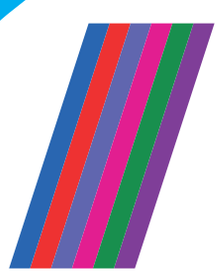
Centre for
Cross Border Cooperation

S2o25

Implementing the opportunities from peace:

An overview of the collective impacts of the North-South Implementation Bodies established under Strand 2 of the 1998 Good Friday/Belfast Agreement

AUGUST 2025



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To read the full version of the report,
including the individual case studies for
each North South Implementation Body,
please scan the QR-code below.

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Introduction

The North-South Implementation Bodies were established as a result of the 1998 Good Friday/Belfast Agreement. They were created to undertake practical cross-border and all-island cooperation in a range of specific areas in the "new beginning" brought about by the Agreement. But what has that meant in practice?

To begin to answer that question, this report presents an overview of the collective impacts achieved by the North-South Implementation Bodies in the first 25 years since their establishment under Strand 2 of the Agreement. It is the product of research undertaken as part of the S2@25 project, supported by PEACEPLUS, a programme managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB).

Whilst the 25th anniversary of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement was rightly celebrated in 2023, the provisions of Strand 2 only began to come into operation in December 1999. There may be some familiarity with the work of individual Implementation Bodies under Strand 2, but when looking at what they have achieved as a collective it becomes apparent how they impact on lives across the island of Ireland in so many diverse ways. The overseas tourist spending money in a local shop may have been prompted to visit through the work of Tourism Ireland (an implementation body), and among the reasons that tourist may have come is because of the island of Ireland's natural beauty (which Loughs Agency and Waterways Ireland – both Implementation Bodies – help to conserve), and its cultural richness and linguistic heritage (which Foras na Gaeilge and the Ulster-Scots Agency protect and develop, both of them forming another implementation body known as the Language Body). That tourist may be buying a food product that came from across the border (sold by a business that was supported to start trading cross-border by InterTradeIreland – another implementation body), and that food product is safe to eat because of the work of another implementation body (Safefood). The tourist then leaves the shop to take a walk along a local greenway (developed with funding provided by a programme managed by the SEUPB – another implementation body).

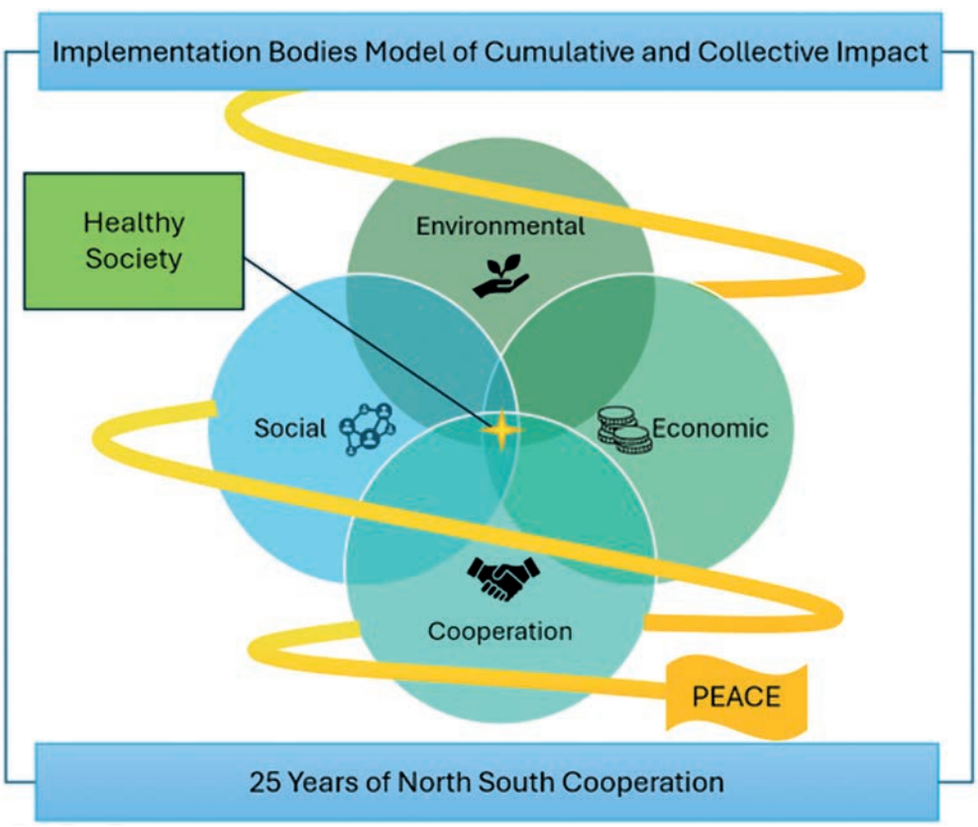
This is obviously an oversimplistic way of trying to communicate the collective impact of the Implementation Bodies, but this vignette offers a small sense of how far-reaching that impact is. It also begins to give a sense of how, in fulfilling their very different remits, the impacts they have each achieved go beyond areas immediately related to their roles, and that their individual impacts reinforce each other to make an impressive contribution to the social, economic and environmental health and wellbeing of communities across the island of Ireland. They have come about as a result of peace, but the Implementation Bodies have collectively been embedding peace and exploiting the opportunities it brings for the benefit of all.

To give a fuller understanding, this report brings together the findings from research undertaken on the work of the individual Implementation Bodies established under Strand 2 of the 1998 Good Friday/Belfast Agreement. The research set out to explore the collective and individual achievements made across four impact pillars – social, economic, environmental and cooperation – based on a framework devised by the Centre for Cross Border Cooperation in partnership with the Euro-Institut in its *Impact Assessment Toolkit for Cross-Border Cooperation*.[1] The evidence for impacts draws on interviews carried out with staff and key stakeholders of the Implementation Bodies, and on the annual reports and other corporate documents produced by them over the past 25 years, as well as other relevant documentation. Analysis of the reflections provided by interviewees and of the documentary evidence that formed part of the research for this report attempts to go beyond the numbers of programmes and activities delivered by the Implementation

[1] Centre for Cross Border Studies and Euro-Institut, *Impact Assessment Toolkit for Cross-Border Cooperation* (2011), available at https://www.crossborder.ie/pubs/2011-IAToolkit.pdf

Bodies, and the numbers of participants involved in them – the "outputs". It seeks to show what those outputs actually mean in terms of results and impacts – the change that has been brought about by the Implementation Bodies collectively.

The evidence suggests that the key achievements across each of the Implementation Bodies fit within each of the four pillars. Whilst the work of some of the Implementation Bodies may, in the first instance, appear more naturally and closely aligned with one or more of these impact areas, there are clear synergies and overlap between the Implementation Bodies' key impacts. The particular nuances and sub-themes within these broader impact areas will be discussed in further detail in this report. The collective contribution of the Bodies to each of the four impact pillars will be examined below, with detail pertaining to each of the emerging sub-themes. However, the ways in which the individual Implementation Bodies' impacts contribute to a collective impact across the four pillars, and how these have simultaneously profited from and strengthened peace and have helped to make healthier communities across the island of Ireland, is represented in the model below.[2]



Each of the key aspects of this model are set out in the main body of this report.

[2] This model has been adapted from an original concept developed by Optimum Research and Innovation Northern Ireland

Executive Summary

The overarching aim of this research was to gather learning and reflections on the individual and collective economic, social, environmental and cooperation impacts achieved by the North South Implementation Bodies under Strand Two of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement over the first 25 years since they came into operation in December 1999 (with Tourism Ireland being established one month later, in January 2020). Evidence gathered from analysis of relevant corporate and other documentation, and from interviews with members of staff of all the Implementation Bodies and external stakeholders strongly underlines that all of them have contributed according to their specific remits to the four main areas of impact, but that their collective impact has been impressive and needs to be acknowledged.

Their collective impact has been both made possible by peace and the structures set out in the 1998 Agreement, and has contributed to embedding peace and exploiting the opportunities it has presented to the benefit of all on the island of Ireland. This Executive Summary offers a small sample of those impacts, the details of which can be found in the body of the report.

In terms of social impacts, the research has suggested that there are three key areas of significant intersection between the Implementation Bodies where they have achieved significant collective social impact:

- Culture and Language: Cultural and linguistic impacts have been realised through the work of both Foras na Gaeilge and the Ulster-Scots Agency in their advancement of a living and diverse linguistic and cultural heritage. The SEUPB's collaboration in the shaping of the PEACE programmes has provided opportunities for cultural expression and respect for different cultural traditions to serve to continue progress towards a peaceful and stable society and to promote reconciliation. Tourism Ireland has both benefited from the cultural impacts others have made and produced its own, with the overseas tourism it has helped to attract by the promotion of culture and providing support for cultural activities on the island of Ireland.
- Education, training and employability:
    - The Implementation Bodies have achieved educational impacts as all of them are involved in educational or training programmes targeted at children and young people and/or adults, or by more broadly disseminating knowledge in areas related to their remit. Foras na Gaeilge has been centrally involved in developing resources, learning materials and new language terminology to support both Irish medium education with children and young people and education with adult learners across the island of Ireland. The Ulster-Scots Agency has also achieved education impacts through its work in supporting new writing in Ulster-Scots, its publication of educational resources for schools and its support for adult learners through delivery of classes. Both Loughs Agency and Waterways Ireland have achieved significant impact through their extensive programmes of environmental education with children and young people. Since its establishment Safefood has also achieved educational impact through the programmes related to food safety and healthy eating it delivers in schools and through its extensive and high-profile public health education programmes and campaigns.
    - Safefood also offers food safety education courses, including for teenagers, enabling, for example, students to take part-time jobs in businesses where food is handled or served, and serving as a means to a future career in the food industry. InterTradeIreland and Tourism Ireland have also provided a stepping-stone into employability, with InterTradeIreland offering programmes that connect recent

graduates on the island of Ireland with businesses, while Tourism Ireland's Global Internship Programme has similarly provided employability impacts, offering applicants the opportunity to gain first-hand experience working within the organisation. To give some sense of how the programmes managed by the SEUPB have impacted educationally and on employability, examples include PEACE II's funding of childcare places that benefited 9,987 children and their families, 100,767 people gaining qualifications, 77,652 entering or progressing in employment and education, of which 21,360 young people achieving accreditation following funded training programmes, and 29,466 young people progressing within education, training or moving into employment, and 7,235 people in employment achieving enhanced skills, including in ICT. A further 2,456 progressed in employment and education under PEACE IV.

- Health and wellbeing: Safefood's work has meant people right across the island of Ireland have been able to make informed choices that will help them avoid negative health outcomes. Its promotion of healthier eating habits via public health campaigns, research, and educational resources focusing on public health issues like obesity, heart disease, and diabetes has given people the tools to live healthier lives. The funding programmes designed by the SEUPB in collaboration with government departments and stakeholders also provided, among other impacts related to health and wellbeing, cross-border integrated health and community services that resulted in 'improved health outcomes'. Projects spanning the areas of tourism, reconciliation and social cohesion, community space and the environment made possible by the funding programmes shaped by the SEUPB have impacted positively on the physical and mental health of individual users. The Greenways and Blueways Waterways Ireland has developed deliver health and wellbeing benefits to the regions through which they pass, with the inland waterways under its responsibility acting as a "natural health service". Both Loughs Agency and Waterways Ireland have used water-based outdoor activities to positively impact on young people's health and wellbeing. Loughs Agency has engaged, for example, with 2,000 pupils in 2022 in the Foyle and Carlingford catchment areas, providing water activities for young people to experience first-hand the physical and mental health benefits of getting active. For its part, InterTradeIreland, through its Synergy programme, supported the All-Island Cancer Research Institute (AICRI), a partnership of ten universities across the island, co-led by Queen's University Belfast and University College Dublin, which also involves a variety of other stakeholders including cancer charities and patient representatives. The InterTradeIreland funded research in April 2024 was a comprehensive landscape review which captured the current oncology and allied digital health industry landscape and highlighted the transformative economic impact that a well-functioning oncology and digital health ecosystem could have on the island of Ireland.

  In addition, in March 2021, InterTradeIreland were instrumental in facilitating the signing of a historic Memorandum of Understanding which built on the original partnership of the Ireland-Northern Ireland- NCI Cancer Consortium. The Consortium works to reduce cancer incidence and mortality on the island of Ireland through cross-border and transatlantic collaborations in cancer research and education. Areas of focus include enhancing clinical trials for patients across the island of Ireland, supporting research and providing additional training for the next generation of health care professionals and scientists to support cancer care and research.

In terms of economic impacts, the research pointed to three key areas of significant intersection between the Implementation Bodies where they have achieved notable collective economic impact:

- Trade and business development: With total cross-border trade in goods and services having grown from approximately €2bn/£1.2bn in 2001 to €6.3bn/£5.5bn in 2011 to €14.3bn/£12.4bn in 2023, InterTradeIreland has supported businesses across the island to grow through cross border exporting, innovating, collaborating, attracting investment and making connections. It has provided assistance and guidance to over 60,000 businesses across the island of Ireland generating approximately €1.95/£1.7 billion in business development value.
- Designed in collaboration with government departments and stakeholders, the EU funding programmes managed by the SEUPB have also supported businesses to develop and to export. Two examples of how the programmes managed by the SEUPB have supported business development are in promoting the uptake of new technologies and building collaborative partnerships between SMEs and research and innovation institutions. These are both areas in which the current PEACEPLUS programme will also invest in. For example, the INTERREG IVA programme assisted 3,352 businesses in promoting innovation and funded 33 networking projects to raise the competitiveness of small firms, while the INTERREG VA programme saw 153 enterprises working with research institutions with 460 also receiving one-to-one innovation advice. Safefood also makes an important contribution to trade by protecting and strengthening the integrity of the food chain, protecting the reputation of Irish food production and helping underpin the important agrifood sector across the island. It has also worked to support business development in the area of food safety offering a range of targeted resources.
- Tourism and infrastructure: Waterways Ireland's and Loughs Agency's management and development of fisheries, Blueways, Greenways and marine tourism have made them a significant attraction to local and overseas tourists and anglers, and has supported the development of a wide range of small businesses that have emerged to service the visitors these assets attract. Likewise, Foras na Gaeilge and the Ulster-Scots Agency's work on the preservation and promotion of indigenous language, culture and heritage also contributes to tourism and the attraction of overseas visitors. Tourism Ireland's promotion and marketing of the island of Ireland in global markets has seen a huge increase in tourism that provides economic impact across the island, including in rural and coastal communities. Belfast City Council, for example, has noted how 'growth figures from international visitors indicate that Tourism Ireland is having significant success in delivering new visitors to the island of Ireland'. To contribute to growth in overseas tourism, Tourism Ireland doesn't just invest significantly in marketing campaigns tailored to its target international audiences, often leveraging major sporting or cultural events, it also supports businesses on the island of Ireland more directly. Its role in shaping and its management of the PEACE and INTERREG funding programmes has meant the SEUPB has also boosted local economies by enabling the development or restoration of infrastructure that has not only provided employment in the construction phase, but also created attractions for local and overseas visitors. Infrastructure projects such as cycle paths, walking trails and greenways the SEUPB's programmes have supported has facilitated the development of a range of tourism initiatives. Its programmes have also made various significant infrastructure investments in, for example, the railway connection between Dublin and Belfast and the Peace Bridge in Derry-Londonderry.
- Employment: The economic opportunities presented to businesses through the projects developed by Waterways Ireland and Loughs Agency have contributed to supporting existing jobs, and to the creation of new jobs where businesses expand to exploit the new

opportunities provided by the Bodies' activities. In terms of more direct support, by 2023 28 Irish language development officers were being employed across the island of Ireland through Foras na Gaeilge's Irish Language Networks Development Scheme, and in 2021 four development officers were being jointly funded with three local councils in Northern Ireland. The Ulster-Scots Agency has also provided direct support for employment, including through a Community Workers Scheme and the financing in 2010 of eight part-time administrative workers within community and voluntary groups. The work of Tourism Ireland in the promotion of the island as a tourism destination to overseas travellers has made a significant contribution to sustaining a large number of jobs. In 2024, for example, it supported approximately 300,000 jobs across the island of Ireland in various sectors including hospitality, transportation, retail, recreation and entertainment. InterTradeIreland's contribution to job creation has been both as a result of the expansion of businesses as they engage in cross-border trade and wider export and the innovation that requires, as well as more direct ways through specific programmes. The result of InterTradeIreland's work has been the creation and/or supporting of over 23,000 jobs in the businesses it has assisted across the island of Ireland in its first 25 years. InterTradeIreland also supports employability through programmes which connect third level institutions with science or technology graduates creating over 800 graduate roles. In terms of the SEUPB, over the programming periods between 2000 and 2020, approximately 10,500 jobs were created or sustained directly as a result of the support businesses and organisations in other sectors received from PEACE and INTERREG.

- Research and innovation: Safefood has had a specific focus on addressing knowledge gaps in food safety and public health nutrition through a structured programme of externally commissioned research. Between 2000 and 2023 Safefood commissioned 142 research projects with a total expenditure in excess of €18m on their research programme in that period. Loughs Agency has led internationally significant scientific research projects tracking the movements of marine species. It uses scientific research to inform its decision making on a range of environmental issues within its remit but particularly in relation to the management and conservation of salmon (and other fish), oysters and the preservation and enhancement of aquatic ecosystems. The Agency has led on a range of research projects involving local, national and international partners over the past 25 years, which has included managing EU funding to the value of over €18m. Research commissioned by Waterways Ireland is used to gather an evidence base for organisational decisions on improving and widening access to the waterways under its responsibility, which not only results in social impacts, but also in economic ones, while also providing positive environmental impacts. It has driven innovation as a means of ensuring maximum accessibility to the inland waterways under the organisation's remit while also protecting them. For InterTradeIreland and Tourism Ireland research, development and innovation have the primary purpose of driving economic growth, assisting businesses to make informed decisions that will result in positive outcomes. The specific remit set out for InterTradeIreland in legislation to establish new approaches to business development is embodied in the Synergy programme. The Synergy programme has supported scaling of cross-border collaboration and increased SME participation in all-island clusters. It links clusters and networks to collaborate on an all-island basis in high value sectors including precision oncology, cybersecurity, fintech, engineering and advanced manufacturing. This ensures that innovators and entrepreneurs have been able to benefit from the full breadth of expertise and talent available and contribute to a growing, island-wide cluster ecosystem. Clusters drive innovation by bringing people together, pooling talent, sharing ideas, and creating a vibrant ecosystem where innovation thrives. They bridge the gap between research and industry, leading to high-quality jobs, cutting-edge products, and economic growth, and they ensure that SMEs, so vital to our economy, are at the heart of this ecosystem. InterTradeIreland has supported research networks like the All-Island Oncology

Industry Report and other collaborations like the Royal Academy of Engineers / Irish Academy of Engineers. The current PEACEPLUS programme shows a continuation of the focus on research and innovation as drivers of economic growth from previous SEUPB programmes, such as INTERREG VA's contribution to increasing the research capacity and capability of the region to attract foreign direct investment, and how INTERREG IVA created cross-border linkages between research institutions and industry, particularly SMEs.

In terms of positive environmental impacts, two key areas of significant intersection between the Implementation Bodies were identified by the research where they have achieved significant collective environmental impact:

- Environmental sustainability, protection and climate action: The conservation, preservation and regeneration of aquatic ecosystems is a core environmental impact of the work undertaken by both Loughs Agency and Waterways Ireland evidenced via a range of activities including fisheries management (regulation/enforcement), educational initiatives, responses to pollution incidents, measures taken to protect aquatic ecosystems, and improvement of waterway navigation. For its part, InterTradeIreland has supported businesses to develop environmentally-friendly products and services, and has facilitated and encouraged small and medium enterprises to take up opportunities arising from the growth of the green economy. It has also supported them to adopt sustainable processes by reducing their carbon footprint, minimising waste and adopting circular economy principles. Tourism Ireland's work has also included undertaking consumer research to understand the views and behaviours around sustainability and holiday destination choice, while also considering the relative emissions created by tourism accessing the island of Ireland from different markets. The SEUPB has also played a key role in promoting environmental sustainability across the island of Ireland by managing funding programmes that address environmental challenges. For example, a core objective of the INTERREG VA programme focused on protecting and restoring biodiversity and investing in the water sector, as well as investing in the development of greenways under its priority on sustainable transport, with the projects it supported achieving a reduction in carbon emissions of approximately 476 tonnes.
- Conservation of biodiversity: The SEUPB's INTERREG IVA programme also supported projects contributing to the enhancement of the geo-diversity, biodiversity and natural environment, and the protection and effective management of aquatic life, while INTERREG VA also served to protect and restore protected marine and terrestrial habitats and priority species. The Language Body has also supported initiatives focusing on the conservation of biodiversity on the island of Ireland, such as Foras na Gaeilge's support for the Irish language *Líon an Dúlra*, which raised primary schoolchildren's awareness of the natural habitat and the need to protect it. Given their specific remits, Loughs Agency and Waterways Ireland have been closely involved in the conservation of biodiversity. Loughs Agency has achieved significant impact in protecting marine ecosystems through its leadership of internationally important research on the movement of fish species and cetaceans in the seas around the UK and Ireland, and it has a long track record in monitoring fish populations in both the Foyle and Carlingford catchments. Waterways Ireland has been surveying the natural habitats in and around the waterways across the island of Ireland since its establishment. This involves the constant testing of water quality, assessing the levels of fish stocks, and surveying the flora and fauna within and along the waterways under its remit. Furthermore, progress made to date within the organisation is set to reduce its energy emissions below the 2030 legislative target by 2028. Indeed, in 2024 – its 25th anniversary year – Waterways Ireland was honoured with the designation as UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Champions by the Department of Environment, Climate & Communications, acknowledging the organisation's efforts in aligning its operations with the UNSDGs.

In terms of cooperation impacts, there are three key areas of significant intersection between the Implementation Bodies where significant collective cooperation impact is evident:

- Governance: Interactions between Ministers from the two administrations, jointly agreeing to approve their respective implementation body's Annual Reports and appointments to their Boards, and the ongoing dialogue between officials from the two jurisdictions and with their respective Implementation Bodies, are essential processes of strengthening cooperation.
- Operational cooperation: All the Implementation Bodies engage with a wide range of collaborators in both jurisdictions through their formal and informal networks on a day-to-day basis to fulfil their respective remits. Partners in local government, other statutory organisations, academic institutions, civic society organisations, local community groups and individual citizens are all part of the cooperation ecosystems the Implementation Bodies have developed.
- Cooperation outcomes: The process of the design of programmes, projects and initiatives by the Implementation Bodies involves cross-border collaboration between the Bodies and the two administrations on the island of Ireland, as well as seeking the views of stakeholders and communities on what their priorities are. However, this operational cooperation ultimately delivers cooperation outcomes, such as: the formation and strengthening of sustainable cross-border, cross-community and transnational partnerships; the testing, developing and/or rolling out of shared solutions to common challenges; the promotion of knowledge exchange and innovation across borders, building capacity for sustainable development, and generating long-lasting socio-economic and environmental impacts.

The evidence collected and analysed as part of the research undertaken for this report has suggested a model that represents how the social, economic, environmental and cooperation impacts the Implementation Bodies have achieved individually in the first 25 years of their existence collectively contribute to healthy societies. The 1998 Good Friday/Belfast Agreement not only marked a turning point towards peace, but also began the Implementation Bodies' contribution to the continuing process of cementing peace on the island of Ireland. It is a dual process, whereby the Implementation Bodies' work both profits from and helps to embed peace, and where their proven collective potential to address broader aspects of societal "health" remains invaluable.

A quick overview of Strand 2 of the 1998 Agreement and the North South Implementation Bodies

Strand 2 of the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement put in place a formal structure for dialogue and cooperation between the Irish Government and the devolved administration in Northern Ireland, as well as setting out the creation of a number of Implementation Bodies to undertake practical cross-border and all-island cooperation in a range of specific areas.

Strand 2 consists of 19 paragraphs and an Annex, setting out what the structures for North-South cooperation and their functions would be. The first paragraph is on the establishment of the North South Ministerial Council:

> Under a new British/Irish Agreement dealing with the totality of relationships, and related legislation at Westminster and in the Oireachtas, a North/South Ministerial Council to be established to bring together those with executive responsibilities in Northern Ireland and the Irish Government, to develop consultation, co-operation and action within the island of Ireland – including through implementation on an all-island and cross-border basis – on matters of mutual interest within the competence of the Administrations, North and South.[3]

Paragraph 9 sets out two categories of cooperation to be agreed by the Dublin and Belfast administrations at the North South Ministerial Council:

> 'As part of the work programme, the Council will identify and agree at least 6 matters for co-operation and implementation in each of the following categories:
>
> (i) Matters where existing Bodies will be the appropriate mechanisms for co-operation in each separate jurisdiction;
>
> (ii) Matters where the co-operation will take place through agreed Implementation Bodies on a cross-border or all-island level'.

The six areas of cooperation where "common policies and approaches are agreed in the North South Ministerial Council but implemented separately in each jurisdiction" that were later agreed are:

1. Agriculture – EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), policy and research on animal and plant health, and rural development;
2. Education – special needs education, educational underachievement, teacher qualifications, and school, youth and teaching exchanges;
3. Environment – research into environmental protection, and water quality management and waste management in a cross-border context;
4. Health – accident and emergency planning, major emergencies, high technology equipment, cancer research, and health promotion;

[3] *The Belfast Agreement; An Agreement Reached at the Multi Party Talks in Northern Ireland*, available at https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-belfast-agreement

5. Tourism, including Tourism Ireland – common policies and approaches in the area of tourism, and decisions on actions and policies to be implemented by Tourism Ireland, "a publicly owned limited company established to promote the island of Ireland overseas as a tourist destination"; and
6. Transport – strategic transport planning, and road and rail safety.[4]

It should be noted that Tourism Ireland, seen as an implementation body, was established as a limited company in January 2000 under one of these six areas of cooperation. The six Implementation Bodies that would be agreed upon by the Belfast and Dublin governments are:

- The Food Safety Promotion Board (known as Safefood), responsible for the promotion of and research into food safety;
- The Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission (consisting of two agencies – Loughs Agency and the Lights Agency, although the latter is yet to be established), with Loughs Agency being responsible for the promotion and development of Lough Foyle and Carlingford Lough for commercial and recreational purposes;
- The Language Body, consisting of two agencies: Foras na Gaeilge, with responsibility for the promotion of the Irish language on the island of Ireland; and Tha Boord o Ulster Scotch/The Ulster-Scots Agency, responsible for encouraging and developing the full range of Ulster-Scots culture, promoting understanding of the history of the Ulster-Scots, and promoting the study, conservation and use of Ulster-Scots as a living language;
- The Special European Union Programmes Body (SEUPB), with responsibility for the management and oversight of EU funding programmes;
- The Trade and Business Development Body (known as InterTradeIreland), responsible for the promotion of trade and business on an all-island and cross-border basis; and
- Waterways Ireland, charged with the management, maintenance, development and restoration of specified inland navigable waterways.[5]

The Implementation Bodies, their structures and their individual responsibilities and specific remits have a legislative basis, with the UK and Irish Governments enacting laws through their respective parliamentary systems. The enacting of these laws brought them into operation in December 1999,[6] with each body having sponsor government departments from the two administrations.

[4] For more information on the six areas of cooperation, see https://www.northsouthministerialcouncil.org/areas-of-cooperation

[5] For more on the Implementation Bodies, see https://www.northsouthministerialcouncil.org/north-south-implementation-bodies

[6] The UK legislation is The North/South Co-operation (Implementation Bodies) (Northern Ireland) Order 1999, which can be accessed at https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/1999/859/schedule/1, and the Irish legislation is the British-Irish Agreement Act 1999, available at https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/bills/bill/1999/10/

About the S2@25 project

S2@25: Capturing and Transferring the knowledge of the Strand 2 Implementation Bodies for improved cooperation and cooperation governance is a twenty-four-month cross-border project supported by PEACEPLUS, a programme managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB). The project is being delivered by the Centre for Cross Border Cooperation as the Lead Partner in partnership with Atlantic Technological University, working closely with the North South Implementation Bodies – Foras na Gaeilge, InterTradeIreland, Loughs Agency, Safefood, SEUPB, Tourism Ireland, Ulster-Scots Agency and Waterways Ireland.

The project aims to record the collective impacts of the Implementation Bodies, with the entering into operation of Strand 2 of the 1998 Agreement having celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2024, and use the learning from that process to improve strategic cross-border cooperation in the future. It will identify and disseminate examples of best practice in their cross-border and all-island operations that will improve capacity for cooperation at a strategic level.

This research report reflecting on the collective impacts of the Implementation Bodies is one of the main outputs the project will produce. The other main outputs include:

- a strategy jointly developed by the Implementation Bodies setting out how they could effectively contribute to addressing the longer-term challenges and priorities shared by the two administrations on the island of Ireland, and any potential obstacles to their contributions and potential solutions;
- a pilot action resulting in the testing of a short course on cross-border collaboration to improve capacity for cooperation through the transfer of relevant skills; and
- eight organisations cooperating across borders in the development and execution of a demonstration initiative comprising three dissemination events, and in the implementation of the joint strategy.

The long-term impact the project expects to achieve is improved capacity for cooperation and cooperation governance, with the Implementation Bodies as a collective and their key stakeholders better equipped with a knowledge framework of strategic collaboration that can be applied not only by current actors, but also by those who will be responsible for cooperation in the future.

Methodology

The overarching aim of the research for this report was to gather learning and reflections on the individual and collective impacts achieved by the Implementation Bodies across four outcome pillars, namely: their North – South economic, social, environmental and cooperation impacts over the first 25 years since their establishment in 1999. This was based on a framework devised by the Centre for Cross Border Cooperation in partnership with the Euro-Institut in its *Impact Assessment Toolkit for Cross-Border Cooperation*.

The research involved a two-pronged approach:

1. Exploring the learning and impacts across each of the individual Implementation Bodies in turn, and;
2. Synthesizing this information to analyse the collective impact across all the Implementation Bodies' work over the past 25 years.

In particular, this research involved an exploration of the following:

- Gathering learning and evidence on WHAT has been achieved as well as HOW Implementation Bodies have achieved their successes, and WITH WHOM; and
- Identifying, reporting and disseminating examples of best practice in cross-border operations in the subsequent stages of the S2@25 project.

Firstly, a desk-based review of all relevant documentation was undertaken. The initial research team (Optimum Research and Innovation Northern Ireland – ORINI) reviewed key documentation pertaining to each of the Implementation Bodies. The Project Advisory Board advised that the annual reports would provide a high-level "flavour" of the work of the Bodies and their outcomes, and that other supporting documentation would be of interest. This phase of the project involved a light review of the annual reports, as well as a further review of evidence and reports deemed relevant by each of the Implementation Bodies. The review provided insight into each of the Bodies, in terms of their remits and outputs/outcomes over 25 years. Additionally, the review supported content for bespoke probing questions adopted during stakeholder consultations. Further evidence and reports were reviewed post-interviews also, in order to corroborate assertions made.

A range of relevant stakeholders from all the Implementation Bodies and associated external organisations (as stakeholders involved with them) were invited to engage with the ORINI research team. The Centre for Cross Border Cooperation and the Implementation Bodies' Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) acted in a coordinating capacity in order to expedite recruitment and encourage engagement.

In order to maximise stakeholder engagement, a range of different modes of consultation were employed. This involved: online interviews and focus groups; telephone interviews; and the use of an online consultation tool (OCT). All implementation body CEOs were invited to take part in a face-to-face or online one-to-one interview. All other stakeholders were invited to contribute their inputs via their preferred mode of consultation:

- Implementation Body CEOs: All CEOs took part in an online one-to-one interview (n=8).
- Implementation Body staff: Staff took part in an online focus group or individual interviews (n=15). The Online Consultation Tool also gathered staff written submissions (n=5).
- Statutory body officials and external stakeholders: All took part in either online focus groups or individual interviews (n=11).

The research team worked flexibly to ensure wide and full engagement. Interviews/focus groups ranged from 30 to 90 minutes in length. With participants' permission, interviews were audio recorded for transcription and data analysis.

A series of different semi-structured interview schedules were designed to best suit each of the different participants. Following the initial Project Advisory Board meeting (22 July 2024), it was clear that each interview would require bespoke tailoring considering the unique remit, scope and outcomes of each of the different Implementation Bodies. As such, a semi-structured and open interview schedule framework (See table below) was proposed in order to allow for flexibility in each interview, whereby emerging interests and concepts could be explored. This framework explored key achievements across the four proposed impact pillars (economic, social environmental and North-South cooperation impacts) and was supplemented by key probes informed by the documentary review, as well as by Advisory Board feedback and input.

Impact evaluation	
Question	Example probe
What impact have you witnessed? In terms of the NSIBs' bespoke individual impacts as well as the collective cooperation impacts.	Probing around the social, economic, environmental and cooperation impacts of the Implementation Bodies over the past 25 years.
What has this change looked like?	
How has it been measured?	
In your opinion, what have been the key influences that have resulted in these changes?	
How has cooperation influenced impact?	
Implementation evaluation	
Can you explain, from your own perspective, HOW these impacts have been realised (again on an individual NSIB level as well as the collective impact level)?	Who was involved? What were the key factors at play?
Were any key barriers encountered?	Socio, political and economic challenges, e.g.,
How were these addressed/overcome?	
In your opinion, what does best practice look like?	Can you provide examples of the best practice you have witnessed?
Recommendations	

Due to the time constraints, the OCT facilitated written submissions from participants who were unavailable for interviews/focus groups but who wished to submit a response. A range of open and closed questions were developed, addressing issues such as: extent of cooperation; economic, social, environmental and North-South cooperation impacts. The OCT was hosted online and distributed accordingly via CCBC/Implementation Bodies, to all relevant stakeholders and Bodies.

Salient data from the audio files were transcribed verbatim by the ORINI research team. Selected quotes were returned to all CEOs for review. Transcriptions were analysed using the grounding principles of thematic analysis (and following Braun & Clarke's (2006)[7] thematic analysis framework). Emerging themes aligning with each of the key research questions are presented in the reporting, with a selection of quotes to evidence assertions made. Initial respondent validation was undertaken by the ORINI research team with CEOs to check for accuracy and resonance with their experiences, as per Birt et al., (2016) and Espedal et al., (2022).[8]

Additional extensive analysis of corporate documents produced by the Implementation Bodies since their inception was also undertaken by the Centre for Cross Border Cooperation to augment the primary research. This included in-depth analysis of the annual reports and accounts of the Implementation Bodies, their corporate plans, business plans and strategy documents, and a range of other relevant material.

The resulting report is based on the initial research and analysis carried out by the ORINI research team, and the further research and secondary analysis carried out by the Centre for Cross Border Cooperation. Therefore, the ultimate interpretations and presentation of the overall analysis is the responsibility of the Centre for Cross Border Cooperation.

[7] Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). "Using thematic analysis in psychology". Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3, 77–101

[8] See Birt L, Scott S, Cavers D, Campbell C, Walter F. (2026). "Member Checking: A Tool to Enhance Trustworthiness or Merely a Nod to Validation?". Qual Health Res. 2016 Nov; 26(13):1802-1811. doi: 10.1177/1049732316654870. Epub 2016 Jul 10. PMID: 27340178 *and* Espedal G, Lovaas B J, Sirris S, Waeraas A. (2022). *Researching Values. Methodological Approaches for Understanding Values Work in Organisations and Leadership*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2022. ISBN 978-3-030-90768-6 ISBN 978-3-030-90769-3 (eBook) https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-90769-3

1. The Social Impacts

All the Implementation Bodies are, in various ways, contributing to a range of social impacts. The Bodies' social impacts are presented across a number of themes including culture, employability, education and health and well-being. Broadly speaking, these are the types of impacts felt by individuals and communities across the island of Ireland, opening up new opportunities for them, changing how they view and relate to each other, and making knowledge available to them.

1.1. Culture and Language

Cultural and linguistic impacts have been realised through the work of both Foras na Gaeilge and the Ulster Scots Agency in their advancement of a living and diverse linguistic and cultural heritage. Through its 'promotion of the Irish language' and 'facilitating and encouraging its use in speech and writing in public and private life',[9] Foras na Gaeilge has played a central role in preserving, promoting and normalising the use of Irish in everyday life across the island of Ireland. The more direct means of achieving linguistic impacts includes its support for the arts sector, through initiatives such as the Festivals Scheme, the Drama Companies Scheme and the Major Arts Events Scheme.[10] In explaining the organisation's role, one member of staff interviewed touches upon the deeper social impact of Foras na Gaeilge's work:

> "The big challenge for any minoritised language is where you get to use the language. [...]Part of our main role is to maximise the opportunities to use Irish in the community, [...]normalising the Irish language [so] that if I want [to] I can more or less live my life through Irish, I can send my child to an Irish speaking school, I can get a job where Irish is the medium of communicating".

The deeper social impact touched upon here is how Foras na Gaeilge has contributed to moving away from a sense of exclusivity to one of inclusivity. In other words, for those who speak or choose to learn the Irish language, they see themselves as part of a society that is increasingly accepting of the language as an integral part of its fabric rather than an exclusionary element that denies full and equal participation in all walks of life.

The Ulster-Scots Agency, in its turn, plays a key role in preserving and promoting Ulster-Scots cultural traditions and expressions. Its cultural impact has been achieved through various means, including its support for school drama and music and dance workshops.[11] As was the case with the comments above from the Foras na Gaeilge staff member, the reflections offered here by a member of staff of the Ulster-Scots Agency shine a light on the deeper social impacts of the organisation's role:

> "What does this Ulster-Scots thing do? Actually, quite often, if we're funding a band, that's a group of families in a particular area, and what our money is actually doing is keeping that set of people together who might otherwise have fallen apart. [...] It's not just about preserving a musical tradition; actually, it's much more than that".

The "much more than that" is the deeper social impact the Ulster-Scots Agency has had. The example used by the interviewee above is illustrative of how the organisation has been promoting the value of Ulster-Scots cultural traditions, enabling people to come together to share in their expression and to see them as worthy of continuing and of being a full and cherished part of a

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9 Foras na Gaeilge, "About us", https://www.forasnagaeilge.ie/about-foras-na-gaeilge/?lang=en

10 For more on Foras na Gaeilge's support for the arts, see https://www.forasnagaeilge.ie/support/arts-support/?lang=en

11 See https://ulsterscotsagency.com/education/

wider social and cultural fabric. Moreover, the part played by Ulster-Scots culture is not exclusive to one jurisdiction on the island of Ireland, but is present in both and, indeed, the history of the Ulster-Scots spans across these islands and beyond.

Both of these Bodies encourage social cohesion and a sense of identity across communities, North and South. In discussion with stakeholders, it was acknowledged that cultural expression, particularly in Northern Ireland has, at times, been a contentious and divisive issue. Without the positive work of Foras na Gaeilge and the Ulster-Scots Agency, issues related to linguistic and cultural diversity had the potential to become more divisive, potentially resulting in 'disenfranchisement' and more serious social challenges. The theoretical absence of the two organisations was raised by a Foras na Gaeilge stakeholder when considering their impacts:

> "The positive impact? … It's hard to quantify, but all you have to do is think well, what if these institutions weren't there? And these two cultures were not getting this institutional recognition, what would […] fill the vacuum? You could see people feeling disconnected, disenfranchised and maybe go in another [direction]".

By providing space for communities to celebrate their culture, the two organisations that make up the Language Body are also contributing to peace building and community relations, providing positive avenues for language promotion and cultural expression.

With its specific remit in managing EU funds, the SEUPB has also had a particular impact in this field, especially through its role in designing, in collaboration with the two administrations and stakeholders, various iterations of the PEACE programme.

Launch of An Bosca Leabharlainne (Library Box)

The SEUPB's shaping of the PEACE programmes has provided opportunities for cultural expression and respect for different cultural traditions to serve to 'reinforce progress towards a peaceful and stable society and to promote reconciliation'.[12] As a result, as one of the SEUPB's stakeholders

[12] SEUPB, *The Story and Impact of EU Peace and INTERREG Funding: Past and Future* (2023), p. 6, available at https://www.seupb.eu/sites/default/files/2024-02/Impact%20Report%202023.pdf

interviewed as part of the research for this report noted in terms of the social impacts the organisation has had, the provision of "cultural space in terms of peace building" has been an important aspect. Examples of how culture was given a space by the SEUPB in funding programmes include: the support given to community-based organisations through the PEACE II programme for projects on reconciliation and cultural understanding; PEACE III's setting out to promote 'cross-community and cross-border sharing of educational facilities, and support governors, teachers and education providers to enable them to train, develop and educate young people to participate in a multi-cultural society';[13] and PEACE IV's investment in shared education initiatives that not only equipped educators and children with the skills to promote a culture of tolerance and mutual understanding, but also supported projects that dealt with issues such as racism and expressions of language and culture.

Once again, when reflecting on the social impacts of the SEUPB, which has supported work on tolerance, understanding and respect for different cultures and cultural traditions, a stakeholder framed their comments in terms of a theoretical absence:

> "[SEUPB are] Very significant and very meaningful in terms of creating an environment where peace and reconciliation can prosper in Northern Ireland. That work would never have happened without the peace programmes [and] without the existence of the SEUPB".

Given the nature of their remits, it might be expected that the other Implementation Bodies would not have had cultural impacts over the first 25 years of their existence. However, whilst perhaps not immediately as explicit as in the case of Foras na Gaeilge, the Ulster-Scots Agency and the SEUPB, the other Bodies under Strand 2 of the 1998 Agreement have also played their part. Indeed, Tourism Ireland could be said to have both benefited from the cultural impacts others have made and produced its own less immediately obvious ones. In terms of benefiting from cultural impacts, Tourism Ireland has consistently used culture in its promotion of the island of Ireland overseas, with its 2023-2025 Corporate Plan, for example, stating that 'The organisation will capitalise on the tourism legacy of cultural events'.[14] In terms of its own cultural impacts, in considering the social dimension of Tourism Ireland's work, the same document notes 'the benefit that communities experience from inbound tourism including jobs right across the island of Ireland but also benefits such as support for cultural activities'.[15] However, what also needs to be highlighted is that overseas tourism not only provides support for cultural activities on the island of Ireland, it also contributes to local communities' exposure and increasing understanding of the diversity of cultures those tourists bring with them.

Indeed, that exposure also takes place as overseas tourists visit the waterways, Greenways and Blueways developed by Waterways Ireland, and the cross-border loughs that are the responsibility of Loughs Agency. Moreover, the opportunities for cross-border cultural exchanges between communities on the island of Ireland made possible by the two organisations also leave their own cultural impacts and contribute to the role played by Strand 2 of the 1998 Agreement in the process of peace and reconciliation. Similarly, and beyond its immediately more obvious economic impacts, over its first 25 years InterTradeIreland has contributed significantly to social cohesion by building cross border connections between individuals, businesses and organisations across the island, these connections have enabled cultural and knowledge exchange often helping to challenge preconceptions and build trust. In turn, Safefood has contributed to the identification

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13 SEUPB, "PEACE III EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation 2007-2013 Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland: Operational Programme", p.65

14 Tourism Ireland, "Corporate Plan 2023-2025", p.10, available at https://assets.tourismireland.com/data/docs/default-source/corporate-items/tourism-ireland-corporate-plan-2023---2025.pdf

15 Ibid, p.5

of culture as one of the determinants of food poverty affecting people across the island of Ireland,[16] while also providing all-island impacts within a broader definition of culture that encompasses the promotion of a better food safety culture. It has frequently used cultural events to do so, including where it has presented its message by adopting culturally popular themes, such as its "Strictly Yum Dancing" initiative.[17]

1.2. Education, training and employability

All of the Implementation Bodies have achieved educational impacts as all of the Bodies are involved in educational or training programmes targeted at children and young people and/or adults, or by more broadly disseminating knowledge in areas related to their remit. In general terms, this has meant an increase in our understanding of the social, linguistic, cultural, economic and environmental context of the island of Ireland that better equips its people to avail of the potential opportunities resulting from the 1998 Agreement.

Foras na Gaeilge is centrally involved in developing resources, learning materials and new language terminology to support both Irish medium education with children and young people and education with adult learners. The educational impacts the organisation has had in terms of a legacy of introducing and supporting the use of the Irish language to tens of thousands of children and young people across the island of Ireland since its establishment has been part of a process that promotes the Irish language in all parts of education, but also one that supports 'the learning and use of Irish as a lifelong process'.[18] The other part of the Language Body, the Ulster Scots Agency, has also achieved education impacts through its work in supporting new writing in Ulster-Scots, its publication of educational resources for schools and its support for adult learners through delivery of classes, as well as its role in providing a deeper understanding of 'the longstanding historical, cultural and linguistic links between Ulster, Scotland and further afield' through its Discover Ulster-Scots Centre.[19]

Robert Burns performance at Theatre at The Mill in Newtownabbey

[16] In its 2020 Annual Report, for example, Safefood notes that 'Food poverty, defined as the inability to access a nutritionally adequate diet, is a significant issue for many people on the island of Ireland' (p.20), available at https://www.safefood.net/about-us/corporate-publications/annual-reports/annual-report-2020

[17] Safefood, "Annual Report 2007", p.24

[18] See Foras na Gaeilge, "Education Support", https://www.forasnagaeilge.ie/support/education-support/?lang=en

[19] For more on the Discover Ulster-Scots Centre, see https://ulsterscotsagency.com/about-us/discover-ulster-scots-centre/

Among the ways in which the organisation has impacted on the educational context was through its "Ulster-Scots Flagship Schools Programme". Developed and managed by the Ulster-Scots Agency in partnership with primary schools in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, it supported primary schools 'in the development of high quality educational and curriculum opportunities for children and young people to learn more about Ulster-Scots tradition and culture'.[20]

Loughs Agency has achieved significant impact through its extensive programmes of environmental education with children and young people, landowners and anglers. Loughs Agency's education and outreach work has encouraged a sense of public stewardship of these waterways and the biodiversity they are home to. By 2019, for example, more than a quarter of a million people had visited its interpretive educational facility, Riverwatch, since its opening at the Agency's headquarters in 2001,[21] while its hands-on learning Salmon Ambassadors programme for primary schools saw more than 40 school classes involved between 2019 and 2024.[22] Additionally, since its launch in 2021, more than 7,000 students had engaged in its Water Warriors conservation educational programme, and more than 340 young people had graduated through its Foyle and Carlingford Ambassadors programme.[23]

Similarly, Waterways Ireland has achieved significant educational impacts through its engagement with young people, providing tailored programmes for them to foster interest in waterways, ecology, and engineering. Waterways Ireland's Education Programme was run as a pilot in 2012 while in the same year, as part of Engineers Week, staff hosted site visits from primary schools in Co. Fermanagh and Co. Cavan.[24] By the following year over 300 primary schools were availing of the Education Programme, and it was recognised for excellence in learning with the DCAL Claire Award.[25] By 2019, 3,000 students from 104 schools from across the island were participating in Waterways Ireland's educational programmes, with the organisation supporting and collaborating in a wide range of activities aimed at young people and offering placements during its first 25 years of operation. Alongside these educational activities, Waterways Ireland also provides a dedicated Learning Zone on its website with resources for teachers, parents and children,[26] as well as a digital archive that allows people to explore two centuries of the waterways' history.[27]

Since its establishment, and aside from its initiatives providing food safety training for those involved in relevant industries and commerce, Safefood has also achieved educational impact through the programmes related to food safety and healthy eating it delivers in schools, and through its extensive and high-profile public health education programmes and campaigns. It has continually worked with relevant stakeholders and partners to develop resources for different age groups across the island of Ireland, with a range of such resources available through a dedicated Education page on its website.[28] Launched in 2005, its "*Safe*food for life" initiative, which offers food safety education for teenagers, had seen over 39,000 "*Safe*food for life" exams being taken by 2021, enabling 'students to take part-time jobs in businesses where food is handled or served'

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20 Ulster-Scots Agency, "Introducing the Ulster-Scots Flagship School Programme", available at https://ulsterscotsagency.com/fs/doc/flagship-schools-programme/USA_Flagship_Programme_(Final_Version).pdf

21 Loughs Agency, "Confluence" (2019), p.9, available at https://issuu.com/loughsagency/docs/confluence-reduced-for-web

22 See https://www.loughs-agency.org/what-we-do/education/salmon-ambassador-programme

23 See https://www.loughs-agency.org/what-we-do/education/foyle-and-carlingford-ambassadors-programme, and "Confluence" (2019), p.41

24 Waterways Ireland, "Annual Report and Accounts 2012", p.24

25 Waterways Ireland, "Annual Report and Accounts 2013", p.24

26 See https://www.waterwaysireland.org/about-us/learning

27 The archive is available at https://archive.waterwaysireland.org/

28 See https://www.safefood.net/Professional/Education

and serving as a means to a future career in the food industry, thereby providing not only educational but also employability impacts.[29]

In its turn, InterTradeIreland has also provided a stepping-stone into employability through programmes that connect recent graduates on the island of Ireland with businesses. Over 800 science or technology graduate jobs have been created, for example, through InterTradeIreland's Fusion and its successor Innovation Boost programmes, which provide companies with 'new product or process development needs, access to a three-way partnership that includes a third level research institution with specialist expertise and a high-calibre science or technology graduate'.[30] The Engineering Across the Border project recruited six post-primary schools offering students the opportunity to work collaboratively with professionals from manufacturing and engineering resulting in the development of technology skills, greater understanding of STEM careers and new relationships between schools, companies and students with many extending work experience with summer placements. Tourism Ireland's Global Internship Programme has similarly provided employability impacts, offering applicants the opportunity to gain first-hand experience working within the organisation and contributing to the delivery of its 'world-class marketing programmes, promoting the island of Ireland overseas'.[31]

Both InterTradeIreland and Tourism Ireland have achieved significant impact in terms of increasing our knowledge of the evolving economic context of the island of Ireland. Through the "Research and Insights" section of its website,[32] Tourism Ireland offers invaluable information that is accessible to all on the number of visitors to the island of Ireland, where they come from, where they visit and what they spend while visiting.[33] It also offers consumer insights into the island of Ireland's main overseas tourism markets through its Market Profiles,[34] as well as regular Situation and Outlook Analysis Reports (SOAR) that provide current data on aspects such as specific sectoral issues and the overall competitive environment. Similarly, InterTradeIreland's quarterly All-Island Business Monitor offers current information gathered from surveys of over 750 businesses on areas such as business sentiment, sales and employment, and is the largest and most comprehensive business survey on the island of Ireland.[35] The organisation's website also provides an accessible and informative view of the evolution of cross-border trade in goods and services. Its Cross-Border Trade Statistics informs users on the total value of cross-border trade, as well as the extent to which both North-South and South-North trade contribute to that total value.

Also available online and accessible to all, the purpose of the SEUPB's PEACE Programmes Learning Platform's is to 'act as a repository and archive of key records related to the PEACE Programmes and to provide a single point of access to the materials that have been developed since 1994'.[36] Its impact has been through the provision of knowledge of the history of the PEACE programmes and access to information on over 22,500 peace and reconciliation projects across Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland. However, through its design of the various iterations of the PEACE and INTERREG A programmes in coordination with the two administrations on the island of Ireland and stakeholders, the SEUPB has impacted across all educational levels, as well as on employability. It has supported programmes with a particular focus on 'groups or individuals who have been prevented from fulfilling their potential in society or in the labour market

29 Safefood, "Annual Report 2021", p.19, available at https://www.safefood.net/About-us/Corporate-Publications/Annual-Reports/Annual-Report-2021

30 InterTradeIreland, "Annual Review of Activities and Accounts 2020", p.31, available at https://intertradeireland.com/assets/publications/ITI-Annual-Report_2020.pdf

31 See https://www.tourismireland.com/careers/global-internship-programme

32 See https://www.tourismireland.com/research-and-insights

33 See https://www.tourismireland.com/research-and-insights/visitor-facts-and-figures

34 See https://www.tourismireland.com/research-and-insights/market-profiles

35 See https://intertradeireland.com/insights/business-monitor

36 https://peaceplatform.seupb.eu/en/

or which have been excluded from the labour market as a result of community conflict and divisions (e.g. young people, women, older workers)'.[37]

To give some sense of how the programmes managed by the SEUPB have impacted educationally and on employability, examples include PEACE II's funding of childcare places that benefited 9,987 children and their families,[38] 100,767 people gaining qualifications,[39] 77,652 entering or progressing in employment and education,[40] of which 21,360 young people achieving accreditation following funded training programmes, and 29,466 young people progressing within education, training or moving into employment, [41] and 7,235 people in employment achieving enhanced skills, including in ICT.[42] A further 2,456 progressed in employment and education under PEACE IV,[43] as well as 7,861 marginalised and disadvantaged young people aged between 14 and 24 having completed approved programmes that developed their soft skills and a respect for diversity.[44] Crucially, PEACE IV's focus on shared education initiatives brought to the fore how the programmes managed by the SEUPB and designed by the organisation in partnership with the two administrations were able to combine educational impacts with the objective of progressing the process of peace and reconciliation. This meant that the shared education initiatives not only yielded educational impacts (access to a wider curriculum, sharing ideas and good practice among education providers), but also wider societal impacts (equipping educational providers and children with skills to promote a culture of tolerance and mutual understanding).[45] A total of 492 schools were involved in delivering shared education to 121,974 participants, with 2,417 teachers trained to facilitate shared education even before the closure of funded projects.[46]

1.3. Health and wellbeing

In undertaking the research for this report, it became apparent that health and wellbeing was an important area of social impact to which the Implementation Bodies have contributed over the first 25 years of their existence. The health impacts achieved by the Implementation Bodies are across key themes that include those relating to healthy eating, health and social care provision, physical activity and wellbeing, with different Bodies contributing to one or more of these themes.

1.3.1. Healthy eating, health promotion and food safety, and health and social care provision and research cooperation

Safefood's work has meant people right across the island of Ireland have been able to make informed choices that will help them avoid negative health outcomes. Its promotion of healthier eating habits via public health campaigns, research, and educational resources focusing on public health issues like obesity, heart disease, and diabetes has given people the tools to live healthier lives. The research undertaken on Safefood for this report presented numerous examples of how

37 SEUPB, "EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland 2000-2006: Operational Programme", p.38

38 SEUPB, "Final Programme Closure Report: EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland 2000-2006", p.345

39 SEUPB, "The Story and Impact of EU PEACE and INTERREG Funding: Past and Future", p.9

40 SEUPB, "Weaving a Lattice of Peace: The impact of PEACE funding on our Citizens and Communities", p.15

41 SEUPB, "Final Programme Closure Report: EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland 2000-2006", p.328

42 Ibid, p.182.

43 SEUPB, "Weaving a Lattice of Peace: The impact of PEACE funding on our Citizens and Communities", p.17

44 SEUPB, "The Story and Impact of EU PEACE and INTERREG Funding: Past and Future", p.13

45 Ibid, p.12

46 Ibid, p.13

their work has encouraged healthier choices, with the materials for its public health campaigns specifically developed to have impact on an all-island basis and ensuring there is a consistency of messaging for audiences in the two jurisdictions.

An independent evaluation by Millward Brown commissioned by Safefood of its three-year "Let's take on childhood obesity" campaign, for example, found that 85% of parents reported that it had made them 'realise what will happen to my children if I don't take steps to change'.[47] Another example is how Safefood promoted the benefits of women taking folic acid through its "Babies know the facts about Folic" campaign. With the daily intake of folic acid supplements potentially preventing two thirds of Neural Tube Defects such as spina bifida, this three-year campaign resulted in significant behavioural change. An evaluation after the first year of the campaign showed a 26% year-on-year increase in sales of folic acid,[48] while by the end there was an increase from 7.9% to 12.1% of women who were not planning a pregnancy taking folic acid supplements, and an increase from 15.7% to 18.9% among women planning a pregnancy.[49] In terms of its work on food safety, a stakeholder interviewed for this report noted how "the impact [...] is that [Safefood] are preventing foodborne disease". An illustrative food safety initiative was Safefood's three-year "Trust the meat thermometer" campaign, launched in 2021 to increase the proportion of adults on the island with knowledge of the safe internal cooking temperature for meats and to encourage the use of meat thermometers.

Safefood "Trust the Meat Thermometer" campaign

47 Safefood, "'Let's take on childhood obesity': Evaluation of a 3 year public health campaign" (2019), p.6, available at https://www.safefood.net/admin/getmedia/06b21843-d47c-4156-8958-a4c1b0d81cad/Childhood-Obesity-Campaign-Evaluation-Final.aspx?ext=.pdf

48 Safefood, Annual Report 2015, p.24

49 Safefood, Annual Report 2017, p.31

It saw an increase in the ownership of meat thermometers from 17% in 2021 to 38% in 2024,[50] and the proportion of adults who knew the safe internal cooking temperature for meats rising from 22% in 2022 to 30% in 2023.[51]

The funding programmes designed by the SEUPB in collaboration with government departments and stakeholders also provided cross-border integrated health and community services that resulted in 'improved health outcomes'.[52] PEACE II, for example, supported cross-border sectoral development in the area of health and social services, and cooperative arrangements between Health Boards in Northern Ireland and Health and Personal Social Services Agencies in the Republic of Ireland.[53] During the same period (2000-2006), the INTERREG IIIA programme supported the development of 59 cross-border health and social care networks, and funded projects that trained 1,835 health and social care professionals.[54] The Final Report for INTERREG IVA (2007-2013) noted how the programme left an impact of 'improved cross-border co-operation [...], improving services in order to improve the quality of life for those living in the eligible region', with the Putting Patients First Project given as an example of an initiative that benefited 97,256 people by offering 'facilities for patients with conditions such as autism, obesity, diabetes and eating disorders in the border region'.[55]

For its part, InterTradeIreland consistently supported North-South research and development initiatives in the area of health. Since its establishment, it has supported initiatives such as BioMedIreland (2004), 'a formalised network for North/South industry co-operation within the biotechnology and health technology sector',[56] and the Innova programme, a North-South research and development programme that in its first year (2006) saw eight collaborative projects 'across a range of health and technology issues, including cancer diagnostics, colon cancer treatment, microscopy instruments and a hygiene management system for health care institutions'.[57] InterTradeIreland continues to play a key role in facilitating the US-Ireland R&D Partnership. This is a unique tri-jurisdictional research programme, established as a direct result of the BGFA in 2006, which connects researchers in Ireland, Northern Ireland, and the US to collaborate on shared global priority areas including health. Of the total of 99 projects to date (May 2025), 17 projects have been funded under the health priority area with funding from the Health Research Board in Ireland, HSC RD Northern Ireland and the National Institutes of Health in the US. Projects supported have included a focus on diabetes, kidney disease, cystic fibrosis and several cancers.

1.3.2. Physical activity

In its 2022 Annual Report, Waterways Ireland highlights how the Greenways and Blueways it has developed deliver 'health and wellbeing benefits to the regions through which they pass'.[58] Moreover, while describing the inland waterways as forming part of the "natural health service" encouraging healthy outdoor activity, the 2019 Annual Report notes how 'It is estimated that the proximity of cycle and walking trails to the inland waterways improves the economic mortality

50 Safefood, "Meat thermometer use grows 20%" (July 2024), https://www.safefood.net/communications/news/2024/meat-thermometer-use-grows-20

51 Safefood, Annual Report 2023, p.12, available at https://www.safefood.net/getmedia/1d99ae81-c904-4536-bcbd-53c113913057/Safefood-Annual-Report-2023.pdf

52 SEUPB, "Final Fund Report: INTERREG IIIA Ireland/Northern Ireland Programme 2000-2006", p.17

53 SEUPB, "Final Programme Closure Report: EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland 2000-2006", p.286

54 SEUPB, *The Story and Impact of EU PEACE and INTERREG Funding: Past and Future*, p.17

55 SEUPB, "INTERREG IVA Final Report", p.68

56 InterTradeIreland, "Annual Review of Activities and Annual Accounts 2003", p.29

57 InterTradeIreland, "Annual Review of Activities and Annual Accounts 2006", p.38

58 Waterways Ireland, "Annual Report and Accounts 2022", p.21

rate by approximately €38.5m per annum'.[59] Similarly, Loughs Agency's promotion of angling as an outdoors physical activity contributing to improved health outcomes has been a prominent feature of its work over its first 25 years of existence. Conscious that 'As well as the positive economic impacts, particularly in rural areas, the health and social benefits of angling are well recognised',[60] Loughs Agency has striven to make it a sport accessible to all, including 'people with a physical impairment or older people, through the provision of improved access at sites'.[61]

In fulfilling their respective remits, both Loughs Agency and Waterways Ireland have used water-based outdoor activities to positively impact on young people's health and wellbeing. In 2022 Loughs Agency, for example, engaged with 2,000 pupils in the Foyle and Carlingford catchment areas through its Water Warriors programme, which 'provided water activities, encouraging young people to experience first-hand the physical and mental health benefits of getting active in our loughs'.[62] Aimed at young people, initiatives like "Paddles Up", "Get Rowing" and "Family Fun Challenges" reflect Waterways Ireland's commitment to community wellness and sports development. In its first year (2017), the "Paddles Up" canoe programme saw 408 secondary school students gaining an introduction into canoeing,[63] which had risen to 1,741 by the following year.[64] These and other programmes run by Waterways Ireland in partnership with other organisations 'to increase recreational participation, and promote improved levels of fitness, health and wellness across all ages in a fun and sociable environment', attracted over 10,000 participants in 2019.[65]

Projects spanning the areas of tourism, reconciliation and social cohesion, community space and the environment made possible by the funding programmes shaped by the SEUPB have impacted positively on the physical and mental health of individual users. The development of greenways such as the cross-border North West Greenway Network (of which €23.8m was funded through the INTERREG VA Programme), resulted in 'an environmentally friendly travel option for commuters as well as facilitating active travel, physical activity and encouraging sustainable transport and decarbonisation'.[66] Indeed, the external evaluation commissioned by the SEUPB concluded that 'an increase in exercise and leisure uses of greenways may be seen as positive outcomes' of the INTERREG VA programme.[67] As part of its Colmcille partnership with Bòrd na Gàidhligh in Scotland,[68] Foras na Gaeilge has also worked with a range of partners including local authorities across the North West of the island of Ireland and Scotland to develop the Slí Cholmcille (the St Columba Way), which currently consists of nine trails, 'which allows people to follow in the footsteps of Colm Cille and the medieval communities that shaped the history of Ireland and Scotland'.[69]

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59 Waterways Ireland, "Annual Report and Accounts 2019", p.10. The economic mortality rate is usually used to refer to situations where economic factors such as poverty or unemployment contribute to a higher death rate among populations.

60 Loughs Agency, "Confluence", p.35

61 Loughs Agency, "Annual Report and Accounts 2013", p.8

62 Loughs Agency, "Annual Report and Accounts 2022", p.35

63 Waterways Ireland, "Annual Report and Accounts 2017", p.25

64 Waterways Ireland, "Annual Report and Accounts 2018", p.10

65 Waterways Ireland, "Annual Report and Accounts 2019", p.28

66 SEUPB, "Successful Completion of North West Greenway Celebrated" (13 September 2024), https://www.seupb.eu/latest/news/successful-completion-north-west-greenway-network-celebrated

67 SEUPB, "INTERREG VA Priority 3 Sustainable Transport: Evaluation 2017-2022" (November 2022), p.52, available at https://www.seupb.eu/current-programmes/interreg-va/evaluations/interreg-va-impact-evaluation-pa-3-sustainable-transport

68 Bòrd na Gàidhligh is 'the principal public body in Scotland responsible for promoting Gaelic development, including providing advice to Scottish Ministers on Gaelic issues' (https://www.gaidhlig.scot/en/). For information on the Colmcille partnership, see https://colmcille.net/en/.

69 See https://www.colmcille.org/en/about/

The Royal Canal Greenway

It is important to note how the development of Greenways and Blueways has become part of a virtuous tourism cycle, whereby they have become attractions for overseas visitors who can also benefit from the health benefits they provide, while also contributing to their future sustainability through the economic impacts they bring. They feature, for example, in Tourism Ireland's 2023 Business Plan, which sets out to 'Leverage Greenways, Blueways and walking/hiking as compelling reasons to choose the island of Ireland, and engage with nature, the environment and history' in its marketing of the island of Ireland to potential overseas visitors in mainland Europe.[70]

An interesting example of the overlap between the health and wellbeing benefits of engagement in physical activity and tourism can be seen in two projects supported by the PEACE IV and INTERREG IIIA programmes developed by the SEUPB. The PEACE IV project brought together on a cross-border and cross-community basis a number of groups involved in water-based activities, with 'The surfers focused on how water therapy can help young people with autism relax and enjoy the sport'.[71] The INTERREG IIIA project resulted in a feature documentary film entitled *Waveriders* that focused on the history of surfing and the practice of the sport on the island of Ireland. As quoted in the INTERREG IIIA Final Report, *Irish Times* critic Donald Clarke described it as 'an award-winning film which supports the growth of economic and social cohesion in the cross-border region through the promotion of discretionary tourism to those interested in a beautiful environment and world class water sports locations'.[72]

Over their first 25 years, the Implementation Bodies have positively impacted on the health of people across the island of Ireland through sports and the promotion of physical activity. While many projects supported through the SEUPB's PEACE programmes in particular have used sport

[70] Tourism Ireland, "Business Plan 2023", p.11, available at https://assets.tourismireland.com/data/docs/default-source/corporate-items/tourism-ireland-business-plan-2023.pdf

[71] SEUPB, "Impact Evaluation of the PEACE IV (2014-2020) Programme – Specific Objectives 2, 3 and 4 – Final Report", p.97

[72] SEUPB, "Final Fund Report: INTERREG IIIA Ireland/Northern Ireland Programme 2000-2006", p.82

to increase cross-community and cross-border understanding and cohesion, they have also funded the development of sports facilities 'often addressing the needs of deprived areas' and widening access to the health and wellbeing benefits of physical activity.[73] The Language Body has also funded and supported programmes and events that included sporting activities, which not only provided participants with the health and wellbeing benefits of engaging in physical activity, but also allowed Foras na Gaeilge to promote the Irish language and the Ulster-Scots Agency to promote Ulster-Scots culture. Launched in 2017, Safefood's multi-year childhood obesity campaign, START, aimed 'to build a society-wide movement that will inspire and support parents to start building and persisting with healthy lifestyle habits',[74] which included providing advice and support on physical activity. Safefood's partnership with the Irish Football Association in the "On the Ball" programme saw the two organisations deliver 'interactive and practical challenges and games to introduce children to the benefits of healthy eating and physical activity' to more than 1,200 children in 2021,[75] more than 3,000 in 2022,[76] and almost 5,000 in 2023.[77]

1.3.3. Wellbeing and the legacy of the conflict

While many of the impacts achieved by the Implementation Bodies over their first 25 years have resulted in wider positive wellbeing outcomes, it is important to highlight those that have addressed the consequences of "the troubles". Here, the SEUPB's specific remit has meant that its shaping of funding programmes in collaboration with government departments and stakeholders has supported numerous initiatives that promote mental health, well-being, and community resilience, especially in communities that were badly affected by the conflict. This has included trauma recovery programmes, mental health support, and community outreach aimed at reducing social isolation. Examples include the "Relatives for Justice" and the "WAVE Youth" projects, supported by PEACE II, which provided complementary and alternative therapies in helping victims and survivors suffering from trauma,[78] and 'support services to children/young people bereaved or traumatised as a result of the Troubles'.[79] Under the PEACE III programme, 44,037 people attended 1,887 events assisting victims and survivors, with 6,999 people receiving trauma counselling.[80] The PEACE IV programme also funded projects that offered advocacy support to 3,956 individuals,[81] and provided 'counselling and emotional support, welfare advice, and opportunities for personal and professional development for victims, survivors and their families'.[82]

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73 SEUPB, "Final Programme Closure Report: EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland 2000-2006", p.84

74 Safefood, "Annual Report 2017", p.29

75 Safefood, "Annual Report 2021", p.19

76 Safefood, "Annual Report 2022", p.6

77 Safefood, "Annual Report 2023", p.4

78 See SEUPB, "Special EU Programmes Body Case Study: Relatives for Justice", available at https://peaceplatform.seupb.eu/en/peace-platform/report/view/reference/032053_P2_CS/

79 SEUPB, "Final Programme Closure Report: EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland 2000-2006", p.78

80 SEUPB, "The Story and Impact of EU PEACE and INTERREG Funding: Past and Future", p.11

81 Ibid, p.13

82 SEUPB, "Weaving a Lattice of Peace: The impact of PEACE funding on our Citizens and Communities", p.22

2. The Economic Impacts

All of the Implementation Bodies have achieved economic impacts over the first 25 years of their establishment across their respective remits. These include in areas such as trade and business development, tourism, employment, infrastructure, and research and innovation. However, before analysing these specific areas of economic impact, it is important to acknowledge that the Implementation Bodies are of themselves economic operators, purchasing goods and services to undertake their day-to-day operations. Over their first 25 years of existence, the Implementation Bodies have collectively expended over £217/€255 million buying goods and services from a range of providers across the island of Ireland.[83] This expenditure represents a direct economic impact in terms of those businesses from which the Implementation Bodies have been acquiring goods and services, but also generates a multiplier effect in terms of how those businesses will in turn be purchasing goods and services from others.

2.1. Trade and business development

Having provided assistance and guidance to over 60,000 businesses across the island of Ireland, generating approximately €1.95 billion (£1.75 billion) in Business Development Value, a key measure of InterTradeIreland's economic impact is evidenced via cross-border trade statistics. External stakeholders noted InterTradeIreland's pivotal role, with one interviewee stating:

> "InterTradeIreland has been at the forefront of driving and increasing all-island trade, overseeing a significant and diverse range of business interventions aimed at enhancing economic opportunities across the island."

This impact is evident in official trade statistics from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) and the Central Statistics Office (CSO). When InterTradeIreland was established, cross-border trade was worth approximately €2 billion. By 2011, trade in goods and services had risen to €6.3 billion (£5.5 billion) and by 2023 it was worth €14.3 billion (£12.4 billion). This substantial growth underlines the effectiveness of InterTradeIreland's strategic focus on fostering cross-border economic collaboration.

A central part of InterTradeIreland's efforts has been its business first focus. From the outset, InterTradeIreland made a conscious decision to direct the majority of its funding towards businesses themselves, rather than administrative overheads or intermediary delivery.

As a result, although not a large grant-giving body in absolute terms in 2024, the organisation recorded an impact-to-expenditure ratio of 10:1, meaning that for every pound or euro invested, businesses reported £10/€10 in combined additional revenue, efficiency savings, or further investment. This high return reflects the relevance and targeting of its programmes.

InterTradeIreland's support for the development of businesses across the island has been delivered in a variety of ways, whether through vouchers that provide financial assistance to address specific business development and trade issues, wider programmes on business development and investment, and one-to-one advisory services.

In the period immediately following the UK's exit from the EU, InterTradeIreland provided Brexit vouchers that gave financial assistance to businesses to, in the first instance, identify what their exposure to Brexit might be and, in the second instance, to implement necessary changes to their

[83] This figure does not include the operating costs of Tourism Ireland given that much of its activity takes place outside the island of Ireland, and the estimate is based on administrative and other operating costs as set out in the implementation bodies' annual accounts. It does not include expenditure classed as programme costs.

InterTradeIreland Seedcorn Award Winners 2024

operations.[84] It also supported businesses involved in cross-border trade to navigate Brexit through its Brexit Advisory Service, almost 16,000 engaged with the service with almost 4,000 availing of voucher supports. This service has since evolved into its Trade Hub, containing 'the latest information, advice and bespoke support for businesses engaged in, or planning to engage in cross-border trade across both jurisdictions'.[85] Other examples of its support programmes include Acumen, which helps businesses to make the first step into cross-border trade by providing funding to recruit a sales resource,[86] the Enterprise Investment Scheme and the Seed Enterprise Investment Scheme, assisting in the raising of finance, and its Seedcorn programme, which supports businesses to become 'investor ready' and attract investment.[87]

Designed in collaboration with government departments and stakeholders, the EU funding programmes managed by the SEUPB have also supported businesses to develop and to export. The very first PEACE programme, which came before the 1998 Agreement and the establishment of the SEUPB and the other Bodies under Strand 2, was acutely aware of the fact that 'The Northern Ireland economy suffered immense adverse effects from the years of continued conflict'.[88] That awareness was maintained by the SEUPB following its establishment, including in the most recent funding programme – PEACEPLUS:

> Peace and prosperity are synonymous with one another, and peace is a necessary precondition for sustained economic growth. In turn, the prosperity arising from a stable and rising economy, can help foster and embed peace. Conflict and peace

[84] For more on InterTradeIreland's Brexit vouchers, see https://intertradeireland.com/news/intertradeirelands-brexit-vouchers-a-must-for-cross-border-traders-minister-heather-humphreys-td-launches-intertradeirelands-enhanced-brexit-support

[85] See https://crossbordertradehub.intertradeireland.com/about-the-cross-border-trade-hub

[86] See https://intertradeireland.com/sales-growth/acumen

[87] See https://intertradeireland.com/funding/seedcorn

[88] "Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Ireland 1995-1999", p.13; available at https://peaceplatform.seupb.eu/en/peace-platform/report/view/reference/PP1005/

> both shape and are shaped by the economy. As such, economic development in post conflict regions must take account of this and, where possible, be designed to strengthen peace and reconciliation.[89]

This is why one of the investment priorities for PEACEPLUS for the period 2021-2027 is delivering socio-economic regeneration and transformation. The previous programmes for which the SEUPB had responsibility were designed to achieve economic impacts through specific support for, among other areas, economic renewal and economic cross-border cooperation (PEACE II), integrated local development focusing on promoting economic and social cohesion (INTERREG IIIA), developing a dynamic economy (INTERREG IVA), and research and innovation (INTERREG VA).

Two examples of how the programmes managed by the SEUPB have supported business development are in promoting the uptake of new technologies and building collaborative partnerships between small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and research and innovation institutions, which are both areas in which the current PEACEPLUS programme will invest. Thus, for example, through an SME Development and Transition Programme, it will 'support SMEs to deliver productivity improvements or transition to the latest digital tools'.[90] The programme will also support cross-border collaborative research and innovation projects and cross-border academic and industry collaborative projects,[91] while its Innovation Challenge Fund 'will invest in cross-border consortia groups comprising stakeholders who wish to collaborate on high level innovation projects, which will deliver local and national benefits'.[92]

However, even as far back as PEACE II it was investing in 'Actions to promote transition to the knowledge-based economy, particularly in key areas such as information and communications technology, software engineering and multimedia applications'.[93] In the same period (2000-2006), the INTERREG IIIA programme was 'exploiting ICT and rural economy opportunities',[94] and 'improving the region's use of modern technology and increasing awareness of ICT opportunities and access to ICT resources'.[95] As a result, 6,580 SMEs were supported through PEACE II projects 'focused on promoting ICT use in local businesses in economically and socially deprived areas',[96] and 'The associated upturn in the local economy contributed to an increase in business confidence and competitiveness, which in turn encouraged inward investment'.[97] INTERREG IIIA's objective of exploiting ICT and rural economy opportunities resulted, among other things, in 1,291 SMEs and community groups participating in knowledge economy initiatives, with 23,667 people trained in new skills.[98] The impacts achieved through the programme's aim of improving the wider region's use of modern technology was that 216 businesses benefited from staff trained in ICT skills.[99]

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89 SEUPB, "PEACEPLUS Programme 2021-2027: Programme Overview", p.13, available at: https://www.seupb.eu/sites/default/files/2023-05/PEACEPLUS_Overview_24052023.pdf

90 Ibid, p.14

91 Ibid, p.15

92 Ibid, p.16

93 SEUPB, "EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland 2000-2006: Operational Programme", p.80; available at https://peaceplatform.seupb.eu/en/peace-platform/report/view/reference/PP2001/

94 SEUPB, "Final Fund Report: INTERREG IIIA Ireland/Northern Ireland Programme 2000-2006", p.50

95 Ibid, p.66

96 SEUPB, "Final Programme Closure Report: EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland 2000-2006", p.182; available at https://peaceplatform.seupb.eu/en/peace-platform/report/view/reference/PP2289/

97 Ibid, p.183

98 SEUPB, "Final Fund Report: INTERREG IIIA Ireland/Northern Ireland Programme 2000-2006", p.51

99 Ibid, p.71

In the 2000-2006 period, the PEACE II programme led to the establishment of 19 centres of research excellence, 'transferring innovative ideas into the Northern Ireland economy' and providing 'a support mechanism for start-up companies and joint ventures'.[100] During that same period, the INTERREG IIIA programme saw 3,877 SMEs being assisted through clusters created to support cross-border business enterprise and research and development (R&D) linkages,[101] resulting in 445 educational establishments participating in networks, with an impact of 352 information linkages established between businesses and educational and research agencies.[102] The final programme closure report noted how the impact of the projects funded by the programme 'has been impressive, insofar as they have succeeded in bringing together, on a cross-border basis, not only SMEs, but also key figures and teams from academia, business innovation, the social and voluntary sector and economic development'.[103]

In terms of the 2007-2013 period, the INTERREG IVA programme assisted 3,352 businesses in promoting innovation and funded 33 networking projects to raise the competitiveness of small firms.[104] The INTERREG VA programme, which was for the period 2014-2020, saw '153 enterprises working with research institutions' with 460 also receiving one-to-one innovation advice.[105] In their evaluation report on the programme's investment into research and innovation, the external assessors commissioned by the SEUPB concluded that the projects funded had 'contributed to the shared policy agenda of the eligible region to transform the region into a knowledge-based economy, characterised by increased research capacity and capability, which can produce new intellectual property, human capital and attract foreign direct investment'.[106]

Safefood makes an important contribution to trade by protecting and strengthening the integrity of the food chain. This protects the reputation of Irish food production and helps underpin the important agrifood sector across the island. This trust is crucial for the reputation of the food industry, both locally and internationally, protecting Ireland's strong position in the global food market.[107] With regard to food safety activities, one of Safefood's key audiences is those who produce, process and sell food, including the food service sector. It has, therefore, worked to support business development in the area of food safety offering a range of targeted resources, such as the Safefood for Business free online training programme 'in basic food safety for small food businesses in food service, catering, retail and manufacturing'.[108] Its Knowledge Network brings together over 4,000 professionals working in food businesses, environmental and public health, regulatory agencies, food testing laboratories, research and education. Membership of the Network provides access to a range of benefits, including applied and focused training and networking opportunities, and it is advised by an expert group on issues that impact on food safety and their relation to trade and the economy.[109] This work on food safety not only protects consumers; it also protects businesses and helps their development.

[100] SEUPB, "Final Programme Closure Report: EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland 2000-2006", p.180

[101] SEUPB, "Final Fund Report: INTERREG IIIA Ireland/Northern Ireland Programme 2000-2006", p.51

[102] Ibid

[103] Ibid, p.75

[104] SEUPB, "The Story and Impact of EU PEACE and INTERREG Funding: Past and Future", p.18

[105] Ibid, p.19

[106] SEUPB, "INTERREG VA Impact Evaluation – Final Report: Priority 1 – Research and Innovation" (5 April 2023), p.204; available at https://www.seupb.eu/sites/default/files/2023-04/RI%20Final%20Impact%20Eval%20Report.pdf

[107] Safefood, "Predicting the future of food safety" (December 2023), https://www.safefood.net/Professional/Food-Safety/Food-safety-news-(1)/2023/Predicting-the-future-of-food-safety

[108] See https://www.safefood.net/Professional/Food-Safety/safefood-for-business

[109] See https://www.safefood.net/Professional/Food-Safety/Knowledge-network

Ulster Canal Phase 2 official opening

2.2. Tourism and infrastructure

Although much of their work is on conservation, Loughs Agency and Waterways Ireland both contribute to economic activity on the island of Ireland. Their management and development of fisheries, Blueways, Greenways and marine tourism have made them a significant attraction to local and overseas tourists and anglers, and has supported the development of a wide range of small businesses who have emerged to service the visitors these assets attract. A Loughs Agency staff member interviewed for this report remarked on how "Increased angling and marine tourism investment has brought economic benefits to local communities, creating jobs and stimulating local businesses", while a study published by Inland Fisheries Ireland estimated that the economic contribution in 2015 of Salmon and Sea Trout Angling in Ireland from domestic and international anglers was €154m.[110] A previous report jointly commissioned by Northern Ireland's Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Loughs Agency and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board estimated that the overall net economic impact of angling carried out by domestic and international visitors was £20.5m in 2005 with projected growth (on a base case scenario) to £31.5m by 2015.[111]

By protecting water quality standards and assessing and managing fish stocks in their respective areas of operation, both Waterways Ireland and Loughs Agency have been protecting the economic value of the inland waterways and Lough Foyle and Carlingford Lough, and the businesses that depend on anglers. Moreover, Loughs Agency also took on additional powers provided by legislation to protect the native oyster fishery in Lough Foyle,[112] thereby ensuring the

[110] Inland Fisheries Ireland, "The Economic Contribution of Salmon and Sea Trout Angling in Ireland" (2015), available at https://www.fisheriesireland.ie/sites/default/files/migrated/docman/SalmonSeatroutEconomicContribution.pdf

[111] Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, the Loughs Agency of the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, "The Social and Economic Impact to Northern Ireland, and areas within the Loughs Agency, of Recreational Fisheries, Angling and Angling Resources" (2015), available at https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dcal/economic-impact-of-angling-final-report-july-2007_1.pdf

[112] The relevant legislation is The Foyle Area (Control of Oyster Fishing) Regulations 2008, available at https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisr/2008/298/made

sustainability of its economic exploitation. The economic value of the oyster fishery and its role in managing it was set out in written evidence submitted by Loughs Agency to the UK House of Commons Northern Ireland Affairs Committee in 2018:

> 'Loughs Agency licences approximately 50-60 fishers to fish for native oysters in Lough Foyle annually. Landings from the fishery are approximately 100-150 tonnes of oysters annually during the fishing season and it is valued at approximately £400,000 per annum.'[113]

Waterway-based tourism and recreation generate substantial revenues. Marinas, hotels, bed-and-breakfasts, boat-rental operations, and other local businesses benefit from increased visitor spending. Waterways Ireland's 2023-2025 Corporate Plan, for example, highlighted that its role in the development of the Royal Canal Greenway had created an economic value of €17.2 million to the business community, led to the opening of 17 new businesses, and a further 13 businesses reporting that they had pivoted to exploit the new opportunities provided by the development or that they had expanded.[114]

The assets developed and managed by Waterways Ireland and Loughs Agency are significant attractions for overseas visitors that contribute to the economic prosperity of enterprises across the island of Ireland. Likewise, Foras na Gaeilge and the Ulster-Scots Agency's work on the preservation and promotion of indigenous language, culture and heritage also contributes to tourism and the attraction of overseas visitors. Whilst Tourism Ireland's 2017-2019 Corporate Plan stated that it would 'Amplify the island of Ireland positioning as a destination full of authentic immersive experiences using the experience brands to appeal to the interests and passion points of the Culturally Curious',[115] Foras na Gaeilge and the Ulster-Scots Agency have proactively been involved in and supporting initiatives to attract overseas visitors. As well as supporting local initiatives to attract tourists, the Ulster-Scots Agency has had as one of its priorities 'To widen access to and appreciation of Ulster-Scots culture and heritage for residents and visitors from abroad, including through cultural tourism'.[116] An illustrative example of how it has enacted that priority was its taking up of an opportunity offered by the Northern Ireland Bureau in Washington DC to install an exhibition in the Irish Cultural Museum in New Orleans' French Quarter in 2018, which 'featured the contribution and legacy of Ulster-Scots to the city, state and country', while it also 'worked with Tourism NI, Tourism Ireland and the Irish Consulate at the Stone Mountain Highland Games in Atlanta'.[117]

An example of Foras na Gaeilge's involvement in initiatives to attract overseas tourists is its role in the development of Slí Cholmcille (the St Columba Way) as a heritage, community and tourism project. It was reported in 2015 that: 'A week-long tour of Slí Cholmcille was piloted by MNG. Visitors from the USA, Scotland and Ireland took part in the tour'.[118] These types of activities undertaken by the two organisations that make up the Language Body have not only promoted

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113 Loughs Agency Written Submission to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee July 2018 available at https://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/northern-ireland-affairs-committee/brexit-and-northern-ireland-fisheries/written/87460.html

114 Waterways Ireland, "Corporate Plan 2023-2025", p.20. See also Waterways Ireland, "Business Plan 2023", p.21

115 Tourism Ireland, "Corporate Plan 2017-2019", p.13, available at https://assets.tourismireland.com/data/docs/default-source/default-document-library/2017-2019-corporate-plan-final-draft-awaitng-nsmc-approval-pdf-adobe-reader.pdf

116 The North/South Language Body, "The North/South Language Body Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 December 2014", p.46

117 The North/South Language Body, "The North/South Language Body Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 2018", p.57

118 The North/South Language Body, "The North/South Language Body Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 2015", p.24

Ardal O'Hanlon pictured at Balor's Fort, part of 'The Emerald Isles' three-part television series on BBC2 and BBC iPlayer about Ireland's islands, which was co-produced by Tourism Ireland

the uniqueness of the linguistic and cultural landscape of the island of Ireland to an international audience, but have also contributed to creating a pull factor for overseas tourists thereby supporting the local enterprises that rely on tourism for their economic prosperity.

Indeed, Tourism Ireland's promotion and marketing of the island of Ireland in global markets has seen a huge increase in visitor numbers and revenue that provides economic impact, including in rural and coastal communities. In written evidence to the UK House of Commons Northern Ireland Affairs Committee's 2019 inquiry on tourism in Northern Ireland, Belfast City Council noted that 'Tourism growth figures from international visitors indicate that Tourism Ireland is having significant success in delivering new visitors to the island of Ireland'.[119]

An indication of the economic impact of tourism is in how growth supports businesses to sustain jobs, as highlighted by Tourism Ireland's Chief Executive when launching its 2025 marketing plans: 'Overseas tourism to the island of Ireland delivered an estimated €7 billion in revenue in 2024 – up over +10% on 2023 – and, importantly, helped to sustain around 300,000 jobs'.[120]

To contribute to growth in overseas tourism, Tourism Ireland does not just invest significantly in marketing campaigns tailored to its target international audiences, often exploiting major sporting or cultural events (such as The Open golf tournament and the *Game of Thrones* series),[121] it also

[119] Belfast City Council, "Response to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee Tourism in Northern Ireland Inquiry" (May 2019), available at https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/102516/pdf/

[120] Tourism Ireland, "Tourism Ireland launches 2025 marketing plans" (January 2025), https://www.tourismireland.com/news-and-press-releases/press-releases/article/tourism-ireland-launches-2025-marketing-plans#:~:text=Tourism%20Ireland%20today%20launched%20details%20of%20its%20marketing,500%20tourism%20industry%20leaders%20from%20around%20the%20country

[121] See Tourism Ireland, "The 153rd Open in Northern Ireland", https://www.ireland.com/en-gb/magazine/golf/the-open-royal-portrush/, and Tourism is coming ... Northern Ireland turns into a Game of Thrones hotspot", The Guardian, 29 Mar 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2019/mar/29/tourism-is-coming-northern-ireland-turns-into-a-game-of-thrones-hotspot and https://www.ireland.com/en-gb/plan-your-trip/trip-ideas/game-of-thrones/

supports businesses on the island of Ireland more directly. As well as providing relevant market intelligence as referred to earlier in this report, it offers platforms for tourism industry partners 'to provide new and existing opportunities to grow their business from our overseas markets'.[122] It also supports local businesses to engage directly with relevant audiences through overseas sales missions and events that allow them to promote their tourism products to industry stakeholders and potential visitors, while also offering one-to-one workshops to advise businesses on how to best exploit engagements overseas. These types of supports that Tourism Ireland has been developing since its inception have a positive economic impact that goes beyond the businesses it assists, but also boosts the wider economy as the numbers of overseas visitors to the island of Ireland grows.

Its role in shaping and its management of the PEACE and INTERREG funding programmes has meant the SEUPB has boosted local economies by enabling the development or restoration of infrastructure that has not only provided employment in the construction phase, but also created attractions for local and overseas visitors. The development of infrastructure such as cycle paths, walking trails and greenways the SEUPB's programmes have supported has facilitated a range of tourism initiatives. PEACE II, for example, invested in projects to regenerate infrastructure in rural towns and villages, with the Final Report concluding that 'These types of ventures have become great tourist attractions, the success of which have helped the towns and villages targeted by PEACE II funding to become self-sustaining'.[123] During that same period (2000-2006), the INTERREG IIIA programme recognised that 'Efficient and competitive public transport services are critical to the development of trade, inward investment and tourism'.[124] It included amongst its priorities the development and enhancement of transport infrastructure, resulting in 'enhanced transport linkages and improved connectivity' through investment in roads and the rail network spanning the border.[125]

The SEUPB's programmes have made various investments in the railway connection between Dublin and Belfast, which have not only improved travel between the two cities, but also contributed to the development of an economic corridor that links other urban areas along its course. Describing the impact of the SEUPB's facilitation of funding in the Dublin-Belfast railway connection, one stakeholder interviewed for this report commented:

> "That will have an effect on normal people's lives in a way that other interventions won't and it will enable a greater degree of communication. If you make it easier to travel between two places, you get better communication between two places at all kinds of levels."

Another notable example of investment in infrastructure was the building of the Peace Bridge in Derry-Londonderry, made possible by funding from the PEACE III programme. Described by one stakeholder as "infrastructure that has come to deliver so much more than merely being something you can walk over", the Peace Bridge – 'used routinely by the local population and tourists alike'[126] – has not only improved cross-community social connections between two parts of the city, but it has also facilitated an economic dynamic that had not previously existed. However, another notable example of investment in infrastructure enabling a wider connectivity and greater economic development of the region has been in the support for digital infrastructure. This was highlighted as a significant impact of INTERREG IVA, with an evaluation report stating in relation to Project Kelvin: 'The provision of specialised infrastructure is also a more visible result thanks to

[122] See https://www.tourismireland.com/opportunities/partnership-programmes

[123] SEUPB, "Final Programme Closure Report: EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland 2000-2006", p.134

[124] SEUPB, "Final Fund Report: INTERREG IIIA Ireland/Northern Ireland Programme 2000-2006", p.52

[125] Ibid, p.183

[126] SEUPB, "Weaving a Lattice of Peace: The impact of PEACE funding on our Citizens and Communities", p.29

large initiatives, such as the creation of fast telecoms connection for the whole area with direct connection to the US'.[127]

Loughs Agency and Waterways Ireland have both contributed to the development, restoration and maintenance of infrastructure and the resulting economic impact through the preservation and promotion of the marine ecosystems of Lough Foyle and Carlingford Lough and the development of inland waterways. This has facilitated marine tourism, water-based recreation, angling and other leisure activities that have supported local businesses.

Map of the waterways managed by Waterways Ireland, courtesy of Waterways Ireland

[127] European Commission, "Ex post evaluation of Cohesion Policy programmes 2007-2013, financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and Cohesion Fund (CF): INTERREG IVA Northern Ireland, Border Region of Ireland and Western Scotland" (August 2015), p.13. See also Department for the Economy, "Project Kelvin – Direct Communications Link – Evaluation 2015" (February 2022), available at https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/project-kelvin-direct-international-communications-link-evaluation-2015

25 Years after its establishment, Waterways Ireland is responsible for almost 1,100kms of inland navigational waterways, 214 boat moorings, 348 bridges, 56 weirs, fishing stands, aqueducts, overflows, sluices, locks and lock houses and other buildings and adjoining lands, archives and over 600kms of Greenways and Blueways across the island of Ireland. It has an infrastructure portfolio estimated at €1 billion in terms of rebuild costs.[128] The completion of Phase 2 of Waterways Ireland's Ulster Canal restoration project, for example, has opened up opportunities for economic activity, as was recognised by the Department of the Taoiseach. It noted: 'Restoration of the canal will provide communities right across the rural border region with a new amenity to enjoy, as well as an important new tourism destination with opportunities for new businesses to open and existing businesses to expand'.[129]

For its part, Loughs Agency has also sought to improve infrastructure as a means to increase accessibility which has, in turn, supported greater economic development. This role was highlighted by members of staff taking part in a focus group for this report, with one commenting: "In terms of economic and social cohesion, there's lots happening...bringing communities together, putting infrastructure in place for recreational angling or marine tourism". In partnership with Londonderry Port and Harbour Commissioners, the then Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Inland Fisheries Ireland and local councils in Donegal, Strabane, Derry and Limavady, the organisation secured €3.7m INTERREG IVA programme funding in 2011. This investment provided upgraded facilities for tourists and anglers across a range of the North West's best-known beach and riverside locations including the Foyle Pontoon, Benone Beach Activity Centre, and Malin Head.

2.3. Employment

Throughout their first 25 years fulfilling their specific remits, all the Implementation Bodies have contributed to creating new or sustaining existing jobs across sectors on the island of Ireland. This has come as a result of both direct interventions by Implementation Bodies and indirectly through the economic activity they have stimulated. It is important in this regard not to underestimate how the economic opportunities presented to businesses through the projects developed by Waterways Ireland and Loughs Agency, for example, have contributed to sustaining existing jobs within businesses, and even to the creation of new jobs where businesses expand to exploit the new opportunities provided by the Implementation Bodies' activities. Safefood's role should also not be underestimated as its work contributes to the protection of the production and supply of food, and therefore to the protection of the agrifood sector on the island of Ireland, as well as distributors and caterers of food, which are all major employers.

In terms of more direct support, by 2023 28 Irish language development officers were being employed across the island of Ireland through Foras na Gaeilge's Irish Language Networks Development Scheme,[130] and in 2021 four development officers were being jointly funded with three local councils in Northern Ireland.[131] However, Foras na Gaeilge staff interviewed for this report pointed to how the activity generated by a funded development officer has the potential

[128] See Waterways Ireland, "Corporate Plan 2023-2025", p.6 https://www.waterwaysireland.org/about-us/our-plans, and Waterways Ireland, "About us", https://www.waterwaysireland.org/about-us

[129] Department of the Taoiseach, "Government marks the completion of Phase 2 of the Ulster Canal Restoration" (19 June 2024), https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/4827a-government-marks-the-completion-of-phase-2-of-the-ulster-canal-restoration/

[130] See Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, "Fourth annual report on progress of Action Plan for the Irish Language 2018-2023 approved by Government and launched by Ministers" (December 2023), https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-culture-communications-and-sport/press-releases/fourth-annual-report-on-progress-of-action-plan-for-the-irish-language-2018-2023-approved-by-government-and-launched-by-ministers/

[131] The North/South Language Body, "The North/South Language Body Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 December 2021", p.46

Edward Bruce event, photo courtesy of Ulster-Scots Agency

for the stimulation of further jobs within the communities they operate. From an initial placement of one development officer in one area of Belfast, it was suggested that it "has somewhere in the region of 65 people working in it...from the origins of one – a huge amount of employment has been created".

The Ulster-Scots Agency has also provided direct support for employment, including through a Community Workers Scheme and the financing in 2010 of eight part-time administrative workers within community and voluntary groups,[132] and the approval in 2002 for it to finance the costs of employing a Cultural Officer in Altnaveigh House Cultural Society in Newry.[133]

The distribution of grants and core funding has also supported employment. The Ulster-Scots Agency's provision in 2016 of £98,805 to three Ulster-Scots Community Impact projects, for example, 'resulted in a full-time Ulster-Scots Development Officer being employed within a specific geographical area', which was also the case in 2015.[134] For its part, Foras na Gaeilge's award of funding in 2020 to the non-profit social enterprise, Caifé na gCrom, looked to 'create employment opportunities in the Irish language sector in this semi-rural area',[135] while in 2006 it reported that its funding to 11 Irish language organisations resulted in 64 people being directly employed.[136]

[132] The North/South Language Body, "The North/South Language Body Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 December 2010", p.52

[133] The North/South Language Body, "The North/South Language Body Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 December 2002", p.15

[134] The North/South Language Body, "The North/South Language Body Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 December 2016", p.45

[135] The North/South Language Body, "The North/South Language Body Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 December 2020", p.29

[136] The North/South Language Body, "The North/South Language Body Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 December 2006", p.29

Although its remit does not encompass the provision of direct financial support to businesses in terms of job creation, nevertheless the work of Tourism Ireland in the promotion of the island as a tourism destination to overseas travellers has made a significant contribution to sustaining a large number of jobs. In 2019, it supported 330,000 jobs across the island of Ireland in various sectors including hospitality, transportation, retail, recreation and entertainment.[137] Moreover, the spread and location of jobs across the island also encourages a more balanced economy with employment distributed across both urban and rural locations, as was highlighted by Northern Ireland's Economy Minister during a visit to the United States and Canada in 2024:

> "Tourism is one of our largest indigenous industries, supporting around 65,000 jobs across the north of Ireland, with most of those jobs located outside Belfast – so tourism is key to promoting a more regionally balanced economy".[138]

By supporting businesses to grow through cross-border trade and developing more innovative products and processes, InterTradeIreland has also contributed to the creation of new jobs in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, with one staff member remarking, "A lot of what we're doing is building employment". InterTradeIreland's contribution to job creation has been both as a result of the expansion of businesses as they engage in cross-border trade and wider export and the innovation that requires, as well as more direct ways through specific programmes. In terms of the business growth supported by InterTradeIreland, it has achieved an estimated total Business Development Value of £1.7bn/€1.95bn since its inception,[139] which is the additional revenue generated, and the efficiency savings and investments made by businesses as a direct result of their participation on an InterTradeIreland programme. This has allowed businesses to take on additional employees or to sustain existing jobs. An example of its more direct support in terms of supporting employment is the Acumen programme, which makes a significant financial contribution for a company to directly employ a full or part-time salesperson to assist the business in its cross-border trade.

An indication of how the PEACE and INTERREG programmes the SEUPB have designed in collaboration with government departments and stakeholders have impacted on economic development is through the ability of the businesses they have supported to create new employment and to safeguard existing jobs. Over the programming periods between 2000 and 2020, approximately 10,500 jobs were created or sustained directly as a result of the support businesses and organisations in other sectors received from PEACE and INTERREG.[140] This creation or sustaining of jobs has not necessarily always come about through the funding of posts, but also through the innovation and capacity to exploit new opportunities made possible through the projects these programmes have supported.

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137 See Tourism Ireland, "Overseas Tourism and Tourism Ireland – Key Facts", https://www.tourismireland.com/research-and-insights/tourism-key-facts

138 Tourism Ireland, "Economy Minister promotes Northern Ireland to leading tour operators, airlines and media in Chicago and Toronto" (September 2024), https://www.tourismireland.com/news-and-press-releases/press-releases/article/economy-minister-promotes-northern-ireland-to-leading-tour-operators—airlines-and-media-in-chicago-and-toronto

139 InterTradeIreland, "Corporate Plan 2023-2025", https://intertradeireland.com/corporate-information/corporate-plans, p.5. See also InterTradeIreland, "About Us", https://intertradeireland.com/corporate-information/about-us.

140 This estimate excludes the programmes before 2000, which were principally designed before the SEUPB's establishment, and where the PEACE I programme resulted in the creation of 7,000 to 8,000 jobs; SEUPB, "The Story and Impact of EU PEACE and INTERREG Funding: Past and Future", p.7; see also PriceWaterhouseCoopers, "Ex-post Evaluation of PEACE I and Mid-Term Evaluation of PEACE II: Executive Summary and Conclusions & Recommendations", p.3, available at https://peaceplatform.seupb.eu/en/peace-platform/report/view/reference/PP1037/

2.4. Research and innovation

Supporting research and driving innovation has been a constant feature of the Implementation Bodies since their establishment in 1999. Safefood has had a specific focus on addressing knowledge gaps in food safety and public health nutrition through a structured programme of externally commissioned research. As a member of staff interviewed for this report noted, many of Safefood's achievements have been supported by "commissioned research to produce the evidence that underpins large public-facing media campaigns". Between 2000 and 2023 Safefood commissioned 142 research projects with a total expenditure in excess of €18m on their research programme in that period.[141]

One example of the centrality of research to the organisation was the project 'Investigation of the Presence of Anti-Nutritional and Toxic Compounds in Health Foods', which was completed in 2008. Commissioned by Safefood and undertaken by Teagasc, it found that a range of health food products had been contaminated by toxins, resulting in their withdrawal from sale by the Irish Medicines Board. This information was further disseminated by the EU rapid alert system, which resulted in similar withdrawals in other EU member states.[142] Between 2014 and 2022 Safefood also funded research into the cost of a healthy food basket in both jurisdictions, which was carried out on a biannual basis by The Minimum Essential Standards of Living Research Centre at St. Vincent de Paul. In Northern Ireland, the NI Consumer Council collaborated on the research in 2014 and 2016, with the Northern Ireland Food Standards Agency collaborating on subsequent reports. The research looked at food baskets for a range of household types and calculated the cost as a proportion of take-home income. This series of reports informed Safefood's own work around food poverty, nutrition and messaging on healthy eating in low-income households and communities, and shaped the development of Community Food Initiatives in disadvantaged areas. Crucially, the wealth of research commissioned by Safefood that shapes the organisation's activities, including its engagement with consumers and producers, is a resource available to all.[143]

The Food Safety Skills Fund, image courtesy of Safefood

[141] Safefood Research programme expenditure was calculated from information on the organisation's annual accounts presented in Annual Reports from 2000-2023

[142] Safefood, "Annual Report 2009", p.11 See also Investigation of the presence of anti-nutritional and toxic compounds in "health foods", Teagasc 2010, available at https://www.teagasc.ie/media/website/publications/2008/Investigation-of-the-presence-of-anti-nutritional-and-toxic-compounds-in-health-foods_5429.pdf

[143] The results of the research commissioned by Safefood can be accessed at https://www.safefood.net/research

Loughs Agency has led internationally significant scientific research projects tracking the movements of marine species. It uses scientific research to inform its decision making on a range of environmental issues within its remit but particularly in relation to the management and conservation of salmon (and other fish), oysters and the preservation and enhancement of aquatic ecosystems. Its Science Strategy 2022-2030 includes goals to deliver robust scientific research that allows for environmental management, communicate research transparently to stakeholders, take an ecosystem based approach and ensure all science is delivered using an outcomes focused approach.[144] The Agency has led on a range of research projects involving local, national and international partners over the past 25 years, which has included managing EU funding to the value of over €18m.

SeaMonitor is an example of the ground-breaking research programme led by Loughs Agency. Funded by INTERREG, between 2019 and 2023 the Agency led a consortium of eight leading marine research institutions to use acoustic equipment in the seas around Ireland, Northern Ireland and Scotland to gather data on fish and marine mammal movements. During 2022 the team began drafting Ireland's first marine management plan for Atlantic salmon, as well as working with partners to produce a regional marine migration pathway model for the species based on the tracking data obtained from the project. It used the data generated to deliver conservation programmes and build capacity for managing marine protected areas and their species.[145] This type of research serves to help protect marine life not only from an environmental perspective, but it also assists in developing more sustainable fishing policies and practices.

Waterways Ireland's 2023-2025 Corporate Plan highlights the role of research for advancing operations by 'proactively investigating new systems and technologies to manage this valuable natural resource and how it supports waterways as ecological, recreational and wellbeing corridors'.[146] But that research capability has had to be built and nurtured, with the 2004 Annual Report noting that the first phase of its Research Programme was implemented that year, resulting in two pieces of research: a profile of waterways users, and a review undertaken on behalf of the Department of Community, Arts and Leisure into the commercial and recreational usage of Lough Neagh.[147] This type of research, which has continued to the present day, is used to gather an evidence base for organisational decisions on improving and widening access to the waterways under its responsibility, which not only results in social impacts, but also in economic ones, while also providing positive environmental impacts. It has driven innovation as a means of ensuring maximum accessibility to the inland waterways under the organisation's remit while also protecting them, thereby not only safeguarding the businesses that rely on those visiting and using the waterways, but also providing opportunities for the expansion of those existing businesses and the establishment of new ones with the positive economic impacts these bring.

As noted earlier in this report, both InterTradeIreland and Tourism Ireland have increased the knowledge of the evolving economic context of the island of Ireland, making the research they undertake and/or commission available to all. However, in both cases that research has the primary purpose of driving economic growth, assisting businesses to make informed decisions that will result in positive outcomes. Tourism Ireland regularly commissions research in important overseas markets for tourism on the island of Ireland, which it uses to inform its own marketing and to inform partner organisations and the travel industry in relation to consumer sentiment. Its Sentiment Tracker Research programme, for example, provides detailed information gathered from an online survey of over 8,000 potential holidaymakers across eight key markets on what they think about the island of Ireland.[148] Its regular market reviews are designed to 'ensure overseas

144 The Strategy can be accessed at https://www.loughs-agency.org/what-we-do/research

145 See https://www.loughs-agency.org/what-we-do/research/funded-programmes/sea-monitor

146 Waterways Ireland, "Corporate Plan 2023-2025", p.24

147 Waterways Ireland, "Annual Report 2004", p.18

148 See https://www.tourismireland.com/research-and-insights/sentiment-tracker-research

opportunities are maximised for inbound tourism and for industry partners across the island', and are aimed at those 'wishing to increase their tourism business from overseas',[149] while its market profiles 'summarise tourism trends amongst holidaymakers to the island of Ireland'.[150] All of the information provided by Tourism Ireland as a result of its research allows the tourism industry and related business sectors on the island of Ireland to manoeuvre to maximise the economic opportunities presented by overseas visitors.

Part of the specific remit set out for InterTradeIreland in the 1999 legislation that established the Implementation Bodies was to devise 'new approaches to business development in a cross-border context, in such areas as research', and to initiate 'new programmes to assist small and medium enterprises with researching and implementing joint venture partnerships on a North/South basis or jointly with overseas partners'. While it has been fulfilling this remit during its first 25 years, as well as the All-Island Business Monitor referred to earlier in this report, InterTradeIreland has also been commissioning research providing valuable information to businesses across the island of Ireland. The InterTradeIreland Research Knowledge Base contains research across a range of trade and business topics, including cross-border trade, productivity and business dynamism, innovation, sustainability and entrepreneurship, and business clusters and networks.[151] The research reports it publishes identify challenges for businesses and policy-makers on the island of Ireland, potential solutions, and business opportunities that support economic growth. An example of this research, published as InterTradeIreland celebrated its 25th anniversary in December 2024, and launched in February 2025, was its report on "The Changing Nature of Trade on the island of Ireland" which, among its recommendations, called for the strengthening of relationships north and south, alignment of policies and clear forward looking guidance to reduce uncertainty for businesses.[152]

InterTradeIreland has played a key role in supporting north/south collaboration under the European Union Research and Innovation Framework Programmes including FP7, Horizon 2020 and currently Horizon Europe. As most calls under this funding stream require a consortium approach, InterTradeIreland has provided tangible support by delivering events, workshops, travel vouchers and master classes for researchers in industry and academia to come together to seek new partnership opportunities. In addition, InterTradeIreland provides a key role in the facilitation of and secretariat support to the US-Ireland R&D Partnership, a unique tri-jurisdictional alliance of researchers drawn from Ireland, Northern Ireland and the US. This exceptional Partnership allows the three jurisdictions to work collaboratively on key areas of strategic importance whilst sharing resources, expertise and skills.

Under the theme of "Delivering Socio-Economic Regeneration and Transformation", the current PEACEPLUS programme managed by the SEUPB and designed in partnership with government departments and stakeholders sets out the following:

> A more innovative culture is being fostered across the Programme Area. There is an opportunity to build upon this positive cultural shift and invest in high level research and innovation initiatives. This will facilitate commercially driven partnerships involving the Programme Area's best researchers and companies of all scales, in a manner which will contribute to significant economic growth.[153]

This is a continuation of the focus on research and innovation as drivers of economic growth from previous SEUPB programmes. Aspects of this have already been highlighted by this report, such

[149] See https://www.tourismireland.com/research-and-insights/market-reviews

[150] See https://www.tourismireland.com/research-and-insights/market-profiles

[151] See https://research.intertradeireland.com/

[152] See https://research.intertradeireland.com/changing-nature-of-trade. See also InterTradeIreland, "New Report Reveals Changing Nature of Trade Landscape on the Island of Ireland", https://intertradeireland.com/news/new-report-reveals-changing-nature-of-trade-landscape-on-the-island-of-ireland

[153] SEUPB, "PEACEPLUS Programme 2021-2027: Programme Overview", p.13

as INTERREG VA's contribution to increasing the research capacity and capability of the region to attract foreign direct investment, or how INTERREG IVA created cross-border linkages between research institutions and industry, particularly SMEs. An illustrative example of this included in an evaluation of INTERREG VA was a project led by InterTradeIreland, which had:

> Supported over 1,400 SMEs to overcome a range of barriers and to take the initial steps to enhance the level of innovation that they were engaged in, increase their 'innovation capacity' and for many to engage with a research institution for the first time and/or to engage collaboratively on a cross-border basis for the first time.[154]

Although research for the specific purpose of achieving economic impact may not be within the natural scope of the two organisations that make up the Language Body, nevertheless the undertaking of research was made possible for both under the 1999 legislation that established them. One of the core principles set out in the Ulster-Scots Agency's Corporate Plan for 2014-2016, for example, is how 'the Ulster-Scots heritage that we develop and promote will be authentic and will be based on sound knowledge and research on Ulster-Scots culture, heritage and language'.[155] The research supported by both the Ulster-Scots Agency and Foras na Gaeilge – which in the case of the latter has directly involved businesses in terms of the use of the Irish language in the business context – has served to protect, develop and promote a linguistic and cultural heritage that, as has been noted earlier in this report, represents an economic asset both in terms of tourism and in terms of a wider economic benefit to bilingual business.

[154] SEUPB, "INTERREG VA Impact Evaluation – Final Report: Priority 1 – Research and Innovation", p.204

[155] Ulster-Scots Agency, "Corporate Plan 2014-2016", p.8, available at https://www.ulsterscotsagency.com/fs/doc/publications/ulster-scots-agency-corporate-plan-2014-to-2016-final.pdf

3. The Environmental Impacts

Both Loughs Agency and Waterways Ireland make explicit and significant contributions to the environmental impact pillar due to the work they undertake to fulfil the roles set out for them in legislation. However, all the Implementation Bodies have demonstrated a contribution to environmental impact and outcomes through their corporate sustainability actions and plans. Two core environmental themes are evident that include protection, preservation, and regeneration, as well as sustainability and climate actions.

3.1. Environmental sustainability, protection and climate action

The conservation, preservation and regeneration of aquatic ecosystems is a core environmental impact of the work undertaken by both Loughs Agency and Waterways Ireland, evidenced via a range of activities including fisheries management (regulation/enforcement), educational initiatives, responses to pollution incidents, measures taken to protect aquatic ecosystems, and improvement of waterway navigation. Waterways Ireland's Climate Action Plan was one of the first in Ireland, and was shaped by extensive collaboration with staff and stakeholders. It details the commitment and approach Waterways Ireland is taking to achieve emissions' reductions and energy efficiency targets by 2030. Progress made to date means the organisation is set to reduce its energy emissions below the 2030 legislative target by 2028. Indeed, in 2024 – its 25th anniversary year – Waterways Ireland was honoured with the designation as UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Champions by the Department of Environment, Climate & Communications, acknowledging the organisation's efforts in aligning its operations with the UNSDGs.

Another illustrative example of its commitment to the protection of the environment is reported in Waterways Ireland's 2023-2025 Corporate Plan:

> The very act of managing our navigations results in the emission of Green House Gases. To ameliorate this impact and maximise the lifecycle of our plant and fleet, Waterways Ireland conducted a Hydrogenated Vegetable Oil trial on the Grand Barrow Canal Line and Barrow Navigation, migrating all diesel vehicles to this alternative fuel source. This resulted in a 90% reduction in emissions for these navigations (p.24).

In its concern for protecting the environment Loughs Agency has often been called to lead in the responses to pollution threats. For example, in 2020 a section of peat bog adjacent to a wind farm development slipped into a feeder stream and from there contaminated a significant stretch of the Mourne Beg River in the Foyle catchment.[156] This resulted in the Agency implementing 12 separate restoration schemes involving gravel cleaning, fencing and tree planting with a total capital expenditure of £170,000.[157] The response to the incident involved the formation of two inter-agency working groups chaired by Loughs Agency and including representatives from Donegal County Council, Environmental Protection Agency Ireland, National Parks and Wildlife Service, NI Environment Agency, Derry City and Strabane District Council and NI Water. This type of action was noted in one member of staff's overview of the Agency when interviewed for this report:

> "Our work provides a model for managing, protecting, conserving, developing, and promoting a vulnerable natural environment that spans a border, with sponsorship

[156] "Donegal: Peat landslide had 'significant' impact on Tyrone river" BBC News NI website 21 Jan 2021 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-55752527

[157] Loughs Agency, "Annual Report and Accounts 2022", p.30

> and support from two governments. Empowered by unique legal frameworks, we operate across two jurisdictions with authority, allowing us to enforce conservation laws effectively and ensure accountability. We have worked seamlessly across borders and prosecute based on domicile, and we currently have several cases on our books".

In addition to the work of Waterways Ireland and Loughs Agency which, by their very nature, addresses issues of water quality and biodiversity protection, other Implementation Bodies address issues of environmental sustainability. For example, InterTradeIreland has been supporting businesses in both jurisdictions to develop products and services that are environmentally friendly. InterTradeIreland encourages and assists SMEs to adopt sustainable practices, such as reducing their carbon footprint, improving energy efficiency, and minimising waste. InterTradeIreland's "innovation programmes, projects and new products focused on climate" align with broader environmental goals, helping businesses contribute to a greener economy. Over the years, the practical engagement with businesses in relation to environmental sustainability have been increasingly informing and informed by research commissioned by InterTradeIreland. The reports it has published have included work on cross-border compliance with environmental regulations in both jurisdictions, the renewable energy and the environmental goods and services sectors across the island of Ireland, carbon measurement, the composting and anaerobic digestion sectors, and most recently, circular economy and off-shore wind.[158]

For its part, Tourism Ireland has given priority to environmental concerns in its operations, with its 2023-2025 Corporate Plan noting:

> Tourism Ireland's work includes undertaking consumer research in major source markets to understand the views and behaviours around sustainability and holiday destination choice. Tourism Ireland has also considered the relative emissions created by tourism and in particular the emissions from accessing the island of Ireland from different markets. The findings from this research and emissions analysis have helped build the strategy outlined in this plan as well as supporting the sustainability agenda across the island of Ireland.[159]

This translates into the promotion of sustainable holidays and behaviours, giving priority to sustainable industry stakeholders, and working alongside stakeholders to advocate for sustainable island of Ireland consumer experiences.

The SEUPB has played a key role in promoting environmental sustainability across the island of Ireland by managing funding programmes that address environmental challenges. For example, a core objective of the INTERREG VA programme focused on protecting and restoring biodiversity and investing in the water sector. In addition, it invested in the development of Greenways under its priority on sustainable transport, with the projects it supported achieving a reduction in carbon emissions of approximately 476 tonnes as estimated by the external evaluators,[160] and the programme delivering 73 cross-border electric vehicle charging points.[161] INTERREG IVA also managed projects that supported the development of renewable energy and environmental management. By enabling cooperation between organisations in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland to address shared environmental issues. These projects ensured that both jurisdictions worked better together to meet sustainability goals that are similar on both sides of the border. The agricultural sector was a particular focus of PEACE II in terms of the environment, resulting, for example, in 859 farm businesses integrating environmental concerns into their farm

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158 InterTradeIreland's reports on sustainability can be found at https://research.intertradeireland.com/sustainability-and-the-environment

159 Tourism Ireland, "Corporate Plan 2023-2025", p.5, available at https://www.tourismireland.com/docs/default-source/corporate-items/tourism-ireland-corporate-plan-2023---2025.pdf

160 SEUPB, "INTERREG VA Priority 3 Sustainable Transport: Evaluation 2017-2022" (November 2022), p.25

161 SEUPB, "The Story and Impact of EU PEACE and INTERREG Funding: Past and Future", p.19

investments.[162] There was also a recognition of the natural environment as a resource requiring protection, as was seen in the programme's investment in the development of sustainable tourism. As the Final Report notes, PEACE II contributed to the development of sustainable tourism as a 'product based on shared natural and cultural resources, whilst at the same time protecting the very assets on which it sought to capitalise'.[163]

3.2. Conservation of biodiversity

The SEUPB's INTERREG IVA programme also supported projects contributing to the enhancement of the geodiversity, biodiversity and natural environment, and the protection and effective management of aquatic life, while INTERREG VA served to protect and restore protected marine and terrestrial habitats and priority species. The Language Body has also supported initiatives focusing on the conservation of biodiversity on the island of Ireland, such as Foras na Gaeilge's support for the Irish language *Líon an Dúlra* newsletter between 2013 and 2024, which raised primary schoolchildren's awareness of the natural habitat and the need to protect it.

However, given their specific remits, Loughs Agency and Waterways Ireland have been closely involved in the conservation of biodiversity. Loughs Agency has achieved significant impact in protecting marine ecosystems through its leadership of internationally important research on the movement of fish species and cetaceans in the seas around the UK and Ireland, and it has a long track record in monitoring fish populations in both the Foyle and Carlingford catchments. The organisation uses an audit point management system to monitor salmon populations in the Foyle and Carlingford systems, which one staff member interviewed noted was "regarded internationally as the gold standard for salmon management". Another staff member remarked, "If we didn't exist there certainly would have been a decline in numbers [of fish], a decline in habitat".

Fishery Officers patrol Lough Foyle

[162] SEUPB, "Final Programme Closure Report: EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland 2000-2006", p.103

[163] Ibid, p.172

Over the 25 years since its establishment, Waterways Ireland has been surveying the natural habitats in and around the waterways across the island of Ireland. This involves the constant testing of water quality, assessing the levels of fish stocks, and surveying the flora and fauna within and along the waterways under its remit. Its 2001 Annual Report highlighted the importance of protecting biodiversity:

> The ecological systems on our inland waterways offer a unique refuge that supports a huge diversity of flora and fauna. The waterways are teeming with plants and animals which were common less than 25 years ago throughout our countryside, but are now in decline as a result of modern farming methods. Careful environmental management is needed to preserve the balance between conservation of habitat, wildlife and the needs of other users (p.25).

Waterways Ireland has successfully navigated the tension between addressing the needs of the users of its inland waterways and, indeed, working to increase accessibility to them, whilst at the same time protecting the biodiversity that exists within and around them.

4. The Cooperation Impacts

The evidence gathered in the research for this report strongly indicates that there are three key areas in which the Implementation Bodies have impacted on cooperation: governance, operations and outcomes. Indeed, cooperation is at the heart of the Implementation Bodies given their origins in Strand Two of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement in 1998.

4.1. Governance

In terms of governance, the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) to which they are answerable is itself a mechanism for cooperation at the highest level between the two administrations on the island of Ireland, supported by a Joint Secretariat staffed by members of the Northern Ireland Civil Service and the Irish Civil Service.[164] It is at this level, at sectoral meetings of the NSMC, that Ministers approve things such as Implementation Bodies' Annual Reports and their budgets. Ministers from the Northern Ireland Executive and from the Irish Government are required to report to the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Oireachtas, respectively, on meetings of the NSMC, including those regarding the Implementation Bodies, thereby providing accountability to elected representatives in both jurisdictions. With core funding for their day-to-day operation coming from both jurisdictions, channelled through their respective sponsor Departments and approved by the Northern Ireland Executive and Irish Cabinet respectively and their Finance Departments, the Comptroller and Auditor General in both jurisdictions, in cooperation, examine and certify the annual accounts of the Bodies.

Below the ministerial level, with the exception of Tourism Ireland, North-South governance of the Implementation Bodies also takes place through the more regular oversight of officials from their sponsor government departments in both jurisdictions, as well as the NSMC's Joint Secretariat. They work closely on the Bodies' business plans and budgets before being submitted to the NSMC for approval from Ministers. While also under the NSMC's policy direction and answerable to it, Tourism Ireland was established as a company limited by guarantee under the NSMC's remit for cooperation on tourism, with Fáilte Ireland and Tourism NI as its founding members and a Board of Directors appointed by the NSMC.[165] The NSMC also appoints the members of the Boards of InterTradeIreland, the Language Body (Foras na Gaeilge and the Ulster-Scots Agency), Loughs Agency, and to the Advisory Board of Safefood.[166] All of these Boards include representatives from both jurisdictions, making them, in effect, systems of governance that encourage cross-border cooperation, while the regular oversight of the Implementation Bodies by government departments from the two administrations does the same. This was a feature picked up by an SEUPB stakeholder when interviewed for this report:

> "The process started with the Good Friday Agreement. Government agencies, government departments, civil servants, officials, talking to each other in ways that you could never have envisaged would not have been possible without the North South Bodies. So, for me, that is huge and something that is one of the biggest achievements of the North South Bodies, and that is before you even get into the specifics of each of the individual Bodies themselves".

Interactions between Ministers from the two administrations, jointly agreeing to approve their respective implementation body's Annual Reports and appointments to their Boards, and the

[164] For more on the NSMC Joint Secretariat, see https://www.northsouthministerialcouncil.org/joint-secretariat

[165] See, for example, Tourism Ireland, "Annual Report 2022", p.19

[166] See North South Ministerial Council, "Boards of North South Bodies", https://www.northsouthministerialcouncil.org/boards-north-south-bodies

ongoing dialogue between officials from the two jurisdictions and with their respective Implementation Bodies, are essential processes of cooperation. However, while the establishment of the Bodies called for this cooperation, it is a result of the framework created by the 1998 Agreement and of the legislation enacted in London and Dublin that set out the governance arrangements. Comments made by a member of staff of Loughs Agency when interviewed for this report point to the value of cooperation with officials in the two administrations, but they also touch on the cooperation that occurs below the level of governance:

> "Our most important partnership is with our Sponsor Departments. Currently, we have a strong, collaborative relationship with our government sponsors, and this connection is vital to our success and long-term viability. Our effectiveness and resilience are directly linked to the strength of our relationships across these islands. These connections enable us to accomplish our mission and continue delivering significant impact".

Similarly, an InterTradeIreland staff member stated that "InterTradeIreland [and] the other cross-border Bodies…[are] uniquely placed to bring policy makers and stakeholders together on a cross-border and all-island basis".

4.2. Operational cooperation

All the Implementation Bodies engage with a wide range of collaborators in both jurisdictions through their formal and informal networks on a day-to-day basis to fulfil their respective remits. Partners in local government, other statutory organisations, academic institutions, civic society organisations, local community groups and individual citizens are all part of the cooperation ecosystems the Implementation Bodies have developed. Indeed, they have also built cooperative relationships with partners in Great Britain as well as forming relationships across the EU and further afield. This is the operational level of cooperation that they both need, create and sustain. It was reflected in all the interviews undertaken with staff of the Implementation Bodies, as illustrated in these comments by a member of staff of Waterways Ireland:

> "We have core values for our organisation and one of them is collaboration. And collaboration is the secret sauce. So, in actual fact, the work that we do, we couldn't do it if we didn't collaborate to the level that we do".

While Tourism Ireland's 2023-2025 Corporate Plan states that 'Effective collaboration with key stakeholders and partners across the island of Ireland is critical to Tourism Ireland's success',[167] like all the other Implementation Bodies, these are not just words on a page. The research for this report has consistently seen evidence spanning the first 25 years of the Implementation Bodies' existence that cooperation across the island of Ireland is essential to their effective operation. Tourism Ireland *needs* to cooperate with the tourism Bodies in both jurisdictions – Fáilte Ireland and Tourism NI – and industry stakeholders to be able to attract overseas visitors to the island of Ireland. InterTradeIreland needs to establish and grow relationships to fulfil their critical connecting role with stakeholders, industry, SMEs; Safefood *needs* its Knowledge Network expert group to advise on issues that impact on food safety and their relation to trade and the economy. The Waterways Ireland 2014 Annual Report highlights this need:

> The attractiveness of our waterways network is also testament to the work of many volunteers and Inland Waterways Association of Ireland members throughout the waterways. They are at the heart of the waterways on a daily basis organising cleanups, tree planting and supporting us in our plans to sustain this unique natural environment for future generations to come.[168]

[167] Tourism Ireland, "Corporate Plan 2023-2025", p.13

[168] Waterways Ireland, "Annual Report and Accounts 2014", p.12

Further examples from the other Implementation Bodies could be given, but the crucial point is that while they need to cooperate with stakeholders across the island to enable their operations, it is cooperation for mutual and impactful benefit, and the stakeholders *need* the results of that cooperation.

Some of the work of the Ulster-Scots Agency can serve as an example of cooperation for mutual benefit. The Ulster-Scots Agency's cross-border work and relationship building is a key cooperation achievement, particularly their work with the Ulster-Scots communities in the border counties of Ireland. Part of that work has involved forging new relationships with wider community organisations and civic society in Donegal, Cavan and Monaghan, as well as local authorities and other key statutory Bodies. That relationship-building and work contributed to the Monaghan Peace Campus and the Bailieborough Bridewell Project. The Monaghan Peace Campus resulted in the first Ulster-Scots exhibition in a mainstream museum on the island of Ireland,[169] while the Bailieborough Bridewell Project includes a Plantation Museum, Visitor and Exhibition Space.[170] As a result of this cross-border cooperation work with stakeholder communities, the Ulster Scots Agency has provided a valuable funding source and undertaken an important advocacy role on behalf of Ulster-Scots communities in the border counties.

Monaghan Peace Campus

169 See https://www.seupb.eu/latest/news/new-eu217m-peace-funded-monaghan-peace-campus-hailed-place-where-both-difference-and

170 See https://www.cavancoco.ie/news/2024/bailieborough-bridewell-visitor-centre-launched.html

Recognition of the effectiveness of how the Implementation Bodies have cooperation at the centre of their operations has led to lessons from its impact being sought both on a North-South basis and more widely. For example, as a result of the different status of the Irish language in Northern Ireland compared to the Republic of Ireland, the language's development in Northern Ireland has been advanced by Foras na Gaeilge using a community development approach that cooperates with grass roots Irish speakers and promoters. This approach is now increasingly seen as best practice in the Republic of Ireland, with one Foras na Gaeilge staff member noting that the "model in the North is an intensive model, but it's very successful", and another highlighting that "The South are learning from what's happened in the North…to see how this sector was developed here…there's certainly a lot of cooperation North-South in that way". The wider interest in the benefits of cross-border cooperation as practised by the Implementation Bodies was illustrated by a Loughs Agency staff member, who said:

> "By seamlessly operating across borders, we can navigate through complex and often contested spaces, demonstrating successful North-South cooperation that attracts significant international interest…Working with partners across borders is inherent to our operations and provides the stability and resilience that define our work. This cross-border cooperation enables us to bring meaningful and lasting impact to the areas we serve".

These remarks highlight the interest sparked in how cross-border cooperation is integral to the Implementation Bodies' operations, but they also touch on the significance of the impacts of the outcomes of those operations. What does that cooperation between the Implementation Bodies and stakeholders actually mean in terms of wider cooperation outcomes?

Carlingford Greenway

4.3. Cooperation outcomes

The work of the SEUPB serves as an illustrative example of what all the other Implementation Bodies do in terms of establishing wider cooperation as a result of their operations. The SEUPB approach to design and development of the EU funding programmes it has responsibility for has showcased a commitment to not only ensuring alignment between policies developed by the two administrations on the island of Ireland and by the EU, but also a commitment to ensuring this resonates with and addresses the wider public need. A SEUPB staff member interviewed as part of the research for this report reflected on how this has been put into practice:

> "We take the European priorities for programmes because they work in seven-year cycles, we align this with the Government policies in Northern Ireland and Ireland. We locate the areas of policy overlap, and importantly alongside that we go out to the public and we do extensive public consultation to take their views".

As these comments point to, the process of the design of programmes involves cross-border collaboration between the SEUPB and the two administrations on the island of Ireland, as well as seeking the views of communities on their priorities. However, this operational cooperation ultimately funds projects whose outputs are: the formation and strengthening of sustainable cross-border, cross-community and transnational partnerships; the testing, developing and/or rolling out of shared solutions to common challenges; the promotion of knowledge exchange and innovation across borders, building capacity for sustainable development, and generating long-lasting socio-economic and environmental impacts.

By enabling people and professionals to collaborate across borders, the PEACE and INTERREG programmes have reduced barriers and disparities, broadened perspectives, and strengthened regional cohesion, ultimately benefiting communities, building trust and relationships to help maintain peace on the island of Ireland.

5. The Implementation Bodies Model of Cumulative and Collective Impact

The evidence collected and analysed as part of the research undertaken for this report has suggested a model that represents how the social, economic, environmental and cooperation impacts the Implementation Bodies have achieved individually in the first 25 years of their existence collectively contribute to healthy societies. The 1998 Good Friday/Belfast Agreement marked a turning point towards peace, and the Implementation Bodies have contributed to the continuing process of cementing peace on the island of Ireland. It is a dual process, whereby the Implementation Bodies' work both profits from and helps to embed peace, and where their proven collective potential to address broader aspects of societal "health" remains invaluable.

5.1. Peace – the "golden thread"

The decisive turning onto a path for peace signalled by the 1998 Agreement paved the way for the establishment of the North-South Implementation Bodies under Strand 2. Crucially, however, their work in fulfilling their remit that crosses the border between the two jurisdictions has been exploiting the opportunities presented by peace. In doing so, they have been instrumental in cultivating an environment where peace can be accepted and become embedded, and where the building of cross-border relations has been at the heart of that work.

That work of embedding peace and achieving reconciliation is most obvious in the case of the SEUPB. It inherited an EU PEACE programme that was deliberately put in place after the 1994 ceasefires to support the first steps on the path to peace, even before the signing of the 1998 Agreement and the subsequent establishment of the Strand 2 Implementation Bodies. Through its management and its design in collaboration with government departments and stakeholders of the funding programmes that followed, it has been responsive to the changing nature of societal need over its first 25 years. It has been instrumental in cultivating an environment where peace can be accepted and become embedded. However, while perhaps less explicitly, the work of all the other Implementation Bodies has brought people together from across both jurisdictions and all sectors to cooperate for mutual benefit that would not be possible without peace. It is upon this peacebuilding foundation that social, economic, environmental and cooperations benefits can be realised.

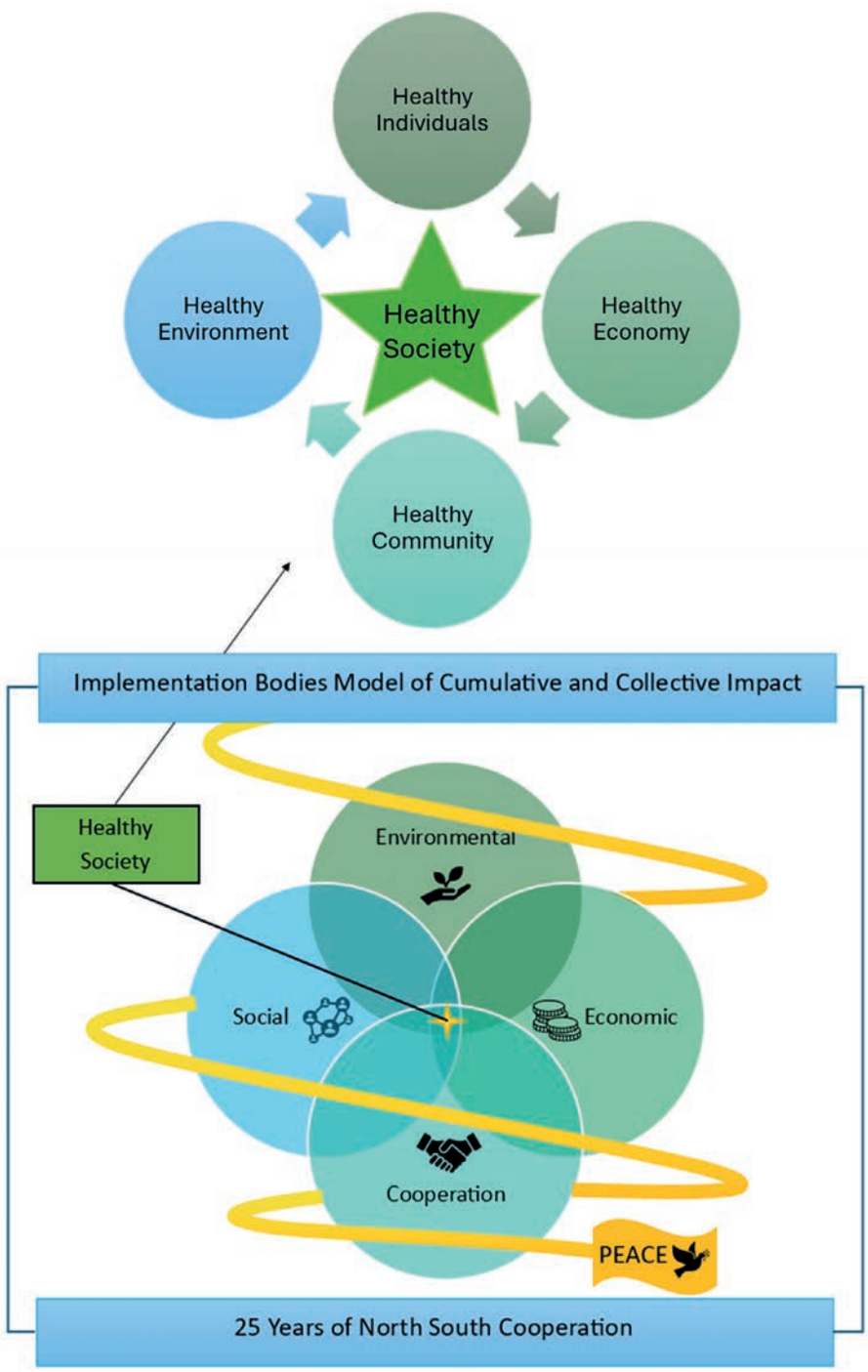
5.2. "Healthy Society": The intersection of collective impacts

Where all of the social, economic, environmental and cooperation impacts achieved by the individual Implementation Bodies intersect represents an opportunity for collectively impacting on an overarching concept of a 'healthy society.' What is meant here by the concept of a 'healthy society' is the result of the overlap and interconnectivity of all of the Implementation Bodies' work. That is, a 'healthy society' is possible when the society is made up of 'healthy individuals', which is facilitated by:

- healthy eating (e.g., via Safefood promotion); physical activity, which is encouraged by a 'healthy environment' (e.g., via the recreational use of blue and green spaces, as a result of the preservation and promotion work of Loughs Agency and Waterways Ireland);
- 'healthy communities' which are socially cohesive, peaceful, connected and shared (e.g., via projects supported by the funding programmes managed by the SEUPB) and where culture and heritage is visible, celebrated and non-contentious (e.g., as a result of the work of Ulster-Scots Agency and Foras na Gaeilge);

- 'healthy economies', which facilitate employment opportunities, business development, and vibrant societies (e.g., via the trade growth facilitated by InterTradeIreland and the impact of Tourism Ireland on tourism growth.

These 'healthy' impacts operate in a cyclical rather than linear fashion, whereby they each impact on each other. For example, a 'healthy environment' and 'healthy community' will impact on 'healthy economies,' by protecting the island of Ireland's natural ecosystems, linguistic diversity, culture, and peace, which will inevitably result in enhanced tourism. Similarly, from a health economics perspective, 'healthy individuals' who engage in healthy eating and physical activity stay healthier for longer leading to reduced demand on health care systems. Additionally, 'healthy individuals' who are physically and emotionally well, are in a position to contribute to a 'healthy economy' and a 'healthy community,' in a virtuous cycle, as represented below.



Conclusion

The impacts achieved by each individual North South Implementation Body since the entering into operation of Strand 2 of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement is impressive, but when considered together, their collective impact is much more so.

In fact, this report cannot really do justice to it, and can only offer a sense of its breadth and how the individual Implementation Bodies' achievements complement and amplify each other. They were made possible by peace, the 1998 Agreement that sealed it, and by the legitimacy it gave them.

However, working with government departments and (despite the disruptions) the North South Ministerial Council Joint Secretariat since 1999, they have grasped that possibility and, as a result, made a hugely significant contribution to embedding peace and improving the social, economic and environmental health and wellbeing of communities on the island of Ireland through cooperation. The evidence that came through in the research for this report speaks loudly to this.

There have obviously been challenges along the way, but their commitment to the work they do and the knowledge of the benefits it brings to people have sustained them for the path that still needs to be travelled.

The cooperation they undertake has no hyphen. It is not working in parallel in the two jurisdictions on the island of Ireland; it's working together with stakeholders and communities across the island, and further afield, and the staff and stakeholders interviewed for this report repeatedly recognised the need for this cooperation in order to fulfil their remits.

With knowledge of the impacts they have achieved collectively, the North South Implementation Bodies should rightly be proud, and so should the two administrations that provide them with their policy direction and oversee them.

Of course, there is still much to do. There is huge potential for the Implementation Bodies to contribute to addressing the shared challenges that will face the two governments on the island of Ireland, and to grasp opportunities that can only be fully maximised through cooperation. However, although it is true that more can be done in future, we need to acknowledge what the Implementation Bodies have collectively achieved to date. We hope that this report plays a small part in that.

S2d25

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