



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

EU Funds: Ireland Wales Co-operation Programme 2014-2020

2020 Annual Implementation Report – Summary



UNDEB Ewropeaidd
EUROPEAN UNION



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

**Cronfa Datblygu
Rhanbarthol Ewrop
European Regional
Development Fund**

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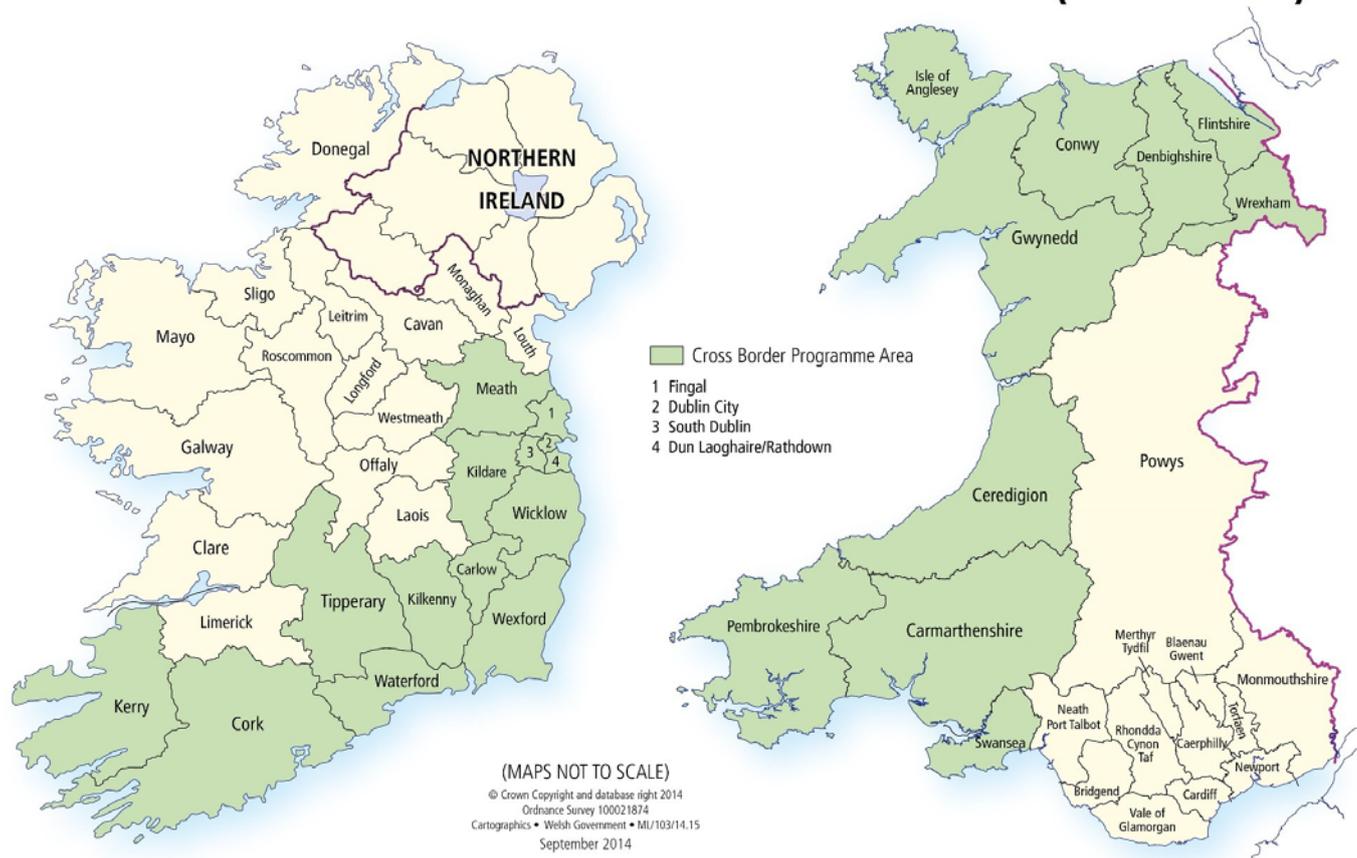
Introduction

The €100m Ireland-Wales Co-operation programme is one of a set of European Territorial Co-operation programmes which provide opportunities for regions in the EU to work together to address common economic, environmental and social challenges.

Funded through the European Regional Development Fund, the programme is connecting organisations, businesses and communities on the West coast of Wales with the South-East coast of Ireland.

The Irish Sea is a central focus for the programme given the maritime nature of the border between the two nations.

IRELAND/WALES CROSS BORDER PROGRAMME (2014-2020)

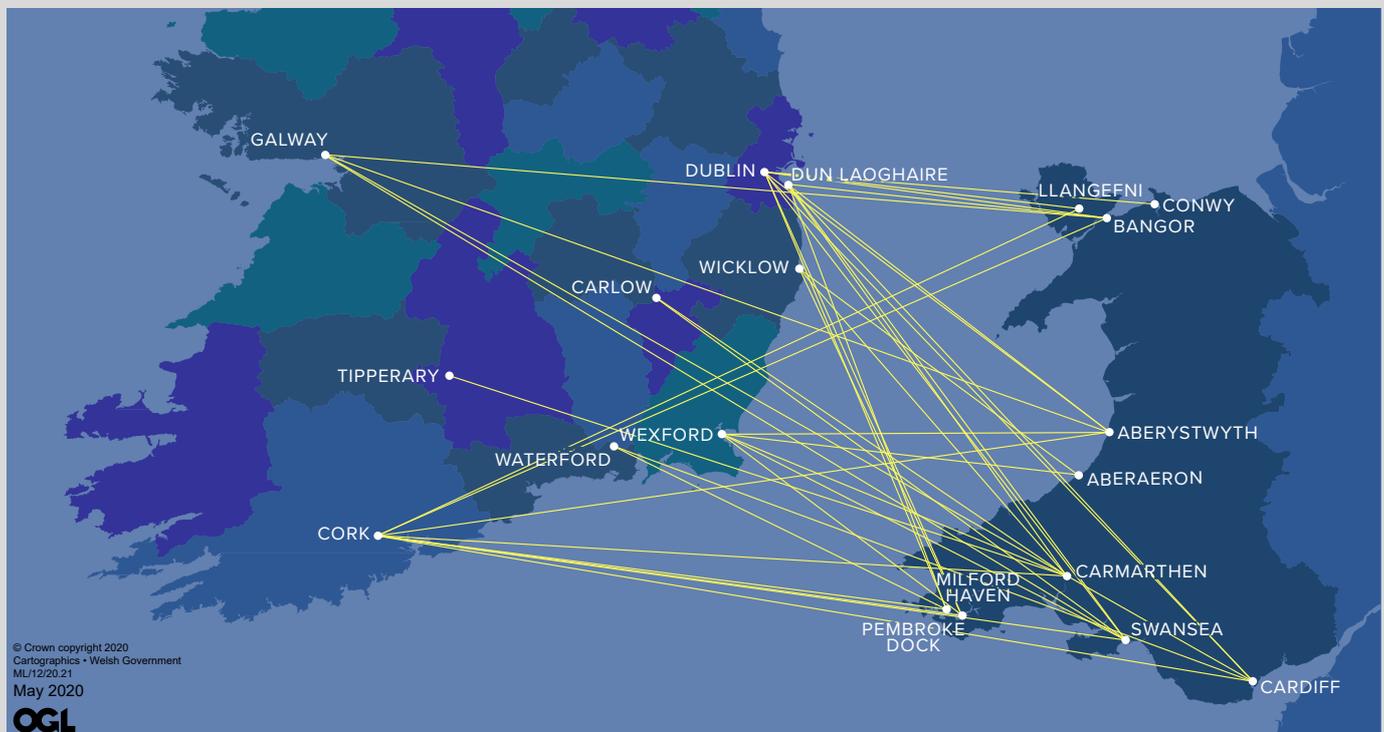


About the programme

The programme's vision is to provide a framework for organisations in the cross-border area to actively co-operate to address challenges and shared priorities on both sides of the Irish Sea, thereby contributing to economic and sustainable development of Ireland and Wales.

The programme's focus on the Irish Sea includes projects that are bringing together scientific expertise from both nations to increase capacity and research into the effects of climate change.

Universities and colleges are also linking with businesses to stimulate collaboration in sectors including food & drink, marine and environmental sciences and life sciences, while the programme is also utilising shared culture, resources and heritage to boost tourism and visitor numbers to the cross-border region.



Collaborative links made between organisations in both nations through the Ireland-Wales Co-operation programme

The Welsh European Funding Office, part of the Welsh Government, is the Managing Authority for the programme and is delivering the programme alongside its operational partners, the Southern Regional Assembly in Waterford, and government partners, the Department for Public Expenditure and Reform in Dublin.



Programme progress

Overview

Taking account of the issues surrounding the UK's exit from the EU and the pandemic, the programme continued to make significant progress.

By the end of 2020, €81m of EU funds had been invested in 22 projects in the cross-border region.

During the year, the profile of the programme was raised through news stories and programme progress being announced by Ministers and covered by news outlets and stakeholders in both nations.

The programme website, www.irelandwales.eu, and Ireland Wales twitter channel www.twitter.com/irelandwales continue to publish breaking news and information about the progress of the programme.

Programme priorities

Priority 1 – Cross-border Innovation

Projects under this priority are increasing the intensity of knowledge sharing and collaborations between research organisations and businesses

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

Projects under this priority are increasing capacity and knowledge of climate change adaptation for the Irish Sea and coastal communities

Priority 3 – Cultural and Natural Resources and Heritage

Projects under this priority are utilising the potential of natural, cultural and heritage assets to increase visitor numbers to coastal communities

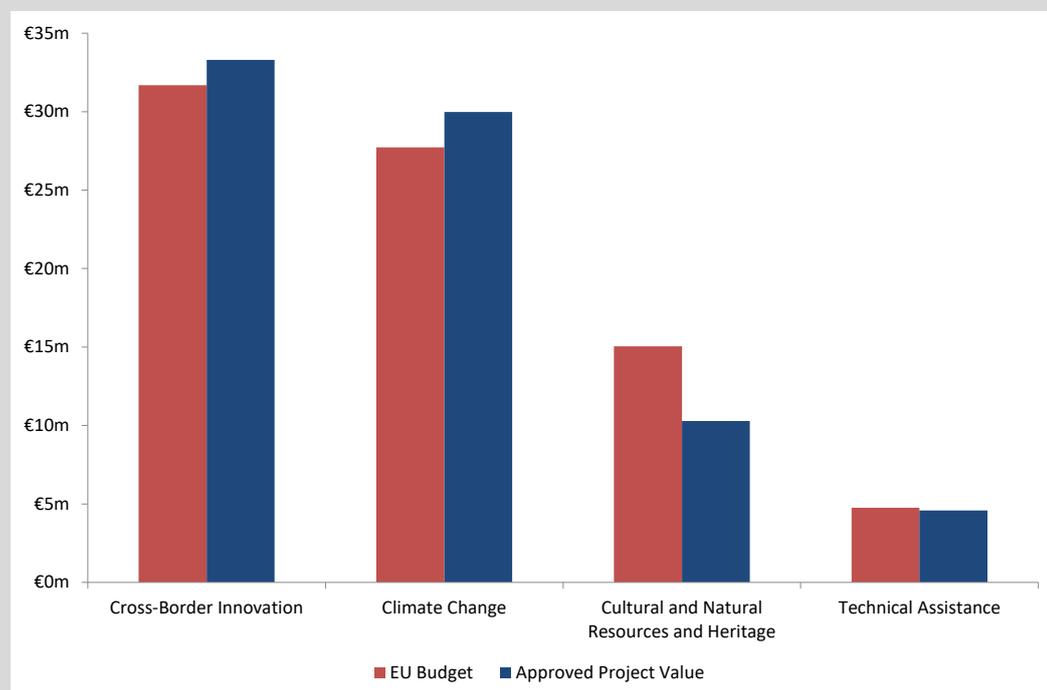
Priority 4 – Technical Assistance

This priority provides funding to support the management of the programme

Financial progress

The following chart shows the total allocation of EU funds for the Ireland-Wales programme and how much has been invested in each of the three priorities by the end of 2020.

Chart 1: EU Grant: Budget and Approved



Progress by Priority

Cross-border Innovation

By the end of 2020, marginally exceeded the total allocation of EU funds available under this priority for ten projects.

Creative project to address the challenge of water pollution

In February, €1.1m funds was announced to the Brainwaves project to address the problem of pollution of freshwater and coastal water resources along the west coast of Wales and south-east coast of Ireland in a creative way – by growing duckweed.

Duckweeds grow naturally on waste streams and contain high quality protein including essential amino acids, which can be used in animal feeds for the beef and dairy industry. This creates a “reduce, reuse and recycle”, full-circle use of nutrients, by using natural plant growth to create new nutrients to feed the agri-economy, and addressing pollution problems by minimising waste water.

The project, led by Aberystwyth University and University College Cork, will research technological systems to maximise duckweed growth, and develop state-of-the-art demonstration systems which will, if successful, offer farmers the dual benefits of cleaning farm waste while also growing a high-protein crop. This research has the potential to bring tangible economic and environmental benefits to farming practices in Ireland, Wales, and beyond.

Welsh Government Minister for European Transition, Jeremy Miles said “This is a great way to help the transition to a sustainable, circular economy. Through cross-border collaboration, Wales and Ireland are taking a novel, innovative approach to preserving resources, creating local jobs – and treating waste water as a resource and an opportunity to create something good.”



Brainwaves, Harvested Duckweed oven

Adaptation of the Irish Sea and Coastal Communities to Climate Change

By the end of 2020, the programme had exceeded the total allocation of EU funds available for seven projects.

Innovative eco-engineering project wins major European Union award

In December, Ecostructures won the prestigious Better World category at the 2020 .eu Web Awards online ceremony, which was streamed live from the Teatro Verdi in Pisa, Italy.

Ecostructures successfully beat two other finalists for the award, which celebrates websites that encourage green initiative and was presented with the award online by singer Sting.

The project was awarded €3.25m of EU funding in 2017 to facilitate greater use of nature-based solutions to enhance the ecological value of artificial coastal structures along the Welsh and Irish coasts. As part of the project, existing eco-engineered interventions from around the world have been tested in the Irish Sea and new designs created and attached to artificial structures such as sea defences to investigate their role in providing new habitats for marine life.

The project was awarded a further €1.61m EU funds in July 2020, to continue its work for a further 18 months.

Irish Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Michael McGrath, T.D. said: “I am delighted that the EU Ireland-Wales Ecostructure project has received such a significant European Union award under the Better World category. The Ecostructure project is a collaboration between University College Cork, University College Dublin, and Bangor, Swansea and Aberystwyth universities and the award is a tribute to these Universities working together under the EU funded Ireland-Wales programme. I would like to congratulate all those involved.

“Ireland recognises the critical importance of protecting our environment, as evidenced by the publication of an ambitious Climate Action Plan last year and the progress on the Climate Action Bill this year. We also recognise our shared responsibility, with our nearest neighbours, to protect our seas.”

Cultural and Natural Resources and Heritage

By the end of 2020, 76% of EU funds available under this priority had been invested in four projects.

Bringing new life to Welsh and Irish Sea Ports

In March, *Ports Past and Present* was launched as part of a number of cultural events for Wales Week in Ireland.

The project aims to develop new tourism opportunities between 5 port towns and their surrounding coastal communities on either side of the Irish Sea – Dublin, Rosslare, Holyhead, Fishguard and Pembroke Dock, drawing on academic research and community partnerships. It also aims to raise the local populations' awareness and appreciation of their cultural heritage and to increase visitor numbers and enhance visitor experiences.

Specifically, the project will work with port authorities, transport carriers, tourism agencies, and local artists and writers to generate new tourism sites/sights/traffic, and commission creative works in the visual arts, literature and film in English, Gaelic and Welsh. New audiences will be sought through digital technology including apps and social media.

Speaking at the launch event, the Welsh Minister for International Relations and Welsh Language, Eluned Morgan, said: "The Welsh Government have long recognised how vital our ports are to the nation's economy and to the communities that surround their location. They provide important access to international markets, jobs and wider economic opportunities – particularly through shipping, tourism and as a hub for businesses to locate."

"By bringing life and colour to the ports through visual arts, literature and film, as well through digital technology including apps and social media, this will enhance the experience of modern travellers of all ages and interests, and encouraging people to spend more time and money in these towns."



Ports, Past and Present Launch event



Professor Claire Connolly and Eluned Morgan MS, at the Ports, Past and Present launch event

Project examples

Acclimatize

Acclimatize is developing a range of technologies to monitor water quality and understand the effects of climate change through altered weather patterns, affecting rainfall, temperature and tides which impact on coastal areas.

During 2020, utilising their knowledge and expertise in response to the COVID 19 pandemic, Acclimatize have been measuring the levels of SARS-CoV-2 at wastewater treatment plants in Ireland, providing insight into the prevalence of the virus in the community whilst also potentially serving as an early warning system for new waves of infection. Acclimatize have also looked at what happens to the SARS-CoV-2 virus in nearby bodies of water such as rivers, streams and sea, including swimming waters to determine the decay rates of viable virus and that of its genetic material in river and seawater.

These findings are reported back weekly to the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHET) in Ireland, the Irish Epidemiology Modelling advisory group, Irish Water and the Department of Health, which have enabled better understanding of the fate of the virus in the environment.



Acclimatize researcher

LIVE

LIVE is developing a cooperative network focussed on the natural and cultural heritage of the Llŷn Peninsula in Wales, and western Iveragh, co Kerry in Ireland. It aims to maximise the natural and cultural heritage of the peninsulas and further develop sustainable year-round eco-tourism options in the surrounding coastal communities, as well as the establishment of an eco-museum in Ireland.

To date, the project has established a strong visual branding on digital presence on various social media channels and the team have been developing, circulating and processing an innovative survey to map public perceptions, knowledge gaps, and areas of interest on Iveragh. The preliminary results already show some interesting insights that will inform the project outputs. *LIVE* are also working directly with schools in both regions to develop location-specific resources to help teachers to bring local natural heritage into their classrooms and to bring their students out of the classroom into nature. *LIVE* is in the process of developing digital resources for each region that will enable increased engagement in and awareness of the natural heritage of these regions among residents and visitors alike.



LIVE project launch

Rediscovering Ancient Connections – The Saints

Rediscovering Ancient Connections – The Saints is helping communities in the city of St Davids and Wexford, in particular, the town of Ferns, to rediscover their shared heritage of the early medieval saints, St David and his pupil St Aidan and to promote this further to attract new visitors to these coastal communities

Community digs have been held in both regions with huge interest, with over 4,000 people attending the dig on St Patricks chapel in Whitesands. In Ferns, the Irish archaeology field school has been developed and promoted to overseas students.

Whilst COVID 19 restrictions have had an impact on planned public/visitor facing events, public art commissions have gone ahead, as well as Archaeology, poetry and history courses re-imagined and successfully delivered online, reaching a far wider audience than anticipated. Further planned activities include: traditional skills package, business and innovation hub, large scale outdoor events, two music festivals, and community digs in both regions in autumn 2021, 2022 and 2023 as well as the development of a cross border pilgrimage linking St Davids and Ferns.



'The Saints' at the Irish National Heritage Park, Wexford

piSCES

Smart Cluster Energy System (piSCES) closed in December. The aim of the project was to reduce the costs and carbon footprint for the fish processing industry by developing and testing a new 'smart grid' electricity network. Principally to help fisheries businesses in remote locations minimise their exposure to energy price peaks, reduce their carbon footprint and improve the quality and security of energy supply.

piSCES developed prediction models for the various modules of the platform which enabled the optimisation of flexible loads. This technology was implemented at a number of sites successfully, in areas such as Cold Storage and Ice Manufacture which resulted in significant savings. For example, in Milford Haven port the implementation of this technology resulted in 60-80% energy savings for ice making as well as allowing sites to take control of their energy and become a 'prosumer' with the ability to trade in the market.

The project also formed part of a wider whole system perspective developed in Pembrokeshire around the port and Milford Haven waterway where smart management and integration of multi vector energy through smart systems and digital platforms are key to future developments.



piSCES project team