




Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Looking to a shared future

Report on the Shared Island
Dialogue series 2020-2021

Prepared by the Department of the Taoiseach
www.gov.ie/SharedIsland



“Increased opportunities
for everybody North and
South of the border.”

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Foreword by the Taoiseach

In launching the Shared Island Dialogue series last year as part of the Government's Shared Island initiative, I spoke of the need for reflective, inclusive civic conversations on the island, to inform how we work to build consensus around a shared future, underpinned by the Good Friday Agreement.

I also emphasised the value of as broad a range of perspective and experience as possible in these discussions, including from groups traditionally under-represented in the Peace Process, particularly women, young people and ethnic minorities.

Over the past year, through the online Shared Island Dialogue series, the Government has listened to people's ideas, questions, concerns, fears and hopes for the future, across a range of areas, from healthcare and the environment, to equality and civil society engagement on the island.

As set out in this report, a number of strong themes have emerged from the Shared Island Dialogues. There has also been a common thread throughout - a consistent message on the need and desire for greater cooperation on the island, in government and in civil society, on the issues that matter most for people, such as economic prosperity, health, education and the environment.

The vision and quality of ideas that have come forward through the Dialogues on how, in real terms, we can undertake that mutually-beneficial cooperation has been inspiring.

Over 1,000 civic representatives from across all regions and communities have been involved, in what have been positive, practical, forward-looking discussions, which I and Government colleagues have been glad to participate in.

These Dialogues have focused on the opportunities, and the challenges, we face in striving for a better connected and more reconciled future on this island.

They are also leading to exciting, new shared island civil society initiatives, contributing to the civic and community engagement that is at the core of the Peace Process. New projects, including an all-island women's forum; an all-island youth dialogue; and on shared island practice in civil society are now underway.

Inclusive, meaningful interaction - in civic, cultural, social, economic and political terms - is fundamental to the vitality of our shared island. The Government will continue to support the deepening of these connections in the years ahead.

We have also taken account of what civil society on the island is saying, in public investment planning through the Shared Island dimension of the revised National Development Plan, and in how we work to deepen North/South and East/West partnerships through the Good Friday Agreement.

I want to thank all civic representatives who have participated in the Shared Island Dialogue series over the last year. We will continue the Shared Island Dialogue series next year, to support continued and deepening civic engagement on how, across all communities and traditions, we can better work for a shared future on the island underpinned by the Good Friday Agreement.

Micheál Martin T.D.
Taoiseach





Introduction

Introduction

The Shared Island Dialogue series is part of the Government's Shared Island initiative, launched by the Taoiseach, Micheál Martin TD, in October 2020 to harness the full potential of the Good Friday Agreement to enhance cooperation, connection and mutual understanding on the island and engage with all communities and traditions on a shared future.

To date, over 1,000 civic representatives from across communities, traditions and regions on the island have participated in the Shared Island Dialogues, discussing their views on key issues for the future on the island; exploring opportunities for cross-learning; and looking at how to deepen mutually-beneficial cooperation through the framework Good Friday Agreement.

The Dialogues are providing a space for civic engagement on the opportunities and challenges that arise in seeking a more reconciled future on the island. Discussions have borne out significant common ground, solidarity and willingness across communities and different political traditions, to work together on areas of shared concern and importance for the future.

Reflecting the priority for the Government, the Dialogue series has actively sought to engage with those who have traditionally been under-represented in the Peace Process, including women, ethnic minorities and young people, and there was early initial engagement with representatives in these groups, at the outset of the series in late 2020.

Seven online Shared Island Dialogues have been held over the last year on:

- **New Generations and New Voices on the Good Friday Agreement;**
- **Environment and Climate - addressing shared challenges on the island;**
- **Civil Society - catalyst for connection and understanding on a shared island;**
- **Equality on a shared island;**
- **Building back together: Economic recovery on a shared island;**
- **Working together for a Healthier Island; and**
- **Learning from each other: The future of education on a shared island.**

The Dialogues are ensuring broad-based and inclusive participation by civil society representatives across the island. In this way, we are supporting contributions from people directly involved, affected or with expertise or experience on a particular theme. In consultation with civil society, particular attention is given to ensuring that there is inclusive participation and an overall balance of representation in the Dialogue programmes, including on gender, age, ethnicity, region, and the different communities and traditions, North and South, on the island.

Discussion at the Dialogues is feeding into the broader Shared Island initiative, helping to shape the Shared Island research programme and inform the development of Government policy, investment and cooperation on the Shared Island. A number of civil society-led projects are also emerging from the series.

The Dialogues are organised by the Shared Island unit in the Department of the Taoiseach working closely with the Department of Foreign Affairs, relevant Government Departments and Agencies and in consultation with civil society stakeholders on the island.

Further information on the Shared Island Dialogue series including videos of the plenary sessions from these events is available on the gov.ie website - www.gov.ie/SharedIsland/Dialogues.



Key Themes



Ahead of the first Shared Island Dialogue with young people on the island in November 2020, participants were asked to express what a Shared Island means to them. Below are just some of the statements that were provided in response. The full video can be watched back [here](#)



¹ Mutual respect and understanding of the different cultures and languages of the entire island

Context

The Shared Island Dialogues to date have taken place in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the implementation of post-Brexit arrangements on the island of Ireland and more broadly between the UK and European Union. Both of these significant events have featured prominently in discussions throughout the series. The need for better data frameworks on the island and the potential for the Shared Island Fund to unlock important North/South projects have also been common themes of discussion.

	
<p>COVID-19</p>	<p>BREXIT</p>
<p>The negative impacts and strains of the COVID-19 pandemic on individuals, communities, and society on both sides of the border was a strong theme across the Dialogue series. The exacerbation of socio-economic and gender inequality on the island as well as the impacts of the pandemic on mental health were important points of discussion in many of the Dialogues.</p> <p>The pandemic was also viewed as a potential catalyst for positive change on the island. The response from communities in working together to deliver support services in the midst of the pandemic is encouraging and should be recognised and harnessed for the longer-term recovery. COVID-19 has also resulted in new ways of working and delivering services which can enable greater North/South cooperation and engagement.</p> <p>A fair and equitable recovery from the pandemic came through as a priority for all, North and South of the border.</p>	<p>The impacts of Brexit were also raised across the Dialogues, including on areas where there is a need to find new ways to enable and support North/South cooperation on the island, and to deal with possible future divergence on sectoral policies and regulations that were previously underpinned by common EU law and membership.</p> <p>Brexit was also discussed in the context of citizenship and rights provisions under the Good Friday Agreement, and its impacts on non-Irish or non-British citizens and ethnic minority communities, especially those living close to the border. The need to build up trust and mutual understanding between communities following the disruption of Brexit was another common theme across the Dialogue series.</p>



DATA

A further cross-cutting theme was the need for better-coordinated statistical data. The value of more robust and comparable data on an island-wide basis was raised across virtually all discussions, including in the context of climate action, rights monitoring, health cooperation and identifying economic trends and opportunities.

The importance of comparable statistical data for research across all disciplines on the island was emphasised throughout the Dialogue series, as was its potential to support greater North/South cooperation in an evidence-based way. There is scope for cross-border learning and exchange on how statistical data is collected with potential for more coordination between systems North and South. This would make it easier for researchers, civil society and policy-makers to understand differences and commonalities between both systems to identify where shared approaches might have most impact.



RESOURCING

The importance of resourcing to enable cooperation, in terms of public policy and civic, community, cultural, social, economic and political interactions was a theme raised across all Dialogues. The value and impact of funding that supports the objectives of the Good Friday Agreement was widely acknowledged, including the EU PEACE and INTERREG programmes; Irish, UK and Executive funding; and the International Fund for Ireland, philanthropic and charitable donators.

There was a widespread view that given the continuing task of reconciliation and enduring challenges, there is a need for sustained funding in support of the Peace Process, for the years ahead. The forthcoming PEACE PLUS programme 2021-27, was recognised as a vital support in this respect.

The establishment of the Shared Island Fund by the Irish Government in 2021, providing capital funding for North/South projects was also recognised as a significant development in bringing fresh impetus and potential to cross-border investment. Under the renewed National Development Plan published in October, the Government has committed to extending the Shared Island Fund out to 2030, representing a commitment of €1 billion for North/South investment over the next 10 years.



Climate and Environment



Invisible Lines

This tug of war between invisible lines
Where roots take hold of your hand and mine
And raise us up to the light, to see
That nature doesn't settle on a boundary.

Seeds fly further than horizons and skylines
Fault-lines, can carry the rumble of sound
The quiet misinformation, what's native,
What is for profit
The lessening of land for thriving 'value
economics'

Nature isn't a commodity, to buy and sell
You are its husk, its heart, its shell.
The strategies and plans are empty, vacuous
If the protective layer that surrounds us, is
discounted
In numbers, figures, projections. What?

We share an island, so rich in wonder
With a language that has spoken from earth
and sky
Dreoilín, bóin dé, slater, cuckoo flower.
Rewilding our minds needs to surge from
all edges
To fold inward and outward so compassion...
is inherent.

An island compact in its conflicts, common
ground is just that,
The soil which we tread on, that gently holds
us, together.

But
Our piece of earth is scattering like dust
The threads that hold it, are stretched so taut
Tension is thrumming, strumming,
murmuring, yelling.

Compelling, this story, which can unfold
From feet and hands and mouths and minds.
Utterings from ancestors, to lessen the load
To go gently with focus.
Throw out the lines

Cast them wide, for all to catch to learn,
To ache and find, that within, it was there
All along.
Deep knowing that money, superfluous things
Were not worth the price of losing our life
support.

Do we flatline, accept, that we live within
constraints
That nature must play second fiddle to our
lack of restraint

No. We rally. We inspire. We light the flame.
We've done it before, we can do it again.
We can be Good We can Agree
That nature must now take precedent if we
want to continue. Inhabiting.

The earth isn't finite, and neither are we. Let's
use our time here
And leave, a shared legacy.

Invisible Lines, by award winning author, naturalist and environmental campaigner, Dara McAnulty was written especially for the Shared Island Dialogue on Climate and Environment on 5 February 2021

Climate and Environment

Discussion on the climate and biodiversity emergency on the island has featured prominently throughout the Dialogue series. It was an issue of significant importance for young people in the first Dialogue in November 2020 and has also been cited in subsequent Dialogues as an important area where more should be done through North/South and East/West cooperation.

The nature of the island as a single biogeographic unit and the comparable international commitments on climate change and biodiversity, North and South, provide valuable opportunities to develop cross-border frameworks and funding mechanisms to support “co-created solutions” to the climate and biodiversity challenges for the island as a whole.

The distinct circumstances and experience of the island also provide an impetus for greater collaboration and knowledge-sharing. For instance, the comparable importance and structure of the Agriculture sector on the island speaks for strong all-island interaction on the common task of tackling greenhouse gas emissions in the sector. Cross-border opportunities to reduce emissions, protect biodiversity through land use projects and to sequester carbon through the rewetting of peatlands were encouraged.

“We should deliver big and deliver on the ground, using our green infrastructure. Let’s look at our large landscapes straddling the border. Let’s form a necklace of peace lands using the peatlands along the border, knitting the landscape together with common biodiversity objectives, restoration actions and community buy-in.”

Shirley Clerkin, Panellist, Environment and Climate - addressing shared challenges on the island

Given the common challenges faced North and South as both jurisdictions move towards decarbonisation there could also be greater knowledge-sharing and collaboration on innovation, research and development to deliver environmental and other benefits for both parts of the island.

Scaling-up cooperation on climate and environmental issues was also seen as a natural area of focus for the Shared Island initiative, given the focus on working on strategic issues of concern for the island as a whole.



Participants in the Dialogue on Environment and Climate in February were also consulted with for the research undertaken by the National Economic and Social Council (NESCC) as part of the Shared Island initiative research programme.

The subsequent [NESCC report](#) in October made a number of recommendations for strengthening North/South collaboration on Climate and Biodiversity issues, through both formal and informal structures.

These include the development of a statement of shared purpose for climate and biodiversity on the island; the creation of a dedicated funding stream for cross-border environmental networks; and the establishment of working



groups to explore strategic opportunities for cooperation.

The Government welcomes this report, which will help to inform the Government's commitment to work on an all-island basis on climate and biodiversity challenges and to invest for a more sustainable island in the decade ahead, as set out in the Shared Island chapter of the renewed National Development Plan.

Discussion on Climate and Environment issues at the Dialogues informed the development of Shared Island investment priorities under the renewed National Development Plan to create a more sustainable island, which will be supported through the Shared Island Fund and other funding streams. These include: working with the Northern Ireland Executive on cross-border and all-island approaches to green energy supplies; coordinated roll-out of Electric Vehicle charging across the island; and, delivery of the second North/South interconnector on the island, which will

facilitate integration of renewable energy into the power system.

There will also be support for cross-border climate action partnerships and interventions and coordinated investment to preserve cross-border region peatlands, and coastal regions and marine resources of the island.

The Government's new North/South Research Programme which is now underway with €40m funding from the Shared Island Fund over five years, will also support greater collaborative research on key concerns for our shared future, including on climate and biodiversity.



Health and Mental Health

Health and Mental Health

“Individuals talked about collaboration being the life blood of healthcare. Something that you would naturally do, in fact the question would be why would you not as we are facing similar challenges? And as an island, perhaps we could have a critical mass to deliver some services that we just simply couldn’t deliver individually. And we may be able to deliver higher quality, more specialised services as an island.”

Professor Deirdre Heenan, Panellist, Working together for a healthier island

The scope for greater collaboration on health and mental health issues has been another strong theme in the Shared Island Dialogues so far. It has been discussed both in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery, and looking at health on the island more broadly with a view to delivering better services and health outcomes for people, North and South.

Alongside the Shared Island Dialogue on Health in July, Professor of Social Policy at Ulster University, Deirdre Heenan, published scoping research on [“Collaborating on Healthcare on an All-Island Basis”](#), which was commissioned as a discussion paper contribution for the Dialogue. The findings of this research, based on stakeholder consultation, chimed in many areas with discussions on health issues across the Dialogue series.

Existing cooperation overseen by the North South Ministerial Council, such as through the All-Island Congenital Heart Disease Network, Cooperation and Working Together (CAWT), the Institute of Public Health and the North West Cancer Centre were strongly supported and seen as providing models for cooperation in other health sector areas, in particular the provision of specialist health services on an all-island basis.

The commonalities of mental health for people on the island, including the experiences of specific groups such as young people and travellers, were raised frequently in the Dialogue series, particularly so in the first discussion with young people.

“Respect for young people must inform the absolute priority of building reliable and accessible youth mental health services on every part of this island”

Ian Power, Panellist, New Generations and New Voices on the Good Friday Agreement

The scope for beneficial cooperation and exchange on mental health was explored extensively in the Health Dialogue, by sector leaders North and South and looking at the current mental health strategies of both Administrations.





The potential to do more on suicide prevention was also recognised with an acknowledgement that suicide rates have tended to be higher in Northern Ireland and in border regions, as well as among marginalised communities on the island, including travellers. There are opportunities for agencies to work more collaboratively cross-border to address these specific circumstances and to share knowledge on emerging trends.

Health cooperation was also seen to be ready to benefit from technologies and practices deployed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, the growth area of eHealth was identified as an enabler of greater delivery of services on a cross-border basis, as undertaken during the pandemic by JIGSAW.ie – the national centre for youth mental health.

Contributions on health cooperation throughout the Dialogue series have helped to inform the Government's investment priorities for North/South Health cooperation under the renewed National Development Plan 2021-2030, to be supported through the Shared Island Fund and other funding streams.

The Government will seek to work with the Executive, including through the NSMC, to together develop an overarching strategy for healthcare cooperation, to better identify needs and opportunities and set priority actions; to share experience, innovation and support more all-island research; and, to ensure that specialist health services are available on the island for all who need them.

Specific investment priorities include working with the Northern Ireland Executive to increase regional access to diagnostic and other services on a cross-border basis; to deliver new eHealth solutions, through developing an all-island ecosystem in digital health; and, to provide new specialist health services on an all-island basis

The Government's new North/South Research Programme which is now underway with €40m funding from the Shared Island Fund over the next five years, will also support greater collaborative research on key concerns for our shared future, including on health matters.



Economy, Education and Opportunity

Economy, Education and Opportunity

“Today we see a pivotal moment in the island’s history, in the future of the island and in the future of the opportunities that are being presented, and what I mean by that is we are at least seeing the route through or out of the pandemic, we have a protocol, we have the opportunity to build relations across the island, and we also have a pivotal moment in economic terms around the green and sustainable agenda.”

Richard Kennedy, Panellist, Building back together: Economic recovery on a shared island

Growing the all-island economy is an important objective for the Government and through the seven Shared Island Dialogues so far, the potential to support greater economic opportunity across the island has been widely discussed.

The Dialogues have taken place during a period where the Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol has come into effect post-Brexit and when both parts of the island are starting their economic recovery from the pandemic. While challenging, both have also been cited as opening new opportunities for developing skills and innovation, attracting investment and for growing mutually-beneficial trade in goods and services.

It was noted that cross-border trade is below what would be expected given geographical proximity, and has the potential to be doubled in the years ahead with coordinated policy and support from the two Administrations on the island. This could also include greater promotion of existing supports for cross-border enterprise. A discussion between young entrepreneurs on the island, commented on an instinct to look to the UK, EU or the US for export growth and cooperation opportunities, missing opportunities across the border, North or South, on the island of Ireland.

The opportunities to grow the all-island economy through the development of

strategic clusters and centres of excellence was also discussed, with suggestions that an all-island cluster policy and action plan could be developed, with a focus on FinTech, Health and Green Tech in the first instance.

In the context of the Protocol, business representatives spoke of Northern Ireland’s unique position to attract more investment internationally and from within the UK, and the scope for North/South cooperation to harness those opportunities, for instance through support for supply-chains and transport routes to the wider EU and UK markets.

Innovation and skills development were consistently highlighted as keys for sustainable economic growth in the years ahead, and with clear scope for enhanced cooperation on the island. Both are important in managing structural economic changes, including as a result of the pandemic, decarbonisation, and the advancement of disruptive technologies such as digitisation, automation and robotics.

“For me a shared island means protecting the ability for young people to access education, training and employment opportunities regardless of where they come from on the island”

Participant, New Generations and New Voices on the Good Friday Agreement



It was also emphasised that an inclusive and diverse skills base, both in terms of skills attained and people trained, is vital for economic growth and opportunity across the island, including by retaining talent on the island and addressing youth unemployment.

Cooperation between industry, education and training, research and community sectors on a North/South basis, can also deliver greater economic opportunities and help address social exclusion on the island. The North West Further and Higher Education cluster, with links into business and industry in the region, was cited as an exemplar in this regard, that could be replicated elsewhere on the island. The Dublin Belfast Economic Corridor initiative, which is also seeking to better link enterprise with higher education on a cross-border basis has also been recognised in this context.

The indispensability of education and training from early years and primary level through to the research sector, in supporting equality of opportunity on the island, particularly for marginalised groups, has also been a strong theme in the Dialogue series. There has been particular emphasis on the need to place more value and status on vocational training and further education options.

There are also new and growing opportunities for beneficial North/South collaboration between education and training providers, with the adoption of more hybrid and remote delivery modes, in response to the pandemic.

Consistent with perspectives and views raised on economic opportunity through the Shared Island Dialogue series, the Government has developed its commitments to invest for a more prosperous island for all in the decade ahead through the renewed National Development Plan, to be supported through the Shared Island Fund and other funding streams, including to:

- **Support InterTradeIreland to help businesses trade on the island and develop high potential sectors; and support the mission of Tourism Ireland to grow tourism into the island;**
- **Facilitate cross-border enterprise development through the Border and Regional Enterprise Development Funds and Regional Enterprise Plans to enhance clustering, innovation diffusion and collaboration;**
- **Support cross-border approaches to attract investment to the island and invest in infrastructure that will support all-island supply chains and networks;**
- **Invest in deeper cooperation between further and higher education institutions on an all-island basis; and,**
- **Develop cross-border apprenticeships under the Government's Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021-2025.**



Equality and Rights

Equality and Rights

“In disability spaces there is an important mantra of nothing about us without us. In work surrounding equality we need to move to equity... How do we ensure that we are not just creating equality, but equity and justice by changing the system? Systematically and systemically, so that progress is not just an opportunity, but an absolute possibility.”

Sinéad Burke, Guest Contributor, Equality on a shared island

In launching the Shared Island Dialogue series, the Taoiseach emphasised the importance of including voices traditionally under-represented in the Peace Process, such as women, young people and minorities, in these discussions. This has been a core principle of the series so far, with early engagement with representatives in these groups and with participation ensured in all Dialogue events.

For young people in the New Generations and New Voices Dialogue, diversity, inclusion and equality were principles that they clearly felt should be foundational to a shared island. The inclusion of underrepresented voices was viewed as essential to achieving this with many speaking of their willingness to forego their place in these discussions if it meant inclusion of a marginalised voice in their place.

Opportunities for cross-learning and sharing of best practice in tackling inequality and discrimination have been often identified through the Dialogues. Racism, hate crime, and economic and social exclusion of minorities were viewed as all-island issues. While cross-border engagement on these already happens at a civil society level, there is clear scope for greater engagement and collaboration between the two Administrations on these issues.

The centrality of the Good Friday Agreement to the rights and equality agenda on the island and the work of the related Human

Rights and Equality Bodies North and South is broadly recognised. However, in more than one discussion frustration was expressed about unimplemented parts of the Good Friday Agreement in particular a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland and the establishment of a Civic Forum for engagement between civil society and politicians.



The evolution of the rights and equality agenda on the island since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement was also highlighted. The need to underpin international rights frameworks and to better reflect contemporary society in legislation, was also emphasised with a call to both Administrations to be more ambitious in the protection of rights and to move beyond minimum standard of protections. The position of migrants and changed entitlements and constraints on travelling and working freely across the island post-Brexit was also raised as requiring more North/South cooperation and attention.

“Recognising the diversity of the island and ensuring that all voices are included in the conversations about what a shared island should look like has to move beyond cultural understanding and celebration of diversity”

Lilian Seenoi-Barr, Panellist, Civil Society – catalyst for connection and understanding on a shared island

Finally, a common theme throughout the Dialogues was the need for greater representation of women, minorities and those with disabilities across public life and society more broadly. This necessitates recognising the barriers to participation and taking practical steps to address these. There are also opportunities for both Administrations to work collaboratively with civil society on an all-island basis to address these challenges.

Taking on board the points raised through the Shared Island Dialogue series, the Government will welcome submissions from across the island, and consult with the Northern Ireland Executive on the development of new Equality Strategies, including those being developed in 2022. The independent National Anti-Racism Committee met with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission as part of their consultation on the second National Action Plan Against Racism for Ireland, which will be submitted to the Minister for Children, Equality, Integration and Youth in early 2022.

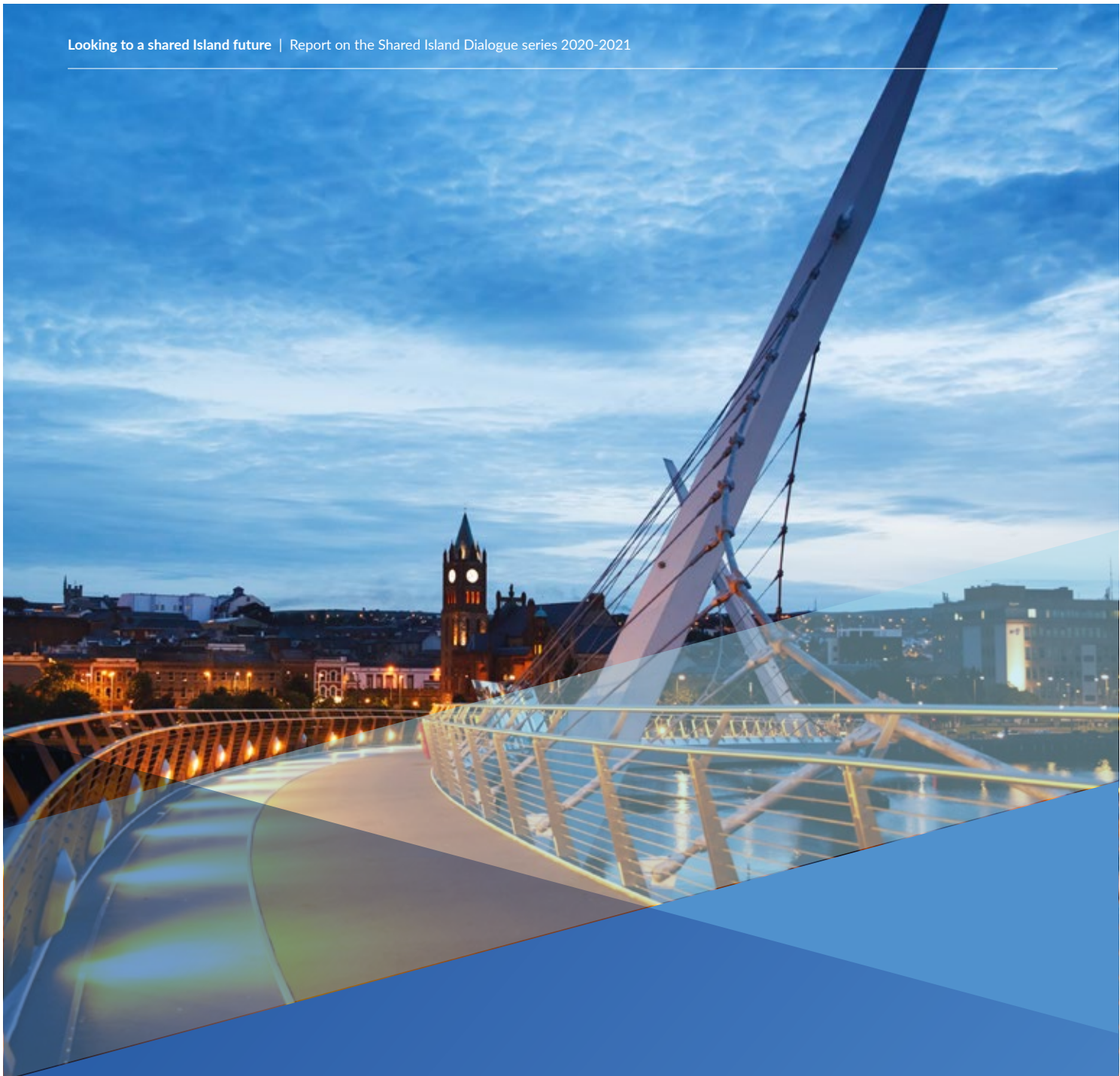
Minority and marginalised voices will continue to be consulted and involved



as part of the Dialogue series, ensuring representation of these perspectives in the further development of the Government’s shared island agenda.

The Government will continue to work to support full implementation of outstanding commitments under the Good Friday Agreement and subsequent agreements and engage with the UK Government and the Executive on Rights and Equality issues, as a co-guarantor of the Agreement and recognising the benefits of complementary polices and protections on the island of Ireland.

The Government also welcomes the Memorandum of Understanding agreed between the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland on providing oversight of and reporting on rights and equality issues falling within the scope of the commitment in Article 2 of the Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol that have an island of Ireland dimension.



Engagement and Reconciliation

Engagement and Reconciliation

“Everything should be done to encourage young people to get to know their neighbours – only with the understanding of each other can we build relationships to make a better future.”

Tommy Bowe, Contributor, *Building back together: Economic recovery on a shared island*

Deepening connections and trust between communities and traditions on the island and the achievement of reconciliation is at the core of the Good Friday Agreement, and how we can do better here has been a prominent theme in the Shared Island Dialogue series.

The centrality of engagement on issues of common interest in building trust, understanding and reconciliation between communities on the island was emphasised throughout the discussions.

Young people expressed a strong desire to have more opportunities to engage with others from different backgrounds and communities, and an interest in developing a greater understanding of their traditions and cultures and to foster new relationships. The potential for the arts, culture and education sectors on the island to provide these opportunities was consistently raised.

“It was an eye opener for the students. That’s what I found was most interesting about it. A lot of the students came with some preconceived ideas of what the other students, what their perspectives might be, and there was an awful lot of common ground”

Joe McBride, Panellist, *Learning from each other – the future of education on a shared island, on his school’s involvement in North/South school exchange programme*

Education was viewed as an enabler in building trust, understanding and reconciliation. Many throughout the series spoke of their positive experiences of cross-border engagement through school exchange programmes, cooperation at student union level and other initiatives to bring young people together from different communities and traditions. The impact education can have on understanding of others on the island through teaching and learning practice has also been highlighted.

Civil society also has a central role to play in fostering reconciliation and trust between different people on the island. This sector has the experience and understanding to provide spaces for people from different communities and backgrounds to come together and collaborate for common purpose. The need for greater engagement in the South on reconciliation on the island, has also been a recurring theme of discussion.

Celebration of diversity and cultural differences should also be aspired to, both in terms of the traditional cultures and identities on the island as well as those that are growing as a result of migration and generational changes. There should be better representation of and engagement with minority cultures, including to engender a better acknowledgment of pro-Union culture in the South.

The Shared Island Dialogue series has been welcomed as a forum for engagement and



discussion across communities and traditions on the future of the island. Other ongoing work in this area, led by civic society and at community levels was also recognised and encouraged.

The support that will be provided through the PEACE PLUS programme 2021-2027, with over €1billion delivered by the European Union, UK Government, Irish Government and Northern Ireland Executive, to support peace and prosperity in Northern Ireland and across the island has also been emphasised throughout the Dialogue series. Key aspects of PEACE PLUS are to support civil society in bringing people together to develop trust and understanding, as well as building positive relationships between cultures and communities across the island.

The Government is strongly committed to supporting opportunities for greater engagement on a cross-border basis to enhance understanding and trust across communities on the island. This is recognised as especially important for young people on the island, who are growing up in the post-Good Friday Agreement era.

To support these opportunities for engagement, the Departments of Education,

North and South, jointly prepared a number of proposals for funding under PEACE PLUS, including to expand the North/South Schools Programme out to 2025, to deliver 100 cross-border engagements per year.

As a co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement, the Government is deeply committed to the achievement of reconciliation on the island. The Reconciliation Fund was increased again in 2021, supporting more grants to organisations working to build better relations across traditions in Northern Ireland, between North and South, and Ireland and Britain.

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

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



Next Steps

Next Steps



The Shared Island Dialogue series has provided valuable input and insight for the development of Government policy, investment and cooperation actions under the Shared Island initiative so far. This will continue into 2022, as part of the next phase of the Dialogue series.

Seeking as broad a range of experience and perspective as possible from across civil society on the island, and ensuring the inclusion of under-represented voices of women, young people and ethnic minority communities will remain core to the approach on the Shared Island Dialogues.

The series will also continue to inform the research programme of the Shared Island unit and research outputs will likewise be connected to civic discussion in the Dialogues.

Themes that have come through from the series will help shape the approach on the Shared Island Dialogues next year. To deepen

the engagement, it is planned that sectoral discussions will focus on more specific issues. Dialogues will also be convened around broader societal concerns under the Good Friday Agreement, such as on arts and culture and identity. Opportunities will also be sought to convene Shared Dialogue engagements with civil society partners.

Our objective is to move to in-person discussions next year and to include a regional dimension so that civic discussions can take place in different locations around the island.

The Dialogue series complements the breadth of civic and community engagement that supports different aspects of the Peace Process founded on the Good Friday Agreement, which the Shared Island unit will continue to take cognisance of, working with the Department of Foreign Affairs. The unit will also continue to actively meet with civic, community, cultural, economic and political stakeholders to inform its work.

A number of civil society projects have developed on foot of engagement at the Dialogues, such as the National Women's Council All-Island Women's Forum; the NI Youth Forum's North/South Youth Forum; and, the Shared Island, Shared Practices project being run jointly by The Wheel and the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA). The outputs of these and other initiatives will be considered by the Shared Island unit.

The Government will also continue to support initiatives by civil society, the community sector and the arts and cultural sector aimed at promoting constructive and inclusive dialogue around the future of the island.



Appendix

New Generations and New Voices on the Good Friday Agreement 26 November 2020

Summary

There is an evident **willingness among young people to engage** with the Shared Island initiative.

The strong desire among those present to have more **opportunities for engagement on a cross-border basis** on issues of shared interest such as mental health and climate change was notable.

Building **understanding of identity and ensuring inclusivity** in its broadest sense is of clear value to the young people who engaged in this Dialogue.

Specific policy issues raised throughout this dialogue included access to education and the potential use of **education as a tool to build understanding** between communities on the island. The issues of **climate change, rights, mental health and regional equality** were also very important to the young people present on the day.

Finally, there was a broad sense of an opportunity through the Shared Island initiative to **develop engagement and understanding of the Good Friday Agreement** among young people across the island. This is especially true in the South where it was seen there is less broad public engagement on Peace Process issues more generally than in Northern Ireland.

Link to full Dialogue report:

www.gov.ie/SharedIsland/Dialogues

Programme

Moderator: Freya McClements, Irish Times

Format:

11.00 - 11.05 Opening remarks

11.05 - 11.10 Opening Address from Taoiseach, Micheál Martin TD

11.10 - 11.58 Panel 1 – Building understanding and connection on the island-leadership by post-1998 generation

Panellists:

- **Emma DeSouza**, citizens' rights campaigner and commentator
 - **Ryan Shaw**, Youth Action Northern Ireland
 - **Síona Cahill**, activist and campaigner
-

12.10 - 12.55 Panel 2 - Equality of opportunity on a Shared Island - agenda for the 2020s.

Panellists:

- **Ian Power**, CEO, SpunOut.ie
 - **Ellen Fearon**, President NUS-USI
 - **TJ Hogan**, Coordinator at East Cork Traveller project
-

13.00 - 13.30 Lunch break

13.30 - 14.30 Breakout sessions: Based on submissions by participants

- Making the Good Friday Agreement work for the next 20 Years
 - Role of Civil Society and Culture in shaping a Shared Future
 - Identity and Rights on a Shared Island
 - Education and Opportunity on a Shared Island
-

Environment and Climate - addressing shared challenges on the island

5 February 2021

Summary

There is a **strong desire among civil society representatives to see greater cooperation at all levels on environment and climate issues for the island.** There are comparable domestic and international commitments in both jurisdictions, and common challenges faced across the island. Deeper coordination and cooperation would assist in meeting these challenges, and there is clear potential for cross-learning and sharing of best practice and knowledge, North and South.

There were a **range of practical suggestions for greater cooperation** in the Dialogue - on addressing climate, biodiversity and other environmental challenges - which were noted and warrant consideration.

Reflecting the intrinsically shared nature of environment and ecology on the island, there was a **strong focus on issues of land use, biodiversity and nature-based solutions as key areas that need and are amenable to coordinated or cross-border approaches on the island.** There was emphasis also on the need for coordinated actions in **working for just transition to a carbon neutral future on the island.**

The **importance of networks** in working to address environmental challenges was consistently noted, in respect of **research, civil society and community networks**, and also in **networked approaches to nature-based solutions.**

There already exist **strong and vibrant networks of cross-border cooperation in civil society and by researchers on the island**, with both North/South and East-West dimensions. These networks facilitate sharing of data and knowledge, which is integral to addressing challenges on climate and biodiversity, and continued **focus on and development of these networks is essential.**

The **island of Ireland has some distinct challenges to address and factors to take account of as compared with circumstances in other European states and regions.** For example, the island is considered a single biogeographic unit, and the importance of the Agricultural sector for economy and society in both parts of the island is distinctive. At the same time on many challenges, like energy and the climate, the links between the UK and Ireland are critical meaning that cooperation with counterparts in Britain is also highly relevant and important in a range of areas.

Recognising the fact of different systems and rules on the island, North and South, there is **clear scope for greater cooperation and collaboration on shared environmental issues.** Climate and Biodiversity breakdown are challenges faced across the world and a global response is required, but with effective mechanisms for cross-border coordination and cooperation on the island. Also, the **transboundary nature of the environment on the island would be most effectively addressed through a shared strategic approach.** This is of increased importance post-Brexit, and opportunities should be sought for greater joint engagement on environmental issues through existing North/South and East-West frameworks.

Link to full Dialogue report:
www.gov.ie/SharedIsland/Dialogues

Programme

Moderator: Kevin O’Sullivan, Environment and Science Editor, Irish Times

Format:

11.00 - 11.05 Opening remarks

11.05 - 11.15 **Opening Address**, Minister for Environment, Climate and Communications, Eamon Ryan TD

11.15 - 11.20 **Opening Presentation - *Shared Island - Climate and Biodiversity Challenges and Opportunities***, Dr Jeanne Moore, Policy Analyst, National Economic and Social Council

11.20 - 11.25 **Opening Presentation - *Invisible Lines***, Dara McAnulty, naturalist, writer and environmental campaigner

11.25 - 12.15 **Panel 1 - Tackling the Climate emergency - a Shared Island perspective**

Panellists:

- **Dr Amanda Slevin**, Chair Climate Coalition NI
 - **Professor Brian Ó Gallachóir**, Director, MaREI, the SFI Research Centre for Energy, Climate and Marine
 - **Dr Eimear Cotter**, Director, EPA Office of Environmental Sustainability
-

12.15 - 13.05 **Panel 2 - Addressing the Biodiversity crisis on the island**

Panellists:

- **Anne-Marie McDevitt**, Head of Species, RSPB NI
 - **Professor Yvonne Buckley**, Nature +, the Trinity Centre for Biodiversity and Sustainable Nature Based Solutions
 - **Shirley Clerkin**, Heritage Officer with Monaghan County Council
-

13.05 - 13.35 **Break**

13.35 - 14.25 **Panel 3 - Future priorities for all-island cooperation on Environment**

Panellists:

- **Oonagh Duggan**, Head of Advocacy BirdWatch Ireland, representing the Environmental Pillar
 - **Dr. Viviane Gravey**, Lecturer in European Politics, Queen’s University Belfast
 - **Professor Tom Collins**, Chairperson, An Fóram Uisce
-

Civil Society – catalyst for connection and understanding on a shared island

25 March 2021

Summary

Civil society has played a major role in **peace building and reconciliation** on the island since before the Good Friday Agreement and continues to do so. The influence and impact of civil society and the power of community engagement to **build trust, connections and commonality of purpose across communities and traditions** on the island was recognised.

Funding is essential to enable civil society and community organisations to build new connections and work together on a shared island basis, recognising the other societal needs that civil society groups also meet. There are a number of funding streams available to civil society groups that relate to the objectives of the Shared Island initiative of building connection and understanding including the Irish Government's **Reconciliation Fund**, the EU **PEACE PLUS** programme, the Community Foundation for Ireland and Community Foundation for Northern Ireland, **All-Island Fund** and ReThink Ireland's **Equality Fund**.

Civil society is an established driver for change in society, founded on inclusive, respectful engagement. Historically, civil society was behind the abolition of the slave trade in the UK, the women's suffrage campaign, and more recently, the social reform referenda campaigns in Ireland.

The **importance of ensuring inclusivity and diversity across all levels of society** was expressed across all discussions as a means to build trust and understanding. Civil society can create spaces that allow people and groups from different communities and backgrounds to collaborate for mutual benefit. Excluding or failing to take account of all perspectives and experiences in discussions on issues for the future, risks alienation among marginalised groups.

Culture and the arts can play a significant role to promote better understanding between communities on the island. Organisations in the sector have the capacity to create shared spaces and promote the values of equality, equity, human rights and diversity on the island

Cross-border cooperation is already prevalent among many areas of civil society and best practice in cooperation **should be acknowledged and promoted.** Collaboration should be incentivised to bring about new civil society partnerships across the island.

Link to full Dialogue report:
www.gov.ie/SharedIsland/Dialogues

Programme

Moderator: Audrey Carville, Broadcaster, RTÉ & BBC

Format:

10.00 - 10.05 Opening remarks

10.05 - 10.15 Opening Address - Minister for Foreign Affairs, Simon Coveney TD

10.15 - 11.00 Q&A with Minister Coveney

11.05 - 12.00 Panel 1: Civil society - engaging together for a shared future

Panellists:

- **Deirdre Garvey**, CEO, The Wheel
 - **Seamus McAleavey**, CEO, Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA)
 - **Gina McIntyre**, CEO, Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB)
-

12.00 - 12.55 Panel 2: Civil society - building social and cultural understanding

Panellists:

- **Brian Dougherty MBE Bsc(Hons) MTPL**, Advisor, North West Cultural Partnership
 - **Lilian Seeno-Barr**, Director of Programmes, North West Migrant Forum
 - **Orla O'Connor**, Director, National Women's Council
-

Equality on a Shared Island 10 May 2021

Summary

The importance of **equivalence of rights** across the island was emphasised throughout the Dialogue. The provisions under the Good Friday Agreement in this regard were recognised and the signing of a **Memorandum of Understanding** (MOU) between the two Equality Commissions, North and South, was welcomed in providing oversight of and reporting on equality issues, further to the UK commitment under the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland to 'no diminution' of the rights, safeguards and equality of opportunity provided for the people of Northern Ireland under Good Friday Agreement.

Inequality experienced on the island is complex.

Income, race, ethnicity, gender and ability are all factors that can contribute to unequal life experiences both North and South. There is also intersectionality between income and other factors in determining opportunities and outcomes for people.

The **rights and equality agenda** on the island is not static and has progressed and evolved considerably since the Good Friday Agreement was signed in 1998. Domestic legislation in both jurisdictions needs to keep pace with shared international commitments and both Administrations should be ambitious in the protection of rights and push to achieve more than a minimum standard of protections.

There are **shared experiences of inequality** both across the island of Ireland and in Britain which would benefit from sharing expertise and developing complementary policies and protections, using the framework of the Good Friday Agreement as a basis to do so.

Diverse and inclusive representation in policy and decision making is central to ensuring

equality on the island. This needs to be provided for in a meaningful way that ensures representation of communities and groups on legislation and policy that will impact their lives. The need to better engage marginalised communities in the political process was also consistently emphasised.

The **impact of COVID-19** on already marginalised groups was discussed. It was emphasised that the pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on vulnerable groups and women, and that actions to remedy this should be considered, North and South.

The key role that **civil society has played in advancing rights** and equality, North and South, with important advances in recent years, was recognised. There is already a tradition of cooperation among civil society groups, working cross-border on campaigns, programmes or issues of shared concern. Civil society also contributes to a **Community Development mandate**, including by engaging voices that are not at the table.

In order for civil society to continue to effectively deliver in this important role it needs to be **adequately resourced**. Sustainable support and funding is needed for the sector, North and South.

There are shared challenges North and South in the areas of **racism, discrimination and hate crime** with potential to coordinate policy on a North/South basis in these areas in view of joint commitments on the protection of rights as guaranteed under the Good Friday Agreement.

Link to full Dialogue report:
www.gov.ie/SharedIsland/Dialogues

Programme

Moderator: Amanda Ferguson, Freelance Journalist

Format:

11.00 - 11.05 Opening remarks

11.05 - 11.15 **Opening Address** - Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Roderic O’Gorman TD

11.15 - 11.35 **Q&A with Minister O’Gorman**

11.40 - 12.25 **Panel 1: Equality agenda on the island**

Panellists:

- **Geraldine McGahey OBE**, Chief Commissioner, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
 - **Les Allamby**, Chief Commissioner, Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission
 - **Sinéad Gibney**, Chief Commissioner, Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission
-

12.25 - 13.10 **Panel 2: Inclusive Representation on the island**

Panellists:

- **Senator Eileen Flynn**
 - **Danielle Roberts**, Policy Officer, Here NI
 - **Salome Mbugua**, Founder and Head of Operations and Strategy, AkiDwA
-

13.10 - 13.40 **Break**

13.40 - 14.25 **Panel 3 - Creating an island of equals**

Panellists:

- **Colm O’Gorman**, Executive Director of Amnesty International Ireland
 - **Kate Clifford**, Director, Rural Community Network
 - **Tony O’Reilly**, Human Rights Advocate, North West Forum of People with Disabilities (NWFPD)
 - **Ala Buisir**, Visual Artist & Journalist
-

Building back together: Economic recovery on a shared island

2 June 2021

Summary

There is significant **potential for greater North/South economic cooperation** as both economies look to recover post-pandemic. The twin challenges of Brexit and COVID-19 have resulted in a unique opportunity to rebuild the economies on the island in a more inclusive and sustainable way. The common goals, North and South, on transitioning to carbon neutrality also present significant potential for greater collaboration.

There is already a level of **interdependence in the all-island economy** and North/South trade is currently at an historically high volume of €6.5 billion per year. There is clear scope to double this mutually-beneficial trade on the island through targeted policy interventions and aligned supports and measures from the two Administrations.

The importance of **developing skills and innovation** across the island was emphasised throughout the discussion. There are common strategic needs and aims on developing innovation, research and development and areas where through all-island collaboration, there is potential to become a global leader. Existing examples of North/South working on innovation technologies were highlighted, including on advanced manufacturing and biotechnology. The importance of **collaboration between government and industry** to support innovation by companies on the island was also noted.

Clustering and centres of excellence offer significant potential for building a stronger economy and for regional economic and skills development. It was suggested that a **comprehensive all-island cluster policy and associated plans for delivery** could provide a driving force for opportunities for businesses on the island. Sectors identified that are particularly suitable for such an approach include Fintech, Health and Green Tech.

It emerged in the discussion that many entrepreneurs and business people on the island have an outlook that means they **do not instinctively look cross-border for growth opportunities**. East/West trade and business relationships are essential and more predominant, but the untapped opportunities of looking North/South for business growth and development was raised in a number of the discussions.

Brexit and the Protocol were discussed in all sessions of the Dialogue. The challenges that have been faced by all businesses as a result of Brexit were recognised, as were the issues experienced by some businesses in Northern Ireland with respect to the Protocol. There was general consensus that the Protocol offers unique opportunities for Northern Ireland in terms of market access and FDI, which need to be pursued with support from governments. Brexit has also raised cross-border challenges which warrant attention in areas such as mutual recognition of professional qualifications and right to work/labour market, that could negatively impact on economic growth.

There are a number of **supports for businesses, provided by InterTradeIreland and other agencies on the island**, to develop cross-border trade or partnerships. While many of these were referenced in the discussion, it was also clear that awareness of the available supports could be further increased for interested businesses on the island.

The need to **promote cross-border business opportunities beyond the border region** to the full breadth of the island was also consistently emphasised in the Dialogue.

Link to full Dialogue report:
www.gov.ie/SharedIsland/Dialogues

Programme

Moderator: Laura Noonan, Acting Ireland Correspondent, Financial Times

Format

10.00 – 10.05 Opening remarks

10.05 – 10.15 Opening Address – Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Leo Varadkar TD

10.15 – 10.45 Q&A with Tánaiste Varadkar

10.45 – 10.50 Guest Address – Tommy Bowe, Former Rugby Player, Broadcaster and Business Owner

10.50 – 11.35 Panel 1: Supporting enterprise and trade on a shared island

Panellists:

- **Ken Nelson**, Chair, InterTradeIreland
 - **Steve Orr**, CEO, Catalyst NI
 - **Helen Nolan**, Chair, Inishowen Development Partnership
-

11.35 – 12.05 Break

12.05 – 12.35 In-Depth View: Next generation entrepreneurs on the island

Panellists:

- **Deepa Mann-Kler**, Founder and Chief Executive, NEON
 - **Kate Madden**, Co-Founder and Head of Global Sales at FenuHealth
 - **Seán O'Connor**, Co-Founder, STATSports
-

12.35 – 13.20 Panel 2: Untapped potential of the all-island economy

Panellists:

- **Angela McGowan**, CBI Northern Ireland Director
 - **Neil Gibson**, EY Ireland Chief Economist
 - **Richard Kennedy**, Chief Executive, Devenish Nutrition
 - **Leo Clancy**, CEO, Enterprise Ireland
-

Working together for a healthier island 8 July 2021

Summary

The importance of **collaboration and building relationships** cross-border in response to health challenges was emphasised across all panel discussions.

There are already many **existing examples of successful North/South cooperation** on health such as CAWT; cross-border cancer treatment in Derry; all-island paediatric cardiac care in Dublin; the human donor breast milk bank; the Ireland-Northern Ireland-U.S. National Cancer Institute Cancer Consortium; accident and emergency planning; and health promotion.

All panellists in the Dialogue spoke of the potential and value of **more North/South collaboration** on health. Particular areas identified include mental health, perinatal mental health, dialysis, cardiac care, and rare diseases. It was raised that an **overarching strategy** could be developed to help advance cross-border collaboration on health.

Cross-border services need to be developed in a **rational and evidence-based** way. **Clinical leadership, patient focus and policy alignment** from both Administrations is required to deliver cross-border initiatives. This approach should also be taken if establishing new all-island **centres of excellence** and ensuring these are located in areas where these can best link in to the populations they are intended to serve.

The **impact of COVID-19** on health systems, staff, patients and people was discussed extensively during the Dialogue. The pandemic has resulted in more awareness of public health and mental health on the island and there is an opportunity to **target health inequalities** as we recover from the pandemic. COVID-19 has also resulted in new ways of using technology which could be utilised to

deliver care and training on a cross-border basis. Awareness of how using technology could impact on marginalised groups was also advised.

The **impact of Social determinants on health outcomes** was raised by a number of the panellists. Greater consideration should be given to how adverse childhood and societal experiences can impact on health harming behaviours, mental health and non-communicable diseases in later life.

The importance of **collecting data** was emphasised throughout the Dialogue. There is a need for aligned data collection systems and frameworks for sharing data cross-border. Northern Ireland is leading the South in this area and there is scope for lesson learning from the North when developing data infrastructure in the South. Aligned data collection systems would support North/South collaboration and long-term planning on health.

The importance of **research** and supporting **collaboration between researchers and clinicians** on the island was raised in the discussion. All-island research networks should be supported and adequately funded.

The importance of **health promotion and early intervention** in the delivery of better outcomes was discussed in terms of public health and mental health. The scope for greater collaboration on these areas was also recognised.

The **community and voluntary sector** has a central role in the delivery of health and social care on the island. The sector should also be engaged with to identify needs and develop best practice.

Link to full Dialogue report:
www.gov.ie/SharedIsland/Dialogues

Programme

Moderator: Priscilla Lynch, Clinical Editor, Medical Independent

Format:

10.00 – 10.05 Opening remarks

10.05 – 10.15 Opening Address – Minister for Health, Stephen Donnelly TD

10.15 – 10.20 Video – “Working together for a healthier island”

10.20 – 11.10 Panel 1: Public health cooperation on the island

Panellists:

- **Dr Anthony Breslin**, Director of Public Health, HSE North West
 - **Dr Tom Black**, Council Chair, British Medical Association (BMA), Northern Ireland
 - **Suzanne Costello**, Chief Executive, Institute of Public Health
-

11.10 – 12.00 Panel 2: Approaches to future health cooperation on the island

Panellists:

- **Damien McCallion**, HSE National Director Vaccination Programme and Director General CAWT
 - **Dr Len O’Hagan**, Chair, All-Island Congenital Heart Disease Network
 - **Professor Deirdre Heenan**, Professor of Social Policy, Ulster University
-

12.00 – 12.05 Responding Remarks, Minister for Health, Stephen Donnelly TD

12.05 – 12.35 Break

12.35 – 13.25 Panel 3: Improving mental health outcomes – shared vision for a healthier future

Panellists:

- **Dr Joseph Duffy**, CEO, JIGSAW – The National Centre for Youth Mental Health
 - **Professor Siobhan O’Neill**, Interim Mental Health Champion for Northern Ireland
 - **Professor Ella Arensman**, Chief Scientist, National Suicide Research Foundation, University College Cork
-

Learning from each other: The future of education on a shared island

1 October 2021

Summary

The importance of **education and training systems** that facilitate life-long learning and support development opportunities was highlighted throughout the Dialogue.

The potential for **greater North/South cooperation and collaboration** across education and training sectors, as well as the facilitation of engagement by people right across the island through education and training, was raised in both sessions of the Dialogue.

The scope for more cooperation was noted in the **provision of higher education and training opportunities** and **on the skills agenda**. In terms of Primary and Post-Primary education, potential for more collaboration was noted on the **provision of specialist services** and **addressing shared challenges** such as educational inequality. In both sessions, the potential for greater cross-border engagement by young people through **school and student exchanges** was noted.

The **importance of collaboration** for the future of education on the island was also emphasised. Cooperation between industry, education and training, research and community sectors can contribute to meeting education and training needs on the island, and help address social exclusion and facilitate holistic approaches to some of the more challenging issues for the sector.

Opportunities have arisen as a result of COVID-19 to facilitate greater interaction in education and training on the island and in developing all-island approaches to learning and skills development, in particular given greater use of distance and blended learning options. These and other more flexible models in education can also enable greater student mobility in institutions across the island.

There are **existing models of cooperation** that can be used to develop further North/South connections on the island. **The North West Higher and Further**

Education cluster is viewed as an exemplar of **institutions coming together** across a border region to complement rather than compete with each other, thus delivering better for the broader community in the region. The **links of the cluster with business and industry** was also put forward as an example of how to develop education and training offerings in line with the skills need of the region.

The importance of **sustainable funding** for improving education outcomes for disadvantaged communities was raised in both sessions of the Dialogue. In the session on higher and further education it was raised in the context of supporting **access programmes** while in the session on education underachievement it was noted in the context of supporting communities **address the entrenched challenges** that they face. Funding was also seen as requisite for **greater North/South cooperation** and engagement across education, training and research sectors.

A final key theme was that the education and training sectors on the island have under-utilised potential to **break down barriers and support reconciliation** between different communities and traditions on the island. Through programmes that bring students from different identities and backgrounds together, there are opportunities to challenge pre-conceived ideas of others and to foster greater tolerance and understanding through shared endeavour and experience. This can be seen for instance through engagement between student unions at both post-primary and tertiary levels on the island and through the success of a range of North/South exchange programmes for young people. The development of more opportunities for young people to encounter and interact with each other from diverse communities across the island was recommended in both sessions.

Link to full Dialogue report:
www.gov.ie/SharedIsland/Dialogues

Programme

Moderator: Aoibhinn Ní Shúilleabháin, Academic, Broadcaster and former teacher

Format:

Session 1: Higher and Further Education

10.00 – 10.05 Opening remarks

10.05 – 10.15 **Minister Address** – Minister of State with responsibility for Skills and Further Education, Niall Collins TD

10.15 – 10.55 **Panel 1: Enhancing education accessibility on a shared island**

Panellists:

- **Professor Ian Greer**, Vice Chancellor, QUB and President, Universities Ireland
 - **Paul Hannigan**, President, Letterkenny IT
 - **Clare Austick**, USI President
-

10.55 – 11.00 **Video – “All-island research cooperation”**

11.00 – 11.40 **Panel 2: Matching skills needs with opportunities across the island**

Panellists:

- **Gavin Kileen**, Chair, NW Smart Industry Board & MD Nuprint Technologies Ltd
 - **Hilary McPartland**, North West Regional Skills Manager
 - **Hugh MacConville**, Chair, Léargas
-

11.40 – 12.05 **Break**

Session 2: Primary and Post-Primary Education

12.05 – 12.07 Opening remarks

12.07 – 12.20 **Minister Address** – Minister for Education, Norma Foley TD

12.20 – 12.45 **In-Depth View: Innovative connections on a shared island**

Panellists:

- **Emer Neville**, President Irish Second Level Students' Union (ISSU)
 - **Joe McBride**, Teacher, Loreto Community School, Milford, Donegal
 - **Morgan Shuttleworth**, President of Secondary Schools Union of Northern Ireland (SSUNI)
-

12.35 – 13.25 **Panel 3: Addressing educational underachievement on the island**

Panellists:

- **Dr Noel Purdy**, Director of the Centre for Research in Educational Underachievement, Stranmillis University College
 - **Mary Jackson**, Principal of Ardee Community School
 - **Emma Shaw**, Community Education Advocate
-



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island’s diversity.”

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