



WHAT'S THE story?



25 stories about Ireland and Europe





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Gerry Kiely and Helen McEntee, T.D.

Introduction

Ireland's rich storytelling tradition has entertained, educated and informed countless generations of Irish people.

It is an essential form of communication that is just as important now as it was for our ancestors who exchanged tales around forest campfires long before there were books or newspapers.

One of the greatest stories to be told today is that of Ireland's relationship with Europe. It's a tale that has lasted over four decades, and one that will continue to unfold for many future generations.

So, as we often say here in Ireland, *"what's the story?"* Well, so far it has been a story of peace, prosperity, freedom and hope.

Ireland's European Union membership has changed how we work, travel and shop for the better, but there are still big challenges like tackling climate change, which can only be addressed by all EU Member States working together.

New initiatives like the Banking Union are protecting our finances while the Energy Union is helping to keep our energy supply safe and ensuring we have effective measures to fight climate change. Reform of the Common Agricultural Policy will help modernise farming and deliver stronger environmental protection.

The Digital Single Market is providing us with better access to online goods for our businesses and consumers while keeping us safe from cyber-attacks.

The European Union's agenda on migration is developing new ways to manage migration fairly and humanely while keeping our frontiers safe.

But while these major initiatives are vitally important, perhaps the real story of the European Union and Ireland can be found in the stories that unfold quietly and without fuss in the communities, businesses, farms, schools and universities around the country.

The European Commission Representation in Ireland has put together this project to tell 25 stories that highlight just some of the ways that Ireland benefits from European Union membership.

There are thousands more stories just like them up and down the country that demonstrate how the European Union belongs to each and every Irish and European citizen.

And the best part is, the story continues, with many more chapters still to be written.

Gerry Kiely

Head of Representation of the European Commission in Ireland

Helen McEntee T.D.

Minister of State for European Affairs



Telling award winning stories

Ireland has a great storytelling culture, so it shouldn't be a surprise that one of the country's leading documentary filmmakers has picked up multiple global awards.

Crossing the Line produces powerful documentaries on subjects as diverse as wildlife, science and history. In 2018 they won an Emmy for 'The Farthest', a fascinating feature length movie about NASA's iconic Voyager mission – our very first spacecraft to reach interstellar space.

Crossing the Line is just one of many creative companies and individuals in Ireland supported by Creative Europe MEDIA, an EU programme that helps the European audiovisual, cultural and creative sector.

Creative Europe Desk Ireland provides advice, support and information on the programme and funding opportunities from its offices in Dublin and Galway.

John Murray from Crossing the Line acknowledges that Creative Europe MEDIA has helped the company to develop into an award winning enterprise.

"I think, like a lot of production companies in Ireland, we're big in our ambitions but quite small in terms of our actual structure," he says.

"MEDIA funding has allowed us to develop ideas and produce films to the highest international standards. It has really helped elevate the quality of our work, which has in turn spurred us on to even bigger and better projects."

Murray says Creative Europe Desk Ireland can help aspiring media artists with great ideas to develop their projects.

"I think the main advice is not to be daunted by the application itself," he adds.

"Break it down into sections and take it piece by piece. And remember, you need to sell yourself and your idea so don't be shy about listing your accomplishments and explaining what makes your project idea so fantastic."





Galway to host celebration of culture

Galway is often referred to as the cultural centre of Ireland and in 2020, all of Europe will get to see why as the city of tribes officially becomes a European Capital of Culture.

Introduced in 1985, the idea behind Capitals of Culture is to boost the cultural, social and economic development of the selected cities. Having been chosen for 2020, Galway is getting ready to show its culture credentials to the rest of Europe and beyond.

The city's FRESH STREET#3 event - held in May 2019 while preparations were still under way - provided a taste of what to expect from Galway 2020.

More than 200 international artists, programmers, researchers, teachers, journalists and policy makers descended on the city for what was Europe's largest international seminar for street arts.

The three-day event featured performances from local, national and international street artists. President of Ireland, Michael D Higgins, was among those who enjoyed the spectacle.

"By giving recognition to, and encouraging the development of imagination and creativity in all its forms, we create the foundations for an inclusive citizenship built on a sense of shared meaning and heritage," he said.

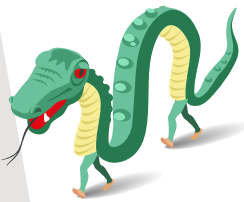
During FRESH STREET#3, Galway Community Circus hosted a workshop to develop an inspired act called 'Wires Crossed - A Balancing Act for Europe'. Taking place as part of Galway 2020, the performance will see 400 people cross the River Corrib and the Claddagh Basin on tightwires.

This is just one of the events Galway 2020 is now putting together, with EU funding and support, for what is shaping up to be a fantastic programme of events, which will kick-off with a massive opening ceremony in February 2020.

"It will be an ideal opportunity to celebrate our culture and the vibrancy of this exceptional place in which we live, and to encourage a more inclusive society - so that everyone can truly feel part of this community we live in" said Galway 2020 CEO, Patricia Philbin.

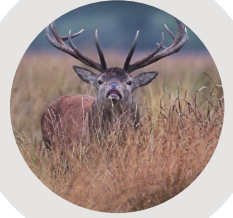
To keep up to date on what's happening during this exciting year of European culture visit www.galway2020.ie.

FRESH STREET#3 celebrations





Launch of Kerry Way app with EU Commissioner Phil Hogan



App sends walkers on their Kerry Way

The rich heritage and ancient folklore of the Kerry Way walking route has been brought into the 21st century thanks to an innovative app that is supported by EU funding.

Developed by Béaloideas Chiarraí (Kerry Folklore), the app provides walkers with a wealth of information on the popular route including detailed descriptions of over 60 points of interest and maps.

The Kerry Way multilingual app was officially launched by EU Commissioner Phil Hogan in April 2019.

"It's a great example of a local community using EU support to achieve sustainable local development," he said.

"By developing the app, Kerry draws on its proud storytelling tradition to make the most of its rich heritage through smart tourism."

Béaloideas Chiarraí Committee Chairman, Johnny O'Connor, believes the Kerry Way is possibly the most beautiful route-marked walk in the world.

"Our aim in developing this app was to showcase the rich and diverse heritage and folklore that exists in South Kerry to visitors to the region, particularly the walkers who come in their thousands to experience the Kerry Way" he said.

Walkers who download the free app can find points of interest identified with photographs that are triggered by GPS codes as they pass specific spots.

The app also features short history and folklore stories told by locals living along the route to give walkers first-hand insights into the area's life and legends.

Its development was made possible by local people giving up their time, and supported by local groups including the South Kerry Development Partnership, trustees of Muckross House, SOLAS trainees in Kerry and many others.

During the initial stages of development, information needed to be gathered covering the area from Muckross to Glencar.

This was funded through an EU Interreg project with support from Kerry County Council and the Kerry Group.

Completing the data gathering and translations was funded through LEADER, which provided just over €19,000 with match funding provided by the Kerry Group and Béaloideas Chiarraí.



#EU
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ME





Making festivals more inclusive

Technological University Dublin (TU Dublin) is taking part in a European research project that is aiming to make festivals, events and urban public spaces more accessible and inclusive.

The FESTSPACE project is looking into the dynamics of festivals and events to see how public spaces might be made more accessible for all, and used in new ways that could improve relations between people from different cultural, ethnic or socio-economic backgrounds.

TU Dublin academics, Dr Bernadette Quinn and Dr Theresa Ryan, are collaborating on FESTSPACE with colleagues from the UK, Sweden and Spain.

"FESTSPACE will investigate how festivals and events affect the inclusivity of public spaces," said Dr Quinn.

"The Irish project will have a particular emphasis on commemorative events planned as part of the Decade of Centenaries programme."

"Festivals and events are an important part of Dublin city's cultural landscape, and this research is interested in understanding how these events affect those who use public spaces and ultimately in learning about how public spaces can become more inclusive."

TU Dublin has been awarded funding for FESTSPACE by the Humanities in the European Research Area (HERA), a partnership between 26 Humanities Research Councils across Europe and the European Commission.

Professor Brian O'Neill, Director of Research, Innovation and Enterprise at TU Dublin, said TU Dublin is excited to play a part in the research.

"FESTSPACE is just one of 20 transnational projects, which have recently received €20 million in funding under the HERA programme and it's a fantastic opportunity for TU Dublin to build relationships with humanities researchers across Europe," he said.

Prof David Gillivray & Dr Bernadette Quinn with circus performers



Ailbhe Kenny and Dr Sara Brandellero



#EU AND ME





The Shed Distillery's gin-spiring success

Breaking into the Canadian market was a significant milestone for Drumshanbo Gunpowder Irish Gin from The Shed Distillery in Drumshanbo, Co Leitrim.

It's a challenging market for what is Connacht's first distillery in 101 years, but CETA - the EU's new trade agreement with Canada - opened some great export opportunities to this major global market.

International markets manager, Eva Kelly, travelled over to Canada personally so The Shed could hit the ground running.

The visit coincided with Drumshanbo Gunpowder Irish Gin winning the prestigious Flaviar Award, which annually presents Best Spirit 'Oscars' to just five of 22,000 eligible premium spirits.

Launching the brand in Canada is very significant in terms of what it means for the wider Drumshanbo community and employment in rural Ireland.

"The people of Drumshanbo have shared our vision of partnership, sustainability, employment and a thriving rural community from the very beginning," says Patrick J Rigney, founder and managing director of The Shed Distillery.

"The remarkable international response to our first brand – Drumshanbo Gunpowder Irish Gin – has been fundamental in bringing this vision to life."

"We had just two employees when we launched in December 2014. Following the incredible international response to Drumshanbo Gunpowder Irish Gin since its launch in April 2016, the number of employees had risen to 32. Securing this listing in Canada - one of the world's largest markets - will be key to further job creation."

It is still very early days for The Shed Distillery but there are plans to launch a premier 'grand cru' Irish Whiskey brand, which will be the first whiskey distilled in Connacht for over a century.

"We will continue to reinvest as much as we can into the business for many years to come," says Rigney.

"The continued ambitious international growth of Drumshanbo Gunpowder Irish Gin and Sausage Tree Pure Irish Vodka, along with our new Visitor Experience will bring employee numbers at the distillery from 32 to 50 in 2020."

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Details were announced at Ayrfield in Co Dublin



EIB backs Irish social housing project



Hundreds of new homes are being built in Dublin, Louth, Wicklow and Kildare with the help of multi-million euro financing from the European Investment Bank (EIB).

The lending arm of the European Union is providing half of the 25 year financing for the initial stage of Ireland's first social housing Public-Private Partnership (PPP).

Ireland suffers from a social housing shortage and the PPP model is now being used to develop a total of 1,500 units across the state that will provide badly needed homes for low-income families.

The €120 million initial phase project will see 534 new homes built by Comhar Housing. The new housing units will be managed by Choice Housing, part of the Comhar consortium, under a 25 year financing agreement and will then be returned to the Irish State.

Bank of Ireland, Macquarie Capital and Korea Development Bank are also backing the project, but it's the first time in Europe that the EIB has financed a PPP social housing scheme.

"The European Investment Bank recognises the urgent need to increase the supply of social housing in Ireland and is pleased to provide half of the financing," said Andrew McDowell, Vice-President of the EIB.

"The €120 million programme will improve the lives of hundreds of families across the country in the coming years and follows the close cooperation between the EIB and Irish partners to tackle the housing crisis."

The 534 homes are being built across five local authority areas but Dublin City Council will act on behalf of them all.

"Given the scale of social housing needs facing the country, and local authorities in particular, it is important that new and innovative approaches to increasing social housing supply are developed," said Dublin City Council's Brendan Kenny.

Ireland's Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, Eoghan Murphy, said the project represents a significant milestone in the provision of social housing in Ireland.

"The valuable support of the European Investment Bank and Bank of Ireland for this project demonstrates their faith in what is an innovative social housing delivery mechanism, and I would like to acknowledge the hard work of the range of public and private sector stakeholders that have brought the project to this stage," he added.





Leirim railway bridge



Bridging the gap in Leitrim

Not so long ago passengers travelling by rail from the west of Ireland to Dublin had their train journey slow to a snail's pace as they crossed the Shannon at Drumsna in Co Leitrim.

The original railway bridge had aged so much that trains were forced to reduce their speed to a crawl to cross safely.

"The existing bridge was old and in need of constant repair, so trains could only travel at a speed of 10 miles per hour in the vicinity of the bridge," says specialist structural engineer with Irish Rail, Aidan McAdam.

Reconstruction had been considered numerous times, but the cost was too high. It finally got the go ahead in 2008 thanks to the European Regional Development Fund, which supported the bridge's renewal as part of a rail safety program.

"Now trains can travel at a speed of 75 miles per hour for the entire journey, which makes a huge difference to the lives of regular passengers," McAdam says.

The location of the railway bridge – it crosses the River Shannon from Leitrim to Roscommon at a spot that cannot be reached by the road – meant that engineers needed to construct a temporary road to safely reach and work on the bridge.

"One of the world's largest cranes was hired to lift out the old spans, lift in the new bed stones, and put in the new spans before laying a new track across the bridge and connecting to the existing track," explains McAdam.

All of the initial preparation work was done out of train operating hours to minimise the disruption to passengers and then the track was closed for 10 days while the works were safely carried out.

The reconstruction, which cost a total of €5.5 million, has resulted in a more reliable bridge structure that has improved train journey times from Sligo to Dublin. The new structure is expected to last for 120 years.





The Island of Cape Clear

A Clear view of clean energy

Islands off the coast of Ireland are set to become more self-sufficient, prosperous and sustainable thanks to a EU clean energy initiative.

The Aran Islands and Cape Clear are amongst 26 islands across Europe taking part in an ambitious project to transition to clean energy sources.

Despite having an abundance of renewable energy sources like wind, solar and waves, most islands still depend on expensive fossil fuel imports for heat, cooking and hot water.

The objective of Clean Energy for EU Islands is to help as many island communities as possible to make the switch to renewable energy.

Cape Clear, or Oileán Chléire in Irish, is an ideal location for the project. The 5km long island was a global leader in clean energy over 30 years ago when Ireland's first wind energy system was built there.

"Cape Clear was actually a pioneering island when it came to renewable energy," said Mairtín Ó Méalóid, manager of island co-op, Comharchumann Chléire Teoranta (CCT).

Ó Méalóid hopes Clean Energy for EU Islands will once again see Cape Clear as a leader in green energy.

"Long-term, it could have huge significance for the island," he said.

"It would make Cape Clear one of the pioneering green energy islands again and we would expect that it would bring a certain amount of eco-tourism too."

Locals are keen to get the island generating its own renewable energy again as soon as possible.

The Cape Clear community is developing a clean energy transition agenda that's due to be published in 2020, but a fantastic green energy initiative will arrive on the island in the summer of 2019.

The National Transport Authority is introducing electric buses to the island as part of a pilot project that could replace its Local Link rural transport service across the country.

Two seven-seater electric minibuses will be handed over to CCT, which runs the existing island service. They will be initially charged using purchased green units and Solar Photovoltaic (PV) panels.

The ultimate goal is to charge them from power generated by the island's original wind turbines from the 1980s which will be renovated for this purpose.



BirdWatch battles to save the Curlew

The distinctive cry of the Curlew is one of the most evocative sounds of the marshes and boglands in summer, but it could soon become a distant memory for Irish people.

That's because the largest European wading bird, with its distinctive down-curved bill and long legs, is in real danger of vanishing from our shores.

Over the last 50 years, the loss of a suitable breeding habitat has seen the Curlew suffer widespread declines across Europe, but nowhere has this been more severe than in Ireland.

The threat is so stark, the Curlew is now an official conservation priority and is red listed in the Irish Government's 'Birds of Conservation Concern'.

Bird experts estimate there has been a 97 percent decline in numbers since the 1980s and the race is on to protect the species before it's too late.

BirdWatch Ireland has partnered with the Irish Natura and Hill Farmers Association, the Irish Grey Partridge Conservation Trust and Teagasc in an EU project that is making a difference in known breeding sites in Lough Corrib, Co Galway and the south Leitrim bogs area.

The Irish Breeding Curlew Agricultural European Innovation Partnership (EIP-AGRI) project, funded by the EU and the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine, is using pioneering measures to improve breeding outcomes on both farmland and bogs.

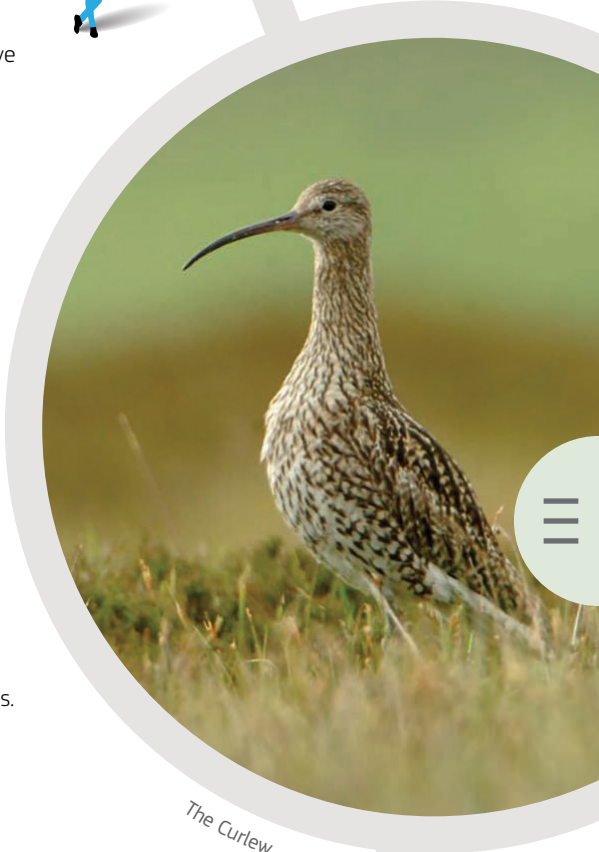
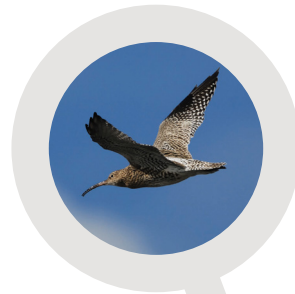
The decline of curlew has been so severe that there are now only 135 breeding pairs left.

"The declines have largely been driven by loss of habitat and increased predation, and currently breeding success is below sustainable levels," says Kathryn Finney, project manager of the Irish Breeding Curlew EIP.

Working closely with key stakeholders and with the farming community, the Curlew EIP will be setting up agri-environmental schemes designed to restore habitats and protect nests from predators.

"It is vitally important that we develop appropriate habitat and regional specific solutions to the factors affecting breeding Curlew in Ireland," says Finney.

"The EIP programme has provided an important mechanism through which we can do this."



The Curlew





Mapping the deep blue sea

We know more about the dark side of the moon and the surface of Mars than we do about our deep ocean environments.

However, Irish participants in an EU funded project are shedding light on the darkest depths of the North Atlantic maritime region.

The ATLAS project, led by the University of Edinburgh, with the National University of Ireland Galway, University College Dublin and Irish SME AquaTT UETP Ltd all participating, is mapping the North Atlantic maritime region to help manage marine resources in an efficient, safe and sustainable way.

"The ATLAS project was put together in response to a broad call from the European Commission to improve our understanding of the balance between preservation and exploitation in the North Atlantic ecosystem," says project coordinator Murray Roberts of the School of Geosciences at the University of Edinburgh.

ATLAS research activities mainly focus on waters where deep-sea ecosystems are coming under increased pressure from human activities.

A number of case studies have been chosen to represent the different types of marine environments found in the North Atlantic.

One of these, the Porcupine Seabight (PSB) off the west coast of Ireland, is an ideal candidate to develop Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) approaches within ATLAS.

Dr Anthony Grehan of NUI Galway is leading the MSP work in the ATLAS project.

"MSP is considered a key enabler to promote ecosystem based sustainable resource management in the deep-sea," he said.

The PSB is an area that has been intensely researched for decades. The importance of its cold-water coral reefs only came to prominence at the beginning of this century.

The area contains carbonate mounds that can reach heights of hundreds of meters. The Porcupine Seabight's Belgica Mound province is the first offshore Special Area of Conservation (SAC) in the EU, as designated by the Irish authorities under the European Union's Habitats Directive.

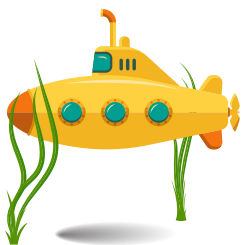
In recent times, the PSB has experienced an increase in oil and gas exploration interest and there are several other stakeholders including fishing, telecommunications, scientific research and conservation that can benefit from the development of MSP approaches within ATLAS.

The outcomes and insights from ATLAS will inform the 2020 Irish national maritime spatial plan and contribute to international deliberations on the drafting of a United Nations regulation to protect biodiversity beyond national jurisdictions – the so called UN BBNJ regulation.

More information on ATLAS can be found at www.eu-atlas.org.



The ATLAS project





Isabel Conaghan, Amarda Bates and Cael Gallagher of St Columba's College



Isabel Conaghan, Amarda Bates and Cael Gallagher of St Columba's College

Students debate Europe's future

Getting young people involved in politics is often a difficult task, but an annual event organised by the European Commission is giving secondary school students a chance to take part in the debates that shape our futures.

The Model Council of the European Union simulates a meeting of the Council of the European Union where the students can experience the EU's decision-making process for themselves.

Each school represents one EU Member State for the debate, with students and their teachers researching the issues for the country they are role-playing.

St Columba's College, Stranorlar, Co Donegal won the debate in 2019, rising above 24 other schools from around Ireland while discussing how the EU should spend its budget for the period 2021-27.

Cael Gallagher, who was on the winning team, said it was brilliant to take part.

"It allowed us to get a feel for the inner workings of Europe," he said. *"Participating in this competition made me realise how intrinsic the EU is to our daily lives."*

St Columba's were representing Croatia in the debate that was opened at Dublin Castle by Ireland's Minister of State for European Affairs, Helen McEntee, who was impressed by what she saw and heard.

"I'm delighted to see so many schools from across Ireland full of enthusiasm for the 2019 Model Council Debate on the future EU budget," said Minister McEntee.

Head of the European Commission Representation in Ireland, Gerry Kiely, said the topic of the debate was timely.

"The EU Member States are actively discussing whether the Budget proposed by the European Commission addresses their individual and collective long-term priorities," he explained.

The debate was chaired by Senator Neale Richmond, who said the students demonstrated an impressive understanding of the spending priorities of the Member State they represented.

"They portrayed, very creatively, how Member States defend their interests in such a complex negotiation and – with great diplomatic potential – came to some clear conclusions on how the EU budget should be spent," he added.

First Vice-President of the European Parliament, MEP Mairead McGuinness, presented the prizes to the winning and runner-up teams.



#EU AND ME





Professor John Nolan



Waterford based project is a real eye-opener

An EU funded project hosted at the Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) has discovered new ways to improve vision using key nutrients found in fruit and vegetables.

Extensive eye tests in the CREST project led by Professor John Nolan identified that three pigments known as carotenoids, that are found in fruit and veg, protect the eye's macula, which is responsible for central and detailed vision.

The research is good news for patients in the early stages of age-related macular degeneration (AMD.)

Further research has shown that the carotenoids also help memory and reactions, so they may help to improve the quality of life for patients with Alzheimer's disease.

"These carotenoids are now routinely used in eye care," said Prof Nolan. "Doctors are prescribing them internationally with great success.

"It is remarkable that we have identified, through the use of natural, safe and cost-effective nutritional pigments, ways to enhance visual function in the general population, and for those with AMD."

In total, CREST researchers received almost €6.5 million of private and public funding for follow-on work and according to Nolan, the European Research Council (ERC) is one of the best supporters for research programmes.

"It created a unique platform to attract the best scientists and do the best research, which attracted funding," he said.

"We are also getting international attention at conferences. We are leveraging the ERC's investment to take research to the next level."

WIT has a great track record in research and was the first Institute of Technology in Ireland to receive the HR Excellence in Research designation from the European Commission.



Laura Mulkeen

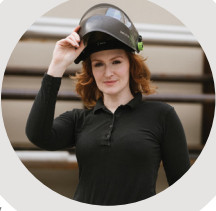


Photo:
Ruth Connolly

A bright spark in the welding world



How does a female event manager break through gender barriers and end up in a traditionally male trade like welding? Well, that's the unusual career path Laura Mulkeen took, and she has absolutely no regrets.

Laura loved the creativity involved in the event management career she had built up over ten years. Originally from Derry, she had been working in the busy industry in Dublin and Belfast.

She enjoyed her work, but there had been a niggling feeling of unfulfillment. So, after moving to Donegal for family reasons and finding herself unemployed, Laura decided to rethink her options dramatically.



Having taken up blacksmithing as a hobby, Laura signed up to a basic welding class with Donegal Education and Training Board (ETB).

The trade really appealed to her love of practical, craft-focused work and she has since gone on to complete intermediate welding and coded pipe welding courses.

"Taking up welding with Donegal ETB is the best decision I've ever made," Laura said.

"I had always wanted to take up a trade, but was pushed down the academic route. The ETB has helped me realise that I'm much more at home in the workshop than in the office."

"Despite having never welded before the basic course, I'm now a coded pipe welder and really love what I do. Although welding is still a male-dominated industry, the ETB is hugely supportive of women in trades."

"The instructors and facilities are world-class and I couldn't have asked for a better environment to learn in."

Laura has since started working for an engineering company and is looking forward to building her skills further.

The specific skills courses Laura undertook were co-funded by the European Social Fund as part of the ESF Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning (PEIL) 2014-2020.



Photo:
Ruth Connolly

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Improving mental health through technology

Almost 165 million people in Europe are affected by mental or neurological disorders including depression and anxiety.

Meeting the increasing demand for mental health services is a challenge but an EU funded project called eMEN is helping to develop ways to keep mental health care affordable and accessible in the digital age.

eMEN is a network of key stakeholders in six countries who research, promote and help develop new technologies to treat mental health conditions.

It is funded by the Interreg North-West Europe Programme and the HSE in Ireland. Mental Health Reform is leading the Irish part of eMEN and is helping promote the development and implementation of eMental Health.

In June 2019, Mental Health Reform and the Union of Students in Ireland hosted a seminar as part of the project that explored the possibilities for technology to support mental health in third level education.

“eMental Health technologies present valuable opportunities within the mental healthcare services and supports for students in Ireland and elsewhere,” said Executive Director of Mental Health Reform, Shari McDaid.

“These types of technologies offer young people easier and potentially faster access to mental health care, and increased choice and control over their own treatment.”

The Irish eMEN team is providing support for online Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) for adolescent mental health services.

CBT is a complex, adult-oriented treatment but eMEN is promoting a game-based app that can be used by adolescents during mental health treatment sessions.

eMEN has already made important contributions to wider policy development and understanding of the potential offered by eMental Health in Ireland.

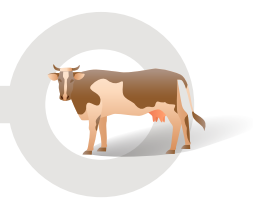
It has reached and influenced more than 300 key players through international seminars on eMental Health topics as well as thousands more through various media channels.

Based on its successes to date, it is anticipated that eMEN will have a lasting legacy in promoting eMental Health innovations, helping to address challenges facing service providers and empower people with mental health difficulties to better address their needs.



Speakers at an eMEN seminar





Beefing up the battle against climate change

Greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture are a significant contributor to climate change, and Ireland is taking part in an EU funded project that could help reduce Europe's beef carbon footprint.

Tackling climate change is a top European Commission priority and as beef production generates six percent of all human-induced emissions, it's a serious problem.

LIFE Beef Carbon aims to help farmers reduce the beef carbon footprint by 15 percent over 10 years in Ireland, France, Italy and Spain by sharing knowledge and best practice on farm efficiency.

The project includes Teagasc and Bord Bia from Ireland as partners.

"Over the last 50 years, there has been a large increase in the volume of carbon in the atmosphere and there is concern that this is changing the climate and adversely affecting the economy and environment," said Teagasc's Donal O'Brien.

"Most emissions are generated from biological farming sources such as soils and animals.

"Nevertheless, it is possible to cut beef's carbon footprint by improving efficiencies, using low emission technology and building soil carbon.

"The innovative farmers of LIFE Beef Carbon are testing the impact of these recommended strategies on a voluntary basis and have already seen some carbon footprint improvements."

New agriculture techniques that reduce gas emissions are emerging, but it's difficult for farmers to measure the carbon footprint on their farm to see where they can use these techniques to become more carbon efficient.

The Beef Carbon Navigator, developed by Teagasc and Bord Bia, is helping to address this. Already used on over 50,000 Irish beef farms, it captures the carbon footprint of farms by regularly measuring key efficiency areas like slurry management.

By setting targets in these key areas, farmers can see exactly where environmental gains can be achieved.

The Navigator will also help in the development of an action plan that will eventually pave the way to lowering the beef carbon footprint.





Students from St. Oliver's Community College Gleaning after the harvest



Irish farm tackling global food waste



The world is facing a crisis with 30 percent of food produced ending up uneaten or discarded.

In Ireland, over one million tonnes of edible food is disposed of every year and our agriculture sector has a vital role to play in tackling the problem.

Inefficiencies in the agri-food chain can lead to reduced productivity and food loss, so measures to prevent it are important.

Meade Potato Company in Co Meath has zero food waste and has come up with some interesting ideas on how to address this global issue.

The family farm business is helping to develop a 'gleaning' network with community foodbank FoodCloud, a partner organisation for the EU's Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) in Ireland.

Gleaning is simply following harvesters in the field to gather leftover crops that are then donated to food charities.

"The amount of gleaned produce varies according to harvest conditions," says business operations manager, Eleanor Meade.

"However, a huge benefit is that it makes consumers aware of the importance of valuing food all along the supply chain, starting at the farm gate. And we have found gleaning is actually a great team-building activity."

Some Meade Potato Company produce is also sent to FoodCloud for re-distribution to people in need. Any produce not suitable for other markets is sent for stock feed.

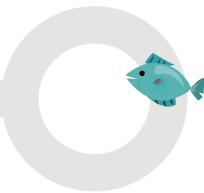
"We are continually investing in more efficient production methods and co-products recovery; this is crucial from a sustainability point of view," emphasizes Eleanor.

Meade Potato Company's experience in reducing food waste could benefit farms around Ireland and Europe. The farm has hosted an Agricultural European Innovation Partnership (EIP-AGRI) focus group, which disseminates knowledge on best practices in agriculture.





Michael Keohane with sons Colman (left) and Brian



Supporting Ireland's sensational seafood

As an island nation, fishing has always been important to Ireland. Our natural clean water has delivered exceptional seafood for thousands of years.

Today, the seafood is arguably even better but it has to be provided without jeopardising fish stocks for future generations.

The EU's Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) and European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) support sustainable fishing in Ireland and help coastal communities diversify their economies.

The EMFF is supporting Irish companies like Keohane Seafoods in Bantry to develop and advance Ireland's seafood industry.

In 2019, this family business was one of 17 Irish enterprises to be awarded funding towards investment in the seafood processing sector.

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine Michael Creed announced the EMFF funding awards, praising Keohane Seafoods and the other enterprises.

"The 17 seafood enterprises that are investing €6.5 million this year with assistance from the EMFF are evidence of strong confidence in the seafood sector," he said.

"These companies are seizing the market opportunities that are there in abundance for quality Irish seafood products.

"This is particularly true for companies like Keohane Seafoods, which is undertaking a major €3 million investment to double its salmon production capacity at its plant in Bantry."

Keohane Seafoods was founded in 2010 by Michael Keohane who has 30 years of experience working in the fishing industry. Together, with sons Colman and Brian, the business has developed into a fantastic Irish seafood success story in less than a decade. It now has around 200 employees across two facilities in Cork City and Bantry, and supplies products to a number of major supermarket chains.

The company has also picked up a string of awards for its quality seafood and continues to invest in research and new product development.

The EMFF offers financial support, available through Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM), to Irish seafood enterprises so they can grow their output, add value to products and develop their markets worldwide.





Soccer project counts on success

Young students in Dublin are benefitting from a unique EU funded programme that promotes social inclusion and uses soccer to teach numeracy.

More Than A Club is funded through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), and Bohemian FC - a Dublin club fully owned by supporters - is putting the programme to good use.

The club's More Than A Club team, led by Carina O'Brien, has run a number of innovative and successful soccer programmes, including one for teenage students in Luttrellstown Community College that had modules on soccer commerce, marketing, club finance and career development.

As well as earning FAI coaching badges, the students learned about how big sporting events are organised and the way sports clubs are run.

More Than A Club was also behind an inspirational initiative that taught numeracy through the medium of soccer.

The Double Club programme combined a maths class of 45 minutes with physical activity and used a course book designed around football and Bohemians.

"Each lesson has a top tip from Bohs' manager Keith Long and we promote the players, members and volunteers of the club, the people in the shop, the groundsman," said O'Brien.

"For example, we use concepts like the club shop - trade price, cost price, stock etc, to show how many scarves you can buy for your €20."

Former Dublin Lord Mayor, Nial Ring, presented almost 100 students from four local schools with certificates at the Mansion House for completing the Double Club programme during his term of office.

"For the kids to commit 12 weeks to this course is brilliant," he said. *"Bohs have reached out to its community. When I get to Phibsborough I see how much they are doing in the local area and in the local schools."*

More Than A Club is funded through the ERDF's Ireland-Wales Programme. Other clubs benefiting are Cork City and Welsh clubs Conwy Borough FC and Haverfordwest County AFC.



Students from St Finbar's, Cabra, with their More Than A Club certificates





Some of the young 'Journeys' participants

#EU AND ME



Journeys lead to better understanding

Hundreds of young people from disadvantaged communities in Belfast, Limavady and the border regions of Cavan and Monaghan have embarked on a shared voyage of self-discovery and understanding.

They are participating in the 'Journeys' programme, which has received funding from from the European Union's PEACE IV Programme managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB).

Journeys is a cross-border collaborative project between Springboard Opportunities Ltd, Belfast, Roe Valley Residents' Association, Limavady and Cavan and Monaghan Education and Training Board

Its aim is to empower young people aged 14-24 to work together on projects based on good relations, personal development and citizenship so that they can form positive, effective relationships with those of a different background and make a positive contribution to building a better society.

"By participating in this project children and young people who have experienced social exclusion or marginalisation will be able to build up their self-esteem, resilience and understanding of people from a different background and culture," said Gina McIntyre, CEO of the SEUPB.

"It will make a real difference in their lives and encourage them to share what they have learned with their own families and the communities in which they live, on both sides of the border.

"In doing so they will become the architects of change for a more forward thinking and inclusive society."

Over 200 young people completed the programme's Phase 1 projects, which included a short film on mental health, and many have progressed into employment, volunteering, further training or university.

More than 220 participants began Phase 2 of Journeys in early 2019 and those who completed the first phase have formed a Youth Advisory Group that is now making decisions and sharing ideas to help shape the future of the project.

One young person participating on the programme said Journeys has provided opportunities that surprised him.

"The programme has created new experiences for me, which I didn't think I'd like," he said.

"Journeys has opened up new ideas for me, which I will hopefully continue to explore."



Dunhill's rural innovation and resilience

Ireland's rural communities face many challenges but there is growing evidence of successful innovation and regeneration supported by EU funding.

Dunhill-Fenor parish, which includes the villages of Boatstrand and Annestown in Co Waterford, is one outstanding example.

The local community has been transformed into a dynamic socio-economic ecosystem and a model of best practice in bottom-up regeneration.

In 1993, an umbrella social enterprise group was established in the area in response to the loss of local teachers, a declining population, migration to cities and emigration.

At that time, national LEADER partnership programmes, county enterprise boards and community employment (CE) schemes were set up, with EU support, to encourage local communities to generate greater self reliance and boost economic recovery.

The combination of challenges and supports prompted the Dunhill community to take action, and the results have been terrific.

The Dunhill-Fenor parish population has increased from 1,500 to 2,100, and over 250 jobs have been created in the Dunhill Ecopark since its opening in 2000.

More than 5,000 people have received accredited education in the Dunhill Ecopark Education Centre.

The local motto of 'there is no limit to what can be achieved by a community working together' is living up to its promise.

One of the community's wonderful projects is the Anne Valley Walkway and Wildlife Sanctuary. This is an 11 km return stretch through the valley from Dunhill Village to Annestown, with Dunhill Castle located at mid point.

The walkway was developed by a local group of volunteers, including ten farmers who lease their land in the valley to the local council.

The project involves a tastefully constructed pathway meandering through the valley, taking in a scenic landscape of water, trees and rocks, rich in flora and fauna.

It has become a haven for thousands of visitors including photographers, wildlife and heritage enthusiasts, environmentalists, educationalists, visitors and local families.

The project was funded in two phases by the local EU LEADER partnership company in 2013 and 2018 with matching funds from the community.

The trail is accredited by National Trails Council and maintained and managed to a very high standard by the volunteers.



Locals at the official opening of the Anne Valley Walkway





#EU AND ME



Simona Bondor and Ikimhat Bahmus from Riverdale School, Dublin 15

Flying the flag for diversity

Thousands of schoolchildren around Ireland have taken part in a unique programme that helps them celebrate diversity and challenge discrimination.

The Yellow Flag programme encourages pupils, staff and management in participating schools to think about culture and ethnicity, to feel proud of who they are and to have a positive understanding of differences within their school community.

Supported by the EU's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) the programme was pioneered by the Irish Traveller Movement (ITM) in response to the difficult experiences some of their community had faced in school.

"The idea came about to have a programme that tackled the issues of racism and cultural diversity in schools," said programme coordinator, Elva O'Callaghan.

"The ITM wanted the focus to be broader than just Travellers and to include other ethnic minorities too, as they too have experienced identity-based bullying."

Philanthropic funding was secured to start Yellow Flag and as its benefits became evident, EU funding of just over €150,000 was later granted through the AMIF.

The Yellow Flag programme sees schools complete an eight-step process that helps pupils and teachers learn about inequality and racism and shows them how to challenge it.

At the end of the programme, a prestigious Yellow Flag is awarded that can be flown proudly over the school.

So far over 34,000 students and 1,200 teachers have participated in the Yellow Flag programme, but the benefits go beyond the classroom.

"The programme invites parents to participate as well," Elva explains. *"Each school has a diversity committee made up mostly of students, but also teachers and parents."*

"We're growing and developing. We'd love to see every school go through the programme and have a Yellow Flag. We have more demand than we can keep up with."

Ireland's responsible authority for the AMIF is the EU Funds Unit in the Department of Justice and Equality.



New Irish roots for refugee farmers

Foothills of fragrant olive groves blossomed on Abdul's farm in Syria, before conflict forced him to flee.

Now resettled in Ireland, the 73 year-old farmer is being given the chance to put down new roots and care for an orchard of apple trees.

"Trees are like humans, they need to breathe," says Abdul, tending to a branch. *"So we prune them and let the air blow through, just like with olive trees in Syria."*

Abdul and fellow Syrian refugee Faisal took part in a ten-week 'social farming' initiative on Ahena Farm in Co Mayo, after being resettled to Ireland under a programme run by the Government in partnership with UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency.

Supported with funding from the European Union's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the scheme offers resettled refugees a chance to work and exchange skills with local farmers.

Abdul's placement is one of several funded by Social Farming Ireland and organised by the South West Mayo Development Company (SWMDC), which supports communities and individuals across the west of Ireland, and has successfully delivered a number of EU LEADER programmes.

Margaret Leahy from SWMDC says there is nothing unique about the farms who take part in the scheme.

"These are ordinary working farms," she explains. *"They are not therapeutic farms or specially designed around one group of people. They are normal, honest to God farms. That's why they work so well."*

Enda O'Neill, Head of Office with UNHCR Ireland says positive experiences of refugee integration are often most visible at the local level – at the school gates, in work, on sports pitches or in community halls.

"The social farming initiative is a great example of how rural communities across Ireland go to great lengths to reach out to their new neighbours and give them an opportunity to participate in, and contribute to community life," he adds.

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Abdul and Faisal on Ahena Farm



Photo:
Andrew McConnell
UNHCR



Sven Moritz



When the wall came tumbling down



In 1989, communism in Europe was crumbling and pressure was mounting on East German authorities to open checkpoints at the infamous Berlin Wall which divided the historic city.

On the night of November 9, the barriers were lifted and tens of thousands of jubilant Germans crossed over to the west and wept with joy as they embraced loved ones who they had been separated from for decades.

Actor Sven Moritz from East Berlin was only 14-years-old back then, and while he remembers the event he didn't realise its significance until later in life.

"I felt I was living in a very safe, protected environment as I grew up," he recalls. "Of course you were influenced by propaganda but as far as we were concerned we were on the good side of the wall."

On the night the wall opened, Sven was listening to the radio and fell asleep not quite aware of what had happened.

"The next day I had to go to school and my mother made me promise not to go to West Berlin," he says.

"I went to school and half the class was missing. Some of them had already gone to West Berlin so school didn't happen."

Sven and a group of friends asked their mothers if they could cross to the West and they got permission – as long as they returned by 9pm.

"It was exciting for everyone. People were drunk with joy. In the months and weeks beforehand people were talking about possible new travel rules but it happened so quickly in the end."

Being in a unified Germany meant Sven could take advantage of his rights as an EU citizen to travel and work in any member state.

"It gave me a lot of opportunities that I don't think I would have got in East Germany," he says.

In 2008 Sven took advantage of his freedom to travel to come to Ireland for love, and while the romance didn't last, Sven set up home and is developing his acting career here.

"Just as Irish people are able to live and work anywhere in the EU, I'm able to live and work here and I didn't need to ask permission," he says. "I could just make the decision and come. I really value being a European citizen in Ireland."



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Empowering Somalia's displaced communities

In 2011, Somalia was struck by a deadly drought that killed 250,000 people and destroyed the livelihoods of thousands more who fled their homes in search of refuge.

Amongst them was farmer Ibrahim Iman, a 39 year-old married father of seven.

Ibrahim's family was forced to migrate from Ufurow village in southwest Somalia to one of the biggest camps for Internally Displaced Peoples (IDPs) in Baidoa south.

Ibrahim and his wife, Hawa Ugas Mohamed, occasionally find work to provide for their family, but like many others they face extreme shortages of essential goods and services such as water supply.

Ibrahim became a member of the Displacement Affected Communities Forum, a core component of an EU Trust Fund for Africa that is being implemented by Irish NGO Concern Worldwide in collaboration with other partners.

Established in 2015 to address the root causes of irregular migration in Africa, the Trust Fund for Africa is worth over €3.9 billion.

It is funded by the European Union budget and EU Member States, with Ireland pledging €15 million to it.

Ibrahim is chairperson of the Displacement Affected Communities Forum in his area.

The Forum brings together IDPs, returnee refugees and host community members to coordinate humanitarian work and it provides the whole community with a platform where they can discuss issues without fear.

"We identify the vulnerable individuals from our community and help them to address their basic needs," said Ibrahim.

"We also solve any disputes, and we are working as an advocacy platform for the needs of our community."

The forum identified the need for an education facility in the area as a high priority and recently collaborated with Concern to help the NGO provide a school.

Ibrahim says the EU programme in Somalia – with the support of Ireland and the efforts of NGOs such as Concern – empowers affected communities through active participation in projects.

"Life has tested me and my family a lot so far," he said.

"Now I feel that I belong to this place, these people, and I am part of them. As time goes by I will feel more integrated in this community and it feels like it is actually becoming my home."



The opening of a school in southwest Somalia



Irishman leading Europe's biggest drug busts

A former Garda is leading Europe's fight against drug smuggling and organised crime cartels as head of the Maritime Analysis and Operations Centre – Narcotics (MAOC-N).

This is an EU backed law enforcement unit based in Lisbon tasked with targeting drug trafficking in the Atlantic and Mediterranean.

Michael O'Sullivan has been its executive director since 2017 and helped the unit seize about €1.5 billion of cocaine destined for Europe in 2018.

Early in 2019 the agency played a major role in the seizure of 9.5 tonnes of high-purity cocaine from a ship in the island nation of Cape Verde.

"It was the largest drug seizure in European maritime history," O'Sullivan says.

"We're tasked with working with law enforcement agencies to target drug shipments coming from South America. Our role is to try and intercept the transnational organised crime drug shipments before they land on the streets of Paris or Dublin."

The Irishman built up vast experience dealing with terrorism and gangland crime in a career spanning almost four decades with An Garda Síochána.

He now uses his expertise to help define strategies to intercept international drug shipments at sea and in the air. He often cooperates with different EU agencies and programmes to combat drug trafficking and enforce the EU Drugs Strategy and the EU Maritime Security Strategy.

O'Sullivan knows fighting the drug traffickers is a constant battle, but when MAOC-N intercepts drugs it hits the cartels hard.

"We can certainly say a lot more would get through to Europe if it wasn't for the good work of the law enforcement, customs and maritime agencies throughout Europe who are pooling their resources and personnel to try and prevent this. If we weren't there it would be whole lot worse."

Michael O'Sullivan



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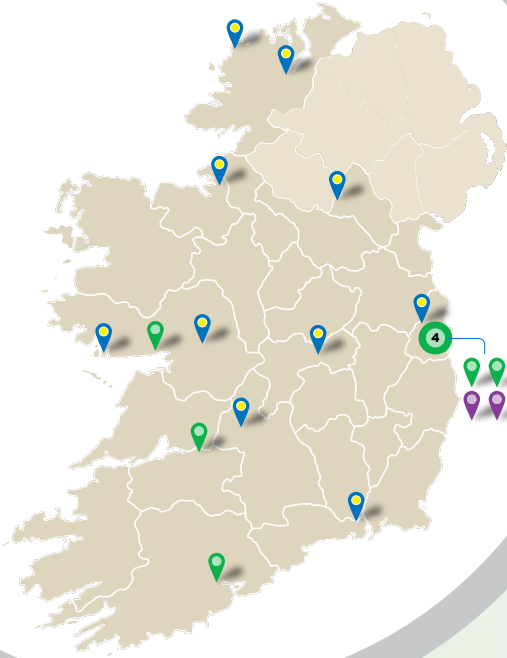
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