

International Relations Monitoring Report

July 2024 – Issue 3



Contents

1.	Introduction	3
2.	International relations.....	4
	First Minister scrutiny session	4
	UK Government and foreign policy	5
	International Strategy	7
	Overseas offices	7
	Wales in India.....	8
	Gaza	9
	Envoys.....	9
	Technology.....	9
	Other	10
3.	Europe	11
	European Parliament elections	11
	Wales - Ireland relations.....	11
	Trade and Co-operation Agreement (TCA) and Withdrawal Agreement.....	13
	Withdrawal Agreement.....	13
	TCA	13
	TCA Specialised Committee meetings.....	14
4.	Welsh Government ministerial outward/inward visits: April - June16	

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 May- June 2024

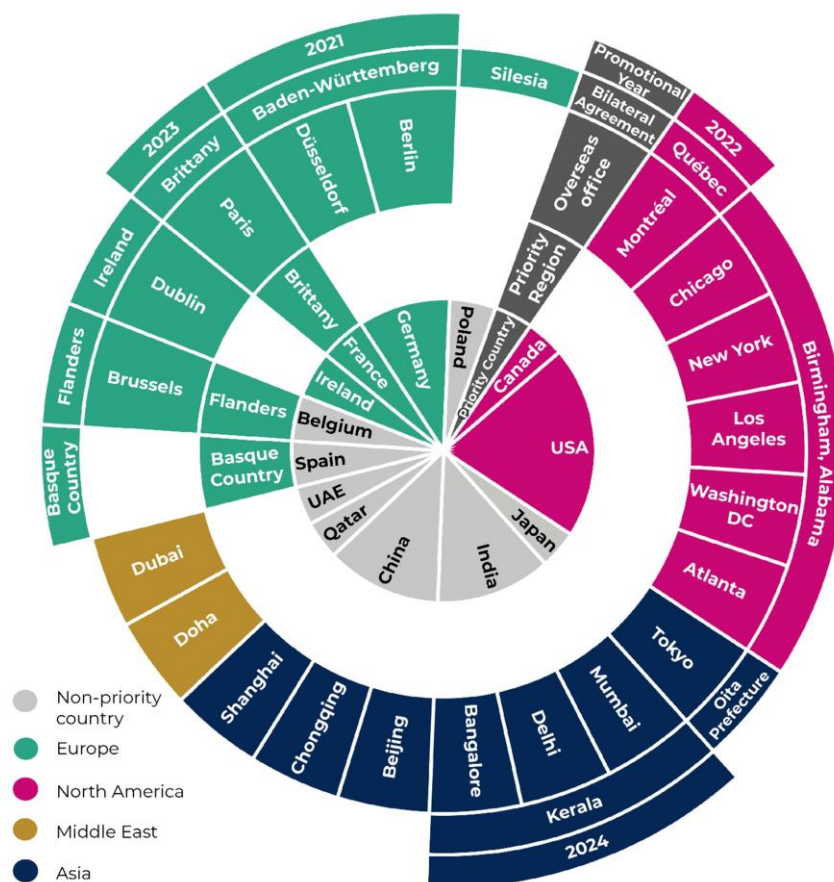
2. International relations

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

First Minister scrutiny session

The First Minister, Vaughan Gething MS, appeared before the Committee for [annual international relations scrutiny on 19 June](#). The Committee discussed a range of issues with the First Minister and some of his responses are included in this report under relevant headings.

Senedd Research has [published an article](#), presenting its new international relations infographic. It shows the Welsh Government's international priority relationships, overseas offices, international bilateral agreements and promotional years.



UK Government and foreign policy

Following July's general election, David Lammy MP was appointed as the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs and has since made a number of international visits, including to Sweden, Germany and Poland. Other relevant ministerial appointments included:

- Nick Thomas-Symonds MP as Minister for the Constitution and European Relations in the Cabinet Office;
- Anneliese Dodds MP as Minister of State at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO)
- Stephen Doughty MP as Minister of State (FCDO);
- Catherine West MP as Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (FCDO); and
- Lord Collins of Highbury as Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (FCDO).

The UK Labour Government's manifesto commitments on international relations and foreign policy are shown on the table below.

Subject	Manifesto commitment
UK-US relations	▪ "We will continue to work with the United States on the basis of our shared values and common interests including on economic co-operation, defence and intelligence".
UK-EU relations	▪ "With Labour, Britain will stay outside of the EU. But to seize the opportunities ahead, we must make Brexit work. We will reset the relationship and seek to deepen ties with our European friends, neighbours and allies. That does not mean reopening the divisions of the past. There will be no return to the single market, the customs union, or freedom of movement". ▪ "Labour will seek an ambitious new UK-EU security pact to strengthen co-operation on the threats we face. We will rebuild relationships with key European allies, including France and Germany, through increased defence and security co-operation". ▪ "We will seek new bilateral agreements and closer working with Joint Expeditionary Force partners. This will strengthen NATO and keep Britain safe".

Human rights and international law	▪ “We will use the UK’s unique position in NATO, the UN, G7, G20 and the Commonwealth to address the threats we face, and to uphold human rights and international law”. ▪ “Britain will unequivocally remain a member of the European Convention on Human Rights”. ▪ “Labour will also strengthen support for British nationals abroad. We will introduce a new right to consular assistance in cases of human rights violations”.
Climate change	▪ “Labour will create a new Clean Power Alliance, bringing together a coalition of countries at the cutting edge of climate action”.
Soft power	▪ “Our diplomatic leadership is bolstered by the soft power of our world-leading cultural institutions. Rather than running these institutions down, we will work across government to bring leading creative and cultural institutions together to increase the UK’s international clout”. ▪ “We will work with our proud diaspora communities to enhance our cultural links across the world”.
Middle East	▪ “Long-term peace and security in the Middle East will be an immediate focus. Labour will continue to push for an immediate ceasefire, the release of all hostages, the upholding of international law, and a rapid increase of aid into Gaza”. ▪ “We are committed to recognising a Palestinian state as a contribution to a renewed peace process which results in a two-state solution with a safe and secure Israel alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state”.
International development	▪ “Labour is committed to restoring development spending at the level of 0.7 per cent of gross national income as soon as fiscal circumstances allow”. ▪ “We will deliver value for money for the British taxpayer by working closely with the Independent Commission for Aid Impact to apply the highest standards to our aid spend”. ▪ “Labour will strengthen international development work within the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office. We will renew expertise and focus, especially in priority areas such as supporting economic transformation, tackling unsustainable

	debt, empowering women and girls, supporting conflict prevention, and unlocking climate finance”.
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International Strategy

The Welsh Government’s International Strategy is due to expire in 2025 and First Minister, Vaughan Gething MS, addressed its refresh during the annual scrutiny session on 19 June, saying:

On your point about refreshing the international strategy, through the summer, I've already had a conversation with [officials] on examining options for a refresh [...] I want to understand, though, what that could look like, and even if there is a light-touch refresh to get us through to 2026 [...] If that were the option that we go through in the summer, then, yes, I would look to want to engage the committee. And again, that might be a technical briefing, but an engagement to think about how that would best work for the committee to have a conversation about what renewing those priorities looks like.

Overseas offices

The aims of the International Strategy form the remit of Welsh Government’s overseas office network. The network comprises of 20 overseas offices in 12 countries. Annual reports are published relating to the network’s activities. There have been three so far for 2021-22, 2022-23 and 2023-24. The 2023-24 report’s title has changed from previous years; from “Overseas network-“ to “International relations-“ annual report. It said:

- 2025 will be the year of Wales in Japan;
- more than 100 diplomatic and international visits took place in Wales, an increase on the 35 visits averaged before the pandemic;
- In North America, there were 14 additional members added to the Congressional Friends of Wales Caucus, increasing the Caucus by 70%;
- There has been a growing global interest in the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, with a delegation of the Members of the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly to Wales, who have been considering bringing forward a similar Act;
- In relation to Wales and Africa, 44 gender champions have been trained – 25 women and 19 men. In addition, 40 women were trained in leadership and decision making, and were able to pass their training on to a further 664 women; and

- On the year of Wales in France, a vital workstream was communicating the commitment of Wales to youth mobility.

On 14 June, the Welsh Government responded to a Freedom of Information (Fol) request, which asked for a breakdown of the annual cost of running each of the overseas offices including salaries, rentals, office equipment and any other associated costs, such as staff travel. The Welsh Government said details of the overseas running costs were published in an Fol request on 12 February 2024. It added that the figure for 2023-24 is not currently available but it anticipates the figure will be ready for release by the end of the summer, at which point they will write again to the correspondent.

Wales in India

The year of Wales in India involves a year-long programme of events, designed to develop and celebrate Wales-India relations. The international relations annual report 2023-24 said the India office team is fully staffed and launched the Wales in India campaign, with 18 events taking place in the first quarter of 2024.

Senedd Research's article summarises the former First Minister, Mark Drakeford's, response to the Committee's request for more information on activity and costs. This section outlines the recent developments in Wales-India relations.

- In May, First Minister, Vaughan Gething MS, travelled to India for meetings with Tata. In a press release, the Welsh Government said the First Minister made "the case for avoiding hard redundancies across the company's Welsh sites".
- Andrew RT Davies tabled written questions, requesting details on the trip, including a cost breakdown, which officials went on the visit and who the First Minister met with. The Welsh Government responded that associated costs are to be published "after the end of the financial year", in line with the Ministerial Code.
- The Welsh Government's Chief Scientific Adviser met with the Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India and the Scientific Secretary. They discussed green energy, renewables, bio-diversity, semiconductors, and artificial intelligence (AI).
- The Welsh Government met with British Council in India and Indian ministry delegates where they discussed Welsh language policy and best practice in bilingualism.

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- The Welsh Government highlighted a trade mission to Mumbai and Bengaluru in May. The focus of the mission was manufacturing, life sciences, technology and education.
 - Global Wales launched its 'Study in Wales' campaign in Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore and Hyderabad.

Gaza

Since the Hamas attacks of 7 October 2023, Israel and Gaza have been regularly discussed at the Senedd. On 12 June, Senedd Research launched a timeline of what's happened at the Senedd so far which was last updated on 10 July.

During the scrutiny session on 19 June, the First Minister, Vaughan Gething MS, responded to questions on the Disasters Emergency Committee, cuts to the Welsh Government's international development budget, joint working with the Foreign Office and the role of the overseas office in the conflict.

Envoys

Envoys were appointed by Welsh Government in 2020 and they form part of the International Strategy. In 2020, the Welsh Government said the envoy programme:

will offer in-market support for our export and inward investment ambitions, whilst also playing a wider role in raising awareness of Wales and promoting areas of Welsh excellence.

There are currently four Welsh envoys based in the US, Japan and United Arab Emirates.

- On 29 April, Peter Fox tabled written questions on the amount spent by the Welsh Government on envoys since their introduction and the amount of inward investment they have secured. In response, the First Minister, Vaughan Gething MS, said it was not possible "to directly attribute any export or investment results to their work as their roles are more facilitatory in nature".

Technology

The Committee conducted a visit to the University of South Wales to learn more about the video game industry. There has since been interest at the Senedd regarding video game development as well as the wider tech sector.

- The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Welsh Language, Jeremy Miles MS, visited the Cyber Innovation Hub. The Hub is led by Cardiff University and its “mission is to make South Wales a leading cluster for cyber security by 2030”.
- On 21 May, Jack Sargeant questioned the Counsel General, Mick Antoniw MS, about the implementation of UNESCO's recommendation on the ethics of AI. The Counsel General confirmed the UK had adopted the recommendation and highlighted a Welsh Government AI working group “to embed AI thinking into policy and delivery”. Senedd Research has published an article which explores different countries’ approaches to AI regulation.
- Global Welsh highlighted that a Welsh Fintech company had secured an export deal, worth a projected £5 million over five years. Finalrentals is a digital car rental platform based in Cardiff and the deal could see it expand in ten locations across Turkey.
- Global Wales hosted a roundtable event, in collaboration with Study Tennessee. The roundtable focused on advanced manufacturing and semi-conductor production. The latter is a priority sector in the International Strategy.

Other

- The Welsh Government and the Government of Québec launched the fifth Wales-Québec Joint call for proposals. The programme was launched after a Declaration of Intent on collaboration was signed by the two governments in 2020. Initially, the programme covered research, innovation, and sustainability but has since been broadened to include projects in arts and culture.
- The BBC reported on local opposition to plans to build space radar dishes in Cawdor Barracks, Pembrokeshire. The plans fall under the Deep Space Advanced Radar Capability programme, which is a part of the trilateral AUKUS security partnership between the UK, the US and Australian governments.

3. Europe

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

European Parliament elections

The European Parliament elections were held between the 6-9 June. The centre-right European People's Party (EPP) group in the Parliament looks set to remain the largest political group with 188 seats. The Parliament's website has a [full breakdown of the results](#).

- The first Plenary session of the new legislative term will take place from 16 - 19 July in Strasbourg. During this first session, the Parliament will elect its President, vice-presidents and quaestors. It will also decide on the number of MEPs who will be sitting in each parliamentary committee. [EU leaders nominated](#) current European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen for a second five-year term.
- [Fidez, the party of the Hungarian President Victor Orbán, left the EPP prior to the election and announced the launch of a new faction](#) 'Patriots of Europe', alongside Austria's Freedom party, the Czech Republic's ANO. Since the announcement, [a number of other parties have joined the group](#), with latest being France's National Rally and Italy's Lega. The group now has 84 MEPs and is the third largest in the Parliament.

Wales - Ireland relations

This section provides updates relating to developments in the Wales-Ireland relationship, following the Committee's [inquiry on Wales-Ireland relations](#).

- The Ireland Wales Ministerial Forum was postponed due to the general election. It was scheduled to be held in Cork in June, but during the [scrutiny session on 19 June](#), First Minister, Vaughan Gething MS, noted the Forum is now due to be held in October.
- The First Minister confirmed the Forum's postponement in [a letter to the Committee, dated 17 June](#). He also provided an update on actions taken since the 2023 Ireland Wales Ministerial Forum and these were:

- A visit by officials to Udaras na Gaeltachta in Galway to discuss economic development as linked to language planning;
 - A visit by officials to Trinity College Dublin and ADAPT centre to discuss Irish language technology, including AI in language policy;
 - A visit by M-Sparc and members of the AgriTech.Wales cluster to University College Dublin's Lyons Farm and Nova campus; and
 - The former Minister for Social Justice also visited Dublin on St David's Day, where she met with the Irish Government's Basic Income policy team.
- The First Minister discussed the refresh of the Shared Statement and Action Plan in the 19 June scrutiny session, saying:

I'm interested in the forum and the priorities for Wales and Ireland and how they get taken forward. Now, there are two issues around that. The first is that we have our own elections in 2026 [...] One of the things we do need to be aware of, though, is that there will be an Irish general election by spring 2025 at the latest [...] So, I'm looking to agree on how we take matters forward, with a refresh to go into, if you like, the next phase that would be from 2026 to 2030, but to be centered around what they can agree ahead of their own set of elections. And as we're doing that, again, I'm very happy for the committee to be engaged in what we're looking to do.

- The Minister for Economy, Energy and Welsh Language, Jeremy Miles MS, attended the 41st Summit of the British-Irish Council. Following the summit, a communiqué was released, which stated the summit had discussed the initiatives “to realise the opportunities of renewable energy”. It also welcomed the return of the restoration of the devolved institutions in Northern Ireland. The next summit will be hosted by the Scottish Government.
- Paul Davies MS tabled written questions on Agile Cymru support for the Irish Sea Framework in the current and previous financial year. The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Welsh Language, Jeremy Miles MS, provided a breakdown of the nine projects which had received part of the previous £150,000 fund. He highlighted the launch of an initiative on 9 May, which has a budget of up to £100,000, for Irish Sea Framework projects. He said this would be “complemented by other

relevant Agile Cymru funding initiatives, including one supporting strategic capacity to engage in Horizon Europe with a budget of up to £50k”.

Trade and Co-operation Agreement (TCA) and Withdrawal Agreement

This section provides an overview of developments under the TCA and Withdrawal Agreement.

Withdrawal Agreement

- In May, the former European Commission Executive Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič and former Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, Rt Hon Lord Cameron issued a joint statement on the Withdrawal Agreement Joint Committee and Trade and Co-operation Agreement Partnership Council meeting.
- The meeting discussed citizens’ rights and there was a reiteration of the commitments under the Withdrawal Agreement. But the Committee agreed that joint work should intensify “with a view to finding solutions to outstanding issues”. The Equality and Social Justice Committee is responsible for monitoring European citizens’ rights at the Senedd. Its second annual report was published in April and it held oral evidence sessions on 1 July. Senedd Research’s article summarises the key issues faced by Europeans trying to stay in Wales after Brexit.
- The meeting also welcomed the restoration of devolved institutions in Northern Ireland and recognised the progress made against the Windsor Framework. However, there was recognition that there is “a number of outstanding challenges and upcoming milestones” and there was agreement that “intensive work should continue with renewed efforts and commitment to ensure the full implementation of all the elements of the Windsor Framework in a faithful and timely way”. See Senedd Research’s Wales and the Windsor Framework for more information.

TCA

- The Welsh Government opened funding applications to support engagement with Horizon Europe. It said the objective of the initiative

was to “to increase the quality, number and size of Welsh participations in Horizon Europe projects in a systematic way” with the aim of providing “additional ‘bandwidth’ for Welsh clusters to mobilise and integrate with relevant European networks”.

- The TCA and its implementation review were discussed during the [international relations scrutiny session](#) with the First Minister on 19 June. On whether the Welsh Government should adopt a specific EU strategy, he said

“I share the view of the former First Minister; we don't need a specific EU strategy. It's really clearly set out in our international strategy”.

- Speaking on the TCA implementation review, the First Minister said:

So, our starting point with the TCA review is not just looking at the governance structures, but looking to understand the approach that whoever the new UK Government is wants to take around the TCA, and we want to see barriers to trade removed.

- He also addressed the movement of touring artists and the creative sector during the session, which has been the focus of the Committee's inquiry on [culture and the new relationship with the EU](#).

There are some specific points about movement as well. So, probably the most well-advertised one is about touring artists and the creative sector. It's a real issue and a real barrier.

TCA Specialised Committee meetings

The table below shows the latest TCA Specialised Committee meetings. For more information, see our [guide to the TCA's institutional framework](#).

Committee	Date	Discussion
<u>Specialised Committee on Road Transport</u>	Meeting held on 23 November (minutes published on 23 February 2024)	The Committee discussed issues facing specialist events hauliers under existing cabotage restrictions, namely those supporting cultural tours. The UK said it would “welcome further dialogue on the potential for a cultural exemption in general, and one specifically to support both UK and EU own account operators in particular”. However, the EU was clear that “there is nothing in the TCA that can solve this issue”. The EU is also not “in favour” of any amendment to the TCA. TCA cabotage rules have been a prevalent issue in the Committee’s inquiry into on culture and the new relationship with the EU. Welsh Government officials attended the meeting as observers (no speaking/voting rights).
<u>Specialised Committee on Aviation Safety</u>	Meeting held on 30 November (minutes published on 20 March 2024)	The Committee discussed air traffic management (ATM) and the future scope of the TCA’s aviation safety chapter. There was discussion around extending working arrangements around ATM and the UK said this would this “be a positive step forward for EU-UK cooperation” but the EU responded that extending co-operation is not an obligation and is currently “not in the EU’s agenda”. Welsh Government officials did not attend the meeting.

4. Welsh Government ministerial outward/inward visits: April - June

The following table provides details on 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, in addition to its own monitoring.

Minister/Guest	Location	Purpose of Visit	Date
Japanese Ambassador to the UK	Wales	The First Minister met with the Ambassador at St Fagans to celebrate 'Hanami' as part of the Sakura Tree Project. A short bi-lateral meeting was held covering the 2025 Wales in Japan year, the World EXPO and Wales-Japan relations.	April 2024
Ukrainian Culture Foundation	Wales	The Counsel General met with a delegation from the Ukrainian Culture Foundation who were visiting Wales with the support of the British Council. The main item of discussion was the Cultural Mobility Forum that was due to take place in North Wales on 25-26 April.	April 2024
King Letsie III of Lesotho	Wales	The First Minister met with King Letsie III of Lesotho during his visit to Wales. The delegation visited Wales to explore Wales' experience of progressing renewable energy, as well as reaffirming existing links spanning 40 years. The visit <u>also forms part</u> of the memorandum of understanding between Wales and Lesotho.	April/May 2024
Palestinian Head of Mission	Wales	The First Minister met with the Palestinian Head of Mission to the UK in Cardiff. The main item of discussion was the situation in Gaza.	May 2024
First Minister	India	The First Minister travelled to Mumbai to hold discussions with TATA.	May 2024

EU Ambassador to the UK	Wales	The EU Ambassador was accompanied by the Austrian Ambassador and the High Commissioner of Cyprus. They met with the First Minister, Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Welsh Language and the Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs. The meetings discussed the economic relationship between Wales and the EU, EU citizens in Wales, challenges since Brexit, the TCA, replacing EU sources of funding, Taith, Horizon Europe, the circular economy, post-Brexit agricultural policy, environmental governance, net zero and climate change.	June 2024
First Minister	Normandy	The First Minister travelled to Normandy to commemorate the anniversary of D-Day and to meet with Welsh veterans.	June 2024
Minister for Economy, Energy and Welsh Language	Isle of Man	The Minister for Economy, Energy and Welsh Language travelled to the Isle of Man for the 41st Summit of the British-Irish Council. The Summit discussed a range of political and economic developments across the administrations including various ways administrations are developing initiatives to realise the opportunities of renewable energy to stimulate economic growth and support decarbonisation efforts.	June 2024