



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



REGIONAL ENTERPRISE PLAN
TO 2024

NORTH-WEST



An initiative of the Department
of Enterprise, Trade and Employment



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Minister's Foreword



A stylized, handwritten signature in white ink on a teal background, reading 'Robert Troy'.

Robert Troy TD,
Minister of State for Trade Promotion,
Digital and Company Regulation

I am delighted to welcome the publication of this new North-West Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024. Its preparation comes as Ireland's society and economy is emerging from one of its greatest challenges with COVID-19 and the imperative to recover strongly and in a sustainable manner.

This recovery must and will be different. The Government's Economic Recovery Plan (ERP) provides a vision of the economy post-pandemic, which is export-oriented, digital, and green, whilst also being regionally balanced and inclusive. We need to address the economic fallout from the pandemic, but also embrace the positives of its legacy. New opportunities from pandemic-related behavioural changes such as remote working are potentially transformative – especially for our regions. We need to continue to navigate the post-Brexit complexities; and, above all, our recovery must embrace an ambitious green and digital transition. Our recently reviewed National Development Plan (NDP) 2021-2030 underpins this sustainable and regionally balanced post-pandemic recovery.

Within the framework of the ERP, realising the enterprise and jobs potential in all our regions and reducing disparities between them remains a core priority. My Department has an important role to play in regional development, by assisting businesses directly through the work of our enterprise agencies, and through measures to strengthen and support the enterprise ecosystem for example, capital investment in innovation and start-up infrastructures.

Critically, our Regional Enterprise Plans recognise that there are significant advantages for all if local stakeholders work together to understand their unique enterprise opportunities and challenges and collaborate on solutions. Throughout 2021 there has been intensive engagement around the country and in each region; amongst regional stakeholders, representing the Enterprise Agencies, LEOs, Local Authorities, Regional Skills, Higher and Further Education, the Northern and Western Regional Assembly, Private Sector, Fáilte Ireland and others. Collectively, they considered important questions about enterprise development and recovery in their region, including: enterprise resilience; place attractiveness; competitiveness; and the twin business transformation imperatives – low carbon and digital that are so critical for future business success and sustainable job creation.



This new Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024 for the North-West is future-focused and centred around a number of priorities including:

- Encouraging entrepreneurship and scaling of micro and SME businesses in the North-West.
- Supporting growth of the Wind Energy industry (onshore/offshore) and the Ocean Economy.
- Promoting the North-West as a region to work in and invest high value jobs in.
- Fast tracking the North-West's enterprises transition to low carbon operations.
- Supporting enterprise cross-border relationships and Shared Island initiatives.
- Addressing the skills issues experienced by enterprises in the North-West.

With continued regional collaboration, knowledge sharing and a solutions mindset, we are confident that the actions within this Plan can make a real and lasting difference for the North-West, and to national economic recovery.

I would like to especially thank the Chairperson of the North-West Regional Steering Committee Seamus Hughes, for his leadership on the preparation of this new Plan, and Anne McTernan, North-West Programme Manager for her critical role in delivering the final product. I am also very appreciative of the time and energy given by all the members of the Steering Committee, and for your ongoing commitment to the Regional Enterprise Plan.

To assist the Regional Enterprise Plans, my Department through Enterprise Ireland, has made available over €126 million in funding since 2018 to assist locally-led regional enterprise development projects. Of this, €15.6m has been approved for the North-West Region under the Regional Enterprise Development Fund, the Border Enterprise Development Fund and the Regional Enterprise Transition Scheme.

I'm pleased to confirm new funding of up to €180m will be available for the development and implementation of collaborative and innovative enterprise projects in the regions. Projects that can make a significant impact on enterprise development in the regions to not just sustain but to add to employment at county, regional and national level. This funding complements the aims and objectives of the Regional Enterprise Plans and with continued regional collaboration, knowledge sharing, and the solutions mindset that is in evidence through this new Plan, the North-West Region is well positioned to compete for future funding calls to drive enterprise and employment development in the region.

I am very much looking forward to further engagement with Seamus and the members of the North-West Steering Committee as implementation progresses.



Message from the Chair



Seamus Hughes

Seamus Hughes,
General Manager and Director of
Zeus Industrial Products (Ireland) Ltd

The North-West Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024 (REP) is building on the actions completed through the previous iterations of the plan and concentrating on existing and emerging strengths in areas unique to the North-West e.g. blue economy, coastal energy and creative economy.

The development of this plan was set against a challenging economic environment – between Brexit and the COVID pandemic, both which have had a disproportionately large effect on the North-West and border region. Through this plan, key national challenges are tackled from ‘the ground up’ by regional stakeholders working collaboratively – addressing our region’s response to climate change, addressing the challenges the North-West has with entrepreneurship and growth of SME’s and building our region’s resilience post Brexit and COVID.

The North-West Region has had significant successes under the REP to 2020. I would like to recognise the outgoing Chair, Philip Martin of CORA Systems, Carrick-On-Shannon for his leadership and championing of issues. Philip is passionate about the growth of indigenous SMEs and his passion is clear through the implementation of the previous plan and creation of this plan. Through the Border Enterprise Development Fund and the Regional Enterprise Development Fund, the North-West has been awarded 14.4m of funding to further impactful projects within the region. Through the collaborative efforts of the public agencies and educational bodies in the region, projects ranging from the development of digital and enterprise hubs to creative clusters have been funded. A key goal of this plan is to build on these projects and help them reach fruition and develop further.

This Plan’s strategic objectives seek to complement and build upon the core activities of the development agencies across the region and build on a number of the objectives in the 2017-2020 plan including strengthening our SME ecosystem – from encouraging entrepreneurship to encouraging growth, developing the blue economy and continuing on the considerable work in the region done around remote working. The continued challenge of climate change has led to an emphasis on enterprise transition to green operations and encouraging the coastal energy industry.

The North-West Regional Enterprise Plan was developed throughout 2021 in a challenging environment with considerable virtual consultations to tease out the impactful actions. I would like to thank both the public and private individuals who engaged with the consultation session – these various stakeholders showed passion for the development of our region and I look forward to continuing this collaboration during the implementation phase.



North-West Regional Profile

The North-West Regional Enterprise Plan covers three counties – Sligo, Leitrim, and Donegal. From a governance perspective, it comprises of three local authorities and sits within the NUTS 3 ‘border region’ configuration. All three counties are coastal counties with Leitrim and Donegal sharing a strategically important border with Northern Ireland.

The population of the North-West is 256,771 (2016) which is an increase of 21 percent over the previous 10 years. The projected population growth of the region between 2016-2031 is 11-15 percent. As is the case in the rest of Ireland, the North-West Region has an ageing population. The age cohorts that cover a range between 20 to 44 have seen a decline which can be explained, amongst other reasons, by outward emigration of young people. The trend of incoming migration which was seen during COVID-19 with the remote working trend has yet to be quantified or the impact seen, however in a short-term trend, Donegal has seen its house prices rise by 6 percent with similar trends seen in Leitrim and Sligo which may be explained by an increase in demand for housing fuelled by inward migration and relative economic decline.

The Labour force participation rate is at 62 percent with an unemployment rate of 3.7 percent (Q3 2021). This is compared to a rate of 63.8 percent in the West, 62.8 percent in the Mid-West and 65.1 percent in the West. Since the launch of the Regional Action Plan for Jobs (RAPJ) there has been an increase of 458,800 people in employment across the State between Q1 2015 and Q3 2021. The RAPJ initiative was a central pillar of the Government’s ambition to create 200,000 new jobs by 2020, 135,000 of which are outside of Dublin. Between 2015 and Q3 2021 there was an increase of 16.1 percent in employment in the Border region, compared to 22.7 percent nationally.

The North-West Region is characterised by a mostly rural area with two key gateway towns in Sligo and Letterkenny. A gateway town is an existing urban centre which has a critical mass of population which could sustain third level educational centres, public transport, housing and leisure facilities, the criteria necessary for further economic expansion. Many parts of the North-West Region are heavily dependent on indigenous industries to generate economic activity. The region is rich in culture and heritage and includes several significant tourism and recreational attractions.

The North-West Region lies within the Northern and Western Assembly region which covers eight counties – Galway, Roscommon, Leitrim, Sligo, Donegal, Monaghan, Mayo and Cavan. The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) provides a high-level development framework for the Northern and Western region that supports the implementation of the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the relevant economic policies and objectives of Government. The realisation of the RSES will be key to addressing longer term strategic planning and infrastructural requirements that will be needed to unlock the economic and enterprise potential of the region. Recently, the European Commission downgraded the Northern and Western region from a More Developed Region to a Transition Region, providing further evidence of the region’s continued relative economic decline. This designation is based on their GDP per head of population relative to the EU27 Average. The Northern and Western Regional Assembly’s recent publication entitled “Region in Transition” recommends greater government investment in the region’s key growth enablers, with the view of increasing the region’s productive capacity and its standard of living.



Due to the geographical location of the North-West Region as a border region, our relationship with Northern Ireland is seen as a key strategic relationship for the region. Cross-border groups (Intertrade, ICBAN etc) are a key resource in developing cross-border projects to further different key growth areas. These relationships are further strengthened by the recent dialogue around the 'Shared Island initiative'. The Government's Shared Island initiative aims to harness the full potential of the Good Friday Agreement to enhance cooperation, connection and mutual understanding on the island and engage with all communities and traditions to build consensus around a shared future. Donegal has developed and grown very successfully the North-West Strategic Growth Partnership. This is a unique partnership established in 2016 through the North South Ministerial Council that brings together senior Government officials from all Government departments in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland to meet with Donegal County Council and Derry City and Strabane District Council to deliver on the strategic priorities aimed at bringing real and positive change for the North-West City Region. The Partnership is jointly led by Donegal County Council and Derry City and Strabane District Council and supported by the International Centre for Local and Regional Development (ICLRD). The impact of Brexit on the border region has, arguably, been exacerbated by our geographical location and specifically the impact on fisheries has been felt locally on our industry in Killybegs.

The COVID -19 pandemic has proven challenging for enterprise across the region. Research conducted by the Western Development Commission found that the counties of Clare, Donegal, Galway, Leitrim, Mayo, Limerick, Roscommon, Kerry and Sligo – also known as the Atlantic Economic Corridor (AEC) – were hit hardest by the COVID pandemic because of the predominance of small, micro-enterprises and the concentration of jobs in consumer-facing sectors such as tourism and accommodation. It noted that at the peak of the lockdown in April 2021, almost a third of the labour force in Donegal were in receipt of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP). Another factor playing into the regional disparity, the report found, is the concentration of employment towards tourism, agriculture, traditional sectors and public services, which have been among the worst-hit sectors.

The Connacht-Ulster Alliance (CUA) of GMIT, LYIT and IT Sligo formally submitted its application to become a TU in May 2021. Following an international evaluation process the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, Simon Harris, TD, formally approved the CUA for designation as a TU in October 2021. New research conducted by the Northern and Western Regional Assembly has confirmed the major contribution that a new Connacht Ulster Technological University could make to Ireland's overall economy, with an estimated €600m boost through productivity gains from research, innovation and teaching as well as supporting up to 3,000 jobs.



Typically, every educational institute in Ireland specialises in certain areas. The research areas supported by LYIT specifically are, amongst others, WiSAR (Enterprise Ireland Technology Gateway) – a wireless and embedded systems group that provides electrical and electronic solutions for established companies and technology start-ups throughout Ireland, a strong focus on renewable energy in the Bryden Centre, SMARTrenew and TAOIDE Ocean Energy. LYIT hosts the CoLab which is an innovation centre providing flexible office space, and facilities for high-potential start-ups. CoLab is a community of entrepreneurs and a culture of collaboration. IT Sligo has three strategic research centres PEM, the Precision Engineering Materials and Manufacturing Centre, CRISP, the Centre for Research in Social Professions and CERIS, the Centre for Environmental Research Innovation and Sustainability.

The Innovation Centre at IT Sligo is a centre for entrepreneurs and enterprise encouraging them to ‘exploit the physical and intellectual assets of the Institute’. It is home to over 35 businesses at different stages of development that employ more than 100 people and generate annual sales in excess of €3m. In terms of encouraging industry engagement, IT Sligo also has the Contract Research Unit, which has been providing research, development and innovation assistance to regional enterprises, communities, and individuals for over eight years.

The North-West Region boasts several specialisations within the region. These specialisations are supported through LEOs, Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland. Many of these sectors are backed by public and private sector supported clusters. These high-level sectors have an array of assets, skillsets and capabilities which are instrumental to advancing the region's economy, and whose growth will be key to achieving balanced regional development in line with the NPF and RSES.

Tourism e.g. Go visit Donegal brand and cluster, Visit Sligo, Leitrim explore/experience/enjoy

Renewable Energy and Low Carbon Economy

Marine and Blue Economy e.g. Killibegs Marine Cluster

ICT and Med Tech e.g. Donegal have in their enterprise strategy to help a Patient Centric Healthcare sector

Agri-Tech and Agri-Food

Civil engineering and architectural services

Creative, Arts and Entertainment Activities e.g. Creative Heartlands Leitrim/Sligo, Creative Coast Cluster Donegal, Sligo Live/ Audio-visual sector, immersive technology

Advance Manufacturing and Engineering (Plastic and Rubber Products, Machinery and Equipment, Medical Devices and Instruments) e.g. Abbvie, Abbott, other members of Border Manufacturing cluster, Donegal engineering cluster, Tech NW cluster

Food and Food Innovation e.g. Donegal Food Coast cluster, Sligo Food Trail cluster, Taste Leitrim cluster/brand centred around the Drumshambo food hub

The enterprise ecosystem of the North-West is expertly assisted by a number of diverse agencies – Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, Údarás na Gealtachta, Western Development Commission (WDC) and the Local Enterprise Offices. Through a number of different funding avenues, these agencies bolster local enterprises through vouchers, mentoring, funding, courses, infrastructure development and capital project development. These agencies' regional offerings will be detailed in other sections of this publication.



Overview of Strategic Objectives and Actions



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1: Harness the potential of micro, small and medium indigenous businesses in the North-West Region through encouraging entrepreneurship and scaling of existing businesses.

- Action 1.1** Develop regional initiatives to assist scaling micro to large businesses within the North-West.
- Action 1.2** Continue with a working group post-publication of the *North-West Barriers to Entrepreneurship Report* to action the recommendations coming from the Report.
- Action 1.3** Improve linkages between SMEs and Multinational/large enterprise in the North-West .
- Action 1.4** Encourage the development of clusters in the region.
- Action 1.5** Explore opportunities to grow strategically the creative economy.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2: Ensure that the North-West capitalises on the enterprise opportunities posed by the advancement of the wind industry (onshore/offshore wind) and the continued growth of the ocean economy.

- Action 2.1** Encourage the growth of the wind energy industry (onshore/offshore wind) in North-West industry and along the Atlantic coast, through regional collaboration, regional supply chain diversification and assistance of the public agencies and educational bodies.
- Action 2.2** Continue to assist the on-going development of the regional blue economy encompassing our full Northwest coastline and additionally the development of the marine cluster centred in Killybegs.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3: Support the offering of the North-West Region as a place to work and invest high value jobs in.

- Action 3.1** Work collaboratively with regional and national stakeholders in addressing infrastructural deficits in the North-West.
- Action 3.2** Develop a messaging campaign for the North-West to encourage working and investment in the region. This messaging is to be focused on enterprise and economic attributes whilst addressing our designation as a 'region in transition'.
- Action 3.3** Utilise the shift to remote working to attract and retain high quality talent in the region.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4: Support the North-West's enterprise to mainstream climate action and transition to a low carbon future in their business planning.

Action 4.1 Identify and implement opportunities to promote and expand the regional circular economy.

Action 4.2 Develop a suite of targeted initiatives to enable enterprise in the region transform and meet their decarbonisation requirements.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 5: Recognising the North-West's strategic border location, encourage the ongoing development of cross-border relationships and Shared Island initiatives to further the enterprise agenda in the North-West.

Action 5.1 Encourage the development of cross-border relationships in order to further enterprise growth and mitigate Brexit impacts in the Northwest through new initiatives which can provide additionality or help existing initiatives e.g. Cross-border Smart Industry forum.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 6: By harnessing the partnerships available to the REP's steering committee, assist the Regional Skills Forum and other agencies in addressing the skills issue encountered by enterprises in the North-West.

Action 6.1 Through the networks available to the Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committee, create a 'skills working group' to assist in addressing the enterprise issues in the North-West around skills shortage, talent retention (where it pertains to skills), talent development and upskilling, ensuring the working group assists existing initiatives and offers additionality to the overall issue.

1

The Regional Enterprise Plans Initiative

Introduction

In early 2019 nine Regional Steering Committees established by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE) finalised and commenced implementation of the first *Regional Enterprise Plans*. This 'bottom-up' collaborative mechanism involves the enterprise agencies, local enterprise offices, local authorities, higher and further education bodies, private sector and others, within each region, chaired by a senior figure from industry. The Committees were formed initially in 2015 to drive the Regional Action Plans for Jobs until 2018.

The Regional Enterprise Plans each contain agreed 'Strategic Objectives' for enterprise development, accompanied by a time-bound set of actions that deliver to the objectives. Progress Reports on implementation of the Regional Enterprise Plans to 2020 are available on the Department's website.

Policy Context

Delivering balanced regional growth through a coherent policy approach to the enterprise needs of every part of Ireland is a stated objective within the Programme for Government (PfG) and more recently emphasised in the *Economic Recovery Plan 2021*.

DETE contributes to this agenda in a number of ways, including through: the enterprise agencies; the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs); and direct investments in strengthening the enterprise ecosystem (incl. Regional Enterprise Development Fund, IDA Ireland property programme etc.), guided by our national enterprise policy. This work takes place in the context of the National Planning Framework (NPF), which provides the vision and holistic future planning framework for Ireland's spatial development across society and economy over the longer-term, and its translation through Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES) and the aligned Local Authority County and City Development Plans.

The NPF and the three RSES provide a statutory long-term framework for the spatial, economic and social development of all regions in Ireland, offering an ambitious and sustainable proposition to delivering balanced regional development in Ireland. Smart Specialisation (S3) represents one of the key economic principles adopted in each of these high-level statutory frameworks, with a key enabling condition for funding interventions under the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) also being the development of and alignment with the Member State's S3. By placing Smart Specialisation as one of the thematic areas of the Regional Enterprise Plans, we can ensure that regional enterprise priorities identified and bolstered in these plans are aligned with the long-term vision and objectives of the NPF and the RSES.



Other pertinent national policies include the *National Skills Strategy 2025*, *Innovation 2020* (with a new innovation strategy forthcoming); and Making Remote Work, amongst others. Also, as part of the Shared Island initiative, there will be added impetus to delivering balanced regional growth by leveraging the potential to grow the all-island economy, while driving growth and job creation North and South.

Ensuring that all regions can realise their enterprise development potential and that regional disparities are reduced therefore requires that the Department works closely with relevant partners across Government to strengthen the enabling conditions for investment and business growth.

The Regional Enterprise Plans recognise that enterprise policy coherence and collaboration at the national level needs to be mirrored from the 'bottom up', to enable:

- a place-based perspective on needs, capabilities and opportunities to inform national enterprise and other policies;
- economies of scale through joined up actions and investment;
- effective targeting of national initiatives to areas of opportunity and greatest need; and
- development and delivery of a programme of collaborative actions that can drive better outcomes in terms of regional job creation.

Although the Plans themselves are focused and timebound, the Steering Committee mechanism also maintains a live agenda at regional level, responsive to emerging opportunities and challenges, for example: Brexit, COVID-19 pandemic impacts, remote working opportunity for regions, climate action/just transition, and regional shocks requiring joined up responses.

Developing new Regional Enterprise Plans to 2024

The outgoing Regional Enterprise Plans (REPs) concluded at the end of 2020. Final Progress Reports from the nine Steering Committees show that the model has impact and that actions delivered are complementary and add value to the mainstream interventions of the enterprise agencies and other bodies working to enable enterprise development at a regional level.

The new Plans to 2024 build on the first iteration of the REPs and each Steering Committee had a clear mandate to deliver a new Plan to 2024 that would:

- complement and translate national enterprise policy in a regional context;
- facilitate collaboration regionally to address prioritised ecosystem gaps and opportunities, and help achieve Agency and LEO investment and jobs targets in each region; and
- use collective insight and resources in each region, and available regional funding, to progress initiatives to enable enterprise growth and job creation in each region.

The Department highlighted a number of national policy challenges that each of the Regional Committees were asked to consider as part of the preparation of the new Plans: enabling recovery and building enterprise resilience in the context of COVID-19 and other external shocks; the twin transition imperative for enterprises to digitalise and contribute to a carbon neutral economy; improving competitiveness through effective placemaking, including enabling flexible work patterns; and capitalising on existing and emerging sectoral strengths and capabilities through smart specialisation.

The development of Regional Enterprise Plans to 2024 has for the first time been done in parallel with the creation of Ireland's forthcoming new Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3). The stakeholder consultation events undertaken as part of the development of these Regional Enterprise Plans has acted as an entrepreneurial discovery process which has contributed valuable insights to the S3 for Ireland.

The final appendix summarises the various stages that have led to the publication of the Regional Enterprise Plans. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the development of the nine new Plans to 2024 was undertaken in a virtual environment. The Regional Enterprise Plans and Initiatives Unit, within DETE, will oversee the 'implementation of the new Plans at the national level, while roll-out of the process in each region will be driven on the ground by the existing Regional Steering Committees, assisted by Programme Managers appointed by the Local Authorities in each region.

Finally, to help drive delivery of the new REPs to 2024, drive best practice across regions, and encourage cross-regional collaboration on areas of common interest and opportunity, the Department has established a National Oversight Group (NOG) for the REPs, chaired jointly by Minister Robert Troy and Minister Damien English. This grouping includes the Chairpersons and the Programme Managers of the Regional Steering Committees, national level representatives of the enterprise agencies and other relevant bodies, as well as relevant Government Departments. The Group will meet over the lifetime of the new Regional Enterprise Plans.



2



North-West Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024

Strategic Objective 1:

Harness the potential of micro, small and medium indigenous businesses in the North-West Region through encouraging entrepreneurship and scaling of existing businesses

Context and Vision to 2024

In order to compete for talent and investment, the North-West needs to ensure that its enterprise environment provides world class opportunities, initiatives, networks and facilities. This objective focuses on actions to encourage start-up entrepreneurs and the growth of SMEs in the region.

Following on from the report that was commissioned through the LEOs and Enterprise Ireland for the North-West Regional Enterprise Plan and completed by Lancaster University, entitled *Barriers to Entrepreneurship in the North-West*, it is highlighted that the North-West has the lowest regional new business formations when compared at a NUTS 3 level – Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim having 26 new business formations/county per 10,000 pop (start-up activity by county in Ireland 2015-17 (Source CSO) It is this recognition of regional variations, which has given rise to this objective – to empower a more localised and tailored approach to local development, and in particular through a lens of assisting and fostering entrepreneurship and ambitious SME development. These regional variations combined with the Northern and Western Region’s status as a *region in transition*, highlights the need for specific measures dedicated to this region for entrepreneurship stimuli.

SMEs (companies <250ppl) dominate the Irish and the North-West economic landscape. Nationally they account for 99.8 percent of the total number of business enterprises in the private business economy; they employ 1.06m people, accounting for 68.4 percent of total employment in the private business economy. In recognition of concentration risks in the Irish economy, where a small number of large companies make an inordinate contribution to the economy, it is vital that a strong indigenous sector is developed and nurtured and that SMEs in particular can play an increasingly important role in firstly rebuilding the Irish economy post COVID-19, and secondly in helping to ensure the longer-term sustainability of the Irish economic model.



The North-West's SMEs contribute to many industries – manufacturing, engineering, the experience economy, fisheries etc. Ireland's experience economy encompasses multiple sectors including hospitality, retail, travel, food, drink, tourism, entertainment, technology, events and organisations in the arts, cultural, sporting and heritage sectors. It reaches deep into the supply chain assisting business and employment encompassing many of the hard to reach but critical elements of the economy and society: young people, SMEs, regional and rural development, with real, tangible benefits for the Shared Island. The creative economy as called out in Action 4 is a key part of the experience economy and a strength of the North-West. The Northwest's food and drinks industry is particularly characterised by SME's and is a key industry of the region e.g. Drumshambo Food Hub.

Both *Enterprise 2025 Renewed* and the report of the SME Growth Taskforce highlight the importance of seeking out new opportunities in clustering and networks and how such collaborations lead to a strengthened SME and entrepreneurship base. Under the previous Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020, significant progress was made in the appointment of a cluster manager in Killybegs and Border Engineering Cluster. Continued development of the clusters in the region and the potential for new networks will be a focus of this Plan. In the North-West Region, we have a combination of LEO lead clusters at a county level (e.g. Creative Coast, Sligo Food Trail) Enterprise Ireland funded clusters (e.g. Killybegs Marine Clusters and Border Manufacturing Cluster) and enterprise-led clusters e.g. Tech NW.

Actions to 2024

Action 1.1: Develop regional initiatives to assist scaling of micro to large businesses within the North-West.

| Action Leader: | Action Partners: | For completion by: |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Public Sector Chair North-West Regional Enterprise Office | Enterprise Ireland, LEOs, IDA Ireland, Regional Skills Forum (RSF), Western Development Commission (WDC), North-West Regional Enterprise Office, Educational bodies, Údarás na Gaeltachta, WestBIC, Private sector input. | Q4 2024 |
| <p>Rationale:</p> <p>Due to the importance of SMEs to the North-West's ecosystem and with the North-West having the lowest regional new business formations, this action around regional positive discrimination and regional initiatives to assist SMEs start-up and scale is an effort to arrest this trend. This action intends to build on ongoing actions by agencies in the region, addressing unique barriers to growth identified by the steering committee. These regional differentiations are highlighted in the designation of the Northern and Western Region as a 'region in transition' and a 'moderate innovator'.</p> | | |
| <p>Action Outcome:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working group established to frame 'value add and unique' regional initiatives required to encourage start-ups or scale ups – Q4 2022. Funding identified for running regional initiatives. New regional initiatives introduced and operational with measurement practices in place. | | |



Action 1.2: Continue with a working group post-publication of the North-West Barriers to Entrepreneurship Report to action the recommendations coming from the report.

| Action Leader: | Action Partners: | For completion by: |
|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| LEO representative | Enterprise Ireland, LEOs, IDA Ireland, RSF, WDC, North-West Regional Enterprise Office, Educational bodies, Údarás na Gaeltachta and Private sector. | Q4 2024 |

Rationale:
 Through the North-West Regional Enterprise Plan 2017-2020, there was a study commissioned by Enterprise Ireland and the LEOs in Sligo, Leitrim, Donegal and completed by Lancaster University entitled *Barriers to Entrepreneurship in the North-West*. This report recommends several actions to encourage entrepreneurship in the region. These actions will be considered by the working group and actioned upon where appropriate.

Action Outcome:

- Working group established to consider outcomes and recommendations within the report, Q2 2022.
- Execution of actions as considered appropriate by working group.

Action 1.3: Improve linkages between SMEs and multinational/large enterprise in the North-West.

| Action Leader: | Action Partners: | For completion by: |
|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Public sector lead | Enterprise Ireland, LEOs, IDA Ireland, North-West Regional Enterprise Office, Ibec, Private sector input, IT Sligo and LYIT. | Q4 2024 |

Rationale:
 The existing supply chains of the multinationals in the region have a strong focus on utilising indigenous North-West businesses. Having a multinational as a customer for an SME can ensure continuity of business and the opportunity to develop networks within the region. The intent of this action is to increase these relationships, increase supply chain opportunities and ensure all current opportunities where these relationships are established are utilised/publicised in the region e.g. sourcing events hosted by enterprise agencies.

Action Outcome:

- Report completed on the readiness of SMEs to engage with multinationals in the region and how much engagement is ongoing (including mentorship). This research is to include data on how well utilised the current sourcing events are in the region. Additionally, research into the different avenues of mentorship available to SMEs in the region will be conducted – Q4 2023.
- Promote, assist and/or develop ‘regional sourcing events’ to foster the multiplier effect and enhanced supply chain opportunities for companies in the North-West, resulting in an increase in uptake of opportunities for the regional SMEs and multinationals to network Q4 2024.



Action 1.4: Encourage the development of clusters in the region.

| Action Leader: | Action Partners: | For completion by: |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| IT Sligo LYIT North-West Regional Enterprise Office | Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, RSF, LEOs, Údarás na Gaeltachta, ETB, Private companies. | Q4 2024 |

Rationale:

Industry clustering is recognised as a valuable economic tool for companies, industry sectors, for regional development and for national competitiveness. The National Competitiveness Council notes that regions successful in facilitating industry clusters have been found to have higher levels of productivity, innovation, employment, and prosperity. Their recent appointment of full time Education Outreach Managers in the educational bodies in the North-West has led to some best-case examples of cluster formation. Utilising this experience and international examples, development of existing clusters and new clusters would significantly benefit regional economic development. In the North-West Region, we have a combination of LEO led clusters at a county level e.g. Creative Coast or Sligo Food Trail, Enterprise Ireland funded clusters (e.g. Killybegs Marine Clusters and Border Manufacturing Cluster) and enterprise lead clusters (e.g. Tech NW).

Action Outcome:

- Conduct research into the different 'levels' of clusters in the region e.g. emerging networks, industry forums etc – Q2 2023.
- Utilising the data presented within the above research, create a cluster growth plan for the region incorporating some of the below initiatives:
 - › Utilising the growth journey of existing clusters in the region, prepare best-case examples as a demonstrator to guide development of other clusters – Q2 2023.
 - › Provide education to potential/existing clusters in the region on routes to growth/sustainability etc e.g. webinars, information events etc – Q2 2023.
 - › Upon release of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment cluster policy, ensure the North-West capitalises on opportunities posed by the new policy – Q4 2023.
 - › Explore and identify opportunities to promote and expand the reach of emerging growth industries in the North-West Region e.g. Business Process Outsourcing (BPO), animation, gaming and ICT/Fintech. This may involve looking at a value proposition for these industries in the region and analysing the potential of developing a cluster – Q4 2024.



Action 1.5: Explore opportunities to grow strategically the creative economy.

| Action Leader: | Action Partners: | For completion by: |
|----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Sligo LEO | Enterprise Ireland, LEOs, IDA Ireland, WDC, North-West Regional Enterprise Office, IT Sligo, Letterkenny Institute of Technology (LYIT), Údarás na Gaeltachta, Private sector. | Q4 2024 |

Rationale:

The North-West has a strong creative economy with specialisations emerging in audio visual expertise, music and the craft industries. Each county has their own strengths – Donegal has the Creative Coast; Sligo has recently been awarded funding for the Digital Gaming Campus in Strandhill and Leitrim is in the Creative Heartlands. Feedback from the creative sector consultation session held in September 2021 clearly demonstrated there is appetite and an opportunity to ensure the region grows strategically and takes initial steps to encourage further growth over the next few years. This action within the Regional Enterprise Plan aligns with the strategic ambitions of the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media for the sustainable development of the creative and cultural economy. The plan also aligns with the ambitions identified by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment in *Enterprise 2025 Renewed* and with the plans for the development of a creative industries roadmap by Creative Ireland, as outlined in Future Jobs Ireland 2019.

Action Outcome:

Building on the expertise of companies in the region, develop a series of actions for implementation in the region to ensure strategic growth in the areas of its strength, including the following:

- Complete research into the volume of companies in the region within the creative economy particularly those which are involved in the audiovisual/digital sector which is becoming a strength in the North-West. This data will help both cluster development/network development – Q4 2023.
- Complete a skills assessment with several creative economy companies in the North-West to develop a picture of what the North-West needs to offer to grow its creative economy. Socialise this assessment with educational bodies in the region to ensure implementation of its findings – Q4 2023.
- Develop and implement a plan with related actions to encourage the commercialisation of the North-West’s creative economy, boosting its existing strengths -Q4 2024.
- Develop and implement a communications plan for promotion of the creative economy along the Atlantic region – Q4 2024.
- Explore, identify and implement cross-sectoral opportunities for content creation – Q4 2024.



Strategic Objective 2

Ensure that the North-West capitalises on the enterprise opportunities posed by the advancement of the wind industry (onshore/offshore wind) and the continued growth of the ocean economy

Context and Vision to 2024

The North-West Regional Enterprise Plan 2017-2020 recognised the importance of the blue economy industry to the North-West and this has continued as a strong theme in this plan. In recent years the combined events of Brexit and an increased climate action focus presents enormous opportunities for the North-West to capitalise further on the natural resources available to us. Maritime and the ocean economy is a growth sector and selling point for the region, reaching into a range of areas including tourism, technology, engineering, and sustainability, among others. By focusing on the ocean economy and energy sectors, we will build on the existing natural strengths and economic activity in the region.

Ocean-based economic activity makes a major contribution to Ireland's economy and has an especially important role to play in regional development. The employment provided by ocean economy industries has a wide geographical spread, with most jobs in the sector located outside of Dublin. Recent estimates by the Socio-Economic Marine Research Unit (SEMURU) at NUI Galway put the overall turnover of Ireland's ocean economy in 2019 at €5.8bn and provides almost 31,000 jobs.

The impact of the established ocean economy to the North-West Region is particularly evidenced by Donegal's strong fisheries industry, centred around Killybegs. Sligo Port operates mainly as a light freight and tourism port. The development of Killybegs town and harbour has been identified as a key strategic objective of Donegal County Council and its role in the development of the blue economy in the region has been highlighted through the appointment of a cluster manager for the sector based in Killybegs. Donegal is also the primary county for aquaculture and shellfish production (with an emerging industry in Sligo) and has one of the most developed research facilities in the sector in Fanad.

The Atlantic region, comprising of the North-West, West and Mid-West regions (from Donegal to Clare) has an abundance of natural resources along its coastline with verified power resources of 35GW and estimates of a further 75GW. The region has an established onshore wind industry with significant potential for offshore wind in the medium term (5-10 years). A supply chain has developed to cater for the onshore wind industry. For Ireland and the North-West to realise the full potential of our wind resources, thereby facilitating private investment and job creation, this supply chain must be encouraged to both develop further to cater for onshore wind and to diversify to cater for the future offshore wind industry. The economic benefits of the existing onshore wind industry to the North-West is centred around employment (directly and in the wider supply chain), community benefit funding and local authority contributions e.g. contributions can also account for a strong share of local authorities' total commercial rates income (22 percent total income in Leitrim).



Actions to 2024

Action 2.1: Encourage the growth of the wind energy industry (onshore/offshore wind) in North-West industry and along the Atlantic coast, through regional collaboration, regional supply chain diversification and assistance of the public agencies and educational bodies.

| Action Leader: | Action Partners: | For completion by: |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Public sector lead Leitrim County Council | Enterprise Ireland, LEOs, other wind energy related agencies, Killybegs cluster manager, RSF, Údarás na Gaeltachta, County Councils, Regional Enterprise Programme managers. | Q4 2024 |
| <p>Rationale:</p> <p>The North-West has already an existing strong onshore wind industry which can also diversify into the upcoming offshore wind industry. Recent reports suggest wind resources in Ireland are good for fixed bottom, shallow to mid floating offshore wind along the east, south and southwest of Ireland. North of Galway requires floating technology. Regional collaboration will be a key avenue for the North-West to ensure it develops its capability in this industry and capitalises economically on this opportunity (AEGIR Ireland market outlook, 2021).</p> | | |
| <p>Action Outcome:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete feasibility study into opportunities for assisting the growth of this industry along the Atlantic coast, looking at how the public bodies can encourage its growth – Q4 2022. • Following on from the feasibility study, continue to implement their recommendations within the report – Q4 2024. • Utilising network of programme managers and their extended networks, establish a working group to investigate through regional collaboration how we can encourage the development of the onshore and offshore industry by Q4 2024 e.g. cluster development, port development, SME expertise growth in the industry. | | |

Action 2.2: Continue to assist the on-going development of the regional blue economy encompassing our full Northwest coastline and additionally the development of the marine cluster centred in Killybegs.

| Action Leader: | Action Partners: | For completion by: |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Public sector lead | Enterprise Ireland, LEOs, other regional enterprise offices, North-West Regional Enterprise Office, Údarás na Gaeltachta, Killybegs Marine Cluster Manager, County Councils, LYIT, Private companies. | Q4 2024 |
| <p>Rationale:</p> <p>The impact of the established ocean economy to the North-West Region is particularly evidenced by Donegal's strong fisheries industry, centred around Killybegs; Sligo Port operates mainly as a light freight and tourism port. In recent years, Killybegs has evolved from primarily a fishing port into a multifunctional port bolstering food processing, renewable energy production and tourism. The development of Killybegs town and harbour has been identified as a key strategic objective of Donegal County Council's economic development plans, with the appointment of the Killybegs Cluster manager. In addition, Sligo has an emerging aquaculture industry along its coastline.</p> | | |
| <p>Action Outcome:</p> <p>Develop and implement a cluster development plan with intermediary measurable steps. Investigate potential for the growth of the industry into Sligo/Leitrim – Q4 2023.</p> | | |



Strategic Objective 3

Support the offering of the North-West Region as a place to work and invest high value jobs in

Context and Vision to 2024

A strong sense of place contributes to the attractiveness of a region for enterprise investment and growth as well as assisting regional competitiveness. Feedback through the consultation session in development for the North-West Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024 has led to inclusion of this objective. The inclusion of this strategic objective will help enhance the current messaging propositions offered by the County Councils, Údarás na Gaeltachta and the WDC assist in realising the potential of the region as a location for enterprise expansion and investment. There is an opportunity through this strategic objective to identify possibilities for collaboration among relevant regional stakeholders, to develop 'marketing' collateral including key datasets that links them together to further strengthen our regional offering and highlight the unique selling point of the North-West as an attractive place to invest and work. This objective intends to concentrate on the economic and enterprise messaging for the North-West, highlighting its strengths and ensuring the narrative around the North-West is positive. The messaging campaign will also seek to recognise the region's status as a 'region in transition' and address how to message this appropriately, to the correct audience, in order for the region to get positive discrimination.

Through the consultation process for the development of the North-West Regional Enterprise Plan, there was considerable feedback as to how the status of infrastructure in the North-West is a strong inhibitor to enterprise growth and international investment in the region. This is in correlation to the research finding that "public infrastructure is one of the important determinants of economic growth. Not only access to but also quality of infrastructure affects firm productivity as well as people's livelihood". Recognising there has been significant investments in the region, the North-West Regional Enterprise Plan will also help the implementation of Project Ireland 2040 in delivering on key infrastructure projects that drive future productivity growth and maximise returns on investment. This concern around infrastructure in the region is mirrored in the Northern and Western Regional Assembly's RSES around making their North and West Region a 'Connected Region', – "there are significant gaps in the quality of the transport network across the region, which require prioritised investment to bring it up to a comparable standard with the rest of the country".

The National Remote Work Strategy aims to make remote working a feature of Ireland's workforce while IDA Ireland, in its FDI Strategy 2021-2024, recognises the potential of remote working as part of its value proposition to attract investment to Ireland. It is important that this Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024 maximises the positive effects of a new type of blended working environment through the region's broad range of remote working facilities. This Plan intends to capitalise on the remote working trend to ensure that talent in the region is retained and further talent is attracted to the region.



Actions to 2024

Action 3.1: Work collaboratively with regional and national stakeholders in addressing infrastructural deficits in the North-West.

| Action Leader: | Action Partners: | For completion by: |
|---------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| IT Sligo North-West Regional Enterprise Office | LYIT, County Councils, Ibec, Chambers of Commerce, Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA), Infrastructure agencies e.g. Eirgrid, Airports. | Q4 2022 |

Rationale:

Through the consultation process for the development of the North-West Regional Enterprise Plan, there was considerable feedback as to how the status of infrastructure in the North-West is a strong inhibitor to enterprise growth and international investment in the region. This correlates to the research finding *“Public infrastructure is one of the important determinants of economic growth. Not only access to but also quality of infrastructure affects firm productivity as well as people’s livelihood”*. This concern around infrastructure in the region is mirrored in the NWRA Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy around making their North and West region a ‘Connected Region’, *“there are significant gaps in the quality of the transport network across the region, which require prioritised investment to bring it up to a comparable standard with the rest of the country”*.

Action Outcome:

- Noting the significant development already invested in the region through Project 2040 and the proposed development as outlined in the National Development Plan 2021-2030, this report will examine the benefit to enterprise development of infrastructural priorities being addressed – Q2 2023.
- Informed by the Report’s finding, engage collaboratively with regional and national stakeholders in effectively implementing infrastructure priorities in line with the North-West – Q4 2023.



Action 3.2: Develop a messaging campaign for the North-West to encourage working and investment in the region. This messaging is to be focused on enterprise and economic attributes whilst addressing our designation as a 'region in transition'.

| Action Leader: | Action Partners: | For completion by: |
|-------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| North-West Regional Enterprise Office Public Chair | County Councils, Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, Educational bodies, Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA), Údarás na Gaeltachta, LEOs, Private companies. | Q4 2024 |

Rationale:

During the consultation session for the North-West Regional Enterprise Plan, recognition was given for the work by the three County Councils and the WDC on highlighting the significant merits of the region through their marketing campaigns. This Regional Enterprise Plan sees an opportunity to look for collaborative messages around enterprise and economic opportunities in the region to assist the considerable 'work/life' balance messaging for the region. This action intends to address perceived opinions of the region and develop positive economic datasets, marketing materials, value propositions for the established sectors/clusters within the region (e.g. engineering/manufacturing) and emerging recognised competitive strengths of the region. The messaging will concentrate on the enterprise and economic strengths of the region. It will also seek to recognise the region's status as a 'region in transition' and address how to message this appropriately, to the correct audience, in order for the region to benefit from positive discrimination.

Action Outcome:

Develop a suite of cohesive messaging material which publicises the strengths of the region, comparing it to other regions and emphasising the narrative of the region as a progressive region with a positive future. Utilise this material for widespread distribution and for promotional efforts for the North-West – Q4 2023.

Action 3.3: Utilise the shift to remote working to attract and retain high quality talent in the region.

| Action Leader: | Action Partners: | For completion by: |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Public Sector Chair | Digital/Remote Hub Managers, LEOs, Education and Training Boards (ETBs), County Councils, Údarás na Gaeltachta, WDC, Private companies. | Q4 2023 |

Rationale:

The Department of Rural and Community Development, in its recently published 'Rural Development Strategy 2021-2025', highlighted remote work as having 'the potential to be transformative for rural Ireland'. The Strategy notes that remote working hubs will enable remote working and assist the revitalisation of rural towns. There are some excellent examples of hub collaboration and innovation in the region e.g. Leitrim/Cavan/Longford Hubs. The Donegal Digital Innovation Company is an example of collaboration between regional and cross-border hubs and ERNACT provides a service to hubs on technology transfer to their client SMEs from universities, ITs etc.

Action Outcome

- Explore, identify and implement opportunities to retain and attract talent to the region, including opportunities posed by the Connected Hubs initiative – Q4 2023.



Strategic Objective 4

Support the North-West's enterprise to mainstream climate action and transition to a low carbon future in their business planning.

The Programme for Government commits to an average 7 percent reduction in overall greenhouse gas emissions from 2021-2030 (a 51 percent reduction over the decade) and to achieving net zero emissions by 2050. The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 will assist Ireland's transition in achieving these targets. With enterprise emissions accounting for 13.3 percent of total emissions in the Irish economy, they must now take stock of the sustainability of their products, services and supply chains and evolve or transform their activities in line with decarbonisation requirements to assist in contributing to the ambitious national targets as outlined above.

The first part of this journey for enterprise is to understand the changes that will be required, along with the significant opportunities and challenges that come with this transformation. The SME Growth Taskforce emphasises the fact that SMEs will need to develop management capacity and skills required to assess not alone the regulatory requirements but also the likely changes to their cost base and the needs of their customers. In tandem with this they will be required to build the capabilities required to deliver sustainable products and services.

Enterprise Ireland will prioritise climate action and sustainability in its Strategy for 2022-2025, a key pillar of which will be to assist existing clients and new start-ups to exploit the opportunities transition to a low carbon economy brings.

Strategic Objective 4 seeks to assist enterprise across the region with transition to decarbonisation. Firstly, by helping them understand the imperatives of climate change. Secondly, by helping to identify opportunities to adopt sustainable practices in the products and services they provide. And finally, by identifying opportunities available for both existing and new enterprises to provide the goods and services which will be needed as we decarbonise our economy. We will also collaborate with the Climate Action Regional Offices (CAROs) to facilitate effective climate action at regional and local level.



Actions to 2024

Action 4.1: Identify and implement opportunities to promote and expand the regional circular economy.

| Action Leader: | Action Partners: | For completion by: |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| North-West Regional Enterprise Programme Manager Public Sector Chair | LEOs, IT Sligo, LYIT, Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, ETBs, Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI), Climate Action Regional Offices (CAROs), Private companies. | Q4 2024 |

Rationale:

Today's global and North-West Regional economy is overwhelmingly based on a linear ('take-make-waste') model of production and consumption. The environmental impacts of this linear model, in which we extract great quantities of natural resources to make things that we may use only once before throwing them away, are not sustainable. The circular economy offers an alternative to this linear model, one in which we keep resources in use for as long as possible, extract the maximum value from them whilst in use, then recover and regenerate products and materials at the end of life. There are strong industries in the North-West which traditionally can be great contributors and best-case examples of the regional circular economy e.g. food and drinks industry.

Action Outcome:

- Identify available information on how best to raise awareness amongst households, businesses, communities, and individuals about the Circular Economy – Q4 2023.
- Implementation of targeted messaging campaign based on the research above – Q4 2023.
- Assist and promote increased investment in the circular economy in the North-West, with a view to delivering sustainable, regionally balanced economic growth and employment – Q4 2024. This will be completed through specific initiatives e.g. pilot projects, EU projects etc.

Action 4.2: Develop a suite of targeted initiatives to enable enterprise in the region transform and meet their decarbonisation requirements.

| Action Leader: | Action Partners: | For completion by: |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Public Sector Chair North-West Regional Enterprise Programme Manager | IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, Local Authorities, LEOs, IT Sligo/LYIT, ETBs, SEAI, CAROs, Private companies. | Q4 2024 |

Rationale:

The transition to a low carbon economy presents a significant transformational challenge for enterprise – part of this challenge includes an understanding of the transition process and the opportunities and barriers that may present. Action 2 seeks to identify such opportunities and barriers along with the identification of appropriate initiatives and interventions required to enable enterprise to withstand the challenges and impacts of transition.

Action Outcome:

- Complete research on SME enterprises' understanding of transitioning to low carbon and the implications of same in terms of planning for the future e.g. supply chain issues, servicing carbon neutral companies Q4 2023.
- Using the research findings and working in conjunction with the relevant agencies to leverage existing initiatives such as the Enterprise Ireland Green Offer and LEO Green for Micro and where applicable develop additional targeted initiatives to enable enterprise in the region transform and meet their decarbonisation requirements Q4 2023.



Strategic Objective 5

Recognising the North-West’s strategic border location, encourage the ongoing development of cross-border relationships and Shared Island initiatives to further the enterprise agenda in the North-West

The Government’s Shared Island initiative aims to harness the full potential of the Good Friday Agreement to enhance cooperation, connection and mutual understanding on the island and engage with all communities and traditions to build consensus around a shared future. In Budget 2021, the Government established the Shared Island Fund, committing €500m in capital funding out to 2025, ring-fenced for investment in collaborative North/South projects to deliver key cross-border initiatives and objectives as set out in the Programme for Government including enhancing, developing and deepening all aspects of north-south cooperation and the all-island economy. This objective centres around capitalising on this initiative recognising the North-West’s strategic location as a border region. Donegal has already well established relationships with Derry/Strabane area in the North-West Strategic partnership.

In a recent study commissioned by the Department of Rural and Community Development, entitled *Brexit and the Border: The Impact on Rural Communities*, the Committee recommends that “the eleven border area local authorities develop North/South tourism strategies applicable to their specific cross-border regions”. The Committee also recommends “the pooling of local/regional bodies’ resources where practicable to promote cross-border initiatives which will enhance and strengthen rural development e.g. in tourism, heritage, arts and culture etc”.

As Brexit has been realised in 2020, the North-West is getting to grips with its impact. Research suggests Brexit is likely to significantly reduce bilateral trade flows between Ireland and the UK by up to 20 percent. As a region, arguably we have been impacted at a greater proportion than some other regions.

Actions to 2024

Action 5.1: Encourage the development of cross-border relationships in order to further enterprise growth and mitigate Brexit impacts in the North-West through new initiatives which can provide additionality or assist existing initiatives e.g. Cross-border Smart Industry forum.

| Action Leader: | Action Partners: | For completion by: |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Public Sector Chair North-West Regional Enterprise Programme Manager | IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, Local Authorities, LEOs, Sligo/LYIT, ETBs, SEAI, CAROs, Private companies. | Q4 2024 |

Rationale:

In a recent study commissioned by the Dept Rural and Community Development, entitled *“Brexit and the Border: The Impact on Rural Communities”*, there was a number of recommendations made to encourage cross-border relationships. These relationships are already important to Donegal with their relationship developed in the North-West Strategic Partnership. Extending this partnership and pursuing other initiatives to develop these relationships will enhance the opportunities available to enterprises in the region.

Action Outcome:

- Enhanced development of relationships and execution of initiatives to develop cross-border relationships e.g. Cross-border Smart Industry Forum, cross-border supply chain sourcing events.



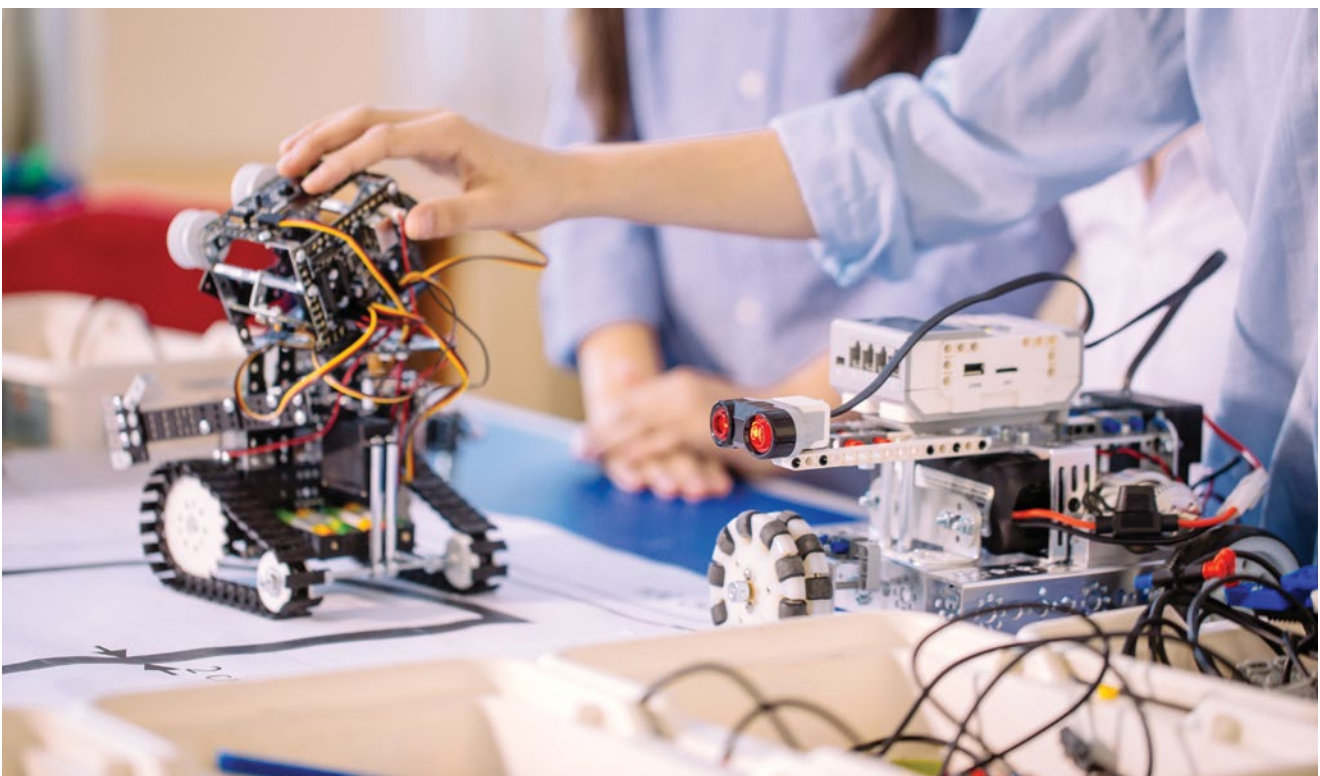
Strategic Objective 6

By harnessing the partnerships available to the REP's steering committee, assist the Regional Skills Forum and other agencies in addressing the skills issue encountered by enterprises in the North-West

During the consultation sessions to develop the North-West Regional Enterprise Plan, there was considerable feedback received from the enterprises in the region on the challenges around skills shortages, talent retention, talent development and upskilling. Remote working has both enhanced and exasperated this issue. The North-West's ability to continue to grow and attract investment will be dependent on readily available talent and highly skilled workers. The National Skills Strategy 2025 sets out an ambitious plan to ensure the development of a skills supply that is responsive to the changing and diverse needs of our people, society and the economy. The skills supply needs to be appropriately configured so that it can be responsive and adaptable to the needs of enterprise in the North-West. Considerable work is ongoing to address these needs, in particular through the North-West Regional Skills Forum. The North-West Regional Enterprise Plan will assist and add value to work that is currently ongoing while also seeking to identify and drive new initiatives through increased collaboration. The wide network that the steering committee can bring to the solution will aid the considerable efforts already ongoing in the region.

Skills and Talent is one of the key themes under Future Jobs Ireland, the Government's new plan to guide the next phase of Ireland's economic development. By placing this objective at the heart of the Regional Enterprise Plan, the North-West Region can be both reactive and proactive in creating sustainable jobs that can deal with new challenges and embrace modern technologies.

Funded by the Department of Education, the network of nine Regional Skills Fora has been created as part of the Government's National Skills Strategy 2025. The Fora provides an opportunity for employers and the education and training system to work together to meet the emerging skills needs of their regions. The Fora have been established to align with wider Government policy and initiatives on regional economic development. The innovative structure of the Fora sees the work plan within each region being driven by key stakeholders in the region including employers, enterprises and education and training providers. The work of the Fora through facilitation and engagement will contribute to better outcomes for learners and bolster enterprise development. The Fora provide a single point of contact in each region to help employers connect with the range of services and initiatives available across the education and training system; provide more robust labour market information and analysis of employer needs to inform programme development, greater collaboration and utilisation of resources across the education and training system; and enhancement of progression routes for learners. The Fora also provide a structure for employers to become more involved in promoting employment roles and opportunities for career progression in their sectors.



Actions to 2024

Action 6.1: Through the networks available to the Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committee, create a ‘skills working group’ to assist in addressing the enterprise issues in the North-West around skills shortage, talent retention (where it pertains to skills), talent development and upskilling, ensuring the working group bolsters existing initiatives and offers additionality to the overall issue.

| Action Leader: | Action Partners: | For completion by: |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| North-West Regional Enterprise Programme Manager Public Sector Chair | LEOs, IT Sligo, LYIT, Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, ETBs, Local Authorities, LEOs, Regional Skills Manager. | Q4 2024 |

Rationale:

There is considerable work ongoing in the region to try and assist enterprises in the region address some of the issues being experienced with skills. Due to the wide-ranging participation of the steering committee, the intent is to use the networks on the committee to offer additionality and assist in addressing the issue.

Action Outcome:

- Skills working group/workshop hosted to highlight specific issues, get input from private industry and develop initiatives to assist in the skills issues which enterprise is facing in the North-West Q4 2022.
- Using the networks available to the steering committee, develop and implement initiatives (from the workshop hosted) which provide additionality and new solutions to the skills issue in the North-West Q4 2024.



3

Implementation

The consultation process to develop the North-West Regional Enterprise Plan (REP) to 2024 was enhanced by an understanding amongst stakeholders of the importance of ownership, collaboration, and the definition and delivery of specific measurable actions that could add value to the existing activities being undertaken by the Enterprise Agencies, Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) and other relevant bodies involved in supporting enterprise development. These priorities are reflected in the implementation structure for the North-West Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024.

Implementation of the REP will be overseen by a Regional Enterprise Steering Committee. The Steering Committee for the North-West Region will continue to be chaired by Seamus Hughes, and this is welcomed by Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. The functions of the Steering Committee are as follows:

- Oversee and drive delivery of the REP.
- Nominate and secure Public and Private Sector leads, where appropriate, to support delivery of the Strategic Objectives.
- Oversee the formation of working groups as necessary to drive implementation of actions.
- Explore and propagate new ideas and opportunities for collaborative projects and funding opportunities.
- Provide a forum for the sharing of updates and information by members on key enterprise development initiatives including those set out by the Agencies and LEOs in this Plan and other pertinent updates (incl. REDF, RSES, URDF, RRDF Project Ireland 2040 etc.).
- Oversee, contribute to and sign off on Progress Reports to the Department.

The Chairperson will convene at least two meetings of the Steering Committee per year and will present a progress update on the implementation of the Plan. The Chairperson will also lead the Committee in the preparation of both a mid-term and a final progress report, to be submitted to the Department. These reports will be the subject of a meeting between the Chairperson and/or the Steering Committee and the Minister during one of the biannual meetings.

The North-West Regional Steering Committee will oversee the formation of six working groups to drive delivery of each of the strategic objectives and their list of actions in the REP. Working Groups will convene as frequently as is required and will report on progress to the Chairperson and the Regional Steering Committee.

The Department will be responsible for the oversight and coordination of the REPs at national level. A National Oversight Group (NOG), which all Chairpersons attend, will oversee implementation of the new REPs. This group will be chaired by Ministers of State Robert Troy and Damien English and will provide a fora for the Chairs to share good practice and identify potential areas for inter-regional cooperation.



4

North-West Enterprise Agencies and Local Enterprise Offices

The Regional Enterprise Plans to 2024 are based on a collaborative approach to regional enterprise development. The Strategic Objectives and actions identified are set alongside and complement the core activities of the Enterprise Agencies and the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs). Each Agency has corporate strategies which include national level objectives as well as activities that assist specific regional enterprise development potential. This Chapter provides an overview of those Agency activities and that of the LEOs in the North-West Region to 2024.



4.1 Enterprise Ireland: Focus to 2024

Enterprise Ireland is the government organisation responsible for the development and growth of Irish enterprises in world markets. This is achieved in partnership with Irish enterprises to help them start, grow, innovate and achieve international growth. In this way, sustainable economic growth, regional development and secure employment is achieved.

Balanced regional development is central to Enterprise Ireland's remit. A number of regional development funds are managed on behalf of Government in collaboration with key stakeholders in all regions to deliver regional enterprise infrastructure, strengthen the enterprise base and deliver regional growth.

Recent developments in the North-East region

Enterprise Ireland's team of Development Advisors and capability specialists work with over 166 companies employing more than 6,797 people in the North-West Region.



Between 2019-2020, Enterprise Ireland invested €11.3m in companies in the North-West Region assisting employment creation, innovation, competitiveness, and expansion. North-West sectoral strengths include Marine, Medtech, Digital Gaming sectors, BPO/Financial and Engineering.

Enterprise Ireland's team of development advisors and capability specialists work with over 166 companies employing more than 6,797 people in the North-West Region. Between 2019-2020, Enterprise Ireland invested €11.3m in companies in the North-West Region supporting employment creation, innovation, competitiveness and expansion.

A strategic priority is to support successful domestically focussed companies to seek growth through international markets. Enterprise Ireland has recently added a dedicated resource, based in the Letterkenny office, to work with the North-West's successful, non-exporting companies on developing exporting capability and targeting overseas markets for their next phase of growth.

Strong regional clustering is important to enhancing regional enterprise success. Under the Regional Technology Cluster Fund, Enterprise Ireland approved funding of €600k to Sligo and Letterkenny ITs for the Border Region's Manufacturing Cluster Initiative to increase the engagement and connectivity of the three border Institutes of Technology, Sligo, Dundalk and Letterkenny, with Counties Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Cavan, Monaghan and Louth manufacturing SMEs and micro/small companies in particular. This clustering will drive collaboration to strengthen productivity, competitiveness and globalisation in this exposed manufacturing sector, which is facing the urgent issues of Brexit, internationalisation, Automation/ Industry 4.0 and digitalisation, new technologies and the low carbon economy. In addition, the clustering supports the Killybegs Marine Cluster to help boost productivity, increase market share, enhance innovation, and looks to harness the opportunities that the bountiful renewable energy resource off the North-West coast presents.

Enterprise Ireland continues to dedicate significant investment in assisting the regional development initiatives and investments across the North-West Region. Ambitious enterprise development projects that have been bolstered by the REDF (€5.6m) and BEDF (€8.8m) will be significant catalysts and economic drivers for the North-West including the Donegal Digital Innovation Centre; Strand Campus; The AIM Centre, Sligo; The Alpha Innovation Centre, Letterkenny; Leitrim Design House; Leitrim Food Enterprise Zone; Leitrim County Enterprise Fund; Innovation as a Service, Letterkenny; W8 Project, Manorhamilton.



Investment in regional infrastructure that supports innovation and entrepreneurship is central to Enterprise Ireland's regional development strategy. The North-West benefits from important well-established entities such as the three Local Enterprise Offices in the region and a New Frontiers Programme in IT Sligo/Letterkenny IT.

Enterprise Centres are another critical enterprise development tool to which Enterprise Ireland has committed significant funding over several years. In 2020, €800k in development funding was allocated to 9 Enterprise Centres across the North-West in response to COVID-19.

Enterprise Ireland's objectives for the North-West Region to 2024

Enterprise Ireland's development objectives for the North-West to 2024 focus on the dual priorities of delivering an effective and supportive enterprise ecosystem and driving entrepreneurship activity across the North-West Region.

To bolster these objectives, our strategic priorities for the North-West to 2024 include:

- The successful delivery of projects funded under the regional development funds including the Regional Enterprise Development Fund, the Regional Technology Clustering Fund and the Powering the Regions Community Enterprise Centre Scheme.
- Collaboration with local stakeholders to identify gaps in the North-West's enterprise ecosystem and to plan and help fund essential regional enterprise-enabling infrastructure.
- Work with partners such as the LEOs, HEIs and regional accelerators to deliver initiatives that support entrepreneurship and foster an exciting new generation of innovative and ambitious start-ups in the North-West.
- Enterprise Ireland's sectoral and capability specialists will work closely with clients across the North-West Region to assist their growth plans as well as assisting companies on transformation initiatives such as climate change, digitisation and sustainability.
- Broadening and strengthening the North-West's exporting base by identifying and supporting first-time exporters, growing knowledge and capability, and supporting SMEs to scale-up their exporting strategies.
- Drive cluster activity in the North-West in the Marine, Medtech, Digital Gaming sectors, BPO/Financial and Engineering Sectors.
- Continue to strengthen linkages between the North-West's third level and research institutes and industry through the Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund, the Commercialisation Fund, Innovation Partnerships and Innovation Vouchers.

- Promote entrepreneurship in West Donegal in partnership with Údarás na Gaeltachta and, in collaboration with the Atlantic Economic Corridor initiative, to attract and retain entrepreneurs.
- Assist 500 co-working and incubator spaces in the North-West under the #Worksmartchallenge, #SmartAtlanticWay co-working initiative.
- Work with the Regional Skills Forum and our clients to ensure availability and development of appropriate skills and talent to bolster company growth.

Enterprise Ireland is a member of the Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committee for the North-West Region and looks forward to working closely with our partners on the implementation of this Plan and continuing the strong spirit of collaboration and collective effort that is essential to delivering on our ambition for the North-West Region.



4.2 IDA Ireland: Focus to 2024

IDA Ireland’s mission is to partner with multi-national companies (MNCs) to win and develop foreign direct investment, providing jobs for the economic and social benefit of Ireland. IDA Ireland works with key stakeholders both in the public and private sectors to deliver on this mandate. IDA Ireland partners closely with Enterprise Ireland across the Regions on multiple initiatives, including under the Regional Enterprise Plans and in relation to the provision of property solutions to the indigenous base, where appropriate.

IDA Ireland’s strategy Driving Recovery and Sustainable Growth 2021-2024 was developed in the context of the Government’s National Economic Recovery Plan and positions IDA Ireland to respond to the emerging trends that are accelerating as a result of the COVID-19 global pandemic. It identifies the opportunities for sustainable growth among IDA Ireland’s established base of clients through a focus on transformative investments to increase the productivity of Irish operations and their workforce through RDandI, digitisation, training, and actions on sustainability. Crucially it also maintains a focus on attracting the next generation of leading MNCs to locate in Ireland, further driving sustainable growth and maximising the impact of FDI in Ireland to 2024 and beyond.

The Strategy has five pillars:

| | |
|---|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Growth pillar – win investment to support job creation and economic activity |
| 2 | Transformation pillar – partner with clients for future growth in Ireland |
| 3 | Regions pillar – win investment to advance regional development |
| 4 | Sustainability pillar – embrace an inclusive and green recovery; and |
| 5 | Impact pillar – maximise FDI’s positive impact on local businesses and communities |

Regional development is at the centre of IDA Ireland’s strategy. Although FDI cannot be the sole contributor in addressing the challenges facing Ireland’s regions – from Brexit to COVID-19, digital transformation to the climate transition – it can have a significant impact in propelling economic recovery and realising more balanced growth. IDA Ireland is targeting half of all investments (400) from 2021-2024 to regional locations and is maintaining the same high level of investment as targeted in IDA Ireland’s previous strategy for each region of the country.

Under the Regions pillar of *Driving Recovery and Sustainable Growth*, IDA Ireland will:

- Win investment to propel recovery and development in each region;
- Partner with existing regional clients to transform through innovation and upskilling;
- Develop clusters to bolster transformation, spill overs and linkages;
- Collaborate with clients and stakeholders to facilitate remote working opportunities; and
- Continue to roll-out IDA Ireland’s regional property programme, including delivery of 19 Advanced Building Solutions (ABS) to regional locations over the course of the strategy.



The global competition for FDI is intense as countries compete for investment to assist economic recovery. It is in this context – of greater competition for potentially fewer projects – that IDA Ireland wins investment for Ireland and engages with MNCs on the benefits of choosing regional locations for their investment projects. Key to IDA Ireland's success in the past and essential to success in the future is strategic collaboration with national and local stakeholders to ensure that each region has the necessary conditions in place to foster enterprise and innovation and attract investment and talent. The delivery of necessary infrastructure and property solutions, the availability of a skilled and future ready workforce, and an emphasis on quality of life and placemaking in each region are pre-requisites to winning continued investment from MNCs.

Regional Economic Impact of FDI

IDA Ireland client companies directly employed almost 145,000 people outside of Dublin in 2020. Combined with indirect employment of 116,000, an estimated 260,000 jobs in the regions were supported by FDI in 2020. Clients in regional locations had an annual spend of €7.9bn on payroll, €2.7bn on Irish services and €2.2bn on Irish materials in 2019. They contributed a further €1.3bn on in-house R&D. These linkages assist diverse, innovative, and vital local economies.

Over the period 2021-2024 IDA Ireland will:

- Win 800 total investments to assist job creation of 50,000 and economic activity
- Partner with clients for future growth through 170 RD&I and 130 Training investments
- Win 400 investments to advance Regional Development
- Embrace a green recovery with 60 sustainability investments
- Target a 20 percent increase in client expenditure in Ireland to maximise the impact of FDI

Read more about IDA Ireland's 2001-2024 Strategy *Driving Recovery and Sustainable Growth* at www.idaireland.com.

IDA Ireland objectives for the North-West Region to 2024

IDA Ireland Regional Targets are aligned to EU NUTS III Regions which defines the 'Border Region' as comprising the five counties of Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Monaghan, and Sligo. The North-West REP region is therefore a subset of the IDA Ireland Border region. IDA Ireland is targeting 25 investments for the Border Region overall in the period 2021 to 2024.

There are 50 IDA Ireland client companies in the North-West Region comprising Donegal, Sligo and Leitrim. IDA Ireland clients in the North-West are assisted through the agency's offices in the regional growth centres of Sligo and Letterkenny.

IDA Ireland client companies directly employ 7,129 people in the North-West. Both direct and in-direct employment associated with FDI in the North-West provides an estimated 12,832 jobs.

The North-West has a diverse FDI base with leading global companies from the Technology, Life Sciences, Business and Consumer Services, International Financial Services and Engineering and Industrial Technologies sectors. Key clients in the region include Tata Consulting Services, Abbott, AbbVie, Optum, Phillip Medisize, Zeus and PGIM Private Capital. IDA Ireland's strategy to 2024 will build on the strengths and competencies of the region with a particular focus on opportunities arising in Life Sciences, Technology, and services sectors, while also taking advantage of emerging technologies and business models, including home and hub working. IDA Ireland will deliver Advance Building Solutions in Letterkenny and Sligo over 2021-2024. Further upgrade works are also planned on IDA Ireland Parks in the region. The Advanced Building Solution under construction in Sligo is already being marketed to win further FDI.

The North-West has seen a number of new name investments and expansions in recent years. Tata Consulting Services, the largest IT services company in the world by market capitalisation entered the North-West through the acquisition of Pramerica Systems Letterkenny securing 1,500 jobs in the region. Expansions have been announced by SITA (55 jobs) and Druva (20 jobs) in Donegal, while VistaMed announced a 100-job expansion in Leitrim. New name investments have included Advantio (40 jobs), Hypercurrent (40 jobs) and Eliatra (15 jobs) in Sligo.



IDA Ireland will continue to work with the three Local Authorities in the North-West on 'Placemaking', infrastructure and property initiatives. Work is ongoing to expand and strengthen linkages between IDA Ireland clients and SMEs in the region through cluster development and local initiatives. Regional clusters in the North-West include the Border Region Manufacturing Cluster, ICT Fintech Group, Tech North-West, Atlantic MedTech Cluster, Cyber Ireland, North-West Chapter and the Blue Economy and Marine Cluster.

Strong links will continue to be fostered between businesses and the higher education sector in the North-West, building on initiatives such as Sligo Institute of Technology's participation in NIBRT; the development of the Atlantic MedTech cluster; and Letterkenny Institute of Technology's engagement with client companies to form a North-West chapter of Cyber Ireland. The new Technological University status for the region will greatly augment the region's value proposition.

IDA Ireland is a member of the Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committee for the North-West Region and looks forward to working closely with its regional partners on the implementation of the Regional Enterprise Plan and continuing the strong spirit of collaboration and collective effort that is essential to delivering on IDA Ireland's ambition for the Region.



Local Enterprise Office

4.3 Local Enterprise Office: Focus to 2024

The Local Enterprise Offices aim to promote entrepreneurship, foster business start-ups and develop existing micro and small businesses to drive job creation and to provide accessible high quality initiatives for your business ideas. The Local Enterprise Office is the First Stop Shop for anyone seeking information and initiatives on starting or growing a business in Ireland. Entrepreneurs and Businesses are assisted to:

- Increase exports
- Build resilience
- Increase productivity
- Prepare for the Low carbon economy
- Embrace the Digital economy
- Innovate
- Be managed by ambitious and capable individuals
- Fuel regional growth

Recent Developments in the North-West Region

| Regions | Client Numbers 2021 | Total Jobs 2021 | Net Job Change 2021 |
|------------|---------------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| North-West | 602 | 2,786 | 215 |

The North-West Regional areas of strength are as follows:

- **Food/Seafood and innovation sector** – Each county in the North-West has a strong food brand – Sligo Food Trail, Taste of Leitrim and Donegal Food Coast e.g. Total investment of €200,000 in the development of a Taste Leitrim Food Tourism and Enterprise Zone, consisting of a Visitor Centre, Feasibility Study, Distribution Unit, food events and training.
- **Creative sector** – Each county in the North-West has key strengths in the creative industries – ranging from craft to music to audiovisual – Creative Heartlands (Leitrim, Roscommon and Sligo) secured €371,600 in funding to bring regional initiatives together to harness and grow the creative sector across Sligo, Leitrim and Roscommon. Sligo has received funding for a Digital Gaming campus in Strandhill.
- **Tourism** – the increase in staycations has increased domestic visitor numbers to the North-West e.g. Leitrim enjoys the benefits of dual branding of Wild Atlantic Way/Hidden Heartlands as well as River Shannon and Shannon Erne waterways has opened tourism in Co. Leitrim.
- **Engineering/Fintech/Patient Centric healthcare** – Maximising the opportunities for businesses in these areas of strength e.g. Pointed cluster development, courses and initiatives for these areas are an area of concentration, AIM (Advancing Innovation in Manufacturing and Supply Chain Logistics) project with funding from Enterprise Ireland, EU, IT Sligo and Sligo County Council.
- **Course provision** – The performance of the LEO in the North-West with regard to project approvals, workshop and programme delivery remains strong. With the arrival of the COVID pandemic there was an unprecedented demand for initiatives and engagement with the LEO and thus a significant increase in the programmes and workshops e.g. The delivery by Donegal of an Investment Accelerator in 2019 with participants from Dublin, Sligo and the east coast of the USA, Design and delivery of a Female pre-accelerator programme in 2020 which was also open to members of the Donegal Diaspora and from which four promoters have already received assistance from the LEO.



Significant developments in the North-West: Further Development of the Food Industry

- Technological University for the region in prospect.
- The region has been awarded 14.4m in REDF and BEDF funding.
- Some investment in roads infrastructure particularly around Sligo.
- Major investment in attractions (Maritime Centre, National Mountain Biking Centre, walking trails, etc.).
- Significant funding secured by the LEOs to assist businesses respond to Brexit and COVID, with focused programmes on retail, exporting, green business, innovation and finance e.g. Delivery and achievement of the targets for the LEO under the cross-border Co-Innovate programme led by InterTradeIreland and on which LEO Donegal represents the border LEOs on its management committee.
- LEO are advancing technology usage and uptake among businesses through e.g. ToVs, using social media for business, digital marketing, google webinar promotion, etc. whilst also focusing on assisting them become more competitive through various other programmes including LEAN, mentoring, etc.

Local Enterprise Office objectives for the North-West Region to 2024

For the next plan period several key national and local challenges will need to be prioritised and addressed by the Local Enterprise Offices while focusing on the local and regional strengths in the area. These include:

Development of the Enterprise Ecosystem

New approaches to ecosystem and courses include the creation of an ambitious and innovative new approach to creating a vibrant enterprise ecosystem within the region. While it is likely that this will take a considerable period to achieve there is a real need to address this challenge if the region is to compete at national and international level. We aim to get a better understanding and innovative response to the challenges facing new-start up creation. It is hoped that research undertaken by Lancaster University on the RAP 2020 will assist in this area.

The generation of an increased number of new scalable start-up firms eligible for direct financial initiatives from the enterprise agencies. E.g. The presence of the Organic Centre and The Food Hub has led to several new food businesses being established in Leitrim and in the development of the Taste Leitrim brand. The plan is to further enhance these developments in the northwest through strategic linkages and to progress the PGI application for boxty in the region.

Further enhancement of Creative Sector

Continue the strong initiatives in the Creative Coast and Creative Heartlands.

Tourism and Recreation

Continue to develop the North-West counties brand whilst growing a sustainable environmentally friendly industry.

Digitalisation/Innovation

The Local Enterprise Offices have adapted training and mentoring to online which has further reach resulting in a positive impact on the environment and more quality time, resulting in cost savings. The continuation of the TOV scheme to those who have received one voucher has enabled more businesses to participate/engage in the digital economy and enhance or upgrade their existing presence.

Development of the enablers to the Enterprise Ecosystem

- **Skills base** – Enhancing the skills base within existing firms and the provision of skilled labour to encourage indigenous and FDI investments. Addressing the financial management, productivity and innovation management capabilities of small and micro business owners and managers as identified by the OECD report.
- Maximising the opportunities for businesses in areas such as the **green economy, digitalisation and smart industries**.
- Enhancing the ambition and capabilities of local firms to **grow, scale, and export**.
- The development of **sectoral initiatives and clusters** at both local and regional level – e.g. LEO Donegal has been engaging pro-actively with the food, engineering, and creative sectors in the county.



5



Complementary Strategies and Initiatives



Through these regional brand development initiatives, Fáilte Ireland has worked closely with a wide range of industry and stakeholder partners towards the sustainable development of tourism in the North-West.

5.1 Fáilte Ireland: Focus to 2024

As the National Tourism Development Authority, Fáilte Ireland's role is to assist the long-term sustainable growth in the economic, social, cultural and environmental contribution of tourism to Ireland. In addition to helping to develop destinations, Fáilte Ireland also provides consumer and buyer insights, mentoring, business initiatives and training programmes and buyer platforms to help tourism businesses innovate and grow.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, Fáilte Ireland's mission over the next three years is to assist the survival and drive the recovery of the sector in order to maximise the sustainable economic, environmental, cultural and social contribution of tourism to Ireland. It is also Fáilte Ireland's objective to spread the benefits of tourism more evenly around the country.

The North-West Region is served by two of Fáilte Ireland's regional tourism brands, Ireland's Hidden Heartlands and the Wild Atlantic Way. Fáilte Ireland is currently preparing a suite of four Regional Tourism Strategies (one for each of the four Regional Tourism Brands), which will be published in early 2022.

Since March 2020, with the onset of COVID-19, Fáilte Ireland has delivered significant business initiatives, by way of direct grant-aid, mentoring and training. Destination Recovery Task Forces were established to provide targeted initiatives to tourism businesses.

At the same time, Fáilte Ireland has remained focused on the medium-to-long term sustainable recovery and development of tourism in the region. For example, the preparation of the Wild Atlantic Way Route Review, and the preparation of Destination Experience Development Plans (DEDPs) for County Sligo, Inishowen, West Donegal and South Donegal. Led by Waterways Ireland and in association with Fáilte Ireland and the ten Local Authorities (including Leitrim County Council), a Shannon Tourism Masterplan was prepared for the Shannon and the Shannon-erne Waterway. These plans are aimed at unlocking the tourism potential of the region through a range of targeted strategic initiatives.



Fáilte Ireland's objectives for the North-West region to 2024

The overall tourism objective for the North-West Region is to continually increase visitor numbers by raising awareness of the region as a visitor destination through sustained domestic marketing and sales promotion, and by substantiating the Wild Atlantic Way and Ireland's Hidden Heartlands brand propositions with exciting saleable visitor experiences that appeal to our target audiences. Fáilte Ireland will also work with Tourism Ireland to ensure awareness of all that's new in the North-West Region such that it informs their international marketing activity as well.

- Continuing to raise awareness of the region as a visitor destination and of the range of things for visitors to see and do.
- Providing a range of business initiatives focused on meeting the particular needs of tourism businesses in the region in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic over the next three years.
- Implementation of the findings of the Wild Atlantic Way Route Review.
- Working with a range of industry and stakeholder partners to prepare a series of Destination Development Plans that will agree the shared development priorities that will improve both the destinations' appeal and the experience they offer on the ground; and by extension, help to increase visitor dwell time and spend in the region.
- Helping tourism providers to secure new business by introducing them to new markets and buyers and helping them to secure incremental sales. In particular, helping them to hone their saleable experiences to ensure they are picked up by domestic and international tour operators.
- Liaising with Local Authorities and other State Agencies such as Coillte, Waterways Ireland, the OPW and in optimising the benefit of state assets and attractions for tourism, in particular through the development of new tourism infrastructure and products which can be leveraged by tourism enterprises to create new jobs.

- Complete the development of a master plan for the Beara Breifne Way and for Malin Head with a view to unlocking the tourism potential of these assets. Ensuring that the potential of existing strategic tourism infrastructure, assets and facilities is fully explored and that they are fully leveraged by tourism businesses in order to create new enterprises and jobs, in particular, the Surf Centre in Sligo, the new cultural plaza in Sligo town, the beach facilities at Rosses Point and Enniscrone, and the mountain bike trail centre in Coolaney. Donegal will see a significant investment in Fort Dunree as a strategically important large-scale visitor attraction which will unlock regional dispersal of visitors and extend the tourism season in these regions beyond the traditional summer months
- Establishing and assisting a range of effective commercially-focused tourism business networks throughout the region and helping them to cross-promote and cross-sell one another.
- Aiding the digital transformation of the tourism industry in the region through a 'Digital that Delivers' initiative, aimed at providing improved online presence and bookability for tourism businesses, enhancing their connected distribution and improving their digital skills.
- Develop and execute a sustained strategy for Tourism Skills and Careers to both attract and retain staff within the tourism industry – the absence of staff represents an existential crisis as businesses capacity to trade is being restricted.

As a member of the Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committee for the North-West Region Fáilte Ireland looks forward to continuing the strong spirit of collaboration and collective effort that is essential to delivering on its ambition for the North-West Region.



5.2 Regional Skills Forum: Focus to 2024

The National Skills Strategy to 2025 provides a framework for skills development that drives Ireland's growth both economically and societally. One of the key elements of the Strategy was the development of a National Skills Council (NSC) and nine Regional Skills Fora (RSF). The Fora structure fosters engagement and collaboration between relevant Government Departments and agencies, the education (Further and Higher) and training system, and enterprise.



The RSF seek to bring people together at local and regional level, to identify, interrogate and validate skills needs, and to ensure that employers and enterprise are linked with the appropriate resources across the education and training system. The RSF provide an opportunity for employers and the education and training system to work together to meet the emerging skills needs of their regions. The RSF work to ensure the availability of skills and talent to realise the region's economic potential and address upskilling requirements.

The Regional Skills Forum leads a number of key activities in each region:

- acting at local and regional level, to drive forward the National Skills Strategy;
- assisting local enterprises identify skills needs to ensure that the region has the effective use of skills to assist economic and social prosperity;
- linking (once skills needs have been identified) companies with regional education and training providers best suited to responding to identified skills need; and
- assisting with actions in the Regional Enterprise Plan where linkages to Education and Training Providers are required.

The North-West Region, covering the counties of Donegal, Sligo and Leitrim, boasts a diverse industry sector comprising large multinational companies such as TCS, Optum and Abbott, as well as dynamic indigenous companies such as Cora Systems, SL Controls and Seaquest. The region's ability to continue to grow and attract investment will be dependent on readily available talent and highly skilled workers. The North-West Regional Skills Forum (NWRSF) is committed to facilitating structured engagement between the region's employers and education/training providers to strengthen the quality of and alignment between local talent supply and industry demand.

The region has long established strengths in life sciences, business services, technology, advanced manufacturing and engineering, while more recent years have seen growth of activity across marine, creative, food and the tourism sectors. To help drive further growth and new business investment the NWRSF will continue to utilise sectoral skills audits as a means of profiling the unique skills needs of employers in the region and develop appropriate local responses working with education and training providers and other partners.

In the past the NWRSF has produced regional skills audits in the manufacturing sector and the ICT and FinTech sector, and there is a cyber security skills audit currently underway. The objective of these skills audits is to articulate and collate the talent requirement of enterprises in the North-West Region, to inform local education and training providers about the skills needs of employers in the various sectors, influence curriculum development to better reflect the needs of local industry, and to offer direction and insight to job seekers wishing to pursue careers in related sectors.

The NWRSF will assist the actions in the North-West Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024 where there is a focus on the availability of skills and talent to realise the region's economic potential and will work with the other partners and agencies to achieve same.



5.3 The Regional Assembly

The Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA) covers eight counties containing nine Local Authorities namely – Cavan, Donegal, Galway, Leitrim, Mayo, Monaghan, Roscommon and Sligo County Councils and Galway City Council.

Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy

One of the principal functions of the Assembly is the delivery of a Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES), which sets out the strategic regional development framework for the region. The primary aim of the RSES is to implement [Project Ireland 2040, the National Planning Framework](#) (NPF), at the regional tier of Government and to assist NPF policy for achieving balanced regional development.

The Region's priorities for investment are identified in the RSES and Metropolitan Area Strategic Plans (MASPs) and set a 12-year strategic planning and economic development framework for future economic, spatial, and social development for the region in line with vision and objectives for national change in the NPF and the National Development Plan (NDP).

The Regional Assembly's RSES also aims to develop a sustainable, competitive, inclusive and resilient regional economy. Key to delivering this vision is ensuring the region develops a strong and diverse economic base and with immediate challenges such as COVID-19, Brexit, Just Transition and potential vulnerabilities for Ireland's enterprise base.



Alignment of the economic principles of the RSES and Regional Enterprise Plan (REP) is critical to underpin the achievement of national strategic outcomes at the regional and local level and give regional assistance for the implementation of actions identified through the REP. This is also of key relevance for EU cohesion funding in Ireland for the period 2021-2027 and the development of priorities under the ERDF 2021-2027 Programme. The Regional Assembly has an enhanced role in the management of this programme which will have a focus on smart cities and a smart region, lower carbon emissions, climate resilience and urban regeneration, themes that assist priorities and actions under the REP.

The RSES for the Northern and Western region can be found here: www.nwra.ie/rses



5.4 Local Authorities – Local Economic and Community Plans

Local Authorities are the key agents of government responsible for local and community development at local level. The Local Government Reform Act 2014 strengthened the role of Local Authorities towards economic, social and community development.

The Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs), as provided for in the Local Government Reform Act 2014, set out, for a six-year period, the objectives and actions needed to promote and bolster the economic development and the local and community development of the relevant local authority area, both by itself directly and in partnership with other economic and community development stakeholders.

The Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) has statutory responsibility for the LECPs overall and additional responsibility for the Local Community Development Committees who are charged with the development and the delivery of the Community elements of the LECP. The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH) have statutory responsibility for the Economic elements of the LECP. The local authorities are responsible for the development and implementation of the economic elements of the LECP through the relevant Strategic Policy Committee.

The purpose of the community elements of the LECP is to promote local and community development and to ensure the coordination of relevant public funded local and community development actions in a way that reduces duplication, targets available resources where they are most needed and maximises benefits for communities. The focus of the community elements of the LECP should be on the social and economic issues that have relevance and can be addressed at a community level.

The development of the economic elements of the LECP is part of the wider role of economic development in local government. Revised guidelines on the development of LECPs to assist with the development of local area plans were published in November 2021.

As the framework for the economic and community development of the local authority area, the LECP is also the primary mechanism at local level to bring forward relevant actions arising from national and regional strategies and policies that have a local remit.

The development of the economic elements of the LECP is part of the wider role of economic development in local government. Revised guidelines on the development of LECPs to assist with the development of local area plans were published in November 2021. These new guidelines reinforce the important role of communities in determining the needs and priorities of their local area.

As the framework for the economic and community development of the local authority area, the LECP is also the primary mechanism at local level to bring forward relevant actions arising from national and regional strategies and policies that have a local remit.



Appendices

Appendix 1: Membership of the Regional Steering Committee

| |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Chair Regional Enterprise Plan: |
| Seamus Hughes, General Manager and Director, Zeus Industrial Products Ireland |
| Programme Manager: |
| Anne McTernan |
| Membership of the Committee: |
| Sligo County Council |
| Leitrim County Council |
| Donegal County Council |
| Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment |
| IDA Ireland |
| Enterprise Ireland |
| LEO Sligo |
| LEO Leitrim |
| LEO Donegal |
| North-West Regional Skills Forum |
| Sligo IT |
| LYIT |
| Regional ETBs |
| Northern and Western Regional Assembly |
| Western Development Commission |
| Ibec |
| Private company representatives |
| Other groups where initiatives are supported e.g. Cross border groups |



Appendix 2: North-West Statistical Snapshot

| | | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|---------|--------------------------|
| Constituent counties | Donegal, Leitrim and Sligo | | |
| North-West Population | 256,771 ¹ | | |
| Persons aged 15 years and over in Employment | 196,700 ² | | |
| ILO Participation Rate | 62% ³ | | |
| ILO Unemployment Rate | 3.7% ⁴ | | |
| Persons aged 15 years and over in Employment (Male) | 107,400 ⁵ | | |
| Persons aged 15 years and over in Employment (Female) | 89,300 ⁶ | | |
| Persons aged 15 years and over in Employment from Q1 2015 ⁷ – Q3 2021 | Q1 2015 | Q3 2021 | |
| | 169,400 | 196,700 | |
| Actual Increase in Employment between from Q1 2015 – Q3 2021 | 27,300 | | |
| Employment Growth Rate between Q1 2015 – Q3 2021 | 16.1% | | |
| Persons aged 25 years and over on Live Register in the Border region at 01/12/2021 | 50,304 ⁸ | | |
| Persons in receipt of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment at 07/12/2021 in the North-West | 2,169 ⁹ | | |
| Irish-owned Companies – Total Employment in the Border ¹⁰ , 2015-2020 ¹¹ | 2015 | 2020 | Change between 2015-2020 |
| | Jobs: | 15,363 | 18,043 |
| Foreign-owned Companies – Total Employment in the North-East, 2015-2020 ¹² | 2015 | 2020 | Change between 2015-2020 |
| | Jobs: | 9,426 | 11,221 |

1. 2016 CSO Census
2. Q3 2021 CSO Labour Force Survey (Border Region)
3. Q3 2021 CSO Labour Force Survey (Border Region)
4. Q3 2021 CSO Labour Force Survey (Border Region)
5. Q3 2021 CSO Labour Force Survey (Border Region)
6. Q3 2021 CSO Labour Force Survey (Border Region)
7. Launch of the Regional Action Plan for Jobs
8. CSO Live Register
9. <https://www.gov.ie>
10. Border region – Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Louth, Cavan, Monaghan
11. Annual Employment Survey 2020
12. Annual Employment Survey 2020



Appendix 3: Other State Agencies and Bodies Supporting Enterprise Development

Bord Bia

Bord Bia, the Irish Food Board, is responsible for the development of new markets and the promotion of Irish food, drink and horticulture, reporting to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. The agency's mandate covers trade development, promotion, quality programmes, information provision and marketing assistance especially for export markets. Bord Bia operates in thirteen overseas locations. Its Origin Green programme is the only sustainability programme in the world that operates on a national scale, uniting government, the private sector and food producers.

Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM)

BIM is the state agency with responsibility for developing the Irish sea-fishing and aquaculture industries. BIM's mission is to lead the sustainable development of a competitive, market-led, innovative and quality-driven Irish seafood industry, maximising the returns to industry stakeholders and the socio-economic contribution to communities in coastal regions in particular. BIM is focused on expanding the volume, quality and value of output from the Irish seafood industry. It provides a range of advisory, financial, technical and training services to all sectors of the Irish seafood industry. BIM's Strategy 2013-2017 is an action plan that aims to deliver 1,200 jobs and €1bn seafood sales by building scale and enhancing competitiveness in the Irish seafood sector.

InterTradelreland

InterTradelreland's mission is to assist businesses, through innovation and trade initiatives, to take advantage of North/South co-operative opportunities to improve capability and drive competitiveness, jobs and growth. InterTradelreland helps small businesses through a strong mix of funding initiatives, business intelligence and meaningful contacts. It helps companies not only with funding, but also with specialist expertise and introductions.

Skillnet Ireland

Skillnet Ireland was established in 1999 and is funded from the National Training Fund through the Department of Education. The primary objective of Skillnet Ireland is to increase participation in enterprise training by companies. Skillnet Ireland fosters an enterprise led approach to workforce development. The process of determining training needs and coordinating the delivery of training, is primarily owned by the enterprise groups engaged with Skillnet Ireland. Skillnet Ireland operates under a joint investment model, part-funded by matching contributions from participating businesses in our learning networks. Encouraging enterprise to lead the process in this way helps ensure that programmes delivered through Skillnet Ireland are highly relevant to the needs of industry.

This approach also enables cohesive enterprise networking and the flexibility to respond to ever-changing skills demands through both formal and informal learning. Through 65 plus Skillnet Learning Networks, Skillnet Ireland allocates funding to groups of companies in the same industry sector (or region) and with similar training needs, so they can deliver subsidised training for their teams. Skillnet Ireland also plays a key role in assisting and enabling Skillnet funded groups to reach their full potential.



Science Foundation Ireland (SFI)

Science Foundation Ireland is the national foundation for investment in scientific and engineering research, operating under the auspices of DBEI. SFI invests in academic researchers and research teams who are most likely to generate new knowledge, leading edge technologies and competitive enterprises in the fields of science, technology, engineering and maths. SFI has assisted the establishment of 17 National Research Centres, aligned with the research priority areas set out in Ireland's research prioritisation exercise (which is currently being refreshed). SFI plays a key role in developing international relationships in the research and innovation domain. It is instrumental in raising Ireland's profile and visibility as a location of research excellence in international markets, thus strengthening Ireland's attractiveness for overseas investment.

Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI)

The purpose of the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) is to play a leading role in transforming Ireland into a society based on sustainable energy structures, technologies and practices. SEAI provides a range of programmes and services to homes, businesses, schools and communities. It is a key actor in providing research and advice to Government on sustainable energy policy, including renewables and energy efficiency.

Western Development Commission

The Western Development Commission (WDC) is a statutory body that was established in 1997 to promote social and economic development in the Western Region (the counties of Donegal, Leitrim, Sligo, Mayo, Roscommon, Galway and Clare). It has a statutory obligation to advise the government on issues that impact on the Western Region and to promote government policy directed at improving social and economic standards here.

It manages the WDC Investment Fund, which provides loans and equity to businesses and local communities in the region. The work of the WDC is outlined in their 'Work Smarter, Live Better' strategy. Published in 2019 it sets out the roadmap of the organisation for the following five years. The strategy is built on three pillars: regional promotion; regional leadership; and sustainable enterprise, reflecting the organisation's strategic goals in the short, medium and long terms. In the short term, the focus of the WDC is to raise the profile of the region and reach a wider audience, particularly those seeking to live or work here. The western region is an area of remarkable physical beauty, situated on Ireland's Atlantic coast, Europe's western edge and a natural entry point from the US, Canada and the Americas.

In terms of regional leadership this includes medium-term goals to build cohesion across the region, through significant projects such as the Atlantic Economic Corridor. It also shows support for the shift to remote and distributed work, which offers significant scope for rural and regional growth. This pillar of the WDC's strategy also covers both national and EU projects that explore and assess new ways of working and collaborating and provide the platform for forward thinking and regional resilience.



The Atlantic Economic Corridor

The Atlantic Economic Corridor (AEC) is a consortium of geographical, sectoral and thematic interests, with a singular goal to transform the Atlantic Economy encompassing the nine western seaboard counties of Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Mayo, Roscommon, Galway, Clare, Limerick and Kerry. The consortium is driven by business representatives and communities and supported by national and local government and State agencies. The region represented by the AEC has a total population of 1.7 million people and is home to a number of higher education institutions and a wide range of successful businesses, including ambitious start-ups, established multinationals, and indigenous Irish firms prospering in global markets. The AEC seeks to bring together and better harness State and private sector resources to strengthen the region's economic contribution, and to create and attractive place to seize opportunities both in life and work.

The Irish Government has recognised the importance and potential of the AEC in Project Ireland 2040, the overarching national policy that provides a framework for long term planning and investing in Ireland's future. The development of the AEC is also central to both the Northern and Western Region and the Southern Region Economic and Spatial Strategies and features prominently in both the National Planning Framework and the National Development Plan. Each of the 10 Local Authorities within the AEC has appointed an AEC Officer to support and progress the work of the AEC initiative. The Atlantic Economic Corridor initiative aims to lay a strong foundation for the region's economic growth through a broad programme of innovation-led initiatives, with a particular focus on building on the region's natural resources.

The AEC partnership aims to grow our entrepreneurial and innovation culture, encourage infrastructural investment, attract foreign direct investment and support indigenous companies with global ambitions. The initiative seeks to consolidate and align the State capital investment programme with the potential investment of the private sector to strengthen the region's economic contribution and make the Atlantic region a better place in which to live and work.

Waterways Ireland

Waterways Ireland is one of six North-South Implementation Bodies established under the British-Irish Agreement in 1999. It has responsibility for the management, maintenance, development, promotion and restoration of inland navigable waterways, principally for recreational purposes. The waterways under the remit of the Body are the Shannon-erne Waterway, the Shannon, the Erne Navigation, the Barrow Navigation, the Grand Canal, the Lower Bann, and the Royal Canal.

Enterprise Europe Network (EEN)

The Enterprise Europe Network helps businesses innovate and grow on an international scale. It is the world's largest support network for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with international ambitions. The Network is active in more than 60 countries worldwide. It brings together 3,000 experts from more than 600-member organisations – all renowned for their excellence in business support. The Enterprise Europe Network at Dublin Chamber offers assistance and advice to Leinster SMEs, helping them to make the most of business opportunities beyond Irish and European Union borders. Dublin Chamber's services include a free international partner sourcing service, advice on new markets, advice on access to finance and funding, advice on EU legislation, and networking opportunities with international trade missions.



Appendix 4: Our Rural Future – Rural Development Policy 2021–2025

Introduction

Our *Rural Future-Rural Development Policy 2021-2025* is the most ambitious and transformational policy for rural development in Ireland for decades.

The vision of the policy is for a thriving rural Ireland which is integral to our national economic, social, cultural and environmental wellbeing and development, which is built on the interdependence of urban and rural areas, and which recognises the centrality of people, the importance of vibrant and lived-in rural places, and the potential to create quality jobs and sustain our shared environment.

The policy contains more than 150 commitments for delivery across the whole-of-Government for both short-term recovery and longer-term development. It has a five-year timeframe, with updates on delivery provided by a series of Progress Reports. Annual work programmes allow for the review and revision of priorities contained in the measures for delivery.

Policy Objectives

The policy aims to bring about improved opportunities and a better quality of life for people who live and work in rural areas, through balanced regional development, benefitting individuals, families, communities and businesses.

We want to see more people living and working in rural Ireland, rural towns as vibrant hubs for commercial and social activity, reduced regional income disparities, improved access to public services such as transport links, rural Ireland benefitting from the transition to a more sustainable future and rural communities – especially young people – having an active role in shaping their future.

Funding streams

The level of activity across Government in recent months highlights delivery of the Policy's ambition. The Government's commitment to rural Ireland is also evidenced in the unprecedented capital investment of €850m provided under the revised *National Development Plan* for rural development projects to 2025, across a range of areas such as remote working facilities, rural regeneration projects and outdoor amenities. This includes huge levels of assistance for important projects under the Department of Rural and Community Development's (DRCD) Rural Development Investment Programme.

DRCD initiatives include:

- Revitalisation of rural town centres through the €1bn Rural Regeneration and Development Fund.
- Investment of €220m through the LEADER Programme.
- Provision of funding for other programmes such as the Small-Scale Rural Projects (CLÁR), Town and Village Renewal, Local Improvement Scheme for non-public roads, Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme and Connected Hubs Fund.



Appendix 5: Shared Island Initiative

Shared Island Opportunities from the Shared Island Initiative

There is significant potential to grow the all-island economy, driving growth and job creation North and South. This will make a vital contribution to recovery, particularly in border areas which have been acutely impacted by the pandemic and by Brexit.

As part of the Shared Island initiative, the Government will invest to enhance the all-economy, working with the Executive in Northern Ireland and with the British Government. In the revised National Development Plan, the Government will set out an enhanced level of ambition for investment to build a more connected, prosperous and sustainable island. Through the Shared Island Fund, €500m is provided out to 2025, ring-fenced for investment in North/South projects – including in research and innovation, education and training, sustainable transport and addressing the challenges of the Border regions – to take up the opportunities of our shared island.

The Government will also continue to fully assist the work of InterTradeIreland, in working with enterprises to grow trade across the island, dealing with the impacts of Brexit and pandemic, and developing sectors with most potential for the island, including in bioeconomy, advanced manufacturing, health and life sciences and the green economy.

The PEACE PLUS programme – funded by the European Union and UK Government, together with the Irish Government and Northern Ireland Executive – will also provide significant assistance for economic regeneration and transition in Northern Ireland and the six Southern border counties, including to enhance SME competitiveness and research and innovation capacity, and fund skills development as well as smart towns and villages.

North-West REP

Operating on a cross-border basis is an important part of growth strategy and of supply chains for enterprises, right across the North-West Region.

Business look to the wider cross-border region for their customer base, for employees and for new partnerships and innovation opportunities.

This Regional Enterprise Plan takes full account of the extent of cross-border economic integration in the North-West Region, and of the opportunities at business and sector levels of working with a cross-border focus.

In recent years, the Government's Regional Enterprise Development Fund and Border Enterprise Development Fund have made investments to assist enterprise opportunities with a cross-border dimension. This cross-border focus will be continued and expanded to promote and facilitate enterprise development on a cross-border basis including to enhance clustering, innovation diffusion and collaboration.

There is also important cross-border collaboration on skills and training to meet the needs of business in the North-East region, which will be fully assisted and expanded.



Appendix 6: Regional Enterprise Development Funding

Regional Enterprise Development Fund, Border Enterprise Development Fund and Regional Enterprise Transition Scheme

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment's Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF), Border Enterprise Development Fund (BEDF) and Regional Enterprise Transition Scheme (RETS) bolsters the development and implementation of collaborative and innovative projects that can enable and sustain enterprise and employment growth in the regions. Under the RETS, BEDF and the three calls of the REDF to date, the North-West has secured €15.5m in funding for 11 enterprise projects.

Projects approved for North-West Region

| Projects approved award | County | Project description |
|-----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Donegal Digital Innovation CLG | Donegal | Creation of an Innovation Ecosystem through a 3-year Enterprise Capacity Building Programme |
| Leitrim County Enterprise Fund | Leitrim/Cavan/Longford | Three Digital and innovation Hubs |
| Leitrim Food Enterprise Zone | Leitrim, Cavan, Sligo, Donegal | Development of a Food Enterprise Zone to create an infrastructure and support hotspot to cluster and grow food companies. |
| Sligo County Enterprise CLG | Sligo, Mayo, Leitrim | Development of a 12,000 sq. ft Strand Campus for Digital Gaming and Associated Tech |
| The Leitrim Design House CLG | Leitrim | Development of a creative cluster to assist and grow creative enterprises within Sligo, Leitrim, and Roscommon. |
| Donegal County Council | Donegal | This project is a development of a high tech workspace facility in Letterkenny which will include a bespoke pre-accelerator programme for early idea entrepreneurs along with a programme of wrap-around initiatives for businesses. |
| ERNACT | Donegal | Based in Letterkenny, this project will assist the North-West cross-border area, city-region and wider border area to maximise its opportunities for successful transition to the digital economy. |
| Manorhamilton Innovation and Development CLG | Leitrim | This project is an 'Industry 4.0' Innovation and RandD Centre for the Quarry and Construction industry, focusing on robotics and cobotics, artificial intelligence and smart data, virtual reality, augmented reality, 3D Printing, software development to develop new prototypes or products and upskill staff, within both industries. |
| Sligo Leitrim ITS Regional Development Projects DAC | Sligo | Based in Sligo, this Digital Futures Manufacturing Centre, (DFMC) will promote knowledge and implementation of cutting-edge innovation to stimulate industry and 3 rd level collaboration across the region. |
| Manorhamilton Innovation and Leitrim | Development CLG | Manorhamilton Innovation and Development (MID) has developed an innovation and RandD Centre for the quarry and construction industries in Industry 4.0 with a core focus on robotics, cobotics, software development, AR/VR and 3D printing. |
| Donegal Digital Innovation Hub | Donegal | The primary goal of Donegal Digital is the development of a digital innovation hub including 3-year capacity building innovation programme based in Buncrana, Inishowen, Co. Donegal. The centre partners are Donegal County Council, LYIT, ERNACT/CoLab, Inishowen Development Company and the Donegal LEO. |
| Total North-West REDF, BEDF and RETS Funding | €15,596,706 | |



Appendix 7: Methodology

The process to develop these Regional Enterprise Plans involved the following steps:

| | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| January 2021 | A round of initial consultations with key stakeholders was undertaken by the Department including the Chairpersons of the Regional Steering Committees, Agency representatives, Programme Managers, and other key organisations represented on the Regional Steering Committees. The bilateral discussions focused on what worked/didn't work well over the period of the outgoing Regional Enterprise Plans. |
| February-March 2021 | In February 2021 the Tánaiste wrote to the Chairpersons of the Regional Steering Committees formally setting out the Department's intention to develop new Plans to 2024. |
| February-May 2021 | The Tánaiste and Ministers of State formally launched the commencement of the process to develop Regional Enterprise Plans to 2024 with meetings of the nine Regional Steering Committees in virtual sessions around the country. Each Committee established a Project Delivery Team for the process, led by the Steering Committee chairperson. |
| March-May 2021 | Each of the Project Delivery Teams met to review the outgoing Regional Plans and considered future thematic areas of focus and agreed an approach for a formal stakeholder consultation with the wider Steering Committee members and other relevant stakeholders. |
| May-August 2021 | An online facilitated Stakeholder Consultation event was held in eight of the nine regions; with a series of bilateral stakeholder engagements and focus group discussions undertaken in the South-East Region. Participants considered topics including: enterprise resilience, smart specialisation, placemaking, transition-climate, digitalisation. |
| July-October 2021 | The Project Delivery Teams re-grouped to consider the consultation outcomes and further develop emerging themes into Strategic Objectives and to identify suitable actions for delivery in the period to 2024 |
| November-December 2021 | The Draft Final Regional Enterprise Plans were signed off by the Project Delivery Teams and Steering Committees. |
| February 2022 | Memo for Government considered by Cabinet and noted the Department's intention to publish the nine Regional Enterprise Plans. |



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