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

NORTH-WEST

Regional Enterprise Plan 2022-2025

Final Progress Report



Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment
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Minister's Foreword

I am pleased to present this Final Progress Report on the implementation of the North-West Regional Enterprise Plan to 2025. Since its launch in 2022, the Plan has sought to drive economic growth, innovation, and sustainable enterprise development across the region.

Since the Plan's inception, work has focused on unleashing the potential of the North-West region, covering counties Donegal, Leitrim, and Sligo, ensuring that it prospers economically and also plays a vital role in the overall Irish economy.

The 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) and Border Enterprise Development Fund (BEDF) have seen substantial investment in enterprise centres and hubs around the country, delivering supports to businesses in line with regional strengths. In the North-West, over €17 million was allocated for nine projects through the REDF/BEDF. This funding was complemented by the Smart Regions Enterprise Innovation Scheme, launched in 2023.

Strategic sectors such as advanced manufacturing, renewable energy, and the circular economy have been supported through targeted investment, collaborative initiatives, and innovative programmes. A defining feature of this Plan 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 North-West is well positioned to compete nationally and internationally.

Over the lifetime of the Plan, the region has strengthened skills development aligned to Smart Specialisation, advanced regional enterprise promotion, secured stronger advocacy on critical infrastructure needs, expanded entrepreneurship supports, and progressed industry led cluster development. These achievements demonstrate the North-West's resilience, ambition, and capacity for innovation.

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 North-West.

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to Chairperson Séamus Hughes and his predecessor Philip Martin, 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 Programme Manager Cathriona MacCarthy and her predecessor Anne McTernan, the members of the Steering Committee and all regional partners whose commitment has been instrumental in delivering 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



Alan Dillon TD

Minister of State for Employment, Small Business and Retail

Chairperson's Introduction

I am delighted to present the highlights of the activities during the lifetime of the North-West Regional Enterprise Plan to 2025.

Throughout this period, the Steering Committee and I remained committed to bringing real additionality to the region by advancing the objectives laid out in the Plan. We have sought to complement the already significant and successful work of the enterprise agencies operating in the North-West region, while also fostering cohesion and strong collaboration across all partners.

As the Chairperson I have been particularly heartened by the tangible progress and outcomes delivered over the lifetime of the Regional Enterprise Plan 2022–2025. This includes the development of a shared Vision for the North-West Region, progressed in partnership with Sligo, Leitrim and Donegal County Councils, which provides a strong framework for future investment and placemaking across the region. I also wish to highlight the achievements under Action 3.1, which strengthened coordinated advocacy for critical infrastructure investment and Action 3.2, which advanced the region's transition towards a zero-carbon economy through support for the renewable energy sector.

The continued growth of the enterprise support ecosystem in the North-West is highly commendable. This includes the success of the AIM Centre Sligo, the Alpha Innovation Centre Donegal and the expansion of enterprise clusters in BORMAC, Killybegs Marine Cluster and the smaller networks supported by the enterprise agencies, for example Donegal Tech advocates.

May I pay compliments and thanks to the enterprise agencies and educational institutes in the region who have contributed their expertise to furthering the objectives within the North-West Regional Enterprise Plan. I also acknowledge the many private enterprises who generously give their time to this work. In addition, the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment and senior government ministers – who continue to champion the causes in the North-West.



I have sincerely enjoyed my time working as Chairperson of the North-West Regional Enterprise Plan including working and engaging successfully with two accomplished Programme Managers, Anne McTernan and Jessica Fuller, whose professionalism and dedication have greatly enhanced the impact of the Plan. I wish the incumbent chairperson every success in their role.



Séamus Hughes

Chair of North-West Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committee



North-West Regional Enterprise Plan Final Progress Report

This progress report documents overall implementation of the North-West Regional Enterprise Plan to the end of 2025, building on the information in the North-West Mid-term progress report published in April 2024. The progress report has been prepared and signed off by the North-West Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committee.

North-West Highlights

SMART SPECIALISATION DEVELOPMENT IN THE REGION:

Through the established Skills Working Group under Action 6.1, the Regional Skills Forum aligned two skills audits with the Smart Specialisation industries identified in the North-West REP, focusing on Cybersecurity and the Blue Economy in the North-West region. The Cybersecurity audit, published in May 2023, identified areas of unique regional value, including creating a strong 'Cybersecurity culture', promoting the North-West region's cybersecurity sector, and building a sustainable cyber talent pipeline. The Blue Economy audit will address critical skills gaps and growth opportunities to inform future workforce planning across marine and coastal enterprise sectors.

REGIONAL ECONOMIC AND ENTERPRISE PROMOTION:

Since 2020, regional agencies have collaborated to promote economic development and enterprise in the North-West, aiming to attract talent and investment while articulating the region's value proposition. This included hosting North-West in the City in Dublin in February 2023 with IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, the WDC and the North-West Regional Enterprise Plan. In 2025, the region's three county councils developed a North-West Region Strategy setting out a shared vision to 2050, which will also guide the next Regional Enterprise Plan.

ENTERPRISE INFRASTRUCTURE ADVOCACY:

In line with Action 3.1 a regional Working Group of academic, policy and business representatives coordinated advocacy on the impact of poor infrastructure on enterprise development in the North-West, ensuring regional challenges were reflected in national planning. Following regional consultation, the North-West Regional Enterprise Plan submitted evidence to the National Development Plan and the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment, highlighting gaps in energy, water, transport and waste. The group also secured funding for a regional report with case studies from twelve businesses, which was presented to the Minister for Enterprise in July 2024.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN THE NORTH-WEST

10x North-West Entrepreneurship Exchange: To address key entrepreneurship barriers identified by regional enterprise agencies, a collaboration of Enterprise Ireland, the Western Development Commission, Údarás na Gaeltachta and the Sligo, Leitrim and Donegal LEOs launched the 10x North-West Entrepreneurship Exchange. This two-day intensive programme paired 12 experienced entrepreneurs with 12 early-stage or scaling North-West companies, delivering structured mentoring and strategic support. Outcomes included the establishment of advisory boards, clearer and more profitable business models, and improved understanding of organisational culture, strengthening a more collaborative and growth-oriented regional enterprise ecosystem.

CLUSTER DEVELOPMENT

Cluster development in the North-West has advanced through the Border Region Manufacturing Cluster (BORMAC) and the Killybegs Marine Cluster, both supported by Enterprise Ireland funding to 2027 under the Regional Technology Clustering Fund (RTCF). These clusters have strengthened industry, education and stakeholder collaboration, with BORMAC enhancing knowledge sharing and skills alignment in manufacturing, and the Killybegs Marine Cluster driving growth in sustainable proteins, renewable energy and start-up activity. Together, they reflect the region's increasing capacity to develop industry-led ecosystems that support long-term competitiveness.

Case Studies from the North-West Regional Enterprise Plan

1. Entrepreneurship development in the North-West region



Entrepreneurs and early-stage companies engaging in structured one-to-one mentoring sessions during an intensive business exchange programme.

Following the publication of the North-West Barriers to Entrepreneurship Report, under the previous REP, a structured and collaborative regional response was initiated to convert the report's findings into meaningful action. A Regional Enterprise Plan (REP) working group – comprising of enterprise agencies and select entrepreneurs – was established to analyse the report's outputs and guide the region's next steps. This group played a central role in shaping a collective approach to addressing the structural and cultural challenges identified. One of the group's first strategic decisions was to convene an Enterprise Enablers Forum, designed to unite enterprise-support organisations to discuss and act on the key issues.

The first forum, held in Sligo in February 2023, focused on strengthening the sustainability of the North-West's enterprise ecosystem. It facilitated discussion on the existing support landscape, reviewing frameworks across innovation, start-ups, micro-enterprises, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), and established businesses. By identifying regional strengths and weaknesses, the event successfully grounded the regional strategy into shared insight and evidence. Building on this groundwork, a second Enterprise Enablers event was held on 17 January 2024 in Lough

Eske Castle. With 80 attendees – including representatives from enterprise agencies, educational institutions, the Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA) and around 30 entrepreneurs – the event aimed to benchmark the North-West against other regions and develop a long-term action plan for the next five to ten years. The 2024 forum achieved several core objectives – creating a platform for collaboration among enterprise enablers across the region, facilitating a critical review of existing entrepreneurship supports, mobilising the collective experience of agencies, academics, and entrepreneurs to design an action-focused response to low levels of Start-Ups and High-Potential Start-Ups (HPSU).

Through group discussions and analysis of comparative regional data, five priority action areas were identified: Harnessing human capital and supporting business scaling, improving access to finance for agencies and SMEs, addressing cultural barriers to entrepreneurship, mitigating the impact of infrastructural deficits and developing a regional entrepreneurship dataset for evidence-based policy.

In direct response to the first priority – harnessing human capital and supporting scaling – a collaboration of enterprise agencies (Enterprise Ireland, Western Development Commission, Údarás na Gaeltachta, Sligo/Leitrim/ Donegal LEO) launched the 10x North-West Entrepreneurship Exchange, a two-day intensive programme. This unique initiative paired 12 highly experienced entrepreneurs, each with significant start-up and scaling expertise, with 12 North-West companies at early or scaling stages. Through structured mentoring, networking, and strategic guidance, participating companies achieved meaningful outcomes, including the formation of advisory boards, refocusing of business models toward more profitable opportunities, and deeper understanding of internal culture. Collectively, these initiatives demonstrate that the region not only identified critical barriers to entrepreneurship but also took coordinated, concrete steps to address them — building a more collaborative, data-informed, and growth-oriented enterprise ecosystem for the North-West.

2. Growth of the AIM Centre in Sligo



Advancing Innovation in Manufacturing (AIM) is an awardwinning modern innovation hub that plays a central role in delivering the ambitions of the North-West Regional Enterprise Plan, particularly its focus on strengthening digital capability, fostering innovation, and enhancing the competitiveness of regional enterprises. AIM supports businesses to embrace digital transformation, smart manufacturing and advanced technologies such as AI, robotics and data analytics so they can remain competitive and scale. The centre provides specialised supports across advisory services, collaboration networks, talent development and flexible working spaces, all designed to boost productivity and innovation for SMEs and larger manufacturers in line with the North-West Regional Enterprise Plan (NWREP) priorities.

AIM was established through a collaborative partnership between Atlantic Technological University, Sligo County Council and Leitrim County Council. This strategic initiative is funded and supported by Enterprise Ireland via the Border Enterprise Development Fund, with additional backing from regional and EU programmes that align with the NWREP's objective of driving job creation and digital adoption across the North-West.

Since opening its state-of-the-art facility in 2024, AIM has become a key regional resource for innovation, collaboration and skills enhancement in manufacturing and technology-driven sectors. Its work directly supports the NWREP's ambition to position the North-West as a leader in advanced manufacturing and digital innovation. AIM actively promotes the region nationally and internationally, including representing the North-West at the 25th Anniversary of the Interreg Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme and EU Regions Week. Also hosting international delegations such as a recent visit from Mentor, Ohio where the visit focused on strengthening ties between Ireland and Northeast Ohio in the areas of advanced manufacturing, engineering, and economic development.

With support from Enterprise Ireland's Smart Regions Enterprise Innovation Scheme, AIM's role as home to Ireland's National AI Studio for Manufacturing further strengthens the region's visibility and credibility as an innovation hub, an outcome strongly aligned with the NWREP's strategic goals. The funding will enable the establishment of an AI studio focused on supports to manufacturing companies, particularly SMEs, to explore, develop, and implement AI-driven solutions. The AI Studio is a unique space dedicated to demonstrating how AI can solve real-world challenges in manufacturing.

While AIM was established primarily to support existing SMEs rather than early-stage entrepreneurs, it contributes to entrepreneurial development through participation in national initiatives such as the National AI Challenge and delivery of the Skillnet Pathway to Innovate programme. AIM also partners with the Western Development Commission to provide technical support to start-ups at the CREW (Creative Enterprise West) hub in Galway and is exploring expanded entrepreneur-focused supports within the North-West from 2026 onwards, reinforcing the NWREP's commitment to nurturing a dynamic enterprise ecosystem.

In a short period, AIM has become a key pillar of the North-West's enterprise support system and an award-winning organisation, recognised as Ireland's National Winner at the 2025 European Enterprise Promotion Awards in the category of Supporting the Digital Transition—further demonstrating its alignment with and contribution to the North-West Regional Enterprise Plan.

3. North-West City Region

Throughout the lifetime of the Regional Enterprise Plan, partners across the *North-West City Region* have worked collaboratively to advance the NWREP's core objectives: strengthening the region's long-term economic position, enhancing innovation capacity, and building a coherent cross-border proposition for investment. The *North-West City Region*, centred on the linked cities of Letterkenny, Derry-Londonderry and Strabane, is a significant cross border urban agglomeration with a metropolitan population of 193,106 and a wider functional territory of more than 350,000 people. Its scale, concentration of employment and services, and unique access to both EU and UK markets make it a strategic location for delivering the NWREP's ambition to position the region as a competitive, innovation driven economy.

Promotion of the region is led by Donegal County Council and Derry City and Strabane District Council, supported by education providers, industry representatives and national and international stakeholders. This collaborative approach directly reflects the NWREP's emphasis on building a unified regional narrative that supports sustainable enterprise growth, deepens specialisation and strengthens the region's attractiveness for global investment.

Strategic progress in developing the *North-West City Region* has centred on four key areas that align closely with NWREP priorities: city-region promotion, investment strategic planning, innovation development and educational collaboration.

Investment promotion has expanded internationally, supporting the NWREP's goal of increasing the region's visibility and competitiveness. A comprehensive Inward Investment Strategy and place-branding collateral for the *North-West City Region* are in development, complemented by dedicated annual trade and investment events in locations such as London and the United States.

Innovation-focused initiatives have also accelerated in line with the NWREP's commitment to fostering a strong regional innovation ecosystem. The North-West RegTech Initiative—driven by Donegal County Council, Derry City and Strabane District Council, Atlantic Technological University, Catalyst Northern Ireland and other partners—has progressed through a feasibility study and business case. The *Navigating the Future of Regulation* conference, held in October 2023 in Letterkenny, convened international experts to explore the potential for a multi-sector regulatory supercluster, leveraging the region's cross-border advantages. The development of a RegTech cluster is recognised as a key enabler of economic and enterprise growth and directly supports NWREP objectives around innovation-led development.

Further cross-border opportunities are being explored through a study commissioned by Donegal County Council with Fermanagh and Omagh District Council on the potential for a Food Innovation Plaza between Ballyshannon and Irvinestown, reinforcing the NWREP's focus on sectoral diversification and collaborative regional development.

Educational collaboration continues to evolve as a central pillar of NWREP implementation. The North-West Smart Industries Board, led by Atlantic Technological University in partnership with industry and training providers, is advancing initiatives that strengthen innovation capability and workforce readiness. In parallel, the *North-West Education Tertiary Cluster*—comprising four tertiary institutions—is developing enhanced cross-border learning pathways to build a skilled, future-focused workforce aligned with regional enterprise needs.

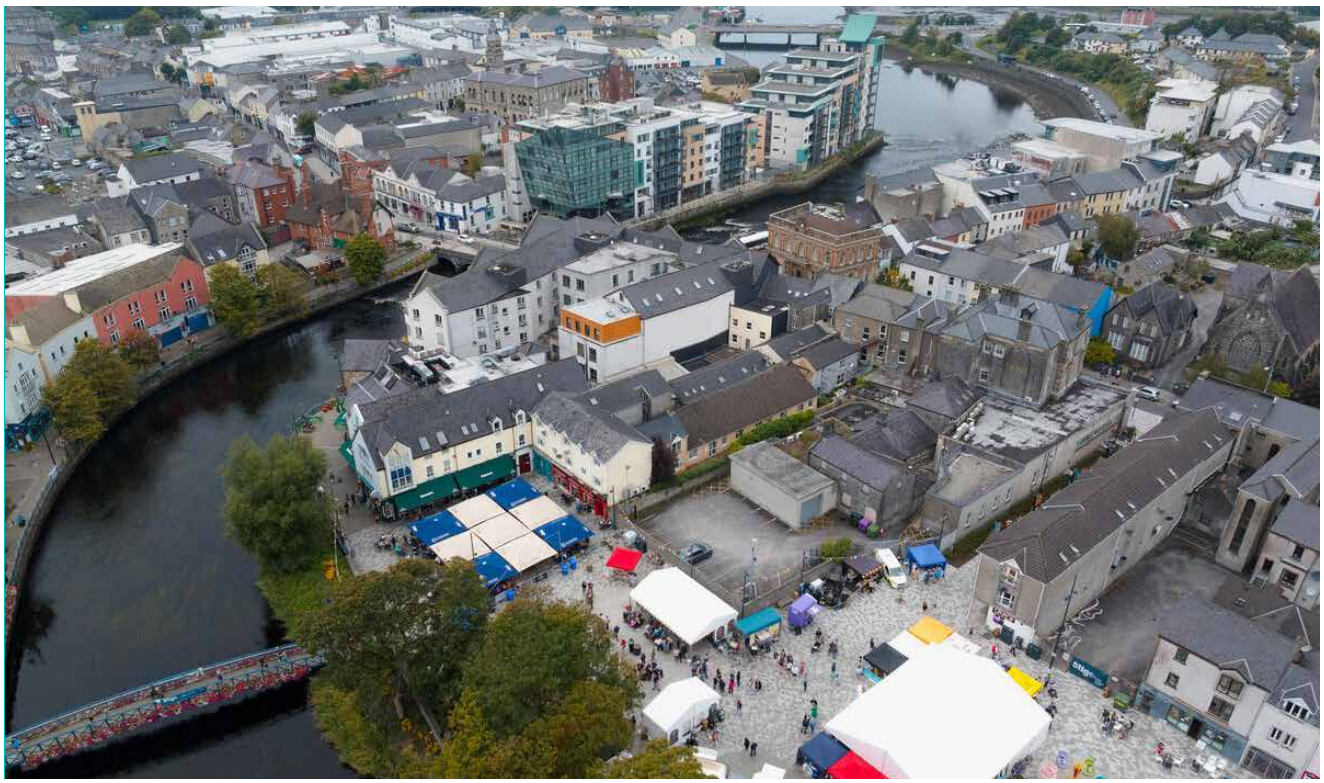


Overview of the Regional Enterprise Plans

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 North-West Region:

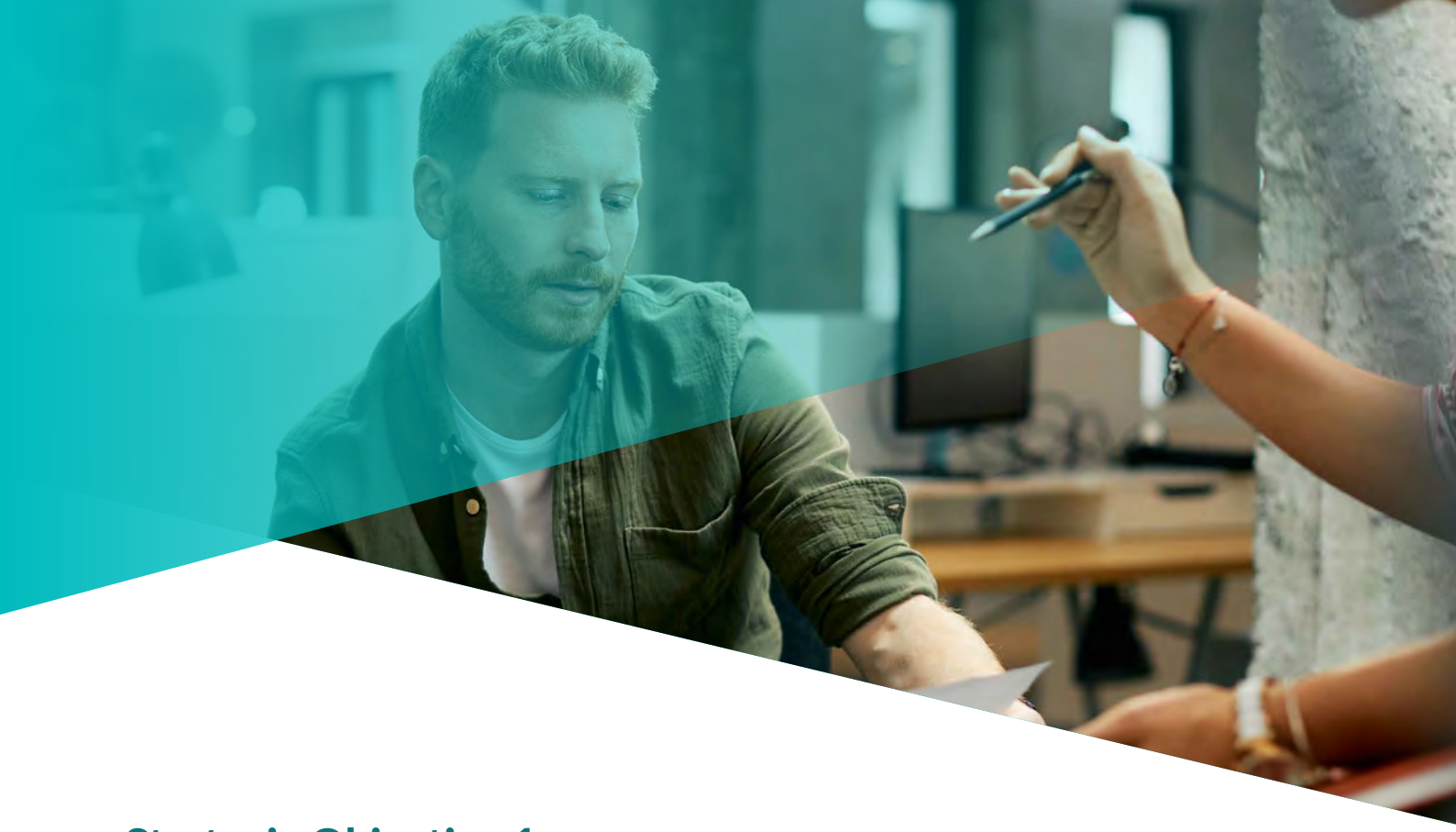
Smart Specialisation in the North-West region is framed by the ambition of the *National Smart Specialisation Strategy for Innovation 2022-2027* (S3) to strengthen regional innovation ecosystems, accelerate digital and green transitions and build globally competitive clusters.

In the context of the North-West region, the implementation of Ireland's S3 is supported by the priorities under Policy Objective 1 of *the Northern and Western Regional Programme*, which is co-funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and managed by the Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA). Over the lifetime of the North-West Regional Enterprise Plan, a wide range of schemes have been developed and implemented which have supported the implementation of Ireland's S3 in the North-West region, including investments in:

- The TU *Research and Innovation Supporting Enterprise* (RISE) Scheme, which has supported the Atlantic Technological University (Sligo and Donegal) in recruiting PHD students to support regional enterprises.
- The *Smart Regions Enterprise Innovation Scheme*, which is delivering investments in innovation assets in the region.
- The *Technology Gateway Programme*, which supports three Technology Gateways across the ATU's campuses, delivering expertise and practical solutions for industry in the region.

Throughout the lifetime of the strategy, the North-West has engaged in a structured process of capability mapping, stakeholder consultation and opportunity assessment. These steps have supported the emergence of region-specific priorities that reflect both the industrial heritage of the North-West and its evolving innovation potential. This work will continue beyond the current strategy period as regional partners deepen their collaboration.

The North-West region demonstrates a diverse and resilient enterprise base, shaped by its rural geography, strong research infrastructure, and long-standing clusters across high-value sectors. Over the past decade, the region has continued to build capability in advanced manufacturing and engineering, agrifood, marine industry, digital services and life sciences, supported by both indigenous firms and international investors. While employment in high-tech services remains below the national average, the region's progression in research, innovation and advanced manufacturing positions it for sustained growth and future competitiveness.



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 of micro to large businesses within the North-West

Amended Action 1.1: Develop regional initiatives to assist in identifying startups and scaling of micro to large businesses within the North-West

Action Leader: Údarás na Gaeltachta, Donegal Local Enterprise Office (LEO)
Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2025
Final Status: Action complete

Action Update:
With the support of concurrent funding programmes through the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment, the establishment of centres of business excellence in the region has contributed to the growth in start-ups and scaling companies. These centres are a result of the substantial investment from County Councils, educational institutions and Enterprise Ireland through its *Regional Enterprise Development Fund* (REDF), *Border Enterprise Development Fund* (BEDF) and *Smart Regions Enterprise Innovation Scheme* (Smart Regions).

The AIM (Advanced Innovation in Manufacturing) Centre was established to support existing SMEs and early-stage entrepreneurs; it contributes to entrepreneurial development through participation in national initiatives such as the National AI Challenge and delivery of the Skillnet Pathway to Innovate Programme. The AIM Centre has also recently entered a new pilot initiative with the Western Development Commission to provide technical support to start ups and SMEs from the region at the Landing Studio in CREW Galway and is exploring expanded entrepreneur focused supports in the NW region from 2026 onwards. The AIM Centre is an award-winning organisation, named Ireland's National Winner at the 2025 European Enterprise Promotion Awards in the category of Supporting the Digital Transition. Establishment of the AIM Centre was supported through Enterprise Ireland's REDF.

Alpha Innovation in Donegal plays a key role in encouraging start-ups and helping them scale by offering practical supports, mentorship and growth-focused programmes tailored to early-stage founders and innovative entrepreneurs. It runs start-up bootcamps, coaching clinics and workshops that equip participants with essential tools and strategic frameworks to validate ideas, refine propositions and connect with potential customers and investors, accelerating their progression from concept to market-ready business. A standout annual highlight is *Disrupt by the Sea*, an open, community-driven event that brings together founders, investors, mentors and industry experts for talks, panels, and networking in a relaxed coastal setting — helping spark ideas, build connections and inspire ambition. The Alpha Innovation Centre was supported through Enterprise Ireland's REDF.

Donegal County Council through Donegal Local Enterprise Office and Alpha Innovation, and working with Derry City and Strabane District Council, have delivered a number of cross border business development programmes including *Pathfinders I* and *II* in 2023 and 2024 respectively and the *Lead2Grow Leadership Programme* in 2025. These cross-border programmes supported both start-ups and scale-ups from the *North-West City Region*.

Inishowen Innovation Hub (The ii) is an innovation hub in Buncrana, Donegal, focusing on disruptive technology-driven and business models. The Entrepreneur in Residence (EiR) programme was introduced to address the need for expert guidance and mentorship in the Inishowen start-up ecosystem. By bringing in an experienced entrepreneur with a deep understanding of the local context and a passion for supporting local businesses, plus global start-up/scale up and acquisition experience, ii is bridging the gap between start-ups and the resources they need to succeed. Lee Tedstone, ii's EiR, has been meeting with and offering guidance to new and potential start-ups. Along with business support workshops, the ii has hosted many workshops dedicated to increasing the innovation of ii members and businesses in the local community. Example topics include Revolutionising Business: The Power of AI and XR, cyber security (securing your SME), Navigating Tomorrow: Harnessing AI and AR for your Business, and Gateway to Product Development Success.

Future Cast is a centre for innovation, education, and research and development, dedicated to advancing the construction, manufacturing, and quarrying industries in Manorhamilton, Co. Leitrim. Future Cast has received Smart Regions Scheme funding to deliver programmatic supports to SMEs in the areas of energy, environmental, geological material science and circularity.

Carrick Campus, Leitrim has progressed with its *EmpowHer Series* which is a series of events (February and October 2025) supporting female entrepreneurs, encouraging securing investment and scaling for long-term sustainable growth with senior women in business. Additionally, Carrick Business Campus completed a Feasibility Study undertaken with funding under Stream 4 of the Smart Regions Scheme, focused on the viability of a proposed Smart Technology Platform in the central atrium at Carrick Business Campus.

Mayo, Sligo, and Leitrim ETB and Donegal ETB have established dedicated regional services streamlining engagement with enterprise and enabling tailored responses to skills gaps across sectors to assist enterprises in the region to make it easier to upskill their workforce. Working with all stakeholders/employers and regularly providing customised and rapid response training programmes for enterprises in the region. In 2026, Donegal ETB are making available a Level 5 Enhancing Productivity with AI course to businesses in the county for the first time, providing companies with sharper, time-saving tools to boost productivity.

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

Action Leader: Donegal LEO
Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2025
Final Status: Action complete

Action Update:
The publication of the *North-West Barriers to Entrepreneurship Report*, published during the previous North-West Regional Enterprise Plan (2017–2020), provided the foundation for a coordinated regional response to strengthening the enterprise environment in the North-West. Following its release, a dedicated Regional Enterprise Plan working group was established, bringing together key agencies, selected entrepreneurs and regional policy expertise. From the outset, the group focused on understanding the report's findings in depth and identifying practical ways to address the structural challenges faced by start-ups, micro enterprises and SMEs across the region. This work has continued throughout the life of the plan and is expected to carry forward as the region deepens its approach to entrepreneurial development.

One of the early outputs from the working group was the decision to convene an Enterprise Enablers Forum to promote shared problem solving among enterprise agencies. This forum was held in Sligo in February 2023 and January 2024 and were designed to support the development of a more sustainable enterprise ecosystem by examining existing supports, mapping regional strengths and weaknesses and fostering discussion on the conditions required to enable business growth.

In direct response to priorities identified through the Enablers Forum, a collaboration of enterprise agencies (Enterprise Ireland, Western Development Commission, Údarás na Gaeltacht and Sligo, Leitrim and Donegal LEOs) launched the 10x North-West Entrepreneurship Exchange, a two-day intensive programme exclusive to the North-West region. This unique initiative paired 12 highly experienced entrepreneurs, each with significant start-up and scaling expertise, with 12 North-West companies at early or scaling stages. Through structured mentoring, networking, and strategic guidance, participating companies achieved meaningful outcomes, including the formation of advisory boards, refocusing of business models toward more profitable opportunities, and deeper understanding of internal culture. Collectively, these initiatives demonstrate that the region not only identified critical barriers to entrepreneurship but also took coordinated, concrete steps to address them – building a more collaborative, data-informed, and growth-oriented enterprise ecosystem for the North-West.

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

Action Leader: ATU Sligo
Timeframe for delivery: Q3 2025
Final Status: Action partially complete

Action Update:
Skillnet Innovation Exchange connects large businesses facing innovation challenges with SMEs capable fast-tracking solutions. In 2024, a collaboration between Skillnet Ireland and the AIM Centre in Sligo - established and operated through a joint partnership involving ATU, Sligo County Council and Leitrim County Council – expanded the initiative into the North-West region through its west regional partner, Galway-based Platform94, as part of its continuing nationwide expansion.

Platform94 will bring the benefits of *Skillnet Innovation Exchange* to businesses in Donegal, Sligo and Leitrim. The partnership offers ambitious and innovative SMEs the opportunity to get connected with large businesses looking to access digital transformation solutions.

The need to strengthen linkages between SMEs and Multinational Corporations (MNC's) is expected to continue beyond this plan.

Action 1.4: Encourage the development of clusters in the region

Action Leader: ATU Sligo
Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2025
Final Status: Action complete

Action Update:
Cluster development has progressed significantly in the North-West, supported by sustained collaboration and investment from Enterprise Ireland's Regional Technology Clustering Fund through to 2027. Two priority clusters – the Border Region Manufacturing Cluster and the Killybegs Marine Cluster – have demonstrated the region's growing capacity to develop innovation-led, industry-driven ecosystems. Each cluster has deepened cooperation between industry, higher education institutions and regional stakeholders, resulting in structured platforms that support innovation, skills development and long-term competitiveness. Action 2.2 provides more information on the Killybegs Marine Cluster development.

The Border Region Manufacturing Cluster (BORMAC) has broadened its engagement with manufacturing firms across the region, strengthening knowledge sharing and aligning responses to shared challenges such as workforce needs and technological adoption. BORMAC actively facilitates its member companies, some of whom are LEO clients in the region, with participating and exploring self-directed groups and initiatives – bringing in private expert consultants and collaborators in response to industry needs, for example Sustainability (Decarbonisation), Digitisation (AI/Automation/Industry 4.0/5.0) and knowledge sharing.

BORMAC attended Parliament Buildings at Stormont in Q2 2025, for two meetings with several political and economic representatives who have key roles right across the border region. The BORMAC Cluster manager presented a new policy paper: *Strengthening Regional Resilience for Manufacturing Businesses: The Strategic Role of the Border Region Manufacturing Cluster*. Additionally, BORMAC has hosted successful networking and learning events *Practical Digitalisation Options for Manufacturers* in Derry-Londonderry and *Reducing Energy Costs at Manufacturing Sites* in Cavan.

Together, these two clusters illustrate the North-West's growing capability to build specialised, industry-led ecosystems that contribute to regional development.

The working group responsible for this action, chaired by the Vice President for Enterprise and Engagement at Atlantic Technological University, includes regional networks, established clusters and policy specialists. In March 2023, the group hosted the *North-West Regional Enterprise Plan Clusters and Best Practice* event in Killybegs to explore national and international examples of effective cluster development. Insights from the event informed a survey conducted in the Q4 2023 to map formal and informal clusters operating within the region. The survey identified several shared priorities: enhanced networking, the development of a regional communications approach, the potential need for a jointly funded cluster development resource and the creation of long-term growth strategies. The survey also identified the breadth of support the enterprise agencies give to enterprise networking group across the region e.g. Donegal Tech advocates, Donegal Creative Coast and Sligo/Leitrim Women in Business. The working group has contributed to national policy development to ensure that rural and peripheral regions, including those with emerging ecosystems, are able to access upcoming supports. Members of the Regional Enterprise Plan steering committee met the Minister for Enterprise in July 2024 to discuss positive regional targeting and the importance of ensuring equitable access to cluster supports.

In addition, there is investment from Local Authorities in supporting enterprise networks e.g. Donegal Tech Advocates, Women in Business Forums.

Action 1.5: Explore opportunities to grow strategically the creative economy

Action Leader: Sligo Local Enterprise Office (2021-2023), Private Industry Chair (2024-2025)
Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2025
Final Status: Action complete

Action Update:
A North-West regional working group (WG) was established in alignment with the Regional Enterprise Plan (REP), chaired by Sligo Local Enterprise Office from 2021–2023 and by a private sector Chair from 2024–2025. Meeting quarterly, the WG has coordinated a structured programme to strengthen the creative economy across the Atlantic region. Its membership brought together industry, public-sector and advocacy representatives, ensuring actions were grounded in national, regional and sectoral evidence and contributed to long-term, sustainable industry stabilisation and growth.

From the outset, the group prioritised enabling infrastructure, data and market intelligence, talent attraction and retention, enterprise development, and marketing and visibility. These themes shaped a series of strategic interventions designed to reinforce the resilience of the creative sector rather than produce isolated activities.

A major focus has been infrastructure capable of anchoring talent and enterprise. The first phase of the Errigal Virtual Production Studios in Donegal is underway and is expected to support around 150 full-time equivalent roles. Developed with the Donegal Film Office, the studio is positioned as a central hub within the regional CreaTech cluster and a catalyst for long-term enterprise capacity. The Atlantic CreaTech Innovation and Enterprise Cluster was activated in early 2024, driven by three major regional companies, and had aligned 25 internationally trading creative enterprises by late 2024.

The national *Creative Industry Data and Market Intelligence* (CIDMI) service, established in 2022, has engaged with Cluster-aligned enterprises in the North-West, providing essential insight for investment planning and evidence-based growth. Additional initiatives supported through Regional and National Enterprise Development Funding and Creative Ireland now underpin the stabilisation of the commercial creative sector. These include the Atlantic TIDE initiative (2022–2024) led by the Institute of Designers in Ireland (IDI) and Sligo County Council, resulting in the appointment of an IDI Regional Development Officer; the Immerse AR/VR initiative led by Eirmersive and Donegal County Council; the Sligo-Leitrim-Roscommon (SLR) Creative Heartlands programme; and the completion of the Strand Campus Innovation facility (SoCo Lab).

In 2025, the working group identified four industry-informed priorities for 2026 onwards, aligned with digitalisation and the green agenda, cluster expansion, investment for market-oriented enterprises, infrastructure development, and enhanced industry visibility. These pillars build on the successful delivery of current actions and aim to deliver sustained regional impact.



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 industry (onshore/offshore wind) in the North-West region and along the Atlantic coast, through regional collaboration, regional supply chain diversification and assistance of the public agencies and educational bodies

Action Leader: North-West Regional Programme Manager, Leitrim Local Authority, WDC
Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2025
Final Status: Action complete

Action Update:
Aligned with government and regional priorities, the growth of the onshore and offshore wind industry in the North-West region is a key economic and enterprise focus. In response to shared strategic priorities across the Atlantic region, the North-West, West, and Mid-West REP programme managers jointly commissioned the *Growth of Onshore to Offshore Wind – Atlantic Region Wind Energy and Supply-Chain Feasibility Study*, co-funded by Enterprise Ireland and completed by Dublin Offshore Consultants in Q3 2022. The report provides essential evidence base for long-term planning, investment, and capacity building in the renewable energy

sector. Following publication, the team delivered an online webinar open to all stakeholders and implemented a targeted communications campaign to raise awareness among regional networks, policymakers, and industry groups. Its recommendations have been actively reviewed by programme managers and working groups, informing ongoing discussions on skills, infrastructure, and supply-chain readiness.

The North-West REP Steering Committee continues to promote and deepen this work, focusing on strengthening links with the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment – through the cross Governmental Offshore Wind Delivery Taskforce – to ensure regional priorities inform national planning. This engagement contributed to a formal submission ahead of the publication of *Powering Prosperity – Ireland's Offshore Wind Industrial Strategy* in 2023, where Regional Enterprise Plans were recognised as a mechanism for coordinating regional action. Since September 2024, the Department's Green Tech Unit (formerly Offshore Wind Strategy Unit) has held quarterly meetings with the Chairs and Programme Managers of each regions' Offshore Wind Partnership / Working Group. These have enabled the regional groups to work collaboratively and recognise the vast shared opportunity that offshore wind energy represents. Collaboration has expanded through the first West/North-West online joint working group on offshore renewable energy, held in Q2 2023 and chaired by the Chief Executive of Údarás na Gaeltachta. The group coordinates regional action, shares structured information, provides feedback to national bodies, and identifies gaps in supply chains, skills, research, and infrastructure. Following engagement with regional chairs, the Taskforce agreed to a formal meeting schedule with the working group starting Q4 2024.

Under the pillar of supply chain development, an Ireland and Scotland event was hosted by the Western Development Commission in partnership with the Scottish Government and the North-West REP at the AIM Centre, Sligo, in March 2025. The event convened regional actors to learn from the Scottish scenario, establish continued collaboration, and identify priority areas for policy, supply chain and infrastructure, and education and skills development. In H2 2025, Údarás na Gaeltachta, supported by four Atlantic-region county councils, commissioned a study on opportunities in constrained wind energy, exploring green energy parks, community-led models, marketing approaches, smart data applications, and battery storage, providing additional pathways for development.

In November 2025, the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment (DETE) led a delegation on a visit to Denmark to GreenLab - a leading example of a Green Energy Park that co-locates renewable energy production with industrial energy demand. GreenLab was identified as a particularly well-developed application of the green energy park concept in the economic assessment of the potential for green energy parks carried out by Gavin and Doherty Geosolutions on behalf of the DETE (Powering Prosperity - Action 37). A representative from the Western Development Commission, Helen McHenry, joined the delegation.

While individual projects will evolve beyond the current plan period, the collective momentum has created a strong foundation for continued regional leadership in offshore renewable energy.

Complementary regional activities include the Interreg Europe Green Hydra project, a collaboration between Donegal County Council and EU partners to enhance SME participation in the green hydrogen ecosystem across ten European regions. The project supports policy development, awareness campaigns, pilot projects, R&D funding, and sharing best practices and expertise. This aligns with EU targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030 and achieve net-zero by 2050. Activities include assessing regional conditions for SME engagement, identifying enablers and barriers, and improving public policies and support structures.

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

Action Leader: Killybegs Marine Cluster manager
Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2025
Final Status: Action complete

Action Update:
The Killybegs Marine Cluster continues to drive blue economy development in the North-West, uniting industries across commercial fishing, fish processing, marine engineering, aquaculture, offshore services, renewable energy, and marine tourism. Supported by Enterprise Ireland through its Regional Technology Clustering Funds, the Cluster implements a coordinated programme to strengthen enterprise capacity, expand international connections, and lay the foundations for long-term industry transformation.

Guided by three priority themes – sustainable proteins, renewable energy, and a vibrant start-up culture – the Cluster focuses on four strategic pillars: internationalisation, scale and competitiveness; skills and talent; research, development and innovation; and structured ecosystem growth. These pillars inform integrated actions that balance economic opportunity, innovation, and regional identity.

In sustainable proteins, the Cluster has supported members to engage internationally and learn from peer sectors. Activities included Aquaculture UK in May 2024, collaboration with Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM) HATCH in October 2023, and relationship-building with Salmon Scotland, enhancing market insight, networks, and the region's profile within European aquaculture.

In renewable energy, practical testing and industry collaborations took place in early 2024, including subsea micropile trials for Mincom, launch-and-recovery system development with Exofin, and offshore survey capacity-building with Fruugo. Complementary links with Scottish renewable energy organisations and the Northern Ireland Maritime Cluster position Killybegs strategically within the offshore renewable energy supply chain.

The Cluster has also focused on culture and workforce development. Preparatory work is underway to establish an electrical apprenticeship at Killybegs, and partnerships with the Bryden Centre advance shared goals for marine renewable energy leadership across Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Ireland. Discussions are progressing to rebrand and formalise the Cluster as a company limited by guarantee, with governance and membership frameworks to be advanced from 2024.

The Donegal Blue Economy Working Group extends beyond the Killybegs Cluster, bringing together local authorities, state agencies, education providers, industry representatives, and enterprise supports to promote sustainable development of Donegal's marine and coastal economy. Its focus includes fisheries, aquaculture, marine engineering, renewable energy, and coastal tourism. The group identifies skills and infrastructure needs, encourages research and innovation, and improves coordination between stakeholders. Achievements include raising awareness of Donegal's marine potential, convening workshops linking industry and academia, and shaping a shared vision for future development.

A holistic strategic plan, developed by an independent consultancy, is considered essential to maximise the region's potential and chart a phased roadmap. The work to date provides a strong foundation for continued growth, with Killybegs and BORMAC clusters proving critical to regional enterprise and economic development.

Complementary regional activities include DIBEST, an Interreg Atlantic Area project led by the Western Development Commission (WDC), supporting 26 Irish micro-enterprises, including nine in the North-West, through online digital upskilling, mentoring, and transnational networking. The programme concludes in July 2026. *GoNaturePositive!* a four-year EU research and innovation initiative coordinated by Trinity College Dublin (January 2024–December 2027), accelerates the transition to a nature-positive economy within the Blue Economy, led locally by the WDC Blue Economy Pilot.



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 Leader: ATU Sligo
Timeframe for delivery: Q3 2024
Final Status: Action complete

Action Update:
A working group comprising of academic staff from the Atlantic Technological University, regional policy specialists, the Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA) and business representatives was established to support a unified approach to addressing infrastructure needs in the North-West. Its work has centred on ensuring that the specific challenges facing the region are clearly articulated and embedded within national-level planning for enterprise development. Throughout the life of the plan, the working group has acted as a conduit between local experience and government policy discussions, with a view to clearly communicating needs and assisting in securing long-term improvements in the conditions required for sustainable business growth.

Following consultation across the region, the North-West Regional Enterprise Plan submitted a detailed evidence-based paper to the National Development Plan, Accelerated Infrastructure Delivery Taskforce consultation and to the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment, outlining infrastructure gaps in energy, water services, transport and waste management. The submission, supported by data, graphics and local insight, contributed to the Department's ongoing review of national infrastructure to meet future enterprise needs.

Recognising the importance of a cohesive narrative, the working group subsequently applied to the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment for funding to commission a consultant to prepare a summarised regional report incorporating case studies and illustrating the practical impact of infrastructure challenges on enterprise. The report included case studies from twelve regional businesses and provided a literature-backed assessment of priority issues, developed in collaboration with the working group. In July 2024, Chief Executives from Sligo, Leitrim and Donegal County Councils, the NWRA's economist and the working group ATU chair met and presented this report to the Minister of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment, Peter Burke TD.

Using an evidence-based approach, the NWRA advocates for the development of the Northern and Western Region of Ireland (which includes the counties of Sligo, Leitrim and Donegal as well as Galway, Mayo, Roscommon, Cavan and Monaghan). A part of this advocacy role, the NWRA develops research publications, economic briefing notes and policy submissions which aim to inform national, regional and local policymakers of the challenges and opportunities facing the Northern and Western Region. Particularly of note are the NWRA's publications, supported by the REP, namely the Regional Infrastructure Tracker, Regional Economic Briefing Note on Regional Housing Activity, Submission to NDP *Review*, Submission to *Accelerating Infrastructure Delivery* Taskforce and numerous submissions to County Development Plans that include policies and objectives for infrastructure provision and economic development

The work of the working group and other agencies in the region will continue beyond the current plan period, ensuring sustained advocacy and evidence gathering to support infrastructure investment essential for long-term regional enterprise development.

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: IDA North-West
Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024
Final Status: Action complete

Action Update:
A coordinated effort between IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, the Western Development Commission and the North-West Regional Enterprise Plan has strengthened the visibility and investment profile of the North-West region through a series of strategic promotional and engagement initiatives. Central to this work was the North-West in the City event held in Dublin in February 2023, designed to connect with the professional diaspora, highlight recent regional transformation and articulate a compelling value proposition for enterprise development. With senior executives from more than twenty global employers in attendance, the event succeeded in raising the region's profile and establishing a repeatable model for future promotional activity.

Building on this momentum, IDA Ireland commissioned a marketing agency in March 2024 to produce sector-specific video content showcasing the North-West's ecosystem, including its clusters and the strong track record of companies operating in the region. Filming commenced in May 2024 and featured testimonials from clients across the North-West. The content was finalised later in 2024 as part of a wider effort to promote regional locations in Ireland to FDI investors in 2025. It will also be used in an upcoming marketing campaign for the next North-West in the City event, scheduled for November 2026. This material now forms a high-quality suite of collateral that supports talent-attraction and investor-engagement initiatives and reinforces the strategic messaging established through earlier promotional activity.

International outreach has also expanded. In June 2024, the Western Development Commission, supported by IDA Ireland, hosted a major trade mission from the Irish Australian Chamber of Commerce, accompanied by fifteen businesses and potential investors from Australia. This marked the first visit of its scale focused specifically on the North-West and included structured engagements with stakeholders across Leitrim, Sligo and Donegal. Early follow-up meetings with potential investors have already begun, signalling strong interest generated by the visit.

Looking ahead, partner agencies are collaborating on a repeat of the North-West in the City event, with dates under consideration for H2 2026. The intention is to sustain a long-term promotional platform that continues to connect senior diaspora, attract investment and communicate the evolving strengths of the North-West economy.

In 2025, the three Chief Executives of Sligo, Leitrim and Donegal County Councils collaborated in developing a joint vision *North-West Region Strategy* which articulates the joint regional vision to 2050, how the region will develop industrially and contribute towards the national targets and development. Additionally, this North-West regional vision will provide strategic guidance towards the development of the next REP.

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

Action Leader: IDA Ireland
Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2023
Final Status: Action discontinued

Action Update:
As reported in the *Mid-term progress report*, upon evaluating all the considerable work on remote working being completed regionally and nationally, the North-West Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committee felt its efforts were better spent adding additionality in the other actions within the plan and the decision was taken to discontinue this action.



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 Leader: Enterprise Ireland
Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2025
Final Status: Action complete

Action Update:
Enterprise Ireland has led the regional effort to advance the circular economy across the North-West, establishing a coordinated structure to guide activity under this action. Since the beginning of the Regional Enterprise Plan, the working group has concentrated on understanding the needs of local businesses and identifying practical ways to embed circular practices within enterprise development. This has required ongoing engagement with industry, support agencies and policy experts to assess regional capabilities and determine what additional supports are needed to help companies transition to more sustainable models. As circularity becomes increasingly central to national and regional economic strategy, this work is expected to continue beyond the current plan.

A key early focus has been examining how existing Enterprise Ireland-supported initiatives can be strengthened or adapted for the North-West. The Regional Enterprise Plan Programme Manager and the Chairperson have reviewed national supports such as the Local Enterprise Offices' *Green for Business Voucher* and Enterprise Ireland's *Climate Action Voucher* to assess how the Regional Enterprise Plan can add further value. The emphasis has been on increasing awareness, expanding access to specialist advice and addressing gaps specific to the region's enterprise profile.

The development of European Digital Innovation Hubs under the Digital Europe Programme has created an additional platform for innovation. *Data2Sustain*, led by Atlantic Technological University Sligo, supports SMEs across the Northern and Western region by helping them adopt digital tools that enhance sustainability, operational efficiency and circular practices. This aligns closely with the working group's ambition to ensure that North-West enterprises benefit from European supports that promote low-carbon transition and resource efficiency.

Raising awareness and facilitating knowledge exchange have become central components of the group's work. A circular economy webinar was delivered in the second half of 2024 as part of Mayo Ideas Month and was promoted to companies across the West and North-West. The session provided accessible information on circular opportunities and emerging technologies. Participant feedback was gathered to gauge demand for further supports. If strong interest continues, an in-person conference is planned for 2026, jointly hosted by the North-West and West regions, bringing together businesses, researchers and policymakers.

Collectively, these activities demonstrate a structured and evolving approach to embedding circularity within the regional enterprise landscape. By building on national schemes, strengthening links with European initiatives and creating platforms for engagement, the working group is laying the groundwork for long-term sustainability and innovation across the North-West.

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

Action Leader: Enterprise Ireland
Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2025
Final Status: Action complete

Action Update:
Throughout the life of the Regional Enterprise Plan, significant emphasis has been placed on raising awareness of existing supports, analysing their effectiveness for our rural region and ensuring strong regional participation in the available supports. A wide range of supports are currently available to micro enterprises and SMEs across Donegal, Leitrim and Sligo to assist them in progressing sustainability and decarbonisation. These supports, delivered through the Local Enterprise Offices and Enterprise Ireland, form an integrated suite of programmes that help businesses understand their environmental impact, adopt resource-efficient practices and develop long-term sustainability plans. Among the most widely used supports are *Green for Micro*, the *Energy Efficiency Grant*, the *Kickstarter Programmes*, the *Climate Action Voucher*, *Green Start* and *Green Plus*. Together, these initiatives provide structured pathways for businesses at different stages of their climate transition journey.

In March 2024, one of Enterprise Ireland's *Kickstarter Programmes* was highlighted as a Spotlight event during Donegal Local Enterprise Week. The event attracted thirty-five registered companies, demonstrating strong regional interest in sustainability planning and the practical steps required to embed decarbonisation into day-to-day business operations. This workshop model, which results in a tailored sustainability action plan for each participating company, has proven effective in supporting firms to move from awareness to action.

Building on this success, a further series of *Kickstarter Programmes* began September 2024. These sessions ran online every second Friday and were open to clients of the Local Enterprise Offices and Enterprise Ireland across the North-West. Participation was promoted through direct outreach and social media to ensure broad engagement across the three counties. Importantly, these workshops were provided free of charge, reducing barriers for smaller firms that may lack internal resources to begin their sustainability journey.

Alongside these structured programmes, the Local Enterprise Offices coordinated an extensive programme of green-themed promotional activities across Donegal, Leitrim and Sligo over H2 2025. These efforts aimed to encourage more companies to begin their decarbonisation journey, while also highlighting the range of advisory and financial supports available.

The region has also benefited from national initiatives, including the first *Building Better Business* event, hosted in the North-West in March 2023. This in-person event, organised by the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment, focused on supporting businesses as they navigate the transition to a low-carbon economy and adopt digital transformation. The event brought together experts, policymakers and business representatives for panel discussions on the opportunities and challenges of sustainability and digital adoption.

Collectively, these activities reflect an ongoing and expanding regional commitment to supporting sustainable enterprise growth. The foundation built through these programmes will continue to drive decarbonisation and competitiveness in the North-West well beyond the current plan period.



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 North-West through new initiatives which can provide additionality or assist existing initiatives e.g. Cross-border Smart Industry forum

Action Leader: Donegal County Council Economic Development Group
Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2025
Final Status: Action complete

Action Update:
Throughout the lifetime of the Regional Enterprise Plan, partners across the North-West City Region have worked collaboratively to strengthen the region's long-term economic position, expand innovation capacity and build a shared cross-border investment proposition. This collaborative effort has been led by Derry City and Strabane District Council and Donegal County Council, supported by education providers, industry representatives and a wide network of national and international stakeholders.

From the outset, the aim has been to develop a coherent regional narrative that supports sustainable enterprise growth, deepens areas of specialisation and positions the region as a competitive location for global investment. This work will continue beyond the current plan period.

Over the duration of the plan, several interconnected projects have progressed.

Regional advocacy has remained a central focus. The two councils jointly prepared a submission to the Review of the National Planning Framework, ensuring that the North-West's cross-border needs, demographic trends and strategic assets were clearly represented. The annual North-West Trade Mission continued through the Golden Bridges Trade and Investment Mission to the East Coast of the United States, with engagements in Philadelphia and Boston, alongside the Golden Bridges Conference.

Investment promotion activities have expanded internationally. Work is underway on a comprehensive Inward Investment Strategy and place-branding materials for the North-West City Region. A programme of dedicated international trade and investment events is planned annually, including engagements in London and the United States, to strengthen the region's visibility and attract new investors.

Innovation development has also advanced significantly. The North-West RegTech Initiative –driven by Donegal County Council, Derry City and Strabane District Council, Atlantic Technological University, Catalyst Northern Ireland and other partners – has progressed through a feasibility study and business case funded by the Shared Island Local Authority Development Funding Scheme. The Navigating the Future of Regulation conference, held in October 2023 in Letterkenny, brought together international experts to explore the potential for a multi-sector regulatory supercluster, leveraging the region's unique cross-border advantages. The continued development of the RegTech cluster is seen as a key driver of future economic and enterprise growth.

Significant progress has also been made on the North-West Innovation Hub in Letterkenny and the sister Digital Innovation Hub in Derry. The North-West Innovation Hub, also known as the Beta Business Centre, will house the Alpha Innovation Programme and is co-funded by Shared Island, Enterprise Ireland and Donegal County Council. The project is now shovel-ready, with land acquisition complete, planning consent secured and detailed designs and tender documentation finalised.

Cross-border enterprise development has been strengthened through programmes delivered by Donegal County Council, Donegal Local Enterprise Office, Alpha Innovation and Derry City and Strabane District Council. These include Pathfinders I and II (2023–2024) and the Lead2Grow Leadership Programme

(2025), supporting both start-ups and scaling companies across the region. Additional opportunities are being explored through a study commissioned with Omagh and Fermanagh District Council on the potential for a Food Innovation Plaza between Ballyshannon and Irvinestown.

Educational collaboration continues to evolve through the North-West Smart Industries Board, led by Atlantic Technological University, and the North-West Education Tertiary Cluster, which is developing enhanced cross-border learning pathways. A Human Skills pillar, operating under the Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN), brings together further and higher education institutions on both sides of the border to collaborate in agreed areas. Numerous Peace Plus and Shared Island projects are also underway, spanning social enterprise, digital health and advanced manufacturing.

Collectively, these initiatives form an integrated programme of work that will continue beyond 2025, reinforcing the region's long-term competitiveness and cross-border cohesion.



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 bolsters existing initiatives and offers additionality to the overall issue

Action Leader: North-West Regional Skills Forum Manager

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2025

Final Status: Action complete

Action Update:

Throughout the lifetime of the Regional Enterprise Plan, activity under this action has continued to strengthen skills development, education collaboration and sectoral readiness across the North-West Region. The work has centred on building a coherent, cross-border approach to talent development

that supports enterprise growth and responds to emerging industry needs. This approach has involved close cooperation between education providers, local authorities and regional industry partners, and is expected to continue beyond the end of the plan period. The Regional Skills Manager supports the work of the North-West REP by being a key "Cross objective" support to each industry as it grows in the region.

Significant progress has been made in strengthening regional capacity in cybersecurity. The North-West Cyber Security Skills Audit Report, published in May 2023, set out recommendations across three themes: promoting the region's cybersecurity sector, creating a strong cybersecurity culture and building a cyber talent pipeline. Action has been advanced in each area. A cybersecurity roadmap for micro enterprises has been developed in partnership with Cyber Ireland to provide practical guidance on risk and resilience. The findings of the 2023 audit also informed the PeacePlus proposal submitted by the North-West Education Tertiary Cluster, which focuses on digital skills and cybersecurity.

A skills audit for the Blue Economy and Marine skills is nearing completion with the output set to address critical skills gaps and growth opportunities that will inform future workforce planning in marine and coastal enterprise sectors. In addition, the Regional Skills Manager contributes to national policy coordination through participation in the cross-government Offshore Wind Delivery Taskforce and the West and North-West Offshore Wind Working Group.

The North-West Education Tertiary Cluster has remained central to this effort. Since 2023, the four participating tertiary education institutions have collaborated to expand cross-border education pathways and improve training opportunities for learners across the region. Their joint work was further advanced through support provided during the PeacePlus Theme 2.3 call in summer 2023, which focused on area-based skills development, notably 'NW Depth' and 'North South ESTEEM'. The NW Depth project develops a learner-centred digital skills framework that encourages individuals to progress along flexible but structured learning pathways. North-South ESTEEM is a new collaboration led by Atlantic Technological University, working alongside Ulster University, North-West Regional College, and Donegal Education and Training Board, with policy expertise from the Centre for Cross-border Cooperation. The project will deliver three interconnected strands: improving student mobility, boosting employment skills portability, and developing a research-based strategy to align education and skills systems with the needs of an all-island economy. Regional Skills is an Associate Partner on both initiatives.

Overall, this action has delivered sustained, collaborative progress in aligning skills, education and enterprise needs, reinforcing the North-West's long-term competitiveness.

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 North-West Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committee

Action Status Table by Strategic Objectives

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.	Status	Completion Date
Action 1.1: Develop regional initiatives to assist scaling of micro/large businesses within the North-West. [Amended]	Action complete	Q4 2025
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 complete	Q4 2025
Action 1.3: Improve linkages between SME's and multinational/large enterprise in the North-West.	Action partially complete	Q4 2025
Action 1.4: Encourage the development of clusters in the region.	Action complete	Q4 2025
Action 1.5: Explore opportunities to grow strategically the creative economy.	Action complete	Q4 2025

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.	Status	Completion Date
Action 2.1: Encourage the growth of the wind energy industry (onshore/offshore wind) in North-West region and along the Atlantic coast, through regional collaboration, existing supply chain diversification and work with the public agencies and educational bodies.	Action complete	Q4 2025
Action 2.2: Continue to assist the on-going development of the regional blue economy encompassing our full North-West coastline and additionally the development of the marine cluster centre in Killybegs.	Action complete	Q4 2025

Strategic Objective 3: Support the offering of the North-West Region as a place to work and invest high value jobs in	Status	Completion Date
Action 3.1: Work collaboratively with regional and national stakeholders in addressing infrastructural deficits in the North-West.	Action complete	Q3 2024
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 complete	Q4 2024
Action 3.3: Utilise the shift to remote and blended working to attract and retain high quality talent in the region.	Action discontinued	Q4 2023

Strategic Objective 4: Assist the North-West's enterprises to mainstream climate action and transition to a low carbon into their business planning and delivery.	Status	Completion Date
Action 4.1: Identify and implement opportunities to promote and expand the regional circular economy.	Action complete	Q4 2025

Action 4.2: Develop a suite of targeted initiatives to enable enterprise in the region transform and meet their decarbonisation requirements.	Action complete	Q4 2025

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.	**Status**	**Completion Date**
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 complete	Q4 2025

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.	**Status**	**Completion Date**
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 backs existing initiatives and offers additionality to the overall issue.	Action complete	Q4 2025

Appendices

Appendix 1 Membership of Regional Steering Committee

Chairperson of North-West Regional Enterprise Plan
Séamus Hughes, Corporate Vice President, Zeus Letterkenny
Programme Manager of North-West Regional Enterprise Plan
Cathriona MacCarthy (January 2026 to Present)
Anne McTernan (September 2020 - January 2026)
Membership of the Committee
Director of Economic Development, Donegal County Council
Director of Economic Development, Leitrim County Council
Director of Economic Development, Sligo County Council
Head of LEO Donegal
Head of LEO Sligo
Head of LEO Leitrim
Head of Economic Development, Donegal County Council
Vice President of Enterprise and Engagement, ATU
Head of Engagement and Enterprise, ATU
Regional Director Northern and Western Region at Enterprise Ireland, Enterprise Ireland
Regional Manager, North-West Region (Donegal, Sligo and Leitrim) at IDA Ireland
Regional Skills Forum Manager, North-West Region
Area Training Manager, Donegal ETB
ATU Enterprise and entrepreneurship development, ATU
Killybegs Cluster Manager, ATU
Economist, Northern and Western Regional Assembly
Director of Further Education and Training at Mayo Sligo and Leitrim Education and Training Board, MSL ETB
Head of Regional Development, Western Development Commission
ÚCaire Consulting, Private Consultant
CEO | Príomhfheidhmeannach, **Údarás** na Gaeltachta

Appendix 2 Statistical Snapshot

To note: NUTS 3 statistical regions of Ireland was used for the statistical snapshot

Constituent counties	Donegal, Leitrim, Cavan, Monaghan and Sligo
Border Population[1]	442,600
Persons aged 15 years and over in Employment[2]	216,100
ILO Participation Rate[3]	63.9%
ILO Unemployment Rate[4]	5.3%
Persons aged 15 years and over in Employment (Male)[5]	117,100
Persons aged 15 years and over in Employment (Female)[6]	99,000
Persons aged 15 years and over in Employment from Q1 2019[7]	184,000
Persons aged 15 years and over in Employment from Q3 2025[8]	216,100
Actual Increase in Employment from Q1 2019 – Q3 2025	32,100
Employment Growth Rate between Q1 2019 – Q3 2025	17.4%
Persons aged 25 years and over on Live Register in the Border region at 01/12/2025[9]	13,355
Irish-owned Companies – Agency Assisted Employment in the Border region, Jobs 2019[10]	16,923
Irish-owned Companies – Agency Assisted Employment in the Border region, Jobs 2025[11]	21,691
Change between 2019 - 2025[12]	4,768
Foreign-owned Companies – Agency Assisted Employment in the Border, Jobs 2019[13]	13,061
Foreign-owned Companies – Agency Assisted Employment in the Border, Jobs 2025[14]	14,313
Change between 2019 - 2025[15]	1,252

Endnotes

1 CSO - Estimated Population (Persons in April) - https://data.cso.ie/table/PEA08
2 CSO - Labour Force Survey - https://data.cso.ie/table/QLF08
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/QLF01
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 Persons on Live Register https://data.cso.ie/table/LRM17
10 DETE Annual Employment Survey - CSO - Estimated Population (Persons in April) Annual Employment Survey 2024 - DETE
11 DETE Annual Employment Survey - CSO - Estimated Population (Persons in April) Annual Employment Survey 2024 - DETE
12 DETE Annual Employment Survey - CSO - Estimated Population (Persons in April) Annual Employment Survey 2024 - DETE
13 DETE Annual Employment Survey - CSO - Estimated Population (Persons in April) Annual Employment Survey 2024 - DETE
14 DETE Annual Employment Survey - CSO - Estimated Population (Persons in April) Annual Employment Survey 2024 - DETE
15 DETE Annual Employment Survey - CSO - Estimated Population (Persons in April) Annual Employment Survey 2024 - DETE

An Roinn Fiontar, Turasóireachta agus Fostaíochta
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