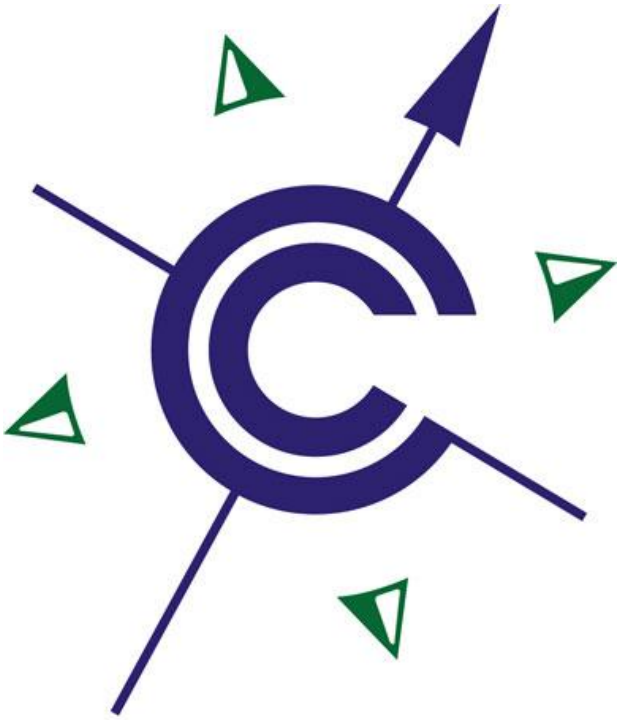

Centre for
Cross Border
Cooperation

Annual Report
2025

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Our Vision

The Centre for Cross Border Studies will build further upon its reputation as an authoritative advocate for cross-border cooperation and a valued source of research, information and support for collaboration across borders on the island of Ireland, Europe and beyond.

Our Mission

The Centre for Cross Border Studies empowers citizens and builds capacity and capability for cooperation across sectors and jurisdictional boundaries on the island of Ireland and further afield. This mission is achieved through research, expertise, partnership and experience in a wide range of cross-border practices and concerns.

Our Values

The Centre for Cross Border Studies:

- Is committed to the principles of partnership, equality and mutual respect as the basis of relationships between people and governments;
- Is dedicated to contributing to social cohesion, economic development and environmental sustainability through cross-border cooperation on the island of Ireland and beyond;
- Is independent and takes no position on the constitutional question;
- Supports the protection of civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights and advocates the core values of human dignity, freedom, democracy, peace-building and social justice; and
- Acts in recognition of the fundamental importance of non-partisanship, the pursuit of excellence, openness and transparency, and the value of local experience.

The Centre for Cross Border Studies is an independent company limited by guarantee founded in 1999
Our founding partners are:
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and
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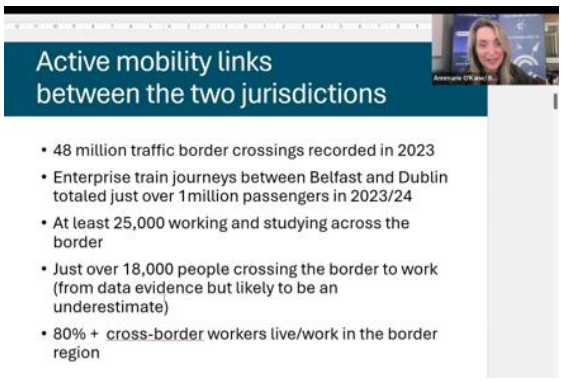
Introduction

This is the first Annual Report since it was announced at its 25th Anniversary Conference that the Centre would operate under the name of the Centre for Cross Border Cooperation rather than the Centre for Cross Border Studies. The decision was made in order to better reflect what we are. Although research and analysis are at the heart of everything we do, it is always only a starting point – we pursue through collaborative action the conclusions we arrive at through our research. We're not a "think tank", we're a "think and do tank". 2025 provided plenty of evidence of this.

Having published in the final quarter of 2024 a major report commissioned by the Labour Employer Economic Forum (LEEF) Shared Island Working Group on the cross-border mobility of the labour market on the island of Ireland, the Centre's flagship Border People project organised a series of webinars to progress the report's recommendations. Involving a range of experts, these examined topics such as tax and pensions, social security coordination, and skills and qualifications.



Annmarie O'Kane introducing the first webinar on labour mobility

Indeed, these webinars paved the way for the Centre's Annual Conference in September whose theme was "The All-Island Labour Market: Challenges and Opportunities". As well as panels considering the topic from the perspectives of employers, workers and business support organisations, the conference also considered remote working and set out actionable pathways forwards.

Peter Osborne, Chair of the CCBC Board, welcomes delegates to the Annual Conference

The Centre was fortunate that its Strategic Partnership with the Department of Foreign Affairs' Reconciliation Fund was extended by another year, which allowed for the continuation of a number of initiatives under the "Maintaining the conditions for cooperation and cross-border lives" project.

These included the quarterly surveys on North-South and East-West cooperation, which the Centre began in the first quarter of 2021. A further four surveys were undertaken in 2025, with Research Briefings and online presentations of the results produced for each one, outlining and analysing the responses from civic society organisations and local authorities on the island of Ireland.

Also supported by the Strategic Partnership, the Centre continued to promote the New Common Charter for Cooperation Within and Between these Islands. Born out of the "Towards a New Common Chapter" project (2015-2019), the New Common Charter represents a set of principles and vision for cooperation developed by civic society organisations on the island of Ireland and Great Britain. In 2025 a number of organisations became new supporters of the Charter, which was presented at various events during the year, culminating in one in December organised in collaboration with Ireland's Consul General in Edinburgh.

CCBC Director, Anthony Soares, promoting the New Common Charter in Edinburgh

Thanks to our Strategic Partnership with the Reconciliation Fund, the Centre was also supported to continue convening of the Ad-Hoc Group for North-South and East-West Cooperation. This Group brings together a range of organisations from both jurisdictions on the island of Ireland to exchange information on their experiences of undertaking North-South and East-West cooperation. As in previous years, the views of the Ad-Hoc Group were represented in meetings with relevant decision and policy makers, including with the co-Chairs of the Specialised Committee on the Implementation of the Windsor Framework. In June representatives from the Ad-Hoc Group also participated in the All-Island Stakeholder Forum organised by the European Economic and Social Committee, which was dedicated to the theme of "Mobility across the island of Ireland after Brexit".

CCBC's Border People Project Manager, Annmarie O'Kane, presenting to the EESC's All-Island Stakeholder Forum

As convenors of the Ad-Hoc Group, the Centre also hosted a meeting in May with Lord Murphy as part of his independent review of the Windsor Framework. This was an opportunity for members of the Group to share their views on the extent to which the necessary conditions for North-South cooperation had been maintained post-Brexit.

Meeting with Lord Murphy in CCBC offices

The Centre was delighted that the 10th Annual Sir George Quigley Memorial Lecture was delivered jointly in November by the Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland, Jon Boutcher, and the Commissioner of An Garda Síochána, Justin Kelly. Their lecture focused on cooperation between the two police services in combatting economic crime on the island of Ireland.

Chief Constable of PSNI, Jon Boutcher (L), and Commissioner of An Garda Síochána, Justin Kelly (R)

In 2025, as has always been the case since the Centre was established in 1999, research and analysis was at the heart of everything we did. As well as the research undertaken by our Border People project, supported by the Strategic Partnership with the Reconciliation Fund, significant work also took place in relation to our S2@25 project, which is funded by PEACEPLUS, a programme managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), and in which the Atlantic Technological University is a partner. Having begun in 2024 to, among other things, research the impacts of the North South implementation bodies under Strand 2 of the 1998 Good Friday/Belfast Agreement, the Centre and Chief Executives of some of the bodies as well as other stakeholders took part in a dissemination event in May in Seanad Éireann. The event served to offer an overview of the findings from the research ahead of the publication of two research reports.

CCBC's Research Programmes Development Manager, Aidan Campbell, presenting S2@25 research in the Seanad

Our continuing participation in Ulster University's EPIC Futures NI project, which also began in 2024, saw our Senior Research Associate, Niall O'Donnellan, and our Research Programmes Development Manager, Aidan Campbell, progress research into economic inactivity in the border region. The Centre's openness to research collaborations also meant that in 2025 we partnered with the University of Strathclyde's European Policy Research Centre to be contracted by the PEACEPLUS DISC project to begin research into the

potential for cooperation between the project partners and their stakeholders. Led by the Southern Regional Assembly, and in partnership with the Scottish and Welsh Governments and the Northern Ireland Executive Office, the project's overarching objective is to explore the potential for future social and economic partnerships between the participating regions.

Another collaboration led to the Centre's involvement in hosting a delegation of Malaysian government officials in October. As part of a wider training programme led by the University of Durham, Queen's University Belfast and the Centre organised a two-week programme for the delegation, where the Centre contributed in terms of aspects of North-South cooperation. As part of the delegation's visit, the Centre took them to meet representatives from some of the Strand 2 implementation bodies and the North South Ministerial Council Joint Secretariat.

Malaysian delegation visit to the North South Ministerial Council

2025 also saw the Centre delivering two six-week guided sessions of its "Getting Started with Cross-Border Collaboration" training programme. This online training programme was one of the legacies of the CBenACT project, supported by the International Fund for Ireland, which came to an end in 2024, and was a partnership with Creative Spark (Dundalk) and Women's TEC (Belfast and Newry). Although a self-guided version of the programme had already been launched at the end of 2024, the guided version involved weekly one-hour sessions with the Centre's Director, where participants received training on the development of cross-border cooperation projects.

At a European level, the Centre's Director was elected to the Steering Committee of the Transfrontier Euro-Institut Network (TEIN) at its General Assembly, which took place at the University of Girona in October. However, our involvement in Europe had already begun back in January, as the Centre's Director, Anthony Soares, was invited to take part in a two-day event in Strasbourg organised by one of our TEIN partners – Strasbourg University – in collaboration with Waseda University. Anthony made a presentation entitled "Being and not being an EU citizen on the

island of Ireland", which was delivered in the European Parliament.

Through its provision of secretariat services, the Centre continued to support the activities of two important all-island networks during 2025: the Standing Conference on Teacher Education, North and South (SCoTENS), and Universities Ireland.

With the Centre's organisational support, SCoTENS held yet another successful annual conference. Attended by over 100 delegates and taking place over two days in October in the Lough Erne Resort, this year's theme was "A New Era for Professionalism: Teacher Identity, Authenticity and Agency". The event commenced with a compelling keynote address by Professor Viv Ellis (University College London Institute of Education), entitled "Profession, Identity, and Agency: Authentic Keywords for Teacher Education." The call for expressions of interest resulted in a rich programme of parallel sessions across both days, covering the themes of Professionalism, Teacher Identity, Authenticity & Inclusion, and Agency. These sessions featured insightful presentations from researchers across the island of Ireland, and the keynote address on the second day was by Dr Thomas Walsh, Associate Professor at Maynooth University, who delivered a thought-provoking address on "Teaching Through Time: Navigating Shifting Policies, Practices and Purposes".

The SCoTENS Steering Committee at the Annual Conference 2025 (with the Centre's Secretariats Administrator, Tricia Kelly, on the far left)

For Universities Ireland, the highlight in 2025 was its conference. The Universities Ireland Conference 2025 was hosted by Queen's University Belfast on the 9th and 10th of October, and speakers and delegates explored the theme of "Collaborating for Change".

Vice Chancellor of Queen's University Belfast, Prof Sir Ian Greer, welcoming delegates to the 2025 Universities Ireland Conference

Focused on strengthening cross-border collaboration between universities across Ireland, the conference got under way on the evening of the 9th with a leadership roundtable and dinner, addressed by former Tánaiste and Fine Gael TD, Simon Coveney.

From left to right, Simon Coveney TD, Prof Eeva Leinonen (Chair of the Universities Ireland Executive Committee), Prof Sir Ian Greer (Vice Chancellor of Queen's University Belfast)

The opening sessions set the tone with a clear call for stronger cooperation between institutions north and south. Speakers underlined the importance of deeper cross-border partnerships in tackling shared challenges, with delegates discussing student mobility, research funding, inclusive economic growth and the role of higher education in responding to geopolitical and societal challenges.

These are just some examples of what the Centre did in 2025. However, this and a lot more that we were able to do would not have been possible without the ongoing support of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science through the provision of core funding and, for that, we are extremely grateful. We also owe our gratitude to all the organisations from both jurisdictions on the island of Ireland and further afield for their generosity in sharing and collaborating with us throughout 2025.

Targets

The Centre for Cross Border Studies' Workplan for 2025, which was agreed with our core funders, the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, set out targets to be achieved across a range of activities. All of those targets were achieved and, in some cases, exceeded. The principal targets are listed below.

TARGET: 1 Annual Conference (75 participants)

TARGET EXCEEDED: 1 Annual Conference (132 participants)

18 Sept: "All-Island Labour Market: Challenges and Opportunities"

TARGET: 4 seminars

TARGET EXCEEDED: 9 seminars for public representatives, officials and other stakeholders on cross-border policy and practice, including cross-border mobility issues

4 Feb: *Presentation of the results of the 16th Quarterly Survey on North-South and East-West cooperation*

13 Mar: *All-island labour market: Mobility of workers*

17 Apr: *All-island labour market: Tax and pensions*

27 May: *S2@25: The impact of 25 years of the North-South implementation bodies*

29 May: *Presentation of the results of the 17th Quarterly Survey on North-South and East-West cooperation*

4 Jun: *"All-island labour market: Social security coordination"*

24 Jun: *"All-island labour market: Skills and qualifications"*

16 Aug: *Presentation of the results of the 18th Quarterly Survey on North-South and East-West cooperation*

10 Nov: *Presentation of the results of the 19th Quarterly Survey on North-South and East-West cooperation*

TARGET: 1 report on postgraduate student flows

TARGET ACHIEVED: Review of paper on Republic of Ireland-domiciled postgraduate students enrolled in Northern Ireland HEIs submitted to the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science

TARGET: 3 submissions to public policy consultations

TARGET EXCEEDED: 6 written submissions to public policy consultations

Feb: *Response to Sinéad McLaughlin MLA's Private Members Bill on Regional Economic Imbalance*

Mar: *Submission to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee's inquiry into the operation of the Windsor Framework*

Apr: *Submission to the House of Lords Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee inquiry into strengthening Northern Ireland's*

voice in the context of the Windsor Framework

Jun: *Submission to the Assembly and Executive Review Committee's review into Assembly and Executive reform*

Jul: *Submission to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's public consultation on the development of the new Reconciliation Fund strategy*

Oct: *Response to the consultation on Northern Ireland's draft Climate Action Plan 2023-2027*

TARGET: 1 research project completed

TARGET ACHIEVED: 1 project completed

- *Quarterly Surveys on North-South and East-West Cooperation*

TARGET: 1 application for research project funding submitted

TARGET EXCEEDED: 4 applications submitted

Proposed project	**Funder/ Contracting authority**	**Outcome**
Border People FLOW: Research to provide evidence-based analysis and policy recommendations to inform legislative and administrative developments that will improve labour mobility and economic resilience on the island of Ireland	PEACEPLUS (SEUPB)	Successful
North South ESTEEM (led by Atlantic Technological University): Research to resolve the systemic issues that have contributed to low levels of cross-border student mobility and impediments to the free movement of some categories of skilled employees	PEACEPLUS (SEUPB)	Successful
Tender for report on cross-border mobility of workers	Cross Border Partnership – Employment Services	Successful
Tender for research on cooperation across the Irish Sea, in partnership with University of Strathclyde's European Policy Research Centre	PEACEPLUS DISC project	Successful

TARGET: 1 Journal of Cross Border Studies in Ireland

TARGET ACHIEVED: 2025 edition of Journal published December

TARGET: 3 Briefing Papers published

TARGET EXCEEDED: 7 Briefing Papers published

Feb: *Briefing on the findings from the 16th Quarterly Survey (October to December 2024)*

Mar: *Briefing Note on the Electronic Travel Authorisation scheme and the Windsor Framework*

Mar: *Briefing Note on the proposed Defence of Democracy Directive and the Windsor Framework*

May: *Briefing on the findings from the 17th Quarterly Survey (January to March 2025)*

June: *Briefing Paper on the EU proposal to discontinue seasonal time change*

Aug: *Briefing on the findings from the 18th Quarterly Survey (April to June 2025)*

Nov: *Briefing on the findings from the 19th Quarterly Survey (July to September 2025)*

TARGET: 1 Sir George Quigley Memorial Lecture

TARGET ACHIEVED: 2025 Sir George Quigley Memorial Lecture jointly delivered by Jon Boutcher, Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland, and the Commissioner of An Garda Síochána, Justin Kelly

TARGET: 12 monthly Border-Zine electronic newsletters

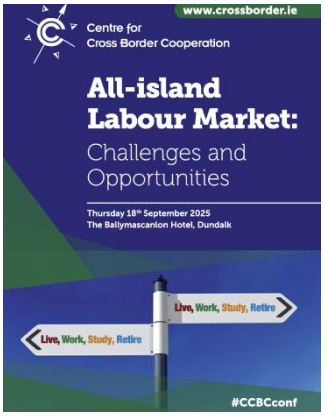
TARGET ACHIEVED

TARGET: 4 Border People Advisory Group meetings

TARGET ACHIEVED

Annual Conference

The Centre for Cross Border Cooperation's 26th Annual Conference took place in the Ballymascanlon Hotel and Golf Resort on the 18th of September. Over 130 delegates gathered for discussions under the theme of the "All-island labour market: Challenges and opportunities", with a number of webinars having been organised by our Border People project ahead of the event to explore some of the areas that would feature in the conference. Moreover, both the conference and the preceding webinars were aimed at identifying actionable measures that would address some of the challenges to cross-border labour mobility analysed in the major report commissioned by the Labour Employer Economic Forum (LEEF) Shared Island Working Group, which the Centre published in late 2024.



The Chair of our Board, Peter Osborne, began by welcoming the conference delegates and thanking the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science for its continued support in terms of core funding, and the co-headline sponsors, panel sponsors and other sponsors of the 2025 Conference. Also addressing the delegates were the representatives of the conference's co-headline sponsors. First, representing the Dublin Belfast Economic Corridor (DBEC), Cllr Robert Nash, Cathaoirleach of Dundalk Municipal District, spoke about how the theme of the conference related to the work and mission of DBEC. He was followed by Paul Hannigan, Vice President for Cross Border Engagement at Atlantic Technological University, who was representing our other co-headline sponsor, the North West Tertiary Education Cluster.

CCBC Chair, Peter Osborne, welcoming delegates

Cllr Robert Nash, representing DBEC

Paul Hannigan, representing NWTEC

Sponsored by Ibec and chaired by Dr Rory O'Sullivan (Adjunct Profess, Dublin City University), the opening panel session examined the cross-border mobility of labour from the perspective of employers. Fergal O'Brien, Ibec's Director of Lobbying and Influence, suggested that employers were increasingly reluctant to employ someone from the other jurisdiction due to what they perceived as the complexities of having cross-border workers. Some of those complexities were set out by Rose Tierney of Tierney Tax Consultancy, who also pointed to how many of these could be addressed by decision and policy-makers.

The employers' perspective on the all-island labour market

The Chair of the Northern Ireland Skills Council, Kathleen O'Hare, highlighted how employers in both jurisdictions were facing a skills shortage that was undermining growth, and how there was a need to approach this challenge from an all-island perspective, including by ensuring the cross-border development and portability of skills. This issue was picked up by Paddy Hannigan, Senior Lecturer for Strategy at Atlantic Technological University, who spoke of the potential of involving employers in cross-border apprenticeships, but also noted the obstacles that needed to be removed in order to exploit their full potential.

One of the issues the first panel touched upon on several occasions was how remote and hybrid working had changed the landscape for employers, and how there were administrative and legal barriers to adopting this on a cross-border basis. This was the issue that was the focus of a conversation between Sarah Daly (Executive Director of Creative Spark), Kate Clifford (Chief Executive of Rural Community Network), Dónal Kearney (Head of Programmes at Grow Remote), and Aidan Campbell (Research Programmes Development Manager with the Centre for Cross Border Cooperation).

Conversation on the theory and practice of remote working

Both Sarah Daly and Dónal Kearney attested to the rapid growth of hybrid working in Ireland, with Creative Spark opening its Downtown Hub in Dundalk to accommodate this growth and Grow Remote expanding its support to employers so that they can more properly exploit the benefits of remote and hybrid working practices. Kate Clifford highlighted the potential of remote working to support rural communities, expanding the reach of good jobs beyond rural centres. However,

she also reflected on the findings of research Rural Community Network commissioned the Centre for Cross Border Cooperation to undertake, which were published in a 2023 report. The research, as Aidan Campbell noted, had shown the greater levels of investment and development of policies in Ireland compared to Northern Ireland, although he also highlighted how taxation and other regulations were not receptive to remote and hybrid working being undertaken by cross-border workers.

Panel session on employee perspectives

The second panel session brought the perspectives of employees to the question of mobility of the labour market on the island of Ireland. Chaired by Caitriona Mullan, a Senior Research Associate with the Centre, and sponsored by EPIC Futures NI, the panel questioned the gaps between the potential of an all-island approach to the labour market and the realities faced by those currently in work or who were seeking to enter the labour market. Professor Kristel Miller from Ulster University spoke of the work of the EPIC Futures NI project examining economic inactivity and the barriers facing those who wanted to be employed but were unable to do so, which impacted on economic growth, particularly in Northern Ireland. Owen Reidy, General Secretary of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, highlighted the differences between the rights of workers in the two jurisdictions, exacerbated to some extent by the UK's exit from the European Union. He noted the enormous potential of an all-island approach to the labour market, but also how it could not be fully realised until there was equality of rights and full workers' representation in decisions affecting their working conditions in both jurisdictions. Both Manus Reid (Information Officer with North Connaught and Ulster Citizens' Information Service) and Annmarie O'Kane (the Centre's Border People Project Manager), offered practical examples of the information those in cross-border employment or who are looking to take up a job in the other jurisdiction need in order to navigate some of the complexities involved.

Minister for the Economy, Caoimhe Archibald MLA

Following a video message from Thomas Byrne TD, Minister of State for European Affairs and Defence, delegates were addressed by Minister for the Economy, Dr Caoimhe Archibald MLA. She spoke of the work her Department was undertaking to grow the Northern Ireland economy, including through supporting the expansion

of cross-border trade where InterTradeIreland plays an important role. She also noted the importance of the cross-border mobility of workers and of the cross-border development of skills, as well as the benefits of her Good Jobs Bill in protecting the workforce.

Perspectives on the all-island labour market from business support organisations

Maureen O'Reilly, a Senior Associate with the Centre, chaired the final panel session, which offered the perspectives of business support organisations on all-island labour mobility. Both Christine Kelly, Tax Advisor with IDA Ireland, and Joanne McMullan Chanyuka, Head of Labour Market Solutions with Invest NI, spoke about what their organisations were doing to support businesses to access the skills they needed, including by expanding their search to the other jurisdiction. Kevin McShane, Senior Development Executive – Shared Island with Enterprise Ireland, and Elaine Patterson, Programme Manager for Innovation and Entrepreneurship with InterTradeIreland, highlighted the all-island programmes their organisations had in place to develop managerial skills within businesses and women entrepreneurs.

Colin McCabrey, Director of Trade at InterTradeIreland, then took to the stage to propose some actionable pathways forwards to address some of the challenges to developing the labour market from an all-island perspective discussed during the conference.

Colin McCabrey (InterTradeIreland) setting out Actionable Pathways Forwards

Underlining the need for collaboration and drawing on the major report that the Centre was commissioned to undertake by the Labour Employer Economic Forum (LEEF) Shared Island Working Group, among the actions Colin McCabrey identified were the need to define cross-border workers and employers, the provision of clear and accessible guidance, and the piloting of all-island skills and apprenticeships programmes.

Closing remarks from the Centre's Director, Dr Anthony Soares

Following closing remarks from the Centre's Director, Dr Anthony Soares, and with the formalities of the conference over, there was a reception and the conference dinner. In case you are not aware of who was behind the phenomenon of the Twitter account @BorderIrish, we won't spoil it for you by revealing a photo that would spoil that surprise for you. Those who were present, though, heard how this story unfolded at the height of Brexit, and also had the chance to be entertained as scenes from the book, *I am the Border, so I am*, were acted out by the author and some of those attending the dinner.

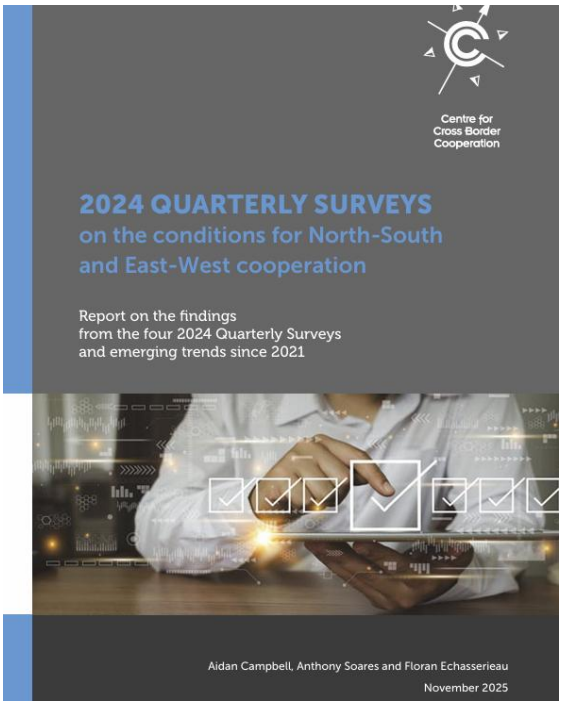
If you would like to look back at the conference, you can access it at [2025 Annual Conference - The Centre for Cross Border Cooperation].

Research

Research and analysis continued to be at the heart of everything the Centre did in 2025. As a "think and do tank" rather than a think tank, that research and analysis drove and informed us in our engagements with decision and policymakers as we looked to support and advocate for improved cross-border cooperation.

Crucially, without this research, we wouldn't be able to provide the vital practical information and advice for those crossing the Ireland-Norther Ireland border to live, work, study or retire through our flagship Border People project. Much of the research undertaken by the Border People project and by the Centre as a whole was once again made possible through our Strategic Partnership with the Reconciliation Fund, which had been extended into a fourth year, as well as the ongoing support of the Department for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.

Although much of our research in 2025 continued to seek to understand the extent to which North-South and East-West cooperation and mobility were being supported in the post-Brexit context, one of the ways in which we had been gathering information since 2021 came to an end this year. This was our quarterly surveys on North-South and East-West cooperation, which had been aimed at civic society organisations and local authorities on the island of Ireland, allowing us to monitor trends in North-South and East-West collaborative activity, and to gather information on the challenges respondents were facing since the end of the Brexit transition period. Our analysis of the responses to these surveys, and their implications, were presented in online briefings and published in quarterly Research Briefings.

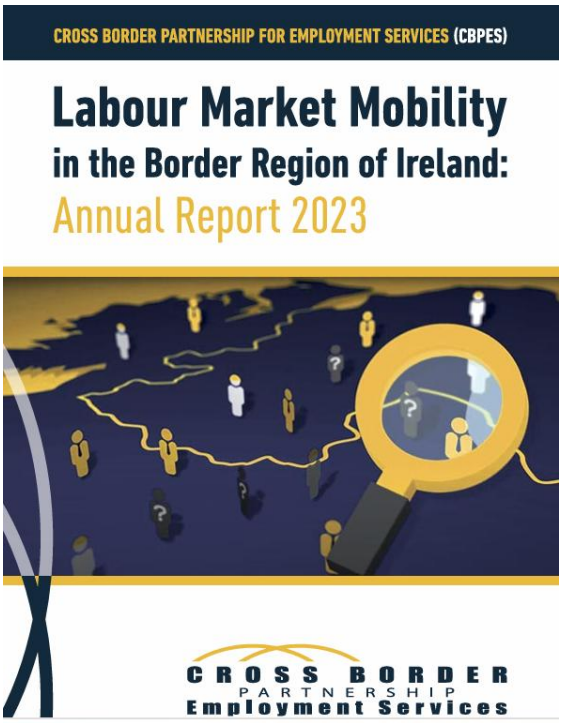


Importantly, particularly as the vast majority of respondents to our quarterly surveys were repeat respondents, the Centre was able to look back and identify significant trends in North-South and East-West cooperation in the period from 2021 to 2024. We shared this information in a

report published in November 2025. As the 20th and final quarterly survey took place in December 2025, the Centre committed to publishing a further report in 2026 that would set out an analysis of the results from the entire five-year period.

However, another area where the Centre was undertaking intensive research was in relation to the two-year S2@25 project – a project funded in 2024 by PEACEPLUS, a programme managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB). Two reports were published in 2025 as a result of the first phase of the research, which was to assess and set out the collective impacts of the North-South implementation bodies established under Strand 2 of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement over the first 25 years of their existence.

One of the reports set out an overview of the collective impacts of the North-South implementation bodies and included an examination of each individual implementation body, identifying how they had contributed to those collective impacts. The other, shorter, report focused solely on the overview of the collective impacts and did not include case-studies on the individual bodies. In 2025 work also began on the subsequent phases of the project, looking at how the implementation bodies could collectively contribute to the shared priorities of the two administrations on the island of Ireland, with research also informing the bodies in their development of a joint strategy. Additionally, in partnership with the Atlantic Technological University, the project also began the development of a training programme on cross-border collaboration to improve capacity for cooperation through the transfer of relevant skills, aimed principally at officials within relevant government departments in the two administrations and personnel within the implementation bodies.



As in previous years, the Centre also undertook research on behalf of the Cross

Border Partnership for Employment Services (CBPES). This would lead to the publication of an Annual Report that set out our analysis of 2023 official statistics in relation to the labour market in the border region and the wider context of the island of Ireland, and the extent of cross-border labour mobility.

Other research activity in 2025 informed our responses to public consultations and parliamentary inquiries and to the publication of a number of Briefing Papers (set out in following sections of this Annual Report). A major focus of this research was on the extent to which the necessary conditions for North-South cooperation were being maintained in the post-Brexit context, and whether Article 11 of the Windsor Framework was being effective in upholding the commitments made by the UK Government and the European Union.

Policy Seminars

The Centre organised nine policy seminars in 2025, all of them based on findings from our research. The vast majority of these (eight of them) were either dedicated to presenting the findings of our quarterly surveys on North-South and East-West cooperation, or to focusing on some of the findings from the research undertaken for the 2024 report on the all-island labour market commissioned by the Labour Employer Economic Forum (LEEF) Shared Island Working Group. However, one of them served to disseminate the findings of our research into the collective impacts of the North-South implementation bodies established under Strand 2 of the 1998 Good Friday/Belfast Agreement, undertaken as part of our PEACEPLUS S2@25 project.

"Presentation of the results of the 16th Quarterly Survey on the Conditions for North-South and East-West Cooperation"

4 February

The first seminar of 2025 was an online presentation of the results of the final quarterly survey on North-South and East-West cooperation of 2024 (for the October to December period). Introduced by the Centre's Research Programmes Development Manager, Aidan Campbell, the overview of the results was presented by Dr Ben Rosher, one of the Centre's Research Associates. There were a further three similar seminars, presenting the results of the 17th (29 May), 18th (16 August) and 19th (10 November) quarterly surveys.

"All-island labour market: Mobility of workers"

13 March

The first of four online seminars resulting from the major report on the all-island labour market commissioned by the Labour Employer Economic Forum (LEEF) Shared Island Working Group, and led by our Border People project, explored the mobility of workers on the island of Ireland. This included setting out what the legal pathways to employment are in Northern Ireland post-Brexit, but our Border People Project Manager, Annmarie O'Kane, was also joined by Úna Boyd from the Committee on the Administration of Justice, as they also considered the implications of the rolling out of the UK's Electronic Travel Authorisation scheme.

"All-island labour market: Tax and pensions"

17 April

The second seminar on the all-island labour market focused on tax and pension complexities that arise from working, or employing workers, on a cross-border basis. Examples of cross-border solutions to some of these complexities found in other border regions were also briefly considered. In this seminar, Annmarie O'Kane was joined by Rose Tierney of Tierney Tax Consultancy (who, like Annmarie, was one of the co-authors of the

report commissioned by the Labour Employer Economic Forum), and John Lucas from Lucas Financial Consulting.

S2@25: The impact of 25 years of the North-South implementation bodies

27 May

Elected representatives, senior officials, and civic society leaders from both jurisdictions, as well as Chief Executives of the North-South implementation bodies gathered in the Chamber of Seanad Éireann to hear about the findings of the research undertaken as part of the PEACEPLUS S2@25 project, with senior representatives of the Atlantic Technological University – partners with CCBC in the project – also attending.

Cormac Devlin TD making opening remarks at the S2@25 event

The event was opened by the Cathaoirleach of the Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, Cormac Devlin TD, with the Centre's Director, Dr Anthony Soares, offering an overview of the S2@25 project, before the Centre's Research Programmes Development Manager, Aidan Campbell, presented some of the key findings of the research on the impacts of the Strand 2 North-South implementation bodies. This opening session was moderated by Dr Etain Tannam, Associate Professor at Trinity College Dublin. Paul Donnelly, Deputy Secretary in the (NI) Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, then highlighted the importance of the research and of the work of the North-South implementation bodies, which had been of particular relevance to his Department.

Paul Donnelly, Deputy Secretary, Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

The Chief Executive of the East Border Region, Pamela Arthurs, moderated a discussion and presentations by JP O'Doherty, Joint Interim Designated Officer (Accounting Officer) of the Loughs Agency, and the Chief Executive of Waterways Ireland, John McDonagh.

JP O'Doherty, Loughs Agency

John McDonagh, Waterways Ireland

The event was officially closed by Senator Maria Byrne, Leas-Chathaoirleach of Seanad Éireann, who offered her own views on the research findings.

"All-island labour market: Social security coordination"

4 June

The third seminar on the all-island labour market focused on social security coordination, and the Centre's Border People Project Manager, Annmarie O'Kane, was joined by Dr Anne Devlin from the All-Island Social Security Network and the Economic and Social Research Institute. They highlighted the research undertaken for the Labour Employer Economic Forum on the social welfare systems operating in the two jurisdictions on the island of Ireland, and the extent to which they accommodate cross-border workers and their families.

Among the most significant challenges they noted were the impacts of divergence following Brexit, and information failures that often led to confusion for cross-border workers and to those who offer advice to citizens.

"All-island labour market: Skills and qualifications"

24 June

Bringing an end to the series on the all-island labour market, the final seminar was dedicated to the cross-border portability of skills and qualifications. Joining the Centre's Annmarie O'Kane for this event were Gillian Doherty, the Chief Operations Officer at Accounting Technicians Ireland, and Maureen O'Reilly, one of the Centre's Senior Research Associates and a co-author of the 2024 report commissioned by the Labour Employer Economic Forum.

Among the issues highlighted and discussed during this seminar were the cross-border recognition of some professional qualifications, confusion regarding the cross-border equivalence of qualifications, and how such issues impact on the development of skills within an all-island labour market.

Contributing to Public Policy & Practice

In 2024 the Centre made six written submissions in response to public consultations and parliamentary inquiries. Focusing as always on the relevance for cross-border cooperation, our submissions considered proposed legislation in the Northern Ireland Assembly on addressing regional economic imbalance, reform of the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly, Northern Ireland's draft climate action plan, the new strategy for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Reconciliation Fund, as well as aspects of the Windsor Framework.

February: Response to the Private Member's Bill on Regional Economic Imbalance - The Centre for Cross Border Cooperation

Our first submission in 2025 was in response to a Private Member's Bill on Regional Economic Imbalance brought forward by Sinéad McLaughlin MLA. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, we highlighted how the proposed legislation should be "developed with an understanding of where various regions within Northern Ireland sit in terms of economic imbalance, and the extent to which imbalances are the result of specific regions' lack of adequate connections across local and/or jurisdictional boundaries". The Centre also stated that "Legislation aimed at building balanced regional development needs to encourage the optimum use of capabilities and resources throughout and across regions, including on a trans-boundary basis where relevant, focusing investment in physical infrastructure, regional sectoral clustering and human capital, proportionate to their roles and potential within the spatial hierarchy". Although the Centre broadly welcomed the proposed legislation, among the concerns we raised was that "Legislation simply 'to mandate all departments to have due regard to regional economic balance when developing, adopting, implementing or revising policies, strategies and plans and designing and delivering public services' may not ensure the required whole of government response to the issue."

March: Submission to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee's inquiry into the operation of the Windsor Framework - The Centre for Cross Border Cooperation

In its response to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee's inquiry into the operation of the Windsor Framework, the Centre's focus was on the extent to which the necessary conditions for North-South cooperation were being maintained in accordance with Articles 1(3), 2 and 11 of the Windsor Framework. It was part of the Centre's ongoing efforts in monitoring the extent to which the necessary conditions for North-South cooperation are being maintained following the UK's withdrawal from the EU in accordance with Article 11 of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland and the Windsor Framework, and our submission was informed by the results of our quarterly surveys on the conditions for North-South and East-West cooperation, ongoing since the first quarter of 2021, as well as the Centre's role in convening the Ad-Hoc Group for North-South and East-West Cooperation. The Centre's overall

assessment of the operation of the Windsor Framework was that, "Given that a substantial number of its articles are dedicated to trade and related matters, the implementation and operation of the Windsor Framework cannot guarantee the maintenance of the necessary conditions for continued North-South cooperation as set out in Article 11, or the overarching objectives set out in Articles 1 and 2, unless more considered focus is dedicated to these aspects". Among the recommendations included in our submission was that "The Joint Committee should undertake an update on the 2017 mapping exercise on North-South cooperation, but one that should include cooperation taking place at the informal, local and community level that both the UK and European Commission recognised may not have been captured in the original mapping exercise. This updated exercise would serve to offer a more accurate and complete picture of North-South cooperation".

April: Submission to the House of Lords Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee inquiry into strengthening Northern Ireland's voice in the context of the Windsor Framework

From the Centre for Cross Border Cooperation's experience of engaging with parliamentary committees and the institutions of the European Union, as well as others considered relevant to Articles 1(3), 2 and 11 of the Windsor Framework, our response to the Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee's inquiry set out five overarching issues that arise in terms of civic engagement relating to North-South cooperation: (i) seeking to have effective engagement is resource intensive; (ii) a long-term commitment is required; (iii) most of the bandwidth is taken up with Articles 5 to 10; (iv) current structures are not readily equipped to engage with civic society stakeholders from both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland in discussions related to Article 11; and (v) confidence is needed that the current structures are responsive to stakeholders' identification of potential difficulties rather than simply addressing the consequences of existing problems.

June: Submission to the Assembly and Executive Review Committee's review into Assembly and Executive reform

The Centre's submission to this review into reform of the Northern Ireland and Executive set out recommendations in a number of areas, including the interpretation of cross-community consent, nomination of the First and Deputy First Ministers, the development and implementation of Programmes for Government, and the use of the petition of concern. However, our submission also noted:

> There is no doubt that Northern Ireland has not enjoyed stable government since Ministers first took office on 2nd December 1999. The periods of absence of the Strand One institutions have not only left people without a locally accountable government, and departments and civic society organisations without budgetary certainties; they have also prevented the NSMC from operating and meant Northern Ireland had no Executive presence at the British Irish Council. This would suggest that – given the

ability of the largest parties with a right to Executive seats to unilaterally prevent the functioning of the institutions – the current design of Strand One does not sufficiently guarantee comparable stability of government in Northern Ireland to that seen in the other devolved nations or for building public confidence in the institutions. Changes that can command cross-party support are required to prevent future Executive and Assembly collapse; however, of themselves these would not necessarily guarantee the effective government required to address Northern Ireland's challenges and to fully exploit opportunities for improved outcomes. The degree to which there is cross-party appetite for change will perhaps test the extent to which the Northern Ireland political and social landscapes have progressed since 1998, and whether they have done so in tandem.

July: Submission to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's public consultation on the development of the new Reconciliation Fund strategy

The Centre's submission to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's consultation on the development of the new Reconciliation Fund strategy highlighted what we thought had worked well in the 2021-2024 strategy. Our view was that the 2021-204 strategy's thematic pillars and priority areas were sufficiently broad and comprehensive to support a wide range of projects and organisations working for peace and reconciliation, including on a cross-border/North-South basis, and that the support it provided for North-South and (to an extent) East-West activities were of the greatest relevance for the Centre.

October: Response to the consultation on Northern Ireland's draft Climate Action Plan 2023-2027

Whilst the Centre welcomed certain aspects of Northern Ireland's draft Climate Action Plan 2023-2027 in its submission to the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, including how the stakeholder engagement process involved organisations engaged in discussion on a North-South and East-West basis, we also raised concerns regarding the absence of cross-border considerations in the draft Plan:

> However, there is less evidence of, or reference to coordination or consideration of impacts on emissions of neighbouring jurisdictions. Whilst the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 sits within the overall UK Climate Change Net Zero framework, and Ministers and officials in Northern Ireland have received advice from the UK Climate Change Committee (UK CCC) in developing the CAP so Northern Ireland can play its part in the overall UK plans to address climate change, there appears to be no reference to transboundary connections with RoI, England, Scotland or Wales.

Briefing Papers

February: *Briefing on the findings from the 16th Quarterly Survey (October to December 2024)*

Authored by Dr Ben Rosher (Research Associate, Centre for Cross Border Cooperation) and Aidan Campbell (Research Programmes Development Manager, Centre for Cross Border Cooperation), this Briefing Paper set out the results of the Centre's last quarterly survey of 2024 on the conditions for North-South and East-West cooperation.

March: *Briefing Note on the Electronic Travel Authorisation scheme and the Windsor Framework*

Authored by Dr Anthony Soares (Director, Centre for Cross Border Cooperation), this Briefing Note examined the Electronic Travel Authorisation scheme and the Windsor Framework. Introduced as part of the 2022 Nationality and Borders Act, the Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) system was introduced by the UK Government as a means 'to deliver a more streamlined, digital immigration system which will be quicker and more secure for the millions of people who pass through the UK border each year'. It is for 'visitors to the UK who do not currently need a visa for short stays, or who do not already have a UK immigration status'. The ETA 'is a digital permission to travel – it is not a visa and does not permit entry into the UK – it authorises a person to travel to the UK'. The roll-out of the UK's ETA system will include non-visa nationals from the EU/EEA/Switzerland from 2 April 2025 (with citizens from these countries being able to apply from 5 March 2025). This will mean those non-visa nationals wishing to visit the UK, including Northern Ireland, will have to apply online for an ETA prior to entering the UK at a cost set to rise to £16 per ETA (from the current cost of £10).

March: *Briefing Note on the proposed Defence of Democracy Directive and the Windsor Framework*

Authored by Dr Anthony Soares (Director, Centre for Cross Border Cooperation), this Briefing Note examined the proposed Defence of Democracy Directive and how it may conflict with the Windsor Framework. Increased collaboration between Northern Ireland and Ireland has been a major achievement of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, most notably amongst civil society organisations. The European Union played a significant role in funding this increased collaboration, in particular through the PEACE and INTERREG Programmes, and now through the PEACEPLUS programme. The Windsor Framework (the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland), which forms part of the Withdrawal Agreement that is the legal framework for the UK's departure from the EU, is declared to set out 'the arrangements necessary to address the unique circumstances on the island of Ireland, to maintain the necessary conditions for continued North-South cooperation, to avoid a hard border and to protect the 1998 Agreement in all its dimensions' (Article 1(3)). It contains a further joint UK-EU commitment 'to maintain the necessary conditions for continued North-South cooperation' (Article 11).

May: *Briefing on the findings from the 17th Quarterly Survey (January to March 2025)*

Authored by Dr Ben Rosher (Research Associate, Centre for Cross Border Cooperation) and Aidan Campbell (Research Programmes Development Manager, Centre for Cross Border Cooperation), this Briefing Paper set out the results of the Centre's quarterly survey for the period January to March 2025.

June: *Briefing Paper on the EU proposal to discontinue seasonal time change*

This Briefing Paper, which was authored by Floran Echasserieau – an intern with the Centre – was produced in response to the European Commission's Work Programme for 2025, which lists a proposed directive to end seasonal time changes in the EU. As the Republic of Ireland remains an EU Member State, while the UK, including Northern Ireland, is no longer part of the EU, the paper reflected on how the adoption of this directive could have important implications for cross-border cooperation and coordination.

August: *Briefing on the findings from the 18th Quarterly Survey (April to June 2025)*

Authored by Dr Ben Rosher (Research Associate, Centre for Cross Border Cooperation) and Aidan Campbell (Research Programme Development Manager, Centre for Cross Border Cooperation), this Briefing Paper set out the results of the Centre's quarterly survey on the conditions for North-South and East-West cooperation for the period April to June 2025.

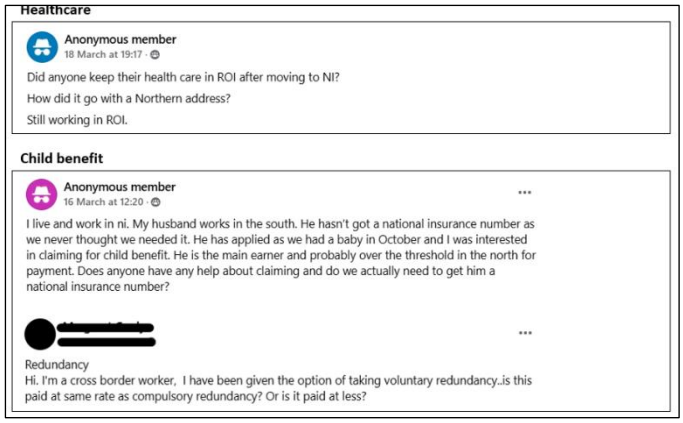
November: *Briefing on the findings from the 19th Quarterly Survey (July to September 2025)*

Authored by Dr Ben Rosher (Research Associate, Centre for Cross Border Cooperation) and Aidan Campbell (Research Programme Development Manager, Centre for Cross Border Cooperation), this Briefing Paper set out the results of the Centre's quarterly survey on the conditions for North-South and East-West cooperation for the period July to September 2025.

Border People

Throughout 2025 the Border People project continued to provide updated online information for citizens who cross the border regularly to work, live, study or retire, reflecting any changes due to the UK's exit from the EU or to changes introduced by either the UK or Irish governments that could have an impact on those with cross-border lives.

Between January and November of 2025, the project website (www.borderpeople.info) had an average of 24,000 page views per month and 2,200 users. During 2025 the project also continued to provide an online discussion platform for people from the region to ask questions and share cross-border information with each other - Border People Discussion Group on Facebook. By the final quarter of 2025, the Border People Discussion Group on Facebook had over 1,000 members.

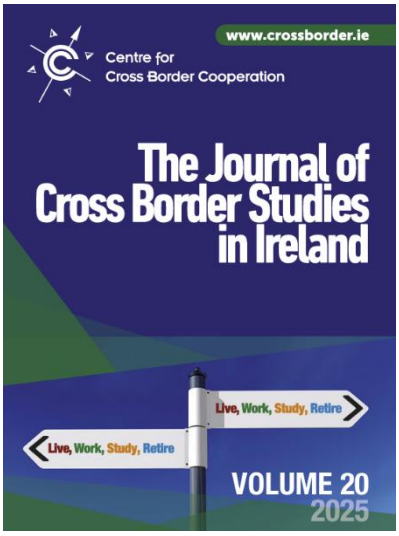


The project also continued to convene meetings of its Cross-border Practitioners' Group, which gathered together citizens advice and information providing organisations based in Ireland and Northern Ireland. The meetings provided an opportunity for members to offer updates on general cross-border topics, whilst also often exploring complex issues such as family benefits when parents have separated, tax-free childcare with cross-border employment and the cross-border enforceability of e-flow penalties. This element of the Border People project allows members to share expert knowledge and to build important cross-border relationships. In-person training was also delivered to advisors in June, with three online training sessions also delivered during 2025, which focused on themes such as family benefits and illness and sickness benefits for cross-border workers.

However, over the course of 2025 significant work was undertaken to develop and submit a funding application under Investment Area 6.1 of the PEACEPLUS programme. The Border People project was ultimately successful in its application for the Border People FLOW (**F**ostering **L**abour **O**penness and **W**orkforce mobility) project, which is to be implemented in 2026 in partnership with Advice NI, Community Advice, Newry, Mourne and Down, and North Connacht & Ulster Citizens Information Service.

Behind the scenes the project's cross-border Advisory Group met each quarter, with its membership including the North South Ministerial Council Joint Secretariat, supporting the project to undertake all of the activity outlined above, as well as the series of webinars disseminating the issues raised in the 2024 report on the labour market on the island of Ireland, commissioned by the Labour Employer Economic Forum.

Journal of Cross Border Studies in Ireland



Preceding and informing both the Centre's 2025 Annual Conference and the 2025 edition of *The Journal of Cross Border Studies in Ireland* came the publication in October 2024 of an important report, commissioned by the Labour Employer Economic Forum (LEEF) Shared Island Working Group. Overseen and co-authored by the Centre's Border People Project Manager, Annmarie O'Kane, this major report highlighted how sustainable economic growth depends on people, and how employers across Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland need access to talent, and that workers need systems that support mobility. It also showed how practical obstacles – from tax treatment and pensions to recognition of skills – often continue to stand in the way. Following the publication of this report, and in the run-up to the Centre's annual conference, our Border People project held a series of webinars to explore in more detail some of the issues raised in the report and to begin to propose potential solutions.

The 2025 edition of The Journal of Cross Border Studies in Ireland opened with an article by Annmarie O'Kane, which examines from the perspective of an all-island labour market the challenges faced by frontier workers – those living in one jurisdiction and working in another. Despite their economic importance, the article highlights how these workers remain underrepresented in legislation and policy, leading to complex issues around taxation, social security, and employment rights, particularly after Brexit. It notes how the rise of remote and hybrid work has further complicated compliance and benefits entitlements, while outdated systems and fragmented information exacerbate non-compliance risks. The author calls for an official legal definition of frontier workers, improved cross-border advice services, and coordinated, island-wide solutions leveraging existing institutions to ensure equitable treatment and unlock the full potential of cross-border employment.

In The Journal's second article, "How do we handle the 'Too Hot to Handle' tax and pension issues for Frontier Workers and employers?", Rose Tierney explores the intricate tax, social security, and pension challenges confronting frontier workers and employers on the island of Ireland. Current global mobility and double taxation rules fail to accommodate workers who live in one jurisdiction but perform duties in another, creating costly dual payroll obligations and compliance risks. Remote and hybrid work have amplified these issues, impacting mortgage applications, income protection, and pension tax relief. The author argues for legislative reform, including clear definitions of frontier workers and employers, alignment of tax and social security thresholds, and bilateral agreements to simplify payroll and pension

rules. Such measures, according to Tierney, would reduce administrative burdens and support labour mobility across the Ireland-Northern Ireland border.

Written by Dónal Kearney, The Journal's third article analyses the evolution and impact of remote and hybrid work across Ireland, Northern Ireland, and globally. It highlights Ireland's leadership in flexible work adoption, which was supported by legislation such as the Work Life Balance Act, but it also notes gaps in enforceability and employer resistance. Kearney describes Northern Ireland as lagging behind due to limited policy infrastructure and sectoral constraints. Globally, however, hybrid has become a feature of the world of work, although challenges persist around culture, inclusion, communication, and management capability. Kearney's article underscores remote work's economic, social, and environmental benefits – such as regional revitalisation, reduced commuting emissions, and improved wellbeing – while stressing the need for intentional design, robust policy frameworks, and cross-border alignment to maximise long-term gains.

The fourth contribution is by Paddy Hannigan. His article provides an insight into what a cross-border approach can achieve in terms of developing skills necessary for a thriving economy. It outlines the strategic vision and initiatives of the North West Tertiary Education Cluster (NWTEC), a cross border alliance of four major education providers that aim to transform the North West City Region on the island of Ireland into a hub for smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth. Through strategic cross-border partnerships and targeted projects, NWTEC has been deepening collaboration, expanding educational pathways, and strengthening enterprise engagement. The author highlights some of NWTEC's key priorities, which include reducing early school leaving, boosting research capacity, and promoting lifelong learning, while leveraging international partnerships and local governance structures to position the North West region as a globally competitive centre for education, innovation, and socio-economic regeneration.

In her article, Kathleen O'Hare proposes the evolution of the Common Travel Area into a Common Work Area, highlighting the need for integrated skills ecosystems across Ireland and Northern Ireland. It examines barriers created by Brexit – such as fragmented qualification recognition, the loss of EU mobility schemes, and divergent migration policies – and how these impact on workforce mobility. The author argues for coordinated strategies, including all-island apprenticeships, dual certification, and shared curriculum development, supported by initiatives like PEACEPLUS and the Shared Island Fund. Emphasising collaboration between the Skills Councils in the two jurisdictions on the island of Ireland, the article argues that seamless skills portability is essential for addressing labour shortages, driving innovation, and fostering inclusive economic growth.

Authored by Una McCane, the fifth article in this edition of The Journal positions apprenticeships as a strategic lever for economic transformation in Northern Ireland, underpinned by policies such as the Apprenticeship Action Plan. It highlights the role of MEGA

– the Manufacturing & Engineering Growth & Advancement cluster – in bridging education and industry through employer-led training, mentorship, and work-readiness programmes. However, McCabe notes that whilst apprenticeships deliver strong returns for employers, challenges persist around funding complexity, curriculum alignment, and soft skills gaps. Her article calls for reforms, including simplified access for SMEs, modular learning, and investment in industry-led training centres, alongside cross-border integration to harmonise standards. By embedding collaboration and inclusivity, apprenticeships can drive productivity, innovation, and social mobility across the region.

Closing the 2025 edition of The Journal of Cross Border Studies in Ireland, Colin McCabrey examines the evolution of economic cooperation between Ireland and Northern Ireland since the Good Friday Agreement, highlighting the significant growth in cross-border trade, business activity, and services integration despite persistent structural challenges. It identifies key barriers – including skills shortages, productivity gaps, regulatory complexity, and trade policy uncertainty – while emphasising the need for coordinated solutions to unlock further potential. The author proposes five actionable pathways: establishing a shared definition of cross-border workers and employers; providing clear compliance guidance; piloting all-island skills and apprenticeship programmes; issuing toolkits for remote work; and creating standing cross-border forums. By embedding collaboration into institutional frameworks and aligning policy priorities such as digitalisation, sustainability, and regional development, the article argues that both jurisdictions can build a resilient, inclusive, and globally competitive all-island economy.

Members of the CCBS Board (2025)

Peter Osborne (Chair), founder of Rubicon, chair of the regional board of Remembering Srebrenica and a member of its UK Board, non-executive director of the Integrated Education Fund, board member of the International Fund for Ireland and the Policing Board.

Dr Ryan Feeney, Vice-President Queen's University Belfast

Eileen Weir, employed by Shankill Women's Centre as the Greater North Belfast Women's Network Co-Ordinator funded by the Community Relations Council and TEO/North Belfast Good Relations Programme

Sir David Sterling, former Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service

Olwen Dawe, Policy Analyst and Consultant, member of the Board of Women's Aid

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