

Meeting Minutes

EU Just Transition Fund 2021-2027

1st Programme Monitoring Committee Meeting

Date: Wednesday 8th March 2023

Location: The Bridge House, Tullamore, Co. Offaly

Present

Geraldine Behan, Bernie Bradley, Orla Carroll, Andrew Condon, Jim Conway, Ann Cunningham, Helena Deane, Carmen Gonzalez-Hernandez, Aoife Greene, Dae Hanley, Dymrna Harney, Miia Jouppi, David Kelly, Jerry MacEvilly, Paul Madden, Frank Maughan, Declan McGarrigle, Fiona Monaghan, Sarah Morgan, Colette Nulty, Pat O'Neill, David Pasley, Paraic Rattigan, Maria Rigney, Siobhan Roche, Bernie Roe, Anna Shakespeare, Helena Stromberg, Simon Musial, Robert McDermott, Akriti Brady, Ruth Buggie, Terry Connolly, Chris Fogarty, Paddy Kavanagh, Clare Kelly, Bernard O'Shea, Rob Power, John Mulholland.

Apologies

Cllr Turlough McGovern, Sonya Kavanagh, Patrick Barrett, Patricia Waller, Suzanne Nally, Geraldine O'Sullivan, Johnny Sheehan, Jean O'Mahony, Dervila Twamley, Gina McIntyre, Paul Herron, Kattalin Deppner-Quittner, Joe Boland, Anne Cusack, Eamon Murphy, Mary Colhoun, Laure Antoniotti.

Agenda

Time	Item	For
09:30	Arrivals and Registration (Tea/Coffee)	
10:00	Welcome and Opening Remarks <i>Jim Conway- Director EMRA, Chair</i>	
10:05	Welcome from the Commission <i>DG REGIO</i>	
10:10	Tour de table	
10:15	Adoption of the Agenda	Adoption
10:20	Responsibilities of the PMC including Rules of Procedure <i>Bernie Roe- Assistant Director EMRA, Secretary</i>	Information
10:35	Adoption of the rules of procedure	Adoption
10:40	Introduction to Partnership Agreement and CPR <i>DPER</i>	Information
10:55	The Just Transition Plan	Information



	<i>DECC</i>	
11:10	Introduction to the EU Just Transition Fund 2021-2027 <i>EMRA</i>	Information
11:25	Break	
11:40	Presentation on the Horizontal Principles <i>IHREC</i>	Discussion
11:55	Presentation of Action 1.2, LECP/REP Schemes <i>Pobal</i>	Discussion
12:10	Presentation of Action 2.3, Network of Trails <i>Fáilte Ireland</i>	Discussion
12:25	Presentation of Action 3.3, Community Charging Points, <i>Pobal</i>	Discussion
12:40	Communications and Launch Planning <i>EMRA</i>	Information
12:55	Evaluation Plan (Introduction) <i>EMRA</i>	Information
13:00	Any Other Business	Discussion
13:10	Date of Next Meeting	Noting
13:15	Meeting Ends- Followed by Lunch	

Welcome and Opening Remarks

The Programme Monitoring Committee meeting was chaired by Jim Conway, Director, Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly. The Chair welcomed all attendees to the meeting, in particular the European Commission representatives, and representatives from Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications; the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, the other Regional Assemblies, and the Cathaoirleach of the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly. The Chair acknowledged the hard work done by the staff of the Member State, the Commission, the Managing Authority, and all the delivery partners involved in designing the first ever plan and programme of this type.

Welcome from the Commission

This welcoming message was given by Carmen González Hernández, Head of Unit for regional operations in Denmark, Ireland, Sweden and the United Kingdom, DG REGIO. Ms. González Hernández advised members of the PMC to take ownership of the Just Transition Programme, and to take their role seriously. Ms. González Hernández highlighted that the EUJTF is a brand-new Programme, and that it is very rare to get an opportunity to work on a new programme. The commission have been working closely with the Member State and Managing Authority for the past two years on the development of the Plan and Programme. The Commission is here to help everyone to deliver the JTF, feel free to ask questions, the door is always open.

The Chair highlighted that the meeting is taking place on International Women's Day, the theme of which is #EmbraceEquity, and asked members to keep the principles of International Women's Day in mind when conducting the work of the PMC.



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There then followed a round table of introductions by each attendee.

Adoption of the Agenda

John Mulholland of the CCMA proposed the agenda for adoption, EMRA Cathaoirleach Cllr Rob Power seconded it. The agenda was **ADOPTED**.

The Chair reminded everyone to sign the code of conduct form, and they were also reminded of their obligations in the event of a conflict of interest.

Responsibilities of the PMC including Rules of Procedure

This presentation was given by Bernie Roe, PMC Secretary, Assistant Director of the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly. The PMC is being held within 3-months of the date of the European Commission decision to approve the programme, as outlined in the CPR. Ms. Roe outlined the role of the PMC under Articles 38, 39 and 40 of the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR) Reg (EU) 2021/1060.

The presentation then led into the contents of the Rules of Procedure. Broadly, these rules set out establishment, composition and functions of the Monitoring Committee as per Articles 38, 39 and 40 of the CPR which had just been described. The PMC is Chaired by the Director of the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly and the Secretary is nominated by the Chair. All communications are to be addressed to the Secretary. Meetings will be held at least once a year, called by the Chair and notified by Secretary. The place and format of meeting is decided by Chair and notified by the Secretary. There are provisions for decision by means of a written procedure. There will be at least 21 days' notice given via email of a PMC. Exceptionally, and for urgent reasons, the Chair may reduce the period of notice. A draft agenda will be circulated with notice and approved at commencement of business. Documents are to be normally circulated fourteen days in advance of the meeting. Each member has a vote (2/3 majority), decisions normally by consensus. Minutes are taken, decisions recorded, then circulated and published. Each member is asked to sign and abide by a Code of Conduct. It was highlighted that the work of the Committee will not be confidential, also that the Committee may amend the rules.

Adoption of the rules of procedure

The Secretary proposed the rules to the PMC. The Chair asked for consensus, which was given by the members. The Rules of Procedure were **ADOPTED**.

Introduction to Partnership Agreement and CPR

This presentation was given by Andrew Condon, Principal Officer, Expenditure Policy, Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. Mr. Condon highlighted that for the EU JTF, the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications fulfill the Member State role, while the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly fulfill the Managing Authority role. Funds do not happen in isolation at the Member State level. Ireland is now a net contributor to the EU; however we still receive funding. There is €1.4bn for the Republic of Ireland, and with Northern Ireland this comes to about €3.5bn on



the Island of Ireland for the 21-27 period. EU funding for JTF is €84.5m, which is match funded by the Exchequer to a total of €169m.

The PMC discussions are an important part of the input into the overall monitoring committee process. A common challenge across all funds is absorption. This problem is not just across the island, but also across Europe. Covid and the war in Ukraine have caused issues around spending. Also, complementarity is an issue, we want to make sure that through dialogue this is done smoothly. It is 2023, and we are talking about a programme which spans 21-27, this is part of the lag from Covid and highlights the absorption issue. There is some flexibility to transfer in between funds.

An advantage of EU funding like this is that it is difficult to move away from strategic priorities, these are the things against which the fund will be held to account. They will remain the focus despite any future changes that may come.

The Just Transition Plan

This presentation was given by Frank Maughan, Principal Officer, Just Transition and Sectoral Policy, Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications. Questions on the Plan and Programme were taken together before the Coffee Break.

Mr. Maughan thanked all involved in getting the EU JTF to where it is today. The Plan and the Programme are really a package. The Plan has a clear regulatory basis as set out in the EU JTF Regulation (EU 2021/1056) Article 11. The Plan needed to: provide a description of the transition process at national level towards a climate neutral economy; identify the most negatively affected territories and carry out an assessment of transition challenges being faced; outline the expected contribution of the EU JTF support to addressing challenges; identify the type of interventions envisaged; have consistency with other relevant national and regional strategies; complement other relevant EU programmes; and propose governance, monitoring and evaluation arrangements.

The approach taken to prepare the Plan was evidence based and bottom-up: in partnership with stakeholders and in synergy with existing initiatives and local and national strategies. It involved an analysis of existing reports as well as building upon strong stakeholder engagement through existing interventions such as the National Just Transition Fund and the work and reports of the Just Transition Commissioner. The Public Consultation process involved a significant number of surveys, workshops, and written submissions, resulting in engagement with over 240 individuals and organisations. This work resulted in the 3 priorities of the Plan:

1. Generating employment for former peat communities by investing in the diversification of the local economy.
2. Supporting the restoration and rehabilitation of degraded peatlands and regeneration and repurposing of industrial heritage assets.
3. Providing former peat communities with smart and sustainable mobility options to enable them to benefit directly from the green transition



Introduction to the EU Just Transition Fund 2021-2027

This presentation was given by Terry Connolly, Administrative Officer, Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly. Mr. Connolly started by linking together how the Commission, Department, EMRA, and the Intermediary Bodies (IBs) will work together to deliver on the Plan, through the processes laid out in the Programme. The presentation then went on to show again what the 3 priorities are, and how much funding is allocated to each; where the funding will be spent; outlined a description of the Just Transition Fund Territory; who the funding will target and is expected to benefit; how the Programme will be delivered through 9 actions (3 per priority) and with the help of the delivery partners; the reason the programme is being undertaken, that is to create jobs, help enterprises, and restore biodiversity; and finally when the funding needs to be spent.

The presentation was followed by a point to note by Miia Jouppi from the European Commission. PMC members need to know that what they see in these presentations is as a result of extensive consultation processes. EU Programmes come with strict rules and requirements, so while changing the context is possible if absolutely necessary, the PMC can discuss changes, but requires discussions and approvals with the European Commission before these changes can be made.

She also advised on the spending profile. The purpose of the fund is to support the transition. It is a very ambitious timeline. The Programming period does not end later, but it started later so this puts pressure on delivery. The PMC will be hearing about N+3 and for the JTF this is a much higher percentage than for other programmes.

It is also important that successful implementation requires transparency. If the PMC notice something not going to plan, this must be reported to the European Commission. The rules are not there to restrict, but to support delivery.

Cllr Rob Power had a question on Priority 3, as to how charge points and challenges faced by the uptake of electric vehicles relate to each other. Mr. Connolly replied that it is part of a broader group of schemes being rolled out by Zevi, for example the sports scheme that this Action is based upon could complement it. The JTF is also helping to prioritise the Territory so it is not left until last in the rollout of chargers nationally. Ms. Jouppi added that the reason is also regulatory in nature. There are restrictions around support to local urban transport. Under the regulation it is not eligible for funding. Support from the EU cannot distort competition. These are private companies so state aid rules would come into play.

The SRA and NWRA representative pointed out that there are good complementarities with other funds. There is a Complementarities working group and a Partnership Agreement group, so work is underway in parallel.

Ms. Jouppi added that the role of the PMC will be important in approving the selection criteria, either circulated at PMC or by written procedure. The Commission will need to see and approve these before they go live.

The Chair agreed, the Programme needs to spend money in a timely manner so will bring selection criteria forward in a timely manner.



Presentation on the Horizontal Principles

This presentation was given by Bernie Bradley, Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty, Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission. The theme of IWD is #EmbracingEquity. Equality is not just something you put in your plan, it has to be something you value. Ms. Bradley presented on the Enabling conditions and Horizontal principles, including their relationship to the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty which is a statutory obligation in Section 42 of the IHREC Act 2014.

The Public Sector Duty Training is one of the tools to help deliver on the Horizontal Principles. Horizontal means they apply across the whole programme. The Secretary will circulate IHREC guidelines with minutes from this meeting. Public bodies are required to have regard, in the performance of their functions, to the need to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and protect the human rights of staff and service users. The Horizontal Principles are to embed respect for fundamental rights and compliance with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights; to ensure equality between men and women, gender mainstreaming and the integration of gender perspectives; and to prevent any discrimination based on gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation and focus on accessibility for persons with disabilities.

There will be Annual Reporting to the PMC. A reporting template has been agreed between IHREC and the Managing Authorities to be used in conjunction with guidance. There will be annual reporting by each Intermediary Body or scheme delivery partner which will start in early 2024. Reports will be reviewed by IHREC as part of their monitoring role and a report will be prepared annually for consideration by the Programme Monitoring Committee on compliance with the enabling conditions and Horizontal Principles.

Ms. Bradley encouraged the use of Technical Assistance for further training and capacity building on equality and human rights, and also the promotion of the IHREC eLearning module. The tool and training are about being proactive and avoiding non-compliance down the road.

The Secretary will also share the link to IHREC online training <https://www.ihrec.ie/elearning> with the minutes.

The presentation was followed by a point to note by Miia Jouppi – the Commission appreciates the guidance document; it is very useful for anyone involved in EU funding.

Presentation of Action 1.2, LECP/REP Schemes

This presentation was given by Colette Nulty, Programme Design Specialist with Pobal. Action 1.2 has been developed with DECC and EMRA. Key factors in the design of this Action have been: Ensuring alignment with other strategies; People and Place; Statistical Analysis and Territorial Profile; bottom-up initiatives; local and regional; complementarity with other funds; equality of opportunity to avail of funding across the region; and incorporation of the Equality and Human Rights into the delivery of the projects. There will be three strands to the Action. Strand 1 for Local Authority JTF Projects, Strand 2 for JTF Flagship Projects, and Strand 3 for Community Grants. Some examples of what may be funded include: Investment in SMEs/organisations diversifying and creating employment; renewable energy and energy efficiency, reducing energy poverty using new technologies; waste prevention/reduction, reuse, repair and recycling; investment in Infrastructure to support transition, e.g. education, training, training facilities, childcare and eldercare.



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For strands 1 and 2 there will be a two-step application process. All projects must be endorsed by the Advisory Committee for the LECP or Steering Committee for the Regional Enterprise Plan. Grants are expected to be from €200,000 up to €1m. State Aid & De Minimis Regulations will apply. Strand 3 will be an Open Call for Community Organisations, Social Enterprises, and Not For Profit Organisations, with grants ranging between €50,000 and €200,000.

Indicative timelines for all strands were presented. Pobal will also provide potential applicants with information events, a dedicated webpage with resources and information and FAQs, guidelines, and a dedicated email for queries.

Following the Presentation, the Secretary stressed that all operational aspects, methodology, etc. will come back here to the next PMC for review, clarification, and approval.

Miia Jouppi emphasised that everyone will have the opportunity to modify, discuss thoroughly and to adapt. It is to know that PMC members need to see this and approve this before it actually goes live.

The Chair noted these comments and will bring it forward in a timely manner.

John Mulholland, CCMA noted that a lot of LECP plans are in various stages and asked whether in strand 3 there is a requirement for match funding? He added that in relation to hard-to-reach communities, people who successfully apply tend to do so time and time again, if we can find a way to get to communities who are usually silent. Ms. Nulty replied that communities can apply up to 100%, unless there is a state-aid issue. Pobal will reach out also to communities through the plan. On the LECP plans, this is why the steering committee needs to sign-off. Projects do not need to be specifically mentioned, but need to be aligned with the objectives.

Presentation of Action 2.3, Network of Trails

This presentation was given by Fiona Monaghan, Tourism Strategy & Development, Fáilte Ireland. Ms. Monaghan started by thanking DECC and EMRA for guidance during Programming. Fáilte Ireland's plans are aligned with the Regional Tourism Development Strategies 2023-2027, in particular: to improve the range and quality of visitor experiences; to create jobs in local communities; to leverage the natural and cultural assets of the region in a sustainable way with a focus on eco-tourism; to foster a Trails Development Strategy, to ensure ease of access, mobility and navigation; to enhance the capacity and capability of the sector; and to deliver regenerative tourism.

Fáilte Ireland's approach to Regenerative Tourism is to move beyond just 'doing no harm' to ensuring that tourism is a positive regenerative force for both communities and nature. Fáilte Ireland is committed to establishing the midlands as one of Europe's leading regenerative tourism destinations, renowned for its thriving communities and flourishing natural environment.

There will be 4 strands: Strand 1 Trail development on old railways through rehabilitated wetlands; Strand 2 Amenities/Experiences & support for SME's; Strand 3 Low-carbon alternative accommodation; and Strand 4 Smart solutions/digitization programme for the tourism sector.

The Network of Trails under Action 2.3 will deliver a strategic network of connected walking, cycling and water trails across the midlands. Trails will inter-connect with the existing and emerging arterial Greenway network - including the repurposing of former narrow gauge rail track, culverts, etc. It includes related infrastructure & enhancing the experience e.g. reimagined industrial bridges formally used to transport peat to factories across the JTF region to thematic experiences; placemaking and art



installations; signage and interpretation to create a sense of connectivity across the towns and villages, bogs and waterways of the Just Transition region. Local Authorities are seen as key delivery partners, with licenses from Bord na Móna to develop on their land. Trail development is not cheap, a cyclable walkable trail is about €300k per km. Fáilte Ireland will have a toolkit developed by the end of Q1. Trail development may be constrained by availability of land. The outline of the Developer Toolkit & Design Principles was presented including Gateways to the Trail Network, 'Iconic' trail features, Discovery Points, and Restpoints.

Presentation of Action 3.3, Community Charging Points

This presentation was given by Colette Nulty, Programme Design Specialist with Pobal, who will be working with Zero Emission Vehicles Ireland (Zevi) to deliver Action 3.3. This Action has a budget of €15m to fund the installation of EV Charging Points and associated ground works at Community Centres and potentially Enterprise Centres. The target date for an initial launch is July 2023. The aim is to achieve a balance of EV Chargers across the region which will be cost neutral for Community Centres/Enterprise Centres. The scheme is being co-designed with Zevi/Department of Transport and consultations are currently underway with Local Authorities. It is very much modeled along the Sports Club scheme which has just been launched by Zevi. There will be a two-stage application process, with Expressions Of Interest for Suitable Sites. There will be a set of Minimum Requirements for a Site to be considered.

Miia Jouppi commented that it is nice to see how much thinking has been put into these actions, really taking a lot into account, it is nice to see continuity possibilities. With good planning, partners can start something which will grow. Have seen this in Urban Development ERDF programmes: there is a positive knock-on effect on businesses who improve when their area improves.

Communications and Launch Planning

This presentation was given by Helena Stromberg, Communications Officer for EU Just Transition Fund, Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly. Ms. Stromberg drew attention to where Communications is mentioned in the Common Provisions Regulation, in particular: Article 46 Visibility; Article 47 Emblem of the Union; Article 48 Communications Officers & Networks; Article 49 Responsibilities of MA; Article 50 Responsibilities of Beneficiaries; Annex IX: Communications & Visibility. Communications & Visibility is an important responsibility for all entities implementing EU funding. The overall communication strategy for JTF is noted in the Programme text.

There are planned to be two Operations of Strategic Importance: under Action 1.2: economic and community actions; and under Priority 2: regeneration and transitioning of peat lands for new uses, linking with economic diversification.

2022 Highlights included: Europe Day Sunday Independent supplement; Ploughing Championships; InformEU seminar on "Strategic Communication"; Establishment of page on eufunds.ie & Twitter accounts; and Participation in National Network of Communications Coordinators.

The purpose of Communications in EU Programming is to increase the visibility and the role and impact of EU funding in Ireland. As last year, the JTF will be involved in a newspaper supplement in the Sunday Independent and the content will focus on Ireland 50 years in the EU. Going forward there will be an



emphasis to secure eco-conscious merchandising, and we will have workshops and guidance documents at IB and Beneficiary level so communication and visibility requirements are clear at all levels.

The Programme Launch will be on the 28th of April at a location within the Territory (TBC). Members were advised to please save the date.

Miia Jouppi stressed how important Communication is. In the early days of the EU there were big signs for funding. Now the work is less visible but just as important. We are trying to do the things that are necessary that would not be done otherwise. If everything is negative news, we see the consequences. It's important to show that the EU is trying to make a difference locally, with real impact. It is hoped that all PMC members will bring these positive messages to their networks.

Evaluation Plan (Introduction)

This presentation was given by Terry Connolly, Administrative Officer, Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly. Mr. Connolly drew particular attention to the following articles in the CPR: Article 44 Evaluations by Member State; Article 45 Evaluation by the Commission; Article 9 Horizontal Principles; Article 22 Content of Programmes; Article 38 Functions of the Monitoring Committee; and in particular Article 18 Mid-term Review, where it was noted that for programmes supported by the JTF, the assessment carried out by the Commission, is pursuant to point (b) of Article 29(1) of Regulation (EU) 2018/1999 (the progress made by each Member State towards meeting its objectives, targets and contributions and implementing the policies and measures set out in its integrated national energy and climate plan).

Actions for 2023 are to: Draft Programme Evaluation Plan with IBs, stakeholder organisations, the Member State and other Funds (where appropriate); and to submit to Monitoring Committee for approval by 01/11/2023.

Any Other Business

The Chair invited Helena Stromberg to take the floor. Ms. Stromberg invited those present to take part in a group photo to mark International Women's Day.

Date of Next Meeting

The Chair indicated that we are targeting the end of April. Normally we try and align the dates of PMCs with colleagues in the other funding Programmes, we will try and take stock of the best date and get back to PMC members with plenty of notice.

