



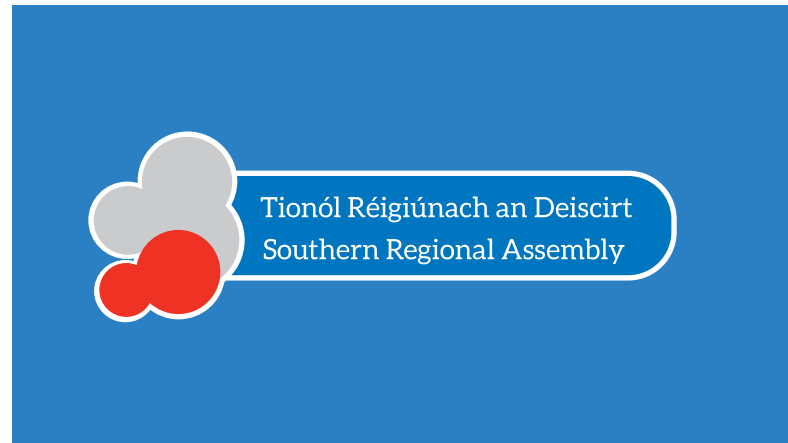
Ireland's European Structural and Investment Funds Programmes 2014-2020

Co-funded by the Irish Government and the European Union

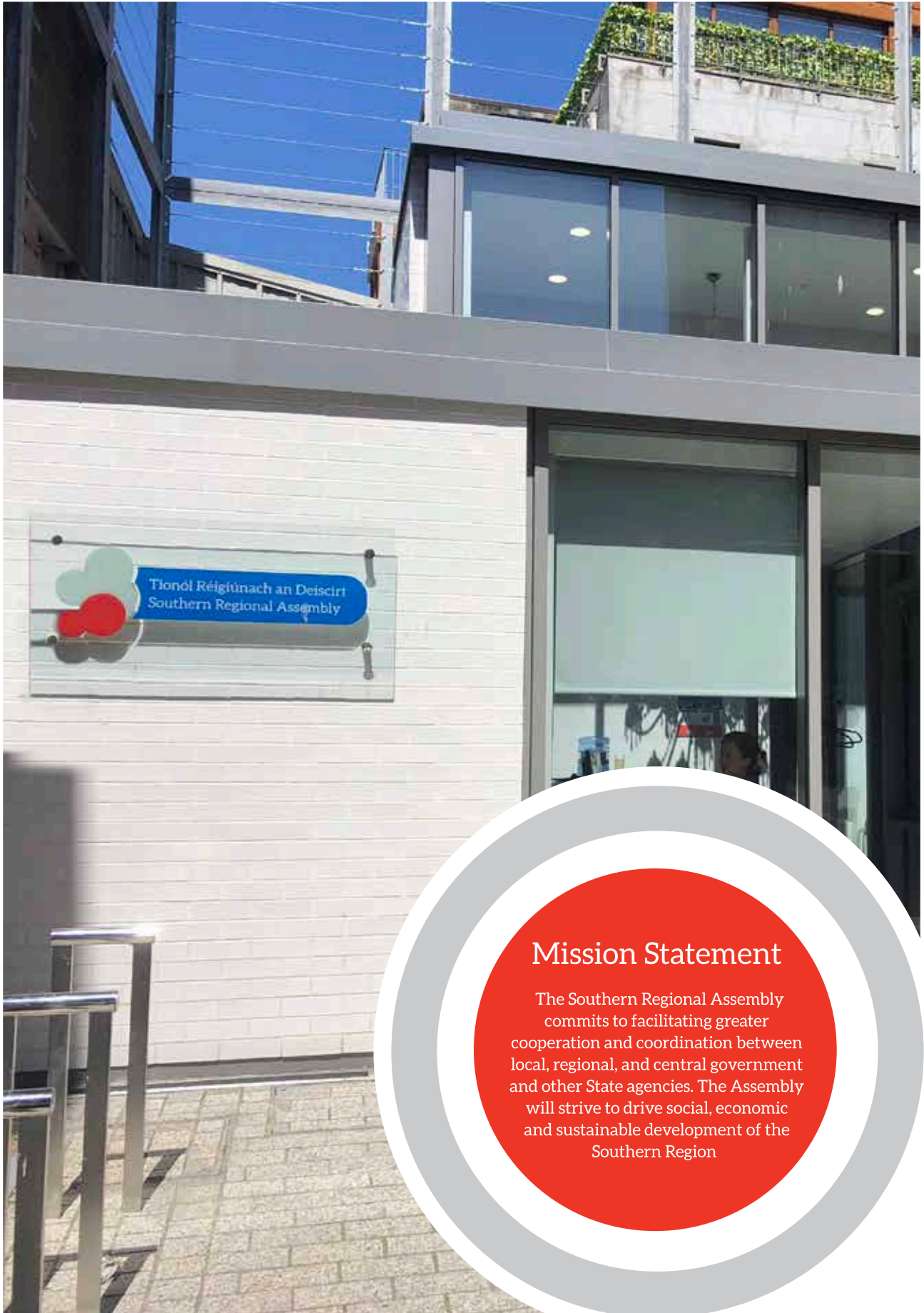


European Union

European Regional Development Fund



2020 ANNUAL REPORT



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

Contents

	Cathaoirleach's Message	4
	Director's Message.....	5
1.	The Southern Regional Assembly.....	6
	Governance of the Assembly	8
	Assembly Staff 2020	9
2.	Assembly Membership.....	10
	Meetings & Briefings 2020.....	10
	Membership of the Southern Regional Assembly (as at December 2020)	11
3.	Corporate Highlights 2020.....	13
	Annual Meeting 2020 & Election of Cathaoirleach 2020-21.....	13
	Highlights 2020	14
	Events & Webinars, 2020	14
	Online Communications	16
4.	Corporate Plan 2020-24.....	17
5.	Regional Planning	19
6.	Regional Programme	24
7.	EU Project Activity	31
	COHES3ION.....	32
	Blue Green City	35
	MATCH-UP	37
	FIRESPOL.....	40
	MARIE	42
	EMPOWER.....	44
8.	EU Programmes.....	46
	Interreg VA: Cross-border Cooperation	47
	Ireland-Wales Programme 2014-20	47
	INTERREG North West Europe Programme	52
	Interreg Atlantic Area	55
	Northern Periphery & Arctic Programme.....	56
	Interreg Europe	58
	URBACT III	59
	ESPON 2020.....	60
9.	Irish European Regions Office & Committee of the Regions	61
10.	Regional Assembly Energy Usage 2020.....	64
11.	Annual Financial Statement 2020	65

Cathaoirleach's Message

As Cathaoirleach of the Southern Regional Assembly, it is a privilege to introduce the Annual Report and Financial Statement 2020.

The year could not have been more different to our original plans. Nonetheless, the Assembly continued its work remotely, delivering many achievements for the Southern Region.

A highlight of the year was the publication of the Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy for the Southern Region, marking the culmination of extensive engagement with stakeholders and the public. Work on the implementation framework for the RSES also progressed to deliver a structured and transparent approach to achieving the Regional Planning Goals.

Another major achievement is the response of the Southern & Eastern (S&E) Regional Programme to the public health emergency, by creating a Health Support Scheme to divert ERDF funding towards supporting the cost of essential PPE supplies to the Irish healthcare system in the fight against COVID-19 across the S&E region.

Our Assembly meetings and briefings were largely held online during 2020. I thank my fellow Assembly Members for their invaluable contributions during the year. I also wish to thank Leas-Cathaoirleach Cllr. Deirdre O'Brien for her assistance and support.

I extend my sincere thanks to the Assembly Director, David Kelly, and his team for their continued work and swift response to the challenging circumstances throughout the year.

Cllr. John Sheahan
Cathaoirleach



Director's Message

I am delighted to present the Annual Report and Financial Statements of the Southern Regional Assembly for 2020.

COVID-19 presented unexpected challenges; however, it did not deter the commitment of the Assembly Members and staff in delivering our programme of work for 2020 and the Assembly achieved many goals during the year.

The Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy for the Southern Region was published, 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.

The Assembly managed the revision of the S&E Regional Programme to respond to the pandemic through a Health Support Scheme to support continuous access to supplies of essential Personal Protective Equipment for the health services in the S&E region. This, and the continued delivery of co-financed supports to energy efficiency, research & innovation, and micro-enterprise, reinforces the importance of EU membership to our regions and localities.

In late 2020, the Assembly was delighted to be appointed Managing Authority of the fourth ERDF Regional Programme. Development work started immediately, and the Assembly continues active engagement with the Irish Government on draft proposals for the 2021-27 EU budget and legislative package.

Support to Irish project partners under Interreg programmes progressed remotely, through Contact Points and First Level Control. The FLC team audited project claims worth over €7.2m for Irish organisations participating in projects co-financed through five European Territorial Cooperation programmes.

I thank our Cathaoirleach, Cllr. John Sheahan, for his time and expertise during a very challenging year. I thank the Assembly staff for their flexibility and adaptability in the face of the immediate and unexpected move to remote working. 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



1 | 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, which includes 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.

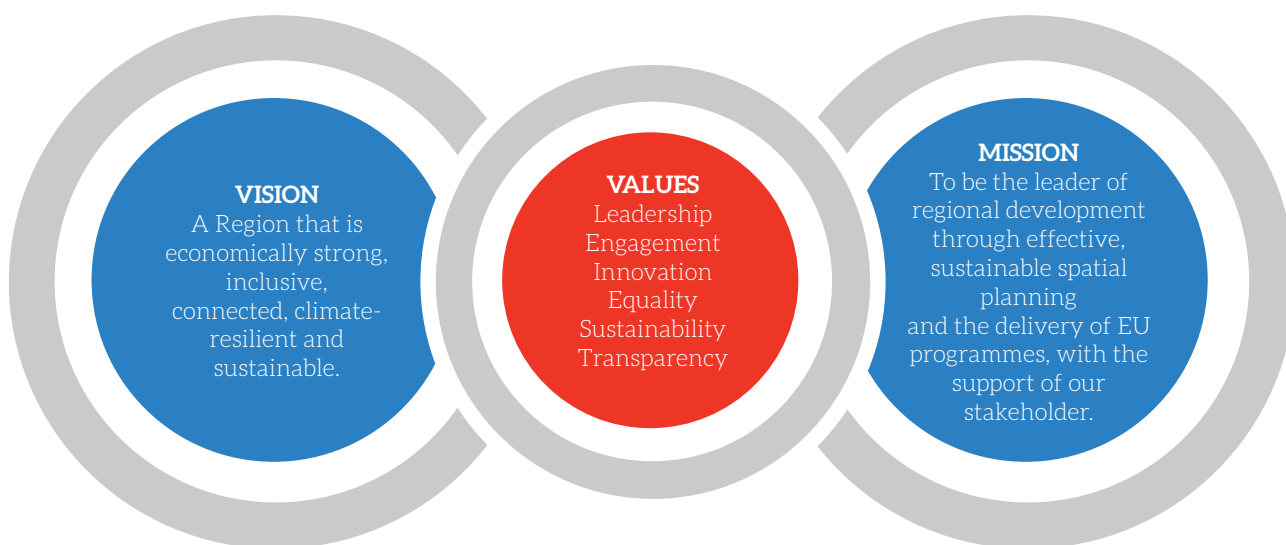
The Assembly forges links between the EU, and national and local levels through regional spatial and economic planning and European funding (in particular through the European Regional Development Fund) for the benefit of the Southern Region.



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.

To discharge its statutory functions, the Assembly interacts with a wide variety of Government Departments, State Agencies, local authorities, and stakeholders from the private and the third sectors at local, regional national and EU levels.



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



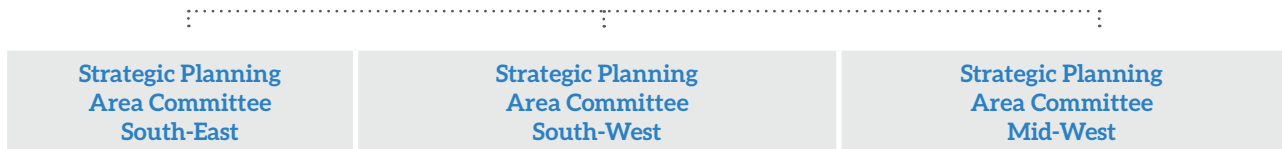
Wealth of
environmental,
natural, cultural
and heritage
assets

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.

Southern Regional Assembly Members



Staffing Structure

The Assembly has 27 staff members across two divisions.

DIRECTOR



Southern Regional Assembly at a virtual coffee morning, November 2020

Assembly Staff 2020



Derville Brennan
Assistant Director



David Kelly
Director



Kevin Lynch
Assistant Director/ Senior Planner



Dominic Walsh
Regional Planning
Officer



Robert Fennelly
Regional Planning
Officer



Bryan Riney
Regional Planning
Officer



Sharon Murray
Administrative Officer
Finance & HR



Vincent Dunphy
Programme Executive
Financial Mgt. & Control



Enda Hogan
Programme Executive
Financial Mgt.,
Monitoring &
Evaluation



Michael Buckley
Auditor



Siobhán Rudden
Senior Staff Officer



Rita McGarvey*
National Contact Point
Interreg North-West
Europe



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
Acting Senior First
Level Controller



Yvonne Cooney
Acting 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

* Rita has moved on and the post was filled in early 2021.

2 | Assembly Membership

The Southern Region is represented by 33 Local Councillors who are appointed as Members of the Regional Assembly for a five-year term, which commenced following the 2019 local elections.

The Region's 10 local authorities nominate 27 Members and the Government appoints a further six from the Committee of the Regions (see Section 9 for more information).

The Members meet monthly to discuss issues related to regional planning; submissions to local authorities, national government, and the EU; EU programme management 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.



Cathaoirligh & Leas Cathaoirligh 2020

CATHAOIRLIGH 2020

January to July

Cllr. Joe Carroll

July to December

Cllr. John Sheahan

LEAS-CATHAOIRLIGH 2020

January to July

Cllr. John Brennan

July to December

Cllr. Deirdre O'Brien

Meetings & Briefings 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic limited to five the number of statutory Assembly meetings in 2020 which took place in person in January, February, and July and online in November and December in line with Government guidelines. Informal online briefings were held March to June, September, and October.

A Supplementary Standing Order, adopted in November, allows for the provision of remote statutory meetings in light of the designation of the Regional Assembly in the Civil Law and Criminal Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2020 (Section 29) (Local Authorities) (Designation) Order 2020 (S.I. No. 446 of 2020).



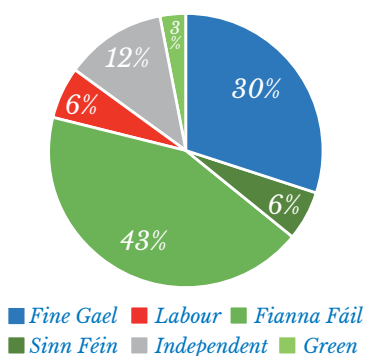
Assembly Meetings moved online from March 2020, due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

External Speakers at Statutory Meetings, 2020

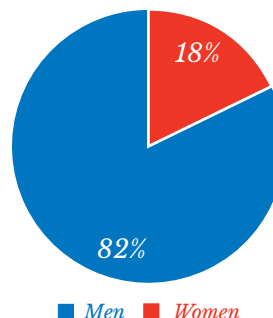
January	Gregg Allen, CEO, Community Power
February	Carol O'Reilly, Dept. of Tourism, Transport & Sport - Public Consultation on a Review of Sustainable Mobility Policy
December	Professor Niamh Moore-Cherry & Dr. Carla Kayanan, University College Dublin - Ireland in the Metropolitan Century

Membership of the Southern Regional Assembly (at December 2020)

**Political Breakdown
at Dec 2020**



**Gender Breakdown
at Dec 2020**



COUNCILLOR

LOCAL AUTHORITY

Cllr. John Sheahan	Limerick City & County Council	<i>Cathaoirleach</i>
Cllr. Deirdre O'Brien	Cork County Council	<i>Leas-Cathaoirleach</i>
Cllr. Thomas Kinsella	Carlow County Council	
Cllr. Ken Murnane	Carlow County Council	
Cllr. Alan O'Callaghan	Clare County Council	
Cllr. P.J. Kelly	Clare County Council	
Cllr. Kieran McCarthy	Cork City Council	<i>CoR Member</i>
Cllr. Terry Shannon	Cork City Council	
Cllr. Garret Kelleher	Cork City Council	
Cllr. Dan Boyle	Cork City Council	<i>CoR Member (alt)</i>
Cllr. Deirdre Forde	Cork City Council	<i>CoR Member</i>
Cllr. Gillian Coughlan	Cork County Council	<i>CoR Member (alt)</i>
Cllr. Gerard Murphy	Cork County Council	
Cllr. Joe Carroll	Cork County Council	
Cllr. Sean O'Connor	Cork County Council	
Cllr. Sheila O'Callaghan	Cork County Council	
Cllr. Michael O'Shea	Kerry County Council	
Cllr. Séamus Cosáí Fitzgerald	Kerry County Council	
Cllr. Robert Beasley	Kerry County Council	
Cllr. Andrew McGuinness	Kilkenny County Council	
Cllr. John Brennan	Kilkenny County Council	
Cllr. Frankie Daly	Limerick City & County Council	
Cllr. Michael Collins	Limerick City & County Council	
Cllr. Michael Murphy	Tipperary County Council	<i>(CoR Member)</i>
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	<i>CoR Member (alt)</i>
Cllr. Thomas Phelan	Waterford City & County Council	
Cllr. Tom Cronin	Waterford City & County Council	
Cllr. Oliver Walsh	Wexford County Council	
Cllr. Pip Breen	Wexford County Council	
Cllr. Maura Bell	Wexford County Council	

Association of Irish Regions

The Association of Irish Regions is the national representative organisation of the three Regional Assemblies in Ireland. It comprises the current Cathaoirleach, immediate past Cathaoirleach, and Directors of the three Regional Assemblies.

Its objectives are to express the collective view of its membership on matters concerning their constitution and the functions for which they have statutory responsibilities, and to offer advice to Government on matters pertaining to economic and social development, including matters relating to balanced regional development.

It also aims to facilitate an exchange of information and experience between its members, by arranging meetings, conferences, and seminars and producing publications to further the objective of improving the quality of service, which members can give to their authorities and to the public.



Cllr. Joe Carroll immediate past Cathaoirleach, Cllr. John Sheahan, Cathaoirleach & David Kelly, Director

Committee Representatives

Southern & Eastern Regional Operational Programme Monitoring Committee

Cllr. Joe Carroll

Cllr. John Brennan

Cllr. Seamus Cosai Fitzgerald

Cllr. Michael O'Shea

Interreg Ireland-Wales Programme Monitoring Committee

Cllr. Ken Murnane

Cllr. Shane O'Callaghan

Rural Development Programme Monitoring Committee

Cllr. Alan O'Callaghan

Programme for Employability Inclusion & Learning Monitoring Committee

Cllr. Gerard Murphy

3 | Corporate Highlights 2020

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent restrictions led to a revision of plans for 2020, nevertheless, the Southern Regional Assembly had a very busy year with many achievements. Activity continued across EU programmes, EU projects and in regional planning.

Annual Meeting 2020 & Election of Cathaoirleach 2020-21

In line with Government COVID-19 guidelines, the Annual Meeting took place on 17th July, at The Tower Hotel in Waterford to facilitate social distance requirements.

It was the first in-person meeting since February and would be the last during 2020. The meeting saw the election of Cllr. John Sheahan as Cathaoirleach.

Cllr. John Sheahan of Limerick City & County Council was elected Cathaoirleach of the Southern Regional Assembly at the Annual Meeting on 17th July. Representing Limerick City & County Council on the Regional Assembly since 2014, Cllr. Sheahan was first elected to the Council in 2004. He is a member of Fine Gael.

Cllr. Deirdre O'Brien of Cork County Council was elected Leas-Cathaoirleach. Cllr. O'Brien is a member of Fianna Fáil.



Cllr. Deirdre O'Brien, Leas-Cathaoirleach, Cllr. Joe Carroll outgoing Cathaoirleach, Cllr. John Sheahan, Cathaoirleach & David Kelly, Director at the Annual Meeting 2020 in Waterford.



Cathaoirleach Cllr. John Sheahan, the Assembly Members and staff at the Annual Meeting in July 2020.



Socially distant greetings at the Annual Meeting at The Tower Hotel, Waterford, 17th July 2020.

Highlights 2020

Research & Publications

The Regional Assembly produced a variety of publications during 2020, including of particular note the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Region, and the Corporate Plan 2020-24, both statutory requirements. The Assembly was also involved in the publication of several research documents and produced regional action plans through the Interreg Europe projects that the Assembly is partnered on.



Further information on these publications are found across the Annual Report:

Section 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Southern Regional Assembly Corporate Plan 2020-24
Section 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy for the Southern Region COVID-19 Regional Impact Analysis Impact Analysis Report Learning Region Action Plan. Stakeholder Consultation Regional Co Working Analysis Report Published October 2020
Section 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FIRESPOLE Regional Action Plan MARIE Regional Action Plan MATCH-UP Regional Action Plan Interreg Europe Match Up Project - 10 Minute Town Framework Report

Events & Webinars 2020

Public Consultation Workshop, July 2020

The three Regional Assemblies, with the Departments of Public Expenditure and Reform, and Education & Skills, co-hosted an information workshop on the consultation process to inform the selection of priorities for the use of EU Cohesion Policy funding in Ireland 2021-27. See Section 6 for more information.



Wales Week, February 2020

Just before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ireland Wales Programme Development Officers attended the official launch of the Ports Past and Present project during Wales Week, a cultural event hosted by the Welsh Government in Dublin to celebrate St David's Day and highlight the shared connections with Ireland. See Section 8 for more information.

EU Project Study Visits to Ireland

Two of our Interreg Europe co-funded projects brought their project partners and key stakeholders to Ireland in 2020 to showcase Irish good practices in the area of smart specialisation and multi-modal transport:

- In February, we hosted the 4th interregional thematic meeting of the MATCH UP project with visits to good practices of sustainable transport across the Southern & Eastern region;
- In October, we took our COHES3ION partners and stakeholders on a virtual trip around the Southern Region to hear good practices on the innovative work practices related to smart specialisation.

See Section 7 for more information.

EU Week of Regions & Cities, October 2020

The Regional Assembly was involved in many activities and events during the European Week of Regions and Cities, which took place online due to COVID-19 restrictions. Two of EU-funded projects to which the Assembly is a partner hosted events and the Assembly took part in others:

- COHES3ION: Virtual Innovation Study Visit of the Southern Region for EU regions and stakeholders.
- MATCH-UP: Participatory Lab on Irish good practices on behavioural changes and initiatives for accessible, inclusive, and low-carbon mobility.
- S&E Regional Programme: Workshop on communicating the EU locally with the European Commission.

Irish Regions European Office Roadshow, November 2020

The IREO brought their online roadshow to the Southern Region, co-hosted by the Regional Assembly, to update local authorities on key EU policy and funding opportunities. See Section 6 information



Samantha Richardson (SRA), Denise Hanrahan, Irish Consulate General in Cardiff, and Breda Curran (SRA) at Wales Week, March 2020.



MATCH UP project partners visit St. Clare's Primary School in Dublin to meet the Green Schools Travel Programme Student Committee in February 2020.



The COHES3ION virtual project visit around the Southern Region in October 2020.

Staff Changes 2020

We welcomed the appointment of Maria Murphy, Alice Byrne-Kelly, Catherine Connaughton, and Teresa Burke to the Regional Assembly as Clerical Officers during 2020. We also said farewell to Rita McGarvey who had worked at the Assembly since 2008 and we wish her all the best for the future.

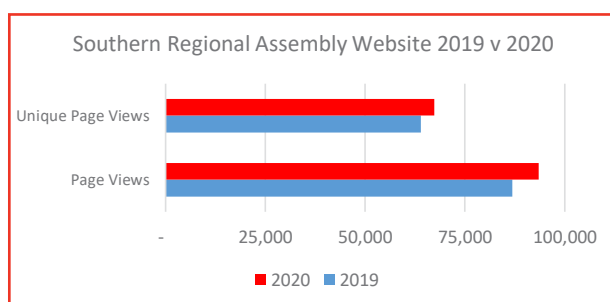
Southern Regional Assembly Staff celebrate International Women's Day at Assembly House in early March 2020



Online Communications

Website

The website is the Assembly's main online communications tool for the Regional Programme, Interreg programmes, EU projects, and Regional Planning. The number of page views have increased steadily since 2015 and last year continued this trend.



Social Media 2020

The Assembly has an online presence on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram. Twitter followers grew by approximately 8%, and Facebook by approximately 18% during the year.

	Followers
Twitter	2,491
Facebook	491
Instagram	325

Adoption of the Corporate Plan 2020-24

The Members adopted the Regional Assembly's Corporate Plan 2020-24 at the July meeting. The Plan will be delivered under three goals, Regional Leadership, Valuing Our People, and Promoting Sustainable Regional Development. An update on the Corporate Plan can be found in Section 4.



4 | Corporate Plan 2020-24

The Members adopted the Assembly's Corporate Plan 2020-24 in July, which will be delivered under three goals, Regional Leadership, Valuing Our People, and Promoting Sustainable Regional Development.

Goal 1: Regional Leadership

- Regional Governance: A Region Driving Sustainable Regional Development & Regional Governance in Ireland
- Strategic Collaborations: A Region that engages, collaborates, & forms partnerships to benefit the Region
- Regional Representation: Support, foster and develop democratic regional representation

Goal 2: Valuing Our People

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

Goal 3: Promoting Sustainable Regional Development

- Deliver on the Objectives in the RSES
- EU Programmes and Projects: Harness the potential and opportunities for the Region
- Research and Regional Data

Delivering the Corporate Plan 2020-24: Progress 2020

- Adoption of a Corporate Work Programme and Budget 2020, the Annual Report and Statement of Accounts 2019, and the Corporate Plan 2020-24;
- Adoption of a supplementary statutory order for remote Regional Assembly meetings in response to the COVID-19 restrictions;
- Monthly updates on statutory activity, items related to Regional Planning, the S&E Regional Programme, ETC Programmes and EU projects - 3 in-person and 2 statutory online Assembly meetings, and 6 online non-statutory briefings, held in response to the COVID-19 restrictions;
- 8 Assembly Members nominated as Committee Representatives on EU Programme Monitoring Committee to support the regional agenda;
- 2 presentations from the Irish Regions European Office to the Assembly Members in 2020 to update on EU policy and funding development of relevance to the local authorities;

- Involvement of Members in activities related to our 6 Interreg Europe projects to inform and update on the policy learning arising from other EU regions.
- Collaboration with the other Regional Assemblies to support the wider regional agenda, including research and joint submissions to public consultation processes at local, national and EU levels, and the delivery of EU funded programmes: The Assembly made 20 submissions to public consultations in 2020, (development plan process, national government consultations, the ESIF consultation and others);
- Participation on EU Programme Monitoring Committees on behalf of the Irish Member State: Interreg Europe, Interreg North-West Europe, Ireland Wales Programme, ESPON, ESF, and EMFF;
- Representation of the regional view and engagement in ongoing relevant EU, national and regional policy implementation processes through submissions to public consultations and participation on committees and stakeholder for a;
- Ongoing support and facilitation of the ETC Network, which is a member-driven network of ETC Project Officers from across the region. The network provides a platform for learning and sharing experiences to support ETC Project Officers in the delivery of European Projects to the benefit of the region.
- 6 thematic stakeholder groups for each Interreg Europe project, which feed into the following key policy areas of relevance to the S&E Regional Programme, the RSES, and local and national policies and strategies: smart specialisation, responsible research and innovation, multi-modal forms of transport, renewable energy, energy monitoring, and blue green cities concepts;
- 6 strategic interregional collaboration networks with organisations from 37 European regions across our Interreg Europe projects to facilitate interregional learning about best practice to support better public policy.
- RSES for the Southern Region adopted and published;
- RSES Implementation Programme with stakeholder engagement on implementation structures;
- Development of a Regional Development Monitor based on the three RSES Implementation Themes: Liveable Region, Green Region and Creative and Innovative Region;
- Ongoing engagement with the Local Authority Development Plan process including providing advice and assistance as well as formal submissions to pre-draft consultations and draft development plan submission (Wexford);
- Representation of the regional view and engagement in ongoing relevant EU, national and regional policy implementation processes through multiple fora.

- Management of the S&E Regional Programme and reprogramming in response to the pandemic by supporting the Irish health service, and a declaration of €74 million ERDF under the S&E Regional Programme to support activities in the S&E region to support smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth;
 - Coordination of the development of the Regional Programme 2021-27 for the Southern, Eastern and Midland regions in collaboration with EMRA, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, the EU Commission and various programme partners;
 - Support for project partners, including liaison with Programme Managing Authorities, as a Programme partner for the Ireland Wales Programme, designated contact points for the Interreg North-West Europe, and Interreg Europe;
 - Public Consultation on the selection of priorities for the use of EU Cohesion funding in Ireland 2021-27
 - Continued partnership with the Welsh European Funding Office and the Department of Public Expenditure in the implementation of the Ireland Wales Programme;
 - Assembly's First Level Control team audited and validated 180 project claims worth over €7.2 million to Irish organisations participating in project co-funded by five European Territorial Cooperation programmes.
-
- 3 research publications on regional impact of COVID-19, co working analysis and 10-minute towns;
 - 2 Regional Action Plans published by Interreg Europe projects on multi-modal transport and energy monitoring: FIRESPOL on renewable energy, MATCH-UP project Regional Action Plan on multi-modal transport, EMPOWER project Regional Action Plan to reduce carbon by monitoring energy efficiency in social housing.
-
- An inhouse webinar team established with online event management coordination skills;
 - A website and social media team established to coordinate the corporate messages from each Unit and Division;
 - The Assembly's energy return to the SEAI submitted, as per statutory obligation;
 - An Assembly energy team was established.



5 | Regional Planning

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 Regional 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).

2020 marked a significant year for the RSES as it was published on 31 January.

What is the RSES?

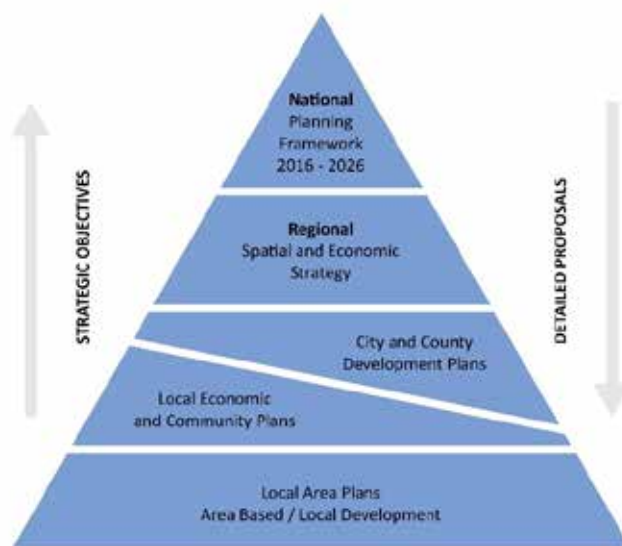
The Southern Region faces an era of great change, challenge and opportunity. Over the next 20 years, our population will grow by nearly 400,000, our age profile and our family structures will transform. We face rapid global change, technological developments, and the dramatic impact of climate change.

The RSES is a 12-year strategic regional development framework to guide this change. It establishes a broad framework for the way in which 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 primarily 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 ten local authorities in the Region. While informed by national, EU and international policies, the RSES is driven at the local level by Elected Members, local authorities, stakeholders, community groups and individual citizens who have shaped this shared strategy.

Monitoring and Reporting Arrangements

Following the adoption of the RSES, each local authority in the Region and the public bodies prescribed in the legislation is required to prepare and submit a report to the Assembly every two years, setting out progress made in supporting objectives of the Strategy, relevant to that body. The Assembly will prepare a monitoring report every two years on the progress in securing the overall 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) who 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 in the delivery of the programme for change set out in Project Ireland 2040, the NPF and the NDP 2018-27. It sets out ambitious targets for growth across the Region supporting the NPF ambition for transformational change with a 50:50 split of growth between the Eastern and Midlands Region, the Southern Region and Northern and Western Region. This impacts each local authority area, including a projected additional population of 380,000 by 2040 bringing the population of the region 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 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 focussing on compact growth, placemaking, responding to the challenge of climate change and resilience.

The achievement of the transformative change required will be challenging and will need significant and timely investment in infrastructure 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.

There is also a regulatory requirement to implementation. The RSES is a statutory document underpinned by legislation, is democratically mandated by the Assembly Members following extensive and open engagement and collaboration involving citizens, communities, key stakeholders, government and public bodies. Local authorities had a key and direct input to the development of the RSES strategy. The Planning Acts, including Sections 22, 25 and 27 places obligations on the Regional Assembly, Local Authorities and other stakeholders for implementation and monitoring of the RSES.

The RSES contains 301 objectives: the 229 Regional Policy Objectives (RPOs) together with 22 Cork MASP Objectives, 23 Limerick Shannon MASP Objectives and 27 Waterford MASP Objectives. The objectives have a range of targets, involving differing actions and stakeholders. Some require direct action by the Regional Assembly (Regional Actions), others require statutory application by other groups - for example ensuring the Core Strategy of Development Plans accord with the RSES (Instructive) while others involve support for initiatives undertaken by other agencies (Supportive). Combined they provide a comprehensive mechanism for implementation.

The objectives address three over-arching pillars:

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

These relate to the 11 Strategy Statements contained in the RSES.



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 including 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 from **North to South** and **East Coast to West Coast**, connecting to the **Atlantic Economic Corridor** & developing an extended **Eastern Economic Corridor to Rosslare Europort;**
- Creating the **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.

Activities, Progress and Milestones in 2020

The priority was the achievement of developing implementation structures and the achievement of RPO 226:

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 MASPs is specific measurable, attainable, realistic and time-bound. The implementation phase will include action plans that include time bound targets, progress indicators and a set project tracking plan to ensure effective and efficient delivery.

Design & publication of the RSES

The team worked closely with our design and print partners, Modern Printing, to produce the hard copy of the RSES to the highest possible standard and distribution was compliant with Covid 19 guidelines. The Assembly website was updated, offering both high- and low-resolution copies of the final document.



Categorisation and Prioritisation of Workload – Development of Implementation Programme

The development of an Implementation Work Programme has involved the categorisation and prioritisation of the 301 RSES objectives depending on the nature of the action required:

- **Active:** largely direct action by Regional Assembly in a co-ordination capacity to drive progress by key stakeholders;
- **Instructive:** largely statutory obligation for stakeholders to comply with in formulating their own policies, plans and strategies (especially important for Development Plan alignment);
- **Supportive:** largely supporting/tracking work of other agencies and a signal of regional support for key initiatives, strategic projects and bids for funding pursued by stakeholders.

In addition, each Objective has been assessed to determine the following high-level details:

- Identification of lead agency.
- Identification of agencies involved.
- Identification of the action required.
- Identification of common actions.

Engagement on Implementation Structures

A review of implementation mechanisms was undertaken in consultation with Local Authorities Chief Executives, Government Departments, and stakeholders and a roadmap for Implementation produced.

Development Plan Process

Ongoing engagement with local authorities including submissions made to the following Pre-Draft Consultation processes:

- Cork County Council Development Plan 2022-28
- Carlow County Council Development Plan 2022 -28
- Cork City Development Plan Consultation Notice
- Kerry County Council
- Waterford County Council
- Limerick Development Plan 2022 -28
- Tipperary Development Plan 2022-28
- Clare County Development Plan 2022 – 28

In addition:

- Submission on the Draft Wexford County Development Plan
- Agreement on Submissions Procedure at the July meeting of the Assembly

Engagement with Government Departments/Others

Submissions made in 2020:

- National Marine Planning Framework-DHLGH.
- National Economic Recovery Plan-DETE.
- Public Consultation on the revised Wind Energy Development Guidelines.
- Rail Consolidation Strategy-Iarnród Éireann.
- Five Cities Management Survey -DoT.
- Department of Transport Strategy Statement 2021 – 23.
- Sustainable Mobility Policy Review-DoT.
- Review of the National Development Plan-DEPR.
- Limerick Shannon MATS – National Transport Authority.
- Ag-Climatise’ – A Draft National Climate & Air Roadmap for the Agriculture Sector to 2030 and Beyond.

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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- Engagement with Academic research including UCD on IRC COALESCE Ireland in the Metropolitan Century project.
 - EU-Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) Policy
 - International Transport Forum (ITF)
- Irish Planning Institute (IPI) Marine Planning Committee.

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 7 for more information.

Interreg Europe Match Up Project - 10 Minute Town Framework Report

RPO 176 of the RSES 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.



The Assembly worked with the MATCH-UP project to identify the need for a good practice framework and step by step methodology toolkit for local authorities and stakeholders to assist plans, projects and awareness initiatives for implementation of 10 Minute Cities and Towns at the local level. ARUP was commissioned to develop the framework, which was piloted with three local authorities - Carlow, Kerry and Clare - and three Key Towns of Carlow, Tralee and Ennis. This helped to refine the methodology before disseminating it across the Region.

The MATCH-UP 10 Minute Town Concept Framework & Methodology Report was presented to Assembly Members in September 2020 during European Mobility Week. One of the first actions under RSES implementation, it has been positively received as a proactive resource and approach. The Assembly plans to use this framework to further communicate the benefits of 10 Minute Cities and Towns, seek the implementation of actions and monitor results. See Section 7 for more information.

COVID-19 Regional Impact Analysis Impact Analysis Report

The team, in partnership with the Eastern & Midland and the Northern & Western Region Assemblies, published the COVID-19 Regional Economic Analysis in May 2020.



Using GeoDirectory commercial data, this report identified which geographical areas in Ireland are more likely to be exposed to economic disruption due to the necessary measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The report informs local, regional, and national policymakers to the extent of economic exposure and resilience across Ireland.

Learning Region Action Plan Stakeholder Consultation

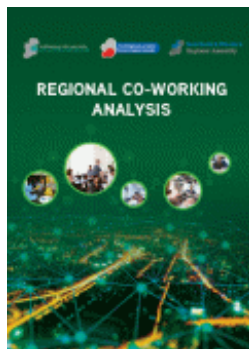
The RSES identifies that expanding the Learning Cities initiatives in Limerick and Cork to develop a Learning Region will play a significant role in promoting social inclusion, a sustainable society and developing our skills and talent proposition. There is a specific objective to establish Waterford as a UNESCO Learning City. The Learning Region Action Plan is a bottom up, Smart Specialisation approach to ascertain how the policy position of the RSES to enhance skills, lifelong learning and promote social inclusion can be best implemented. Smart Specialisation brings together key stakeholders with the view of developing economic opportunities. This is the approach taken to develop this Action Plan. The provision of both data analysis and stakeholder engagement provides a strong basis for the Action Plan recommendations.

Development of Regional Development Monitor based on the RSES Implementation Themes – Liveable Region, Green Region & Creative and Innovative Region

This is a joint initiative between all three Regional Assemblies and a working group has been established.

Regional Co Working Analysis Report Published October 2020

The team, in partnership with the Northern & Western and the Eastern & Midland Regional Assemblies, published the Regional Co-Working Analysis in October 2020. The report specifically:



- Identified the number of private sector workers that can operate remotely on a national, regional, and county basis, as of Q2 2020.
- Identified the name, location, and type of co-working hubs in each county, as of September 2020.
- Provided a series of considerations to assist policymakers in developing additional co-working hubs across Ireland.

The Regional Assemblies identified eight areas for consideration to identify how information gaps can be addressed, discuss potential actions, and establish an evidence-based approach to grow remote working. These eight areas should inform policy makers of the next steps needed to deliver additional co-working hubs in line with the spatial and economic objectives of each Assembly's RSES.



6 | Regional Programme

The Southern & Eastern (S&E) Regional Programme 2014-20 is a €620.1 million package from the European Regional Development Fund (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 organisations across the S&E region.

The Southern Regional Assembly is the Managing Authority for the overall Programme and the co-financed activities under each priority are implemented through specific schemes. The ERDF co-funds activities aimed at strengthening economic and social cohesion across the EU by correcting imbalances between its regions.



2020 in Focus

The Programme is progressing well and is either achieving or exceeding its targets. During 2020, the Programme was significantly revised to respond to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in the S&E region.

 Strengthening RTDI	4 world class research centres supported	653 new researchers in supported research centres	870 industry partners engaging with research centres	97 commercialisation fund awards
 SME Competitiveness	55,358 enterprises receiving financial/non-financial supports	1,024 employment increase in supported enterprises	54,459 number of participants on enterprise training programmes	
 Low Carbon Economy	12,214 households with improved energy consumption classification	10,796 tCO₂eq estimated annual decrease in GHG		
 Sustainable Urban Development	9 integrated growth centre strategies implemented	1,652,174 people living in areas with integrated urban development strategies		
 Coronavirus Response	111,346,031 Items of PPE Purchased	€77,920,823 Value of PPE Purchased		
€310.06 million Total Programme Funding - ERDF	€290.9 million Total Expenditure Selected - ERDF	€158.7 million Total Eligible Costs Declared - ERDF		

Programme Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

In 2020, the European Commission launched the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative (CRII), and the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative Plus (CRII+) in response to the COVID-19 pandemic which allowed flexibility for EU Cohesion Policy to respond to the rapidly emerging needs in the most exposed sectors to help citizens in the most affected regions.

Under these measures, the S&E Programme underwent two revisions to reallocate undeclared funding, first, from existing priorities¹, and second, from the European Social Fund, to facilitate the creation of a new priority called Coronavirus Response.

The revisions were adopted by the Commission in October and December respectively. The new priority has one scheme, the Health Support Scheme, which aims to maintain continuity of access to supplies of essential Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for the health service in the S&E region.

CASE STUDY: Sustainable Urban Development - Dodder Valley Greenway, Dublin

Despite delays due to COVID-19, work began on the Dodder Greenway project to link Dublin City Centre to the Dublin Mountains, through Ballsbridge, Milltown, Rathfarnham, Firhouse and Tallaght.

The project represents a major new transport and recreational facility for the entire Dublin region, catering for both commuter and social cyclists.

The route takes specific account of the rich ecology of the area and is a combination of off- and on- road cycleways that will use existing facilities in the Dodder Valley and connect with the linear parkland along the route. Co-financed by the ERDF S&E Regional Programme, South Dublin County Council and the National Transport Authority, the project is building three new pedestrian and cycle bridges, 750m of new path and 2.6km of upgraded paths along the Dodder Greenway.

Revision of S&E Regional Programme Budget 2020

Programme Priority	ERDF	ERDF
Priority 1 RTD&I	€91,572,685	€28,869,477
Priority 2 ICT Supports	€30,000,000	€0
Priority 3 SME Supports	€35,556,827	€11,933,177
Priority 4 Low Carbon Economy	€66,500,000	€60,878,975
Priority 5 Sustainable Urban Development	€24,427,315	€24,427,315
Priority 7 Coronavirus Response	€0	€121,947,882
Technical Assistance	€2,009,350	€2,009,350
TOTAL ERDF	€250,066,177	€250,066,177



¹ Reprogramming saw a reallocation of undeclared funds of €121.9 m ERDF from the RTD&I, ICT Infrastructure, SME Supports and Low Carbon Economy priorities, and €60 m ERDF from the European Social Fund.

Programme Priorities

 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 research centres	870 industry partners engaging with research centres	97 commercialisation fund awards

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

SFI Research Centres Scheme (IB: Science Foundation Ireland)

Supporting the development of world-leading, large-scale research centres that facilitate collaboration between research and industry to develop new technology for commercialisation, attract international research capital, and increase researchers employed in industry.

Spokes Programme (IB: Science Foundation Ireland)

Promoting further development of SFI Research Centres to incorporate new research areas, industry and academic collaborators aligned to the Research Prioritise Exercise for Ireland.

Commercialisation Fund (IB: Enterprise Ireland)

Supporting science and engineering researchers in third level institutions and research organisations in applied research projects that generate outputs to benefit the Irish economy.

Innovation Partnership Programme (IB: Enterprise Ireland)

Encouraging Irish-based companies to work with Irish research institutes for mutually beneficial cooperation and access expertise & resources to develop new/improved products, processes, services, and generate new knowledge/expertise.

CASE STUDY: Research, Technology, Development & Innovation - Lero Research Centre

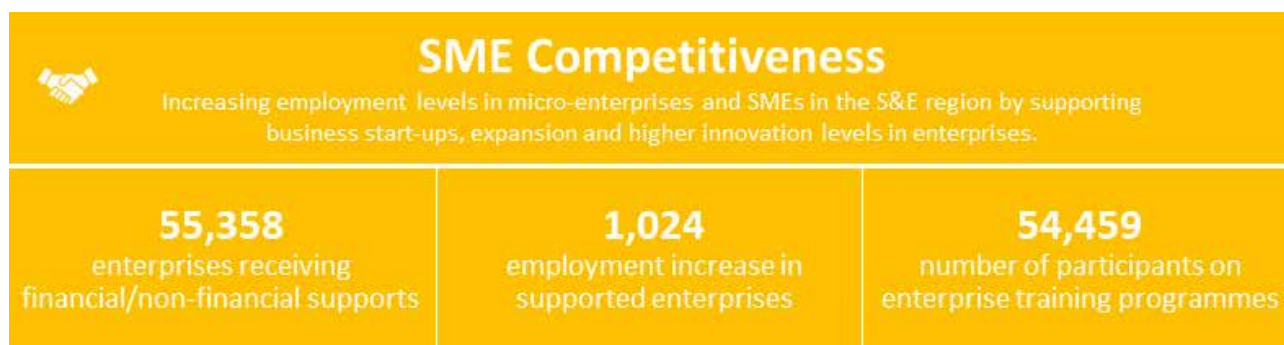
Lero, the SFI Research Centre for Software, brings together expert software teams from Irish Third Level institutions to engage with industry, state agencies, education, and international collaborators to deliver on its twin goals of research excellence and social and economic relevance.

As the world's second largest software exporter, Ireland is recognised internationally as a leading location for companies in the software sector and Lero is a key pillar of that with research spanning domains from driverless cars to artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, fintech, govtech, smart communities, agtech and healthtech.

Lero has a proven capacity to attract and retain global research leaders and to make a substantial contribution both to software-related research and to the Irish economy. An economic impact assessment of Lero found that, every €1 invested in the centre (including EU funding) between 2005-2018 has contributed an average €5.25 to the Irish economy.



Photo & text courtesy of LERO



SME Competitiveness is delivered by one scheme:

Micro-enterprise Support Scheme

(IB: Enterprise Ireland/ delivered by 18 Local Enterprise Offices in the S&E region).

Increasing the rate of business start-up/ expansion, and enhance management capability, competitiveness, innovation, technological adaptation, and the export-orientation of micro-enterprises with supports such as the provision of business information, advisory services, capacity building, mentoring and financial supports.

CASE STUDY: SME Competitiveness - Intosport, County Kilkenny

Established in 1991, Intosport filled a marketplace void at the time by manufacturing and designing sports and leisurewear and before long the business had established a client base ranging from schools, colleges and GAA clubs.

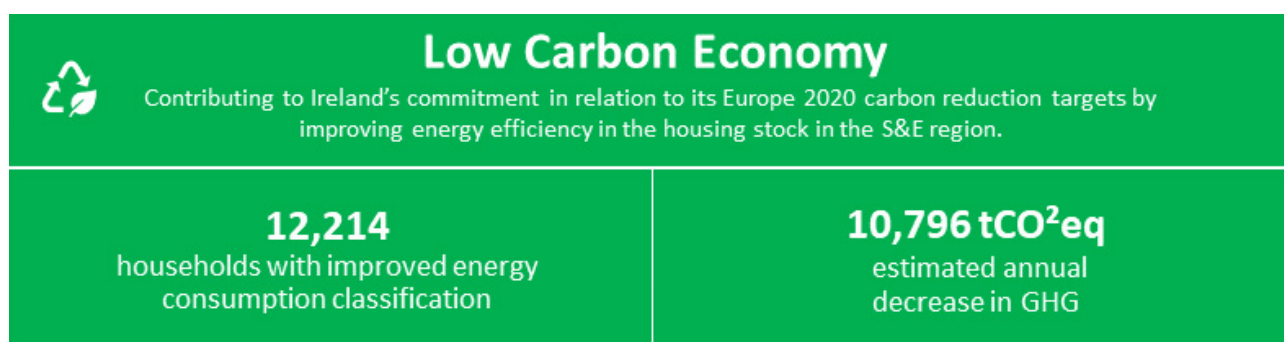
More than 20 years on, Intosport has become synonymous with a wide-ranging catalogue of sports wear and accessories with special design requests a special feature of their service and have become an official supplier of GAA sportswear and merchandise.



Photo & text courtesy of localenterprise.ie

Local Enterprise Office Kilkenny supported Intosport in its early years with an Employment and Capital grant and recently with a Business Expansion Grant.

Intosport also availed of non-financial supports such as business advice and specialised mentoring Intosport have grown from strength to strength and the couple have handed the business onto the next generation of their family.



Low Carbon Economy is delivered by one scheme:

Better Energy Warmer Homes Scheme

(IB: Department of the Environment, Climate & Communications/ delivered by Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland).

Improving the energy efficiency of the household at risk of poverty, reduce the amount of expenditure required for energy, and to improve health and well-being by reducing the amount of disposable income spent on energy. Households can avail of the expansion of the wall insulation measures to include internal and external wall insulation as standard (rather than just cavity wall insulation). This deeper retrofit is more expensive but yields greater energy efficiency improvements per household.



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

€77,920,823

Value of PPE Purchased

Coronavirus Response is delivered through one scheme:

Health Support Scheme

(Scheme Beneficiary: Health Service Executive).

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 supports the cost of supplying the Irish healthcare system with essential PPE as part of a targeted, State-led investment that aims 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.



Photo courtesy of the Health Service Executive.



Sustainable Urban Development

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

9

integrated growth centre strategies implemented

1,652,174

people living in areas with integrated urban development strategies

Sustainable Urban Development is delivered through one scheme:

Designated Urban Centre Grants Scheme (IB: Southern Regional Assembly)

Supporting local authority strategies in the S&E region to tackle social, economic, environmental, climate and demographic challenges affecting urban centres. The Covid-19 pandemic and the resultant lockdowns during 2020 which halted construction has had a detrimental effect on the work programme of the majority of ongoing sustainable urban development projects.

By the end of 2020, four projects are complete – the Apple Market in Waterford City, the Mary Elmes Bridge in Cork City, Shannon Town Park in County Clare, and Crescent Quay in Wexford Town.

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

Progress on the remaining ten projects was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic which halted construction works at various points in the past year. However, progress is ongoing.

CASE STUDY: Sustainable Urban Development - Mallow Bridge Boardwalk Extension, Co. Cork

Construction works to install a boardwalk to Mallow Bridge, an ERDF co-funded project with Cork County Council will create a shared space for cyclists, pedestrians, and other vulnerable road users along the side of the existing bridge and facilitate better traffic flow across the bridge for motor transport.

The steel boardwalk is designed to minimise the visual impact on the historic bridge, a protected structure dating back to 1712. While creating a significant share space for multi-modal transport, it will also reinforce the link between the town centre and the residential area of Mallow to the south.



Information & Communications 2020

#EUinmyregion

A multi-annual communications strategy, adopted by the Programme's Monitoring Committee in 2015, is delivered through a yearly action plan. The strategy and yearly plans focus on communications and publicity activities, and compliance with the communications requirements set out in the EU regulations and national eligibility guidelines. The communications plan 2020 was revised in March to take account of the COVID-19 pandemic. Much of the planned events moved to online, however, work continued to tell the story of how EU funding is benefitting our regions and communities.

Information & Communications Compliance Activity

The MA publishes a searchable and downloadable list of the operations funded by the Programme on the Regional Assembly's website. This list was updated in December 2019 and December 2020 following certification of expenditure in compliance with Article 115.2 of Commission Regulation 1303/2013. Work continued in 2020 to support Programme beneficiaries to comply with the communications requirements under the Common Provisions and the ERDF Regulations, along with the National Information and Communications Guidelines to ensure that the ERDF and the Programme are acknowledged through logos, wording, notices and webpages.

National ESIF Communications Network & INFORM Network

The MA continued regular contact with the other EU funds and programmes operating in Ireland, and the Member State through the national ESIF network. The Network consists of representatives from the EU funds operating in Ireland, including collaboration with the Special EU Programmes Body in 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. The INFORM network is facilitated by DG Regio and coordinates the #euinmyregion campaign, an EU-wide communications campaign which aims to encourage citizens to learn about the successes of EU funded stories in their own region. The MA has branded all of its communications activities to boost their reach across Ireland and the EU.

Print and Radio Advertisements

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.

EUDeliversintheRegionsCampaign: Mary Elmes Bridge, Cork



In September, the MA collaborated with the European Commission in the "EU Delivers in my Region" campaign to highlight unique initiatives that

are the pride of a region and its inhabitants.

At the heart of the S&E region's campaign was Cork's Mary Elmes Bridge, a multimodal transport channel that doubles up as a beautiful piece of architecture in the centre of the city with seating and amazing views along the River Lee.

The bridge is part of Cork City Council's strategy to create a more sustainable and more connected city centre. The Mary Elmes Bridge was co-financed with €1.5m through the ERDF.

Originally planned in-person events moved largely online, using outdoor display signage, digital channels, and social media to tell the story of how the EU has helped improve localities and regions. A Cork-based Instagram influencer, Dan Sweeney, was encouraged to showcase the campaign and the bridge on his social media platforms. He did this in style by water skiing under the bridge and made the national print media!

Public Consultation Communications Campaign 2020



The ERDF and ESF MAs, the Eastern & Midland Regional Assembly, and the Department of Public Expenditure & Reform collaborated on a national consultation to inform the selection of priorities for the use of EU Cohesion Policy funding in Ireland for the period 2021-27. Interested parties were invited to submit their views by way of response to the survey on a consultation website and had the opportunity to express their views at a webinar in July. The survey ran from 13th July - 4th September.

Development of a National EU Funds Website

During 2020, the MAs of the ESIF collaborated to develop a national website as a dynamic and high-level one-stop source of relatable stories and plain-English information on EU funding in Ireland. The website was advancing well by the end of last year in preparation for the 2021-27 funding period.



Communicating the EU Locally Workshop

Key Events 2020

Munster European Youth Parliament, February 2020



The MA collaborated with the European Youth Parliament in Ireland at the Cork event in February 2020, which took place just before the onset of the pandemic and subsequent restrictions. A representative from the Vistamilk Research Centre spoke at the plenary session to highlight the benefit of EU funding to research. The event exposed the successes of the Regional Programme to over 100 young people from across Ireland and the EU.

Communicating the EU Locally Workshop, October 2020

The MA was asked to take part in an exchange with the European Commission and other regions about the EU Delivers in the Regions campaign as part of European Week of Regions & Cities event.

Irish European Regions Office Roadshows, November 2020

The Programme was featured as part of the IREO roadshow which showcased potential EU funding avenues for local authorities. This event centred on the 10 local authorities in the Southern Region, with IREO events taking place in the two other Irish regions on the same topic.

The Graduate Quiz Sponsorship



The MA continued to sponsor the Graduate.ie competition, an initiative of national and local government, and the EU-funded Citizenship and Democracy Programme for Irish second level students. It aims to engage, inform and inspire young people in a fun way to learn about important local and national topics. Participants complete an online quiz to win education trips. The Assembly sponsorship serves to highlight the successes of the Regional Programme activity to young people in Ireland. Over 8,000 students took part in the competition and 24 were selected as winners. The two winners were sponsored by the MA, two Transition Year students from Tipperary and Wexford and they will travel to the European Parliament once it is safe to do so.

7 | EU Project Activity

Southern Region European Territorial Co-operation Network

The Southern Region European Territorial Co-operation (ETC) Network was established in May 2019 in response to an identified requirement for co-ordinated 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.

2020 was a year like no other due to the COVID-19 pandemic which required everyone to innovate in their approach emphasising the need for networks such as this. The ETC network rose to the challenge and moved online. To ensure the ethos of the member-driven approach was maintained the SRA issued a survey to all members to better understand how the network could support project officers in their work in this challenging climate.

In response to needs identified in the survey the ETC network hosted two webinars in 2020.

October 2020

The webinar was opened by Derville Brennan, Assembly Assistant Director, and Brendan Mooney, Contact Point for the Interreg Northern Periphery & Arctic Programme and Interreg Atlantic Area Programme gave an update on the proposed direction for the next programming period.

Teresa Lennon, Head of the Irish Regions European Office (IREO), introduced the work of the IREO which acts as a bridge between Irish regions and the European Union, the focus being bringing the EU closer to the wider local government sector working both ways. Teresa provided a comprehensive overview of the various funding programmes available under the ETC Programme. Michael Buckley, Head of the Assembly's First Level Control, advised network members on how to successfully submit claims online. Rose Power and Karen Coughlan, EU Project Officers with the SRA, closed the event with some tips and good working examples for hosting successful online events.

December 2020

The ETC members came together again on the 1st December with another jam-packed agenda.

David Kelly, Director of the SRA, kicked off the event with an update on the progress of both the Interreg Europe and Interreg North-West Europe Programmes for the next programming period.

Cllr Kieran McCarthy who wears many hats in his role as Councillor with Cork City Council and as a member of both Committee of the Regions (CoR) and Southern Regional Assembly, addressed the network members. He spoke of the role and work of the CoR, emphasising the value of their work as the voice of our respective cities and regions to bring the EU closer to the citizen.

Enda Hogan gave an update on the Southern & Eastern Regional Operational Programme (ROP) 2014-2020 and the implications of the EU's decision to reprogramme unclaimed expenditure to the new Coronavirus Response priority. He outlined the potential knock-on effects for those working on EU projects giving advice on how to address this.

The future for the ETC Network

The SRA 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 to include a series of online discussions in early 2021 to cover topics such as:

- European Project Consortium Building;
- Creating Strong European Project Proposals;
- Virtual Stakeholder & Public Engagement.

The SRA 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.



Southern Regional Assembly EU Project Participation

The Southern Regional Assembly participates as 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, such as multi-modal transport, responsible innovation and research, renewable energy and green and blue infrastructures.



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 aims to tackle 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 of Ireland 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, published in January 2020, 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 will inform the focus of the Regional Action Plan. Results of the mapping exercise are available to those that are interested.

In conjunction with the STM, 2020 was a key year for COHES3ION in terms of sharing good working practices with many visits to partner regions. Due to Covid-19, partners only visited the Ruhr region in person, however this did not stop the exchange with the rest of the visits moving online.



Interregional Study Visits

Essen, Ruhr Region Germany: 15-16 January 2020



Partners were fortunate to visit Essen, the second largest city of the Ruhr region and the largest urban area in Germany. Hosted by Business Metropole Ruhr, partners heard about the regions innovative work practices including:

- Ruhr region's experience with the Lead Market approach;
- German Cyber-Security Cluster Ruhr;
- Healthcare industry in the city of Essen;
- Organizing regional change in a multi-actor environment.

As part of the visit, partners visited the Zollverein Coal Mine Industrial Complex, which during its active industrial period was the largest coalmine in the world. It was awarded the designation of UNESCO World Heritage site in 2001 and is considered one of the most impressive industrial monuments on the planet!

Calabria Region, Italy: 28-29 April 2020

The Calabrian region, one of Italy's strongest innovators, is at an advanced stage in the rollout of their S3. Partners heard from leading experts. **Green HoMe** is an innovation Hub for Sustainable Building, one of 8 priorities identified in Calabria's S3, which brings together the expertise of private companies and academia. **FinCalabria** provides technical support to the S3 sector through the management of public funds (on behalf of their sole shareholder Calabria Region) mainly from the operating programs, including the ERDF ROP. It supports to local small and medium enterprises by developing business innovation programmes and generating economic development and employment particularly in highly innovative areas. They have been successful in facilitating over 300 newly employed researchers and over 300 funded projects. The second day of the virtual learning visit gave partners the opportunity to discuss the progress of their Smart Territorial Maps (STM), a diagnostic analysis of the region mapping regional S3 strategies and its relationship with other regional policies/bodies. The STM will focus the region on recognising and building on its smart priorities.

Cluj, Romania: 25th June 2020



The next stop on the COHESION learning journey took us to Cluj in the North-West Region of Romania, located in Northern Transylvania, which is famous for more than its association with the legend of Dracula! Partners learned from innovation experts on implementing their smart priorities.

Partners were given an overview on the status of Romania's S3, which went through public consultation and due for publication in late 2020, and a comprehensive outline of the **INCDTIM (National Institute for Research and Development of Isotopic and Molecular Technologies) Development Strategy**, which focuses on customer driven R&D. The INCDTIM is the only national institute for research and development in this region and develops projects in top-of-the-range areas to allow the region to compete in the European Research Area.

Partners also learned about the **TETAPOLIS digital incubator**, Romania's first digital incubator focused on digital start-ups and spinoffs (company or academic). Among other initiatives, each year the incubator hosts three 'Start-up Camps', an intensive one-month session with complementary focus themes.

The incubator only selects applicants aligning with local opportunities and global trends at that particular time making them more market driven than most others.

Stockholm Region, Sweden: 24th September 2020

Sometimes called the 'Venice of the North' because of its setting on 14 islands in a large archipelago on Sweden's East Coast, Stockholm's is considered one of the world's most liveable cities and its growing economy means we have plenty to learn from them. Part of their planning ethos is to allow companies to get involved in the early stages of planning demonstrating their participatory bottom-up approach. Partners heard about the work of the **Stockholm Business Alliance (SBA)**, a partnership between 56 municipalities in eight counties with a focus on attracting foreign investment to the region, is tasked

with carrying out the activities identified in the joint business plan on behalf of the region and in co-operation with the municipalities. Their efforts are primarily aimed at selected industries but are open to all investors regardless of industry as a way into the region. Partners heard about the innovative **Södertälje Science Park** that facilitates 'true triple helix' cross-industry research and development projects between business, academia and society. They have a strong governance structure in place in the form of a strategic board made up of members across many disciplines who guide them in their focus on S3 priorities.

The presentations were followed by a lively discussion on overcoming the shared challenges of implementing a regional S3 with the question of how to remove the abstract notion of S3 and adjust the infrastructure in place to support the introduction of S3 at the regional level.

Southern Region of Ireland, 15th



October 2020

We were delighted to welcome our Regional Stakeholders and European partners to our own region as part of European Week of Cities & Regions, to hear from experts across the Southern Region who shared some of the innovative work practices.

Through our work on the project we are learning about the benefits of a move away from the traditional hierarchal governance to a more network based model encouraging collective decision-making processes where authority and influence is shared between stakeholders operating at different levels. Key to the success of this multi-level governance (MLG) approach is promoting citizen participation, cooperation and creating networks. Partners heard from a number of leading regional experts on their experiences of adopting these work practices into policymaking and implementation. These bottom-up

approaches support the key message Every Voice Counts. The good working practices presented at the visit included:

RSES Consultation Process: This extensive consultation process is the first time a diverse range of stakeholders engaged on an equal basis to shape the region's vision & objectives. They outlined the systematic process of meaningful engagement and sharing of knowledge including those outside the policy-making process to better inform that process;

Limerick Digital Leaders Network (LDLN): The LDLN consists of stakeholders and thought-leaders from leading organisations that committed on a voluntary basis to work together and support the development of 'Smart Limerick City Region' and Limerick Digital Strategy. Collaboration and consultation is a critical element of successful implementation of Smart Specialisation Strategies and the LDLN presents a proven model of success and a clear method in how to establish a successful, effective and sustainable network through collaboration with the right stakeholders;

Cyber Ireland Regional Chapters: This provides a regional forum for the cyber security community and links in with Cyber Ireland's national activities. Partners learned of the regions strong position to become a regional centre for cyber security, reflected in the Southern RSES, but there was a gap in terms of how and who would drive it, which the Regional Chapters is now addressing.

Mazovia Region, Poland: 26th November 2020

Our Mazovian partners had many informative and innovative work initiatives to share including an introduction to the Mazovia region and RIS3 status; CEZAMAT: connecting R&D infrastructure with the regional and (inter)national innovation ecosystems; the process of entrepreneurial discovery – working groups on S3 in the Mazovian region; and integrated Territorial Investments in the Warsaw Metropolis. Presentations were followed by an animated discussion on overcoming the shared challenges of implementing a targeted Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) at the regional level.

Wales: 9th December 2020

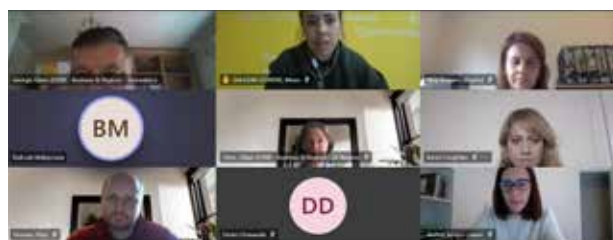
Wales was our final "destination", marking the end of a fascinating virtual learning journey across Europe to discuss innovative work practices taking place to assist us in our objective of boosting the impact of Smart Specialisation Strategies at the regional level.

The first good practice was the **Small Business Research Initiative (SBRI) Centre of Excellence**, which works with public sector bodies to identify health challenges where no solution exists and invites businesses to collaborate with them to develop innovative ideas and solutions. They are changing the way UK public procurement money is spent to promote innovation and solve the grand challenges of government.



We heard about the **Tech Valleys Initiative**, a 10-year, £100m commitment to creating the future. Tech Valley is an enabler to drive and support business activity and provide high quality employment and skills development for people living in South Wales. The third good practice from Wales was the **Cardiff Capital Region (CCR)**, a programme to drive and support economic activity and provide high quality employment and skills development for people living in South-East Wales. To deliver this vision, the ten local authorities have set up a joint committee, the CCR Cabinet, which comprises the leaders of the ten local authorities, as the ultimate decision-making body for the City Deal. A number of advisory bodies supports the cabinet.

All activities, good practices, interregional study visits and stakeholder engagements will assist the Southern Regional Assembly in developing a Regional Action Plan for the COHES3ION project, which is anticipated to be published in late 2021.



For more information about the COHES3ION project:

Karen Coughlan, Project Officer:
kcoughlan@southernassembly.ie

Website: www.interregeurope.eu/cohes3ion/
Twitter: @cohes3ion

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

Blue Green City

The Southern Regional Assembly is the Irish partner in an Interreg Europe Project called Blue Green City. The project started in August 2019 and has a total budget of €1,348,909.

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 if 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.

Blue Green City 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 Green City Interreg Europe



International Good Practices

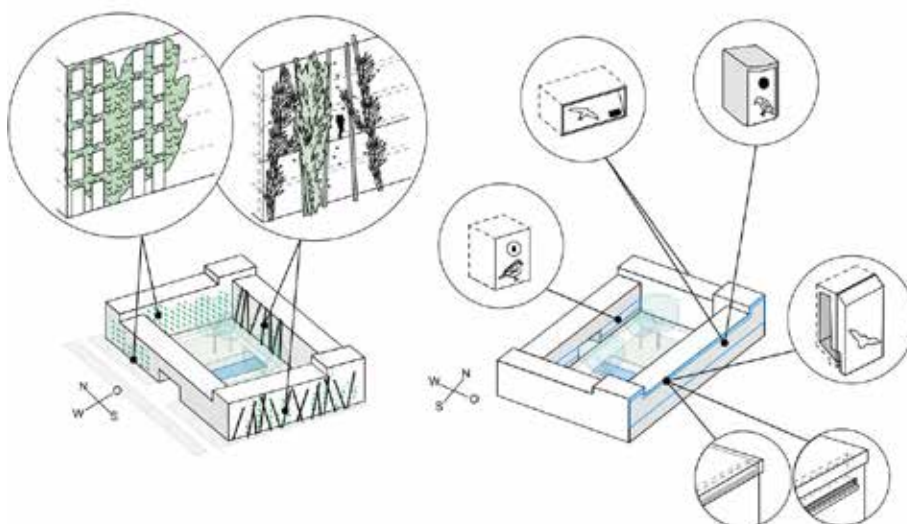
Växjö in Sweden are one of the partners in Blue Green City. They have developed interesting policy instruments including a Green Structure and they have pursued and achieved a target to be one of Europe's greenest cities since 2007. In 2018, Växjö won the European Green Leaf award.

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.



Good Practice from Vaxjo, Sweden

Example of AAD in Schumacher Quartier, Berlin.



Example of AAD in Schumacher Quartier, Berlin.

Animal-Aided Design (AAD) in Ingolstadt, Germany uses a species' life cycle to improve open space planning and conservation. The basic 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 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.

For further information about the Blue Green City:

Bryan Riney: briney@southernassembly.ie
 Rob Fennelly: rfennelly@southernassembly.ie
 Dominic Walsh: dwalsh@southernassembly.ie
 Website: www.interregueurope.eu/bluegreencity

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, all 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.

MATCH-UP Stakeholder Good Practices Recognised by Interreg Europe

To date the Assembly has submitted six Irish Good Practices on behalf of our MATCH-UP stakeholders to the Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform, all assessed by thematic experts. We are delighted that they have published the good practices as examples for other regions in Europe:

1. Cycle & Ride Infrastructure associated with the Luas Light Rail from Transport Infrastructure Ireland;
2. Cork Transport Mobility Forum from Cork City Council;
3. Local Link Rural Transport Programme from Waterford Local Link;
4. The Green-Schools Travel Programme from An Taisce;
5. Limerick Smarter Travel - Workplace Mobility Management Programme;
6. Race Against Rob.

Interregional Study Visit and Thematic Meeting: Dublin, Waterford & Cork, January 2020

The Assembly hosted the 4th Interregional Thematic Meeting in Ireland in January 2020, one of the last physical events hosted by the project before the COVID 19 pandemic. During this event our MATCH-UP stakeholders presented some of Ireland's sustainable transport good practices to the Interregional partners.

Our first stop was to Sarah O'Donnell, Assistant Chief Architect with Transport Infrastructure Ireland to hear about the Cycle & Ride Infrastructure Associated with the Luas Light Rail good practice. We visited Heuston Station to see the infrastructural improvements as a result of this initiative between train, light rail, cycling and walking.

We took our partners back to school to learn about The

MATCH-UP Interreg Europe



Green Schools Travel Programme. Jane Hackett and Trevor Keppel, National Programme Managers with An Taisce Green Schools presented this good practice. We also visited St Clare's Primary School in Dublin to hear from their Green Schools Travel Programme Student Committee who presented the upgrades they have made for sustainable transport in their school.

We travelled back in time to Ireland's oldest city - Waterford founded by the Vikings in 914. In line with the MATCH-UP objective we used the most sustainable form of transport to tour of our oldest city - our feet.



Our partners had the opportunity to experience Local Link Rural Transport with Waterford Local Link. We travelled to the wonderful town of Lismore to hear a presentation by James O'Donoghue, Road Transport Co-Ordinator with Waterford Local Link. Our Interregional partners experienced a Local Link route and explore the full details and breath of the programme in Waterford which aims to provide sustainable transport connectivity in rural Ireland and also to meet the needs of the elderly and to provide a link to assist with social inclusion.

Our journey then took us to Cork City where we joined a meeting of the Cork Transport Mobility Forum. This allowed our Interregional partners to experience first hand the interaction between all members of the forum coming together to implement and create policy for sustainable transport in Cork City.

This visit to Ireland by the Interregional Partners of the MATCH-UP project inspired many of these partners to implement some of these good practices in their regions to improve sustainable transport policies.



MATCH-UP Regional Action Plan

Over the past two and half years the Assembly has been learning from our Interregional partners and other Interreg Europe projects to assist us in improving policy in Ireland. In September 2020 the Joint Secretariat for Interreg Europe validated our Regional Action Plan –

“The Role of Modal Interchange to Foster Low Carbon Urban Mobility”.

This Regional Action Plan is seeking to improve two policy instruments, the Southern and Eastern Regional Operational Programme, and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy.

Action 1: to design a framework based on the learnings from MATCH-UP to incorporate low carbon mobility and modal interchange improvements for Public Realm Improvement Projects funded under the Southern & Eastern Regional Operational Programme.

Action 2: inspired by learnings from MATCH-UP to develop a framework and Methodology for the implementation of a 10 Minute Town Concept.

MATCH-UP “10 Minute Town” Framework and Methodology

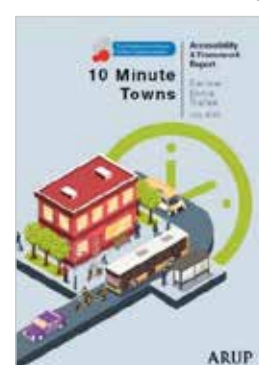
The Assembly was inspired by the learnings of MATCH-UP to create The 10-Minute Town Framework & Methodology. The 10 Minute Town Concept is a Regional Policy Objective of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Southern Region that came into effect in January 2020.

RSES RPO 176: It is an objective to attain sustainable compact settlements with the “10-minute” city and town concepts, whereby, a range of community facilities and services are accessible in short walking and cycle timeframes from homes or are accessible by high quality public transport services by connecting people to larger scaled settlements delivering these services.

The Assembly commissioned **ARUP** to assist in designing the framework and methodology which could be used as an implementation tool by local authorities and a resource in achieving the 10 Minute concept. The RSES identifies 14 Key Towns.

Therefore, to create the “10 Minute Town” framework and methodology we first piloted the framework with the assistance of **Carlow County Council, Kerry County Council and Clare County Council** on three Key Towns Region – Carlow, Tralee and Ennis. This would provide proof of concept. This allowed us to fine-tune the methodology before disseminating it across the Southern Region.

The MATCH-UP “10 Minute Town Concept” was presented to the Assembly Members in September to coincide with European Mobility Week.



The **10 Minute Town report** implementation tool is now available to assist local authorities. In conjunction with National Transport Agency and Transport Infrastructure Ireland initiatives and analysis tools, Metropolitan Area Transport Strategies, Local Transport Plans and other sustainable mobility projects with Local Authorities, our report is advancing “10 Minute City and Town Concepts” in the Region. It is positively promoting increased use of sustainable transport and reduced carbon emissions in the Southern Region.

European Week of Regions and Cities – “Mobilizing People for Active Inclusive Low Carbon Mobility”



In October, MATCH-UP hosted a Participatory Lab during the European Week of Regions and Cities which

provided an opportunity for the Regional Assembly to present good practices from Ireland identified by our MATCH-UP Irish Stakeholders.

The Lab aimed to share Good Practices and Policies on behavioural changes and other initiatives towards accessible, inclusive, and low-carbon mobility.

The Future for MATCH-UP in the Southern Region

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. The Southern Regional Assembly as a partner in the MATCH-UP project along with our stakeholders will continue to implement the actions within our Regional Action Plan to enhance and inspire changes in the sustainable transport strategies for our region.

For further information about MATCH-UP:

Rose Power, Project Officer:
rpower@southernassembly.ie

Website: interregeurope.eu/match-up/
Twitter: @MATCHUP_Project
Facebook: @MatchUpProject

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

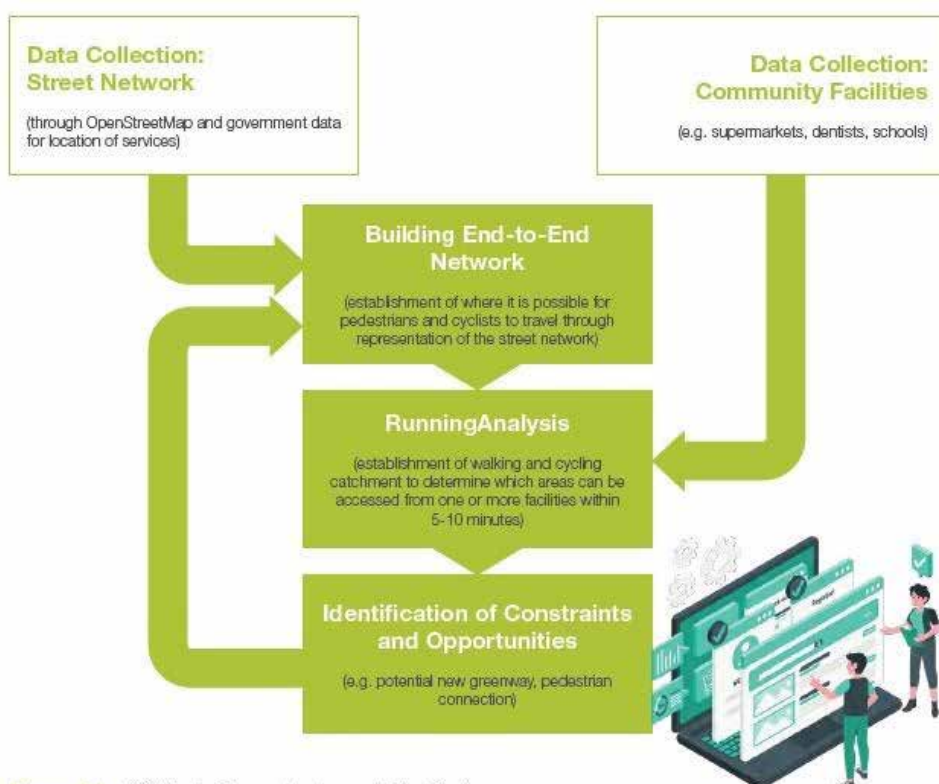


Figure 51 - 10 Minute Towns Implementation Tool

FIRESPOL

FIRESPOL 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 regions across Spain, Germany, Croatia, Latvia, Poland and Ireland. Partners are sharing 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 to 2020 for renewables by about one eighth. The Climate Action Plan sets ambitious new targets for renewables for 2030 and this ambition was reflected in the drafting of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Southern Region.

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

FIRESPOL Interreg Europe



Interregional Study Visit, 18th & 19th February 2020

The study visit facilitated sharing good practices from our regions. Following a workshop on developing Regional Action Plans, partners visited Getli ģi ecological landfill which is one of the largest and most modern producers of green energy in Latvia. Partners learned the source of energy is the landfill gas – natural gas which mainly consists of methane.

It is formed in covered waste deposits – biodegradation cells, in which unrecyclable waste is stored and which have anaerobic environment, i.e., an environment protected from exposure to air or rainwater. They shared their objective of developing the recycling of biodegradable waste and to promote the reuse of waste in municipalities around Riga.

Partners were also brought to the Development Finance Institution, Altum, a state-owned development finance institution offering state aid for various target groups with the help of financial tools (loans, credit guarantees, investing in venture capital funds, etc.). They introduced their 'Fixed Income Financial Instrument' good practice involving financing without collateral for the implementation of RES and energy efficiency projects.



Interregional Event, May 2020

Partners were scheduled to visit Badajoz, Spain however due to travel restrictions this event moved online where partners updated each other on the status of their regional action plans sharing their difficulties in developing Regional Action Plans within the current crisis.

Project Progress

The Regional Assembly submitted 15 good practices outlining some of the innovative work practices already happening in the region that our partners can take inspiration from:

1. **Templederry Community Wind Farm:** a 100% community-developed and owned wind farm, financed from a range of sources;
2. **Kilmeedy Wind Farm:** using an income tax relief scheme to raise equity finance for renewable energy projects;
3. **Meenbog Wind Farm:** Unsubsidised Corporate PPA, the wind farm revenue stream is secured by a Corporate Power Purchase Agreement, not supplemented by the government support scheme;
4. **Tullahennel Wind Farm:** Subsidised Corporate PPA, the wind farm revenue stream is secured by a Corporate Power Purchase Agreement supplemented by the government support scheme;
5. **Huntstown Anaerobic Digestion (AD) Plant:** Project finance for one of the largest AD Plants in Ireland;
6. **GRAZE Gas Project:** grant to develop a central grid injection facility for renewable gas into the grid;
7. **Coolbawn ESCO Project:** Energy Services Contract (ESCO) approach (incl. finance) for biomass boiler and energy efficiency project for a local authority water treatment plant;
8. **Dublin Waste to Energy Project:** Public Private Partnership to develop a waste to energy project;
9. **Tallaght District Heating Scheme:** financing Ireland's first data centre district heating scheme;
10. **Silvermines Pumped Hydro Project:** Financing a major green energy infrastructure project;
11. **Support Scheme for Renewable Heat:** Government funded initiative to increase the energy generated from renewable sources in the heat sector in Ireland;
12. **Better Communities Scheme:** Solar PV providing energy to public buildings - Tipperary Co. Co. availed of grant support under the Better Communities Scheme, an innovative government grant scheme, to install solar PV panels in nine public buildings;
13. **Carlow County Hall SOLAR PV:** Carlow Co. Co. availed of grant support under the Better Communities Scheme, an innovative government grant scheme, to install solar PV panels for the County Hall;
14. **Domestic Solar PV Pilot Grant:** scheme introduced by the Government in 2018 to support domestic solar photovoltaic (PV) installations by private homeowners and grow the supplier base;
15. **Community Power:** a community-based Virtual Power Plant (cVPP) - Ireland's first community owned electricity supplier and is one of three being developed in Europe through Interreg NWE's cVPP project.



Renewable Energy Investment Forum

Throughout the second half of 2020, the Assembly worked with the consultancy Sustainability Works on the viability of establishing and launching a 'Renewable Energy Investment Forum' for the Southern Region, with the objective to support and boost investment in renewables in the Southern region through 4 key pillars:

1. Be Informed

Hear from subject matter experts and get their insights on specific areas and issues.

2. Be Connected

Connect with peers and with potential collaborators.

3. Be Inspired

Hear case studies of what has worked from those who delivered successfully.

4. Be a Leader

Demonstrate and communicate your organisation's contribution to meeting the region's renewable energy targets.

In July, Sustainability Works conducted a scoping exercise and consulted with a wide range of stakeholders including the public sector, primarily local authorities and CAROs, local energy agencies, organisations with community interest, and the private and finance sector. The overall response to the suggestion of a Renewable Energy investment Forum has been positive and work will continue in 2021. All of these activities, good practices, Interregional study visits and stakeholder engagements assisted the Assembly in developing a Regional Action Plan for the FIRESPOL project, which was published in late 2020 and can be found on our website www.southernassembly.ie

For further information about the FIRESPOL project:

Karen Coughlan, Project Officer:
kcoughlan@southernassembly.ie

Website: interregeurope.eu/firespol/
Twitter: [@firespolproject](https://twitter.com/firespolproject)
Facebook: [@firespolproject](https://www.facebook.com/firespolproject)

FIRESPOL 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.

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, the promotion of gender equality and ethics in R&I and promoting science education. Fundamentally, it is about creating high quality science that is more in the public interest. MARIE promotes RRI in key sectors.

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.

MARIE Progress 2020

MARIE entered phase-2 in January 2020, which saw partners implementing the shared learning that inspired the work behind the Regional Action Plans. The Assembly worked with Science Foundation Ireland throughout phase-1 to incorporate additional reporting on RRI elements in all their Research Centre and Spokes Programmes. Specifically, they will ask beneficiaries to report on two RRI keys: Public Engagement and Science Education. The template informs monitoring metrics and indicators to measure these elements. This information will be submitted annually for the duration of the programme (July 2020 & 2021) to enable the Assembly to assess quantitative changes related to the RRI indicators.

As a result, the Assembly began monitoring the results and impact this enhanced reporting has had to demonstrate the socio-economic benefits of responsible working practices. This policy improvement supports MARIE'S overall 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 has a second objective of influencing the Southern Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) which was published in January 2020 and over the following 12 months worked on establishing the framework for implementation and monitoring. Thanks to MARIE, the RSES contains an explicit reference to RRI championing the message that innovation should deliver measurable benefit for society. We will continue work on integrating RRI principles into the monitoring and implementation of the RSES throughout phase-2.

Partner Meeting 19th May 2020



Covid-19 travel restrictions meant project partners couldn't meet as planned however this didn't stop the partners getting together who met for a virtual meeting on the 19th May. All partners provided updates on the progress of their action plans and shared any successes, problems or input that might be helpful to the other partners.

Partner Meeting, 1st October 2020



Project partners came together for a second meeting on the 01st October 2020. A key theme that emerged from the meeting was the belief from partners that a responsible approach to innovation is one of the best ways to emerge from the Covid-19 crisis.

Partners also discussed the necessity to define measures to measure qualitative impact in line with their Regional Action Plans which they will continue to work on over the duration of phase-2.

#Build Back Better - Responsible Innovation Summit 20th & 21st October 2020

The MARIE partners continued the successful collaboration with the Responsible Innovation Summit for the third year running. This year's event moved online and the aim of the summit was to inspire innovators from business, research and policy sectors to 'build back better' after the Covid19 pandemic by adapting Responsible Innovation and sustainable business practices.

Leaders of change came together virtually to mainstream Responsible Innovation, learn from emerging business models making a 'Profit with Purpose' and support value-driven enterprises. The summit presented insights on future-shaping



MARIE project partner taking part in discussion on 'Financing Positive Change'

trends to spot opportunities and turn challenges into advantages.

For further information about MARIE:

Karen Coughlan, Project Officer: kcoughlan@southernassembly.ie

Website: www.interregueurope.eu/marie/

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

EMPOWER: More carbon reduction by dynamically monitoring energy efficiency

EMPOWER focuses on reducing carbon emissions by dynamically monitoring energy efficiency. This is to be achieved 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.

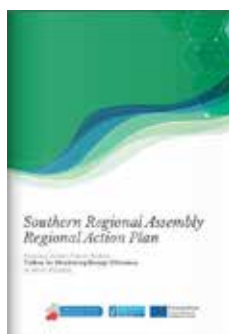
In January 2020, the project moved into Phase 2, implementing our Regional Action Plan which was validated by the Interreg Europe Secretariat in December 2019.

Our Regional Action Plan seeks to improve the Southern & Eastern Regional Operational Programme, working with Cork City Council, to implement a pilot to install energy monitoring equipment to calculate the exact energy usage of a number of social housing units before and after a deep retrofit. This will allow local authorities to test the actual energy savings before and after the deep retrofit to ensure real energy-efficiency behaviour change of social housing residents is achieved and thereby reducing CO2 emissions and assisting Ireland in meeting our carbon emissions targets.

We have been working hard along with our Irish EMPOWER stakeholders, in particular Cork City Council, to progress the implementation of our Regional Action Plan.

The 3 main actions in our Regional Action Plan are concentrated on the Social Housing Sector in Ireland:

1. Investigate if it is possible to monetise energy savings following the deep retrofit of social housing units;
2. Identify, using energy monitoring equipment the actual energy savings created by the retrofitting of social housing units;
3. Establish the wider benefits of our retrofitting programme within the social housing sector.



Progress 2020

With increasing levels of air pollution, CO2 emissions and with buildings alone accounting for around 40% of EU energy needs and 36% of carbon emissions, a need exists

EMPOWER Interreg Europe



to find suitable solutions to respond to this challenge. As part of EMPOWER, we commissioned 3 Counties Energy Agency to undertake a feasibility study of our proposed financial instrument model to monetise energy savings in social housing units in Ireland which was completed in December 2019.

This model was developed as part of the exchange of experiences process with the Interregional Partners of the EMPOWER project during technical workshops in Phase 1. Unfortunately, this study concluded that the financial model would not work in its current configuration. It concluded that the model was too complex with too many stakeholders, the scale of funding required at a support rate of 80% is not realistic and the return on investment would not be attractive for Banks or ESCO's.

However, it has opened the conversation on financial instruments for the social housing sector in Ireland and created a platform for further discussion that we hope can be developed upon during the next programming period.



In February 2020, the Regional Assembly and Cork City Council met with the social housing residents in Cork City to outline to them our plan to install energy monitoring equipment in social housing units in advance of undertaking a deep retrofit of these units. We



presented our plan to assess the energy usage in these units before and after the deep retrofit to identify the deep retrofit features that have created the most benefits to reducing energy consumption and energy costs.

These measurements will also allow Local Authorities to test the actual energy savings before and after the deep retrofit to ensure real behaviour change is achieved. All residents who have agreed to have energy monitoring equipment installing in their homes completed a pre retrofit survey prior to the deep retrofit so that we could assess the comfort levels in these units before and after the deep retrofit that will assist us in identifying the wider benefits of the retrofitting programme.

In August 2020, ACE Controls and Cork City Council tested the energy monitoring equipment off site and the communications, interface and weather station to ensure it was functioning correctly. The weather station will measure a number of parameters including wind speed, wind directions, temperature, humidity, air pressure, and rainfall. Inside the house gas consumption, electricity consumption, energy generated by the boiler, air temperature, air pressure and humidity will be measured. All of this data will be transferred and stored on a server from which it can be downloaded and analysed.



COVID 19 Impact on EMPOWER Regional Action Plan for the Southern Region



In March, COVID 19 arrived in Ireland and a lockdown followed. Like many energy efficiency projects, this led to a significant delay in the installation of our energy monitoring equipment at a time when more people are working from home as building contractors were not permitted physical access to these properties.

This is in line with the International Energy Agency report, Energy Efficiency 2020 that indicated that global progress on using more efficiency sources of energy would slow down as a result of the economic impact of COVID 19. More importantly, they advised that electricity use in residential buildings in the first half of 2020 grew by 20% in some countries because of COVID 19, coupled with social distancing and teleworking. Given the potential increase in energy usage in Irish homes because of COVID 19, we are delighted that in November 2020 we managed to install the energy monitoring equipment into the social housing units in Cork City and data collection on energy usage commenced in December 2020.

For further information about EMPOWER:

Rose Power, Project Officer:
rpower@southernassembly.ie

Website: www.interregeurope.eu/empower
Twitter: @interregempower
Facebook: @EmpowerO

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

8 | EU Programmes

European Territorial Cooperation (ETC), including Interreg is one of the goals 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. Cooperation projects are supported by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) through 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 a contact point for the Ireland Wales Programme, Interreg North-West Europe, and Interreg Europe, and carries out the First Level Control audit function for five ETC programmes.

First Level Control Audit

First Level Control (FLC) involves the checks, or audits, of project expenditure during project implementation, each time before submitting a payment claim.

It involves the following checks:

- Verification of the delivery of the products and services as described in the approved application form;
- Verification of the soundness of the declared expenditure;
- Verification of the compliance of such expenditure with the Programme, EU and national rules.

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.

What does the FLC team do within the Assembly?

The FLC Team verifies and validates expenditure incurred to implement a project and 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. The main aim of the controls is to 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.

The FLC team validate expenditure claims for five European Territorial Cooperation programmes:

- Ireland Wales
- North West Europe
- Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme
- Interreg Europe Programme
- URBACT

Activity update 2020

During 2020, the Assembly's FLC team audited and validated 180 project claims worth €7,228,685.22 to Irish organisations participating as project partners on the five European Territorial Cooperation programmes. Two FLC staff attended the Interreg Europe project seminar on the 21st-22nd January 2020 in Budapest, Hungary, and the Head of the FLC Unit participated in the ETC Network webinar on 6th October 2020.

For further information on First Level Control:
flc@southernassembly.ie

Ireland-Wales Programme 2014-20

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 first Programme started in 1994 and it has gone from strength to strength since then. The current programme began in 2014 with 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

Programme Update 2020

Priority 1 - Cross-border Innovation

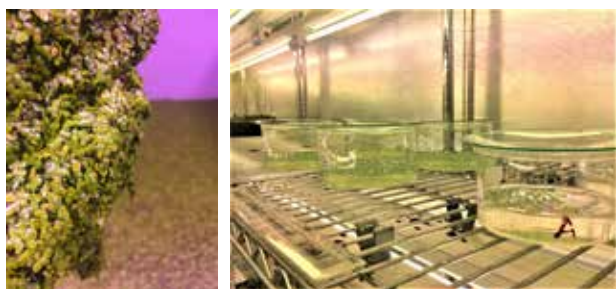
BRAINWAVES

Agri Prospecting
Archwilio Amaethyddol
Taisceolaíocht Talmhaíochta

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

Partners: University College Cork (Lead) & Aberystwyth University

Project budget: €1.16m ERDF



Close-up of duckweed stock cultures (r), & cultures (l) being tested for growth optimisation (e.g. growth rate, nutrient uptake, water remediation & protein content) on standardised synthetic wastewater under lab conditions as a first-step to help farms manage soiled water, e.g. yard-washings.

BUCANIER

Bucanier aims at increasing the innovation capacity within SMEs & social enterprises.

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

Project budget: €2.35m ERDF



Bucanier participants on a site visit to Clonakilty Distillery for a cross-border Workshop on Sustainability, Wellness & Equality Strategies for SMEs, January 2020.



CALIN is 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 & National University of Ireland Galway

Project budget: €14.72m ERDF



CALIN taking part in discussions on the future of research collaborations between Welsh and Irish Universities, March 2020.



CATALYST aims to drive innovation in Welsh and Irish businesses in the life science, and food & drink sectors by supporting them to develop new specialist products, research accessing new markets and ensure that product packaging is sustainably sourced and minimised.

Partners: University of Wales- Trinity Saint David (Lead), WRAP Cymru, Carlow Institute of Technology, Tipperary Co. Co. & Carlow Co. Co.

Project budget: €1.35 million ERDF



Irish & Welsh project participants attend a Catalyst 'Trade Residencies' at the Packaging Innovations event in Birmingham, February 2020.



Dŵr Uisce (Distributing our Water Resources: Utilising Integrated, Smart & Low-Carbon Energy) aims to improve the long-term sustainability of the supply of water, treatment and end-use. The partners installed a PAT demo site in Blackstairs Group Water Scheme water treatment plant. In the first 12 months, it produced almost 15,600 kWh of electricity (3.6 tonnes CO₂ eq) and €2,037 in savings which were donated to a charity called Wells of Life Ireland to provide financial and technical support for drilling and reconditioning community water wells in rural Uganda.

Partners: Trinity College Dublin (Lead) & Bangor University

Project budget: €4.47m ERDF



Official handover by Dŵr Uisce project partners of the cheque to Wells of Life charity in December 2020.



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

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



piSCES, a Smart Cluster Energy System, is working with the fish processing industry to reduce operational costs and its carbon footprint by developing and testing a new 'smart grid' electricity network.

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

Project budget: €1.8m ERDF



The piSCES platform which models the usage profile of energy networks, optimising that against the wholesale energy market and any available onsite generation. The graph shows the platform working in a Coldstore, automatically ramping it up and down within set temperatures at the most economic price.



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

Partners: Football Association of Ireland (Lead) & Vi-Ability
Project budget: €1.03m ERDF



The Irish Sea Portal (Pilot) formed a cluster focusing on a study of juvenile shellfish larvae and seabed settlement. This project closed in 2019.

Partners: Bangor University (Lead) and Bord Iascaigh Mhara
Project budget: €1.1m ERDF

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



Acclimatize is investigating the impacts of climate change on bathing waters and developing a range of technologies, including smart, real-time predictive tools, to monitor water quality to protect human health and the marine environment.

Partners: University College Dublin (Lead) and Aberystwyth University
Project budget: €7.4m ERDF



Acclimatize team celebrate EU day 2020 online. Top l-r: Dr Laura Sala-Comorera, Joanne Chadwick, Dr Liam Reynolds, Dr Aisling Corkery, Dr Guanghai Gao. Middle l-r: Dr John O'Sullivan, Tristan Nolan, Dr Mark Wyer, Paula Hopkins, Dr Conor Muldoon. Bottom l-r: Prof David Kay, Prof Wim Meijer, Jayne Stephens, Niamh Martin, Prof Gregory O'Hare.



BlueFish aims to develop understanding of the connectivity (demographic, genetic, life history, commercial) between shellfish, finfish and parasite and pathogen populations around the Irish Sea, and how this connectivity might be altered by predicted climate change effects on the physical, chemical, and biotic environment.

Partners: Bangor University (Lead), Swansea University, Aberystwyth University, University College Cork, the Marine Institute and Bord Iascaigh Mhara
Project Budget: €5.3m ERDF



The vital role of the ocean, climate change & actions to safeguard our oceans for future generations were the focus of conversations between The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and the Bluefish team during the royal couple's first official visit to Ireland, March



CCAT (Coastal Communities Acting Together) aims to build resilience (adaptive capacity to change) 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 County Council, Cardiff University, Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum and Port of Milford Haven

Project budget: €1.3m ERDF



Students show off the marine energy devices they created at the CCAT STEM Careers in Marine Energy event for local secondary schools and college in Milford Haven, March 2020.



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

Partners: Royal Commission on the Ancient & Historical Monuments of Wales (Lead), Aberystwyth University, Geological Survey of Ireland, Discovery Programme Ireland

Project budget: €4.9m ERDF



CHERISH Team undertake an archaeological survey at Buckspool coastal promontory fort, Castlemartin range.



ECHOES (Effect of Climate Change on Bird Habitats around the Irish Sea) is addressing the challenges of climate change on the coastal bird habitats of the Irish Sea by promoting climate change understanding, providing tools to monitor, manage and adapt to its potential impacts. The project is working with Irish & Welsh stakeholders incl. those tasked with managing coastal habitats and bird populations and people who live within or enjoy the coastal environment.

Partners: Aberystwyth University (Lead), University College Cork, Compass Informatics, British Trust for Ornithology and Geo Smart Decisions

Funding: €2.6m ERDF



British Trust for Ornithology tagging Curlews in Cefni valley, Anglesey, December 2020.



STREAM (Sensor Technologies for Remote Environmental Aquatic Monitoring) will bring 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 and Cork Institute of Technology.

Funding: €4.3m ERDF

During Covid-19, STREAM has deployed a commercially available temperature, pH and Nitrate sensor to measure water quality. This device will be used as a benchmark to assess the performance of STREAM developed sensors in the future.





ECOSTRUCTURE aims to raise awareness of eco-engineering solutions to the challenge of coastal adaptation to climate change. It will provide developers and regulators with accessible tools and resources, based on interdisciplinary research in the fields of ecology, engineering and socioeconomics.

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

Funding: €4.88m ERDF



Installing experimental Ecostructures at Milford Haven
(l) Close up of the structures (r), Summer 2020.

Priority 3 – Cultural and Natural Resources and Heritage



Celtic Routes is 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 County Council (Lead), Waterford County Council, Wexford County Council, Wicklow County Council, Ceredigion County Council and Pembroke National Park Authority

Funding: €1.59m ERDF



The Mahon Falls in County Waterford is one of the stunning locations in Ireland selected for **Celtic Routes**, which guides explorers towards the roads less travelled. Each of the **Celtic Routes** takes travellers closer to the coast and countryside, the people and the places, that has shaped a rich culture still shared between Ireland and Wales.



LIVE will promote 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, Gywnedd Council, South Kerry Development Partnership, Kerry County Council and National Trust

Funding: €2.66m ERDF



Launching LIVE in Killarney National Park, from left to right: Seán de Buitlear (South Kerry Development Partnership), Orla Breslin and Lucy Taylor (University College Cork).



Ports, Past and Present
Calafort, Innio agus Inné
Porthladdoedd, Ddole a Heddiw

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 visitor numbers and enhance visitor 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 County Council, Aberystwyth University, University of Wales Trinity St David, Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies

Funding: €2.6m ERDF



Ports, Past and Present team attend the inaugural Programme Board Meeting and meet Welsh stakeholders, January

For information about the Programme:

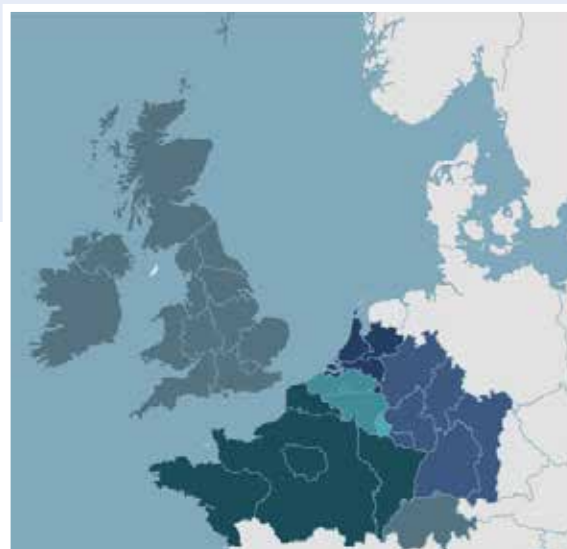
Samantha Richardson, Development Officer:
srichardson@southernassembly.ie
Breda Curran, Development Officer:
bcurran@southernassembly.ie
Michael Buckley is responsible for the First Level Control team: flc@southernassembly.ie

Interreg VB: Transnational Cooperation

INTERREG North West Europe Programme

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.



The 2014-2020 programming period focused on three thematic priorities

1. Innovation
2. Low carbon
3. Resource and materials efficiency.



Since 2014, 102 projects have been approved through nine calls for proposals for a total amount of €376 million (60% grant rate). 44 projects were funded in Priority 1. Innovation; 35 projects in Priority 2. Low carbon; 23 projects in Priority 3. Resource & materials efficiency. The last calls under the current programming period was launched under the “capitalisation call” in 2021.

Programme Update 2020

Adapting to COVID-19

The Covid-19 pandemic forced the Programme and its projects to take precautionary measures to ensure the health and safety of staff and partners. Interreg NWE projects were supported throughout 2020 by increased speed of processing project claims to avoid cashflow issues and through it time extensions. Despite these challenges, some projects managed to deliver their tasks planned for the first half of the year creatively, turning such difficult times into opportunities to thrive.

For instance, the project “E-mental health innovation and transnational implementation platform North West Europe” (eMEN) took the opportunity to discuss the advantages of digital applications in a context of lockdown and social distancing. A key project partner is **Mental Health Reform (MHR)**, Ireland’s leading national coalition of organisations campaigning to transform mental health and well-being supports in Ireland. MHR launched a pilot programme with Wellola which offered free of charge online mental health supports to clients, including secure phone and video consultations and a client management system, enabling organisations to provide secure services to people who needed them during the lockdown periods.



Members of the eMen consortium in Dublin event, February 2020

Interreg NWE projects with Irish partners in 2020

Since 2014, Irish partners working on activities in Interreg NWE projects have been awarded over €32.8 million ERDF funds. In 2020, six new projects started, with a value of over €2 million awarded by ERDF.

Project	Irish Partner	Grant Award ERDF €
CURCOL	Athlone Institute of Technology	€204,307.71
	DeltaQ T/A Quality Additives	€67,728.30
	Repak Limited	€0.00
Enter to Transform	Letterkenny Institute of Technology	€0.00
	Irish Refugee Council	€233,487.57
	Irish Refugee Protection Programme (Dept. of Justice & Equality)	€0.00
HI-ECOWIRE	National University of Ireland Galway	€71,599.22
MegaAWE	Mayo County Council	€423,041.94
	SmartBay Ireland	€77,164.48
	Bord na Mona	€0.00
RIGHTWEIGHT	University of Limerick	€0.00
STEPS	National University of Ireland Galway	€307,210.67
	Carlow Kilkenny Energy Agency/ TA 3 Counties Energy Agency	€197,308.99
	Galway Energy Co-operative	€ 212,126.77
	Galway Energy Co-operative	€ 212,126.77
	O'Shea Farms Ltd	€0.00
	Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI)	€0.00
	Medtronic	€0.00

Capitalisation Call 2020

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. On 12th February 2020, eight projects from the first call for capitalisation were approved by the Monitoring Committee in Brussels for a value of €3.8 million additional ERDF funds. Six of those projects have active Irish partners receiving increased funding of over €400,000 collectively.

EUSEW Citizens Award

EU Sustainable Energy Week (EUSEW) is the biggest annual event dedicated to renewables and efficient energy use in Europe, it took place 22-26 June 2020. The EUSEW Awards celebrate outstanding individuals, projects and ideas in priority categories.

The Interreg NWE project Community-based Virtual Power Plant (cVPP) as a new model for energy system organisation won the prestigious EUSEW Citizens Award. The consortium of Irish Partners includes Community Power, Templeberry Windfarm, Tipperary



A meeting of Irish cVPP sub partners pre-lockdown
(photo: Gregg Allen)

Energy Agency (TEA), Friends of the Earth, Smart M Power along with community partners, Energy Communities Tipperary Co-operative (ECTC), Aran Island Energy Co-op, Claremorris Energy Co-op and Tait House Social Enterprise Limerick all of whom have been actively promoting community energy initiatives in their local area. The team replicate cVPP in small communities in Ireland, developing business cases and attracting prosumers into the cVPP locally.

REGIOSTARS Award

The REGIOSTARS Awards identify good practices in regional development and highlight innovative projects, which could be attractive and inspiring to other EU regions.

The Interreg NWE funded Sustainable Housing for Inclusive and Cohesive Cities (SHICC) project was **the award winner in the category "Citizen's engagement for cohesive European cities"**. SHICC supports the establishment of more successful Community Land Trusts (CLT). Since 2017, the project has invested in CLTs in Brussels, Ghent, Lille and London to 'prove the concept', creating a supportive local, regional and national policy, funding and regulatory environment for CLTs. In 2020 the project began to support additional countries, Netherlands, Germany, Scotland, and Ireland.



Nimble Spaces - Inclusive Neighbourhoods, Callan, Co. Kilkenny promoting CLT with the award winning SHICC project

The Irish partner: Self-Organised Architecture (SOA) is a not-for-profit organisation aiming to develop broad recognition of community-led housing and CLT models, to provide a platform for the exchange of expertise and to develop transparent mechanisms for communities and state agencies to establish CLTs across Ireland.

EU Regions Week 2020

Interreg NWE project RegEnergy was a prominent participant in EU Regions Week 2020, sharing best practices during the well-attended Partnerships for Renewable Energy session which examined how regions and cities have been joining forces with rural communities to create Renewable Energy partnerships.



2nd RegEnergy Working Group Meeting, Waterford Ireland, 2019 © INFRASTRUKTUR & UMWELT

Ireland's Southern Region is well represented in this project with three important partners involved: The Three Counties Energy Agency (3 CEA), Waterford Institute of Technology and Ormonde Upgrading Limited (OUL), receiving over €2million ERDF grant funding jointly. OUL is implementing a biogas upgrader so that the biogas generated at its rural facility can be upgraded to biomethane which the same standard as fossil natural gas. 3 CEA is working to realise renewable energy partnerships which will use the biomethane. Through Waterford Institute of Technology, sub partner Údarás na Gaeltachta (UnG) rolls-out the optimisation platform to fitting sites in its portfolio, contributing to the long-term roll-out of RegEnergy strategies and solutions. Further cooperation with other local authorities are facilitated by UnG's excellent network in the Gaeltacht.

PLANNING PERIOD 2021-2027

Interreg NWE formally started the process aimed at designing a new programme which will run in the next seven years (2021-2027). An Interreg NWE task force (NTF) made of delegations from each country involved in the future NWE Programme was launched at the end of 2019.

The priorities, objectives area and process were discussed throughout 2020, and the outcome of those discussions have been made available as draft papers on the North West Europe website.

Further Information on Interreg NWE in Ireland

Sarah Davoren, National Contact Point:
sdavoren@southernassembly.ie

Michael Buckley is responsible for the First Level Control team: f1c@southernassembly.ie

Website: www.nweurope.eu/

Interreg Atlantic Area

INTERREG Atlantic Area promotes transnational cooperation among 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 €185 million, Atlantic Area assists transnational co-operation projects in the fields of Innovation & Competitiveness, Resource Efficiency, Territorial Risks Management, Biodiversity and Natural & Cultural Assets.

The overall objective of the programme 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 also the designated First Level Controller for payment claims from partners located in the S&E Region for INTERREG Atlantic Area.

Programme Update 2020

Nineteen organisations are involved in 34 different Atlantic Area co-funded projects. Below is a list of partners from the Southern Region and the projects they are partnered on.

Participating Organisation	Projects Participating
Cork County Council	PROTOATLANTIC
Cork City Council	ADSA, Atlantic-Social-Lab, AtlanticFoodExport, MMIAH
Limerick City and County Council	CAPITEN, MMIAH
Clare County Council	Atlantic-Geoparks
Port of Cork	@BluePortS
Shannon Foynes Port Company	PORTOS
Teagasc	Dairy-4-Future
An Roinn Tithíochta, Pleanála & Rialtais Áitiúil	OceanWise
Irish Sea Fisheries Board	OceanWise
Irish South & West Fish Producers Organisation CLG	CephSandChefs
University College Cork	ARCWIND, Atlantic-POSITIVE, EERES4WATER, JONAS, KETmaritime, MONITOR, NEUROATLANTIC, COCKLES, SEAFOOD-AGE, PROTOATLANTIC, PORTOS, OceanWise
Cork Institute of Technology	AtlanticCultureScape, AT-VIRTUAL, BODAH, CONSORTEx, CircularSeas, GeoAtlantic, IN 4.0
Limerick Institute of Technology	4H-CREAT, Triple-C
Institute of Technology Tralee	FAN-BEST
Indigo Rock Marine Research Station	SEA-TRACES, SEAFOOD-AGE, PRIMROSE, NANOCULTURE
Cork BIC	AT-VIRTUAL
Copper Coast Geopark	Atlantic-Geoparks
Resolute Marine Limited	EERES4WATER
BioAtlantis Ltd	NASPA

For further information

National Contact Point: Brendan Mooney, bmooney@nwra.ie
Website: www.atlanticarea.eu/

First Level Control: sconway@nwra.ie

Northern Periphery & Arctic Programme

The Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme involves cooperation between nine countries. The large programme area shares several joint challenges and opportunities that can best be overcome and realised by transnational cooperation.

The Programme's vision is 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 also the designated First Level Control for all payment claims from partners located in the Southern Region for the Northern Periphery & Arctic Programme.

Programme Update 2020



In March 2020, the Programme established the NPA COVID-19 Response Group as an informal group of experts who had participated in, or had led, an NPP or NPA e-health projects.

The group had 138 participants in the NPA programme area, Canada, USA, and Australia. It was through the open dialogue and the spirit of cooperation of this inclusive group that worked together to bring projects to life to address the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 Call for Proposals

The Programme opened a call for proposals for short-term projects under six themes which are aimed at responding to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The programme received 19 applications – 5 were approved. Approved projects will deliver under the following topics: Clinical aspects, Health and well-being, Technology solution, Citizen engagement/ Community response, Economic impact, and Emerging themes.

New Programme Preparation

Three programme planning group meetings took place during 2020 to work on the shape and format of the new programme, including preparation of a public consultation during 2021. Full details are available on the NPA website.

Participation in Projects – Southern Region

Below is a list of organisations from the Southern Region involved in co-funded projects.

Participating Organisation	Projects Participating
Cork County Council	KICK, N-EEC, Pre NordRES, e-Lighthouse
Limerick City and County Council	PLACE-EE, Re-Mind, SAC
University College Cork	A:EYE, COAST, Energy Pathfinder, NEES2, Pre-Lighthouse, Pre-Nord_ZEB, SENDoc_Preparation, SenDOC
University of Limerick	COVIDWATCH-EU-NPA
Cork Institute of Technology	Arctic Apps, Cool Route, ChatPal
Waterford Institute of Technology	FOBIA
Limerick Institute of Technology	FREED
Bantry Marine Research Station Ltd	AINNPA
Royal Cork Yacht Club	Cool Route
Macroom E Enterprise Centre	Circular Ocean
NCE Insulation	Energy Pathfinder, Pre NordRES, Pre-Nord_ZEB e-Lighthouse
The Gaeltacht Authority	LECo
National Microelectronics Applications Centre Ltd	SAC
International Energy Research Centre	SMARTGrid

For further information:

Brendan Mooney, National Contact Point: bmooney@nwra.ie
First Level Control: f1c@southernassembly.ie / sconway@nwra.ie

Website: 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.



**Interreg
Europe**



European Union | European Regional Development Fund



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 of Ireland and represents the Irish Member State on the Programme's Monitoring Committee. The Assembly is also the designated First Level Controllers for all payment claims from partners located in the S&E Region for INTERREG Europe.

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.

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, COHESION, EMPOWER, FIRESPO, 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

First Level Control: f1c@southernassembly.ie / info@nwra.ie

Website: www.interregeurope.eu/

Other European Territorial Cooperation

URBACT III

The URBACT III European Territorial Co-operation programme aims to enable cities to work together and 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 has a total eligible budget of €96.3 million and is financed through the European Regional Development Fund.



URBACT III has four main objectives:

1. Capacity for Policy Delivery: improve the capacity of cities to manage sustainable urban policies and practices in an integrated and participative way;
2. Policy Design: improve the design of sustainable strategies and action plans in cities;
3. Policy Implementation: improve the implementation of integrated and sustainable urban strategies and action plans in cities;
4. Building and Sharing Knowledge: ensure that practitioners and decision makers at all levels have increased access to knowledge and share know-how on all aspects of sustainable urban development to improve urban development policies.

The Eastern & Midland Regional Assembly is the National Contact Point for URBACT III. The Southern Regional Assembly is the designated First Level Control for payment claims from partners in the S&E Region. Two Programme Monitoring Committee meetings took place in May and November, online due to COVID-19.

Programme Update 2020

The Action Planning Networks bring together 7-10 cities from across Europe to exchange experience on a particular thematic urban development challenge and to share ideas about possible solutions. While Phase 1 focused on the development of baseline studies, city profiles, Phase 2 the cities focus on the exchange and learning activities using a range of learning tools and approaches in line with the URBACT Method, and undertake pilot actions to experiment with new ideas for projects from network exchanges. A total of 23 Phase 1 Action Planning Networks were approved for Phase 2 in 2020, including six with Irish partners. Due to the pandemic, the Networks have been given a three-month extension until August 2022.

Participating Local Authority	Network	Thematic Objective
Limerick City & County	Find your Greatness Health & Greenspace	Economy Environment
Dublin City Council	Access	Inclusion
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown	Tourism Friendly Cities	Economy
Fingal	iPlace	Economy
Longford County Council	UrbSecurity	Physical Urban Development

For further information

National Contact Point: urbactireland@emra.ie

First Level Control: flc@southernassembly.ie

Website: www.urbact.eu

ESPON 2020

The ESPON 2020 Programme 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 other policy actors at all levels.

The objective of ESPON 2020 is to support the reinforcement of the effectiveness of EU Cohesion Policy and other sectoral policies and programmes under European Structural Investment Funds, as well as national and regional territorial development policies, through the production, dissemination and promotion of territorial evidence covering the entire territory of the 28 EU Members States, as well as Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.

The ESPON 2020 Programme has two priorities:

1. Territorial Evidence, Transfer, Observation, Tools and Outreach
2. Technical Assistance

Five specific objectives that guide the implementation of the ESPON 2020 Programme:

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.

Programme Update 2020

ESPON's schedule for 2020 was disrupted by COVID-19, and the Programme's activities subsequently moved online, including transnational outreach conferences, peer learning workshops and e-learning activities. ESPON was very active at European Week of Cities and Regions, hosting 15 sessions in cooperation with over 60 partners. The ESPON seminars, planned for May and November, were replaced by an online magazine, TERRITORIAL. In addition to highlighting ESPON projects, the magazine covers a range of topical issues from green infrastructure to the geography of COVID-19.

Dedicated ESPON Conference Weeks were hosted in the second half of 2020:

- ESPON Week on Just Transition and Recovery for Cities and Regions in Europe, 18-19 November



- ESPON Conference Week on Ageing: Adapting European Cities to Population Ageing: Policy Challenges and Best Practices, 30 November-4 December

Ireland's engagement in ESPON activities during 2020 included:

Applied Research

ESCAPE (European Shrinking Rural Areas Challenges, Actions & Perspectives for Territorial Governance) focuses on European rural regions experiencing or threatened by demographic decline, includes TEAGASC. The final report, submitted in October, provides knowledge & evidence on the causes & consequences of socio-economic change in Europe's rural regions & explores innovative territorial governance solutions for rural regions experiencing acute and often irreversible depopulation & economic decline.

Targeted Analysis

ENSURE (European Sustainable Urbanisation through port city Regeneration) project, with Cork City Council (lead stakeholder), submitted its final report in January. The project generates learning from port cities which have had success in regenerating their former port areas and will help to better define the contribution of regenerated smaller port cities to the collective socio-economic health of the EU. The project is creating a unified repository of the critical enabling elements of transformation and development in smaller European port cities focused on funding, knowledge, regulation, citizen engagement, governance & other catalysts & builds the evidence base for policy to support the redevelopment of port city areas across Europe.

QGasSP (Quantitative Greenhouse Gas Impact Assessment Method for Spatial Planning Policy) started in October with the Eastern & Midlands Regional Assembly (lead stakeholder). The main objective is to produce a robust, simple and proportionate methodology to allow competent planning authorities at national, regional and local levels to quantify and forecast the influence of spatial planning policies on GHG emissions in a consistent way. The final output is due in October 2021.

Transnational Outreach

One of the identified themes for outreach activities for 2020-21 was maritime spatial planning. The Irish ECP led the development of a policy briefing on maritime spatial planning and land-sea interactions, jointly with Ulster University and MaREI SFI Research Centre.

For further information:

Caroline Creamer is the Contact Point:
Email: caroline.creamer@nuim.ie

Website: www.espon.eu

9 | Irish European Regions 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 (LRAs). Operationally the office is part of the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly and with the support of the Department for Housing, Planning and Local Government. The focus is on bringing the EU closer to the wider local government sector and vice versa. The three Regional Assemblies play a vital role in the management and delivery of EU Regional Policy funding programmes in Ireland, also acting as Contact Points for European Territorial Cooperation Programmes 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. 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, Communication, Building Capacity, Networks & Partnerships

While the pandemic halted opportunities for meetings in Brussels, the IREO launched an **online roadshow** of the regions to update local authorities on key EU policy and funding opportunities in Ireland, particularly ERDF and INTERREG. The event also featured good practice examples of EU project coordination from the local authorities of Cork City Council and Limerick City & County Councils. The IREO published a revamped **bi-monthly newsletter** at the end of 2020 to update local authorities and Regional Assemblies on the work of the IREO, the EU policy and the EU funding landscape, to highlight the work of the Irish Delegation to the Committee of the Regions and EU projects involving local authorities. The IREO took part in the Southern Regional Assembly's **ETC network** to outline how the work of the



IREO can assist local authorities to engage more fully in EU policy and funding programmes.

Raising the profile of the strengths of local and regional Government

A highlight was **European Week of Regions and Cities** in October, albeit virtually. The event, 'Green Cities by Co-Design', co-hosted with the Greater London Authority, brought together 9 cities from across Europe to examine how citizen engagement and smart technology work in building green cities. The IREO was particularly delighted to showcase Limerick City & County Council and Smart Dublin. Both outlined how local engagement is essential to combat climate change and make an impact on the urban agenda.

Influencing European Policy

During 2020, IREO worked closely with key EU stakeholders and policy makers, including Irish local and regional representation on Brussels-based specialised networks in relation to Cohesion Policy negotiations and Brexit. IREO regularly communicates Irish interests, including the Irish MEPs, European Commission officials and Irish Government officials in the Irish Permanent Representation to the EU.

Due to the pandemic, EU policy development quickly focused on responding as a bloc to the emergency. A comprehensive and ambitious recovery plan, **REACT EU**, was launched by the European Commission with a significant focus on using cohesion policy to ensure a balanced recovery for all regions - agreed by the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers in December 2020. The package provides additional funding for dedicated programmes under the Investment for Growth and Job goal (ERDF/ ESF) and for existing cross-border cooperation programmes under the ETC goal.

The **Recovery and Resilience Facility** will make €672.5bn in loans and grants available to support reforms and investments by Member States. It aims to mitigate the economic and social impact of the pandemic and make European economies and societies more sustainable, resilient and better prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the green and digital transitions. Ireland will avail of €853m in grants for 2021-22 with possibly further funding in 2023, depending on the economic situation.

The EU also dealt with **BREXIT** and the implications for Ireland were at the forefront for the European Commission. The IREO worked closely with Irish Committee of the Regions Members to ensure that Irish issues in relation to trade, peace and stability were raised with the EU institutions and other Member States.

The Multi-Annual Financial Framework (EU budget) was also centre stage during 2020, with an agreement reached at the end of the year on the EU's spending priorities for the 2021-27 period. The IREO monitored policy developments in relation to agriculture, trade and environment, including the new EU Green Deal and the developments establishing the Just Transition Mechanism.

For further information:

Teresa Lennon teresa.lennon@ireo.eu
Website: www.ireo.ie

Committee of the Regions



The Committee of the Regions (CoR) is the EU's assembly of local and regional representatives. It has 350 members from across the EU Member States, all democratically elected and/or hold a political mandate in their home country. The CoR's role is to inform the development of EU legislation and future 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. 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 during the year to prepare the opinions for adoption at the 5-6 plenary sessions. Commissioners, Presidency Ministers, and MEPs regularly attend CoR meetings and there is an ongoing exchange between the institutions on policy issues. Irish Regions European Office is the secretariat to the Irish delegation to the Committee of the Regions and co-ordinates the work of the members of the national delegation to the Committee of the Regions.

The Irish Delegation 2020 – Southern Region Representatives

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

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

Legislative Works

The Delegation met 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 relevant policy dossiers and made interventions, via amendments as well as commission and plenary interventions.

JULY	Cllr Michael Murphy opinion on the Implementation of Free Trade Agreements – the local and regional perspective was adopted by majority during July 2020 plenary.
OCTOBER	Cllr Declan McDonnell's opinion on the Local and Regional Authorities in the permanent dialogue with citizens was adopted at October 2020 plenary.
DECEMBER	Cllr Enda Stenson's opinion on the EU Strategy for Rural Revival was adopted at December 2020 plenary.

Priorities of the 2020 Work Programme

The CoR contributed to a broader debate lead by the European Commission on shape the **future priorities of the EU**, looking to the post-Brexit period and the mandate of the newly elected European Parliament. The CoR responded to ongoing discussions at the EU's highest levels at a summit in Romania where they presented its declaration by local and regional leaders on the future of Europe, which voiced concerns on the functioning of the EU, particularly in light of new term of office of the EU institutions.

In 2020, the CoR continued to promote its position on the **Multiannual Financial Framework**, to influence the ongoing funding negotiations, particularly recovery post-COVID 19. Irish Delegation took part in both debates as well as external events to voice the concerns of Irish local and regional authorities regarding future EU funding. Irish Delegation are members of the #CohesionAlliance, a group set up in 2018 to defend a strong budget for a cohesive Europe, and met with Irish officials from EU institutions and the Irish Permanent Representation on the matter.

The **future relationship between the EU and the UK** was a priority for the Irish Delegation, taking the position that the CoR should maintain as close a relationship as possible with the UK following Brexit. All full and alternate Irish members are members of the interregional group on Brexit, the CoR's main platform for knowledge and information exchange on Brexit. Last year also saw the beginning of discussions in relation to a CoR EU-UK Consultative Group to allow the UK to participate in the work of the CoR post-Brexit, particularly in areas of interest such as agriculture or ETC.

Main discussions and opinions held and adopted in 2020

Due to the pandemic, five plenary sessions were held online. The pandemic and emergency proposals for EU funding mechanisms to tackle its aftermath, saw the focus of CoR's work change towards **debates on sustainable recovery**. A number of exchanges were also held on the State of Play on the Conference on Future of Europe, both with Commission officials, as well as

Council Presidencies. The most important debates during the year included regular incorporation of exchange of learnings and best practices in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially on deployed tools and linking EU programmes to recovery.

Key debates with the following representatives:

- July: Commissioner Janez Lenarcic on Crisis Management and Recovery;
- July: Commissioner Johannes Hahn on future MFF and Recovery;
- July: Commissioner Thierry Breton on economic aspects of Recovery;
- October: Commissioner Frans Timmermans on Sustainability aspects of EU recovery;
- October: Commissioner Elisa Ferreira on cohesion policy as a tool for sustainable European recovery;
- October: Chancellor Angela Merkel on EU recovery, role of regions and cities in its delivery, and cushioning EU regions and cities against future crises;
- December: Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, on the EU-UK Agreement and territorial consequences of Brexit. before the EU-UK deal was struck.

For further information:

<https://cor.europa.eu/en>

10 | Regional Assembly Energy Usage 2020

Energy efficiency is of national importance for addressing global climate change, and energy cost and supply. The contribution of the public sector in relation to energy efficiency actions is crucial to meeting national and international energy and climate goals.

The Energy Efficiency Directive (2012/27/EU) sets out the policy roadmap to 2020 with a target for public bodies to achieve a 33% energy efficiency improvement by 2020 and measures for Member States to advance more efficient use of energy at all stages of the energy chain.

Published in 2019, Ireland's first Climate Action Plan sets a new and ambitious target of 50% improved energy efficiency by public sector bodies by the end of 2030. It also requires a new Public Sector Decarbonisation Strategy to deliver 30% emissions reduction by 2030 and to develop a roadmap to carbon neutrality by 2050.

Public bodies must submit yearly energy performance reports to the SEAI to track progress to achieving the 2020 target, and report this in their own annual report.

Energy Usage 2020

The Assembly employs 27 FTE staff with the majority located at Assembly House. Electricity is the sole energy source and four main categories account for our energy consumption: office heating, office lighting, powering IT and other office equipment, and heating water. In 2020, 20,363 Kwh of energy was consumed at Assembly House, all generated by electricity. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a decrease in energy consumption in our office building despite unchanged activity levels as the full staff complement migrated to remote working.

Energy Efficiency Activity 2020

The Assembly is a protected structure and a listed building of outstanding architectural or historical importance which limits the level of retrofitting. However, we have taken energy efficiency measures, such as external insulation of the roof and energy efficiency lighting, and further measures are being explored. The building is exempt from BER certification under Directive (EPBD) 2002/91/EC).

The Regional Assembly undertook the following actions to review energy performance:

- Establishment of an Energy Management Team to explore appropriate future measures to contribute to the new 2030 public sector targets;
- Quarterly review of energy costs and supply, in accordance with the National Procurement Service contractual arrangements;
- Annual energy return to SEAI during 2020.

Actions Planned for 2021

In 2021, the Assembly will work with the SEAI to reach our energy saving target, including:

- Ongoing review of energy consumption, bills and performance;
- Return annual energy performance reports to SEAI;
- Climate Change training for all employees and further engagement on energy efficiency awareness;
- Develop an energy management programme or system and an annual plan to identify potential energy improvement areas and take appropriate action where necessary.



11 | Annual Financial Statement 2020

Consolidated Balance Sheet for the Financial Year ending 31st December 2020

Income	2020 €	2019 €
Local Authority Contributions	1,649,245	1,668,016
Built Heritage Investment Scheme Grant	6,000	0
Travel Recoupment EU Programmes	0	15,602
Salary Recoupment EU Programmes	205,608	196,160
General Recoupment EU Programmes	46,506	44,503
Dept of Public Expenditure & Reform	4,448	0
Technical Assistance Recoupment	231,792	280,694
Designated Urban Centre Grants Scheme	2,405,299	981,526
First Level Control (FLC) Fees	108,623	64,866
Miscellaneous	5,477	21,192
Total	4,662,998	3,272,558

Expenditure	2020 €	2019 €
Payroll Costs	1,439,897	1,375,893
Pension Related Deduction	49,392	52,188
Superannuation SSP Scheme	10,806	9,250
Travel & Subsistence – Staff	32,724	162,577
Members Annual Allowance	68,677	63,807
Members SPA / Other Travel	1,833	4,373
Members Training / Conference Allowance	0	32,269
Conference Fees	0	1,932
Office Equipment & Supplies	34,870	24,946
Repairs, Maintenance & Office Costs	19,212	84,551
Refurbishment Costs	0	31,148
Annual Contracts	77,466	58,501
Energy Costs	13,877	12,690
Post & Phone	14,292	14,741
Rates & Water Charges	2,648	666
Insurance	13,833	10,883
Annual Report	5,435	4,855
Consultancy/Professional Fees	79,838	55,026
Information & Communications	44,067	82,550

Expenditure	2020 €	2019 €
Contributions/Fees/Levies (LGMA & Audit)	10,976	8,471
Health, Safety & Wellbeing	1,027	1,780
Regional Planning RSES	128,680	55,206
Gateway Grant Scheme – Project Payments	2,405,299	1,932,530
Depreciation Charge	1,477	1,503
Bank Charges	5,049	868
Bad debts written off	0	3,133
Miscellaneous	4,686	4,986
Inter-Account Transfer	0	28,163
Total Expenses	4,466,060	4,119,486
Excess of Income over Expenditure	196,937	408,024

Balance Sheet as at 31st Dec 2020

	2020 €	2019 €
Fixed Assets	998,312	999,789
Current Assets		
Cash at Bank	2,109,559	1,642,259
Debtors	728,809	1,224,102
Prepayments	11,503	0
	2,849,870	2,866,360
Current Liabilities		
Creditors & Accruals	323,534	536,640
Credit Card	173	1,972
	323,707	538,612
Net Current Assets	2,526,163	2,327,749
Net Assets	3,524,474	3,327,537
Financed By		
Balance at beginning of year	3,327,537	2,919,513
Excess of Income over Expenditure	196,937	408,024
	3,524,474	3,327,537

Appendices

Glossary of Terms

CPR	Common Provisions Regulation
DHPLG	Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government
DCCAE	Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment
DPER	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
EAFRD	European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development
EMFF	European Maritime and Fisheries Fund
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds
ETC	European Territorial Cooperation
EMR	Eastern & Midland Region
FLC	First Level Control
FOI	Freedom of Information
GDPR	Data Protection and the General Data Protection Regulation
HEI	Higher Education Institution
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IRO	Irish Regions Office
LECPs	Local Economic and Community Plans
NOAC	National Oversight and Audit Commission
NSS	National Spatial Strategy
NW	Northern and Western Region
OP	Operational Programme
OPR	Office of the Planning Regulator
R&D	Research and Development
RPG	Regional Planning Guidelines
RSES	Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy
S&E	Southern and Eastern
SDZ	Special Development Zones
SME	Small & Medium Enterprises
SPA	Strategic Planning Area
SRA	Southern Regional Assembly

Image credits: Thank you to the following who supplied photographs

- Leo Murphy Photography
- Joe Evans
- Gregg Allen
- LERO
- localenterprise.ie
- Cork County Council
- Cork City Council
- South Dublin County Council
- Waterford City & County Council
- Health Service Executive
- European Youth Parliament
- Nimble Spaces
- INFRASTRUKTUR & UMWELT
- BRAINWAVES.eu
- BUCANIER.eu
- CALIN.eu
- CATALYST.eu
- Dŵr Uisce.eu
- SELKIE.eu
- piSCES.eu
- CHERISH.eu
- ECHOES.eu
- CHERISH.eu
- Acclimatize.eu
- BlueFish.eu
- CCAT.eu
- ECOSTRUCTURE.eu
- STREAM.eu
- Celtic Routes.eu
- LIVE.eu
- Ports, Past and Present.eu
- www.pexels.com

Notes