An Roinn Fiontar,
Turasóireachta agus Fostaíochta
Department of Enterprise,
Tourism and Employment

MIDLANDS

Regional Enterprise Plan 2022-2025

Final Progress Report



Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment
www.enterprise.gov.ie



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Minister's Foreword

I am pleased to present this Final Progress Report on the implementation of the Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan to 2025. The Midlands region comprises the counties of Offaly, Laois, Longford and Westmeath, and since 2022, the focus has been on ensuring its economic vitality and integral role in shaping the broader economy of the country.

Regional Enterprise Plans are bottom-up initiatives, developed and led by regional stakeholders, which focus on collaborative initiatives to strengthen the enterprise environment in each region. Each Regional Enterprise Plan is tailored to reflect regional strengths and opportunities and are aligned to the National Smart Specialisation Strategy for Innovation 2022-2027 and national enterprise policy priorities such as decarbonisation and digitalisation.

To support balanced regional development and the implementation of the Regional Enterprise Plans, my Department, through Enterprise Ireland, has made available over €150 million in regional enterprise development funding since 2017. Schemes such as the Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF) have seen substantial investment in enterprise centres and hubs around the country, delivering supports to businesses in line with regional strengths. In the Midlands, just under €7 million was allocated for five projects through the REDF. This funding was complemented by the Smart Regions Enterprise Innovation Scheme, launched in 2023.

The implementation of the Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan has been significantly strengthened through support from the Just Transition Fund; co-funded by the Government and the EU and designed to support the region's transition to a low-carbon economy. This funding is not simply an economic stimulus; it is a promise to the people of the Midlands that their future will be one of opportunity and help the Midlands not only move towards a new green future, but to ensure that it has a strong path to thrive and be a great place to live, study and work.

Under the Plan, strategic sectors such as advanced manufacturing, med-tech, and life sciences have been supported through targeted investment, collaborative initiatives, and innovative programmes. A defining feature of this initiative has been the spirit of collaboration. Government agencies, local authorities, educational institutions, business representative bodies and local industry have worked together to address challenges and seize opportunities, ensuring the Midlands is well positioned to compete nationally and internationally.

Over the lifetime of the Plan, the region has supported entrepreneurs and innovation, strengthened industry-aligned skills development, and undertaken significant work to increase the region's national and international profile through a range of initiatives – including delivery of the Midlands Food and Drink Strategy, development of the Cube, a national centre of excellence focused on supporting the low-carbon and renewables industry, and joining the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities. This work is paying dividends with the Financial Times naming the Midlands as a 'European Region of the Future'.

While challenges remain, the achievements documented in this report reflect the dedication and vision of all stakeholders. I have been heartened by the collaboration on display and encourage all stakeholders to continue to work together to deliver real results for the Midlands.

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to Chairperson Anne Cusack and interim Chairperson Paul Madden for their leadership and drive; they made a significant impact bringing their wealth of experience to bear in this voluntary role. I would also like to thank the current Programme Manager Deirdre Hunt and her predecessor Sarah Morgan, the members of the Steering Committee and all regional partners whose commitment has been instrumental in delivering on the actions in the Regional Enterprise Plan.



My Department commissioned an independent review of the Regional Enterprise Plan initiative in 2025, which consulted widely with regional stakeholders and provided an opportunity to take stock of our approach. Taking on board the findings of the review, we will continue to build on what has been achieved and strengthen our support for regional enterprise development into the future.

Peter Burke TD
Minister for Enterprise, Tourism and Employment

Chairperson's Introduction

It is a privilege, as Acting Chair of the Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committee, to present this Final Progress Report, marking the conclusion of the *Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan 2022–2025*. This report captures the delivery of an ambitious programme of work and reflects the collective effort, collaboration and commitment that has characterised the Midlands throughout the lifetime of the Plan.

The period covered by this Plan has been one of significant change and challenge. The Midlands has been at the forefront of Ireland's transition to a low-carbon economy, experiencing early and concentrated impacts arising from decarbonisation, while also responding to broader global, economic and technological shifts. Against this backdrop, the Regional Enterprise Plan provided a clear and practical framework to support enterprise, communities and workers, while positioning the region for sustainable, long-term growth.

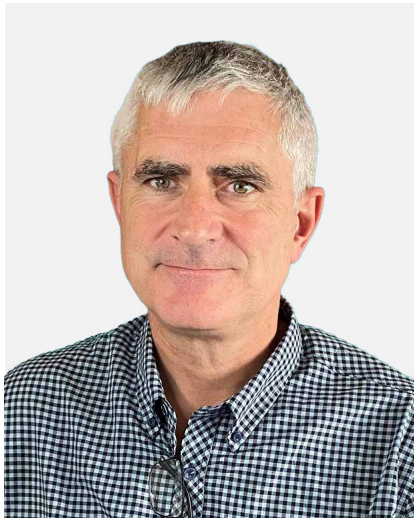
The Plan was structured around three strategic objectives: transitioning to a net zero-carbon economy; building on sectors of competitive advantage through smart specialisation and digitalisation; and strengthening placemaking to position the Midlands as a community of choice in which to live, work, study, invest and visit. As this report demonstrates, tangible progress has been achieved across each of these pillars, supported by strong alignment with national policy and European funding instruments, including the EU Just Transition Fund.

A defining feature of the *Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan* has been its collaborative delivery model. Local Authorities, enterprise agencies, education and training providers, industry representatives, community organisations and Government departments have worked together through the Steering Committee and thematic working groups to ensure actions were grounded in regional need and delivered with pace and purpose. This partnership approach has been central to achievements across climate action, skills development, advanced manufacturing, digitalisation, tourism, food and drink, and place-based enterprise supports.

The establishment of the Smart Connected Technologies and Information and Communications Technology Cluster stands as an important milestone under the Plan, providing a structured platform to leverage the region's strengths in telecommunications, software and digital innovation, and to deepen collaboration between industry, education and the public sector. Alongside this, the growth of the Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest has been transformative, strengthening the region's capacity in research, innovation and skills provision and reinforcing the Midlands' role within Ireland's national innovation ecosystem.

I would like to formally acknowledge the leadership of Dr Anne Cusack, who chaired the Steering Committee during the earlier phases of the Plan, and whose stewardship helped set a strong strategic direction. I also wish to recognise the contribution of Sarah Morgan, Programme Manager and Eileen O'Meara-Hayes during the initial and mid-term phases, whose work laid much of the foundation for delivery.

I extend my sincere thanks to Deirdre Hunt, Acting Programme Manager, for guiding the Plan through its final stages, and to Amanda Spain, whose support has been invaluable in ensuring continuity, momentum and high-quality delivery.



Finally, I thank the members of the Steering Committee and working groups for their sustained commitment, and the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment for its continued engagement and support.

This Final Progress Report represents both a conclusion and a legacy, demonstrating what can be achieved through regional collaboration and providing a strong platform for the Midlands' continued economic and community development into the future.

Paul Madden
Acting Chair, Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committee

Midlands Final Progress Report

This progress report documents overall implementation of the Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan, building on the information in the Midlands Mid-Term Progress Report published in April 2024. The progress report has been prepared and signed off by the Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan (MREP) Steering Committee.

Midlands Highlights

In April 2023, Ireland officially launched the €169 million EU Just Transition Fund (EUJTF) Programme, supported by €84.5 million in EU funding and matched by the Irish Exchequer. Managed by the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA), it targeted the Midlands region—specifically counties Laois, Longford, Offaly, Westmeath, Roscommon, and parts of Galway, Kildare, and Tipperary—to support communities transitioning away from peat extraction.

The aim of the fund is to address the long-term economic transition of the region following the end of commercial peat extraction and peat-fired power generation. It works to support economic diversification, retraining, peatland regeneration, and green infrastructure through various schemes like community grants, enterprise plans, tourism and skills development.

Launched by then Minister for Environment, Climate and Communications, Eamonn Ryan TD, the EU Just Transition Funding directly supported over 170 regional and community-based projects in the wider Midlands Region. The Midlands REP worked closely with the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly, Laois County Council and POBAL to be awarded significant funding under this scheme to support the successful implementation and delivery of the Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan actions to support regional enterprise development in the Midlands. An EU Just Transition funding stream, Pathway to Transition, has seen a number of objectives and actions of the Midlands REP being achieved with some others continuing, for example the Midlands ICT Action Plan Implementation, Midlands Advanced Manufacturing Plan, Midlands Ireland website and Midlands Food and Drink Strategy.

The Midlands Region officially joined the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities. The successful application was made through the Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan, Laois County Council, and the Midlands Regional Skills Forum in late 2025. This designation recognises the region's commitment to lifelong learning, skills development, and facilitating a green, sustainable transition for the workforce. It promotes inclusive education across all ages and supports regional enterprise. Despite other Irish cities having made it on the list, the Midlands is the only region of Ireland to be recognised in this way.

Midlands Ireland promotes lifelong learning through the Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan and Midlands Regional Skills Forum, linking public and private sectors to widen access to learning. The Technological University of the Shannon advances this vision with flexible pathways, blended delivery and recognition of prior learning, while community Learning Gates extend higher education to remote areas. Supported by national and EU frameworks, the Midlands strengthens opportunities for all learners and, as a UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities member, it aims to contribute as a 'learning region' model with inclusive access and green skills development.

Continuing the strong and vital working relationship developed in previous regional enterprise plans, the Midlands REP Programme Manager and Regional Skills Manager are members of each group's steering committees and forums ensuring that the vital place of skills in enterprise is foremost in regional development. The Regional Skills Forum successfully delivered bespoke training in areas such as retrofitting, renewable energy systems, and ICT and puts critical skills and training at the heart of enterprise planning for the region.

The Midlands Region was recognised as a European Region of the Future by the Financial Times. In 2024 the Midlands Region placed 8th in the *Small Regions Category for Foreign Direct Investment Strategy*, and in 2025 the Midlands climbed six places and was ranked 2nd. Regions of the future are identified by factors such as Strategic FDI attraction, Sustainability and Green Initiatives, Digitalisation, Economic Potential and Growth and Innovation Ecosystems. The objectives and actions contained in the Midlands Regional Enterprise 2022-2025 have enabled the Midlands' continued recognition and potential for growth.

Mountlucas, the National Construction Training Centre, was designated the Modern Methods of Construction National Demonstration Park in July 2022 by then Minister for Further and Higher Education, Innovation and Science Simon Harris TD. The *Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan* has significantly assisted in advancing development of Green and Sustainability Skills across the further education and training sector, culminating in a specialised focus by the Laois and Offaly Education Training Board in Construction, Agriculture, and Climate Solutions, and the integration of Green Skills across all Further Education and Training Centres by Longford Westmeath and the Laois Offaly Education and Training Boards.

In Portlaoise, the Cube, a 10,000 sq. ft Low Carbon Midlands-based national centre of excellence focused on facilitating economic growth, innovation and education in the low carbon and renewables industry was officially opened in 2023. This project was supported by Enterprise Ireland's Regional Enterprise Development Fund and Laois County Council. This facility hosts employees from IDA, Enterprise Ireland and Local Enterprise Office client companies and manages the *Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan's Pathway for Just Transition*. The Cube offers consultancy and training to address pressing environmental challenges for businesses, the agricultural sector and communities, while fostering economic growth and societal well-being.

Case Studies from the Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan

1. Case Study 1 - STEM Passport for Inclusion

Strategic Objective No. 2 Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan



STEM passport graduation ceremony at Midlands Showcase 3 December 2025

The *STEM Passport for Inclusion* is opening real routes into digital and STEM careers for young people in the Midlands, with a clear focus on girls in DEIS schools who traditionally face the biggest barriers. The programme gives Transition Year students a university-accredited Level 6 microcredential, structured mentoring, and a CAO points pathway into STEM degrees, directly supporting the Midlands REP's objectives on Smart Specialisation, adoption of digitisation and technology, development of skills, and inclusive growth in the region. Backed nationally by Taighde Éireann - Research Ireland (previously Science Foundation Ireland), the Department of Education, and Microsoft Ireland and strengthened in the Midlands through the Midlands REP EU Just Transition funding – it brings academic quality, industry relevance, and regional ambition together in one model

Delivery in the Midlands has been powered by strong collaboration. Maynooth University and the Technological University of Shannon (TUS): Midlands Midwest worked closely to tailor the programme for local needs, piloting the '21st Century STEM Skills' module in Athlone. TUS then secured approval to award 50 CAO points to graduates, ensuring students have a meaningful and recognised route to third level. Schools such as Meán Scoil Mhuire, Longford, led the way, supported by mentors from Microsoft Ireland, Ericsson, and regional partners who helped broaden exposure, confidence, and career insight.

In December 2025, the Midlands celebrated its first STEM Passport Showcase at TUS Athlone, where 23 students earned their Level 6 qualification. Their achievement aligns with the strong national track record: more than 5,000 female students have taken part across Ireland, supported by over 1,000 mentors and more than 2,500 mentoring hours. Most participants now say they are considering STEM courses and careers. Locally, progress is already visible, with 19 Midlands post-primary schools now teaching Computer Science, strengthening early-stage digital skills and curiosity.

Beyond the numbers, the programme is shifting mindset and identity. Students report increased confidence and a stronger belief that they belong in STEM. Collaboration between universities, local authorities, schools, and industry led by the *Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan* has deepened, and the region now has a clearer, more inclusive talent pipeline aligned to its digital and ICT ambitions.

The experience also offered clear lessons. Codesign and shadowing proved essential for fast, high quality regional rollout, allowing TUS to localise delivery without losing programme integrity. The presence of a formal accreditation and CAO points pathway dramatically boosted interest and progression intent. Local authority leadership was crucial, bringing partners together and giving the initiative visibility among families, schools, and employers. The programme's design also aligns tightly with national priorities – from Smart Specialisation and skills for ICT and advanced manufacturing to Future Jobs Ireland's focus on inclusion, and national STEM education strategies centred on public engagement and microcredentials.

The focus now is on scaling across all Midlands counties, expanding mentoring and work-based experiences, and securing long-term sustainable funding through EU-level, national and regional funding mechanisms. With momentum behind it, the STEM Passport is helping build a stronger, more diverse, and future-ready digital talent base for the Midlands.

2. ReSHAPE, Regional Skills Horizon and Pathways to Employment Strategic Objective No. 2 Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan



Members from Advanced Technologies in Manufacturing (ATIM) Cluster

The Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan's Action 2.1 sets out a clear ambition: to work with the Technological University of the Shannon: (TUS) Midlands Midwest to unlock the full business, industry and skills potential created by Technological University status, supporting regional development through initiatives such as Empower Eco and the Midlands Technology Campus.

The *ReSHAPE* programme, led by TUS in collaboration with the University of Limerick and Munster Technological University, is delivering this ambition in practice. Launched in 2024 with support from the *Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan*, *ReSHAPE* aims to upskill 3,900 people in digital, green and advanced manufacturing skills, offering fully funded pathways that directly strengthen the region's talent base and future economic resilience.

Backed by the European Union's Just Transition Fund, it's a significant boost for the region – helping workers and employers get ready for a low-carbon, tech-driven economy. The programme offers fully funded training with clear pathways into advanced manufacturing, ICT, and sustainability, giving learners the practical skills they need to move into future-focused jobs.

In early 2025, *ReSHAPE* in collaboration with the Midlands Regional Skills Forum and the Advanced Technology in Manufacturing (ATiM) Cluster began to establish a needs led forum on workforce development, training and upskilling opportunities. Following consultation with industry partners, it was identified that there was a significant need for creating space for companies to engage on the challenges faced with workforce development upskilling and training opportunities. The *ReSHAPE* programme created the *Workforce Horizon Series* to give industry a space to openly discuss the workforce challenges emerging across the region. Companies were struggling to access flexible training options, and many could not release staff for long blocks of accredited education. The first Horizon workshop brought together participants from 18 companies and quickly surfaced several shared priorities that would shape the next phase of regional skills development. One of the strongest insights centred on the need to build more competent and confident middle management teams. Companies highlighted a growing skills gap among employees newly progressing into supervisory roles, many of whom needed structured support to strengthen their leadership, communication and decision-making capabilities.

A second strong theme was the need to strengthen career pathways by creating more visible, integrated links between schools, further education, higher education and industry. Employers stressed that young people in the Midlands need clearer information about opportunities, better exposure to real workplaces and greater awareness of progression routes into high-value sectors. Another key concern centred on retention and workforce resilience. Companies described the pressures facing employees and the need to invest in mental health supports, wellbeing initiatives and structured development programmes, from mental health first aid to sustained professional development that encourages people to stay and grow within the region. Leadership development also emerged as a critical theme, with employers emphasising the mix of soft skills and technical skills required for effective modern leadership, and the importance of developing both from early career stages.

These insights directly shaped *ReSHAPE's* next steps. Using programme funding, *ReSHAPE* developed a six-session, industry-informed and industry-led supervisor and team lead training programme, designed to support companies navigating the shift to more sustainable, carbon-neutral operations. This transition is placing new pressures on manufacturing managers, and the new programme – developed in partnership with Ibec – now supports both new and existing supervisors across the Midlands. *ReSHAPE* also rolled out a dedicated middle-management development programme in October 2025, followed by a second delivery in December involving 35 participants from 13 companies.

The *Workforce Horizon Series* has now become a trusted space for employers to talk openly about shared challenges and to work directly with TUS and regional partners on rapid, relevant solutions. It showcases the role of TUS as a regional anchor institution in line with Action 2.1 of the *Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan*. Supporting the Midlands REP and the EU Just Transition Fund's goals for a Green, Smart and Social Territory, *ReSHAPE* is building a more skilled, resilient and future-ready workforce that positions the Midlands to thrive in the next phase of economic transformation.



Overview of the Regional Enterprise Plans

Balanced regional enterprise development is a Government priority; the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment and its agencies contribute to this agenda in several ways, including through the nine Regional Enterprise Plans (REPs).

The Regional Enterprise Plans 2022-2025 were bottom-up plans developed and led by regional stakeholders, which focused on collaborative initiatives to strengthen the enterprise ecosystem in each region. They were considered complementary to the ongoing work of key enterprise stakeholders including IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland. The REPs aimed to help drive economic growth and sustain better standards of living throughout Ireland. Each plan was underpinned by an understanding of the unique local strengths and assets in that region.

The REPs were aligned to national policy priorities including the National Smart Specialisation Strategy for Innovation 2022-2027, green growth and digitalisation. Each plan included several strategic objectives and actions under each of these. Some REP actions focused on delivery of enterprise centres and hubs in the regions and associated programmatic supports to businesses. Since 2017, the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment has allocated over €150 million to regional enterprise development through a range of schemes administered by Enterprise Ireland, some of which have funded key REP projects.



The nine REP regions are the North-East (Cavan, Monaghan, Louth), North-West (Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim), West (Galway, Mayo, Roscommon), Mid-West (Limerick, Clare, Tipperary), South-West (Cork, Kerry), South-East (Carlow, Kilkenny, Waterford and Wexford), Midlands (Laois, Offaly, Longford, Westmeath), Mid-East (Meath, Kildare, Wicklow) and Dublin.

The REPs evolved from the Regional Action Plans for Jobs in place from 2015 to 2017. The first set of REPs launched in 2018 and covered the period to 2020.

The latest plans launched in 2022 and were originally to run until the end of 2024; following a one-year extension to support implementation and enable an independent review of the REP initiative, the plans came to an end in December 2025. Mid-term progress reports for each of the REPs were published in April 2024 and are available on the Department's website.

At regional level, each REP is implemented by a Steering Committee made up of regional stakeholders and chaired by an enterprise champion, typically a senior private sector businessperson. A full-time REP Programme Manager, hosted in a local authority, drives implementation on the ground. The Department oversees implementation of the REP initiative at the national level; this includes hosting the REP National Oversight Group (NOG), co-chaired by the Minister for Enterprise, Tourism and Employment, and Ministers of State. The NOG provides overall strategic direction for the REP initiative and typically met twice annually to review progress, share insights and guide future planning.

Smart Specialisation

In July 2022, the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment (DETE) published Ireland's National Smart Specialisation Strategy for Innovation 2022–2027 (S3). Its goal is to drive innovation-led and sustainable regional growth by leveraging local sectoral strengths and emerging opportunities through collaboration among businesses, research institutions, public authorities, and civil society. S3 links DETE's Regional Enterprise Plans (REPs) and the Regional Assemblies' Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSESs) with national innovation strategies, ensuring alignment in Research, Development and Innovation (RD&I) policy and planning both regionally and nationally.

Ireland's Smart Specialisation Strategy fulfils a European Commission requirement for Ireland to access structural funding under European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) Policy Objective 1: A Smarter Europe. The preparation of the strategy itself represents a key strategic outcome under Ireland's ERDF Programmes 2021-2027.

Launched in November 2022, the Regional Development Monitor (RDM) is a joint initiative of Ireland's three Regional Assemblies and the All-Island Research Observatory (AIRO). The RDM provides an online mapping viewer with socio-economic and environmental indicators, enabling stakeholders to track progress under themes such as:

- Green Region
- Liveable Region
- Creative and Innovative Region

This tool supports evidence-based decision-making and promotes transparency in regional development. The Regional Development Monitor also includes a Smart Specialisation dashboard to enable better monitoring of progress.

The first progress report on Ireland's Smart Specialisation Strategy was published in March 2025 and progress under the eight goals of the strategy were highlighted.

- Goal 1: Linking national and regional enterprise and innovation policy
- Goal 2: Enabling "A Smarter Europe"
- Goal 3: Improving research and innovation capacity in Ireland's regions
- Goal 4: Encouraging more regionally dispersed RD&I
- Goal 5: Advancing the twin green and digital transformation
- Goal 6: Skills for innovation
- Goal 7: Reinforcing sectoral strengths
- Goal 8: Monitoring progress on regional innovation, and building international connections

Each of the Regional Assemblies sit on the National Smart Specialisation Implementation Group which has overall responsibility for the delivery of the Strategy's national and regional strategic priorities. In ensuring delivery of regional priorities, the Regional Assemblies also sit on the steering committees for the REPs. Working with the REPs is an important vehicle in translating S3 into regional and local impact.



Smart Specialisation in the Midlands Region

The Midlands region has strong information and communications technology, advanced manufacturing/ engineering sectors and food/agri-tech sectors which align with the objectives and actions of the *Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan*. The Midlands Region advanced its smart specialisation approach by identifying key strengths and clustering opportunities around advanced manufacturing, digital technologies, renewable energy, and the circular bioeconomy. The establishment of Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest (2022) has been transformative, providing a strong anchor for innovation and research. Collaboration between Technological University of the Shannon (TUS), the Midlands Regional Skills Forum (MRSF), and industry has enabled the region to access national and EU innovation supports. Initiatives such as the Midlands Advanced Manufacturing Action Plan and digitalisation programmes for SMEs have supported business transformation, productivity growth, and adoption of new technologies. The selection by the European Commission of the wider Eastern and Midland Region to receive a Regional Innovation Valley (RIV) label in 2024 has the potential to unlock new collaboration and funding opportunities.





Strategic Objective 1:
Climate Action – Transition to a net zero-carbon economy

Action 1.1: The Midlands Regional Transition Team (MRTT) will work to develop transformative projects with the support of Project Ireland 2040 funding streams and to support relevant projects in the European Union Just Transition Fund (EU JTF), including the provision of technical sectoral advisors/ mentors within the enterprise agencies and Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) to guide emerging low-carbon focused projects across the region

Action Leader: Midlands Regional Transition Team (MRTT) Steering Committee and thematic working groups, under the auspices of the Midlands Regional Enterprise Development Office.
Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2025
Final Status: Action complete

Action Update:
The *Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan* (MREP) focuses on developing transformative projects to support the region's transition to a low-carbon economy. This effort leverages Project Ireland 2040 funding streams and the EU JTF, with technical advisors and mentors provided through enterprise agencies and LEOs. The action, led by the MRTT Steering Committee and thematic working groups, had a delivery targeted for Q4 2025.

Launched in 2023, the EU JTF became a cornerstone for regional transition efforts. The MRTT actively engaged with the fund through its Steering Committee and working groups, ensuring alignment with national and EU-level strategies. The Chair of the MRTT Steering Committee sits on the EU JTF Programme Monitoring Committee (PMC), reinforcing regional representation.

MRTT contributed to Ireland's Climate Action Plan (2023) and participated in the EU Just Transition Platform Horizontal Working Group. In 2022, MRTT hosted an exchange programme with Just Transition Greece, and in 2023, partnered with the European Investment Bank for a webinar on financing net-zero projects.

Announced in mid-2024, the Midlands *Pathway to Just Transition* initiative secured €3.9 million in funding to 31 March 2026, with Laois County Council as project lead. It comprises five work packages aligned with the MREP and EU JTF themes:

1. *Midlands Pathway to Transition* – advancing net-zero economy goals.
2. *Advanced Manufacturing Action Plan* – fostering innovation in manufacturing.
3. *Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Action Plan* – driving digital transformation.
4. *Placemaking Programme* – enhancing regional attractiveness.
5. *Food and Drink Strategy* – supporting agri-food sector growth.

In early 2025, MRTT launched an online Briefing Series for EU JTF projects, promoting collaboration and shared learning. County-specific information events followed, engaging stakeholders such as LEOs, Climate Action Teams, the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI), LEADER companies, and community organisations. These sessions highlighted opportunities under schemes like Regenerative Tourism and Placemaking, and through the National Parks and Wildlife Service and Midlands Westland Restoration (Tóchar).

Appointed in each Local Authority in 2025, Just Transition Officers provide on-the-ground support for communities and enterprises, fostering synergies among EU JTF funded projects. They collaborate with Climate Action Teams, Biodiversity Officers, schools, and other local networks. A comprehensive impact report is scheduled for March 2026.

The Midlands Economic Property Portfolio identified strategic sites for sectoral growth, strengthening the region's investment potential. This effort contributed to the Midlands being ranked number two Small Region in the Financial Times European Region of the Future 2025. A masterplan for these sites has been completed. The Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan has laid a strong foundation for the Midlands'

transition to a sustainable, low-carbon economy. Through strategic funding, collaborative initiatives, and capacity-building measures, the region is positioned to leverage future investment and deliver long-term economic resilience.

Action 1.2: Develop a framework for Local Authorities to realise economic opportunities from the low-carbon transition and empowering communities to embrace social enterprise and community gain, in partnership with the Eastern and Midlands Climate Action Regional Office (CARO) and the County and City Management Association (CCMA) and other regional and national agencies and the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment (DETE). Develop and implement Local Authority Climate Action Plans, addressing both adaptation and mitigation measures, including the development and designation of decarbonisation zones, building upon lessons learned from the various elements in Portlaoise, as the national low-carbon demonstration town, including The Cube.

Action Leader: Local Authorities and the Eastern and Midlands Climate Action Regional Office
Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2025
Final Status: Action Complete

Action Update:
The *Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan* (MREP) has significantly advanced development of a framework for economic opportunities from low carbon transition and empowering communities to embrace social enterprise and community gain, in partnership with the Eastern and Midlands CARO, the CCMA and other regional and national agencies including DETE.

During Q3/Q4 2022 specialised training for LEO staff and the Local Authority Local Economic Community Plan (LECP) teams was delivered by the Eastern and Midlands CARO as part of the Local Authority Climate Action Training Programme in collaboration with Maynooth University, Enterprise Ireland, the LEO Network, and the Local Government Information Unit (LGIU). One of the main focuses was on integrating economic opportunities with climate action at the local authority level. In addition, the Eastern and Midlands CARO led an *Empowering Communities training programme, EMERGE*. The programme commenced under the EU Just Transition Fund and was delivered to over 21 impacted

communities across the Midlands Region. This training supported communities to develop projects to address the challenges and opportunities posed by Ireland's transition to a lower carbon economy through the delivery of 15 community transition dialogues, 27 mentoring workshops and 11 activation plans.

The then Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications launched a set of statutory guidelines, supported by the Climate Action Regional Offices (CAROs), to assist local authorities in preparing Local Authority Climate Action Plans (LACAPs). The CAROs mobilised a framework of support for Local Authorities to assist in the development of these plans, which commenced in early 2023 and continued until February 2024. The Decarbonisation Zones initiative was incorporated into LACAPs, and work to implement the Plans continues to 2028. Dedicated Climate Action Teams are now in place across the four Local Authorities in the Midlands Region. LACAPs were developed in line with provisions of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Amendment Act 2021 and are currently being implemented. Implementation is ongoing and further iterations are subject to compliance with climate legislation.

The third annual Economic Opportunities from Climate Action conference was held in Tullamore, Offaly in April 2023, providing a platform for knowledge exchange - Global examples of climate-related economic initiatives.

The Eastern and Midlands CARO commissioned a report titled *Exploring Economic and Enterprise Opportunities from Climate Action – The International Context for Irish Local Government*, which highlighted examples of actions and projects undertaken in various jurisdictions and how local government systems are supporting economic opportunity based upon addressing the challenges of climate change.

In March 2025, the Midlands Region hosted the *Together We Thrive: Realising Sustainable Economic Opportunities for Enterprise, Tourism and Communities in the Midlands* event in association with regional stakeholders which included the Eastern and Midlands CARO, Education and Training Boards, Fáilte Ireland and the Midlands Regional Skills Forum. The event addressed the three themes of the EU JTF – with dedicated sessions on supports, community initiatives and skills development. The event was well attended and case studies against each of the themes were presented. The Midlands Showcase event in December 2025 was a similar event but encompassed all actions and objectives of the MREP.

Action 1.3: Regional Education and Training Boards (ETBs) will develop a National Pilot on Sustainability and a Rural Centre of Excellence within the Midlands Region

Action Leader: Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board.
Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2025
Final Status: Action Complete

Action Update:
The *Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan* (MREP) has seen significant advancements in the development of green and sustainability skills across the further education and training (FET) sector, culminating in a specialised focus by the Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board (LOETB) in Construction, Agriculture, and Climate Solutions, and the integration of Green Skills across all FET Centres by Longford Westmeath Education and Training Board (LWETB) and LOETB.

The ETB *Green Skills 2030 Implementation Plan* was initiated in September 2022 with a blend of Sustainable Living Skills Programmes, coupled with Continuous Professional Development in sustainability. New Green Provision was established in the National Construction Training Campus (NCTC), Mount Lucas, including a range of Retrofit and Nearly Zero Energy Building (nZEB) programmes. Mount Lucas NCTC also partnered in the successful EU LIFE Project, *Build Up Skills Ireland 2030*. Furthermore, a new Building Information Modelling Traineeship commenced, focusing on Modern Methods of Construction (MMC). By March 2023, the focus shifted to the integration of Green Skills across all FET programmes. Mount Lucas was designated as the Modern Methods of Construction National Demonstration Park working with three government departments. The Groundworks Contract was tendered in mid-2024 alongside the expansion of nZEB courses. New SOLAS 'Green Skills' QQI programmes were developed, and a national pilot, the *Family Farm Traineeship*, was launched in Sustainable Agriculture.

Both LOETB and LWETB successfully delivered validated Green Skills QQI programmes alongside the expansion of nZEB courses. The *Build Up Skills Ireland 2030* project was quantified as seeking to determine the scale and type of skills needed for the built environment to meet 2030 climate targets. LOETB led on a national FET agriculture pilot, collaborating with other ETBs on sustainable agriculture. *Nature Skills Awareness Programme* development was underway, in collaboration with the National Parks and Wildlife Service and the OPW.

By H1 2025 the FET sector was actively driving the Green Skills agenda. Provision at the NCTC, Mount Lucas, now heavily features retrofitting and MMC, aligning with Ireland's *Housing for All Strategy*. Outcomes include LOETB partnering with the ESB to develop an Overhead Lines Apprenticeship and the development of a Mount Lucas outdoor training space adjacent to the MMC Demonstration Park that is nearing the end of its groundworks phase; Ireland's first National MMC Traineeship is due to commence in Q1 2026 with a primary focus on on-site assembly and installation in timber frame, light gauge steel and insulated concrete forms. LWETB is developing state-of-the-art electrical apprenticeship workshops at the Connolly Campus in Longford Town.

In Agriculture, the regional Family Farm Traineeship is proving successful, with plans for further iterations. LOETB is providing specific learner support to all Agricultural Colleges in Ireland and developing an access route to the Green Cert in partnership with Teagasc. Midlands ETBs are supporting enterprise sustainability by offering short, stackable accredited courses (NFQ Levels 5 and 6) in areas like sustainable supply chain procurement and lean practices for sustainable business.

The ETB *Green Skills 2030 Implementation Plan* has transitioned from pilot to full-scale integration and specialisation. The key outcome is the strategic move away from single Centre of Excellence to a targeted focus by LOETB on Construction, Agriculture, and Climate Solutions, with the integration of green skills embedded across all FET centres by Midlands ETBs. The foundation laid by the Build Up Skills project and the various national pilots ensures ongoing relevance and future expansion of green skills provision.



Strategic Objective 2:
Build on achievements to date in sectors in which the region has a competitive advantage through Smart Specialisation and wider adoption of digitalisation within business, leveraging the new Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest

Action 2.1: Work with Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest (TUS) to capitalise and realise business, industry, and skills opportunities presented by Technological University status to further support the development of the region, including the growth and expansion of Empower Eco, and the development of the Midlands Technology Campus

Action Leader: TUS Midlands Midwest
Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2025
Final Status: Action Complete

Action Update:
The MREP Steering Committee, four REP Working Groups, alongside the REP Programme Manager, work very closely with Technological University of the Shannon (TUS), a key delivery partner for Strategic Objective 2.

TUS leveraged its technological university status to strengthen Smart Specialisation, accelerate digitalisation within enterprise, and underpin long-term regional resilience. Over the full life of the MREP, TUS has focused on embedding capability rather than delivering isolated initiatives, aligning research, skills development, innovation infrastructure, and enterprise engagement into a coherent regional system that supports sustainable economic transition in the Midlands.

From the start of the MREP, TUS prioritised the creation of enabling platforms that connect academia, industry, public bodies, and communities. A central outcome has been the establishment and maturation of Empower Eco™, a sustainable enterprise and innovation platform that operates as a flagship hub-and-spoke model underpinning the TUS Research, Development and Innovation Strategy 2025–2029. Empower Eco is embedded within the RUN-EU European University framework, strengthening regional access to European expertise, mobility, and innovation networks.

This platform approach enabled TUS to secure significant European and national investment and to translate that funding into regionally anchored assets. Most notably, investment of €5.3 million from the EU JTF and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine is delivering Ireland's first integrated multi-trophic aquaculture bioeconomy demonstration site at Mount Lucas, Co. Offaly. This site represents a step change in how post-peat landscapes can be repurposed for sustainable employment, innovation, and skills development. Designed as a fully digitised living lab with immersive training, biorefinery capability, and zero-waste operations, the site moves beyond research demonstration to become an engine for enterprise creation, workforce transition, and policy learning. Its alignment with the Just Transition Academy, delivered with Offaly County Council, reinforces its role in supporting communities to pivot away from fossil fuel dependency.

In parallel, TUS systematically strengthened the region's human capital base. Throughout the plan period, and extending beyond it, the university has expanded flexible learning provision through Higher Education Authority-funded Springboard+ programmes, informed by sustained engagement with industry. Ensuring that digitalisation, sustainability, and advanced manufacturing skills are accessible across NFQ Levels 6 to 10, supporting both workforce upskilling and labour market participation. Apprenticeship education has also been significantly expanded.

TUS has also progressed strategic infrastructure and ecosystems, including feasibility and early-stage development of the Manufacturing Technology Centre and advancement of the Northgate site as a digitalisation and innovation nexus. Investment in core capacity, such as the opening of the Science,

Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics building in 2025 and the Applied Polymer Technologies facility in 2024, has reinforced the region's ability to deliver high-quality education, applied research, and industry engagement at scale.

The cumulative outcome of these steps is the emergence of a connected regional innovation system rather than a series of standalone projects. TUS has embedded Smart Specialisation, digitalisation, and Just Transition principles into enduring platforms, infrastructure, and skills pipelines. While the current plan period concludes, delivery will continue beyond it, with Empower Eco, the Mount Lucas Integrated Multi-Trophic Aquaculture site, flexible learning provision, cluster participation, and strategic campus developments all positioned for growth, scaling, and long-term impact across the Midlands.

As highlighted above the Midlands Region (first Region) is among 72 cities from 46 countries joining UNESCO's Global Network of Learning Cities (GNLC), recognising their commitment to making the right to education across all ages a reality for all at local level. As a GNLC member, the Midlands aims to contribute as a 'learning region' model with inclusive access and green skills development.

Action 2.2: Deliver on the actions within Midlands Advanced Manufacturing Action Plan, to position the region as an advanced manufacturing centre of excellence through defined actions across enabling themes of education, training and skills; research and innovation; support infrastructure and networks; and strengthening the manufacturing base

Action Leader: Industry chair and public sector chair
Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2025
Final Status: Action Complete

Action Update:
Action 2.2 of the MREP set out to position the Midlands as an advanced manufacturing centre of excellence through targeted actions across four enabling themes: education, training and skills; research and innovation; support infrastructure and networks; and strengthening the manufacturing base. The plan aimed to foster collaboration among regional stakeholders, enhance skills development, and drive innovation to support sustainable growth in manufacturing.

From 2022 to 2025, significant progress was achieved through coordinated efforts by the Midlands Advanced Manufacturing Steering Committee and partner organisations.

The 2022 Advanced Manufacturing Skills Survey identified critical vacancies, current and future skills needs, curriculum development priorities, and training availability. The findings of this survey informed alignment between training providers, employers, and agencies, ensuring responsiveness to industry requirements.

During 2023 the Midlands Advanced Manufacturing Steering Committee met quarterly to maintain momentum and oversight. The Midlands Regional Skills Forum completed a comprehensive skills audit and issued an Upskilling Guide to regional companies. A scoping exercise commenced with employers and Technological University of the Shannon (TUS) to explore a new apprenticeship in Robotics and Advanced Manufacturing Design Engineering. Regional partners facilitated access to funding and innovation support, enabling companies to engage in projects addressing operational challenges. Several promotional events across the Midlands encouraged adoption of advanced manufacturing and sustainability practices. The European Digital Innovation Hub funding was secured by Irish Manufacturing Research (IMR) to lead the FactoryxChange (FxC) initiative.

Progress was sustained on skills development, apprenticeship scoping, and innovation engagement through 2024. Regional events reinforced awareness and uptake of advanced manufacturing technologies and sustainable practices, with strong collaboration amongst stakeholders.

Implementation of the original Action Plan concluded in 2024. 2025 saw the commencement and development of the Midlands Advanced Manufacturing Plan 2025+ funded by the EU JTF as a MREP Pathway for Transition project. The key emerging themes include Strategic Vision, Skills and Talent, Collaboration and Ecosystem, Technology Adoption, and Funding and Resources. Stakeholder workshops and one-to-one interviews informed the new plan, scheduled for publication in H1 2026.
The Midlands region has strengthened its position as a hub for advanced manufacturing through:
Enhanced collaboration between industry, academia, and government agencies.
Improved skills alignment and workforce readiness via audits, guides, and apprenticeship planning.
Increased innovation capacity supported by European Digital Innovation Hub funding and regional engagement initiatives.

A clear pathway for future growth through the forthcoming 2025+ plan.
This collective effort reflects the commitment of all partners to driving competitiveness, sustainability, and resilience in the Midlands manufacturing sector.

Action 2.3: Develop a Smart Connected Technologies Cluster to leverage identified and established regional competencies in telecoms and supporting areas including augmented reality and data analytics

Action Leader: Industry Chair and Regional Enterprise Development Office
Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2025
Final Status: Action Complete

Action Update:
Since the launch of the *Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan* (MREP), the Midlands Information and Communications Technology Network has been instrumental in shaping the identity and visibility of the Midlands both regionally and nationally. Action 2.3 was delivered through three dedicated Working Groups: Marketing and Visibility, Skills and Talent Development, and Research and Development Ecosystem. The *Midlands ICT Cluster Action Plan* was officially launched in April 2023 by Minister Dara Calleary TD. These ICT Working Groups have delivered tangible outcomes, strengthened collaboration, and laid the groundwork for a sustainable ICT cluster beyond the lifetime of the plan.

Formed in 2022, the Marketing Working Group focused on building a strong brand identity and increasing regional and national visibility. From December 2024–December 2025, the team were heavily involved in active management of LinkedIn channels, achieving 51,357 organic impressions, 1,085 followers, and a 3.23% engagement rate. During this period the dedicated Midlands ICT Network webpage on Midlands Ireland, serving as a central hub for resources, was launched. A brochure was developed outlining the ICT Cluster Value Proposition, along with a targeted social and PR strategy to showcase success stories and regional achievements. A distinct Midlands ICT Network brand identity to enhance recognition was explored. A number of events were held during the lifetime of the MREP and saw the creation of promotional assets for events such as the *Let's Talk* series.

The ICT Network now has an identifiable network and strong engagement metrics. Funding for branding of ICT Network has been provided under EU Just Transition Fund – Pathway to Transition. Continued investment in branding and content creation will be essential to attract talent and secure investment and to continue to make the Midlands a fantastic region to visit, live, work and invest in.

The Skills and Talent Development Working Group was established in September 2022 and set goals across education levels and workforce development. A key achievement of this MREP Working Group is the appointment of STEM Engagement Officers in each county, supported by Broadband Officers. These appointments have supported enormous strides in STEM in both the educational and community

sectors. Since September 2024, 6,249 people have been reached through the school system with 57% of primary schools involved in STEM and 97% of secondary schools, a direct impact of the STEM Officer appointments. Further to this, 59% of secondary schools in the region now offer Computer Science for Leaving Cert (target: 100%). Stem Officers have also assisted with the roll out of multiple programmes including Ericsson Infuse, Microsoft Dream Space, Code4Fun, and VEX Robotics. Investment of ICT equipment into schools has been €640,000. The launch of the STEM Passport initiative promoting diversity and inclusion has also been achieved.

Strong collaboration with TUS Athlone for curriculum development and lifelong learning programmes continue. The transition of TUS Athlone to Technological University coincided with the establishment of the ICT Cluster. The growth and expansion of TUS and its strength and focus on software engineering is a major asset to the region. The very successful Advanced Technology in Manufacturing (ATiM) Cluster has been selected as a pilot for the new national International Impact Clustering Programme and has considerable scope to collaborate further with Midlands ICT Cluster.

The merged Skills and Talent and Research and Development Ecosystem will continue driving talent development beyond this MREP. A particular noteworthy feature is the exceptional level of collaboration between industry and public/educational bodies.

The Research and Development Ecosystem Working Group was also formed in September 2022. This group focused on strengthening industry and academic collaboration, focusing on software engineering and the software research centre in TUS. Achievements included: 19 collaborative projects with 15 companies worth €2.9 million, half with regional firms; the expansion of research into digital transformation, AI, and robotics; tripling PhD output (from three to nine annually) and 47 active PhD students; and commissioning of a 5G Standalone Network in partnership with Ericsson and Three Ireland at TUS Athlone. TUS Athlone's transition to a Technological University ensures continued research capacity and industry engagement.

The Midlands ICT Network retains early-stage cluster characteristics but shows strong momentum. The merged Working Group (September 2025) has the structure and ambition to sustain cluster development beyond the Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan, provided critical funding and branding initiatives continue.



Strategic Objective 3: Placemaking – Position the Midlands as a community of choice in which to live, create, study, work, visit, and invest

Action 3.1: Utilising MidlandsIreland.ie, promote and position the region as community of choice, showcasing the value proposition of the region: centrality, access to talent, the existing enterprise base, regional recreational assets, arts and cultural assets.

Action Leader: Midlands Ireland Office, Midlands Ireland Working Group and Midlands Regional Enterprise Development Office
Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2025
Final Status: Action Complete

Action Update:
The *Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan* (MREP) has focused on strengthening the region's identity and economic potential through a comprehensive brand and website redevelopment initiative. This effort aimed to position the Midlands as a prime destination for investment, living, working, visiting, and studying, while supporting the EU Just Transition Programme and regional enterprise growth.

The EU Just Transition Funding – Pathway to Transition has played a significant role in the success of this action with the appointment of a Marketing and Communications Manager and Executive. Also noteworthy is the retention of Media agency to support advanced content-rich campaigns for 2025, shifting focus from awareness to deeper storytelling

During the MREP steps were taken to create a brand and website redevelopment, which was launched in September 2023. A brand workshop was held with the working group to define identity and messaging. The photography and videography strategy included bespoke homepage video, hero images for landing pages, and run-of-site visuals sourced from partners and internal production.

Another area of noticeable growth was social media with organic campaigns across Facebook, LinkedIn, X, and Instagram achieving strong engagement. By mid-2023, content reached 520,000 views YTD, later scaling to 35 million reach and 554,000 engagements by 2024.

Media agency engagement began in June 2023, and a PR agency was appointed soon after. Paid digital campaigns launched in November 2024, followed by partnership campaigns in March 2025 (Tourism/ Living and Food and Drink).

Website performance has seen significant growth over the lifetime of the MREP, from 53,900 sessions, 45,900 unique visitors in March 2023 to 342,800 sessions and 295,700 unique visitors in March 2025. A number of notable physical presence events were held including the flagship *Midlands Showcase* at the Technological University of the Shannon (TUS) Arena on 3 December 2025.

Other supported sectoral events included the Food Network, ICT Network, Together We Thrive Conference, CATEX Exhibition, and regional meetings.

The Midlands Region was named a European Region of the Future for Foreign Direct Investment by the Financial Times. The Midlands was also winner of ".ie Digital Town Overall Winner 2024" award for STEM education initiatives. Other awards were Local Authority Innovation Award 2025 Award in Excellence for the four local authorities in the region for *Driving STEM in the Midlands*.

The Midlands region's branding and placemaking has progressed through a series of strategic milestones, with media and PR agency appointments in June 2023. By May 2024, the Midlands Food and Drink Directory launched, followed in October with new funding and national recognition for FDI and STEM initiatives, alongside the EU JTF Pathway to Transition event in The CUBE, Portlaoise. Paid campaigns went live in March 2025 as the website exceeded 342,000 sessions. By September 2025, Midlands

Flavours was showcased at the National Ploughing Championships with extensive national media coverage, leading to the flagship *Midlands Showcase* in the TUS Arena that December. The region also achieved global recognition as one of 72 cities across 46 countries admitted to UNESCO's Global Network of Learning Cities.

Action 3.2: Expand the Midlands Network of Co-Working Facilities (MNCF) in partnership with existing network members, chambers of commerce and local authorities, to support and develop additional flexible office solutions throughout the region, including the exploration of and the development of vacant properties, through strategic partnerships and in cooperation with communities

Action Leader: MNCF Business Development Manager and the Midlands Regional Enterprise Development Office
Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2025
Final Status: Action Complete

Action Update:
The Midlands is a thriving, vibrant region home to approximately 330,000 people and providing opportunities for living, learning, enterprise and tourism.

The Midlands Network of Co-Working Facilities (MNCF) comprises 30 facilities since March 2022. The MidlandsHubs.ie website went live in Q1 2023 which features the Midlands Hubs Directory, a guide to the remote working and enterprise spaces located throughout the Midlands is available to view on www.midlandsireland.ie and it is also possible to undertake virtual tours of larger hubs in the region on the Midlands Ireland YouTube channel.

The hubs provide space where opportunities arise, and meaningful connections are made. The Network caters for employees, business owners, mature students and the larger SME and Multinational Corporations wishing to set up locations outside of coastal cities.

The MNCF is an initiative of the four Midlands Local Authorities and is supported by the *Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan* and the EU Just Transition Fund.

The MNCF members worked with TUS to become official Learning Gates, where people can access TUS courses from hubs within their own communities. There are eight hubs signed up as Learning Gates.

The Midlands Hubs network offers flexible workspaces and supports designed to meet the needs of diverse users across the region. The hubs accommodate startups seeking a supportive environment, remote workers looking for a dedicated workspace, and visitors requiring temporary desks with reliable broadband.

Facilities across the network include private offices, meeting rooms, coworking spaces and hot desks available on short or longer term arrangements. Hubs also provide online meeting technologies, virtual office services, and a range of business supports to assist earlystage enterprises. Regular networking and community events further encourage collaboration among professionals in the region.

Action 3.3: The regional stakeholders will progress the implementation of Visitor Experience Plans and deliver targeted experience economy projects across the region

Action Leader: Fáilte Ireland, Local Authorities and tourism industry representatives.
Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2025
Final Status: Action Complete

Action Update:
The *Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan* (MREP) has delivered transformative outcomes for tourism and placemaking across the region from 2022 to 2025. Through strategic collaboration between Fáilte Ireland, Local Authorities, and industry stakeholders, the plan advanced sustainable tourism development, enhanced visitor experiences, and strengthened the Midlands' position as a destination of choice.

Key achievements include the activation of Greenways and completion of the Slieve Bloom Mountain Bike Trail; Fáilte Ireland continues to work with Waterways Ireland, Local Authorities and relevant stakeholders to support the delivery of the Shannon Tourism Masterplan.

Work will continue beyond the plan's end, with A Destination Experience Development Plan for the Mid Shannon and Midlands, including Longford, Westmeath, and Offaly, currently being developed. This is a five-year tourism destination plan, co-created with local stakeholders to boost sustainable tourism, ensure long-term growth, community engagement, and a thriving experience economy in the Midlands. The region now boasts enhanced cycling and outdoor recreation infrastructure, diversified visitor experiences, and improved digital capabilities among tourism businesses. Economic benefits include increased visitor numbers, revenue generation, and job creation, while the emphasis on sustainability ensures long-term viability.

Fáilte Ireland has announced in December 2025 almost €60 million investment in the EU JTF Regenerative Tourism and Placemaking Scheme for tourism projects across the Midlands. Across the EU JTF territory this includes €16 million investment grant-aid to 85 private and community SME projects, and €26 million allocated under the Local Authority and Strategic Partner schemes. A further €9.4 million was awarded to BnM (formerly Bord na Móna) to develop and begin delivery of a network of universally accessible trails across suitable parts of its landbank within the EU JTF territory. Further investment under this scheme is expected to be announced over the coming months. The scheme also supports 82 businesses participating in the Tourism Learning Network Programme, 66 participants in the Digital Transformation Programme, and 8 Tourism Activators, one in each county across the territory

Fáilte Ireland works to support tourism businesses to attract and retain skilled talent, and to promote tourism as a career through several initiatives and resources. These include the *Employer Excellence Programme* which supports businesses to drive employee engagement and continuously build the appeal of their business, to ensure they are in a competitive position to attract and retain talent.

The Fáilte Ireland online learning platform, LearniFI, launched as a vehicle to meet long-term needs of the sector and shape a skilled and professional workforce, supports the upskilling of employees across areas most critical to business performance. It enables businesses to onboard and upskill staff effectively, reducing training costs, improving service quality and driving business performance.

Fáilte Ireland also delivers a national programme of careers promotion, including media and digital campaigns showcasing thriving professionals and diverse career paths within the sector, and a work experience programme aimed primarily at Transition Year (TY) students. This includes an annual calendar of engagement to target students and their career influencers such as parents, teachers, guidance counsellors and TY coordinators.

These initiatives are supported by best practice recruitment, induction and retention resources to help tourism businesses stand out in a competitive labour market.

Digital that Delivers is a groundbreaking initiative from Fáilte Ireland designed to power the digital transformation of tourism businesses, providing financial support and technical expertise to help them embrace digital innovation, drive online sales, increase productivity and deliver operational efficiencies. Since 2021, 11 businesses throughout Longford, Westmeath, Offaly and Laois have fully completed the programme. As part of the EU JTF Regenerative Tourism and Placemaking Scheme, 66 participants across the EU JTF territory are currently participating in the Digital Transformation Programme. Fáilte Ireland's Destination Towns Scheme is designed to boost the attractiveness and tourism appeal of the towns

nationwide and is funded under *Project Ireland 2040*. Fáilte Ireland allocated funding to Westmeath County Council to develop Athlone, Offaly County Council to develop Birr, and Laois County Council to develop Portlaoise.

Action 3.4 Deliver the Midlands Regional Food and Drink Strategy to 2024, including the resourcing and establishment of Regional Food and Drink Cluster to progress sustainability goals, build resilience and grow exports

Action Leader: Midlands Food and Drink Programme Manager and Midlands Regional Enterprise Development Office
Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2025
Final Status: Action Complete

Action Update:
This initiative aimed to progress sustainability goals, build resilience, and grow exports for the region's food and drink sector. By fostering collaboration among producers, SMEs, and stakeholders, the *Midlands Regional Food and Drink Strategy* sought to enhance competitiveness, create jobs, and position the Midlands as a leading hub for quality food and drink products.

September 2022 saw initial stakeholder engagement and formation of the Midlands Food and Drink Working Group. Later in that year the *Midlands Regional Food and Drink Strategy*, developed as an outcome of the Midlands REP to 2020, was further developed with input from producers, enterprise agencies, and Local Authorities.

The *Midlands Regional Food and Drink Strategy* was launched at the Midlands Food Futures Forum in March 2023. In Q3 of the same year a survey to underpin a Regional Food and Drink Directory got underway, with a digital directory of producers hosted on MidlandsIreland.ie, along with an application for funding to undertake Food and Drink Regional skills Needs Assessment submitted. In August 2024, *Skills Audit and Capacity Building - A Comprehensive Skills Audit* by TUS and MREP was published, identifying workforce challenges in food safety, sustainability, digital literacy, and technical skills.

In H1 2025, funding was secured under the EU JTF MREP Pathway to Transition Project – Work Package 5 - *Delivering the Midlands Ireland Regional Food and Drink Strategy*. This has been a game changer, which in March of 2025 saw the hosting of the Midlands Food and Drink Summit to highlight achievements and future opportunities and in April 2025 saw the launch of Midlands Flavours Network with nearly 100 producers.

By Q4 2025, Action 3.4 had delivered a fully operational Food and Drink Cluster with over sixty active member companies. The cluster has a skills-informed capacity building programme, a strengthened regional identity through Midlands Flavours and has supported expanded market exposure through trade missions and showcase events.

Key achievements include: the successful launch and implementation of the *Midlands Regional Food and Drink Strategy*; establishment of a cluster with over 60 member companies representing diverse food and drink sectors; delivery of capacity-building programmes focused on sustainability, innovation, and export readiness; and, most importantly, the creation of new market linkages through trade missions and regional showcase events.

The Midlands Food and Drink Network, Midlands Flavours will continue to explore funding opportunities through various mechanisms to build on the achievements to date and to continue to grow the network that will enable it to expand, promote innovation and export capability, ensure sustainability and increase awareness of the region's food and drinks producers. These initiatives will ensure long-term resilience, competitiveness, and sustainable growth for the Midlands food and drink sector in alignment with the ambitions of the *Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan*.

Funding under this work package was provided initially by EI's Regional Enterprise Development Fund with €350,000 secured in June 2023. Additional funding under EU JTF – Pathway to Transition secured in 2024 for 5 Work Packages which included the Food and Drink Strategy with a value of €3.9 million. The Midlands Food and Drink Summit is now scheduled annually.

Action Status Key

Action complete: *The Steering Committee has deemed that these actions have been fully completed.*

Action discontinued: *The Steering Committee has agreed that these actions are no longer being pursued.*

Action partially complete: *The Steering Committee notes that this action is partially completed; work may continue to progress beyond the finalisation of current plans.*

Action could not be completed: *The Steering Committee has determined that this action could not be delivered as originally envisaged.*

This final progress report documents implementation to end of Q4 2025 and has been prepared and signed off by the Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committee

Action Status Table by Strategic Objectives

Strategic Objective 1: Climate Action – Transition to a net zero-carbon economy.	Status	Completion Date
Action 1.1: The Midlands Regional Transition Team (MRTT) will work to develop transformative projects with the support of *Project Ireland 2040* funding streams and to support relevant projects in the EU JTF, including the provision of technical sectoral advisors/mentors within the enterprise agencies and LEOs to guide emerging low-carbon focused projects across the region.	Action Complete	Q4 2025
Action 1.2: Develop a framework for Local Authorities to realise economic opportunities from the low carbon transition and empowering communities to embrace Social Enterprise and Community Gain, in partnership with the Eastern and Midlands Climate Action Regional Office (CARO) and the County and City Managers Association (CCMA) and other regional/national agencies and the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment. Develop and implement Local Authority Climate Action Plans, addressing both adaptation and mitigation measures, including the development and designation of decarbonisation zones, building upon lessons learned from the various elements in Portlaoise, as the national low-carbon demonstration town, including The Cube.	Action Complete	Q4 2025

Action 1.3: Regional Education and Training Boards (ETBs) will develop a National Pilot on Sustainability and a Rural Centre of Excellence within the Midlands Region.	Action Complete	Q4 2025

Strategic Objective 2: Build on achievements to date in sectors in which the region has a competitive advantage through Smart Specialisation and wider adoption of digitalisation within business, leveraging the new Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest.	**Status**	**Completion Date**
Action 2.1: Work with Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest (TUS) to capitalise and realise business, industry, and skills opportunities presented by Technological University status to further support the development of the region, including the growth and expansion of Empower Eco, and the development of the Midlands Technology Campus.	Action Complete	Q4 2025
Action 2.2: Deliver on the actions within *Midlands Advanced Manufacturing Action Plan*, to position the region as an advanced manufacturing centre of excellence through defined actions across enabling themes of education, training and skills; research and innovation; support infrastructure and networks; and strengthening the manufacturing base.	Action Complete	Q4 2025
Action 2.3: Develop a Smart Connected Technologies Cluster to leverage identified and established regional competencies in telecoms and supporting areas including augmented reality, data analytics.	Action Complete	Q4 2025

Strategic Objective 3: Placemaking – Position the Midlands as a community of choice in which to live, create, study, work, visit, and invest.	**Status**	**Completion Date**
Action 3.1: Utilising MidlandsIreland.ie, promote and position the region as community of choice, showcasing the value proposition of the region: centrality, access to talent, the existing enterprise base, regional recreational assets, arts and cultural assets.	Action Complete	Q4 2025

Action 3.2: Expand the Midlands Network of Co-Working Facilities (MNCF) in partnership with existing network members, Chambers of Commerce and Local Authorities, to support and develop additional flexible office solutions throughout the region, including the exploration of and the development of vacant properties, through strategic partnerships and in cooperation with local communities.	Action Complete	Q4 2025
Action 3.3: The regional stakeholders will continue to progress and support tourism development, visitor experience development plans and experience economy across the region.	Action Complete	Q4 2025
Action 3.4: Deliver the *Midlands Regional Food and Drink Strategy to 2024*, including the resourcing and establishment of Regional Food and Drink Cluster to progress sustainability goals, build resilience and grow exports.	Action Complete	Q4 2025

Appendices

Appendix 1 Membership of Regional Steering Committee

Chairperson of Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan
Paul Madden
Programme Manager of Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan
- Deirdre Hunt (August 2025 to Present) - Sarah Morgan (September 2020 to July 2025)
Membership of the Committee
Westmeath County Council
Laois County Council
Longford County Council
Offaly County Council
Enterprise Ireland
IDA Ireland
Midlands Regional Skills Forum
Offaly Local Enterprise Office
Laois Local Enterprise Office
Longford Local Enterprise Office
Westmeath Local Enterprise Office
Fáilte Ireland
Longford Westmeath Education and Training Board
Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board
Technological University of the Shannon
Irish Business and Employers Confederation
Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly
Department of Social Protection
Bord Bia
Bord na Móna
Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht
Ericsson, Athlone
Abbott Diagnostics, Longford

Midlands Climate Action Regional Office
Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment
ESB
Midlands Ireland – Laois County Council
Midlands Food & Drink Network Manager, Laois County Council

Appendix 2 Statistical Snapshot

Midlands Region[1]

Constituent counties	Longford, Westmeath, Offaly and Laois
Midlands Population[2]	332,500
Persons aged 15 years and over in Employment[3]	165,400
ILO Participation Rate[4]	63.5%
ILO Unemployment Rate[5]	4.7%
Persons aged 15 years and over in Employment (Male)[6]	87,600
Persons aged 15 years and over in Employment (Female)[7]	77,900
Persons aged 15 years and over in Employment from Q1 2019[8]	129,000
Persons aged 15 years and over in Employment from Q3 2025[9]	165,400
Actual Increase in Employment from Q1 2019 – Q3 2025[10]	36,400
Employment Growth Rate between Q1 2019 – Q3 2025	28.2%
Persons aged 25 years and over on Live Register in the Midlands region at 01/12/2025[11]	9,679
Irish-owned Companies under the remit of the enterprise agencies - Total Employment in the region, 2019[12]	9,673
Irish-owned Companies under the remit of the enterprise agencies - Total Employment in the region, 2025[13]	11,331
Change between 2019 - 2025[14]	1,658
Foreign-owned Companies under the remit of the enterprise agencies - Total Employment in the region, 2019[15]	7,485
Foreign-owned Companies under the remit of the enterprise agencies - Total Employment in the region, 2025[16]	8,697
Change between 2019 - 2025[17]	1,212

Endnotes

1 To note: The NUTS 3 classification was used to compile the statistical snapshot

2 CSO - Estimated Population (Persons in April) - https://data.cso.ie/table/PEA08

3 CSO - Labour Force Survey - https://data.cso.ie/table/QLF08

4 CSO - Labour Force Survey - https://data.cso.ie/table/QLF08

5 CSO - Labour Force Survey - https://data.cso.ie/table/QLF08

6 CSO - Labour Force Survey - https://data.cso.ie/table/QLF01

7 CSO - Labour Force Survey - https://data.cso.ie/table/QLF01

8 CSO - Labour Force Survey - https://data.cso.ie/table/QLF01

9 CSO - Labour Force Survey - https://data.cso.ie/table/QLF01

10 CSO - Labour Force Survey - https://data.cso.ie/table/QLF01

11 CSO Persons on Live Register https://data.cso.ie/table/LRM17

12 DETE - Annual Employment Survey 2024 – companies under the remit of IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, Údarás na Gaeltachta

13 DETE - Annual Employment Survey 2024 – companies under the remit of IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, Údarás na Gaeltachta

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