



European Committee
of the Regions



Northern & Western
Regional Assembly

Irish
College
Leuven
est. 1607

European Green Deal digital dialogue



Event type

Dates

Initialising member

Audience

Digital local
dialogue

22, 24 & 26
February 2021

Clr Enda Stenson
(IE/EA)

Total of 208 registrations across three sessions by politicians, policy makers, business representatives and ordinary citizens from the Northern and Western region of Ireland.

Organisers

Northern and Western Regional Assembly of Ireland (NWRA), and the Irish College, Leuven.

Partner

The European
Commission
Office in Dublin

Theme

The European Green Deal



Speakers

CoR Members:

Clr Declan McDonnell
(IE/EA) Northern and Western
Regional Assembly (NWRA)

Clr Enda Stenson
(IE/EA) NWRA

Andries Gryffroy
Member of the Flemish Parliament
(BE/EA)

European Parliament:

Maria Walsh MEP (IE/EPP)
Colm Markey MEP (IE/EPP)

European Commission:

Jonathan Claridge
Head of Communication, European
Commission Office, Dublin

Quentin Dupriez
DG Climate Action

Jean-Claude Merciol and
Jesus Maria Alquezar Sabadie
DG Environment

David Grant
Chief Executive, Irish College
Leuven

Adrian Hiel
EU policy and communication,
Energy Cities

Elmar Willems
Circular Economy Facilitator,
Vlaanderen Circular OVAM

Dr Mike Clarke
Associate at the Institute for
European Environmental Policy

Dr Malorie Schaus and
Milan Elkerbout
Researchers at the Centre for
European Policy Studies

Teresa Lennon
Head of Office, Irish Regions
European Office

Simon Pascoe
EU Regional Policy Specialist



Key messages

“For our region, the EU Green Deal is a timely North Star”: Clr Declan McDonnell, event opening.

The European Green Deal offers many opportunities, plus challenges, for rural areas such as the northern and western parts of Ireland.

The region is well-placed to benefit from massive wind power generation off its coast, plus solar.

However, its low population density will make other green energy options less viable. And the renovation of older buildings to meet the new efficiency standards will also be problematic.

Investment in infrastructure will be key, e.g., high-speed broadband, to support greener ways of working, create a truly circular economy, and reverse rural depopulation.

Businesses, community groups and government bodies need to start planning now, so they are ready when project funding becomes available.

They also need to start discussing what they want the future of Europe to be, and be prepared to submit their views after the Conference on the Future of Europe is launched.



Press/Social media coverage

Media coverage

[COR Event Page](#)

Website

[Future of Europe](#)

[NWRA Green Deal](#)

Social Media

[#EU_CoR](#)



Northern and Western Regional Assembly, “Green Deal Information” event

The [Northern and Western Regional Assembly](#) (NWRA) of Ireland organised an **online information event on the European Green Deal** in the mornings of the 22nd, 24th and 26th of February. Its aim was to outline the key strategies set out in the European Green deal, the funding structures around the Deal, and how these could benefit the Northern and Western Region. There were 208 registrations on the online platforms across the three sessions, by local politicians, policy makers, business representatives and ordinary citizens. Recordings of the online sessions will be available via the [NWRA's event page](#).

The Committee of the Regions was represented by local Councillors Declan McDonnell (IE/EA) (opened the first session) and Enda Stenson (IE/EA) (opened the final session), plus Andries Gryffroy (BE/EA), Member of the Flemish Parliament, who presented about the local implementation of Green Deal policies in Flanders. In his opening remarks, Cllr McDonnell said **"For our region, the EU Green Deal is a timely North Star, and Covid-19 has accelerated our need for good decision making."**

European Green Deal in the Northern and Western Region of Ireland

The European Green Deal is seen by NWRA to have the potential to kick-start a new wave of innovation and investment that would both raise the standards of living of its citizens and tackle climate change issues.

The region is mostly rural in nature, lying on the western fringes of Europe, and its economy is largely dependent upon agriculture, fishing and other more traditional industries. It is officially classed by the European Commission as a "lagging" region, requiring additional support and investment. It also struggles to retain young people in its local communities after they complete secondary education.

The NWRA, along with its partner, the [Irish College, Leuven](#), structured the three half-days into different themes:

- 22/02 (session 1) – introduction to the European Green Deal and its ambitions and structure, with presentations from European Commission officials from the Directorates-General for Climate Action and Environment about the Green Deal and the LIFE Programme.
- 24/02 (session 2) – more specific information on how the European Green Deal could affect different sectors and policy areas, with experts from projects and think tanks presenting their views on its potential impact upon energy policy, the circular economy, biodiversity and industry.
- 26/02 (session 3) – funding opportunities, with presentations on the resources available specifically through the European Green Deal, as well as through other EU programmes. This final session also included a presentation on how elements of the Green Deal are already being implemented in Flanders, as well as a dual input from local MEPs Maria Walsh and Colm Markey (both IE/EPP).

Where time permitted, the presenters also answered questions that the audience submitted electronically via the video conferencing platform. All of the sessions and presentations were conducted in English.



Key messages

Key messages from the event include:

- **The region is ideally placed to benefit from the opportunities that the Green Deal offers** with regards to energy policy, with vast potential for offshore and onshore wind generation, as well as solar generation and ground heat pumps. Local communities can take advantage of these technologies to help ensure their longer-term viability and sustainability.
- The age of the region's municipal buildings, and public and private housing stocks will present a **challenge in meeting energy efficiency targets**. However, the amount of renovation required could provide business opportunities and skilled employment for large numbers of people for many years.
- **The EU should tackle climate change issues more at regional and cross-border levels**, where the solutions can be more effective and tailored to local needs than at national levels.
- As a "lagging" region, **significant infrastructure investment will be needed** to help communities to meet the climate change challenges. For instance, fast broadband would support more home working and reduce commuting to towns and cities. It would also give more employment opportunities to younger people and help reduce the "brain drain".
- Local government bodies, communities and businesses **need to start developing plans now**, with equivalent EU partners, so that they have "shovel ready" projects when funding streams come online.

Conference on the Future of Europe

In addition, as regards the Conference on the Future of Europe, the MEPs encouraged participants to begin local discussions, both in the context of the Conference and the ongoing discussions on a rural strategy for Europe. **They saw the Committee of the Regions as being integral in ensuring the debate gets into every community in Ireland.**

Maria Walsh MEP sounded a note of caution, however, saying that in recent meetings with students about the future of Europe, they appeared to be becoming more nationalistic in their outlook. The COVID-19 crisis has caused them to focus locally on family, health, education and jobs, with little regard to the wider EU. In addition, many had little knowledge of what the EU does and how, and thus struggled to form an opinion on what the future of Europe should be.