

State agencies and enterprises, 2023

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Overview of public bodies

For 2023 the number of commercial state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and non-commercial state agencies, in addition to other public bodies and institutions, was 353 (Irish State Administration Database, 2024).¹ This figure has remained consistent in recent years. Spanning a range of public policy domains – from education and enterprise to transport and culture – these organisations include a mix of household names like An Post and the IDA and also less-known entities such as the Galway Harbour Company and the Ulster-Scots Agency.

The organisations on this list, which are involved in making and implementing public policy, evolve as policymakers create new bodies, merge existing ones and terminate others.

Below are public bodies established in 2023:

- Irish Air Navigation Service;
- Maritime Area Regulatory Authority;
- An Rialálaí Agraibhia – The Agri-Food Regulator;
- Office of Director of Authorised Intervention, Tuam.

Meanwhile, in 2023 Coimisiún na Meán replaced the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland, while the Electoral Commission replaced the Referendum Commission (Irish State Administration Database, 2024).

¹ This figure excludes ministerial departments.

State-owned enterprises

It was a year of mixed fortunes for Ireland's SOEs. The annual reports and financial statements of a number of SOEs, published in 2023, recorded healthy profits for 2022 in the context of strong post-pandemic economic growth. However, the impact of rising operating costs and other exceptional charges was felt by others. While, over the summer, the national broadcaster became embroiled in one of the biggest controversies to hit a SOE in recent times. In this section a brief review of several SOEs is provided.

Like other transport providers, Irish Rail experienced a sharp rise in passenger journeys and revenues for 2022. Passenger revenue experienced a year-on-year increase of 66 per cent from 2021, while the number of passenger journeys increased by 106 per cent for the same period. The next few years should be an exciting period for the company and its passengers as capital investment projects are delivered. For example, new InterCity and DART railcars will be rolled out while refurbished train stations will be reopened (Irish Rail, 2023).

Dublin Bus reported an increase in operating costs from €270.8 million in 2021 to €310.3 million in 2022. These additional costs mainly resulted from an expansion of its services under the BusConnects project and the implementation of a pay agreement (Dublin Bus, 2023).

Following heavy losses during the pandemic, the Dublin Airport Authority Group (DAA) announced a return to profitability: €98 million in profits for 2022, compared to a loss of €101 million the previous year. As passenger numbers through its terminals surged – over 30 million used Cork and Dublin airports in 2022 – the group succeeded in recruiting over 1,000 new staff to help alleviate well-publicised security delays (DAA, 2023). Against the background of rapidly growing passenger numbers and the opening of a second runway in 2022, the DAA warned that the passenger cap at Dublin Airport – set at 32 million per year – will need to be lifted if the airport is to meet its long-term growth ambitions (Beesley, 2023). This contentious matter of raising the passenger cap, which is a planning condition set down by Fingal County Council, will present the government with economic, climate and political considerations.

For Coillte, its operating profit was down from €135 million in 2021 to €119 million in 2022, while the company confirmed a dividend payment of €27.7 million to the state (Coillte, 2023). Inflation and rising interest rates were cited as reasons for the dip in profits.

An Post announced a net loss of €224 million for 2022 compared to a loss of €37.9 million for 2021. In the context of a pension agreement with trade unions, the company incurred an exceptional charge in respect to staff pension benefits. However, there was a growth in revenue from the Post Office network. The company has collected €150 million in VAT since the introduction of the new customs regime after Brexit (An Post, 2023). After delays with the government approval process, in September it was reported that over 7,000 An Post pensioners stood to receive a backdated cost-of-living increase in their pension (Malone, 2023).

Profits for the Electricity Supply Board (ESB) escalated considerably in 2022, with this trend continuing into 2023. The company's profit after tax rose sharply from €265.9 million in 2021 to €649.3 million in 2022. Unprecedented increases in wholesale gas prices were driven by the war in Ukraine and a reduction in the supply of Russian gas. In this context, the ESB agreed to pay a dividend of €327 million for 2022 to the state, compared to a dividend of €126 million for 2021 (ESB, 2023).

Finally, in an *annus horribilis* for RTÉ, the company reported a deficit of €2.8 million for 2022. This deficit was in the context of a continued fall in television licence fee revenue and the well-publicised commercial failure of the *Toy Show* musical (RTÉ, 2023). Not long after news of a presenter payment controversy broke in June 2023, Director General of RTÉ Dee Forbes resigned and was replaced by former BBC executive Kevin Bakhurst in July (MacRedmond, 2023). This controversy exacerbated the funding crisis at the beleaguered broadcaster as members of the public increasingly stopped paying their licence fee. After RTÉ management set out plans in respect of governance reforms and cost efficiencies, in November, the government approved interim funding of €56 million to secure the station's short-term future (Lehane, 2023). A decision on a reformed funding model for RTÉ, to replace the existing licence fee, is expected to be made by the government later in 2024.

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