



Opening statement to the Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement by InterTradelreland

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Thank you, an Cathaoirleach, and the members of the Joint Committee for the invitation to discuss the all-island economy and InterTradelreland's role in supporting enterprise.

As you will be aware, InterTradelreland is one of the six North-South Implementation Bodies, established in 1999 under Strand 2 of the Good Friday Agreement with a remit to support and develop all-island trade and economic co-operation. Our work supports businesses across the island to grow through trading cross-border, innovating, collaborating and attracting investment. We play a unique role in making connections North and South and identifying opportunities where an all-island approach can accelerate business growth.

In 1998, cross-border trade was worth around €2 billion. By 2022, it had grown to around €12 billion, a record high. The most recent figures published by the CSO tell us that from January to November 2023, cross-border trade in goods alone was worth €9.5 billion. Services data is less timely, but since 2013 services have accounted for most of the growth in cross-border trade and were worth around €2.7 billion in 2022 and growing.

Last year, research by the Economic and Social Research Institute into cross-border trade, showed that goods trade between Ireland and Northern Ireland has now risen to be above the levels expected between two neighbouring economies of this size, demonstrating strong integration between both economies, and representing a much improved position from previous ESRI research in 2009. Ireland remains Northern Ireland's largest export market.

This growth in cross-border trade comes against a background of challenging macroeconomic conditions. There have been deep and lengthy recessions, the Brexit process, a prolonged global pandemic, and geopolitical economic shocks such as the war in Ukraine. This demonstrates how resilient, innovative, and enterprising the businesses on this island are. We also know from our research that firms who trade across the border tend to be more resilient and innovative, and generally outperform their non-exporting peers.

InterTradelreland's purpose is to provide information, advice and tailored support to small and medium-sized enterprises across the island to help them to grow and take advantage of the opportunities available in the all-island economy.

Since 1998, we have directly supported more than 57,000 businesses, creating and/or protecting 23,000 jobs and generating €1.8 billion in business development value. Over 1,800 first-time exporters and 1,200 first-time innovators took their initial steps with our support. Last year alone, we supported over 2,600 businesses in every county on the island.



Our programmes and support focus on three strategic priorities: growing cross-border trade, enabling collaborative innovation and preparing businesses to become 'investor-ready' and to secure the funding they need to grow and scale.

Our trade supports grow the number of exporting businesses, including first-time exporters, by unlocking new sales and sourcing opportunities across the entire island, using the cross-border market as a first step to exporting internationally.

Our innovation supports build connections for entrepreneurs, academics, and policymakers North and South to collaborate, to develop new and improved processes, products and services, to drive competitiveness, greater sustainability and productivity across the island.

Our investor-readiness programmes help prepare ambitious entrepreneurs across the island to connect with investors and secure the external funding that they need to grow and scale up. For example, our Seedcorn programme is one of the biggest early-stage investor readiness competitions on the island and last year's Venture Capital Conference in Dublin was attended by over 500 businesses, high potential start-ups and the VC and investor community.

InterTradelreland has a unique role as a connector, to facilitate collaboration North and South, and to identify opportunities where an all-island approach can accelerate economic growth and contribute to the delivery of shared policy objectives for our partner departments, the Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland and the Department for Enterprise, Trade, and Employment.

All of this work is supported by our strategic research programme, which ensures our supports are evidence-based. We are on the pulse of business sentiment. Our All-Island Business Monitor is a unique quarterly survey of 750 SMEs across the island, enabling us to track and monitor issues such as business outlook, profitability, current challenges, and how firms are responding to changing trading conditions. This means we can see and respond quickly to emerging issues and opportunities across the island. Our quarter three survey showed us that almost two thirds of businesses on the island were in a stable position, seven in ten reported they were profitable and there was cautious optimism about future sales prospects. However, we noted that competition emerged as an issue for a quarter of the businesses surveyed.

Finally, we commission specific research projects that highlight the benefits and opportunities of all-island approaches, enabling us to inform policy development and provide foresight for businesses and stakeholders in key areas such as sustainability and competitiveness.

Thank you again for the opportunity to address the Joint Committee. I hope that this is a helpful overview, and we will be glad to take any questions.