

International Relations Monitoring Report

May 2024 – Issue 2



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1. Introduction

The Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee has a broad remit covering a wide range of areas. In March 2022, the Committee noted its intention to conduct regular monitoring of international activity undertaken by Welsh Ministers as part of its strategy and priorities for the Sixth Senedd.

This monitoring report is intended to provide Members of the Committee with an update on key policy developments related to the Committee's international relations remit. This includes relevant statements made by the Welsh and UK governments, as well as public bodies, delivery partners and stakeholders. Relevant publications from Senedd Research will also be included in the report.

The report covers the period January – April 2024.

2. International relations

This section summarises key developments related to the Welsh Government's International Strategy and other relevant updates.

International agreements

This section focuses on developments in relation to the Welsh Government's international agreements. Eight of the Welsh Governments' bilateral agreements are shown on [a dedicated webpage](#) which was established at the request of the Committee. Others such as the [new healthcare recruitment agreement with the Indian state of Kerala](#) and [its international friendship pact with the city of Birmingham, Alabama](#) in the US, are not on the webpage.

- In January, the former First Minister, Mark Drakeford undertook a three-day visit to [Silesia in Poland](#) to renew a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and action plan with the Silesian Voivodeship. The new agreement and plan will initially focus on life sciences, cyber, coal tip safety and green transformation, science and innovation, education and industrial tourism.
- In March, the former First Minister [held a meeting](#) with Vice President of the Brittany Regional Council where they discussed Wales-Brittany relations and signed an action plan to support the implementation of the MoU signed last year.
- The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, Eluned Morgan, announced the renewal of an MoU between [Welsh Government and the World Health Organization](#) (WHO). The agreement covers areas of health equity and rights, investment for health and wellbeing and the essential underlying conditions of health, and sustainable development and prosperity for all. She [also issued a statement](#) on her attendance at an event to mark the 20th anniversary of the WHO and said the organisation would also be publishing a deep dive on the well-being economy in Wales.
- The [year of Wales in India](#) was launched on St David's Day and involves a year-long programme of events, designed to develop and celebrate Wales-India relations. [Senedd Research's article](#) summarises the First Minister's response to the Committee's request for more information on activity and costs.
- Wales in Germany [met with colleagues](#) to work on activities around the [Shared Statement of Cooperation with Baden-Württemberg](#).
- The [former First Minister met](#) with the Minister-President of Flanders to discuss progress on the shared MoU.

Wales-Ireland relations

This section provides updates relating to developments in the Wales-Ireland relationship, following the Committee's [inquiry on Wales-Ireland relations](#). Further [information can be found in an article](#) published by Senedd Research.

- The Welsh Government shared a [report with the Committee on learning from the secondment](#) of a Welsh Government official to the [Irish Government's Department of Foreign Affairs](#), which was a commitment under the [Wales-Ireland Shared Statement](#) and Joint Action Plan. The report noted the benefits of the secondment including an increase in engagement between Welsh and Irish Government officials. The report proposed that shared learning be undertaken between Irish and Welsh Governments in the coming year and over a range of policy areas. To facilitate shared learning, the report also states there will be regular ministerial engagement, facilitation of official level consultations and the organisation of joint site or study visits. A progress report will be prepared for the Ireland Wales Forum 2024.
- In March, the former Minister for Social Justice undertook a [St Davids Day visit to Ireland](#) to discuss the [Ireland-Wales Shared Statement](#) and the Irish Government's Basic Income for the Arts pilot.
- In January, the former Deputy Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing visited Dublin to [attend a British and Irish Council Ministerial Meeting](#) on Drugs & Alcohol. The purpose of the meeting was to review activity of the Council's workstream on Drugs and Alcohol and to discuss a proposed forward work plan.

Nation of Sanctuary

This section outlines developments which relate to the Welsh Government's [refugee and asylum seeker plan](#) (Nation of Sanctuary), which details the support the government will provide to those groups in Wales.

- Launched as a part of a wider support package, the Welsh Government introduced the Welcome Ticket scheme in 2022. It was a free public transport scheme aimed at supporting Ukrainians, Afghans and other refugees. It ended on 31 March 2024. In a [written statement](#), the former Minister for Social Justice said the scheme will be reviewed, with the intention to establish a new phase in 2024. [Lesley Griffiths has assumed responsibility](#) for the 'co-ordination of issues relating to' asylum seekers and refugees as the Cabinet Secretary for Culture and Social Justice.
- The Committee [received a letter from the former Minister for Social Justice](#) on support for Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees. The letter outlined a range of cultural support including raising awareness of important Ukrainian cultural dates and engagement with Polish and Welsh Scout organisations to support children in joining a youth organisation, whilst retaining a sense of national identity.

- In February, the former Minister also **made a statement** on the two-year anniversary of the Ukraine invasion. She referenced the **UK Government announcement** that those with Ukraine scheme visas can extend their right to remain in the UK for a further 18 months. She also noted the establishment of a Nation of Sanctuary strategic oversight board, which the Minister said includes members from “local authority leaders, representatives from our wider public sector services, third sector partners and representatives from the Home Office and Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities”.

Wales and Africa

The **Welsh Government’s International Strategy** committed to expanding and renaming the Wales for Africa programme, which aims to develop community-based links and partnerships with countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Subsequently, it published a **Wales and Africa Action Plan. Schemes under the ‘Wales and Africa’ programme** include the Wales and Africa grant scheme and Hub Cymru Africa, which provides guidance around fundraising for Africa-based projects. This section provides updates in relation to the programme, and other Welsh-based initiatives to support African communities.

- Round six of the Welsh Government’s Wales and Africa Grant scheme **opened to funding applications**, on 11 March. It closed on 15 April.
- Hub Cymru Africa **announced that it will take over as host partner** for the **Sub-Saharan Advisory Panel**, replacing the Welsh Centre for International Affairs.
- Bawso, an organisation which provides support to black and minority women affected by abuse, **announced a Wales and Uganda project** to work with Sebei Community Empowerment Project in Uganda to tackle the practice of female genital mutilation.

UK-Rwanda

The Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee considered the UK-Rwanda asylum agreement on 8 January 2024 and agreed to **request the Welsh Government’s view** on specific matters within the Committee’s remit, including international obligations and the Sewel Convention.

In February 2024, the **former First Minister said** he appreciated the opportunity to share the Welsh Government’s view of the Agreement and the then Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill (now Act). Part of the Act’s purpose is to implement the Agreement. In his response, he said:

Welsh Ministers have repeatedly stated in recent years – and it remains our view – that proposals to detain and remove everyone arriving via irregular means are not workable or ethical. We have been clear that an effective system requires compliance

with the UN Refugee Convention and the ECHR, effective returns agreements with safe countries where connections exist, and sufficient safe and legal routes to the UK.

He added the Welsh Government:

- believes the contents of both relate to reserved matters. We do not believe that a Legislative Consent Motion is required.
- remains concerned that the Home Secretary cannot state that the Bill is compatible with the European Convention on Human Rights.
- was frustrated that the will of Senedd Cymru was ignored when legislative consent was withheld in relation to both the Nationality and Borders Act 2022 and Illegal Migration Act 2023.
- maintains the position that the provisions it highlighted in those Acts have dual purpose which impacts upon Senedd competence. In those cases the Welsh Government does not believe the Sewel Convention has been observed. In relation to the Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill and the accompanying agreement, we do not believe the Sewel Convention is engaged.
- highlights the loss of the Dublin III Regulation and EURODAC to UK Ministers as a result of the UK's withdrawal from the EU. He states that:

These systems enabled the UK to return individuals to other Member States where connections existed. Traffickers and people smugglers know that the UK can no longer rely on this pan-European cooperation which makes the UK a far more attractive destination.

Gaza

On 23 April 2024, the new First Minister set out his position on the situation in Gaza.

It's been the position of the Welsh Government for some time that there should be an immediate ceasefire. There needs to be a significant increase in routes for aid, as well as the amount of aid provided, because there is a very real humanitarian crisis taking place before us, in addition to resolving the issues around the atrocities that did take place on 7 October, which includes the release of all the hostages. Now, I don't think that, across this Chamber, people will disagree with that position. Our challenge is the level of influence we have on decision makers within the region, the talks that are taking place between different actors to try to generate a ceasefire, and the ability to stop the killing.

And:

The Welsh Government is clear: we want to see an immediate end to the killing, a ceasefire; we want to see an immediate significant increase in the aid that can be provided; we want to see hostages returned. It remains my view that the long-term way to guarantee the stability and peaceful security that citizens should expect is for there to be a viable, secure Israel, as a neighbour to a viable and secure Palestinian state. We are a long way off from that being delivered in reality.

The Petitions Committee has considered a petition calling on the Welsh Government to **provide humanitarian aid to Gaza**.

The **latest letter**, dated 12 March 2024 and from the former Minister for Social Justice, Jane Hutt MS, said that the Welsh Government will consider donating to a DEC appeal, should one be launched and offered to meet with the Chair of the Petitions Committee to discuss this further.

On 17 April, this Committee **agreed to write** to the Petitions Committee requesting to be kept updated on next steps.

Updates from across the UK

- The Scottish Government **published its new international strategy**, which outlines its international objectives up to 2026. It builds on the **Global Affairs Framework** and its **feminist approach to international relations**. The Scottish Government will report on progress annually. The strategy focuses on three main themes, economy, trade and investment, climate change, biodiversity and renewable energy; and relationships, influence and reputation
- A **publication from the UCL Policy Lab** called for reform of UK foreign policy. The report suggested the Foreign Office is “struggling to deliver a clear mandate, prioritisation and resource allocation” and recommended the creation of a new Department for International Affairs or Global Affairs UK. The report also suggested that to achieve the needed reform.

“We need to harness the combined levers of the state. That requires better central coordination, delivery structures (eg agencies and a development bank) and engagement with domestic stakeholders including devolved administrations”.

3. Europe

This section summarises the latest news relating to Europe, and lists important updates.

Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) and Withdrawal Agreement

This section provides an overview of developments under the TCA and Withdrawal Agreement, including any implications for the devolved governments.

- The Interministerial Group (IMG) on UK-EU Relations met on 6 March where upcoming meetings of the TCA’s Partnership Council and Withdrawal Agreement Joint Committee, expected in “early 2024”, were discussed. The meeting was attended by the former Minister for Economy (now First Minister), Vaughan Gething MS, who called on the UK Government to include devolved governments in TCA meetings and their preparation. The meeting agreed the updated Terms of Reference for this IMG. Other Welsh Government priorities included:
 - The need for an agreement on mutual recognition on conformity assessments
 - Retaining EU Data Adequacy arrangements.
 - EU import rules affecting the export of live bivalve molluscs.
- The House of Commons European Scrutiny Committee published the UK Government’s response to its report on the UK’s EU representation. The UK Government responded that the IMG on UK-EU Relations was established “to give the devolved administrations the opportunity to comment on the TCA and Withdrawal Agreement”.
- The Specialised Committee on the implementation of the Windsor Framework issued a joint statement, following its meeting on 25 April. It noted the restoration of the Northern Ireland institutions and discussed the implementation of the Framework in the areas of agri-food and customs.

Meetings held under the TCA

The latest TCA specialised committee meetings are shown below, where Welsh Government officials were listed as participants..

Committee	Date	Areas of discussion
<u>Specialised Committee on Participation in Union Programmes</u>	4 December 2023 (Minutes published on 2 February 2024)	The Committee welcomed the UK’s participation in Horizon Europe and Copernicus but the EU expressed regret on the UK’s decision not to participate in Euratom and the Euratom Joint Undertaking Fusion for Energy
<u>Trade Specialised Committee on Goods</u>	8 November 2023 (Minutes published on 25 January 2024)	The Committee discussed <u>the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism</u> and an update on supply chain initiatives.
<u>Trade Specialised Committee on Customs Cooperation and Rules of Origin</u>	27 September 2023 (Minutes published on 11 January 2024)	The Committee heard updates on customs regimes and border strategies. It also discussed automotive industry concerns with changes in the TCA’s Rules of Origin for batteries for electric vehicles, scheduled from 2024.
<u>Trade Specialised Committee on Public Procurement</u>	16 November 2023 (Minutes published on 22 February 2024)	The Committee heard updates on the UK’s Procurement Act 2023 and the EU’s approach to sustainable procurement. Concerns were raised around the UK carbon reduction plans and the cloud cyber certification scheme in one EU Member State.
<u>Trade Specialised Committee on Regulatory Cooperation</u>	6 November 2023 (Minutes published on 23 January 2024)	The Committee heard updates on the UK Government’s Smarter Regulation programme and on EU Better Regulation agenda. It also discussed improving regulation accessibility through digitisation and regulatory approaches to emerging technologies.
<u>Trade Specialised Committee on Level Playing Field for Open and Fair Competition and Sustainable Development</u>	4 October 2023 (Minutes published on 12 January 2024)	The Committee heard updates on the subsidy control and spending elements of its Green Deal Industrial Plan and UK Freeports and Investment Zones.

Other EU Updates

- In April, the European Commission **proposed to open negotiations with the UK** on an agreement to facilitate youth mobility, which sought create a means by which young people could travel between the UK and the EU easier and for longer. It has since been rejected by both the UK Government and the Labour Party. **Analysis from the Financial Times** noted that EU member states, which were previously open to a bilateral arrangement with the UK, have decided that youth mobility must be available to all member states equally. While both the UK Government and Labour Party have suggested that such a deal would be “synonymous with free movement”.

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- In April, the Equality and Social Justice Committee published **its second annual report on the EU settlement scheme**, which it has been monitoring since its establishment in 2021. Senedd Research **published an article** outlining the latest EUSS statistics and summarises the Committee’s findings.
 - The latest **UK Government proposals on the introduction of a UK carbon border adjustment mechanism** (CBAM) were published in March, which would “place a carbon price on some of the most emissions intensive industrial goods imported to the UK”. Senedd Research **published an article** explaining the details of the UK’s proposals, as well as developments in the EU’s CBAM.
 - The Welsh Government’s Representative on Europe, Derek Vaughan, **addressed the European Parliament’s Culture and Education Committee** and provided an update on **Taith**, the Welsh Government-funded international learning exchange programme. A **written briefing** provided to the Committee on Taith highlighted activities in Brussels. This focused on a policy discussion organised in 2022 around education mobility. The event was organised by the **Welsh Higher Education Brussels** and the Welsh Government Brussels office.

4. Welsh Government Ministerial Outward/Inward Visits: January – March 2024

The following table provides details on all visits undertaken by Welsh Government ministers and incoming official visitors to Wales. The Committee is provided with monthly lists of these engagements from Welsh Government and carries out its own monitoring. Any visits which are not included in the Welsh Government’s lists are highlighted in the table.

Minister/Guest	Location	Purpose of Visit	Date
German Ambassador to the UK	Wales	Meetings with the former First Minister and former Minister for Economy. The <u>meeting with the First Minister</u> focused on renewables, youth mobility and closer links with Europe. The <u>meeting with the Economy Minister</u> focused on the Shared Statement of Cooperation with Baden Württemberg.	January 2024
India: Maharashtra Legislative Assembly	Wales	Members of the Legislative Assembly <u>met with the former Minister for Social Justice</u> to discuss the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act. There are plans to bring forward a similar <u>private member’s Bill in Maharashtra</u> .	January 2024
Former First Minister	Poland	The former First Minister undertook a three-day visit to Silesia to sign a MoU with the Silesian Voivodeship. (<i>Further details in the International relations section</i>)	January 2024
Former Deputy Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing	Ireland	To attend a British and Irish Council Ministerial Meeting on Drugs & Alcohol. (<i>Further details in the Wales-Ireland relations section</i>)	January 2024
High Commissioner for Bangladesh in the UK	Wales	The former First Minister met with the High Commissioner, where they discussed the promotion of Welsh Language, education in Wales and the Bangladesh community in Wales.	February 2024
Former First Minister	Brussels	The former First Minister spoke at an event hosted by Forum Europe, met with the Minister President of Flanders, held a roundtable discussion hosted by WindEurope and attended an event hosted by Universities Wales. In the evening the First Minister hosted a	February 2024

		reception to celebrate St. David's Day at the Ambassador's Residence in Brussels.	
Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care	India	The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care <u>travelled to India to launch the year of Wales in India 2024</u> at the St David's Day reception in Mumbai.	February 2024
Former Minister for Social Justice	Ireland	The former Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip travelled to Dublin to mark St David's Day. <i>(Further details in the Wales-Ireland relations section)</i>	February 2024
Former First Minister	London	The former First Minister met with the Indian High Commissioner in London at the Commission's St David's Day reception.	February 2024
Former Minister for Rural Affairs, North Wales and Trefnydd	London	The former Minister met with the US Ambassador in London at the Embassy's St David's Day reception.	February 2024
Vice President of Brittany Regional Council	Wales	The former First Minister held a bilateral meeting with Vice President of the Brittany Regional Council when he came to Wales for the Wales in France closing event.	March 2024
Councillor Mulot of Hauts-de-France Regional Council	Wales	The former First Minister held a bilateral meeting with Councillor Mulot from Hauts-de-France Regional Council when he came to Wales for the Wales in France closing event. During the meeting they discussed youth mobility and green energy, particularly around the use of hydrogen.	March 2024
Irish Minister for Education	Wales	The former First Minister had an informal meeting with the Irish Minister for Education during her visit to Wales to celebrate St Patrick's Day. The brief meeting touched on areas of cooperation covered in the Wales Ireland Shared Statement.	March 2024
Danish Ambassador to the UK	Wales	The former Deputy Minister for Climate Change met with the Danish Ambassador to discuss the Welsh	March 2024

		Government's approach to sustainability, trade and investment.	
Italian Ambassador to the UK	Wales	The former Minister for Rural Affairs, North Wales and Trefnydd and met with the Italian Ambassador and a business delegation to demonstrate support for Wales-Italy relations and to strengthen links with Italian stakeholders.	March 2024