



2022 Look-back

Irish Social Enterprise Network



Introduction

In this look back to 2022, we focus on the highlights and critical actions of ISEN's year. We also describe the network, staff and board, and we outline the social enterprise environment in Ireland. We thank our partners and members for your invaluable support. We hope you find this a useful read.

Lucie Cunningham, Chair, and Chris Gordon, CEO

Our work

We describe our work as having three pillars in terms of advocacy, networking and building capacity. In truth, individual activities often combine different elements of these.

In advocating for social enterprise, our position is that social enterprise forms a distinct sector that sits alongside, but is not part of, the voluntary and commercial sectors. Social enterprises are businesses and so need - and deserve - enterprise supports and social enterprises need to be recognised as a valuable and necessary part of Irish society and the economy.

At the most basic level of our work we find ourselves the first port of call for many people wishing to set up or further develop their social enterprise. We estimate we handle 200-300 phone and email enquiries a year. And much of our work involves talking and emailing, signposting and informing pre start-ups, start-ups and growing social enterprises through the ecosystem of support agencies and information providers that we describe below.

Perhaps our most important pieces of advocacy have been practical responses to the needs of social enterprises. First we have been working with Rethink Ireland, Trust Law and Dechert LLP to develop a constitution and handbook for companies limited by guarantee that suits the social enterprise business model. This work is ongoing. Second, we are a supporting partner working with Community Finance Ireland, Rethink and DCU to explore new models of social finance for the sector - [Social Finance Ireland](#) seeking to establish what type of financial models are missing for the sector, what models are working elsewhere across Europe, and what a vibrant, future finance model might look like.

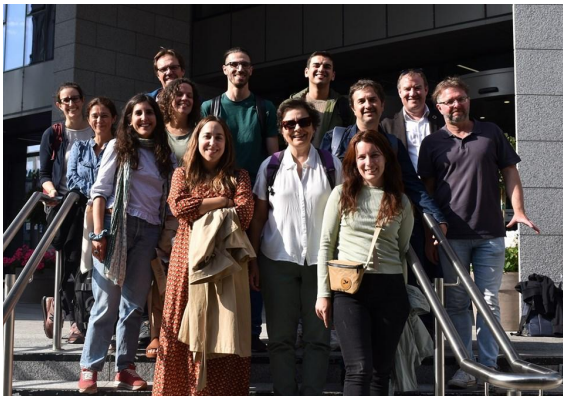


During 2022 we managed a contract for the Department of Rural and Community Development as part of the ARISE programme - Awareness Raising Initiative for Social Enterprise. This delivered an improved [Buy Social](#) directory which provides consumers and businesses with information on social enterprise goods and services. Currently we have nearly 200 entries and are working to add a further 100. We build networking into our activities and services whenever we can. So during the year, as part of ARISE, we contributed to and facilitated events such as SoCircular in Dublin in October, the Social

Enterprise marketplace in Airfield in Dublin in May, and other networking events in Galway, Cork and Donegal. We also supported local networking events, for example working with local development companies through [SEED Networking](#) with Southside Partnership and hosted the [FOSO POCO](#) project in Cork. In raising awareness of and advocating for social enterprise in Ireland, we have provided guest lectures for:

- MBA California Baptist University
- Webinar with Munster Technical University
- IBEC Academy Lectures
- Institute of Directors Ireland
- University College Dublin Innovation Academy
- Changemaker event with Community Enterprise Association Ireland.

We have contributed to publications and other media: Enactus Social Enterprise video, Accountancy Ireland magazine, webinar and podcasts and CPD session, iCommunity Webinar and Podcasts, and Ireland country report for [B-WISE project](#). And of course we have delivered our own mailshots and social media communications.



We are members of EU projects consortia and deliver several pieces of work for European partners and networks including the Full Life and [Net-Works projects](#). The most significant in 2022 has been NetWorks where we lead on a “work package” for ENSIE, the European network of Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISEs), developing good practice guides based on experience and knowledge from inside the network. It is a three year Erasmus + funded project which aims to establish new national or regional networks of WISEs. While this work is useful in itself, we believe

that this work and our membership of [ENSIE](#), [Euclid](#) and [DIESIS](#) networks help to build our capacity as a network and increase our influence in advocating for Irish social enterprise at home and in Europe. We have helped support these partners in hosting events and conferences including the Access Europe Conference with The Wheel in Croke Park, the first anniversary event of the Social Economy Action Plan in the EU Parliament and the SESK Project Dublin event for ENSIE.

During 2022 we continued to contribute to the implementation and review of the national social enterprise policy under the direction of the Department of Rural and Community Development. We have participated in the policy implementation group and the technical advisory group of the social enterprise data collection exercise, and collaborated with the researchers in identifying social enterprises for inclusion in the first comprehensive listing of social enterprises in Ireland. At an international level we met with the OECD as part of their review of social enterprise in Ireland and at a local level we have advocated for social enterprise through participation in the Dublin City Social Enterprise Sub Committee and with Social Enterprise Exchange, Just Transition Project in the midlands.

Social Enterprise Environment in Ireland

While there is now an official Irish government-led definition of social enterprise (“an enterprise whose objective is to achieve a social, societal or environmental impact, rather than maximising profit for its owners or shareholders”), there is no specific legal form in Ireland for social enterprise nor any form of

registration. Most established social enterprises - those known to us - are companies limited by guarantee, although we also know of those that are private limited companies, sole traders and industrial and provident societies (co-operatives). We estimate that there may be between 1000 and 2000 social enterprises in Ireland but on the edges of the Irish social enterprise ecosystem are a multitude of organisations with an affinity to social enterprise: nonprofits with an entrepreneurial disposition, pre-start ups, and B-Corps and private enterprises that have an interest in - and sometimes a commitment - to achieving a social impact. Part of our work involves helping social enterprises to navigate the Irish social enterprise landscape which includes different types of support organisations including many LEOs (Local Enterprise Offices) and Local Development Companies, social lenders such as Clann Credo and Community Finance Ireland, specialist agencies like Social Impact Ireland, local agencies like ICE (Inner City Enterprise), and accelerator agencies like Social Entrepreneurs Ireland and Rethink Ireland.

Resources

We operate leanly through a mix of virtual working, contract working, collaboration with partners, contributions in kind, interns and volunteer time. As is apparent, much of our impact is achieved through working with partners. In addition to those mentioned above our partners have included DCU, Trinity Business School, Pobal, many local development companies, county councils and individual social enterprises. Our financial resources last year were primarily from the state (Dormant Accounts Fund), EU funded programmes, membership subscriptions and service fees.

Who are we?

ISEN is an open network of social enterprises across the Republic of Ireland, funders, academics and support agencies who we reach through mailings, social media, partners' contacts and our own lovely subscribed members. We believe this is an inclusive business model that optimises our reach and best serves Irish social enterprises. A big thank you goes to all those social enterprises and individuals who have become subscribed members. If you would like to join and support ISEN in this way, visit <https://www.socent.ie/> and press the tab for Join ISEN.

Our Board comprises social enterprise practitioners Lucie Cunningham (Chair) of [THE Homeshare](#), Eamon Stack of [Range Therapy](#), Leyla Karaha of [YourY Network](#) and Thomas McCabe of [Siel Bleu](#), and individuals with specialist knowledge: Dr Emma McEvoy Assistant Professor in Law at DCU (public procurement), Ciara Holland (Fair Trade) and Dr Danielle Byrne from [Trinity Centre for Social Innovation](#). Our thanks go to Clodagh O'Reilly who stepped down from the board during 2022. Our staff, CEO Chris Gordon and EU Projects Researcher Duncan Walker, and Company Secretary Danielle have all managed social enterprises in Ireland and the UK. If you are a subscribed member and are interested in joining the board, please contact Chris or Danielle at info@socent.ie.

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