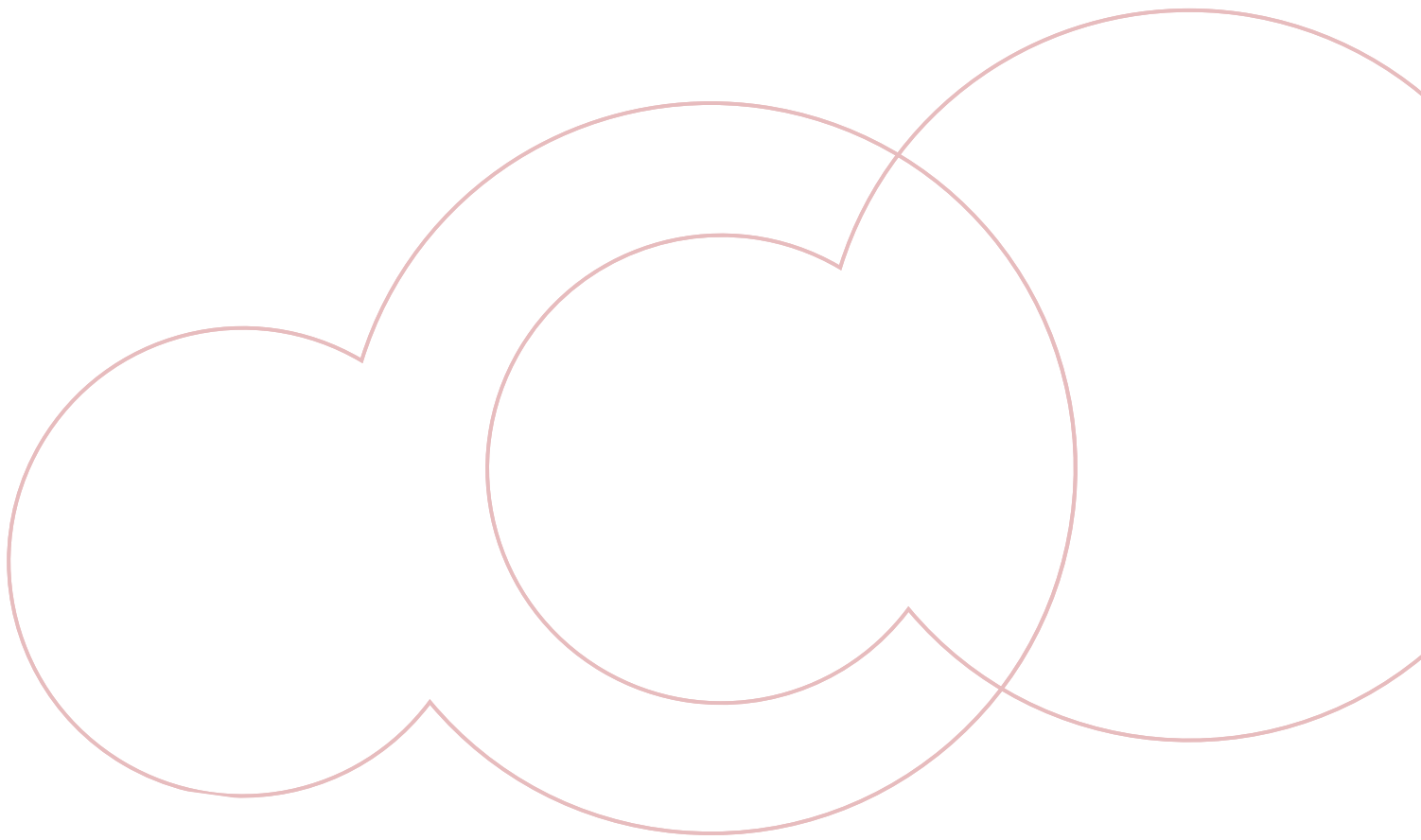
The National URBACT Point also attended two URBACT Coordination meetings, one in-person in Paris in June 2025 and one online in November 2025. There were also two Programme Monitoring Committee meetings held in 2025: Malbork in June and in Copenhagen in October.

To learn more about URBACT in Ireland:

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Website: www.urbact.eu/ireland



EU Projects

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FutureECOS

Co-funded by the European Union
FutureECOS is a growth corridor regions

Co-funded by the European Union
FutureECOS is a cooperation project for
Integrated urban development policies.

FutureECOS takes on the task of
future-proofing living space, de
integrated policies with public
actors and citizens.



CITIZENS

FOSTERING
STAKEHOLDER
DIALOGUE IS
KEY FOR
LONG-TERM
IMPACTS

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TOURBO - Boost
and digital transfor

Green Hydra - Impr
ecosystem, Donegal

CIBUS - Cutting Foot
Galway County Coun

*Lead Partner



ROBIN

ROBIN is a 36-month Horizon Europe project designed to support regions across Europe in developing and adapting their bioeconomy governance models and structures. Its overall aim is to accelerate progress towards achieving circular bioeconomy targets. Through ROBIN, participating regions from Greece, Spain, Germany, and Slovakia collaborate and exchange knowledge, enabling the co-development of governance approaches tailored to the specific needs of each region.

In Ireland, the Southern Regional Assembly, together with Munster Technological University's Circular Bioeconomy Research Group (CircBio), represented the Southern Region within the project. ROBIN formed part of the Circular Cities and Regions Initiative (CCRI), an initiative established by the European Commission to advance Europe's green transition by promoting circularity at both local and regional levels.

The outputs of the ROBIN Project have a direct bearing on the role assigned to the Regional Assemblies in the [National Bioeconomy Action Plan 2023-2025](#), in particular under Pillar 5 – Communities, Cities and Regions – Action 5.1 to “Advance bioeconomy governance in cities, regional assemblies and local authorities” by integrating bioeconomy policy development into the [National Planning Framework](#).

Throughout 2025, the Southern Regional Assembly engaged in collaborative efforts with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment in the preparation and review of a comprehensive Bioeconomy Strategy for the Southern Region, compiled by the Assembly and Munster Technological University, and containing insights and policy recommendations for bioeconomy policy.

Arising from our involvement in the ROBIN Project, the Assembly was invited to take part in workshops with the [ClimateKIC](#), who, in collaboration with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, are exploring ways to accelerate the development of synergies between local authorities who are at a more advanced stage of bioeconomy activity in their counties.

Through an ‘Open Call’ process among all the participating regions in ROBIN to widen the involvement of stakeholder groups in the Project, the Assembly engaged with the two other Regional Assemblies as well as local authorities from outside the Southern Region who are engaged in bioeconomy-related projects.

The Assembly collaborated with Teagasc and Munster Technological University to host a webinar in May 2025 at which representatives from local authorities, regional assemblies, and government departments met to discuss advancing regional bioeconomy development in Ireland. The event combined insights from both projects, a panel discussion with policymakers, and networking opportunities aimed at fostering cross-sectoral collaboration.



ROBIN Project partners at final Project meeting, Brussels, May 2025

The Assembly participated in the ROBIN Project final networking event in Brussels in May 2025 as part of the European Rural Circular Bioeconomy Conference, which the project organised in collaboration with five other Horizon Europe projects.

The final meeting included a “Train-the-Trainer Workshop” and focused on the [ROBIN Toolbox, policies, and strategies](#). The meeting saw the ROBIN partners sign a memorandum of collaboration agreement to explore future opportunities for collaboration. This event concluded the 3-year project, which officially ended in September 2025.



TALENT4S3

TALENT4S3

In 2025, the Southern Regional Assembly advanced the Interreg Europe TALENT4S3 Project, which addresses brain drain, skills shortages, and regional depopulation by strengthening talent retention and attraction through Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3). The project supports building regional ecosystems where skilled people can stay, return, or relocate, aligning with the Southern Region’s goals for competitiveness and innovation.

The Assembly hosted stakeholder meetings in Waterford, Cork, and Limerick, examining factors such as regional attractiveness, skills gaps, and the housing crisis, contributing to long term policy refinement. International learning was central: study visits to Romania, Lithuania, and Finland, and provided best practices on diaspora engagement, skills development, and barriers such as housing.

Key outcomes included developing a regional strategic framework for skills and knowledge transfer and work on a Diaspora Knowledge and Skills Transfer Framework. The Assembly also promoted the project internationally, positioning the region for a more resilient, skilled, and competitive future.



FutureECOS

FutureECOS

Overview

The Interreg Europe FutureECOS Project (Future-proof living spaces in growth corridor regions) focuses on supporting integrated urban development in regions experiencing economic and population growth. The project supports delivery of the Corporate Plan 2025–2029, particularly under Objective 3.2 (sustainable regional development and quality of life), and Objective 4.5 (regional development and policy making).

FutureECOS promotes the development of future-proofed living environments through three key themes: Smart Living, Sustainable Living, and Inclusive Living. It supports regional policy development by integrating economic, environmental, and social considerations into planning processes. In the Southern Region, the project is linked to the implementation of the [Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy](#), particularly in relation to strengthening economic corridors and improving connectivity.

Key Activities in 2025

In March 2025, the Southern Regional Assembly hosted a Regional Stakeholder Meeting in Wexford, focusing on the development of an economic corridor in the South-East. The session explored the potential extension of the Dublin–Belfast Economic Corridor to include the Southern Region, strengthening connections to key strategic locations such as Rosslare Europort and the Port of Waterford. The meeting brought together policymakers, regional planners, and experts to share insights on governance, economic development, and sustainable growth. Contributions highlighted the importance of collaboration, renewable energy opportunities, and integrated transport systems in supporting regional development.

In May 2025, the Assembly hosted an interregional meeting in Cork, welcoming European project partners, and stakeholders. The event focused on Smart Living, Sustainable Living, and Inclusive Living, and included thematic sessions on digital innovation, regeneration, and citizen engagement. Participants explored best practices from across

the region, including regeneration initiatives in Cobh and Clonakilty, and discussed approaches to embedding community participation in planning processes.

In November 2025, the Assembly participated in an interregional study visit to Timișoara and Reșița in Romania. The visit provided valuable insights into integrated transport systems, circular economy initiatives, and community-led development. Participants also explored how regional programmes are supporting urban regeneration and sustainable mobility, demonstrating how European policy can be translated into practical local actions.



Interregional Study Visit to Timișoara and Reșița, Romania, November 2025

Impact and Next Steps

Through FutureECOS, the Southern Regional Assembly is strengthening its approach to integrated regional planning, particularly in relation to economic corridors and growth areas. The project is supporting the development of more connected, resilient, and attractive places to live and work.

Future work will focus on refining policy actions within the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy, strengthening the development of the Eastern Economic Corridor, and continuing to integrate Smart Living, Sustainable Living, and Inclusive Living principles into regional planning. Ongoing interregional cooperation will continue to inform policy development and support the delivery of balanced and sustainable growth across the region.

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www.southernassembly.ie/eu-project/futureecos

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S3ADAPT

S3ADAPT

S3ADAPT integrates Smart Specialisation with climate adaptation, supporting the Corporate Plan's priorities of climate action, resilience, and evidence-based policymaking.

Its Climate Adaptation Policy Mapping Exercise enhances regional preparedness, aligning with the Southern Regional Assembly's responsibility to respond effectively to climate and environmental challenges.

In 2025, the Assembly advanced its role in the Interreg Europe S3ADAPT project, which integrates Smart Specialisation Strategies with climate adaptation policy to strengthen regional resilience and innovation. The project responds to Europe's growing climate risks and supports the Southern Region's long-term competitiveness.

A major achievement was the Climate Adaptation Policy Mapping Exercise, which analysed regional climate hazards, reviewed existing strategies, and identified gaps in current interventions, building a stronger evidence base for future adaptation measures. The Assembly also engaged in interregional knowledge exchanges with partners



Southern Regional Assembly attend first Interreg study visit for the S3Adapt project in Warsaw

across six EU regions and discovery partners in Ukraine and Bosnia and Herzegovina, sharing expertise on resilience stress-tests, best practices, and policy refinement.

Regionally, the Assembly strengthened collaboration across government, research institutions, and civil society, ensuring solutions reflect local needs. It also examined innovation strengths and emerging climate-related development factors to better prepare the region for extreme weather events.

Through comparative policy studies and ongoing cooperation, the Assembly continues to refine regional instruments and embed climate resilience within smart specialisation, supporting sustainable growth across the Southern Region.

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SMOOTY

ISMOOTY supports improved intra-regional mobility, accessibility, and sustainable transport solutions in rural and low-density regions, aligning with the Southern Regional Assembly's Corporate Plan's commitment to delivering balanced territorial development, improved connectivity, and sustainable mobility.

By addressing rural marginalisation and promoting zero-carbon mobility, SMOOTY directly contributes to the Plan's focus on sustainability, social inclusion, and regional cohesion.

In 2025, the Assembly advanced its involvement in the Interreg Europe SMOOTY Project, which supports sustainable mobility in low-density rural areas facing depopulation, limited transport options, and marginalisation. SMOOTY focuses on improving intramobility, helping residents move within rural regions by identifying and exchanging good practices that enhance accessibility, competitiveness, and community vitality.



Southern Regional Assembly attend first Interreg study visit for the Smooty project in Livorno

For the Southern Region, where dispersed rural settlement patterns pose major transport challenges, SMOOTY aligns with the Assembly's mandate for balanced, sustainable development. Key activities included delivering a territorial analysis, presented at the Initial Conference in Livorno, highlighting local mobility gaps. The Assembly also contributed to policy improvements, stakeholder engagement, and capacity-building efforts that encourage collaboration among transport authorities, rural organisations, and local communities.

Through workshops, knowledge exchange, and identification of European best practices, the project strengthened regional understanding of innovative mobility models. These early outcomes will guide future Southern Regional Assembly mobility strategies, including demand-responsive transport and rural mobility hubs, improving long-term accessibility and resilience across the Southern Region.

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PROXIMITIES

PROXIMITIES**Overview**

The Interreg Europe PROXIMITIES Project focuses on improving the quality of life in peripheral urban areas by making them more accessible, sustainable, and liveable. PROXIMITIES supports delivery of the Corporate Plan 2025–2029, particularly Goal 3 (liveable region), Goal 2 (climate-resilient development), and Goal 4 (regional governance and stakeholder collaboration).

The project promotes a proximity-based approach to planning, where essential services, employment, and amenities are located closer to where people live. This approach responds to key challenges in the Southern Region, including low-density suburban development, car dependency, and unequal access to services. It also supports national and regional planning priorities, including compact growth and sustainable mobility.

Key Activities in 2025

In 2025, the Southern Regional Assembly advanced its participation in the PROXIMITIES Project through stakeholder engagement, knowledge exchange, and policy development. The project was presented at the Association of Irish Regions Training Seminar in Athlone in February 2025. The event brought together over 270 delegates, including elected members, policymakers, and regional stakeholders, and provided an opportunity to highlight the project's contribution to sustainable placemaking and regional governance.

In April 2025, the Assembly hosted the second Regional Stakeholder Group meeting in Waterford. This brought together representatives from local authorities, national agencies, academia, and civil society. The meeting focused on sharing knowledge, exploring good practices from European partners, and discussing approaches to improving accessibility, connectivity, and liveability across the region.



Regional Stakeholder tour of Waterford's Viking Triangle, highlighting urban regeneration and heritage preservation, April 2025

In May 2025, the Assembly marked Europe Day and its tenth anniversary by showcasing PROXIMITIES as a flagship European project. This highlighted the importance of European cooperation in supporting regional development and demonstrated the project's alignment with strategic priorities such as climate action, sustainable mobility, and quality of life.

Also in May 2025, the Assembly hosted an interregional study visit in Cork, welcoming project partners from across Europe. The visit showcased examples of community-led regeneration, sustainable housing, and inclusive urban development. It also included a masterclass on sustainable placemaking and presentations on compact growth approaches, supporting shared learning between regions.

In October 2025, the third Regional Stakeholder Group meeting was held in Waterford. This session focused on applying interregional learning to policy development and included collaborative work on the Sustainable Place Framework, a regional tool being developed to support sustainable placemaking and improved service accessibility.

Impact and Next Steps

Through participation in PROXIMITIES, the Southern Regional Assembly is strengthening its capacity to support local authorities in delivering more sustainable and connected communities. The project is contributing to the development of practical policy tools, increased stakeholder collaboration, and the exchange of knowledge at European level.

Future work will focus on refining regional policy approaches, testing the Sustainable

Place Framework in pilot areas, strengthening community engagement, and improving accessibility to services in peripheral urban areas.

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Developing Irish Sea Cooperation



Overview

Developing Irish Sea Cooperation, or DISC, is a two-year project led by Southern Regional Assembly with partners The Executive Office Northern Ireland, Welsh Government and Scottish Government. DISC is supported by PEACEPLUS, a programme managed by the Special EU Programmes Body.

The key outputs of the project are a Strategy and Action Plan for future cross-border cooperation between Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. The project is running from September 2024 to August 2026 and is providing partners with the opportunity to take a proactive and open approach to future North-South and East-West cooperation and foster stronger ties between the four jurisdictions. DISC is acting as a conduit for information, providing a unique and valuable mechanism for open and explorative discussion and knowledge sharing, connecting those engaged in cross-border activity and strategic policy making in the four jurisdictions.

DISC is supported under the PEACEPLUS investment theme 6.1 'Building and Embedding Partnership and Collaboration' aimed at capitalising on working relationships between Northern Ireland and Ireland, as well as growing East-West links. DISC is exploring cooperation within three initial thematic areas - Sustainable Blue Economy, Innovation in Health and Life Sciences, and Communities and Culture - while remaining open to the exploration of other thematic areas.

The DISC project supports delivery of the Corporate Plan 2025–2029 and aligns with our commitment to strengthening regional governance, harness regional opportunities, and stakeholder collaboration.



Rebecca Evans MS, Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning, Welsh Government (front & centre) at the DISC Symposium in Cardiff, hosted by Welsh Government on 06 November 2025 with members of the DISC project team from Southern Regional Assembly, The Executive Office Northern Ireland, Welsh Government and Scottish Government

Key Activities in 2025

Two cross-border DISC Symposium events were held in 2025. The first in Belfast, hosted by The Executive Office Northern Ireland in May and the second in Cardiff hosted by Welsh Government in November. Both Symposiums brought together regional leaders, partners and innovators from across national, regional and local government, academia, business and civil society from all four jurisdictions to discuss the challenges and identify opportunities for the future of our cooperation and explore how we can forge a new era of cooperation between Ireland, Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland. The Symposiums mark a significant milestone in cooperation between our partners in the Irish Sea region and will feed into the development of the DISC Strategy & Action Plan.

Also in 2025, the DISC project was referenced in the 'Ireland-Wales Shared Statement 2030', a framework for cooperation between Ireland and Wales to 2030 and published in July 2025. DISC was also referenced in the 'Ireland-Scotland Bilateral Cooperation Framework 2030' a framework for cooperation between Ireland and Scotland to 2030 and published in November 2025.

Impact and Next Steps

As lead partner in DISC, the Southern Regional Assembly is strengthening its capacity to deliver more connected regional governance and enable wider cooperation and facilitate collaboration opportunities across the Irish Sea.

The projects' final events are scheduled for 2026. Scottish Government will host the third Symposium in Edinburgh in February and Southern Regional Assembly will host the fourth and final Symposium in Dublin in May.

These events and the stakeholder consultations will inform the Strategy and Action Plan for future cross-border cooperation between Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, scheduled for publishing at the end of the project in August 2026.

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Southern Regional Assembly staff from the EU Projects Team



Irish Regions European Office





Overview

The Irish Regions European Office is a shared service provides a shared service for the three Regional Assemblies and thirty-one local authorities of Ireland. The office is also the National Coordinator of the Irish Delegation to the EU Committee of the Regions.

Operationally, the office is part of the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly, and with the support of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 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 in the monitoring committees of those programmes.

2025 saw the beginning of the new Committee of the Regions mandate and a new Irish Delegation selected, along with the enhancement of the Irish Regions European Office with both a promotion and addition of one new staff member. Laura Murphy, a native of Kilkenny joined the Irish Regions European Office in Brussels as a Clerical Officer. Laura formerly worked at Kilkenny County Council.

The Irish Regions European Office 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.

Raising Awareness and Communication

Following the appointment of the new Irish Delegation to the Committee of the Regions, the Irish Regions European Office hosted a one-day induction in Dublin for all Members to raise their awareness and understanding.

In February 2025, the Irish Regions European Office attended the annual Association Irish Regions training seminar in Athlone entitled 'Driving the Future of Regions: Governance,



Delegation members at the visit of the President of the EU Committee of the Regions to Dublin in October 2025



Cllr Michael Collins, Cllr, Fergal Dennehy, Bill Kelleher MEP, Teresa Lennon (IREO), and Tadhg Browne (IREO) at the Southern Regional Assembly study trip to Brussels in April 2025

Sustainability and Place-Based Impact.
Throughout the year, the Irish Regions European Office produced six newsletters, which highlighted the work of the Committee of the Regions, the Irish delegation, EU policy and funding developments, as well as EU related events in Ireland and across Europe.

In December 2025, the Irish Regions European Office published articles in both the [Irish Independent](#) and the Irish Times highlighting the visit of the President of the Committee of Regions to Ireland in October 2025.

Influencing European Policy

One of the highlights of 2025 was the visit of the President of the EU Committee of the Regions to Dublin in October 2025. The aim of this visit was to meet with Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and at the Department of Defence, Thomas Byrne TD, and to highlight the importance of Cohesion Policy in the discussions on the Future EU Budget beyond 2027. The President was accompanied to this meeting by Head of the Irish Delegation, Cllr Gillian Coughlan.

Throughout the year, the Irish Regions European Office has held regular meetings with Irish Members of the European Parliament and the Irish Permanent Representation to stay informed about EU policy developments and has ensured discussions with Irish local authorities and regional assemblies. This has particularly been the case for the future of cohesion policy post 2027.

The Irish Regions European Office has been an active member of the EURegions4Cohesion grouping of 149 regions from across the EU calling for a clear, distinct, and ring-fenced budget for cohesion policy. As part of this grouping, the Irish regions' position was presented at an event in November 2025 in the European Parliament by Cllr Declan McDonnell, Member of Galway City Council, and a Committee of the Regions Member.

Building capacity, networks, and partnerships

The Irish Regions European Office continued to meet with a range of organisations in Brussels to promote the work of the Irish regions. The office has joined the [Capital Cities and Regions Network](#) and aims to ensure the views of Irish cities and regions are presented to the EU institutions, particularly on regional policy.

The Irish Regions European Office 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 Irish Regions European Office 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 are ongoing communication and exploration of any potential collaboration opportunities with local authorities and other stakeholders in the UK.

During 2025, the Irish Regions European Office worked with the Committee of the Regions to promote the [Young Elected Politicians Programme](#) across Ireland. This programme is a network of politicians who are no older than forty and hold a mandate at regional or local level in the EU.

The Irish Regions European Office was delighted to participate in the Capital Cities and Regions Network political debate “Housing for the Common Good: Sustainable Housing Governance in European Cities and Regions”. Cllr Dermot Lacey, Irish Delegation member and Dublin City Councillor participated on this event’s panel of speakers together with representatives from Brussels, Riga, and Amsterdam.

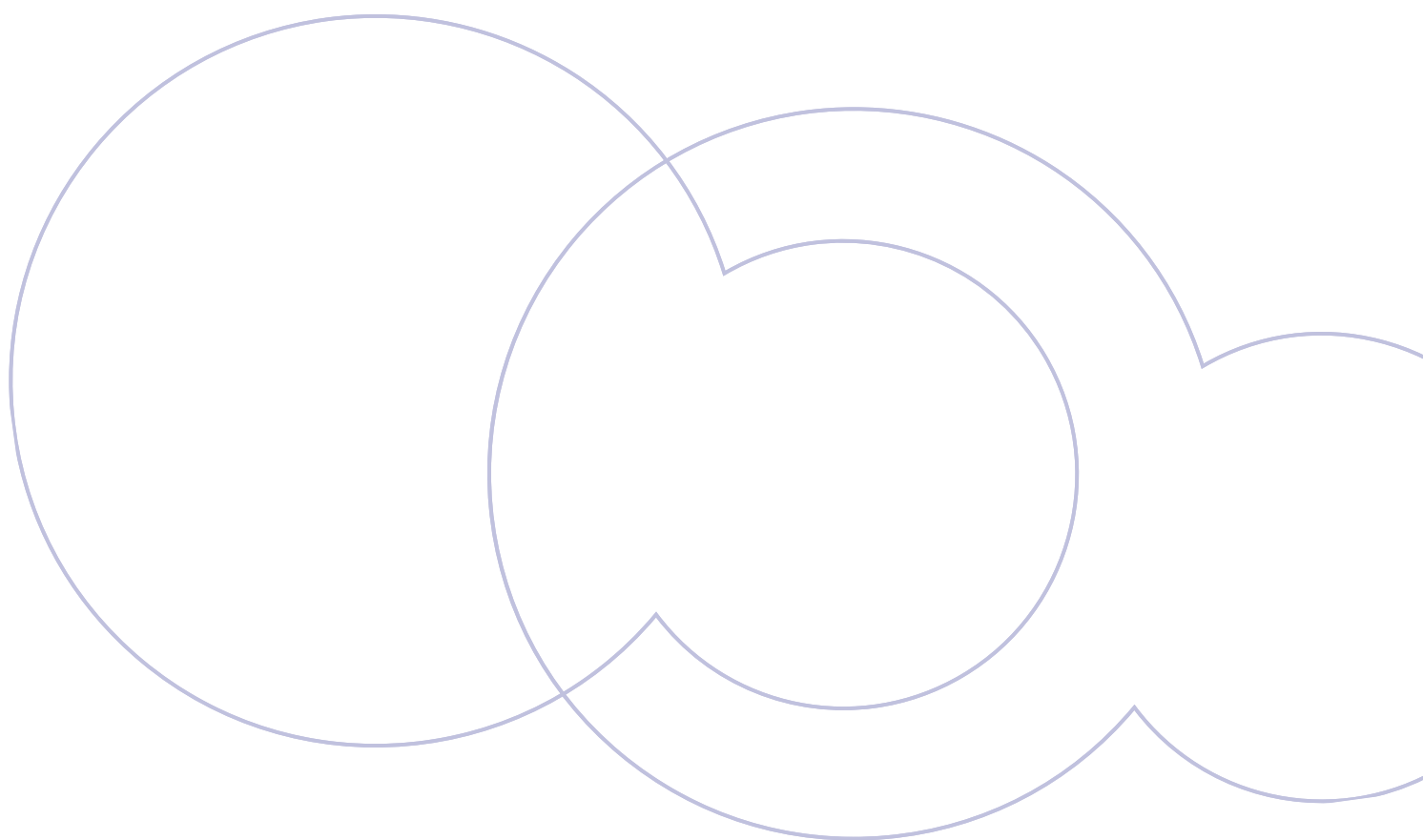
Raising the profile of the strengths of local and regional Government

In 2025, the Irish Regions European Office facilitated six high-level study visits to Brussels for local authorities and Regional Assembly officials, showcasing the expertise and influence of Ireland’s local and regional government at the EU level. Delegations from Cork County Council, the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly, Southern Regional Assembly, Galway City Council, and the Northern and Western Regional Assembly engaged with key EU institutions,

including the European Commission, European Parliament, Committee of the Regions, and the Irish Permanent Representation to the EU.

The programmes provided opportunities to discuss a wide range of policy areas, including cohesion policy, housing, energy, environment, transport, tourism, Small and Medium Enterprise support, climate action, and the green transition. Delegates explored EU funding mechanisms such as the European Regional Development Fund, Just Transition Fund, and European Urban Initiative, while meetings with Commissioners, Members of the European Parliament, and senior EU officials offered insights into EU decision-making processes and Ireland’s priorities ahead of its 2026 EU Council Presidency.

Through these visits, participants gained practical knowledge on policy engagement, administrative capacity building, and the use of EU data platforms for benchmarking and evaluation. The experiences strengthened the connections between Irish local authorities and EU institutions, highlighted the value of local and regional perspectives in shaping European policy, and reinforced Ireland’s reputation for effective regional governance in the EU context.





Committee of the Regions



European Committee of the Regions

Overview

The Irish Regions European Office 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.

The European Union's assembly of local and regional representatives, the Committee of the Regions has 329 members from across the twenty-seven EU Member States, all of whom are democratically elected and/or hold a political mandate in their home country. The Committee of the Regions' 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.

Committee of the Regions 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
- Territorial Cohesion Policy and EU Budget
- Economic Policy
- Environment, Climate Change and Energy
- Natural Resources
- Social Policy, Education, Employment, Research and Culture

Each Commission generally meets on five occasions during the year to prepare the opinions for adoption at the plenary annual sessions. Commissioners, Presidency Ministers, and Members of the European Parliament regularly attend Committee of the Regions meetings, and there is an ongoing exchange between the institutions on policy issues.

The European Committee of the Regions continues to emphasise the essential role of local and regional authorities in shaping and delivering European Union policy. This renewed focus has been reinforced by the election of Ms Kata Tüttő as President of the Committee of the Regions in February 2025, signalling a continued commitment to strengthening the voice of regions and cities at EU level.

The Irish Delegation – Southern Region Representatives

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

Full Members

Cllr Gillian Coughlan
(Head of Delegation)
Cllr Clare Colleran Molloy
Cllr Bridín Murphy

Alternate Members

Cllr Dan Boyle
Cllr Fergal Dennehy
Cllr Joe Hannigan
Cllr Kieran McCarthy

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

Annual Financial Statements

Income and Expenditure Account as at 31 December 2025

	2024 €	2025 €
Income		
Local Authority Contributions	1,577,867	2,000,991
Technical Assistance Recoupment	928,466	979,013
Interreg Recoupment	2,225	61,444
Salary Recoupment – EU Programmes/Projects	279,425	169,044
Travel Recoupment – EU Programmes/Projects	7,303	28,894
General Recoupment EU Programmes/Projects	175,580	71,869
Designated Urban Centre Grants Scheme	2,723,506	6,260,735
First Level Control (FLC) Fees	121,240	153,289
Association of Irish Regions (AIR) Conference Fees	19,990	7,500
Local Government Payroll Allocation	59,601	143,685
Miscellaneous	4,706	-15,100
Dividend (IPB)	1,176	3,264
Total	5,901,085	9,864,628
Expenditure		
Payroll Costs	2,277,332	2,875,926
Superannuation SSP Scheme	45,901	60,655
Travel & Subsistence – Staff	149,173	185,643
Members Annual Allowance	72,038	91,511
Members SPA / Other Travel	3,330	3,595
Members Training / Conference Allowance	14,063	13,992
Office Equipment & Supplies	40,036	35,611
Energy Costs	19,445	17,348
Post & Phone	17,477	19,503
Rates & Water Charges	6,285	6,09
Repairs, Maintenance & Office Costs	11,155	10,801
Consultancy/Professional Fees	37,346	136,201
Annual Contracts	103,425	115,026
Insurance	17,030	18,086
Annual Report & Corporate Plan	8,018	11,282
Information & Communications	155,689	134,756
Contributions/Fees/Levies (LGMA)	8,471	8,471
Association of Irish Regions (AIR) Event	32,969	823
Bank Charges	813	860
Health, Safety & Wellbeing	9,297	4,391
Regional Planning RSES	172,505	87,106
Depreciation Charge	4,174	7,129
Refurbishment Costs	0	344
Designated Urban Centre Grants Scheme	2,723,506	6,260,735
ETC Network	0	1,250
VAT	13,155	38,754
In-House Catering	0	468
Miscellaneous	11,510	15,658
Total Expenses	6,014,027	10,162,014
Excess of Income over Expenditure	-112,942	-297,386

Balance Sheet as at 31 Dec 2025

	2024 €	2025 €
Fixed Assets	1,016,295	1,019,079
Current Assets		
Cash at Bank	2,551,103	2,197,193
Debtors	343,376	445,348
	2,894,479	2,642,541
Current Liabilities		
Creditors & Accruals	198,475	209,505
Credit Card	542	465
	199,018	209,970
Net Current Assets	2,695,461	2,432,570
Net Assets	3,711,756	3,451,649
Financed by		
Balance at beginning of year	3,765,818	3,711,756
Previous Year Adjustment	0	0
Excess of Income over Expenditure	-112,942	-297,386
Superannuation Reserve	58,880	58,880
	3,711,756	3,473,250



Staff of the Southern Regional Assembly 2025

David Kelly	Director
Kevin Lynch	Assistant Director
Enda Hogan	Assistant Director
Cormac Lapthorne	Assistant Director
Dominic Walsh	Regional Planning Officer
Brigh Ryan	Regional Planning Officer
Padraig O'Shea	Regional Planning Officer
Eoin O'Connor	Executive Planner
Kevin Twomey	Executive Planner
Mary Molloy	Executive Planner
Michael Buckley	Auditor
Rose Power	Administrative Officer
Marie Harnett	Administrative Officer
Ronan O'Brien	Administrative Officer
Anna Sellars	Economic/Policy Analyst
Naomi Flood	Administrative Officer
Sarah Davoren	EU Executive
Ian Ludlow	Senior Staff Officer
Eve Hayden	Senior FLC
Breda Curran	Development Officer
Edel Hunt	Senior FLC
Samantha Richardson	Development Officer
Catherine Cullimore	Projects Officer
Lisa Slater	Communications/Projects Officer
Elayne McDonnell	Senior FLC
Áine Whelan	EU Projects Officer
Colm Walsh	A/ EU Projects Officer
Rhiannon Carey Bates	EU Projects Officer
Oonagh Messette	A/ EU Projects Officer
Elizabeth Howard	EU Projects Officer
Yvonne Cooney	Assistant Staff Officer
Pauline Toomey	Assistant Staff Officer
Denis Cotter	Assistant Staff Officer
Gary Burke	Graduate Placement
Róisín Slattery	Clerical Officer
Elaine Gallagher	Clerical Officer
Anna Higgins	Clerical Officer
Maria Murphy	Clerical Officer
Omer Sunguroglu	Clerical Officer
Claire Breen	Clerical Officer
Adam Hearne	Clerical Officer
Lorraine Barron	Clerical Officer
Laoise Doyle	Clerical Officer

Appendices

Glossary of Terms

Cllr Councillor

DISC Developing Irish Sea Cooperation

ERDF European Regional Development Fund

ETC European Territorial Cooperation

EU European Union

FLC First Level Control

MS Microsoft

OECD Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

TD Teachta Dála (member of Irish parliament)

UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

WAM Willing Able Mentoring

Further information on acronyms can be found at [Southern Regional Assembly](#)

