

# CaraDem

An Irish-led Democracy Initiative

Overview Document

Autumn 2025



# Preface

In June 2024, a group of 20 Irish leaders came together to consider whether Ireland could play a role in supporting democracy as it becomes increasingly threatened around the world. We considered if the island's history, challenges and successes could offer an important perspective in democracy building at a global level.

After a period of deliberation, we have established CaraDem, an Irish-led Democracy Initiative. Taking its name from the Irish word *Cara*, meaning 'friend', our organisation aims to work with partners around the world to build, strengthen and protect democratic governance.

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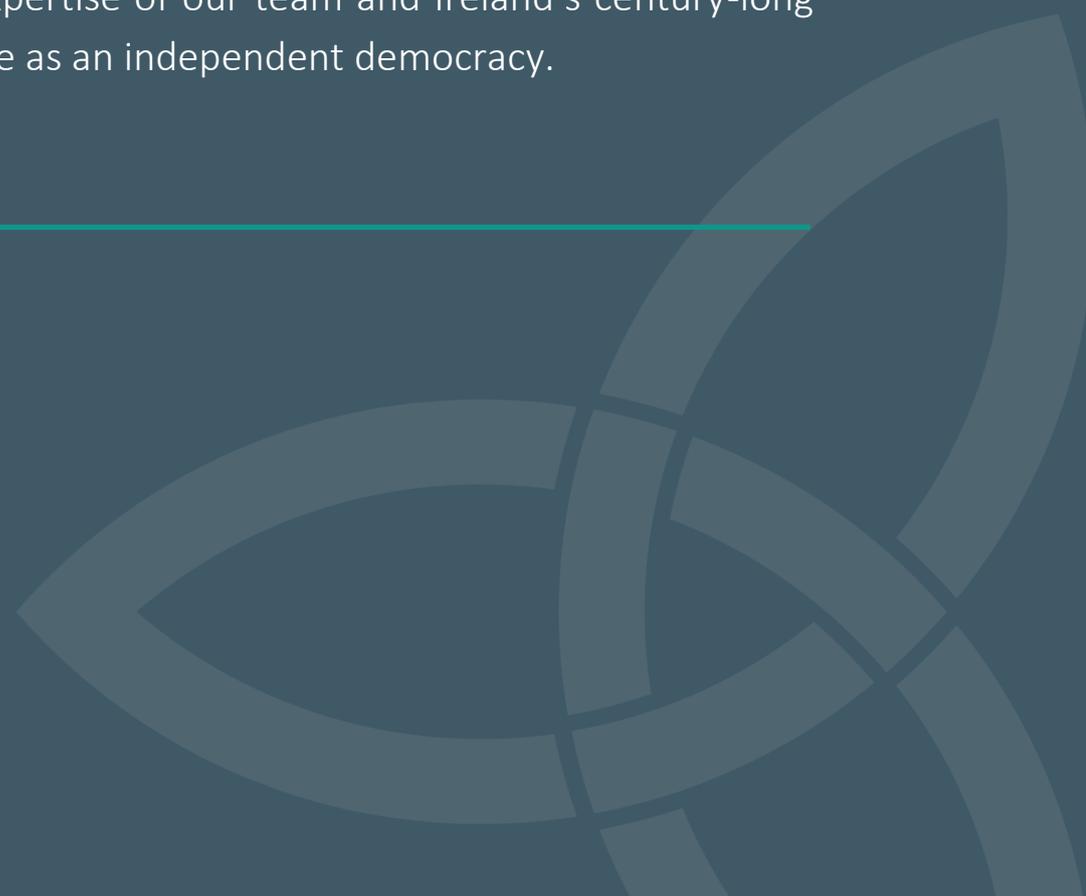
# About CaraDem

CaraDem is an Irish-led, independent, not-for-profit organisation committed to encouraging democratic governance. Our founding group is comprised of Irish and international leaders with backgrounds in public service, business, politics and civil society.

CaraDem partners with international institutions, political parties, governments, economic actors and civil society to facilitate the development of enduring solutions, grounded in democratic principles.

Our approach is deeply collaborative, harnessing the diverse expertise of our team and Ireland's century-long experience as an independent democracy.

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# CaraDem's Purpose

CaraDem partners with leaders across governance systems, from government institutions to civil society, to facilitate the development of enduring solutions grounded in democratic principles.

# CaraDem's Vision

CaraDem envisions societies where everyone, from citizens to government, work together in trust and accountability, upholding democratic principles.

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# CaraDem's Values

## Collaboration

We work in **diverse, multi-disciplinary teams** to bring a breadth of knowledge and experience to our practice. We collaborate closely with our partners to **co-create solutions**, never acting in isolation or imposing our views.

## Respect

We acknowledge diverse perspectives and are committed to dialogue that leads to solutions which are **fair, inclusive, and lasting**. We respect democratic principles, human rights and the rule of law.

## Trust

We trust in our team-based approach and build trust with partners by listening actively, being honest and accountable in everything we do.

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# CaraDem's People

CaraDem was inspired by Irish and international leaders with backgrounds in public service, business, politics and civil society. Among our group, we have experts and leaders in defence and security, policing, regulation, technology, strategic communications, business and post-conflict redress.

Our co-founding directors are Catherine Heaney, a strategic consultant who has led the development of the initiative, and former Ministers for Foreign Affairs and Tánaistí (deputy prime ministers), Simon Coveney and Eamon Gilmore.

See **Appendix 1** for a full list of CaraDem's People.

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# CaraDem's Work

By convening diverse voices, supporting policy design and facilitating trust-building initiatives, CaraDem is committed to shaping governance practices that are collaborative and resilient.

Our work is delivered through multi-disciplinary teams and close cooperation with partners to strengthen outcomes. Rather than competing with existing efforts, CaraDem complements and amplifies them.

Our primary pillars of work include:

- ▶ Working with governments, parliaments and institutions of the state to **enhance democratic governance**.
- ▶ Facilitate **trust-building** between governments, institutions and citizens.
- ▶ Fostering **collaborative democracy** by maximising citizen participation.
- ▶ Supporting the conditions for **economic growth and job creation**.

Recognising technology's significant impact across all areas of democratic governance, trust-building, collaborative democracy, and economic growth and job creation, we integrate it as a key consideration in all the support we offer.

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## Our Work Practices

We will demonstrate the following in our work:

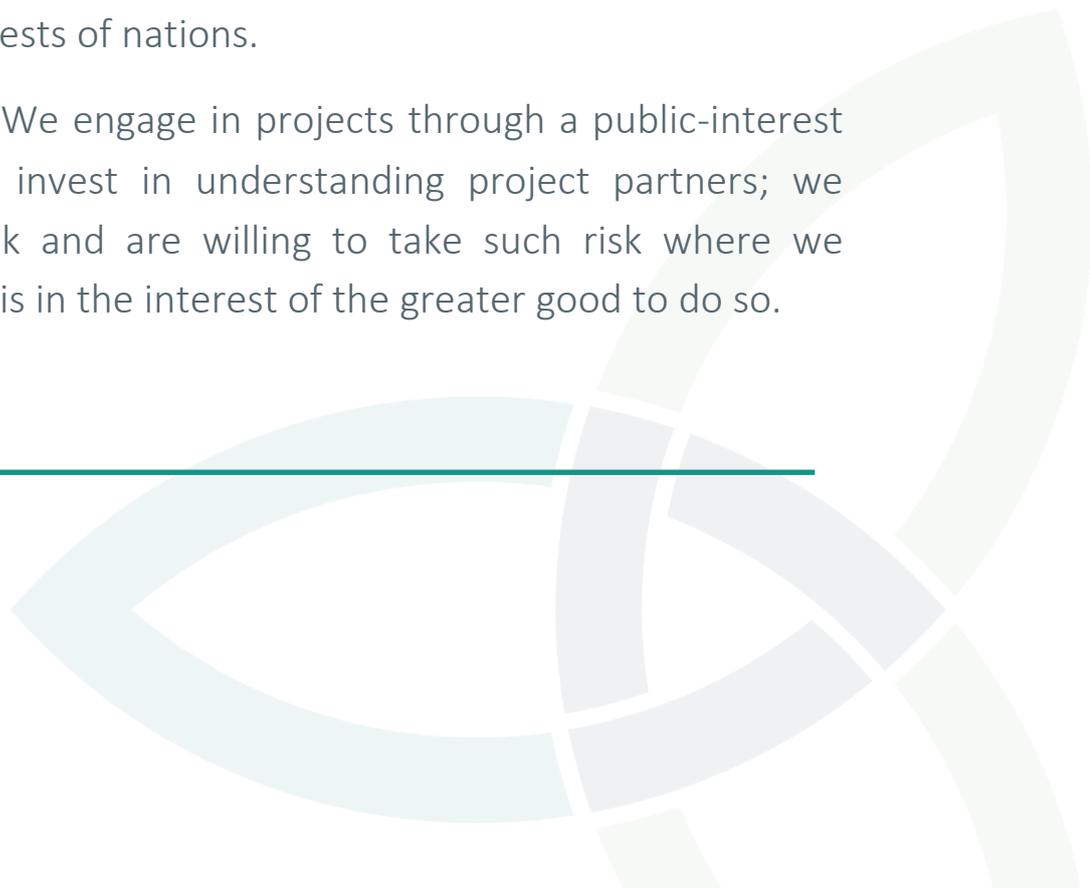
**Agility:** We have access to experienced leaders, across multiple disciplines from Ireland and beyond, who we can deploy to support governance projects around the world. We are only bound by our values and accountability processes. We can respond quickly and effectively.

**Responsiveness:** We work to understand challenges and problems. We deploy our most suitable people to lead projects.

**Accountability:** We are not afraid to undertake challenging work, but we rely on our strong governance systems and adherence to our values to ensure that we operate in the best interests of nations.

**Integrity:** We engage in projects through a public-interest lens. We invest in understanding project partners; we assess risk and are willing to take such risk where we believe it is in the interest of the greater good to do so.

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# Our Pillars of Work

## Pillar 1

**Enhancing Democratic Governance**

Coalition formation and delivering a programme for government

Government accountability encompassing oversight, and communications

Training and mentoring elected representatives and support staff

Policy framing for economic and social transformation, including innovation in the delivery of government

## Pillar 2

**Trust-Building**

Leadership development for public-facing institutions, through mentoring and skills exchange

Humanitarian diplomacy; designing and building post-conflict governance models

Rights-based community policing and public safety partnerships; safety initiatives, utilising technology

Online and media regulation; building capabilities and infrastructure for independent, trusted public information

## Pillar 3

**Fostering Collaborative Democracy**

Cross-sectoral and cross-institutional working, such as designing models for social partnership

Public communications strategies

Effective opposition and civil society engagement, including diverse political representation (age, gender, ethnic and regional perspectives)

Participative democracy encompassing public engagement; public consultation processes and citizen assemblies

## Pillar 4

**Supporting Economic Growth & Job Creation**

Alignment of education, training and skills with research and job creation strategy

Through a national policy framework, delivering balanced economic growth to benefit regions, including innovation in the agriculture sector

Stimulating economic growth through approaches to taxation; economic/trade policy; and investment

Building effective frameworks to support business and human rights; as well as environmental and social governance

# Corporate Structure

- ▶ CaraDem is registered in Ireland as a Company Limited by Guarantee. CaraDem has a membership which appoints a board of directors and is responsible for agreeing the organisation's constitution.
- ▶ CaraDem is a not-for-profit organisation, governed by a board of nine directors, including three founding directors, an independent chair and five independent, international leaders.
- ▶ Sub-committees of the board comprise the Finance, Audit, Risk and Governance Committee as well as the Remuneration and Review Committee. Membership comprises independent board members and external members.
- ▶ An Advisory Council is appointed by the board of CaraDem to provide strategic advice and lead our project work.
- ▶ CaraDem is staffed by an experienced executive team, comprising a Chief Executive, Chief Operations Officer and Company Administrator.
- ▶ CaraDem invites associate members to subscribe to the organisation: associate members do not have voting or governance responsibilities; however, associate members are appraised of CaraDem's activity and can contribute to our discussions on democracy building. A financial contribution is required from associate members.

# Revenue Model

CaraDem's business and funding approach includes:

- ▶ **Consultancy Services:** Charging fees for our services where appropriate.
- ▶ **Public and Institutional Income:** Partnering on publically funded programmes.
- ▶ **Individual Donor Income:** Recruiting associate members with a commitment to democracy.
- ▶ **Foundations:** Building relations with international foundations.

All profits from consultancy work are re-invested in the business.

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## CaraDem Co-Founders



### **Simon Coveney**

International Affairs Specialist and Former Senior Member of the Irish Government

With over 26 years of dedicated public service, Simon Coveney is a highly accomplished professional leader. His experience spans the National and European Parliaments, and eight ministerial roles in the Irish Government, including Deputy Prime Minister (Tánaiste). He excels in strategic leadership, communication, and relationship-building, evidenced by his pivotal role as Chief Brexit Negotiator and his work on climate action and foreign investment. Simon's leadership is characterised by a commitment to positive global change, strategic planning, and negotiation skills, all while maintaining a focus on kindness and humility.

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### **Eamon Gilmore**

European Diplomat and former Irish Government and Political Leader

Eamon Gilmore is a distinguished European diplomat and former leader of the Irish Labour Party with over 25 years of international experience. As former EU Special Representative for Human Rights and Special Envoy for the Colombian Peace Process, he's a proven mediator and advocate for global justice. Previously, as Ireland's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, he skilfully navigated economic recovery and spearheaded significant social reforms. Now a Senior Advisor at the European Institute of Peace, Eamon brings expertise in strategic thinking, peace-building and human rights advocacy to any challenge.



## Catherine Heaney

Chief Executive Officer of CaraDem

Catherine Heaney is a highly experienced professional with over 25 years in strategic leadership, communications, public affairs and governance. As former president of Edelman Public & Government Affairs and as founder of DHR Communications, she possesses sharp business acumen and strong international networks. Catherine has a track record in public interest and human rights advocacy, successfully leveraging para-legal approaches in international courts for critical causes. Her commitment extends to public history and cultural heritage, where she has undertaken recent academic research and chaired the board of the National Museum of Ireland. On behalf of the government, Catherine chairs the Citizens Information Board, Ireland's independent, state-funded information, advice and advocacy service. As pragmatic leader with a proven track record, Catherine invests her positive energy into relationship-building and strategic approaches to achieve meaningful change.

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# CaraDem Advisory Council



## **Celene Craig**

Audio-Visual & Digital Media Regulatory  
Specialist

Celene Craig is a highly respected media and regulatory consultant, renowned for her extensive national and international expertise in broadcasting and digital communications. As former Commissioner at Coimisiún na Meán and CEO of the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland, she has been instrumental in shaping media legislation and policy, particularly for digital platforms. Celene possesses a vast global network of regulators and academics, and her work consistently advocates for public service media, tackling disinformation, and safeguarding democracy. She is a proven leader in regulatory policy implementation and fostering accountable, inclusive organisational cultures.

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## **John Dennehy**

Start-up Founder and Investor

John Dennehy is a seasoned entrepreneur, investor, and leader with over 25 years of experience in technology and sustainability. As the founder of Agreeable Capital, he invests in businesses driving positive social and environmental impact. He co-founded SolarPath and serves as a trustee at Plan Vivo. John also founded successful tech companies, including Zartis.com and Hirehive.com, and co-founded Upstart Games. His expertise extends to building high-potential global teams and leading humanitarian efforts, including Safe Harbour for Ukraine. John blends sharp business acumen with a deep commitment to impactful change.



## Damien English

Government and Public Affairs Specialist

Damien English is a highly experienced and impactful politician with a background in business and accounting. As a Fine Gael TD since 2002, he has held key ministerial roles, including Minister of State for Business, Employment and Retail, Housing, and Skills, Research and Innovation. Damien is renowned for his strategic leadership, having spearheaded crucial policy transformations in Ireland's economic recovery, research and development, and housing. His strong organisational skills were evident in leading Fine Gael's successful local election campaign in 2024. A skilled communicator, he advocates for diverse community engagement and robust rural infrastructure.

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## Steven Finizio

International Arbitration and Dispute Resolution Specialist

Steven Finizio is a Partner at Wilmer Hale, specialising in international arbitration and dispute resolution. Based in the firm's London office, he acts as both counsel and arbitrator in complex commercial and regulatory disputes. His extensive experience includes working on cases governed by the laws of jurisdictions across Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas. He has particular expertise in energy, financial services, and joint venture issues. In addition to his legal practice, he is a Professor of Practice at SOAS University of London and has co-authored several publications on international commercial arbitration.



## Martin Mackin

Strategic Communications Specialist

Martin Mackin is a highly respected strategist and problem-solver, with a remarkable track record in voter-engagement and political campaigns. As former General Secretary of the Fianna Fáil party, he was instrumental in consecutive successful election victories. Now a founding partner at Q4 Public Relations, he leads a thriving communications consultancy and advises the Irish Government on citizen assemblies. A former Harvard Kennedy School Fellow, Martin brings deep expertise in political strategy, international advisory, and mentoring, making him an invaluable asset for complex challenges.

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## Mark Mellett

Expert in Defence, Security, Oceans and Ecosystem Governance

Mark Mellett is a highly distinguished leader with extensive military, academic, and strategic expertise. As Ireland's former Chief of Defence, he provided critical advice on national security and led significant operations, including the COVID-19 military response. With a PhD in Ecosystem Governance, he founded Green Compass, offering strategic counsel on climate change and ocean issues. Mark chairs multiple boards, including the Irish Maritime Area Regulatory Authority and Sage Advocacy, demonstrating strong governance and a commitment to public service and innovation.



## Philip Nolan

Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Health Specialist

Professor Philip Nolan is a physician-scientist and academic leader. He served as Vice-President Academic and Deputy President of University College Dublin (2004-2011), President of Maynooth University (2011-2021) and Director General of Science Foundation Ireland (2022-2024). He was a member of the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic, focused on providing mathematical modelling and statistical analysis to inform Government policy and decisions. He is currently Research Professor at Maynooth University.

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## Nóirín O'Sullivan

Rule of Law, Law Enforcement, Policing and Security Governance Expert

Nóirín O'Sullivan is an accomplished executive leader with extensive experience in international law enforcement, intelligence management, and safety and security. As Garda Commissioner leading Ireland's National Policing and Security Service, and later as United Nations Assistant Secretary-General for Safety and Security, she led strategic reforms and critical operational management in dynamically changing environments. She has advised senior government and institutional leaders on security, policing, public safety, and crisis management. Nóirín is known for forging collaborative partnerships across diverse, multicultural stakeholders to enhance mutual trust and effectively navigate complex and sensitive challenges.



## Allen Sanginés-Krause

Investment Banking, International Business  
and Governance Specialist

Allen Sanginés-Krause is a distinguished executive with over 35 years of global experience in investment banking, advisory services, and corporate governance. He holds a Harvard Ph.D. in Economics and he served in pivotal roles at Goldman Sachs, including Advisory Director and was a key member of their Firmwide Commitments Committee, managing both commercial and reputational risks. As Executive Chairman of The Arc Collection and Chairman of Rasa Resorts, Allen consistently delivers strategic leadership. His expertise spans advising governments on critical economic reforms to leading investments in tourism and renewable energy, making him an invaluable asset in dealing with complex global challenges.

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## Bethlehem S. Gebeyaw

Human Rights and Legal Advocacy Expert

Bethlehem S. Gebeyaw is a legal professional with expertise in human rights and advocacy. She has previously served in roles across both public and private sectors, including as Executive Director of the French Chamber of Commerce in Ethiopia. Bethlehem currently coordinates EU-wide initiatives with AkiDwA, Ireland, and leads a NGO that delivers justice through innovative approaches in Ethiopia. Holding an LLB and LLM with a focus on human rights and dispute resolution, she offers a combination of expertise on justice and democratic participation.



## Judith Thompson

Conflict Legacy, Victim Rights, and Justice Reform Specialist

Judith Thompson is a highly experienced professional specialising in conflict legacy, victim rights, and justice reform. As the former Commissioner for Victims and Survivors in Northern Ireland, she was instrumental in developing victim-focused legislation and establishing a regional trauma network. Judith is an expert in ensuring policy and practice are trauma-informed, providing oversight for complex historical investigations, and is a member of the Independent Advisory Group for the ICIR. Renowned for enhancing inter-agency collaboration and peacebuilding, she consistently advocates for victim-focused approaches and high professional standards.

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## Moira Whelan

Technology and Communications Specialist

Moira Whelan is a Washington, DC-based independent consultant and foreign policy expert. With a distinguished career in democracy, digital strategy, and national security, she has held key government roles, including Deputy Assistant Secretary at the U.S. Department of State. Whelan also directed the Democracy and Technology team at the National Democratic Institute, focusing on democratic resilience and countering online violence against women. She is a non-resident senior fellow with the Atlantic Council, renowned for her strategic insight and commitment to strengthening democratic institutions.



## Paul Silk

Senior Independent Member

Paul Silk was a senior official in the British House of Commons and in the Welsh Parliament. He also chaired the UK Government's Commission on Devolution to Wales. Over the last 15 years, he has collaborated with a number of organisations engaged in democracy building, working in over 30 different countries. He is an honorary Professor at Cardiff University, an honorary Fellow of Aberystwyth University and an honorary researcher at University College London. He has been a frequent visitor to Ireland, including having spent a time as an official of the Northern Ireland Office and having been one of the original officials of the British Irish Interparliamentary Body.

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# CaraDem Independent Board



**Zeina Akar**  
Independent Director

Zeina Akar is a prominent Lebanese figure who broke barriers, serving as the first female Deputy Prime Minister and the first woman Minister of National Defence in Lebanon and the Arab World. During her government tenure, she managed significant crises, including the Beirut port explosion and the COVID-19 pandemic, coordinating security, aid, and recovery efforts with national and international partners. She was deeply involved in reform initiatives, economic recovery planning with the IMF, and establishing social safety nets. Akar also founded Information International, a leading research firm, and the INMA NGO.

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**Lawson Naidoo**  
Independent Director

Lawson Naidoo is the Executive Secretary of CASAC since 2010, focusing on constitutionalism, democracy and governance. A political consultant and commentator, he is a Founding Partner at The Paternoster Group. Naidoo chaired Cricket South Africa and was an ICC Director from 2021 to 2024. His background includes roles in the Ginwala Enquiry and special advisor to the Speaker of the National Assembly. Previously, he worked for the ANC while in political exile in the UK. He holds LL.B and LL.M degrees and is a barrister.



**Dickson Nsofor**  
Independent Director

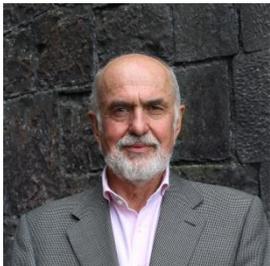
Dickson Nsofor is a serial entrepreneur and innovative leader in technology. He earned a Bachelor of Engineering degree from Covenant University and a Master of Arts degree from Nankai University in China. Following previous startup ventures, he founded Kora, a cutting-edge online payment infrastructure tailored for the African market. Established as an idea in 2018, Kora offers seamless online payment tools, cross-border transfers, and currency conversion, enabling African businesses to expand globally and facilitating international companies entering Africa. Kora has grown significantly, now employing around 200 people across three continents, serving diverse clients worldwide.

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**Lisbeth Pilegaard**  
Independent Director

Lisbeth V. Pilegaard is a seasoned democracy expert and senior leader with over 25 years of professional experience, primarily from conflict-affected countries. She has extensive experience in negotiation and representation. Ms. Pilegaard has served as the Chair of the Executive Committee for the European Endowment for Democracy (EED) since 2018. From 2019 to 2023, she was the Executive Director of the Danish Institute for Parties and Democracy. Her career includes leading departments at KVINFO and the Norwegian Refugee Council, covering the Middle East & North Africa and establishing work in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran. She has worked in over 40 conflict-affected countries and is a Steering Group Member of the Nordic Women Mediators Network.



## Gregory Sparks

Independent Chair

Gregory Sparks is a chartered accountant and co-founder of RSM Farrell Grant Sparks which grew to be Ireland's seventh largest accounting practice. He retired as partner in 2012 and subsequently chaired the practice until its merger with Grant Thornton in 2015. Gregory served as programme manager to the Deputy Prime Minister of Ireland (Tánaiste) from 1992-1997. He currently chairs the Vhi, Ireland's largest private medical insurance and VistaMilk, a research centre concerned with environmental sustainability in the Irish dairy industry. He has extensive non-executive experience including service on the boards of The Irish Times, Digicel, Eir, Joe Duffy Motor Group, Special Olympics World Games and Jigsaw.

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## Finance, Audit, Risk & Governance Committee



### **Geraldine Finucane**

External member of Finance, Audit, Risk and Governance Committee

Geraldine Finucane is a Fellow of Chartered Accountants Ireland, qualifying in 1987. She was called to the Bar in 1998, holding a Diploma in Legal Studies and a Barrister-at-Law degree. With a strong background in corporate governance and accountancy, she held significant roles within the CIÉ Group, including Group Secretary from 1997. She also served as Company Secretary for Iarnród Éireann – Irish Rail between 2004 and 2020. Geraldine's career began in accountancy in Cork, London, and Dublin before she joined the CIÉ Group.

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### **Gillian Keating**

External member of Finance, Audit, Risk and Governance Committee

With over two decades of experience as a senior business leader across both public and private sectors, I am recognised for my strategic leadership, commercial acumen, and ability to navigate complex stakeholder environments to deliver sustainable, growth-oriented solutions. My board-level experience spans education, healthcare, local government, and higher education, where I have championed excellence in corporate governance, compliance, and ethical leadership. I foster cultures grounded in equity, integrity, and strong values. A passionate advocate for Ireland's global reputation, I consistently promote the country as a hub for innovation, STEM leadership, and inclusive economic opportunity—particularly for young women shaping the future workforce.

# CaraDem Executive



## **Bob Jordan**

Chief Operations Officer of CaraDem

Bob Jordan has over 20 years' leadership experience in the public and non-profit sectors, with extensive expertise in governance, operations, and public policy. As former CEO of the Irish government's housing agency, he oversaw the rollout of national programmes with significant exchequer funding. He streamlined operations, enhanced compliance, and worked with diverse stakeholders to deliver impact. An Adjunct Senior Research Fellow at University College Dublin's Geary Institute for Public Policy and policy adviser to governments, Bob brings executive leadership and policy insight to support CaraDem's purpose and growth.

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## **Ellen Kane**

Company Administrator

Ellen Kane brings extensive administrative expertise from her work with NGOs, charities and cultural institutions. With a background in art and advocacy, she helped establish the National Gallery of Ireland's 'Apollo Project' for youth engagement. Her diverse experience also includes managing a private art collection in New York, and implementing participative democracy for the development of communities in Dublin with Lorne Consultancy. Since early-2024, Ellen has supported Catherine Heaney in all stages of conceptualising and developing CaraDem.



# CaraDem

AN IRISH-LED DEMOCRACY INITIATIVE

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