



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Mid-Term Progress Report

West Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024



An initiative of the Department of
Enterprise, Trade and Employment

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Minister's Foreword

I am pleased to present this Progress Report on the implementation of the West Regional Enterprise Plan, an initiative launched in 2022 to support economic development, foster innovation and cultivate sustainable growth across the West of Ireland.

The West region spans the beautiful counties of Galway, Mayo, and Roscommon. Since the inception of the Plan, the focus has been on unlocking the region's inherent potential, ensuring that it not only thrives economically but also contributes to the broader prosperity of all of Ireland.

Central to the approach has been the commitment to building a dynamic economy that aligns with the distinctive strengths of the West. Sectors such as Audiovisual/Creative, Life Sciences and Med Tech, Renewable Energy and Advanced Manufacturing are being supported through investment, innovative programmes, and collaborative efforts with key stakeholders.

Innovation has been at the forefront of the Plan. By fostering a culture of creativity and entrepreneurship, it seeks to create an environment that supports research and development, encourages emerging industries, and positions the West as a location for investment.

The success of these efforts has been underpinned by collaboration. The strong partnership between government agencies, local authorities, businesses, educational institutions, and others has been integral in navigating challenges and seizing opportunities. The West, with its diverse and vibrant communities, has embraced a collaborative approach, pooling collective wisdom and resources to address regional challenges and ensure that economic progress is sustainable and inclusive.

To assist with the implementation of Regional Enterprise Plans, my department has secured up to €145 million in funding for the Smart Regions Enterprise Innovation Scheme, co-funded under the European Regional Development Fund, which will support projects aligned to the Regional Enterprise Plans. The first call of €35m was announced in October 2023 with subsequent calls in the coming years. This funding complements the aims and objectives of the Regional Enterprise Plans and with continued collaboration the West is well positioned to compete for current and future funding calls to drive enterprise development in the region.

As we reflect on the achievements outlined in this report, it is evident that the West is on a trajectory of growth and prosperity. Challenges undoubtedly persist, but the progress made thus far is a testament to the hard work and dedication of the stakeholders in West. I invite all stakeholders to continue their active engagement and support as we build upon these accomplishments.

Finally, I extend my sincere appreciation to Chair Evelyn O'Toole, Programme Manager Helena Deane, and all the regional stakeholders who have played a role in progressing the implementation of the West Regional Enterprise Plan. Their dedication and collaborative spirit have been crucial in shaping the successes highlighted in this Progress Report.

Dara Calleary TD

Minister of State for Trade Promotion, Digital and Company Regulation

Chair's Introduction

As the Chair of the Steering Committee for the West Regional Enterprise Plan (WREP) to 2024, I am delighted to oversee the mid-progress review of the WREP for the Region.

A wide range of actions have been in motion and have been progressing at solid pace to facilitate the implementation of objectives in Roscommon, Mayo, Galway City and Galway County, driven by the regional stakeholders, through collaboration (often also on an intra-regional and national level).

Key regional infrastructure, with a sectoral focus, such as BIA Innovator Campus and CREW, are already delivering many programmes and interventions to assist the entrepreneurs in the region and beyond. Wide-ranging European Funding has been secured to address specific challenges in the region, including industrial development via a small hydrogen valley in Galway, funding for sustainable tourism solutions to drive the green and digital transition, and funding to create a stronger ecosystem, to name just a few examples, with additional progress being made in industrial development for offshore wind and capacity building for circular economy.

These positive outcomes from the actions are a testament to the cohesive thinking, enhanced engagement and work of the many stakeholders including the various enterprise agencies, local authorities, business organisations, chambers of commerce, our universities, and wider stakeholders. It has been more evident than ever, that by joining up the effort, and vision of individual organisations, supports for enterprise growth and job creation can be enriched and boosted exponentially - benefitting all the region.

I want to thank the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment for their support, Minister Calleary, the Programme Manager, and the Regional Steering Committee, for their continuous commitment in helping drive the implementation.

Evelyn O'Toole

Chair of the West Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committee

West Highlights

- The regional enterprise ecosystem is being strengthened with exploration of new sector-specific infrastructure projects, including feasibility for the Infinity Hub at Ireland West Airport Knock Strategic Development Zone, and with new programmes.
- Significant progress has been made to explore new opportunities for industrial development, including offshore renewable energy including the publication of an inter-regional study on the economic potential, and work under the GH2 (Galway Hydrogen) initiative.
- The West has benefited from major bodies of work being completed to develop the creative and cultural sector and especially creative enterprise, including activities completed and ongoing under Creative Ireland, Shared Island and European funding projects and initiatives, such as SPECTRA Horizon Europe project, as well as Atlantic TIDE and IMMERSE Creative Ireland projects.
- The work to position the creative sector in the West as a key partner in Europe for policy formulation, data, market intelligence, and business support has made major strides, while in parallel, planned regional infrastructure development, such as launch of CREW enterprise hub and plans for AnBealach, are also advancing at pace.
- Key initiatives have been launched under the strategic objective for tourism (pilot acceleration programme), digital transformation (commencement of the European Digital Innovation Hub Data2Sustain) and Living Labs (the launch of the Atlantic Region of Innovation).
- A wide range of activation measures have been implemented under the leadership of the BIA Innovator Campus in collaboration with regional stakeholders, including a launch of a national network, and a string of knowledge-based projects funded by Europe, with the Campus opening its doors in coming months.
- Considerable development is also evident under the green transformation objectives, including the West becoming a fellow region in the European Circular Cities and Regions Initiative, capacity building actions under the University of Galway strategic fund, and a range of actions under the auspices of European funding.

Smart Specialisation

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment published Ireland's *National Smart Specialisation Strategy for Innovation 2022-2027 (S3)* in July 2022, which embraces a regional approach to addressing Ireland's Research, Development and Innovation (RD&I) challenges. It provides a bridge between regional and national innovation strategy building and decision making, bringing coherence to RD&I planning for the benefit of enterprise and advancing the RD&I agenda regionally and nationally.

Smart Specialisation is a key component of the economic element of each of the three Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies for delivering balanced regional development in Ireland aligned with the objectives of Project Ireland 2040. S3 is also fundamental to developing smarter more competitive regions, one of the key strategic outcomes under Ireland's European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) Programmes 2021-2027.

The Smart Regions Enterprise Innovation Scheme has a very particular focus on supporting the Regional Enterprise Plans (REPs). It aims to accelerate economic growth in all regions by working with regional stakeholders to deliver on their potential regional enterprise strengths and opportunities, and by strengthening the regional enterprise innovation system. The scheme opened for applications on 12 October 2023.

Each of the Regional Assemblies sit on the National S3 Implementation Group which has overall responsibility for the delivery of S3 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 West Region

At NUTS 2 level the West Region is part of Ireland's Northern and Western Region.

The West Region has strong the creative sector and economy, the land-based and blue economy, and life sciences, including Medtech.

These sectors of strength align with the objectives of the West Regional Enterprise Plan and are being progressed through the work of CREW, the BIA Innovator Campus, the Marine Institute, Údarás-led initiative Nua Na Mara, and the development of a Western Regional Life Sciences Hub.

This progress report documents implementation to end of Q3 2023 and has been prepared and signed off by the West Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committee.

Action Status Key

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

Action on target: The Steering Committee has deemed that these actions are on target for completion by the deadline.

Action not on target: The Steering Committee notes that delivery of these actions has been delayed but is still being progressed.

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

New /Amended action: The Steering Committee has agreed to create a new action or revise an existing action.

Strategic Objective 1: Advance the development of the regional Entrepreneurship and Innovation Ecosystem

Action 1.1: Expand availability of incubation, acceleration, and sector-specific start-up infrastructure and programmes

Action Leader: University of Galway and Enterprise Ireland

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

- Working group Western Enterprise Ecosystem has been established, initiated by Enterprise Ireland. The purpose of this group is to increase collaboration, knowledge sharing and support to underpin the work of the regional start-up and innovation hubs (for example, the Portershed, Platform94, ATU iHubs and others) and ultimately benefit their clients to build, scale and grow in the region and beyond.
- A priming/scoping grant has been awarded through the Regional Enterprise Innovation Scoping Scheme (REISS) fund, to support development of a Western Regional Life Sciences Hub in Galway; this effort is being led by the University of Galway and Western Development Commission.
- The Galway City Innovation District grew to encompass two Portershed buildings in Galway City Centre while also continuing to implement the National Digital Research Centre (NDRC) pre-acceleration and acceleration supports, as well as other programmes, as a regional partner.
- Platform94 has appointed a Client Scaling Manager and a Regional and Global Outreach Manager, embarking on a regional roadshow, while also having launched the Innovation Exchange initiative that connects large businesses with SMEs, and the new extension being ready for Q4 2023.

Action 1.2: Expand access to early stage and scaling capital

Action Leader: WestBIC

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

***Original timeframe extended**

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

Sub Action 1: A prerequisite to expanding access to early stage and scaling capital is fully understanding the financing landscape; research of alternative funding avenues and associated workshops is underway but is not yet complete, to allow for some further scoping work to take place. Estimated completion by Q4 2024 (originally Q2 2023).

Sub Action 2: WestBIC and Western Development Commission (WDC) were successful in securing European funding that will further refine the activities under project UnicornQuest, which seeks to improve the conditions for start-ups to scale and become high-valuation companies. Estimated completion by Q2 2024 (originally Q4 2023).

Action 1.3: Drive forward the development of People and Skills

Action Leader: Regional Skills Forum West

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

- A working group has been established to manage the progress of this action, that coincides with the Regional Skills Forum, with the objectives to help identify enterprise skills needs and identification of key-skills bottlenecks (such as development of skills for offshore wind industry, and in the area of hydrogen and circular economy).
- MSLETB led a successful application under the SOLAS Innovation Fund, across the three Western Regional Enterprise Plans (West, North-West and Mid-West), under the leadership of Mayo, Sligo Leitrim Education and Training Board (MSLETB), to develop offshore wind skills utilising immersive technologies. There is an ongoing collaboration with the North-West Regional Skills Forum to harness the full breadth of skills availability and development across the Atlantic Technological University (ATU).

Action 1.4: Harness the Connected Hubs and Grow Remote initiatives to assist Placemaking and Talent Retention

Action Leader: Western Development Commission

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

Sub Action 1: The work to support placemaking harnessing the Connected Hubs initiative and through promotional efforts is ongoing.

Sub- Action 2: The Western Development Commission, building on Connected Hubs and its policy work, has applied for European funding to support 'Retaining and attracting knowledge workers and skills for regional development (REWARD)', outcome is expected by Q4 2023. REWARD aims to improve regional policies and programmes for retaining and attracting knowledge workers for regional development. It will identify, analyse, disseminate, and transfer good practices. The specific objectives are to:

- Improve the effectiveness of university-industry collaboration as a means of retaining graduates in existing jobs;
- Support entrepreneurship and increase business support to create new jobs in the economy;
- Improve interventions that enhance the quality of life and foster regional attractiveness;
- Adapt to new forms of work;

Talent attraction and retention has been recognised as a key priority and challenge and insights have been shared at the Regional Skills Forum in Q2 2023 (original target date Q4 2022).

Action 1.5: Advance the Enterprise Strategy for the Strategic Development Zone (SDZ) at the Ireland West Airport Knock

Action Leader: County Council and Ireland West Airport Knock

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

***Original timeframe extended**

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

Action amended to reflect the introduction of new funding and structure for the Strategic Development Zone development by Government.

- A feasibility study funded through the Regional Enterprise Innovation Scoping Scheme (REISS) for an Infinity Hub at Ireland West Airport Knock (IWAK) is underway, with an architectural consultant having been appointed by Horan Trust CLG with support from Mayo County Council and the Western Development Commission to develop the building concept, as well as a consultancy focusing on developing the related business case, Urban Foresight.
- The Government has allocated funds for two years to Mayo County Council to advance the development of the Strategic Development Zone (SDZ). The funding will be used to put in place dedicated project management and external expertise to prepare a detailed roadmap for the development of the SDZ. The roadmap development will be overseen by a steering group including Mayo County Council, IWAK, Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, the Western Development Commission, and the West Regional Enterprise Plan Programme Manager. This set of actions addresses the three action outcomes

(stakeholder group establishment, phased masterplan, development of a funding and development strategy), now with completion target date of Q4 2025.

Action 1.6: Continue to champion gender equality, inclusivity, and diversity in innovation and entrepreneurship

Action Leader: ATU (Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology), iHub Mayo

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2023

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

This is an ongoing action. Preliminary work has been undertaken to address this action, including consideration of the OECD policy tool for data evaluation.

- The Atlantic Futures Project, a collaboration between Ulster University, University of Galway, Atlantic Technological University and University of Limerick for sustainable regional development in the North-West Atlantic Innovation Corridor region, is undertaking research on factors to improve levels of female entrepreneurship.
- While the EMPOWER programme is not continuing in its original format, ATU iHubs and the stakeholders continue to work on building on its legacy. The CUMASÚ programme to support female entrepreneurs has been launched in collaboration with Údarás na Gaeltachta.

The University of Galway IdeasLab launched the CreateHER undergraduate female incubation programme in 2022, which continued on in 2023.

Strategic Objective 2: Strengthen and harness the Cultural and Creative Sector to attract new investment, commercialisation, and collaboration opportunities

Action 2.1: Build-up and scale the activities of CREW Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF) project, to act as hub and spoke across the region, developing creative centres of excellence such as An Bealach, Roscommon

Action Leader: CREW

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

Extensive progress has been made to build up and scale the activities of CREW working with regional stakeholders.

- CREW has successfully developed and launched the new Creative Entrepreneurship and Enterprise Development (CEED) LEVEL 9 course, with two cohorts already having completed the programme, and a third cohort underway.
- The new CREW Hub situated at the ATU Galway Campus Wellpark Road, is due to be launched in Q1 2024.
- The Bealach Nua development (AnBealach), including a virtual production studio, has been awarded planning permission (with conditions) and is set to be located on the Fairs and Market Site in the town centre in Ballaghaderreen, Co. Roscommon. An associated Cost-Benefit Analysis and Business Plan are in preparation.
- The Western Development Commission and CREW have successfully secured EU funding to help strengthen the cultural and creative industries ecosystem in the West of Ireland, under the auspices of the SPECTRA project 'Stimulating Performance in Creative Territories and Regional Actors'. Galway Culture Company and ATU are associate partners in the project.

Action 2.2: Develop clustering of the Creative and Cultural Sector, by creating new linkages and new collaborative opportunities and expand creative assets (e.g., film studio, production facilities) and capitalise on emerging development in immersive technology and animation

Action Leader: Western Development Commission

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

- A baseline survey of the creative industries sector in the region to provide data and highlight opportunities has been completed.
- Key stakeholders have secured targeted funding through the Creative Ireland Local Authority Economic Fund, under the leadership of the Local Authorities, and support of, for example, CREW, Ardan and the Western Development Commission. These initiatives include Atlantic TIDE (Transforming Ireland's Design Economy) and Wild Games Initiative, both securing follow-on funding.
- IMMERSE, another initiative under Creative Ireland, led from Donegal, is aiming to raise capacity for augmented reality capabilities, including collaboration in the West via Connected Hubs, Regional Enterprise Offices, CREW Digital, Údarás na Gaeltachta and the Western Development Commission.
- ImTech project, under SOLAS Innovation Fund, led by Mayo Sligo Leitrim Education and Training Board (MSLETB), aims to utilise immersive technology for development of skills for the offshore wind industry.
- CREW in collaboration with An Bealach (Roscommon County Council) and The Western Development Commission and other key sectoral stakeholders, supported by Enterprise Ireland REISS funding, commissioned work to scope out the national creative industries data repository focusing on feasibility of activating a permanent data, statistics, and market intelligence repository for the creative industries. The process included identifying and engaging with senior stakeholders, defining the service development phases, drafting an appropriate business activation plan and the identification of funding sources.

Action 2.3: Further the collaboration between industry, academia, and researchers, thereby assisting the development and commercial exploitation of creative and cultural intellectual property

Action Leader: ATU (Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology)

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

Action Outcome 1 is under development (funding source to be identified for initiation of Creative Vouchers), Action outcome 2 on delivery of Creative Entrepreneurship Programme in

collaboration with ATU, has been achieved (via the CEED programme, outlined previously) and outcome 3 (establishment of North-South collaborative projects) is under development.

- The stakeholders have been successful in securing funding under the Shared Island Fund for two initiatives, led by Galway City Council, including CREW, and the Galway Culture Company as project partners:
 - (i) Culture Connects - testing the feasibility of creating new knowledge capital through a diverse artist-led, cross-border support programme for emerging cultural practitioners; specific assessment of development need, operations and development costs for artist residency and workplace sites on a cross-border basis
 - (ii) ARCC - Atlantic Region of Creative Content - bringing together the expertise and strengths of the partner organisations to support the development of an all-Island Creative Industries Cluster facilitated through virtual production spaces and clustering for the creative industries North and South.
- The Western Development Commission has secured associate partnership with the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KIC) for Creative and Cultural Sector Industries (CCSI) and is a member of the Co-Location Centre for North-West Europe.
- The Western Development Commission secured EU funding under the Interreg Europe VIADUCT project, which explores the elements needed to enhance commercial exploration of research and IP assets.
- The Western Development Commission has also been appointed as the national network partner for Ireland as part of the European Cultural and Creative Sectors and Industries Policy Platform (EKIP Policy Lab) Horizon Europe project in support of the topics under this action.

Strategic Objective 3: Realise the Atlantic West Region’s potential for enterprise and job creation in the Renewable Energy sector

Action 3.1: Engage in inter-regional collaboration for development of the supply-chain and upskilling programmes, in particular in offshore renewable energy

Action Leader: West Regional Enterprise Plan Programme Manager

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

- Action outcome 1 (feasibility study on supply chain development and pilot upskilling initiative) has been achieved, with action outcomes 2 (animation activities to stimulate enterprise participation in the sector) and 3 (establishment of panels of mentors and experts) being under ongoing development.
- In collaboration with the Mid-West and North-West Regional Enterprise Plans, under the leadership of Leitrim County Council, together with other stakeholders, including Mayo County Council and the Western Development Commission, a feasibility study was commissioned and has been published to outline the potential of offshore and onshore wind industrial development within the Atlantic West. The report outlined that by 2037 there could be upwards of 5,000 jobs supported directly by the offshore wind sector and up to €400m in Gross Value Add annually. This study was funded under the Regional Enterprise Transition Scheme.
- A wide range of work to activate the sector and develop initiatives around skills, in collaboration with the Regional Skills Forum West, are underway including the implementation of project T-Shore by the Atlantic Technological University focusing on research of innovative approaches for skills provision in the offshore renewable energy sector and blue economy, and Imtech immersive training for offshore wind upskilling under the SOLAS Innovation Fund.

Action 3.2: Develop smart specialisation of the region in the field of renewable energy, linked to natural and physical assets, e.g., Atlantic Marine Energy Test Site (AMETS) while identifying suitable locations and investment opportunities for further development, including green hydrogen

Action Leader: West Regional Enterprise Plan Programme Manager

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2023

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

- A follow-up from the outputs of the feasibility study under action 3.1 is being developed, to help define next steps.
- A partnership was established bringing together the University of Galway, Port of Galway, Bord Na Mona, CIÉ Group and other partners to progress the Galway Hydrogen Hub (GH2), Ireland's first Hydrogen Valley. The EU SH2AMROCK proposal is to develop a small Hydrogen Valley in the Galway region, similar to those launched in other European countries. A Hydrogen Valley is a regional ecosystem that links hydrogen research, production, distribution, and transportation with various end users such as transport and industry. The utilisation of indigenous green hydrogen at Hydrogen Valleys is considered an important step towards enabling the development of a new hydrogen economy. The partnership has won European funding of €8m under the EU Clean Energy Partnership initiative. Separately, feasibility funding has been won under Enterprise Ireland REISS scheme to explore potential for an innovation hub led by Port of Galway.

Action 3.3: Form a task force with the goal of enabling development and removing barriers to progress of critical infrastructure

Action Leader: Western Development Commission

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

***Original timeframe extended**

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

This task has not yet been established. Terms of Reference are currently under development to support the implementation of this action and formation of the task force.

Strategic Objective 4: Drive the Global Competitiveness of the Life Sciences sector underpinned by an expanded regional footprint and coordination

Action 4.1: Further develop coordination activities and integration of the diverse elements and actors in the ecosystem

Action Leader: Enterprise Ireland and Private Sector Lead

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

***Original timeframe extended**

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

While work by the stakeholders to further mature the ecosystem is well underway, some more work is required to develop and define the membership and work of the strategic group.

Action 4.2: Scale and diversify sector specialisms and specialism – specific initiatives across the region, including access to necessary infrastructure in liaison with Strategic Objective 1

Action Leader: Údarás na Gaeltachta

Timeframe for delivery: Q3 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

- A priming/scoping grant has been successfully awarded under the REISS fund, to support development of a Western Regional Life Sciences Hub in Galway; this effort is being led by the University of Galway and Western Development Commission. A project manager has been appointed, with building/site identification, due diligence and business case refinement work under development, while consulting with industry and potential partners is also being carried out.
- A RETS feasibility grant was awarded to support investigation of smart specialisation opportunities in the area of frontline healthcare (Health and Social Care Professions, the second largest clinical grouping of the healthcare workforce), arising from the impacts of COVID-19, Brexit and other identified market changes and trends, with a focus on innovation and digital transition. The work had been undertaken under the leadership of Atlantic Technological University, with the support of the Western Development Commission, Local Enterprise Office Mayo and a range of stakeholders. Conclusions from the feasibility study are under review and next steps are under consideration.

Strategic Objective 5: Grow the AgTech and Food sector in the West, underpinned by an integrated innovation network, facilitating the transition towards a sustainable Bioeconomy

Action 5.1: Utilising the BIA Innovator Campus as a central engine for development of Agri-food and Ag-Tech, develop an integrated regional platform for innovation in conjunction with national and regional partners, ensuring proactive, joined-up approaches to identify and address ecosystem needs

Action Leader: BIA Innovator Campus

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

- BIA Innovator Campus has implemented a large range of actions to support the objective, in collaboration with regional and European stakeholders. The Campus is due to formally launch in Q4 2023.
- BIA was also successful in securing a range of EU funding for projects, including ECO-SME, Nature, Little Yeti, Ethical Food Entrepreneurship, Cook it Forward, Simulating Healthy Food Service Innovation under the Erasmus+ programme, to support upskilling, training, and youth inclusion.
- More recently, BIA has submitted two Interreg Europe applications – in the area of Slow Tourism and digitalisation in the Agri/AgTech sector, with policy partners Galway County Council and Teagasc respectively.
- BIA Innovator Campus also launched a new Irish community and learning forum for food and drink entrepreneurs called Bread & Jam Ireland; it is a food enterprise network, acceleration, and brand building community for the West of Ireland and nationally.

Action 5.2: Encourage Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the sector to enable clustering and intra-company collaboration

Action Leader: Enterprise Ireland

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

This is an ongoing action, which is currently under development.

Action 5.3: Expand the innovation, educational and entrepreneurial opportunities for AgTech

Action Leader: West Regional LEOs

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

***Original timeframe extended**

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

This is an ongoing action.

BIA Innovator Campus successfully secured Enterprise Ireland REISS Funding towards the development of additional supports for startups and SMEs in AgTech, as well as Shared Island funding for collaboration to develop Excellence Centres in Food Innovation and Agritech across three themes; establishment of the first cross-border Food and Agritech Innovation Network; including feasibility of new investment projects by cross-border Local Authority partnerships, led by Galway County Council. Further work is planned, as outlined in action 5.1.

Action 5.4: Develop industry-Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) collaboration and research further to facilitate transition to circular Bioeconomy, championing cross- sectoral, low-carbon and smart approaches

Action Leader: Atlantic Technological University (Mountbellow)

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

***Original timeframe extended**

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

Atlantic Technological University (ATU) have joined the prestigious BiOrbic, Bioeconomy SFI Research Centre, a national collaboration of over 100 researchers focused on the development of a sustainable circular bioeconomy. Hosted by University College Dublin, BiOrbic researchers work on selectively separating and extracting valued compounds from renewable materials, converting those resources into novel bio-based products and processes, and delivering market and industry-scalable sustainable resources.

- Bioeconomy demonstration projects (action outcome 1) are being formulated, facilitated by the 2023 Bioeconomy Demonstration Initiative – EU Just Transition Fund. The fund has been published in Q4 2023.

- Framework for collaboration is under further development (action outcome 2), awaiting also inputs from REISS and Shared Island funded activities under action 5.3.

Action 5.5: Further the development of enterprise and innovation in the Blue Bioeconomy

Action Leader: Marine Incubation and Development Centre

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

The Nua Na Mara initiative has had a soft launch by Údarás na Gaeltachta as a champion for marine product commercialisation, and to bridge the gap in linking innovation, application, concepts, and commercialisation, in collaboration with research, testing and enterprise development facilities for the marine sector provided by the Atlantic Technological University (ATU) and University of Galway. It will also coordinate collaborative programming of specialist supports and development interventions to be jointly implemented by Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM), the Marine Institute, the Education and Training Boards, Skillnet and other regional stakeholders.

- Capital allocation has been granted to provide for a second planning application for the Páirc na Mara project to Galway County Council by Údarás na Gaeltachta, with an update to the masterplan. Páirc na Mara's strategic project is of key importance to the local economy and has significant potential as a national research and industry hub. It is expected that a new planning application will be brought to Galway County Council by the end of 2024.
- Go Nature Positive!, a Horizon Europe funded project led by Trinity College Dublin, with Western Development Commission as a case study pilot partner, focuses on integration of nature positive principles within the context of Blue Economy in the West of Ireland for innovative nature-based enterprise and investment, while learning from methodologies developed through project activities and good practice/case studies provided by international partners. Activities will start in 2024 and dovetail with the work of the Marine Institute and Udarás na Gaeltachta.

Strategic Objective 6: Expand prospects for sustainable entrepreneurship, employment and upskilling in Tourism

Action 6.1: Develop a pilot accelerator programme based around the experience economy, underpinning companies with sector-specific assistance and growth funding

Action Leader: Regional Chambers, led by Galway Chamber of Commerce

Timeframe for delivery: Q2 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

EU funding was secured to pilot an acceleration programme with funding for companies, under the Single Market Programme – COSME project ‘Scaling Twin Transition in Tourism by harnessing the Experience Economy for greater Resilience’ – ST3ER, coordinated by Údarás na Gaeltachta and supported by WestBIC. The programme will be delivered in collaboration with regional stakeholders. The specialism of the accelerator will be focusing on digitalised and data-driven solutions for smart, secure, and sustainable tourism.

Action 6.2: Build out integrated, networked approaches for smarter, greener, connected, and a more sustainable tourism offering

Action Leader: Fáilte Ireland

Timeframe for delivery: Q3 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

The North Mayo Destination Experience Development Plan (DEDP) is being prepared by Fáilte Ireland to help drive and sustain tourism in the Mayo North region. The plan is due to be finalised and published in 2024. An Upper Shannon, Shannon-Erne and Border Destination and Experience Development Plan is also under development, with workshops completed and surveys underway.

- Tourism projects in County Roscommon and the Ballinasloe Municipal District of East Galway will now be able to access a new €68m fund allocated to Fáilte Ireland as part of the EU’s Just Transition Fund; collaborative projects are currently under consideration.
- Galway County Council, in collaboration with BIA Innovator Campus, has applied for EU funding under the topic of ‘Slow Tourism’. The project is intended to help develop tourism in a sustainable manner in less frequently visited destinations, resulting in benefits to local communities through the creation of jobs, while ensuring the protection of the environment.

Strategic Objective 7: Facilitate an equitable digital and green transformation in the West

Action 7.1: Leverage the European Digital Innovation Hub (EDIH) ecosystem to progress adaptation of the artificial intelligence, High Performance Computing (HPC) and cybersecurity technologies by the industry and public sector

Action Leader: Western Development Commission

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

EDIH Data2Sustain for the Northern and Western region has been formally funded under the Resilience and Recovery Fund, the funding being managed by Enterprise Ireland, with the grant agreement coming into force in February 2023. The EDIH is led by Atlantic Technological University with partners WestBIC, University of Galway, ERNACT, Western Development Commission, Local Enterprise Office Mayo, Údarás na Gaeltachta and Northern and Western Regional Assembly. The EDIH will offer 'test before invest', skills and training, matchmaking and market support, as well as access to finance services across the partnership, acting as a virtual 'one stop shop' for SMEs and public organisations looking to advance their digitalisation.

- The Western Development Commission, in collaboration with ITAG, has submitted an EU funding application, focusing on Improving conditions and policies for SMEs to embrace AI (EmbrAlsm) under Interreg Europe funding programme. Outcome of the application is expected by end of Q4 2023.

Action 7.2: Develop initiative to encourage emergence of 'born sustainable, born circular' start-ups

Action Leader: West Regional LEOs

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

This action is work in progress. To date, the Local Enterprise Offices have already started to embed the concept of 'born sustainable, born circular' in their early-stage programmes like SYOB (Start Your Own Business) and Lean Launch. Additionally, the regional stakeholders are progressing action 7.3 to Develop further capacity to stimulate circular economy adaptation by enterprise in collaboration with the public bodies, industry and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), which will help underpin more technical aspects of action 7.2.

Action 7.3: Develop further capacity to stimulate circular economy adaptation by enterprise in collaboration with the public bodies, industry and Higher Education Institutes (HEIs)

Action Leader: University of Galway

Timeframe for delivery: Q1 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

- The Western Development Commission has secured the participation of the West of Ireland in the European Circular Cities and Regions Initiative (CCRI), as a fellow region. Launched and funded by the EU as part of the Circular Economy Action Plan, CCRI focuses on implementing the circular economy across Europe's cities and regions. The CCRI aims to increase synergies among projects and initiatives, disseminate relevant knowledge, and give greater visibility to best practices, combining this knowledge sharing with technical and financial support. ATU and University of Galway actively support this activity.
- The University of Galway Strategic Fund approved funding for a joint initiative of the University of Galway College of Science and Engineering (School of Engineering) with the Western Development Commission 'Leading the Transition to a Circular Economy in our Region'; project activities include mapping the circular economy in the West of Ireland and international benchmarking.
- Developing and demonstrating new value chains is part of the capacity building. Blue Circular Nets (CIRCNETS) project, funded by the Interreg Northern Periphery and Arctic 2021-2027 Programme (NPA) supports the collection, treatment, and recycling of fishing gear, ensuring that end-of-life nets do not end up polluting the seas and degrading the marine environment. The project is driven by University of Galway and the Western Development Commission.

Action 7.4: Develop the region as a 'Living Lab' to help address challenges associated with the Digital and Green Transformation

Action Leader: Western Development Commission

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

The Living Lab concept is based on a user co-creation approach integrating research and innovation processes to achieve a solution to specific challenges. Activities include

exploration, experimentation and evaluation of innovative ideas, scenarios, concepts and related technological tools and systems, in real life use cases.

- Under the Constructing Healthcare Environments through Responsible Research Innovation and Entrepreneurship Strategies (CHERRIES) Responsible Research and Innovation EU project, West of Ireland was a mirror region, adopting co-creation methodologies to support the Living lab project on Clare Island, with project partners CISCO, Health Service Executive (HSE), Mayo County Council and University of Galway.
- The Western Development Commission joined forces with the award-winning CivTech Alliance Global Scale-Up Programme. This programme draws together leading GovTech and CivTech innovation programmes from around the world to deliver a global platform for fast-growth companies to access policymakers, procurers and investors across regional ecosystems, to solve challenges, such as for example, greater adaptation of green procurement at scale. Additionally, under the banner of the Atlantic Region of Innovation, membership of the European Network of Living Labs (ENoLL) was secured.

Action 7.5: Develop a shared regional enterprise strategy to harness the potential of Decarbonising Zones

Action Leader: Climate Action Regional Office (CARO)

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

***Original timeframe extended**

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

Further work is required to develop a regional strategy to harness the potential of Decarbonising Zones. Funding and resources to facilitate these activities is still pending. Initial conversations and ideas have been exchanged with Climate Action Regional Office (CARO) Atlantic Seaboard North.

- Galway City Council have been successful in securing a €1m grant as part of the European Union NetZeroCities Pilot Cities programme. Galway is the only Irish city participating in the programme. The pilot proposes a Retrofit Accelerator Programme to upskill contractors, incorporate learnings from post-retrofit performance management, and support behavioural change to increase people's engagement around retrofitting.
- Galway City and Mayo County Council have become signatories of Mission Charter for Climate Adaptation, with CARO Atlantic Seabed North as friends of the Mission. The Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change focuses on supporting EU regions, cities and Local Authorities in their efforts to build resilience against the impacts of climate change.

Action Status Table by Strategic Objectives

*Updated timeframe agreed by Steering Committee

| Strategic Objective 1: Advance the development of the regional Entrepreneurship and Innovation Ecosystem. | Status | For completion by |
|---|------------------|--------------------------|
| Action 1.1: Expand availability of incubation, acceleration, and sector-specific start-up infrastructure and programmes. | Action on target | Q4 2024 |
| Action 1.2: Expand access to early stage and scaling capital. | Action on target | Q4 2024* |
| Action 1.3: Drive forward the development of People and Skills. | Action on target | Q4 2024 |
| Action 1.4: Harness the Connected Hubs and Grow Remote Initiatives to assist Placemaking and Talent Retention | Action on target | Q4 2024 |
| Action 1.5: Advance the Enterprise Strategy for the Strategic Development Zone at the Ireland West Airport Knock. | Action on target | Q4 2024* |
| Action 1.6: Continue to champion gender equality, inclusivity and diversity in innovation and entrepreneurship. | Action on target | Q4 2023 |

| Strategic Objective 2: Strengthen and harness the Cultural and Creative Sector to attract new investment, commercialisation, and collaboration opportunities. | Status | For completion by |
|--|------------------|--------------------------|
| Action 2.1: Build-up and scale the activities of CREW REDF project, to act as hub and spoke across the region, developing creative centres of excellence such as An Bealach, Roscommon. | Action on target | Q4 2024 |

| | | |
|--|-------------------------|----------------|
| <p>Action 2.2: Develop clustering of the Creative and Cultural Sector, by creating new linkages and new collaborative opportunities and expand creative assets (e.g., film studio, production facilities) and capitalise on emerging development in immersive technology and animation.</p> | <p>Action on target</p> | <p>Q4 2024</p> |
| <p>Action 2.3: Further the collaboration between the industry, the academia, and the researchers, thereby supporting development and commercial exploitation of creative and cultural intellectual property.</p> | <p>Action on target</p> | <p>Q4 2024</p> |

| <p>Strategic Objective 3: Realise the Atlantic West Region’s potential for enterprise and job creation in the Renewable Energy sector.</p> | <p>Status</p> | <p>By completion by</p> |
|---|-------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <p>Action 3.1: Engage in inter-regional collaboration for development of the supply-chain and upskilling programmes, in particular in offshore renewable energy.</p> | <p>Action on target</p> | <p>Q4 2024</p> |
| <p>Action 3.2: Develop smart specialisation of the region in the field of renewable energy, linked to natural and physical assets, e.g. AMETS while identifying suitable locations and investment opportunities for further development, including green hydrogen.</p> | <p>Action on target</p> | <p>Q4 2023</p> |
| <p>Action 3.3: Form a task force with the goal of enabling development and removing barriers to progress of critical infrastructure.</p> | <p>Action on target</p> | <p>Q4 2024*</p> |

| Strategic Objective 4: Drive the Global Competitiveness of the Life Sciences sector underpinned by an expanded regional footprint and coordination. | Status | By completion by |
|---|------------------|-------------------------|
| Action 4.1: Further develop coordination activities and integration of the diverse elements and actors in the ecosystem. | Action on target | Q4 2024* |
| Action 4.2: Scale and diversify sector specialisms and specialism-specific supports across the region, including access to necessary infrastructure in liaison with SO1. | Action on target | Q3 2024 |

| Strategic Objective 5: Grow the AgTech and Food sector in the West, underpinned by an integrated innovation network, facilitating the transition towards a sustainable Bioeconomy. | Status | By completion by |
|--|------------------|-------------------------|
| Action 5.1: Utilising the BIA Innovator Campus as a central engine for development of Agri-food and Ag-Tech, develop an integrated regional platform for innovation in conjunction with national and regional partners, ensuring proactive, joined-up approaches to identify and address ecosystem needs. | Action on target | Q4 2024 |
| Action 5.2: Encourage Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the sector to clustering and intra-company collaboration. | Action on target | Q4 2024 |
| Action 5.3: Expand the innovation, educational and entrepreneurial opportunities for AgTech. | Action on target | Q4 2024* |
| Action 5.4: Develop industry-HEI collaboration and research further to facilitate transition to circular Bioeconomy, | Action on target | Q4 2024* |

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|--|------------------|-------------------------|
| championing cross-sectoral, low-carbon and smart approaches. | | |
| Action 5.5: Further the development of enterprise and innovation in the Blue Bioeconomy. | Action on target | Q4 2024 |
| Strategic Objective 6: Expand prospects for sustainable entrepreneurship, employment and upskilling in Tourism. | Status | By completion by |
| Action 6.1: Develop a pilot accelerator programme based around the experience economy, underpinning companies with sector-specific supports and growth funding. | Action on target | Q2 2024 |
| Action 6.2: Build out integrated, networked approaches for smarter, greener, connected, and a more sustainable tourism offering. | Action on target | Q3 2024 |

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|--|------------------|-------------------------|
| Strategic Objective 7: Facilitate an equitable digital and green transformation in the West. | Status | By completion by |
| Action 7.1: Leverage the European Digital Innovation Hub (EDIH) ecosystem to progress adaptation of the artificial intelligence, High Performance Computing and cybersecurity technologies by the industry and public sector. | Action on target | Q4 2024 |
| Action 7.2: Develop initiative to encourage emergence of 'born sustainable, born circular' start-ups. | Action on target | Q4 2024 |
| Action 7.3: Develop further capacity to stimulate circular economy adaptation by enterprise in collaboration with the public bodies, industry and HEIs. | Action on target | Q1 2024 |

| | | |
|--|------------------|----------|
| Action 7.4: Develop the region as a 'Living Lab' to help address challenges associated with the Digital and Green Transformation. | Action on target | Q4 2024 |
| Action 7.5: Develop a shared regional enterprise strategy to harness the potential of Decarbonising Zones. | Action on target | Q4 2024* |