

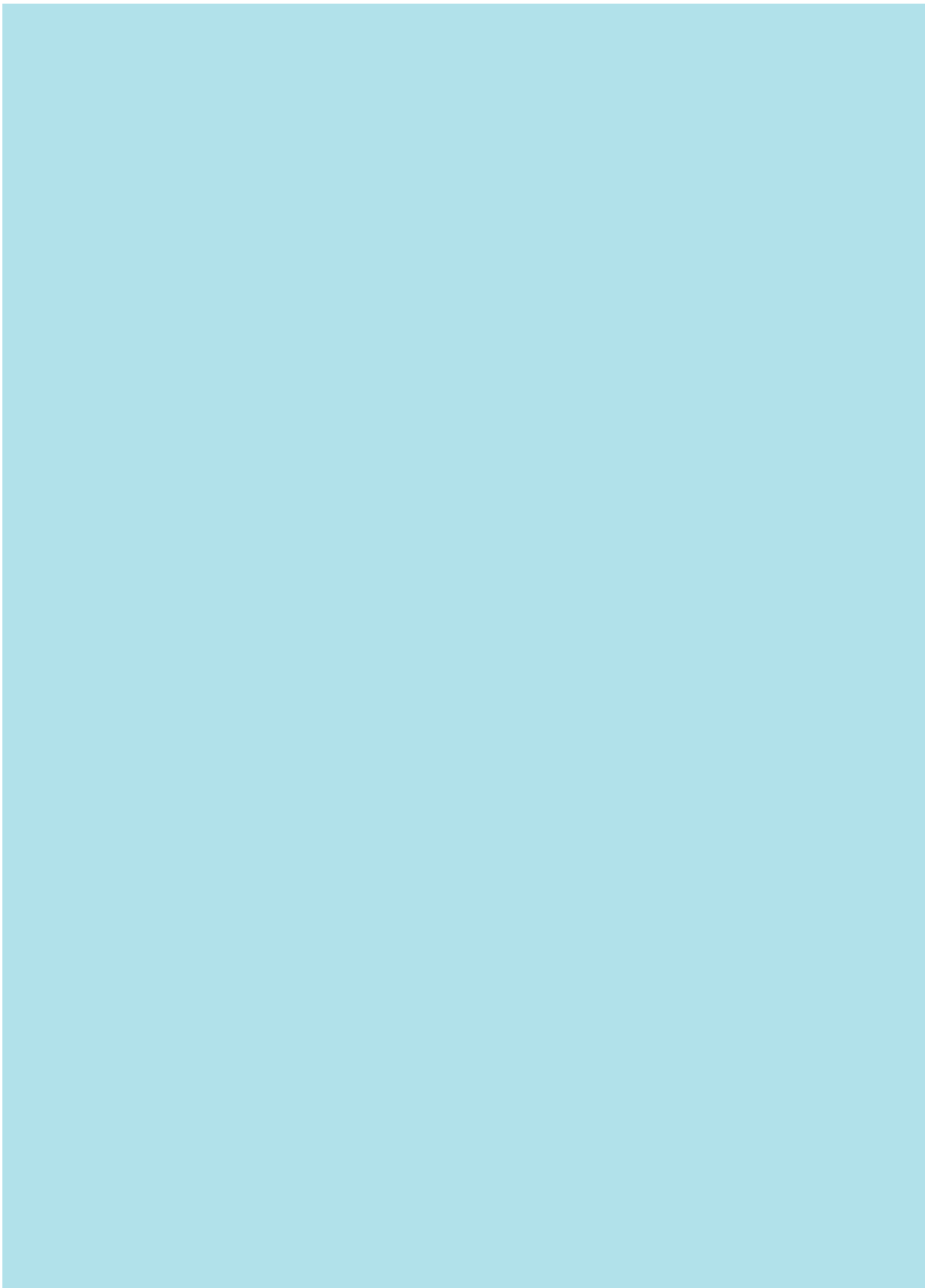


**An Roinn Fiontar,
Trádála agus Fostaíochta**
Department of Enterprise,
Trade and Employment

Annual Report

2023





Contents.

Minister’s Foreword.	4
Secretary General’s Foreword.	6
Delivering on Our Mission.	8
Executive Summary.	9
Vision, Mission, Values.	16
Department Management Board and Divisional Structure.	17
Organisation Chart.	18
Offices and Agencies of the Department.	19
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Statement of Strategy 2023-2025.	20
Strategic Goal 1: Sustain full employment and ensure strong regional economic development.	21
Strategic Goal 2: Advance the green and digital transition to ensure the competitiveness and sustainability of Irish-based enterprise.	32
Strategic Goal 3: Promote safety, better pay and conditions, good quality jobs, gender equality and inclusivity in the workplace.	39
Strategic Goal 4: Enhance our business regulatory environment and Ireland’s attractiveness as a place to do business.	43
Strategic Goal 5: Deepen and extend Ireland’s global business and trade in a responsible, fair and sustainable manner supportive of high living standards and grow further the all-island economy.	50
Strategic Goal 6: Build an innovative and agile Department with a strong public service ethos driving effective and responsible policy implementation.	57
<hr/>	
Appendix 1: Bills Enacted in 2023.	63
Appendix 2: Statutory Instruments made in 2023.	64
Appendix 3 Green Public Procurement.	67

Minister's Foreword.



In 2023 my Department together with the Offices and Agencies under our aegis played an integral role in facilitating economic growth and the creation of high quality, sustainable enterprises and employment right across Ireland.

We have record numbers in employment, a positive trade balance and growth throughout the regions. Our policies as set out in Government's White Paper on Enterprise are delivering quality sustainable jobs by increasing innovation and productivity. Our work is strengthening trade and national competitiveness. We are supporting entrepreneurs, facilitating investment, promoting competitive markets, safeguarding employment rights and ensuring workplaces are safe.

Through a range of measures in 2023 my Department supported business in every region and every sector deal with the challenges of rising energy costs and challenging geopolitical conditions, including grant support and new loan guarantee scheme including the Ukraine Credit Guarantee Scheme and the Growth and Sustainability Loan scheme further aided business.

Helping businesses innovate, decarbonise and boost performance through digital transformation was a key focus in 2023. Over €76 million was allocated under the Disruptive Technologies Innovation fund. The Department continued to fund climate adaptation and green transition funds and the €85 million multi-annual Digital Transition Fund was also launched. As well as our significant contributions to the Climate Action Plan and the National Digital Strategy, we advanced future focused strategies to develop Offshore Wind and Clustering.

To ensure our regulatory and enforcement bodies continued to deliver for consumers, employers and employees, my Department progressed significant legislation in 2023 in consumer protection, personal injuries, employment rights, company law and trade controls. We continue to implement our Trade and Investment strategy that ensures our business friendly, open economy is well positioned to benefit from the network of EU Free Trade Agreements and new trade opportunities.

As Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment my singular focus is to build on this strong performance. We are making progress in areas such as decarbonisation, digitalisation, and innovation and it is encouraging to see the progress already made in delivering on our ambitions for a resilient, sustainable and regionally balanced economy in the White Paper on Enterprise.

However, I believe we can and will need to do more. I am acutely aware that many businesses are facing difficulties due to the cost of doing business. With this in mind since my appointment I have asked my Department to place an increased emphasis on measures that can help SMEs and micro enterprises in particular mitigate the challenges posed by increased costs.

Since my appointment I have been struck by the drive and commitment of senior management and staff of the Department. In presenting the 2023 Annual Report, I wish to thank Secretary General Hughes and Dr Orlaigh Quinn who retired from the role in 2023. I wish to pay tribute to the leadership of my colleague Simon Coveney TD, who as this report makes clear, delivered a huge amount of work in his time as Minister. Finally, I wish to acknowledge Ministers Neale Richmond TD and Dara Calleary TD for their significant contributions in 2023.



Peter Burke TD

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment

Secretary General's Foreword.



This is the first annual report delivered under the Department's statement of strategy 2023-2025. Under this strategy our vision is to make Ireland the best place to succeed in business, with vibrant enterprises, more high-quality employment, growing trade, fair workplaces and higher productivity. In 2023, led by Ministers Coveney, Calleary and Richmond, I am pleased to report that we made significant progress towards realising this vision.

CSO data shows 89,600 more people in employment in Q4 2023 compared to a year earlier, with total employment at a record high of 2.7 million. Since 2019 more than half of the jobs created are in health and social work activities, ICT, professional, scientific & technical activities, and education. In terms of quality, sustainable jobs higher employment growth in sectors with average and above average weekly earnings is a positive development as the economy and workers move towards higher value activities.

Ireland's sustained employment growth is a credit to the commitment and innovation of employers and employees across the country who are supported by the work of this Department and our offices and agencies. We continued to make progress in increasing the rate of start-ups in the economy and in productivity levels across all sectors. Enterprise Ireland (EI), IDA Ireland, and the Local Enterprise Offices reported strong employment results in 2023. EI client companies delivered 15,530 new jobs while LEO client companies created 6,640 new jobs. EI recorded an increase in the number of large Irish exporting companies and the number of High-Potential Start-Ups. IDA reported 248 investments into Ireland which are expected to deliver almost 19,000 jobs to the economy. In 2023 we also saw increases in IDA Ireland client expenditure. Moreover, targets for regionally balanced development were met during the course of 2023, with 53% of all FDI investments located outside of Dublin and 68% of new jobs created in EI assisted firms outside of Dublin.

A key policy focus for our Department in 2023 was implementation of Government's White Paper on Enterprise to ensure businesses in Ireland succeed through competitive advantage founded on sustainability, innovation and productivity, delivering rewarding jobs and livelihoods. Our Department has placed a huge emphasis on supporting business make the twin transitions in decarbonisation and digitalisation. We have increased business funding for green investments - such as through the Growth and Sustainability Loan Scheme and Green Transition Fund - alongside support for training provision in vital green skills, and the publication of our first National Bioeconomy Action Plan and development of our National Strategy for Offshore Wind. We are now seeing 85% of SMEs at basic digital intensity, while four European Digital Innovation Hubs are now fully operational in Ireland. We have launched new funds to enhance disruptive innovation and to accelerate the commercialisation of innovative research, including in the Irish space sector.

Securing our competitive position in Global Value Chains, winning mobile direct investment, from Irish-owned and foreign-owned firms and our two-way international

trade remain central to Ireland's growth model and economic strategy. Ireland's trade policy objectives are embedded through our work in the EU and WTO, where Ireland continues to advocate for open sustainable trade. The first Team Ireland Trade Mission Week, led by the Taoiseach, took place in South Korea in 2023. As a key priority of our Trade and Investment Strategy, this successful event was complemented by a programme of Minister led trade and investment missions throughout 2023.

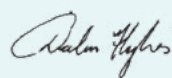
Stakeholder engagement remained a priority for all Divisions of the Department in 2023. We undertook nine Building Better Business events across Ireland to promote the climate action and digitalisation agendas, which helped businesses to seize the opportunity and challenges of these transitions.

Our Department progressed a suite of legislative priorities throughout the year through the delivery of three new Acts and 57 Statutory Instruments. Our legislation programme strengthens consumer rights, company law, personal injuries policy as well as the regulation of the framework surrounding export of controlled goods and an offsetting of potential threats to security and public safety for third country investments.

The Sick Leave Act 2022 came into effect on 1 of January 2023. Other significant employment rights advanced in 2023 included the introduction of the Right to Request Remote Working for all employees under the Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2023. We brought forward an amendment to the National Minimum Wage Act 2000 to remove service charges from being a reckonable component of basic pay. In terms of the broader industrial relations environment approximately 4,203 days were lost to strike action in 2023. This compares favourably to 2022 where a total of 5,256 days were lost due to Industrial action.

In 2023, we also reinforced our commitment to support the Balance for Better Business initiative. Irish businesses have made significant steps to achieve gender balance at board and leadership level, with Ireland currently ranked 6 of the EU-27 in terms of female representation. As a Department we strive to be an employer of choice with a resilient workforce and was awarded 'Investors in Diversity – Silver' accreditation through the Irish Centre for Diversity in 2023. We also published our Climate Action Roadmap for 2021-2023.

As a Department, we recognise that our people are our greatest asset. In 2023 staff of the Department not only delivered on our critical mission but continued to foster a culture of accountability, efficiency and innovation, all rooted in public service values of independence, equality, integrity, openness, dignity and respect. I want to sincerely thank all staff of the Department and my Management Board colleagues for their work in 2023. I also wish to acknowledge and extend my appreciation to our colleagues who retired in 2023 and my predecessor Dr Orlaigh Quinn for her lasting contribution to the Department.



Declan Hughes
Secretary General,
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment

Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment Delivering on Our Mission.



2.707 million

Total employment
record high



534,604

Total employment
in Agency firms



€34.6 billion

in exports by
Enterprise
Ireland Clients



1st

Team Ireland
Trade Mission Week
to South Korea



€371 million

Disruptive
Technology Funding
across 104 innovative
projects



Eirsat
launched

104

Irish companies
benefitting
from European Space
Agency contracts



6,519

workplace
inspection visits



61,800

callers helped by
WRC Information
and Customer
Service staff



30,981

Employment
permits issued



€500 million

Growth and
Sustainability Loan



9

Building
Better Business'
events across Ireland



€145 million

Smart Regions
Enterprise Innovation
Scheme



€257 million

Increased Cost
of Business grant



€7.9 million

in funding
across 206 projects
approved under the
Green Transition Fund



12,400

tailored
climate action plans
generated
for businesses



3

Bills and
57 SIs enacted

Executive Summary.

Our Department's Statement of Strategy 2023-2025 sets out 6 strategic goals to realize our vision to make Ireland the best place to succeed in business across all parts of our country, with vibrant enterprises, more high-quality employment, growing trade, fair workplaces and higher productivity.

Progress across these goals in 2023 is summarised as follows:



Strategic Goal 1: Sustain full employment and ensure strong regional economic development.

CSO data shows 2,706,400 persons were in employment in Q4 2023, up 3.4% (89,600) from Q4 2022 with employment increasing over the year in all NUTS 3 regions. The South-East region saw the largest percentage increase at 6.1%, followed by the South-West region at 5.6%, with all regions at full employment.

Enterprise Ireland supported companies employed 225,495 people in 2023. 15,530 new jobs were created by EI supported companies in 2023, with 68% of these jobs outside Dublin. LEO supported companies created 6,640 new jobs, with a net gain of 2,131 jobs with 82% of the new jobs created located outside of Dublin. The numbers directly employed in IDA multinational clients in Ireland was 300,583 holding above the 300,000 level for the second consecutive year. There were 132 investments secured across regional locations during 2023, representing 54% of the overall figure.

The [first implementation report on the Government's White Paper on Enterprise 2022-2030](#) was published in November 2023. The report sets out advances in seven key priority areas such as supporting a greater number of Irish businesses as well as increased funding for decarbonisation, digitalisation, and innovation. Ireland was ranked 2nd globally according to the Institute for Management Development's World Competitiveness Ranking 2023 report.

Delivering balanced regional enterprise growth and supporting sustainable local job creation is a core objective of the *White Paper on Enterprise*. We launched a new €145 million *Smart Regions Enterprise Innovation Scheme* to support projects aligned to the *Regional Enterprise Plans*. Nine *Building Better Business* events were held across the country to support businesses navigate the green journey and boost performance through digital transformation.

We engaged with three Regional Assemblies, the enterprise agencies and Science Foundation Ireland to collaborate with similar regions and sectors across Europe to build upon Ireland's *Smart Specialisation Strategy* which aims to encourage geographical locations to focus on their strengths and areas of opportunity.

To facilitate employment growth throughout Ireland our Employment Permits Unit processed 38,469 permits, a year-on-year increase of 8%.



Strategic Goal 2: Advance the green and digital transition to ensure the competitiveness and sustainability of Irish-based enterprise.

The Department provided financial supports and advice to assist with the disruption arising from geopolitical turbulence including the ongoing impact of the war in Ukraine, inflationary pressures and accelerating climate change pressures. The Ukraine Credit Guarantee Scheme was launched in January 2023 to provide loans to businesses affected by the war in Ukraine. A total of €218.3 million was drawn down by the end of 2023. We also facilitated the delivery by Revenue of over €153 million in support to businesses through the Temporary Business Energy Support Scheme and a further €611,720 to kerosene users through the Business Users Support Scheme for Kerosene. In addition, €2.3 million was awarded to retailers under the Online Retail Scheme.

We provided significant input to the [Climate Action Plan 2023](#) and engaged across Government to develop measures to support the enterprise sector reduce emissions in line with the targets included in the Plan. We continued to promote the [Climate Toolkit 4 Business](#) to make it easier for businesses to address their climate impact. In addition, in 2023 we launched a consultation to inform the development of a National Offshore Wind Industrial Strategy.

We continued to progress [Here for Good the National AI Strategy](#) to ensure that Ireland is well positioned for the rapid acceleration in Artificial Intelligence technology. In July, Ministers Richmond and Calleary jointly launched Ireland's [AI Standards & Assurance Roadmap](#).

We launched the €85 million multi-annual Digital Transition Fund as part of Ireland's *National Recovery and Resilience Plan*. In 2023 four European Digital Innovation Hubs (EDIH) were established in Ireland which are intended to stimulate the broad uptake of Artificial Intelligence, High Performance Computing, Cybersecurity and as well as advanced Digital Skills and other digital technologies by industry, particularly, SMEs.

We continued roll out of the Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund (DTIF) which is a €500 million enterprise-focused fund that encourages collaboration between SMEs, multinational companies and Irish research institutions. In 2023, €76 million in funding was allocated under Calls 4, 5 and 6 bringing the total funding to over €371 million across 104 innovative projects.

2023 saw Ireland become a space faring nation with the launch of EIRSAT-1 in December 2023. Our commitment to the space-active sector continued in line with Ireland's National Space Strategy for Enterprise (NSSE). The Department invested €30.87 million in the European Space Agency (ESA) in 2023. The NSSE's target to have 100 companies engaged with ESA by 2025 was surpassed in 2023 with 104 Irish companies now benefitting from ESA contracts.



Strategic Goal 3: Promote safety, better pay and conditions, good quality jobs, gender equality and inclusivity in the workplace.

In 2023, the Department continued to coordinate the Irish response to the EU's Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability and coordinated the Irish input into the revision of the *Classification, Labelling and Packaging Regulation* and continued work on the modernisation of regulations governing flammable liquids and fuels.

The *Sick Leave Act 2022* came into effect. This new law gives employees an entitlement to up to 3 days of employer-paid sick leave in a year.

The *Employment (Collective Redundancies and Miscellaneous Provisions)* and *Companies (Amendment) Bill 2023* was published in September 2023 and when enacted will establish the Employment Law Review Group to conduct an ongoing assessment of employment and redundancy law to ensure that it remains fit for purpose.

Other significant employment rights advanced in 2023 include the introduction of the right to request remote working for all employees under the *Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2023*, enacted in April 2023. An amendment to the *National Minimum Wage Act 2000* to remove service charges from being a reckonable component of basic pay and the introduction of a Fixed Payment Notice in lieu of prosecution for offences contained in the *Payment of Wages (Amendment) (Tips and Gratuities) Act 2022* were also introduced.

Approximately 4,203 days were lost to strike action in 2023, a 25% reduction compared to 2022 when 5,256 days were lost.

We continued to provide the Secretariat and technical support to the Low Pay Commission. As well as submitting its annual recommendation on the appropriate minimum wage the Commission began deliberations on subminimum, or youth rates of the National Minimum Wage.

The sixth [Annual Report of the Balance for Better Business Review Group](#) launched in December 2023 shows the percentage of women on the Boards of ISEQ20 companies rose to 39%, exceeding the 33% target set for the end of 2023 and up 21 percentage points since 2018. For other listed companies, the percentage of women on boards is now 28%, exceeding the 25% target set for the end of 2023 and up 18 percentage points since 2018.



Strategic Goal 4: Enhance our business regulatory environment and Ireland's attractiveness as a place to do business.

In 2023 we had extensive engagement at EU level in terms of the negotiation of a range of EU directives and regulations including files related to the EU Chips Act, Data Act, Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence, the EU Copyright Directive, Late Payments and Insolvency Law.

Domestically, we advanced legislation to assist and support regulatory and enforcement authorities in carrying out their statutory duties in areas such as company law, competition and consumer protection.

The *Competition (Amendment) Act 2022* came into force in September 2023. The Act gives additional powers to the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) to protect consumers and challenge anti-competitive practices. For the first time, breaches of competition law can be enforced through administrative actions taken by competition authorities. The Act aligns competition policy across the EU, enabling greater cooperation between competition authorities and allows for the challenging of illegal practices across borders.

The *Representative Actions for the Protection of Collective Interests of Consumers Act 2023* was enacted on 11 July 2023. The Act will allow for qualified entities to seek collective redress on behalf of consumers for breaches of their consumer rights in areas such as data protection, financial services, travel, energy and telecommunications.

The *Control of Exports Act, 2023* was enacted on the 25 October 2023. The new Act ensures that Ireland has a robust framework for regulating the export of controlled goods, principally "Dual-use" and "Military" items. It will mitigate the risk that controlled goods could be exported from Ireland in breach of regulations and used to cause injury in regional conflicts or to violate human rights in third countries.

The *Personal Injuries Resolution Board Act, 2022* was commenced over three phases in 2023. The Act expands the number and type of cases the Injuries Resolution Board can resolve without recourse to litigation, enhances the Board's research and analysis functions, strengthens its powers to combat fraud and introduces a new mediation service.



Strategic Goal 5:
Deepen and extend Ireland's global business and trade in a responsible, fair and sustainable manner supportive of high living standards and grow further the all-island economy.

As part of Government's [Trade and Investment Strategy 2022-2026 Value for Ireland, Values for the World](#) the Taoiseach-led the inaugural Team Ireland Trade Mission Week to South Korea in October 2023. Team Ireland Trade Mission Week is a new Government approach to strengthening ties and untapping opportunities for Irish companies in like-minded countries. This was complemented by a program of Ministerial trade and investment missions held in the UAE, Denmark, Poland, Czech Republic France and Germany, and Canada, as well as a number of trade missions to the United States.

Engagement at EU level continued including through Ministerial attendance at the Trade, Competitiveness, and EPSCO Councils. Department officials represented Ireland across a range of EU working party groups and committees dealing with Single Market, company law, consumer and employment policy and managed Ireland's contribution to other EU networks, including the SOLVIT Centre and Internal Market Information System.

The Global Value Chains (GVCs) and Supply Chains expert working group met throughout 2023 to identify key GVCs, conduct mapping and risk assessment, and identify action responses.

We continue to have a strong overseas presence with senior officials working in the Irish Embassies of key markets, including the UK, the US and China, and in the Irish missions in Brussels and Geneva.

We worked with colleagues across Government to address matters arising from Brexit, including on the Trade and Cooperation Agreement, the Windsor Framework and the UK's new Border Target Operating Model to ensure the best opportunities for the all-island economy. The Department continued to work with the Department of An Taoiseach in support of the all-island economy.

In fulfilment of trade licensing and control functions, the Department issued 846 export licenses in 2022. The Department was responsible for 12 packages of sanctions adopted by the EU in response to the Ukrainian war working closely with the Office of the Revenue Commissioners. The Screening of Third Country Transactions Act, 2023 was enacted to offset the potential threat posed to security and public order from some third country investments.

The Responsible Business Forum, chaired by Minister Calleary was launched in September 2023 and is driving engagement between policymakers and stakeholders in corporate sustainability measures being brought forward by the EU.



Strategic Goal 6: Build an innovative and agile Department with a strong public service ethos driving effective and responsible policy implementation.

The Revised Estimates 2023 provided the Department with a gross allocation of €1,621.4 million for 2023. This ensured our offices and agencies were resourced to carry out their mandates. It also enabled the Department to deliver enterprise development, innovation and regulation programmes, as well as supporting measures such as the Temporary Business Energy Support Scheme, Growth and Sustainability Loan Scheme, and Ukraine Credit Guarantee Loan Scheme.

Staff serving in the Department increased to 975.38 full-time equivalents at the end of 2023, an increase from 933.06 full-time equivalents at the end of 2022. We continued to implement our [People Strategy](#) and reviewed our blended working policy. Our first Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (ED&I) policy was also developed.

We successfully launched a new cloud-hosted scheduling system for the Labour Court and made significant progress in upgrading legacy systems for Export Licensing and Employment Permits services which will deliver modern, responsive customer facing services. During the year, the Department began to explore opportunities to leverage Artificial Intelligence within the Department's internal processes to improve the delivery of services to the public.

In 2023, we maintained a strong focus on customer service and meeting our obligations under Freedom of Information and Protected Disclosures legislation.

Our digital channels remained a key means of stakeholder communication. Our [website](#) recorded over 7.5 million pageviews with growth in followers on both our [LinkedIn](#) and [X](#) accounts. Our internal communications team meanwhile ensured that our staff remained informed about Departmental work and initiatives throughout the year.

We updated our Safety Statement and maintained a strong focus on the safety and wellbeing of staff during 2023. The Department's [Climate Action Roadmap](#) was published in September and sets out our commitment to meeting our decarbonisation and sustainability targets in line with CAP 23 targets.

A new Organisation Culture team was established to cultivate a values based, connected organisational culture. A new Statement of Strategy in 2023 was published setting out the high-level goals of our Department for the period to 2025. A new strategy to ensure best practice in records management and our corporate procurement plan were also published.

Internal Audit reviewed and revised its annual work plan in 2023 and remained focused on strategic risks whilst adopting its audit programme to address new and emerging risks.

Vision, Mission, Values.

The Department's Statement of Strategy 2023-2025 summarises our strategy and provides an outline of our mission and strategic goals. It sets out, concisely, the current context facing our stakeholders and our Department, and details the commitments we are making in terms of delivering on our strategic goals. It also sets out our vision, mission and values.

Vision

We will make Ireland the best place to succeed in business across all parts of our country, with vibrant enterprises, more high-quality employment, growing trade, fair workplaces and higher productivity.

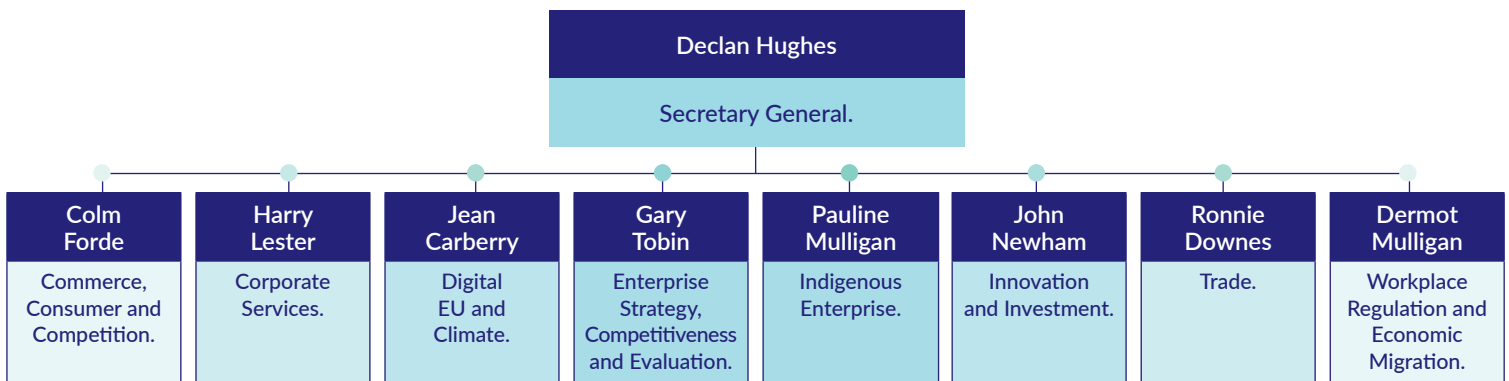
Mission

We will lead on sustainable economic development through the creation and maintenance of high quality employment across all parts of our country by championing enterprise; ensuring a competitive business base to incentivise work, sustainable enterprise, innovation and investment; strengthening global connections and trade; promoting fair and competitive markets, responsible business practice; as well as safe, flexible and decent workplaces through the regulatory and enforcement work of the Department, its Offices and its Agencies.

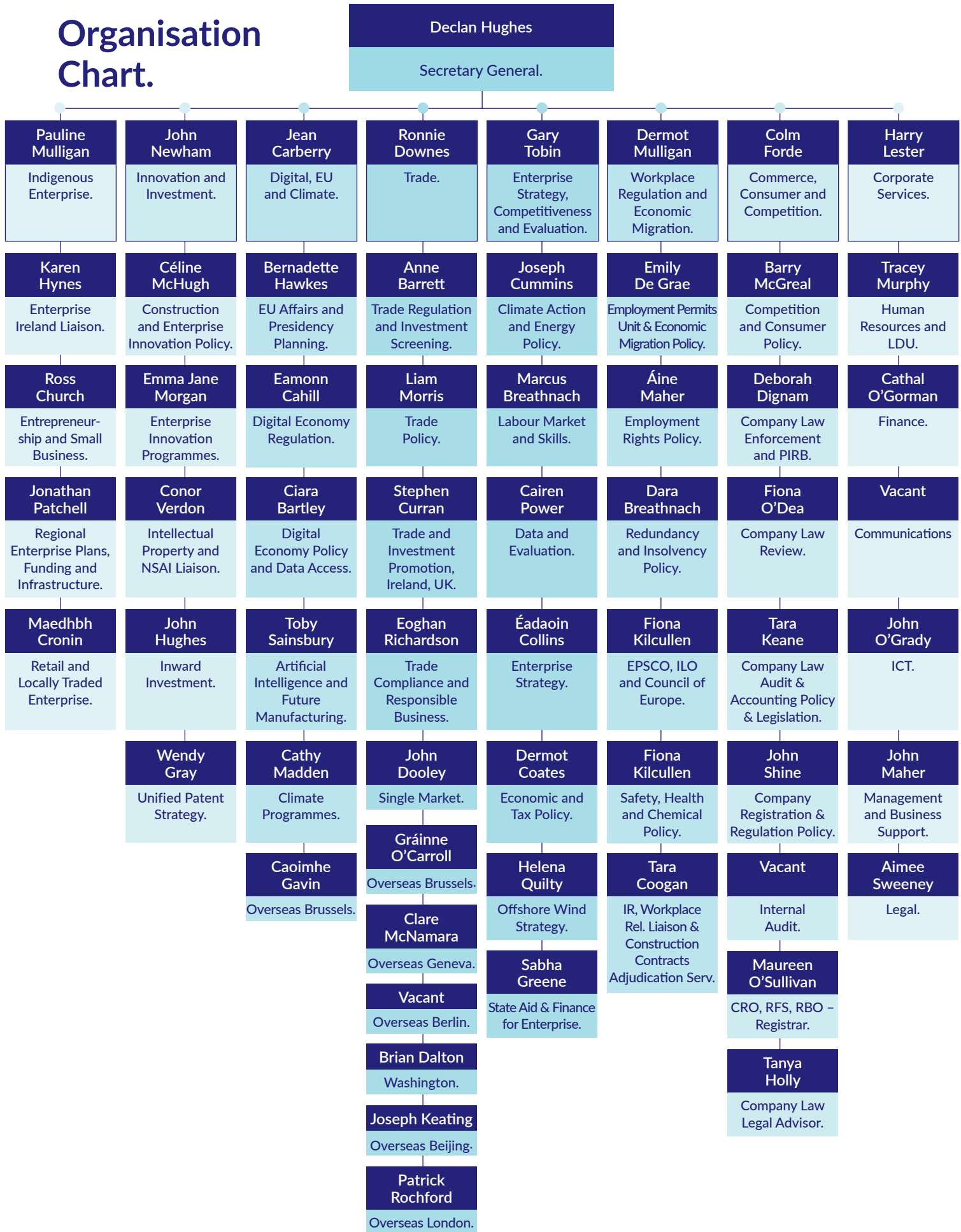
Values

As a Department, we foster a culture of accountability, efficiency, innovation and value for money, which is rooted in a public service ethos of independence, equality, integrity, impartiality, openness, fairness, dignity and respect. As Civil Servants, we espouse the highest standards of professionalism, honesty, objectivity and quality, which are central to fulfilling our roles in serving Government, the democratic system and the public.

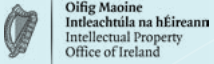
Department Management Board and Divisional Structure.



Organisation Chart.



Offices and Agencies of the Department.



Statement of Strategy 2023-2025.





Strategic Goal 1:

Sustain full employment and ensure strong regional economic development.

Context.

Government's [White Paper on Enterprise 2022-2030](#), published in December 2022 sets out a vision for Irish-based enterprise to succeed through competitive advantage founded on sustainability, innovation and productivity, delivering rewarding jobs and livelihoods.

Government set seven enterprise policy objectives in the White Paper;

1. **Integrating decarbonisation and net zero commitments.**
2. **Placing digital transformation at the heart of enterprise policy.**
3. **Advancing Ireland's FDI and trade value proposition.**
4. **Strengthening the Irish-owned exporting sector.**
5. **Enabling locally trading sectors to thrive.**
6. **Stepping up enterprise innovation.**
7. **Building on Ireland's existing strengths and opportunities, through a clustering approach.**

In May 2023, the Department published the first of consecutive two-year Implementation Plans of cross-Government activity under the White Paper. The first [Implementation Plan](#), covering the period 2023-2024, identifies 40 key initiatives and projects across the seven objectives. The first bi-annual update report on the White Paper's Implementation was published by the Department in November, and covers progress made during the first half of 2023. It sets out how Local Enterprise Offices are supporting a greater number of Irish businesses as well as increased funding for decarbonisation, digitalisation, and innovation. In addition, it sets out strategy development in support of Offshore Wind, Clustering and access to finance. We launched four new European Digital Innovation Hubs to support digital transformation in SMEs and public sector organisation. Additional skills programmes have been rolled out to support the green and digital transitions while also continuing to strengthen the competitiveness of our enterprise-base in a challenging global economy.

Key target metrics set out in the White Paper show good progress is being made on national and regional employment, enterprise productivity rates, export levels, the total number of exporting companies and high potential start-ups, as well as investment across our regions.

Job Creation.

Employment in Ireland grew to record levels in 2023. The CSO's [Labour Force Survey](#) shows that there was 2.706 million people in work in Q4 2023, a rise of 89,600 on the previous year. Unemployment levels reduced to 4.2% nationally. Since 2019, more than half of the jobs created are in four sectors, health and social work activities, information and communications, professional, scientific & technical activities, and education, where job quality is higher. Higher employment growth in sectors with average and above average weekly earnings is a positive development as the economy and workers move towards higher value activities.

Companies supported by our enterprise agencies accounted for a total of 41,702 new jobs, bringing the total employed in client companies to over 564,000 in 2023. Regional growth continues to be a strong feature of the work of our agencies in delivering the conditions for both our indigenous and multinational client companies to grow. IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland (EI) and the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) all recorded jobs growth in client companies in 2023. IDA Ireland secured 248 new investments, 54% of which were in regional locations bringing the number employed in IDA multinational clients to above 300,000 for the second year running. EI client companies had a net increase of 5,011 jobs. EI companies now employ 225,495 people. In 2023 LEO supported companies created 6,640 new jobs in 2023 with employment in LEO supported businesses reaching 38,726.

IDA Ireland.

IDA Ireland's strategy [Driving Recovery and Growth 2021-2024](#) is focused on winning investment for Ireland and sustained regional development through a focus on five pillars - Growth, Transformation, Regions, Sustainability, and Impact. IDA Ireland is targeting 800 investments and the creation of 50,000 jobs over the period 2021-2024. 2023 saw over 1,800 IDA Ireland client companies directly employing 300,583 in Ireland, reflecting a mature, stable and resilient FDI base in Ireland. FDI employment now accounts for over 11% of national employment.

In 2023, 248 investments were won for Ireland enabling the creation of over 19,000 new jobs. 132 of these were in regional locations. IDA Ireland's Regional Property Programme ensures the supply of land, buildings and infrastructure in regional locations as required by current and prospective clients of IDA Ireland itself as well as for Enterprise Ireland and Local Enterprise Offices' clients. 19 buildings are committed to under the current Strategy, 8 of which were complete at the end of 2023. An additional three are under construction and the remaining eight are in the various stages of planning, procurement or site selection.

The Department continues to work in partnership with IDA Ireland to ensure Ireland's FDI performance remains world-class and that strategies, policies and resources are applied to best advantage for Ireland in an increasingly competitive global environment for foreign direct investment.

Enterprise Ireland.

Enterprise Ireland's strategy [Leading in a Changing World 2022 - 2024](#) includes strategic priorities aimed at increasing levels of innovation by sustainable methods, scaling through internationalisation, and continued regional development. The strategy sets out ambitious targets including the creation of an additional 45,000 new jobs by 2024, two thirds of which are outside Dublin.

Enterprise Ireland's focus in 2023 was on continued support enabling Irish businesses to capitalise on change and continue to deliver sustainable growth. To deliver on this, despite a difficult global economic environment, Enterprise Ireland reported job creation ahead of target with 15,530 new jobs created in 2023 against a target of 15,000 and 69% of jobs created outside Dublin. The positive jobs figures saw increases in regional employment, with the West and Northeast regions growing 5% and an overall 68% of new jobs created were outside Dublin.

Given the challenges of competing in international markets the Department continues to work closely with Enterprise Ireland to ensure that the appropriate policy supports are in place to ensure the Agency meets ambitious targets of creating 45,000 jobs and increasing exports by client companies to €30 billion by end 2024.

Local Enterprise Offices.

The 31 Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) are the First Stop Shop for anyone seeking information and support on starting or growing a business. In 2023 the LEO mandate was extended to financially supporting companies employing more than 10 and less than 50 full time employees with export ambition.

For the 10th consecutive year, the 31 LEO-supported enterprises recorded strong employment growth, with 6,640 new jobs created in 2023 representing a 6% increase year on year. There was a net employment gain of 2,131 for the year. Total employment in LEO supported businesses in 2023 was 38,726, with 82% of net new jobs created outside of Dublin.

In 2023, we also commenced work on a LEO policy statement that will set out the future direction for the LEOs in the coming years while implementing the White paper on Enterprise to further enhance the services available through the LEOs.

Resilience and Innovation.

Sustainable growth can only be realised through delivery of responsive policies, guidance and supportive programmes to help businesses to meet the challenges of the climate crisis through mitigation and adaptation, accelerating digital transformation, and developing the resilience and agility required to respond to the shocks and uncertainty which are increasingly becoming a feature of the global economy. In 2023 businesses continued to report challenges with supply chains and increases in costs. In 2023 the Department continued to work across Government to support business including through the development and rollout of a number of schemes designed to support enterprise resilience.

The Ukraine Enterprise Crisis Scheme (UECS).

The [UECS](#) assists businesses that have been impacted by additional costs due to the war in Ukraine. In 2023, the UECS was extended in response to continued uncertainty in the international environment and the ongoing impact of excessive energy costs on businesses. In line with revisions to the EU's Temporary Crisis and Transition Framework, the eligible period for the UECS has now been extended until end June 2024. An additional stream of the UECS, to allow for support to be provided to businesses in the key strategic sector of microelectronics manufacturing, was also introduced during 2023. In total €6.034 million was approved under the scheme in 2023 to 27 companies.

Temporary Business Energy Support Scheme (TBESS).

[TBESS](#) was a Government grant designed by the Department of Finance and administered by the Revenue Commissioners to help businesses with increasing energy costs. Funding for the Scheme was allocated to the vote of this Department. TBESS provided qualifying businesses with up to 40% of the increase in electricity or gas bills up to €10,000 per month. The Revenue Online System took applications from 5 December 2022 to 30 September 2023, with payments commencing on 21 December 2022. A total of €153,716,125 was paid out up to the end of December 2023 to 25,515 businesses.

Businesses Users Support Scheme for Kerosene.

As part of a review of the operation of TBESS, Government agreed that the Minister would explore options for providing a standalone Scheme to businesses that rely on Kerosene and Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) as their heating energy source. During 2023, Government agreed to the development and implementation of a scheme to assist business users of kerosene that had been impacted by significant increases in the cost of this fuel following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The proposal to develop a scheme was informed by consultations with industry representative bodies and other stakeholders which identified the absence of energy supports for businesses that rely on kerosene for heating purposes as an issue of concern. The [scheme](#) was launched in September 2023 and the number of businesses that availed of the scheme was 1,044 to the value of €611,725.

Increased Cost of Business (ICOB) Grant.

This [grant](#) supports firms who have been affected by increases in business costs. The total allocation for the ICOB grant is €257 million and it will be targeted at small and medium businesses operating directly within a premises that is commercially rateable by a local authority. It is a once-off grant provision and will have no bearing on the commercial rates paid by firms. The grant

is intended to be paid at a rate of half the enterprise's commercial rates bill in 2023, for firms paying up to €10,000 in rates. For those paying between €10,000 and €30,000 in rates, a grant of €5,000 will be available.

Emergency Humanitarian Flood Aid.

In response to the flooding damage in October and November 2023 Government opened the Emergency Humanitarian Aid Scheme to small business, community, voluntary and sporting bodies as well as an additional scheme to provide enhanced levels of financial support due to the exceptional nature of the damage caused. Both schemes provide a contribution towards the costs of returning premises to their pre-flood condition and are not intended as compensation for loss or a replacement for the cover provided by insurance. The Red Cross administer the scheme on behalf of the Department and received over 350 applications for support with final payments to be made in 2024.

Supporting SMES.

In 2023 the Department continued to build on the range of reforms and measures introduced to help SMEs sustain and grow jobs and employment opportunities.

- We held nine 'Building Better Business' events in the nine regions covered by the Regional Enterprise Plans between March and December. The purpose of the events was to showcase enterprise opportunities aligned with digital transformation and decarbonisation, two priorities in the White Paper on Enterprise, and to highlight the breadth and depth of State supports for business. Several events also focused on scaling and internationalising of indigenous enterprise. These themes were explored through panel discussions with companies and subject matter experts. Information stands from relevant Departments and Agencies promoted the range of supports and services available.
- The supportingsmes.gov.ie website was enhanced to provide more useful information and promoted at all building better business events.
- The new National Enterprise Hub (NEH) was announced in October 2023. The NEH will build on and eventually replace supportingSMEs.gov.ie. It will also include outbound proactive engagement with businesses to raise awareness of different supports available.
- The [SME & Entrepreneurship Taskforce](#) co-chaired by Minister Coveney and Ministers Calleary and Richmond delivered a report to the Government in December 2023 highlighting significant progress made on the implementation of eleven priority actions.
- Co-chaired by Minister Coveney and the Secretary General, the Enterprise Forum met four times in 2023. The Forum has been used extensively for stakeholder engagement on competitiveness and costs issues and strategic issues that impact enterprise at a national and international level.
- Meetings of the [Retail Forum](#), chaired by Minister Richmond, assisted the retail sector to navigate sectoral challenges including the energy crisis alongside a focus on the sector's developmental needs and the future of retail. A work programme for the Forum was established through co-creation with members to be delivered through the Working Groups focusing on Green Transition, Digitalisation and Skills, and Town Centre First and the Night-time Economy.
- During the year, the Department was an active participant at the OECD's Committee on SMEs and Entrepreneurship (CMSEE). This included a Ministerial Level meeting in June, at which Minister Richmond spoke on the topics of Fostering the contribution of SMEs and entrepreneurs to the green and digital transitions and Rebooting start-up and scale up policies.
- We commissioned the OECD to undertake an assessment of the Irish incubation and acceleration system and potentially transferable lessons from other countries on the promotion of start-up globalisation through incubation and acceleration.
- We continued to lead the cross-Government network on implementation of the [SME Test](#). The SME Test encourages policymakers across Government to consider the impact that any new regulations or laws will have on SMEs. Through the network the Department provided support to Departments on the application of the test and sought updates on applications of the test on a quarterly basis. By the end of 2023, 11 Government Departments had applied the test to new relevant legislation.

Sustainable Economic Development.

Regional Enterprise Plans.

Delivering balanced regional enterprise growth and supporting sustainable local job creation is a key component of the White Paper on Enterprise. The current set of nine [Regional Enterprise Plans](#) were launched in 2022 and will run until the end of 2024. The Plans cover the North-West (Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim), North-East (Louth, Cavan, Monaghan), South-East (Carlow, Kilkenny, Wexford, Waterford), Dublin, Mid-East (Meath, Kildare, Wicklow), Midlands (Laois, Offaly, Longford, Westmeath), South-West (Cork, Kerry), Mid-West (Limerick, Clare, Tipperary), and West (Galway, Mayo, Roscommon).

The principle underpinning the Plans is that of collaboration between regional stakeholders on initiatives that can help to realise each region's enterprise development potential. This collaboration allows the Plans to be informed by an understanding of unique local strengths and assets and to have the potential to enable more effective translation of national policy into regional impact. The Plans are not meant to be comprehensive economic development strategies on their own. They include specific strategic objectives and over 200 associated actions requiring a collaborative regional effort.

In terms of implementation, each Plan is overseen by a Steering Committee of regional stakeholders and chaired by a senior private sector businessperson. The Steering Committees are supported by a Programme Manager in each of the nine regions. Ministers Coveney,

Calleary and Richmond chaired the Regional Enterprise Plans National Oversight Group (NOG) in October 2023, which is made up of the Chairs of each Regional Enterprise Plan, as well as representatives from the enterprise agencies, the Local Enterprise Office network, the County and City Management Association, the Regional Assemblies and representatives from other relevant enterprise focused agencies. Implementation of strategic objectives and actions were progressing well. Nine mid-term progress reports were prepared for publication in early 2024.

Smart Regions Enterprise Innovation Scheme.

The Department announced a new €145 million [Smart Regions Enterprise Innovation Scheme](#), co-funded under the European Regional Development Fund, to support projects aligned to the Regional Enterprise Plans. The first call of €35 million opened for applications in October 2023. The Scheme supports innovative clusters, local infrastructure projects, and feasibility and priming funding for early-stage project development. It will assist regionally based SMEs to collaborate with other partners to embrace the opportunities of digitalisation and the green economy. The Smart Regions Scheme builds on the €126 million in approved funding under the Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF) and Border Enterprise Development Fund and will ultimately support job creation and enterprise development in each region throughout Ireland.

Smart Specialisation Strategy.

Ireland's [Smart Specialisation Strategy \(S3\)](#) aims to boost regional innovation, contributing to growth and prosperity by helping and enabling regions to focus on their strengths. The S3 provides a 'bridge' between regional and national innovation strategy building and decision making, bringing coherence to RD&I planning for the benefit of enterprise and advancing the RD&I agenda regionally and nationally. In 2023, the National Implementation Group for Ireland's Smart Specialisation Strategy, which is chaired by the Department, continued to oversee the delivery of national and regional strategic priorities.

At a programme level, Smart Specialisation is supported by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). The first annual ERDF budgetary allocations were made in 2023. The allocation for the three ERDF funded programmes, namely KT Boost, Technology Gateways and Innovators' Initiative, is €14.037 million. The Technology Gateways programme was launched in June 2023 with KT Boost launched in December. Innovators' Initiative is expected to be launched in Q1 2024. In addition, the first call under the Smart Regions Enterprise Innovation Scheme for €35 million was announced in October 2023. The schemes are aligned with the national Smart Specialisation Strategy to leverage and build on each region's strengths and emerging areas of opportunity.

National Clustering Programme.

The Government's White Paper on Enterprise commits to the establishment of a new National Clustering Programme (NCP) to encourage the formation and strengthening of cluster organisations and targets the funding of five national cluster organisations under the programme by 2025. The programme will build on existing strengths and will take advantage of opportunities to maximise the scale, impact, and international visibility of Irish clusters, improve Ireland's attractiveness for new business investment, strengthen SME productivity, competitiveness, and resilience, and boost regional development.

In January 2023, the Department published a report, [Evidence Base to Support the Development of a National Clustering Policy and Framework](#). The report provides an overview of the current cluster landscape in Ireland, including a mapping of cluster organisations, provided case studies from seven comparator regions and countries, a summary of the results of a stakeholder consultation exercise and provided policy options for the National Clustering Programme. This evidence base has contributed to work on the development of the Programme throughout 2023.

Shannon Estuary Economic Taskforce.

The Shannon Estuary Economic Taskforce (SEET) was established as part of the Programme for Government in 2022 to consider the economic development potential of the Shannon Estuary region, with research and technical support provided by the Department. The SEET published its final [report](#) in July 2023, with a core focus on a suite of recommendations to enable the delivery of Atlantic offshore wind potential. The Taskforce outlined an ambition for the Shannon Estuary to become Ireland's Atlantic Green Digital Corridor by having 2 GW of green energy capacity in development by 2030 and up to 30 GW of installed capacity by 2050. This was complemented by proposals for targeted initiatives in the region across the onshore renewable energy, transport and connectivity, and tourism sectors.

The SEET also made several national policy recommendations, among which was the development of a National Offshore Wind Industrial Strategy. Other recommendations related to the development of offshore wind energy and an associated green industrial ecosystem, including proposed measures on RD&I, supply chains, and clusters which will be advanced at a national level through the implementation of the Industrial Strategy.

The Department is coordinating the cross-Government response to the Report. The first periodic [implementation update](#) was published on 21 December 2023 and included updates on several national policy developments recommended by the SEET, which have been actioned by Government since it finalised its Report, while also highlighting areas where further progress is required.

A Growing Economy.

Economic Infrastructure and National Planning Framework Policy.

The [National Planning Framework](#) (NPF) guides development and investment at a national level out to 2040. It also sets the high-level objectives that guide the development of regional and local plans. The NPF is of strong relevance to the Department and the enterprise agencies. It guides policy and strategic objectives, supports regionally balanced development and economic growth, and provides the enterprise base with a coherent view of Ireland's future development. The Department's work around economic infrastructure and National Planning Framework policy aims to align infrastructure delivery under [Project Ireland 2040](#) with the needs and priorities of enterprise to support economic growth in a balanced manner across Ireland. This includes the identification and elaboration of the infrastructure needs of enterprise, as well as the identification of infrastructural "pinch points" affecting enterprise in different regions of Ireland.

National Competitiveness and Productivity Council.

The [National Competitiveness and Productivity Council](#) (NCPC) reports to the Taoiseach and the Government, through the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, on key competitiveness issues facing the Irish economy and offers recommendations on policy actions required to enhance Ireland's competitive position. Research, analysis, and the secretariat role for the NCPC is undertaken by the Department, which places a high priority on ensuring that the key enterprise competitiveness issues are identified and prioritised for action.

The NCPC published two principal outputs in 2023, [Ireland's Competitiveness Scorecard 2023](#) and [Ireland's Competitiveness Challenge 2023](#). Published in May 2023, the Scorecard provides an analysis of Ireland's competitiveness performance based on internationally comparable data and the latest international competitiveness rankings. The Scorecard assesses Ireland's relative macroeconomic fundamentals as strong, with favourable demographics with the second highest share of working age population with tertiary education in the OECD, and noted Ireland leads in the EU in terms of Science Technology Engineering and Maths graduates per 1,000 of population aged 20-29. Since 2018, Ireland has consistently ranked in the Top 20 across most indicators of business and government efficiency. Ireland is also a strong performer internationally across a range of quality-of-life indicators.

Ireland's Competitiveness Challenge, an annual report outlining the challenges to Ireland's competitiveness and productivity over the medium term and the policy responses required to meet those challenges, was published in September 2023. The report includes recommendations for Government on the costs of doing business, infrastructure delivery, energy generation and consumption, and research, development and innovation – all critical aspects of current and future competitiveness. In November, Government published its [response](#) to the report.

Expert Group on Future Skills Needs.

The [Expert Group on Future Skills Needs](#) (EGFSN) advises the Government on the future skills requirements and associated labour market issues that impact on the national potential for enterprise and employment growth. The Department provides the research and technical support to the Group.

In 2023 the EGFSN progressed studies on the current and future skills needs of the Biopharma sector in Ireland, as well as future skills requirements in high potential sub-sectors of Ireland's International Financial Services Sector. Both studies were finalised and scheduled for publication in early 2024. In 2023 the EGFSN also commenced a study to determine the skills required to transform Ireland's construction sector through widespread adoption of Modern Methods of Construction, including offsite manufacturing. This study is scheduled to be completed in H1 2024.

In addition to these studies, the EGFSN focussed on the implementation of recommendations from other studies completed in recent years. In 2023 these included the areas of Artificial Intelligence, Logistics and Supply Chain, SME Management and Skills for Zero Carbon. The EGFSN also contributed to the finalisation of the review of Ireland's National Skills Strategy, commissioned by the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, and undertaken by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Taxation Policy.

Maintaining and refining our competitive business taxation regime is essential to ensure that Ireland continues to be an attractive destination for talent, investment and enterprise. The Department liaised with business stakeholders and enterprise representative groups throughout the year to identify potential enhancements to the taxation system. This work, together with inputs from the Department's enterprise agencies contributed to the development of the Department's pre-budget submission on taxation. The submission focused on crucial areas such as supporting entrepreneurship and scaling SMEs, improving tax administration, sustainability measures, corporation tax and personal taxation offering. Budget 2024 measures included an increase in the VAT registration thresholds for SMEs to €40,000 for services and €80,000 for goods businesses and reduced Capital Gains Tax rate of 16% for Angel Investors in innovative SMEs, on gains of up to €3 million. Budget 2024 also committed to increasing the R&D tax credit from 25% to 30%, as well as increasing the first year upfront payment from €25,000 to €50,000 and amendments to the Key Employee Engagement Programme (KEEP) for the attraction and retention of staff.

Housing.

As part of the whole of government [Housing for All](#) plan, the Department continues to promote construction sector innovation and productivity, including through the adoption of Modern Methods of Construction (an umbrella term used to capture a range of innovative construction processes like panelised housing or 3D volumetric/modular pods), to help in the faster delivery of high-quality (compliant), environmentally sustainable, and more-affordable housing. In 2023 the Department delivered several actions to promote innovation in the construction sector, including hosting the first stakeholder event on Government led innovation in residential construction to explore the opportunities presented by Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) in residential construction with stakeholders, including industry.

In July, the Department, in collaboration with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, published the [Roadmap for Increased Adoption of Modern Methods of Construction](#) in social housing delivery. The roadmap contains 28 actions, that are intended to increase capacity and efficiency in the residential construction sector through the increased adoption of innovative construction methods, to help deliver home building targets under Housing for All.

The Modern Methods of Construction Leadership and Integration Group (MMC LIG), an interdepartmental and inter-agency working group chaired by the Department, which was established to develop the policies needed to promote innovative and productive construction practices, has overseen the delivery of the MMC Roadmap actions and continued to drive stakeholder engagement and cross-departmental collaboration over the course of 2023.

Several other actions delivered through the work of the MMC LIG in 2023 include the publication of an MMC information booklet in plain English, the commencement of the Accelerated Housing Applied Research Dissemination and Demonstration Programme Fund projects under Construct Innovate, an assessment of the Agrément certification and inspection process offered by the National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI), and the engagement of a services contractor to create a MMC data dashboard.

To encourage greater adoption of MMC in the Irish construction industry, NSAI launched its Certification Scheme in MMC, in support of the Housing for All plan. This scheme is designed to improve residential construction product assessment processes, including expanding the current NSAI Agrément approach, to ease certification of new building methods, the introduction of sustainable construction materials, and oversight of on-site installation.

Economic Migration Policy.

In accordance with EU obligations, Ireland's economic migration policy is calibrated to encourage the meeting of general labour and skills needs from within the workforce of the European Union (and other EEA countries).

However, where specific skills prove difficult to source within the State and the EEA, the employment permits system offers a path into the Irish labour market for non-EEA nationals who possess those in-demand skills.

The Department operates a managed employment permits system maximising the benefits of economic migration and minimising the risk of disrupting Ireland's labour market. The system is vacancy-led and driven by the changing needs of the labour market. The system is managed through the operation of the Critical Skills and Ineligible Occupations Lists which track current skills shortages and surpluses in Ireland and the EEA.

Review of Employment Permits Occupations Lists, and Review of Minimum Annual Remuneration.

A number of changes were made to the Employment Permits Occupations Lists in 2023 to address ongoing skills and labour shortages in sectors including healthcare, transport and agri-food. In July a quota of general Employment Permits available for the road safety sector was extended by 100 and in September a quota of permits was provided to those working to enhance the national electricity supply grid on behalf of ESB Networks.

In December, following consideration of the [2023 Review of the Employment Permits Occupation Lists](#) and the concurrent [Review of Minimum Annual Remuneration \(MAR\) Reports](#) Minister Richmond introduced comprehensive [changes](#) to the employment permits system, with 43 changes to the jobs eligible for an employment permit as well as a roadmap for increasing salary thresholds. The main changes include:

- 11 roles added to the Critical Skills Occupations List.
- 32 roles made eligible for a General Employment Permit.
- salary requirement for majority of General Employment Permit holders will rise from €30,000 to €34,000 in January 2024.
- healthcare assistants and home carers salary requirement will increase from €27,000 and horticultural workers and meat processor salary requirement will increase from €22,000 to €30,000 in January 2024, bringing them in line with family reunification thresholds.
- extension of existing quotas for dairy farm assistants, butcher/deboners, meat processors and horticultural workers.
- a Labour Market Needs Test (LMNT) is required for General Employment Permit applications and will have to reflect the revised thresholds in order to be deemed valid.

A roadmap for increasing salary thresholds for all types of employment permits was also introduced.

Employment Permits Bill 2022.

The purpose of this Bill is to consolidate and modernise employment permits legislation, to increase the responsiveness of the system and facilitate a more streamlined and flexible approach to the employment permits system in Ireland. The Bill retains the core focus of a vacancy-led employment permits system oriented to meeting the skills and labour needs. Drafting of significant amendments to the Bill continued throughout 2023. The time between Committee and Report Stages allowed for the carrying out of a consultation exercise, and careful drafting of provisions on two key elements of the Bill which were being taken at Report Stage – the new Seasonal Employment Permit, and a new option to Change Employer under an employment Permit.

The Single Application Procedure.

In December 2022 Government agreed in principle, that a single application procedure for employment permits and immigration permissions be developed and that an Inter Departmental Working Group develop an implementation plan for consideration by Government. Currently to work in Ireland, a person from outside the European Economic Area has to be successful in being granted a Work Permit by this Department and then make a second application to the Department of Justice for an immigration permission. The Working Group has concluded its work and the Department is supporting the Department of Justice in drafting and finalising a Report to Government on its deliberations.

Employment Permits Processing.

The Department made significant progress in improving the permits processing system to address increasing demand. Internal processes were streamlined and initiatives developed to contribute to improving timeframes for the processing of applications. Additional permanent processing staff were also assigned to the Employment Permits Unit to ensure processing capacity could meet the demand for employment permits services.

During 2023, 38,469 employment permit applications were received over the year (an increase of 8% on 2022). 30,981 permits issued (with 1,575 applications refused and 641 withdrawn). 3,302 applications were returned (via the pre-screening process) and 251 applications rejected. Across the main permit types there were 15,671 Critical Skills Employment Permits and 12,905 General Employment Permits. In addition, 956 Intra-Company Transfer Permits were issued in 2023.

Access to Finance.

Across the EU, SMEs and microenterprises can experience difficulties in accessing market credit. In response to difficulties in the Irish market the Department continues to develop and manage schemes to help SMEs and micros to access loans at affordable rates and favourable terms and conditions.

Following the enactment of the Credit Guarantee (Amendment) Act 2022 in December 2022, the Department launched the Ukraine Credit Guarantee Scheme in January 2023. The Scheme was developed to assist businesses impacted by cost increases arising from the war in Ukraine.

The Scheme makes €1.2 billion in loans available to SMEs and Small Mid-Caps for working capital and investment purposes. Loans of up to €1 million are available from participating financial providers, which includes banks, non-bank providers and credit unions. The Scheme is administered by the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) and is available until 31 December 2024. A total of 2,318 loans with a value of €218.3 million were approved up to the end of December 2023.

The €500 million Growth and Sustainability Loan launched in September 2023 provides longer-term lending to SMEs, including farmers and fishers and small mid-caps. Loans of between €25,000 and €3 million, with terms of up to 10 years and attractive terms and conditions, are available to eligible SMEs through participating finance providers, with loans of up to €500,000 available unsecured. The scheme will target a minimum of 30% of the lending volume towards environmental sustainability purposes with the aim of encouraging SMEs to take positive actions in support of the climate change agenda. Loans for climate action and environmental sustainability purposes will also benefit from an additional interest rate discount. Up to 70% of lending will be for strategic investments with a view to increasing productivity and competitiveness and thus underpinning future business sustainability and growth. The Growth and Sustainability Loan Scheme will operate until 30 June 2026 or until the scheme has been fully subscribed (whichever is earlier).

Microfinance Ireland.

In June 2023, Government approved the drafting of legislation that will transfer the ownership of Microfinance Ireland to the Minister for Enterprise Trade and Employment. Pre-legislative scrutiny was completed on 20 September 2023. This is an important building block in the State support infrastructure for viable microenterprises that would otherwise not have access to loan financing from the market. As at end September 2023, Microfinance Ireland has been in business for over 10 years. In this time, it has approved €82 million of loans and supported 4,979 micro-enterprises and 10,339 net jobs. 78% of loans have been granted to enterprises outside Dublin.

In October 2023 Microfinance Ireland launched loans for microenterprises impacted by the recent extreme weather events. This scheme is available by way of low-cost loans to small businesses that cannot get loan financing from other lenders. Loan options include cashflow loans of up to €25,000, at a fixed interest rate of 5.5% APR with up to 6 months full repayment moratorium. Loans can be used for general business purposes including restocking and other business costs. Loans for capital expenditure are also available which could fund the refurbishment of premises or the replacement of equipment.

Irish Innovation Seed Fund Programme.

The Irish Innovation Seed Fund Programme is a €90 million fund-of-funds, made up of a €30 million investment from the Department, through Enterprise Ireland, which is matched by a €30 million investment from the EIF, and a €30 million co-investment from ISIF. As a fund-of-funds, the programme will invest in other specialist fund managers who will target high growth innovative companies based on disruptive intellectual property, who are at the early stages of external funding for innovative, high growth, scalable sectors.

In 2023, two allocations of funding were announced under this programme to both WakeUp Capital (€35 million) and Resolve Ventures (€20 million). Investments from these funds will be targeted at the early stage innovative, high growth, scalable sectors including Lifesciences, Healthcare & Pharma, Food and Agritech, Technology & Digitalisation and Climate and Sustainability. The programme will continue to focus on supporting key priorities such as female entrepreneurs, regional development, and sustainability. It is expected that a third and final allocation of funding will be announced in 2024.

Seed and Venture Capital.

Innovative enterprises need risk capital (i.e. equity) to fund their growth. The private equity investment market has grown significantly over the last decade, but there are sections of the market that are still in need of intervention, primarily seed/start-up and scale-up. The Government, through Enterprise Ireland and the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund, is a significant player at every stage of the investment cycle (in particular at the seed/start-up stage via the Seed and Venture Capital scheme and the Innovation Seed Fund).

Since 1994, Enterprise Ireland has committed more than €700 million to the venture capital industry in Ireland. This funding provided essential risk capital for Irish start-ups, served as a cornerstone for early-stage funds and attracted significant levels of domestic and international private capital into the Irish funding eco-system. The current cycle of the SVC scheme ends on 31 December 2024. The Department has commissioned an independent research provider, to conduct an external review of State equity finance programmes and initiatives, including the SVC programme, to inform future policy in this area. This review will be published in 2024.

Finance for Scaling.

Government recognises that challenges in accessing finance for scaling-up results in quality businesses seeking investment from outside of Ireland and the European Union, resulting in increased risk of exceptional ventures, technologies, knowledge, and jobs relocating elsewhere. To address the limitations in access to finance, which can constrain business' ability to scale and grow, the Department established a Finance for Scaling Working Group in 2022. A report recommending future policies aimed at increasing scale-up activity in the Irish equity ecosystem by improving access to appropriate finance and published in 2024.

Research, Development, and Innovation.

R&D and innovation drives competitiveness, economic growth and employment creation Enterprise Ireland provide a range of programmes for enterprise from short-term and relatively small innovation projects, right through to building deeper engagement through large-scale, multiannual collaborative projects. Included are programmes to drive in-company R&D in Irish-owned companies and programmes to support the translation of academic research into new products, processes and services by industry.

The Department funds the Enterprise Ireland Research, Development and Innovation (RD&I) Programme which provides direct and indirect research, development and innovation supports for indigenous companies as well as the commercialisation of State funded research. Enterprise Ireland's RD&I funding supports for Irish businesses help companies remain competitive and grow their sales and employment. In 2023, the programme was allocated capital funding of €152 million.

Health Innovation Hub Ireland.

Health Innovation Hub Ireland (HIHI) is a joint initiative of this Department and the Department of Health. The Hub is a collaboration between the health service and the enterprise sector leading to the development and commercialisation of new healthcare technologies, products, and services. HIHI, through its 2021-2026 business plan will continue its critical support to Irish companies with innovative healthcare solutions, who benefit from formalised access to the HSE network and infrastructure. In 2023 HIHI launched Ireland's first FemTech Call which was seeking project proposals for innovations which have the potential to positively impact women's healthcare.

EUREKA.

EUREKA is the world's biggest public network for international cooperation in RD&I. It is open to SMEs, large companies, universities, and research performing organisations and offers opportunities to combine expertise, exchange knowledge and enhance resources. Through the Department, Ireland continues its membership of Eureka which offers project partners rapid access to skills and expertise across Europe and national public and private funding schemes. In 2023 the funding of Irish participation in EUREKA projects was just under €423,000 and nine new EUREKA projects were funded in 2023.



Strategic Goal 2:

Advance the green and digital transition to ensure the competitiveness and sustainability of Irish-based enterprise.

Context.

The Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment has responsibility under the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 to reduce Industry on-site emissions (manufacturing, including cement and alumina) by 20% by 2025 and 35% by 2030, while emissions from the heating of non-residential buildings (on-site built environment emissions) must be reduced by 20% by 2025 and 45% by 2030. Emissions from manufacturing industry in Ireland account for roughly 10% of national Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions.

The [Climate Action Plan 2024](#) is the third annual update to Ireland's Climate Action Plan. The Department is working on a range of industry abatement actions under the Plan, including through the Heat and Built Environment Taskforce. In 2023 the Department continued work to ensure all businesses in Ireland are activated and engaged in the green transition and the broader sustainability agenda. This will be a crucial component of ensuring Ireland's economy remains competitive, resilience and sustainable as we progress towards our target to be net zero by 2050.

Funding for Green Transition.

Green Transition Fund.

The [Green Transition Fund](#) is part of Ireland's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP). The total budget of €55 million for the fund is split into two streams, the Enterprise Emissions Reduction Investment Fund (€30 million) and the Climate Planning Fund for Business (€25 million) which will both run from 2022 through to 2026.

The Fund contains a range of supports to help businesses make the green transition including vouchers, capital support and grants to explore the development of new or improved products, services or processes in the areas of sustainability and decarbonisation. In 2023, €7.9 million in funding was approved under the Green Transition Fund across 206 projects, bringing the total approved spend to €9.7 million across 293 projects since the fund's launch in June 2022. Approximately €2.1 million was approved under the Climate Planning Fund for Business (CPFB) across 246 projects, and approximately €7.6 million approved under the Enterprise Emissions Reduction Investment Fund (EERIF) across 47 projects.

Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund.

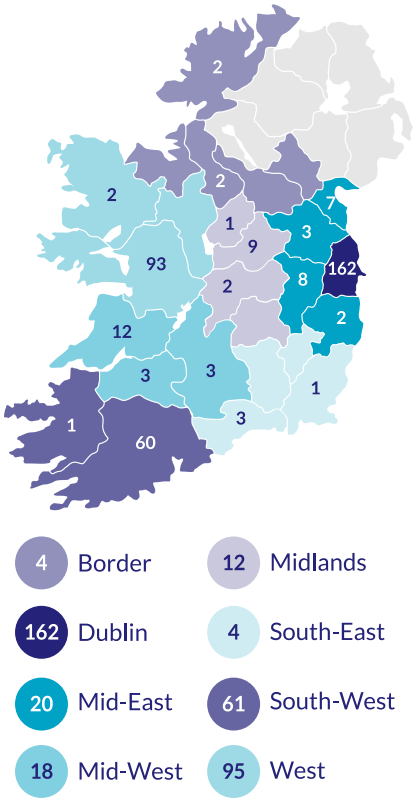
The Government established the [Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund](#) (DTIF) in 2018 as one of four National Development Plan (NDP) 2018-2027 Funds under Project Ireland 2040. DTIF is a €500 million enterprise-focused fund that encourages collaboration between SMEs, multinational companies, and Irish research institutions. It is aimed at encouraging collaboration and innovation in the development and deployment of disruptive technologies, on a commercial basis, targeted at tackling national and global challenges.

The Fund is open to projects that seek to alter markets, alter the way business operates or involve new products or the emergence of new business models. The Fund is managed by the Department and administered by Enterprise Ireland.

In 2023, over €76 million in funding was allocated to 17 successful applications, consisting of 68 project partners under Calls 4, 5 and 6. To date, €371 million has been allocated to 104 projects involving collaborative partnerships (comprising of 393 organisations) between industry, especially SMEs, and public research bodies in applying industrial research

in areas such as health, climate action, food, ICT and manufacturing. SME participation is mandatory for a project to be eligible for funding. While not a requirement under the Fund, almost 56% of the project partners are located in 18 counties outside Dublin. A seventh DTIF call was launched in early 2024.

Project Partner Locations - DTIF Call 1-6



Sustainable FDI.

IDA Ireland's 2021-2024 strategy includes a focus on sustainable growth in all its forms, including the promotion of responsible and environmentally sustainable business practices among the Agency's client base. Sustainability considerations, including a company's corporate level approach to the environment and whether a client has a climate action plan for its Irish site, form part of IDA's due diligence process in assessing investment projects for approval.

The focus on decarbonisation in the White Paper on Enterprise aligns with the objectives of the sustainability pillar of IDA's 2021-2024 strategy. As set out in the White Paper, IDA will incorporate carbon abatement as a consideration in project evaluations alongside factors such as employment and value added. In addition, all environmental supports require an assessment of the project proposal and its projected environmental impact, in the first instance, and thereafter it is a condition of each grant that the proposed capital investment is completed and commissioned in line with the project proposal.

In 2023, IDA Ireland continued to deliver several schemes to support companies in the areas of decarbonisation as well as in relation to energy costs. These measures have been facilitated under the National Recovery and Resilience Fund and the European Commission's Temporary State Aid Crisis Framework.

The Agency continues to work with its existing client base on their decarbonisation and digitalisation journeys while seeking out new projects as well as second or third-generation investments by existing clients in a variety of sectors. IDA Ireland works with client companies to support their drive for competitiveness as they move through the twin transition. In 2023, IDA Ireland approved 25 sustainability projects focused on carbon abatement and building Ireland's Green Economy. In addition, IDA supported clients on the development and adoption of cutting-edge technologies. Over €1.4 billion was committed by IDA clients on research and innovation projects during the year.

IDA supported Digital Manufacturing Ireland, the industry-led national organisation that enables Irish-based manufacturers to access, adopt and accelerate new digital technologies, on their decarbonisation and digitalisation journeys. IDA Ireland also funded the National Institute for Bioprocessing Research and Training, Ireland's globally recognised centre of excellence for training and research in bioprocessing, with a significant expansion to the facility delivered in 2023.

Energy Efficiency Grant.

The Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) are actively engaged in supporting the green transition through a suite of supports of competitiveness and productivity supports for small businesses. The LEO Energy Efficiency Grant was launched by Minister Coveney in May. It supports the investment in technologies and equipment identified through a green consultancy assignment, aiming to reduce the impact of enterprises on the environment, thereby increasing the agility and resilience of these businesses. The grant is 50% of eligible costs, up to a maximum grant of €5,000.

Businesses must complete a free Green for Business programme from the LEOs as a first step in receiving the EEG. This enables a business to receive advice and technical support on resource efficiency, how to better understand their carbon footprint, and how to implement an environmental management system to reduce costs and lower greenhouse gas emissions. Actions identified in this first step can then be implemented through the EEG funding.

Between May and end-December 2023, 35 clients were approved for the Energy Efficiency Grant, to the sum of €137,423. There were over 550 approvals for Green for Business in 2023, indicating a strong pipeline of businesses that can avail of the Energy Efficiency Grant in 2024.

Commercial Built Environment.

The Climate Action Plan sets out our level of ambition for decarbonising the commercial built environment. The objectives for the commercial built environment, including the public sector, are a Sectoral Emissions Ceiling of 7 MtCO₂eq. for 2021-2025 and 5 MtCO₂eq. for 2026-2030.

The Commercial Built Environment Roadmap Working Group has discussed a number of issues including the Energy

Performance in Buildings Directive (EPBD), the Energy Efficiency Directive (EED), relevant data availability, the elements to be included in the roadmap, and their approach to engagement with stakeholders.

The Department held a number of engagements throughout 2023 with business representative organisations and industry representing the high abatement sectors (hospitality, retail, office users) in relation to the decarbonisation of the commercial built environment. Such engagements will inform the preparation of the Commercial Built Environment Roadmap to decarbonise heat within our commercial buildings. The Roadmap will set out the key existing and new policy interventions to achieve the objectives set out to reach the targeted level of abatement from commercial buildings.

Cement & Concrete Public Procurement Mandate.

The cement manufacturing sector is highly concentrated, while demand for cement from the construction sector in Ireland is largely fragmented – making demand-driven evolution difficult. The State across all its activities is a significant market participant and is likely the only demand-side entity that can effectively signal and drive a shift toward low carbon cement products.

The Cement & Construction Sector Decarbonisation Working Group coordinates the key State bodies with a role across a range of interconnected policy areas, with a mandate to drive ambitious measures consistent with the level of decarbonisation identified in the cement, concrete and construction sectors in successive Climate Action Plans. In 2023 the Department secured expert services to support development of procurement criterion to reduce embodied carbon in the cement or concrete procured in construction projects by public bodies. Extensive

consultations took place with key stakeholders including standards and regulatory bodies, procurement bodies and concrete and cement suppliers.

Climate Toolkit 4 Business.

The [Climate Toolkit 4 Business](#) is a carbon calculator and climate action plan generator that is aimed at SMEs who want to reduce their carbon emissions. The toolkit was jointly developed by the Department in collaboration with the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications and launched in December 2021. Since launch, over 12,400 tailored climate action plans have been generated for businesses. Throughout 2023, the Department continued to promote the Climate Toolkit 4 Business through:

- attendance at key events, such as the Building Better Business conferences and the National Hubs Summit.
- Partnering with Munster Technological University to deliver training to cluster managers and to present the Toolkit as an example of a Green and Digital Transition project at an Interreg Europe event.
- working with Fáilte Ireland to increase the reach of the Toolkit in the leisure and hospitality sector.
- ensuring our agencies point their members to the Climate Toolkit as the best starting point for climate action.

Retrofit Collection.

In June 2023 Ministers Coveney and Richmond launched a new collection of standards recommendations compiled by the National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) to guide the efforts of professionals in the sector to deliver high-quality, sustainable, and efficient building upgrades. The collection includes clear guidelines around heat pump systems, solar photovoltaic micro-generators, conventional heating systems and solar thermal systems, when being installed in the home.

Climate Appraisal Model.

During 2023, the Department continued to develop a Climate Appraisal Model, as recommended in the White Paper on Enterprise. The model factors the cost of carbon emissions into the grant decision making processes of the Enterprise Agencies and incorporates the new shadow price of carbon published in Q4 2023. Implementation of the final model will commence in 2024.

National Offshore Wind Industrial Strategy.

Ireland's Offshore Energy Programme includes a target to deliver 5Gigawatts (GWs) of Offshore Wind Energy (OWE) by 2030 and a further 2 GWs of Floating OWE to be in development by 2030. The total target for OWE rises to at least 37 GWs by 2050. This forms part of Government's target to provide 80% of electricity from renewable sources by 2030.

In May 2023 Government approved the development of a National Offshore Wind Industrial Strategy, the overarching objective of which is to ensure that Ireland maximises the economic benefits associated with Government targets to deliver 37 GWs of offshore wind by 2050. The Department engaged in extensive consultation across Government and with industry in 2023 to inform the development of the Strategy. The Strategy is iterative and will, over time, also examine industrial development opportunities arising from the potential to co-locate energy generation and demand, as well as measures to ensure balanced regional development from offshore wind and, working with the enterprise agencies to explore new initiatives such as the potential to develop Green Energy Industrial Parks of scale. The Department participated in several cross-Government working groups in 2023 to progress future end-uses for offshore wind energy to add value to this renewable resource, and this work will continue in 2024.

The National Industrial Strategy for Offshore Wind will complement the suite of upcoming government policies led by the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications through the Offshore Wind Delivery Taskforce.

Energy Security.

Russia's war in Ukraine has also exposed vulnerabilities in Europe's energy supply that presents Ireland with an added imperative to quickly shift away from imported fossil fuels and to accelerate the exploitation of indigenous, renewable energy. Security of energy supply is crucial to Ireland's attractiveness as a place for enterprise investment, job creation and a place to do business.

The Department contributed to the Government first-of-its-kind strategy for Ireland's energy security published in November 2023. The [Energy Security in Ireland to 2030](#) report outlines a new strategy to ensure energy security in Ireland for this decade, while ensuring a sustainable transition to a carbon neutral energy system by 2050. The report's 28 actions provide a roadmap to ensuring a sustainable, affordable and secure energy landscape that balances energy risk and resilience against our binding European and domestic energy and climate commitments. The Department will continue to contribute on energy security policy in 2024 and engage with relevant departments, state bodies and wider industry on energy security issues.

Driving Digital Transformation and Innovation.

Support the Digital Transition in Irish Enterprise.

Under the [2023 EU Digital Economy and Society Index](#), Ireland holds a leading position on several enterprise, skills, connectivity and public services indicators. The Index shows 70% of adults in Ireland have at least basic digital skills, well above the EU average (54%) and close to the EU 2030 target of 80%. In addition, 85% of Irish SMEs demonstrate at least a basic level of digital intensity. This is significantly higher than the EU average of 69% and very close to the 2030 target of more than 90%. The index also highlights areas where progress could be accelerated, including driving higher levels of enterprise adoption of AI, Cloud and Big Data, continuing to meet the demand for digital skills, and citizen access to Digital Health records.

Under the [National Digital Strategy](#), Government has committed to driving a step change in the digitalisation of enterprise right across Ireland. Growing the use of digital technologies by businesses will help us to build the resilience of our enterprise base and future-proof our economy for the years ahead. The strategy sets out specific targets for the digitalisation of enterprise, including achieving 75% enterprise take-up of cloud, big data and AI by 2030; ensuring that 90% of our SMEs have reached at least a basic level of digital intensity by 2030; and ensuring that at least 35% of State funding for start-up and early-stage businesses is invested in innovative digital businesses from 2022 onwards. It also sets a target of at least 800 businesses supported under the Digital Transition Fund by 2026.

The Department leads the implementation of the Enterprise Pillar of the National Digital Strategy to develop the optimal digital ecosystem for SMEs, increase Ireland's digital competitiveness and drive the digitalisation of enterprises in Ireland. In this regard the Department coordinates the work of and provides secretariat to the [Enterprise Digital Advisory Forum](#) (EDAF), which is chaired by Minister Calleary. The EDAF was established to provide a focused body for Government to be able to hear the views and perspectives of enterprise and experts to facilitate adoption of digital technologies among industry, including cloud, data analytics and AI. It brings together representatives of indigenous enterprise, multi-national enterprises, and experts in digital technologies and their adoption by enterprise for dialogue with Government.

National AI Strategy.

As set out in the White Paper on Enterprise, digital transformation is at the heart of our enterprise policy and Artificial Intelligence is central to this. Ireland is committed to an AI approach that is responsible, ethical and trustworthy and ensuring an agile and appropriate governance and regulatory environment for AI. This is a priority for the Department as it will provide the foundations for public trust in AI and for the safe adoption of AI by businesses and the public service.

In 2023, the Department continued to drive execution of the [National AI Strategy](#) to ensure that Ireland is well positioned for the rapid acceleration in Artificial Intelligence technology. The Strategy is founded on three core principles: adopting a human-centric approach to the application of AI; staying open and adaptable to new innovations;

and ensuring good governance to build trust and confidence for innovation to flourish. It sets out a whole-of-Government approach to ensuring that the necessary enablers are in place to support AI adoption in enterprise and public services. These enablers include a supportive innovation ecosystem, a secure data and connectivity infrastructure, and policies to ensure that our workforce is prepared for the impact of AI.

A [Progress Report](#) on the Strategy was published in August 2023. Building public trust in AI is an important pillar of the strategy, and to that end the Department supported the continued public engagement programme of Dr Patricia Scanlon, Ireland's AI Ambassador, and advanced the establishment of an AI Advisory Council to provide an agile sounding board for Government on AI related issues. Work on AI in the public service progressed and CeADAR was established as Ireland's European Digital Innovation Hub for AI, providing services in particular to SMEs and public sector bodies.

Digital Transition Fund.

The Department through Enterprise Ireland makes a suite of supports available to eligible businesses as they work to digitalise, including through the [Digital Transition Fund](#) (DTF) to help businesses to develop a strategic roadmap for digital transition and to support companies seeking to invest in the implementation of new or significantly improved production and service delivery. This €85 million fund is supporting the digital transformation of Irish enterprise through direct company supports as well as through provision of financial support to European Digital Innovation Hubs (EDIHs). EI also offers its clients support for strategic

consultancy, exploring innovation, research and development and building their digital marketing. The Digitalisation Voucher has seen payments of €2.04 million in 2022 and €0.46 million in 2023. Payments under the Digital Marketing Capacity Scheme from 2019-2023 totalled €4.59 million.

In addition, the Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund (DTIF) aims to encourage collaboration and innovation in the development and deployment of disruptive technologies, on a commercial basis, targeted at tackling national and global challenges.

Online Trading.

The network of 31 Local Enterprise Offices offers a range of digitalisation supports to eligible businesses, including through the [Trading Online Voucher scheme](#), which is in place to help businesses develop their online trading capability, and Digital Start, which is designed to help prepare and implement a plan for the adoption of digital tools and techniques. Digital Start may be used to obtain digital strategic, technical and/or advisory services from approved providers.

The Online Retail Scheme supports the resilience of the domestic retail enterprise sector by enhancing online sales capabilities to drive productivity and increase competitiveness and subsequently scale businesses in international markets. Since 2018, more than 850 projects have been approved for €30 million in funding through seven rounds of competitive calls. In 2023 the Department delivered the seventh call (includes two pilots) of the [Online Retail Scheme](#). The scheme was delivered with a total budget of €2.3 million with over 80 retail companies across Ireland benefitting.

European Digital Innovation Hubs (EDIHs).

As part of the Digital Europe Programme, the European Commission and EU Member States co-fund a network of European Digital Innovation Hubs (EDIHs) to support digital transformation in SMEs and public sector organisations. EDIHs will serve as “one-stop-shops” providing access to technical expertise and experimentation, as well as innovation services, and the training and skills development necessary for successful digital transformation.

In 2023, four EDIHs were established in Ireland which are intended to stimulate the broad uptake of Artificial Intelligence, High Performance Computing, Cybersecurity, advanced Digital Skills and other digital technologies by industry (particularly SMEs). The Irish EDIHs drew down €7 million in the period 2022-2023.

Digital Creative Industries.

In line with a commitment in the Programme for Government in 2023 the Department worked with the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media to develop a Digital Creative Industries Roadmap. The Roadmap is intended to provide the strategic framework and collaborative approach needed to realise the potential of the targeted sectors to drive innovation, resilient growth and sustainable jobs in the future economy. It is expected that the Roadmap will be published in early 2024.

Digital Standards.

In July, Ministers Richmond and Calleary jointly launched Ireland’s [AI Standards & Assurance Roadmap](#). This roadmap is a key deliverable of Ireland’s National AI Strategy to develop and utilise Artificial Intelligence for the benefit of Irish society and the economy. Firmly rooted in supporting Ireland’s implementation of the EU AI Act, the roadmap was developed following a ‘Top Team on Standards in AI’ engagement process.

Marking European Cybersecurity Month, NSAI launched its Let’s Talk about Information Security awareness campaign and webinar series in October. Aimed at both private sector and public sector organisations, NSAI promoted the benefits of information security management systems and launched explainer videos for its free resources and certification scheme.

As part of [NSAI’s Strategic Plan 2022-2026](#) and to deliver on its leadership role in climate action and sustainability, NSAI established two Centres of Excellence in 2023, relating to Climate Action and Digital Transformation. The core objectives of these Centres are to identify and develop collaborative opportunities to support businesses in their climate action, sustainability, circular economy, and environmental journeys, and develop new service and business.

EU Developments.

Artificial Intelligence Act.

The EU proposal for a Regulation known as the “Artificial Intelligence Act” was published in April 2021 and sets out harmonised rules for the development, placement on the market and use of AI systems in the Union.

The regulation aims to ensure the protection of fundamental rights and user safety, as well as trust in the development and uptake of AI, thereby enhancing EU investment and innovation. A general approach was reached at EU Council in December 2022 and by Parliament in June 2023. The Department, in consultation with key stakeholders, was actively involved in these negotiations on behalf of Ireland. In December 2023, the co-legislators reached provisional political agreement on the Act. The Act will enter into force from May 2024 and will be phased in over the following 36 months, with the main elements of the regulation applicable within 24 months of entry into force.

Artificial Intelligence Liability Directive.

The European Commission published its proposals for an Artificial Intelligence Liability Directive (AILD) in September 2022. The purpose of the proposal is to improve the functioning of the internal market by laying down uniform rules for certain aspects of non-contractual civil liability for damage caused with the involvement of AI systems. Negotiations at EU level began in October 2022 with the first reading completed at the end of January 2023.

The Department also carried out a public consultation on the draft directive seeking the views of stakeholders on this important directive. The consultation closed in January 2023. Following consultation with Member States, the Commission put the AILD on hold during 2023 while the AI Act was being negotiated, given the close alignment between the two and that the outcomes of the AI Act will impact the text of the AILD. It is expected that negotiations on the AILD will recommence in 2024.

Council of Europe Legal Convention on Artificial Intelligence.

Ireland's negotiations on the Legal Convention on Artificial Intelligence were led by the Department in 2023. The purpose of the Convention is to ensure that human rights, democracy and the rule of law are protected and promoted in the development, design and use of AI and to ensure responsible innovation. Following approval of the Committee of Ministers, the work on the convention was extended beyond its original deadline of November 2023 with the expectation that the convention will be agreed by March 2024 and approved by Ministers in May 2024.

Net-Zero Industry Act – EU Industrial Policy.

The Net-Zero Industry Act (NZIA) was proposed by the European Commission on 16 March 2023 and aims to create a regulatory environment that will provide a framework for net-zero technologies, to support the scaling up of the EU's net-zero manufacturing capacities and products, helping to meet Europe's climate neutrality goals, create green jobs and maintain the EU's competitiveness, especially in light of the US Inflation Reduction Act. The draft NZIA aims to present economic opportunities for Europe, where the global market for net-zero industry technologies is expected to reach an annual worth of around €600 billion a year by 2030.

In 2023 the Department coordinated the Irish response to the NZIA and represented Ireland's position at the Industry Working Party in the Council of the European Union throughout the process of developing the final General Approach which was adopted by the Competitiveness Council in December 2023.

Participation in Multi-Country Important Projects of Common European Interest.

Important Projects of Common European Interest (IPCEI) are large-scale, EU multi-country projects for global state of the art innovation to address market or systemic failures in particular sectors that significantly benefit the EU and help achieve the twin digital and green transitions.

Following Government approval of Ireland's participation in this project in early 2023, Ireland completed the notification process under the IPCEI on Microelectronics and Communication Technologies (IPCEI ME/CT) submitting one project to the European Commission. The IPCEI ME/CT, which is the first IPCEI in which Ireland is directly participating, addresses the technological performance, sustainability and societal challenges of the next decade and is expected to result in a significant innovation advantage for Europe.

Ireland's National Strategic Roadmap for the EU Digital Decade.

In line with Article 9 (1) of the Digital Decade Policy Programme, Member States were obliged to submit national roadmaps to the Commission by 30 November 2023. Through cooperation with colleagues across relevant departments the Department successfully met this deadline and submitted Ireland's [National Strategic Roadmap for the EU Digital Decade Programme](#). The European Commission

published its first [State of the Digital Decade 2023 Report](#) in September 2023, encompassing the annual Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI). Ireland's Digital Decade Country Report found that Ireland is expected to make a positive contribution to the collective efforts to achieve the EU's Digital Decade targets for 2030, with positive performances in particular on digital skills, and progress on digital infrastructure and digitalisation of businesses.

Space.

The [National Space Strategy for Enterprise 2019-2025](#) sets ambitious goals for how Ireland intends to develop an economically sustainable and expanding space-active industry while delivering quality jobs. 2023 was a historic year as Ireland became a space faring nation following the launch of EIRSAT-1 in December 2023. The development, launch and operation of UCD's educational and research cube satellite was made possible through Ireland's membership of and investment in the European Space Agency (ESA) and its Fly your Satellite! programme.

The Department is making good progress towards meeting the target of increasing public and private investment in the ESA by 50% (on the 2019 level) by 2025. The Department investment of €30.87 million in the ESA in 2023 reflected a continued commitment to the expansion of our space-active sector in line with the Space Strategy. 2023 also saw the Strategy's target to have 100 companies engaged with ESA by 2025 surpassed, with 104 Irish companies benefitting from ESA contracts.



Strategic Goal 3:

Promote safety, better pay and conditions, good quality jobs, gender equality and inclusivity in the workplace.

Context.

In 2023 the Department continued to deliver positive workplace relations, well-functioning dispute resolution mechanisms, robust enforcement of employment rights, a safe working environment and a responsive economic migration policy aligned with the needs of the economy, along with an efficient employment permits process to regulate the entry of workers from non-EEA countries. Employment rights and labour market standards were also kept under review and updated to reflect national and international developments, including at EU, the Council of Europe, Court of Justice and International Labour Organisation level.

Standards and Safety.

In 2023 the Department continued to coordinate the Irish response to the EU's Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability an ambitious project intended to overhaul the EU Chemicals industry, including revisions of the major EU Chemicals legislation Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals (REACH) and Classification, Labelling and Packaging (CLP). This Strategy will have cross-governmental impacts and may require significant changes to Irish legislation.

The Department coordinated the Irish response to proposals for EU chemicals safety legislation, including the update to the Directive on the protection of workers from exposure to asbestos at work, which Ireland supports. The draft Asbestos Directive was adopted in Q4 as Directive 2033/2668. This Directive is the first step in a broader EU initiative to remove asbestos from all buildings across the EU. The Department also coordinated the Irish input on proposals to update both the Chemical Agents Directive and the Carcinogens Directive, which should be adopted in 2024. The Department also coordinated the Irish input into the revision of the Classification, Labelling and Packaging Regulation which was concluded in Trilogues in Q4 2023.

The Department continued its programme of work in 2023 on the modernisation of the regulations

governing flammable liquids and fuels, with the preparation of technical updates to existing regulations and progressing discussions with Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform on a set of new licence fee regulations for Dangerous Substances.

Throughout 2023 the Department engaged with stakeholders on a wide-reaching proposal to ban all uses of Per- and Polyfluorinated Substances (PFAS) in the EU. PFAS make up over 15,000 chemicals with uses in a wide range of areas, including pharmaceutical production, medical devices, semiconductors, batteries, fire-resistant materials, heat- and cold-resistant materials and wind turbines. The Department has been encouraging stakeholders to engage with the EU consultations to ensure that any final restriction proposal will be balanced and implementable.

In 2023, the Health and Safety Authority's (HSA) newly established Occupational Health Division ensured the availability of in-house occupational health expertise to address both public health and occupational health concerns in the workplace. Including risks such as work-related stress, psycho-social hazards, ergonomic hazards and workplace exposure to chemical, biological and physical agents, and to develop and deliver targeted programmes, services and strategies in occupational health and new ways of working.

Farm Safety.

The Department continued to work alongside the HSA in 2023 to improve work safety standards in the farming sector. In November Regulations governing the safe use of ATV/Quad Bikes in workplaces came into effect. The regulations introduced compulsory helmet wearing and training for quad bike operators in the workplace. The regulations are the first of their kind in the EU and have been introduced to help prevent, and reduce, the fatalities and the life-altering injuries associated with quad bike accidents, especially on farms. The Regulations apply only to the use of quad bikes in the workplace, not for leisure purposes.

The Code of Practice for Indoor Air Quality (IAQ).

In May 2023 the *Code of Practice for Indoor Air Quality* came in operation, applying to all places of work. It provides practical guidance on improving and managing indoor air quality in the workplace and sets out a practical risk assessment approach to assist employers with IAQ. It also provides detailed information on ventilation, air filtration, carbon dioxide monitors and promotes designing out IAQ issues and appropriate control measures along with practical checklists and tools for employers.

Better Pay and Conditions, More Secure Jobs.

Employment Rights.

The Department continued with its priorities to ensure that the rights of workers were protected and improved. The *Sick Leave Act 2022* came into effect on 1 of January 2023. The introduction of a statutory sick leave scheme brought Ireland in line with many other OECD countries, ensuring that all employees are entitled to a minimum level of financial compensation if they are unable to work due to illness or injury. It is primarily intended to provide sick pay coverage to those employees, often in low-paid and precarious roles, who do not have access to a company sick leave scheme. The scheme offers a floor level of protection and does not interfere with existing, more favourable, sick pay schemes. Payment for statutory sick leave days is currently set at 70% of an employee's average gross earnings, up to cap of €110. The rate of 70% was chosen to ensure excessive costs were not placed on employers, who in certain sectors may also have to deal with the cost of replacing staff who are out sick at short notice.

In July the Department secured Government approval to develop legislation to amend the *Protection of Employees (Employers' Insolvency) Act 1984*. This legislation will address a Supreme Court judgment by fully transposing Article 2(1) of Directive 2008/94/EC and incorporate various technical amendments to improve the Act's operation.

The *Employment (Collective Redundancies and Miscellaneous Provisions) and Companies (Amendment) Bill 2023* was published in October 2023. This Bill reflects a Programme for Government commitment and serves to implement the remaining legislative commitments set out in the Plan of Action on Collective Redundancies following Insolvency. The Bill also provides for the establishment of the Employment Law Review Group (ELRG) to advise the Minister on matters concerning employment and redundancy law as well as international developments in employment and redundancy law and related matters. In advising the Minister, the Review Group will seek to ensure that the State's suite of employment rights and redundancy legislation remains relevant and fit for purpose and is updated to reflect international developments.

In December Minister Richmond introduced new Regulations providing for the imposition of a Fixed Payment Notice in lieu of prosecution, where appropriate, in respect of offences contained in the *Payment of Wages (Amendment) (Tips and Gratuities) Act 2022*. Minister Richmond also made Regulations to amend the National Minimum Wage Act 2000 to remove service charges from being a reckonable component of basic pay. Employers who do not provide employees with their terms of employment or provide false information will receive a fine of €1,500. Employers who do not provide employees with a written statement on the distribution of tips and gratuities or fails to treat a service charge as a tip, will be subject to a fine of €750.

Work Life Balance.

The *Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Act* was enacted in April 2023 and represents a significant advance in workplace entitlements for employees. Provisions for the right to request remote working for all employees and the right to request flexible working arrangements for parents and carers are available under the Act and these rights are now in operation. The right to request flexible working for parents and carers transposes Article 9 of the EU Work Life Balance Directive. Ireland has now fully transposed the Directive.

Section 31(1) of the Act provides that the Minister may, following consultation with the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, give a direction to the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) to prepare and submit a Code of Practice for the purpose of practical guidance to employers and employees. A public consultation on the Code concluded in June. The WRC reviewed 51 consultation submissions received, as well as other relevant policy documents, research, and best practice in other jurisdictions as part of finalising a working draft Code. A working group was established and four meetings took place since the beginning of October 2023, attended by representatives from ICTU and Ibec. This Group will continue to meet on a regular basis and to ensure the Code is published in 2024.

The Remote Work Interdepartmental Group continued to meet in 2023 to coordinate implementation of the [Making Remote Work - National Remote Work Strategy](#). All 15 actions outlined in the Strategy have been delivered including legislating for the right of all workers to request remote

working through the Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2023, the development of a Code of Practice on the Right to Disconnect and the development of the National Hub Network and [ConnectedHubs.ie](#) platform.

Low Pay Commission.

In 2023 the Department continued to provide the Secretariat to the Low Pay Commission (LPC), the body responsible for making recommendations on the National Minimum Wage (NMW). In July, the LPC submitted its Annual Report to the Minister which recommended setting the National Minimum Wage at €12.70 from 1 January 2024. This recommendation was accepted by Government and announced as part of Budget 2024. This increase can be considered the second year of a proposed four-year path towards reaching the living wage of 60% of the median wage by January 2026. The figure of €12.70 is estimated to be 55.1% of the hourly median wage.

In November 2023 [research](#) on subminimum wages in Ireland was published under the terms of the Low Pay Commission/ESRI Partnership Agreement. This research is informing the Low Pay Commission's deliberations on subminimum, or youth rates of the National Minimum Wage. Their recommendations on this issue are expected in 2024. During 2023 the Department was represented at an expert group on the transposition of Directive (EU) 2022/2041 on adequate minimum wages in the European Union. The group met eight times in total and submitted a final report in November 2023 to assist Member States in the transposition.

Industrial Relations.

Industrial Relations Environment.

The Department's primary policy role is to foster a good industrial relations environment through an appropriate legislative framework. Areas of responsibility include industrial relations legislation, trade union matters, monitoring of industrial disputes, and legislation relating to employee involvement in the workplace (information and consultation/participation). There were approximately 4,203 days lost to strike action in 2023. This compares favourably to 2022 where a total of 5,256 days were lost due to Industrial action.

Workplace Relations Commission (WRC).

The activities of the [Workplace Relations Commission](#) (WRC) are concerned both with facilitating and assisting workplace change and creating an environment of equity and fairness in employment. The WRC has a broad range of functions including industrial relations advisory and conciliation services and the resolution of industrial relations disputes of interest between employers and workers across the public and private sectors.

In 2023, the WRC provided comprehensive early resolution, mediation and adjudication services in relation to the full spectrum of employment rights and equality cases. It carried out workplace inspections to ensure the employment rights of workers and responsibilities of employers are respected and it has an enforcement function in relation to breaches of employment legislation.

The Inspection Service completed a total of 4,727 workplace inspections resulting in €1,950,601 in unpaid wages recovered during the year. The Adjudication Service of the WRC received 14,158 specific complaints in 2023. The Adjudication Service held 4,765 hearings in 2023, an increase of 12% over the previous year. The WRC mediation service delivered an additional 127 mediations in 2023 compared to the previous year, representing a 19% increase. In total there was a 42% increase in cases successfully mediated on compared to 2022. In addition, the WRC answered over 62,000 calls and handled 9,000 emails seeking information on employment rights, equality, industrial relations, and employment permits. In addition, the WRC website had over 4.65 million website pageviews.

Labour Court.

The [Labour Court](#) provides a free, comprehensive service for the resolution of industrial relations disputes and is the sole appellate Body under employment rights legislation. In industrial relations disputes, the Labour Court operates as an industrial relations tribunal, hearing both sides in trade disputes and then issuing Recommendations, setting out its opinion on the dispute and the terms on which it should be settled.

During 2023, the Labour Court received 1,141 appeals and referrals, compared to 1,138 referrals in 2022. The Court scheduled 1,513 hearings. This compared to 1,485 hearings in 2022. Hearings convened in a virtual courtroom made up 5% of all hearings, compared to 30% in 2022. In 2023, the Court issued 425 recommendations/determinations/decisions. In addition, it investigated 70 appeals/referrals that were ultimately settled prior to the issue of a decision by the Court. A total of 753

appeals to the Court were withdrawn, 486 of these after the parties had been allocated a hearing date. There were 297 requests for postponement of scheduled hearings, down from 447 in 2022.

Infrastructure developments in 2023 included an upgrade in one of the Courtrooms, to enable remote attendance of one or more participants at physical hearings and the completion of a new Case Management system providing a comprehensive platform for the activities of the Court, which for the first time, allows for online referrals and appeals to be lodged directly by parties.

High Level Group on Collective Bargaining.

The Final Report of the Labour Employer Economic Forum (LEEF) High-Level Working Group on Collective Bargaining was published on the 5 October 2022. A LEEF Subgroup, chaired by Minister Richmond, was established in 2023 to examine implementation of the Report's recommendations with the social partners. The Subgroup met in June and November 2023. Updates on these issues were also provided at the LEEF plenary meeting chaired by the Taoiseach in November 2023.

Construction Contracts Adjudication Service.

There is a statutory and robust adjudication process in place to swiftly resolve payment disputes that arise in the Construction Sector. The Construction Contracts Act, 2013 applies to construction contracts that have been entered into since July 2016. During 2023 there were 80 applications made to the Chairperson of the Construction Contracts Adjudication Panel, Mr Bernard Gogarty, for the appointment of an Adjudicator under section 6(4) of the Construction Contracts Act, 2013.

The [seventh Annual Report](#) on the implementation of the Construction Contracts Act, 2013 to Minister Richmond was published in October 2023.

Balance for Better Business.

The sixth [Annual Report of the Balance for Better Business Review Group](#) was launched by the Minister in December 2023. The report shows that Irish businesses have made significant progress in achieving gender balance at Board level over the past year. In 2023, the percentage of women on the Boards of ISEQ20 companies rose to 39%, far exceeding the 33% target set for the end of 2023 and up 21 percentage points since 2018. For other listed companies, the percentage of women on boards is now 28%, exceeding the 25% target set for the end of 2023 and up 18 percentage points since 2018. The Department agreed to continue its support for the initiative beyond the initial 5-year horizon set in 2018, with a new 5-year strategy under development. The strategy will seek to build upon the progress made in achieving gender balance in senior leadership during the first 5-year horizon and will further seek to increase its focus on gender balance in leadership teams and in large Irish owned private companies.

National Disability Inclusion Strategy (NDIS).

The Department of Children, Equality, Disability integration and Youth is currently developing a successor strategy which is due to be published in 2024. The Department is represented at senior level on the Interdepartmental Working Group developing actions for the strategy to promote greater participation by those with disabilities in the workforce and the take up of the range of supports available to employers.



Strategic Goal 4: Enhance our business regulatory environment and Ireland's attractiveness as a place to do business.

Context.

As set out in the White Paper on Enterprise, a well-functioning regulatory environment is an essential condition, underpinning a competitive and productive economy. Ireland has long been considered a conducive environment for enterprise to develop and grow and we continue to perform well across a range of indicators for the business and regulatory environment. This is reflected in the 2023 IMD World Competitiveness Booklet which ranked Ireland 3rd in the world for both government and business efficiency as well as business regulation.

In 2023 the Department continued to develop and implement legislation to enhance Ireland's business regulatory environment and attractiveness as a location which facilitates enterprise and entrepreneurship, while also providing appropriate safeguards for stakeholders. The Department proactively engaged at EU institutional level and with our EU partners to achieve regulatory outcomes that are supportive, in particular, of the enterprise, competitiveness, single market and innovation agendas.

State Aid.

The EU State Aid Legal Framework is a comprehensive set of rules designed to minimise the negative impact of public subsidies on trade and competition while still allowing certain subsidies in support of economic development. During 2023 the Department engaged with the European Commission and other Member States in the ongoing development of the Framework to ensure that Ireland's interests are represented in the development of State Aid rules.

The EU State Aid legal framework is evolving, driven by the Commission's State Aid Modernisation (SAM) Programme. In 2023, the SAM Programme focused on developing new rules relating to aid for the green and digital transition; with the final adoption of a targeted amendment to the General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER), following two years of negotiations. The Department coordinated the Irish response over the two-year negotiation period on the amendment which will further facilitate, simplify, and speed up support for the EU's green and digital transitions. The Department further represented Ireland in negotiations on the revision of both the general de minimis and Services of General Economic Interest (SGEI) de minimis regulations of the SAM Programme in 2023.

In March 2023, the Temporary Crisis Framework (TCF) was expanded in scope and became the Temporary Crisis and Transition Framework (TCTF), following the Commission's Communication on A Green Deal Industrial Plan for the Net-Zero Age, and in response to the US Inflation Reduction Act. Ireland collaborated with several like-minded Member States in issuing a Joint Statement urging caution regarding the possible impact on competitiveness of further increasing the flexibility of State Aid rules on the level playing field in the single market. In addition, the period of application for certain measures under the TCTF was extended until 30 June 2024. This allowed the Department to prolong the applicability of the measures covered by the Ukraine Enterprise Crisis Scheme and the Microelectronics Manufacturers scheme, respectively, until mid-2024.

The Department made a significant contribution to the SAM Programme in 2023 by submitting a Position Paper, supported by other Member States which seeks to amend the definition of an Undertaking in Difficulty in the context of the upcoming revision of the Rescue and Restructuring Guidelines and the wider State Aid Modernisation programme. This would correct an anomaly whereby early-stage innovative businesses can inadvertently fall within the technical definition of an undertaking in difficulty and are thereby barred from State Aid programmes.

The Department secured agreement from the Commission to examine and revise the rules pertaining to aid for businesses in difficulty which affects eligibility for State Aid across all schemes and is of significance for supporting innovative start-ups. The Rescue and Restructuring Guidelines are being extended for two years to facilitate this. The Department is also the national point of contact at EU level on State Aid policy and works with officials across the public service to ensure compliance with State Aid rules. In 2023, the Department engaged with 160 officials from across 27 public bodies

Company Law Review Group.

The [Company Law Review Group](#) (CLRG) is the statutory expert advisory group under the Companies Act 2014 charged with advising the Minister on company law. Secretariat to the group is provided by the Department. The CLRG held its 100th Plenary Meeting in 2023. During 2023 the CLRG continued to implement the 2022-2024 Work Programme. In December 2023 the Group submitted two reports; a [Report on the Review of Parts 17, 23, and 24 of the Companies Act](#), and a [Report on a Review of Directors' Compliance Statements under the Companies Act](#). The CLRG's Corporate Insolvency Committee also provided ongoing technical assistance to the Department in negotiations at an EU Working Party level on the proposal for a Directive on harmonising certain aspects of substantive law on insolvency proceedings.

Legislative Developments.

Control of Exports Act 2023.

The *Control of Exports Act 2023* was signed into law in October 2023 reinforcing Ireland's commitment to effective export controls. It repeals and replaces the *Control of Exports Act 2008* and provides for control of the export of items that can be used for civil or military purposes and for control of the provision of brokering services of technical assistance in respect of, or control of transit of, those items. The Act will ensure that Ireland continues to operate a robust framework for regulating the export of controlled items, principally dual-use and military items.

Competition (Amendment) Act 2022.

The *Competition (Amendment) Act 2022* was commenced in September 2023. For the first time in Irish law, breaches of competition law can be enforced through administrative actions taken by competition authorities, with maximum fines of up to €10 million or 10% of total worldwide turnover, whichever is the greater. In addition to the introduction of administrative fines, the Act also introduces increased fines for breaches of competition law, new leniency provisions, an express provision against bid-rigging, and additional powers in the areas of mergers and surveillance powers.

The Act aligns competition policy across the EU, enabling greater cooperation between competition authorities and allows for the challenging of

illegal practices across borders. It is underpinned by secondary legislation, namely the *Competition Act 2002* (Adjudication Officers) Regulations, to ensure its effective application. The Act provides for the reform of competition enforcement including the transposition of the ECN+ Directive. To ensure a coherent approach to competition law, the Act puts in place a single regime for breaches of both EU and national law.

Representative Actions for the Protection of Collective Interests of Consumers Act, 2023.

The Department progressed the Representative Actions for the *Protection of Collective Interests of Consumers Act, 2023* through the Oireachtas and it was signed into law in July 2023. The Act allows consumers to seek collective redress or remedy for an alleged infringement of their consumer rights by traders.

It is the first legislation of its type in Ireland. It allows for an organisation that has been designated as Qualified Entity (QE) to take an action before the High Court, on behalf of a group of consumers whose consumer rights, as listed in the Act, have been breached, either here in Ireland or in other Member States, by unlawful practices by traders. The Act aims to protect the collective interests of consumers across many areas, like data protection, financial services, travel and tourism, energy and telecommunications, environment, life sciences, healthcare, and aviation. The Act applies to both domestic and cross-border infringements.

Companies (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Covid-19) Act 2020.

The Companies (Miscellaneous Provisions) (COVID-19) Act 2020, was signed into law in 2020, making temporary amendments to the Companies Act 2014 and the Industrial and Providence Societies Act 1893, to address issues arising because of COVID-19. It ensures that 240,000 companies and 950 industrial and provident societies in Ireland can hold their Annual general meetings and general meetings by electronic means. It also made provision in respect of business solvency by increasing the period of examinership to 150 days and increasing the threshold at which a company is deemed unable to pay its debts to €50,000. The amendments applied for an interim period, initially up to 31 December 2020.

In December 2023 the Government approved the sixth extension of the temporary provision pertaining to virtual meetings up to 31 December 2024. The further extension of this provision provides certainty for companies and co-operatives. It will allow companies and co-operatives to continue to comply with their legal obligations and allow members to hold directors accountable. This extension will provide for consistency into 2024, when Minister Calleary intends to bring forward permanent legislative provisions in relation to virtual and hybrid meetings.

Co-operative Societies Bill 2022.

The General Scheme of the Co-operative Societies Bill was published in November 2022 and introduces a modern legal framework which will place the co-operative model on a more favourable clear legal basis, thereby creating a level playing field with companies and encouraging consideration of the co-operative model as an attractive formation option for entrepreneurs and for social and community activities. The Joint Oireachtas Committee on Enterprise, Trade and Employment completed pre-legislative scrutiny of the proposed legislation in early 2023 and published its report in May 2023. Drafting of the Bill commenced in March 2023 and was ongoing at year end.

EU Directives / Regulations.

Digital Services Act (DSA).

The Digital Services Act (DSA) (Regulation (EU) 2022/2065) entered into force in November 2022 and will fully apply from February 2024. The DSA establishes a pioneering regulatory framework to protect EU users of digital services and their fundamental rights online. It aims to rebalance the responsibilities of users, online platforms, and public authorities according to European values, placing citizens at the centre.

Throughout 2023, the Department led on the preparations for the implementation of the DSA in Ireland. The Digital Services Bill 2023 was published in December 2023. The Bill will designate Coimisiún na Meán as the Digital Services Coordinator and lead competent authority for the EU Regulation and designate the CCPC as a second competent authority, with specific responsibility for online marketplaces. It will also provide the authorities with the necessary powers for supervision and enforcement of the DSA. It is intended that the Bill will be commenced in February 2024. The Department also provided significant additional resources to the authorities to support their new responsibilities, with €2.7 million allocated in 2023 to specifically support the establishment of the Digital Services function within Coimisiún na Meán, in preparation for this legislation and an additional €6 million provided for 2024 to complete preparations and capacity building for the Digital Services function and to support initial operations.

Digital Markets Act (DMA).

The Digital Markets Act (DMA) (Regulation (EU) 2022/1925) entered into force in November 2022 and will apply fully from March 2024. It introduces harmonised rules for platforms that act as “gatekeepers” by controlling core platform services in the EU’s market for digital services. It will regulate certain practices by the gatekeepers to promote competition and fairness in the EU’s digital market. Six businesses were designated as gatekeepers in relation to 22 core platform services by the European Commission in September 2023.

The Department engaged with stakeholders in 2023 to prepare for the full implementation of the DMA in Ireland. It enacted secondary legislation in July to provide for the amendments to Directive (EU) 2019/1937, the “Whistleblower Protection Directive”, to apply to the reporting of breaches of the DMA and the protection of persons reporting such breaches. While DMA will be enforced by the European Commission, it may call upon Member States to support its enforcement and the Department drafted secondary legislation to provide for this support. This legislation was enacted in time for March 2024 commencement.

The EU Chips Act.

The EU Chips Act aims to strengthen the European semiconductor ecosystem, to increase the EU’s security of supply of semiconductors and to develop new markets for cutting-edge European technologies.

The Department played an active role in negotiating the Chips Act, which entered into force in September 2023. In addition, the Department worked closely with stakeholders to secure a better understanding of a complex supply chain, looking to support robust and reliable supply chains, skills availability, and open market access. The work helped determine how Ireland can best leverage the potential of the Act for increased research and manufacturing investment in Ireland.

The Department has commenced development of a national strategy for the development of the sector and in support of the opportunities presented by the EU Chips Act. It is anticipated that this strategy will be published in 2024.

Data Act.

The EU published its proposal for the Data Act Regulation in February 2022 as a key pillar of the EU’s Data Strategy. The Data Act, together with the previously agreed EU Data Governance Act initiatives are intended to unlock the economic and societal potential of data and technologies, creating a coordinated approach to using data across sectors and clarifies who can create value from data and under which conditions. Regulation (EU) 2023/2854 (Data Act) was published in the Official Journal of the European Union in December 2023. The Data Act is expected to come into force in early 2024 and will be applicable from September 2025. The Department is working on national transposition to ensure EU requirements are met and that the regulatory authorities and powers for their enforcement obligations are in place by the date it enters into application in September 2025.

EU Patent Package.

In April 2023 the European Commission published proposed new rules to improve the protection of intellectual property (IP) in Europe, covering patents relating to industry standards, compulsory licensing of patents in crisis situations, and the revision of the legislation on supplementary protection certificates. We completed public consultations on the proposed regulations regarding Standard Essential Patents and Supplementary Protection Certificates and continues to represent Ireland’s position at Council working parties, as each proposal moves towards the negotiations of a General Approach.

Consultation on Article 15 of the EU Copyright Directive 2019/790.

In December 2023, we published a consultation seeking views from stakeholders on the implementation of Article 15 – Protection of press publications concerning online uses - of the EU Directive on Copyright in the Digital Single Market 2019/790. The Directive was transposed into Irish law by way of the European Union (Copyright and Related Rights in the Digital Single Market) Regulations 2021, S.I. No. 567 of 2021. This consultation relates to Recommendation 6-9 of the Future of Media Commission Report 2022. A report on the outcome of the consultation will be published by the Department in 2024.

Transposition of Directive on Public Country-by-Country Reporting of Tax Information.

The EU (Disclosure of Income Tax Information by Certain Undertakings and Branches) Regulations 2023 (S.I. 322 of 2023) gave effect to Directive (EU) 2021/2101 amending Directive 2013/34/EU, in June 2023.

The Regulations require EU based multinationals and standalone entities with consolidated revenue exceeding €750 million for each of the last two consecutive financial years to publish corporate tax information separately for each Member State and each third country on the EU list of non-cooperative jurisdictions and an aggregate figure for all other third countries. Application of the Regulations begins the first financial year on or after 22 June 2024, with 2025 the first potential year for reporting, to be published in 2026.

Transposition of Mobility Directive as Regards Cross-Border Conversions, Mergers and Divisions.

The EU (Cross-Border Conversions, Mergers and Divisions) Regulations 2023 (S.I. 233 of 2023) gave effect to Directive (EU) 2019/2121 amending Directive (EU) 2017/1132, came into effect in May 2023. The Regulations provide for new procedural rules for cross-border mergers and introduce harmonised rules and legal certainty for companies seeking to engage in cross-border conversions and divisions. The Regulations are intended to reduce the administrative cost for companies, whilst providing appropriate safeguards for the public including employees, creditors, and minority shareholders.

Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive.

The EU Directive (EU) 2022/2464, amending the Audit Regulation (EU) No 537/2014, Transparency Directive 2004/109/ EC, Audit Directive 2006/43/EC, and Accounting Directive 2013/34/EU was adopted in December 2022. An objective of one of the European Green Deal's actions it aims to significantly enhance the disclosure by companies on environmental, social, human rights and governance matters.

Companies in scope include all large companies and large public interest entities (banks, insurance undertakings, listed companies on a main market in the EU) and listed SMEs (except listed micro-enterprises). Companies will report annually in their director's report according to mandatory standards entitled European Sustainability Reporting Standards (ESRS). Transposition is due on 6 July 2024.

We launched a public consultation on implementation of the Directive in January 2023, with the proposed policy response to the public consultation published in July 2023. As part of our ongoing engagement with stakeholders on the Directive, Minister Calleary also hosted a webinar in July to provide enterprises with an update on the Directive and its transposition into Irish law, including policy options arising from the public consultation.

Proposal for EU Directive on Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence (CSDD).

This proposal intends to create legally binding obligations on companies to address potential adverse environmental and human rights impacts arising from their own operations, their subsidiaries' operations, and their chain of activities. Following trilogue negotiations at EU level in the latter part of 2023, a provisional agreement was reached on this file in December 2023. Subject to further technical work, it is expected that the Directive will be finalised in the early part of 2024. Subject to formal endorsement at EU level by Council & the European Parliament, it is expected that thereafter, Member States will have two years to transpose the CSDD.

Proposal for EU Directive on Upgrading Digital Company Law (UDCL).

This proposal builds on an earlier Directive (the "Digitalisation Directive") and aims to further EU digitalisation efforts in the area of company law. It aims to enhance transparency about companies and connectivity between Member State public administrations, while reducing administrative burden for companies and other stakeholders in cross-border situations. Examination of the proposal at EU working party level commenced in April 2023 and was ongoing at year end.

Regulations Providing for the Elimination of Paper- Based Certificates of Title in Securities Transactions and a Move to Electronic Book-Entry.

The European Union (Dematerialised Securities) Regulations 2023 enacted a number of amendments to the Companies Act 2014 to strengthen the legal position of dematerialised securities, in line with the Central Securities Depository Regulation (Regulation (EU) No 909/2014). Dematerialisation provides for the elimination of paper-based certificates of title in securities transactions and a move to electronic book-entry. Dematerialisation of all newly issued applicable securities are required from 1 January 2023 and for all other applicable securities from 1 January 2025.

Proposal for EU Directive harmonising certain aspects of Insolvency Law.

The Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council harmonising certain aspects of insolvency law (2022/0408) was published in December 2022. The aim of this Proposal is to harmonise insolvency rules, with the primary objective of making them more efficient and effective with a view to facilitating more cross border investment. It forms part of the wider EU Capital Markets Union initiative which is designed to further financial and economic integration across the EU. In 2023, we carried out a public consultation on the proposal seeking the views of stakeholders in preparation for negotiations. We are also working with the Departments of Justice and Finance to review the Proposal and prepare for negotiations which took place throughout the year, and which will continue into 2024.

Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on Multiple-Vote Share Structures in Companies that Seek the Admission to Trading of Their Shares on a SME Growth Market.

The proposal for a Directive on Multiple – Vote Share Structures in Companies that seek Admission to Trading of their Shares on a SME Growth Market is part of the Commission's Listing Act package, a set of measures designed to simplify and improve listing rules, in particular for SMEs, without jeopardising investor protection and market integrity. In 2023, negotiations proceeded throughout the year and a Directive is expected to be agreed in 2024.

EU Industrial Design Reform Package.

Following the publication of the European Commission's reform package on industrial design protection, consisting of a Directive and a Regulation amending existing EU legislation on industrial designs to modernise and provide greater harmonisation of Member States laws and procedures by streamlining the EU unitary design right. We actively engaged with the negotiations on the reform package at EU Council working party meetings throughout 2023 and a Council General Approach was agreed in September 2023.

Regulation on Geographical Indication Protection for Craft and Industrial Products (EU) 2023/2411.

The Regulation on Geographical Indication Protection for Craft and Industrial Products entered into force in November 2023, providing for a harmonised regulatory framework for geographical indication protection for craft and industrial products at EU level that will incentivise the production of quality authentic craft and industrial

products (CIs). The Department actively engaged with the negotiations on the Regulation throughout 2023, representing Ireland's position at EU Council working parties and we will progress implementation of the Regulation in 2024.

A Regulation to Replace the Late Payments Directive.

In September 2023 the European Commission presented a proposal for a Regulation on combating late payment in commercial transactions which would replace Directive 2011/7/EC. The proposed regulation will make significant changes to current rules.

We completed a Public Consultation and initiated an extensive stakeholder engagement process to inform negotiations at EU level. In tandem, we initiated work to improve implementation and awareness of current Prompt Payments rules.

EU Pharmaceutical Legislation.

On 26 April 2023 the European Commission published a proposal to revise and replace the existing general pharmaceutical legislation. The EU Pharmaceutical legislative package proposes a suite of measures with the purpose of assuring the quality and safety of medicines and ensuring their availability to health services across the EU. The Department is a member of the Pharmaceutical Strategy Working Group established by the Minister for Health to inform the national consideration of this proposal. During 2023, we engaged with stakeholders, EU colleagues and colleagues in the Department of Health to examine the proposal and analyse the impact of the proposed measure for the Irish pharmaceutical sector and this work will continue in 2024.

National Standards Authority of Ireland & MedTech.

In the MedTech sector, [NSAI](#) achieved designation in February 2023 under the In Vitro Diagnostic Medical Devices Regulation (EU) 2017/746, making it one of only ten Notified Bodies in Europe. As a result, NSAI can conduct conformity assessments under the In Vitro Diagnostic Regulation (IVDR) and grant CE marked certificates to medical device manufacturers, enabling them to access the European market.

Corporate Enforcement Authority (CEA).

The [CEA](#) was established in July 2022 under the Companies (Corporate Enforcement Authority) Act 2021 and derives its mandate principally from the Companies Act 2014. In the 18 months since establishment the CEA has firmly positioned itself as a highly knowledgeable, professional, and ambitious organisation. Minister Calleary provided the opening address at the Authority's inaugural conference in October 2023.

The Department continues to work closely with the CEA to ensure it has the appropriate legislative tools necessary to undertake modern, complex corporate law enforcement and deliver on its statutory objectives. New powers and other enhancements for the CEA are being actively considered by the Department for inclusion in a forthcoming Companies (Corporate Governance, Enforcement and Regulatory Provisions) Bill. The Department's focus on the Bill is to deliver practical, pro-enterprise reforms.

Resourcing levels for the CEA are kept under constant review. In 2023 the Department increased the budget and sanctioned additional staff for the CEA. The CEA secured its own recruitment licence in 2023, and significant progress in hiring staff was made in the latter half of the year. The Authority's budget for

2023 was €9,706 million, a budget uplift of 25% over its 2022 allocation. Budget 2024 included a commitment to provide an additional €1.2 million to the CEA, a 12% increase over 2023 bringing its budget to €10,906 million, and signals Government's continued commitment to ensuring the CEA has the requisite resources required to deliver on its statutory objectives.

Injuries Resolution Board.

The Programme for Government contained a commitment to enhance and reform the role of the Personal Injuries Assessment Board to increase the number of personal injury claims resolved through the agency's process and remove the need for costly and time-consuming litigation.

To meet this commitment the Personal Injuries Resolution Board Act 2022, was signed into law in December 2022 and commenced over three phases during 2023. The Act provides for the establishment of an [Injuries Resolution Board](#) to:

- Expand the types of cases it can assess, such as psychological injuries.
- Enhance its ability to carry out research and analysis to better inform stakeholders.
- Strengthen the Board's powers to combat fraud.
- Introduce mediation as a new service.

The final phase of commencement of the Act saw the introduction of mediation as a new service offered by the Board for the resolution of personal injury claims. Mediation has been introduced for employer liability injury claims and will be introduced for all other claims during 2024. The agency was renamed as the Injuries Resolution Board with effect from December 2023.

Throughout 2023 the Board's model continued to deliver major benefits by providing a low-cost, quick, and fair option in injury compensation, with

circa 20,000 injury claim applications received during the year. By facilitating the resolution of injury claims in a quick and less costly fashion the work of the agency impacts favourably on the cost of insurance premiums.

Preparations for a Referendum on the Unified Patent Court.

Ireland's participation in the Unified Patent Court requires a referendum to enable the transfer of jurisdictional powers from Irish Courts to a new International Court. In 2023 the Department advanced its preparations for a referendum and reconvened the Inter-Departmental Committee to facilitate information sharing, ensure cross Department cohesion in the development of a proposal and to make preliminary preparations in the event of the Referendum being passed.

The Inter-Departmental Committee is comprised of the Department of Justice, the Courts Service, Attorney General's Office and Department of the Taoiseach with the addition of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage given its role in the planning stages for a referendum and the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science with remit over the 3rd and 4th level research and education system, which uses patent protections.

During the latter half of the year, significant dialogue took place with colleagues across the Committee to progress the drafting of the constitutional amendment Bill on the Agreement of the Unified Patent Court. A Date for the Referendum will be decided by Government.



Strategic Goal 5:

Deepen and extend Ireland's global business and trade in a responsible, fair and sustainable manner supportive of high living standards and grow further the all-island economy.

Trade and Investment Strategy.

The Government's Trade and Investment Strategy 2022-2026: [Value for Ireland, Values for the World](#) sets out a principled and holistic approach to trade policy, the goal of which is to see Ireland grow sustainably, diversify export markets, address climate issues, and provide for Ireland's continued economic wellbeing. The Department provides the secretariat to the Trade and Investment Council which brings together Ministers whose responsibilities relate to the promotion of Trade and Investment, the heads of relevant state agencies, and representatives from industry bodies to support the implementation of this strategy. In 2023 progress was made under the following priority actions:

- *Review and Refresh the Local Market Teams* – Following the completion of the review in 2022, implementation began in 2023 including a first meeting of the new Headquarters Market Team (HQMT) in May with a follow-on session taking place in September. The HQMT provides a platform for Team Ireland to share information and ensure that opportunities to coordinate and collaborate are maximised.
- *Positioning Ireland within Global Value Chains (GVCs) and Supply Chains* – The GVC expert working group met throughout 2023 to identify key GVCs, conduct mapping and risk assessment, and identify action responses. It is due to report in early 2024.
- *Communicating Ireland's Interests as a Trading Nation* – A new communications and engagement approach for the Department and for Team Ireland was agreed by the Trade and Investment Council in September 2023. Developments include more strategic use of social media platforms to highlight trade and investment activities, and, going forward a special focus will be placed on promoting trade to learners at all stages.
- *Maximising Ireland's return from EU Trade Agreements* – The first Trade Horizons conference was hosted in July 2023 with a broad range of national and international speakers highlighting the benefits of open, rules-based global trade, and particularly the benefits to businesses of availing of the EU's extensive network of FTAs.
- *Team Ireland Trade Mission Week* – The inaugural Taoiseach-led Team Ireland Trade Mission Week took place in South Korea in October / November 2023. The event was regarded as highly successful in its objectives of promoting Ireland's visibility and presence in this important market, and cemented excellent relationships at both political, business, diplomatic and economic levels. A Joint Economic Commission between Irish and South Korean senior officials also took place as part of this visit.
- *Reaping the Benefits of the EU Single Market* – The implementation of the Strategy continues to support Ireland in realising its trade and investment goals, in increasing exports sustainably, deepening and extending trade relationships, growing employment and overall, in the reinforcement of our economy.

Trade Promotion.

Each year, the Department works closely with its agencies, Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland, on a programme of Minister-led trade and investment promotion missions. In 2023, trade missions were held with the UAE, Copenhagen, Warsaw and Prague, France and Germany, and Canada, as well as a number of trade missions to the US (West Coast; East Coast; Mid-West and South regions). These missions supported Enterprise Ireland client companies to scale in key markets and further developed trade relationships with current and prospective IDA client companies. During these missions, meetings took place with some of the largest and most dynamic companies in areas such as internationally traded services, fintech, high tech construction, global business services, engineering and life-sciences. Valuable contracts were signed, and participating companies had an opportunity to showcase their products and services.

Joint Economic Commission.

Alongside the Team Ireland Trade Mission Week in October/November, the Department co-chaired a meeting of the Ireland-Korea Joint Economic Commission in South Korea. Discussions revolved around strengthening cooperation and growing the trade, economic, diplomatic and education relationships between Ireland and South Korea. South Korea is the world's 12th largest economy and the 4th largest economy in Asia. Trade between Ireland and South Korea reached a record value of over €6 billion in 2022.

International Trade Relations.

The Department plays a leading part in responding to the global economic challenges currently faced by Ireland. In doing so the Department works to ensure that Ireland is well placed to engage with the international community actively and visibly, and in doing so ensure that we can effectively promote and protect our strategic national interests.

The Department, has accordingly, invested in its overseas presence by appointing senior officials to the Irish Embassies in a number of key markets overseas, including the UK, the US and China. The presence of these officials in-market enables the Department to strengthen existing relationships and forge new partnerships with countries of strategic importance to Ireland's trade and investment performance.

Ireland-UK Trade Relations.

Cumulatively, over 30 formal Ministerial visits were facilitated by the Embassy in London in 2023, with an average duration of 2.5 days. Many of these visits were focussed on trade and investment promotion or included a trade outreach component in the programme. Much of this activity was coordinated through the UK Local Market Team, with the Department responsible for leading and working together with the enterprise agencies to maximise opportunities for Irish business in the UK market.

The Department and its agencies have continued to support businesses in the post-Brexit trading environment, providing financial supports as well as advice. Irish exports to the UK have proven very resilient, with the enterprise agencies reporting net increases in 2023. The UK is Ireland's second largest trading partner (after the US) and Ireland is the UK's fourth largest export market – ahead of both China and France. The UK remains the go-to market for food and drinks companies and this is borne out

by a 4% increase in volume over the last four years, despite the negative impact of Covid and Brexit.

The Windsor Framework has paved the way for a new trade relationship between the UK and the EU, and between the UK and Ireland. The Framework protects the all-island economy, one of the many dividends of the peace process and provides the opportunity for it to continue to support economic growth, jobs and prosperity across the island. The Department continues to work with colleagues across Government to help to address matters arising from Brexit, including on the Windsor Framework and the UK's new Border Target Operating Model which sets out its new model for importing goods to the UK from inside and outside the EU, including Ireland.

InterTradeIreland.

InterTradeIreland (ITI) is responsible for the promotion of trade and business on an all-island and cross-border basis. The Department's funding for ITI in 2023 was more than €11.5 million. During the year the Agency sought new opportunities for North South trade, supported development of clusters and networks across the island, and continued to help cross border traders to adapt to the post-Brexit trading environment.

A key highlight of ITI's 2023 outputs was the launch of its new Cross-Border Trade Hub. The Hub builds on the success of ITI's previous Brexit Advisory Service and delivers support to businesses based in Ireland and Northern Ireland who need information to help them establish and grow their cross-border export journey and navigate areas of trade. It will play an important role in helping businesses across the island maximise cross-border opportunities and help them navigate the areas of trade post-Brexit to establish and grow exports.

Shared Island.

The Shared Island initiative aims to utilise the Good Friday Agreement to improve cooperation, connection, and mutual understanding on the island of Ireland. The initiative involves working with the Northern Ireland Executive and the British Government to address strategic challenges faced on the island, by further developing the all-island economy, and investing in the Northwest and border regions. The Shared Island Unit (SIU) in the Department of the Taoiseach acts as a driver and coordinator of this whole-of-Government initiative. We continued to work closely with the SIU over the course of 2023 to explore opportunities to support the all-island economy.

NSAI & UK Trade.

In April, NSAI Certification UK Ltd, a subsidiary of the NSAI, achieved accreditation from UKAS, the UK Accreditation Service, under the UK Construction Products Regulation. The subsidiary was set up to facilitate trade between businesses in Ireland and Great Britain, post-Brexit, by helping Irish companies achieve UKCA marking. This allows exporters in Ireland to place, or to continue to place, products on the marketplace in England, Scotland, and Wales. Minister Richmond announced that a manufacturer in Limerick became the first Irish company to achieve the UKCA mark from NSAI Certification UK. In November, NSAI Certification UK Ltd co-hosted a webinar with the British Embassy and the UK Department for Business and Trade, called: *Understanding UKCA, UKNI, and CE Marking*. This was organised to help businesses understand the main product markings required for trading in EU and UK, post-Brexit.

Ireland-US Trade Relations.

The Ireland-US trade and investment relationship continued to thrive, despite ongoing challenges in the global economy. Almost 1,000 Irish-owned companies are exporting to the US, employing just under 100,000 people; and in parallel, almost 1,000 US companies have operations in Ireland, providing direct employment of almost 210,000 and indirect employment of 168,000 in 2022.

Ireland's Embassy in Washington DC facilitates and supports existing business connections and helps foster new ones. High-level visits by Government representatives as well as trade and economic missions, offer opportunities to reinforce and expand these enormously important ties.

The Taoiseach's St Patrick's Day programme in DC included a strong economic dimension, with a number of business events including a roundtable discussion focussed on 'Transformative Technologies'. The Taoiseach also delivered a keynote address at the US Chamber of Commerce, underlining the importance of the two-way trade and investment relationship, and Ireland's role as a gateway to the EU for US companies. Embassy DC also facilitated the visit of Minister McGrath, Minister Donohoe, and European Commissioner McGuinness to Washington for a week-long programme of IMF - World Bank Spring Meetings. The embassy also facilitated the visit to DC of the Irish business delegation to the Select USA Summit. This US Commerce Department programme aims to facilitate job-creating business investment into the United States.

Through the US Local Market Team, Embassy DC also coordinates Ireland's market activities and pursues opportunities for information sharing and planning. Throughout 2023, the Embassy hosted several business breakfasts and dinners for representatives of US companies with operations in Ireland.

EU-US Trade Relations.

In 2023, Ireland continued to advocate at EU level for closer cooperation on trade issues with the US, our largest trading partner. The fourth EU-US Trade and Technology Council held in Lulea, Sweden in May 2023, saw the parties commit to advance transatlantic cooperation on emerging technologies, sustainable trade, economic security and prosperity, secure connectivity and human rights in the digital environment. Both parties also reaffirmed their unwavering commitment to support Ukraine.

An EU-US summit was held in Washington DC in October 2023. At the end of the summit, the leaders adopted a joint statement, which includes a roadmap to underpin and further strengthen the trans-Atlantic relationship for years to come. Among the trade policy issues considered were addressing distortive non-market economic practices, reducing supply chain vulnerabilities and strengthening transatlantic supply chains.

Work is continuing on reaching an agreement on Global Steel Sustainability, and a Critical Minerals Agreement to allow EU firms better access to the supports available under the US Inflation Reduction Act.

Ireland-China Trade Relations.

In early 2023, having recently abandoned its strict zero-covid policy, China began to open for foreign travel again. One of the first official visits to China was Minister Eamon Ryan for St Patrick's Day. Throughout the year a number of high-profile visits on both sides took place, including the Tánaiste's visit to China in November 2023.

As face-to-face meetings were again possible, regular meetings with the central government reconvened. As part of the Department's Team Ireland activities via our embassy in Beijing, officials met with the Ministries of Commerce, Education and the National Development and Reform Commission and China Council for the Promotion of International Trade.

Officials also attended a number of trade expos during the year, the major ones being the Consumer Goods Fair in Hainan, the Hi-Cool tech expo and CIFTIS Services expos in Beijing, the GreenTech Expo in Wuxi and CIIE in Shanghai.

Foreign Affairs Council (Trade).

There was a total of four meetings of the Foreign Affairs Council (Trade Formation) in 2023 with meetings of Trade Ministers, including Minister Coveney, in Stockholm, Valencia and Brussels.

The meetings included strategic discussions on the EU's trade policy contribution to EU competitiveness, EU-US trade relations, EU-China trade relations, how trade policy can contribute to the Union's economic security, preparations for the Ministerial Conference of the WTO in Abu Dhabi (in spring 2024) and continuing economic support for Ukraine. Ministers were also provided with updates on various Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations over the course of 2023.

Free Trade Agreement Negotiations.

Following the conclusion of negotiations with **New Zealand** in 2022, the European Council and Parliament adopted respective decisions in 2023 to ratify the EU-New Zealand FTA. This process clears the path for entry into force of the agreement once New Zealand completes its own legal procedures, anticipated for early 2024. Once in place the FTA will liberalise and facilitate trade and investment, as well as promote a closer economic relationship, which will open significant economic opportunities for companies and consumers on both sides.

The **EU and India** are negotiating three agreements in parallel: a Free Trade Agreement; an Investment Protection Agreement; and an agreement on Geographical Indications. Initial market offers have been tabled by both sides with further discussions required to ensure that a fair and balanced agreement can be reached. The first ministerial meeting of the EU-India Trade and Technology Council (TTC) was convened in May 2023. The TTC is a key forum to deepen the strategic partnership and dialogue on trade and technology between the EU and India.

Following its political conclusion in 2022, the **EU and Chile** signed an Advanced Framework Agreement and an Interim Trade Agreement on the 13 December 2023 which will see 99.9% of EU exports entering Chile without duties. The agreements will strengthen political cooperation between the EU and Chile, will modernise the trade and investment relationship, make it easier for Irish SMEs to trade with Chile and will help EU companies to gain better access to Chile's public procurement market. This agreement also provides geographical indication protection to over 200 traditional EU food and drink products including Irish Whiskey and Irish Cream Liqueur.

The **EU and Kenya** signed an Economic Partnership Agreement on 18 December 2023, which will boost bilateral trade in goods, increase investment flows, and contribute to sustainable economic growth. It is the most ambitious trade deal ever signed by the EU with a developing country when it comes to sustainability provisions such as climate and environmental protection, labour rights and gender equality. It will increase the opportunities for Irish SMEs to trade with Kenya, building on our existing ties to the country.

Negotiations on Free Trade Agreements with Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines and others are ongoing, in addition to the pursuit of digital trade agreements with existing FTA partners, including Singapore and South Korea, which will deliver on the digital trade agenda of the EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy.

Building on the Economic Partnership Agreement which entered into force in 2019 between the **EU and Japan**, both sides concluded a Cross-Border Data Flows agreement on 28 October 2023, to make doing business in the online world easier, less costly and more efficient. This deal will advance the digitalisation of both societies and economies in both partners, including Ireland where there is a strong technology and digital economy and increasing use of digital tools in society. Cross-border data flows are a crucial enabler to this development. They lay the foundation for a common approach on digital trade, sending a strong message against digital protectionism and arbitrary restrictions. They are also consistent with the EU digital agenda and EU privacy rules.

Trade and Sustainable Development.

The importance of sustainability in the trade agenda remained a significant area of focus for the Department during 2023. The June 2022 outcome of the European Commission's Review of the Trade and Sustainability (TSD) provisions of FTAs continues to be implemented in the ongoing programme of FTA negotiations. At the multilateral level Ireland welcomes and supports ongoing WTO environmental sustainability initiatives (including the Trade and Environmental Sustainability Structured Discussions, the Dialogue on Plastics Pollution and Environmentally Sustainable Plastics Trade, and the Fossil Fuel Subsidy Reform initiative), together with WTO work around trade and gender.

EU & International Engagement.

European Councils.

In 2023 the Minister and Ministers of State represented Ireland's interests at the EU Trade, Competitiveness and EPSCO Councils. During 2023 Minister Coveney and Minister Calleary represented Ireland's interests at the Competitiveness (Internal Market and Industry) Councils which considered a wide range of issues including the Single Market at 30 Communication, Open Strategic Autonomy and competitiveness in the context of the green transition. On the Net-Zero Industry Act, Council agreed the General Approach at the December 2023 Competitiveness Council. During 2023, Council also agreed General Approaches on the following:

- Directive concerning financial services contracts concluded at distance,
- Regulation on enhancing data-sharing in relation to the short-term rental sector,
- Regulation establishing a framework for setting ecodesign requirements for sustainable products,
- Directive on the legal protection of designs (recast),
- Regulation on Community designs,
- Regulation on type-approval of motor vehicles with respect to their emissions and battery durability (EURO 7).

EPSCO.

The Department co-ordinates Ireland's participation on the employment, equality and social policy elements of the EU's Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO). During 2023, Minister Richmond and the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth Roderic O'Gorman represented Ireland at meetings of EPSCO.

In line with the priorities of the Swedish and Spanish Presidencies of the Council of the European Union, EPSCO considered a wide range of issues which included promoting greater social justice, strengthening European unity and advancing the green transition, while ensuring a continued focus on the social and employment rights which promote a good working environment and enhancing social dialogue.

Given the cross-cutting nature of the issues involved, a number of other departments also provide inputs to the Council, and the Department remains closely engaged with colleagues across government in this regard.

Council of Europe.

The Department is the lead Department in relation to the Council of Europe's Revised European Social Charter which is an international treaty that guarantees a broad range of human rights related to employment, housing, health, education, social protection and welfare. The Department leads, coordinates and prepares Ireland's annual national reports under the Charter.

In 2023, the Department submitted Ireland's *Ad-hoc Report on the Cost-of-Living Crisis* as requested by the Council of Europe.

EU Single Market in Services.

Work continued in 2023 to ensure ongoing compliance with the Services Directive and to enhance Ireland's administrative capacity to implement, enforce and improve the Single Market in Services. The Department continued to manage a number of Single Market tools, including the Irish Point of Single Contact website and SOLVIT. SOLVIT is an informal problem-solving network, with centres in each EEA country, which works to assist citizens and businesses when they have been denied their Single Market rights.

We continued to represent Ireland on relevant Single Market issues at EU level and worked closely with the European Commission and other Member States to identify and remove barriers that remain in the Single Market, particularly through the programme of the Single Market Enforcement Taskforce, which was established by the European Commission to improve the functioning of the single market.

In addition, we continued to represent Ireland's position during negotiations on the European Commission's proposal for a Regulation Establishing A Single Market Emergency Instrument, which

was published in September 2022. The Regulation's objective is to ensure the smooth functioning of the Single Market in times of crisis.

EU Export Controls.

The Department is the Competent Authority for National and EU Export Controls in respect of a range of sensitive goods, principally dual-use items and defence-related equipment. Export Controls form part of a global framework designed to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, to preserve regional stability and to protect human rights. In 2022 the Department issued 879 export licences, authorising exports valued at €2.45 billion.

The Control of Exports Act 2023 was signed into law in October 2023 reinforcing Ireland's commitment to effective export controls.

In line with Ireland's obligations under the EU Investment Screening Regulation, the Department is the National Contact Point for cooperation with the European Commission, and with Member States of the EU on investment screening matters. In this capacity the Department reviewed 486 screening notifications received from other Member States.

The Screening of Third Country Transactions Act 2023 was signed into law in October 2023 and provides the Minister with powers to protect security or public order from hostile actors acquiring ownership of, or influence over, businesses and assets to harm the State. Implementation of this important new Departmental function will commence from mid-2024.

A new desk-based audit system was successfully trialled in 2023 and work has been ongoing on the enforcement module of the ICT project accompanying the Control of Exports Act 2023 which will lead to efficiencies. 2023 saw an

increase in the numbers of audits to 37, from 33 in 2022. Over 150 exporters participated in a "what to expect" webinar in May 2023.

EU Trade Sanctions.

Two sanctions packages against Russia's continued aggression against Ukraine were negotiated by the Department in relation to the trade elements of the packages. Details of the packages have been communicated through our website and with notifications on departmental social media. The Department has also participated in onsite outreach to public and private sectors in third countries with historical links to Russia including Turkey, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, to increase the detection of, and a reduction in, circumvention.

EU Trade Legislative Files.

Negotiations continued, in 2023, on a Commission Proposal for an updated Regulation for the EU's Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP) with the Department leading on the representation from Ireland in the Council discussions. The scheme offers easier access to the EU market for goods exported from developing countries by eliminating or reducing import tariffs unilaterally (i.e. on a non-reciprocal basis). Ireland actively supports the EU's GSP scheme as a fundamental development tool that substantially assists beneficiary countries. It is hoped that the new Regulation will be agreed in 2024.

The Union's Anti-Coercion Instrument (ACI) entered into force on 27 December 2023 and now provides the EU with a mechanism to deter and respond, if necessary, to acts of economic coercion by third countries. The instrument, as agreed by the EU 27, grants the European Commission a wide range of countermeasures if and when a third country seeks to unfairly influence the EU or its Member States from pursuing legitimate policy

objectives. Measures envisaged under the instrument include the imposition of tariffs, restrictions on trade in services and trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights, and restrictions on access to foreign direct investment and public procurement. Throughout the negotiations, the Department sought to ensure that Member States are adequately protected from any negative impact of EU countermeasures and that Member State opinions are taken into consideration before any EU response is exercised.

Autonomous Trade Measures (ATMs) for the Ukraine and Moldova, which were originally put in place in 2022, were extended in June 2023 for a further year. These measures help alleviate the difficult situation faced by producers and exporters in both the Ukraine and Moldova because of Russia's unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression. Ireland actively supported the implementation of these measures.

Responsible Business.

A range of new EU mandatory requirements on Irish businesses, designed to enhance sustainability, the circular economy and respect for human rights, are being dealt with collectively under the heading 'Responsible Business'.

The Responsible Business Forum, chaired by Minister Calleary, launched in September 2023 as a sub-group of the Enterprise Forum. This new roundtable is driving forward the engagement between policymakers and Departmental stakeholders in corporate sustainability measures being brought forward by the EU. A communications strategy, a new webpage and an internal contact group has been established to ensure a consistent approach and coherent overall messaging for this agenda. A well-received summer webinar brought a number of the measures under Responsible Business to the public's

attention. As one part of this broad agenda, the Department represents Ireland at EU negotiations on the proposal to prohibit products made with forced labour from the EU market. 2023 also saw a successful Technical Support Instrument application to the European Commission. Arising from this successful application, a new "Responsible Business Compass" will be developed to assist both businesses and policymakers to understand the impact of each of the various measures under this broad agenda, and how they will interact with each other.

Business and Human Rights.

The Department is working with the Department of Foreign Affairs on the development of a second National Plan on Business and Human Rights. A public consultation took place in autumn 2023 and the first round of stakeholder engagement took place in December 2023.

OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises (MNEs) on Responsible Business Conduct.

The OECD National Contact Point (which is part of the Department) for the Guidelines on Responsible Business Conduct has successfully concluded cases and published its findings. The National Contact Point continues to work with MNEs and civil society to progress complex and sensitive cases. Minister Coveney attended the OECD's first ever Ministerial meeting on Responsible Business Conduct in February 2023, which was followed by the publication of the updated OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprise on Responsible Business Conduct.

World Trade Organization (WTO).

The Department's teams in Dublin, Brussels and Geneva continued to engage intensively on matters relating to the World Trade Organization, which is of central importance as the custodian of rules-based, multilateral trade. In 2023, the WTO and its Members continued to prepare for the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC-13) taking place in Abu Dhabi in February 2024. WTO engagement includes ongoing discussions on WTO reform, including the restoration of a fully functioning Dispute Settlement Process which is a priority for Ireland and the EU; trade and health; food security; a second set of provisions on fisheries subsidies; e-commerce including an extension of the moratorium on customs duties; negotiations on environmentally sustainable trade in plastics; fossil fuel subsidy reform; and an intellectual property agreement (the TRIPS waiver) on therapeutics and diagnostics to assist developing countries.

In October 2023, the Department attended a Senior Officials Meeting to engage with other WTO members' priority areas with the aim of progressing issues in a wide range of areas in advance of MC-13.

International Labour Organisation.

The Department leads on Ireland's engagement with the International Labour Organisation (ILO), a specialist UN agency which deals with labour market issues. National positions on the ILO Governing Body and International Labour Conference agendas are coordinated through an Interdepartmental Group, which brings together Departments with policy responsibility for items on the ILO's wide-ranging agenda. A key feature of the work of the Group is the involvement of employer and employee representative organisations, to reflect the fact that the ILO is a tripartite organisation.

In 2023, the Department represented Ireland in an observer capacity at the ILO Governing Body sessions and led a tripartite delegation to the 111th International Labour Conference. The Department is responsible for the ratification of labour standards and reporting to the ILO on their application in Ireland.

Oireachtas Scrutiny.

In keeping with the Department's EU Oireachtas Scrutiny obligations, the Department informed the Oireachtas on 32 EU proposals across a range of policy issues, as well as meeting its obligation to submit two six-monthly reports on EU developments.



Strategic Goal 6:

Build an innovative and agile Department with a strong public service ethos driving effective and responsible policy implementation.

Context.

The White Paper on Enterprise sets out key priorities for the Department to support businesses adapt to climate and digital transformation which has also led to additional work priorities and extra demands on the staff of the Department. In 2023 the Department's Corporate Services Division continued to support delivery of our strategic goal of building an innovative and agile Department. This is achieved through HR and Learning & Development supports, finance, budget and accounting services, ICT supports, legal advice, internal and external communications, governance and management support services, and facilities (accommodation, health and safety procurement, records management).

Finance.

The Revised Estimates 2023 provided the Department with a gross allocation of €1.621.4 billion for use in 2023. This included significant non-core funding of €649.13 million to support the payment of grants under the Temporary Business Energy Support Scheme (TBESS). The Estimate also provided the Department with additional funding of €54.5 million from the carryover of unspent 2022 capital appropriations.

The funding provided to the Department in 2023 allowed us to support our Offices and Agencies and ensure that they were sufficiently resourced to carry out their mandates, deliver on our suite of enterprise development, innovation and regulation programmes, as well as supporting discrete measures such as TBESS, the Growth and Sustainability Loan Scheme, the Ukraine Credit Guarantee Loan Scheme and the establishment of the Digital Services Co-ordinator.

The Department had a Supplementary Estimate which was approved by the Dáil in December 2023. The Supplementary Estimate was technical in nature and involved the redistribution of €43.405 million in savings to meet priorities on a number of current and capital programmes.

The Department's 2022 Appropriation Account was published in the Comptroller Auditor General's Report and received a clear audit opinion.

Public Spending Review.

In September 2023, the Department published a review of the [Capital Expenditure in the Enterprise Sector](#) under the Public Spending Review 2023 process. This review thematically analysed the Capital Expenditure in Enterprise Sector examining changes at a programme level over the period 2013-2022, and whether these changes aligned with the national and departmental policy priorities. The outcomes of the analysis will help inform discussions on the alignment between Departmental enterprise policy – including implementation of the White Paper on Enterprise and the capital expenditure of the Department.

Quantifying Industrial Strategies.

The Department engaged with the OECD "Quantifying Industrial Strategies" project that aims at measuring industrial policy expenditures across OECD countries in terms of industrial policy expenditures, policy priorities, policy instruments and recipients. The project produced an analytical report and country notes that were published in June 2023.

People Strategy.

People Strategy 2021-2024.

In 2023, we continued to implement actions in line with the Department's [People Strategy](#). The three core goals of the People Strategy are: to be an Employer of Choice; to develop a Resilient Workforce that can withstand future changes and challenges; and to be an Inclusive Workplace that supports equality of opportunity for all staff.

Public Sector Duty.

Under the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act, 2014, all public bodies are statutorily obliged to have regard to human rights and equality issues in the performance of their functions. In this regard, the Department maintains a strong commitment to diversity, gender equality and the fair and equal treatment of all and a committed public service ethos of independence, integrity and impartiality.

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion.

In 2023, we secured 'Investors in Diversity – Silver' accreditation through the Irish Centre for Diversity. Investors in Diversity is Ireland's Diversity and Inclusion accreditation mark. Silver accreditation affirms that the organisation has been benchmarked against other bodies and has both embedded inclusive practices throughout the organisation and developed a sense of fairness and belonging among colleagues. Assessment for this accreditation involved analysis of our policies, procedures, and the views and experiences of staff. On foot of the assessment, two staff groups, including a volunteer group, were established to use its findings to develop the department's first ED&I Strategy, due for launch in early 2024. Part of this work included Departmental staff at the most senior levels undertaking 'Inclusive Leadership' training in 2023. In line with the

Government commitment to increase the percentage of people with a disability employed in the public sector to 6% by 2024, the Department has reached a level of 7%.

Review of Blended Working Policy.

A full evaluation of the Department's Blended Working policy was undertaken in 2023, including consultation with staff, review of best practices, and policies in other Civil Service Departments. The policy was re-published and re-communicated to staff from July 2023 onwards. Key elements of the revised policy were the retention of minimum two-day onsite attendance for eligible staff; the requirement for staff to give flexibility for business needs; all teams to be present for team and Divisional 'Anchor Days'; and all teams to develop a 'Team Charter' with the support of the HR team. A new section was also established to focus on cultivating the Department's strong and supportive culture in a blended environment.

Gender Pay Gap Reporting and Research.

The Gender Pay Gap Information Act 2021 Regulations require organisations with more than 250 employees to report on the hourly gender pay gap in their organisation across a range of metrics. In December 2023, the Department published its [second Gender Pay Gap report](#) based on data as of 24 June 2023.

The Department had 928 employees: 57% women and 43% men, at the time of reporting. The department's gender pay gap is 10.86%. The percentage of female employees within the upper remuneration quartile is 48.05%. In 2023, we committed to a number of actions such as using learning and career development initiatives to improve our approach to ED&I and undertaking qualitative research into female career progression in the Department. In

2023 this research included a series of interviews with female staff, and a staff-wide survey to understand the different drivers behind individuals' career development.

TY Work Experience Programme.

In 2023, we developed and published its first [Transition Year \(TY\) work experience policy](#) and launched a TY programme for 2023/2024. In November 2023, we hosted four students to take part in this programme, in partnership with the North-East Inner City (NEIC) TY work experience initiative.

Workforce Planning.

Numbers serving in the Department increased to 975.38 full-time equivalents at the end of 2023, an increase from 933.06 full-time equivalents at the end of 2022. Throughout 2023, natural attrition, additional resources and promotional opportunities accounted for a significant 'churn' of staff during the year with 142 New joiners, 108 Exits, including 27 retirements, 61 Internal transfers, and 86 promotions.

We continued to operate in a very tight labour market. In terms of recruitment in 2023, regular engagement with the Public Appointments Service (PAS) was undertaken to recruit general grades and some specialist posts. HR Unit managed talent pipeline challenges to support teams across the Department deliver critical and priority objectives.

The Department undertook formal workforce planning engagements with the Management Board on two separate occasions during 2023, which informed learning and development initiatives, organisation design and increased resources in areas where the department's mandate has grown (digital, climate and other areas).

We continued to support the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) during 2023 in response to Ireland's ongoing assistance for those impacted by the war in Ukraine. One staff member was permanently redeployed in 2023 and two staff remained on secondment in support of providing a valuable public service.

The HR team continues to work closely with the officials in the Department's Liaison Unit and Finance Unit, and with colleagues in the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform to ensure adequate support for staffing in its eight agencies and assignments to the State Boards under its aegis. Over 60 requests were processed in 2023 to deal with the filling of vacancies and establishment of new posts for State Agencies, while 2 PAS campaigns were undertaken to fill 18 vacancies arising on the State Boards under the Department's remit.

Learning and Career Development.

868 (90%) staff engaged with one of the 400 courses that were offered both internally and by OneLearning throughout 2023. Additionally, the in-house training offering continued to expand, providing 17 Information Sessions and 16 Lunch & Learn Sessions. Many of the sessions were recorded and made readily available to staff.

In 2023, we funded 38 staff who undertook 3rd level academic courses in 2023 across a range of disciplines aligned to the Department's strategic priorities such as Climate Change Policy, Legislative Drafting, Economic Policy, Business Administration, Human Resource Management and Governance. Our Mentoring Programme continued to act as a significant tool to support staff growth and development with a total of 76 people taking part and a total of 18 senior leaders participated in the Executive Coaching programme.

The Learning and Career Development offering culminated with the successful launch of our 'Enterprise Academy', a one-stop platform for learning and development that is supported and funded by the Department and through access to OneLearning. The aim of our Enterprise Academy is to encourage life-long learners and to make the experience of identifying required learning opportunities more accessible.

2023 saw a strong focus on adapting and improving the Department's Induction Programme, utilising technology to ensure that new joiners were provided with an opportunity to reference the suite of modules contained in the Induction Programme during onboarding and in ensuing months. The modules contain eLearning videos relevant to the work of our Department and our role as civil servants. The modules also include an in-person networking event to ensure connectedness and opportunity to build relationships with colleagues.

Sustainable Development Goals Engagements and Contributions.

Consistent with our commitment to contribute to progressing the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Department provided inputs on the SDG targets that it is leading on. The Department has also been involved in the promotion of the 2023 edition of the SDG Champion Programme and has provided inputs towards the draft of Ireland's second Voluntary National Review of the SDGs, which was presented to the UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in July 2023.

Communications.

Corporate Communications Unit, including Data Protection, FOI and Customer Service.

2023 was the Corporate Communications Unit's first full year serving both internal and external customers as the newly shaped team spanning Media Relations; Campaigns & Digital; FOI and Customer Services; Internal Communications; and Data Protection.

The Department delivered on the commitments made in relation to the provision of customer services under the Department's Customer Charter and Action Plan 2022-2024, ensuring services were fully accessible and personal information was protected. In 2023, the Department received and processed 285 Freedom of Information requests. In 2023, the Department and its Offices received 90 Subject Access Requests, and these were processed in accordance with the provisions of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Data Protection Acts 1988 to 2018. This represents an increase of almost 88% on the previous year.

The Department also ensured that commitments made in relation to the provision of services in the Irish language were delivered, while implementing the new provisions introduced under the Official Languages (Amendment) Act 2021.

The redesign of the Department's intranet homepage delivered useful and popular features and introduced a more vibrant news area and discussion forum. Over 370 news stories were published during the year providing a mix of social, wellbeing and business news and campaigns for staff.

External Communications.

Raising awareness and communicating the impacts of how the Department meets its strategic goals has been the primary mission for the Corporate Communications Unit during 2023. Over the past number of years, the Department has recognised the opportunity to communicate effectively with stakeholders through our digital offering, which is comprised of our website and two social media channels, [X](#) and [LinkedIn](#). The Department has also promoted messages through other social media channels and online in paid advertising campaigns.

The corporate [website](#) had 7.5 million page views during the year, with the most popular topics including employment permits, Building Better Business, the Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund, late payments and trade sanctions. The [Enterprise Newsletter](#) subscriber list increased by almost 1,150 to over 4,000 subscribers and during 2023 it moved from a monthly publication to providing subscribers with a round-up of news from the Department every two weeks.

The Department's LinkedIn page saw strong engagement, ending 2023 with almost 83,000 followers. The Department's X account (@DeptEnterprise) also grew with followers increasing by almost 1,500 to almost 34,000 followers. During 2023, we promoted the nine Building Better Business events across the country. Other proactive communications campaigns included an employment legislation campaign – It comes with the job focused on changes to the National Minimum Wage and employee sick leave benefits, the promotion of the Business Users Support Scheme for Kerosene and supporting and working with our colleagues across Government on a Brexit awareness campaign which included changes to the UK import controls.

ICT.

Using Technology for Effective Service Delivery and Efficiency.

2023 saw the Department's ICT team continue its work on delivery of an ambitious multi-annual programme to upgrade a range of major legacy applications. A new cloud-hosted scheduling system for the Labour Court had a successful launch in November 2023, and significant progress was also made in relation to the development of new systems capabilities (which will also be cloud hosted) to manage the delivery of Export Licensing and Employment Permits services. These new systems, scheduled for go live during 2024, will deliver modern, responsive customer facing services coupled with efficient back-office case management systems.

Efficiencies were delivered through the deployment of robotic process automation within the Workplace Relations Commission in addition to development of a new public facing portal for logging complaints to the Commission which is scheduled for launch in 2024. In addition, a number of improvements and upgrades were made to key systems in the Intellectual Property Office of Ireland. Further work was undertaken by the Department during 2023 to align the Department's cyber posture to the National Cyber Security Centre's Cyber Security Baseline Standard.

Supporting the Department's policy role in relation to maximising the potential of Artificial Intelligence, the Department also began to explore opportunities to leverage Artificial Intelligence within the Department's internal processes to improve the delivery of services to the public. The Department also continued a programme of service developments to further support remote and hybrid working including the deployment of Microsoft Teams to Department mobile phones. Significant upgrades were also

made to audio-visual meeting facilities across the Department's buildings, to support hybrid meetings and improve the user experience when engaging with stakeholders.

As in previous years, the Department's ICT team also continued to support a robust service for all its staff and provided ongoing engagement and coordination with Government structures for emergency planning and response.

Data Analytics Powered Analysis of CRO Records.

The Department, working in collaboration with the Companies Registration Office (CRO), is also undertaking a data analytics project to extract data from annual reports held by the CRO. The aim of the project is to build a rich, structured database of company performance for evidence-based policy analysis. Open-source R software is being used to extract balance sheet and profit and loss sheet data from the annual report PDFs. In 2023 a prototype model was completed and approved, and work has begun to scale up the project to generate insightful statistics on companies' financial performance.

Corporate Governance.

Internal Audit.

Internal Audit reviewed and revised its annual work plan in 2023 and remained focused on strategic risks whilst adopting its audit programme to address new and emerging risks. The following audit reports were presented to the Audit Committee during the year:

- Review of Systems of Internal Control 2022.
- Companies Registration Office/ Registrar of Friendly Societies/ Register of Beneficial Ownership.
- Intellectual Property Office of Ireland (IPOI).
- The Labour Court.
- The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) Liaison and Governance.
- InterTrade Ireland (ITI) – Liaison and Governance.
- Workplace Relations Commission (WRC).
- Review of GDPR Compliance.
- Irish Auditing & Accounting Supervisory Authority (IAASA) – Liaison and Governance.
- Personal Injuries Assessment Board (PIAB) – Liaison and Governance.

The Quality Assurance Report for 2022, as required under the Public Spending Code, was produced, and is published on the Department's website.

Statement of Strategy.

Government departments are required to prepare a new Statement of Strategy within six months of the appointment of a new minister. Its purpose is to outline the vision, mission, values and high-level goals of the Department for the period ahead. Our [Statement of Strategy 2023-2025](#) was published in May 2023. It summarises the Department's strategy and provides an outline of our mission and strategic goals.

Climate Action Roadmap.

Government's Climate Action Plan sets out a Public Service Mandate under which public bodies are required to adhere to and report on under four headings: our targets, our people, our way of working and our buildings & vehicles. The Department's [Climate Action Roadmap 2021-2023](#) published in September 2023 sets out how the Department is reducing emissions and our commitment to meeting our decarbonisation and sustainability targets and will be reviewed annually in line with the Mandate. The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland's 2022 [report](#) on public sector energy efficiency performance shows that the Department has delivered 62% in energy savings since the baseline year (2009). This is more than the initial 33% target set for public bodies. The Department is now working to deliver the 2030 target of 50%.

Records Management.

The Department's Records Management strategy 2023-2026 complements and augments best practice activities around records management policy by setting out a 3-year strategic implementation plan to facilitate delivery of a clear system of accountability and responsibility for records. The strategy mirrors the two-pronged approach of building on the momentum for change during the Department's migration to the eDocs records management application and ensuring a systematic and planned approach to records management covering records from creation to disposal, by strong oversight and efficiency.

Corporate Procurement.

The Department's Corporate Procurement Plan 2023 sets out how the Department is committed to best practice in all our procurement activities throughout the Department and its Offices. The objectives of the plan are focussed on ensuring compliance with procurement legal requirements, adherence to procurement policies, embedding transparency and accountability in procurement practices, supporting SMEs, improving risk management assessments, addressing Ireland's climate action obligations, informing staff how procurement should be developed and delivering excellence in overall procurement outcomes.

Green Procurement.

The Department of Public Expenditure NDP Delivery and Reform Circular 20/2019 requires that each Department must report annually on its green public procurement (GPP). The template in Appendix 3 includes the eight priority sectors listed in the Environmental Protection Agency's 2014 Green Procurement Guidance for the Public Sector and shows the total value of contracts (over €25,000) issued by this Department in 2023.

Safety Statement.

The Department's 2023 health and safety statement was prepared in accordance with Section 20 of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005. Recognising that safety and health is an integral part of our day-to-day work, the Department is committed to ensuring it fulfils statutory obligations to manage and co-ordinate workplace safety, health, and wellbeing through an effective safety management system, with systems and a culture in place that adheres to best practice. The 2023 Safety Statement reflects our intention as a Department to continue to strive to safeguard the safety, health and wellbeing of all colleagues to the highest possible standards.

Protected Disclosures Policy.

The Protected Disclosures (Amendment) Act 2022 commenced on 1 January 2023. The Act provides a statutory framework within which workers can raise concerns regarding potential wrongdoing that has come to their attention in the workplace in the knowledge that they can avail of significant employment, and other, protections if they are penalised by their employer or suffer detriment for doing so. In 2023 in accordance with the Act the Department published its [Protected Disclosures Policy](#) which sets out procedures for dealing with such disclosures.

Public Service Transformation.

The Department participated in Public Service Transformation Week in October 2023. Our new Organisation Culture section facilitated an iLabs Design Sprint in partnership with UCD's Innovation Academy. 50 staff from across our divisions, offices and locations and representing all grades applied Design Thinking methods to the challenges around our Workplace of the Future. In addition, a number of Transformation Talks on various aspects of how innovative and digital leaders are transforming our public services were held.

Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Awards (CSEIA).

In March 2023 the Department's Climate Action and Energy Policy Unit and colleagues from the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications won the Climate Action award for their work on the Climate Toolkit 4 Business. The Toolkit helps SMEs get started on their carbon reduction journeys. It provides them with all the information they need in a single, accessible resource. They can also generate a tailored climate action plan for their businesses and the supports available from State agencies to help them.

Legal Advisor's Unit.

The Department's Legal Unit is staffed by a number of qualified and experienced lawyers. Its role is to provide independent clear, impartial and well-reasoned legal advice to the Minister and Departmental officials on matters of law, litigation and legislation. The Legal Unit is independent in the operation of its legal advisory function. The Unit advises on legal issues arising across the entirety of the Department's activities, such as in relation to the development of General Schemes of Bills and on EU law transposition measures. The Unit works closely with the Office of the Attorney General, including by referring preliminary legal opinions and requests for advice to that Office on novel constitutional and EU law issues, issues of cross-Governmental relevance and politically sensitive issues, in line with the Cabinet Handbook. The Legal Unit performed these functions across all the Department's Divisions in 2023.

Wider Public Sector Obligations.

The [Code Practice for the Governance of State Bodies 2016](#) includes a requirement that Periodic Critical Reviews (PCRs) of Government Agencies should be carried out every five years. In 2023 the Department commenced a PCR of the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission. It is anticipated that the PCR will be completed in 2024.

Appendix 1.

Bills Enacted in 2023

Representative Actions for the Protection of Collective Interests of Consumers Act 2023 enacted 11 July 2023.

Control of Exports Act 2023 enacted 25 October 2023.

Screening of Third Country Transactions Act 2023 enacted 31 October 2023.

Appendix 2.

Statutory Instruments made in 2023	
S.I. No. 28 of 2023	Personal Injuries Resolution Board Act 2022 (Commencement of Certain Provisions) Order 2023
S.I. No. 146 of 2023	European Union (Restrictive Measures Against Serious Human Rights Violations and Abuses) Regulations 2023
S.I. No. 147 of 2023	European Union (Restrictive Measures Concerning Iran) Regulations 2023
S.I. No. 148 of 2023	European Union (Restrictive Measures Concerning the Democratic People's Republic of Korea) Regulations 2023
S.I. No. 149 of 2023	European Union (Restrictive Measures Concerning Tunisia) Regulations 2023
S.I. No. 197 of 2023	European Communities (Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road and Use of Transportable Pressure Equipment) (Amendment) Regulations 2023
S.I. No. 207 of 2023	Sectoral Employment Order (Construction Sector) 2023
S.I. No. 229 of 2023	Registered Employment Agreement (Overhead Powerline Contractors Group) Order 2023
S.I. No. 233 of 2023	European Union (Cross - Border Conversions, Mergers and Divisions) Regulations 2023
S.I. No. 255 of 2023	Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) (Amendment) Regulations 2023
S.I. No. 260 of 2023	National Minimum Wage Act 2000 (Amendment of Schedule 1) Regulations 2023
S.I. No. 268 of 2023	European Communities (Intra - Community Transfers of Defence Related Products) (Amendment) Regulations 2023
S.I. No. 292 of 2023	Companies (Corporate Enforcement Authority) Act 2021 (Section 35) (Commencement) Order 2023
S.I. No. 293 of 2023	Companies Act 2014 (Section 897) Order 2023
S.I. No. 294 of 2023	Companies Act 2014 (Fees) Regulations 2023
S.I. No. 295 of 2023	Companies Act 2014 (Forms) Regulations 2023
S.I. No. 255 of 2023	Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) (Amendment) Regulations 2023
S.I. No. 268 of 2023	European Communities (Intra - Community Transfers of Defence Related Products) (Amendment) Regulations 2023
S.I. No. 292 of 2023	Companies (Corporate Enforcement Authority) Act 2021 (Section 35) (Commencement) Order 2023
S.I. No. 293 of 2023	Companies Act 2014 (Section 897) Order 2023
S.I. No. 294 of 2023	Companies Act 2014 (Fees) Regulations 2023
S.I. No. 295 of 2023	Companies Act 2014 (Forms) Regulations 2023

Statutory Instruments made in 2023

S.I. No. 354 of 2023	Personal Injuries Resolution Board Act 2022 (Commencement of Certain Provisions) (No. 2) Order 2023
S.I. No. 359 of 2023	Protected Disclosures Act 2014 (Digital Markets Act) (Amendment) Regulations 2023
S.I. No. 424 of 2023	Employment Regulation Order (Security Industry Joint Labour Committee) Order 2023
S.I. No. 439 of 2023	Employment Permits (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2023
S.I. No. 469 of 2023	European Union (Cross - Border Conversions, Mergers and Divisions) (Amendment) Regulations 2023
S.I. No. 474 of 2023	Companies Act 2014 (Section 682) Regulations 2023
S.I. No. 476 of 2023	Competition Act 2002 (Adjudication Officers) Regulations 2023
S.I. No. 497 of 2023	National Minimum Wage Order 2023
S.I. No. 514 of 2023	European Union (Restrictive Measures Concerning Iran) (No. 2) Regulations 2023
S.I. No. 515 of 2023	European Union (Restrictive Measures Against Serious Human Rights Violations and Abuses) (No. 2) Regulations 2023
S.I. No. 516 of 2023	European Union (Restrictive Measures Concerning Syria) Regulations 2023
S.I. No. 517 of 2023	Chemicals Act 2008 (Lead in Gunshot In or Around Wetlands) Regulations 2023
S.I. No. 591 of 2023	Legal Metrology (European Conformity Assessment of Measuring Instruments) (Amendment) Regulations 2023
S.I. No. 626 of 2023	Personal Injuries Resolution Board Act 2022 (Commencement of Certain Provisions) (No. 3) Order 2023
S.I. No. 627 of 2023	Personal Injuries Resolution Board Act 2022 (Change of Name of Board) Order 2023
S.I. No. 646 of 2023	Companies Act 2014 (Section 12A (1)) (Covid-19) Order 2023
S.I. No. 647 of 2023	Industrial and Provident Societies Act 1893 (Section 14A (1)) (Covid-19) Order 2023
S.I. No. 680 of 2023	Employment Permits (Amendment) (No. 3) Regulations 2023
S.I. No. 706 of 2023	European Union (Restrictive Measures Concerning Syria) (No. 2) Regulations 2023
S.I. No. 707 of 2023	European Union (Restrictive Measures Concerning the Republic of Guinea-Bissau) Regulations 2023
S.I. No. 708 of 2023	European Union (Restrictive Measures Concerning Iran) (No. 4) Regulations 2023

Statutory Instruments made in 2023

S.I. No. 709 of 2023	European Union (Restrictive Measures Concerning Iran) (No. 3) Regulations 2023
S.I. No. 710 of 2023	European Union (Restrictive Measures Against Serious Human Rights Violations and Abuses) (No. 3) Regulations 2023
S.I. No. 711 of 2023	European Union (Restrictive Measures Concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo) (No. 2) Regulations 2023

Appendix 3.

Green Public Procurement

Department of Public Expenditure and Reform Circular 20/2019 requires that the Annual Reports of each Department report on green public procurement (GPP). Appendix 3 sets out ten priority sectors listed in the EPA's 2021 guidance document Resources | Environmental Protection Agency (epa.ie) for the Public Sector and shows the total value of contracts issued by this Department in 2023, valued at over €50,000* by priority sector, which have incorporated GPP. Please note that, for reporting purposes, ICT Products and Services have been divided into two distinct sectors in the template (ICT Products, ICT Services).

The sectors were chosen based on expenditure; scope for environmental improvement; impact on suppliers; leadership to market potential; relevance and accessibility of criteria; market availability and economic efficiency (in line with EU policy and practice).

GPP Reporting Template - Reference Year 2023				
Reference year 2023	Total number of contracts signed over €50,000 by priority sector.	Total value of contracts signed over €50,000 by priority sector. All values should be VAT exclusive.	Total number of contracts signed over €50,000 by priority sector which have incorporated GPP.	Total value of contracts signed over €50,000 by priority sector which have incorporated GPP. All values should be VAT exclusive.
Priority Sector*				
Energy-related Products, Food & Catering Services, Heating Equipment, Office Building Design, Construction & Management, Paper Products & Printing Services, Indoor & Outdoor Lighting, Textiles Products & Services, Transport	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
ICT Services	2	€1,250,000	2	€1,250,000
Indoor Cleaning Services	1	€67,172	1	€67,172
Total	3	€1,317,172	3	€1,317,172
Other Sectors**				
Professional Services	5	€748,000	Nil	Nil
Facilities Management	1	€369,750	Nil	Nil
Research	1	€69,563	Nil	Nil
Licensing	1	€180,000	Nil	Nil
Overall Totals	11	€2,684,485	3	€1,317,172
* Ten sectors for which GPP criteria have been developed by the EPA, based on common EU criteria with adaptations to reflect the Irish market and procurement practices. Please note that, for reporting purposes, ICT Products and Services have been divided into two distinct sectors in the template (ICT Products, ICT Services).				
**Any other sectors which are not covered by EPA GPP criteria.				

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