



Rialtas  
na hÉireann  
Government  
of Ireland

Tionscadal Éireann  
Project Ireland  
**2040**

# National Development Plan 2021-2030



Prepared by the Department of Public  
Expenditure and Reform  
[gov.ie/2040](http://gov.ie/2040)





## Chapter 17:

# A Shared Island

### Overview

The reviewed National Development Plan sets an enhanced level of ambition for collaborative cross-border public investment, to build a more connected, prosperous and sustainable island, for all communities and traditions that share the island.

The Government will work through strong all-island partnerships, to co-design, co-fund and co-deliver investments to enhance the shared island and address common strategic concerns including on balanced regional development, pandemic recovery, and climate action.

The Government's Shared Island Fund, the EU PEACE PLUS programme, and partnership approaches with the Northern Ireland Executive and UK Government, provide a strong basis for delivery on strategic investment priorities for a shared island out to 2030.

For 2021-2030, there is a total all-island investment commitment of more than €3.5 billion through the Shared Island Fund, the Project Ireland 2040 funds, the Government's annual funding for North/South cooperation, and the PEACE PLUS programme delivered with the EU, UK and the Northern Ireland Executive. In addition, in the roll out of all aspects of this Plan there will be a focus on identifying and progressing Shared Island projects.

## 17.1 Policy Context

### Delivery to Date

The National Development Plan and the National Planning Framework set out a positive vision for the future of the island. There has been important progress on implementation to date, including:

- Investment in transport infrastructure in border regions including road, rail and active travel.
- Completion of Phase 1 of the Ulster Canal restoration.
- Resourcing of €165m in 2020 for the North South Implementation Bodies and Tourism Ireland and for delivery of cross-border health services.
- Support for the North-West Strategic Growth Partnership between Donegal and Derry, including through the North West Development Fund, with a further commitment to the Fund in 2021 confirmed by the Government in July 2021, and projects funded under the PEACE IV and INTRREG VA programmes.
- Successful implementation of the 2014-2020 PEACE IV and INTERREG VA programmes by the Special EU Programmes Body with total funding of €566m awarded to projects.
- Development of the 2021-27 PEACE PLUS EU programme, combining the PEACE and INTERREG EU funding instruments, with a total value of over €1 billion, funded by the European Union, UK Government, Northern Ireland Executive and Government of Ireland.
- Establishment of the Shared Island Fund with €500m in capital funding between 2021 and 2025 for North/South investments.

### Enhanced Shared Island ambition

The 2020 Programme for Government mission on 'A Shared Island' significantly develops the Government's objectives for strategic cooperation and investment for mutual benefit on the island, and affirms the commitments made by the Irish Government under the New Decade, New Approach agreement of January 2020.

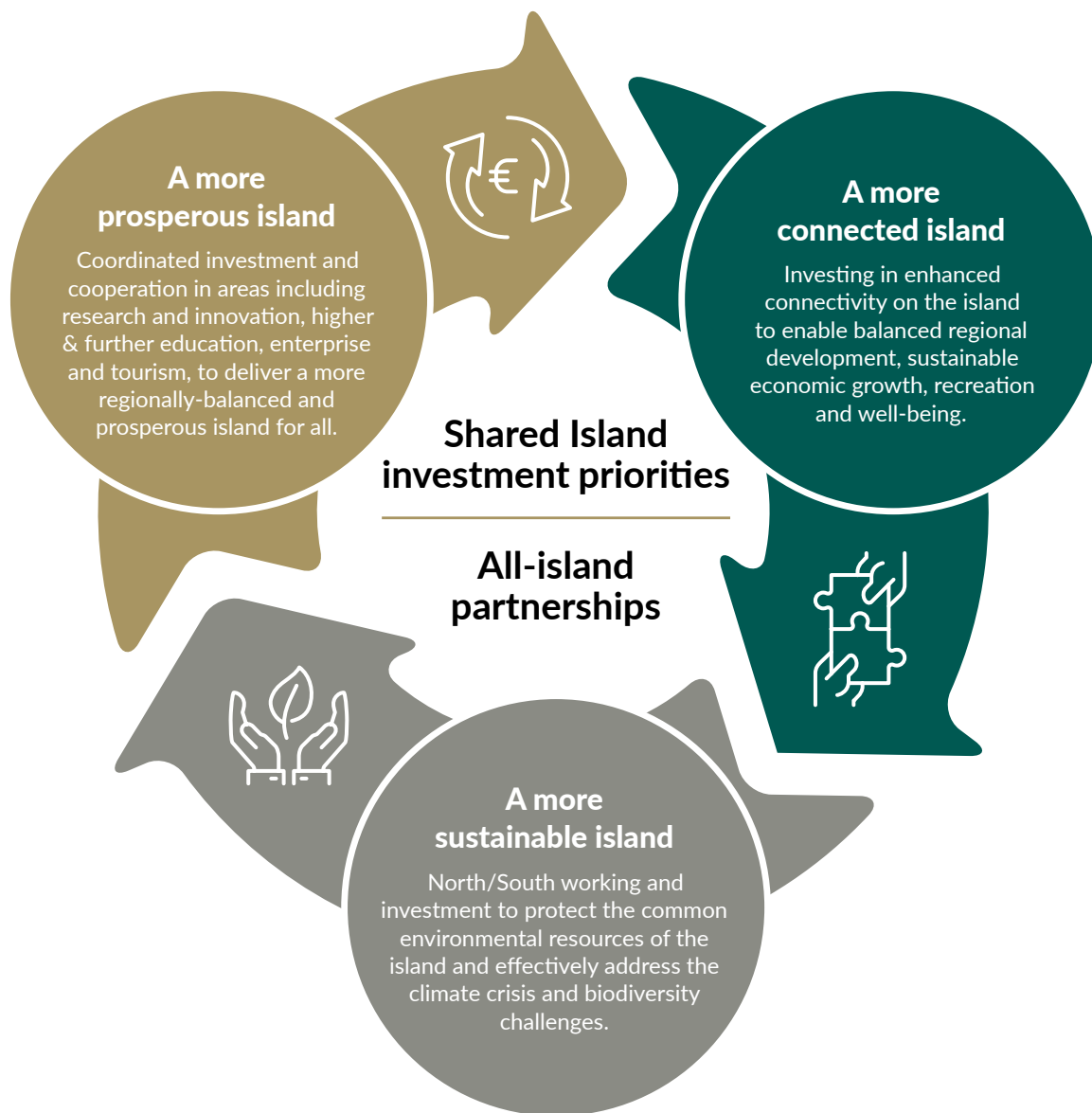
The Shared Island initiative is backed up by the establishment in Budget 2021 of the Shared Island Fund, with €500m in capital funding being made available out to 2025, allocated by the Government for investment in North/South projects that contribute to the Shared Island objectives set out in the Programme for Government.

Allocations from the Shared Island Fund for approved projects are being made alongside funding from other public funding sources, and in collaborative investment approaches with the Northern Ireland Executive, UK Government, European Union and local authorities.

The Government's Shared Island initiative has registered important progress so far in 2021, with a number of new investments confirmed, progressing objectives in the Programme for Government, including:

- Establishment of a new North South Research programme with a commitment of €40m from the Shared Island Fund over five years to support strengthening of links between higher education institutions, researchers and research communities on the island.
- Funding to complete Phase 2 of the restoration of Ulster Canal with an allocation of €6m from the Shared Island Fund and €5.6m from the Rural Regeneration Fund, and €1m from the Shared Island Fund for development work on Phase 3 of the project.
- Funding to progress the Narrow Water Bridge project to tender stage and affirmed commitment by the Government to deliver this cross-border link between the Mourne Mountains and Cooley peninsula, providing tourism and connectivity boosts for the east border region.
- Launch of the all-island strategic rail review, commissioned by the Department of Transport in co-operation with the Department for Infrastructure in Northern Ireland, to examine how the rail network can improve sustainable connectivity between cities and regions, including the feasibility of high and higher speed options.

Through the reviewed NDP, the Government will build on this progress, to develop and deliver a new generation of collaborative cross-border investments that significantly enhance the shared island.



Under the reviewed NDP, the Government will allocate ring-fenced, multi-annual capital resourcing for all-island investment out to 2030, at least at the current level of the Shared Island Fund.

For 2021-2030, there is a total all-island investment commitment of more than €3.5 billion through the Shared Island Fund and the Project Ireland 2040 funds, the Government’s annual funding for North/South cooperation and the PEACE PLUS programme delivered with the EU, UK and Northern Ireland Executive. In addition, in the roll out of all aspects of this Plan there will be a focus on identifying and progressing Shared Island projects.

In this context, the reviewed NDP sets out a significantly enhanced ambition for collaborative cross-border investment out to 2030 with the goal of building a more connected, sustainable, and prosperous shared island, for all communities and traditions.

## 17.2 Framework for delivery – All-Island partnerships

Through all-island partnerships we will co-design, co-fund and co-deliver effective actions that address common strategic challenges for the island as a whole, take up the opportunities of investment at an all-island level, and contribute to the vitality of North/South and East/West relationships in the years ahead.

### North/South partnership

#### All-island planning frameworks

The National Planning Framework sets out 9 National Policy Objectives to support all-island cooperation across themes of: working together for economic advantage; coordination of investment in infrastructure; and, managing our shared environment responsibly.

## Box 17.1: Looking to 2040

By 2040, the island we share will be home to around 8 million people, an increase of more than 1 million, with a commensurately larger consumer market and highly skilled labour pool.

We need to plan and invest for a shared future for all on the island of Ireland, in cooperative ways, recognising the connected environmental, economic, and infrastructure challenges and opportunities now and for the years ahead, which pertain for the island as a whole. As we look at the delivery challenges in the period ahead, there is a real opportunity to deploy our skills, training and labour market on an all-island basis to maximise our capacity and productivity, in traditional and new technology sectors, with significant business opportunities, in Northern Ireland and in the South.

There is also considerable potential through joint and coordinated actions to attract new inward investment across the island - including by maximising the full capacity, scale, market access and supply-chain linkages of cross-border regions; and by investing together in strategic infrastructure, on research and development, and to meet skills needs. We can collectively enhance the FDI attractiveness of the island as a whole, particularly border regions, delivering good jobs and supporting wider regional enterprise development.

Under the strategic investment priorities for a Shared Island, the Government will work to develop and deliver joint and coordinated investments with the Northern Ireland Executive, the UK Government, with local authority partners, and as a committed Member State of the European Union to realise:

**A more connected island:** including enhanced connectivity by rail, road and air; landmark projects including the Ulster Canal, Narrow Water Bridge and an island-wide greenway network; deeper interaction of Health and Education sectors; and, investment in diverse heritage, arts, culture, sports and community connections.

**A more sustainable island:** including strategic all-island infrastructure for energy transformation, such as the North/South Interconnector; all-island action to tackle climate change, protect biodiversity and expand the circular economy; and conserving the common water, coastal and marine resources of the island.

**A more prosperous island:** taking up opportunities to harness all-island research and innovation potential; enable island-wide supply chains; support higher and further education institutions in meeting the future skills needs of the island as a whole; and, championing enterprise development, investment promotion and sustainable tourism growth across the island.

These objectives emphasise the importance of cooperation with the Executive; supporting cross-border regional cooperation at local authority levels; working with the UK Government; and, harnessing the opportunities of our EU Membership to meet shared planning challenges on the island of Ireland.

These policy objectives will continue to guide the approach to planning and investment on a shared island basis under the reviewed NDP.

The Framework for Co-operation on Spatial Strategies between Ireland and Northern Ireland also provides a strong basis for cross-border working, and will be updated and reviewed as required. The related programme of support for cross-border working between local authorities on statutory planning matters supporting environmental considerations will be continued.

### **Delivery with the Northern Ireland Executive**

Our ambition is to work closely with the Northern Ireland Executive to advance all-island investment objectives under the reviewed NDP.

The Executive's Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland is currently being updated. There is potential for considerable alignment of public investment priorities, North and South on the island in the decade ahead, including on climate action; digitisation; sustainable transport connectivity; and, balanced regional development.

There are clear opportunities for more coherent, efficient and impactful actions to deliver on shared goals for the two Administrations on the island through coordinated and joint investment, which offers opportunities to:

- take up advantages of investment at scale at an all-island level;
- combine complementary capacities, North and South;
- harness the full potential of border regions; and,
- coordinate and enhance transport and other connectivity across the island.

An all-island perspective can also assist in meeting skills and labour market demands in both jurisdictions, connected to public investment and wider economic development in the decade ahead.

In progressing NDP Shared Island investment priorities, the Government will work with the Executive to pursue these opportunities in public investment planning and delivery.

The Government and Executive have worked together over the last two decades, including through the North South Ministerial Council and the work of the North South Implementation Bodies, to make mutually-beneficial joint investments for the island. These include the Radiotherapy Unit at Altnagelvin Hospital; the Middletown Centre for Autism; supporting cross-border enterprise development; and, promoting abroad the world-class tourism offering of the island of Ireland.

The Shared Island investment priorities under the reviewed NDP provide a framework for building on this record to significantly enhance the beneficial impacts of North/South partnership in the years ahead.

The Government will also continue our successful partnership with the Executive to implement the PEACE PLUS programme, co-funded by the European Union, UK Government, Northern Ireland Executive and Irish Government, delivered through the Special EU Programmes Body.

### East-West cooperation:

The Programme for Government sets objectives to work with the UK Government as well as the Northern Ireland Executive to achieve greater transport connectivity on the island; commit to investment and development opportunities in the North West and Border communities; and, cooperate on tackling climate breakdown and the biodiversity crisis. Other areas, such as enhancing the research capacity on these islands, also offer real opportunities to work together. These objectives are affirmed and expanded in this reviewed NDP.

The Government will work with the UK Government and the Executive to identify opportunities for coordinated investments that deliver on shared objectives to the benefit of these islands.

A strong and refreshed British-Irish relationship for the post-Brexit context is an important priority in support of the peace process and peace and prosperity on these islands.

In addition, the British Irish Council provides a valuable forum for East-West engagement between the 8 participating governments and administrations. The Government is committed to continued active engagement in the British Irish Council, including on sharing experience and planning on public investment through Work Sectors on Collaborative Spatial Planning, Demography, Environment and Housing.

## Box 17.2: North West Strategic Growth Partnership

The North West city region, which includes Derry, Letterkenny and Strabane, has a population in excess of 300,000 people, representing the fourth largest urban agglomeration on the island and a discrete cross-border functional economic area.

The North West Strategic Growth Partnership brings together Donegal County Council and Derry City and Strabane District Council, with the Irish Government and Northern Ireland Executive, taking an ambitious approach to integrated cross-border regional working, to drive and co-ordinate resources and regional policy development for sustainable growth in the North West region.

The North West City Region Councils developed an updated statement of regional priorities for the North South Ministerial Council in February 2021. Priorities for the North West City Region in cooperating on and delivering public investment in the decade ahead include:

- Enhanced high-quality transport links for the region by road, rail, air and sea;
- Investment in innovation and skills through strengthened third level education access with increased collaboration between third level institutions and innovation hubs;
- Implementation of a Green Growth strategy, developing the region's potential in clean and renewable energies; and,
- Enhanced cross-border healthcare provision, including shared patient catchment and e-health opportunities.



## Box 17.3: Irish Central Border Area Network

The Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN) was formed in 1995 and brings together eight member Local Authorities from North and South, working through non-statutory, multi-stakeholder, collaborative approaches for the almost 900,000 people across the Central Border area. The region is predominantly rural with outstanding natural environment and an economy driven primarily by SMEs.

ICBAN published a Framework of Regional Priorities for the Central Border region of Ireland/Northern Ireland in March 2021, identifying five interlocking strategic pillars of: economic development; infrastructure and connectivity; human capital; liveable communities; and, greening the region.

Key ICBAN objectives for cross-border capital investment in the years ahead include:

- Core infrastructure projects including road upgrades, enhanced broadband connectivity and regional digital hubs;
- Natural infrastructure initiatives and zones, enhancing the sustainable tourism and well-being potential of the region including through development of a network of cross-border greenways and blueways; mountain biking, food and heritage trails; and, river catchment and water management projects;
- Enabling infrastructure to harness the region's capacity and potential including in the bio-economy and agri-food sectors and sub-regional sectoral strengths.

### Strategic regional cooperation

The National Planning Framework recognises the importance of cross-border working in supporting regional development in the North-West, the Central Border region and the Dublin-Belfast corridor.

Cross-border local authority regional development initiatives have built track records and developed strategic frameworks for cooperation, reflecting an increased capacity and level of ambition for the years ahead.

The Shared Island investment priorities set out in the reviewed NDP were developed taking account of consultation with the North West Strategic Growth Partnership, Irish Central Border Area Network, East Border Region and Dublin Belfast Economic Corridor initiative.

Each of these initiatives, and other sub-regional cooperation groupings, can significantly contribute to sustainable development on a cross-border basis, through agreed frameworks for pursuing more integrated regional development, which are underpinned by broad stakeholder engagement and sustained political support and participation of member Councils.

The Government will continue to support fully the work of cross-border local authority partnerships and pursue opportunities for collaborative investment and working in implementing the Shared Island NDP investment priorities.

## Box 17.4: East Border Region

Established in 1976, East Border Region (EBR) is one of the longest established local authority-led cross-border groups in Europe, bringing six Local Authorities together and serving a population of just under 1 million people.

The East Border Region has more than 10 significant urban town centres alongside rural areas, and with access to road, sea and air connections is well-linked to national and international markets. East Border Region Ltd. has played a key role in the administration of cross-border EU funding on the island, with over €150million in funding successfully delivered to projects over 25 years.

In June 2021, EBR Councils agreed and published a Charter of regional priorities for cooperation, with the aim of positioning the East Border Region as “a smart, competitive, sustainable and inclusive cross-border region”. The Charter identifies a range of illustrative actions for the region in delivering these priorities:

- A smart, competitive region: including SME growth and competitiveness; development of the East Border Region tourism product; and, smart towns villages and rural areas;
- A sustainable region: including sustainable transport with greenways and blueways; sustainable energy and energy efficiency measures; and, coastal management;
- An inclusive region: including tackling labour market exclusion, health (including mental health) issues; and, recognising and celebrating cultural diversity.

## Box 17.5: Dublin Belfast Economic Corridor

The Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor (DBEC) is home to over two million people, across eight Council areas, anchored by the two largest cities on the island. Key features of the Corridor as a functional region include: a large talent pool for employers; national and international transport connectivity; and, strong inward investment and enterprise bases.

The Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor was given fresh impetus with the launch in March 2021 of an initiative by the eight Councils with two Universities, to work collectively to realise the benefits of further development of the region as a whole. This includes spreading growth through the Corridor and beyond, lessening pressures on the urban centres.

The DBEC initiative is pursuing cooperation to create a stronger and broader-based trajectory for growth, for the region and the island more generally, including through investments under Project Ireland 2040 and the Belfast Region City Deal. Areas of potential cooperation identified by the Corridor initiative include:

- Enhanced attraction of private and public investment through promotion;
- Developing regional networks and clusters for regional or sub-regional strengths including tradeable services, advanced manufacturing, construction and agri-food;
- Working on enabling infrastructure including in transport, for tourism, and on research and innovation capacities;
- Enhancing educational attainment in the corridor to meet skills demands.

## 17.3 Shared Island investment objectives

In line with our NDP Shared Island investment priorities, the Government will deliver existing commitments and develop a new generation of cross-border public investment projects to achieve a more connected, sustainable and prosperous island, through all-island partnership in the years ahead.

Available funding streams include the Shared Island Fund; the Project Ireland 2040 funds for rural development, urban regeneration, climate action and innovation; the EU PEACE PLUS programme 2021-27; and, other cross-border funding partnerships with the Northern Ireland Executive, UK Government and European Union.

### 1. A more connected island

Investing to enhance connectivity on the island is a crucial enabler of balanced regional development, sustainable economic growth, recreation and well-being, as well as beneficial community interactions across the island of Ireland.

Enhancing connectivity on our shared island encompasses all-island transport infrastructure; tourism and recreation assets; connectivity of public services in health and education; and, supporting vibrant and diverse arts, culture and conserved heritage across the island.

## Box 17.6: Working for a Healthier island

As we emerge from the biggest public health challenge in decades, the Government is redoubling our commitment to deepening and strengthening North-South health links, to deliver better health care and outcomes for people on the island.

We can build on the successes of recent years, including all-island provision of paediatric cardiac surgery in Dublin and cross-border provision of radiotherapy and coronary intervention services in Derry.

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the value of both health services working closely together to share technology and expertise in ICT and eHealth. We will seek to work with the Executive, including through the NSMC, to together develop an overarching strategy for healthcare cooperation, to better identify needs and opportunities and set priority actions; to share experience, innovation and support more all-island research; and, to ensure that specialist health services are available on the island for all who need them.





### Strategic investment priorities for a more connected island

The Government will work with the Executive on Healthcare cooperation to pursue investment opportunities to:

- Increase regional access to diagnostic and other services on a cross-border basis;
- Deliver new eHealth solutions, through a developing all-island ecosystem in digital health;
- Provide specialist health services on an all-island basis, building on the success of the All-Island Congenital Heart Disease Network; and,
- Upgrade ambulance services facilities in border regions.

PEACE PLUS (2021-27) will also make available an indicative €80m to build upon and deliver new cross-border collaborative approaches to health and social care service delivery and the Government will continue to support the all-island work of the Food Safety Promotion Board.

Creating an island-wide greenway network, linking the Atlantic coast with the Eastern seaboard through greenway projects across the border region, creating a transformational green infrastructure asset, benefitting residents and growing sustainable tourism.

Current greenway projects include: Inishowen; Foyle Valley; North-West, Sligo-Enniskillen; Cavan-Leitrim; Cavan Railway; Ulster Canal and Carlingford Lough.

Delivery of the Narrow Water Bridge project, through the Shared Island Fund, to link the Mourne Mountains and Cooley peninsula, providing tourism, recreation and connectivity boosts in the east border region.

Completion of all Phases of the Ulster Canal restoration project, with support from the Shared Island Fund and other partners, with blueways and greenways extending from Upper Lough Erne to Middletown, delivering a landmark sustainable tourism and recreation amenity for the central border region.

Enhanced rail connectivity taking account of the all-island strategic rail review to be completed in 2022. The review is examining improved inter-urban and inter-regional connectivity on the island, including the potential for high-/higher-speed links; rail freight potential; and, improved connectivity for the North-West of the island.

An early priority is the introduction of an hourly rail service on the Dublin-Belfast line through investment in new and additional rolling stock, with funding under the PEACE PLUS programme and by the Government and Executive.

Potential for increased air connectivity on the island, taking account of the outcome of a review on the viability of air routes from Cork to Belfast and Dublin to Derry.

Road infrastructure improvements to support all-island and border region connectivity, with a particular priority to the A5 Transport Corridor to the North West, where the Government has already committed £75 million.

More all-island Education connections including through continued investment in the Middletown Centre for Autism as an internationally-renowned centre, and seeking other opportunities to share experience and resources in early years, special needs, and tackling educational underachievement.

PEACE PLUS (2021-27) will also make available an indicative €45m for the Shared Learning Together Programme in border counties and Northern Ireland, and across the island, including for: shared education; collaborative opportunities for disadvantaged education settings; use of technology in the classroom; and, post-primary school and youth-based organisation partnerships on a cross-border and cross-community basis.

Investing in the diverse heritage, arts, culture and sports of the island:

The border regions of our shared island are places of rich and diverse cultural traditions, layered history and a unique natural and scenic beauty. The built heritage, parkland and waterways infrastructure resonates an architectural signature of a rich vernacular, social, agricultural and industrial history. We will invest in the unique elements of built and natural heritage of border regions, to better recognise their diverse community and cultural traditions, and support a connected heritage tourism offering. We will do so working in North-South partnership and with local communities, including to develop new cross-border heritage parks, like the Marble Arch Caves UNESCO Global Geopark in Fermanagh and Cavan, and cross-border community parks such as the Riverine Community Park in Strabane and Lifford. We will leverage investment in the Ulster Canal as an artery of connectivity between key points of cultural, community and heritage interest along its route, including the repurposing and rehabilitation of heritage infrastructure.

The Government will also:

- Continue to grow funding for a wide range of cross-border initiatives in arts, culture, music, and film, including through the Creative Ireland initiative.
- Engage positively on the further development of sport on the island, including by exploring the potential for new all-island sporting competitions and opportunities to make Ireland-Northern Ireland and Ireland-UK bids for major international sporting events, including the 2030 FIFA World Cup.
- Protect and develop the Irish language and Ulster Scots traditions across the island through the North South language bodies and funding commitments for the Irish language in Northern Ireland.

## 2. A more sustainable island

Both jurisdictions on the island are committed to making rapid transition to a net zero-carbon future. Public investment strategy, North and South, is fundamental to achieving this common goal. The island is a single ecological entity, integrated in crucial environmental, economic and social domains. Well-coordinated North/South approaches are therefore imperative for effective policy and public investment actions on the island, in addressing the generational challenges of climate breakdown and the biodiversity crisis, and protecting the common environmental resources of the island.

Connecting people - the Government's Reconciliation Fund was increased again in 2021, supporting more grants to organisations working to build better relations across traditions in Northern Ireland, between North and South, and Ireland and Britain.

The Government will also, in cooperation with the Executive, pay particular attention to the needs of minorities in border counties and explore options, including the establishment of dedicated funding streams, to address gaps in current support.

PEACE PLUS (2021-27) will also make available an indicative €20m for maintaining and forging relationships between citizens across the island including for cooperation around specific shared challenges; and for North South joint events and activities that develop mutual understanding and cement partnership.

### Box 17.7: Joined-up environmental protection across the island of Ireland

The Government will take a multi-level approach to secure joined-up protections and actions for our shared island environment. The European Green Deal will shape Ireland's approach to addressing climate change and environmental degradation, and we will work with the Executive through the North South Ministerial Council and with the UK Government to coordinate and optimise approaches for the island of Ireland as a whole. The Environmental Protection Agency, Marine Institute, the National Parks and Wildlife Service and other agencies will work in close partnership with their Northern Ireland counterparts. We will also support wider engagement - including by researchers, environmental, economic and civil society stakeholders on the island - for the necessary whole of society action on tackling climate change and environmental conservation in the decade ahead. Delivery of island-wide electric vehicle and other sustainable transport networks and renewable energy infrastructure are strategic priorities. The Government will also pursue coordinated all-island approaches including on the circular economy, protection of our shared marine and coastal environment and biodiversity protection.



### Strategic investment priorities for a more sustainable island

Energy transformation for a net zero-carbon future is a fundamental task and will benefit from North/South as well as East/West cooperation in the decade ahead.

Priorities include:

- Delivery of the North/South Interconnector which will enhance the performance of the Single Electricity Market, and facilitate the integration of renewable electricity into the power system.
- Exploring potential cross-border and all-island approaches on renewable energy, such as renewable electricity, energy efficiency and the potential of hydrogen power.
- Coordinated investment to roll-out Electric Vehicle charging networks across the island.

Climate action funding to take up opportunities for effective cross-border climate action partnerships and interventions.

Coordinated investment to conserve cross-border region peatlands to support biodiversity, provide valuable ecosystem services and act as carbon sinks.

Supporting more all-island approaches to biodiversity protection, building on the success of the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan.

Investing for more efficient operation of the circular economy on an all-island basis.

Coordinated North/South investment on river basin management and water infrastructure and support for the work of Waterways Ireland in maintaining, developing and promoting over 1,000 km of inland navigable waterways across the island.

Cooperation on preservation of coastal regions and marine resources.

In addition to the potential for support from the Shared Island Fund for approved projects and other public funding sources, the PEACE PLUS programme (2021-27) will make available an indicative €100m to support sustainability actions across: Biodiversity, Nature Recovery and Resilience; Marine and Coastal management; Water Quality Management; and, Geothermal Energy.

## 3. A more prosperous island

By investing and working together on the island, we can have greater impact on the key drivers of prosperity for all regions, and better harness the potential of border areas as the geographic core of a growing, high-value all-island economy.

Research and innovation, higher and further education, infrastructure, an enabling enterprise and investment environment, and tourism strategy are pillars for sustainable growth on the island out to 2030. Through coordinated investment and cooperation on the island in these areas, the Government will work for a more regionally-balanced and prosperous island for all.

### Box 17.8: Looking to the future of Higher, and Further Education, Research and Innovation on the island

Building on the launch of the €40m North South Research Programme in 2021, the Government will work with the Executive and UK Government and with the higher and further education sector to realise the huge potential of cross-border collaboration in supporting world-class, inclusive, innovative universities and colleges that serve and contribute to society across the island and beyond. International best-practice and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is accelerating trends in distance learning, hybrid campus models, more integrated and networked institutions, and joint collaborative programmes. This opens up exciting new opportunities for cross-border cooperation that can improve accessibility and institutional excellence, expand learning options and provide valuable opportunities for students, researchers, enterprises and wider society to interact across the island.

Through the new Department for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, the Government will work with our Northern Ireland and UK counterparts and with education and research stakeholders to support more strategic cooperation, realise new opportunities and shape higher, further education and research sectors that will meet the needs and capacity of the shared island in the decade ahead.





### Strategic investment priorities for a more prosperous island

Enhanced cooperation on higher and further education including to:

- Further develop third-level education infrastructure of the North West region in integrated and sustainable ways, including with Ulster University Magee Campus in Derry, working with Letterkenny Institute of Technology and other Higher and Further Education institutions in the region;
- Deepen cooperation between further education institutions on an all-island basis;
- Ensure access to the Erasmus+ programme for students in higher and further education institutions in Northern Ireland;
- Support student mobility on the island; and,
- Develop cross-border apprenticeship programmes.

Delivering the new North/South research programme with €40m over 5 years from the Shared Island Fund, to harness the capacity of institutions and researchers across the island to conduct research, providing a knowledge base on strategic issues faced on the island as a whole.

Creating new all-island research centres and further collaborations, funded through Science Foundation Ireland, the Shared Island Fund and with Northern Ireland and UK partners, and working with industry, to better harness all-island capacities to conduct world-leading research and innovation. The centres will be in areas of common priority for both jurisdictions, such as Biotherapeutics, Climate, Cybersecurity, Digital Healthcare, Food Security, Infectious Diseases and Precision Medicine.

Continuing and growing all-island research partnerships with the United States, including the US-Ireland R&D Partnership Programme and the Ireland-Northern Ireland-US National Cancer Institute Cancer Consortium.

Supporting the work of InterTradelreland to help businesses across the island grow all-island trade, increase productivity and innovation, and support clustering and development of high-potential sectors for the island including on bio-economy, advanced manufacturing, health and life sciences and the green economy.

Build on the success of the Border and Regional Enterprise Development Funds and work through the Regional Enterprise Plans to promote and facilitate enterprise development on a cross-border basis including to enhance clustering, innovation diffusion and collaboration.

PEACE PLUS (2021-27) will make available an indicative €113m to support: SME development, competitiveness, digitisation and clustering; an Innovation Challenge Fund to enhance research and innovation capacities; and a cross-border skills programme.

Infrastructure investments to support all-island supply chains and networks, including at ports and airports.

Supporting cross-border approaches to attract investment, including through the North West City Region and the Dublin Belfast Economic Corridor initiatives.

Pursuing all-island opportunities to promote the sustainable development of the Agri-Food sector as part of the new agri-food strategy 'Food Vision 2030'.

Supporting the mission of Tourism Ireland to grow tourism into the island of Ireland to promote the recovery of the sector following the pandemic.

Working with the Executive on large scale North-South tourism initiatives which support the sustainable growth of the sector including cross-border walking/cycling trails as well as new marketing opportunities.

## Box 17.9: EU PEACE programmes - partnership for peace, prosperity and reconciliation

The PEACE PLUS programme (2021-27), with a total value of over €1 billion funded by the European Union, UK Government, Northern Ireland Executive and Government of Ireland, will support peace and prosperity across Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland, building upon the work of the preceding PEACE IV and INTERREG VA Programmes.

The Programmes reflect the importance of peace-building activity, and also of actions that contribute positively to connectivity, prosperity and sustainability.

Among the successes of the PEACE IV and INTERREG VA programmes are:

### **Connectivity:**

€23.5m for sustainable transport through the North West Multi-Modal Transport Hub.

€6.4m for the increased use of electric vehicles with a cross-border EV charging network.

### **Sustainability:**

€14m in two projects for biodiversity in cross-border blanket bogs and wetland habitats.

€18.3m across four projects to support marine conservation.

€53.6m across three projects for water quality and catchment management.

### **Prosperity:**

€16.6m to support R&I capability development for SMEs in Ireland and Northern Ireland.

€54.8m to support cross-border research and innovation in health and life sciences, renewable energy and advanced manufacturing.