



## Future Europe: Irish Civil Society Shaping Europe's Future

DATE: 22 Jan 2021

**PREPARED BY:**

**POSITION:**

**ORGANISATION:**

**CONTACT DETAILS:**

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## INTRODUCTION

This project was funded by the Communicating Europe Initiative administered by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The project kicked off officially on Monday 5 October after the grant was awarded on 21 September. It ended on 31 December. Significant adaptations were made to the original project plan due to the reduced budget and integration into the larger Access Europe programme (also funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs) to increase impact and visibility of both projects. This increased impact is demonstrated in the results outlined below.

## BACKGROUND

The project proposed in our application was based on the current context experienced by Irish civil society: We are responding to a new Government, a new EU MFF, COVID-19 and the social and economic fallout of the pandemic, and Brexit. Irish communities and the organisations that represent them are struggling to make sense of it all and, as leaders in the community and voluntary space, The Wheel has a responsibility to support them through this turbulent period and to help them recognise opportunities to engage in and shape Ireland's future in Europe.

The activities proposed in this project were designed to demystify this current context and provide civil society organisations with an opportunity to connect with decision makers to discuss these issues. While the project activities did have to be scaled down in response to a scaled down budget, we were successful in congregating civil society representatives to discuss the challenges currently being faced, and created a lasting resource to explain not just [European Union objectives post 2020](#), but also how civil society can drive them, and the supports available to facilitate that.

Originally, we aimed to address several topics relevant to civil society, including the COVID-19 response, the Green Deal, migration, and Brexit. In our scaled down version of the project, we focused on facilitating a discussion with Minister of State for European Affairs, Thomas Byrne TD, which included these topics, and starting a conversation around the overall theme of the social economy, which is especially relevant to our sector and in how it can be a key driver in the European response to these crises:

*“The social economy's values-based approach to the economy can enable it to generate new elements in the ecosystems in which it exists and be an important 'engine' in the immediate recovery and the longer-term possible restructuring of the economy towards more resilience, fairness and sustainability.”<sup>1</sup>*

The social economy comprises “cooperatives, mutual societies, non-profit associations, foundations and social enterprises”<sup>2</sup> and so is very much rooted in our sector, and yet there is a lack of understanding of this concept in Ireland. Our project aimed to show how through developing our social economy in line with EU objectives<sup>3</sup>, our sector can be key to overcoming current challenges and shaping a more inclusive and sustainable future for Europe.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS\\_BRI\(2020\)659336](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI(2020)659336)

<sup>2</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/growth/sectors/social-economy\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/growth/sectors/social-economy_en)

<sup>3</sup> <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-15071-2015-INIT/en/pdf>

## OBJECTIVES

Project objectives included:

- Deepening public awareness of the role that the EU on our daily lives through breaking down large policy issues in ways people can understand in terms of how it impacts their own communities,
- Make EU information more accessible and relatable,
- Tackle pressing EU issues such as COVID-19 response, the Green Deal, migration, and Brexit,
- Focus on the future of Europe, and the role Irish civil society plays in making it a better place for all.

## PROJECT ACTIVITIES

In order to address the current context that provided the motivation for this project and to deliver on its objectives, the following project activities were proposed:

### 1. Podcast series

We originally planned a series of podcasts around key EU issues including COVID-19 and the Next Generation EU Plan for recovery, the European Green Deal and the migration crisis. After reviewing the project in light of the reduced budget, we decided to focus on Activities 2 and 3 outlined in the application, as well as the underpinning communications campaign. We communicated this suggested change to the project plan to the Department of Foreign Affairs on 5 October and received approval for this revised project plan that same day. We do plan to deliver podcasts throughout 2021 anyway as part of our Access Europe programme, and we also incorporated a “Spotlight on Social Economy” session to our special event (see Activity 2) to explore how civil society can take action in responding to various crises facing Europe.

### 2. Special Event

We linked the special event planned in this project to the launch of our Access Europe support programme in order to increase the overall impact of the event. This proved to be successful as 335 people registered for the event and 230 attended (all those who registered received a link to the recorded version after the event). The guest of honour was Minister of State for European Affairs, Thomas Byrne TD who was interviewed along with our CEO Deirdre Garvey by professional broadcaster Joe Little on the role of civil society in Europe. Various representatives from civil society groups had the opportunity to ask the Minister questions, including:

- Niall McLaughlin, Chief Executive Officer, World Vision Ireland
- Catherine Hickey, Director of Funding and Development, Free Legal Advice Centres
- Roisin Mulligan, Social Finance & Communications Executive, Clann Credo
- Sinead Owens, Operations Manager, An Taisce

We also used the opportunity to showcase organisations that have been successful in EU funding, including the Smashing Times Theatre Company, Ballymun Job Centre, Dublin City Volunteer Centre, and the Mullingar Employment Action Group.

Our “Spotlight on Social Economy” session looked at how civil society is at the centre of the EU’s strategy to mitigate ongoing crises through its role in the social economy and helping to “achieve

green and inclusive growth with renewed welfare state models”<sup>4</sup>. We invited expert speakers from Ireland and throughout Europe, including:

- Paul O’Sullivan, retired CEO of Clann Credo and member of the Commission Expert Group on the Social Business Initiative (GECES)
- Ann Branch, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Commission
- Shadin Viratham, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Commission
- Aileen O’Donoghue, CEO of Archways

The full recording of the event is available on [The Wheel’s YouTube channel](#), and a particular section on the social economy was turned into [its own short video](#).

### **3. Video**

We proposed a video covering key issues facing Ireland and Europe and what Irish civil society can do in response. We focused on the key objectives outlined in the New Cohesion Policy<sup>5</sup>, and how civil society can engage in projects that drive them. We linked it with our Access Europe project, also funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs, which provides support to organisations in how to engage in projects driving these objectives. In doing so, we are inspiring groups to take action, and to stay informed and engaged in EU policy and programmes through joining Access Europe, which provides monthly updates and opportunities through its newsletter. The full video is available on our [YouTube channel](#) and [Access Europe website](#).

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<sup>4</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS\\_BRI\(2020\)659336](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI(2020)659336)

<sup>5</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/2021\\_2027/](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/2021_2027/)

## RESULTS

Activity	Goal	Anticipated Outcome	Measurement	Result	Comment
1. Podcast series	Reach 2000 people engage with the podcast	Increased knowledge and dialogue around key EU issues including COVID-19 and the Next Generation EU Plan for recovery, the European Green Deal and the migration crisis.	Stats on podcast listenership, social media and website stats	This activity was removed from the project due to budget reduction	<p>We do intend to produce podcasts/webinars in 2021 as part of our Access Europe programme but it was not possible in the lifespan of this project given the reduced budget.</p> <p>We did however do our “Spotlight on Social Economy” session as part of our special event, which aimed to demonstrate the role of civil society in addressing European challenges.</p>
2. Special event	50 people listen live, widespread dissemination of recorded event	50 people attend a special event featuring a key EU representative in conversation about the future of Europe with The Wheel’s Director of Public Policy, Ivan Cooper	Event registration and attendance, dissemination figures, website stats	230 people listened live, 335 people received follow up materials a links to watch the recorded version. Our CEO Deirdre Garvey participated instead of Ivan Cooper.	Combining this event with our Access Europe launch and incorporating a session on the social economy proved to be very effective for increasing engagement. This was one of our most successful events of the year and we had an overwhelmingly positive response to it.
3. Video	2000 people engage with the video across social media or on Wheel.ie	The video will cover key issues facing Ireland and Europe and what Irish civil society can do in response.	Viewership stats across social media and wheel.ie	1,717 views	We fell just short of our goal of 2000 viewers, however, the video now lives on the homepage of our Access Europe website, and we will continue to promote it through our network with the goal of surpassing our initial target over the next few months.

## CONCLUSION

Overall, we were incredibly pleased with the outcome of this project. Connecting it with our Access Europe programme not only greatly increased its impact, but it also gave civil society groups learning about EU policy and programmes a way to continue their engagement and build their capacity to take a more active role. It also means that the outputs produced are more sustainable and applicable to the overall European programmes of The Wheel.

We would like to thank the Communicating Europe Initiatives for its continued support of European Programmes at The Wheel and the opportunities it provides to connect our membership and wider civil society to the EU policy that affects them.

[https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/information/videos/new-eu-cohesion-policy-2021-2027#:~:text=Five%20main%20objectives%20drive%20investments,the%20fight%20against%20climate%20change](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/videos/new-eu-cohesion-policy-2021-2027#:~:text=Five%20main%20objectives%20drive%20investments,the%20fight%20against%20climate%20change)

## FURTHER INFORMATION

To discuss this report further or to seek any clarifications please contact:

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## EVIDENCE



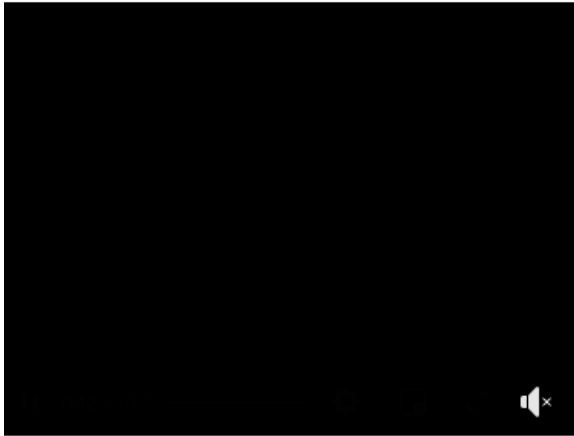


**The Wheel**

Published by Gert Ackermann ·  
18 December 2020 ·

Access Europe is our new programme to support Irish civil society to better access EU funding and engage in EU policy. Find out more in this short video or visit [www.accesseurope.ie](http://www.accesseurope.ie)

A huge thanks to @dfatireland & the #CommunicatingEurope Initiative for funding this project.



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Performance for your post

227 People reached

4 Likes, comments and shares

4 Post clicks

1	2	1
Clicks to Play	Link clicks	Other Clicks

NEGATIVE FEEDBACK

0	0
Hide all posts	Hide post
0	0
Report as spam	Unlike Page

4 Likes, comments and shares

BRANDED CONTENT DISTRIBUTION

View Breakdown

227	227	0
Total reach	Organic reach	Paid reach

237	238	0
Total impressions	Organic impressions	Paid impressions

Video views: 335 total

Hide stats ^

Video views ⓘ

Targeted to: All followers

335

Total

Organic stats ⓘ

1,171	13	2.22%	0
Impressions	Reactions	Click-through rate	Comments
3	26	3.59%	
Shares	Clicks	Engagement rate	



✕ **Tweet Analytics**

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**The Wheel** @The\_Wheel\_IRL

Access Europe is our new programme to support Irish civil society to better access EU funding & engage in EU policy. Join at <http://www.accesseurope.ie> . A huge thanks to @dfatirl & the #CommunicatingEurope Initiative for funding this project. @EuropeAccess @emmamurtagh17 pic.twitter.com/8zbyJBXQOF

**Impressions** 3,039

times people saw this Tweet on Twitter

**Media views** 288

all views (autoplay and click) of your media are counted across videos, vines, gifs, and images

**Total engagements** 43

times people interacted with this Tweet

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