



Eastern & Midland Regional Assembly

2020 Annual Report



Tionól Reigiúnach Oirthir agus Lár-Tíre
Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly



Contents

Message from An Cathaoirleach	3
Message from the Director	5
Introduction	7
Functions of Regional Assemblies.....	7
Assembly meetings and membership	8
Meetings of the Assembly	10
Conferences and Training Attended in 2020.....	11
Meetings and Membership of Sub-Committees.....	11
Planning - The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES).....	13
EU Policy and Funding Framework.....	17
Regional Operational Programmes (ROPs).....	17
EU Programme Monitoring Activities	21
Meetings and Membership of Programme Monitoring Committees	22
European Territorial Cooperation programmes (ERDF).....	23
Preparation for the next programming period 2021-2027.....	23
Other EU related activities	25
Irish Regions European Office	27
Irish Delegation to the Committee of the Regions	29
Projects	31
PROGRESS (1st August 2019 - 31st July 2023)	31
Next2Met (1st August 2019 - 31st January 2023)	31
Quantitative Greenhouse Gas Impact Assessment Method for Spatial Planning Policy (QGasSP) (12 month project - ends October 2021)	32
Care Peat - 2019-2022	32
Corporate	33
Communications.....	35
Annexes	36
List of staff.....	36
Income and Expenditure Account 31 December 2019	37
Consolidated Balance Sheet for the Financial Year ending 31st December 2018	38
Members' payments	39

Message from An Cathaoirleach

I am pleased to present the sixth Annual Report for the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly.



In 2020, the Members from our 12 Local Authority areas adopted the new Corporate Plan 2019-2024 and supported the continued delivery of EMRA's core functions and objectives. I want to take this opportunity to thank my colleagues for their contribution to the work of the Assembly. While

2020 provided an unforeseen challenge posed by COVID 19, the remote engagement in monthly Assembly meetings enabled us to focus on many topics of interest for the Region.

Following the adoption of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) in 2019, the Assembly turned to support the implementation of the RSES with many submissions to a wide range of plans. The year marked the consolidation of our statutory functions and development of the Assembly's engagement and influence on the sustainable development of the Region. I believe the contribution that members and officials have made to the impact of balanced regional development has been significant.

Although challenging with the necessary restrictions on movement in place, the Assembly maintained its engagement at the European level, contributing extensively to the activities of the Committee of the Regions. In October 2020, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform announced his decision to give the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly a direct role in developing and managing the next round of European Regional Development Funds (ERDF) for the Region. The inaugural role for EMRA is expressly recognised concerning ERDF, and it is very welcome. The Assembly has worked with our counterparts in the Northern and Western Regional Assembly and the Southern Regional Assembly to ensure that EU funding coming into the regions have been maximised and used to the best advantage of our citizens. The Assemblies' contribution to the topic of Just Transition also continued.

EMRA continued to hold the rotating Presidency of the Environmental Conference of the Regions of Europe (ENCORE) network for the year. In consultation with the network, it decided to postpone the ENCORE conference to 2021, which will consider the areas of ecosystem services, circular economy and climate change. The Assembly has also provided leadership by developing the Quantitative Greenhouse Gas Impact Assessment Method for Spatial Planning Policy (QGasSP) in partnership with ESPON and partner EU regions.

I wish to thank the Leas Cathaoirleach Councillor Deirdre Heney for her support and work for the Assembly throughout the year. I would also like to thank my predecessor, Councillor Eamon Dooley, for his work during his period as Cathaoirleach of the Assembly.

The members' representative efforts have been supported comprehensively by the Director and his staff throughout the year. I want to recognise the team's agility and resilience during the pandemic lockdowns, their adaption to home-based work, and to commend their ongoing professional efforts to support a more sustainable approach to the development of the Region.

The work carried out this year continues to build on the strong foundations laid since the establishment of the Assembly as it grows its role as a leader of the development of our Region.

Cllr Pádraig McEvoy

Cathaoirleach

Message from the Director

This is the first Annual Report to be prepared for the period of the new Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA) Corporate plan 2019-2024.



This ambitious plan, adopted by the members, sets out the strategic vision of the organisation and is supported by the Annual Programme of Works. The Annual Report sets out the actions undertaken throughout the year to deliver the objectives of that Corporate Plan.

2020 was a challenging year given the impacts of COVID 19 from early March. However, the business of the Assembly continued, availing of online solutions and in no small part due to the flexibility of both staff and members in approaching new ways of conducting our business. Meetings were held online and were underpinned by the Statutory Instrument No. 446 of 2020. At the Annual meeting held in July, Councillor Pádraig McEvoy was elected Cathaoirleach and I would like to thank him and all the members of the Assembly for their support throughout the year. I would also like to thank Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council for its assistance in enabling EMRA hold its Annual Meeting.

2020 saw EMRA formally recognised by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform as a participant in the development and management of the European Regional Development Fund 2021-2027. This is an important milestone for the assembly. EU activities and involvement in projects continued. EMRA has continued to play an active role in the monitoring and implementation of the Regional Operational Programmes and various other European Territorial Cooperation Programmes. The Assembly continued its role as the Irish contact point for the URBACT programme with the task to promote the programme and provide support to Irish applicants.

Following the making of the RSES in 2019, implementation of the strategy became the principal focus on the spatial planning and economic front, with 34 submissions being made throughout the year. In addition to statutory observations, these included a wide range of submissions including Sustainable Mobility, Marine planning, Water Management and several government Departments' statements of strategy. The members and executive participated in and contributed to a substantial number of consultative bodies, enhancing the Assembly's role in regional development. Strategic Planning Area and MASP meetings continued during the year. In addition, a number of significant publications were delivered including a COVID-19 Regional Economic Analysis and A Regional Co-Working Analysis. In March EMRA won the best Plan Making Category at the Irish Planning Awards.

The Irish National Delegation to the Committee of the Regions (CoR) continued its activities during the year. Supports for the committee are primarily delivered through the Irish Regions European Office (IREO) in Brussels and managed through this Assembly. CoR members received assistance in preparation for their participation at plenary meetings of the CoR, and also for the members participating on Commissions throughout the year. As in previous years, the support of Ireland's Permanent Representation to the EU in this process is invaluable and co-operation between the IREO and the Perm Rep continued throughout the year.

Given the challenges posed by COVID-19, the Assembly was particularly pleased to be a lead in a very successful event held during the European Week of Regions and Cities called Green Cities by Co-Design, this was driven by the Irish Regions European Office.

The Assembly also actively engaged in relevant networks such as ENCORE and sat on Regional Enterprise Committees and bodies such as the National Climate Change Adaptation Strategies Steering Group and the Climate Change Regional Offices.

Projects worked on during the year include PROGRESS, Next2Met, QGasSP and Care Peat.

From a Corporate Governance perspective, the Assembly continued to fulfil its legal requirements in relation to finance and audit. Several successful recruitment campaigns were carried out throughout the year.

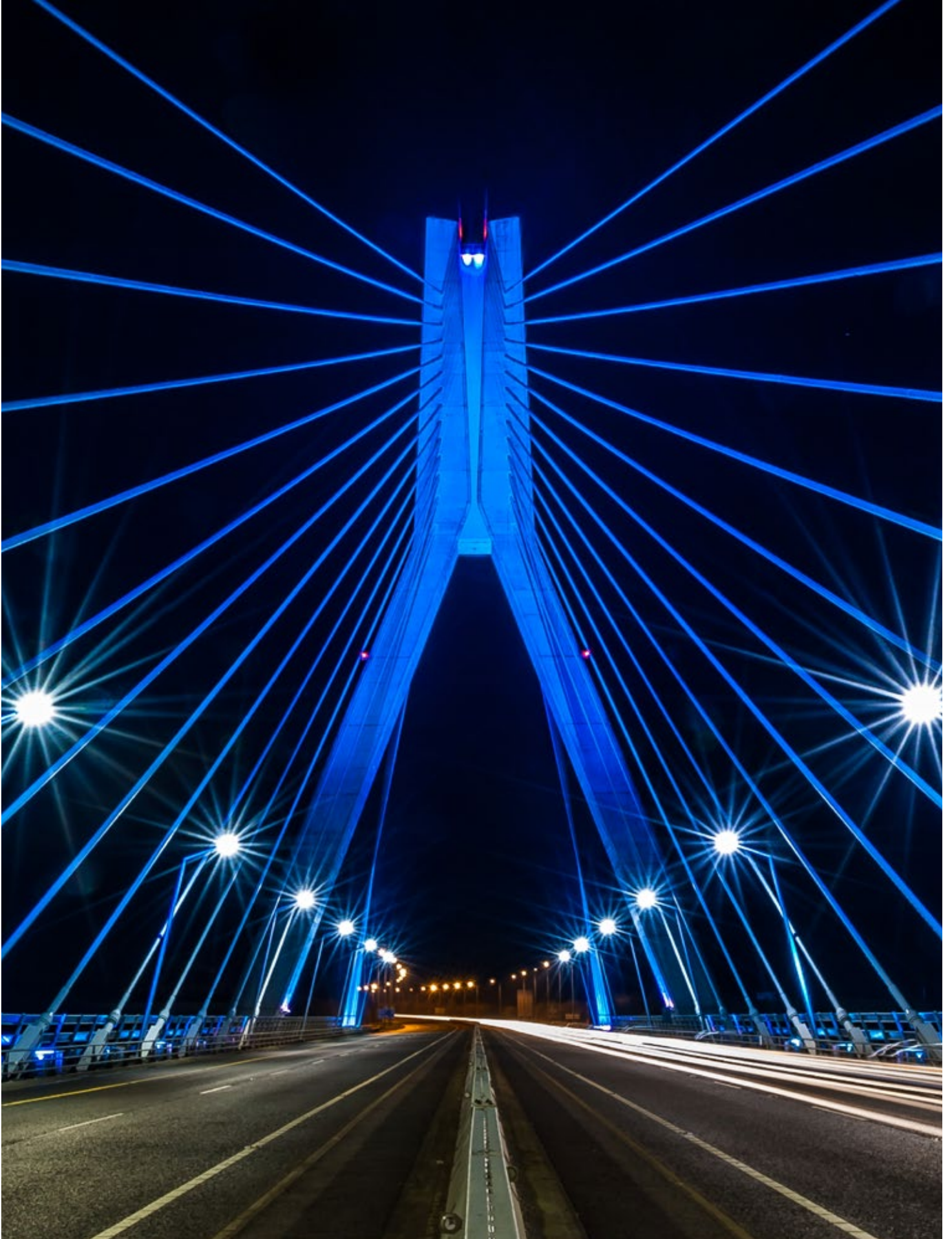
This year's report contains a set of accounts for 2019 audited by the Local Government Audit Service. Governance and financial controls continued to be managed during the year.

The ongoing linkage to local authorities was provided by the designated chief executive Joan Martin from Louth County Council who I would like to thank for her continued support.

Reflecting on the challenges posed by COVID-19 throughout the year, I would very much like to compliment the performance of the team. Again, the enthusiasm and professionalism of staff was evident as we navigated an extremely difficult path with nothing by way of precedent to guide our decision making. I would like to personally thank them for ensuring that we achieved all our works plan objectives.

Jim Conway

Director



Introduction

The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA) is one of the three Regional Assemblies created in Ireland following on from the enactment of the Local Government Reform Act 2014.

Part of the local government structure, the EMRA operates independently to provide a range of functions for the Region which include policy making, monitoring and oversight and promoting enhanced co-ordination in our Region.

The Region is the smallest in land area of the three Irish Regions but the largest in population size with over 2.3 million people. The region has approximately 270km of coastline from Carlingford Lough in Louth to Kilmichael Point at the Wicklow-Wexford border. The main settlement is the capital city of Dublin which is home to 1.2 million people and is supported by a network of regional and county towns and an extensive rural hinterland.

The Region incorporates 12 city and county councils and is comprised of elected members (councillors) who are elected by their peers in the 12 councils to represent them regionally or members of the Irish delegation to the Committee of the Regions.

At European level, EMRA is recognised as a NUTS 2 region¹, a classification that mirrors the administrative reality of Ireland following the Local Government Reform Act 2014 that created the three Regional Assemblies; Eastern & Midland Region (EMRA), Southern Region (SRA) and Northern & Western Region (NWRA).



Functions of Regional Assemblies

The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly aims at playing a key role in the development of the Region for the benefit of its citizens. This role revolves around three axes: strategic planning and sustainable development, European affairs and effectiveness in local government. These three areas constitute the core of EMRA's functions.

Strategic Planning & Sustainable Development

- Make policy - new Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Region
- Provide oversight - statutory observations on local authority development plans and variations

EU Affairs

- Manage funds - Regional Operational Programmes and INTERREG Monitoring Committees
- Provide supports - Committee of the Regions and Irish Regions European Office in Brussels

Effectiveness in Local Government

- Promote co-ordination - between EU/ National/ Regional and local governance
- Develop knowledge - Research and evidence base for implementation and monitoring

¹ The NUTS classification is a hierarchical system for dividing up the economic territory of the EU. It is also used in the calculation and allocation of cohesion funding and to collect, develop and harmonise European statistics.

An aerial photograph of a vast green landscape under a clear blue sky. In the foreground, a circular earthwork feature, possibly a prehistoric site, is visible, consisting of concentric earthen rings. The landscape is divided into fields by stone walls and hedgerows, with scattered trees and small buildings in the distance.

Assembly Meetings & Membership

Assembly Meetings & Membership

Assembly Members are nominated by the constituent Local Authorities in the region in proportion to the size of the Local Authority's population. Councillors nominated to the Committee of the Regions become de facto Members of the Regional Assembly.



In 2020, the Assembly membership was as follows:

Members list

Councillor	Local Authority	Appointed
Daryl Barron	Dublin City Council	
Emma Blain	Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown Co Co	Jan 2020
Aoife Breslin	Kildare County Council	Jan 2020
Fintan Brett	Kildare County Council	
John Browne	Longford County Council	
Emma Coffey	Louth County Council	
Avril Cronin	Wicklow County Council	
Laura Donaghy	South Dublin County Council	Oct 2020
Eamon Dooley	Offaly County Council	
Caroline D Stanley	Laois County Council	Jan 2020
Kate Feeney	Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown Co Co	
Brian Fitzgerald	Meath County Council	
Catherine Fitzgerald	Laois County Council	
Eddie Fitzpatrick	Offaly County Council	
Tom Fortune	Wicklow County Council	June 2020
Mary Freehill	Dublin City Council	June 2020
Jim Gildea	Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown Co Co	
Alison Gilliland	Dublin City Council	Jan 2020
Mary Hanafin	Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown Co Co	
David Healy	Fingal County Council	
Deirdre Heney	Dublin City Council	
Paddy Hill	Westmeath County Council	
Janet Horner	Dublin City Council	March 2020
Vincent Jackson	Dublin City Council	
Pamela Kearns	South Dublin County Council	
Conor Keelan	Louth County Council	
Dermot Lacey	Dublin City Council	
Brigid Manton	Fingal County Council	
Tony McCormack	Offaly County Council	
Padraig McEvoy	Kildare County Council	
Paddy Meade	Meath County Council	
Aisling Moran	Laois County Council	
Colm Murray	Longford County Council	July 2020
Robert O'Donoghue	Fingal County Council	
Peter O'Brien	Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown Co Co	
Clare O'Byrne	South Dublin County Council	
Damien O'Reilly	Meath County Council	
Aengus O'Rourke	Westmeath County Council	
Larry O'Toole	Dublin City Council	

Councillor	Local Authority	Appointed
Robert Power	Kildare County Council	
Una Power	Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown Co Co	
Gerry Walsh	Wicklow County Council	

Number per council as of 31/12/2020

Council	Number	Council	Number
Dublin City Council	8	Louth County Council	2
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council	6	Meath County Council	3
Fingal County Council	3	Offaly County Council	3
Kildare County Council	4	South Dublin County Council	3
Laois County Council	3	Westmeath County Council	2
Longford County Council	2	Wicklow County Council	3

By Party as of 31/12/2020

Party	Number of Members
Fianna Fáil	16
Fine Gael	8
Labour	7
Green Party	5
Independent (Non Party)	4
Sinn Féin	2



Meetings of the Assembly

The outbreak of Covid-19 and the associated restrictions to travel and meetings meant that not all the Assembly meetings scheduled for 2020 could go ahead.

Overall, five statutory Assembly meetings were held in 2020 in January, February, July, November and December. The July meeting took place at the Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown Ferry Terminal and meetings in November and December were held online following the publication of Statutory Instrument No. 446 of 2020 in October 2020 allowing Regional Assemblies to hold meetings remotely and stating that any decision made or vote taken at such a meeting “shall be as good and effectual as a decision made or vote taken or other act done by the members concerned would have been if such a meeting of them had been held in person”. Following the adoption of the Statutory Instrument allowing remote meetings, a specific annex to the Assembly standing order was drafted and adopted by Members at the November meeting.

Before remote meetings were allowed, the Assembly held five online briefings to keep Members informed of and involved in the activities of EMRA and enable them to exchange on current issues and meet with relevant stakeholders. The March meeting was cancelled.

2019 Schedule of meetings

Month	Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly
January	17/01/2020
February	14/02/2020
March	20/03/2020 - cancelled
April	17/04/2020*
May	15/05/2020*
June	12/06/2019*
July	10/07/2020
August	No Meeting
September	11/09/2020*
October	09/10/2020*
November	13/11/2020
December	11/12/2020

* online briefings

The attendance rate for statutory meetings (5 in 2020) was 63%.



Election of An Cathaoirleach

The Annual General Meeting was held on July 10th and saw the election of Cllr Pádraig McEvoy as Cathaoirleach and Cllr. Deirdre Heney as Leas-Cathaoirleach.

Cllr. Eamon Dooley	Cathaoirleach	July 2019 to July 2020
Cllr. Padraig McEvoy	Leas Cathaoirleach	July 2019 to July 2020
Cllr. Padraig McEvoy	Cathaoirleach	July 2020 to present
Cllr. Deirdre Heney	Leas Cathaoirleach	July 2020 to present

Conferences and Training Attended in 2020

Because of the health crisis, no conference or training were attended by EMRA members on behalf of the Assembly in 2020.

EU subcommittee meeting

The following members were appointed to the EU subcommittee meeting that was established in November 2020.

Meeting date 8th December

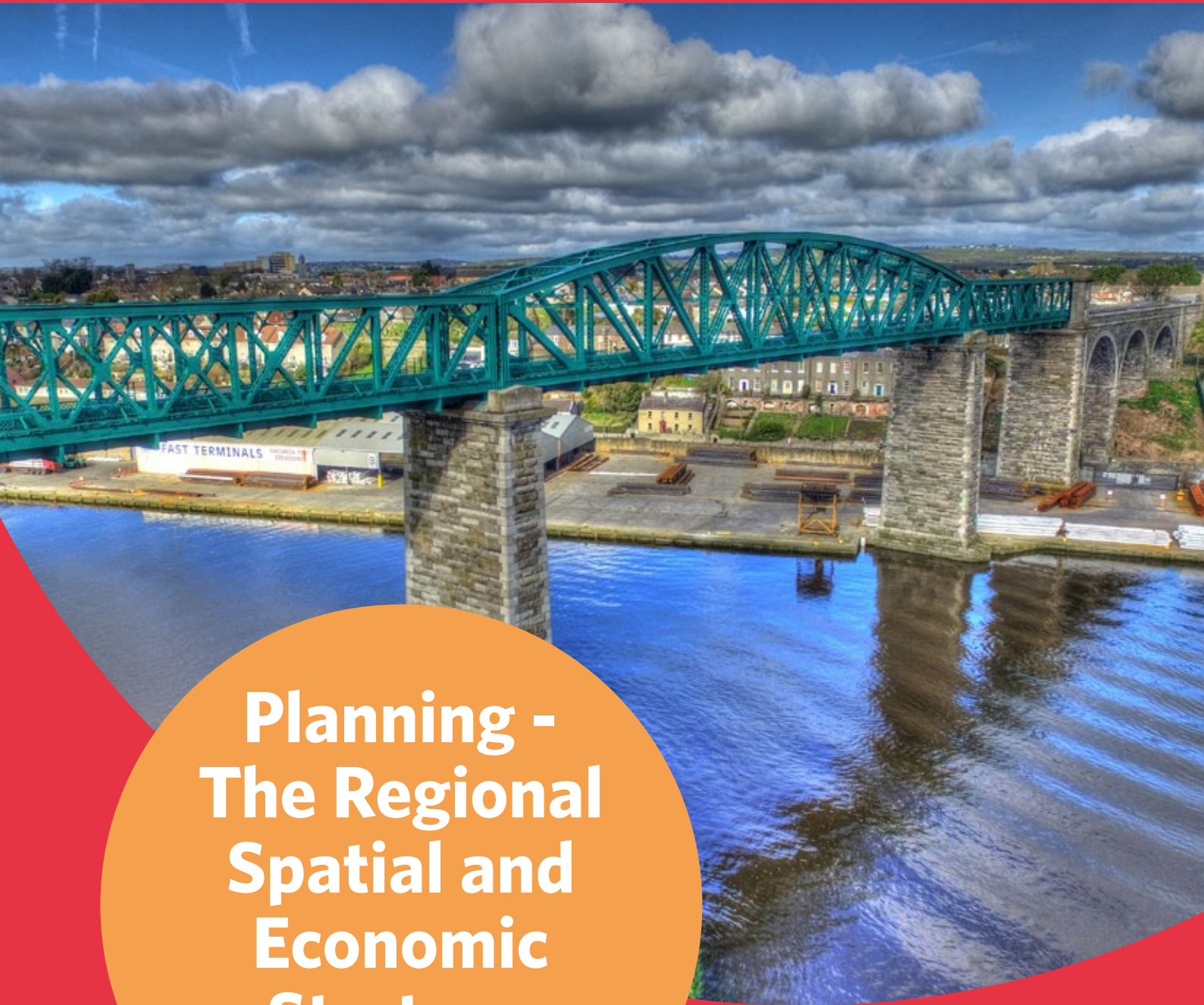
- Pádraig McEvoy (as Cathaoirleach)
- Fintan Brett
- Eamon Dooley
- Kate Feeney
- Alison Gilliland
- David Healy
- Conor Keelan
- Aisling Moran



Meetings and Membership of Sub-Committees

In 2020 the strategic planning area committees for the Dublin, Eastern and Midland strategic planning areas (SPAs) recommenced with each committee holding two meetings in 2020. A new SPA committee for the Dublin Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan was formed and held three meetings.

Dublin SPA	Eastern SPA	Midland SPA	MASP SPA
19 June 2020 & 2nd October 2020	4th June 2020 & 6th October 2020	5th June 2020 & 2nd October 2020	
Members			
Daryl Barron	Aoife Breslin	John Browne	Daryl Barron
Emma Blain	Fintan Brett	Eamon Dooley	Kate Feeney
Laura Donaghy	Emma Coffey	Caroline Dwane Stanley	Jim Gildea
Kate Feeney	Avril Cronin	Catherine Fitzgerald	Alison Gilliland
Mary Freehill	Brian Fitzgerald	Eddie Fitzpatrick	David Healy
Jim Gildea	Tom Fortune	Paddy Hill	Deirdre Heney
Alison Gilliland	Conor Keelan	Tony McCormack	Pamela Kearns
Mary Hanafin	Padraig McEvoy	Aisling Moran	Padraig McEvoy
David Healy	Erin McGreehan	Colm Murray	Paddy Meade
Deirdre Heney	Paddy Meade	Aengus O'Rourke	Brigid Manton
Janet Horner	Damien O'Reilly		Damien O'Reilly
Vincent Jackson	Robert Power		Robert Power
Pamela Kearns	Gerry Walsh		Una Power
Dermot Lacey			Gerry Walsh
Brigid Manton			
Suzanne McEneaney			
Robert O'Donoghue			
Peter O'Brien			
Larry O'Toole			
Una Power			
William Priestley			



**Planning -
The Regional
Spatial and
Economic
Strategy
(RSES)**

Planning - The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES)

Ensuring oversight and alignment of national, regional and local policy in the Region

A central mechanism of RSES implementation in 2020 was ensuring consistency with the RSES across Local Authority plans and the strategies, plans and programmes of public bodies, including government departments, and key stakeholders.

During 2020, 34 submissions were issued, with 12 of these submissions issued as a statutory function under Section 27 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended). The number of submissions approved by the Assembly and Cathaoirleach is distorted for 2020, arising from the inability of the Assembly to hold physical meetings owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. Accordingly, a number of submissions were discussed at online Assembly briefings and subsequently approved by the Cathaoirleach.

Total Submissions; 34

Type of Submission	Level of Submission	Approval
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City/CountyDP=18, • SDZ=1, • Other=15 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional=21, • Local=3, • National=9, • EU/International=1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assembly=11, • Cathaoirleach=13 • Director=10

Eighteen submissions were issued relating to Local Authority County Development Plans. Within the Region, observations were made relating to the issues papers of Laois, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown and South Dublin local authorities. In addition, submissions were issued regarding the Westmeath, Offaly and Louth Draft County Development Plans, and variations to the Kildare, Fingal, Dublin City and Longford Development Plans. The Assembly also made five submissions to local authorities adjacent to the Region namely, Roscommon, Cavan, Carlow, Monaghan and Wexford with respect to their County Development Plan review processes.

In influencing EU and national policy, submissions were made to the DTTAS Sustainable Mobility Policy, the National Policy on Architecture, the National Marine Planning Framework, Significant Water Management Issues in Ireland consultation, Rail Freight 2040 Strategy, the National Economic Recovery Plan, the DHLGH Statement of Strategy, the Department of Transport Statement of Strategy, the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment Statement of Strategy and the EU Commission's Long Term Vision for Rural Areas.

In influencing the regional agenda submissions included the Draft Tourism Masterplan for the Shannon 2020-2030, the Regional Seascape Character Assessment Survey, DART + West. A number of other submissions were made including to the Needs Analysis for the ERDF and the ESF, Proposed Amendments to North Lotts and Grand Canal Docks SDZ, the OPR's Measuring Planning Outcomes Survey and the Sizewell C Nuclear Power Station.



Implementation Groups and Governance

In 2020, implementation of the RSES centred on ongoing engagement that was focused on a bilateral and multilateral basis with key implementation stakeholders. To this end, the Assembly worked with the following stakeholders through dedicated forums, throughout 2020, to advance RSES implementation.

Forum	Date	Attendees
Dublin Regional Action Plan for Jobs	Various	Jim Conway
Midlands Regional Action Plan for Jobs	Various	Jim Conway
Mid - East Regional Action Plan for Jobs	Various	Malachy Bradley
North - East Regional Action Plan for Jobs	Various	Malachy Bradley / Nicci Nolan
Dublin Economic Monitor	Various	Malachy Bradley/ Pauline Riordan
National Climate Change Adaptation Forum	Various	Malachy Bradley / Nicci Nolan
DCCAE REPDF Steering Group	Various	Malachy Bradley
Eastern and Midland CARO Steering Group	Various	Jim Conway
Dublin CARO Steering Group	Various	Malachy Bradley
National SEA Forum	Various	Malachy Bradley/ Nicci Nolan
National AA Forum	Various	Nicci Nolan
Irish Planning Institute	Various	Malachy Bradley
DHLGH - HNDA Advisory Board	Various	Pauline Riordan
DHLGH - Development Plan Guidelines Advisory Group	Various	Malachy Bradley
Cross Border Development Plan Group	Various	Malachy Bradley
Midlands Planning Forum	Various	Clare Bannon
Irish Planning Institute Public Sector Committee	Various	Clare Bannon
Smart Dublin Advisory Board	Various	Pauline Riordan
Midlands Regional Transition Team (MRTT)	Various	Jim Conway
OPR Plan Evaluation Forum	Various	Malachy Bradley/ Clare Bannon

In 2020 further governance structures for the implementation of the RSES were established.

The three pre-existing Strategic Planning Area (SPA) Committees (Dublin, Eastern and Midlands) were re-established and each met on two occasions in 2020. A new SPA Committee for the Dublin Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan was established comprising of a proportion of elected members from each of the 7 local authorities, to oversee the implementation of the MASP. This committee met on three occasions and has made recommendations to the full Assembly. These meetings focused on the role of each area within the RSES and setting implementation priorities.

The Dublin MASP Implementation Group met three times during 2020. A working group was also convened in Q3 2020 to inform a coordinated approach to HNDA in the Dublin Region. During 2020, the MASP Implementation Group agreed terms of reference and governance structures, provided updates on the delivery of strategic development areas since the preparation of RSES, and agreed transitional population projections.

In June 2020, the Assembly also held an online RSES implementation webinar that attracted a large number of attendees from a wide range of stakeholders. The webinar detailed implementation progress of the RSES across the three key principles of Healthy Placemaking, Economic Opportunity and Climate Action, and provided opportunity for attendees to contribute to the discussion.



Monitoring

The Assembly Contributed to the RTPI Research Paper 'Measuring What Matters' which was commissioned by the RTPI with governmental and agency partners across the UK and Ireland.

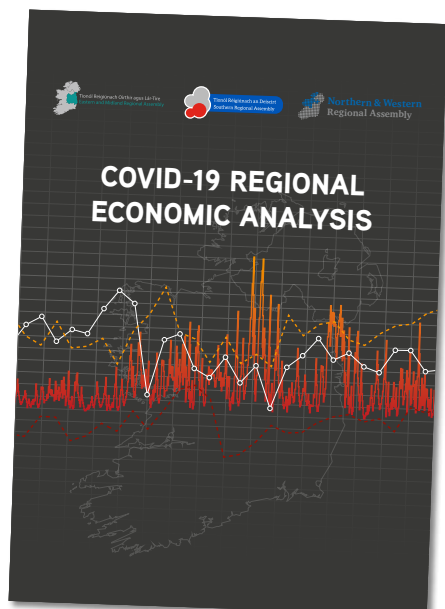
In 2020, the Regional Assemblies, led by the EMRA, initiated the preparation of a Regional Development Monitor (RDM) which will be presented as Ireland's Regional Data Hub. The purpose of the RDM is to monitor performance of the RSES across a number of indicators aligned to the Regional Strategic Outcomes and Key Principles of the RSES. This is expected to be finalised in 2021.

Drive and Deliver Policy and Research to advance RSES Implementation

A Regional Co-Working Analysis was published that identifies the actual number of private sector workers that are capable of operating remotely on a national and regional basis, identifies the name, location and type of co-working hubs in each county in Ireland, as of September 2020. It provides a series of considerations that should assist policymakers in developing additional co-working hubs across Ireland.

COVID-19 Regional Economic Analysis was published that identifies which geographical areas in Ireland are more likely to be exposed to economic disruption caused by the necessary measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 using the GeoDirectory commercial data sets. This report can inform policymakers at a local, regional and national level to the extent of economic exposure and resilience across Ireland.

The Regional Assembly staff presented at DHLGH funding workshops on the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund in county hall in Naas and in the IDA headquarters, and there was a focus on the funds implementing the RSES.



Highlights

In February 2020, The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA) were declared winners in the Plan Making Category at the Irish Planning Awards, in recognition of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES). The award was presented to the plan that represented the best of the art and science of spatial planning, with the Assembly picking up the award ahead of four other shortlisted entries. The panel of judges “the ground-breaking work pioneered by the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly in the preparation of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy. The Plan includes the first Metropolitan Area Spatial Plan ever published in Ireland and aligns investment strategy with spatial planning for the first time ever at regional level. The Project Team brought together an unprecedented number of stakeholders to deliberate and agree upon this plan which champions Ireland’s capital city of Dublin as a smart, climate resilient global city as well as other major towns within the region such as Athlone, Drogheda and Dundalk.”





EU Policy & Funding Framework

EU Policy & Funding Framework

The EU funding cycle runs over seven years. 2020 was the last year of the current cycle covering 2014 to 2020. During this programming period, there were five EU Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF): European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), European Social Fund (ESF), European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF), and Cohesion Fund (CF). Ireland is in receipt of four of these funds: ERDF, ESF, EAFRD and EMFF and is not eligible to the Cohesion fund.

ESIF	Acronym	Allocation
European Regional Development Fund	ERDF	€409.2m
European Social Fund	ESF	€542m
Cohesion Fund	CF	n/a
European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development	EAFRD	€2.19b
European Maritime and Fisheries Fund	EMFF	€147.6m

The shaded areas in table are Structural Funds (ESF, ERDF and CF).

The allocations in the table above represent the EU co-financing element, which in all cases is matched by exchequer spending towards delivering strategic investment objectives.

The common goal of all of the Funds is to bridge the gap between the wealthier and less well-off regions of Europe by co-financing development programmes in order to reduce disparities between regions and create a better economic and social balance within and between Member States. The total amount of ESIF in Ireland for the 2014 - 2020 programming period is **€3,289,837,222** (as per National Partnership Agreement).

The Structural Fund element of the ESIF in Ireland includes both the European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

Ireland will receive €1.153 billion from the Structural Funds for 2014-2020:

- **€542million** will be in the form of ESF assistance. An additional €68m is provided for the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI), programmed through the ESF programme.
- **€409.2 million** is for European Regional Development Fund co-funded programmes including €160,097,179 for the BMW Regional Operation Programme and €249,109,350 Southern and Eastern Regional Region. Further details of these figures are given in the tables below.

The remainder of the ESIF €3.289 billion allocated to Ireland is as follows:

- **€2.19 billion** from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). This includes the LEADER Programme funding of **€157,000,000**.
- **€147.6 million** from the European Maritime & Fisheries Fund (EMFF), also for the period 2014-2020.



Regional Operational Programmes (ROPs)

In Ireland, ERDF is administered through two Regional Operational Programmes (ROP) – the Southern and Eastern ROP and the Border, Midland and Western ROP – which are respectively managed by the Southern Regional Assembly and the Northern and Western Regional Assembly.

These programmes involve significant investment in areas that help create jobs, increase competitiveness and innovation, promote indigenous enterprise and improve the critical infrastructure which facilitates our daily lives.

The programmes were designed to target the following priorities:

1. Strengthening research, technology development and innovation
2. Information and communications technology
3. The creation of new enterprises and support for SMEs
4. Low carbon economy
5. Sustainable urban development

In 2020, the two Irish Managing Authorities were able to request and obtain a modification of their respective ROPs to reallocate funding towards a newly created priority aiming at providing support to the response to the Covid-19 crisis. This was made possible following the adoption by the European Union of two new regulations, the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative (CRII) and CRII +, which allowed to quickly mobilise undeclared cohesion policy funding, including ERDF, to provide financial support to Member States for their immediate response to the Coronavirus crisis and its long-term impact.

Under this new priority, the two ROPs developed Health Support Schemes which fund the HSE's drive to secure and sustain continuity of access and supply of essential Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for the health services in Ireland.

A total of €286.5 million in ERDF funding was awarded to the Health Service Executive (HSE) under these schemes in 2020 to support the cost of essential PPE supplies across Ireland, of which €7,415,632 was awarded under the Border, Midlands & Western (BMW) Regional Operational Programme and €189,165,299 under the Southern & Eastern (S&E) Regional Operational Programme. The latter figure included a transfer of €60m from the ESF co-funded Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning (PEIL) 2014-2020 following the approval of the Programme PEIL Monitoring Committee in September 2020."



Southern and Eastern ROP

As the Managing Authority for the Southern & Eastern Regional Operational Programme (ROP) 2014-2020, the Southern Regional Assembly is responsible for its preparation and delivery, in accordance with the Common Provisions Regulation.

The table below presents the progress in the implementation of the programme, reflecting also the changes operated in 2020.

Priority		Total Funding (following OP Amendments in 2020 to reallocate undeclared expenditure to Priority 7)				Total public eligible expenditure declared (EUR) [1st Jan 14 to 31st Dec 20]		
		ERDF Support	National Counterpart	Total Funding €m	Co-financing Rate	Total	ERDF Support	National support
1	Strengthening RTDI in the S&E Region	21,652,061	21,652,061	43,304,122	50%	43,304,122	21,652,061	21,652,061
2	ICT	-	-	-	50%	-	-	-
3	SME Competiveness	11,933,177	11,933,177	23,866,354	50%	23,866,355	11,933,178	11,933,178
4	Low Carbon Economy	60,878,975	60,878,975	121,757,950	50%	82,711,864	41,355,932	41,355,932
5	Sustainable Urban Development	24,427,315	24,427,315	48,854,630	50%	11,079,113	5,539,557	5,539,557
7	Coronavirus Response	189,165,299	189,165,299	378,330,598	50%	77,920,823	77,920,823	0
6	Technical Assistance	2,009,350	2,009,350	4,018,700	50% ²	536,670	268,335	268,335
TOTAL		310,066,177	310,066,177	620,132,354	50%	239,418,947	158,669,885	80,749,062

² In the case of Priority 7, it is intended to avail of additional flexibilities in the CRII and CRII+ Regulations that allow for 100% co-financing of expenditure provided that it has been declared to the Commission by the end of June 2021. The target is to declare all expenditure under the P7 allocation at the 100% co-financing rate.



Border, Midland and Western ROP

The Northern and Western Regional Assembly is the Managing Authority for the Border, Midland and Western ROP, responsible for its preparation and delivery, in accordance with the Common Provisions Regulation.

The table below presents the progress in the implementation of the programme, reflecting also the changes operated in 2020.

Priority		Total Funding (following OP Amendments in 2020 to reallocate undeclared expenditure to Priority 7)				Total public eligible expenditure declared (EUR) [1st Jan 14 to 31st Dec 20]		
		ERDF Support	National Counterpart	Total Funding €m	Co-financing Rate	Total	ERDF Support 50%	National support 50%
1	Strengthening RTDI in the BMW Region	15,117,08 6.00	15,117,08 6.00	30,234,17 2.00	50%	30,234,17 2.00	15,117,08 6.00	15,117,08 6.00
2	ICT	o	o	o	50%	0	0	0
3	SME Competiveness	9,315,177. 00	9,315,177. 00	18,630,35 4.00	50%	18,630,35 4.00	9,315,177 .00	9,315,177 .00
4	Low Carbon Economy	18,000,00 0	18,000,00 0	36,000,00 0	50%	39,291,75 6.00	19,645,87 8.00	19,645,87 8.00
5	Sustainable Urban Development	13,148,85 0.00	13,148,85 0.00	26,297,70 0.00	50%	3,000,000	1,500,000	1,500,000
7	Coronavirus Response	103,030,6 29.00	103,030,6 29.00	206,061,2 58.00		35,007,90 6.00	17,503,95 3.00	17,503,95 3.00
6	Technical Assistance	2,009,717	2,009,717	4,194,358	50%	676,004.7 3	338,002.3 7	338,002.3 7
TOTAL		160,708,9 22	160,708,9 22	321,417,8 42	50%	126,840,1 92.73	63,420,09 6.37	63,420,09 6.37



EU Programme Monitoring Activities

The EMRA performs a series of important functions in relation to European Affairs. Our regional government status gave us an opportunity to influence EU policy, to access EU funding and to engage in beneficial EU projects and EU networks.

The EMRA represented the Irish Member State in the management of a number of EU Programmes, sitting on the following Programme Monitoring and Steering Committees:

National Partnership Agreement (NPA)

This is the contract between Ireland (as a Member State) and the European Commission for all the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF). These include European Rural Development Fund (ERDF), European Social Fund (ESF), European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD).

European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)

- Border, Midland and Western Regional Operational Programme
- Southern and Eastern Regional Operational Programme
- Interreg North West Europe (NWE)
- Interreg Atlantic Area
- Interreg Ireland-Wales
- PEACE
- URBACT

Meetings and Membership of Programme Monitoring Committees

Each of the Operational Programmes contained in the National Partnership Agreement have a Programme Monitoring Committee (PMC) that is tasked with overseeing the implementation of the programme and ensure the effectiveness and the quality of the implementation of all expenditure under the Programme. The Monitoring Committee considers the progress and impact of the co-financed expenditure and makes recommendations in this regard to the Managing Authority.

European Social Fund (ESF)

- Programme for Employability, Inclusion & Learning (PEIL)

European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF)

- European Maritime and Fisheries Operational Programme

European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)

- Rural Development Programme (LEADER)



EMRA Elected Members representation on Programme Monitoring Committees

Programme	Representative	Meeting Dates
National Partnership Agreement	Cathaoirleach Cllr Pádraig McEvoy	30th November
Border Midland Western ROP	Cllr Catherine Fitzgerald (Full), Cllr Tony McCormack (Alt)	15th September 2020-Joint Committee Meeting
Southern and Eastern ROP	Cllr Mary Hanafin (Full), Cllr Gerry Walsh (Full), Cllr Dermot Lacey (Alt), Cllr Steven Matthews (Alt)	15th September 2020-Joint Committee Meeting
European Social Fund (ESF)	No position on PMC	
European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF)	No position on PMC	
European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)	No position on PMC	
PEACE	Cllr Conor Keelan (Full), Cllr Joe Costello (Alt)	17th November 2020

EMRA officials participating on Programme Monitoring Committees

Programme	Participant	Meeting Attended
National Partnership Agreement	Mr Jim Conway, Director	30th November
Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning (European Social Fund - ESF)	Ms Laure Antoniotti, EU and Corporate Affairs Manager	12th May, 29th September
European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF)	Mr Jim Conway, Director	
European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)	Mr Jim Conway, Director	4th November
Border Midland West Regional Operational Programme	Mr Jim Conway, Director	15th September
Southern and Eastern Regional Operational Programme	Mr Jim Conway, Director	15th September
Regional Operational Programme Quarterly Meeting	Mr Jim Conway, Director Ms Laure Antoniotti, EU and Corporate Affairs Manager	2nd April, 17th September
Interreg Ireland-Wales (PMC)	No position on PMC	
Interreg Ireland-Wales (Steering Committee)	Ms Laure Antoniotti, EU and Corporate Affairs Manager	No meeting
PEACE	No position on PMC	
Interreg Atlantic Area	Ms Laure Antoniotti, EU and Corporate Affairs Manager	8th July
Interreg North-West Europe	Ms Laure Antoniotti, EU and Corporate Affairs Manager	12th February; 2nd April; 23rd September
Interreg Europe	No position on PMC	
Northern Periphery and Arctic	No position on PMC	
URBACT	Ms Pauline Riordan, Senior Executive Planner	11th November

European Territorial Cooperation programmes (ERDF)

The EMRA team follows the implementation and evaluates project proposals for three INTERREG programmes in which Ireland is involved: Ireland Wales, Atlantic Area and North West Europe and for the URBACT programme for which EMRA is also the National Contact Point.

INTERREG Ireland Wales – The EMRA staff sit on the Programme Steering Group and undertook five projects' evaluations over the course of the year. One Programme Monitoring Committee meeting took place in November 2020.

INTERREG Atlantic Area – The EMRA provide ongoing support provision to the Joint Secretariat. No calls were launched in 2020. The EMRA participated in Programme Monitoring Committee meeting in July 2020.

INTERREG North West Europe (NWE): The EMRA provide ongoing support provision to the Joint Secretariat. The EMRA participated in Programme Monitoring Committee meetings in February, April and September. The EMRA team assessed project proposals for the 1st capitalisation call and call 9 step 2; a total of 33 projects were assessed. A second capitalisation call was launched at the end of the year.

URBACT – URBACT promotes integrated sustainable urban development. The EMRA attended the URBACT Monitoring Committee meeting in November where the launch of the final round of new pilot networks under URBACT III was approved.

The EMRA also provides the URBACT National Contact Point for Ireland (NUP). This role involves communicating about the programme and disseminating its results, advising and assisting Irish stakeholders willing to participate in Urbact activities and accompanying Irish participants in Urbact projects in the implementation of their activities. Throughout the year, the NUP engaged with several Irish towns and cities engaged in Urbact networks. The NUP participated in the Urbact e-University that took place online in October to support Action Planning Network to kickstart their activities through a series of workshops. The Irish NUP acted as facilitator during several workshops.

In 2020 the EMRA promoted URBACT in Ireland through 5 newsletters, 9 articles on the URBACT Ireland webpage and 31 posts on the URBACT Ireland Twitter and Facebook pages, the URBACT Ireland Facebook has 86 followers and the URBACT Ireland Twitter has 738 followers.



Preparation for the next programming period 2021-2027

The next EU programming period will run from 2021 to 2027. Legislative proposals for this next round were published in 2018 by the European Commission and while they were still being negotiated throughout 2020 by the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers, preparations for the design and implementation of the future funds continued. EMRA represented the regional position to be taken into account through regular contacts with DPER representatives and the Irish Permanent Representation to the EU.

EMRA is heavily involved in the preparation of the next round of cohesion policy funding in Ireland, especially for ERDF. Convinced that this new period brings an opportunity to align national and regional policy with the delivery of EU funding, EMRA has been advocating for a renewed architecture and governance structure of the funds that would reflect the different regional needs and ensure that European Regional funding is managed at the regional level.

Following its nomination to the Partnership Process Steering Group set up under the aegis of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER), EMRA took part in several meetings throughout the year to oversee the preparation of the future Partnership Agreement that will govern the management and delivery of European Structural and Investment Funds in Ireland for 2021-2027. Further to this, EMRA was officially invited by DPER to begin work on the next operational programme(s) in conjunction with and in cooperation with the Department and the other two Assemblies.

EMRA took part in the consultation launched by DPER to prepare the "Needs Analysis" that would inform and underpin the development of the Partnership Agreement and the future ERDF and ESF+ Programmes. Together with the other Regional Assemblies, DPER and the Department of Education and Skills, EMRA organised the public consultation on the future of ERDF and ESF+ in Ireland that consisted of an online event with regional workshops that gathered more than 120 attendees and a written online questionnaire which received 109 responses. The workshop conclusions and questionnaires replied were analysed and summarised in a report.

In October 2020, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform has decided to maintain the current structure in place for 2021-2027, with Northern and Western Regional Assembly and Southern Regional Assembly acting as the Managing Authorities of Operational Programmes. NWRA will manage the Programme for the Northern and Western Region, while the SRA will manage the Programme for both the Southern Region and Eastern and Midland Region. EMRA will have "an enhanced role" in the governance of the programme, working closely with SRA and fully participating in the design and implementation of the future programme.

Since then, EMRA sits in a series of working groups tasked with the development of the future Partnership Agreement and ERDF programmes and is ensuring that ERDF will support projects of regional interest and relevance.

In order to ensure appropriate input from EMRA members in the preparation of the programme, the Assembly set up a dedicated EU sub-committee made up of seven Members and the Cathaoirleach. This sub-committee will primarily focus on the development of the programme for the Region but will also engage with all EU-related activities of the Assembly. The sub-committee met for the first time in December 2020 and will continue its work throughout 2021.

European Territorial Cooperation programmes

Having been appointed by DPER in 2019 to take part in the preparation of the North West Europe and Atlantic area INTERREG programmes, EMRA continued its engagement with the relevant task forces in 2020.

- **North-West Europe:** four task-force meetings were organised over the year, consultants were selected to carry out the territorial analysis and assist in the drafting of the future programme and a process leader was recruited to lead the work of the task force. Work commenced on the design of the future programme through a range of thematic working group. EMRA specifically took part in the territorial analysis working group and the project development working group.
- **Atlantic area:** seven task-force meetings were organised over the year. Consultants were selected to carry out the territorial analysis and help design and draft the future programme.

In addition, EMRA engaged in the preparation of the future PEACE+ and Urbact programmes:

- **PEACE +:** EMRA took part in the three meetings of the PEACE + Programme Development Steering Group that were held in 2020. EMRA also attended a stakeholder event held in Louth in February. EMRA responded to the public consultation on the future of the programme.
- **URBACT:** EMRA also sit on the group tasked with the preparation of the future Urbact programme. Two meetings took place in May and November 2020 and work commenced on the design of the future programme. EMRA also responded to the EU Survey on Cities' Needs Analysis that will feed into the preparation of Urbact IV.

Other EU related activities

ENCORE (Environmental Conference of the Regions of Europe)

2020 was the second year of the EMRA presidency of ENCORE and the Region was due to organise and host the bi-annual conference of the network in September in Tullamore. However, due to the covid-19 crisis, the decision was taken to extend EMRA's presidency of the network by a year and to postpone the conference to September 2021. The ENCORE biennial conference is the main tool of the network, gathering regional environment ministers and other political leaders. Regions and political leaders from all over Europe will be present, sharing knowledge, experience and good practices and building partnerships.

An ENCORE Steering Group Meeting and expert exchange on circular economy took place in Kymenlaakso, Finland on the 28th-30th of January. Three further steering group meetings were organised and chaired by EMRA in May, October and December. In light of the postponement of the conference, it was decided to organise a series of events in 2021 in the run-up to the conference.

EMRA worked with Failte Ireland to procure and secure a Professional Conference Organiser to assist the Assembly in the preparation of the 2021 event.



Just Transition

The Just Transition to a carbon-neutral economy is a key focus of public policies both at European level and in Ireland. In Ireland, there is a need to accelerate the transition from peat in the Midlands and EMRA has naturally been involved in this process.

At the national level, EMRA had regular contacts throughout 2020 with the Department of Environment, Climate and Communication (DECC) and drafted a Submission to the consultation organised by DECC on the preparation of a Just Transition Plan for the Midlands. This engagement with the Department resulted in EMRA being invited to join the evaluation steering group of the National Just Transition Fund. The Assembly engaged with the Office of the Just Transition Commissioner and was consulted to inform the Recommendations contained in the Commissioner's 1st Progress Report. Following on from this report, EMRA has been assigned as an organisation responsible for the achievement of goals outlined in the Strategy.

At regional level, the Assembly engaged with the Midlands Regional Transition Team (MRTT) and was invited to join the MRTT steering committee.

At EU level, following the publication of the proposal for the EU Just Transition Fund (JTF) regulation in 2019, EMRA in tandem with IREO, analysed the proposal and actively advocated for a strong regional focus in the programme through regular contacts with DPER and the Irish Permanent Representation during the negotiations at the EU level.



Irish Regions European Office

The Irish Regions European Office (IREO) is a shared service provides a shared service for the three Regional Assemblies and 31 local authorities of Ireland (LRAs). Operationally the office is part of the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly and with the support of the Department for Housing, Planning and Local Government, the focus is on bringing the EU closer to the wider local government sector and vice versa.

In 2020, the IREO developed a new strategy which aims to ensure that the office delivers timely, strategic advice and information on EU policy developments to the three Regional Assemblies and local authorities in Ireland and that it coordinates and supports the Irish Delegation to the Committee of the Regions.

This strategy will be delivered by:

- Raising awareness and communicating the opportunities for participation in EU funding programmes
- Seeking opportunities for influencing EU policy developments
- Building capacity, networks and partnerships with other regions in the EU
- Signpost to the National Contact Points based in Regional Assemblies, highlighting their role in providing pre and post project development support
- Raising the profile of the strengths of local and regional Government in Ireland to European partners and to the EU institutions.

Raising Awareness and Communication

Whilst the opportunities for organising physical meetings in Brussels were eliminated, due to the pandemic, the IREO launched online roadshows, taking a virtual tour of the country to provide updates on the key EU policy and funding opportunities which will impact on local authorities and regional assemblies. Top of the agenda were discussions about the EU budget, the future of cohesion policy funding in Ireland – particularly ERDF and the new round of INTERREG. Roadshows were held with EMRA and its local authorities. Of particular note is the work undertaken between IREO, EMRA and Dublin City Council. Both IREO and EMRA participated in a number of initiatives, organised by Dublin City Council to further examine EU policy and EU funding opportunities for the Council, as well as sessions looking at the resources required to undertake this role. Also, to note, IREO and EMRA carried out individual roadshow sessions with Longford County Council and Offlay County Council.

At the end of 2020, the IREO published the newly revamped newsletter. This bi-monthly newsletter will keep Irish Local Authorities and Regional Assemblies up to speed with the latest developments on the work of the IREO, the EU policy arena as well as the EU funding landscape. The newsletter will highlight the important work of the Irish Delegation to the Committee of the Regions (CoR) and will showcase the EU projects involving local authorities.



Influencing European Policy

During 2020, the IREO continued to monitor and report on important EU policy developments. Given the outbreak of the COVID 19 pandemic, EU policy developments were quickly skewed towards responding as a bloc to the emergency. A comprehensive and ambitious recovery plan – REACT EU was launched by the European Commission, with a significant focus on cohesion policy as a tool to ensure a balanced recovery for all regions which was finally agreed by the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers in December 2020. The package will provide additional funding for existing of new dedicated programs under the Investment for Growth and Job goal (IGJ) (ERDF and ESF) and for existing cross- border cooperation programs under the European territorial cooperation goal.

In addition, a new package, the Recovery and Resilience Facility (the Facility) will make €672.5 billion in loans and grants available to support reforms and investments undertaken by Member States. The aim is to mitigate the economic and social impact of the coronavirus pandemic and make European economies and societies more sustainable, resilient and better prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the green and digital transitions. Ireland will avail of €53 million in grants for 2021 and 2022 with possibly further funding in 2023, depending on the economic situation.

As well as these ‘unexpected’ policy developments, the EU was dealing with the UK exit from the EU and from an Irish perspective, the Brexit implications for Ireland were at the forefront of the European Commission. The IREO worked closely with Irish Members of the Committee of the Regions to ensure that the issues for Ireland in relation to trade, peace and stability were highlighted across the EU institutions and other Member States.

The Multi-Annual Financial Framework, otherwise known as the EU budget was also centre stage during 2020, with an agreement reached at the end of the year on the EU's spending priorities for the 2021 – 2027 period.

The IREO also monitored policy developments in relation to agriculture, trade and environment, including the new EU Green Deal. Developments on the establishment of the Just Transition Mechanism were also closely monitored and input provided to ensure Irish participation in the programme. During 2020, IREO worked closely with key EU stakeholders and policy makers, including Irish local and regional representation on Brussels-based specialised networks in relation to Cohesion Policy negotiations and Brexit. IREO regularly communicate Irish interests, including the Irish MEPs, European Commission officials and Irish Government officials in the Irish Permanent Representation to the EU.

Building capacity, networks, and partnerships

The IREO is advising local authorities on a regular basis on the types and forms of networks that can assist with understanding EU policy and funding programs, as well as assist with building partnerships.

Raising the profile of the strengths of local and regional Government

A highlight of 2020 was the organisation of activities during the European Week of Regions and Cities in October. The IREO hosted a virtual event entitled ‘Green Cities by Co-Design’. This event, co-organized by the Greater London Authority, brought together 9 cities from across Europe to examine how citizen engagement and smart technology work in building green cities. The IREO was particularly delighted to showcase the work of Smart Dublin and Limerick City and County Council. Both cities outlined how engagement with the local community is essential to combat climate change and make an impact on the urban agenda.



Irish Delegation to the Committee of the Regions

IREO is the secretariat to the Irish delegation to the Committee of the Regions and co-ordinates the work of the members of the national delegation to the Committee of the Regions (CoR).

2020 saw the start of the new Committee of the Regions mandate for the next five years.

The European Union's assembly of local and regional representatives, the CoR has 329 members from across the 27 EU Member States, all of whom are democratically elected and/or hold a political mandate in their home country. The CoR's role is to inform the development of EU legislation and future European policies through the input of those most closely representing communities, with a focus on those EU policy areas and proposals that most greatly affect regions and cities.

The CoR mainly presents its views through written opinions or resolutions, which are developed in one of six thematic commissions covering the following policy areas:

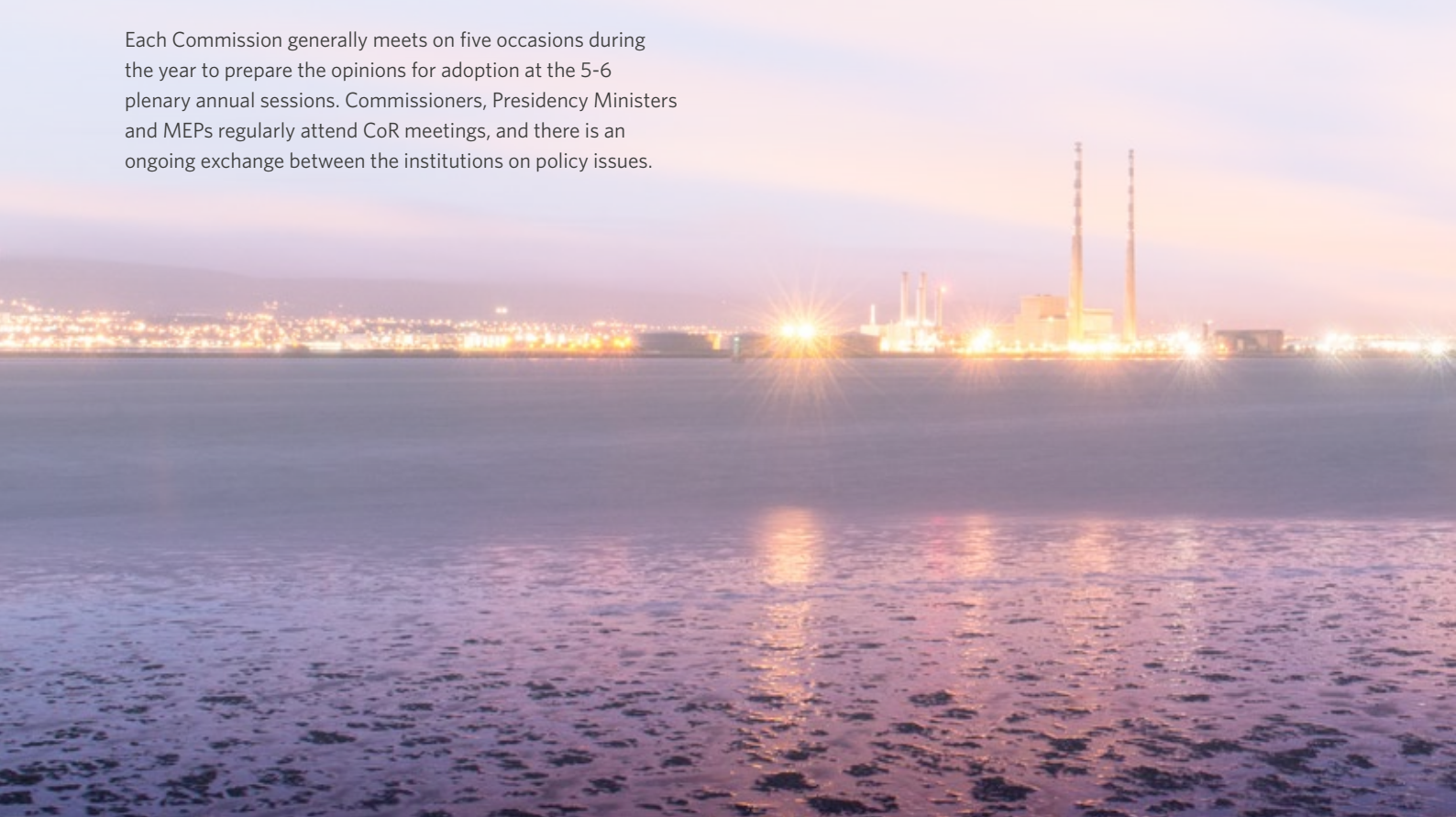
- Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs (CIVEX);
- Territorial Cohesion Policy and EU Budget (COTER);
- Economic Policy (ECON);
- Environment, Climate Change and Energy (ENVE);
- Natural Resources (NAT);
- Social Policy, Education, Employment, Research and Culture (SEDEC).

Each Commission generally meets on five occasions during the year to prepare the opinions for adoption at the 5-6 plenary annual sessions. Commissioners, Presidency Ministers and MEPs regularly attend CoR meetings, and there is an ongoing exchange between the institutions on policy issues.

The Irish Delegation 2020 - Eastern and Midland Region Representatives

The newly nominated representatives were formally appointed in early 2020. Below is a list of CoR representatives for the Eastern and Midland Region for 2020 - 2025.

Full Members	
Cllr Kate Feeney	Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown Co Co
Cllr Eamon Dooley	Offally Co Co
Cllr Aoife Breslin	Kildare Co Co
Cllr Caroline Dwane Stanley	Laois Co Co
Cllr Una Power	Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown Co Co
Alternate Members	
Cllr Emma Blain	Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown Co Co
Cllr. Alison Gilliland	Dublin City Council
Cllr. Pdraig McEvoy	Kildare Co Co



Legislative Works

July

- Cllr Michael Murphy opinion on the Implementation of Free Trade Agreements – the local and regional perspective was adopted by majority during July 2020 plenary.

October

- Cllr Declan McDonnell's opinion on the Local and Regional Authorities in the permanent dialogue with citizens was adopted at October 2020 plenary.

December

- Cllr Enda Stenson's opinion on the EU Strategy for Rural Revival was adopted at December 2020 plenary.

The Delegation continued to act as the key link between the Committee and the Irish Representation. The Delegation also held meetings with Irish MEPs as well as with the Irish Commission representatives to voice the needs of the Irish local government on the EU stage. The Delegation, assisted by the IREO, continued observing all relevant policy dossiers and made interventions, via amendments as well as commission and plenary interventions.

Priorities of the 2020 Work Programme

The CoR contributed to a broader debate led by the European Commission on shape the future priorities of the EU, with a view to the post-Brexit period and the mandate of the newly elected European Parliament in May 2019. To respond to ongoing discussions at the highest levels of the EU, the CoR held a Summit in Romania to present its declaration by local and regional leaders on the future of Europe, which voiced the local and regional concerns on the functioning of the EU, particularly in light of new term of office of the EU institutions.

In 2020, the CoR continued to promote its position on the key Multiannual Financial Framework and in seeking to influence the ongoing negotiations around funding, particularly in light of recovery post-COVID 19 pandemic. Irish Delegation took part in both debates as well as external events to voice the concerns of Irish local and regional authorities regarding future EU funding. The Delegation also held a number of meetings with Irish officials from EU institutions and the Irish Permanent Representation on the matter. Irish Delegation are members of the #CohesionAlliance, a group set up in 2018 to defend a strong budget for a cohesive Europe.

The future relationship between the EU and the UK was a priority for the Irish Delegation, taking the position that the CoR should maintain as close a relationship as possible with the UK following Brexit. All full and alternate Irish members continue to be members of the interregional group on Brexit. The group continues to be the CoR's main platform for knowledge and information exchange in relation to Brexit. Last year also saw the beginning of discussions in relation to a CoR EU-UK Consultative Group to allow the UK to participate in the work of the CoR post-Brexit, particularly in areas of interest such as agriculture or ETC.





Projects

Projects

In 2020, the Assembly has been involved in a number of projects, all co-funded by the European Union. Activities of these project provide a valuable insight that can be useful in regional policy development.

PROGRESS (1st August 2019 - 31st July 2023)



PROGRESS is an INTERREG funded project with the objective of promoting improved governance for ecosystem services across 6 European regions, the first phase of this project is

sharing Good Practice between these regions and presenting them in a best practice handbook to inform an Action Plan for the implementation of Ecosystem Services in each Region.

EMRA is a partner on the Interreg Europe PROGRESS project which brings together six regional partner organisations from across the EU - Ireland, Italy, Spain, Latvia, Romania and Hungary - to exchange experience for the design and enhancement of natural ecosystems and the environmental, social and economic services they provide. The aim of the project is to promote the governance of regional ecosystem services through policy learning and capacity building activities. Through stakeholder network activity and the development of a dedicated Action Plan, the objective of the PROGRESS partnership for EMRA is to improve the governance of ecosystem services across the Eastern and Midland Region.

Over the course of the year, the project has continued at pace and EMRA has participated fully in all project activities including Good Practice identification through local stakeholder engagement (the NBDC All-Ireland Pollinator Plan Framework, the NPWS Ecosystem and Ecosystem Services Mapping Pilot and the Coillte Nature Dublin Mountains Makeover), communication & networking activities, two international project seminars (March and October), and an online training workshop (June).

Highlights from 2020 include: the inclusion of three EMRA Good Practices on the Interreg Europe website and in both PROGRESS project handbooks following competitive selection and scoring procedures over two thematic semesters; strong EMRA stakeholder representation at international learning events with over forty unique Irish participants from national, regional and local government and agencies, as well as relevant sectoral and interest groups in attendance; EMRA organisation of the 2nd Thematic Seminar online in October, and; commencement of Action Plan development to feed into RSES and MASP implementation for ecosystem services and green infrastructure objectives based on international exchange of experience.

Next2Met (1st August 2019 - 31st January 2023)



Next2Met is an innovative interregional exchange project which aims to increase the attractiveness of the Midlands Region as a region to live, work and visit focusing on soft digitalisation measures. The project focuses

on attracting and retaining qualified people and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the Midlands Region.

The project brings together 6 regional and local actors and 1 Advisory Partner sharing this common challenge and working together to implement policy solutions.

Over the course of 2020 Next2Met participated in three Interregional Learning Events hosted by project partners and further bilateral exchanges to discuss and exchange good practices in relation to enhancing the overall attractiveness of the Midlands Region through soft digitalisation measures.

Interregional learning and good practices were then shared with approximately 100 Midland stakeholders through 1:1 bilateral exchange and 3 stakeholder events. The Midland stakeholder event held on 1st of April 2020 engaged with 28 stakeholders representing the public, private and non-profit sector to discuss good practices that focused on digitalisation in the Midlands. Two further events organised by Next2Met focused on engaging with stakeholders from the Agri-sector. The first event showcased the application of digital solutions (the Digibale project) within the Agri-sector to 16 stakeholders and the second event engaged with 23 stakeholders from the Agri-sector, academics, manufacturing and software industry to discuss SMART agriculture in the Midlands.

Quantitative Greenhouse Gas Impact Assessment Method for Spatial Planning Policy (QGasSP) (12 month project – ends October 2021)

This is a 12-month ESPON Targeted Analysis Project, EMRA are the lead stakeholder. The aim of this research project is the development and delivery of a robust, simple and proportionate method for quantifying and forecasting the relative GHG impacts of alternative spatial planning policies, with pan-European applicability. The tender documents were received in May 2020 and the Service Provider appointed in August 2020. A kick-off meeting with all the stakeholders (Scottish Government, Department of Infrastructure Northern Ireland and Regional Council of Kymenlaakso, Finland) held in October 2020 to discuss the project objectives, the methods and approach and agree the time schedule going forward. From October to November 2020 all stakeholders active in discussions with the Service Provider to agree data sourcing and pilot case studies.

In November 2020, the first deliverable of the project – the Inception report – was received (Project tasks and approach to model development and risk assessment). Feedback and comments on this report were organised and collated by EMRA.

The agreed Irish pilot case study for the project is County Meath. EMRA also secured an Irish external observer to sit on the steering committee which is the DHLGH. A webpage dedicated to the project has been produced on the ESPON website and an update on the project with accompanying video presentation is available on the EMRA's website.



Care Peat - 2019-2022



Care-Peat is an Interreg project with nine partners working together to reduce carbon emissions and restore the carbon storage capacity

of different types of peatlands in North-West Europe. The main partnership consists of five knowledge institutes and four nature organisations from Belgium, France, Ireland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. EMRA is an Associate Member of the INTERREG NWE Project Care-Peat.

The Care-Peat project investigates and demonstrates innovative technologies for new restoration and carbon measurement techniques and involve local and regional stakeholders. Together the project partners will develop and test new techniques and socio-economic strategies for carbon reduction.

In 2020, EMRA engaged with Care-Peat through the attendance at Care-Peat policy events including Joint Advisory Panel Meeting (June) and the project policy webinar (October) over 150 experts, farmers, landowners, and policy makers joined the Peatland Policy webinar hosted by Care Peat. The webinar sought to identify barriers, enablers and policy gaps in peatland restoration.





Corporate

Corporate

In 2020 the Corporate Section continued to provide the administrative and organisation support services for the Assembly and the ongoing management of same. Functions such as Finance, Corporate Services and Human resources are delivered in line with organisational objectives.

The 2020 Programme of Works was adopted in January 2020 and circulated to the constituent Local Authorities.

Objectives of the 2020 Programme of Works included;

- Preparation of a new corporate plan
- Preparation of the annual report

The Corporate Plan 2019-2024 was drafted by the executive team on the basis of workshops held in 2019 and was adopted in July 2020 by the elected members. The Corporate Plan presents the functions of the Assembly and sets out EMRA's vision, objectives, and values.



Over these five years, the Regional Assembly will pursue three main strategic goals:

- Drive the regional agenda by ensuring ongoing and meaningful engagement with stakeholders to ensure coherence of regional development and shape policy-making
- Deliver concrete impact on the ground by delivering projects and be a resource and support for the region
- Grow as a region by raising our regional profile and strengthening the organisation

The 2019 annual report was drafted by the executive team and adopted by the elected members at the July meeting.

As meetings could no longer be held in person because of public health restrictions, necessary arrangements were made to ensure online briefings could be organised for Members. Overall, five monthly briefings and two meetings were held online.

Preparations commenced to renew the lease of the EMRA premises which was about to expire. Members were informed at the July meeting and approved the renewal of the lease.

Human Resources

EMRA supported the Elected Members and staff through an unprecedented period of change arising from the impact of the COVID 19 Pandemic. The Pandemic brought significant workplace challenges that required new flexible innovative human resource supports to assist both the organisation, members, and staff. Following public health guidelines, the whole EMRA staff started working from home in March 2020 and remote working arrangements continued until the end of the year. In order to facilitate staff working remotely, EMRA equipped all staff members with necessary IT services and hardware. Online team meetings were organised throughout the year to ensure staff welfare and continuity of service.

The Human Resources Section continued to implement the adopted Workforce Plan for EMRA and worked with management across the organisation to deliver on their resourcing requirements in the context of the objectives of the Corporate Plan. Following a successful recruitment campaign held in 2019, two EU project officers were appointed in January 2020 to work on the INTERREG projects Next2Met and Progress.

Additional staff were recruited and appointed through the following recruitment campaigns over the course of the year:

- Clerical Officer
- EU Support Officer (temporary)

Human Resources engaged with the Local Government Management Agency's HR Network which facilitates knowledge exchange in regard to recruitment, retention and HR policies.

The commencement of the changeover of Version 19 to Version 28 of Core HR took place and a timeframe of going live in 2021 was agreed.

Staff members undertook necessary training throughout the year: Financial Management System

In 2020, EMRA maintained its provision of staff support services as part of an overall employee assistance programme. Usage Reports are produced on a monthly basis as part of the on-going commitment to assist staff during the pandemic.

Finance

The main functions of the Finance section in 2020 included:

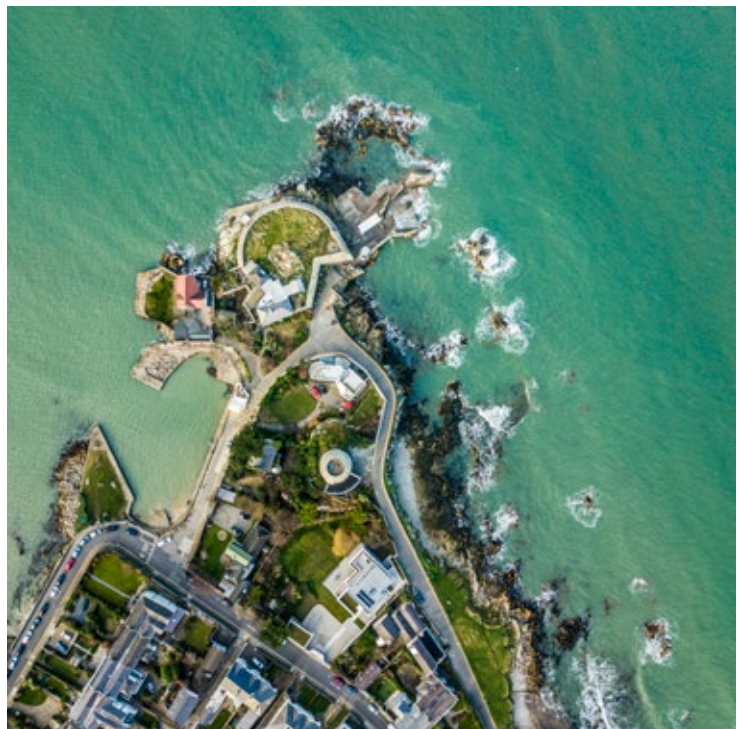
- Preparation of the Annual Financial Statement 2019 (Adopted by the Members in July 2020)
- Financial Management, procurement, and control
- Payment, recoupment, and reconciliation of accounts
- Financial administration of the IREO in Brussels
- Administration of EMRA payroll and superannuation through the local government payroll and superannuation shared services centre (MyPay)
- Preparation of the annual Budget for 2021.

The Corporate team facilitated the annual audit performed by the government auditor which took place in November and December 2020.

GDPR and Freedom of Information

The Data Protection Officer provided training for staff to gain an understanding of GDPR and how best their specific obligations. The DPO continued to provide advice in relation to GDPR throughout 2020.

During 2020, the FOI officer co-ordinated management of requests received under the Freedom of Information legislation. In total, the Assembly received 3 FOI requests in 2020.



Communication

Social Media

In 2020 we have continued to expand our online presence on various social media channels. We currently have accounts with three platforms:



Eastern and Midland
Regional Assembly



@EMRASsembly &
@IrishRegions_EU



Eastern and Midland
Regional Assembly

Twitter is the most important dissemination platform for EMRA as most of our stakeholders and partners have a presence there. Our Twitter audience has grown by 12% between January and December 2020 and we have reached 624 followers by the end of the year. The growth was fully organic (non-paid for). Our Facebook page had 198 followers and our LinkedIn profile had 130 followers on 31st Dec 2020.

Website

Throughout 2020 we have continued to maintain our website www.emra.ie and update it with relevant information particularly during the Covid-19 crisis. We used the website to disseminate information about our involvement in the EU Interreg projects and implementation of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy. We have made preparations to redevelop the website in the course of 2021.

Other communication activities

In 2020 a number of reports were produced by the planning and economic development team. In cooperation with the other two Regional Assemblies we have promoted and disseminated the findings of the Covid-19 Regional Co-working analysis which attracted attention from both regional and national media.

The Corporate Team took part in consultations as part of development of the new local government jobs website, a project coordinated by the Local Government Management Agency.

Irish Planning Award for the RSES



Following the awarding of the Irish Planning Award to the RSES by the Irish Planning Institute we have been featured in the spring edition of the Council Review journal (page 28).





Annexes

List of staff

Jim Conway

Director

Malachy Bradley

Assistant Director and Senior Planner

Laure Antoniotti

EU and Corporate Affairs Manager

Teresa Lennon,

Head of the IREO

Juan Martinez (career break),

Economist for the three Assemblies

John Daly,

Economist for the three Assemblies

Pauline Riordan,

Senior Executive Planner

Clare Bannon,

Senior Executive Planner

Nicci Nolan,

Senior Executive Planner

Michael Brennan,

EU affairs officer

Travis O'Doherty (Secondment),

Research and Policy Officer

Brid Greenan,

EU Project Officer

Owen Douglas,

EU Project Officer

Simon Musial,

Senior Staff officer

Agata Kolodynska,

EU Support Officer

Helena Stromberg,

EU Support Officer

Alan Lambe,

Assistant Staff officer

Ross Higgins,

Clerical officer

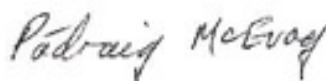
Geraldine Kenny,

Clerical officer

Income and Expenditure Account 31 December 2019

Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly		
Expenditure	EMRA 2019	EMRA 2018
Salaries	819,013	765,025
Office Equipment & Supplies	7,492	17,002
Information Technology	10,828	23,726
Communications & Postage	6,102	8,089
Members Annual Allowances	32,751	44,182
<i>Travel & Subsistence Allowances:</i>		
I - Members Travel & Subsistence	3,389	5,314
II - Members conferences	3,488	7,131
III - Staff Travel and Subsistence	56,304	46,845
Rent	75,413	78,000
Insurance	8,884	3,899
Training	5,755	14,807
Consultancy & professional Fees	5,391	269,172
Facilities, Energy & Rates charges	49,816	65,934
Advertising	8,630	9,434
Audit Fee	6,269	6,227
Miscellaneous	8,486	15,354
EU Affairs & IRO (COR)	142,803	256,905
EU Operational Programme	7,248	4,108
Resilens	0	46,598
I.E. Network	34,289	95,054
Urb-ADAPT	0	4,302
URBACT	46,671	
Urbanarea	2	
Next2Met Interreg Programme	10,161	
Progress Interreg project	7,519	
RSES	103,780	
SPI	297	
Expenditure total	1,460,780	1,787,110
Income		
Local Authorities Contributions	1,188,451	1,152,406
Other Income	41,980	249,330
Superannuation	23,356	24,934
Committee of the Regions	144,797	256,005
COR Misc	791	900
Resilens	9,905	46,598
IE Network	95,618	95,054
Urb-ADAPT	0	0
EU Operational Programme	7,458	
URBACT	48,004	
Next2Met Interreg Programme	7,670	
Progress Interreg project	5,724	
RSES	17,964	
SPI	0	
Receipts total	1,591,719	1,825,227
Difference between Income + Expenditure	130,938	38,117
Opening balance at 01/01/2019	702,825	664,707
Closing Balance at end of year Surplus	833,763	702,825

Signed:



Cllr. Pádraig McEvoy, Cathaoirleach



Mr. Jim Conway, Director

Consolidated Balance Sheet for the Financial Year ending 31st December 2019

Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly		
Balance Sheet 2019		
Fixed Assets		
IT Equip	€5,000	€5,000
Furniture & Fixtures	€0	€0
Heritage Assets	€10,000	€10,000
	€15,000	€15,000
Current Assets		
Cash at Bank	€522,129	€568,972
Debtors	€472,238	€481,197
Petty Cash	€376	€289
Prepayments	€0	€20,954
	€994,742	€1,071,413
Current Liabilities		
Creditors & Accruals	€160,979	€272,970
Deferred income	€0	€95,618
Bank	€0	€0
	€160,979	€368,588
Net Current Assets	€833,763	€702,825
Net Assets	€848,763	€717,825
Financed by		
Balance @ 01/01/19	€702,825	€664,707
General Reserve	€0	€0
Inherited Fixed Assets from old DRA	€15,000	€15,000
(Deficit)\Excess of Income over Expenditure	€130,938	€38,117
	€848,763	€717,825

Members' payments

Members Allowances & Expenses 2020

Members (Cllr.)	Fixed Allowance	Training	Committee of Regions	Conferences/Training
Daryl Barron (Dublin)	€ 225.73	€ -	€ -	€ -
Emma Blain (Dublin)	€ 128.25	€ -	€ -	€ -
Aoife Breslin (Kildare)(CoR)	€ 1,064.70	€ -	€ 99.21	€ -
Fintan Brett (Kildare)	€ 692.43	€ -	€ -	€ -
John Browne (Longford)	€ 2,012.38	€ -	€ -	€ -
Michael Carrigy (Longford)	€ 283.56	€ -	€ -	€ -
Emma Coffey (Louth)	€ 1,369.20	€ -	€ -	€ -
Joe Costello (Dublin)	€ 51.30	€ -	€ -	€ -
Gillian Coughlan (Cork)(CoR)	€ -	€ -	€ 299.42	€ -
Avril Cronin (Wicklow)	€ 978.19	€ -	€ -	€ -
Eamon Dooley (Offaly)	€ 1,405.90	€ -	€ -	€ -
Eamon Dooley (Offaly) (Cathaoirleachs Allowance)	€ 5,850.00	€ -	€ -	€ -
Laura Donaghy (Dublin)	€ 102.61	€ -	€ -	€ -
Caroline Dwane (Laois)(CoR)	€ 1,414.32	€ -	€ 91.31	€ -
Kate Feeney (Dublin)	€ 564.34	€ -	€ -	€ -
Brian Fitzgerald (Meath)	€ 692.43	€ -	€ -	€ -
Deirdre Forde (Cork)(CoR)	€ -	€ -	€ 442.52	€ -
Tom Fortune (Wicklow)	€ 283.39	€ -	€ -	€ -
Catherine Fitzgerald (Laois)	€ 1,539.24	€ -	€ -	€ -
Eddie Fitzpatrick (Offaly)	€ 1,405.96	€ -	€ -	€ -
Mary Freehill (Dublin)	€ 307.81	€ -	€ -	€ -
James (Jim) Gildea (Dublin)	€ 469.79	€ -	€ -	€ -
Alison Gilliland (Dublin)	€ 513.01	€ -	€ -	€ -
Mary Hanafin (Dublin)	€ 615.64	€ -	€ -	€ -
David Healy (Dublin)	€ 772.89	€ -	€ -	€ -
Deirdre Heney (Dublin)	€ 225.73	€ -	€ -	€ -
Patrick Hill (Westmeath)	€ 134.61	€ -	€ -	€ -
Janet Horner (Dublin)	€ 461.72	€ -	€ -	€ -
Vincent Jackson (Dublin)	€ 724.95	€ -	€ -	€ -
Pamela Kearns (Dublin)	€ 225.73	€ -	€ -	€ -
Conor Keelan (Louth)	€ 1,676.81	€ -	€ -	€ -
Dermot Lacey (Dublin)	€ 564.33	€ -	€ -	€ -
Brigid Manton (Dublin)	€ 626.39	€ -	€ -	€ -
Erin McGreenhan (Louth)	€ 646.18	€ -	€ -	€ -
Jimmy McClearn (Galway)(CoR)	€ -	€ -	€ 168.60	€ -
Tony McCormack (Offaly)	€ 672.65	€ -	€ -	€ -
Padraig McEvoy (Kildare)	€ 761.41	€ -	€ -	€ -
Declan McDonnell (Galway)(CoR)	€ -	€ -	€ 194.08	€ -
Conor D McGuinness (Waterford)(CoR)	€ -	€ -	€ 191.05	€ -
Paddy Meade (Meath)	€ 1,587.45	€ -	€ -	€ -
Aisling Moran (Laois)	€ 887.68	€ -	€ -	€ -
Micheal Murphy (Tipperary)(CoR)	€ -	€ -	€ 575.72	€ -
Colm Murray (Longford)	€ 708.89	€ -	€ -	€ -
Clare O'Byrne (Dublin)	€ 51.30	€ -	€ -	€ -
Peter O'Brien (Dublin)	€ 338.60	€ -	€ -	€ -
Robert O'Donoghue	€ 57.57	€ -	€ -	€ -
Damien O'Reilly (Meath)	€ 693.59	€ -	€ -	€ -
Aengus O'Rourke (Westmeath)	€ 863.76	€ -	€ -	€ -
Robert Power (Kildare)	€ 486.40	€ -	€ -	€ -
William Priestly (Dublin)	€ 51.30	€ -	€ -	€ -
Gerry Walsh (Dublin)	€ 798.37	€ -	€ -	€ -





**Eastern & Midland
Regional Assembly**

3rd Floor
Ballymun Civic Centre
Main Street
Ballymun
Dublin 9
D09 C8P5
+353 (0) 1 807 4482
www.emra.ie

