



European
Commission



STORIES



45 INSPIRING STORIES
CELEBRATING IRELAND'S 45 YEARS OF EU MEMBERSHIP







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Introduction

As a nation, most of us aren't old enough to remember what living in Ireland was like before we joined the European Union 45 years ago.

It's undoubtedly the most significant step the country has taken on its journey as an independent nation, and there are certainly a lot more than 45 reasons to celebrate being part of Europe's family of nations. European Union membership has helped improve almost every aspect of Irish life, from how we work, travel and shop to the quality of our environment, our opportunities for learning and the way our businesses buy and sell their goods and services. Being a Member State has greatly facilitated our move from an antiquated, agricultural dependent economy into a modern one largely driven by hi-tech industry and global exports.

It's easier for Irish businesses to trade on both European and international markets thanks to the Single Market and having the euro as our currency helps with exports and travelling abroad. But our great tradition in farming hasn't been forgotten and Irish agriculture has benefited greatly from EU payments.

Between 2007 and 2013 the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) pumped €11.7 billion into Ireland's farming sector and rural areas and a further €11 billion will be invested for the period up to 2020. Over the 2014-2020 programming period, EU Structural and Investment funds will be used, together with Irish Government and Local Authority funding, to invest €6.2 billion in Ireland. This will help pay for initiatives in education, research and job creation to help build a sustainable, healthy economy across the whole of the country.

EU laws protect our environment from climate change. EU initiatives support our rural and coastal communities. EU funding has helped improve education standards in Ireland too, and created lots of opportunities for studying abroad, and being EU citizens means Irish people can choose to live and work freely in any EU country.

Ireland is also more a nation of equals thanks to EU membership. Equality between genders is one of the fundamental principles of EU law and life for Irish women has improved radically since Ireland joined the then EEC in 1973. To celebrate our 45 years of EU membership, we've put together 45 stories that illustrate just some of the ways Ireland has benefited over the past four and a half decades.

Yours faithfully

Gerry Kiely
Head of European Commission
Representation in Ireland

CULTURE

Waterford's future is crystal clear

The origins of crystal production in Waterford date back to the 18th century and the industry once provided more than 3,000 jobs in the famous city. So when the Waterford Crystal manufacturing facility closed down in 2009, it hit the Southern and Eastern region of Ireland hard.

Over 600 jobs were lost and the negative impact on tourism was felt throughout the entire region. In the aftermath of the closure, the European Commission approved an application from Ireland for assistance from the European Globalisation adjustment Fund (EGF). A grant of over €2.5 million was allocated to help the most disadvantaged 598 redundant workers in the crystal glass industry to find new jobs.

However, it was still unthinkable that Waterford would lose its hard earned reputation as a producer of the finest crystal in the world, so Waterford City Council responded by developing a plan to re-establish a crystal manufacturing and visitor centre in the city of Waterford.

The tradition and quality of craftsmanship, as well as the excellent reputation, were already in place, and the EU's Regional Development Fund was there to help with the cost. The project involved the refurbishment of a collection of adjoining buildings into the crystal manufacturing and visitor centre, which included a retail outlet.

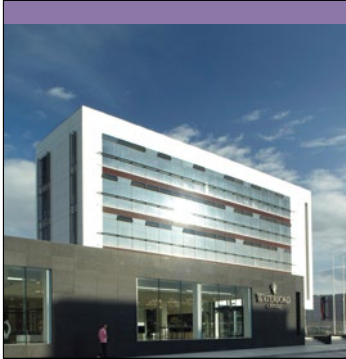
One of the refurbished buildings was a protected structure and needed particular care but its conversion enhanced the industrial character of what was previously a humble granary. Two low headroom floors were removed creating large, airy gallery spaces and as the new centre was right in the heart of Waterford City, it was crucial adequate parking be provided for visitors.

Waterford Crystal was opened to the public in June 2010, just 18 months after the factory had closed, and visitor numbers to the centre reached a very successful 70,000 in its first year.

There has also been a positive knock-on effect on other businesses in the region and Waterford is once again a major centre for quality crystal.

Now, visitors can learn about the history of crystal making in the town and see it being made as they pass through rooms showing the different steps such as blowing, moulding, cutting, sculpting and engraving.

The House of Waterford Crystal project had a total cost of €5,520,000, with the EU's Regional Development Fund contributing €2,760 000 through the Southern and Eastern (S&E) Regional Operational Programme 2007-13.





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CULTURE

Boiler house is now a WISER place

When the Dublin suburb of Ballymun was built during the 1960s in response to poor housing conditions in the city's tenements, it was hailed as the future of living. It was Ireland's first high-rise scheme and the estate included the first major shopping centre on the north side of the capital, its own swimming pool and a public library. But what became Ballymun's landmark building was the towering chimney stack of its boiler house. Capped with red and white stripes, it became an unlikely icon, but as much treasured locally as the Poolbeg Stacks are on Dublin's south side.

Completed in 1966, the boiler house was the largest civic heating scheme in Ireland and the UK, using a 200,000-litre reservoir to supply under-floor heating to Ballymun's 3,000 flats. However, when the flats were scheduled for demolition as part of a major regeneration of the area, the boiler house became redundant and it too was set to be torn down.

In 2011 local environmental project, the Rediscovery Centre, and Dublin City Council turned to Europe to seek funding to save the building. A successful grant application in 2014 to the European Union's LIFE Programme resulted in €3.6 million being made available for an imaginative, eco-friendly project called WISER (Working with Industrial Spaces to Exemplify Reuse) LIFE.

The funding was used to repurpose the boiler house into a prototype '3D textbook' building designed to stimulate curiosity and promote sustainable living.

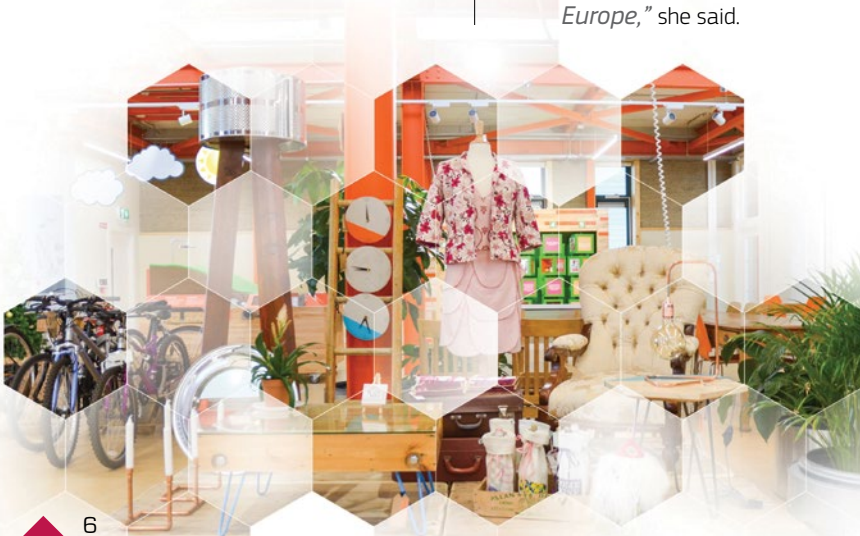
Recycling is at the heart of the Rediscovery Centre's mission so, fittingly, paint salvaged from local recycling centres was used during rebuilding work. Furniture and fittings destined for landfill were also upcycled and reused for the building's finishing touches.

Now, the old boiler house that provided heat and hot water to Ballymun for a generation, is a cutting-edge creative space connecting people, resources and ideas.

It's a centre of excellence for sustainable development with creative workshops, an ecostore, education, training, an events space and a green café that exemplifies reuse and sustainability. There's also successful community training programmes for local long term unemployed people and the centre is home to four social enterprises; Rediscover Fashion, Rediscover Furniture, Rediscover Paint and Rediscover Cycling.

Dr Sarah Miller, CEO of the Rediscovery Centre and WISER LIFE Manager, explained the objectives of the project.

"Our aim is to lead in the creation of an innovative educational space, that promotes the use of the physical environment as a 3-D textbook, showcases best practice in reuse and signposts the direction towards a resource-efficient Europe," she said.





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CULTURE

Preserving our tragic history

When Jim Callery purchased the private country estate of Strokestown Park in 1979 he didn't just preserve a piece of local history, he planted the seeds for a museum that tells the story of one of Ireland's most tragic periods.

At its height, Strokestown Park's 27,000 acres of land in Roscommon were rented out and worked by Irish tenant farmers. When the Great Famine of 1845-1852 struck, landlord Denis Mahon, largely based in London and oblivious to local unrest, forced his tenants to emigrate, and many ended up on some of the worst of the coffin ships. Mahon paid the ultimate price for his ignorance when he became the first landlord to be assassinated during the Famine period, during which more than a million people died of starvation.

Jim Callery's ancestors had been tenants at the once prestigious Strokestown Park, but by the time it came into his hands it was in a state of advancing decay.

Jim sustained the property almost entirely by private philanthropy for over 35 years with the help of his Westward Group motor business. He spent millions of his own money, along with help from European Union funds, to restore the house and gardens to create a museum to the Irish Famine.

His dedication to what many would have considered a lost cause resulted in over 300 years of history being preserved in the house, along with thousands of estate documents which provide an extraordinary perspective on Irish history.

The Strokestown estate is now a flourishing hive of activity that provides education, employment and enjoyment for the surrounding region. The restoration has been the largest act of private philanthropy for cultural heritage in the history of modern Ireland and in 2017 Jim was announced as a winner in the 2017 European Union Prize for Cultural Heritage / Europa Nostra Awards for Dedicated Service.

The prize is considered to be Europe's highest honour in the cultural heritage field.

The Model attracts top talent to Sligo

A former model school in Sligo is now teaching locals and visitors from all around the world how to enjoy the best in contemporary arts. Built in 1862, The Model building has been transformed into one of Ireland's leading centres of innovative art, music and film, as well as home to the Niland Collection.

The collection, started by legendary local librarian Nora Niland, features works by John and Jack B Yeats, Estella Solomons, Paul Henry and Louis le Brocquy amongst others. Such an important collection deserves to be showcased in a world-class setting, and that's exactly what The Model is.

In 2000 a unique partnership between Sligo County Council, Sligo Corporation and the town's voluntary arts organisation first transformed the building from an abandoned 19th century school into the vibrant arts centre we know today. Then, almost ten years later, the council gave the green light to a second project that extended the building and increased its size by a third. The new extension provided artist studios with enviable views of Sligo town and County and a purpose-built performance space. It also allowed for the creation of a complete gallery circuit for visitors as well as a restaurant, coffee dock and bookshop.

Funding for this work was assisted by the European Regional Development Fund through the BMW Regional Operational Programme. Officially called 'The Model, Home of the Niland Collection' the building attracts visitors from around the globe, including leading performers from the contemporary arts world. Influential artist, poet and musician, Patti Smith, called The Model "one of the most beautiful galleries in the world," and in 2006 she accepted an invitation to exhibit and perform there.

The Model has a vibrant music programme that includes an eclectic mix of contemporary and classical music. It also produces the Sligo New Music Festival and supports Sligo Festival of Baroque Music.





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EDUCATION & RESEARCH

Leading the charge for battery power

We've all experienced that frustrating moment when we reach for our smartphone to make a call, email a document or find out the score in a match only to discover the battery has died. For all of technology's great advancements, the devices we rely on are still limited by battery power that hasn't developed at anything like the same rate.

But all that could be about to change, and heading the charge for better batteries is pioneering research led by Professor Valeria Nicolosi in AMBER, a Science Foundation Ireland funded centre hosted in Trinity College Dublin. Professor Nicolosi secured €2.5 million from the European Research Council's (ERC) Consolidator Grants for her 3D2DPrint project that aims to create a new type of extremely long lasting battery.

Professor Nicolosi's battery will come in any shape or size and can be camouflaged within any type of material. The batteries will charge in just a few minutes and can be fitted onto clothing or into the shell of a mobile device.

They can even be implanted within the body, and while that might sound like a futuristic step too far, the batteries could be used to power a device that monitors health discreetly without you even knowing it's there. The 'smart' batteries Professor Nicolosi and her team are working on harvest energy from their surroundings and are actually charging themselves.

Using 2D nanomaterials and 3D printing processes, the batteries can be custom made for devices such as 3D printed smart fitness watches or implanted cardiac devices.

Professor Nicolosi has seen her team expand from just three to 25 since she got her first ERC Starting Grant in 2011.

"The ERC Grants I have been awarded were not only important in helping fund our research and grow our team, but to also help leverage more funding and realise partnerships with large multinationals," she says.

"What is key is that these grants allow us to take the next step with our research – whether it is the licensing of technology or starting up a new company."





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EDUCATION & RESEARCH

Investing in Ireland's future

St Christopher's Special School in Co Longford is one of over 70 schools across Ireland that's benefiting from €200 million in European Investment Bank (EIB) funding.

The non-denominational school on Battery Road caters for children aged between 4-18 who have a moderate general learning disability.

Attached to the school are two special classes; one for pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder and the other for those with severe or profound learning difficulties.

St Christopher's offers a varied curriculum that responds to the individual needs of each child and incorporates academic, vocational, social and recreational skills.

Learning is student-centered and adapted to benefit each child so they can reach his or her full potential.

The 25-year EIB loan is its largest ever support for school investment in Ireland. The money was used by the Department of Education and Skills to finance a wider €530 million programme that's benefiting 44,000 primary, secondary and special needs pupils in 71 schools.

The funding is more than an investment in bricks and mortar; it's a vote of confidence in Ireland's future and young people all across the country. Irish university students are also benefiting from EIB financing.

The European Union's bank is providing €60 million towards development of the NUI Galway campus, which includes new student residences and a new building for the College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences.

The EIB has now supported campus investment at all seven members of the Irish Universities Association. In recent years it has financed investment that's improving teaching, research and student facilities at Trinity, UCD, DCU, University College Cork, Maynooth University and the University of Limerick.

The EIB has also approved €110 million to support consolidation of the new Dublin Institute of Technology campus at Grangegorman and is currently examining additional financing for investment at other third level institutions in Ireland.

Over the last decade the EIB has provided €1.2 billion for education investment across Ireland.





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EDUCATION & RESEARCH

Food that's out of this world

Farming is an Irish tradition dating back thousands of years so it is perhaps fitting that Ireland plays a part in developing agriculture for other planets and outer space. That's exactly what the Controlled Environment Laboratory for Life Sciences (CELLS) Research Centre at Limerick Institute of Technology (LIT) does.

Since 2009, CELLS has been cultivating plants designed to be grown and eaten beyond our world. And while the research may enable future generations to travel and live in space for prolonged periods, it also has benefits for this current generation of Earthlings.

Michelle McKeon Bennett, Principal Investigator of CELLS explains: *"Our research investigates how plants grow and thrive in space, with additional applications to terrestrial environments with limited resources."*

The EU began its support of the research in 2012, when it funded a two-year senior fellowship under the Marie Curie IIF scholarship programme for Dr Gary Stutte to relocate from the Space Life Science Laboratory, Kennedy Space Center, Florida to the CELLS Research Centre.

A leader in hydroponic-based controlled environments, space agriculture and horticulture, Dr Stutte focused his research career on 'space agriculture'. He also worked on the PESTO (Photosynthesis Experiment System Testing Operation) project – arguably the most complex plant-growth experiment that the US National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) ever conducted in space. Since 2015, LIT's CELLS group has been a partner of the EDEN ISS consortium, which was funded under the European Commission's Horizon 2020 funding programme.

EDEN ISS has been tasked with developing new technologies for the production of safe, sustainable food that can be used on the Moon and on Mars. Part of this work involved sending a team on a two-month journey on October 31, 2017, to the Antarctic for the Future Exploration Greenhouse project.

A key priority of the project is to test the agri-output of the facility in an extreme environment that's comparable to those found on our closest celestial neighbours.

The success of scientific research by the CELLS research projects has enabled Limerick Institute of Technology to increase its ability to serve students, industry and citizens of Ireland and beyond.



Leitrim locals protecting the planet

An independent environmental NGO based in Co Leitrim is campaigning to protect Ireland, Europe and the rest of world from threats to our planet's future. Founded in 2011, Good Energies Alliance Ireland (GEAI) promotes energy efficiency, supports renewable energy sources and organises environmental campaigns.

GEAI's voice is heard far beyond its home in the small village of Ballinaglera, as it's an accredited organisation with the EU Erasmus+ Programme and hosts European Voluntary Service (EVS) volunteers as well as coordinating EU Youth Democracy projects.

The organisation also lobbies and advises local, regional and national decision-makers on policies related to the environment and collaborates with other environmental NGOs both here in Ireland and overseas. Earlier this year, GEAI Director Aedín McLoughlin gave a talk on the role and empowerment of rural women in the campaign against fracking at a UN event in New York.

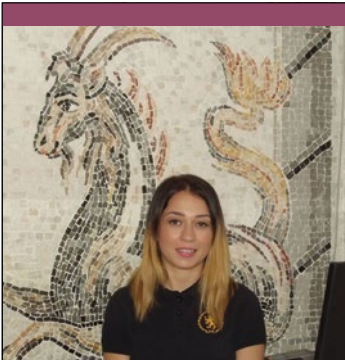
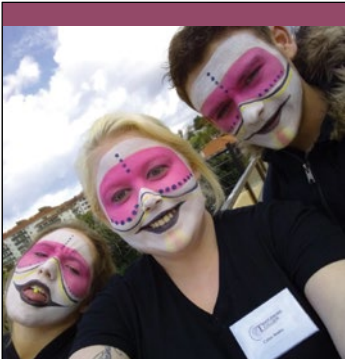
"According to the organisers, the Irish campaign against fracking can act as a template for campaigns globally," she said.

"It was so wonderful to have the opportunity to tell the world of our campaign starting in rural Leitrim that gained such momentum that it influenced our Government to agree unanimously to ban fracking in Ireland."

GEAI is now expanding its activities within the Erasmus+ programme, sending Irish young people abroad to volunteer as well as hosting them.

"Throughout Europe, we are all addressing the same problems. Our young European volunteers hear the message loud and clear - only together can we win the fight against climate change," Aedín says.





EDUCATION & RESEARCH

First class programme for students

There's no doubt that travel broadens the mind and thanks to Erasmus+ Irish students are able to expand their cultural horizons while learning abroad.

The EU programme for education, training, youth and sport allows students to gain valuable life experience that builds confidence and opens doors of opportunity across Europe.

Templemore College of Further Education (TCFE) in Co Tipperary has been making the most of Erasmus for its students over the past eight years.

Programme Co-ordinator, Siobhán Keating, has been there from the start and knows first hand the benefits. The former IT worker was initially teaching at TCFE for two hours a week when she was asked to help out with the college's Erasmus programme.

"I was really excited about doing that because I had been on Erasmus myself when I was in college, so I knew what a brilliant experience it can be for young people," she said.

Siobhán is passionate about Erasmus and being involved helped her decide to teach full-time at TCFE. The college initially sent just three students to France under the programme, but that number has now grown to around 70 and Erasmus is a significant factor for students deciding to enrol at TCFE.

"All the students are familiar with it, they know about it and we have a huge amount of students coming here with the intention of going on Erasmus as part of their course," Siobhán says.

"We find that Erasmus has helped us promote the college as part of a Europe-wide network where people can do work experience no matter what course they do."

Siobhán believes Erasmus is not just about getting training or work experience; it's a fantastic cultural experience and a great opportunity for personal development.

"The students come back as new people, with a new lease of life or a new interest or motivation to continue on with the work that they're doing," she adds.

TCFE has been awarded the Erasmus+ Charter, which is presented to education and training organisations with a track record of organising high quality projects for their staff and learners.





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COMMUNITY

Creating a second chance

When Stephen Plunkett was a prison officer, he often heard prisoners say they'd stay on the straight and narrow if only they had opportunities. Stephen often wondered if this was true, and eventually he decided to leave the security of his prison service job to put it to the test.

"I just wanted to see if we created an environment where it was possible for these prisoners to get an opportunity, whether they would take it or not," he said.

The odds are often stacked against prisoners upon release, particularly those from rural areas where there's little support and even fewer opportunities for work. But Stephen believed that most prisoners could avoid returning to the cycle of crime if they were given a chance, and with the help of some small grants from the local area partnership, FAS and the probation services he set up U-Casadh in Ferrybank, Co Kilkenny.

U-Casadh staff visit prisoners in jail and build up a rapport so they can get in touch upon release. The service works on stabilising clients by helping them adapt to outside life. Stephen says finding meaningful employment is a major factor in breaking the cycle of crime. In 2014, U-Casadh secured funding through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) with the help of the Kilkenny LEADER Programme to build an enterprise hub where ex-prisoners and other locals could start businesses and create employment and training opportunities.

The hub is a key component in keeping prisoners from re-offending, particularly in rural areas where there are few employers willing to give them a chance. The U-Casadh Enterprise Centre allows them to create their own jobs or to work in a supportive environment where they can develop skills, experience and trustworthiness.

U-Casadh is now a fantastic example of social enterprise and has been recognized with awards such as the Social Entrepreneurs Ireland Impact Award in 2015 and an Arthur Guinness Fund Award for social entrepreneurship.





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COMMUNITY

Improving Westmeath's town centres

Towns around Ireland including Athlone and Mullingar are being improved with help from an EU fund for Irish urban regeneration projects. The two Co Westmeath towns have been allocated €1.5 million each from the EU Urban Designated Fund for works designed to improve 19 urban centres around the country.

In Athlone, the Church Street area is benefitting from a Westmeath County Council €3 million project aimed at revitalizing the heart of the town's central shopping area. The project includes a new public space at Custume Place with a plaza area complete with street furniture, bicycle stands and street lighting. There are also beautiful planters with flowerbeds, shrubs and native trees.

Speaking at the project launch, Mayor of Athlone Municipal District, Councillor Aengus O'Rourke, said the works would have far reaching benefits for the town and community.

"The newly enhanced, high quality area will be an inviting, welcoming space for shoppers, tourists, pedestrians and the wider local community, allowing the area to flourish as a thriving shopping, business and social district," he added.

The project in Mullingar will improve the town centre's civic areas and plans include upgraded facilities for pedestrians and cyclists, hard and soft landscaping and modifications to traffic control.

A new public space at the Pearse Street/Castle Street junction will be created while the existing public space at Market Square and Market House will both be improved. The project will also reduce traffic in the area and encourage motorists to use the by-pass (N52) rather than travel through the town centre.

More than a welcome

Ireland prides itself as being the country of a hundred thousand welcomes. We're a friendly, helpful bunch so it's fitting we extend that famous welcoming nature to those new to our nation.

And that's the starting point for a community organisation working with ethnic minorities including immigrants, migrant workers, asylum seekers and refugees across County Meath.

Cultúr helps promote the empowerment, participation, self-determination and rights of ethnic minorities, especially those who experience poverty, social exclusion and racism.

At the end of 2013 Cultúr accessed EU funding for a new project called MORE to work specifically with migrants from outside of Europe.

Co-financed by the European Commission under the European Integration Fund and supported by the Office of the Minister for Integration and Pobal, the MORE project set out to specifically tackle racism and workplace exploitation.

The project provided dedicated outreach work through community workers who engaged with migrant women employed in the hotel, cleaning, agrifood or care work industries.

The project identified women working in these industries as being at risk of workplace exploitation.

Outreach work, done in conjunction with the trade union SIPTU, provided them with workshops on workplace rights and entitlements.

They were also encouraged to become involved in action groups for their particular industry.

The project also engaged with a number of men at risk of exploitation in the red meat industry, who were encouraged to develop an action group.

The project made significant progress against its targets. Overall engagement with its target group exceeded 100 migrants.





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COMMUNITY

Clare's futuristic new library

The County Library in Ennis is one of Clare's most valuable resources but the building allocated to it in 1975 was prone to flooding. In 2009 floodwaters damaged considerable stock and it became clear a new library was needed to serve the people of the Banner County.

Clare County Council decided to go ahead with a project to deliver a library for the 21st century that would strengthen Clare's reputation as a cultural centre, as well as support economic and social activity in Ennis.

The new building that will replace the existing facilities at De Valera Library in the old Presbyterian Church on Harmony Row is being developed at the site of the existing Glór facility on the Causeway Link.

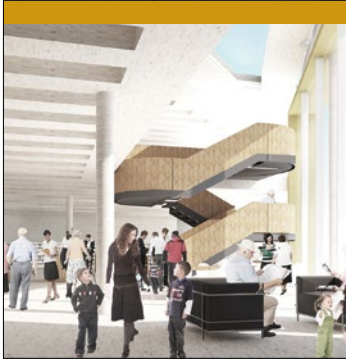
The ambitious project will locate three separate library services together in one building and is expected to cost €8.5 million, and the council needed to be proactive in sourcing funding. One of the avenues explored for this was the Southern Regional Assembly.

Part of the Assembly's job is to manage and monitor European Regional Development Fund programmes and an application to help finance the library project was made. Early in 2016, €1 million in EU funding was received by the council from the Southern Regional Assembly's Operational Programme 2014-2020. A further €3 million capital grant was allocated from the Irish Government and Clare County Council aims to fund the balance from its own resources.

In July 2016, Keith Williams Architects was selected by Clare County Council to design the new county library and work on the project began. Helen Walsh, Clare County Librarian commented:

"Ireland has seen some ambitious library buildings developed in the last decade and some outstanding and beautiful architectural structures have been achieved as a result.

"It is envisioned that the new County Library will be one of these buildings, combining technologically advanced services whilst keeping the customer at the heart of service delivery. It truly will be a library for the 21st century."





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COMMUNITY

All in the same boat

Peace is all about previously divided communities working together towards a common goal, and few projects illustrate this better than one involving two groups from each side of Ireland's border counties. Tar Isteach Cavan Town Men's Shed and the South East Fermanagh Foundation (SEFF) did more than just build bridges; they actually built a boat.

The boat in question was an Erne Cot, a wooden craft once used to ferry man, beast, machines, and goods between the rocky shores and islands off Upper and Lower Lough Erne. The last remaining cot at Crom Castle belongs to the National Trust, so the opportunity to build a replica for the Co Fermanagh estate was an ideal project for the EU's Programme for Peace and Reconciliation (PEACE).

The PEACE Programme was rolled out in 1995 and since then almost €2 billion has been invested within the region, supporting hundreds of projects that have helped to alleviate the negative consequences of the 'Troubles'. The Crom Cot project took place in the historic estate and was facilitated by experienced boat builder, Bert Robinson. Funding was secured from Cavan County Council through the PEACE III Programme.

Using almost forgotten techniques the men from Cavan and Fermanagh worked together and made a fantastic Crom Cot named 'Pulling Together'. They built it from scratch and it's indistinguishable from those used in previous centuries. They not only learned about boat building, they also forged cross-border friendships that have lasted long beyond the launch of the cot in 2014.

Peter O'Hanlon from Cavan Town Men's Shed explained what the project was about.

"It's taking a group of lads and sticking us in a shed with a load of timber and tools and saying 'right lads, have at it'," he said.

"The learning of old traditional ways of doing stuff has been a wonderful experience for all of us, but we were also learning about each other and how when your focus is on something else, then relationships and friendships can grow - and that's really what the project is fundamentally about."

PEACE funding is administered and overseen by the Special EU Programmes Body SEUPB, which is one of the six cross-border bodies set up under the Good Friday Agreement. Under the current PEACE IV Programme, over €16 million has been assigned to the Border Counties of Ireland to help them deliver Local Authority Action Plans.

Seaside village's co-op shop

The charming seaside village of Courtmacsherry in Co Cork has a rich tradition in commerce. The local community once had its own boat builders, a railway station, a busy port, a music hall, cinema, petrol station and a garage as well as over a dozen other shops selling all sorts of goods.

One of the first shops was started by the O'Donovan's in the mid-1870s but sadly Courtmacsherry's last convenience store closed down in 2015 after the owners retired.

The closure left a deep void in the 500-strong community, who faced a journey of several miles to the next nearest shop. A public meeting was organised and locals decided to see if it was possible to open their own community shop.

A survey carried out in the area found overwhelming support for the project, with 96% of those asked in favour of the idea. A cooperative, fully owned by the community, was established and a committee formed to raise funds to get the unique enterprise off the ground.

Discussions with property owners in the area resulted in an agreement to use the Old Post Office on Main Street for the shop.

Shares in the co-op were sold to the community to get the project off the ground and later EU funding from LEADER West Cork and FLAG South was applied for and granted. Locals felt that if the shop was to be a success it should be more than a convenience store.

They decided that it could also provide information for tourists and be a community space where exhibits such as the Patrick Keohane and Lusitania exhibitions could be showcased.

With a little help from EU funding and lots of that famous County Cork spirit, Courtmacsherry Community Shop is now well established in the area and providing a valuable local service.





HEALTH

Fit to start a business

Shelly Malone has always been a fitness fan. She was playing football, basketball and working out in the gym from as young as she can remember. She's even got a winner's medal from an Intermediate All Ireland Championship final. Shelly has worked in top gyms and health clubs around Ireland, building up qualifications and lots of experience along the way, so it was only natural for her to start her own health & fitness business.

However, the odds are stacked against female entrepreneurs with Ireland suffering from a low number of women engaged in business start-ups. Shelly, who's based in Co Mayo, learned that Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT) Innovation Hubs were offering a new regional programme that aims to address the gender imbalance in business and she fired off an application form.

The EMPOWER Programme is designed to help increase the number of female entrepreneurs in Galway, Roscommon and Mayo. It's co-funded by the Irish Government and the European Social Fund as part of the ESF Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning 2014-2020.

Shelly was accepted onto EMPOWER and while she was thrilled, she was also terrified, as although she had qualifications and experience, she had no idea how to run a business.

"My first day arriving to the course I felt nervous," Shelly says.

"I didn't know what to expect and I was not sure that me or my business warranted being there.

"My mind was put at ease almost immediately with the friendly welcome received on arrival.

"Maria Staunton, the course facilitator, has been and continues to be a massive support to me and my business."

The 12-week EMPOWER programme introduced Shelly and the other participants to guest speakers covering a variety of topics on running a business. They learned how to start-up and run a business and were encouraged to think, work and develop themselves as businesswomen. The end results have helped Shelly's business, That's So Shelly Fitness, get off the ground and while there's always more to do, she has the confidence and belief in herself to thrive.

"As a woman in business I personally think we give ourselves a very hard time, we question our abilities and we doubt our talents," she says.

"We spend too much time and energy focusing on what we cannot do instead of focusing on what we can do and instead we should be reaching out to get the help in the areas of our businesses that we need help in.

"What I have learned over the course of the programme is that there are people out there who want you to succeed. There are people out there who are willing to advise and support you."





STORIES

HEALTH

Backing healthcare in Ireland

Fourteen new Primary Care Centres are being built across Ireland with the help of a long-term €70 million loan from the European Investment Bank.

They're being built in the west of Ireland in Sligo, Roscommon, Mayo, Galway and Limerick City and in the south-east in Waterford City, Tipperary and Wexford Town. Early in 2018, two Primary Care Centres in Coolock, Dublin and Kilcock, Kildare were officially opened. Minister for Health, Simon Harris, said they'd help provide a broad range of health services to both local communities.

"Kilcock and Coolock are part of the first public private partnership programme in the health services, which will see a total of 14 purpose-built centres delivered across the country by the end of this year," he added.

"Investment in Primary Care is key to building a better health service."

The 27-year EIB loan is its first support for healthcare investment in Ireland, and its first dedicated backing for Primary Health Care anywhere in Europe.

It's also the first in Ireland to be backed by a guarantee under the European Fund for Strategic Investments initiative (EFSI), the heart of the Investment Plan for Europe intended to generate €315 billion of investment across Europe. Jonathan Taylor, European Investment Bank Vice President, said the investment builds on increased support for Irish education, housing and transport funding in recent years.

"Strengthening local healthcare services is crucial for improving public health and this significant new initiative will ensure more effective healthcare for thousands of people across Ireland," he added.

Over the last six years the European Investment Bank has provided more than €3.3 billion for investment in schools, university campuses, upgraded energy links, renewable energy projects and transport infrastructure across Ireland.



Medical devices for the future

People are now living longer, but often with illnesses such as diabetes, Parkinson's and heart disease. But now a medical research centre in Galway is developing devices to improve life for people with chronic illnesses like these.

CÚRAM, the Science Foundation Ireland Centre for Research in Medical Devices, was established in 2015 at the National University Ireland Galway with help from EU funding.

It's a network of Irish and multinational academic, clinical and industry partners working together on new devices and implants, as well as cell, drug and device combination products, to meet clinical needs not yet addressed.

CÚRAM is attracting top researchers to Ireland and the centre's work could provide medical device solutions that really enhance life quality.

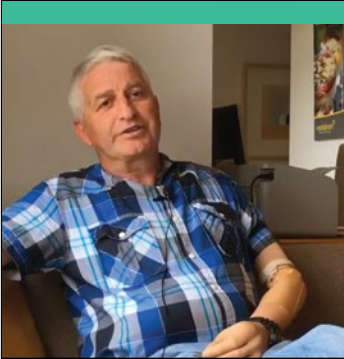
The centre is also training the next generation of scientists, employees and entrepreneurs in the health technology sector so patients, particularly those with chronic illness, can be better treated.

Health technology is important to the Irish economy with over 400 companies based in the country. It also accounts for more than 29,000 jobs and €12.6 billion worth of exports.

CÚRAM is helping to make world-class skills available to companies in Ireland, which gives them a competitive edge. It contributes to consolidating the country's position at the forefront of the medical device industry, including by increasing Ireland's pull as an investment location for multinational companies.

Total investment for the project is over €28 million with the EU's European Regional Development Fund contributing around half of this through the Border, Midland and Western Regional Operational Programme.





HEALTH

Michael's bionic transformation

Being an EU citizen sometimes means being able to access life-changing services not available in Ireland, as Michael Mac Aogáin found out three years ago. In 2008 Michael, who has lived in Wexford for over two decades, was in a serious motorcycle accident while on holiday in France. He lost the use of his left arm but was determined to do what he could to improve his quality of life. He discovered there was a bionic reconstruction specialist in Vienna who could provide treatment but he needed funding. After being told he didn't qualify for the HSE's Treatment Abroad Scheme Michael learned that the EU's Cross Border Healthcare Directive could help.

"Funding of the Cross Border Directive means that I had to pay first and then reclaim it off the HSE," said Michael.

"So to get the funding I approached my credit union here in Wexford. The loan officer thought I was absolutely off my trolley."

In 2015 Michael travelled to Vienna to meet the bionic reconstruction specialist.

"They went through my medical history and connected me to an intelligent prosthesis that was on a stand beside me on a table."

"They asked me to think of moving my hand as hard as I could, and behold, when I thought of moving my hand the prosthesis started to close."

"They then said to let it go and to breath in and I breathed in and the hand opened."

The Cross Border Healthcare Directive meant Michael could have the cost of his treatment covered as if he was being treated here in Ireland.

"After I got the prosthesis I came back and the HSE reimbursed the money to me, which was then straight away handed back to the credit union, so everybody was happy," Michael said.

"I got my new arm, the credit union got their money back which they were extremely happy over, and the HSE were happy to help me."

Since being fitted with his bionic arm, Michael's life has changed completely.

"I'm really happy I went through with it. I think it's a great programme, it's absolutely helped me no end and I'd recommend it to anybody."

Under the Cross Border Healthcare Directive, EU citizens have the right to access healthcare in any EU country and be reimbursed by their home country. The HSE operates the scheme here in Ireland for people entitled to public patient healthcare and who want to avail of it in another EU Member State





STORIES

AGRICULTURE & FISHERIES

EIB backs Ireland's tree-mendous growth

Before 1600 Ireland was a land covered in forests, but over the following two centuries industrialisation, plantations by the English monarchy and a surge in population combined to decimate our woodlands. This led to the extinction of native Irish wildlife such as wild boar and wolves, and a long struggle to develop sustainably managed forests that continues today.

Forests don't just provide the timber we use to build, furnish and heat our homes, they also contribute to the production of the oxygen we breathe and provide a habitat for vast numbers of plants and animals. Wood can also be an important source of local renewable energy that can replace imported fossil fuels, so it is vital Ireland properly manages its forests.

That's why the European Investment Bank (EIB) - backed by the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) - is supporting a €200 million initiative designed to consolidate small, privately owned Irish forests into a professionally managed portfolio of around 18,000 hectares.

Other investors in the project are the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF), and Dasos, a specialist forestry investment fund based in Finland that's managing the scheme. Under the investment, an estimated 35,000 hectares will be replanted, 1,600 km of forest roads constructed or upgraded and 1,000 km of walking routes and mountain bike trails improved.

It'll also help ensure a more predictable supply of wood for the sawmill industry. The EIB's €28.5 million investment - one of two Irish forest initiatives announced in Co Wicklow - represents its first support for agriculture in Ireland for 20 years.

The EIB has also provided a €90 million long-term loan to State-owned forestry group, Coillte, to finance planting, forest management and road construction and maintenance. As European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development Phil Hogan points out, there are several reasons why forests are so important.

"Forests help to keep our rural areas vibrant and sustainable, providing over three million jobs in the EU," he explained.

"They also play a major role in the protection of EU biodiversity and represent a key sector in the transition towards a low-carbon and climate friendly economy.

"Continued investment in the sector is therefore a win-win for our economy, for our local communities, and our environment. This strategic partnership with the European Investment Bank will help to achieve these objectives, deliver the Investment Plan for Europe and support jobs and growth in rural Ireland."



AGRICULTURE & FISHERIES

Scientists chip away at spud problem

Ireland is one of the world's most famous potato producing nations but surprisingly crisp and chip manufacturers face a shortage of locally grown spuds. That's because potatoes used for crisps and chips need to be stored at a temperature of eight degrees to prevent them sprouting and sweetening, which affects both quality and fry colour of two of the country's favourite snack foods.

Manufacturers get around the problem by using sprout suppressant chemicals such as chlorpropham, but the EU is moving to phase them out due to health concerns. This means producers need to import over 50,000 tonnes of potatoes every year for crisps and chips due to problems with the long-term storage of the locally produced product.

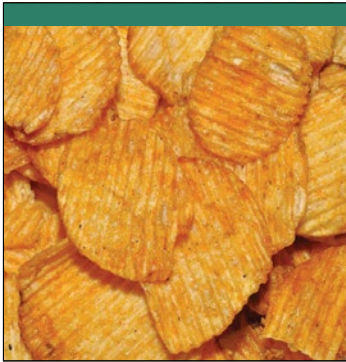
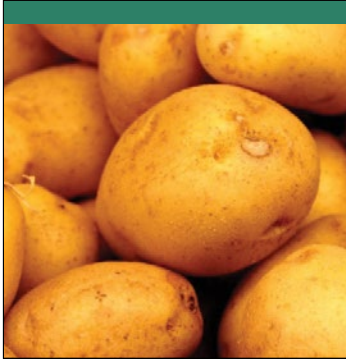
However, EU-funded scientists have discovered genetic markers that could allow potatoes to be selected for their ability to be stored at low temperatures, keeping them fresh and avoiding the use of anti-sprouting chemicals. The GENSPI (Genomic Selection for Potato Improvement) project came up with a way to identify plants that display a resistance to sweet glucose and fructose formation. And crucially, they can be stored at three or four degrees, low enough to keep sprout growth at bay for very long periods and ensuring our crisps and chips remain tasty and golden brown.

GENSPI developed new genomic selection breeding methodologies that will allow potato growers to select varieties of potato that seem to be resistant to sweetening at low temperatures. Using the latest techniques in genome sequences, researchers identified over 100 000 regions across the genome where the DNA sequence varied among the plants.

"From the 100,000 regions showing genetic variation between the breeding lines, we were able to identify a smaller number of DNA markers that gave us a good ability to predict fry colour," said Stephen Byrne, the Irish Marie Skłodowska-Curie fellow who carried out the research.

"This means we can develop an inexpensive DNA-based test to predict fry colour that can be applied to tens of thousands of plants in a potato breeding programme."

The GENSPI project was coordinated by Teagasc, the Agriculture and Food Development Authority based in Carlow.





STORIES

AGRICULTURE & FISHERIES

Killybegs nets harbour project

Think of Killybegs and fish is usually the first thing that comes to mind. The town has a proud maritime heritage dating back beyond the 16th century when the O'Donnell chieftains were known as lords of fish and Killybegs was the chief port of Tír Chonaill.

Visitors today still consider locals in Killybegs to be chiefs of fish, as anybody who has sampled seafood in the town's excellent restaurants will testify.

However, dependence on the fishing industry has seen Killybegs go through tough times. Protecting fish stocks led to reduced quotas and fishermen began replacing smaller boats with larger, better equipped vessels to extend and diversify their fishing reach and catch.

This put the harbour under pressure and meant redevelopment was needed to protect its future.

It came in the shape of a €50 million project for the Fishery Harbour Centre funded from the Border, Midland and Western Regional Programme and co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

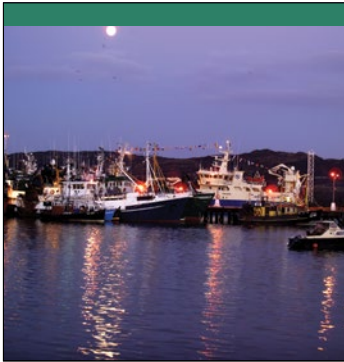
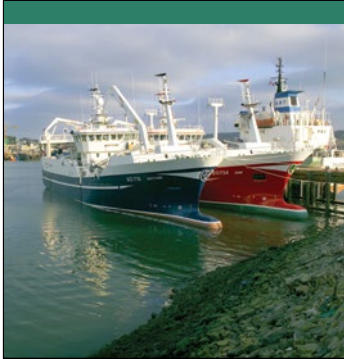
The redevelopment has cemented Killybegs' position as the premier port of Ireland's six designated Fishery Harbour Centres.

It also allowed the harbour to continue fulfilling its role in facilitating vital off-shore exploration, in particular development of the Corrib Gas Field.

The harbour is also used for the delivery of wind turbines for wind farms throughout the north and west of Ireland. Killybegs has become a major port of call for cruise ships that benefit from its modern berthing and quayside facilities along with direct access to the Highlands of Donegal.

The redevelopment has facilitated increasing the range of commercial activities at the harbour and it's now catering for a wider range of cargoes, such as large batches of timber.

Killybegs Harbour Centre today provides Ireland with the newest, sheltered, deep-water facility on the West coast. It's maintaining its position as Ireland's premier fishing harbour and will continue to develop as a major commercial cargo port.





STORIES



AGRICULTURE & FISHERIES

Breathing new LIFE into the Burren

The Burren is one of Ireland's most iconic, heritage-rich landscapes and it's a fantastic attraction for tourists from all over the country and abroad.

Much of this unique, beautiful place is composed of priority sites for conservation under the EU Habitats Directive, but it's also valuable for farming, recreation and education. Sadly, the Burren landscape had come under threat due to a shift away from traditional farm management practices caused by market trends and land abandonment. Local farmers, in conjunction with Teagasc, University College Dublin and the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) carried out a research project in the late 1990s that highlighted the important role farming plays in supporting the rich biodiversity and cultural heritage of the Burren.

Thanks to this work, and that of nature conservationists conserving semi-natural habitats across several sites protected under the EU's Natura 2000 Programme, the seeds of a solution were found. It was decided the best place to start was talking to local farmers and working out a plan, which was how the Burren Farming for Conservation Programme (BFCP) began.

Enlightened leadership from the local farming community was a key factor in its success. Once the idea for the project was developed, the next step was to access funding from LIFE, the EU's financial instrument for the environment, and set up the BurrenLIFE project.

This allowed scientists to carry out research on 20 farms in the area and develop a blueprint for conservation farming in partnership with the farmers.





STORIES

AGRICULTURE & FISHERIES



Project actions removed problem scrub from 242 hectares of priority habitat, opened up 164km of pathways, restored 112km of traditional stone wall and built up a team of highly skilled workers within the local community.

Over 40 new water troughs, 37 water pumps and 80 storage tanks were installed to help protect water sources, which in turn helped protect habitat and wildlife. The project helped farmers earn a decent living from the Burren land, and enabled them to continue their longstanding roles as producers of quality food and custodians of a magnificent heritage and landscape.

The BurrenLIFE Project was 75% funded through EU LIFE and co-ordinated by the NPWS. In 2017 the project received a special 'Best-Ever' award from the European Commission, recognising it as one of the top LIFE projects in the 25-year history of the programme.





STORIES

AGRICULTURE & FISHERIES

Flower of the sea

The spectacular landscapes of the Aran Islands have been shaped by millennia of wild Atlantic weather, but the same elements that make it so beautiful also make it difficult to farm.

However, that didn't stop Máirtín Ó'Conceanainn of Inis Mór from thinking outside the box when he decided to set up business on home turf.

Máirtín was determined to find a way to make good use of one of the island community's most plentiful resources and started a one-man, innovative seaweed harvesting business.

Blath na Mara – or Flower of the Sea, as Béarla – was established in 2002 and Máirtín spent the following years researching, developing and marketing his product.

He became an expert in local species on the shore and single-handedly harvested through the seasons. He also developed a purpose built unit on the island for drying and processing the harvest.

In 2015 Máirtín's daughter, Jenny, her Kiwi husband David and their two daughters returned from New Zealand to the Aran Islands to join her father in his business venture.

The seaweed company's main product was dried organic milled or whole seaweed, brought to market wholesale. However, the heritage and quality of the product presented opportunities to reach new markets and satisfy the expectations of a progressive customer base.

Jenny and David's experience and knowledge along with assistance from the EU funded Ireland West Fisheries Local Area Group Development (FLAG), have helped Blath na Mara to develop and diversify its product offering.

With the extra help, Blath na Mara has upgraded its premises and processing facility and is developing a new phase of business, focusing on seaweed food and educational tourism on the Aran Islands.

Apple farmer's juicy research

When the Traas family moved from The Netherlands to Ireland in the late '60s to grow fruit, they probably never envisaged that one day they'd be involved in cutting edge scientific research. But that's exactly what Con Traas is doing. He's the son of Willem and Ali and current owner of The Apple Farm in Co Tipperary.

Con's parents decided to move to Ireland over 50 years ago and continue their family's fruit-growing tradition on an unused farm.

"It was an ordinary farm that wasn't being used and the owner had decided to emigrate," says Con.

"We started with strawberries, raspberries, plums, cherries and obviously apples but later expanded into making juice as well."

Because there was no structure to enable them sell their fruit locally, the family opened a shop in one of their barns in the early 1970s, and they haven't looked back since. These days the farm grows 60 varieties of apples as well as a range of various other fruits, and employs 15 full-time staff and seasonal workers when those delicious fruits are ripe to pick.

The Apple Farm also produces juices and a very appealing artisan brew called Con's Real Irish Cider, and Con is always looking at ways to perfect his product.

The part-time lecturer in University of Limerick is currently taking part in an EU research project called FieldFOOD that's helping find new ways to improve food and drink quality.

Con's researching how pulsed electric fields (PEF) can be used to extract more juice from apples and improve product shelf life without the use of chemicals. The process can be used to help control fermentation without chemicals, which some people are allergic to.



TRANSPORT

Investing in public transport

Like every European capital city, Dublin suffers from traffic congestion, but the Luas has made life a lot easier for commuters.

The light rail transit system has been a huge success since opening for business in June 2004 and it now carries over 37 million passengers every year.

That figure is rising in 2018 thanks to the opening in December 2017 of the Luas Cross City line from St Stephen's Green to Broombridge Station.

It's not the first time Dublin has seen trams and the original service that began back in 1870s was once considered among the world's best.

However, increasing competition from more flexible buses and lack of investment eventually led to the end of the service in July 1949.

By the beginning of the 20th century it was clear light-rail transport, which was now providing faster and more efficient services in many cities around the world, was needed in Dublin.

Work began on the project and in 2003 the European Investment Bank (EIB) provided €60 million in loan facilities for the Rail Procurement Agency to construct the first stage of the Luas light rail system.

The development of the Luas Red Line (Connolly to Tallaght) was facilitated by EU funding of €82.5 million under the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

And construction of the latest 5.6km extension to the Green Line was supported by €150 million from the EIB, which has helped with investment in several major Irish infrastructure projects.





STORIES

TRANSPORT

Cross-border canal connecting communities

Breaking down barriers caused by borders is the fundamental goal of a special EU funding programme known as INTERREG. In Ireland, the INTERREG Programme has invested around €850 million in projects that strengthen cross-border co-operation

These projects have boosted economic development, benefitted the environment and supported sustainable travel, amongst many other things.

One project that highlights how INTERREG can improve the quality of life for locals is the development of the Ulster Canal Greenway.

The canal was opened in 1842 and ran for 74km (46 miles) through Fermanagh, Monaghan and Armagh with barges navigating its 26 locks until it closed in 1931.

In 2013 a 4km section of greenway was opened along the canal through Monaghan Town, and following a dramatic increase in visitor numbers, plans were made to develop it further. Utilising disused sections of the canal towpath, the project will build upon the existing 4km of greenway to develop 22km of new greenway.

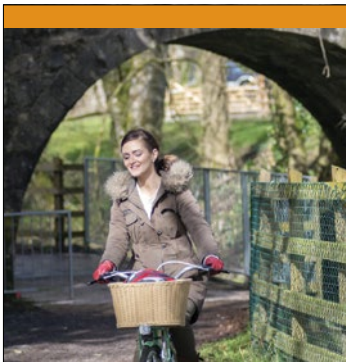
A key objective of the project is to encourage more people to walk or cycle on cross-border journeys. A community engagement programme is expected to result in a 4.5% increase in cycling and walking by 2023, which would reduce carbon emissions by 10.25 tonnes annually.

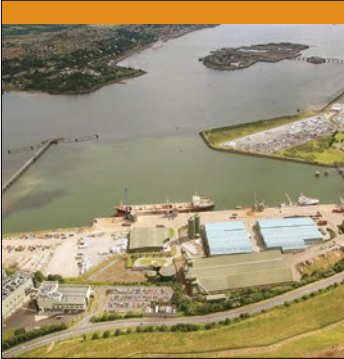
In addition to providing a quality sustainable transportation corridor and leisure facility for local people, it is envisioned that the greenway network will attract visitors to this underdeveloped tourist region.

When completed, the project will provide a sustainable transport route for cross-border commuters between Smithborough, Co Monaghan and Middletown, Co Armagh.

To date, the INTERREG Programme has supported over 3,000 businesses, created around 1,000 jobs and benefitted more than 100,000 people in health, rural development, enterprise and tourism.

INTERREG funding is administered and overseen by the Special EU Programmes Body SEUPB, which is one of the six cross-border bodies set up under the Good Friday Agreement.





TRANSPORT

A sea change in Cork

Cork has a long maritime history with people and goods ebbing and flowing through the mouth of its harbour for at least two thousand years. There might not be any trade with Phoenician merchants from the eastern Mediterranean these days, but the Port of Cork does deal with annual traffic amounting to around 10 million tonnes per year.

Nowadays it's a Tier 1 port of national significance, located on the EU's North Sea-Mediterranean Core Network Corridor, that's improving links between Ireland and Europe. The Port of Cork also handles cruise liners, which bring over 180,000 tourists eager to explore the city and provide local businesses with much appreciated trade.

However, in recent years the Port of Cork has experienced restrictions in handling some of today's massive sea-faring vessels. Redevelopment is vital for the Port of Cork to remain competitive and future proof the city and county as an international gateway for trade.

Plans for the Ringaskiddy port redevelopment project were approved in 2015 and while some advanced works have already been undertaken, 2018 will see this €80 million project get underway.

The Port of Cork hopes the redevelopment will be completed and operational by 2020. It's being part-funded from EU funds as a Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) project, which supports the construction and upgrade of important transport infrastructure across the European Union.

The work includes a new container terminal with an initial 360m berth at Ringaskiddy East, internal road works and improvements to the external road entrance into the existing deepwater berth. The project will ensure operations at the Port of Cork are more competitive, efficient, sustainable and responsive to both current and projected growth in trade.

It will also remove bottlenecks identified in the North Sea-Mediterranean Core Network Corridor plan, by relocating the existing container terminal at Tivoli to Ringaskiddy and building a new terminal better able to handle traffic and facilitate access of larger vessels.

As part of the overall port redevelopment project in Ringaskiddy, the Port of Cork has committed a community gain fund of €1million towards the regeneration of Ringaskiddy village.



TRANSPORT

An Offaly good bypass

European Union funds have helped Ireland develop a modern road network that reduces traffic congestion and makes it easier and safer to get around.

While much of our road infrastructure is designed to get vehicles efficiently between major cities, there are also some good examples of how smaller towns and rural regions can benefit from smart road planning.

One of them is in Tullamore in Co Offaly, where a bypass around the town was completed ahead of schedule and on budget.

The midlands town has a population of over 14,000 and its central location means it plays an important strategic role in linking nearby towns and the rest of Ireland.

That's why planners in Offaly were tasked with building a road that would divert up to 10,000 vehicles away from the town centre and facilitate the movement of goods and services beyond the region.

With the help of funding from Government and the EU's Regional Development Fund under the Border, Midland and Western Regional Operational Programme, the project was given the go-ahead.

The four km-long bypass skirts around the existing N52 road, starting some six kilometres south-west of Tullamore, and rejoins the N52 approximately three kilometres north of the town.

As part of the plans, Offaly County Council and the National Roads Authority commissioned an open competition for an art feature to be included in the project.

Sculptor Maurice Harron's Saints and Scholars work was chosen and his magnificent four 25ft steel figurines can now be seen along the bypass.



Photo by Clare Dunne



BUSINESS

Food for thought

Irish cuisine has developed from the traditional meat and two veg staple into a multi-million euro industry that serves up a variety of delicious dishes as good as any on the planet.

There are thousands of innovative SMEs creating all kinds of fabulous foods from super stews, soups and soda breads to magnificent meals made from locally sourced ingredients. So it's no surprise that Ireland was at the heart of an EU-funded project that supports traditional food producing across Europe.

Coordinated by the Institute of Technology Tralee in Co Kerry, TRADEIT was created to help producers of authentic, high quality traditional foods make the most of available business opportunities.

Consumer demand for artisan and specialist foods is growing but the vast majority of food companies are small businesses without the resources to conduct research or share the knowledge needed for innovation.

TRADEIT aimed to tackle this by creating a European network of hubs where food producers could work together with researchers and technology providers to develop best practice on product, process and operational innovations.

Free workshops across Europe helped producers with food safety, pricing strategies, marketing, labelling and supply chain management.

Food researchers from across Europe were also given the opportunity to attend the TRADEIT Entrepreneurial Summer Schools in which an entrepreneurial skillset was developed to facilitate research, development and innovative activities.

The end result is that consumers get to taste a greater range of quality foods while producers can grow their businesses, create more employment and develop even more scrumptious products for the marketplace.





STORIES



BUSINESS

Waste not, want not

Over 30% of food produced around the world is wasted and much of it is of good quality, but people still go hungry. Globally, we use farmland the size of China, Mongolia and Kazakhstan combined to grow food that's never actually eaten.

It's a problem two Irish entrepreneurs, Iseult Ward and Aoibheann O'Brien, found frustrating enough to do something about. Their answer was FoodCloud, an inspiring social enterprise that connects businesses that have too much food to charities that can use it.

"On one hand you had all this perfectly good food going to waste, but on the other hand we knew that there were charities struggling to support their local communities," said Iseult.

Redistributing surplus food sounds like a perfectly good idea, but it wasn't easy for Aoibheann and Iseult to get it off the ground. However, through perseverance and determination, they've turned FoodCloud into a fantastic resource for local charities and an enterprise that reduces food wastage.

"From working with one store in inner city Dublin, FoodCloud now works with over 2,500 retail stores and we have warehouses in Dublin, Galway and Cork," said Aoibheann.

"We're distributing over a million meals a month to a network of 6,000 charities."

FoodCloud is also a partner organisation for the EU's Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) programme in Ireland. FEAD Ireland is funded by some €22 million of European funding as well as €4 million from the Irish exchequer for the period 2014-2020. The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) is the managing authority of FEAD in Ireland.

Charities signed up for FEAD are given an allocation, and they can then order FEAD products from the FoodCloud Hubs around the country. Charities can supplement FEAD staples with fresh, chilled or frozen foods from FoodCloud. Charities can sign up for FEAD through the DEASP, or get more information from FoodCloud, one of Ireland's best examples of social enterprise.





STORIES

BUSINESS

Tops in energy training and assessment

METAC Training in Co Laois is a great example of how the EU supported Rural Development Programme can boost a good business venture.

Dominic Dunne set up the training facility back in 2006 with the help of start-up funding from Laois LEADER, which is now Laois Partnership.

Dominic's business journey started when he saw a gap in the market for a facility that could deliver quality training in an environment that reflected real-life installation situations.

METAC began providing expert training for the installation and service of oil, gas, wood pellet, solar, geothermal and heat pump systems and quickly became market leader in the area.

By 2010 demand for environmentally friendly energy sources saw the company expand its remit to include training for systems that used renewable energy.

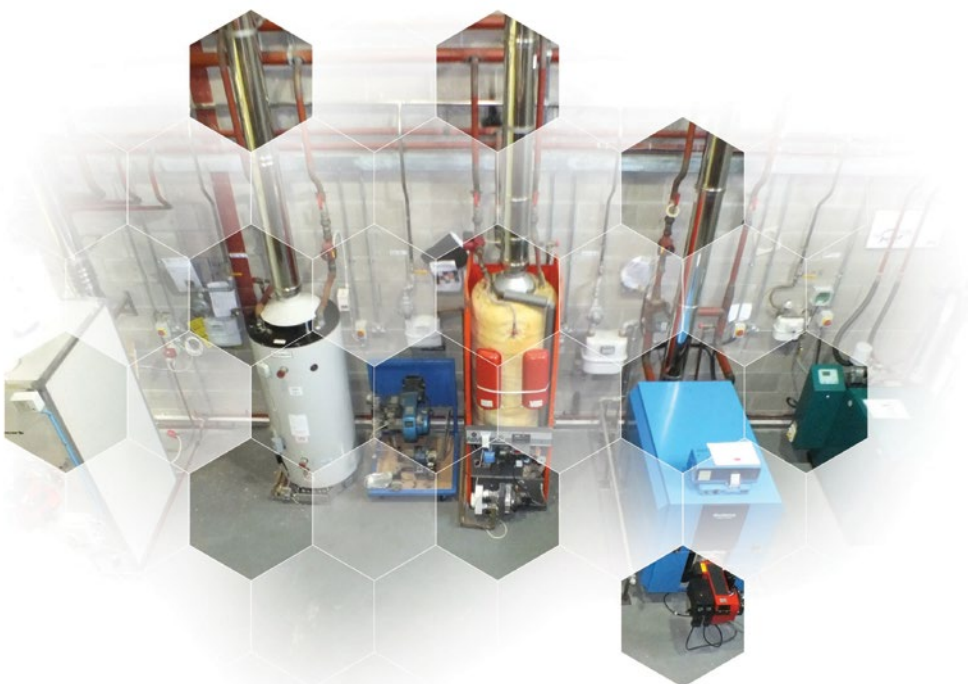
With grant support again provided through Laois Partnership, METAC invested and installed a 16-metre 6KW wind turbine, so it could offer training in this 'green' energy source too.

METAC Training is now the largest energy training and assessment centre in Ireland and the UK. It trains around 1,700 people annually in skills nationally recognised by SOLAS, QQI, City & Guilds, BLUEflame, Bord Gais and OFTEC.

The company's trainers all work in the industries they teach in, which ensures they are up-to-date with the latest technologies and issues that participants may face on a daily basis.

The company's success has seen it win numerous awards including Best Services Provider at the Energy Show Product of the Show Awards 2016.

METAC also won OFTEC Best Training Centre at the OFTEC Awards for Excellence in 2014 and was a finalist in the Overall Achievement Category at the Plumbing & Heating Awards 2017.



BUSINESS

CETA opens gate for whiskey

Louise McGuane is happy to admit she's no expert in farming but when it comes to making whiskey, her knowledge is second to none. That's hardly surprising when you learn Louise's career in the drinks industry has seen her live in New York, Paris, London and Singapore working with global multinational companies like Diageo, Pernod Ricard and Moët Hennessy.

After spending two decades working with some of the biggest names in the industry, Louise decided to return home to the family farm in Co Clare and use her skills to launch Chapel Gate Irish Whiskey Company.

"After all, Irish Whiskey is ultimately an agricultural product, so why not ensure a future for the farm for the next generation by finishing and ageing whiskey in this very special place," she explains.

Chapel Gate Irish Whiskey uses the traditional art of ageing used by whiskey bonders generations ago, and combines that with modern day expertise to resurrect flavours of independent Irish whiskey makers that were enjoyed in Ireland before the 1900s.

Although the distillery is in its infancy, Chapel Gate is already making waves in the industry. Louise recently took part in an overseas Irish trade mission to explore new opportunities presented to businesses of all sizes by the EU's new trade agreement with Canada. CETA makes it easier to export goods and services, benefitting people and businesses in both the EU and Canada and Louise is optimistic it can benefit Chapel Gate Irish Whiskey.

"Very much so," she says.

"As a result of the trip we have pitches in for two different eastern and western seaboard regions and it looks like we'll be live in Canada this summer."

"Canada is a great Irish whiskey market that's growing exponentially, so I think the CETA deal is going to make it better for us in terms of taxation."





ENVIRONMENT

Cavan's prehistoric park

Located just outside Blacklion in scenic West Cavan, Cavan Burren Park is recognized as one of the finest prehistoric landscapes in Ireland.

This mythical, spiritual land of monuments, megalithic tombs and pre-bog walls has long been an important resource for archaeologists and geologists, but these days it's also a fantastic facility for families and tourists.

There are five fascinating walking trails that take visitors through the history of human settlement, from the tombs of early Neolithic settlers to the farm cottages of nineteenth century farmers.

Cavan Burren Park is located within the UNESCO designated Marble Arch Caves Global Geopark, where spectacular landscapes provide the perfect backdrop to activities including cycling, fishing, canoeing and caving.

Picnic facilities are also provided and there's a super visitor centre that explains Cavan Burren Park's archaeological, geological and cultural history and significance.

The visitor centre opened in May 2014 after funding of €1.4 million was granted from the EU backed Border Uplands project.

The funding was used to develop the interpretive visitor centre and create the multi-access trails that allow visitors to explore Cavan landscape formed 340 million years ago.

The Border Uplands project also provided funding for the development of the Cavan Way 25km walking trail from Dowra to Blacklion as well as other tourist related projects in counties Cavan, Fermanagh, Leitrim and Sligo.

In 2015 Cavan Burren Park, which is jointly managed by C oilte and Cavan County Council, won Best Heritage Project at the LAMA All Ireland Community and Council Awards.





ENVIRONMENT

Conservation project takes flight

A rare summer visitor to Ireland is under threat, but an exciting Irish project based on a small island off the coast of Dublin is aiming to ensure its survival.

The beautiful Roseate Tern is a priority species for action under the EU Birds Directive and LIFE fund, and BirdWatch Ireland is leading the fight for its preservation.

The conservation organisation set up its project on Rockabill Island in the late 1980s and immediately set about creating a safe, disturbance-free refuge for the slender seabird with its narrow, pointed wings, long forked tail and pointed black bill.

Since then, BirdWatch Ireland - supported by the National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Commissioners of Irish Lights - has continued to protect and monitor breeding seabirds on the island.

Their work has helped manage the Roseate Terns' nesting habitat and minimise disturbance, which has led to further recovery of the population.

At the start of the initiative in 1989 the island was supporting just 152 pairs of Roseate Terns and 108 pairs of Common Terns. By 2017, this has increased dramatically to 1,597 pairs of Roseate Terns and 2,085 pairs of Common Terns. The success of the recovery on Rockabill is now providing a source population of breeding birds for other colonies in Ireland and elsewhere in Europe.

That's why in 2018 the Irish Roseate Tern Conservation Project was nominated as a finalist the European Union's prestigious Natura 2000 award competition. It's the first time a project from Ireland has reached the final and BirdWatch Ireland was delighted to have its vital work recognized and honoured.

"Rockabill Island is now the most important source for these gorgeous birds in Europe and is now playing a major role in naturally restocking other colonies in Britain and France," said the conservation organisation's Senior Seabird Conservation Officer, Dr Stephen Newton.



ENVIRONMENT

Gardens of EDEN

Ireland's clean fresh air and lush green landscapes attract millions of visitors every year.

Our natural, unspoilt environment is famous throughout the world but visitors sometimes need a little help in finding those hidden gems dotted all around the country.

EDEN (European Destinations of Excellence) aims to promote sustainable tourism development models across the EU and it helps direct visitors to places in Ireland that offer great, eco-friendly facilities.

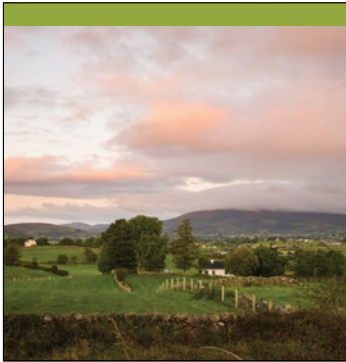
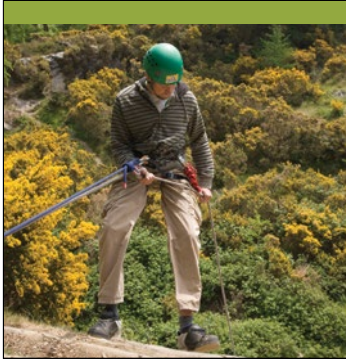
One of those places is Carlingford and the Cooley Peninsula in Co Louth - a past winner of an EDEN award, and it's easy to see why. Carlingford is a virtual outdoor museum of Medieval Ireland. It's quaint cobblestone streets offer the finest dining, artisan shopping, markets and delicious coffee houses.

It's steeped in legend too. Fionn Mac Cumhaill lies on the side of Slieve Foye with his feet resting in Carlingford Lough and, if you really believe in folklore, Fairy Hill on the Cooley Peninsula is rumoured to be home of the last leprechauns in Ireland.

Carlingford and the Cooley Peninsula was an EDEN winner in the Tourism and Local Intangible Heritage category. It was recognised as having a high level of innovation within the local tourism area as well as unrivalled natural appeal.

The EDEN initiative was launched in 2006 by the European Commission, which plays a crucial coordinating role in administering the competition.

Its tasks include encouraging dialogue among stakeholders, co-financing national selection procedures and awareness-raising campaigns, organising the awards ceremony and coordinating comprehensive communication campaigns.



ENVIRONMENT

Restoring Ireland's raised bogs

Ireland's raised bogs are among the world's oldest living eco-systems and many date back almost 10,000 years.

They are found mainly in the midlands and it is estimated they once covered almost a million acres of land. However, today, less than 1% of that figure remains as active, living bogs that are a unique feature of the Irish landscape and of considerable tourist value.

What little remains is in need of restoration and conservation and the European Union is helping fund a project that aims to bring 12 of Ireland's unique raised bogs in seven counties across the midlands back to life.

The €5.4 million Living Bog project is being part funded through LIFE, the EU's financial instrument that supports environmental, nature conservation and climate action projects throughout Europe.

The project is based in Co Westmeath and covers bogs in Offaly, Longford, Roscommon, Galway, Meath and Cavan as well as Westmeath.

The bogs are all on Special Area of Conservation (SAC) lands that are designated as Natura 2000 sites, meaning they belong to an international network of protected areas.

The Living Bog is designed to improve over 2,600 hectares of threatened raised bog habitat – the equivalent of over 7,000 Croke Parks and 18% of the national high bog area.

The project will restore a habitat that supports hundreds of native species, including the under threat shy Red Grouse and the endangered Curlew as well as rare invertebrates, amphibians, insects and a bewildering array of plant-life not found anywhere else.

The project is being carried out in consultation with landowners and local communities and students of all levels can visit project sites to learn more about the unique boglands





CONSUMER

Speedy broadband for rural Ireland

Many small Irish towns and villages have historically suffered from emigration and disadvantage, but rural areas can now help shape modern Ireland's future.

In fact, they have a central role to play in developing a smart, sustainable economy fit for the 21st Century.

For example, Ireland's successful agri-food sector depends on rural communities and it's undergoing a technological revolution.

High-tech innovations used in modern precision farming require rapid connection to the internet and that's one of the reasons why the rollout of rural broadband is a priority in the EU Digital Single Market package.

Rural broadband won't just benefit the agri-food sector; it'll also enable small businesses to connect with customers anywhere in the world and allow families to access online services in health, education and entertainment.

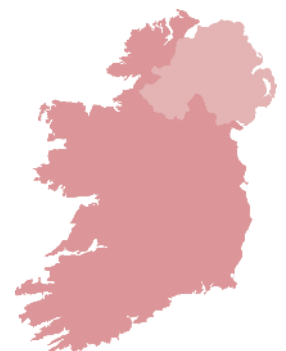
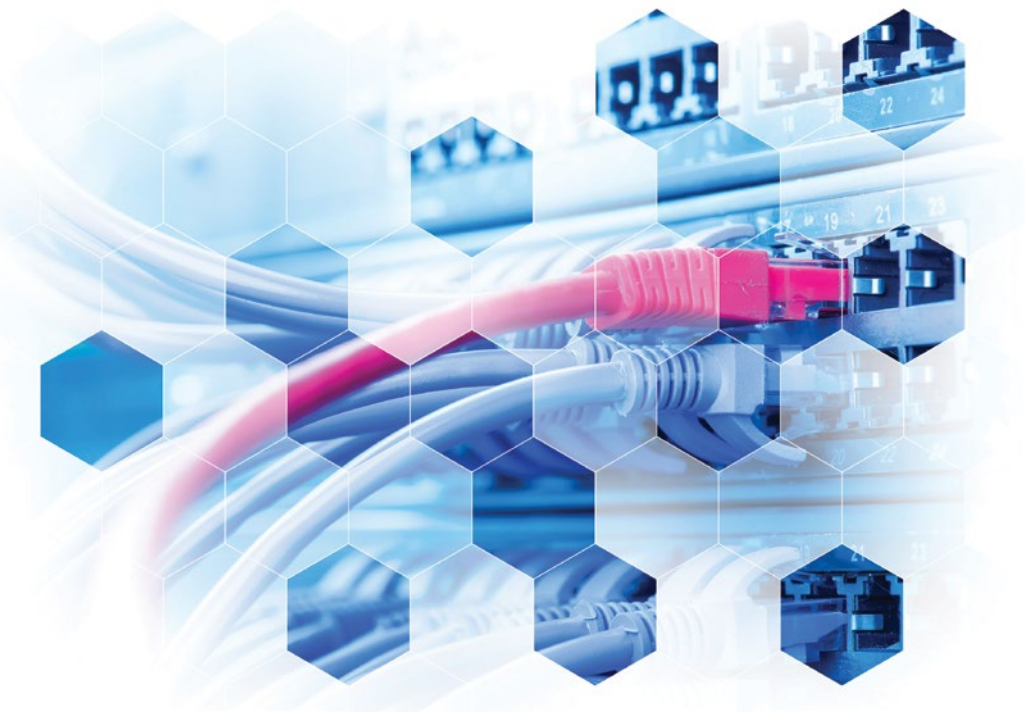
It's planned to close the digital gap between urban and rural areas by providing fast or ultra-fast broadband of at least 100 Mbps right across the EU by 2025.

In order to achieve this, all EU Member States, including Ireland, are required to draw up national broadband strategies.

Ireland's current National Broadband Plan includes Government intervention, which focuses on connecting areas where there is no commercial network and it's not profitable for private operators to develop one.

The Intervention Area covers 540,000 postal addresses including 52,057 farms, 47,096 SMEs and 437 schools.

The Irish Government estimates that 77% of the 2.3 million premises in Ireland will have access to high speed broadband by the end of 2018. That figure is expected to rise to 90% in 2020.





CONSUMER

Sky's the limit for air travel

Many of us can remember a time when airline travel was a privilege only the rich and famous could afford. In today's money, an hour long flight to the UK cost around €450 meaning most travellers making the short journey across the Irish Sea spent 15 hours or more on much cheaper boats and buses or trains.

Foreign holidays were out of the question for the average worker, and you'd need to save for a very long time to buy a flight across the Atlantic. Nowadays, airlines offer flights to the UK from as little as €10 and you can get to Europe's sun-soaked holiday hotspots for less than the cost of a meal in a good restaurant.

The reason why the cost of flying has dropped so dramatically is the EU's Single Market for Aviation. Before its creation in the 1990s, air transport was a highly regulated industry, dominated by national flag carriers and state-owned airports.

The internal market removed all commercial restrictions for airlines flying within the EU, which opened up competition on routes and paved the way for low-cost airlines to transform the industry.

The EU has not only made flights cheaper, it's made them safer and more efficient too. Since 2004, the European Union (EU) has gained competences in air traffic management, moving the decision-making process from an intergovernmental practice into the EU Single European Sky framework.

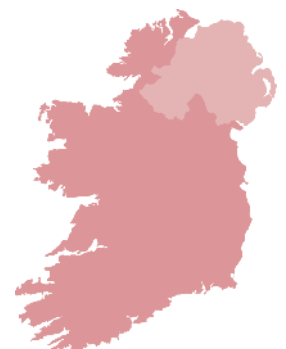
This is reducing delays, increasing safety standards, improving flight efficiency and cutting costs, as well as benefiting the environment through better management of air traffic. Direct emissions from aviation are also being reduced. CO2 emissions from all airlines operating in Europe are monitored and the carbon footprint of the aviation sector has been reduced by more than 17 million tonnes per year.

Consumers also have the EU to thank for regulations that provide compensation of up to €600 for delayed, cancelled or overbooked flights and passengers have a right to reimbursement of up to €1,220 for lost or damaged luggage.

Ryanair chief executive, Michael O'Leary, has described the Single Market in aviation as the stand-out achievement of the EU over the last 25 years.

"It has lowered airfares and enabled citizens to travel freely all over Europe," he added.

"However, we need to tackle long-standing challenges such as the scandal of repeated ATC strikes, which disrupt the travel plans of millions, and remove ruinous aviation taxes and overpriced airport monopolies."





STORIES

CONSUMER

Good call on roaming charges

It's hard to imagine life without mobile phones, but many of us remember when only the wealthy could afford to have one. The phones themselves were expensive, but if you were travelling around Europe it also cost a small fortune to both make and receive calls.

Back in 2006 an Irish holidaymaker in Malta could pay as much as €13.16 for a four-minute call home. Receiving a call was also a big expense, with operators routinely charging customers 300-400% more than the call actually cost. And using a mobile phone abroad to access the Internet or check emails could lead to bills of hundreds of euros for unsuspecting travellers consuming relatively small amounts of data.

It was something the EU was keen to tackle, and when it did, the cost of mobile phone roaming began to fall. Initially rules were introduced to limit what a provider could charge for calls, text and data and on June 15, 2017, roaming charges were finally abolished. Providers now must issue a 'Roam Like at Home' (RLAH) contract by default to customers.

RLAH rules cover data services, along with voice calls and SMS messages. If you have a contract with unlimited data, your mobile operator must provide you with a large volume of RLAH data and inform you of your allowance.

A Eurobarometer survey on roaming that took place following the first summer after charges were abolished showed the number of travellers who used their mobile data while roaming as often as they did at home doubled. Over 90% of Irish respondents said either they or somebody they knew would benefit from the end of roaming charges.

The share of travellers who never used mobile data abroad halved after June 15 2017 (21%) compared to the months preceding that date (42%).



Keeping our data safe

The amount of data passing across the internet every day is astonishing. Most of it is useful information that informs us, educates us and generally makes life a bit easier but some of it is private, personal data that we don't want to share with just anybody.

Under EU law personal data can only be gathered for a legitimate purpose, under strict legal conditions, and anybody who collects and manages personal information must protect it from misuse. Even stronger rules on data protection are being introduced across the EU in 2018 through the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The Data Protection Commissioner (DPC) in Ireland is helping raise awareness of GDPR through a wide range of initiatives, including providing guidance to help organisations adapt to the new law.

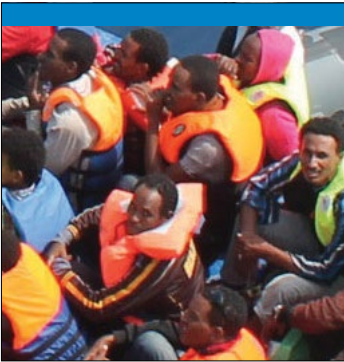
The DPC has a GDPR-specific website at www.GDPRandYou.ie where businesses and individuals can find out exactly what the changes mean to them. The GDPR doesn't apply to data processed by individuals for personal reasons. However, anybody and every business that keeps records for professional or commercial activity needs to apply the new rules or risk incurring serious fines.

Essentially, organisations and businesses can only collect personal data needed for their specific purpose and they must tell individuals what data they are collecting and why they need it. They can't keep the data for longer than necessary and they also have to provide a copy of it to the individual if requested.

This means our data protection rights are strengthened and individuals can find out exactly what data an organisation holds on them and have it corrected, or even erased if there's no legitimate reason for keeping it. Individuals also now can't have their data used for automated decision making, including profiling, but they can have their data transmitted to another organisation if needed.

Organisations are now obliged to incorporate data protection when designing new systems so only personal data needed to provide their goods or services is processed by default. Data collectors also must have procedures in place to detect, report and investigate a data breach within 72 hours of becoming aware of an incident.





GLOBAL IRELAND

Humanitarian rescue missions

Three years ago in 2015 a humanitarian crisis peaked when 1.26 million desperate people arrived in Europe seeking refuge from horrors in their homelands that thankfully most of us can only imagine. Tragically, many migrants never made it to the safety of Europe's shores. Thousands drowned at sea after being illegally crammed onto overloaded boats by human smugglers profiting from their plight.

Action needed to be taken and EU funding was allocated for extra staff and resources at frontline agencies dealing with the crisis including Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency.

Operation Sophia was launched as part of the EU's actions to provide a comprehensive response to the crisis. Ireland played its part separately at that time by undertaking humanitarian search and rescue missions as part of a bilateral arrangement with the Italian government, named Operation Pontus.

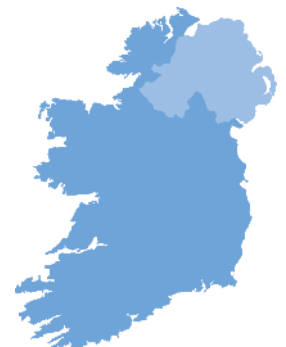
By 2017 Irish participation in Operation Pontus had resulted in the rescue of over 17,500 people. The Government later decided Ireland should participate fully in Operation Sophia, and parliamentary approval was secured in July 2017 for the deployment of an Irish Naval Service vessel as part of that operation.

In December 2015, the Irish Defence Forces was recognised with an Irish People of the Year Award for immense courage and resilience in saving thousands of lives during humanitarian missions in the Mediterranean.

The following year, the Irish Defence Forces also received the European Movement Ireland European of the Year award for its contribution to international peacekeeping and humanitarian work.

Irish Defence Forces are also operating in an EU training mission designed to reduce the threat posed by terrorist groups in Mali and protect the population living there.

Twenty personnel are deployed to EUTM Mali to support the training of Mali security forces so they can restore constitutional, democratic order and neutralise organised crime and terrorist threats.





STORIES

GLOBAL IRELAND

Syrian finds harmony in Ireland

When violin maker Almuthna Loulah fled war-torn Syria for Europe in 2016, he had no idea what kind of a future awaited him. A college lecturer in agricultural engineering, he had finished a masters degree in food science and had just begun work on his PhD when he left home.

He headed north to Turkey and from there managed to secure a place on a dangerously overcrowded plastic boat to the Greek island of Lesbos, not knowing if he would survive the five hour journey through treacherous waters.

"I had heard a lot of people die on these boats but there was no option for me," he says. "It was the only way to get to a safe place."

Thankfully, Al, as he likes to be called, survived the journey. On arrival, he was taken to a dedicated facility in Moria set up on the island to help relocate refugees from frontline Member States like Greece to other EU countries. Al applied through the EU Relocation and Resettlement programmes and chose to come to Ireland.

"I was very happy when they told me my application was successful," he says. "And I am very proud to be in Ireland now."

When Al arrived here he was taken to the Emergency Reception and Orientation Centre (EROC) for refugees in Ballaghaderreen, Co Roscommon. Within a short time, he began to make Irish friends and started to rebuild his life, but he missed the things he loved doing in Syria. One of those things was making violins; something he picked up while working in his father's carpentry workshop.

"It was a hobby I started after watching a guy playing one on TV as a child," he says.

Al taught himself by trial and error how to make the musical instrument and became an expert violin maker. With the help of some Irish friends, including a retired violin maker who gave him his equipment as a gift, Al was able to indulge in his passion again.

"I believed in myself and that if I followed my dreams something good would happen," he said.

Al decided to make a violin for President Michael D Higgins as a present to say thank you from all the Syrian people in Ireland.

"I thought it would be very nice because the way I see him he looks like the father to all the Irish people," he said.

In September 2017, Al was invited to Áras na Uachtaráin to deliver his violin personally to President Higgins.



Making contaminated water safe

The WHO and UNICEF estimate that nearly 660 million people around the world don't have reliable access to safe drinking water.

Half of them live in sub-Saharan African rural areas where they collect water from sources prone to contamination from bacteria or viruses.

But a consortium including the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland and National University of Ireland Maynooth, Co Kildare, are now working on an EU funded project that could change all that.

The WATERSPOUTT project aims to provide safe drinking water to communities who rely on unsafe sources. The consortium tasked with the job is carrying out a technological development programme based on Solar Disinfection.

The project is also working through social sciences and education to improve health and survival in developing African nations.

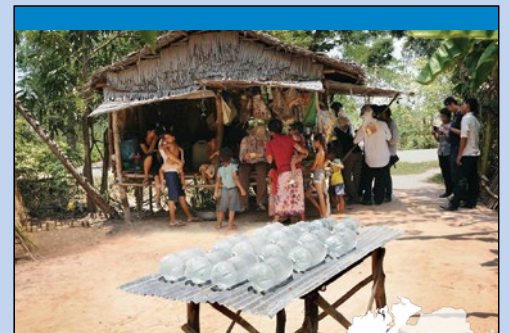
The social science programme is led by the National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis (NIRSA) at Maynooth University.

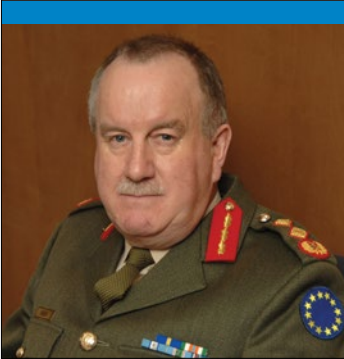
It's been structured to transform access to safe drinking water in four case study areas in South Africa, Malawi, Ethiopia and Uganda.

The social science team is analysing the social, political and economic context of water use, as well as needs and vulnerability in the four communities.

The team will examine the effect of gender relations on controlling water resources too. This is important because research has shown that water projects designed and run with the full participation of women are more sustainable and effective.

The WATERSPOUTT project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research innovation programme.





GLOBAL IRELAND

Ireland take the lead in Chad/CAR

From January 2008 to March 2009 Irish Defence Forces took part in an EU military operation in Eastern Chad and the North East of the Central African Republic (CAR) under a mandate provided by the UN Security Council.

It was part of a package of measures designed to enhance the EU's engagement in tackling a humanitarian crisis in Darfur in neighbouring western Sudan.

The EU Operation Commander for EUFOR Tchad/CAR was Ireland's Lt General Patrick Nash, who became a central figure in what turned out to be a difficult, but ultimately successful, mission.

"My primary task on taking command, was to produce a concept of operations, an operational plan and the rules of engagement for approval by the European Union Council," he says.

"One had to be very mindful of the specifics of the mandate for the EU force, which were a distinct change from UN Peacekeeping missions where minimum force would be a requirement."

The threat facing an EU force in the heart of Africa was extensive. Terrorism was rampant and groups of often more than 100 were destroying the countryside, slaughtering people in villages and taking out revenge on rival tribes.

"By the time EUFOR Tchad/CAR was established there was already some 255,000 refugees and 185,000 internally displaced people," recalls Lt General Nash.

"The threat from Al-Qaeda was a factor also, due principally to the total breakdown of both governments' control."

On top of this, Lt General Nash had to be mindful of nervousness in capitals across Europe over sending a force to an area in such turmoil.

"In trying to convince wavering capitals, all the diplomatic, military and political contacts had to be employed," he says.

"Critical shortages in helicopters, hospitals and a strategic reserve then seriously delayed my capacity to recommend a launch date.

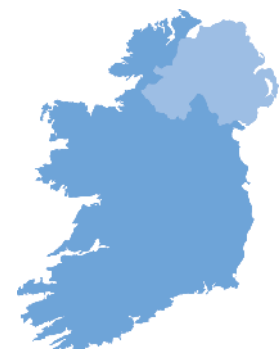
"As regards infrastructure, if work did not commence in time, the approaching wet season would postpone any deployment until the autumn of 2008.

"Eventually, I agreed to commit serious finances to start construction in December 2007 to allow the mission to go ahead."

The mission eventually launched on January 28, 2008, and EUFOR had an almost immediate effect in generating a secure environment, which the mission mandated. EUFOR Tchad/CAR's success is a justifiable source of pride for Lt General Nash and he says Ireland also has plenty to be proud about.

"Ireland can be proud of the political decision to participate in the mission and the subsequent performance of the defence forces," he said.

"The mission is testament to the capacity of the European Union, through a fully developed and resourced security and defence policy, to be a world leader in influencing global peace and security."







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