



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

Annual Report 2024



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Minister's Foreword.



I am pleased to present the 2024 Annual Report of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. This report captures a year of considerable progress, resilience, and innovation across Ireland's enterprise landscape. It reflects the dedication of our Department, its agencies, and our stakeholders in delivering on our mission to make Ireland the best place to succeed in business, to work, and to thrive.

In 2024, we continued to advance the strategic goals that underpin our vision of a dynamic, inclusive, and sustainable economy. From supporting over 2.7 million people in employment, introducing a whole of Government SME package and delivering over €400 million in direct financial support to SMEs through the Increased Cost of Business and Power Up Schemes for example, our work has had a tangible impact on businesses and communities across the country.

We have made strides in advancing the green and digital transitions. The publication of Powering Prosperity – Ireland's Offshore Wind Industrial Strategy, the rollout of the Grow Digital Portal and Voucher, and our leadership in AI policy and semiconductor strategy are just some examples of how we are future-proofing our economy. These initiatives not only support enterprise competitiveness but also align with our national and EU climate goals.

Internationally, we deepened Ireland's trade and investment relationships, strengthened our presence in key markets, and supported the all-island economy through initiatives like the Shared Island Enterprise Scheme. Our engagement at EU and multilateral levels ensured that Ireland's voice was heard on critical issues, from trade policy to sustainability and digital regulation.

As we look ahead to Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2026, we are laying the groundwork to lead on key files that will shape Europe's economic and social future. I am confident that the foundations we built in 2024 will serve us well in the years to come.

I want to pay tribute to my predecessor, Minister Simon Coveney and to thank Ministers Dara Calleary and Emer Higgins, the staff of the Department, our agencies, and all our stakeholders for their dedication and partnership. Together, we are helping deliver prosperity for the people of Ireland by supporting enterprise and employment in our towns, villages and cities.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peter Burke". The signature is stylized, with a large, flowing "P" and "B".

Peter Burke TD

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment

Secretary General's Foreword.



2024 was a year of delivery, resilience and transformation for our Department in supporting and advising our Ministers and implementing Government policies for stimulating the long term productive capacity of the economy, entrepreneurship, enterprise and quality employment growth.

Our work was shaped by a dynamic global environment, with challenges and opportunities arising from technological change, climate action and geopolitical developments. We focused on enabling enterprise to thrive, supporting innovation and digital transformation. We continued to implement the White Paper on Enterprise and our Statement of Strategy 2023-2025, ensuring that our policies and programmes are responsive to the evolving needs of the economy and society.

Record levels of employment were sustained during 2024 with over 2.78 million people in work and importantly unemployment in all regions is within 1% of the State average. We completed revisions to the [Regional Enterprise Plans](#) and driven by our enterprise agencies, growth potential is strong in all regions. Enterprise Ireland supported record employment (234,454), with 64% of job growth outside Dublin. IDA Ireland secured 234 investments, 59% outside Dublin, with €1.9 billion in R&D commitments, and the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) supported over 370,000 small businesses and created 7,104 new jobs. Over €400 million in grant supports was delivered to SMEs through the Increased Cost of Business and Power Up schemes, while new initiatives like the National Enterprise Hub and Innovators' Initiative enhanced access to supports and skills.

We advanced Ireland's green and digital transitions through targeted investments in decarbonisation, offshore wind, and digitalisation. In 2024, €11.4 million in funding was approved under the [Green Transition Fund](#) across two hundred and twelve projects. To enable and support the rollout of vast quantities of offshore wind energy generation capacity in Ireland over the coming years, in early 2024 we published [Powering Prosperity – Ireland's Offshore Wind Industrial Strategy](#). [Powering Prosperity](#). This is the first strategy of its kind for Ireland, aiming to build a successful, vibrant and impactful offshore wind energy industry.

Underlining the recognition across Government of the crucial role SMEs play in our economy and in communities across Ireland, in May, Minister Burke secured Government agreement to roll out a package of measures to support SMEs. The measures support our SMEs in the face of rising costs – while also balancing critical progress in terms of working conditions.

In July, we launched the Grow Digital Portal to help companies to embrace basic digital tools for driving efficiencies and productivity, and for marketing and selling online where appropriate for their business. The Grow Digital Voucher, launched in September 2024, offers small and medium businesses with up to fifty employees financial support to embrace digital technology, including AI. The launch of the Grow Digital Portal and Voucher, alongside leadership in AI policy and semiconductor strategy, will continue to contribute to Ireland's position at the forefront of innovation and sustainability.

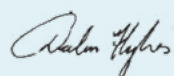
Employment rights and workplace standards were further strengthened during 2024. In terms of legislation, we progressed new Bills and Acts to enhance protections around retirement, redundancy, and insolvency. In 2024, sick leave was increased to five days and the right to request remote working was operationalised. Balance for Better Business launched a new five-year strategy targeting 40%+ female leadership. The WRC continues to play a critical role in ensuring that employment rights are upheld for all, recovering over €2 million in unpaid wages on foot of 5,156 inspections completed during 2024. In terms of industrial relations, during 2024 the downward trend continued with 3,656 days lost to strike action, compared to 4,203 days in 2023 and 5,256 days in 2022.

We progressed the Ministers' legislative priorities throughout 2024 with five new Acts and 35 Statutory Instruments completed. Legislation was introduced in the areas of company law, employment permits and digital services. Reforms for companies were introduced through the *Companies (Governance, Corporate Enforcement and Regulatory Provisions) Act 2024* which on a permanent basis enables companies to hold virtual or hybrid AGMs. Furthermore, we strengthened consumer protection through the commencement of the *Representative Actions Act 2023* and new EU regulations. In July 2024, new Corporate Sustainability Reporting Regulations were introduced. Also, during the year, the Injuries Resolution Board expanded its mediation services.

Internationally, in recognition of the importance of sustaining international connectivity in this time of challenging global relationships, we deepened trade and investment ties, supporting Ministerial-led trade missions and strategic engagement with the EU, WTO, and other global partners.

Internally, we continued to invest in our people, our systems and our culture. We published our first Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, expanded our learning and development offerings through our *Enterprise Academy*, and deepened our commitment to climate action and digital transformation in how we work to drive excellence in public service.

These are just some of our achievements during the year, all of which reflect the dedication of our staff, offices, agencies, and stakeholders. This work continues to make a real difference to the lives of people and businesses across Ireland. I wish to acknowledge the efforts and commitment of all our staff and our Management Board for their work and I look forward to building on this progress in the years ahead.



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

Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment

Key Achievements 2024



2.78 million

Total employment



546,763

Employment in
Enterprise Ireland and
IDA Ireland Clients



€36.75 billion

Exports by
Enterprise
Ireland Clients



€500 million

Growth and
Sustainability Loan
Scheme



€244 million

grants to 75,000
business through
Increased Cost of
Business



€158 million

grants to 39,000
businesses through
Power Up Scheme



€11.4 million

in funding
across 212 projects
under the Green
Transition Fund



€376 million

Disruptive Technology
funding across 105
innovative projects



17,000

tailored climate action
plans generated for
businesses since 2021



5

Bills enacted and
35 Statutory
Instruments completed



39,000

Employment
permits issued



116

Irish companies
benefitting from
European Space Agency
contracts



5,156

workplace inspection
visits by the WRC



59,431

callers helped by
WRC Information
and Customer
Service staff



40%

Female Directors
on ISEQ20 Listed
Companies - Balance
for Better Business



4,033

Export licences,
authorising exports
valued at €2.62 billion

Executive Summary.

This Annual Report is the Department's second and final under our [Statement of Strategy 2023- 2025](#). This Strategy set out six strategic goals to realise the Department's vision of making Ireland the best place to succeed in business across all parts of the country, with vibrant enterprises, high-quality employment, growing trade, fair workplaces and higher productivity.

The Department's work in 2024 towards attaining its goals is summarised as follows:



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

In 2024, the Department advanced its strategic goal of sustaining full employment and promoting balanced regional economic development. Progress was informed by the White Paper on Enterprise 2022–2030 which outlines a cross-government approach to strengthening Ireland's enterprise base through seven key policy priorities. By the end of 2024, over 85% of the 40 initiatives tracked under the Implementation Plan had either been completed or were on schedule, reflecting strong delivery across areas such as digital transformation, decarbonisation, innovation, and regional development.

In May, Minister Burke secured Government agreement on a package of measures to support SMEs and with the aim of reducing costs for small medium sized businesses. Key measures in the SME Package included reopening the Increased Cost of Business (ICOB) Scheme for another 14 days, introducing a second payment of ICOB for businesses in the retail and hospitality sectors, doubling the Innovation Grant Scheme to €10,000 and increasing the maximum amount available under the Energy Efficiency Grant Scheme to €10,000, reducing the business contribution rate from 50% to 25% and implementing an enhanced 'SME Test'.

Following on from the Package, the Department launched the National Enterprise Hub in July 2024, providing a centralised platform for over 230

government supports. The Hub quickly became a vital resource for businesses, handling more than 2,300 enquiries and attracting 4,400 monthly active users. Enterprise agencies also delivered strong results.

In 2024, Enterprise Ireland supported record employment of 234,454, with 64% of job growth occurring outside the capital. The agency also launched a €200 million decarbonisation fund and was allocated €152.9 million for its RD&I programme. In 2024, LEO-supported companies created 7,104 new jobs, with 81% of net new employment outside Dublin. IDA Ireland secured 234 investments, including 69 from first-time investors, with 59% located outside Dublin. These investments are expected to generate 13,500 jobs. €1.9 billion in R&D commitments from IDA clients were also approved during 2024.

Labour market policy was modernised through the *Employment Permits Act 2024*, which introduced a single permit system and new flexibility for permit holders. Indicative of full employment, the total number of applications received in 2024 was 46,624, a 21% increase on 2023. 39,400 permits were issued in 2024.

In 2024, the Department enhanced access to finance through several initiatives. Microfinance Ireland doubled its loan cap to €50,000, while the Ukraine Credit Guarantee Scheme had issued €419 million in loans before

closing at year-end. The Seed and Venture Capital Scheme was expanded by a further €250 million for the 2025–2029 period, and the Growth and Sustainability Loan Scheme continued to provide long-term, low-cost finance to SMEs. Two major grant schemes, the Increased Cost of Business and Power Up Schemes, delivered over €400 million in support to more than 114,000 SMEs, with a focus on locally traded sectors.

Regional development remained a central priority, with mid-term reviews of the nine Regional Enterprise Plans published in April 2024. The Department also coordinated implementation of the Shannon Estuary Economic Taskforce Report, with 22 of its 89 recommended actions completed and 39 in progress. Innovation and clustering efforts were strengthened through the National Clustering Programme and the Smart Specialisation Strategy, which underpinned €200 million in ERDF innovation funding. The Innovators' Initiative launched in 2023 targets four sector-specific training programmes, MedTech, AgTech, Cybersecurity, and Digital Health. Cybersecurity and digital health began in September 2024. The Department also continued to promote Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) to improve productivity and sustainability and get more homes delivered. This included funding for Construct Innovate research centre and the development of a new MMC Demonstration Park.



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

In 2024, the Department made significant strides in advancing its second strategic goal: to drive Ireland's green and digital transition, ensuring the long-term competitiveness and sustainability of Irish-based enterprise.

In terms of climate action, the Department operationalised a suite of targeted initiatives to support decarbonisation across industry sectors. The Green Transition Fund allocated €11.4 million to 212 projects, enabling businesses to plan and invest in sustainable practices. The landmark publication of Powering Prosperity – Ireland's Offshore Wind Industrial Strategy marked a pivotal step in building a robust offshore wind supply chain, with 40 strategic actions underway to position Ireland as a global leader in renewable energy.

Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland worked with businesses to progress decarbonisation plans and the Department's new €300 million Environmental Aid Scheme allowing the agencies to accelerate decarbonising investments by these businesses, with €28.8 million and €28.5 million environmental aid allocated by Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland respectively in 2024.

In parallel, the Department championed the digital transformation of enterprise. Through the Digital Transition Fund, €18.5 million was disbursed to 318 companies, while Ireland's four European Digital Innovation Hubs had delivered over 500 services to SMEs and public bodies by the end of 2024. The launch of the Grow Digital Portal and Voucher provided accessible pathways for businesses to adopt digital tools, including AI, enhancing productivity and competitiveness.

Ireland's leadership in AI policy was reinforced with the publication of a refreshed National AI Strategy and the establishment of the AI Advisory Council. The Department also played a central role in implementing the *EU Artificial Intelligence Act* and other key digital regulations, including the *Digital Services Act* and *Digital Markets Act*, ensuring robust governance and public trust in emerging technologies.

Strategic engagement with EU initiatives remained a cornerstone of the Department's work. Ireland's proactive role in the *European Chips Act* culminated in the nomination of a national Competence Centre and participation in advanced semiconductor pilot lines. In support of sustainable product design and circular economy goals, the Department prepared for the implementation of the Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation and contributed to EU pharmaceutical and consumer protection legislation. The National Standards Authority of Ireland, supported by the Department, expanded its regulatory and strategic activities, particularly in AI, sustainability, and construction.



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

In 2024, the Department continued to advance safety, better pay and conditions, good quality jobs, gender equality, and inclusivity in the workplace through a range of legislative, policy, and institutional developments.

Key legislative milestones included the publication of the General Schemes of the *Employment (Restriction of Certain Mandatory Retirement Ages) Bill* and the *Protection of Employees (Employers' Insolvency) (Amendment) Bill*, both of which strengthened protections for workers. The commencement of the *Employment (Collective Redundancies and Miscellaneous Provisions) and Companies (Amendment) Act 2024* further enhanced employee safeguards in insolvency scenarios and established the Employment Law Review Group to ensure employment law remains fit for purpose.

The Department also implemented progressive changes to statutory entitlements, including increasing paid sick leave from three to five days and operationalising the right to request remote working. These measures were supported by public awareness campaigns and the publication of a Code of Practice to guide employers and employees. The Department completed a statutory review of the *Payment of Wages (Tips and Gratuities) Act* and continued to support the Low Pay Commission, which recommended a new National Minimum Wage of €13.50 (+6.3%) from January 2025.

Gender equality in leadership remained a priority, with the launch of a new five-year strategy by Balance for Better Business, aiming for 40% female representation on boards and leadership teams. The Department hosted sector-specific roundtables to support this goal and collaborated with other departments on research into working conditions, AI's impact on the labour market, and statutory sick pay.

Industrial relations were actively supported through the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) and the Labour Court, both of which handled increased caseloads and implemented new systems to improve efficiency. The WRC recovered over €2.1 million in unpaid wages and achieved an 85% success rate in dispute resolution, while the Labour Court issued more decisions than in the previous year and streamlined its operations through introduction of a new case management system.

In the area of workplace safety, the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) continued to enforce legislation, publish updated codes of practice, and engage with stakeholders on emerging risks, including chemical safety and occupational health. The HSA also launched a new advisory committee for the health and social care sector and continued its work on farm safety through the Farm Safety Action Plan.



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

In 2024, the Department made significant progress in enhancing Ireland's business regulatory environment and reinforcing the country's attractiveness as a destination for investment and enterprise. This work was underpinned by a commitment to fostering a competitive, transparent, and innovation-friendly ecosystem that balances regulatory oversight with business flexibility.

The Department supported the National Competitiveness and Productivity Council (NCPC), contributing to the publication of key research in this area and hosting Ireland's first Competitiveness Summit. These efforts informed policy actions aimed at addressing pressing challenges in housing, innovation, and productivity.

Legislative and regulatory advancements were central to the Department's agenda. The enactment of the *Companies (Corporate Governance, Enforcement and Regulatory Provisions) Act 2024* introduced wide-ranging reforms to streamline company operations while enhancing compliance and enforcement mechanisms. The Department also progressed the *Co-operative Societies Bill*, which will modernise the legal framework for co-operatives, and implemented the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Regulations, aligning Ireland with EU climate disclosure standards.

At the EU level, the Department led and contributed to negotiations on several directives and regulations, including the *Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive*, the *Digital Company Law Directive*, and the *Foreign Subsidies Regulation*. These initiatives aim to harmonise legal frameworks, promote transparency, and ensure fair competition across the Single Market. The Department also advanced preparations for the transposition of the EU Industrial Design Reform Package and the General Product Safety Regulation, ensuring Ireland remains aligned with evolving European standards.

Consumer protection and competition policy were strengthened through the commencement of the *Representative Actions Act*, enabling collective redress for consumers, and through preparations for the implementation of geographical indication protections for craft and industrial products. The Department also supported the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission in its new role under the Foreign Subsidies Regulation. In the area of personal injuries reform, the Injuries Resolution Board expanded its mediation services to include public and motor liability claims, reinforcing its role in delivering efficient, non-adversarial compensation processes.

Intellectual property policy saw further development with the drafting of the *Copyright and Related Rights (Amendment) Bill* and continued engagement in EU-level discussions on patent reform, including compulsory licensing and supplementary protection certificates.



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.

In 2024, the Department's work towards delivering this goal was guided by Government's Trade and Investment Strategy 2022–2026, which promotes sustainable growth, diversification of export markets, and alignment with climate goals.

The Department supported the implementation of this strategy through a range of initiatives, including the revitalisation of Local and Regional Market Teams, enhanced communication strategies, and the publication of a report on Ireland's position in global value chains. Trade missions to key markets such as the US, India, and the Gulf States facilitated new business opportunities and reinforced Ireland's international presence. The Department also played a central role in EU-level trade discussions and negotiations, ensuring Ireland's interests were represented in areas such as the Single Market, digital trade, and sustainability.

The Department continued to support the all-island economy through its collaboration with InterTradeIreland, which celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2024. Ireland's trade relationships with key partners, including the UK, US, China, and EU Member States, were further strengthened through high-level visits, joint economic commissions, and strategic agreements.

The Department actively engaged in the World Trade Organization's 13th Ministerial Conference and contributed to EU trade policy development, including the implementation of new Free Trade Agreements and sustainability provisions. The Department also led Ireland's engagement with the International Labour Organisation and represented Ireland at meetings of the Council of Europe's Governmental Committee.

In the area of responsible business, the Department advanced corporate sustainability initiatives, supported the development of a second National Plan on Business and Human Rights, and strengthened the OECD National Contact Point. Export controls, sanctions enforcement, and investment screening were also enhanced through new legislation and systems, ensuring Ireland's compliance with international obligations and safeguarding national interests.

Preparations for Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the EU in 2026 began in earnest, with the Department expanding its EU Affairs Unit and initiating policy and operational planning. These efforts reflect our commitment to shaping the future of European trade, competitiveness, and employment policy.



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

In 2024, the Department was allocated a gross allocation of €1,435 million following a Supplementary Estimate, enabling the rollout of key schemes such as the Increased Cost of Business and Power Up initiatives. Capital planning extended to 2030, with ceilings secured for 2025 and 2026 under the National Development Plan.

The Department advanced its People Strategy 2021–2024, focusing on resilience, inclusivity, and leadership. Initiatives included the launch of a new HR data dashboard, enhanced training and mentoring programmes, and the embedding of blended working practices. The Department also renewed its 'Investors in Diversity – Silver' accreditation and published its first Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy. Workforce planning was strengthened through structured engagements and increased recruitment, with staff numbers rising to over 1,015 full-time equivalents. The Department published its second Gender Pay Gap

report. Learning and development were central to staff engagement, with the Department's new Enterprise Academy offering over three hundred courses and supporting academic advancement, mentoring, and executive coaching.

Communications and transparency were enhanced with significant growth in social media engagement and website traffic. The Department managed over 390 media queries, issued 125 press releases, and responded to a growing number of Freedom of Information and data protection requests. Internal communications remained strong, with four hundred news stories shared with staff. The Department published its *Climate Action Roadmap 2024*, outlining its decarbonisation targets and reporting a 49% reduction in emissions since the baseline year. Public service transformation was supported through innovation workshops, participation in Transformation Week, and recognition at the Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Awards.

Operational resilience was bolstered through updated health and safety protocols, a comprehensive records management strategy, and a new procurement plan with a focus on green procurement. The Department also advanced its ICT strategy, launching new digital portals and achieving high alignment with national cybersecurity standards. The publication of the Statement of Strategy 2024–2025 in October reaffirmed the Department's mission and strategic direction, encapsulating its commitment to innovation, accountability, and excellence in public service.

Vision, Mission, Values.

Our 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.

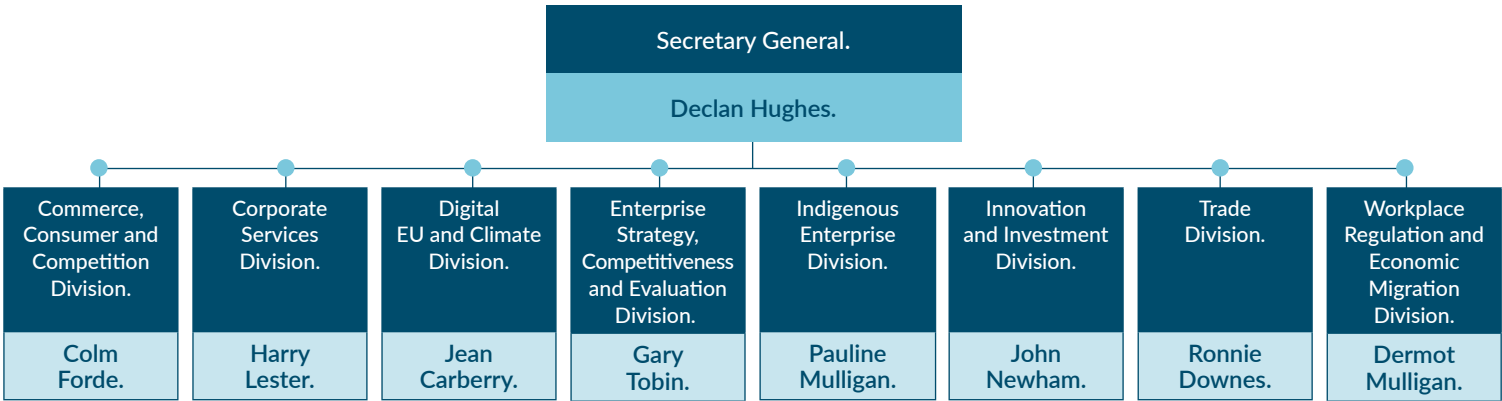
Our Mission

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.

Our 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 2024.



Offices and Agencies of the Department.



Oifig Maoine
Intleachtúla na hÉireann
Intellectual Property
Office of Ireland



THE LABOUR COURT
An Chéirt Oibreachais



Udarás um Fhorfiontúlaíocht Corparáideach
Corporate Enforcement Authority



An tUdarás Sláinte agus Sábháilteachta
Health and Safety Authority



Comisiún um Éimhíocht agus
Cosaint Tiontúcháin
Competition and
Consumer Protection
Commission



INJURIES
RESOLUTION
BOARD
RÉIS IN-ÉIREACHA DEDIMHACHA PÉARSAIN
PERSONAL INJURIES RESOLUTION BOARD



Irish Auditing & Accounting
Supervisory Authority

Statement of Strategy 2023-2025





Strategic Goal 1:

Sustain full employment and ensure strong regional economic development.

In 2024, the Department achieved strategic goal 1 through maintaining full employment along with regional development.

White Paper on Enterprise Implementation

The [White Paper on Enterprise 2022-2030](#) sets out Government's vision and plan for enabling successful Irish-based enterprise, to be done through achievement of the 7 enterprise policy objectives.

- 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 Strengths and Opportunities

In May 2023, the Department published the first of consecutive two-year Implementation Plans of cross-Government activity for the White Paper on Enterprise. This first Implementation Plan, covering the period 2023- 2024, identified a portfolio of 40 key initiatives and projects across the 7 priorities. The 40 initiatives are largely driven by this Department and its enterprise agencies, with other relevant Government Departments and public bodies responsible for several other deliverables. These actions are complemented by efforts on a whole-of-Government basis to enhance Ireland's competitiveness framework conditions, including skills provision, access to finance, infrastructure, and the costs of doing business.

Progress on the White Paper's implementation is monitored through bi-annual update reports which are developed and published by the Department. Three update reports have now been completed, with the [latest report](#) covering the period H1 2024, published in Q4 of 2024. This report identified that over 85% of the activities monitored under the White Paper's implementation had been completed or were on track for completion.

Key achievements in 2024 include progress in the development and implementation of [Powering Prosperity – Ireland's Offshore Wind Industrial Strategy](#), completion of the NIBRT Advanced Therapeutics Extension, the launch of a new digital portal to help enterprise avail of a range of supports available to support them on their digitalisation journey, as well as the publication of the [Roadmap for Decarbonisation of Industrial Heat](#) to drive decarbonisation across the heating and cooling needs of our economy and society.

Supporting SMES.

In May 2024, Government agreed a range of measures with the aim of reducing costs for small and medium sized businesses, brought forward by Minister Burke.

Key measures included:

Reopening the Increased Cost of Business (ICOB) Scheme for another 14 days.	Introducing a second payment of ICOB for businesses in the retail and hospitality sectors.	Doubling the Innovation Grant Scheme to €10,000.
Increasing the maximum amount available under the Energy Efficiency Grant Scheme to €10,000 and reducing the business contribution rate from 50% to 25%.	Widening the eligibility for the Trading Online Voucher, extending it to all sectors up to 50 employees, modernise eligible expenditure and doubling the grant to €5,000.	Increasing the lending limit for Microfinance Ireland loans to €50,000 from €25,000.
Widening the eligibility for the Digital for Business Consultancy Scheme and extending it to all sectors with up to 50 employees.	Launching the new online National Enterprise Hub for SMEs to access information on the wide range of government business supports.	Implementing an enhanced 'SME Test' by this Department along with the Department of the Taoiseach.

The SME and Entrepreneurship Taskforce co-chaired by Ministers Burke, Higgins and Calleary published a report in February 2024 highlighting progress made on the implementation of the identified priority actions for SMEs. In September 2024, enhancements to the SME Test and revised guidelines were approved by Government. The enhanced SME Test encourages policymakers across Government to consider the impact new measures may have on SMEs. Through a cross-government network, the Department provided support on the application of the test and sought quarterly updates on applications of the test. In 2024, twenty-six SME Tests were applied by eight Government Departments compared to eight SME Tests by six Government Departments in 2023.

During the year, the Department actively participated in EU and international SME policy committees, including the OECD's Committee on SMEs and Entrepreneurship (CMSEE), the EU SME Envoy Network, and the EU Competitiveness and Sustainability of SMEs Committee (COSME). Co-chaired by Minister Burke and the Secretary General, the Enterprise Forum met three times in 2024. The Forum is used extensively for stakeholder engagement on competitiveness and costs and strategic issues impacting enterprises at a national and international level.

During 2024, meetings of the Retail Forum, chaired by Minister Higgins, assisted the retail sector to navigate sectoral challenges including retail crime and the cost of doing business alongside a focus on the sector's developmental needs and the future of retail. The annual work programme for the Forum is established through co-creation with members and delivered through the Working Groups focusing on Green Transition, Digitalisation and Skills.

National Enterprise Hub.

The National Enterprise Hub (NEH) was launched by Minister Burke in July 2024. It brings together information and resources on over one hundred and eighty government supports from nineteen different departments and state agencies which can be accessed through the new online hub (www.neh.gov.ie) or by speaking to a member of the team of advisors by phone or via live chat. The aim is to make engaging with government supports more efficient, and to increase the uptake of grants and government schemes, which will support the development and growth of Irish businesses. Since its launch, the NEH has dealt with more than 2,300 enquiries and is seeing 4,400 monthly active user visits to its site.

Enterprise Agencies and Bodies.

Enterprise Ireland.

2024 was the final year of Enterprise Ireland's 2022 -2024 strategy, [Leading in a Changing World](#). During the year, Enterprise Ireland continued its focus on accelerating the development of world-class Irish companies and supporting them to achieve leading positions in global markets.

Total employment in Enterprise Ireland supported companies increased to a record 234,454 in 2024, with jobs growth recorded in all regions of the country. There was a net gain of 6,212 jobs in Enterprise Ireland supported companies in 2024, with 64% of total jobs growth in areas outside Dublin.

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 Programme provides supports to help companies remain competitive and grow their sales and employment. In 2024, the programme was allocated capital funding of €152.9 million, which made up approximately 25% of all Exchequer spending on research and development.

The latest Capital Equipment Call was successfully launched in September 2024. With individual awards of up to €2 million available, the equipment funded through this call will serve as an engine of economic development for local companies, particularly small and medium enterprises that cannot afford to invest at this scale. The new equipment will help companies develop new products and services, focusing on sustainability and manufacturing productivity. The 10 approved projects under this call will receive €12.1 million in funding to access cutting-edge equipment.

In July 2024, as part of a range of measures aimed at reducing costs for small and medium sized businesses, the

Innovation Voucher was increased from €5K to a maximum value of €10K to better support SMEs access collaborative research from our third level sector.

[The National Space Strategy for Enterprise](#) sets out a vision for the space related sector of 'an economically sustainable and expanding space-active industry, delivering quality jobs for the economy of tomorrow'. Enterprise Ireland coordinates Ireland's industrial and research participation in European Space Agency programmes. The Department's continued investment in the European Space Agency (ESA) supports Irish companies' engagement with ESA, with €26.17 million invested in 2024. Enterprise Ireland reports that at the end of 2024, 116 companies were benefiting from ESA contracts. State-of-the-art technology systems designed, built and delivered by an Irish space engineering company were aboard the successful launch, in July, of the Ariane 6 rocket which marked the return of European autonomous access to space.

Local Enterprise Offices.

In 2024, the Department published the [Local Enterprise Office \(LEO\) Policy Statement 2024 – 2030](#). The Policy Statement sets out the future direction and a roadmap of how Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) will align their work with the priorities of the White Paper on Enterprise.

LEOs broadened their engagement with the small locally traded enterprise sector of the economy in response to Government policies to grow the overall productivity of the economy and meet the challenges of a digital, low carbon economy. The expansion of the LEO framework to provide grant assistance to businesses with up to 50 employees combined with the expansion of supports, such as the Energy Efficiency Grant and the new Grow Digital Voucher, to the small locally trading sector means that over 370,000 small businesses are now eligible for support through LEOs.

The 2024 Annual Employment Survey of LEO clients once again shows positive job creation across most of the LEOs. LEO-supported companies created 7,104 new jobs in 2024 which saw a 7% increase in employment from 2023. There was a net employment gain of 2,459 for the year. Total employment in LEO-supported businesses in 2024 was 39,541 with 81% of net new jobs created outside of Dublin.

Design & Crafts Council Ireland.

The Design & Crafts Council of Ireland (DCCI) continued to provide support to designers and makers to develop their businesses in a sustainable way. DCCI's activities are funded by the Department via Enterprise Ireland. The funding assists the design and crafts sectors to develop and generate additional export sales and online revenue opportunities and to increase their market diversification.

IDA Ireland.

In 2024, IDA Ireland completed the final year of its 4-year strategy [Driving Recovery and Sustainable Growth 2021 – 2024](#) and delivered a strong performance against the backdrop of a challenging global economic environment. IDA Ireland helped to deliver regional investment and substantial transformative projects in 2024 in the areas of research and development, innovation, sustainability, and talent development.

IDA Ireland reported a total number of 234 investments which will lead to the creation of 13,500 jobs over the next few years. A total of 69 investments were from new name or first-time investors. Of the 234 investments, 137, or 59%, were in regional locations outside of Dublin, in keeping with the Government's strategy of balanced regional development, an increase from 53% in 2023.

Regional investment is assisted through IDA Ireland's Regional Property Programme which ensures the supply of land, buildings and infrastructure in regional locations as required by current and prospective clients of IDA Ireland, as well as for Enterprise Ireland and Local Enterprise Offices' clients. Under this programme, IDA Ireland is progressing the delivery of 19 Advanced Building Solutions (ABS) across 6 regions in 15 locations, working with Local Authorities, where appropriate, on advance planning permissions for additional building solutions. At the end of 2024, 8 buildings were complete, with 4 more under construction and 7 projects in the various stages of planning, procurement or site selection.

Research and Development (R&D) investment by IDA Ireland client companies, valued at €1.9 billion across 64 projects, was approved by IDA Ireland during 2024. IDA Ireland clients committed capital investment of €117 million towards sustainability investments and a further €118 million to the training and upskilling of their workforce.

In aggregate, IDA Ireland's FDI clients consistently generate highly skilled jobs nationwide and 302,566 people were directly employed in 2024 by over 1,800 IDA Ireland client companies. Employment levels within the FDI sector remained above 300,000 for the third consecutive year.

The Department and its Ministers continue to work closely with IDA Ireland to ensure Ireland's FDI performance remains world class and that we meet the challenges of an increasingly competitive global environment for highly mobile foreign direct investment.

Knowledge Transfer Ireland.

In April 2024 the Department and Knowledge Transfer Ireland jointly hosted the 'Unlocking the Value of the Knowledge Transfer' Conference. The Minister for Business, Employment and Retail, Emer Higgins T.D., opened the Conference. Addressing delegations across the Irish research and innovation eco-system. The aim of the conference was to build awareness of the Guiding Principles for Knowledge Valorisation and to implement Codes of Practice which were published by the European Commission's Directorate General for Research and Innovation. This event was part of a wider series of events being conducted across Europe.

Access to Finance and Finance for Scaling.

Microfinance Ireland Policy.

Microfinance Ireland (MFI) provides loans to microenterprises with fewer than 10 employees, with an annual turnover of less than €2 million, and which do not meet the conventional risk criteria applied by commercial lenders. In May 2024, Minister Burke secured Government agreement to double the maximum limit on loans from €25,000 to €50,000. This increase helped established businesses to secure appropriate finance to sustain and grow their business and will also offer another avenue of financial support to assist start-up enterprises.

MFI also provides post approval mentoring services to its borrowers through the Department's Local Enterprise Office Network. Since their establishment in 2012 MFI have approved over 5,000 loans to the value of €85.4 million, supporting 10,703 jobs. The dominant sectors availing of loans from MFI have been the wholesale and retail sector (20%), manufacturing (11%), other services (10%) and professional, scientific and tech activities (9%).

The Ukraine Credit Guarantee scheme.

The Ukraine Credit Guarantee Scheme, (UCGS), worth €1.2 billion was launched in January 2023 to provide low-cost working capital to SMEs, primary producers, and small mid-caps. Lenders on the scheme included Bank of Ireland, AIB, thirteen credit unions, and non-bank lenders Capitalflow and Linked Finance. The scheme closed to new lending on 31 December 2024 with 4,578 UCGS loans drawn to the value of €419 million.

Seed and Venture Capital.

The Irish investment finance market has grown 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. Enterprise Ireland manages the Seed and Venture Capital (SVC) Scheme on behalf of the Department, to enhance the early-stage segments of the capital investment market.

2024 saw the completion and part-publication of an evaluation of State supports for equity investment, which included a review of the SVC. The review highlighted the continued need for the SVC as well as recommendations to improve its effectiveness.

In June 2024 Minister Burke announced an increased budget of €75 million on previous cycles bringing the total budget of the Seed and Venture Capital Scheme (SVC) to €250 million over the next 5-year period, from 2025 to 2029. In November 2024, Enterprise Ireland launched the first open call for fund managers to participate in the Scheme in 2025.

Finance for Scaling.

The [Finance for Scale-Ups report](#) was published in July 2024. The report provided three policy recommendations to help foster and develop the Irish scaling ecosystem:

1. Ensure that scaling finance is available by introducing and promoting funds that will provide scaling finance options to founders and startups;
2. Investigate options for pension fund and institutional investor participation in scaling equity funds and encourage corporate venturing in Ireland; and
3. Review the State's tax model and design instruments that incentivise investment into scaling companies.

The report also calls for the establishment of an implementation committee to develop practical actions. The successful implementation of the recommendations is expected to result in innovative Irish companies having better access to funding needed to continue to grow and expand in Ireland and align with opportunities at EU level as part of the development of Capital Markets Union.

Start Ups.

In July 2024 Ireland was confirmed as a full member of Europe Startup Nations Alliance (ESNA). Enterprise Ireland was nominated to represent Ireland at ESNA and the Department provides ongoing policy support.

The Department worked with the OECD to complete and publish a report entitled '[Supporting start-up globalisation in Ireland through incubation and acceleration](#)'. In October 2024, Government noted the findings and recommendations of the OECD report and the Department's intention to commence the process of developing a new policy on incubation and acceleration programmes that will increase the internationalisation of start-ups, in line with the White Paper on Enterprise.

Growth and Sustainability Loan Scheme.

The €500 million Growth and Sustainability Loan Scheme (GSLS) was launched in September 2023 and has unlocked significant funding to enable Irish businesses to avail of long-term finance at a lower cost to expand, diversify, improve productivity, and invest in energy efficiency and sustainability. This scheme targets a minimum of 30% of the lending volume towards environmental sustainability purposes with the aim of encouraging SMEs to take positive actions. Over the course of 2024, Bank of Ireland, AIB and

Finance Ireland continued to lend under the Scheme and two other on-lenders, PTSB and Close Brothers launched the scheme in early 2024. The GSLS will operate until June 2026 or until the scheme has been fully subscribed, whichever is earlier.

Increased Cost of Business and Power Up Schemes.

Two grant schemes for SMEs were successfully delivered in 2024 – the Increased Cost of Business (ICOB) and Power Up Schemes. These schemes were designed by the Department to support businesses with the increasing costs associated with running a business. The schemes were administered by the Local Authorities on behalf of the Department. In total over €400 million was paid to SMEs right across the country with a specific focus on small locally-trading firms in the retail, hospitality and beauty sectors.

The Increased Cost of Business Scheme successfully paid over €244 million to over 75,000 SMEs including over 41,000 businesses in the retail, hospitality and beauty sectors. All payments were made to eligible businesses before the end of 2024. The Power Up Grant has paid out €158 million to over 39,000 businesses in the relevant sectors.

Regional Development.

Economic Infrastructure and National Planning Framework Policy.

The National Planning Framework (NPF) guides planning at a national level out to 2040. It also sets the high-level objectives that guide the development of regional and local-level planning. The NPF is of key relevance to the Department and to its enterprise development agencies. It guides policy and strategic objectives, supports balanced regional development and economic growth, and provides the enterprise base with a coherent view of Ireland's future development.

The Department's work in economic infrastructure and NPF policy aims to align the delivery of Project Ireland 2040, which comprises the NPF and the National Development Plan, 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 and planning needs of the enterprise base, as well as the identification of infrastructural issues affecting the enterprise base in Ireland, including issues particular to a given region.

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 Regional Enterprise Plan (REP) initiative is one of the primary policy tools for achieving this and delivering on Goal 1 of the Department's Statement of Strategy. Launched in 2022, the 9 REPs are bottom-up plans developed and led by regional stakeholders, which focus on

collaborative initiatives to strengthen the enterprise ecosystem in each region. A [Mid-Term Progress Report](#) for each region was published on the Department's website in April 2024.

The Regional Enterprise Plans National Oversight Group comprises the Chairpersons 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. Two National Oversight Group meetings took place during 2024, in April and November.

The National Oversight Group's meeting in April was co-chaired by Ministers Burke, Calleary and Higgins. At that meeting it was advised that the Plans would be extended for a year, until end 2025, to allow a renewed focus on implementation of the current REPs, and to allowing additional time to consider the future of the initiative.

The November meeting was co-chaired by Ministers Calleary and Higgins, during which the Department updated on the implementation of a Service Level Agreement between Enterprise Ireland and the County and City Management Association regarding the establishment of the nine REP Programme Managers as permanent positions, each based in a nominated host Local Authority and next steps. The Department also updated stakeholders on the future approach to the initiative in 2025, including the commissioning of an external independent review, as well as the development of a Regional Enterprise Policy Statement and successor initiative.

Shannon Estuary Economic Taskforce.

The independent Shannon Estuary Economic Taskforce was established in response to a Programme for Government commitment to support the region in devising an economic development plan. The Taskforce published its final report, the [Shannon Estuary Economic Taskforce Report](#), in July 2023 which included national policy proposals and recommendations for regional initiatives covering offshore and onshore renewable energy, security of energy supply and energy cost competitiveness, and targeted initiatives across the transport, logistics and connectivity, and tourism sectors. The work of the Taskforce concluded upon the publication of its final report.

Of the 89 recommended actions contained in the independent [Shannon Estuary Economic Taskforce Report](#), 22 are completed, 39 are in progress, either as recommended by the Taskforce, or through alternative means which will achieve a similar outcome, 13 are under consideration, and 15 will not be progressed as recommended by the Taskforce. The Department continues to engage across Government on implementation of those actions assigned to Government Departments which have been accepted, either as recommended by the Taskforce, or for implementation through alternative means.

National Clustering Programme.

In March 2024 the Department engaged TCI Network to undertake a peer review of the draft National Clustering Programme. TCI is a not-for-profit international network of clustering experts of which the Department is a member. As part of the peer review the Department held a one-day workshop

in Q2 2024, facilitated by three international TCI experts, in Trinity College Dublin. It was attended by over seventy stakeholders from the Irish clustering ecosystem, from industry, academia and Government.

Smart Specialisation Strategy.

Ireland's National Smart Specialisation Strategy for Innovation (S3) applies a place-based approach to delivering sustainable and innovation-led growth regionally and nationally. Through the National Implementation Group for the Smart Specialisation Strategy, the Department engages with the Regional Assemblies, the enterprise and research agencies and other government departments to ensure the ongoing monitoring and implementation of the Strategy.

In 2024, the Department compiled a Progress Report on the Strategy's eight high-level goals for publication in early 2025.

The Strategy underpins €200 million worth of Ireland's European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) programmes in innovation including Enterprise Ireland's Knowledge Transfer Boost, Innovators' Initiative, and the Smart Regions Enterprise Innovation Scheme. In line with smart specialisation objectives, these schemes leverage and build on each region's strengths and emerging areas of opportunity. The Technology Gateway and KT Boost programmes launched in 2023. The Innovators' Initiative comprises four education and training programmes hosted in Irish publicly funded Research Performing Organisations (RPOs), each aimed at a different sector of importance to the Irish economy and was launched in February 2024.

Each of the four education and training programmes will receive €7 million in funding over the 7-year Initiative. The first year of the 4 Innovators' Initiative programmes focused on the MedTech, sustainable food and AgTech. Cybersecurity and Digital Health sectors began in September 2024. These programmes provide the participants with immersive training in these sectors - driving their ability to commercialise academic research from our world-class third-level sector to deliver spin outs and high potential startups.

Regional Innovation Valleys.

As part of the New European Innovation Agenda, the European Commission announced the designation of 150 regions as Regional Innovation Valleys (RIVs). The initiative will support collaboration between regions across Europe based on regional strengths and specialisation. Ireland's three NUTS2 regions have been designated as Regional Innovation Valleys following a successful application to the Commission from the Regional Assemblies in collaboration with the Smart Specialisation National Implementation Group. The Commission has already launched competitive funding calls linked with the RIV initiative through Horizon Europe and the Interregional Innovation Investments (I3) instrument and the Department will continue to monitor developments in relation to this initiative.

Labour Market, Economic Migration and Employment Permits.

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 secretariat for the Group.

In April 2024, the EGFSN published 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](#). In July 2024, the EGFSN also completed a [study](#) to determine the skills required to transform Ireland's construction sector through widespread adoption of Modern Methods of Construction, including offsite manufacturing. Work is underway to oversee the implementation of the recommendations outlined in these reports.

In addition to these studies, the EGFSN focused on the implementation of recommendations from other studies completed in recent years, including in the areas of Artificial Intelligence, Logistics and Supply Chain, SME Management and Skills for Zero Carbon. Following 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, the EGFSN has worked with stakeholders throughout 2024 to implement the OECD's recommendations.

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.

Employment Permits.

Ireland operates a managed, vacancy-led employment permits system designed to maximise the benefits of economic migration and minimise the risk of disrupting Ireland's labour market. The employment permits system encourages the filling of general labour and skills needs from within the workforce of the European Union (and other EEA countries). Where specific skills cannot easily be filled within 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 system is managed through the Critical Skills and Ineligible Occupations Lists, through which skills shortages and surpluses in Ireland and the EEA can be tracked. The Occupations Lists are regularly updated, the most recent review occurring in 2023.

The *Employment Permits Act 2024* commenced on 2 September 2024, updating and consolidating previous employment permits legislation. The 2024 Act introduced changes to create a more flexible employment permits system, including:

- A new change of employer option allowing general and critical skills employment permit holders to move employers after 9 months in the State, without the need for a new permit application;
- Enabling subcontractors to access the employment permits system;
- Allowing permit holders to be promoted without the need for a new employment permit;
- The introduction of a Seasonal Employment Permit – with the initial pilot scheme to commence in 2025;
- Changes to the Labour Market Needs Test (LMNT) to reflect modern recruitment practices; and
- Technical changes ensuring that the employment permits system remains flexible and responsive to changing labour market conditions.

These amendments will continue to protect the rights of migrant workers and increase Ireland's attractiveness as a place to work and do business.

Employment Permits Occupations Lists and Minimum Annual Remuneration.

The 2023 Review of the Employment Permits Occupation Lists and Review of Minimum Annual Remuneration (MAR) delivered significant changes to the employment permits system, with changes to 43 occupations, and the introduction of a roadmap for increasing salary thresholds for employment permits. The first remuneration adjustments were introduced through amendment to employment permit regulations commencing on 17 January 2024, and they affected new permit applications and renewal applications received from that date onwards.

Minimum thresholds for most occupations were raised to €34,000 or €38,000, depending on the type of permit. An increase to the MAR threshold of €30,000 for the occupations of Health Care Assistants, Home Carers and Care Workers was deferred until 17 January 2025, following a submission from the sector highlighting their specific funding challenges.

Considering concerns raised by some stakeholders relating to the general increased costs of doing business, a review of the Roadmap commenced in Summer 2024. In November 2024, the Department launched a targeted consultation seeking feedback from employers, employer representatives, employee representatives and other interested stakeholders on the proposed Roadmap and further increases to MAR thresholds as set out in the Roadmap have been paused pending the outcome of this review. The findings arising from the review will be presented to the Minister on completion. Changes made to the Employment Permits Occupations Lists addressed ongoing skills and labour shortages in sectors, such as inclusion of the role of sea fisher in the Irish fleet into the employment permits system.

Employment Permits Processing.

Demand for employment permits has seen record levels of applications received in each of the years 2021, 2022 and 2023. Throughout 2024 this trend continued. The ongoing increase in demand is principally driven by enhanced economic activity in the State, tight labour market (with over 2.7 million people in employment and unemployment standing at 4.2% in December 2024) and the 2023 expansion of the Occupations Lists.

Indicative of full employment, the total number of applications received in 2024 was 46,624, a 21% increase on 2023. 39,400 permits were issued in 2024. Across the main permit types there were 17,167 Critical Skills Employment Permits and 19,478 General Employment Permits issued. In addition, 1,953 Intra-Company Transfer Permits were issued in 2024. Out of the 26 counties, 23 saw an increase in applications submitted, with the average change in demand across all counties being 36%.

The Department is committed to reducing processing times for permit applications and in 2024 provided additional resources to meet the increasing demands for the service. In addition, existing IT systems are being replaced with a modern, fit-for-purpose, cloud-based system which will transform the way in which employment permits are submitted, processed and issued. The technical development work for the new system progressed throughout 2024 with a go live date in early 2025.

The Single Permit Directive.

In December 2022, Government agreed in principle that a single application procedure for employment permits and immigration permissions should be developed and that an Interdepartmental Working Group be put in place to develop an implementation plan for consideration by Government. The Interdepartmental Working Group delivered its report in May 2024 recommending that Ireland develop a Single Application Procedure, in line with practice in other EU countries and the EU's Single Permit Directive. In May 2024 Government gave approval for the Department, and the Department of Justice to begin the roll out of a single permit to both work and live in Ireland. Once this project is delivered, it will significantly enhance Ireland's ability to compete internationally to attract talent, addressing skills shortages in our economy and promoting economic growth.



Strategic Goal 2:

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

The work of the Department in 2024 aligned with national and EU climate and digital objectives, while fostering innovation, resilience, and inclusive economic growth.

The Green Transition.

Energy Policy for a Competitive Enterprise Sector.

The Department's Climate Action and Energy Policy Unit focusses on the energy trilemma of security of supply, affordability/competitiveness, and sustainability as it relates to business and competitiveness. Security of energy supply is crucial to Ireland's attractiveness as a place for enterprise investment, job creation and a place to do business. A well-functioning energy sector is also critical to the overall functioning of Ireland's economy and society. The Department participates in the Energy Security Group, and engages with relevant departments, state bodies and the wider industry on energy issues.

During 2024 the Department contributed to various working groups that developed the National Energy Demand Strategy (NEDS), and which was published by the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) in summer 2024. The objective of the NEDS is to plan for a more dynamic energy demand system to better respond to high availability or limited supply of renewable energy generation – to maximise renewables energy use, limit conventional generation, improve security of supply, and decarbonise the grid which is consistent with national policy and the mandate of the Department from a climate perspective. The Department monitors

energy price trends and works to mitigate the impact of energy prices on competitiveness, and engages with the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications, other relevant departments, state bodies and wider industry to drive competitiveness, innovation and best practice in the energy sector.

EU Net-Zero Industry Act.

The *Net-Zero Industry Act (NZIA)* came into force in June 2024 and its provisions will apply, in a phased manner, over the subsequent 9-month period. It aims to create a regulatory environment that will provide a framework for net-zero technologies. The NZIA is designed 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. It aims to attain at least 40% of the annual deployment needs for net-zero technologies manufactured in the EU by 2030.

The Department is leading on implementation of the Regulation. Work progressed in 2024 through the Interdepartmental Working Group, led by this Department. In addition, bilateral meetings are being held with individual departments and agencies to identify issues and ensure delivery of related provisions in compliance with the respective deadlines. Legislative provisions have been drafted relating

to designation of certain bodies and forwarded to the Office of Parliamentary Counsel.

EU Green Transition Directives.

In 2024, two EU Directives designed to further the Green Transition were published in the EU's Official Journal. The Directive on empowering consumers for the green transition through better protection against unfair practices and through better information, and the Directive on common rules promoting the repair of goods.

The Green Transition Directive increases consumer rights in two main areas. The first relates to the making of any 'green' claims and ensures that claims made are both relevant and accurate. The second is in relation to consumers' rights in respect of the information they must be provided with about products they are purchasing.

The Right to Repair Directive is part of a broader set of measures to support the Commission's goal of climate neutrality in the EU by 2050. This legislation will make it easier for consumers to seek repair instead of replacement and repair services will become more accessible, transparent and attractive. Both Directives have transposition deadlines and implementation dates in 2026.

Climate Appraisal.

The White Paper on Enterprise tasked the enterprise agencies with placing sustainability and digitalisation at the core of their objectives. To this end, in Q2 of 2024, IDA Ireland introduced the climate appraisal of capital-intensive project proposals from new and existing clients utilising an updated Economic Appraisal Model.

The Department completed the integration of emissions into the Economic Appraisal Model in April 2024, in line with initiative 1.3 of the White Paper on Enterprise. The model factors the cost of carbon emissions into the grant decision making process by the enterprise agencies.

Environmental Aid Fund.

Industrial emissions account for around 10% of Ireland's total emissions and we are committed to reducing on-site emissions in our manufacturing sectors by 35% by 2030. This will require reducing emissions in Ireland's biggest emitting industrial sectors. Most of these companies are clients of Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland and both agencies are actively working with businesses to progress impactful decarbonisation plans. These are concentrated in a group of manufacturing companies primarily in the cement, alumina, food and beverage, pharmaceutical and chemicals sectors. While emissions are projected to decrease year on year to 2030, the rate of reduction is insufficient to meet the 2030 target.

The €300 million Environmental Aid Scheme enables IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland to accelerate decarbonising investments by these businesses. The objective of the Environmental Aid scheme is to incentivise and accelerate investment in initiatives to improve energy efficiency; to promote the uptake of energy from renewable sources and to encourage the

carrying out of environmental studies. As of the end of December 2024, EI allocated €28.8 million of Environmental Aid. IDA Ireland had confirmed approvals of €28.5 million for the same period.

The Green Transition Fund.

The Green Transition Fund is part of Ireland's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) and has a total budget of €55 million. The Fund supports businesses at every step of their decarbonisation journey, from planning for the green transition, to investing in decarbonising their manufacturing processes, as well as providing grants to explore the development of new sustainable products or services. In 2024, €11.4 million in funding was approved under the Green Transition Fund across 212 projects.

Offshore Wind Industrial Strategy.

The Government set a target in its Climate Action Plan 2023 to provide 80% of Ireland's electricity from renewable sources by 2030. At least 5GW of this is to come from offshore wind energy (OWE). Ireland's total Offshore Renewable Energy (ORE) capacity is expected to increase to at least 37GW by 2050, with the vast majority of this expected to be delivered from OWE.

In March 2024 the Department published [Powering Prosperity – Ireland's Offshore Wind Industrial Strategy](#). It includes forty actions to be completed by the end of 2025 and was developed as part of close ongoing collaboration between this and other government departments and agencies of the Offshore Wind Delivery Taskforce. These actions aim to build a strong and resilient offshore wind supply chain in Ireland, as well as exploring opportunities for Irish companies to play a major role in the development of offshore wind projects in Ireland and abroad. It also examines 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 through maximising the potential of existing regional structures and working with the enterprise agencies to explore new initiatives such as the potential to develop Green Energy Industrial Parks of scale.

Among some of the actions already completed is the establishment of an annual joint offshore renewable energy event with Scotland, designed to increase cooperation between the two countries in the sector, the publication of an Offshore Wind Skills Action Plan by the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, a fact-finding mission to Denmark, as well as an RD&I Showcase and Access to Finance Event as part of Enterprise Ireland's Offshore Wind Forum 2024. Two notable actions currently underway are Action 37 to 'Commission a sectoral assessment of energy park concepts', and Action 25 to 'Progressing the development of an Offshore Wind Centre of Excellence (OWCE), including a feasibility study and developing a detailed project plan'. Initial funding for the OWCE was allocated in Budget 2025, and Steering Groups have been established to progress both actions.

Climate Toolkit 4 Business.

The Climate Toolkit 4 Business helps businesses to understand their carbon footprint and how to reduce it through providing a tailored action plan. Since its launch in 2021, over 17,000 tailored climate action plans have been generated for businesses. The Department continued to promote the Climate Toolkit 4 Business in 2024 through the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) energy show, social media and the agencies under its aegis.

Energy Efficient Grant.

In 2024, the Energy Efficiency Grant increased to a maximum grant of €10,000, and the Government contribution rate to 75%. The eligible expenditure under this scheme was also amended to cover a wider range of green interventions that will further support small business to invest in technology and equipment and will increase the agility and resilience of these businesses to operate in a sustainable manner.

Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation.

The Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation [ESPR] aims to reduce the environmental impact of the products that we use. It is part of the European Green Deal and the cornerstone of the Commission's circular economy strategy. It came into force in July 2024 replacing and extending Ecodesign Directive 2009/125/EC (which applied only to energy-using products). It will change the way we design, make and use products by setting requirements to reduce the negative environmental impacts throughout a product's life cycle. The Department, along with Enterprise Ireland is working across Government to put in place an appropriate and effective regime for the implementation of ESPR in Ireland.

Industrial Heat Decarbonisation.

The Department published the "[Roadmap for the Decarbonisation of Industrial Heat](#)" in June 2024. It sets out the key policies and Government supports available to facilitate sectors such as food and drink, cement, chemicals, pharmaceuticals and others, to invest in technologies to reduce their on-site emissions from the manufacturing combustion process through a combination of energy efficiency and fuel switching measures.

The Roadmap promotes energy efficiency first, and then the displacement of fossil fuel use. In line with the findings of SEAI's National Heat Study, electrification of heat will primarily be used to decarbonise low-temperature heat use in industry. Biomass and biogases, such as biomethane, should be explored as decarbonisation options where electrification is not feasible and possible.

Announced alongside the roadmap was a ringfencing of €300 million, under the Department's agreed National Development Plan's ceilings, which will support businesses in making significant investment decisions towards achieving our 2030 abatement targets.

Since the publication of the Roadmap, the Department has advanced a programme of work to address the barriers to industry decarbonisation, working with colleagues across the system to identify the policies and levers that will unlock carbon abatement opportunities. A series of enabling measures is being considered for implementation to expedite emission reductions and enable decarbonisation pathways for hard-to-abate sectors.

Decarbonising Construction Materials.

The Cement and 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 May 2024 the Group published an independent expert report [Reducing embodied carbon in cement and concrete through Public Procurement in Ireland](#). This report informed the government's new procurement guidance for public bodies for reducing embodied carbon in construction and promotes the reduction of embodied carbon in publicly supported construction projects, particularly the procurement of cement and concrete. Minister Burke hosted a Ministerial Roundtable with the Cement Sector in October 2024. The Minister was provided with detail of the cement sector's planned pathway to meet the Government's ambitions to decarbonise construction materials and the plans for a minimum of 35% emissions reduction.

The Department is a member of the Timber in Construction Steering Group which was established to create conditions to increase the use of timber in construction whilst ensuring the highest degree of building safety and property protection; to examine regulatory and standardisation challenges; and to maximise the use of homegrown timber in construction. This Department provides Secretariat supports to the Thematic Group "Theme 1: Market Opportunity". The Group is working to develop baseline data and analysis to demonstrate the market opportunities for timber in construction in Ireland.

Decarbonising the Commercial Built Environment.

The Climate Action Plan details our level of ambition for decarbonising the commercial built environment. The Commercial Built Environment Roadmap Working Group has engaged with high abatement sectors (hospitality, retail, office users) and wider business representatives which supported it, in finalising the Roadmap in late 2024. A Roadmap to Decarbonise our Commercial Buildings is expected to be published in early 2025 and will identify a number of key enabling actions to support commercial building owners and users to achieve the targets set for the commercial built environment. The Department is actively prioritising those actions that have been identified in the Roadmap.

The Department also supported the availability of specific business supports for climate action during 2024 which led to the launch, by the Department of Energy, Climate and Communications, of the Business Energy Upgrades Scheme (BEUS). BEUS is available through SEAI and has been introduced to provide a range of supports to assist the business, agricultural, public body, or non-profit sector to introduce energy efficient and renewable measures into their buildings.

Modern Methods of Construction in Housing.

As part of the whole-of-Government *Housing for All – a New Housing Plan for Ireland*, the Department promotes construction sector innovation and productivity, including through the adoption of Modern Methods of Construction (MMC). The term MMC captures a range of innovative construction processes including two-dimensional panelised housing systems, three-dimensional volumetric/modular housing systems, and advanced site-based processes. MMC assists with the faster delivery of compliant, high-quality,

environmentally sustainable, and more affordable housing.

In 2024, the cross-government MMC Leadership and Integration Group, chaired by this Department, met regularly. In 2025 industry participation in the group will feature frequently. The Group has continued to engage with partners across the Government system to progress the MMC development policy agenda, including delivery of a new MMC Demonstration Park led by Laois-Offaly Education and Training Board at the National Construction Training Centre at Mount Lucas, Co. Offaly. In July 2024 the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs published "Skills for Modern Methods of Construction" and the Department will continue its engagement as recommendations are implemented.

The Department secured €1.5 million under the Housing for All Implementation Fund, including allocations to support National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) certification services and for Enterprise Ireland's Built to Innovate programme. The NSAI drove further process improvements in its Agrément Certification Scheme for MMC during 2024. Enterprise Ireland has continued to promote a suite of innovation, productivity and lean business supports under their Built to Innovate programme to the residential construction sector and are continuing to develop the offering in the context of enabling greater capacity and scale in the sector, informed by international best practice.

Construct Innovate, developed by Enterprise Ireland, is an industry-led research centre with a vision to make Ireland a global research and innovation leader for sustainable construction and built environment technology. In September 2024, Minister Burke announced the allocation of an additional €5 million in core funding to

Construct Innovate Technology Centre for a housing research programme. The announcement underpins a commitment in Housing for All for the Centre to prioritise housing-related research challenges. The Department also continued its outreach attending domestic industry events and fact-finding visits to the US, Estonia and Finland and organising a construction industry networking event at the Embassy of Ireland in London.

Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund.

The Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund (DTIF) is a €500 million fund to encourage collaborative research between Irish enterprises and research institutions in the development of disruptive technologies. It is managed by the Department and is open to projects that will alter markets, transform the way a business operates or involve new products or the emergence of new business models. The fund places a large emphasis on SME participation.

In 2024, €11.5 million in funding was allocated to 2 successful projects. One project was awarded €6.9 million under DTIF Call 6 and one project was awarded €4.6 million under DTIF Call 7. Across 7 DTIF Calls, this brings the total amount awarded to €376 million allocated across 105 projects, with additional projects expected to be announced under DTIF Call 7 in 2025. Of the 395 partners participating in the fund, 67% are based outside of Dublin, thereby fostering strong regional economic development across Ireland.

The European Chips Act.

The *European Chips Act*, which entered into force in September 2023, 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.

Throughout 2024, the Department has worked to implement the *Chips Act*, continuing to engage with key stakeholders to inform its work and secure a better understanding of a very complex supply chain, looking to support robust and reliable supply chains, skills availability, and open market access.

The Department successfully nominated a candidate "Competence Centre" for Ireland under the Chips for Europe Initiative in July 2024. The successful candidate was IC-3, a consortium of MIDAS, University College Dublin and Tyndall National Institute. The Department provided administrative support to the IC-3 consortium in its application to the Chips Joint Undertaking, which was approved for funding by the EU's Chips Joint Undertaking in November 2024.

Further, in 2024, Tyndall National Institute was approved to participate in two pan-European 'Pilot Line' projects under Pillar 1 of the *European Chips Act*, in collaboration with leading European RTOs. The focus of these projects is to aid the development of advanced sub-2nm leading edge system on chips (named Nano IC), Fully Depleted Silicon-on-Insulator targeting 7nm (named FAMES). Participation in these Pilot Lines is funded by the Department through IDA Ireland. Tyndall is also participating in PIXEurope, a Pilot Line for advanced photonic integrated circuits. As a result, Tyndall will receive approximately €50 million in Government support over the lifetime of the pilot lines project with a further €50 million co-funding from the European Commission.

National Semiconductor Strategy.

In 2024, the Department also progressed the development of a [National Semiconductor Strategy](#) which, subject to Government approval, is due for publication early in 2025. The Strategy will aim to ensure Ireland can play a proportionate part in reaching the *European Chips Act* and Digital Europe targets to double Europe's current global market share of semiconductors to 20% by 2030, building on a strong position in the sector in Ireland built up over several decades.

The Department will continue to work closely with stakeholders to determine how Ireland can best leverage the potential of the *European Chips Act* for increased research and manufacturing investment in Ireland.

The Digital Transition.

Enterprise Digital Advisory Forum.

The Enterprise Digital Advisory Forum is chaired by the Minister of State for Trade Promotion, Digital and Company Regulation and brings together representatives of indigenous enterprise of all sizes, multi-national enterprises, and experts in digital technologies and their adoption by enterprise. The forum provides a focused body for Government to hear the views and perspectives of enterprise and experts and met three times in 2024.

Digital Transition Fund.

Funding is being provided through the EU's Recovery and Resilience Facility under Ireland's National Recovery and Resilience Plan and is supporting the digital transformation of Irish enterprise. In 2024, €18.5 million in funding was approved under the Digital Transition Fund to provide direct-to-company support to 318 companies across 366 projects.

European Digital Innovation Hubs.

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. Ireland's four EDIHs, FactoryXChange, CeADAR, Data2Sustain and ENTIRE, significantly accelerated their activities during 2024.

By the end of 2024, EDIHs have provided 505 services to 337 companies (predominantly SMEs and start-ups), helping them adopt digital innovations in their products, services and processes in key technologies such as cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, robotics, high-performance computing and digital upskilling. In addition, 23 public organisations benefited from the EDIHs' services. EDIH services are fully funded for public organisations and for SMEs (under De Minimis Aid) by the Digital Europe Programme and the EU Recovery and Resilience Facility.

Over €1.9 million in funding was expended by the 4 EDIHs with the aim of helping companies (notably SMEs) through access to research infrastructure, technical expertise and experimentation in order that these organisations can 'test before invest'.

Grow Digital Portal.

In July 2024 the Grow Digital Portal was launched to help companies to embrace basic digital tools for driving efficiencies and productivity, and for marketing and selling online where appropriate for their business. It helps businesses at any stage of their digital journey. It contains a free, 5-minute online assessment that generates a Grow Digital Scorecard providing businesses with bespoke advice and information on potential supports and funding options.

Businesses can also use the portal to learn more about the benefits of digitalisation and identify what steps and digital tools they might consider using. It also contains a case study catalogue with digital success stories from a range of businesses showcasing how they have embraced digital solutions to boost their operations. The launch of Grow Digital is a key deliverable under Harnessing Digital, the National Digital Strategy, to help achieve the targets of 90% of SMEs having at least basic digital intensity, and at least 75% take-up of AI, Cloud, and Data Analytics by 2030.

Grow Digital Voucher.

The Grow Digital Voucher, launched in September 2024, offers small and medium businesses with up to 50 employees financial support to embrace digital technology including AI. Replacing the Trading Online Voucher, this is an enhanced financial support, funding a wider range of digital software solutions and all businesses are eligible whether exporting or not. The Grow Digital Voucher can be used to help businesses act on recommendations received through the Grow Digital Portal, and to invest in digital systems such as online booking, stock control, AI, customer insights, payroll software, and cyber security. It offers funding of up to 50% of total investment up to a maximum of €5,000 and the Voucher is available from all Local Enterprise Offices.

Artificial Intelligence.

Refresh of the National AI Strategy.

A Refresh of the [National AI Strategy](#) was published in November 2024. The Refresh takes account of the significant developments in AI technology and regulation since the original Strategy was published in 2021. It builds on the solid foundations in place and aims to balance innovation with proportionate regulation and trust-building measures. The Strategy sets out a whole-of-Government approach to putting the necessary enablers in place to underpin AI adoption in enterprise and public services, including a supportive innovation ecosystem, a secure data and connectivity infrastructure, and policies to ensure that the workforce is prepared for the impact of AI. A key part of ensuring AI is widely adopted in the economy and society more broadly is building public trust.

AI Advisory Council.

The AI Advisory Council, comprised of leading experts from academia, industry and civil society, was established in January 2024. The Council provides independent expert advice to government on artificial intelligence policy, with a specific focus on building public trust and promoting the development of trustworthy, person-centred AI. Its first role is providing expert guidance, insights, and recommendations in response to specific requests from government. Its second role is developing and delivering its own workplan of advice to government on issues of artificial intelligence policy, providing insights on trends, opportunities and challenges. Throughout the year, Council members engaged in hundreds of events to build confidence in the use of trustworthy AI, including media interviews, and participation in business, public and sectoral events.

EU Developments.

EU Artificial Intelligence Act.

The landmark *EU Artificial Intelligence Act (Regulation 2024/1689)* was adopted in May 2024 and entered into force on 2 August 2024. The Act provides a high level of protection for people's health and safety, and their fundamental rights, to promote responsible uses of trustworthy AI.

The AI Act is risk-based so that its provisions are targeted and proportionate – it is not a blanket instrument applying to all AI systems. The Act's provisions apply on a phased basis over the period to August 2027.

The Department has lead responsibility for the national implementation of the AI Act and throughout 2024, it engaged with other Government Departments to assess the optimal national configuration of competent authorities for efficient and effective enforcement of the Act, in preparation for the deadline for the designation of these authorities of 2 August 2025.

In May 2024, the Department held a public consultation on the national implementation of the Act. A total of 62 submissions were received from a wide range of stakeholders. The submissions have been reviewed and are published on the Department's website.

The European Artificial Intelligence Board was established by the AI Act in September 2024 with a mandate to advise on the implementation of the Act, EU AI research and innovation policy, and international cooperation on AI. The Department is Ireland's representative on the Board.

To comply with Ireland's first obligation under the Act, in October 2024, the Department published a list of 9 national public authorities responsible for protecting fundamental rights under the

AI Act. These bodies are not competent authorities for the Act but will be conferred with additional powers under the AI Act to facilitate them in carrying out their current responsibilities in circumstances where use of AI poses a high risk to those rights.

Council of Europe Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence.

Negotiations on the Convention, which were led by the Department on behalf of Ireland, concluded successfully with the adoption of the Convention by the Council of Europe in May 2024. The Convention aims to ensure that activities within the lifecycle of artificial intelligence systems are fully consistent with human rights, democracy and the rule of law, while being supportive of technological progress and innovation. It is the first legally binding international treaty on AI. The Department liaised closely with other Government Departments, as well as the European Commission, during the negotiations to ensure the Convention is fully compatible with Union law in general, and the *EU AI Act* in particular. The European Commission signed the Convention on behalf of the EU in September 2024.

EU Digital Services Act.

The *Digital Services Act (DSA) (Regulation (EU) 2022/2065)* entered into force in November 2022 and applied in full 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 its centre. Although the EU Regulation has direct legal effect in EU Member States and consequently its provisions and obligations apply directly to online Intermediary Services Providers (ISPs), it was necessary to introduce national legislation to

implement those provisions of the EU Regulation that provide for the supervision and enforcement of those obligations.

In this regard, the national legislation, the *Digital Services Act 2024*, commenced in February 2024. It provides Coimisiún na Meán and the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission with the necessary powers to carry out investigations and take enforcement actions, including the imposition of significant financial penalties for non-compliance. As the Digital Services Coordinator, Coimisiún na Meán is the single point of contact, with lead responsibility for all matters to do with the EU Regulation in Ireland, including coordination across the EU, handling complaints, communications, supervision, investigation, and enforcement.

In 2024, the Department also provided significant additional resources to the authorities to support their new responsibilities, with €11 million provided to Coimisiún na Meán for the completion of preparations, capacity building and to support initial operations throughout the year. From 2025 onwards, the DSA functions of Coimisiún na Meán will be funded through an industry levy.

Digital Services (Levy) Act 2024.

The *Digital Services (Levy) Act 2024* commenced in July 2024 empowering Coimisiún na Meán and the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) to charge a levy on service providers to fund their enforcement and regulatory functions under the *EU Digital Services Act* and the Terrorist Content Online Regulation, reducing the burden on the taxpayer.

EU Digital Markets Act.

The *Digital Markets Act (DMA) (Regulation (EU) 2022/1925)* entered into force in November 2022 and applied in full from March 2024. It introduced harmonised rules for platforms that act as “gatekeepers” by controlling core platform services in the EU’s market for digital services. It regulates certain practices by the gatekeepers to promote competition and fairness in the EU’s digital market.

The European Commission has exclusive responsibility for enforcing the DMA but may call upon Member States for assistance during its investigations under the DMA. The Department enacted secondary legislation in 2024 to designate the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) as the Irish point of contact for the European Commission in this regard.

EU Data Act.

The *EU Data Act (Regulation 2023/2854)* entered into force in January 2024 and will become applicable across the EU from September 2025. The *EU Data Act* is a key pillar of the EU Data Strategy, which aims to make the EU a leader in a data-driven society, including by creating a single market for data. The EU Data Act aims to foster a competitive data market by making data more accessible and usable and by clarifying who can create value from data and under which conditions. In October 2024, Government approved the designation of two authorities, the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC), and the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg), for two of the most substantive roles under the Act. Work is progressing on identification of remaining bodies for roles under the Act, with preparations for national implementation, including legislative underpinning underway.

D9+ Ministerial Meeting.

The D9+ Group seeks to lead the digital transformation of the European Union by advancing policies on the four pillars of the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI). The Group meets twice a year with meetings taking place in the Member State holding the 6-month Rotating Chair. As Chair, Ireland hosted the D9+ Ministerial meeting in April 2024 in Dublin Castle and was chaired by Ministers of State Dara Calleary and Ossian Smyth. A key achievement was the successful adoption of Ireland’s D9+ Declaration, signed by twelve EU digital ministers.

Digital Ireland Conference.

The Digital Ireland Conference was held in April 2024 in Dublin Castle and brought together representatives from government, industry, and academia to discuss digital developments within the EU and globally. The overarching themes for discussion included implementation of digital regulation, Artificial Intelligence and the opportunities of digital transformation. The Digital Ireland Conference demonstrated Ireland’s ambition as laid out in the National Digital Strategy to continue to be a digital leader at the heart of European and global digital developments. The conference was part of Ireland’s broader D9+ Ministerial Programme.



Strategic Goal 3:

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

In 2024, the Department advanced its third strategic goal through a range of legislative, policy, and institutional developments aimed at fostering a fair, secure, and progressive labour market.

Employment Rights.

In March 2024, the Department published the *General Scheme of the Employment (Restriction of Certain Mandatory Retirement Ages) Bill* to allow, but not compel, an employee to stay in employment until the State Pension age. The Bill will implement a key commitment included in the Government's response to the Pensions Commission Recommendations and Implementation Plan.

In May 2024, the Department published the *General Scheme of the Protection of Employees (Employers' Insolvency) (Amendment) Bill*. This legislation will address the Glegola Supreme Court judgment by fully transposing Article 2(1) of Directive 2008/94/EC, as well as various technical amendments to improve the Insolvency Payment Scheme's operation.

The *Employment (Collective Redundancies and Miscellaneous Provisions) and Companies (Amendment) Act 2024* commenced in July 2024. This Act reflects a Programme for Government commitment and implemented the remaining legislative commitments set out in the *Plan of Action on Collective Redundancies* following Insolvency. It further enhances the protection of employees in a collective redundancy situation following their employer's insolvency and provides for the establishment of a new statutory

Employment Law Review Group which will advise the Minister on all aspects of employment and redundancy law. In August 2024, Minister Higgins published an updated Information Handbook on Collective Redundancies, including a Plain Language Summary available in 8 languages. The Information Handbook provides clear and accessible information for employees facing a collective redundancy situation following a company insolvency.

Sick Leave Entitlement.

Following consultation with the Minister for Social Protection and the social partners Minister Higgins made a Ministerial Order in January 2024 to increase the statutory sick leave entitlement in a calendar year from 3 to 5 days. The Department ran a targeted multilingual social media campaign to raise awareness of the entitlement increase.

In line with the requirements of section 6 of the *Sick Leave Act 2022* and to inform decisions in respect of the potential further rollout of the statutory sick leave scheme, research was conducted on the impact of sick leave to date. The research included a comprehensive firm-level survey, representative of the sectoral and size distribution of Irish businesses.

Right to Request Remote Working.

In March 2024 Minister Burke brought the right to request remote working arrangements into operation for all employees. This right is provided for within the *Work Life Balance Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2023*. On the same day, the Minister, in consultation with the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, also approved and published the Code of Practice for Employers and Employees Right to Request Flexible Working and Right to Request Remote Working. Employers and employees are obliged to have regard to the Code of Practice when considering applications for remote working arrangements. Employees can refer a dispute to the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) where an employer fails to fulfil their obligations under the Act and the Code will be admissible in evidence in proceedings before a court, the Labour Court or the WRC. The Code of Practice was developed by the WRC, in consultation with trade unions and employer representative bodies.

Payment of Wages Review.

In April 2024, the Department published a Statutory Review Report on the operation of the *Payment of Wages (Amendment) (Tips and Gratuities) Act 2022*. The Department conducted a stakeholder consultation and a public opinion survey as part of assessing the impact of the legislation. This report completed the statutory review requirement under section 9 of the Act.

Employment Law Review Group.

On 1 July 2024, the Employment Law Review Group (ELRG) was established on a statutory basis following the commencement of the *Employment (Collective Redundancies and Miscellaneous Provisions) and Companies (Amendment) Act 2024*. The ELRG will be an expert and technical advisory group and will provide a valuable resource to conduct an ongoing assessment of employment and redundancy law to ensure that it is fit for purpose. In December 2024, following an open call for expressions of interest for appropriately qualified candidates to be considered for membership of the ELRG, the Minister appointed members to the ELRG, including the Chair, Ministerial Nominees and representatives of nominating bodies from Government, regulatory, professional, academic and legal categories.

Low Pay Commission.

Throughout 2024 the Department continued to provide the secretariat to the Low Pay Commission (LPC), the body responsible for making recommendations on the National Minimum Wage. In June 2024 the Commission's [Report on Sub-minimum or youth rates of the National Minimum Wage](#) was published. In September 2024 the Department commissioned an economic impact assessment to evaluate possible changes to the sub-minimum wage in Ireland. Additionally, the Department transposed Directive (EU) 2022/2041 on adequate minimum wages in the European Union. In July 2024, the Commission submitted its Annual Report to the Minister which recommended setting the National Minimum Wage at €13.50 from 1 January 2025. This recommendation was accepted by Government and announced as part of Budget 2025.

Industrial Relations.

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 3,580 days lost to strike action in 2024 compared to 4,203 days lost in 2023.

Collective Bargaining.

Many of the recommendations in the Report of the Labour Employer Economic Forum (LEEF) High-Level Group on Collective Bargaining are being progressed. The Labour Court is developing new rules on the use of technical assessors. The social partners are engaged with the Workplace Relations Commission on developing a code of best practice for collective bargaining. A training proposal on collective bargaining is being developed. Engagement is ongoing with on the proposals which would require legislative change.

A technical working group was established with the social partners to examine possible actions for inclusion in Ireland's Action Plan on Collective Bargaining which, under the EU Adequate Minimum Wages Directive, must be submitted to the European Commission by the end of 2025. In October 2024, the Government committed to launch a consultation process on the content of Ireland's Action Plan.

Sectoral Employment Orders and Employment Regulation Orders.

A Sectoral Employment order (SEO) can set the pay, pension or sick pay scheme for workers in a particular economic sector. A new SEO for the Construction Industry (SI 620/2024) was approved by the Minister for Business, Employment and Retail in November 2024 with the amended minimum pay rates coming into effect in August 2025. The SEO is critical to ensure ongoing industrial peace in the construction sector, so the construction industry can urgently deliver quality housing.

An Employment Regulation Order (ERO) is drawn up by a Joint Labour Committee (JLC) and signed into law by the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment. A JLC is composed of equal numbers of representatives of employers and workers who meet under an independent chair to collectively bargain for improved terms and conditions to apply to workers in a particular sector. Several EROs came into force in 2024, demonstrating that the JLCs can work very effectively to bring real benefits for workers when employer and employee representatives are willing to engage constructively. These are: Contract Cleaning (SI 255/ 2024); Early Years Learning (SI 296/2024 and 297/ 2024); and Security Industry (SI 319/ 2024).

Workplace Relations Commission.

In February 2024, Audrey Cahill was appointed new Director General of the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC). The WRC is an independent office of the Department with responsibility for achieving compliance with employment rights legislation, workplace dispute resolution and promoting harmonious industrial relations in the State.

In 2024, the Information and Customer Service Unit of the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) answered 59,431 telephone calls from the public who were

seeking information on employment rights, industrial relations, and employment permits. The Inspection Service of the WRC completed 5,156 workplace inspections resulting in €2,158,870 in unpaid wages recovered during the year. In 2024, the WRC Adjudication service received 7,316 complaint applications comprising 14,890 specific complaints submitted for adjudication. This is a +18% increase in the number of complaint applications in comparison to 2023. Some 894 pre-adjudication mediations were concluded by the WRC in 2024, with a resolution rate of 59%. The WRC's conciliation service achieved 85% success rate in dispute resolution through 2024.

Labour Court.

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 2024, the Labour Court received 1,119 appeals and referrals, compared to 1,141 referrals in 2023. The Court scheduled 1,385 hearings; this compared to 1,513 hearings in 2023. In 2024, the Court issued 507 recommendations/ determinations/ decisions compared with 425 in 2023. In addition, the Court investigated 26 appeals/referrals that were ultimately settled prior to the issue of a decision by the Court. A total of 276 appeals to the Court were withdrawn in 2024, compared with 753 in 2023.

During the year, the new Case Management System, introduced in late 2023, was used at the Court, providing a comprehensive platform for the activities of the Court and, for the first time, allowing online referrals and appeals to be lodged directly by parties.

Construction Contracts Adjudication Service.

The *Construction Contracts Act 2013* applies to construction contracts that have been entered into since July 2016. During 2024 there were 89 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 Chairperson submitted the eighth Annual Report on the Implementation of the *Construction Contracts Act, 2013* to Minister Higgins.

Balance for Better Business.

In May 2024, Balance for Better Business launched its new [strategy, targets and roadmap to improve gender balance](#) at board and leadership level among businesses in Ireland. The new 5-year strategy follows the completion of the initiative's first 5-year cycle since the group's inception back in 2018. During this time Ireland has made significant progress in improving gender balance in senior leadership across the enterprise sector. Having lagged the EU average for female representation on the boards and leadership teams of its largest listed companies in 2018, Ireland now ranks 6th in the EU for female board representation and 5th in the EU for leadership teams, well ahead of the EU average. Significantly, in 2024 the share of female directors on the Boards of Ireland's largest listed companies on ISEQ20 reached 40%.

The new 5-year strategy through to 2028 seeks to further build upon the progress made under the first 5-year term and will focus on enhancing guidance to organisations in advancing their gender balance journey in a structured way, with the overarching goal of attaining 40% plus female representation on both company boards and leadership teams. Balance for Better Business will seek to achieve these

targets through 5 key pillars: targets, impact, advocacy and policy, as well as acting as a strong trusted voice.

The Department hosted two Balance for Better Business industry roundtable events during Q4 2024. These roundtables brought together key stakeholders from the Hospitality and Construction sectors to discuss how Government and industry can further collaborate in achieving 40%+ female representation on board and leadership teams.

Interdepartmental Collaboration.

The Department worked collaboratively with colleagues in the Department of Social Protection on an impact assessment of improvements to working conditions, including statutory sick pay, pension auto-enrolment, and the living wage. This research employed a mixed methods approach, with both a qualitative and quantitative component, and provided the evidence base for a package of supports for firms that were among the most adversely impacted from a cost perspective.

In addition, the Department worked collaboratively with colleagues in the Department of Finance on an assessment of the potential implications of AI for Ireland's labour market. This research examines the exposure of the labour market to the adoption of AI by enterprise, with an assessment across socio-economic and demographic criteria.

EU Developments.

Transposition of Directive (EU) 2022/2041 on Adequate Minimum Wages in the European Union.

The European Union (Adequate Minimum Wages) Regulations 2024 (S.I. No. 633/2024) gave effect to Directive (EU) 2022/2041 on adequate minimum wages in the European Union, in November 2024. One of the aims of this directive is to ensure that workers across the European Union are protected by adequate minimum wages allowing for a decent living wherever they work.

The regulations provide for an increased level of consultation between the Low Pay Commission and the social partners. They also provide for the Commission to consider specific considerations in its annual recommendation on the National Minimum Wage. This includes the purchasing power of the national minimum hourly rate of pay, the cost of living, long-term national productivity levels and developments, and indicative reference values used at international or national levels, such as 60% of the gross median wage, to guide the assessment of the adequacy of the national minimum hourly rate of pay.

EU Platform Work Directive.

Platform work is a form of employment in which organisations or individuals use an online platform to provide specific services in exchange for payment. On 14 October 2024, the European Council adopted new rules for platform work. Following adoption, member states have two years to incorporate the provisions of the directive into their national legislation. The Directive aims to make the use of algorithms in managing platform work more transparent and to help people working for platforms to correctly determine their employment status.

Standards and Safety.

Health and Safety Authority.

The Department ensures that the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) is adequately resourced and equipped from a legislative, staffing and financial perspective as well as to ensure that the HSA complies with the range of governance requirements and policies applicable to state agencies on staffing and budgetary matters.

During 2024, the HSA published the 2024 Code of Practice for the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Chemical Agents) Regulations (2001-2021) and the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Carcinogens, Mutagens and Reprotoxic Substances) Regulations (2024) which in conjunction with S.I. No. 122 of 2024 Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Carcinogens, Mutagens and Reprotoxic Substances) Regulations 2024 transposed Directive (EU) 2022/431 relates to the protection of workers from the risks related to exposure to carcinogens or mutagens at work.

S.I. No. 723 of 2024 Chemicals Act 2008 (CLP Regulation) Regulations 2024 brings the *Chemicals Act* in line with Regulation (EC) No 1272/2008 on classification, labelling and packaging. In 2024, the Department coordinated the Irish response to the revised Classification, Labelling and Packaging Regulation (CLP) regulation, the detergents and surfactants regulation and the One Substance One Assessment legislative package, with work continuing into 2025. Regulation (EU) 2024/2865 on classification, labelling and packaging of substances and mixtures came into effect in December 2024.

Work also began on assessing the transposition requirements for Directive on the protection of workers from the risks related to exposure to asbestos at work and Directive relating to the limit values for lead and its inorganic compounds and for di-isocyanates. Throughout 2024 the Department continued to engage with stakeholders on a wide-reaching proposal to ban all uses of Per- and Polyfluorinated Substances (PFAS) in the EU. The Department has been encouraging stakeholders to engage with the EU consultations to ensure that any final restriction proposal will be balanced and implementable.

The HSA's Occupational Health Division continued to assist businesses in complying with workplace health and safety obligations while also assisting employers and employees to deal with new and/or different work-related health and safety risks arising from changes in work practices, technology and innovation in the workplace at a domestic and EU level. In 2024, the HSA established the Health and Social Care Advisory Committee (HSCAC). The HSCAC engages with relevant stakeholder groups in health and social care sectors. The committee identifies and advises on current and emerging matters relating to improving safety, health and welfare, enhancing the guidance and advice provided to both employers and employees in this sector and ensuring the highest standards of worker health and safety.

Farm Safety.

The Department continued to work alongside the HSA in 2024 to improve work safety standards in the farming sector. The HSA continued to roll out its Farm Safety Action Plan 2021- 2024. The Plan aims to reduce the level of fatalities, serious injuries and ill health in the agriculture sector. The Plan focuses on high-risk activities particularly around the use of tractors and other farm vehicles, livestock handling and working at height. It also aims to improve farmer skill levels around risk identification and management. The Plan was developed in partnership with the HSA's Farm Safety Advisory Committee which includes stakeholders from the farming sector.

National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI).

In 2024, the Department continued to support the work of the NSAI in areas such as the built environment, digital transformation, climate action, and MedTech, by securing funding to cover the costs of additional staff required to deliver NSAI services in these key areas (the Department part-funds the agency to ensure certification and metrology services are provided for the benefit of the consumer and for trade).

With additional funding, NSAI created new certification posts in areas such as Artificial Intelligence, Sustainability and Built Environment, and Automotive. Standards Officers for Construction were hired under the Housing for All Programme, while new Packaging Inspectors joined the Legal Metrology Division. The Department fully supports NSAI's spread of activities and its blended focus between regulatory and wider strategic activities.

In February 2024, Minister Calleary addressed a key European Standards Technical Committee in Dublin, which focused on developing standards in Artificial Intelligence (AI). The event was co-hosted by NSAI and attended by European standards experts. The Minister emphasised the importance of responsible, ethical, and trustworthy standards for this fast-evolving technology. Since the *EU AI Act* came into force in August 2024, NSAI has worked closely with European partners to develop the standards to meet the Act's requirements.

Throughout 2024, NSAI continued to participate in the High-Level Forum on EU Standardisation by collaborating with European partners in various workstreams related to the EU's priority standardisation areas, particularly in AI. The purpose of the forum is to identify standardisation priorities in support of EU policies and legislation, including to support a green, digital and more resilient single market. NSAI's regulatory outputs in 2024 include published standards; legal metrology inspections of premises and trade instruments; motor vehicle products and construction products approved; and scientific instruments calibrated. Details of these and other outputs are detailed further in NSAI's 2024 Annual Report.



Strategic Goal 4:

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

In 2024, the Department reinforced Ireland as an attractive destination for investment and enterprise, with legislative and regulatory advancements central to the Departments agenda.

Regulatory Environment.

National Competitiveness and Productivity Council.

The Department aims to lead across Government on the development of evidence and data-based policy recommendations that will contribute to a competitive environment for investment, productivity, entrepreneurship and employment, drawing on the work and recommendations of the National Competitiveness and Productivity Council.

The Department continued to provide secretariat support to the Council in 2024. This included the publication of Ireland's Competitiveness Challenge 2024 and several research bulletins examining key areas of concern relating to our competitiveness position (e.g. examining the housing market, Ireland's innovation performance, and introducing the reformed competitiveness and productivity framework).

The first Competitiveness Summit also took place in 2024, hosted by the Taoiseach, with research support provided by this Department. On foot of this actions were agreed that will assist in addressing some of the more pressing competitiveness challenges facing Ireland in the short-to-medium term.

The Department also worked with the University of Limerick to host the first NCPC regional meeting, providing

Council Members and regional stakeholders with the opportunity to engage on key areas of concern in relation to competitiveness and productivity in the Mid-West region.

Company Law Review Group.

The Company Law Review Group (CLRG) is a statutory expert advisory group charged with advising the Minister on company law. It operates from a 2 year work programme, determined by the Minister, with Secretariat provided by the Department.

In May 2024, the CLRG's Corporate Governance Committee submitted a report to the Minister recommending an amendment to the *Companies Act 2014* and to the Rules of the Superior Courts to facilitate a fast-track application procedure for trademark proprietors who wish to challenge company names that infringe their trademark.

The CLRG's Corporate Insolvency Committee continued to provide technical assistance to the Department in its negotiations at EU Working Party level on the proposal for a Directive on harmonising certain aspects of insolvency law.

During 2024 the CLRG completed its 2022-2024 Work Programme and in October 2024 its new Work Programme for the period 2024-2026 was approved. The CLRG's current membership will continue until May 2026.

Legislative Advancements.

Companies (Corporate Governance, Enforcement and Regulatory Provisions) Act 2024.

The *Companies (Corporate Governance, Enforcement and Regulatory Provisions) Act 2024* was enacted in November 2024, with most of its provisions coming into force in December 2024. The Act was developed by the Department on foot of extensive consultation and engagement with stakeholders and introduces a diverse range of amendments and enhancements to the *Companies Act 2014*, primarily in the areas of corporate governance, company law enforcement and supervision, company law administration and corporate insolvency. The Act strikes a balance between providing flexibility to companies to efficiently conduct their business by streamlining and improving processes, creating efficiencies and removing unnecessary administration on the one hand, and equipping the statutory bodies with the tools to ensure increased compliance with company law. In recognition of the increasingly virtual and hybrid environment within which we work and conduct our business the Act gives companies and industrial and provident societies the option to hold hybrid or fully virtual general meetings.

Co-operative Societies Bill 2022.

The *Co-operative Societies Bill* provides for the most far-reaching reform of the legislation governing co-operatives in the history of the State. The Bill introduces a modern legal framework which will place the co-operative model on clearer legal basis and encourage the consideration of the co-operative model as an attractive formation option for entrepreneurs and for social and community activities. Drafting of this complex Bill, by the Office of Parliamentary Counsel, has been ongoing since Q2 2023 and was nearing completion by end 2024.

Corporate Sustainability Reporting Regulations.

The [Corporate Sustainability Reporting Regulations 2024](#) transpose the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive ([EU\) 2022/2464](#) which arises from the European Green Deal's climate change action objectives, to further enhance the disclosure by companies on climate and environmental data. The regulations came into effect in July 2024 and commence for financial years on or after:

- 1 January 2024 for public interest entities in scope of EU non-financial reporting rules (greater than 500 employees)
- 1 January 2025 for other large companies (at least 2 of balance sheet greater than €25 million, turnover greater than €50 million and employees greater than 250)
- 1 January 2026 for listed SMEs, with an 'opt out' possible until 2028

Companies in scope must report on a double materiality basis. This means disclosing both the risks they face from climate change and other Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) issues (financial materiality), and the impacts they may have on climate and society (impact materiality). They must also provide information on their value chain.

EU Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive.

The Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive was published in the Official Journal of the European Union in July 2024 (DIRECTIVE (EU) 2024/1760). The Directive focuses on establishing a system within company law to address adverse human rights and environmental impacts arising from companies' own operations and those of their subsidiaries and chain of activities. Member States have two years to give effect to the Directive, that is, until 26 July 2026. The Department has commenced preparations for transposition within this timeframe.

EU Directive on Upgrading Digital Company Law.

The proposal built on an earlier Directive on the use of digital tools and processes in company law (the "Digitalisation Directive"). The proposal aims to create greater transparency and further the digitalisation efforts of company law processes within the EU by aligning the information held on national business registers and BRIS (European Business Registers Interconnection System) in respect of limited liability companies, partnerships, and groups of companies. The proposal was formally adopted in December 2024 and is expected to be published in the Official Journal in Q1 2025. Member States will then have 30 months to give effect to the Directive.

Proposal for EU Directive on European Cross-Border Associations.

The proposal seeks to introduce an additional legal form of a European cross-border association in Member States' national legal systems, which is specifically designed for cross-border purposes and is intended to reduce legal and administrative burdens when it comes to the recognition and establishment of non-profit associations engaging in activities in another Member State. Examination of the proposal at EU working party level was ongoing at year end.

Foreign Subsidies Regulation.

The Foreign Subsidies Regulation aims to ensure that there is a level playing field for all companies operating in the Single Market, whilst remaining open to trade and investment. The Regulation is focused on mergers and acquisitions and public procurement contracts.

The Regulation applied with direct effect from 2023, however, as of 2024 the European Commission can call on Member States to assist them with investigations. The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission

(CCPC) will fulfil this function in Ireland and secondary legislation was completed to enable it to assist if so required.

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.

In 2024, the Department concluded negotiations on EU Directive 2024/2810 on multiple-vote shares structures (in companies that seek admission to trading of their shares on a multilateral trading facility). This initiative has the key objective to develop greater access to diverse sources of financing, especially for small to medium sized enterprises (SMEs) and startups, to reduce the reliance on bank financing. The Department is expected to transpose the Directive by 4 December 2026.

EU Directive harmonising certain aspects of Insolvency Law (INSOLIII).

The Insol III Proposal is intended to harmonise certain aspects of national insolvency law across EU Member States, the primary objective of which is to make them more efficient and effective with a view to facilitating more cross border investment. Such harmonisation has been a priority for the EU over the last decade.

The Department leads on this file and in December 2024, the Council adopted its position on key elements of the proposal. This partial general approach focuses on measures to preserve the insolvency estate, the duties of directors in the event of insolvency and transparency obligations. In 2025, the Department will lead discussions on the remaining provisions of the Proposal.

Consumers and Competition.

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

The Representative Actions for the Protection of Collective Interests of Consumers Act, 2023 commenced in April 2024. It is the first legislation of its type in Ireland, as it allows consumers to seek collective redress or remedy for an alleged infringement of their consumer rights by traders.

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. During 2024, the Minister designated two organisations as QEs, and each may take both domestic and cross-border infringement actions. A Register of QEs is maintained on the Department's website. In 2024, no Representative Actions had been filed with the Court by either an Irish QE or a QE from another Member State.

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

This Regulation entered into force in November 2023 and provides that from 1 December 2025, it will be possible for producers of craft and industrial products to apply for the Geographical Indication protection for the names of their products through a single application process covering all EU Member States. Throughout 2024, the Department worked on the implementation of the regulation, conducting a public consultation in April 2024 and engaging with producers of craft and industrial products and other interested stakeholders on the implementation of the new protection system in Ireland. The Department intends to implement the regulation by

way of secondary legislation by the 1st December 2025 deadline.

EU Industrial Design Reform Package.

In October 2024, the Council of the EU approved two legislative texts under the EU Design Reform Package: a recast Directive 2024/2823 on the legal protection of designs and a revised EU Regulation 2024/2822 on European Union designs. The two legal instruments form the main elements of the legal protection of industrial designs in the EU and provide for an accessible, modern, and harmonised legal framework with increased legal certainty and predictability for industries, SMEs and individual designers. Both texts were published in the EU Official Journal in November 2024 and entered into force in December 2024. The Regulation will be applicable from 1st May 2025 and all EU Member States will have until December 2027 to transpose the Directive into their national legislation. Work has commenced in the Department on the transposition of the Directive into Irish law.

General Product Safety Regulation.

The General Product Safety Regulation (GPSR) is an EU Regulation that replaced the General Product Safety Directive (GPSD). The objective of the GPSR is to update and modernise the general framework for the safety of non-food consumer products. It lays down essential rules on the safety of consumer products placed/made available on the EU market.

The GPSR requires that all consumer products on the EU market are safe. It applies to all non-food products and to both online and offline sales channels. Like the GPSD, it will continue to provide a 'catch all provision' thereby functioning as a safety net for products and risks not regulated in other EU legislation (non-harmonised). The GPSR also applies to all kinds of potential health hazards

including mental health risks. The GPSR has been implemented in Ireland via S.I. No. 726/2024 - European Union (General Product Safety) Regulations 2024.

Proposal for an EU Regulation on the Safety of Toys.

The proposal seeks to decrease the number of unsafe toys sold in the EU by extending the ban on harmful chemicals and strengthening testing on safety, security, and privacy. The proposal also tackles several new challenges introduced by digital toys and online shopping. Trilogues commenced late 2024 and work on the proposal was ongoing at year end.

Personal Injuries Resolution Board.

Throughout 2024 the Personal Injuries Resolution Board ('Injuries Resolution Board') model continued to deliver major benefits by providing a low-cost, quick and fair option in injury compensation. Each year the work of the Injuries Resolution Board saves millions of Euro in avoided costs due to personal injury claims being resolved through the agency's non-adversarial model rather than proceeding to litigation.

In a step change for the resolution of personal injury claims the Injuries Resolution Board has commenced a mediation service. The Injuries Resolution Board's mediation service began for public liability injury claims in May 2024 and was extended to motor liability injury claims in December 2024. This followed the introduction of mediation for employer (workplace) liability injury claims in December 2023. The reform delivered by the Department in 2024 further strengthens and enhances the agency and builds on the success of the agency's previous work.

In 2024, the Board continued to play a key role in Government's '[Action Plan for Insurance Reform](#)' particularly through its continued implementation of the Personal Injuries Guidelines. As part of its reform the Injuries Resolution Board now has a wide reporting and research role which seeks to use the valuable data that the agency has to bring more transparency to the personal injuries landscape. During 2024 it published a number of reports, including a series of '[Personal Injuries Award Values Reports](#)'.

Intellectual Property.

The Copyright and Related Rights (Amendment) Bill 2024.

The purpose of this Bill is to amend the *Copyright and Related Rights Act 2000* (as amended) (the '*Principal Act*') to address the matter of equitable remuneration as contained in a judgment delivered in September 2020 by the Court of Justice of the European Union. The Government approved the General Scheme of Bill, for priority drafting in July 2024. Since then, the Department has been working to prepare the Bill for the legislative process.

EU Patents Package.

In 2024, as part of the proposed patent package, the draft regulation on compulsory licensing of patents for crisis management was discussed and amended at Council working party meetings and entered trilogues with the European Parliament in December. Work continued on the draft supplementary protection certificates regulations which will roll over into 2025. The Department continued to represent Ireland's position at Council working parties as each proposal moves towards establishing a General Approach.



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.

In 2024 the Department advanced its fifth strategic goal guided by the Trade and Investment Strategy 2022-2026, which promotes sustainable growth, diversification of export markets, and alignment with climate goals.

Trade and Investment Strategy 2022-2026.

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 2024, progress continued on the implementation of the strategy under the following priority actions:

- ***Review and Refresh the Local Market Teams*** – This reporting reflected a productive year, with a significant number of engagements in each location, as well as the key role the teams played in planning and delivering a substantial number of Ministerial-led trade missions and high-level visits. Significant engagement around energy and the green transition were common across several reports.
- ***Communicating Ireland's Interests as a Trading Nation*** – Developments included 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. This policy continued to be implemented throughout 2024.
- ***Maximising Ireland's return from EU Trade Agreements*** – A report was presented at the Trade and Investment Council in April 2024 by the Trade Policy Unit on the key findings of a report on Ireland's utilisation of Free Trade Agreements. The EU's external trade agreements grant preferential treatment to EU products, which can help Irish companies gain a foothold and win market shares in key non-EU markets such as Japan and Canada. The agreements also help Irish importers and their customers to lower the cost of imported products, providing cost advantages and cheaper final products.
- ***The Free Trade Agreements (FTA)*** – Free Trade Agreements, negotiated by the EU on behalf of Member States, are already being used substantially by Irish businesses and has generated massive duty savings to Irish businesses. The Directorate-General for Trade of the European Commission data for Irish exports to and imports from the FTA countries has been analysed and combined with additional detailed data from the Irish Revenue Commission and the Central Statistics Office (CSO). The analysis aims to assess if Ireland is missing out on substantial duty savings. This analysis found limited potential for further duty savings for Irish traders and businesses. It found that Irish businesses largely use the agreements optimally.
- ***Trade and Investment Missions*** – As a key action in the Trade and Investment Strategy 2022-2026: Value for Ireland, Values for the World, the Team Ireland Trade Mission Week (TITMW) is a whole-of-government approach to strengthening ties and tapping opportunities for Irish companies in like-minded countries. The inaugural TITMW took place in 2023 in South Korea. The 2024 TITMW to Poland was postponed due to availability and timing issues and work is already underway on planning the next Taoiseach-led Team Ireland Trade Mission in 2025 with a destination to be finalised in Spring 2025.

Trade Promotion.

Each year, the Department works closely with its agencies, Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland, on developing a programme of Minister-led trade and investment promotion missions. In 2024, trade missions in Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait, India, Bangladesh and Poland, as well as several trade missions to the US West Coast and East Coast were undertaken. These missions supported Enterprise Ireland client companies to scale in key markets and further develop trade relationships with current and prospective IDA client companies. During these trade 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.

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 several 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.

Joint Economic Commission.

At the Trade and Investment Council meeting in April 2024, a decision was taken to commence negotiations for two new Joint Economic Commissions (JECs) with the UAE and India. This work is ongoing with both advancing towards the end of 2024. Discussions are also ongoing in respect to the JEC with China and these discussions will continue in 2025 with a view to holding a JEC in Ireland with China during the year. Ireland also signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Vietnam in 2024.

Ireland-UK.

As the world's sixth largest economy and our closest neighbour, the UK continues to be a crucial market for Irish companies to scale and use as a stepping-stone to further export markets. The size and wealth of the economy, added to proximity and overall familiarity means the UK remains of vital strategic importance to growth-orientated Irish companies.

Ireland and the UK are mutually interdependent trading partners, with two-way bilateral trade standing at circa €125 billion per annum, equivalent to around €2.4 billion per week. Ireland is the UK's sixth most important trading partner and in the top ten for both imports and exports across goods and services. The UK is Ireland's second largest export partner and its largest single-source of goods imports. Irish companies currently employ over 117,000 people throughout the UK.

The Department and its agencies continue to support businesses in the post-Brexit trading environment, providing tailored guidance, advice as well as financial supports. The Department is responsible for leading and working together with the enterprise agencies to maximise opportunities for Irish business in the UK market, with the UK Local Market Team supporting many of the bilateral activities.

The UK is the largest and nearest market for indigenous exporters, representing 29% of all exports by Irish companies. Irish exports to the UK have been remarkably consistent over a turbulent economic period, with the enterprise agencies reporting a strong performance in 2024. This strategic importance of the UK market was underscored by the board of Enterprise Ireland meeting overseas for the first time in London in 2024. This visit provided a valuable opportunity for key officials to meet in-market with Irish exporters, UK business leaders and Team Ireland representatives.

In October 2024, the Government announced the establishment of a new Ireland House to open in London in 2026. This will bring Embassy London (Ireland's biggest bilateral mission globally) and key team Ireland partners such as Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland under the one roof. The establishment of Ireland House in London is a concrete expression of Ireland's confidence and ambition for a modern, forward-looking relationship with the UK.

The Department continues to work with colleagues across Government to advance trade and economic relations with the UK, including cooperating on the implementation of the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement and the Windsor Framework. Trade and investment are key areas for cooperation under the Taoiseach and Prime Minister's Joint Statement of September 2024, and this strategic engagement on trade will form a crucial element of the annual Ireland-UK Summit, the first of which is scheduled to take place in March 2025.

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.

InterTradelreland.

In 2024, InterTradelreland marked its 25th anniversary of supporting, promoting, and enhancing all-island trade and collaboration, supporting over 15,000 businesses across Ireland during the year. The organisation's success is built on its focus on key pillars such as trade, innovation, entrepreneurship, and funding for growth, all with a Cross-Border element to leverage expertise and access a larger market.

Established in 1999 under Strand Two of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement, InterTradelreland has directly assisted more than 60,000 businesses across the island, while thousands more have benefitted from its specialist information and advice. As a result, it has generated €1.95 billion/£1.7 billion in business development value, supported entrepreneurs to secure over €350 million investment and led the way in growing collaborative innovation, all-island clustering and cross-border trade from €2 billion to €12 billion.

A highlight for the year was the launch of the Shared Island Enterprise Scheme backed by €30 million funding, which will focus on three key areas, supporting women entrepreneurship, all island clustering and sustainability though green energy investment. InterTradelreland also continued to strengthen Cross-Border partnerships in advanced manufacturing, bioeconomy, fintech, and life sciences.

The Department's funding for ITI in 2024 was more than €12.3 million. This funding played 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.

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.

The Ireland - US trade and investment relationship continued to thrive, despite ongoing challenges in the global economy. Over 98,000 people are employed by over 500 Irish-owned companies across all 50 States and representing a broad range of industries and in parallel, over 970 US companies in Ireland, employ over 210,000 people directly and over 168,000 indirectly, roughly 10% of the total Irish workforce. The US is Ireland's largest trading partner, largest export market and largest import partner. Our two-way economic relationship exceeds €1 trillion annually. Underlining the strength of the two-way relationship, the United States is the largest single source of Foreign Direct Investment into Ireland and Ireland is the 7th largest source of foreign direct investment in the US.

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.

An Taoiseach's St Patrick's Day programme in DC included a strong economic dimension, with several business events. The programme saw 11 Government representatives travel to over 20 cities across the United States. This included the then Taoiseach Varadkar's visit to Boston and Washington DC. In addition to the Taoiseach and Government Ministers, Attorney General Fanning visited Washington and Boston, while Cathaoirleach Buttimer visited the west coast including San Francisco, underlining the importance of the two-way trade and investment relationship, and Ireland's role as a gateway to the EU for US companies.

Other significant outward visits in 2024 include: Minister McGrath who visited LA and San Francisco in January; Minister Chambers visited Washington, DC in January 2024 for the Transport Research Board conference in Washington DC; the Tánaiste's visit to Washington DC and Chicago in February; Minister Paschal Donohoe and Minister Michael McGrath visited Washington DC for the Spring Meetings of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank Group in April; Minister Burke's visit to the US East Coast and West Coast in July and September respectively; Minister Donnelly's visit to Washington DC in July 2024; and then Minister Harris who visited Washington DC and Boston in February. Embassy DC also facilitated the visit of Minister Paschal Donohoe and Minister Michael McGrath for the Annual Meetings of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank Group in October.

Taoiseach Simon Harris met with President Joe Biden in the White House on 9th October 2024 on a visit to Washington DC to mark 100 years of US-Ireland diplomatic relations.

Through the US Local Market Team, Embassy DC also coordinates Ireland's market activities and pursues opportunities for information sharing and planning. Throughout 2024, the Embassy hosted several business breakfasts and dinners for representatives of US companies with operations in Ireland.

EU-US.

The transatlantic relationship remains of crucial importance to Ireland and the EU. The US remains an important market, and the transatlantic alliance is the engine of the global economy. Ireland reiterated its strong support for the continued importance of the Trade and Technology Council. The 6th Trade and Technology Council was held in Belgium in April 2024, which confirmed

a statement pledging continued cooperation under the TTC to address common challenges using relevant trade and technology tools, bilaterally and in other fora, including the G7 and the World Trade Organisation.

Both sides shared concerns about the challenges posed to our economic security by, among other issues, economic coercion, the weaponisation of economic dependencies, and the use of non-market policies and practices by third countries. In this context, the shared objective will be to continue efforts to strengthen the transatlantic relationship further while working together to address the impacts of non-market practices on the global economy which undermine the level playing field.

Ireland-China.

Diplomatic relations between Ireland and China were established in 1979, and 2024 marked the 45th anniversary of this relationship. Ireland currently has three diplomatic missions and several offices of four of our state agencies in China. Ireland was chosen as the Country of Honour at the China International Consumer Products Expo held in Hainan in April 2024. Managed by the ECONTRADE Section of the embassy, Team Ireland in China came together with 29 Irish exhibitors to showcase the best of Irish produce, services, education and culture. China is Ireland's fifth-largest trading partner, and the bilateral trade relationship is an important one. The participants' feedback was extremely positive with record financial contracts achieved. Despite the challenging business environment, the Department's officials based in China have continued to engage with Chinese business in conjunction with our State agencies to grow bilateral trade and investment.

World Trade Organisation.

In February 2024, the WTO 13th Ministerial Conference was held in Abu Dhabi. The Minister attended on behalf of Ireland. The main discussions focused on Agriculture and Fisheries but there was also discussion on the restoration of a fully functioning Dispute Settlement System. WTO members concluded the conference with the adoption of a Ministerial Declaration setting out a forward-looking reform agenda for the organisation. Ministers also took a number of ministerial decisions, including renewing their commitment to have a fully and well-functioning dispute settlement system by 2024 and to improve use of the special and differential treatment provisions for developing and least developed countries (LDCs). They also agreed to continue negotiations in all areas where convergence was elusive at MC13.

A positive outcome from the Irish and EU perspective was the decision to extend the current practice of not imposing customs duties on electronic transmissions (e-commerce moratorium) to until the next Ministerial Conference (MC14) or to March 2026, whichever is earlier. Ministers also adopted a Ministerial Decision to extend the moratorium on non-violation and situation complaints regarding the Agreement on Trade-related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) until MC14.

Day to day WTO engagement includes ongoing discussions on WTO reform, including the aforementioned restoration of a fully functioning Dispute Settlement Process (which is a priority for Ireland and the EU), trade and environment, food security (including full reform in the area of trade in Agriculture), a second set of provisions on fisheries subsidies, e-commerce including an extension of the moratorium on customs duties and ongoing engagement on the matter of Trade and Industrial Policy (a priority

for Ireland and the EU as it seeks to address lack of transparency in the area of subsidies).

In May 2024, senior officials from Trade Division attended the WTO General Council and took the opportunity to have key bilateral meetings with other WTO partners on the areas of most priority to Ireland including the e-commerce plurilateral agreement.

EU Trade Legislative Files.

Autonomous Trade Measures (ATMs) for the Ukraine and Moldova, which were originally put in place in 2022, were extended in June 2024 for a further year. These measures help alleviate the difficult situation faced by producers and exporters in both Ukraine and Moldova because of Russia's unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression. Ireland actively supported the implementation and extension of these measures. Negotiations continued, in 2024, 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 2025.

Free Trade Agreements.

New Zealand.

The EU-New Zealand trade agreement entered into force in May 2024. Following a four-year negotiation process, the EU and New Zealand concluded an ambitious FTA in June 2022. The agreement creates significant economic opportunities for companies, farmers and consumers. It fully respects the Paris Climate Agreement and core labour rights, enforceable through trade sanctions as a last resort, and strengthens EU ties with a like-minded ally in the economically dynamic and strategically important Indo-Pacific region.

Republic of Korea.

While the EU-ROK FTA was formally ratified in December 2015 the EU and the Republic of Korea launched negotiations for a digital trade agreement on 31 October 2023 and progressing throughout 2024, building on the EU-Republic of Korea Digital Trade Principles agreed in 2022.

Singapore.

Singapore is the EU's largest ASEAN trade partner accounting for almost a third of EU-ASEAN trade in goods and services. The EU-Singapore FTA entered into force in November 2019, following that negotiations for a Digital Trade Agreement (DTA) were completed in July 2024 and both parties are currently working on a formal conclusion and entry into force of the DTA.

Mercosur.

In December, the European Commission concluded negotiations with the South American trade bloc – Mercosur – on the EU-Mercosur Agreement, marking the end of a very lengthy period of negotiations over close to 25 years. In 2025, the text of the agreement will undergo legal scrubbing followed by translation into all official EU languages.

Once these steps are concluded, the Commission will submit a proposal to the Council and the Parliament with a view to the ratification of the agreement.

Trade and Sustainable Development.

The importance of sustainability in the trade agenda remained a significant area of focus for the Department during 2024. 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.

Global Value Chains.

The final [Report of the Expert Group on Global Value Chains](#) was published in November 2024. The Expert Group recommends important policy actions to enable business to build more resilient supply chains including the need for regular monitoring of trade dependencies; partnering with industry and international partners to stress test supply chains; focused advisory supports to assist companies in their risk assessment; regular stakeholder dialogue; continued advocating for open international markets and ensuring world-class trade facilitation systems. The Expert Group on GVC's 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.

Reaping the Benefits of the EU Single Market.

Ease of access to cross-border trading opportunities within the EU is especially valuable to Irish SMEs looking to scale up, and as a stepping-stone to expanding to further international markets.

There is still untapped potential—particularly in services, which lag behind goods. The European Commission notes that EU goods markets are up to 15 times more integrated than services. Practical trade barriers remain and must be addressed through greater mutual recognition and legislative harmonisation.

To support this, the Single Market Enforcement Taskforce (SMET) was established in 2020 to strengthen rule enforcement. Department officials have actively engaged with SMET since its inception

Work continued in 2024 to ensure ongoing compliance with the Services directive 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 (PSC) and Solvit. In October, we launched a new PSC website featuring enhanced accessibility and an improved user interface. 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.

The Department 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, 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.

The Department represented Ireland during negotiation on the European Commission's proposal the *Internal Market Emergency and Resilience Act (IMERA)* regulation which was approved and published on the Official Journal in November. The IMERA sets out harmonised rules for Member States (MS) when responding to future emergencies. This is to ensure the continued free movement of people, goods, services, and workers during times of emergency and will apply 18 months after coming into force. Discussions are ongoing on the designation of Ireland's Competent Authority for the purposes of this regulation.

Officials also worked with a likeminded group of Member States on preparation of a non-paper to provide concrete input to the new European Commission for the development of a new horizontal Single Market strategy, as called for by the European Council.

Trade Horizons Conference 2024.

In July 2024, the Department hosted the second annual Trade Horizons Conference as part of the key priority actions under the [‘Trade and Investment Strategy 2022-2026: Value for Ireland, Values for the World’](#). The theme of the Trade Horizons Conference 2024 was ‘Trade for a Sustainable Future’. The conference was based on global trade and business connections and highlighted how trade policy and climate action interact with one another, how policymakers and businesses can work together to advance global prosperity, well-being and meaningful action on climate change and the drive for net zero carbon emissions. This urgent agenda will increasingly affect cross-border trade and investment and will challenge manufacturing and distribution systems as organisations grapple with the challenge of substantially lowering emissions embedded in traded goods and services.

Small Advanced Economies Initiative.

Alongside colleagues in the Trade Division, D/FA and D/FHERIS, the Department represented Ireland at the Small Advanced Economies Initiative (SAEI) 2024 in Helsinki, Finland. This included a presentation of joint D/ETE and DFIN research on the potential impact of AI on Ireland's labour market. This event provided an invaluable opportunity for engagement on shared challenges and offered key learnings.

D/ETE collated information on supports and policies that aim (or have a potential) to help SME firms to face economic challenges in recent years. While most of these challenges have been international in nature – most significantly, energy price inflation – there have been costs associated with domestic measures, including the transition to a Living Wage and the introduction of Statutory Sick Leave. This was reflected in the Assessment of these measures published jointly by Economic and Tax Policy Unit and D/SP in March. In response several measures were agreed by Government in March 2024. These included:

- The preparation of an options paper on the application of the lower rate of Employer PRSI contribution;
- Making available up to €15 million to Local Enterprise Offices to enable a top up payment of up to €3,000 in the Energy Efficiency Grant for businesses in the hospitality and retail sectors;
- Accelerating the roll out of a fully functioning National Enterprise Hub.
- With further time to consider appropriate intervention, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, along with the Minister for Social Protection and the Minister for Further and Higher Education brought forward a more substantial range of measures to reduce costs for small and medium sized businesses.

European Economic Security Strategy.

In 2024, work began within the Department, as well as across Government, on engaging with various initiatives arising from the [European Economic Security Strategy](#) published by the European Commission in June 2023. This strategy is the Commission's response to the perceived threat to the EU's economic security from increased geopolitical tensions and technological shifts, while preserving as far as possible the EU's openness to business, trade and investment.

This included engagement with a number of new files launched as part of a broader Economic Security package in January 2024, as part of the strategy's 'Protect' pillar: a legislative proposal for the revision of the EU Foreign Direct Investment Screening Regulation; examination of a process to identify potential security risks linked to EU investment in third countries; and proposals on how to make EU controls more effective for the export of goods with civilian and military use (dual use goods).

EU Regulation on banning products made with Forced Labour.

In 2024, we contributed to the finalisation and approval of the EU's proposal for a regulation to ban products made with Forced Labour on the EU market, as well as their export. Following negotiations at Working Party level and European Parliament approval, the regulation entered into force in December 2024 but will not fall to be fully implemented by the European Commission and Member States until the end of 2027.

Under the Regulation the European Commission will have exclusive responsibility for conducting investigations into compliance with the regulation for products from outside the EU, while the National Competent Authorities of Member States will lead on investigating and ensuring the compliance of products that originate within individual member states. The designation of National Competent Authorities is the first step in the regulation's implementation process and must be notified to the European Commission by December 2025.

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 2023 the Department issued 1,033 export licences, authorising exports valued at €2.62 billion. The *Control of Exports Act 2023* commenced in August 2024, reinforcing Ireland's commitment to effective export controls. The new Export Control System (EAS) went live in August 2024 and further streamlines the application process for exporters.

Export Control Enforcement.

With the commencement of the *Control of Exports Act 2023*, new policies and procedures were developed alongside more user-friendly IT engagement for the compliance and enforcement aspects of the Act. 47 audits took place in 2024. Best practice models were examined through bilateral engagements with US and Dutch colleagues.

EU Trade Sanctions.

In 2024, the Department was involved in the negotiations of the trade elements of three separate EU sanctions packages against Russia's continued aggression against Ukraine. Details of the packages have been communicated through our website and with notifications on departmental social media. 69 Statutory Instruments were signed and delivered by the Minister in relation to updates to the multitude of EU sanctions regulation updated throughout the year. This ensured that Ireland was up to date in its ability to enforce the ever-increasing breadth of sanctions packages around the globe.

Investment Screening.

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 477 screening notifications received from other Member States in 2024. 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. Following signing of the relevant commencement order in December 2024, implementation of this important new Departmental function will commence on 6th January 2025.

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, held three meetings in 2024 as a sub group of the Enterprise Forum. This roundtable is driving forward the engagement between policymakers and Departmental stakeholders in corporate sustainability measures being brought forward by the EU. Three well-received webinars brought a number of measures under Responsible Business to the public's attention.

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 stakeholder forum, jointly chaired by both departments, took place in June 2024, with significant input from stakeholders, including civil society. These inputs, which require actions to be undertaken across multiple departments, agencies and offices, are being drafted with related KPIs to take forward the Plan in 2025.

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

The OECD National Contact Point (which is standalone Unit 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 parties to progress complex and sensitive cases. A new Advisory Group has been established to support the National Contact Point in accordance with the recently updated Guidelines and peer review recommendation.

EU and International Engagement.

European Councils.

Extensive 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. In 2024, the Minister and Ministers of State represented Ireland's interests at the EU Trade, Competitiveness and EPSCO Councils. During 2024 Minister Calleary represented Ireland's interests at the Competitiveness (Internal Market and Industry) Councils which considered a wide range of issues including the report on the future of the Single Market by Mr. Enrico Letta, the report on the future of European competitiveness by Mr. Mario Draghi, the State Aid framework and its contribution to EU policy objectives, combating late payments in commercial transactions and Better Regulation in Europe.

Foreign Affairs Council (Trade).

The Foreign Affairs Council (Trade) met on five occasions in 2024, in Brussels, Budapest and as part of the EU's engagement at the WTO's Ministerial Conference in Abu Dhabi where Ministers were joined by the Director General of the World Trade Organisation in advance of the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) where preparations were discussed.

Throughout 2024, Trade Ministers participated in strategic discussions on supporting the multilateral trading system, WTO reform, improving the EU's competitiveness, and the future of EU trade policy including the role of EU trade policy in advancing the Union's economic security. Ministers also discussed the EU's trade relations with the United States and EU trade relations with the ASEAN group.

Competitiveness Council.

At the Competitiveness Council (Compet) on 24th May 2024, Ireland supported an eDeclaration initiative for the posting of workers in the EU single market. On 13th November 2024, a legislative proposal for an EU Regulation to establish a common EU web portal to facilitate eDeclaration was published by the European Commission. The proposal aims to contribute to greater cross-border provision of services within the single market by streamlining administrative requirements while encouraging compliance with employment protections by supporting a more uniform application of the Posting of Workers Directive. The initiative is included in the draft EU Competitiveness Deal and aligns with recommendations in the Letta and Draghi reports.

EPSCO Council.

During 2024 Ministers of State Higgins and Richmond represented Ireland at meetings of the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO), which works to increase employment levels and to improve working conditions, social inclusion and gender equality.

The EPSCO Council considered a wide range of issues (in line with the respective priorities of the Belgian and Hungarian Presidencies of the Council of the European Union) with the aim of fostering a more inclusive and fairer society for all, including; addressing demographic and labour market challenges, and their impact on competitiveness; intergenerational solidarity; and the social and economic integration of persons with disabilities.

A number of legislative files were considered at Council during 2024 including the Directive on Improving Working Conditions in Platform Work; the Directive on a Framework for Quality Traineeships; and the Directive on European Works Councils.

Council of Europe.

During 2024, the Department represented Ireland at meetings of the Council of Europe's Governmental Committee which took place in May, July and November where, inter alia, conclusions of non-conformity (adopted by the European Committee of Social Rights) were considered.

In July 2024, a delegation from the Department attended a High-Level Conference in Vilnius, Lithuania, where Ireland submitted a Declaration accepting additional articles of the Revised European Social Charter (Article 8, paragraph 1, and Article 27, paragraph 1, sub-paragraph (c)).

Preparations for Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the EU in H2, 2026.

In early 2024, Department expanded its EU Affairs Unit to include planning for Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the EU from 1 July 2026 to 31 December 2026. During 2024, the Presidency Planning Team worked with colleagues across Government through the Department of Foreign Affairs led Interdepartmental Groups on Presidency Policy Priorities and on Operational Presidency Planning. Preparatory work progressed during 2024 including increasing staffing resources in our Permanent Representation in Brussels and conducting policy analysis as part of the ongoing process of developing our policy priorities for the Presidency. Training has begun for staff both at home and in the PRB. Significant work has been undertaken across the Department to identify and explore the logistics of holding key events in Ireland during Presidency. In the latter part of 2024, work also commenced on developing a plan for engagement at Ministerial and Senior Official level with the EU institutions and other key stakeholders.

Oireachtas Scrutiny.

In keeping with the Department's EU Oireachtas Scrutiny obligations, the Department informed the Oireachtas on 20 EU proposals across a range of policy issues, as well as meeting its obligation to submit two six-monthly reports on EU developments.

World Intellectual Property Organisation.

The World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) is a UN organisation based in Geneva that serves creators, innovators and entrepreneurs to protect and promote their intellectual property internationally, whilst also providing a forum for discussing, presenting and addressing IP issues. The Department's teams in Dublin and

Geneva engage with and represent Ireland at WIPO's various committees and General Assemblies. In 2024, Ireland was represented at two WIPO diplomatic conferences that adopted the Treaty on Intellectual Property, Genetic Resources and Traditional Knowledge in May and the Riyadh Design Law Treaty in November.

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. The ILO was the first international organisation that Ireland joined as a free state in 1923. The Department is responsible for the ratification of labour standards and reporting to the ILO on their application in Ireland.

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 2024, the Department represented Ireland at the ILO Governing Body sessions and led a tripartite delegation to the 112th International Labour Conference. In June, Ireland joined the ILO-led Global Coalition for Social Justice. Membership of the Coalition reinforces our strategic aims which ensure that employment rights and labour market standards are 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.



Strategic Goal 6:

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

In 2024, the Department continued to strengthen its internal capabilities and public service ethos in pursuit of its sixth strategic goal.

Corporate Governance.

Statement of Strategy – 2024 - 2025.

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 2024 - 2025](#) was published in October 2024. It builds on the significant progress we have made delivering the priorities set out in the Programme for Government, Our Shared Future. Our vision is to make Ireland the best place to succeed in business across all parts of our country. This Strategy reflects Government's White Paper on Enterprise objectives to ensure that Ireland builds on its strengths as an open economy and accelerates enterprise adaptation to the green and digital transitions, in particular SMEs. Our focus is on sustaining the strong base of foreign direct investment in Ireland and that we remain at the forefront of new technologies and the industries of the future, with a vibrant, resilient, regionally diversified mix of leading global companies, internationally competitive Irish enterprises and

thriving local businesses. Under the Strategy we will also prioritise and enhance fair competition in the marketplace, consumer protection and the safeguarding of employment rights.

Governance Framework.

In 2024, the Department updated its Governance Framework which provides assurance that good governance policies and practices are embedded in the Department. The focus of this Framework is to set out the governance procedures, processes and principles that underpin the work of the Department. These align with the vision set out in Civil Service Renewal 2030 which seeks to deliver an innovative, professional and agile Civil Service that improves the lives of the people of Ireland through excellence in service delivery and strategic policy development. It details, in one document, the governance arrangements in place and operated by the Department. It sets out what we mean by governance, why it is important, how the Department does its work and how it operates to deliver on its mandate and functions. It ensures that the way the Department takes decisions and implements policies is more transparent to the public and to the staff within the Department. The Framework will be published in early 2025.

Safety Statement.

The Department's 2024 health and safety statement was published in December 2024 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 2024 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.

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 2024 was published in December 2024 and 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 focused 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 eleven priority sectors listed in the Environmental Protection Agency's Green Procurement Guidance for the Public Sector Third Edition 2024 and shows the total value of contracts (over €50,000) issued by this Department in 2024 by priority sector, which have incorporated GPP.

Protected Disclosures.

Under Section 22(5) of the *Protected Disclosures Act, 2014* (the Act) public bodies are required to publish an annual report setting out the number of protected disclosures received in the preceding year and to detail any action taken, if any. Following commencement of the *Protected Disclosures (Amendment) Act 2022* on the 1 January 2023 and as required by the Act, the Department has established a dedicated internal reporting channel to facilitate staff to report potential wrongdoing. The Department also has comprehensive procedures in place to assist staff in making a report. In 2024, there was one report of a potential protected disclosure received through the Department's internal reporting channel and a further five reports were sent to the Department by the Office of the Protected Disclosures Commission.

Internal Audit.

The Department's Internal Audit Unit's mission is to enhance and protect organisational value by providing risk-based and objective assurance, advice and insight. Internal Audit reviewed and revised its annual work plan in 2024 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; Review of Suspense Accounts; Health & Safety Audit; Corporate Enforcement Authority – Liaison and Governance; RD&I Programmes; Risk Management; IDA Ireland – Liaison and Governance.

Climate Action Road Map.

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 2024](#) was published in July 2024 and 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. As of 2023 the Department's overall emissions have fallen from approximately 749 tCO₂ in the baseline year to 369 tCO₂ in 2023, representing a 49% total decrease. To meet our 2030 emissions target, based on 2023 levels the Department will need to reduce total emissions by a further 39%. In accordance with the Public Sector Mandate, the Department rolled out Climate Action training to senior managers (PO and above) in 2024. The Department adheres to DPER procedures for offsetting the emissions associated with official Air Travel. The Department's liability in 2023 was €8,146.21. The liability is calculated based on the prevailing rate of carbon tax and all liability must be paid to the Government's Climate Action Fund.

Periodic Critical Reviews.

The Code Practice for the Governance of State Bodies 2016 sets out the requirements for Periodic Critical Reviews (PCRs) of Non-Commercial State Bodies. In 2024, the Department completed a PCR of the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission. A PCR of the Irish Auditing and Accounting Supervisory Authority will be undertaken in 2025.

Finance.

Budget 2024.

The Revised Estimates 2024 provided the Department with a gross allocation of €1,268 million for use in 2024. This included significant non-core funding of €257 million to support the payment of grants under the Increased Cost of doing Business Scheme. The Estimate also provided the Department with additional funding of €20 million from the carryover of unspent 2023 capital appropriations.

The Department also had a Supplementary Estimate which was approved by the Dáil in October 2024. The Supplementary Estimate was substantive in nature and increased the Department's gross allocation in 2024 to €1,435 million. Most of the additional funding was used to support the roll out of the Power Up Scheme. The Supplementary Estimate also redistributed some funding to meet priorities on several current and capital programmes.

In addition to supporting the roll out of the Increased Cost of Business and Power Up Schemes, the funding provided to the Department in 2024 allowed it to support its Offices and Agencies, ensure that they were sufficiently resourced to carry out their mandates, deliver on its suite of enterprise development, innovation and regulation programmes, as well as supporting measures such as access to finance schemes, the business focused Humanitarian Relief Scheme, the Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund as well as augmented funding for the Digital Services Coordinator.

Capital Ceilings 2025 and 2026.

The Department secured capital ceilings under the National Development Plan (NDP) for 2025 and 2026, of €611 million and €625 million respectively. As part of this work, the Department developed a capital plan to 2030 and engaged with the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform on resources required for strategic, multi-annual programmes of expenditure needed to grow and future proof the enterprise sector. The Department will build on this work to seek additional funding for key projects from the Infrastructure, Climate and Nature Fund and when NDP capital ceilings are set for 2027-2030.

Appropriation Account.

The Department's 2023 Appropriation Account was published in the Comptroller Auditor General's Report and received a clear audit opinion.

Value for Money.

Public Spending Review and Evaluation.

The Department continued a programme of evaluation and analysis of expenditure guided by the Public Spending Code, commencing an evaluation of IDA Ireland's Regional Property Programme in 2024.

Appraisal Framework: Business Case and Economic Appraisal Guidelines.

The Department began a programme of work to develop Department specific appraisal and evaluation guidelines in 2024. The first stage of the programme focused on the development of business case and economic appraisal guidelines which will ensure best value for money for Departmental expenditure underpinned by data and robust evaluation. Draft guidelines were finalised at the end of 2024.

Review of deadweight values in the Department's Economic Appraisal Model.

The Department began a review of the deadweight values used in the Economic Appraisal Model in 2024, which is used by the enterprise agencies in their grant decision making process. This review examines whether the deadweight levels and categorisations of deadweight included in the model should be adjusted. The review also examines the appropriate deadweight level for environmental aid funding.

Quantifying Industrial Strategies.

The Department continued the engagement with OECD 'Quantifying Industrial Strategies' (QuIS) project that aims at measuring industrial policy expenditures across OECD countries in terms of industrial policy expenditures, policy priorities, policy instruments and recipients.

Human Resources.

People Strategy 2021-2024.

In 2024, we continued to implement actions in line with the Department's People Strategy. The three core goals of the Strategy are: to be an Employer of Choice; to develop a Resilient Workforce; and to support inclusion and equality of opportunity for all staff.

Workforce Planning.

Numbers serving in the Department increased to 1,015.78 full-time equivalents at the end of 2024, an increase from 975.38 full-time equivalents at the end of 2023. Throughout 2024, natural attrition, additional resources and promotional opportunities accounted for a significant churn of staff during the year with 162 New joiners, 124 Exits, including 31 retirements, 77 Internal transfers, and 68 promotions.

Throughout 2024, the Department continued to operate in a very tight labour market. Regular engagement with Publicjobs was undertaken to recruit general grades and some specialist posts. The Department undertook formal workforce planning engagements with the Management Board on two separate occasions during 2024, 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 during 2024 in response to Ireland's ongoing assistance for those impacted by the war in Ukraine. Two staff remained on secondment in support of providing this valuable public service.

Blended Working.

Following the publication of DPENDR's Blended Working Evaluation Model in September 2024, the Department started planning for a second full review of its Blended Working policy. This review will commence in January 2025. Actions taken in 2024 focused on communicating the key principles of the Department's policy to staff, supporting managers to implement the policy within their teams, driving uptake of manager training, and ensuring teams have developed a 'Team Charter' to support effective Blended Working.

The Department's Organisation Culture Team organised a range of in-person events and workshops to increase staff engagement within a blended environment. This included an all-staff conference in Dublin Castle and four meetings of the Connected Steering Group, which consists of representatives of all grades, Divisions and Offices. The team, in partnership with DCU, completed a culture and values assessment of the Department. This evidence base will be used to ensure that the Department continues to be a high-performing organisation and an employer of choice.

Learning and Development.

The Department embedded its new Enterprise Academy, launched in 2023, as the one-stop shop for all learning and development resources and supports. 814 (78%) staff engaged with one of the 323 courses that were offered both internally and by OneLearning throughout 2024. Additionally, the in-house training offering continued to expand, providing 22 Information Sessions and 28 Lunch & Learn Sessions. Many of the sessions were recorded and made readily available to staff.

In 2024, the Department funded 39 staff who undertook 3rd level academic courses across a range of disciplines aligned to the Department's strategic priorities such as Legal Studies; Business Administration, Management & Leadership; Finance and Economics; Environmental Studies; and Public Policy & Administration. Our Mentoring Programme continued to act as a significant tool to support staff growth and development with a total of 44 people taking part. 24 senior leaders participated in the Executive Coaching programme and 16 in the HEO Pilot Coaching Programme. Our senior leaders also completed Climate Action Leadership Training in compliance with the mandate in the Irish Government's Climate Action Plan 2023 (CAP23).

2024 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. Further development of our induction programme will continue to be a focus in 2025

Reporting under the Public Sector Duty.

Under the *Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act, 2014*, all public bodies have a duty to give regard to human rights and equality issues in the performance of their functions. This duty is consistent with the values of the Department which are rooted in a public service ethos of independence, equality, integrity, impartiality, openness, fairness, dignity and respect.

In 2024, the Department continued to value and promote equality and human rights through its ongoing work, whether in delivering services, developing policy or supporting staff. Actions taken over the course of the year to realise our commitment to the Public Sector Duty have included:

- Publication of the Department's first ED&I Strategy.
- Ongoing implementation of actions in line with the Department's People Strategy 2021 -2024, and the development of successor strategic goals.
- Publication of a new health and safety statement.
- Continued delivery on the commitments made for the provision of customer services under the Customer Charter and Action Plan 2022-2024, ensuring services were fully accessible and personal information was protected.
- Raised awareness of the Public Sector Duty in our agencies and offices through the inclusion of a dedicated section on 'Accessibility, Equality and Human Rights' in the agency Oversight and Performance Delivery Agreements and office Memoranda of Understanding.

Sustainable Development Goals.

Consistent with its commitment to contribute to progressing the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Department provided inputs and continued its ongoing reporting on achievements and progress made in meeting the SDG targets under its remit in 2024.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

In 2024, the Department renewed its 'Investors in Diversity – Silver' accreditation through an assessment with 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.

The Department published its first [ED&I Strategy](#), which focuses on actions to foster a culture of inclusion, fairness and respect for all staff and customers of the Department. Actions taken under the Strategy in 2024 included a communications programme to staff, introducing an ED&I training module into our induction programme, the publication of a Menopause Policy, the development of guidelines for holding inclusive and accessible events, and the introduction of Exit Interviews. Senior leadership took a role in promoting and supporting the values of the ED&I Strategy through a series of communications and videos.

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 2024, the Department published its second Gender Pay Gap report based on data as of 21st June 2024. The Department had 969 employees: 57% female and 43% male, at the time of reporting. The Department's gender pay gap is 9.55, down slightly from 10.86% in 2023. The percentage of female employees within the upper remuneration quartile is 47.52%.

In 2024, the Department completed a piece of research into the factors behind our Gender Pay Gap, which was published and communicated to staff in June. The research outlined several actions for follow-up, including improved manager training and support, improving communication around competitions, reviewing the Department's Maternity Leave policy, and communicating the findings of the report to staff.

State Agency and State Board Liaison.

HR Unit works closely with policy units and 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. 133 requests were processed in 2024 to deal with the filling and establishment of new posts for State Agencies, while work was undertaken to fill 11 vacancies arising on the State Boards under the Department's remit.

Public Service Transformation.

The latest results from the Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey (CSEES) show the Department has made good progress in its Innovation Climate scores since 2017, climbing 19% to reach 62% in 2023 (compared to a Civil Service average of 44%). In 2024, the Department partnered with the UCD Innovation Academy to further embed the application of design thinking and the development of innovative practices throughout the Department and Offices. 20 workshops to enhance service delivery for the public and other DETE stakeholders were held including in the areas of consumer policy, offshore wind, trade policy and employment permits. In total 325 staff members participated.

The Department participated in Public Service Transformation Week in October 2024. Several Transformation Talks on various aspects of how innovative and digital leaders are transforming our public services were held. In 2024, nine projects were submitted by staff in the Department and its Offices for the Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Awards. The Department's work on the historic EIRSAT-1 satellite launch was shortlisted for the 9th Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Awards.

Corporate Communications.

In 2024, the Corporate Communications Unit continued to serve both internal and external customers in the areas of Media Relations, Campaigns & Digital, FOI and Customer Services, Data Protection and Internal Communications.

With one of Government's most followed social media accounts ([LinkedIn](#)), proactive digital communications were a crucial and growing focus during 2024. The Department's digital presence during 2024 comprised the corporate website [enterprise.gov.ie](#) and social media channels [X](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [YouTube](#). Facebook and Instagram accounts were added later in the year. The Department's LinkedIn page saw a year of strong engagement, ending 2024 with over 89,200 followers, up approximately 6,000 in the year. The Department's [X](#) ended the year with 34,100 followers.

Our corporate website [enterprise.gov.ie](#) had over 10.5 million pageviews during the year, which was an almost 30 percent increase on the previous year. The most popular topics included employment permits, the Increased Cost of Business scheme, the Power Up grant, late payments, corporate sustainability reporting and trade sanctions. Subscribers to the Department's Enterprise Newsletter, which provides a quick round-up of news from the Department every two weeks, increased by over 3,200 subscribers to almost 7,300 subscribers.

During 2024, 390 media queries were managed with 125 press releases issued and 52 Ministerial videos produced. Proactive communication campaigns included promotion and awareness building for the Increased Cost of Business and Power Up schemes, the Small Companies Administrative Rescue Process, and promotion of sustainability, digitalisation and business supports.

Customer Service.

The Department continued to deliver on the commitments made in relation to the provision of customer services under the Customer Charter and Action Plan 2022-2024, ensuring services were fully accessible and personal information was protected.

The Department encouraged and supported colleagues in meeting their obligations under the *Official Languages Acts 2003 & 2021*. A member of Senior Management at Principal Officer level has been appointed to oversee performance and report on the Department's obligations under the *Official Languages Acts*. During 2024, staff attended information seminars including Lunch and Learn to increase staff awareness regarding the Acts. The Department will continue to keep staff informed as new provisions are implemented.

The Department is currently preparing a statutory return in line with the new obligations under section 10A (Advertising by Public Bodies) requiring a minimum of 20% of all advertising undertaken to be in the Irish language and that 5% of annual advertising spend on Irish language.

In 2024, 340 Freedom of Information requests were received and processed, an increase of almost 20% on 2023. More than 500 Data Protection queries were responded to with 70 Data Subject Access Requests and Other Rights Requests administered under the *GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018*.

ICT.

In 2024, the Department's ICT team made strong progress in delivering the strategic objectives of the ICT Strategy 2020–2025: Enabling Digital & Data Agility.

Technical development was completed on two new customer-facing applications in the Trade Regulation area. In August 2024, a portal was launched to manage applications for Export Authorisations covering dual-use items, military goods, and other controlled items. Separately, a portal for Inward Investment Screening, aligned with the *Screening of Third Country Transactions Act 2023*, went live in January 2025. Significant work was also completed on a new Employment Permits ICT system, scheduled to launch in 2025.

The Department continued bilateral planning with the Department of Justice on a joint project to implement the Single Permit Directive, which will streamline applications for Visas, Residence Permissions, and Employment Permits.

A new complaints portal for the Workplace Relations Commission was also launched, improving the customer experience through document upload functionality, accessibility enhancements, and Irish language support.

Ongoing enhancements were made to the business systems within the Intellectual Property Office of Ireland (IPOI) which included improvements to the production of the IPOI's Journal and updates to process paperless international registration of Trademarks. A significant project over the past two years to ensure the Department complies with the National Cyber Security Centre's Cyber Security Baseline Standard concluded at the end of 2024 with the Department achieving a high level of alignment with the Standard.

The Department also developed a proof-of-concept application which explored the potential to leverage Artificial Intelligence (AI) to improve the delivery of services to the public by testing the capability of Generative AI to assist business owners with navigating the range of enterprise supports provided to business by the Government. This technology has been handed over to Enterprise Ireland for further systems development and incorporation into the services provided by the National Enterprise Hub.

The ICT Unit is responsible for emergency planning within the Department and provided active engagement during the year with Government's Emergency Planning structures via the Government Task Force for Emergency Planning. The Unit also developed a substantially revised framework for internal Business Continuity Planning which will deliver greater preparedness and strengthened mitigation strategies for key services.

Finally, the Department's project governance framework was strengthened and the ICT Unit commenced scoping of the future roadmap for development of the Department's ICT environment.

AI-powered analysis of CRO records.

The Department, working in collaboration with the Companies Registration Office (CRO), is undertaking an AI and data analytics project to extract data from annual financial 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. Work in 2024 involved scaling up the project building on an earlier prototype.

Legal Unit.

The Legal Unit provides the Department and the Minister with independent and objective legal advice. There are four legal advisors in the Unit, three of whom are on secondment from the Office of the Attorney General. There is also a company law legal advisor embedded within the CCC Division. The Unit provides the Department with legal advice on all General Schemes of Bills from an early stage in their development to their conclusion. It also provides technical legal advice on EU transposition measures. The EU is increasingly relying on regulations to implement European law, and these transpositions often require primary legislation. The Unit also keeps up to date on all major litigation involving the Minister and the Departments' offices. It also acts as a link between the Department and the Office of the Attorney General and will request the advice of the Office of the Attorney General on complex and sensitive legal matters. The Legal Unit performed these functions across all the Department's Divisions in 2024.

Appendix 1

Bills Enacted in 2024
Companies (Corporate Governance, Enforcement and Regulatory Provisions) Act 2024, enacted 12 th November 2024.
Digital Services Act 2024, enacted 11 th February 2024.
Employment (Collective Redundancies and Miscellaneous Provisions) and Companies (Amendment) Act 2024 enacted 9 th May 2024 (The Act commenced on the 1 st July 2024).
Employment Permits Act 2024 enacted 25 th June 2024.
Digital Services (Levy) Act 2024, enacted 17 th July 2024.

Appendix 2

Statutory Instruments made in 2024	
S.I. No.8 of 2024	Employment Permits (Amendment) Regulations 2024.
S.I. No.10 of 2024	Sick Leave Act 2022 (Increase of Statutory Sick Leave Days) Order 2024.
S.I. No.12 of 2024	Employment Permits (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2024.
S.I. No.53 of 2024	Digital Services Act 2024 (Commencement) Order 2024.
S.I. No.90 of 2024	Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2023 (Commencement) Order 2024.
S.I. No. 92 of 2024	Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2023 (Workplace Relations Commission Code of Practice on the Right to Request Flexible Working and the Right to Request Remote Working) Order 2024.
S.I. No. 117 of 2024	European Union (Contestable and Fair Markets in the Digital Sector) Regulations 2024.
S.I. No. 122 of 2024	Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Carcinogens, Mutagens and Reprotoxic Substances) Regulations 2024.
S.I. No. 187 of 2024	Personal Injuries Resolution Board Act 2022 (Commencement) Order 2024.
S.I. No. 188 of 2024	European Communities (Intra - Community Transfers of Defence Related Products) (Amendment) Regulations 2024.
S.I. No. 258 of 2024	European Union (Foreign Subsidies Distorting the Internal Market.
S.I. No. 255 of 2024	Employment Regulation (Amendment) Order (Contract Cleaning Industry Joint Labour Committee) 2024.
S.I. No. 296 of 2024	Employment Regulation (Amendment) Order (Early Years' Service Joint Labour Committee) Order No. 1 2024.
S.I. No. 297 of 2024	Employment Regulation (Amendment) Order (Early Years' Service Joint Labour Committee) Order No. 2 2024.
S.I. No. 319 of 2024	Employment Regulation Order (Security Industry Joint Labour Committee) 2024.
S.I. No. 324 of 2024	Protection of Employment Act 1977 (Notification of Proposed Collective Redundancies) Regulations 2024.
S.I. No. 328 of 2024	Employment Permits (Amendment) (No. 3) Regulations 2024.
S.I. No. 336 of 2024	European Union (Corporate Sustainability Reporting) Regulations 2024.
S.I. No. 408 of 2024	Digital Services (Levy) Act 2024 (Commencement) Order 2024.
S.I. No. 413 of 2024	Control of Exports Act 2023 (Commencement) Order 2024.
S.I. No. 416 of 2024	Control of Exports (National military export control list) Regulations 2024.

Statutory Instruments made in 2024

S.I. No. 423 of 2024	Microenterprise Loan Fund Scheme (Amendment) Regulations 2024.
S.I. No. 443 of 2024	Employment Permits Act 2024 (Commencement) Order 2024.
S.I. No. 444 of 2024	Employment Permits Regulations 2024.
S.I. No. 498 of 2024	European Union (Corporate Sustainability) (No 2) Regulations 2024.
S.I. No. 558 of 2024	Trademarks (Madrid Protocol) (Amendment) Regulations 2024.
S.I. No. 563 of 2024	National Minimum Wage Order 2024.
S.I. No. 598 of 2024	Employment Permits (Amendment) (No. 4) Regulations 2024.
S.I. No. 633 of 2024	European Union (Adequate Minimum Wages) Regulations 2024.
S.I. No. 639 of 2024	Companies (Corporate Governance, Enforcement and Regulatory Provisions) Act 2024 (Commencement) Order 2024.
S.I. No. 681 of 2024	Personal Injuries Resolution Board Act 2022 (Commencement) (No.2) Order 2024.
S.I. No. 714 of 2024	Screening of Third Country Transactions Act 2023 (Commencement) Order 2024.
S.I. No. 723 of 2024	Chemicals Act 2008 (CLP Regulation) Regulations 2024.
S.I. No. 726 of 2024	European Union (General Product Safety) Regulations 2024.
S.I. No. 733 of 2024	Employment Permits (Amendment) (No. 5) Regulations 2024.

Appendix 3

Green Public Procurement.

GPP Reporting Template - Reference Year 2024				
Reference year 2024	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	1	€120,000	1	€120,000
Food & Catering Services	1	€88,000		
Furniture & Related Services** Office Building Design, Construction & Management Indoor & Outdoor Lighting Textiles Products & Services Transport	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Heating Equipment	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
ICT Products	1	€70,555	1	€70,555
ICT Services	1	€120,000	1	€120,000
Indoor Cleaning Services	1	€442,172	1	€442,172
Paper Products & Printing Services	1	€600,000	1	€600,000
Totals	6	€1,440,727	5	€1,352,727
Other Sectors***				
Professional Services	1	€118,000	Nil	Nil
Media	1	€50,000	Nil	Nil
Research	2	€90,732	1	€51,968
Totals	4	€258,732	1	€51,968
* Eleven sectors for which national GPP criteria have been published by the EPA and were based on common EU criteria with adaptations to reflect the Irish market and procurement practices.				
** The Furniture & Related Services criteria set was published in July 2024				
*** Sectors which are not covered by national GPP criteria published by EPA				



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