

4. ConnectIreland

A mechanism through which individuals can influence Foreign Direct Investment

Category: Diaspora & migrants' role in job creation, enterprise, investment and public policy;

Sub-categories:

- **Diaspora and migrants' action on job creation and entrepreneurship - policy and practice;**
- **Enabling environment in countries of origin/residence/ interest**
 - **Incentives for diaspora and migrant enterprises in countries of origin**

***ConnectIreland** works on an incentivized referral approach (register, refer, reward), engaging Ireland's diaspora to act as ambassadors for Ireland whilst encouraging FDI and as a result creating sustainable jobs. As Diaspora Engagement Specialist at ConnectIreland, **Thelma Harris** also spearheads the ConnectIreland Community Action Plan.*

'I mean, it's not exactly a hard sell when you think of the all of the international names that are in Ireland already,' says actress Saoirse Ronan. The Oscar-nominated actress features alongside other big names, such as Michael Flatley and Hollywood heavyweight Martin Sheen, whose mother was an Irish immigrant, in a video promoting ConnectIreland, the brainchild of Irish entrepreneur Terry Clune.

With a long tradition of protecting its vulnerable migrants abroad, Ireland has a reputation for being a global leader in the diaspora engagement space. Thus, when faced with economic recession in 2008, Ireland sought ways to use the strength of its diaspora relationship to influence economic development and ultimately job creation. This is in a country where, in 2012, the unemployment rate peaked at over 15%.

The work of ConnectIreland, a private company delivering a government initiative, was inspired by the inaugural Global Irish Economic Forum meeting in 2009. The company works in partnership with IDA Ireland, Ireland's investment development agency. Key to the company's success is that it has one clear and concise ask of the diaspora: 'Do you know a company looking to expand internationally?'

69 companies have located in Ireland as a result, with 2,069 approved jobs coming to Irish shores. Due to the size and nature of these companies, many have brought job creation to the more rural areas of Ireland. For example a multi-million euro industry manufacturing basalt fibre chose Ireland for their production facility, creating 70 jobs in 3 years in Meath, in the mid-east.

Over 70,000 diasporans are now 'Connectors'. As the programme is apolitical, these Connectors have a sense of ownership of its successes. Many individuals have registered who either are not in a position to reach a decision-maker in a company but want to positively engage, or there are those who register but are not overly engaged with influencing business in Ireland. ConnectIreland must ensure that these individuals become and remain engaged in alternative ways. It can take months or years for a successful introduction to be made; ConnectIreland therefore plays a long-term role.

'Succeed In Ireland', set up in 2012 as a one-year pilot programme, is now in its fifth year. ConnectIreland's remit seeks that all jobs approved through the programme must be in place for at least two years, and so our work results in sustainable economic development for Ireland.

With a strong understanding of one's own diaspora, a replication of ConnectIreland would be possible. Foundations in diaspora engagement would need to be in place before a job creation model could be implemented. Recently, ConnectIreland launched a Community Action Plan - a strategy designed to mobilise communities throughout Ireland to engage their local diasporas abroad.