



Tionól Réigiúnach
an Deiscirt
Southern Regional
Assembly



Tionól Réigiúnach
Tuaiscirt & Iarthair
Northern & Western
Regional Assembly



Tionól Reigiúnach Oirthir agus Lár-Tíre
Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly

ANALYSIS OF IRISH PARTICIPATION IN TRANSNATIONAL AND INTER- REGIONAL INTERREG PROGRAMMES 2021-2027

MARCH 2026



Contents

Acronyms.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
1. Executive Summary.....	4
2. Introduction.....	4
3. Overview Interreg programmes in Ireland	4
4. Interreg programme participation in Ireland 2021-2027	7
4.1 Funding awarded.....	7
4.2 Irish participation	9
4.3 Type of beneficiary	10
4.4 Geographical distribution.....	12
4.5 Thematic focus of projects.....	16
5. Successes and challenges during the 2021-2027 period	19
5.1 Successes	19
5.2 Challenges	21
6. How should Ireland position itself for the post-2027 period?	22
7. Considerations for 2028-2034	24

Acronyms

AA – Interreg Atlantic Area

ATU – Atlantic Technological University

DPEIDRD – Department of Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation

EC – European Commission

ERDF – European Regional Development Fund

ETC – European Territorial Cooperation

EU – European Union

EUI – European Urban Initiative

MASP – Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan

MFF – Multiannual Financial Framework

MS – Member States

NCP – National Contact Point

NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation

NPA – Interreg Northern Periphery and Arctic

NRPP – National and Regional Partnership Plan

NUTS - Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics

NWE – Interreg North West Europe

PEACE PLUS – Cross-border programme between Northern Ireland and Border Counties

PO – Policy Objective

RSES – Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy

SCOs – Simplified Cost Options

TU - Technological University

URBACT – Urban Development Network Programme

1. Executive Summary

Interreg provides significant regional development investment, policy learning, and strategic cooperation opportunities for Ireland. Stronger participation ensures Ireland maximises EU funding, tackles structural challenges, and shapes future programme design.

This report provides analysis of Irish participation in Transnational and Inter-regional Interreg programmes during 2021–2027, and identifies trends, successes, challenges, and recommendations to strengthen Ireland’s position for 2028–2034.

As negotiations progress for the next programming period, Ireland should reflect on the positive outcomes and key lessons to support the effective implementation of the upcoming programmes. The report proposes considerations, which if taken into account, would strengthen the participation levels of Irish partners in the post 2027 programmes and enhance the impact in Ireland.

2. Introduction

The following report outlines a short analysis of Irish participation in Transnational and Inter-regional Interreg programmes during the period 2021-2027. It does not address participation or benefits from the following programmes PEACE PLUS¹, European Urban Initiatives², or ESPON³ as these are not inter-regional, multi-country consortium projects.

The purpose of the report is to **identify trends and provide feedback and recommendations for the design of the future Interreg Programmes for the 2028-2034 programming period.**

3. Overview Interreg programmes in Ireland

The EU promotes cooperation between regions and countries to help their economic and social development and tackle the obstacle of borders. This **European Territorial Cooperation (ETC), often referred to as Interreg**, is organised under multiple strands. Under the EU Cohesion Policy 2021–2027, Interreg is funded primarily through the **European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)**. Its purpose is to promote cooperation across borders to strengthen the economic, social, and territorial cohesion of the EU. Interreg is built around four strands of cooperation: cross-border (Interreg A), transnational (Interreg B) and interregional (Interreg C) and outermost regions’ cooperation (Interreg D).

¹ The PEACE PLUS programme is a cross-border programme from Strand A

² The [European Urban Initiative \(EUI\)](#) and predecessor Urban Innovative Actions (UIA) are part of the broader EU cohesion framework, but they are not classified as Interreg programmes. They operate as distinct, specialised instruments focused on innovation, capitalisation, and capacity building for cities.

³ The ESPON programme is not a traditional Interreg programme, a single organisation can apply to perform a study, although the research must analyse multiple countries.

Ireland has three **Regional Assemblies**, established under the Local Government Reform Act 2014, with geographic coverage corresponding to EU level NUTS⁴ regions in Ireland. The Regional Assemblies coordinate strategic planning and sustainable development (Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies); the management and delivery of EU funding, including ERDF and coordination and collaboration across local authorities.

The three **Regional Assemblies are the designated Managing Authorities** for ERDF and Just Transition Fund (JTF) shared-management programmes in Ireland, the Southern, Eastern and Midland Regional Programme 2021-2027, the Northern and Western Regional Programme 2021-2027, and the EU JTF Programme 2021-2027. The **Regional Assemblies serve as National Contact Points** for most **Interreg programmes** in Ireland. They have been involved in ERDF fund administration since 2000 for regional programmes and Interreg programmes.

Table 1. lists the Interreg Programmes 2021–2027 where Ireland is eligible to participate. Note that Ireland also previously participated in other programmes that have now closed such as Interreg Ireland-Wales cross-border programme.

Table 1. List of Interreg Programmes where Ireland is eligible

Interreg Strand	Programme (2021–2027)	Scope
Interreg A (Cross-Border)	<u>PEACE PLUS</u>	Cross-border cooperation between Northern Ireland and the Border counties of the Republic of Ireland — supporting peace, reconciliation and regional development.
Interreg B (Transnational)	<u>Interreg North-West Europe (NWE)</u>	Transnational cooperation involving Ireland and other North West European countries (Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Switzerland) on shared challenges covering a wide scope from climate adaptation, energy, to circular economy, innovation, access to healthcare and employment.
	<u>Interreg Atlantic Area (AA)</u>	Transnational cooperation among Atlantic regions of Ireland, Portugal, Spain and France, focusing on blue economy, sustainability, innovation and connectivity.

⁴ A NUTS 2 region is a mid-level statistical area used by the EU to organise regional data, compare regional economies, and allocate EU funding such as the ERDF.

	<u>Interreg Northern Periphery and Arctic (NPA)</u>	Transnational cooperation across remote northern regions including parts of Ireland, Finland, Sweden and partner countries focused on sustainable development and resilience.
Interreg C (Interregional)	<u>Interreg Europe</u>	Interregional policy learning and exchange across all EU Member States , helping regions like those in Ireland learn from peers and improve regional development policies.
	<u>URBACT</u>	Focused on the exchange of learning and good practice for sustainable urban development , includes city-to-city networks and learning for urban innovation across Europe. Ireland participates via projects/partnerships.
	<u>ESPON</u>	European Spatial Planning Observation Network – funds applied research projects only , to provide high-quality territorial evidence for better policymaking in Europe.

Note that consortia apply to an openly published Call for Proposals; and if the project is successfully selected, then the partner budgets are EU funded to a fixed percentage of their proposed project budget (between 60% and 75% depending on the programme) over a period of 3 to 5 years to implement their project ideas. **The remaining percentage of the funding – co-financing, sometimes known as “match funding” - must come from the project partners own resources.** EU funding is normally provided twice yearly in arrears to project partners based on the successful submission of project reports and audits.

Table 2 Co-financing requirements from Irish partners for EU Interreg funding programmes 2021-2027

EU Interreg Funding Programme	Co-financing requirements from Irish partners
Interreg North West Europe	40%
Interreg Atlantic Area	25%
Interreg Northern Periphery and Arctic	35%
Interreg Europe	30%
URBACT	between 30-35% ⁵

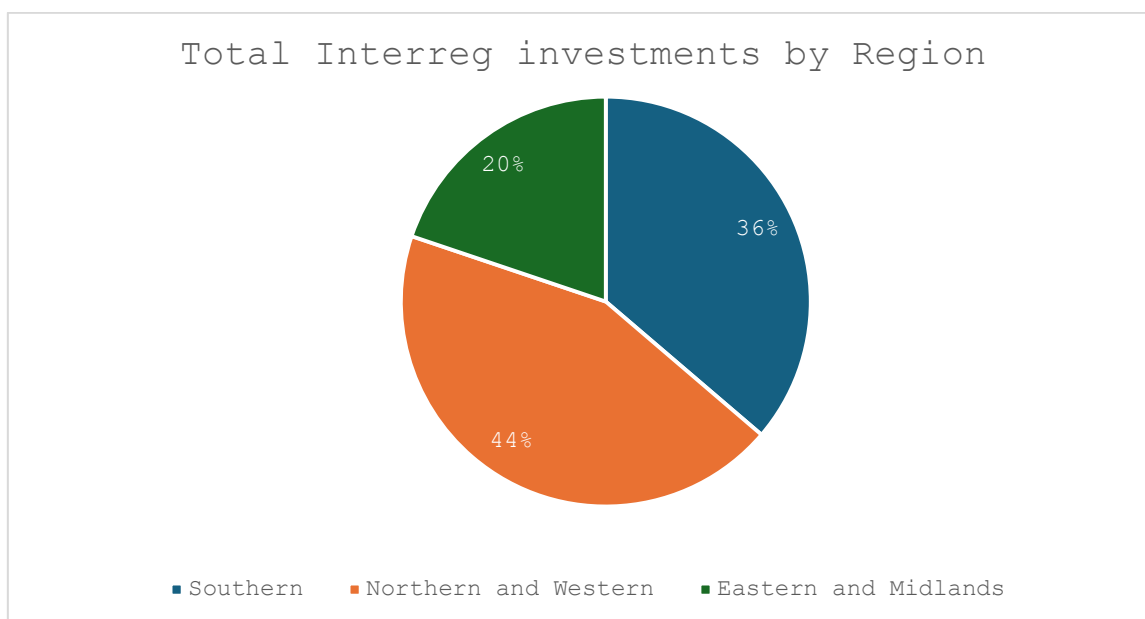
⁵ Partners must bring co-financing of 35% for Southern and Eastern and Midlands regions, partners in the Northern Western Region must bring 30%.

4. Interreg programme participation in Ireland 2021-2027

4.1 Funding awarded

Since the start of the 2021-2027 funding period, until 30th November 2025, **22 Calls for proposals have been published** across all the Interreg programmes **where Ireland is eligible**. From 1st December 2025 until the end of the programming period (June 2029) there are 5 more calls expected to be published (AA, NPA and URBACT).

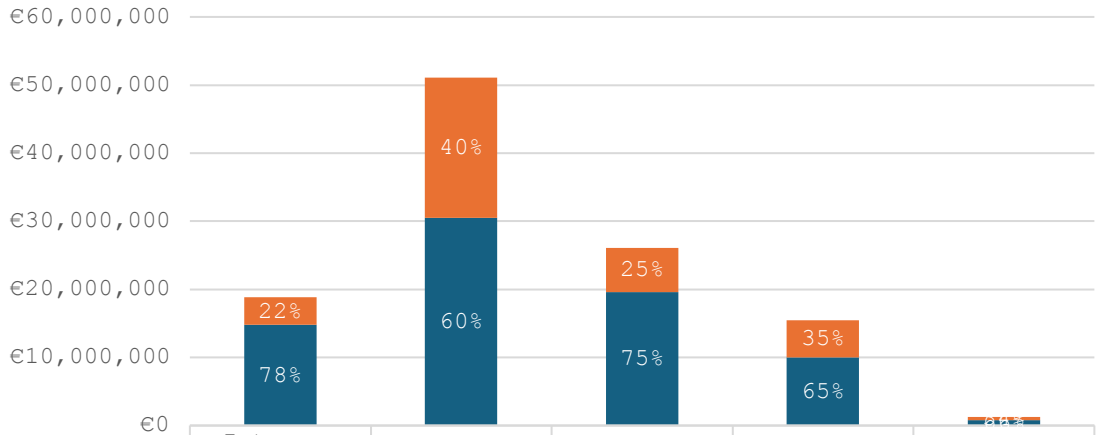
Over €75 million EU funding has been awarded, which when co-financing⁶ is considered, represents **an investment of over €112.7 million for regional development across the country**.



Region	Interreg funding awarded	Total investment in the region	
Southern	€27,664,585	€41,554,567	36%
Northern and Western	€33,289,494	€48,875,558	44%
Eastern and Midlands	€14,789,341	€22,353,090	20%
Total	€75,743,419	€112,783,216	100%

⁶ Partner budgets are EU funded to a fixed percentage of their proposed project budget (between 60% and 75% depending on the programme). [See Table 2](#).

Investment in Regional Development in Ireland, by leveraging EU funding

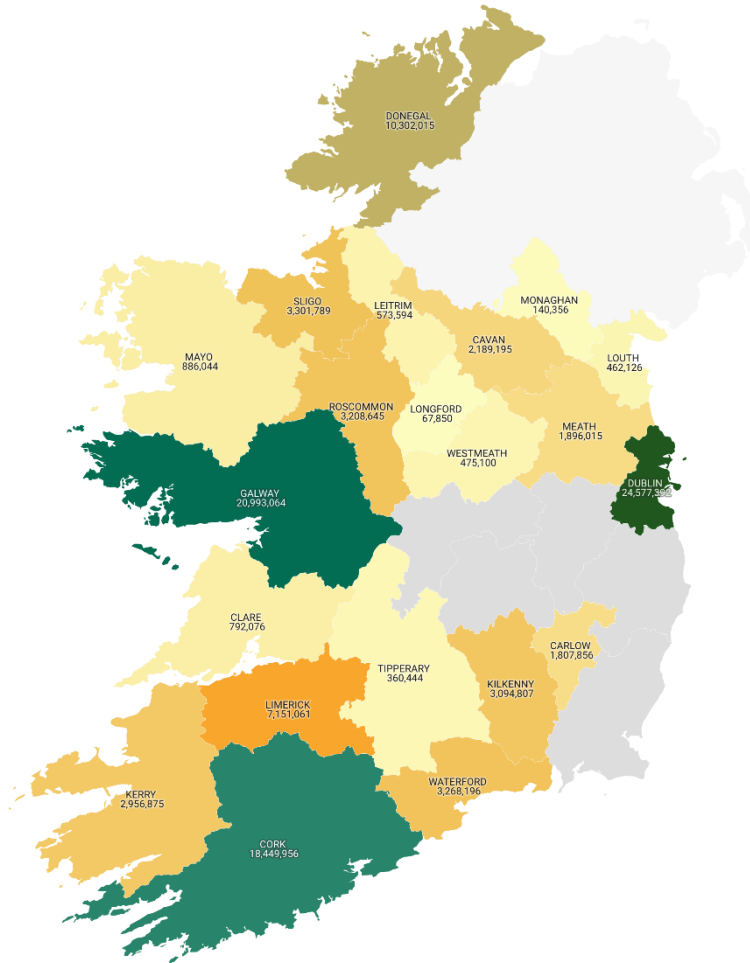


	Interreg Europe	NWE	AA	NPA	URBACT
Co-financing	€4,103,491	€20,581,686	€6,531,260	€5,402,517	€420,842
EU funding (ERDF)	€14,754,409	€30,544,099	€19,593,778	€10,033,246	€817,887

■ EU funding (ERDF) ■ Co-financing

Total Interreg investment across all programmes 2021-2027

Includes Interreg Europe, Interreg North-West Europe, Interreg Atlantic Area, Interreg Northern Periphery and Arctic and URBACT.

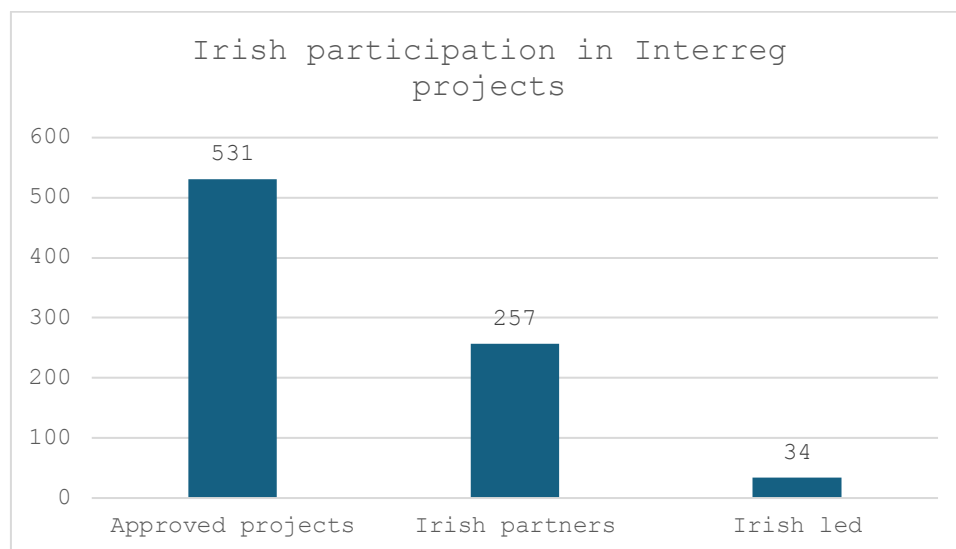


Created with Datawrapper

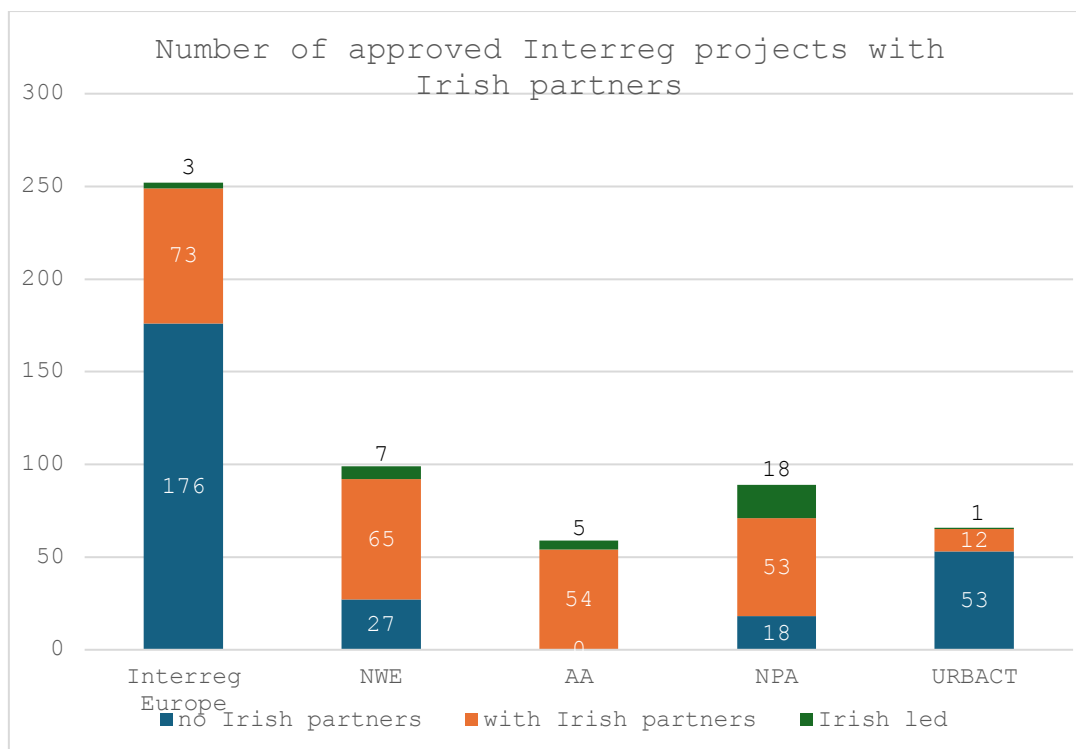
4.2 Irish participation

From the 22 Calls for proposals, 531 projects were funded across Europe, and of those successful projects:

- 257 Irish organisations were involved in successful project consortia.
- 34 projects were led by Irish organisations



Although Irish organisations are very sought after as partners in consortia with nearly half of all projects including Ireland (48%), it is of note that not many projects are led by Ireland, only 34 out of 531 (6%). **Lead Partners** in Interreg projects tend to **have more strategic influence and their organisation shapes the project concept**, the partnership structure and strategic direction throughout implementation.



4.3 Type of beneficiary

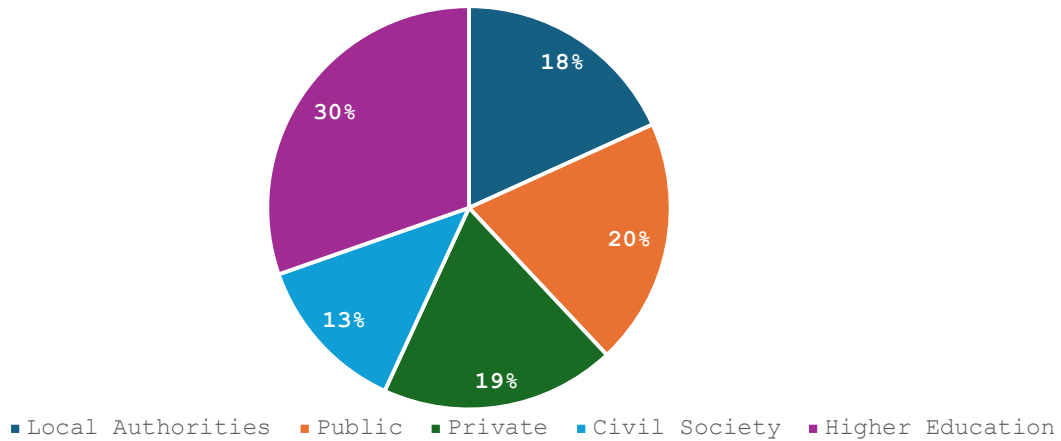
Interreg enables joint programmes, projects, and networks between national, regional, and local actors across EU Member States. As a result, some programmes are specifically focused on target groups (e.g.: URBACT focuses on **sustainable urban development for Local Authorities**). The limited eligibility rules mean that there is a less diversity in the type of organisation that has been awarded this funding. Conversely, other programmes are open to a wider range of beneficiaries, covering the Quadruple Helix⁷ of:

- Academia
- Industry
- Government
- Civil society / the public (including NGOs, citizens, media, cultural actors)

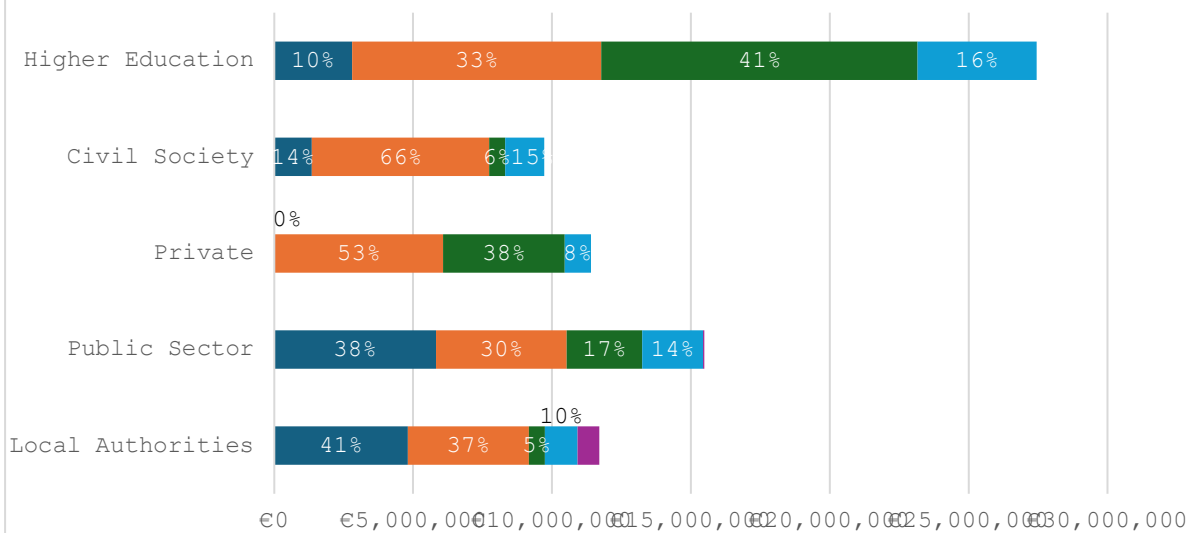
For the purposes of analysis in an Irish context – **this report separates the “Government” category into “local authorities” and “public”** to have a more detailed picture of the benefits to Irish organisations.

⁷ The Quadruple Helix is an innovation model used widely in EU research and regional development policy. It expands the traditional Triple Helix model (academia–industry–government) by adding a fourth key actor: civil society.

Interreg funding, types of organisation awarded funding in Ireland



Interreg projects, EU funding awarded by sector and by programme



	Local Authorities	Public Sector	Private	Civil Society	Higher Education
■ Interreg Europe	€4,801,657	€5,818,349	€0	€1,339,868	€2,794,535
■ NWE	€4,364,863	€4,712,664	€6,086,746	€6,392,885	€8,986,940
■ AA	€576,907	€2,710,248	€4,360,765	€571,738	€11,374,121
■ NPA	€1,185,080	€2,197,641	€956,722	€1,409,069	€4,284,734
■ URBACT	€764,696	€53,191	€0	€0	€0

As evident from the graph – Irish organisations are quite well represented across all sectors, with a **slightly higher proportion of success evident from Higher Education Institutions**. This can be explained by the fact that Universities are very accustomed to applying for grant funding and their research work is often applicable to the topics of the Interreg funds. Universities are also more likely to take the position of Lead Partner in projects, which often represents a higher proportion of the project budget.

Civil society actors, and Technical Universities, report struggling to participate in Interreg projects due to the **challenges of the cofinancing**⁸. Without having enough salaried staff, or cash reserves, smaller organisations and universities **disregard the option of applying to funds such as Interreg due to the high cofinancing rates**. In some cases, Irish partners have **dropped out during the project** lifetime when they can no longer manage to pay staff to work on the Interreg project without external support for the co-financing.

4.4 Geographical distribution

While Interreg funding is evident across all Regions in Ireland, eligibility rules and thematic focus of the funding types are important to consider when examining this data.

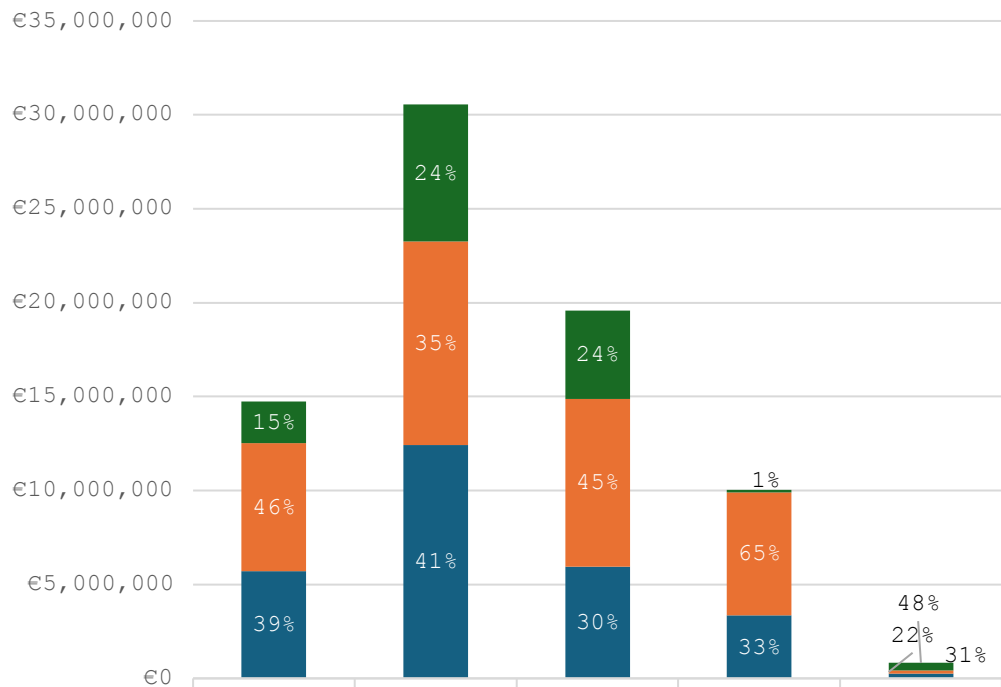
For example, eligibility for **URBACT** funding is limited to local authorities, while for Interreg **Northern Periphery and Arctic (NPA)** funding – only certain counties can apply for the funding⁹. The location of larger universities is also reflective of where funding is awarded – Galway, Cork, Limerick and Dublin.

Similarly, projects with a clear maritime or coastal dimension are strongly aligned with Interreg **Atlantic Area's** funding objectives and the EU's Atlantic Maritime Strategy, even while they also cover innovation, climate, or tourism themes. This has an impact on geographic location of project partners.

⁸ Case study: in 2024, Atlantic Technical University (ATU) took a decision to drop out as a full partner and become associated partners on the Regeneration F project proposal for Interreg North West Europe. They couldn't commit to the 40% cofinancing requirement, and then by default the other Irish partner, a Civil Society Organisation - Farming for Nature- in the Burren, Co. Clare were also required to drop out. This project was highly ranked and would have brought over half a million investment into the Clare-Galway area, contributing to green indicators for Climate, Agriculture and other national policy targets.

⁹ NPA eligibility: only organisations from Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Monaghan, Sligo, Mayo, Roscommon, Galway, Clare, Limerick, Kerry, Cork may apply.

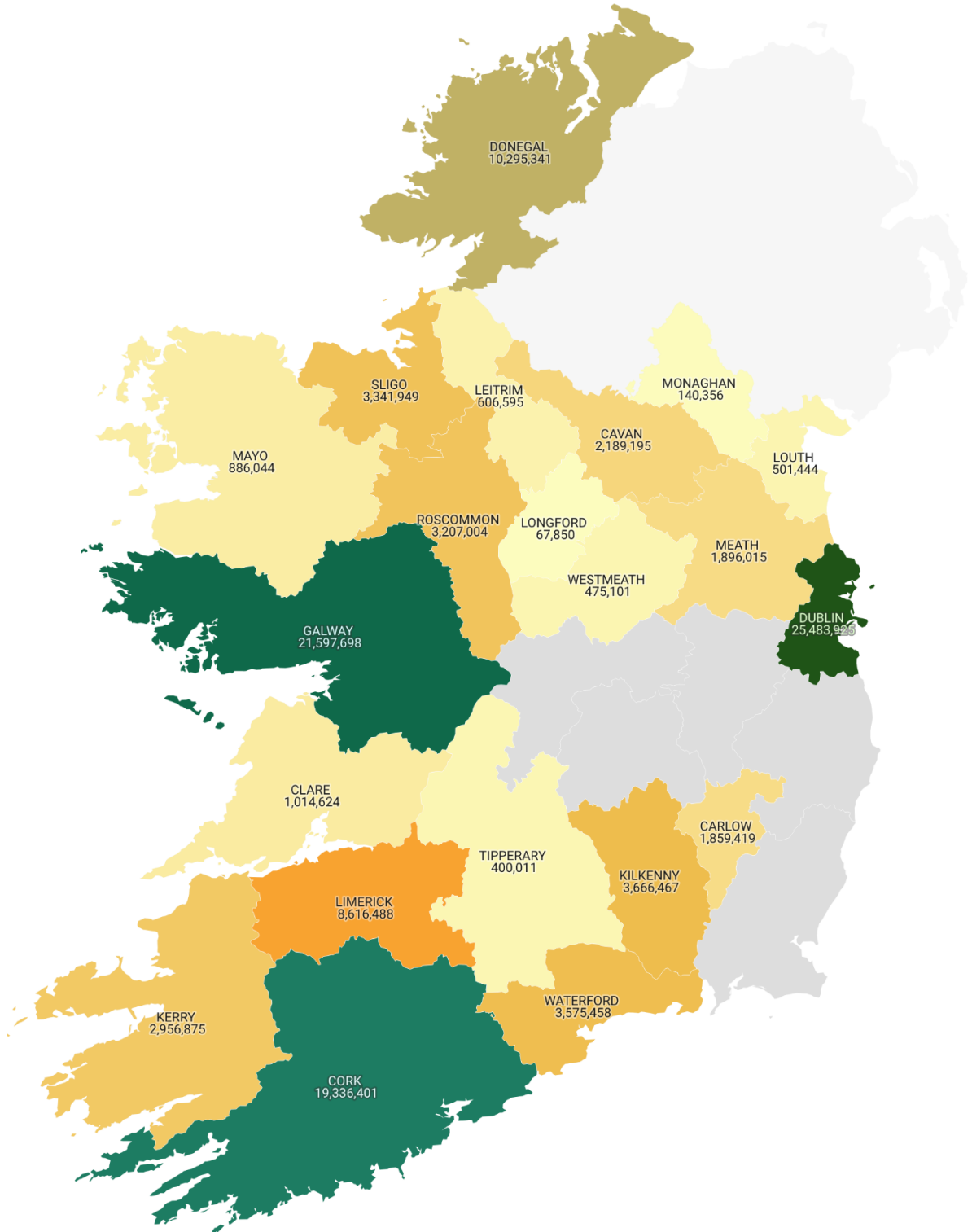
Interreg programmes, EU funding awarded per Region



	Interreg Europe	NWE	AA	NPA	URBACT
■ Eastern and Midlands	€2,246,746	€7,292,416	€4,732,408	€128,341	€389,430
■ Northern and Western	€6,814,404	€10,829,257	€8,906,718	€6,561,157	€177,958
■ Southern	€5,693,259	€12,422,426	€5,954,652	€3,343,748	€250,499

Total Interreg investment across all programmes 2021-2027

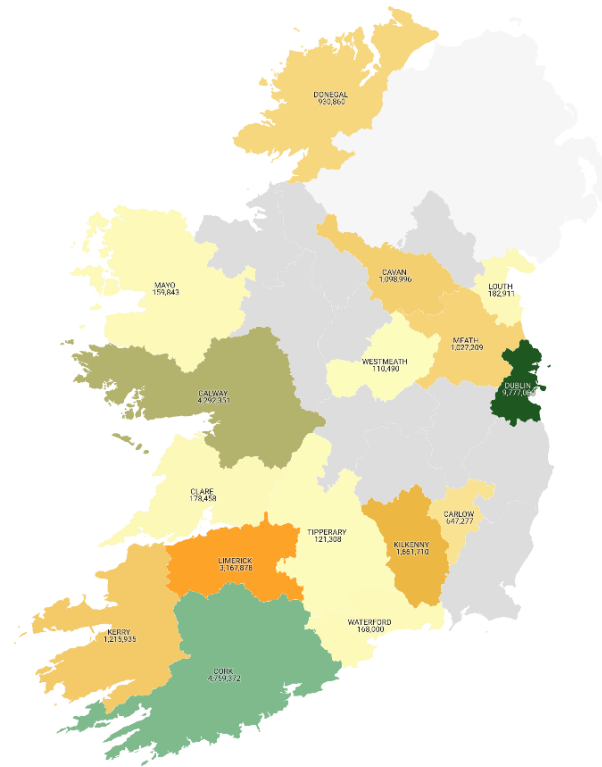
Includes Interreg Europe, Interreg North-West Europe, Interreg Atlantic Area, Interreg Northern Periphery and Arctic and URBACT.



Created with Datawrapper

Interreg North West Europe - EU funded

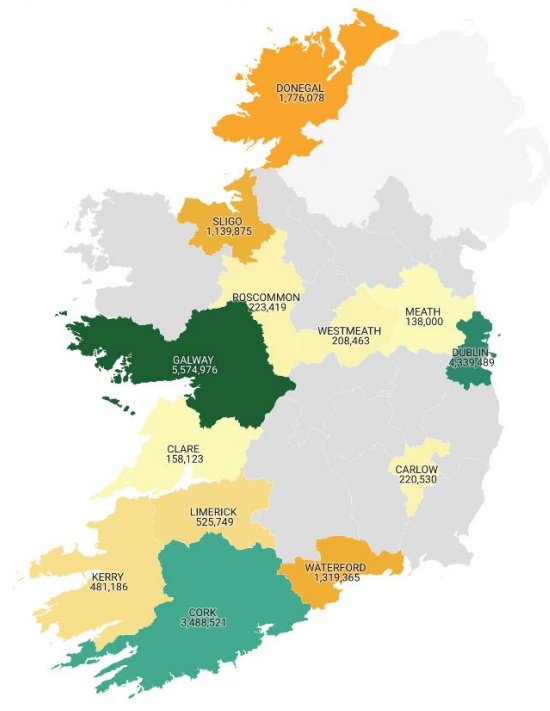
Per county funding from North West Europe Programme - financed by ERDF.



Created with Datawrapper

Interreg Atlantic Area - EU funded

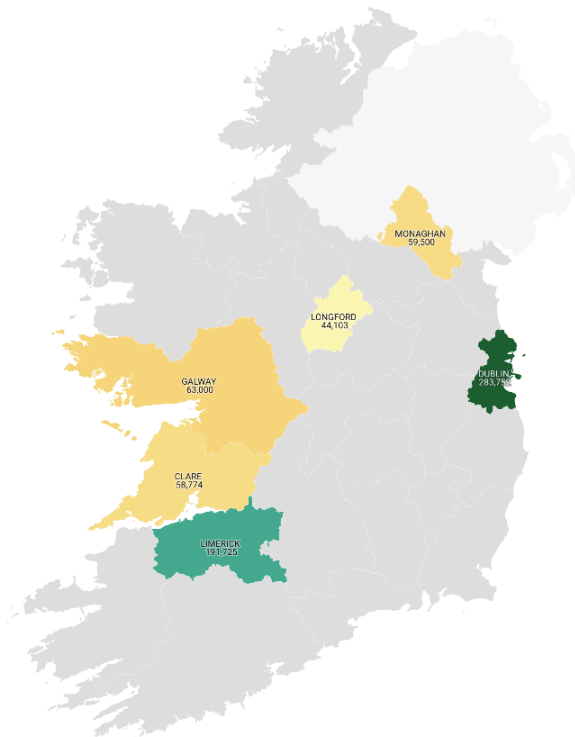
Per county funding from Atlantic Area programme - financed by ERDF.



Created with Datawrapper

Interreg URBACT - EU funded

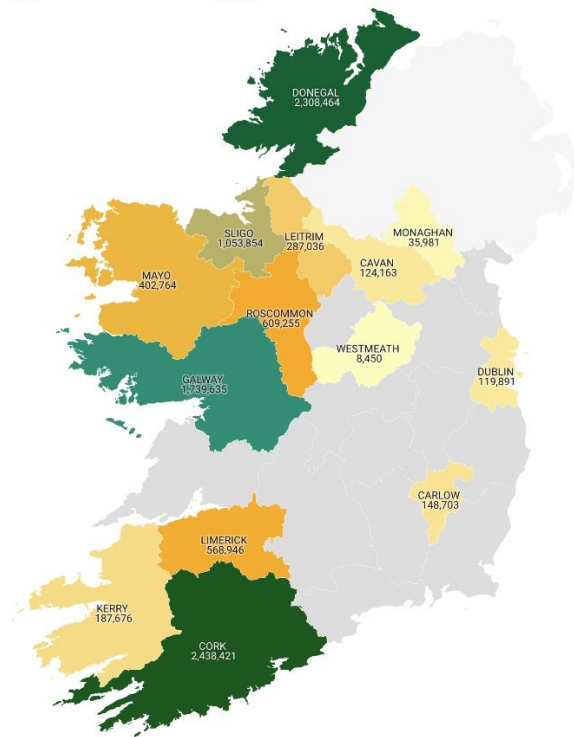
Per county funding from URBACT programme - financed by ERDF.



Created with Datawrapper

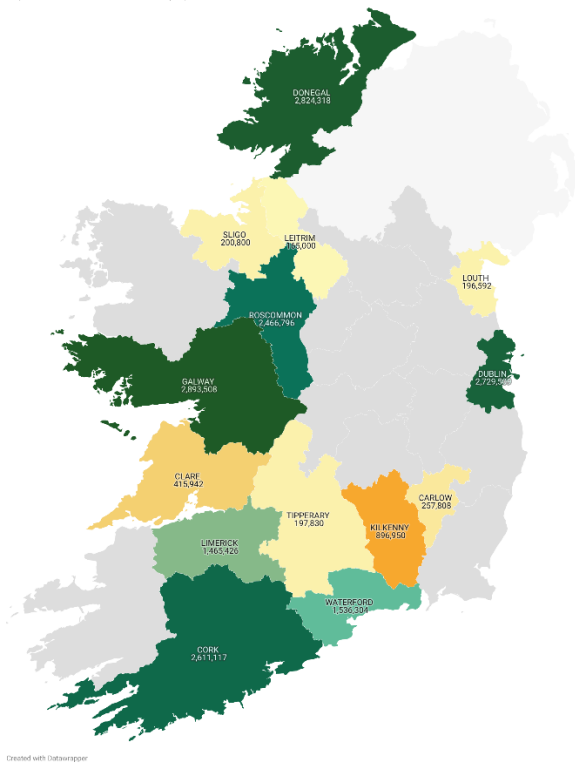
Interreg Northern Periphery and Artic - EU funded

Per county funding from Northern Periphery and Artic programme - financed by ERDF.

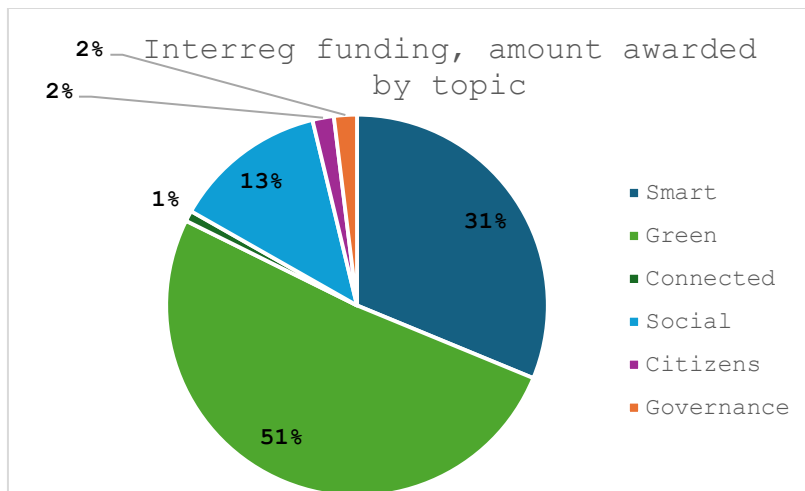


Created with Datawrapper

Total investment Interreg Europe
 Total investment per county for Interreg Europe programme



4.5 Thematic focus of projects



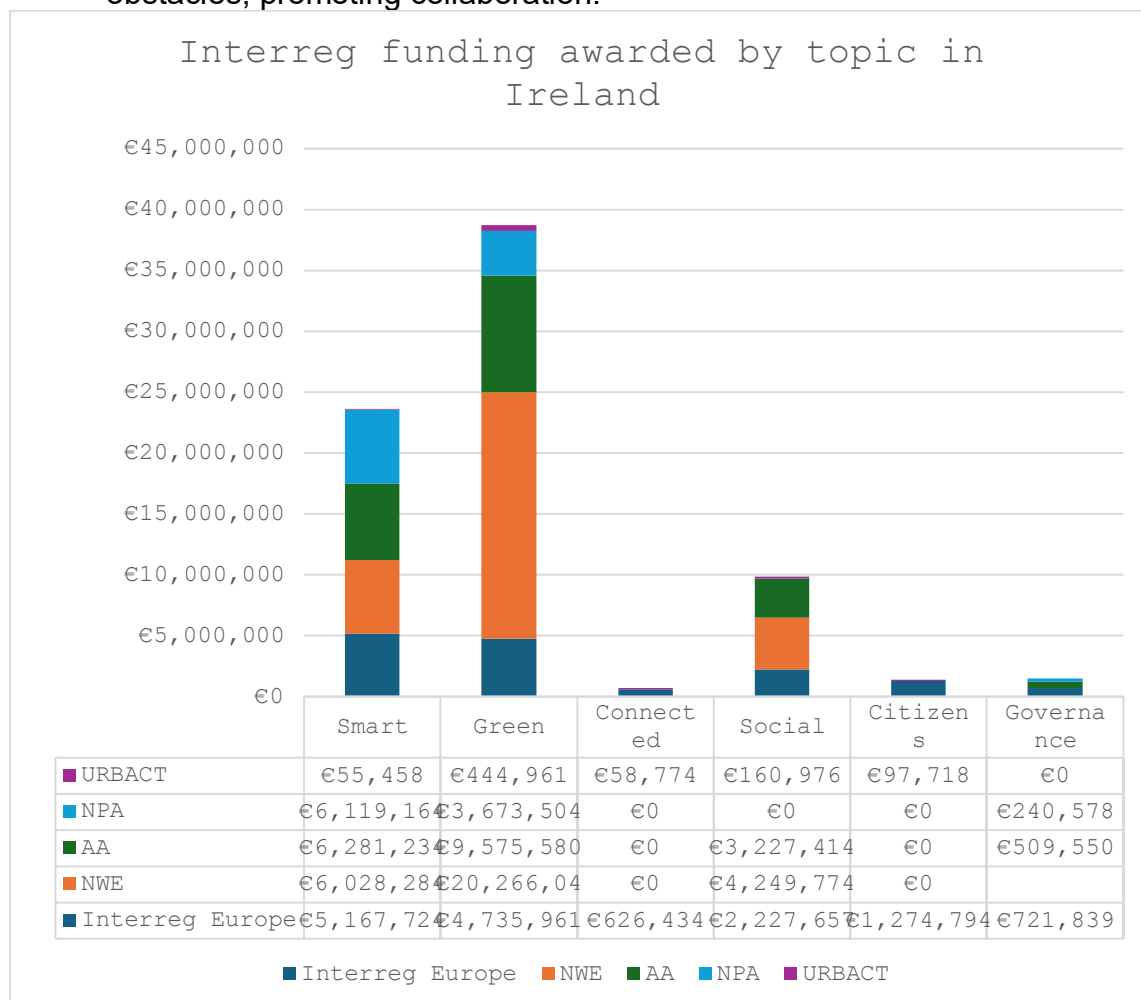
Thematic focus of the Interreg funds were set out during the programme design phase for the 2021-2027 period and had some limitations due to thematic concentration rules set by the European Commission and its Member States. Thematic concentration rules within the ERDF Regulation required that a significant share of funding - particularly in more developed regions - be directed toward:

- PO1: A Smarter Europe
- PO2: A Greener, Low-Carbon Europe

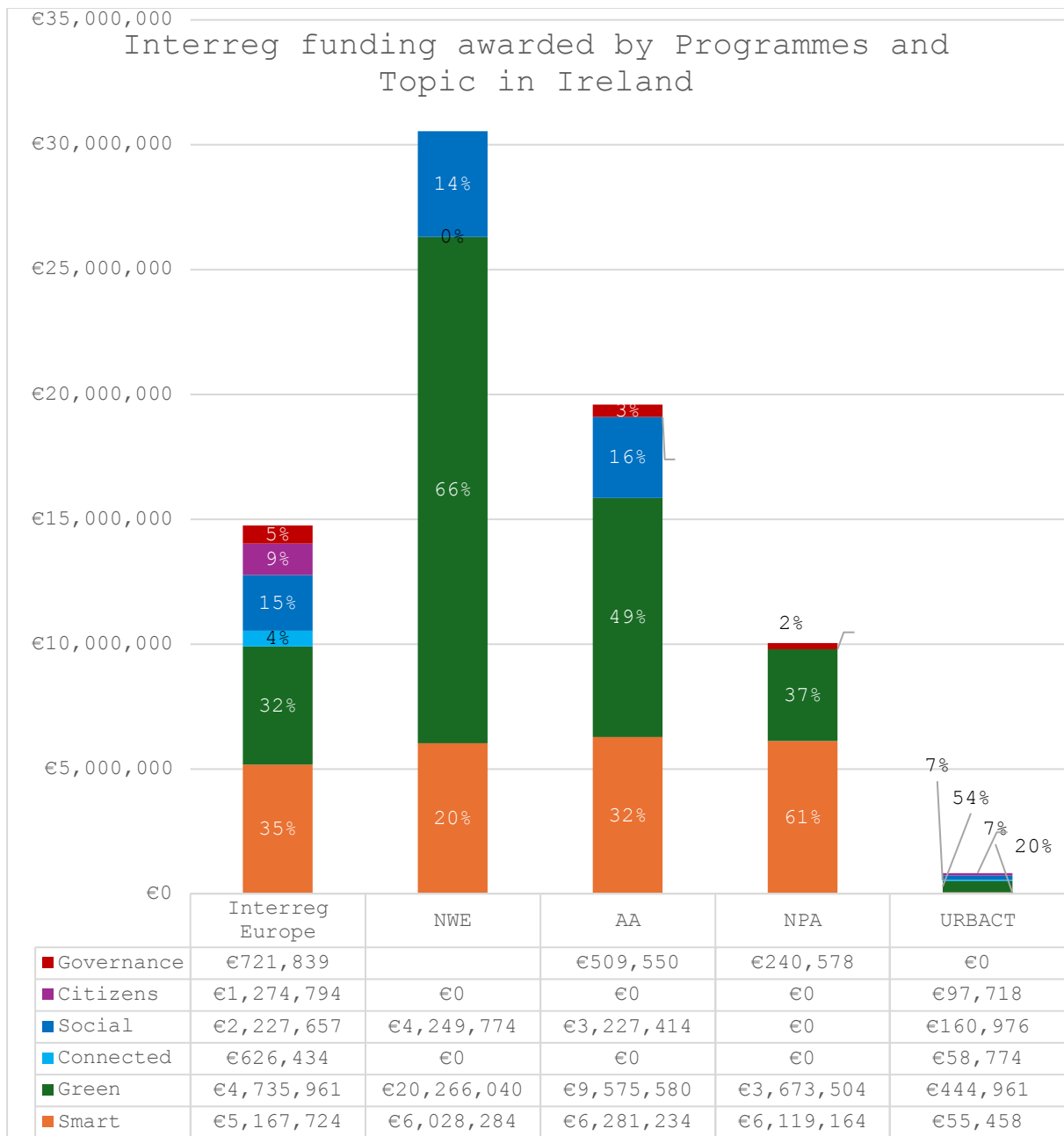
The amounts of funding awarded to project partners in Ireland by Interreg programmes reflects this thematic concentration - as evident in the graphs below, with most funds awarded to projects working on “Green” or “Smart” topics.

The Interreg programmes where Ireland is eligible to apply had a lot of cross-over in thematic areas, as such, all projects funded in Ireland can be assigned one of the following Cohesion Policy¹⁰ categories plus some Interreg specific objectives (governance):

1. A Smarter Europe - innovation, competitiveness, digitalisation, smart specialisation.
2. A Greener Europe - low-carbon transition, climate action, circular economy, risk prevention, nature protection.
3. A More Connected Europe -transport networks and digital infrastructure.
4. A More Social Europe - inclusion, employment, education, skills, health, culture.
5. A Europe Closer to Citizens - place-based and community-led local development.
6. Better Governance - strengthening institutional capacity, resolving cross-border obstacles, promoting collaboration.



¹⁰ As outlined in the Cohesion Policy Regulation (EU) 2021/1058 and (EU) 2021/1060 Common Provisions Regulation (CPR)



5. Successes and challenges during the 2021-2027 period

5.1 Successes

Improved policy development and implementation

Interreg funding leads to improved implementation of local, regional and national policy¹¹, shared best practice with other regions across Europe and showcases Irish regions and successes.

Learnings from Interreg projects are used to inform development plans, Metropolitan Area Strategic Plans (MASP), as well as the Regional, Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES). Interreg projects often involve local authorities, agencies and other stakeholders whose work must align with Ireland's regional development objectives; collaboration with other networks from across Europe brings international best practice into the roll out of their work. Projects can be either knowledge exchange (e.g.: stakeholders learning how nature-based solutions can be used in other countries¹²), or more tangible pilots – really trialling how a solution might work in Ireland (e.g.: energy communities¹³ or retrofitting of buildings).

Testbed for future funding

Interreg **pilot models, strategies, and cooperation frameworks** that can later become templates for ERDF and other public investment. Interreg Strand B (Transnational funding) is explicitly designed to address structural, cross-border challenges that require integrated solutions suitable for scaling by mainstream funds. Interreg is therefore a “development lever” for regions. The projects haven been used to create the conditions for competitiveness, resilience, investment - Interreg projects spot new problems first, tests solutions, and prepares regions for less risky bigger investments¹⁴.

National Contact Points (NCPs)

National Contact Points – by having a locally available contact person, partners have greater support when applying for EU funding, helping them to understand rules and overcome barriers when it comes to application phase and reporting. The role serves to **increase the visibility and accessibility of EU Interreg funding** across the country.

¹¹ [Case study: Cohes3ion](#) - the project developed a regional Smart Specialisation strategy for the Southern Region which fed into the Irish national Smart Specialisation strategy.

¹² [Case study: Blue Green Cities](#) - developed a regional Blue-Green Infrastructure and Nature-Based Solutions (NbS) Framework which directly supports implementation of the Southern Region RSES by guiding Irish local authorities on integrating NbS into planning - one of the RSES's core environmental and climate resilience objectives.

¹³ [Case study: AquaCom project](#) – currently active project, helping Irish communities reduce fossil-fuel dependence by identifying locations and trialling aqua thermal heating solutions in Limerick.

¹⁴ [Case study: HeatNet project](#) in Tallaght, piloted the use of district heating using waste heat from the Amazon data centre to supply heat to South Dublin County Council buildings through a new local district heating network.

The NCPs also support the Irish membership of the Monitoring Committee; and serve as **a communication channel at operational level** with the Joint Secretariats for the different Interreg Programmes.

Note that for the transnational programmes **the NCP's role is hands-on and technical, with broad responsibilities** throughout the programme and project lifecycle – guiding project design, finding partners and inputs to governance. For the Interreg Europe programme (Inter-regional); the role focused mainly on communication and awareness-raising.

There is a NCP for each of the funds, based in different Regional Assemblies. **The NCP is responsible for supporting applicants from all eligible areas in Ireland**, regardless of their Regional Assembly affiliation. The NCPs for the 2021-2027 period are:

National Contact Point	Interreg Programme
Sarah Davoren, Southern Regional Assembly	Interreg North West Europe
Travis O'Doherty, Northern and Western Regional Assembly	Interreg Atlantic Area Interreg Northern Periphery and Arctic
Karl Murphy, Eastern and Midlands Regional Assembly	URBACT
Directors for SRA and NWRA	Interreg Europe

Financial Control Management

Financial control for the Irish organisations making claims for Interreg funded projects is based in the Regional Assemblies. As the Designated Financial Control Authority, the Regional Assemblies play a critical role in the centralised financial control and audit process in place in Ireland through agreement with the Department of Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation (DPEIDRD).

Financial control provides a guarantee for Interreg Programme Authorities and project partners that the co-funded costs are accounted for and eligible. The Assembly's financial control team has responsibility for auditing all payment claims of Irish project lead partners and all Irish project partners regardless of the nationality of the project's lead partner. **Similar to the role of the National Contact Points, this locally available advice and guidance reduce error rates and simplifies administration for Irish applicants.** Project partners are invoiced by the Assembly for these services, and this income defrays a substantial portion of the salary costs of the financial control team.

Financial Control management	Interreg Programme
------------------------------	--------------------

Southern Regional Assembly	Interreg North West Europe Interreg Northern Periphery and Arctic Interreg Europe URBACT EUI
Northern and Western Regional Assembly	Interreg Atlantic Area Interreg Northern Periphery and Arctic Interreg Europe

Simplified Cost Options (SCOs)

A Simplified Cost Option is a way for the EU to pay for results rather than receipts, reducing paperwork, speeding up payments, and helping beneficiaries focus on delivering outcomes instead of managing invoices. The introduction of **flat rates** during the 2021-2027 programming period has been helpful for applicants both while preparing budgets as part of a proposal and during the claims phase. The flat rates **reduce the administrative burden for both managing authorities and beneficiaries**. Reimbursements are based on pre-defined amounts, payments move faster and beneficiaries no longer face long delays due to document verification.

Because processes are simpler and documentation demands much lighter, SCOs lower entry barriers. SCOs facilitate access to Interreg funding for smaller beneficiaries, which might struggle with complex reporting. **Simplified audit trails mean fewer irregularities and better overall programme compliance.**

5.2 Challenges

Co-financing

Interreg does not cover 100% of costs. Beneficiaries must contribute their own share -typically 30–40%, depending on the programme and partner country. See Table 2.

For small NGOs, local authorities, community groups, and even SMEs, finding this upfront money is difficult, especially without predictable multi-year budgets.

As noted in Section 4; Civil society actors, and Technological Universities, report struggling to participate in Interreg projects due to the challenges of the co-financing. In some cases, Irish partners have dropped out during the project lifetime when they can no longer manage to pay staff to work on the Interreg project without external support for the co-financing.

Lead partners

Ireland has low uptake for organisations as Lead partners - as observed in Section 4; Lead Partners in Interreg projects are vital to setting the strategy and design of the work to be done by the whole project consortium. Where **there are Irish lead partners, there are Irish ideas and policy needs leading project direction.** While

Irish organisations are sought after, not many are willing to become Lead Partners in a consortium. This can be due to several factors including **co-financing** – as mentioned above, Lead Partners typically take a larger portion of the budget, but this in turn requires greater co-financing which is a challenge for Irish organisations. An Interreg project Lead Partner takes full financial, legal, and coordination responsibility for the whole consortium, this is **a role that requires expertise and staffing**, and this can be an impediment to some Irish organisations – where they are unwilling or unable to commit to the hiring of EU project staff.

Cashflow

Interreg operates on a reimbursement model, meaning beneficiaries must pre-finance activities. This puts significant pressure on cash flow, especially for smaller organisations without financial reserves.

6. How should Ireland position itself for the post-2027 period?

Ireland has unique, structural, and permanent territorial cooperation needs, with the only EU land border with the UK, requiring continuous cross-border cooperation post-Brexit. Ireland has exposed maritime peripherality along the Atlantic, needing sea-basin collaboration; and as a growing economy – there is a strong need for transnational innovation, climate action, and energy transition. Interreg delivers disproportionate value for a country with **high transnational cooperation needs**.

During the national and EU-level policy dialogues to prepare for the 2028-2034 programming period – **Ireland must position itself to ensure that Interreg programmes have sufficient funding, are run efficiently and that Irish organisations are well placed to participate** and continue the virtuous cycle of Interreg success and regional development.

Externally:

Negotiate for ringfenced Interreg funding

The EC proposal for the future of Cohesion Policy creates National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRPPs) that merge most shared-management EU funds - including cohesion, agriculture, and others—into one national plan **plus one Interreg plan**. The EC proposes a single Interreg allocation (€10.26bn) for the period 2028–2034 across all Member States.

However, the proposal does not list PEACE PLUS as a distinct heading, sub-heading, or standalone fund. Since PEACE PLUS is large and politically sensitive, it requires separate treatment. **Merging PEACE PLUS with other Interreg strands would be likely to lead to less relative funding for all Interreg programmes in Ireland.**

Negotiate for efficient Interreg Programmes at EU level

- **Simplification and performance-based management** proposal remains unclear for Interreg Programme Authorities. Exact control and audit requirements must be clarified to avoid any duplication of audit systems.
- Encourage **Simplified Cost Options (SCOs)** to be kept and scaled up (not specifically mentioned in the draft MFF)
- **New data collection rules:** The post 2027 proposal significantly expands scope regarding beneficial owner data and shifts responsibility to project beneficiaries to collect and inform all parties, creating a higher administrative burden. These provisions are disproportionate, perhaps not even feasible, in the context of Interreg, therefore a derogation for Interreg should be introduced in the Regulation.
- Interreg/ETC **Cooperation-specific rules** must be preserved (e.g.: concept of lead partner principle etc)
- A flexibility clause is needed because, under the 2028–34 draft, even **minor technical adjustments to a single Interreg programme’s Plan Chapter** would require a full formal amendment approved by all the Member States in that programme and by the Commission, which is disproportionate.
- **Communications and identity;** the following aspects were not specifically mentioned in the draft text; requirement for a communication officer per programme should be continued, ensuring capacity for communication tasks and the Interreg co-branding with EU branding should be maintained as it boosts visibility and recognition.

Internally: Encourage greater Irish participation

Interreg funding is focused on regional development, and while Ireland has had great success it is not always balanced – analysis in this report shows that universities tend to have highest rates of success, while Interreg funding can be harder to access for Civil Society organisations. Similarly, there is a low rate of Lead Partner organisations coming from Ireland and leading Irish ideas for regional development. **A major barrier for these stakeholders is the requirement of co-financing.** This impacts both project participation and Lead Partner rates.

A government led co-financing scheme has been in operation in Netherlands; the approach pays dividends, as evident from the **high success rates of Netherlands and other regions** where co-financing is provided by the national or regional governments such as parts of Germany and Belgium. **See Figure 1. Below.** Other schemes, for example in the Flanders and Wallonia regions of Belgium, **offer grants for proposal writing** where the **Lead Partner** is Belgian and is advancing a project idea that is aligned with approved Regional Development policy. For more detail **Business Case for co-financing of Irish Civil Society Organisations.**

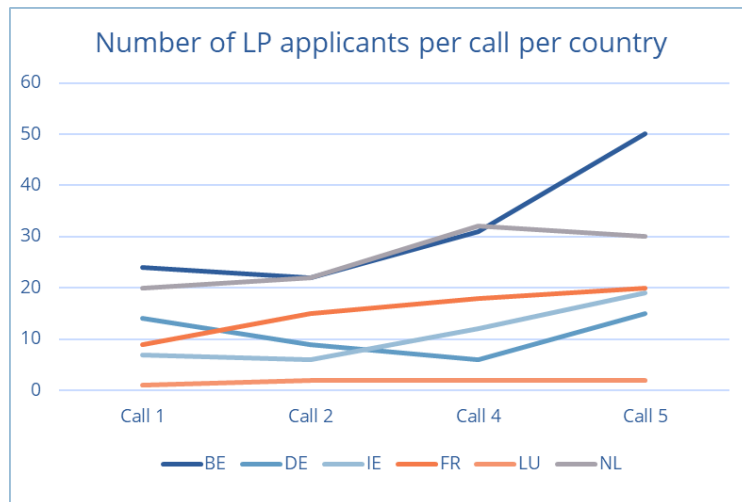


Figure 1. Interreg NWE Analysis of Lead Partner countries of origin; 2021-2027 programming period

7. Considerations for 2028-2034

As negotiations progress for the 2028–2034 period, it is essential to reflect on the positive outcomes and key lessons from 2021–2027 to support the effective implementation of the upcoming programmes. The following considerations, if taken into account, would strengthen the participation levels of Irish partners in the post 2027 programmes and enhance the impact in Ireland:

1. The PEACE PLUS programme will remain a key component of the Interreg Programmes in Ireland and should therefore continue to have its own dedicated budget line alongside the overall Interreg allocation.
2. The importance of efficient Interreg Programme management at EU level should continue to be fully recognised and supported.
3. The vital role played by the regionally based National Contact Points and Financial Control teams in assisting Irish project partners should continue to be acknowledged and maintained.
4. Drawing on best practice in other EU Member States, consideration should be given to establishing a government-funded co-financing mechanism to support civil society participation and to assist Irish Lead Partners in preparing bids. Such a mechanism would strengthen participation levels and enhance the overall impact of Interreg in Ireland.