

# Taoiseach marks one year of Shared Island Initiative

From [Department of the Taoiseach](#)

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- 50m allocated from Shared Island Fund for North/South Investments
- Over 1,000 people and organisations participated in Shared Island Dialogue Series
- Research programme delivers outputs on Healthcare, Climate & Biodiversity and Economy

Taoiseach Micheál Martin T.D. has launched a week-long series of events with participation by Ministers across Government showcasing the Shared Island initiative to date and looking ahead to the ambitious programme of work for the years ahead, culminating in a landmark engagement with the Taoiseach at Dublin Castle on Thursday (9th December 2021).

It's one year since the Taoiseach launched the Government's Shared Island initiative, to harness the full potential of the Good Friday Agreement to enhance cooperation, connection and mutual understanding on the island and to engage with all communities and traditions to build consensus around a shared future.

Over the past twelve months, the Government has allocated over €50m from the Shared Island Fund to move ahead with strategic investment projects such as the Ulster Canal, Narrow Water Bridge and the North-South Research Programme. Seven Shared Island Dialogue events have been held with participation by Government Ministers and over 1,000 people from different sectors and across all regions, communities and traditions on the island. A comprehensive programme of research with partners in the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), the National Economic and Social Council (NESC), the Irish Research Council (IRC) and others is progressing, with a number of publications and announcements being made over the course of this week.

The British Irish Chamber of Commerce are hosting a discussion on ‘Public Investment Priorities on a Shared Island’ on Friday (3 December 2021). A new civil society partnership project between The Wheel and the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action on Shared Island practices will be launched on Monday (6 December 2021), and the first two papers from the ESRI’s research on [The Economic and Social Opportunities](#) from Increased Cooperation on the Shared Island will be published on Tuesday (7 December 2021). NESC will host a seminar on its recently published paper [Collaboration on Climate and Biodiversity: Shared Island as a Catalyst for Renewed Ambition & Action](#) on Wednesday (8 December 2021). The research projects awarded funding under the Shared Island unit partnerships with the Irish Research Council and the Standing Conference on Teacher Education North and South (SCoTENS) will also be announced next week.

Taoiseach Micheál Martin TD said, “Last year, I set out the Government’s Shared Island initiative – to bring people together, increase connections, and provide a space for open and honest conversations about a shared future on this island. I am really encouraged by the level of engagement by civic and sectoral groups across this island, and the progress being made on landmark cross-border infrastructure, research and community projects. Through the Shared Island Fund, we have seen long-standing cross-border infrastructure initiatives such as the Ulster Canal and Narrow Water Bridge unlocked and advanced, as well as the development of significant new all-island investment opportunities like the Government’s major new North-South Research Programme.

“The Shared Island initiative is a whole of Government priority, to bring more ambition, more resourcing and more impact to what we achieve through the framework of the Good Friday Agreement. Working with the Northern Ireland Executive, the UK Government, Local Authorities and our partners in the European Union, the Government will continue to drive this positive and proactive agenda to create a more connected, sustainable and prosperous island for all communities and traditions.”

In October the Government set out its investment priorities for the Shared Island initiative across virtually all sectors, as part of the reviewed National Development

Plan (2021-30), backed by an increased financial package totaling more than €3.5bn.

This will deliver tangible benefits for communities in border regions and right across the island over the next decade, completing many long standing cross-border investment commitments, and developing and delivering a new generation of projects and initiatives focused on meeting common strategic challenges and taking up all-island opportunities.

More information is available at [external-link [www.gov.ie/sharedisland](http://www.gov.ie/sharedisland) | [www.gov.ie/sharedisland](http://www.gov.ie/sharedisland) ]

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Note to Editor:

## Shared Island Week of events:

### **Monday 6 December:**

Launch of The Wheel and NI Council for Voluntary Action Shared Island, Shared Practices initiative with participation by Minister for Foreign Affairs Simon Coveney TD and NI Minister for Communities Deirdre Hargey MLA. Register for the event [here](#).

### **Tuesday 7 December:**

Publication and dissemination of ESRI research papers on Cross-Border Trade in Services on the Island of Ireland and Enhancing the Attractiveness of the Island of Ireland to High Value FDI with

participation by Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment Leo Varadkar TD.

Register for the event [here](#).

### **Wednesday 8 December:**

The National Economic and Social Council event to discuss the recently published Shared Island Climate and Biodiversity report and recommendations with participation by Minister for Environment, Climate and Communications Eamon Ryan TD.

Register for the event [here](#).

### **Thursday 9 December:**

Shared Island Forum event led by Taoiseach Micheál Martin TD, livestreamed on @merrionstreet social media platforms from 2pm-5pm.

### **Friday 10 December:**

British Irish Chamber of Commerce Roundtable Discussion on “Public Investment Priorities on a Shared Island” with Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform Michael McGrath TD and NI Finance Minister Conor Murphy MLA. Register for the event [here](#)

### **Shared Island initiative**

The Government’s Shared Island initiative is focused on: building a Shared Island; fostering inclusive civic dialogue; and commissioning research to inform discourse on a shared future on the island. Delivery to date includes:

#### **Building a Shared Island**

##### **Ulster Canal**

In April 2021, more than €12m allocated from the Shared Island Fund and the Rural Regeneration Fund to enable the delivery of Phase 2 of the Ulster Canal, which is due to be completed in 2023. A further €1m allocation from the Shared Island Fund has also enabled acceleration by Waterways Ireland of development on Phase 3, to a point where a planning application is about to be commenced.

#### **All Island Strategic Rail Review**

In April 2021, the Minister for Transport and the Minister for Infrastructure in Northern Ireland jointly announced the all-island strategic rail review. As well as examining the potential for high and higher speed rail, the review will consider all issues in relation to inter-urban and inter-regional rail connectivity, including the potential for rail freight and improved connectivity to the North-West. The tender process for the review has been completed and substantive work commenced on the review in September and is expected to take up to 12 months to complete.

#### **Narrow Water Bridge**

In July 2021, €3m from the Shared Island Fund was allocated to bring the Narrow Water Bridge project to tender phase. The Taoiseach also affirmed the Government's commitment to allocating further resourcing from the Shared Island Fund, once the due diligence process has been completed and the final costs of the project are determined.

### **North South Research Programme**

In July 2021, €40m from the Shared Island Fund was announced for the new North-South Research programme, which will support the deepening of links between higher education institutions, researchers and research communities on the island of Ireland, delivering all-island approaches to research and innovation, and open to all disciplines and research areas.

### **Revised National Development Plan**

In October 2021, the Government, as part of the revised NDP, committed to allocating ring-fenced capital resourcing for all-island investment out to 2030, at least at the current level of the Shared Island Fund. It affirms the Government's approach of working through all-island investment partnerships, under headings of working for a more connected, more sustainable and more prosperous island, for all communities and traditions.

The NDP Shared Island investment priorities include:

- the creation of an island-wide greenway network;
  - enhanced all-island rail connectivity;
  - coordinated investment to roll-out Electric Vehicle charging networks across the island;
  - funding for all-island climate actions;
  - enhancing support for enterprise development on an all-island basis;
  - the creation of new all-island research centres;
  - further development of third-level education infrastructure in the North West;
- and,
- new cross-border built and natural heritage initiatives.

## **Research**

The Shared Island unit is working with the National Economic and Social Council, the Economic and Social Research Institute, the Irish Research Council, and other partners. North/South and East/West partnerships are core to the research approach.

### **NESC**

The National Economic and Social Council has published a series of Secretariat papers on Shared Island this year, as well as a report on Collaboration on Climate and Biodiversity: Shared Island as a Catalyst for Renewed Ambition & Action, which was published in October 2021. A comprehensive report to Government on Shared Island will be published in early 2022.

### **ESRI**

The ESRI published scoping papers on The Economic and Social Opportunities from Increased Cooperation on the Shared Island in May, and the first two reports ‘Cross Border Trade in Services’ and ‘Enhancing the Attractiveness of the Island of Ireland to High Value FDI’ will be published next week. The research on Education and Healthcare will be published in early 2022.

### **IRC**

The Irish Research Council launched a call for academic contributions to the Shared Island research programme across economic, social, cultural and political themes. The top ten ranked applications by the IRC will be announced next week, with work to be completed and published by mid-2022.

### **SCoTENS**

The Standing Conference on Teacher Education North and South (SCoTENS) opened a call for proposals in October 2021 for action-oriented North/South research on: enhancing educational attainment; and, on a range of teaching, learning and curriculum delivery themes. The first awardees will be announced next week.

### **Further research**

The Shared Island unit commissioned independent scoping research by Professor Deirdre Heenan on Collaborating on Healthcare on an All-Island Basis , a discussion paper contribution for the Shared Island Dialogue on Health, Working together for a healthier island held on 8 July 2021.

## **Dialogue & Engagement**

On 22 October 2020, the Taoiseach, Micheál Martin TD, launched the Shared Island Dialogue series to foster constructive and inclusive civic dialogue on all aspects of a shared future on the island. Since then seven sectoral Dialogues and two Roundtable discussions have been held, with participation by more than 1,000 people from different sectors and across all regions, communities and traditions on the island.

### Shared Island Dialogue Series

The Taoiseach addressed a Dialogue with young people in November 2020, on the theme of “New Generations and New Voices on the Good Friday Agreement.

In December 2020, the Shared Island unit convened roundtable sessions with women’s representatives and with ethnic minority communities on the island, to hear their interests in and priorities for a shared island, and reflecting the Government’s commitment to ensuring the inclusion of often under-represented voices in the Peace Process.

The Minister for Environment, Climate and Communications participated in a Dialogue on climate and environment on the island in February 2021.

In March 2021, a Dialogue on civil society engagement on the island was held, with participation by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and 140 individuals and civil society representatives.

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and more than 100 equality and inclusivity activists, campaigners and representative groups participated in a Dialogue on ‘Equality on a Shared Island’ in May 2021.

A Dialogue on ‘Economic recovery on the island’, was held in June 2021 with participation by the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment and over 140 stakeholders.

The ‘Working for a healthier island’ Dialogue was held in July 2021, with participation by the Minister for Health and over 120 medical practitioners, researchers and patient advocates.

A Dialogue on ‘The future of education on a shared island’, took place on 2 October 2021, with participation by the Minister for Education and the Minister of State for Skills and Further Education and over 130 education and civil society stakeholders.

To date, the Dialogue series has brought together more than 1,000 civic representatives this year in different sectors and across all regions, communities and traditions on the island. All Dialogues are available to watch back here. A report on the key themes and takeaways from across the Shared Island Dialogue series so far will be published as part of the Shared Island Forum on 9 December.

Exciting projects are also emerging from the Dialogues, such as the newly-established All-Island Women’s Forum, which is bringing together women leaders from across the island to address underrepresentation and further develop women’s role in peacebuilding and civic society.

A second collaboration – between NICVA and The Wheel - will be launched next week. The Shared Island, Shared Practices initiative will work to explore and identify areas where civil society North and South can work together on crucial themes like, rural sustainability, recovery from COVID-19, developing the island economy, digital inclusion and achieving a just transition to a de-carbonised island.



