



Tionól Réigiúnach an Deiscirt  
Southern Regional Assembly



# Annual Report & Financial Statement **2021**



Clár Chisti Eorpacha Stuchtúrtha  
agus Infheistíochta na hÉireann  
2014-2020  
Comhaoinithe ag Rialtas na hÉireann  
agus ag an Aontas Eorpach



European Union  
European Regional  
Development Fund





## Mission Statement

The Southern Regional Assembly commits to facilitating greater cooperation and coordination between local, regional, and central government and other State agencies. The Assembly will strive to drive social, economic and sustainable development of the Southern Region

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## Cathaoirleach's Message

It is a privilege to introduce the Annual Report and Financial Statement 2021 for the Southern Regional Assembly.



While 2021 was another challenging year, the work of the Assembly continued, and much was achieved for the Southern Region. The role of the Regional Assemblies has become increasingly important as the regional tier of government and a key champion of the regional perspective in economic and spatial development.

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

I thank my fellow Assembly Members for their invaluable contributions during the year both at our monthly meetings and in representing the Assembly at other meetings and events. I also wish to thank Leas-Cathaoirleach Cllr. Gerard Murphy for his support.

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

**Cllr. Pip Breen,**  
*Cathaoirleach*

## Director's Statement

I am pleased to present the Annual Report and Financial Statements of the Southern Regional Assembly for 2021.



It was a busy year despite challenges presented by COVID-19 and work has progressed across all functions of the Assembly, both Regional Planning and EU Programmes and Projects.

In January, the Assembly Members agreed the implementation roadmap for the Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy for the Southern Region - a 12-year strategic framework to support Project Ireland 2040 and ensuring strong and coordinated regional links between national and local policy and strengthening the regional tier of government. This was developed with our key stakeholders, including local authorities and government departments.

As Managing Authority of ERDF regional programmes, the Southern Regional Assembly progressed work on the preparation of the new ERDF Southern, Eastern & Midland Regional Programme 2021-27. The new Programme will support balanced regional development through an approximate €660 million package of ERDF and national funding for those Irish regions. In parallel, the Regional Assembly continued managing the implementation of the 2014-20 ERDF Southern & Eastern Regional Programme.

I would like to thank our Cathaoirleach, Cllr. Pip Breen for his time and expertise during the year. I thank the Assembly staff for their continued commitment to achieving the goals of the 2021 annual work plan. I welcome the new staff who joined the Assembly in 2020 and thank those who have moved on.

Finally, I look forward to the opportunities presented by the expanded roles for Regional Assemblies in strengthening the regional tier of government.

**David Kelly,**  
*Director*



# The Southern Region

The Southern Region is facing many challenges and opportunities as it changes in the coming decades, such as population growth and how people live and work. We need to plan for each change, particularly within a wider background of international events, such as climate crisis, Covid-19 and Brexit.

The SRA supports the Region through its regional governance remit in the area of economic and spatial planning and EU funds for regional development.

## 1 REGION



## 3 STRATEGIC PLANNING AREAS

- Mid-West
- South-East
- South-West

## 9 COUNTIES

Clare, Limerick, Tipperary, Waterford, Carlow, Kilkenny, Wexford, Cork, Kerry

## 3 CITIES

Limerick  
Cork  
Waterford

## 10 LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Clare County Council, Limerick City & County Council, Tipperary County Council, Waterford City & County Council, Carlow County Council, Kilkenny County Council, Wexford County Council, Cork City Council, Cork County Council, Kerry County Council

Approx.  
**40%**  
of the  
national  
landmass



**33%**  
of the  
population

Largely rural  
region supported  
by a strong  
urban structure



Almost  
**1/3**  
of the  
national  
labour force

Over  
**84,000**  
active enterprises and  
a strong multinational  
presence

Almost  
**40%**  
Ireland's  
active  
farms



Internationally-  
renowned  
third level  
institutes and  
research centres



international and  
regional airports



all tier one/ two  
ports outside of  
Dublin

Wild Atlantic Way,  
Ireland's Ancient  
East and Ireland's  
Hidden Heartlands  
tourism areas active  
in the Region



Wealth of  
environmental,  
natural, cultural  
and heritage  
assets

# 1. ABOUT THE SOUTHERN REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

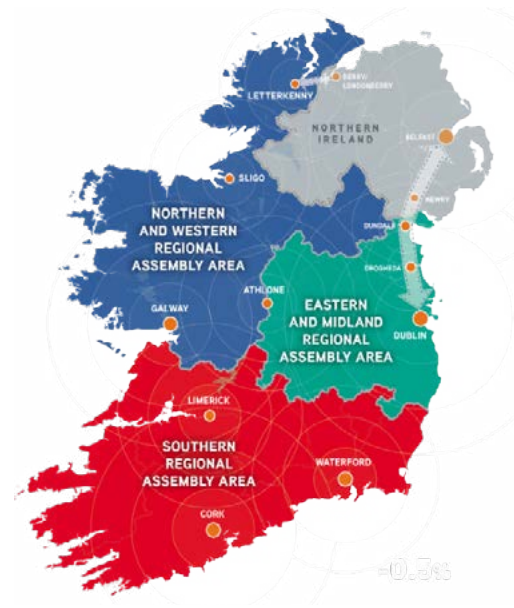
Established in 2015, the Southern Regional Assembly is part of the regional tier of government in Ireland.

The Assembly has a remit for the 10 local authorities of the Southern Region - Carlow, Cork City, Cork County, Clare, Kerry, Kilkenny, Limerick, Tipperary, Waterford, and Wexford.

Part of the Local Government sector, our 33 Assembly Members represent the 10 local authorities at regional level; 27 are appointed by their constituent local authority, and a further six are nominated as Committee of the Regions representatives.

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

- Regional tier of government, represented by elected representatives nominated by our local authorities and the Committee of the Regions,
- Leading the implementation of the Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy,



- Promoting balanced regional development through the management of, support for, and involvement in European Regional Development Funded programmes and projects,
- Linking local, regional, national and EU policy goals through regional planning and EU regional development.

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

## Vision

A Region that is economically strong, inclusive, connected, climate-resilient and sustainable.

## Mission

To be the leader of regional development through effective, sustainable spatial planning and the delivery of EU programmes, with the support of our stakeholder.

## Values

Leadership  
Engagement  
Innovation  
Equality  
Sustainability  
Transparency

# Staff of the Southern Regional Assembly 2021



**David Kelly**  
Director



**Kevin Lynch**  
Assistant Director/Senior Planner



**Dave Hennessy**  
Assistant Director  
(commenced September)



**Derville Brennan**  
Assistant Director  
(retired September)



**Dominic Walsh**  
Regional Planning Officer



**Robert Fennelly**  
Regional Planning Officer



**Bryan Riney**  
Regional Planning Officer



**Sharon Murray**  
Administrative Officer  
Finance & HR



**Vincent Dunphy**  
Administrative Officer  
Financial Mgt. & Control



**Enda Hogan**  
Administrative Officer  
Financial Mgt.,  
Monitoring & Evaluation



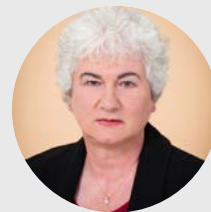
**Michael Buckley**  
Auditor



**Siobhán Rudden**  
Senior Staff Officer



**Sarah Davoren**  
EU Executive



**Breda Curran**  
Development Officer  
Ireland-Wales Programme



**Samantha Richardson**  
Development Officer  
Ireland-Wales Programme



**Rose Power**  
EU Projects Officer



**Karen Coughlan**  
EU Projects Officer



**Eve Hayden**  
Senior First Level Controller



**Marie Harnett**  
Senior First Level Controller



**Edel Hunt**  
Senior First Level Controller



**Yvonne Cooney**  
Assistant Staff Officer



**Róisín Kiely**  
Assistant Staff Officer



**Colm Walsh**  
Clerical Officer



**Anna Higgins**  
Clerical Officer



**Elaine Gallagher**  
Clerical Officer



**Maria Murphy**  
Clerical Officer



**Alice Byrne Kelly**  
Clerical Officer



**Catherine Connaughton**  
Clerical Officer



**Teresa Burke**  
Clerical Officer



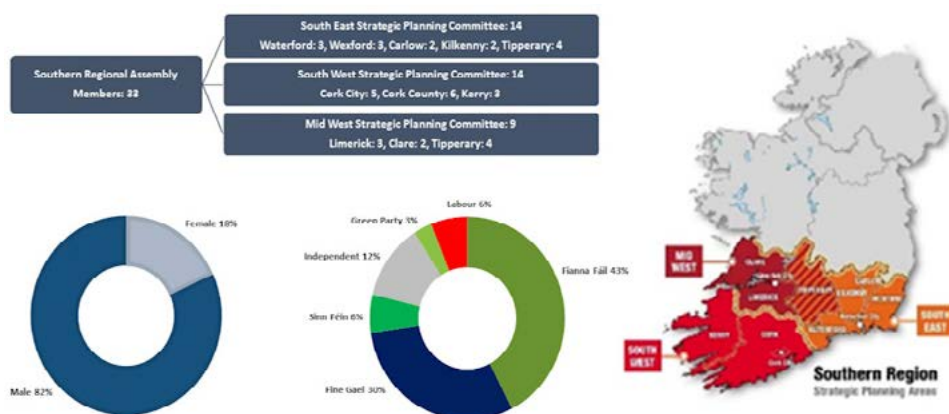
## 2. ASSEMBLY MEMBERSHIP 2021

The Southern Region is represented by 33 Local Councillors who were appointed as Regional Assembly Members for a five-year term following the 2019 local elections. The Region's 10 local authorities nominate 27 Members, and the Government appoints six as Committee of the Regions representatives.

The Members meet monthly to discuss issues related to regional planning, submissions to local authorities, national government and the EU, EU programme monitoring and project benefits, and other statutory functions of the Assembly. They also represent the Assembly on committees related to monitoring EU programme management and regional planning.



*Cathaoirleach Cllr. Pip Breen, the Assembly Members and staff at the Annual Meeting in July 2021.*



*Cllr. John Sheahan outgoing Cathaoirleach, Cllr. Pip Breen, Cathaoirleach at the Annual Meeting 2021.*



### Cathaoirligh

July-December: Cllr. Pip Breen  
January-July: Cllr. John Sheahan

### Leas-Cathaoirligh

July-December: Cllr. Gerard Murphy  
January-July: Cllr. Deirdre O'Brien

*Left to Right: Cllr. Gerard Murphy, Cllr. John Sheahan, Cllr. Deirdre O'Brien, Cllr. Pip Breen, & David Kelly.*



# Southern Regional Assembly Members 2021



**Cllr. Pip Breen**  
**Cathaoirleach**  
Wexford County Council



**Cllr. Gerard Murphy**  
**Leas-Cathaoirleach**  
Cork County Council



**Cllr. Ken Murnane**  
Carlow County Council



**Cllr. Thomas Kinsella**  
Carlow County Council



**Cllr. Alan O'Callaghan**  
Clare County Council



**Cllr. P.J. Kelly**  
Clare County Council



**Cllr. Deirdre Forde**  
Cork City Council  
CoR Member



**Cllr. Kieran McCarthy**  
Cork City Council  
CoR Member



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



**Cllr. Terry Shannon**  
Cork City Council



**Cllr. Garret Kelleher**  
Cork City Council



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



**Cllr. Sheila O'Callaghan**  
Cork County Council



**Cllr. Deirdre O'Brien**  
Cork County Council



**Cllr. Joe Carroll**  
Cork County Council



**Cllr. Sean O'Connor**  
Cork County Council



**Cllr. Séamus Cosáí  
Fitzgerald**  
Kerry County Council



**Cllr. Michael O'Shea**  
Kerry County Council



**Cllr. Robert Beasley**  
Kerry County Council



**Cllr. Frankie Daly**  
Limerick City &  
County Council



**Cllr. Michael Collins**  
Limerick City &  
County Council



**Cllr. John Sheahan**  
Limerick City &  
County Council



**Cllr. Andrew McGuinness**  
Kilkenny  
County Council



**Cllr. John Brennan**  
Kilkenny  
County Council



**Cllr. Michael Murphy**  
Tipperary County Council  
CoR Member



**Cllr. Noel Coonan**  
Tipperary  
County Council



**Cllr. Siobhán Ambrose**  
Tipperary  
County Council



**Cllr. Michael O'Meara**  
Tipperary  
County Council



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



**Cllr. Thomas Phelan**  
Waterford City &  
County Council



**Cllr. Tom Cronin**  
Waterford City &  
County Council



**Cllr. Maura Bell**  
Wexford County Council

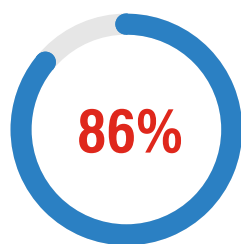


**Cllr. Oliver Walsh**  
Wexford County Council

# Membership Activity 2021

## Meetings 2021

22nd January  
12th February  
12th March  
9th April  
14th May  
11th June  
9th July (in-person)  
10th September  
8th October  
12th November  
10th December



**AVERAGE MEETING  
ATTENDANCE RATE**



## External Speakers at Assembly Meetings 2021

Month	Speaker/ Topic
April	Teresa Lennon, Irish Regions European Office - Update on Committee of the Regions Ray O'Leary, Claire Finn and Tomás Campbell, Department of Transport - National Investment Framework for Transport in Ireland (NIFTI)
October	Russell Vickers, Future Mobility Campus Ireland - Overview of Future Mobility Campus Ireland (FMCI) Nikita Shetty, BABLE - Regional Approach to Smart Specialisation in the Southern Regional
December	Gearoid O'Keeffe, Department of Public Expenditure & Reform - Update on National Recovery & Resilience Plan (NRRP) and Brexit Adjustment Reserve

## Conference Attendance 2021

Month		
May	International Transport Federation conference (online)	2 Members
November	Irish Planning Institute Conference (Wexford)	4 Members



## EU Programmes Monitoring Committee Representatives

EU Programme	Representative
S&E Regional Operational Programme	Cllr. Joe Carroll Cllr. John Brennan Cllr. Seamus Cosai Fitzgerald Cllr. Michael O'Shea
Ireland-Wales Programme 2014-20	Cllr. Ken Murnane
Rural Development Programme	Cllr. Alan O'Callaghan
European Social Fund: Programme for Employability Inclusion & Learning	Cllr. Gerard Murphy

## Committee of the Regions Representatives: Southern Region

Six Assembly Members are also Committee of the Regions representatives, three as full Members and three as Alternative Members. For further information, see Section 10.

## Association of Irish Regions Representatives: Southern Region

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

Cllr. Pip Breen, Cathaoirleach  
Cllr. John Sheahan, previous Cathaoirleach  
Cllr. Gerard Murphy, Leas-Cathaoirleach  
Cllr. Thomas Phelan,  
Cllr. Michael O'Meara,  
David Kelly, Director



*Committee of the Regions Member and Head of Irish Delegation, Cllr. Michael Murphy at the Duologue for Strength & Resilience seminar in November 2021*

### 3. CORPORATE UPDATE 2021

The COVID-19 restrictions did not slow progress of the Regional Assembly Members and staff as activity continued across EU programmes, EU projects and in regional planning.

#### Annual Meeting & Election of Cathaoirleach 2021-22

The Annual Meeting took place on 8th July at The Tower Hotel in Waterford. It was the first in-person meeting since July 2020 and would be the only one during the year.

Cllr. Pip Breen was elected Cathaoirleach of the Southern Regional Assembly at the meeting. Cllr. Breen has been a Fianna Fáil local representative from Wexford County Council since 2014.

Cllr. Gerard Murphy was elected Leas-Cathaoirleach, A member of Fine Gael, Cllr. Murphy has been a local representative for Cork County Council since 2009.

*Top Right: Cllr. John Sheahan congratulating Cllr. Pip Breen on his election.*

*Bottom left & right: Assembly Annual Meeting in session.*





## Meeting with the Minister for Agriculture, Food & the Marine

The Minister for Agriculture, Food & the Marine, Charlie McConalogue TD, and Minister of State for Health, Mary Butler TD met Regional Assembly Members on the importance of the marine economy to the Southern Region on 22nd July.

Members raised concerns about the impact of Brexit on the fisheries sector, the impact of CAP reforms on agriculture in the Southern Region, and the need for investment in the Regions ports, underlining the need for Tier 1 status for the Port of Waterford and Rosslare Europort.

The significance of the marine and coastal environment to the Southern Region is reflected in the RSES, particularly in relation to freight, ports, and harbour strategies for the Southern Region.

*Top left & Right: Cathaoirleach Cllr. Pip Breen presents a copy of the ESES for the Southern Region to the Ministers.*

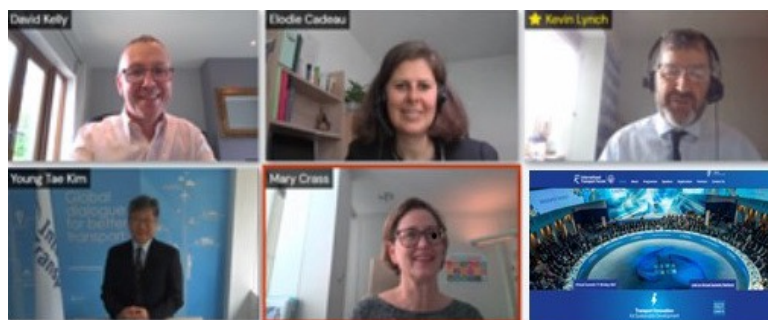
*Top: Members and Staff of the Southern Regional Assembly with Minister for Agriculture, Food & the Marine, Charlie McConalogue TD and Minister of State for Health, Mary Butler TD.*



## International Transport Forum Summit

The Southern Regional Assembly was invited by the Department of Transport to host a virtual exhibition stand at the 2021 International Transport Forum (ITF) Summit which ran from 17th – 28th May.

The ITF is part of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, an intergovernmental organisation of 62 countries with the objective to share knowledge and promote exchange among policy makers for better transport. ITF's Annual Summit is the world's largest gathering of transport ministers and the leading global platform for dialogue on transport policy.



Top: David Kelly, Assembly Director and Kevin Lynch Assistant Director, presenting at the virtual ITF Summit.

## Celebrating Europe Day 2021

Regional Assembly staff flew virtual EU flags for Europe Day on 9th May to celebrate 47 years of transformational financial support from the EU for business, research, and sustainable urban development projects. EU

supports from the ERDF and other EU funds have had an enormous impact on our local communities and regions during those 47 years, co-funding innovative projects, supporting small and medium-sized enterprises and promoting a low-carbon economy.



## Institute of Planners in Ireland conference

Speaking during the welcome address of the Institute of Planners annual conference in the Opera House in Wexford, Cathaoirleach, Cllr. Pip Breen spoke about the importance of Policy alignment between National (NPF), Regional (RSES) and Local (County & City Development Plans). The theme of the Conference was Delivering Plan Led Development.



Cathaoirleach, Cllr. Pip Breen addresses delegates at the Institute of Planners in Ireland annual conference in Wexford.



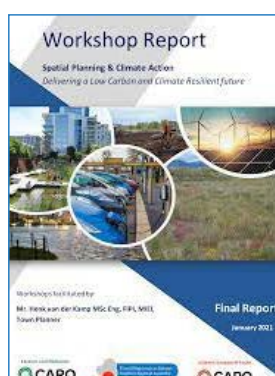
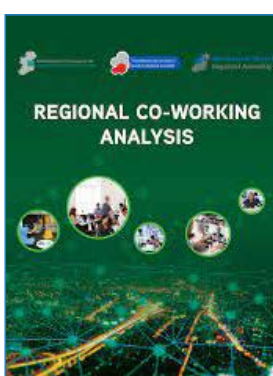
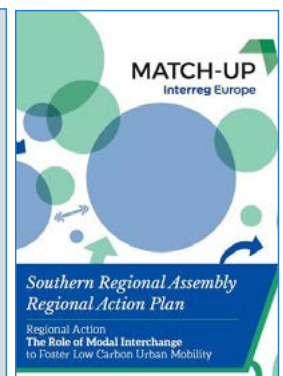
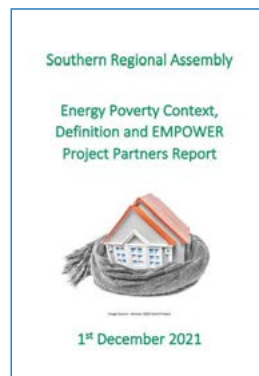
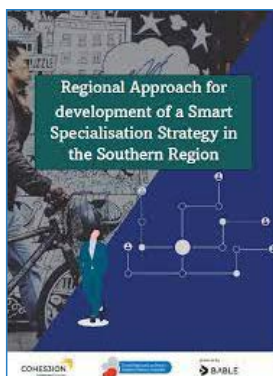
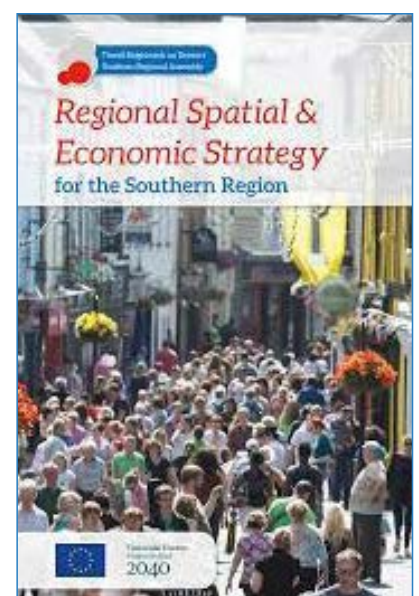
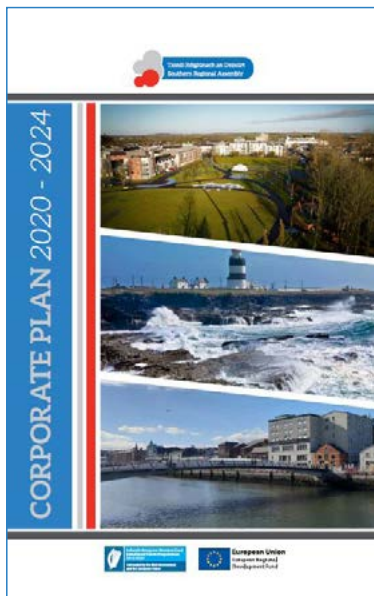
## EU Projects Final Conferences

Three Interreg Europe projects that the Regional Assembly has been partnered for the past four years held their phase one final conferences during 2021 (further information is in Section 8):




- COHESION (smart specialisation) in March,
- MARIE (responsible research & innovation) in September,
- EMPOWER (energy monitoring) in November.

## Southern Regional Assembly Publications since 2000

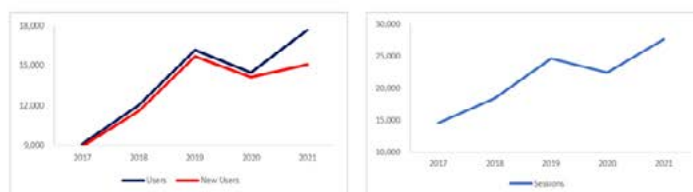
The Assembly has published the following documents since 2020, either solely or in association with other organisations and consultants.



## Online Communications 2021

-  2,552 followers/ average 40k monthly impressions
-  556 followers/ average post reach 221
-  354 followers/ average post reach 19
-  116 followers/ average 660 monthly impressions

www.southernassembly.ie



## Energy Usage 2021

Ireland's Climate Action Plan 2019 sets a target of 50% improved energy efficiency across the public sector by 2030, and that a new Public Sector Decarbonisation

Strategy delivers a 30% emissions reduction by 2030, and to develop a roadmap to carbon neutrality by 2050. The Assembly reports yearly on energy performance to the SEAI to track energy efficiency improvements.

Full-time Equivalent Staff	Energy Sources	Kwh Energy Consumed
27	Electricity & Gas	20,363 Kwh

## Freedom of Information

The Freedom of Information Act 2014 provides that every person has legal right to access official records held by

public bodies, have personal information held on them corrected or updated where it is incomplete, incorrect, or misleading, and be given reasons for decisions taken by public bodies that affect them.

Requests	Granted	Part-Granted	Refused	Withdrawn	Carried to 2022
6	6	0	0	0	0

## Data Protection

The General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act both came into effect in 2018. The Assembly continues to review operations against this statutory requirement. There were no requests under data protection legislation during 2021.

statement in January 2021. A Covid Response Team is in place to prepare an organisational response plan. A draft plan was proposed to the Management Team in late 2021 but implementation was delayed due to the onset of a new Covid variant.

## Irish Language

Sarah Davoren was appointed as our new Irish Language Officer in May 2021.

## Assembly Staff Changes

In March, Sarah Davoren joined the Assembly as EU Executive. In September, Dave Hennessy took over as Assistant Director (EU Programmes & Corporate Affairs) from Derville Brennan who retired after 20 years of service to the Assembly. Clerical Officer, Teresa Burke also moved on during 2021. We wish all our colleagues who have moved to new chapters the very best.

## Health & Safety/ COVID Response

The Management Team reviewed the health and safety



## 4. CORPORATE PLAN 2020-24

The Assembly's Corporate Plan 2020-24 is delivered against three high-level goals.

Goal 1: Regional Leadership	Goal 2: Valuing Our People	Goal 3: Promoting Sustainable Regional Development
<p><b>Regional Governance</b> A Region driving sustainable regional development &amp; regional governance in Ireland</p> <p><b>Strategic Collaborations</b> A Region that engages, collaborates, &amp; forms partnerships to benefit the Region</p> <p><b>Regional Representation</b> Support, foster &amp; develop democratic regional representation</p>	<p><b>Public Sector Duty</b> Ensure we are doing the right things in the right way for the people of our region &amp; our employees, in an inclusive, open &amp; responsible manner, based on the need to eliminate discrimination, promote equality &amp; protect human rights of staff</p> <p><b>Organisational Development</b> An innovative, adaptive &amp; responsive organisation</p> <p><b>Human Resources Management</b> Value &amp; develop our staff</p>	<p><b>Deliver on the objectives in the RSES</b></p> <p><b>EU programmes &amp; projects</b> Harness the potential &amp; opportunities for the Region</p> <p><b>Research and Regional Data</b></p>

### Progress 2020-2021

16 statutory meetings of the Southern Regional Assembly <sup>1</sup>	83% average attendance at statutory Assembly Meetings 2020-21
RSES for the Southern Region adopted	2 Southern Regional Assembly annual reports published
19 submissions to local authority draft city & county development plan processes in the Southern Region (2021-22)	19 submissions to other local, regional, national and European public consultations (2021-22)
€230.1m declared by beneficiaries to the ERDF S&E Regional Programme 2014-20	€10.3m in EU project claims by Irish partners audited by First Level Control
23 cross-border Interreg projects approved by the Ireland Wales Programme 2014-20	52 transnational Interreg projects approved by Interreg North-West Europe 2014-20 with Irish partners
6 interregional Interreg Europe projects with Southern Regional Assembly partner participation	6 Regional Action Plans published through Assembly Interreg Europe projects
5 meetings of the Southern Region ETC Project	PMDS implemented

<sup>1</sup> Reduced number of statutory Assembly meetings in 2020 & 2021 due to COVID-19. Six non-statutory briefings also took place in 2020 to keep Members updated on Assembly work.

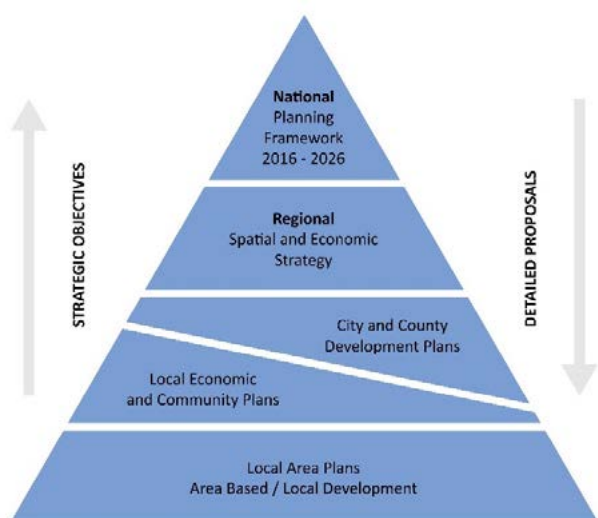
## 5. REGIONAL PLANNING & RSES

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

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

### Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy for the Southern Region

The Southern Region faces an era of great changes, challenges, and opportunities. Over the next 20 years, our population will grow by nearly 400,000, our age profile and our family structures will transform. We face rapid global change, technological developments, and the dramatic impact of climate change.



The RSES is a 12-year strategic regional development framework to guide this change. It establishes a broad framework for the way our society, environment, economy, and the use of land should evolve. It includes Metropolitan Area Strategic Plans (MASPs) for Cork, Limerick-Shannon & Waterford, and strategies for our Key Towns, towns, villages, and rural areas.

The RSES aims to support the delivery of the programme for change set out in Project Ireland 2040, the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the National Development Plan 2018-27 (NDP). As the regional tier of the national planning process, it will ensure coordination between the CCDP and LECP of the 10 local authorities in the Region. While informed by national, EU and international policies, the RSES is driven at local level by Elected Members, local authorities, stakeholders, community groups and individual citizens who have shaped this shared strategy.

### Monitoring & Reporting

Following the adoption of the RSES, each of the Region's local authorities and the public bodies prescribed in the legislation is required to prepare and submit a report to the Assembly every two years on their progress in supporting objectives of the Strategy, relevant to that body.

Every two years, the Assembly will prepare a monitoring report on the progress in securing the objectives of the RSES, including the specific actions and outcomes within the responsibility of the prescribed public bodies. The Assembly will submit its monitoring report to the National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC) which may make recommendations to the Minister in relation to necessary measures to further support the implementation of the RSES.

### The RSES in the Context of the NPF - Implementation

The RSES is a key element of the delivery of the programme for change in Project Ireland 2040, the NPF and the NDP 2018-27. It sets ambitious targets for growth across the Region, supporting the NPF ambition for transformational change with a 50:50 split of growth between the three regions – the Eastern and Midland, the Southern, and the Northern and Western.

This impacts each local authority area, including projected additional population of 380,000 by 2040 increasing the Region's population to almost two million with an additional 225,000 people in employment (880,000 in total). A dual track strategy is pursued that builds on our Metropolitan Areas - Cork, Limerick-Shannon, and Waterford - as significantly scaled economic drivers and supports for the Region (and each constituent local



authority) as a strong network of Key Towns, Towns, villages, and rural areas. The RSES encompasses spatial, economic, social, communication, transport and environmental issues focusing on compact growth, placemaking, responding to the challenge of climate change and resilience.

The achievement of transformative change will be challenging, and it will need significant and timely infrastructural investment and a step change in working arrangements amongst the parties involved, particularly public bodies and local authorities. Effective implementation structures that result in the timely delivery of key enablers and the delivery of transformative change will be necessary.

As a statutory document, there is also a regulatory requirement to the implementation of the RSES. It is underpinned by legislation and democratically mandated by the Assembly Members following extensive, open engagement and collaboration with citizens, communities, key stakeholders, government, and public bodies.

Local authorities had a key and direct input to the development of the RSES. The Planning Acts places obligations on the regional assemblies, local authorities and other stakeholders for implementation and monitoring of the RSES.



The RSES has 301 objectives: 229 Regional Policy Objectives (RPOs) together with specific objectives for the MASPs: 22 for Cork, 23 for Limerick-Shannon and

27 for Waterford. These objectives have differing targets and involve specific actions to be taken by stakeholders - Regional, Instructive and Supportive.

The Regional Actions require direct action by the Regional Assembly.

The Instructive Actions require statutory application by other groups e.g., ensuring the Core Strategy of Development Plans accord with the RSES. Finally, the Supportive Actions involve support for initiatives undertaken by other agencies. Combined they provide a comprehensive mechanism for implementation.

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

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

### Key Enablers: what will success for the RSES look like?

- Taking the rights steps towards more sustainable settlement patterns, travel, energy and bioeconomy to lead on Climate Action in the states transition to a Low Carbon Society;
- Delivering ambitious and sustainable growth targets for our cities and Metropolitan Areas (50% plus) – Cork, Limerick & Waterford;
- Developing and consolidating our Key Towns, Kilkenny City, Tralee, Carlow, Ennis, Wexford, Killarney, Mallow, Clonakilty, Newcastle West, Thurles, Clonmel, Nenagh, Dungarvan, and Gorey;
- Developing the Cork Docklands;
- Regeneration of Limerick-Shannon, including the Limerick Northern Distributor Route/ Smart Travel Corridor;
- Achieving a balanced 'concentric city' model north and south of the river in Waterford with development of the North Quays and adjoining lands in Co. Kilkenny;
- Creating an inclusive and Learning Region, building on our higher education institutions, incl. establishing the new technological universities of MTU and TUSE, a new Learning Region Network and developing a Smart Region;
- Positioning the Southern Region as Ireland's International Gateway through our seaports and airports;
- Making the most of Cork & Waterford Harbours & the Shannon Estuary: our natural maritime assets;

- Improving and protecting the quality of the environment and our rich heritage;
- Sustainably developing our tourism and recreational potential along the Wild Atlantic Way, into Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, through Ireland's Ancient East, and along the Blueways and Greenways;
- Revitalising our urban areas and spaces through creative and regenerative place-making, to deliver on Compact Growth and Housing Need, and provide new vitality for City and Town Centres;
- Revitalising Rural Areas through readapting our small towns and villages and increasing collaboration between networks of settlements to seek higher value, diversified jobs for a higher quality of life;
- Connecting our Region: enhanced infrastructure North-South and East Coast-West Coast, connecting to the Atlantic Economic Corridor & developing extended Eastern Economic Corridor to Rosslare Europort;
- Creating Greenest & most Liveable Metropolitan Areas for diverse communities, culture & enterprise;
- Investing in Public Services to tackle legacies, support planned population and employment growth, providing education, health, transport, community and social services and infrastructure.

*Within a year of the making of the RSES the SRA will establish robust implementation mechanisms, plan and structures, including cross sectoral stakeholder and cross boundary local authority steering group committees, to ensure the delivery of the RSES and the MASP's 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.*

A review of implementation mechanisms was undertaken in consultation with Local Authorities Chief Executives, Government Departments, and stakeholders and a roadmap for Implementation produced. The proposed Implementation structure was agreed by the Assembly at their meeting of 22 January 2021 and included 32 Implementation Actions as follows:

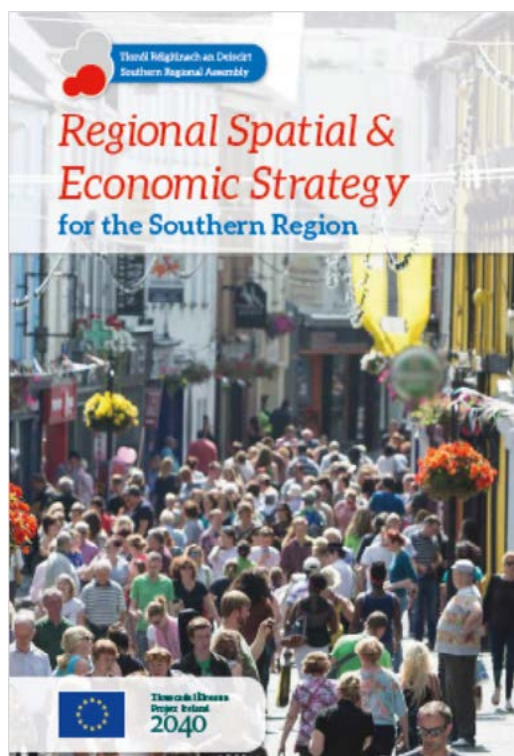
1. Agree with Assembly proposed Implementation Structures and Establish RSES Delivery Board Structures - this has been agreed and work to set up the delivery board is in progress.
2. Establish MASP Structures: In progress in the context of proposed City Development Boards.
3. Establish and Agree Regional Indicators & Monitoring: In development to launch Q2 2022.
4. Scope Collaboration between Metropolitan Areas (Cork, Limerick-Shannon, Waterford, Galway) in progress.

**Actions 5-15 Development Plan Process:** Ensure the RSES Programme for Change is Incorporated in Development Plan Process, Engagement with Local Authorities Development Plan Process, S27 Submissions and track Development Plan Content. Ongoing engagement with local authorities including submissions made to the following Draft Consultation processes in 2021:

- Cork County Council Development Plan
- Carlow County Council Development Plan
- Cork City Development Plan
- Waterford City and County Development Plan
- Limerick City and County Development Plan
- Tipperary Development Plan
- Submission on the Material Amendments for Kilkenny County Development Plan (adopted Sept 2021).

**Actions 16-17 Learning Region:** Develop A Learning Region Action Plan; establish Waterford as a Learning City. Draft completed for 2022.

## Activities, Progress and Milestones in 2021



The priority for 2021 was the development of implementation structures and the achievement of RPO 226:



The RSES identifies that expanding the Learning Cities initiatives in Limerick and Cork to develop a Learning Region will play a significant role in promoting social inclusion, a sustainable society and developing our skills and talent proposition. There is a specific objective to establish Waterford as a UNESCO Learning City. 'The Regional Assembly embraced a bottom-up approach to ascertain how the policy position of the RSES to enhance skills, lifelong learning and promote social inclusion can be best implemented. The provision of both data analysis and stakeholder engagement provides a strong basis for the recommendations. This work aligns strongly with the regional work on Smart Specialisation bringing together key stakeholders with the view of improving Lifelong Learning rates in the Southern Region. A paper entitled 'Towards a Learning Region' will be brought to members in Q2, 2022 to indicate the next steps.

**Action 18 Promotion of RSES/ Region:** Ongoing through the implementation of the SRA Communications Strategy. Key elements included the development of RSES video, hosting a virtual stand at the 2021 International Transport Forum, world's largest gathering of transport ministers the creation of suite of video content for webinars & virtual events, publication of Standalone versions of the MASPs.

**Actions 19-21 Development of a framework/toolkit to support a regional approach for Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) in the Southern Region, Smart Region definition and framework to facilitate Smart Cities Driving a Smart Region and Develop Smart Region Action Plan (following completion of task 19 & 20)**

The SRA in partnership with the EU Interreg Europe Cohes3ion project tendered for External Experts to advance Tasks 19 & 20.

- SRA worked with external experts Bable Consultancy on the Development of a framework/toolkit to support a regional approach for Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) in the Southern Region. The report is completed and published on the SRA website. Work on disseminating the findings and implementation with regional stakeholders will continue throughout 2022. Findings from the report informed the submission to the Dept. of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science consultation for the Research & Innovation Strategy and to the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment for the S3 consultation.

- SRA are working with Maynooth University (MU) in finalising a definition for a Smart Southern Region and framework to facilitate Smart Cities Driving a Smart Region. There was extensive consultation on this work with a wide range of stakeholders including dedicated interviews with Local Authority representatives inclusive of Cllrs. This work is due to be finalised in early 2022 with the publication of a suite of reports. The SRA are also working with MU on developing a Smart Southern Region mapping tool to capture all smart assets and projects across the region. The findings of the reports and Smart mapping Tool will be presented to the members of the Assembly and shared widely at a dedicated dissemination event in 2022.

For more detailed information on these activities please see Cohes3ion in the EU Projects section 8.

**Actions 22-24 - Establish Scope and remit of Regional Freight Strategy, Ports and Harbour Strategy and Airport Strategy for the Southern Region:** These strategies, while separate reports, are interlinked under RSES Strategy Statements for Enhanced Regional Accessibility, High Quality International Connectivity, Sustainable Mobility, and a Strong Economy. Project Charters for each of these strategies, setting out their aims and objectives, were prepared and circulated to Central Government Departments over Q2 and Q3 2021. A series of consultations were undertaken with the Department of Transport for guidance on the aims and objectives of each, to ensure their process and recommendations assist preparation of strengthened national policy in these sectors from the perspective of the Region. Aided by preparation work in 2021, drafting of the strategies will commence over Q1-Q2 2022 following a programme of stakeholder identification and consultations.

**Action 25 Developing Blue Green Infrastructure (BGI) and Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) for Placemaking Interreg Europe Blue Green Cities Project - Establishment of Stakeholder Forum**

The Assembly is the Irish partner on the Interreg Europe Blue Green City project, which started in 2019 with a total budget of over €1,34m. Blue and Green Infrastructure (BGI) and Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) are a key component of making attractive areas. Placemaking, which can be enhanced through BGI and NBS, is a key component for enterprise development and a significant policy focus for NPF and the RSES. BGI and NBS will only be beneficial if we actively plan, coordinate, and collaborate to ensure

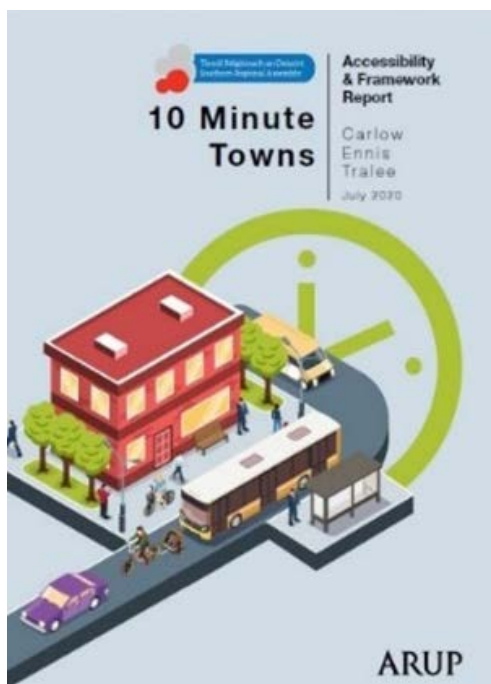
that they are utilised sustainably. The Assembly is working with a wide range of stakeholders to ensure this is achieved. Irish Water sees this collaboration as a way of relieving constraints on combined drainage networks for urban areas and regard Sustainable Drainage Systems as an effective way to achieve this. The motivation of local authorities is wide ranging but broadly include health and wellbeing, placemaking, biodiversity, water quality. See Section 8 for more information.

**Actions 26, 27 & 29 Scope remit of Regional Renewable Energy Strategy (inclusive of the bioeconomy) & Regional Decarbonisation Plan:**

Project Charter developed Identify the scope and role of the Regional Landscape Strategy for the Region. These action under review in the context of the Climate Action Plan published in 2021.

**Action 28 Co-ordination of Climate Action with Climate Action Regional Offices (CARO):** ongoing.

**Action 30 Implementation of Sustainable Mobility and 10 Minute Cities and Towns:** RPO 176 promotes the implementation of the 10 Minute City and Town Concept which seeks to create urban neighbourhoods with high levels of walking and cycling permeability to access public transport, services, and amenities.



Following the preparation and publication of the 10 Minute Towns Accessibility and Framework Report in 2020 in association with the Interreg Europe MATCH-UP Project

and ARUP, the SRA's EU Projects and Regional Planning divisions co-ordinated to prepare an implementation plan for Sustainable Mobility in the Southern Region. The implementation plan identifies RSES implementation actions to progress low carbon transport, modal change and public transport and active travel infrastructure delivery across our cities, towns, and rural areas. A working group was convened by the SRA over Q2 and Q3 2021 comprised of the Department of Transport (DoT), National Transport Authority (NTA), Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) and the Office of Planning Regulator (OPR) to agree this implementation plan and progress actions. Seeking uptake of the 10 Minute City and Towns Framework, support for the preparation and implementation of Metropolitan Transport Strategies and Local Transport Plans and the need to achieve effective land use and transport planning at local level by using the NTA's Area Based Transport Assessment Guidelines by Local Authorities (in accordance with RPOs 151 Integration of Land Use and Transport and RPO 157 Local Transport Plans) is a key focus of the working group.

A key initiative agreed by the working group was for the SRA to host a Regional Sustainable Mobility Webinar for Local Authorities and Transport Stakeholders in the Southern Region in conjunction with the DoT, NTA, TII and OPR, followed by a series of sub-regional seminars. This event aims to provide a key communication and learning opportunity for Local Authorities on strengthened central government policies, frameworks, funding streams and toolkits and regional initiatives in support of local actions for sustainable mobility and lower carbon transport.

Preparation for this event was planned by the EU Projects and Regional Planning Teams in agreement with the working group during Q4 2021 with the aim of linking RSES implementation actions, the new National Sustainable Mobility Policy, new National Transport Demand Management Framework, updates on developing the National Investment Framework for Transport in Ireland and using ABTA Guidelines for preparing Local Transport Plans. The webinar was scheduled for January 31st, 2022, with pre-planning, stakeholder invitations and communication for the event progressed in Q4 2021.

**Action 31 Support the development of the Eastern Corridor:** ongoing.

**Action 32 Improve Capacity Building through developing bidding capacity:** ongoing.



## Engagement with Government Departments/Others

Submissions 2021:

- Draft National Water Resources Plan
- National Resilience and Recovery Plan
- National Investment Framework for Transport in Ireland.
- EirGrid: Shaping our electricity future
- Dep of Transport's Draft 10 Year National Haulage Strategy
- National Research and Innovation Strategy 2021 -2027
- Draft Development Plan Guidelines for Planning Authorities
- Enterprise Ireland
- Irish Academy of Engineers

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

- Project Ireland 2040 board.
- National Climate Change Adaptation Forum.
- National Strategic Environmental Assessment Forum.
- Irish Water National Water Resource Plan and Regional Water Resource Plans
- Regional Enterprise Plans; Steering Group participation for SW, MW, SE Regional Enterprise Plans.
- Regional Skills Forum (SW, MW, SE).
- Midlands Regional Transition Team (MRTT).

- Town Centre First.
- Steering group- coastal change management strategy
- LECP Advisory Group.
- Planning for Climate Change Steering Group.
- Atlantic Economic Corridor.
- Consultation and coordination with DoT, TII and NTA for the implementation of the RSES Transport Strategy including preparation and implementation of Metropolitan Transport Strategies (CMATS, LSMATS and WMATS) and Local Transport Plans.
- All Island Strategic Rail Review -DoT
- National Rail Freight Strategy review with Iarnród Éireann.
- National Marine Planning Framework –consultation with DHLGH Marine Planning Policy division.
- Engagement, research and training through OPR Forum.
  - Academic research with UCD (under the Irish Research Council Enterprise Partnership Scheme) on *Achieving Regional Equality – Urban Rural Dynamics in Irelands Southern Region* EU-Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) Policy
  - International Transport Forum (ITF)
- Irish Planning Institute (IPI) Marine Planning Committee.
- Interreg Europe Match Up Project - 10 Minute Town Framework Report

## 6. ERDF REGIONAL OPERATIONAL PROGRAMMES

The Southern Regional Assembly is the Managing Authority for the ERDF Southern & Eastern Regional Programme 2014-20 and the Southern, Eastern & Midland Regional Programme 2021-27. The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) co-funds activities aimed at strengthening economic and social cohesion across the EU by correcting imbalances between its regions.

### ERDF Southern, Eastern & Midland (SEM) Regional Programme 2021-27

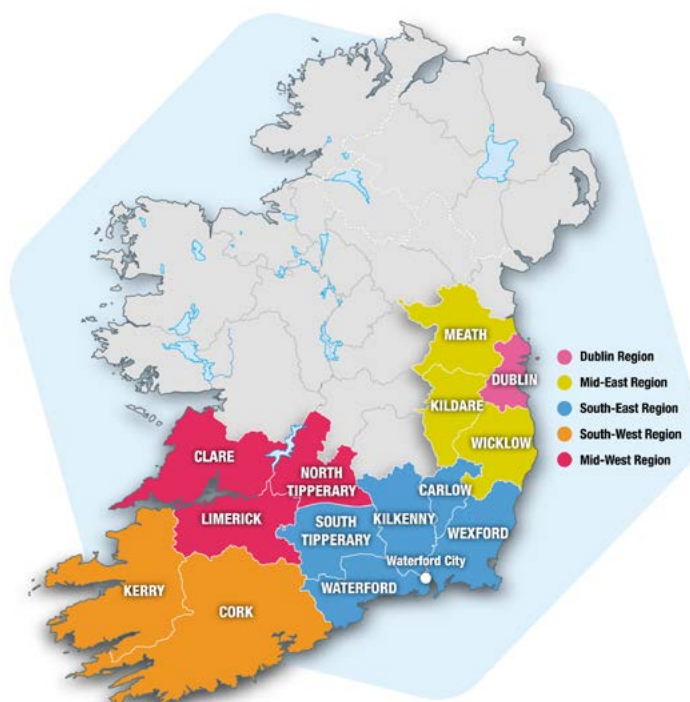
The new ERDF SEM Regional Programme 2021-27 is an approximately €660 million package of ERDF and national funding for the Southern, and the Eastern & Midland regions. The Regional Assembly continued development work on the new Regional Programme during 2021 with key stakeholders at local, regional, national and European levels.

The new Programme will support balanced regional development by co-funding investment under EU policy objectives of a more competitive and smarter Europe (PO1), a greener, low-carbon transitioning towards a net zero carbon economy and resilient Europe (PO2), and a Europe closer to citizens by fostering sustainable and integrated development (PO5).

The SEM Regional Programme will also align with and deliver national and regional objectives under Project Ireland 2040: The National Planning Framework and the Regional Spatial & Economic Strategies for the Southern Region and the Eastern & Midland Region.

### ERDF Southern & Eastern (S&E) Regional Programme 2014-20

The Southern & Eastern (S&E) Regional Programme 2014-20 is a €620.1 million package from the ERDF and national funding which supports activities in the S&E region of Ireland. The Programme co-finances activities under six priority areas to improve quality of life and contribute to Ireland's Europe 2020 targets for smart,



sustainable, and inclusive growth, focusing on specific growth opportunities and sectors identified in Ireland's smart specialisation strategy to support the creation of new quality jobs, boost innovation, increase licenses granted and help to grow the local economies in the region. Beneficiaries include public sector, academic and private sector across the S&E region.

#### Programme Priorities:

- Strengthening Research, Technology, Development & Innovation
- SME Competitiveness
- Low Carbon Economy
- Coronavirus Reponse
- Sustainable Urban Development
- Technical Assistance (programme management supports)

## Programme Progress to 2021

**€310.06 million**

Total Programme Funding - ERDF

**€436.9 million**

Total Expenditure Selected - ERDF

**€394.8 million**

Total Eligible Costs Declared - ERDF

### Strengthening RTDI

Increasing the level of research with company engagement in the S&E region by fostering applied research and increasing the number of companies undertaking industry R&D

**4**

world class research centres supported

**653**

new researchers employed in supported research centres

**870**

industry partners engaging with supported research centres

**97**

Commercialisation fund awards

### Strengthening Research, Technology, Development & Innovation is delivered by four schemes.

<b>SFI Research Centres</b> Delivered by Science Foundation Ireland	Supporting development of world-leading, large-scale research centres to facilitate collaboration between research & industry to develop new technology for commercialisation, attract international research capital & increase researchers employed in industry.
<b>Spokes Programme</b> Delivered by Science Foundation Ireland	Promoting further development of SFI Research Centres to incorporate new research areas, industry, academic collaborators aligned to Ireland's Research Prioritise Exercise.
<b>Commercialisation Fund</b> Delivered by Enterprise Ireland	Supporting science & engineering researchers in third level institutions and research organisations in applied research projects to generate outputs to benefit the Irish economy.
<b>Innovation Partnership Programme</b> Delivered by Enterprise Ireland	Encouraging Irish-based companies to work with Irish research institutes for mutually beneficial cooperation, access expertise/ resources to develop new/ improved products, processes, services & generate new knowledge/expertise.

### SME Competitiveness

Increasing employment levels in micro-enterprises and SMEs in the S&E region by supporting business start-ups, expansion and higher innovation levels in enterprises.

**55,358**

micro-enterprises receiving support

**1,024**

new jobs created in supported micro-enterprises

**54,459**

micro-enterprises participating in training

### SME Competitiveness is delivered by the Micro-enterprise Support Scheme

Increasing the rate of business start-up/ expansion, and enhancing management capability, competitiveness, innovation, technological adaptation, and export-orientation of micro-enterprises with supports such as provision of business information, advisory services, capacity building, mentoring and financial supports. Delivered by Enterprise Ireland via 18 Local Enterprise Offices in the S&E region.



Photo courtesy of Enterprise Ireland.



## Low Carbon Economy

Contributing to Ireland's commitment in relation to its Europe 2020 carbon reduction targets by improving energy efficiency in the housing stock in the S&E region

**12,214**

households with improved energy efficiency

**10,796 tCO<sup>2</sup>eq**

estimated annual decrease in GHG

### Low Carbon Economy is delivered by the Better Energy Warmer Homes Scheme.

Improving the energy efficiency of homes owned by those at risk of energy poverty, improving the health and well-being of those households, and reducing the portion of disposable income required for energy bills.

This scheme has evolved over the lifetime of the programme and now includes deeper retrofits. This deeper retrofit approach is more expensive but yields greater energy efficiency improvements per household.



Delivered by the Department of the Environment, Climate & Communications via Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland.

## Coronavirus Response

Maintaining access to supplies of essential Personal Protective Equipment for the health services in the S&E region affected by the COVID-19 outbreak.

**111,346,031**

items of PPE Purchased

**€207,809,245**

Value of PPE Purchased

### Coronavirus Response is delivered through the Health Support Scheme.

Maintaining access to supplies of essential Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for the health services in the S&E region. Since March 2020, the global pandemic has caused unprecedented demand for PPE, triggering severe disruption to global supply chains.

This presented the Irish health authorities with an extraordinary challenge to traditional PPE supply chains. The Scheme supported the cost of supplying the Irish healthcare system with essential PPE as part of a targeted, State-led investment to facilitate the critical work of minimising the impact of the global pandemic in the S&E region and to safeguard the health and welfare of its people. Scheme Beneficiary: Health Service Executive



Photo courtesy of the Health Service Executive.

## Sustainable Urban Development

Revitalising & regenerating urban environments in designated urban centres as part of integrated urban & support low carbon strategies for sustainable, urban multi-modal mobility & mitigation-relevant adaptation measures.

9

sustainable urban development projects approved

1,652,174

people living in areas with integrated urban development strategies

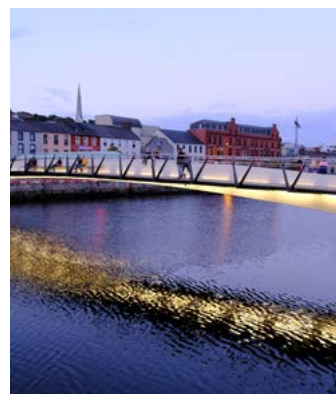
### Sustainable Urban Development is delivered through the Designated Urban Centre Grants Scheme.

Supporting local authority strategies in the S&E region to tackle social, economic, environmental, climate and demographic challenges affecting urban centres.

Delivered by the Southern Regional Assembly.

### Sustainable Urban Development Projects 2014-20

Waterford	€4m ERDF	Public realm works, incl. Apple Market
Cork	€5m ERDF	Mary Eimes Bridge Marina Park
Dublin	€7m ERDF	Swords castle, Cultural & Civic Dodder Valley Greenway Dun Laoghaire Baths Liffy Street Area Public Realm
Limerick-Shannon	€4.5m ERDF	Limerick's O'Connell Street Shannon Town Park
Wexford	€1m ERDF	Crescent Quay Redevelopment
Ennis	€1m ERDF	Ennis Library
Mallow	€1m ERDF	Mallow Bridge Pedestrian Extension
Tralee	€1.5m ERDF	Island of Geese
Kilkenny	€1m ERDF	Redevelopment of Abbey Quarter



Top (l-r): Kilkenny River Gardens, Waterford City's Apple Market, Dodder Greenway in South Dublin, Mary Elmes Bridge in Cork City

Bottom (l-r): Crescent Quay Wexford Town, Shannor Town Park

# Programme Communications 2021

Information and Communications activities are delivered against the multi-annual communications strategy, which was adopted by the Monitoring Committee and complies with EU regulations and national eligibility guidelines. The communications plan 2021 was developed and delivered within pandemic restrictions, with much of it taking place online.

## Information & Communications Compliance Supports

The MA publishes a searchable and downloadable list of the operations funded by the Programme on the Assembly website. The list was updated twice in 2021. Work also continued in 2020 to support Programme beneficiaries to comply with communications requirements under the EU Regulations national guidelines.



## National ESIF & INFORM Communicators Networks

The MA continued to collaborate with other EU funds in Ireland through the national ESIF network which consists of representatives from both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. The MA also participates in the European Commission's INFORM network to communicate with, and learn from, other programmes across the regions of Europe – in particular, activities supporting the Europe-wide #euinmyregion campaign.

## Regional Programme in the Media

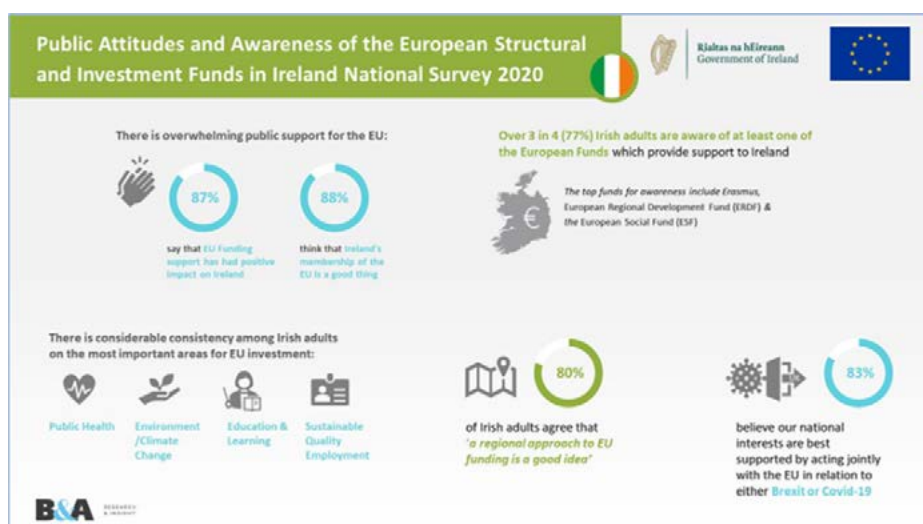
The MA issued regular press releases and advertorials in local, regional and national print media and on local radio in 2020 to highlight the work of the Programme, including connecting these stories with other EU projects and programmes, and local, regional and national policies. Key events included activity around International Women's Day in March, Europe Day in May, and at Christmas. Other media activity included joint pieces with other EU funds in national and sectoral publications.

## Europe Day 2021

The MA collaborated with other EU funds from across the island of Ireland to highlight the benefits of EU funding in communities with a 4 page supplement in the Sunday Independent on Europe Day, 9th May 2021. This activity was bolstered by advertorials in ten local papers and interviews and advertisements in local radio stations across the region.

## Public Awareness & Attitudes Survey

A 2020 collaboration between ERDF, ESF and EMFF, the survey - Public Awareness & Attitudes of the European Structural & Investment Funds in Ireland was published in 2021. It provided positive results on awareness of ERDF and guidance on where to focus communications activities for the 2021-27 funding period.





## EU in my Region Window Exhibition

The MA was invited to submit projects to a window exhibition at Central Library, Waterford City. The exhibition detailed 10 stories EU projects in the region.



Left: Sinead O'Higgins, Europe Direct Office Waterford & Siobhan Rudden, Southern Regional Assembly. Right: Cathaoirleach Cllr. Pip Breen and Dave Hennessy, Assistant Director, Southern Regional Assembly

Stories include a Citizen's Dialogue on Social Enterprise, a Christmas decoration exchange between primary schools through the EU, the building of the Apple Market and the Celtic Routes Ireland Wales project.



## ERDF Regional Programme at Winterval

The MA took the opportunity to highlight in big bold letters the ERDF support that went into the development of the Apple Market in Waterford City at the Winterval Christmas festival.

The MA sponsored music events each weekend at the location which served to inform those enjoying attending the festival how EU membership supports communities and regions.

## The Graduate Quiz

The MA sponsored The Graduate Quiz, an initiative which aims to engage and inspire young people in a fun way to learn about important local, national and European topics by taking part in an online quiz to win educational trips.



Our sponsorship aims to highlight the activities and projects co-financed by the Regional Programme among younger generations. Over 8,000 students took part in the competition and 24 were selected as winners. Two winners were sponsored by the MA, Transition Year students from Tipperary and Wexford, and they will travel to the European Parliament once it is safe to do so.



## 7. EUROPEAN TERRITORIAL COOPERATION PROGRAMMES

European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) is a key goal of EU Cohesion Policy and provides a framework for the implementation of joint actions and policy exchanges between national, regional, and local actors from different Member States.

ETC, which is supported by the ERDF, consists of a variety of Interreg programmes, URBACT, and ESPON. Within Interreg, there are three cooperation streams:

Cross border: Interreg A	Transnational: Interreg B	Interregional
Ireland Wales Programme	Interreg North-West Europe Interreg Northern Periphery & Arctic Interreg Atlantic Area	Interreg Europe

The Southern Regional Assembly is actively involved in the monitoring and delivery of ETC programmes in Ireland.

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

## First Level Control Audit

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

The FLC team verifies and validates expenditure incurred by a project to ensure compliance with the relevant EU, national, regional, institutional and programme rules as well as with the provisions of the subsidy contract and the approved application form. These controls provide a guarantee for the Managing Authority, the Certifying Authority and, most importantly, for the project itself, that costs co-financed under ETC funded Programmes are accounted for and eligible.

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

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

### Activity Update 2021

During 2021, the Assembly's FLC team audited and validated 166 project claims worth €10,165,488.46 to Irish organisations participating as project partners on the five European Territorial Cooperation programmes.

The Director and the Head of FLC attended an online

meeting with the NWE Secretariat on 21st May to discuss the current FLC system, what works well for Ireland what does not, and the future FLC system which will include a sampling methodology and simplified cost options for the new programming period.

The Head of the FLC attended an online workshop "HIT Control package for Controllers" on 20th May to provide feedback on the development of Harmonised Implementation Tools (HITs) for controller documents. (Certificate, Control Report and Checklist for management verifications). The workshop aimed to revise the current set of documents, to streamline them, and adapt them to the new regulatory framework and to promote standard tools among Controllers.

The Head of FLC participated in the ETC Network webinar on 6th October. Several presentations on various topics were delivered to those participants joining online.

During 2021, a new online resource on FLC was created on the Assembly's website with information on audit and programme-specific guidance for project partners. The link to the new section on the website is below. It is anticipated that this resource will grow along with the onset of the new ETC programmes.

#### For further information on First Level Control:

[flc@southernassembly.ie](mailto:flc@southernassembly.ie)

**Website:** [www.southernassembly.ie/first-level-control](http://www.southernassembly.ie/first-level-control)



*The first ECHOES Wales team in person meet up at the beach on Ynys Las in Wales in Summer 2021*

*Right: Dr Ambrose Furey from MTU installed a sonde off the BIM barage in Castletownbere port in November 2021 for the STREAM project.*



# Interreg VA: Cross-border Cooperation

## Ireland-Wales Programme

The Ireland-Wales Programme supports activities that facilitate cross-border co-operation between organisations in Ireland and Wales.



A maritime programme, it connects organisations, businesses, and communities on the west coast of Wales with the eastern and southern coasts of Ireland. The current programme has an overall grant budget of €100m from the ERDF and a co-financing rate of 80%. The Welsh Government manages the programme with partners, the Southern Regional Assembly and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

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

The Programme has three priorities under which projects operate:

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

## Priority 1 - Cross-border Innovation

**Brainwaves** applying a circular economic approach to manage slurry and dirty water by developing technology to remediate these through duckweed to generate economically valuable feed to



*The Brainwaves team examining duckweed species at Mt. Lucas duckweed farm.*

enhance the competitiveness of the beef and dairy industry in the target area.

Partners: University College Cork (Lead) and Aberystwyth University. Funding: €1.16m ERDF

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



Partners: University College Dublin (Lead), Teagasc, Aberystwyth University, Swansea University. Funding: €2.18m ERDF.

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



Partners: University College Cork (Lead), DP Energy Ireland Ltd., Gavin and Doherty Geosolutions, Swansea University, Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum, Menter Môn. Funding: €4.2m ERDF.

**Dwr Uisce** improving the long-term sustainability of the supply of water, treatment and end-use.

Partners: Trinity College Dublin (Lead) and Bangor University. Funding: €4.47m ERDF.



*Prof Aonghus McNabola. Trinity College Dublin, repairing the telemetry system of the Drain Water Heat Recovery pilot model which was installed as part of the Dwr Uisce project in Penrhyn Castle, in Bangor North Wales.*

**CALIN** supporting research & development programmes for SMEs in the life sciences sector.

Partners: Swansea University (Lead), Bangor University, Cardiff University, University College Dublin, Tyndall National Institute and National University of Ireland Galway. Funding: €14.72m ERDF.



*The CALIN Team were delighted to participate in their first face to face event in November 2021 at the IRDG Annual Conference, in Ireland, which brought together companies under the theme of Leading Business Innovation.*

**CATALYST** supporting Irish & Welsh businesses

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

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



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

Partners: Waterford Institute of Technology (Lead), Cardiff University, Milford Haven Port Authority, Bord Iascaigh Mhara. Funding: €1.8m ERDF.



**More than a Club** worked with local professional football clubs in Ireland & Wales to help set up stand-alone social enterprises delivering innovative programmes to address social needs in disadvantaged communities. Project closed in 2019. Partners: Football Association of Ireland (Lead), Vi-Ability. Funding: €1.03m ERDF.



**The Irish Sea Portal** (Pilot) cluster focused on a study of juvenile shellfish larvae and seabed settlement. Project closed in 2019. Partners: Bangor University (Lead), Bord Iascaigh Mhara. Funding: €1.1m ERDF.



**BUCANIER** focused on increasing the innovation capacity within SMEs & social enterprises. Project closed in 2021. Partners:

Pembrokeshire Co. Co. (Lead), Carmarthenshire Co. Co., Wexford Co. Co., Swansea University, Carlow Institute of Technology, Bord Iascaigh Mhara. Funding: €2.35m ERDF.





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

**Acclimatize** investigating impact of climate change on bathing waters and developing technologies, incl. smart, real-time predictive tools, to monitor water quality to protect human health and the marine environment. Partners: University College Dublin (Lead), Aberystwyth University. Funding: €7.4m ERDF.



**CCAT** building resilience (adaptive capacity) in coastal communities directly impacted by climate change, to facilitate marine and climate citizenship and realize the potential of the Irish Sea region by (re) connecting coastal communities with their place, their dynamic coastal systems and changing climate. Partners: University College Dublin (Lead), University College Cork, Fingal Co. Co., Cardiff University, Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum, the Port of Milford Haven. Funding: €1.3m ERDF.



Zixiang Xu, UCD (left) & Uche Nwanu, Fingal County Council, Graduate Planning and Strategic Infrastructure (right) taking part in a workshop to test a VR app developed in collaboration between FCC & UCD as part of CCAT. The app is focused on visualizing future sea level rise and displaying environmental data.

**CHERISH** increasing cross-border knowledge & understanding of the impacts (past, present & near-future) of climate change, storminess & extreme weather events on the cultural heritage of reefs, islands, and headlands of the Irish Sea. Partners: Royal Commission on the Ancient & Historical Monuments of Wales (Lead), Aberystwyth University, Geological Survey of Ireland, Discovery Programme Ireland. Funding: €4.9m ERDF.



Team members of the CHERISH project carrying out a community excavation at Ferriters Cover in Dingle in 2021.

**BlueFish** developed understanding of the connectivity between shellfish, finfish and parasite and pathogen populations in the Irish Sea, and how this connectivity might be altered by predicted climate change effects on the physical, chemical, and biotic environment. Project closed in 2021. Partners: Bangor University (Lead), Swansea University, Aberystwyth University, University College Cork, Marine Institute, Bord Iascaigh Mhara. Funding: €5.3m ERDF.



**ECHOES** addressing the challenges of climate change on the coastal bird habitats of the Irish Sea by promoting climate change understanding and providing monitoring tools to manage and adapt to its potential impacts. Working with Irish & Welsh stakeholders incl. those tasked with managing coastal habitats and bird populations and people who livewithin or enjoy the coastal environment. Partners: Aberystwyth University (Lead), University College Cork, Compass Informatics, British Trust for Ornithology and Geo Smart Decisions. Funding: €2.6m ERDF.





**STREAM** bringing together partners on both sides of the Irish Sea to develop new processes to lower the cost of marine observation and accelerate the process of providing data to key organisations.

Partners: Waterford Institute of Technology (Lead), Swansea University, Munster Technological University. Funding: €4.3m ERDF.



*The first ECHOES Wales team in person meet up at the beach on Ynys Las in Wales in Summer 2021*

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

Partners: Aberystwyth University (Lead), Swansea University, Bangor University, University College Cork, University College Dublin. Funding: €4.88m ERDF.



### Priority 3 - Cultural and Natural Resources and Heritage

**Rediscovering Ancient Connections - The Saints** reviving the ancient links between communities in Pembrokeshire and Wexford using shared heritage of St David and his pupil/ protégé St Aidan. St David is the patron saint of Wales, commemorated in St David's whilst St Aidan is closely associated with Wexford, in particular Ferns. The project aims to motivate both communities to rediscover their shared heritage, mentor each other,

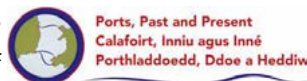
and to share knowledge, experience and skills and use this shared heritage to attract people to the cross-border region, specifically Wexford and Pembrokeshire, who would not otherwise do so.

Partners: Wexford Co. Co., Visit Wexford, Pembrokeshire Co. Co., Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority. Funding: €3.08m ERDF.

#### Ports, Past and Present

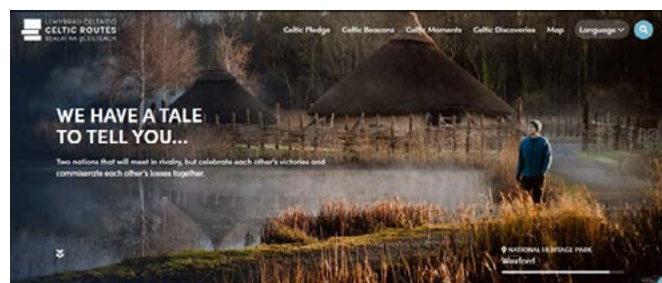
explores the cultures of the port areas of Dublin, Rosslare, Holyhead, Fishguard and Pembroke Dock to bring this heritage to public awareness, both within coastal communities and to increase and enhance visitor numbers and experiences to increase the capacity of coastal communities to utilise their natural and cultural heritage as a driver to economic growth.

Partners: University College Cork (Lead), Wexford Co. Co., Aberystwyth University, University of Wales Trinity St David. Funding: €2.6m ERDF.



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

Partners: Carmarthenshire Co. Co. (Lead), Waterford Co. Co., Wexford Co. Co., Wicklow Co. Co., Ceredigion Co. Co., Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority. Funding: €1.59m ERDF.



*Celtic Routes Television Advert shown on RTE, S4C and various Sky channels during the week of the 4th March 2021 was shown almost 1,000 times, resulting in a gratifying spike in our Google analytics results. By the end of 2021, over 66 million all over the world had seen something on "Celtic Routes".*

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

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



*Fiach Byrne and Linda Lyne of University College Cork discussing local wildlife with children from Scoil an Ghleanna, Iveragh, Co. Kerry as part of a LIVE Operation school visit, 2021.*



**For information about the Programme:**

Samantha Richardson, Development Officer:

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Breda Curran, Development Officer:

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Michael Buckley is responsible for the First Level Control Team: [flc@southernassembly.ie](mailto:flc@southernassembly.ie)



# Interreg VB: Transnational Cooperation

## Interreg North West Europe

The Interreg North-West Europe (NWE) Programme fosters transnational cooperation to make North-West Europe a key economic player and an attractive place to work and live, with high levels of innovation, sustainability, and cohesion.

Interreg NWE supports cooperation across borders in eight North West European countries, Ireland, UK, Belgium, Luxembourg, Switzerland, part of France, Germany, and the Netherlands. Projects must involve partners from at least 3 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.

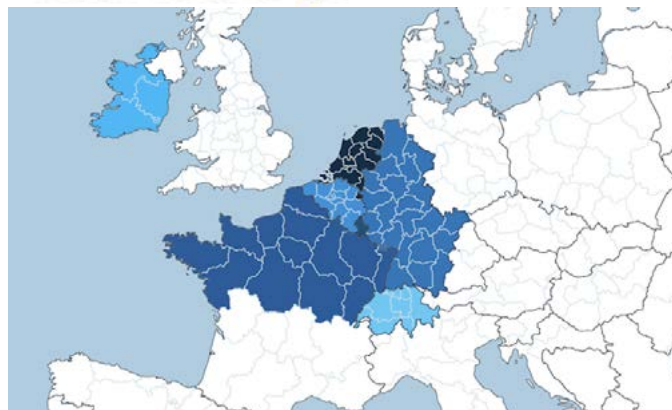
Since 2014, 102 projects were funded worth a total amount of €376 million, of which 60% was EU funded, including 44 projects were funded under the Innovation theme; 35 projects under Low carbon; and 23 projects under Resource and materials efficiency. Projects that had innovative approaches to ensuring the long-term effects of their work were also invited to apply for "capitalisation" funding in 2020 and 2021.

## New Programme Period 2021-27

Interreg North-West Europe formally started the process aimed at designing a new programme (2021-27) at the end of 2019. Delegations from each country involved in the future NWE Programme prepared the



## North-West Europe



Interreg Programme for North-West Europe together for submission to the European Commission.

The draft IP provides an overview of the funding priorities and specific objectives. The document is the outcome of discussions between the seven partner countries and is aligned with the European Cohesion Policy regulations for 2021-27, a SWOT analysis for the future programme was carried out by a consortium of external consultants and input will be taken from the NWE Strategic Environmental Assessment as well as feedback submitted to the NWE Programme via a stakeholder consultation which took place in early 2021. The EC will assess the document and is expected to formally approve the Interreg North-West Europe Programme 2021-27 by mid-2022.

Priority 1 Climate and environment	Priority 2 Energy transition	Priority 3 Circular economy
SO 2.7 Enhancing nature protection, biodiversity and reducing all forms of pollution	SO 2.1 Promoting energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions	SO 2.6 Promoting the transition to a circular and resource efficient economy
SO 2.4 Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention resilience	SO 2.2 Promoting renewable energy	



Priority 4 Innovation and resilience	Priority 5 Inclusive society
<p>SO 1.1</p> <p>Developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies</p>	<p>SO 4.1</p> <p>Enhancing the effectiveness and inclusiveness of labour markets and access to quality employment through developing social infrastructure and promoting social economy</p>
	<p>SO 4.5</p> <p>Ensuring equal access to healthcare through developing infrastructure, including primary care, and promoting the transition from institutional to family and community-based care</p>
	<p>SO 4.6</p> <p>Enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation</p>

### Timeframe and Thematic focus

The estimated timeline for the first call for proposals is outlined below; it is expected that with Commission approval, new projects can be approved by end of 2022 with first project start dates in February 2023. The IP draft document has been available on the programme website since October 2021 and outlines the five priorities for the future NWE Programme to focus on: Climate and Environment, Energy Transition, Circular Economy, Innovation and Resilience, and Inclusive Society. Within each priority area there are specific objectives that will contribute to achieving those priorities.

### Capitalisation Call 2021

The Programme's capitalisation initiative targets existing project partnerships which have a solid ground for additional activities and where continuation of cooperation brings significant added value. Capitalisation initiatives stem from well performing and successful projects, building on existing results (foreseen or unforeseen) that have a strong potential for further uptake and roll-out throughout NWE - and potentially in the rest of the EU. In addition to eight projects with a value of €3.8 million additional ERDF funds which were approved for capitalisation activities in 2020; a further 25 were approved in 2021, bringing the total investment in capitalisation to €33.6 million.

Hydrogen is seen as a key instrument for meeting the EU green deal objectives and GenComm - GENerating energy



secure COMMunities through Smart Renewable Hydrogen - is a project funded to the value of €9.39 million, and which has benefitted from the recent capitalisation funding.

GenComm aims to address the energy sustainability challenges of North-West European communities through the implementation of smart hydrogen-based energy matrixes. The final goal of the project is, through the combination of sources and forms of demand, to lead NWE's road to sustainability while granting hydrogen its position as a commercially viable energy medium for the future.

The project was awarded over €1.1 million in additional funding to capitalise on the important work completed to date, by focusing on the use of locally sourced green hydrogen in the public transport sector. To continue the Green H2 journey, new partners have been taken on board to pilot and reinforce roll-out and uptake of results across North-West Europe whilst additional Europe wide cohesion has been achieved with additional partners joining the project as auxiliary and associate partnership and enhancing the Community Hydrogen Forum (CH2F).

GenComm is developing commodification pathways for green hydrogen, redesigning energy thinking, enabling scaling of projects and informing more ambitious roles for hydrogen in our energy future. Dr Rory Monaghan, GenComm Partner - Lecturer in energy systems engineering at NUI Galway was interviewed by Newstalk radio show in August and delivered a TedX talk in November 2021, focusing on how green hydrogen can be a West of Ireland solution to a global problem.



*Dr Rory Monaghan, GenComm Project Partner - Lecturer in energy systems engineering at NUI Galway delivering his talk on Green Hydrogen as a West of Ireland solution to a global problem.*

The WOW! Project - Wider business Opportunities for raw materials from Wastewater (sewage) - is an international consortium of partners from the UK, France, Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg, Finland, Ireland, and the Netherlands. This innovative group of experts are exploiting the potential of valuable substances contained in sewage that can be used as raw materials for biobased products.

The capitalisation initiative seeks to take two products, PHA and activated carbon derived from cellulose, and move them further towards market readiness. The outputs are focused on the extraction of PHA from industrial wastewater and the production of 3D printed packaging from it, and the use of activated carbon for micropollutant removal. The results will help realise new circular value chains. The results will be new value chains for PHA production using industrial wastewater streams, and for activated carbon from cellulose to be used in micropollutant removal. This extended approach, funded with an additional €659,000 includes Irish partners from Trinity College Dublin.

#### **Partners across the Planet welcome Irish Peatland Restoration Initiative**

The Interreg North-West Europe Project Care-Peat works to restore the carbon storage capacity of different types of peatlands in North-West Europe by developing and testing new techniques and socio-economic strategies for carbon reduction.

NUIG researcher Niall Ó Brolcháin says, "Restoration of



*Care-Peat team at the Peatland Pavilion at COP26, Glasgow, November 2021.  
© Niall Ó Brolcháin*

Peatlands presents an opportunity to reduce GHG emissions by up to 5% globally, with a considerably greater potential impact in Ireland. This could be of great benefit to rural Ireland and the farming community if handled correctly. In fact, this is probably the single biggest opportunity Ireland must reduce emissions quickly, as peatland covers about one fifth of the land area. This is hugely significant for Ireland as land which was once seen as bogland is now being recognised as a major national asset. Many people are very surprised to hear that a hectare of peatland typically holds four times as much carbon as a hectare of tropical rain forest. Peatland will become more and more important and indeed more and more valuable as we head towards 2050 and our net zero carbon target."

The project is very timely as 2021 was the year when we saw the launches of a new Climate Action Bill for Ireland, against a policy background of the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 and EU Green Deal as well as the COP26 which highlighted the importance of climate change and biodiversity loss globally.

#### **Further Information on Interreg NWE in Ireland**

Sarah Davoren, National Contact Point:  
sdavoren@southernassembly.ie  
First Level Control: flc@southernassembly.ie  
Website: [www.nweurope.eu](http://www.nweurope.eu)

## Interreg Atlantic Area

Atlantic Area promotes transnational cooperation between 36 Atlantic regions of five European countries in Ireland, western UK, Portugal and designated coastal regions of Spain and France. With a total budget of €185m, the Programme's overall objective is to implement solutions to answer regional challenges in the fields of innovation, resource efficiency, environment, and protection of cultural assets, to generate a better quality of life in the Atlantic Area territory.

The Programme has four priorities under which projects operate:

1. Stimulating Innovation & Competitiveness
2. Fostering resource efficiency
3. Strengthening the territory's resilience to risks of natural, climate & human origin
4. Enhancing biodiversity & the natural and cultural assets

The Southern Regional Assembly sits on the Programme's Regional Advisory Group and is the designated First Level Controller for payment claims from partners located in the S&E Region.

No new funding was allocated to projects under the 2014-20 Programme during 2021, but a call for project extensions took place and approvals will be announced in 2022.

A task force is preparing the new 2021-27 programme, with representatives of programme Member States (Portugal, Spain, Ireland, France), Managing Authority, Joint Secretariat, and the European Commission. In 2021, the Irish Presidency chaired meetings of the Monitoring



ATLANTIC AREA PROGRAMME 2014-2020

Committee in collaboration with the Managing Authority. The Task Force has been meeting regularly to define thematic priorities and fund allocation. A Public Consultation on the Atlantic Area Programme 2021-27 took place during March 2021.

### For further information

National Contact Point: [info@nwra.ie](mailto:info@nwra.ie)

Website: [www.atlanticarea.eu/](http://www.atlanticarea.eu/)



## Northern Periphery & Arctic

The Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme involves cooperation between nine countries which share several joint challenges and opportunities that can best be overcome and realised by transnational cooperation. The Programme aims to help generate vibrant, competitive, and sustainable communities by harnessing innovation, expanding the capacity for entrepreneurship, and seizing the unique growth initiatives and opportunities of the Northern and Arctic regions in a resource efficient way.

The Programme has four Priorities under which projects operate:

1. Innovation
2. Entrepreneurship
3. Renewables & Energy Efficiency
4. Protecting, developing & promoting natural & cultural heritage

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 S&E region.

The first hybrid NPA annual event took place on 27th October 2021 with 150 participants offering an opportunity to discuss how the changing perception of the periphery in ways of working, living, providing services and decision making in the Northern Periphery & Arctic. The benefits of cooperation across Arctic/ near-Arctic regions also emerged, showing how the exchange of knowledge and expertise between the regions plays a key role in building response capacity and preparedness for the future.

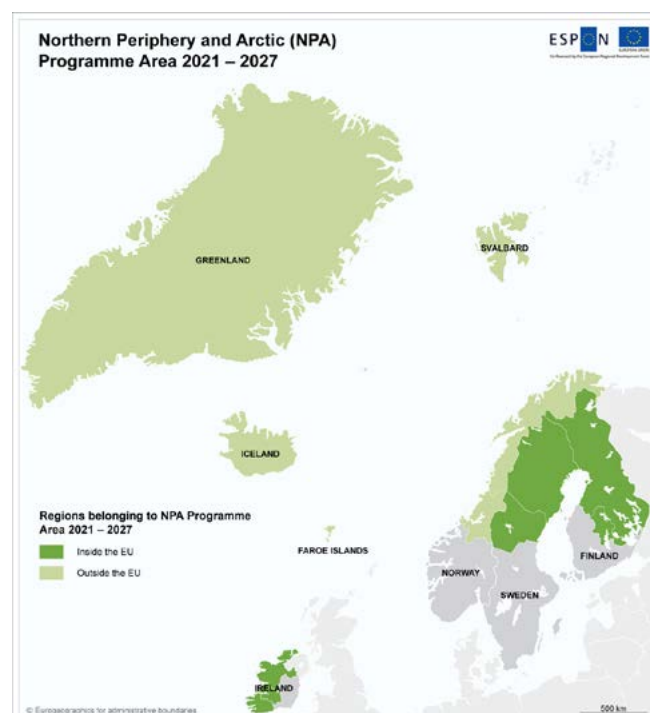
A Bridging Call was launched in August 2021 which saw Irish organisations successfully securing funding for an additional 15 projects worth over €1.2m. The projects have a range of innovative goals, from turning marine waste into an alternative to plastic, to the use of augmented and virtual reality, for the reconstructions and digital restoration of cultural and heritage sites for museums. Bridging projects are preparatory projects funded by the current programme (2014 – 2020), targeting main projects in the future programme.

Interreg



Co-funded by  
the European Union

### Northern Periphery and Arctic



Preparations for the new programme continued under the guidance of the Programme Planning Group, which consisted of national and regional representatives from 7 programme countries and observers from Canada, Russia, NOR, and the Arctic Council's Indigenous Peoples Secretariat. A public consultation was completed early in the year on the draft priorities. The Cooperation Programme document was approved by the Shadow Monitoring Committee 21-27 on 8th June 2021.

#### For further information:

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Website: [www.interreg-npa.eu](http://www.interreg-npa.eu)

# Interreg VC: Interregional Cooperation

## Interreg Europe

Interreg Europe helps regional and local governments across Europe to develop and deliver better policy.

By creating an environment and opportunities for sharing solutions, the Programme aims to ensure that government investment, innovation and implementation efforts all lead to integrated and sustainable impact for people and place. The Programme co-finance projects which allow regional and local public authorities and other players of regional relevance across Europe to exchange practices and ideas on the way public policies work and thereby find solutions to improve their strategies for their own citizens. In addition to regular projects, policy-learning platforms are also co-funded.

The Programme has four Priorities under which projects operate:

1. Research & Innovation
2. SME Competitiveness
3. Low Carbon Economy
4. Environment & Resource Efficiency



The Southern Regional Assembly is a Contact Point for the S&E region and represents the Irish Member State on



the Programme's Monitoring Committee. The Assembly is the designated FLC for all payment claims submitted by partners located in the S&E region.

### 2021-2027 Programme Update

To prepare for the 2021-27 programming period, a programming committee was set up to formally drive the process for taking formal decisions on the shape and format of the new Interreg Europe. The committee comprises delegates from 29 partner states with an observer from the European Commission, the Programme's Managing Authority and Joint Secretariat. The Draft Programme went out for Public Consultation in April 2021 with submissions received helping to shape the final draft which will be submitted to the EU Commission in the first half of 2022. Below is a list of organisations from the Southern Region which are participating in co-funded projects.

Participating Organisation	Projects Participating
Southern Regional Assembly	Blue Green City, COHES3ION, EMPOWER, FIRESOL, MARIE, MATCH-UP
Tipperary County Council	SUPER, SWARE, Rural SMEs
Waterford City and County Council	Local Flavours
Cork City Council	INTENSIFY, Innova Foster, Cult-CreaTE
Cork County Council	Delta Lady, Destination SMEs
University College Cork	Delta Lady
Cork Institute of Technology	SILVER SMEs, ecoRIS3, FOUNDATION
Institute of Technology Tralee	iEER
Department of Communications, Climate Action & Environment	GPP4Growth
Cork Chamber of Commerce	RATIO
Design and Crafts Council of Ireland	CRAFTS CODE

### For further information

Regional Contact Point for Southern & Eastern region: David Kelly, [dkelly@southernassembly.ie](mailto:dkelly@southernassembly.ie)  
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# Other European Territorial Cooperation Programmes

## URBACT III



URBACT III aims to enable cities to work together to develop integrated solutions to common urban challenges, by networking, learning from one another's experiences, drawing lessons and identifying good practices to improve urban policies across the 27 Member States, Norway, and Switzerland.

The programme had a total eligible budget of €96.3 m and is financed through the ERDF. URBACT III has four main objectives:

1. Capacity for Policy Delivery
2. Policy Design
3. Policy Implementation:
4. Building and Sharing Knowledge

The Eastern & Midland Regional Assembly is the National Contact Point for URBACT III. The Southern Regional Assembly is the designated first level control for partners in the S&E region.

In 2021, URBACT approved 13 projects worth approximately €6 million ERDF. Three projects approved with Irish partners are Global Goals for Cities (Trim, Co. Meath), RU:RBAN Second Wave (Carlow town, Co. Carlow), and Playful Paradigm (Cork City).

### For further information

National Contact Point: [urbactireland@emra.ie](mailto:urbactireland@emra.ie)  
First Level Control: [flc@southernassembly.ie](mailto:flc@southernassembly.ie)  
Website: [www.urbact.eu](http://www.urbact.eu)

## ESPON 2020



ESPON 2020 aims to promote and foster a European territorial dimension in development and co-operation by providing evidence, knowledge transfer and policy learning to public authorities and policy actors at all levels.

The Programme's objective is to support the reinforcement of the effectiveness of EU Cohesion Policy and other sectoral policies/ programmes under European Structural Investment Funds, as well as national and regional territorial policies, through the production, dissemination, and promotion of territorial evidence for the 28 EU Members States, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland.

Five specific objectives that guide the implementation of ESPON 2020:

1. Enhanced production of territorial evidence through applied research and analyses,
2. Upgraded knowledge transfer and use of analytical user support,
3. Improved territorial observation and tools for territorial analyses,
4. Wider outreach and uptake of territorial evidence,
5. Leaner & more effective efficient implementation provisions & more proficient programme assistance

The National Institute for Regional & Spatial Analysis at Maynooth University is the Contact Point for the ESPON 2020. The Southern Regional Assembly sits on the Programme Monitoring Committee.

### For further information:

Caroline Creamer is the Contact Point:  
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Website: [www.espon.eu](http://www.espon.eu)



## 8. EU PROJECTS

The Southern Regional Assembly is a project partner on six EU projects, all part-funded through the Interreg Europe Programme by the European Regional Development Fund. Each project addresses a topic relevant to the Southern Region.



### Blue Green City

The Southern Regional Assembly is the Irish partner on Blue Green City. The project started in August 2019 and has a total budget of €1.3m between 9 European partners. It includes partners from France, Croatia, Germany, Hungary, Sweden, UK, Italy, and Romania. The Lead Partner is the Metropolis Nice Côte d'Azur, based in Nice, France.



Blue and Green Infrastructure (BGI) and Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) are a key component of making attractive areas. Placemaking, which can be enhanced through BGI and NBS, is a key component for enterprise development. Placemaking is a significant policy focus for National Planning Framework (NPF) and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Southern Region.

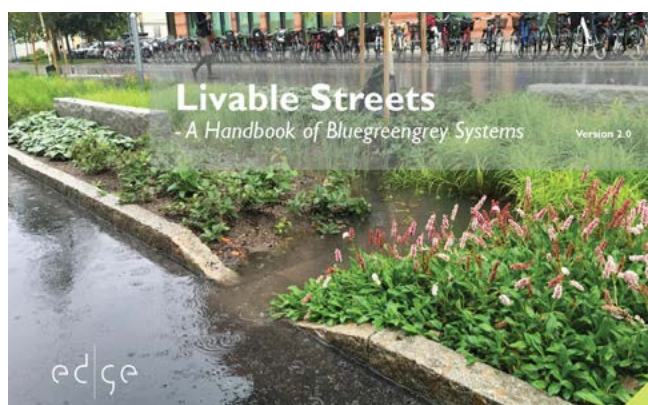
BGI and NBS will only provide us with benefits if we actively plan, coordinate, and collaborate to ensure that they are utilised sustainably. The Southern Regional Assembly is therefore working with a wide range of stakeholders to ensure this utilisation is achieved. For example, Irish Water see this collaboration as a way of relieving constraints on combined drainage networks for urban areas. Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) is regarded by Irish Water as an effective way to achieve this aim. The motivation of local authorities is wide ranging but broadly include (inter alia) health and wellbeing, placemaking, biodiversity, water quality.

In addition, the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) states that BGI and NBS should be a key concept of a local authority's Development Plan, informing actions and strategy around economic development and placemaking.

### International Good Practices

**Växjö in Sweden** is one of the Blue Green City partners. They have developed interesting policy instruments including a Green Structure and they have pursued and achieved a target to be one of Europe's greenest cities since 2007. In 2018, Växjö won the European Green Leaf award.

Växjö have developed **"Livable Streets - A Handbook of Bluegreengrey Systems"**. This handbook was developed to illustrate systems for urban environments where blue, green, and grey functions work together in the same place and space.

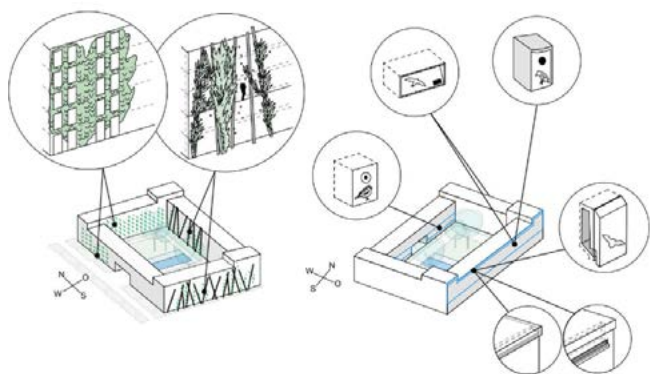


Systems like these manage traffic loads, stormwater flows, pollution, are resilient against climate change and at the same time provide vegetation with generous amounts of underground space. With this method, a small surface area can provide multiple improvements at a lower cost than if the same functions are addressed separately. This is very applicable to the Southern Region and the Southern Regional Assembly aim to use this Good Practice for effective RSES implementation.

### Animal-Aided Design (AAD) in Ingolstadt, Germany

uses a species' life cycle to improve open space planning and conservation. The idea of AAD is to include the presence of animals in the planning process, such that they are an integral part of the design. For AAD, the desired species are chosen at the beginning of a project. The requirements of the target species then not only set framework conditions for the design, but also serve as an inspiration for the design itself. The aim of AAD is to establish a stable population at the project site or contribute to population growth of species with larger habitats. AAD thus allows a combination of good urban design with species conservation.

Selecting target species for AAD at the beginning of the planning process avoids the conflict between the design



Example of AAD in Schumacher Quartier, Berlin.

of urban green spaces and conservation. It avoids this conflict by making the habitat requirements of target species to become an integral part of project design, aligning species conservation and the planning process, without delay to the planning process and without surprises.

The AAD approach recognises that to create green and blue infrastructure, biodiversity needs to be mainstreamed into current planning strategies, to find solutions that benefit both humans and other species at the same development site. This will not only protect the biodiversity present at a planning location, but it will also create new habitats that would otherwise not be there. This will be extremely important and applicable to the Southern Region's Metropolitan Areas and Key Towns in achieving ambitious RSES policy objectives relating to placemaking and Climate Resilience.

### Action Plan

An Action Plan has been created for the project which will be published on the Assembly's website in 2022. The plan aims to address governance issues regarding the implementation of BGI and NBS in our Region. It also aims to monitor the application of these concepts in policy documents across the Region.

### For further information about the Blue Green City:

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 Blue Green City is part-funded by Interreg Europe through the European Regional Development Fund.

## MATCH-UP



MATCH-UP focuses on the optimisation of the places where people change between transport modes. MATCH-UP aims to achieve improvements in the interchange between 4 main types of low-carbon means of transport (walking/cycling; rail transport; public transport; green vehicles).



The partnership consists of four European regions (Southern & Eastern Ireland, County of Northmeath, Germany, Municipality of Funchal, Portugal and Timisoara Municipality, Romania) working together to share experience, solutions, and good practice to develop and deliver better public policy to reduce carbon emissions and support low carbon urban mobility in designated urban centres.

### The Youth Voice: Joining the Conversation on Sustainable Transport in Waterford

The Assembly was delighted to host the *The Youth Voice: Joining the Conversation on Sustainable Transport in Waterford* on 25th February with An Taisce Green Schools and Waterford Institute of Technology - a MATCH-UP mobility café. This event gave a voice and platform to Waterford's young people to explain their experience of sustainable transport, the challenges they face and to how to address them. All presenters were primary, secondary and third level students and they could address their concerns, challenges, ideas and solutions to a panel of policy and decision makers. The panel included the Departments of Transport, Education, the Assembly, Waterford City & County Council, National Transport Authority, Transport Infrastructure Ireland, An Taisce Green Schools and Marc O Cathasigh TD.



This wonderful event had over 100 attendees and covered how primary schools are increasing awareness of sustainable travel, the cycling gender gap in Irish secondary schools, safe school zones and use of system maps to manage complex transport network to address sustainable mobility challenges.

### **MATCH-UP at the International Transport Forum Summit 2021**

The Department of Transport invited the Assembly to host a virtual exhibition stand at the International Transport Forum (ITF) Summit 2021 from 17-28 May - the world's largest gathering of transport ministers and the lead global platform for dialogue on transport policy with over 2,000 delegates from 85 countries. It was a unique opportunity to communicate on a world stage the remarkable Southern Region and highlight the MATCH-UP and the Assembly's ambition to improve regional policies including the RSES.

Through MATCH-UP, the Assembly developed a 10 Minute Cities & Towns framework and methodology to assist the Southern Region's local authorities in developing their Local Transport Plans with an evidence base on securing active travel investment. The Assembly's virtual room hosted transport stakeholders to provide presentations including Cork Transport Mobility Forum, An Taisce Green Schools, Waterford Institute of Technology, Future Mobility Campus Ireland, and the Land Development Agency.

### **Policy Changes Achieved 2021**

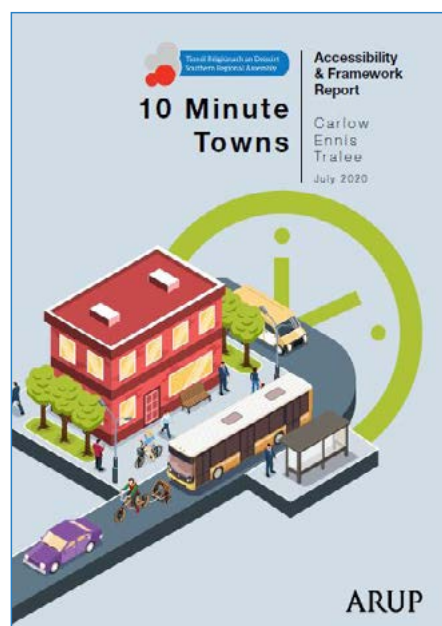
The Assembly MATCH-UP Regional Action Plan sought to improve two policy instruments - the S&E Regional Programme 2014-20, and the RSES.

**Policy Improvement 1:** to design a framework based on the learnings from MATCH-UP to incorporate low carbon

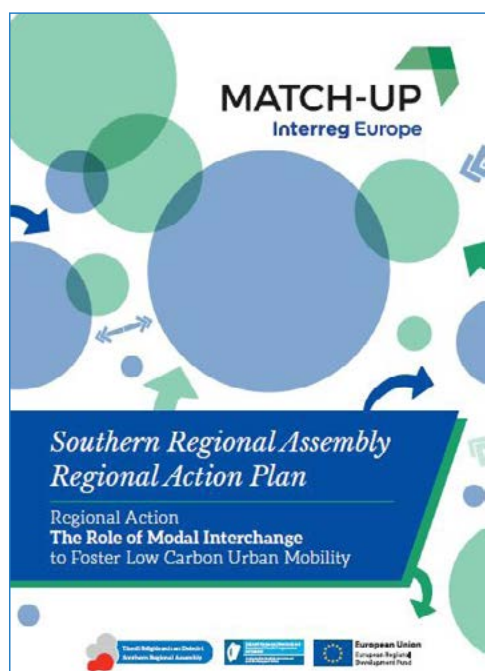
mobility and modal interchange improvements for projects funded under the S&E Regional Programme, presented to, and approved by the Programme's Monitoring Committee on 21st April.

This sustainable transport framework facilitates where possible, incorporating recommendations for low carbon mobility and modal interchange improvements into projects approved but not yet commenced, under the Designated Urban Centres Grant Scheme under the Programme's Priority 5 Sustainable Integrated Urban Development. This directly improved the accessibility, safety of public realm development of Wolfe Tone Square, Temple Bar Square, and Liffey Street in Dublin City which can now be enjoyed by all citizens and tourists to this area.

**Policy Improvement 2:** inspired by the learnings from MATCH-UP to develop a framework and methodology for 10 Minute Cities & Towns as an implementation tool under the RSES, which was presented and approved by the Assembly Director on 26th March.



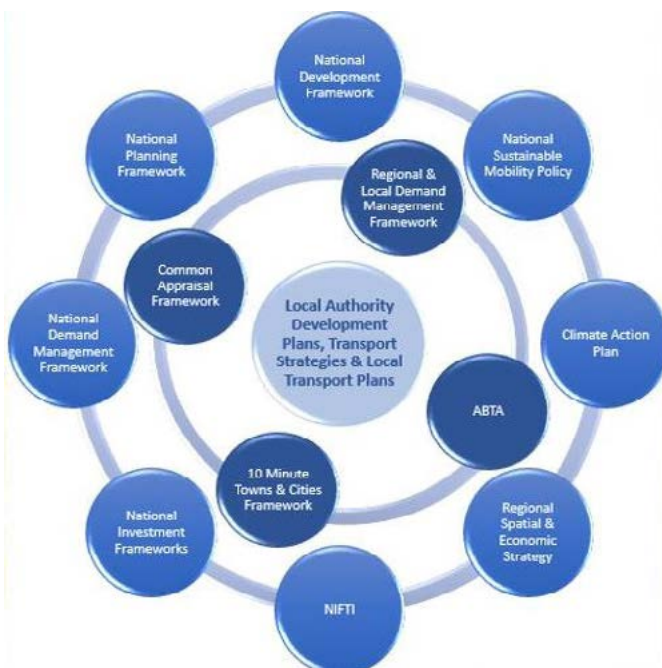
The implementation tool has created a state-of-the-art framework and methodology to ensure consistency across all Local Transport Plans to include priorities for each settlement in terms of improvements to the pedestrian environment, cycle investment, public transport infrastructure and services, and road enhancements. Local authorities will use the framework as an evidence-base to map key towns, identify infrastructure improvements required to support national funding applications for active travel initiatives and assist the Region in improving low carbon urban mobility and encouraging modal shift.





## Next Steps

With increasing levels of air pollution, CO2 emissions and traffic congestion in the EU the development of sustainable multimodal mobility is one of the EU key challenges. As a MATCH-UP partner, the Assembly and its stakeholders will continue improving regional policies with the Department of Transport, Transport Infrastructure Ireland, the National Transport Authority and the Office of the Planning Regulator, including regional sustainable mobility events in 2022 to highlight the need for compact growth, decarbonisation and better-balanced regional development.



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**MATCH-UP is part-funded by Interreg Europe, through the European Regional Development Fund.**

## EMPOWER

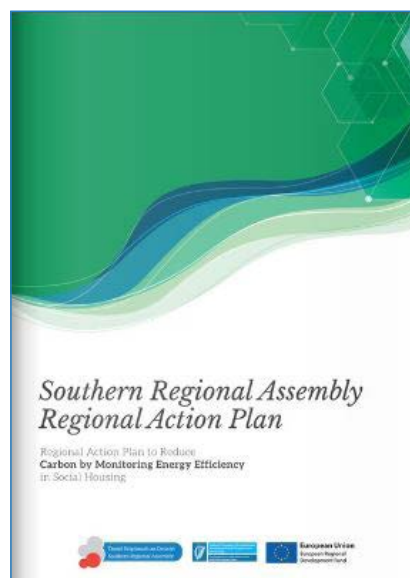
EMPOWER focuses on reducing carbon emissions by dynamically monitoring energy efficiency through energy monitoring and exploring innovative methods of financing energy projects, with an overall objective to develop and deliver better public policy in these areas. The partnership consists of 9 European regions who are working together to share experience, solutions to develop and deliver better public policy to reduce carbon emissions in buildings.



In January 2020, the project moved into Phase 2, implementing our Regional Action Plan which was validated by the Interreg Europe Secretariat in December 2019.

### Policy Improvement Achieved!

The Assembly's EMPOWER Regional Action Plan sought to improve the S&E Regional Programme 2014-20, working with Cork City Council to implement a pilot installing energy monitoring equipment to calculate the exact energy usage of several social housing units before and after a deep retrofit. This will allow local authorities to ensure a real energy efficiency behaviour change of social housing residents is achieved, thereby reducing CO2 emissions, and assisting Ireland in meeting carbon emissions targets.



On 9th September for the first time in Ireland, the cost of energy monitoring equipment was funded by the Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage, Intermediary Body for the S&E Regional Programme's Social Housing Retrofit scheme. This scheme historically only focused on the physical work of retrofitting thermally deficient social housing units. The methodology in Ireland for calculating the energy efficiency of social



housing units after deep retrofitting is by calculating the energy rating of the units using the Building Energy Rating (BER) classification. However, this only provides an indication of energy performance.

Through EMPOWER, the Assembly has improved the governance of the policy instrument by seeking that energy monitoring equipment would be funded under the scheme and then used to calculate the actual energy usage before and after a retrofit of social housing units. By introducing energy monitoring of the units retrofitted the Assembly created for the first time in Ireland a mechanism to quantify the exact energy savings before and after the deep retrofit in the social housing sector and ensure real energy efficiency behaviour change by social housing tenants.

#### EMPOWER 5th Call 2021

Interreg Europe approved 78 projects under the 5th Call and the Assembly was awarded additional funding under EMPOWER starting in September. This allowed the Assembly to extend the work of EMPOWER on energy monitoring and in line with Just Transition to also include a review of good practices for the identification and reduction of energy poverty in the Southern Region. The Assembly was appointed the Lead Partner for energy poverty under EMPOWER.

The EU Energy Poverty Observatory was a European Commission initiative to help Member States foster transformational change in knowledge about the extent of energy poverty in Europe. Its successor, the Energy Poverty Advisory Hub (EPAH), aims to eradicate energy poverty and accelerate the Just Energy Transition of European local government. In November 2021, the Regional Assembly appointed 3 Counties Energy Agency (3CEA) as energy poverty consultants, the only Antenna

Organisation in Ireland which is a member of the EPAH.

#### Energy Poverty Peer Review: 9th December 2021

The Assembly, with 3CEA, was delighted to host the first Energy Poverty Peer Review and invited experts in energy poverty to assist in outlining the definition, context and quantification of energy poverty. In particular, the Assembly was delighted to hear Dr Niall Dunphy from University College Cork an expert on energy poverty outline why it is crucial that energy poverty is addressed as a priority. The Assembly also received submissions and presentations from the owners of 18 good practices that could be replicated in the Southern Region to assist in the identification and/or reduction of energy poverty and the behaviour change initiatives required to support the reduction of energy poverty. As part of this peer review the Assembly requested all applicants to rate these good practices which resulted in narrowing down these good practices to the 10 that were considered most appropriate for replication in the Southern Region.

#### Good Practices

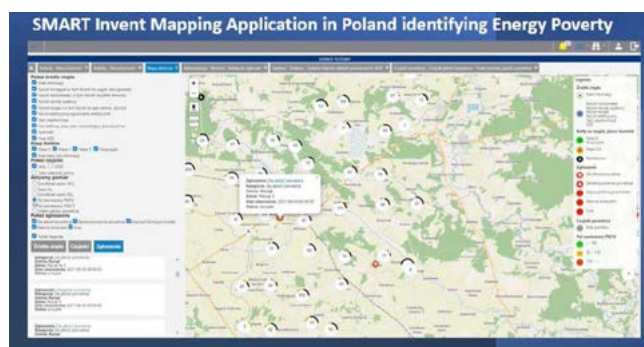
1. **Build Upon 2 (Ireland):** A means of identifying energy poverty in social housing stock for local authorities, currently trialled in 30 European cities including Cork, with the Irish Green Building Council.
2. **Citizens Energy Advice (Slovenia):** Municipality & Energy Agencies advising on energy saving measures/ grants from the EcoFund, supplying up to 100% funding for retrofitting energy poverty households.
3. **Energy Cloud (Ireland):** Partnerships between utilities, Local Authorities, housing associations and charities to divert unused excess renewable energy to energy poverty customers to heat water instead of this energy going to waste as there is currently no efficient storage mechanism.
4. **Living Consciously - Casa SpA (Italy):** Regional authority and energy cooperative funded and built a PV park on public land which supplies energy to social housing tenants. They provide an app and public information systems to raise energy awareness consumption, encourage more conscious consumption and to create a community with engaged citizens contributing to the common good of the region.
5. **A Worthy Winter (Spain):** Replacement of centralised coal boilers with centralised biomass boilers in social housing apartment blocks which is currently operating in 10 European regions.
6. **Act4Eco (Ireland):** Open access learning platform available to all residents in Europe, creating a ladder of behaviour change - translated into 12 languages to date and has over 10,000 registered users.
7. **Energia su Misura (Italy):** One Stop Shop funded by regional authority to identify energy poverty

households through surveys/ interviews, install energy monitoring kits, monitor consumption and provide feedback to support behaviour change resulting in 25% decrease in energy consumption.

8. **RetroKit (Ireland):** Developing digital solutions to create a One Stop Shop Platform to assist in the upscaling of home energy upgrades to reduce energy poverty working closely with Local Authorities and housing associations.
9. **Smart Invent Application (Poland):** IT database that collects information from smart meters and combines it with resident surveys to identify energy poverty across all housing. To date it has been rolled out to 7 Municipalities, 1 City and almost 25,000 buildings.

### Next Steps 2022

The Assembly, with 3CEA, plans to host an Energy Poverty technical workshop in 2022. This is an opportunity to speak to the 10 good practice owners, see live demonstrations and explore how they could be replicated in the Southern Region. In addition, following the findings from the Energy Poverty Technical Workshop, 3CEA will create an energy poverty Good Practice Guide for the Southern Region to be presented to Assembly Members. The long term plan is that by raising awareness of the issue of energy poverty in the Southern Region and providing possible solutions through good practices, it will inspire regional and local authorities, housing associations and other stakeholders to take further action to address energy poverty in the Region.



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**EMPOWER is part-funded by Interreg Europe through the European Regional Development Fund.**

COHES3ION



The Southern Regional Assembly is the Irish partner on COHES3ION, an interregional project that aims at improving the PERFORMANCE and IMPACT of SMART SPECIALISATION STRATEGY (S3) and linked ERDF Regional Programmes in terms of delivery of innovation by Research & Innovation (R&I) actors.

This will be achieved through integration of the regional dimension into S3 governance and policy mix, contributing additionally to regional cohesion in terms of Growth and Jobs. The Assembly is partnered with nine regions in Spain, Italy, Romania, Germany, Sweden, Poland, and Wales, sharing the common challenge of effectively implementing Smart Specialisation at the regional level. COHES3ION is tackling this by identifying regional Smart Priorities, strengthening the regional coordination of innovation delivery and support players. The project started in August 2019, to run for three years with a budget of over €1.87 million.

The Southern Region has its own unique strengths and competitive advantage where priority areas are of more significance to the economy. The integration of a regional dimension into Ireland's S3 will focus the region on recognising and building on its smart priorities through the development of targeted Regional Smart Specialisation objectives. The RSES is a timely opportunity to consider and align S3 strategies at regional level in collaboration with COHES3ION.

A local stakeholder group comprising of key regional innovation players was established to contribute expertise to the project through the provision of good working practices and assist in the implementation of the Regional Action Plan. This group will continue to grow and evolve over the course of the project.

A main project output is the development of a Smart Territorial Map (STM) which performs a diagnostic analysis mapping of regional S3 strategies and its relationship with other regional policies/bodies. This mapping exercise took place in 2020 in consultation with key regional stakeholders and formed the basis for work throughout 2021. Results of the mapping exercise are available to those that are interested.

2021 saw the drafting and approval of the project Regional Action Plan using learnings from good practices presented by project partners. Unfortunately, due to ongoing travel restrictions partners were not able to carry

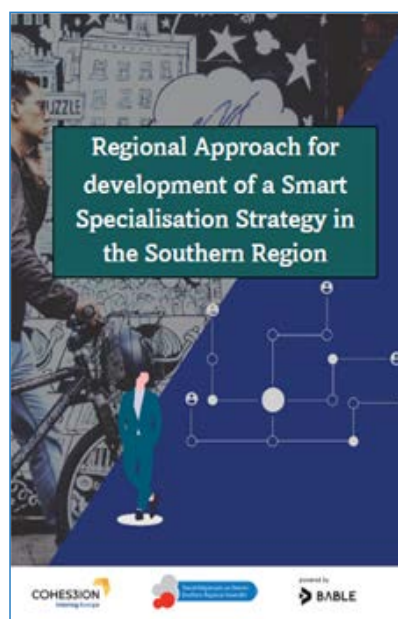


on with learning journeys in-person however work on exchanging ideas continued online.

Key events and work that took place in 2021 include:

### Final project event: 25th March 2021

The Cohes3ion project celebrated the end of Phase-1 with a conference hosted by the Welsh Partner which was well attended and leading experts from across Europe came together to discuss how to make Multi-Level Governance (MLG) work in Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3).



### A Regional Approach to S3 in the Southern Region

The Assembly worked with external experts Bable GMBH to advise on the 'Development of a framework/toolkit to support a regional approach for Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) in the Southern Region' with 2 key objectives:

1. Provide evidence-based recommendations of potential S3 priority areas for the region
2. Develop a methodology framework to inform the next steps for the regional S3 approach

Work Packages included:



Bable completed a macroanalysis of the region after which they performed a sectoral SWOT analysis informed by stakeholder input identified 21 priority areas to consider for smart specialisation for the Southern Region. These build on existing sectoral strengths and focus on a

direction of transformation. The priority areas are cross-sectoral have the potential to impact on several sectors and markets. This work involved extensive consultation with a wide range of stakeholders across the region through targeted interviews and dedicated workshops. They engaged with over 100 stakeholders from private, public, research centres and cluster organisations through this work. A Regional S3 Framework will provide the foundation to initiate integration of the territorial dimension for cohesive S3 and provide a bridge between EU, National and Local policy through the regional tier which was presented to Assembly Members in October.

### Smart Southern Region



The rapid development of digital technologies is resulting in terms such as 'smart cities', 'smart society' and 'smart regions' becoming more and more popular in the modern changing world (Bauer et al, 2019). Smart Cities are the engines of a Smart Region and are key drivers in the delivery of a regional approach to Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3). Key to achieving a competitive, innovative and productive regional economy is for all locations, urban and rural, to collaborate on Smart Region Initiatives.

**Source: Bable Consultancy summary of stakeholder inputs to a Smart Southern Region**

## Smart Southern Region Training

Aligned with RSES objectives the local authorities have a statutory obligation to consider how best to incorporate Smart Initiatives into their respective development plans however concerns have been raised around the lack of awareness of what this actually means and how to initiate and implement this effectively. In response, through Cohes3ion, the Assembly collaborated with Bable and the European Institute of Innovation & Technology (EIT) to offer co-funded Smart City & Smart Regions training on how to practically apply smart principles.

- Comprehensive overview of current developments and solutions in the field of digital and sustainable development
- Learn from good practices and examples of lighthouse cities worldwide
- Benefit from the exchange of experiences with other participants and discuss issues with our experts.

## Cohes3ion Regional Action Plan for the Southern Region of Ireland

The Regional Action Plan (RAP) is a key project output providing details on how the lessons learnt and exchange of experience from the interregional cooperation with other partners will be used to improve the chosen policy instrument i.e., the RSES for the Southern Region. It specifies the nature of the actions to be implemented, their time frame, stakeholders involved, the costs and funding sources.

The economic strategy of the RSES aims to develop a sustainable, competitive, inclusive and resilient regional economy.



Key to delivering the overarching vision is ensuring the region develops a strong and diverse economic base.

With immediate challenges such as COVID-19, Brexit, and potential vulnerabilities for Ireland's enterprise base, it is important that the SR sustains what we have in the immediate term, transforms our enterprise base for longer term resilience while managing potential vulnerabilities. The RSES seeks to achieve this vision through five economic principles including Smart Specialisation.

The RSES recognises smart specialisation as the key to boosting productivity, regaining lost competitiveness, increasing export intensity and diversity of markets. The EC have stressed that this approach can only work if choices are based on real knowledge of local potential involving a bottom-up approach through established structures such as the RSES and Regional Innovation Strategies.

To advance the RSES economic strategy and in alignment with the objectives of the COHES3ION project the Assembly are exploring how best to inform a regional Smart Specialisation approach and building on the STM exercise have identified key actions to facilitate this process.

In support of this and inspired by learnings from the other project partners the Assembly will 'incorporate a strong regional expression and function into the governance of the national S3 to oversee the governance and reporting on regional priorities for the Southern Region.' Through this action the Assembly will facilitate a better coordination between innovation support services at regional and local level. The improved management and monitoring mechanisms of smart specialisation will be embedded at the regional level through the RSES implementation and monitoring and by extension improve governance.

Throughout the Cohes3ion learning journeys it became increasingly evident that having the correct enabling supports in place was critical to the effective delivery of S3. The Assembly considers 'Smart' as the way to stimulate the best from the region and have identified the pursuit of establishing ourselves as a Smart Region as a key enabler to the effective implementation of S3. Smart Cities are the engines of a Smart Region and are key drivers in the delivery of a regional approach to Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3). Key to achieving a competitive, innovative and productive regional economy is for all locations, urban and rural, to collaborate on Smart Region Initiatives. Informed by the work on a Smart Region approach with Maynooth University referenced above the Assembly will develop an implementation and

dissemination plan for the roll-out of the Smart Region Definition and Framework across the Southern Region.

The RAP was approved towards the end of 2021 and work on implementing these actions will take place throughout 2022 in collaboration with key stakeholders including the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment and Regional Enterprise Programmes.

**For more information about the COHES3ION project:**

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**COHES3ION is part-funded by Interreg Europe, through the European Regional Development Fund.**



## FIRESPOL

The Interreg Europe FIRESPOL project seeks to boost Renewable Energy investment by supporting the introduction of innovative Financial Instruments in the partner regions. This will be achieved through improvements in regional policy instruments, including new schemes and operations under Operational Programmes.



The partnership consists of Managing Authorities and Energy Agencies from six EU regions – Spain, Germany, Croatia, Latvia, Poland, and Ireland – to share knowledge, experience, good practices, ideas and solutions.

The publication in 2019 of the Government's Climate Action Plan made clear the importance of increased investment in renewable energy, predicting that Ireland will miss the target set for the period 2013-20 for renewables by about one eighth. The Action Plan sets ambitious new targets for renewables for 2030 and this ambition is reflected in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Southern Region.

Through its involvement in the FIRESPOL project, the Assembly had the opportunity to identify relevant good practices to inform regional policy, facilitate the introduction of innovative grants or financial instruments, and support greater investment in renewable energy in the region.

### Regional Action Plan Implementation

Published in 2020, The Assembly's FIRESPOL Regional Action Plan details how learnings from FIRESPOL will inform the Regional Renewable Energy Strategy for the Southern Region on the specific goals and targets for the use of Innovative Financial Instruments. To inform the process of setting these goals and targets the Assembly is exploring the opportunity of establishing a 'Renewable



Energy Investment Forum' for the Southern Region. The forum would provide an ongoing mechanism to discuss, explore and make recommendations on the use of innovative financial instruments supporting renewable energy investment in the region. Work began on this in 2020 and continued throughout 2021.

The objective of this forum would be to support and boost investment in renewables in the Southern region through 4 key pillars:

1. Be Informed	2. Be Connected
Hear from subject matter experts and get their insights on specific areas and issues	Connect with peers and with potential collaborators
3. Be Inspired	4. Be a Leader
Hear case studies of what has worked from those who delivered successful	Demonstrate and communicate your organisation's contribution to meeting the region's renewable energy targets

To initiate the conversation on innovative financial solutions for RES and determining the viability of The Forum the Assembly hosted a webinar in February 2021 for key regional stakeholders on the topic of 'Renewable Energy Investment in the Southern Region'. The webinar was opened by Keynote Speaker Eamon Ryan TD, Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications who spoke about Ireland's National Renewable Energy Policy and ambition. Kevin Lynch, Assembly Assistant Director outlined the Regional Policy Objectives for RE in the Region including an update on the drafting of the Renewable Energy Strategy.

**Marie Donnelly from Renewable Energy Ireland** spoke next on the benefits of RE Investment to the region outlining the substantial savings to be made. She spoke of the many opportunities open to the region such as district heating, waste heat and the possible roll-out of on-shore wind detailing some of the work being carried out by the Irish Wind Energy Agency on this. She also updated on the results of Ireland's first RESS auction. Marie has a wealth of experience in this area as a former Director for Renewables, Energy Efficiency and Innovation at the Directorate General for Energy of the European Commission and oversaw the implementation of the main energy related Directives in the EU over the past decade.

**Joe MacGrath, Chief Executive with Tipperary County Council** gave the local authority perspective and the pivotal role they play in supporting Ireland's transition to a low carbon society. He detailed Tipperary's investment and approach to RE projects including the Solar Development on Public Buildings involving the installation of 800 photovoltaic panels in 9 local authority buildings generating an average energy cost saving of 11%. Energy saving projects such as this have earned Tipperary numerous awards and they are now the 4th largest producer of renewable energy in Ireland.

The webinar also took the opportunity to showcase a small selection of the good practices shared through the work on the FIRESOL project. **Laura Heuston from Sustainability Works** who acted as external expert to the project spoke of innovative financial instruments from other regional/local authorities across Europe that can be adapted for the Irish market. Laura is a co-founder in Sustainability Works, a sustainability consultancy firm who works with public sector and private businesses to help accelerate Ireland's shift to a sustainable future.



**Elias Spreiter with the Hessian Ministry for Economic Affairs, Energy, Transport and Housing** spoke about Citizen Investment in renewable energy projects in his region. Elias shared some of the innovative solutions that have brought together public sector, private sector and citizen investors. He spoke of potential learnings from innovative solutions they have piloted such as crowdfunding for RES projects and the Citizen Solar Power Station where solar engine owners operate one solar power station together on an external roof.

**Gregg Allen, CEO with Community Power** demonstrated the benefits of Community Investment in renewable energy projects in the Southern Region. Community Power is Ireland's first community owned electricity supplier. They have a mission to help the next generation of renewable energy to be community owned to the benefit of the people. Gregg shared his journey in establishing this pioneering initiative.

Partners continued to meet throughout 2021 to exchange experiences, update and peer review action plans. It has been universally acknowledged that climate action remains the greatest challenge faced and the Assembly will continue to inspire action across the region through initiatives such as the Firesol project.

#### **For further information about the FIRESOL project:**

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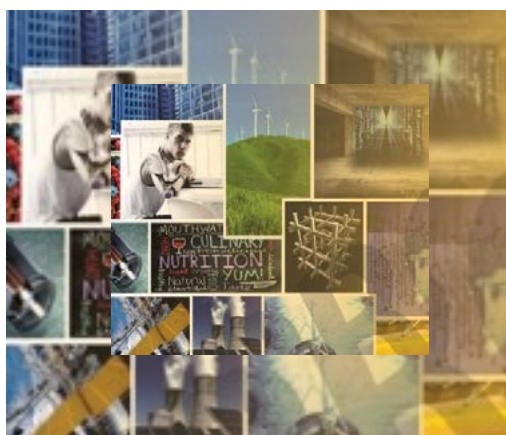
Twitter: [@firesolproject](https://twitter.com/firesolproject)

Facebook: [@firesolproject](https://facebook.com/firesolproject)

**FIRESOL is part-funded by Interreg Europe, through the European Regional Development Fund.**

## MARIE

MARIE aims to improve regional public policy that supports delivery of Responsible Research and Innovation in design, production and distribution of innovation in Smart Specialisation Sectors (S3). It promotes ways to prevent negative social and environmental impact and contributes to better quality of life. With a budget of €1.9m/€1.6m ERDF, MARIE brings together ten partners from eight regions in Italy, Romania, Greece, Spain, Finland, Ireland, France & Germany. The Assembly joined the project to advance our objective of creating a smart, sustainable and inclusive region.



### What is Responsible Research and Innovation?

Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) is about trying to get different sectors of society from Research, Business, Policy Makers & civil society to work together throughout the life cycle of the Research & Innovation process to ensure processes & outcomes are aligned with societal values, needs & expectations. RRI is about engaging the public in R&I to encourage more transparency & access to scientific results, promotion of gender equality and ethics in R&I and promoting science education. Fundamentally, it is about creating high quality science more in the public interest. MARIE promotes RRI in key sectors.

### MARIE Progress 2021

MARIE is in phase-2, running from January 2020 to December 2021, which saw partners implementing all the shared learning that inspired the work behind the Regional Action Plans. The Assembly worked with

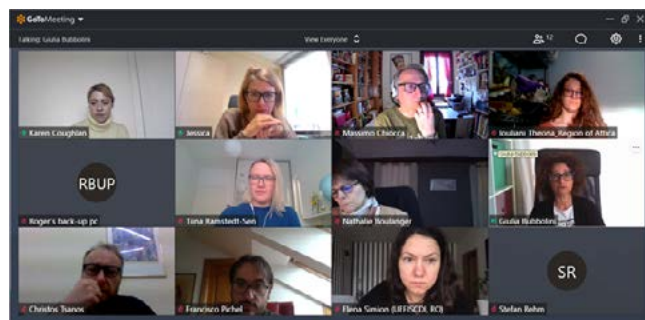
Science Foundation Ireland throughout phase-1. From 2020 onward, additional reporting on RRI will be included in their Research Centre and Spokes Programmes. Specifically, they will ask beneficiaries to report on two RRI keys: Public Engagement and Science Education. This additional reporting will enable the Assembly to assess quantitative changes related to the RRI indicators. This policy improvement supports MARIE'S objective of improving public policy that supports delivery of Responsible Research and Innovation in design, production and distribution of innovation in Smart Specialisation Sectors (S3). By supporting commitment to responsibility, the project helps to create smart, sustainable and inclusive regions.

MARIE had a second objective of influencing the RSES for the Southern Region. Thanks to MARIE, the published RSES contains an explicit reference to RRI championing the message that innovation should deliver measurable benefit for society. The Assembly as part of the RSES implementation stage is working in collaboration with the other two Regional Assembly's to develop a Regional Development Monitor (RDM) to effectively monitor progress. The RDM will collate and visualise a range of relevant socio-economic indicators to aid monitoring the performance of each of the three regions in terms of achieving the objectives outlined in their respective RSES.

The RDM will focus on a wide variety of indicators that have been agreed and developed by each of the three Regional Assemblies and work was ongoing throughout 2021 on how to effectively measure impact by integrating RRI principles into the monitoring and implementation of the RSES.

2021 marked the final year of the five-year project partnership of MARIE. This year was seen as an opportunity to cement and disseminate learnings. Travel restrictions didn't stop partner meetings taking place throughout 2021.

### Partner Meeting February 2021





Partners met to discuss ongoing project management before moving on to a participatory session on monitoring the impact of RRI. This session encouraged an exchange on impact monitoring and how it might be possible to improve the systems used in MARIE partner regions to monitor the impact of our regional policies. Expert advice was provided by Professor Roger Strand, with the Centre for the Study of the Sciences and the Humanities, University of Bergen who gave a novel overview on the challenges of monitoring impact.

## MARIE Webinar Week

MARIE partners marked the end of the project with the 'MARIE Webinar Week' over three days from 7th- 9th September. Webinar Week featured a series of short sessions, networking and video drops to learn and share about Responsibility, Sustainability and Interregional Cooperation for recovery and growth.

**Day 1** Responsible and Sustainable Strategies with networking opportunities for attendees.

**Day 2** Responsibility in practice, looking at how funding schemes could encourage responsible innovation.

**Day 3** A Responsible future and how to work together for recovery and growth.

**MARIE Webinar Week**  
7 - 9 September, 2021

**Day 1 (7th Sept) 10.00 - 11.00 (CET)**  
Responsible and Sustainable Strategies

- Introduction and welcoming words
- Session moderated and introduced by Jessica Huntingford - Resvolvo Srl, Tina Ramstedt-Sen - Region Council of Tampere and Giulia Bubbolini - CISE
- Moving towards SA
- Elisabetta Marinelli, PwC: policy research interface
- Networking moment with all attendees
- Conclusion of Day 1 and introducing Day 2
- Session followed by video drops on MARIE regions' achievements

**Day 2 (8th Sept) 10.00 - 11.00 (CET)**  
Responsibility in practice: Funding

- Session moderated and introduced by Jessica Huntingford Resvolvo Srl and Giulia Bubbolini - CISE
- Good examples on how to change Funding to support responsibility and sustainability
- Shadrack Mwangi - South African Agency for Science and Technology Advancement
- Donia Lasinger - WWTF
- Conclusion of Day 2 and introducing Day 3
- Session followed by video drops on MARIE regions' achievements

**Day 3 (9th Sept) 10.00 - 11.00 (CET)**  
Responsible future: together for recovery and responsible growth

- Session moderated and introduced by Jessica Huntingford Resvolvo Srl and Giulia Bubbolini - CISE
- European level synergies
- Next Generation, NRP and the 2021-2027 programming period
- Ignacio Gonzalez Vazquez, Economic and Policy Analyst, European Commission Joint Research Centre
- Networking moment with all attendees
- Conclusions to the MARIE Webinar week
- Giulia Bubbolini - CISE
- Session followed by video drop of interview with Antoine Duquennoy, Interreg Europe Joint Secretariats and of MARIE regions' achievements

## MARIE lives on!

The pandemic has created untold consequences on health, the economy and on public policy and funding, the full extent of which has yet to be seen. What is clear is the fragility of an economic system that does not embrace sustainable and inclusive development.


The principles of Responsible Innovation must take a more central role in the way that we design our economy and the public policy that sustains it. We must learn from this crisis and create stronger mechanisms for the public and the private sectors to work together pursuing economic growth, fighting climate change and ensuring quality of life for citizens.

Partners will use this additional year to reinforce the message that MARIE has promoted from the start: that **innovation must be responsible**. We must be able to anticipate impact and respond to change effectively. MARIE through its partners will contribute to a recovery that hinges on participation and co-creation of innovations that, while contributing to economic growth, tangibly tackle today's challenge of a just transition towards a sustainable development for all. Impact being the keyword, its clear upfront definition and continuous monitoring are crucial to effective recovery. This will be achieved through:

- Synergy and coherence between local strategies, policy instruments and funding schemes for green and inclusive recovery from COVID.
- Impact assessment of public policy for responsible recovery, moving from economic or quantitative indicators and boosting responsible science, technology and innovation in COVID recovery.

The RSES is the first time that regional statutory strategy in Ireland has addressed both spatial and economic objectives jointly and places the citizen at the heart of it by supporting both people and places. This presents its own challenges in terms of how to effectively monitor the work with the added complexity of the Covid-19 crisis. Through the additional MARIE activities, the Assembly will analyse how the new interregional learnings can raise awareness and inform the monitoring and reporting requirements of the RSES. The intention is to incorporate learnings from MARIE to inform the inclusion of qualitative indicators to measure the impact assessment within a responsible recovery.

Partners will exchange and implement learnings through interregional exchange events and dedicated clinics. The knowledge exchange was kicked off in December 2021 where partners heard from key experts in the area. We first heard from Juliana Chaves Chaparro, an environmental scientist and a senior consultant in the Social Sciences and Humanities Sector for UNESCO. Juliana spoke of UNESCO's mandate to improve science, policy, society interface, in line with the 2017 UNESCO



Recommendation on Science and Scientific Researchers. Juliana gave a detailed overview of the 2017 UNESCO Recommendations and various initiatives related to RRI. The UNESCO Recommendations cover all the RRI pillars but go further adopting a more holistic approach. To address the challenges in monitoring the impact of their work, which relies on a set of untraditional indicators, UNESCO have introduced a set of questions to encourage more discursive answers rather than just quantitative targets for indicators. Juliana provides examples of the questions covering the topics "Creating an enabling environment for science and research" and "Scientific responsibility, safeguards and remedies". MARIE partners will consider this approach in the context of their own work.

Partners then heard from Luc Hulsman RIS3 manager with the Northern Netherlands (NNL) on their Regional Innovation Monitoring and S4+. Luc oversees designing the new ERDF programme in his region and the related smart specialisation strategy. Luc outlined the RIS3 in the Northern Netherlands for 2021-2027, with priority areas defined by societal challenges "Transitions". This strategy is centred around how to gain economic opportunities from social challenges and how to ensure synergies between economic and social considerations. The associated NNL innovation monitor was designed to learn more about SME behaviour based on an annual survey implemented through strategic partners. This innovation monitor now has a societal orientation sector including questions on social innovation, environmental sustainability and societal challenges. Peer learning is critical to this work helping identifying companies with similar issues and needs.

**For further information about MARIE:**

Karen Coughlan, Project Officer: [kcoughlan@southernassembly.ie](mailto:kcoughlan@southernassembly.ie)

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Twitter: [@marieinterreg](https://twitter.com/marieinterreg)

Facebook: [@MARIEinterreg](https://www.facebook.com/MARIEinterreg)

**MARIE is part-funded by Interreg Europe, through the European Regional Development Fund**

## 9. ETC PROJECT OFFICERS' NETWORK

The Southern Region European Territorial Co-operation (ETC) Network was established in May 2019 in response to an identified requirement for coordinated support for European Project Officers working across the Region. The ETC network is member-driven, and the Assembly's role is to facilitate and support the members. The ETC Network provides a forum where all members can benefit and learn from each other by sharing their experiences. The network provides a valuable platform to network and build relationships to enhance the competencies of members in their delivery of European Projects.

**In response to needs identified in the survey the ETC network hosted the following events in 2021.**

### April 2021 – Online Discussion Series

With the launch of the programming period 2021-2027 it is anticipated that funding calls will commence in early 2022. Based on feedback from members the ETC Network hosted several online discussions in April 2021 to assist members to prepare for these upcoming calls.

Online Discussion I	Online Discussion II	Online Discussion III
10.00 – 11.00 - Thursday 15 <sup>th</sup> April 2021 - I – European Project Consortium Building – Host Terence Connolly, Limerick City & County Council and Keynote Speaker – Jessica Huntingford, Head of European Projects, Resolvo	10.00-11.00 - Thursday 22 <sup>nd</sup> April 2021 – II – Creating Strong European Project Proposals – Host Breda O'Dwyer, Munster Technological University and Keynote Speaker – Ger Hanley – Founder Write Fund/ Research Manager AgRefine	10.00-11.00 - Thursday 29 <sup>th</sup> April 2021 – III – Virtual Stakeholder & Public Engagement – Host Stephan Koch, UCC and Keynote Speaker – Kate Morris, Head of Campus Engage

European Project Consortium Building was hosted by our ETC Network member Terence Connolly, EU Programme Manager with Limerick City & County Council. To open proceedings members heard a keynote speech from Jessica Huntingford, Head of European Projects for Resolvo Srl based in Florence, Italy and an expert in the design and management of European projects specializing in European Territorial Cooperation.

Creating Strong Europe Project Proposals was hosted by our ETC Network member Dr Breda O'Dwyer, Senior Lecturer and Head of the Centre for Entrepreneurship and Enterprise Development at Munster Technological University. The keynote speech was provided by Ger Hanley founder of Write Fund who have secured more than €20 million in EU projects for SMEs since 2019. Ger shared her extensive experience in writing, reviewing and consulting on successful EU Funding Applications.

Virtual Stakeholder & Public Engagement was hosted by our ETC Network member Stephan Koch, Commuter

Plan Manager with University College Cork, and Chair of the Cork Transport Mobility Forum. Kate Morris, Head of Campus Engage part of the Irish Universities Association provided the keynote speech. She has over 15 years on embedding, scaling and promoting engaged research and innovation for societal impact.

This series of online discussions was a great success with over 150 ETC Network members attending the events and provided with an opportunity to engage with the hosts and keynote speakers and other ETC Network members.

### October 2021 – Annual Conference

Unfortunately, due to ongoing COVID 19 restrictions the ETC Network Annual Conference 2021 was held online to ensure all members safety and follow public health guidelines. However, there were opportunities for ETC Network members to network in several breakout rooms under thematic areas to discuss project ideas for the next programming period.


Responding to feedback from ETC Network members Day 1 of the conference was dedicated to First Level Control activities, explanations on In-Kind Contributions and Eligibility Rules and closing with details of FLC remote reporting and audit procedure best practices.

ETC Network Annual Conference 2021 6 <sup>th</sup> - 7 <sup>th</sup> October 2021 – 10.00 – 12.00 GMT	
AGENDA 6 <sup>th</sup> OCTOBER 2021	AGENDA 7 <sup>th</sup> OCTOBER 2021
10.00 WELCOME & OPENING	10.00 PROJECT IDEAS BREAKOUT ROOMS
10.15 UPDATE OF THE ETC NETWORK & FORMAT OF THE EVENT	10.15 ROOM 1 SME & SMART SPECIALISATION
10.30 FLC OVERVIEW, ROLE, DO'S & DON'TS	ROOM 2 ENERGY EFFICIENCY & RENEWABLE ENERGY
10.55 IN-KIND CONTRIBUTIONS AND ELIGIBILITY RULES	ROOM 3 ENVIRONMENT & RESOURCE EFFICIENCY
11.30 REMOTE REPORTING/AUDITS, BEST PRACTICE, FUTURE FOR FLC & SLA	ROOM 4 SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT
12.00 SUMMARY & CLOSING OF SESSION 1	11.00 SUMMARY FROM BREAKOUT ROOMS
	11.30 CLOSING OF SESSION 2

On the second day the ETC Network created 4 breakout networking rooms under the following Thematic Areas:

1. SME & Smart Specialisation
2. Energy Efficiency & Renewable Energy
3. Environment & Resource Efficiency
4. Sustainable Transport.





Each breakout room was hosted by a thematic expert to engage participants in discussions to develop new project ideas for the 2021-2027 programming period.

### **The future for the ETC Network**

The Assembly will continue to support, facilitate and build the ETC Network in the Southern Region to provide opportunities for members to learn, actively participate and network with other members. This will ensure project officers participation in EU projects are enhanced and we look forward to hosting further events which will include an update on Interreg Programmes and the Southern & eastern Regional Operational Programme for the 2021-2027 programming period in early 2022. The Assembly will continue to seek feedback from ETC Network members to ensure members drive the agenda and format of ETC Network events to best meet their needs. We hope to meet our members in person in 2022.

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

Rose Power, EU Project Officer: [rpower@southernassembly.ie](mailto:rpower@southernassembly.ie)

Karen Coughlan, EU Project Officer: [kcoughlan@southernassembly.ie](mailto:kcoughlan@southernassembly.ie)

Website: [www.southernassembly.ie/etc-network](http://www.southernassembly.ie/etc-network)

## 10. IRISH REGIONS EUROPEAN OFFICE & COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

### Irish Regions European Office

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

Operationally the IREO is part of the Eastern & Midland Regional Assembly with support of the Department for Housing, Planning and Local Government focusing on bringing the EU closer to the wider local government sector and vice versa. All three Regional Assemblies play a vital role in the management and delivery of ERDF and ETC programmes in Ireland and participating on programme monitoring committees.



In 2020, the IREO developed a new strategy to ensure the delivery of timely, strategic advice and information on EU policy developments to the Regional Assemblies and local authorities in Ireland and to coordinate and support the Irish Delegation to the Committee of the Regions (CoR). Key points include:

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

#### Raising Awareness and Communication

In early 2021, the IREO successfully secured funding from the Department of Foreign Affairs 'Communicating Europe' initiative to organise a series of online seminars with the Regional Assemblies in October and November 2021 called, 'A Duologue for Strength and Resilience - bringing local communities to



the EU and the EU to local communities.' The event topics were aligned to 2021-27 Cohesion Policy priorities the event series highlighted how EU Cohesion Policy funding (ETC programmes) can benefit local communities, and how local communities can participate in a dialogue with the EU.

Each regional event had a panel of speakers with MEPs, members from the Irish CoR Delegation, local authority representatives, European Movement Ireland, and The Wheel. The panel gave presentations and lively discussions on the event themes – how the EU delivers for local communities, how local communities can engage with the EU, and how citizen engagement informs and influences EU policymaking – providing examples of how communities across the country have already benefited from EU policies and programmes. The events also featured experts on citizen engagement from across Europe to discuss ways to best ensure that local communities can participate in the EU process.

The IREO published four bimonthly newsletters in 2021 to keep Irish local authorities and regional assemblies up to speed with the work of the IREO, the EU policy arena and the EU funding landscape. It also highlights the work of the Irish CoR Delegation and showcases EU projects and initiatives involving Irish local authorities.

#### Influencing European Policy

During 2021, the IREO continued to monitor and report on important EU policy developments. Given the ongoing pandemic, EU policy developments continued to focus on recovery and resilience. The IREO, with the three Regional Assemblies, produced a response to the public consultation, launched by the Irish Government in February 2021, on the National Recovery and Resilience Plan for Ireland. Ireland will avail of €853 million in grants for 2021-22 with possibly more funding in 2023 depending on the economic situation.

The EU continued to deal with the UK exit from the EU and the future relationship through the Trade and Cooperation Agreement has been central. The IREO worked closely with Irish CoR Members to ensure that the issues for Ireland in relation to the future relationship, trade, peace and stability, as well as the role of local and regional authorities, were highlighted across the EU institutions and other Member States.

The IREO also monitored EU policy developments in relation to wide range of policy areas including climate action, sustainability, just transition, smart mobility, equality and the Conference on the Future of Europe. IREO regularly communicate Irish interests, including the Irish MEPs, European Commission officials and Irish Government officials in the Irish Permanent Representation to the EU.

### Building capacity, networks and partnerships

The IREO presented an update its work and EU policy developments to the SRA meeting on 9th April 2021 and has provided regular briefings on the work of the Irish CoR for the Southern Region. In addition, the IREO has met with the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR), the Association of European Regions (AER), the Welsh Government Office, the Local Government Association (UK) and the Northern Ireland Executive office to discuss ongoing relationships and opportunities for collaboration. The IREO is advising local authorities on a regular basis on the types and forms of networks that can assist with understanding EU policy and funding programmes, as well as assist with building partnerships.

### Raising the profile of the strengths of local and regional Government

A highlight of 2021 was the participation on online events for the European Week of Regions and Cities in October. Again, due to the pandemic, this was a virtual event. Members of the Irish Delegation, including Cllr Kieran McCarthy participated in a range of events during this week on topics such as digital cities, citizens engagement and the green transition.

**For further information: [www.ireo.ie](http://www.ireo.ie)**

## Committee of the Regions

**The Committee of the Regions (CoR) is the EU's assembly of local and regional representatives.**

With 350 members from across the EU Member States, all democratically elected and/or hold a political mandate in their home country, its role is to inform the development of EU legislation and future EU policy 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.



**European Committee of the Regions**

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

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

Each Commission generally meets on five occasions yearly to prepare opinions for adoption at the plenary sessions. Commissioners, Presidency Ministers, and MEPs regularly attend CoR meetings and there are ongoing exchanges between the institutions on policy issues. The IREO is the secretariat to the Irish CoR delegation and co-ordinates their work.

### The Irish Delegation 2020 - Southern Region Representatives

The nominated representatives were formally appointed in early 2020 for a 5-year term.

<b>Cllr. Michael Murphy</b>	<b>Tipperary County Council (CoR Member)</b>
<b>Cllr. Deirdre Forde</b>	<b>Cork City Council (CoR Member)</b>
<b>Cllr. Kieran McCarthy</b>	<b>Cork City Council (CoR Member)</b>
<b>Cllr. Gillian Coughlan</b>	<b>Cork County Council (CoR Alternate)</b>
<b>Cllr. Conor McGuinness</b>	<b>Waterford City and County Council (CoR Alternative)</b>
<b>Cllr. Dan Boyle</b>	<b>Cork City Council (CoR Alternative)</b>



## Legislative Works

Irish Members continued to present opinions during 2021 – in May: Cllr Gillian Coughlan (Cork Co. Co.) presented an opinion on the Digital Education Action Plan 2021-27, and in October Cllr Michael Murphy (Tipperary Co. Co.) was as appointed rapporteur on an opinion on EU-UK Relations at the sub-national level and remedying the territorial impact of the UK's withdrawal from the EU, and Cllr Kieran McCarthy (Cork City Co.) was appointed rapporteur on an opinion on the New European Bauhaus.

The Delegation continued to act as the key link between the Committee and the Irish representatives, meeting with Irish MEPs and Irish Commission representatives to voice the needs of the Irish local government on the EU stage. The Delegation, assisted by the IREO, continued observing all relevant policy dossiers and made interventions, via amendments as well as commission and plenary interventions.

## Main discussions and opinions held and adopted in 2021

The ongoing pandemic saw plenary sessions being held online or in hybrid format during 2021 and the work of the CoR largely focused on the impact of the pandemic – on local and regional authorities, the impact on health systems across Europe and on recovery and resilience. A major topic of 2021 was the Conference on the Future of Europe and the role of local and regional authorities in promoting citizen engagement in the future of Europe. The most important debates held during the year included:

- May: Union of Equality – in debate with Commissioner Helena Dalli,
- July: Debate on Promoting the European Values through Culture and Education with Margaritis Schinas, Vice-President of the European Commission for Promoting our European Way of Life,
- July: Debate on the European Democracy Action Plan with Vra Jourová, Vice-President of the European Commission for Values and Transparency,
- December: Debate on Strengthening European democracy in the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

A significant highlight of the year for the CoR was the online presence at the December plenary of the French President, Emmanuel Macron, who discussed European values and the renewal of democracy. Cllr Kieran McCarthy participated in this debate on behalf of the European Alliance political group. Members of the Irish

Delegation to the Committee of the Regions participate in many of the working groups of the CoR including the EU – UK Contact Group, the Brexit Inter-regional group and the Broadband platform.

**For further information: <https://cor.europa.eu/en>**

# 11. ANNUAL FINANCIAL STATEMENT 2021

## Consolidated Balance Sheet for the Financial Year ending 31st December 2021.

	2020 €	2021 €
<b>Income</b>		
Local Authority Contributions	1,553,551	1,649,245
Built Heritage Investment Scheme Grant	0	6,000
Travel Recoupment EU Programmes	0	0
Salary Recoupment EU Programmes	320,002	205,608
General Recoupment EU Programmes	17,884	46,506
Dept of Public Expenditure & Reform	0	4,448
Technical Assistance Recoupment	383,351	231,792
Designated Urban Centre Grants Scheme	1,343,593	2,405,299
First Level Control (FLC) Fees	89,870	108,623
Dividend (IPB)	7,183	
Miscellaneous	4	5,477
Inter-Company Transfer	11,597	
<b>Total</b>	<b><u>3,727,035</u></b>	<b><u>4,662,998</u></b>
<b>Expenditure</b>		
Payroll Costs	1,603,274	1,439,897
Pension Related Deduction	53,340	49,392
Superannuation SSP Scheme	15,496	10,806
Travel & Subsistence – Staff	3,018	32,724
Members Annual Allowance	73,727	68,677
Members SPA / Other Travel	1,523	1,833
Members Training / Conference Allowance	1,080	0
Conference Fees	90	0
Office Equipment & Supplies	10,026	34,870
Repairs, Maintenance & Office Costs	1,409	19,212
Annual Contracts	67,446	77,466
Energy Costs	4,740	13,877
Post & Phone	18,065	14,292
Rates & Water Charges	7,944	2,648
Insurance	2,034	13,833
Annual Report	6,380	5,435
Consultancy/Professional Fees	52,066	79,838
Information & Communications	32,774	44,067
Contributions/Fees/Levies (LGMA & Audit)	9,551	10,976
Health, Safety & Wellbeing	3,898	1,027
Regional Planning RSES	37,748	128,680
Gateway Grant Scheme – Project Payments	1,343,593	2,405,299
Depreciation Charge	3,573	1,477
Bank Charges	15,112	5,049
Miscellaneous	3,385	4,686
Inter-Account Transfer	8,326	0
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b><u>3,379,620</u></b>	<b><u>4,466,060</u></b>
<b>Excess of Income over Expenditure</b>	<b>347,416</b>	<b>196,937</b>

## Balance Sheet as at 31st Dec 2021.

	2020 €	2021 €
<b>Fixed Assets</b>	1,004,797	998,312
<b>Current Assets</b>		
Cash at Bank	2,234,645	2,109,559
Debtors	710,261	728,809
Prepayments	0	11,503
	<b>2,944,906</b>	<b>2,849,870</b>
<b>Current Liabilities</b>		
Creditors & Accruals	89,918	323,534
Credit Card	148	173
	<b>90,066</b>	<b>323,707</b>
<b>Net Current Assets</b>	<b>2,854,840</b>	<b>2,526,163</b>
<b>Net Assets</b>	<b>3,859,637</b>	<b>3,524,474</b>
<b>Financed by</b>		
<b>Balance at beginning of year</b>	3,524,474	3,327,537
<b>Inter-Dept Movement on Reserves</b>	-12,253	0
<b>Excess of Income over Expenditure</b>	347,416	196,937
	<b>3,859,637</b>	<b>3,524,474</b>



# APPENDICES

## 1. Glossary of Terms

CCDP	City & County Development Plans
CPR	Common Provisions Regulation
DHLGH	Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage
DPER	Department of Public Expenditure & Reform
EAFRD	European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development
EMFF	European Maritime and Fisheries Fund
EMRA	Eastern & Midland Regional Assembly
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds
ETC	European Territorial Cooperation
FLC	First Level Control
IREO	Irish Regions European Office
LAP	Local Area Plan
LECP	Local Economic & Community Plan
NDP	National Development Plan
NOAC	National Oversight and Audit Commission
NPF	National Planning Framework
NWRA	Northern & Western Regional Assembly
OPR	Office of the Planning Regulator
RPO	Regional Planning Objective
RSES	Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy

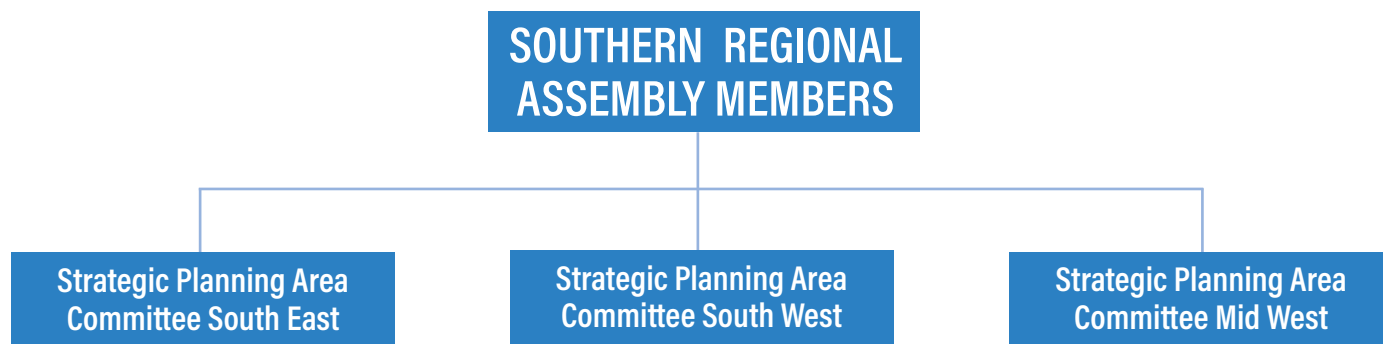
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### 3. Governance of the Assembly

#### Members Structure

The Assembly operates through its 33 Members in relation to overseeing the EU funding programmes and projects and the Regional Planning function, working in partnership with the Assembly staff.



#### Staff Structure

The Assembly staff work across two divisions, Regional Planning, Finance and HR, and EU Programmes & Corporate Affairs.

