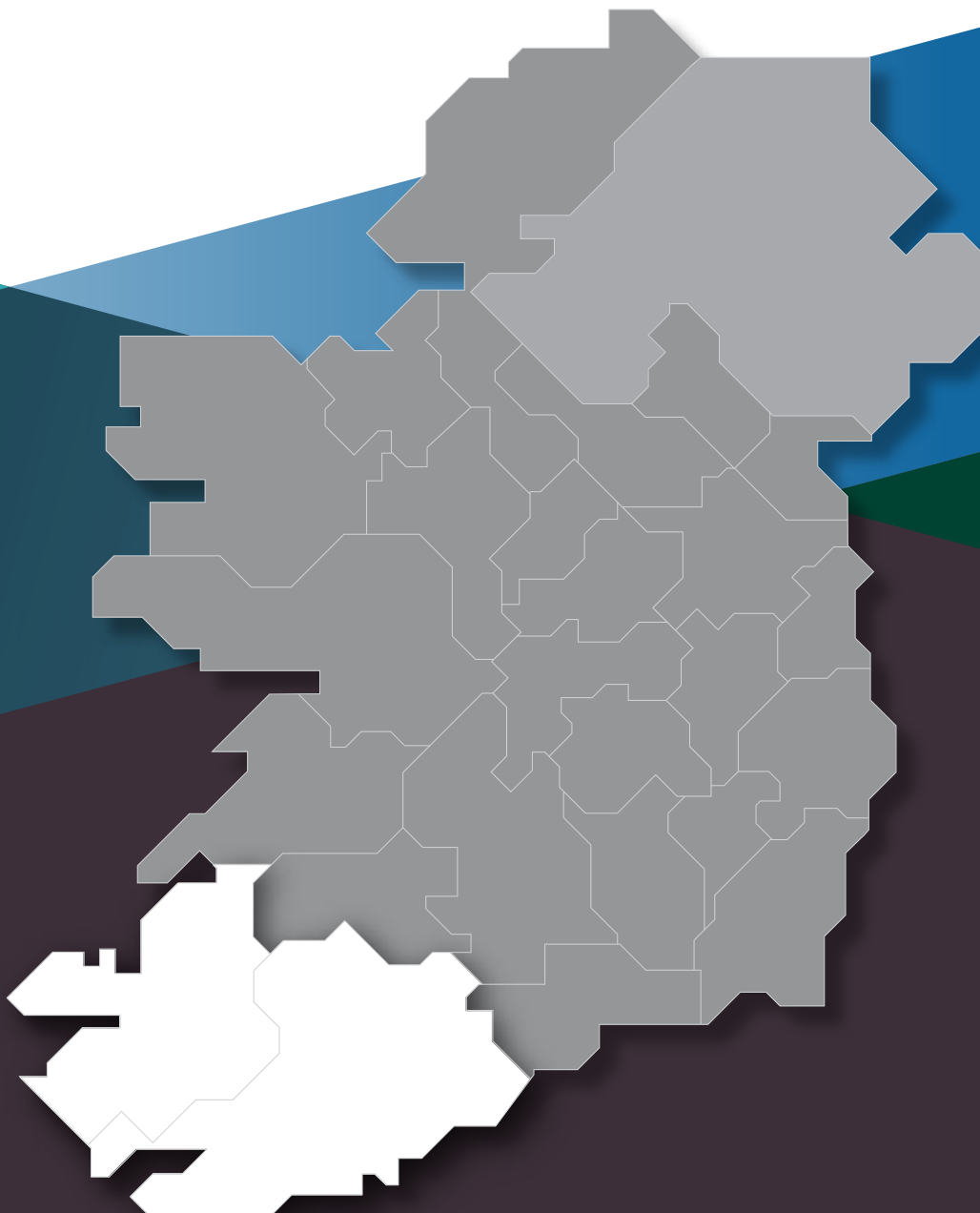




Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

SOUTH-WEST

Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020 – Final Progress Report



An initiative of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment

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Minister's Foreword

I welcome this publication of the final Progress Report on implementation of the South-West Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020. I am pleased to see that the South-West Steering Committee working with regional stakeholders have advanced 87 percent of the actions set out in the Regional Enterprise Plan and are continuing to work on the ongoing actions.

Our Programme for Government has balanced regional growth at its core and seeks to pursue a coherent policy approach to the enterprise needs of every part of Ireland. This is seen in the strategies of the enterprise agencies; the valuable work of the local enterprise offices at county level; as well as through competitive funding and other strategic investments to reinforce regional enterprise ecosystems, including the regional enterprise development fund; regional technology clustering; investment in RD&I infrastructures; and the IDA Ireland regional property programme.

There is added value to be created however if we all work together locally to understand challenges; recognise new opportunities; and make the most of our complementary skills and resources. The Regional Enterprise Plans initiative, first launched in early 2019, takes a 'bottom-up' approach and brings together regional stakeholders to focus on addressing both vulnerabilities and opportunities critical to enterprise growth and job creation in each of regions, including the South-West.

I want to thank all the members of the South-West Steering Committee and the Programme Manager, Ross Church, for all of your work in 2020 and since the commencement of the Regional Enterprise Plan, and for your input to this Progress Report. In welcoming our new chairperson to the Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committee for the South-West, Patricia Quane, retired VP & General Manager, Astellas Ireland, I also want to pay tribute to the contribution of the outgoing chairperson, Dr Adrienne Harrington. Adrienne led the Committee through the preparation and implementation of the South-West Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020.

It is timely now, as we work to assist businesses all over the country to recover from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, to consider also what will help grow and sustain businesses over the longer term as they negotiate the transformative effects of digitalisation, and address both opportunities and challenges in a low carbon economy.

The creation of a new Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024 for the South-West has already commenced and will play a very important role in recognising and realising the potential that exists in this region. I very much look forward to further engagement with the South-West Regional Steering Committee over the coming months as the new South-West Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024 takes shape.



Damien English

Damien English TD,
Minister of State for Business,
Employment and Retail

Message from the Chairperson

I am pleased to present the 2020 Progress Report of the South-West Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020 (SWREP). This Progress Report details the final status of each of the actions within the lifetime of the current plan. Good progress that has been achieved in the South-West across the six Strategic Objectives and I hope that this positive momentum can be built on as we look ahead from the current phase and into the next.

The aim of the South-West Regional Enterprise Plan was to enhance and develop the overall enterprise ecosystem and environment in the region. This goal was primarily pursued through an emphasis on collaboration, partnership and focusing on the strengths of the region.

The actions in this plan all looked to add value to the work of regional stakeholders and I believe that we have achieved a high level of success and engagement in this regard. The collaboration and joint initiatives that have been undertaken under the SWREP will continue to serve the region well as we look to 2021 and beyond.

This Progress Report is published following a most challenging year economically and socially as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the pandemic, the SWREP continued to be implemented and indeed was called upon to lead on bringing forward proposals that would help to address economic impacts of the pandemic in the region. The SWREP submitted a detailed policy submission to be considered as part of the National Economic Recovery Plan and I hope that the issues contained within it can be addressed as we move forward to a recovery.

As a result of the pandemic, there are serious concerns in this region for SMEs, tourism and hospitality, retail, aviation and construction, among others. No sector has been immune to the crisis and our response to the pandemic must acknowledge that that recessions impact regions more severely and that regional locations are often slowest to recover. While research from the Regional Assemblies predicts the South-West region to be the second least affected after Dublin, Kerry is identified as the most vulnerable county in the country under the same analysis.

The pandemic has created a real shift in our thinking and attitudes towards economic resilience, our place of work and our collective ability to adapt. A lot of our work as part of the SWREP can be leveraged to respond to our new reality, particularly in terms of connected/smart working, the benefits of clusters, and looking at our future skills needs.

While the economic challenges posed by COVID-19 remain to the forefront of our attention, we must also remain extremely mindful of the challenges that all regions will face as we transition to a low-carbon and more digital economy. The South-West Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committee includes Just Transition as a standing item on our agenda and I am pleased that a new initiative to identify enterprise opportunities from climate action is being developed by the SWREP and the Atlantic Seaboard South Climate Action Regional Office (CARO) and the Eastern and Midlands CARO.

I was pleased that in January 2020, the South-West was awarded over €7.3m under the third call of the Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF). These projects, along with those funded under Calls One and Two of the REDF, will be instrumental in enhancing the enterprise environment in the region.

I would like to thank the members of the Steering Committee and the different Working Groups that have guided and driven implementation of the actions in the SWREP. I would particularly like to thank the three Local Authorities in the region who continue to fund the position of Programme Manager. Their continued engagement across all the Strategic Objectives remains critical.

And finally, I would like to thank our Programme Manager, Ross Church, for his hard work, enthusiasm and initiative in driving this Plan forward.



Dr. Adrienne Harrington,
Chair South-West
Regional Enterprise Plan

1. South-West Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020 – Final Progress Update

SOUTH-WEST STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1:

Build capability and resilience in the region's enterprise base.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2:

Develop the region's enterprise hubs.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3:

Leverage the opportunities offered through business clustering to drive enterprise performance and resilience in the South-West (including a focus on building internationalisation capability amongst indigenous companies).



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4:

Increase the capacity of the tourism sector through skills development and seasonal extension, and ensure that the region's natural heritage, culture and living landscapes are appropriately managed and protected.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 5:

Support growth in the region's marine and maritime sector.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 6:

Ensure the availability of skills and talent to underpin the region's economic growth potential.

Overall high-level outcomes for the South-West Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020

This is the final Progress Report of the South-West Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020 which closes out this iteration of the South-West Regional Enterprise Plan. For the Steering Committee to present a final assessment on the level of implementation achieved during the 2019-2020 period, actions have been classified into four categories.

Complete: The Committee has deemed that these actions have been fully completed within the scope and lifetime of the South-West Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020.

Action commenced but requires further work:

The Committee has deemed that while these actions were not completed in full, work had commenced, and significant progress was made during the lifetime of the Plan and will continue, as many projects are of a delivery period which exceed the plan duration. The Committee will consider if these actions could be included as part of future regional strategic objectives in the new South-West Regional Enterprise Plan through to 2024.

Action not commenced: The Committee has deemed that these actions were either not initiated, or insufficient progress was made within the scope and lifetime of the South-West Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020. However, this does not preclude these actions from being reconsidered as part of future strategic objectives in the in the new South-West Regional Enterprise Plan.

Table 1: Progress on Actions during 2020 and Final Status

South-West Regional Enterprise Plan	
Total Actions	23
Complete	8
Action commenced but requires further work	12
Action not commenced	3

Each of the previous Regional Action Plan for Jobs 2015-2017/8 set out two core outcomes for achievement in each region by the end of 2020 and these continued to be monitored under the Regional Enterprise Plans to 2020:

- employment growth of between 10 and 15 percent; and
- an unemployment rate reduced to within one percentage point of the State average.

Table 2: Utilising data from the CSO Labour Force Survey (LFS), the rate of growth and unemployment rates achieved for the Border region during the period Q1 2015 up to Q4 2020 are as follows:

Region	Numbers Employed			Actual Increase in Employment	Unemployment Rate	
	Q1 2015	Q4 2020	Growth Rate Q1 2015 - Q4 2020	Q1 2015 - Q4 2020	Q1 2015	Q4 2020
South-West	295,000	328,600	11.4%	33,600	10.5%	6.3%
State	2,014,400	2,306,200	14.4%	291,800	10.5%	5.7%

Source: CSO Labour Force Survey, Q4 2020

Since launch of Regional Action Plan for Jobs in 2015, 33,600 more people are in employment between Q1 2015 and to Q4 2020. This is an increase of 11.4 percent which achieves the Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020 target while the unemployment rate also fell from 10.5 percent to 6.3 percent over the same period, in the region, again inside the 2020 target.

The figures in Table 2 exclude people who were receiving the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) at the end of 2020. As of the 31st December 2020, a total of 45,881 people were in receipt of the PUP (see Table 3 for a county and regional breakdown).

Table 3: Persons in receipt of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment at the end of 2020

County	Persons in receipt of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (Number)
Cork	32,535
Kerry	13,346
South-West	45,881

Source: CSO, Labour Market Live Register (<https://data.cso.ie/table/LRW03>)

2020 Highlights



Establishment of a network of Cork-based digital hubs in addition to the Kerry hubs network.



Over €7.3m secured under the Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF) for the South-West region in 2020.



Development of a new programme with the Climate Action Regional Offices and Maynooth University (CARO) to explore enterprise opportunities from climate action.



Study undertaken to analyse the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the marine and coastal tourism industry in pilot study towns of Bantry and Valentia.




Enterprise Week event on Smart Technology held in the region.



Mapping of digital hubs in partnership with the Atlantic Economic Corridor project.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1

Build capability and resilience in the region’s enterprise base 

Action 1:

Design and deliver a pilot ‘Hack-a-Team’ initiative as an additional means to providing resources to early-stage companies/ entrepreneurs. The initiative will be focused on building a team around potential projects and promoters with a view to funding the model, rather than funding the applicant, to assist the applicant for a defined period of time to develop, strengthen, and test their business idea. The pilot could be developed with focus on a particular sector.

Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:

IT Tralee, Cork Institute of Technology (CIT), Cork County Council, Cork City Council, Kerry County Council, LEO South Cork, LEO North and West Cork, LEO Kerry, LEO Cork City, Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland

Timeframe for delivery:

Q4 2019

Final Status:

Action commenced but requires further work

Progress achieved to date and reason for delayed completion:

A joint application was submitted to the LEO Competitive Fund. However, this application was not successful in securing funding on this occasion.

Outline of remaining work to be completed on this action:

Efforts will be made in the event of future funding calls to re-examine the application to see what improvements can be made and whether there are opportunities to find new areas of focus.

The Local Enterprise Offices in the region (Cork City, Cork South, Cork North and West, Kerry) have been central to supporting businesses through the COVID-19 pandemic. The table below gives an indication of the level of support:

LEO	TOV	BCV
Cork City	642	725
Cork South	590	320
Cork North & West	441	423
Kerry	614	291
SW Total	2287	1759

Action 2:

'Showcase' advanced technologies, including the establishment of 'Smart City/Village/Town' pilot sites, in the region. This 'showcase' of advanced technologies and their industry applications will be delivered in the South- West, targeted at relevant sector(s) for the region.

Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:

IT Tralee, CIT, Cork County Council, Cork City Council, Kerry County Council, Cork Smart Gateway, Enterprise Ireland, the Dingle Hub

Timeframe for delivery:

Q2 2020

Final Status:

Action commenced but requires further work

Expected Completion Date:

Work and collaboration to continue beyond 2020.

Progress achieved to date and reason for delayed completion:

The South-West Local Authorities along with UCC, CIT and Institute of Technology Tralee (ITT) completed a mapping exercise to outline their current areas of focus/research under the broad topic of "smart" technology. This generated an increased level of awareness and information sharing across the region.

In addition to this, the three South-West Local Authorities have increased collaboration and contact in relation to the development and roll-out of their respective digital strategies.

As part of Enterprise Week 2020, Cork City Council, Cork County Council, Cork Smart Gateway, UCC and CIT (Nimbus) took part in a panel discussion event on "Smart Technology in your City and County". This event was an opportunity to hear from the Local Authorities about how they use technology and innovation in the provision of services. It was also an opportunity for businesses to hear what research priorities are happening for CIT and UCC.

Outline of remaining work to be completed on this action:

Further collaboration between Local Authorities and HEIs and on digital and smart technology initiatives should be encouraged and facilitated along with working with enterprises to see what opportunities are available.

The South-West has demonstrated a strong ability to progress and innovate in this area.

Work will continue to see how greater linkages across the region can be harnessed to ultimately identify challenges and offer opportunities for industry to find solutions to these.

There is also further scope to see how progress towards a low-carbon and digital economy that has been piloted through initiatives such as those led out of the Dingle Creativity and Innovation Hub can be replicated in other parts of the region.

Action 3:

Assess upskilling needs and knowledge transfer/strengthening opportunities in relevant sector(s) to support the adoption of advanced and disruptive technologies in the South-West, in particular those pertaining to the transition to a low carbon economy. As part of the work of the South-West Regional Skills Forum (Strategic Objective 6), companies in sectors undergoing, or with the potential to be disrupted by, technological transformation, will be given priority in order to understand emerging skills needs and the ability of current services/training programmes to meet these.

Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:

The Regional Skills Forum, Higher Education Institute's (HEIs), Enterprise Ireland, Local Authorities, IDA Ireland, Education and Training Boards (ETBs)

Timeframe for delivery:

Q4 2019

Final Status:

Complete

Outline of work undertaken during 2020:

In addition to the activities undertaken by the Regional Skills Forum, the South-West Regional Enterprise Plan has been central to developing a new initiative with the Climate Action Regional Offices (CARO), to equip Local Authorities with the information and guidance required to support enterprises to take advantage of the opportunities of climate action.

This initiative is currently in the first of two phases as part of the project. The initial phase involves research on the current national and European policy context, a survey of Local Enterprise Offices and Local Authority Heads of Economic Development, and also a survey of businesses through local Chambers of Commerce. The second phase will use the findings of the research to design and implement training and awareness programmes for Local Authorities and other stakeholders.

Action 4:

Support the development of key strategic sites within the region so as to ensure capacity for enterprise development and growth, in particular the targeting of brown field sites in urban areas.

Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:

IDA Ireland, Local Authorities, Enterprise Ireland, industry

Timeframe for delivery:

Q4 2019

Final Status:

Complete

Outline of work undertaken during 2020:

There was continued good collaboration between the Local Authorities, IDA Ireland and industry around the development of key strategic sites in the region.

IDA Ireland continues to enhance and develop its strategic landbanks in the South-West region. This has included development at its sites in Ringaskiddy where significant works have taken place to enhance the attractiveness of IDA's Loughbeg strategic landbank.

IDA Ireland has also received planning permission to open its Colmore, Ringaskiddy site to facilitate marketing of the site. This work to open-up the site is due to be completed by mid-2021.

IDA Ireland also continues to engage with the respective Local Authorities across the South-West Region to ensure the availability of suitable enterprise property solutions.

In their recently released strategy, IDA Ireland announced that the agency will deliver an Advanced Building Solution in Tralee over 2021-2024, while continuing to work closely with the private sector in the South-West to secure the provision of appropriate and cost-effective building and property solutions for client companies.

Local Authorities in the South-West are currently reviewing their respective Development Plans and will be considering the use of land and strategic sites for economic development in this regard.

Of particular significance under this action is the development of Cork City Docklands. In November 2020, Cork City Council and the Land Development Agency confirmed the establishment of a new Delivery Office for Cork City Docklands. The Cork Docklands Delivery Office will lead the delivery of thousands of homes and the creation of a new urban centre for international investment into Cork City. The partnership will seek to promote a regeneration project of international scale and significance in Cork City. In addition to the Docklands, Cork City Council will be looking at the development potential of the Grand Parade Quarter.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2

Develop the region's enterprise hubs 

Action 1:

Establish a network among the South-West's Tech and Enterprise Hubs. Hubs in the region to be invited to join a learning network that will facilitate innovation, best practice learning and development of services.

Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:

Cork City Council, Cork County Council, Kerry County Council, KerrySciTech, it@Cork, RDI Hub, CIT, UCC, ITT, Dingle Hub, Ludgate Hub, Department of Rural and Community Development, Údarás na Gaeltachta

Timeframe for delivery:

Q2 2019

Final Status:

Complete

Outline of work undertaken during 2020:

A network of Cork-based enterprise/digital/innovation hubs was established in May 2020. The network contains both public and private hubs from across Cork City and Cork County. This follows on from the establishment in 2019 of a similar Kerry Hubs Network.

Final outcome achieved:

The South-West region now has a strong and well-connected eco-system of hubs offering a full range of services from hot desks to incubation programmes.

Following on from the pilot work carried out in the Atlantic Economic Corridor and the development of a national dataset of hubs, there is a much clearer picture on the number, variety and capacity of hubs in the region. This positive development will enable the region to take advantage of the lasting changes in work practices that have been accelerated as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

At present, the following data is available on the number of enterprise/digital/innovation/co-working hubs in the region:

Cork City	17
Cork County	17
Kerry	16

Action 2:

Best practice sharing among Tech and Enterprise Hubs in the region. Examples of best practice activity and service provision to be highlighted and shared among network members.

Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:

Cork City Council, Cork County Council, Kerry County Council, KerrySciTech, it@Cork, RDI Hub, CIT, UCC, ITT, Dingle Hub, Ludgate Hub, Department of Rural and Community Development, Údarás na Gaeltachta

Timeframe for delivery:

Q4 2019

Final Status:

Complete

Outline of work undertaken during 2020:

A network of Cork-based enterprise/innovation hubs was established in May 2020. The network contains both public and private hubs from across Cork City and Cork County. This follows on from the establishment in 2019 of the Kerry Hubs Network.

Final outcome achieved:

The existence of two networks of hubs in the South-West has facilitated best practice sharing to a far greater degree than was seen before the implementation of this action. At both formal and informal levels, there has been a marked increase in information and experience sharing.

Among the South-West networks, members have discussed:

- The impact of COVID-19 on their hubs and hub clients.
- Best practice for re-opening of hubs in line with COVID-19 guidelines/restrictions.
- The work of the Atlantic Economic Corridor (AEC) project in terms of mapping hubs and classifications.
- Information session on Enterprise Centre Fund from Enterprise Ireland.

The formal and informal networks have also supported the development of Cork County Council's Rural Digital Innovation Hubs strategy as well as planning for new hubs in the region.

<p>Action 3:</p>
<p>Showcase best practices locally and internationally to Tech and Enterprise Hubs and provide a conduit for connecting member firms across these entities. Development of a best practice showcase (with international inputs) and facilitate both B2B introductions and research connections between Tech and Enterprise Hub members and academia in order to promote collaboration and innovation through solid connections regionally, nationally and internationally.</p>
<p>Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:</p>
<p>Cork City Council, Cork County Council, Kerry County Council, KerrySciTech, it@Cork, RDI Hub, CIT, UCC, ITT, Dingle Hub, Ludgate Hub, Department of Rural and Community Development, Údarás na Gaeltachta</p>
<p>Timeframe for delivery:</p>
<p>Q4 2019</p>
<p>Final Status:</p>
<p>Action not commenced</p>
<p>Reason:</p>
<p>Progress under this action was not initiated in the course of the SWREP and will be reconsidered under the next REP process.</p>

Action 4:
Assess the potential for a remote working initiative targeting particular sectors/companies.
Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:
Cork City Council, Cork County Council, Kerry County Council, KerrySciTech, it@Cork, RDI Hub, CIT, UCC, ITT, Dingle Hub, Ludgate Hub, Department of Rural and Community Development, Údarás na Gaeltachta
Timeframe for delivery:
Q4 2019
Final Status:
Action commenced but requires further work
Expected Completion Date:
Work and collaboration to continue beyond 2020.
Progress achieved to date and reason for delayed completion:
<p>In 2019, good progress had been made in piloting a remote working initiative between members of it@Cork and the Ludgate Hub in Skibbereen.</p> <p>With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the landscape in relation to remote working has changed beyond recognition from when the current action was formulated. According to the CSO Labour Force Survey (Q3 2020), Just under one in 20 (4.9%) of persons in employment reported that their main place of work was 'Home' in the four weeks prior to COVID-19 compared to more than one in four (27.6%) in Q3 2020.</p> <p>It is clear that for hubs in the region, there is a huge opportunity for a unified and concerted effort to attract employees and employers to use the facilities that are available in both rural and city-based hubs.</p>
Outline of remaining work to be completed on this action:
The South-West REP will continue to work closely with Government in developing a national dataset of hubs and will also examine joint initiatives to raise awareness of the benefits to employees and employers that can be gained from working in different types of hubs as an alternative to working from their homes and to explore smart working options.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

3

Leverage the opportunities offered through business clustering to drive enterprise performance and resilience in the South-West (including a focus on building internationalisation capability amongst indigenous companies)



Action 1:

Action Learning Workshop on clustering development and practice. Organisation of a regional workshop and action learning event for industry, academia and policy makers to showcase and examine best practice cluster initiatives, and their development from across the globe.

Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:

HEIs, Cyber Ireland, ecoRIS3, Chambers, Local Authorities, other regional stakeholders

Timeframe for delivery:

Q4 2019

Final Status:

Complete

Outline of work undertaken during 2019:

The Action Learning Workshop was delivered on 15th May 2019 by Cork Institute of Technology (CIT) on behalf of the South-West Regional Enterprise Plan (SWREP) and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE), and with the support of the Interreg Europe ecoRIS3 project. The Action Learning Workshop was an important step in contributing to raising awareness and knowledge of clustering, cluster initiatives and cluster organisations in the South-West.

Final outcome achieved:

As a result of this action, there is now a greater understanding and appreciation of the importance of cluster organisations and cluster initiatives in the region and the role that they can play in regional growth and development. The South-West is well positioned to contribute to the development of a national Smart Specialisation Strategy.

Action 2:

Develop cross sectoral collaboration and market access strategies amongst the emerging clusters both regionally and nationally.

Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:

HEIs, Cyber Ireland, ecoRIS3, Chambers, Local Authorities, other regional stakeholders, DETE

Timeframe for delivery:

Q1 2020

Final Status:

Action commenced but requires further work

Expected Completion Date:

Work and collaboration to continue beyond 2020.

Progress achieved to date and reason for delayed completion:

Initial planning had commenced on organising a meeting of stakeholders, enterprise agencies and DETE to support and inform the formulation of a National Cluster Policy – as part of Future Jobs 2020. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this work has been postponed but will recommence in 2021.

A number of nationally significant clusters/cluster organisations are based in the South-West. These include Kerry Sci Tech, Cyber Ireland, it@Cork and Energy Cork. The insights from industry provided by the managers of these cluster organisations have been very useful.

There are also a number of cluster organisations in development stage including STEM South-West, International Financial Services, Agri-Tech (IT Tralee), and Circular Bio Economy (IT Tralee).

The South-West will work towards fostering greater collaboration between cluster organisations, academia and the public sector. It is important that industry, business support organisations, and policy makers understand how cluster ecosystems operate both within the region, and their external relationships forged beyond the South-West, so that collaboratively, they can deliver growth and employment through supportive policy and initiatives. This could be achieved through the establishment of an industry/cluster reference group to inform and highlight gaps in the regional innovation/enterprise system that need to be addressed.

Action 3:
Undertake an examination of the current suite of supports and advice available to businesses in the South-West who want to grow their international reach and convene an industry focus group to explore opportunities to strengthen the offering so as to increase the performance of the region's indigenous businesses.
Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:
South-West Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committee members
Timeframe for delivery:
Q4 2019
Final Status:
Action commenced but requires further work
Expected Completion Date:
Work and collaboration to continue beyond 2020.
Progress achieved to date and reason for delayed completion:
Progress under this action concerning the supports and advice available to businesses wanting to grow their international reach will be closely aligned with the efforts being undertaken by Enterprise Ireland to increase the proportion of Irish companies that are exporting. These efforts form part of the work that was recommended by an OECD Review of SME and Entrepreneurship Policy in Ireland and an accompanying roadmap with priority areas for implementation. The recently published SME Taskforce Report will help inform and guide work on this topic in the South-West region.
Outline of remaining work to be completed on this action:
Provide a framework for the funding of cluster organisations and use their expertise, along with the enterprise agencies to identify gaps which local/national Government can address.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

4

Increase the capacity of the tourism sector through skills development and seasonal extension, and ensure that the region's natural heritage, culture and living landscapes are appropriately managed and protected

**Action 1:**

Investigate potential for a tourism/hospitality training Centre of Excellence in the region. This action will be explored by the REP Steering Committee in the context of the planned merger of ITT and CIT.

Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:

Kerry County Council, Cork City Council, Cork County Council, CIT, ITT, Fáilte Ireland, Kerry ETB, Cork ETB

Timeframe for delivery:

Q4 2019

Final Status:

Action not commenced

Reason:

A funding application for a feasibility study was not submitted in 2019, though an application will be prepared for future funding calls.

To support and enhance resilience in the tourism sector in the region, fresh consideration should be given to the funding and establishment of Tourism/Hospitality Training Facility and Centre of Excellence, in conjunction with Munster Technological University (MTU).

Action 2:
Work with Cork (City and County) and Kerry County to unlock the economic growth potential of the area by progressing a range of key initiatives that will motivate and facilitate potential tourists to visit and stay in the local area through the implementation of the Visitor Experience Development Plans (VEDPs).
Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:
Kerry County Council, Cork City Council, Cork County Council, CIT, ITT, Fáilte Ireland, Kerry ETB, Cork ETB
Timeframe for delivery:
Q4 2020
Final Status:
Action commenced but requires further work
Expected Completion Date:
Work and collaboration to continue beyond 2020.
Progress achieved to date and reason for delayed completion:
Up until the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, good progress has been reported by Fáilte Ireland on the existing VEDPs in the region as well as those due for development throughout 2020 (Skelligs, Dingle, Three Heads, Haven Coast, Killarney Gateway). Cork City are also working with Fáilte Ireland on a tourism destination plan for Cork City.
Outline of remaining work to be completed on this action:
The Tourism and Hospitality Sector in the South-West has been severely impacted by COVID-19 and requires additional supports for both short-term survival and sustainability. There is a critical role for Local Authorities, Fáilte Ireland, industry and other key stakeholders to continue to work collaboratively through the Destination Development Groups and VEDP groups to reimagine and rebuild tourism in the South-West region. This collaboration can unlock the economic growth potential of the area by progressing a range of key initiatives that will motivate and facilitate potential domestic and international tourists to visit and stay in the region.

Action 3:
Build capability and resilience in the region's tourism enterprise base.
Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:
Kerry County Council, Cork City Council, Cork County Council, CIT, ITT, Fáilte Ireland, Kerry ETB, Cork ETB
Timeframe for delivery:
2020
Final Status:
Action commenced but requires further work
Expected Completion Date:
Work and collaboration to continue beyond 2020.
Progress achieved to date and reason for delayed completion:
<p>Stakeholders and industry in the South-West will continue to explore the development of proposals that could become significant attractors for visitors to the area. Where these advance (having been tried and tested from a market, consumer and business feasibility perspective) such 'Attractions of Scale' need Government support to progress.</p> <p>Key existing tourism infrastructure and facilities in the region will require support to cover staffing, infrastructure and operational costs. All of these are essential networked facilities to attract and retain tourists in the region.</p>

<p>Action 4:</p>
<p>Reduce seasonal ‘underemployment’ in the tourism sector. Fáilte Ireland will continue to offer programmes to help businesses to develop their experiences and explore the financials of extending the tourism season into the ‘shoulder’ months.</p>
<p>Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:</p>
<p>Kerry County Council, Cork City Council, Cork County Council, CIT, ITT, Fáilte Ireland, Kerry ETB, Cork ETB</p>
<p>Timeframe for delivery:</p>
<p>2020</p>
<p>Final Status:</p>
<p>Action commenced but requires further work</p>
<p>Expected Completion Date:</p>
<p>Work and collaboration to continue beyond 2020.</p>
<p>Progress achieved to date and reason for delayed completion:</p>
<p>Students from CIT undertook a piece of quantitative and qualitative research to examine the data available around the issue of underemployment and in turn to help policy makers take informed actions to address the issue. However, the commencement of this research coincided with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and so proved very difficult to produce meaningful research at that time.</p>
<p>Outline of remaining work to be completed on this action:</p>
<p>The tourism and hospitality sector in the South-West has been severely impacted by COVID-19 and requires additional supports for both short-term survival and sustainability. There is a critical role for Local Authorities, Fáilte Ireland, industry and other key stakeholders to continue to work collaboratively through the Destination Development Groups and VEDP groups to reimagine and rebuild the South-West region.</p>

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

5

Support growth in the region's marine and maritime sector

**Action 1:**

Undertake an audit of the marine and maritime economy, in the South-West, including an assessment of numbers employed and areas of work, in order to create a comprehensive picture of the sector's impact in the region, drawing from national level analyses (incl. BIM).

Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:

Cork County Council, Cork City Council, Kerry County Council, Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM), Fisheries Local Action Group (FLAG) South, FLAG South-West, Údarás na Gaeltachta, LEO Kerry, LEO Cork North and West, LEO Cork South, Enterprise Ireland, ITT, UCC, National Maritime College of Ireland

Timeframe for delivery:

Q4 2019

Final Status:

Action commenced but requires further work

Expected Completion Date:

Work and collaboration to continue beyond 2020.

Progress achieved to date and reason for delayed completion:

A specific working group was established and tasked with narrowing the scope of the Strategic Objective and its associated actions. The working group has met twice.

In order to avoid duplication, it was agreed by the working group that a separate audit of the marine and maritime sector in the South-West was not necessary as there is a large body of work already completed by the FLAG (Fisheries Local Action Group) for both the South (Cork) and the South-West (Kerry and Limerick). The working group engaged with Bord Iascaigh Mhara and the Chairs of the two FLAGs to learn more about their work and to see how the SWREP can support them and add value.

Following these consultations, it was agreed by the working group that an audit would be undertaken to examine the current activities that are taking place in certain sectors outside of the scope of the existing FLAGs. These sectors include marine tourism; marine bioeconomy; renewable energy; and smart initiatives/ internet-of-things. This audit will build on the existing FLAGs and will employ a similar methodology. Ultimately the audit will present a picture of the existing work in these fields as well as the opportunities. Significantly, the scope of the audit will go beyond the original geographic scope of the FLAGs and will cover the whole of the South-West area.

Funding is required in order for this audit and action to be progressed. Such funding was not identified during the lifetime of this Regional Enterprise Plan and so substantial progress was not achieved. However, the aspirations of this Strategic Objective remain very important and should be delivered upon.

<p>Action 2:</p>
<p>Establish feasibility study to explore potential of the marine and maritime economy for job creation in the two pilot areas. Selecting two pilot coastal areas for audit, conduct a study to assess how best to realise potential for job creation through the assets and opportunities of the marine and maritime economy, to include maritime innovation and maritime/marine skills training.</p>
<p>Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:</p>
<p>Cork County Council, Cork City Council, Kerry County Council, BIM, FLAG South, FLAG South-West, Údarás na Gaeltachta, LEO Kerry, LEO Cork North 'and West, LEO Cork South, Enterprise Ireland, ITT, UCC, National Maritime College of Ireland</p>
<p>Timeframe for delivery:</p>
<p>Q4 2019</p>
<p>Final Status:</p>
<p>Action commenced but requires further work</p>
<p>Expected Completion Date:</p>
<p>Work and collaboration to continue beyond 2020.</p>
<p>Progress achieved to date and reason for delayed completion:</p>
<p>The marine/maritime working group agreed that a focused scoping exercise of two locations in the South-West (one in each county) will be undertaken. These locations selected were Bantry (Cork) and Valentia (Kerry).</p> <p>This exercise will take a more detailed look at the marine and maritime activities and opportunities in the two coastal areas through the lens of the audit model completed in Action 1 and also building on the work of the FLAGS. The exercise will assess the strengths/ weaknesses of these two pilot areas to provide evidence-based recommendations of future opportunities that will complement and support their traditional activities around marine/maritime.</p>
<p>Outline of remaining work to be completed on this action:</p>
<p>Following on from the designation of the two pilot towns, initial research has been carried out by a UCC Masters student. This study will offer a valuable academic study of analysing the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the marine and coastal tourism industry in pilot study towns of Bantry and Valentia. It is intended that this research will create a predictor of future trends in the economy utilising data. The objective is to use empirical data from Fáilte Ireland, the CSO and other sources to create a streamlined model using past trends to predict future trends. Bantry and Valentia could potentially use it to navigate economic recovery.</p>

Action 3:
Promote networking and collaboration in the South-West's marine and maritime sector. Develop a network/ collaborative forum or event to bring together diverse strands of the sector, to support collaboration, highlight supports and resources, and showcase best practice.
Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:
Cork County Council, Cork City Council, Kerry County Council, BIM, FLAG South, FLAG South-West, Údarás na Gaeltachta, LEO Kerry, LEO Cork North and West, LEO Cork South, Enterprise Ireland, ITT, UCC, National Maritime College of Ireland
Timeframe for delivery:
Q4 2019
Final Status:
Action commenced but requires further work
Expected Completion Date:
2021
Progress achieved to date and reason for delayed completion:
<p>The Marine/Maritime working group agreed that an event would be organised in 2020 to present the findings of both the audit and the pilot scoping exercises. This event would present an opportunity to increase collaboration and bring together diverse strands of the broader sector. Given the delays encountered as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the working group will re-examine how to proceed with this action.</p> <p>To support collaboration and also to seek solutions to challenges in the sector, the SWREP partnered with the Dublin City University (DCU) Ryan Academy to organise and participate in a Blue Economy online hackathon, in December 2020. The findings of the hackathon will be of great benefit to the working group in developing new actions beyond 2021.</p>

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 6

Ensure the availability of skills and talent to underpin the region’s economic growth potential



<p>Action 1:</p> <p>As part of the Skills for Growth initiative the Regional Skills Forum will assist local enterprises identify their skills’ needs through a variety of audit tools to ensure that the Region has the effective use of skills to support economic and social prosperity. Once skill needs have been identified, Regional Skills Fora will link companies with the education and training providers best suited to responding to identified skills need.</p>
<p>Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:</p> <p>Regional Skills Forum and partners</p>
<p>Timeframe for delivery:</p> <p>Q4 2019</p>
<p>Final Status:</p> <p>Complete</p>
<p>Outline of work undertaken during 2020:</p> <p>The South-West Regional Skills Forum (SWRSF) achieved this objective in the 2019 timeline indicated above and continues to engage with and support companies with skills needs in identifying the most appropriate solutions to address these needs on an ongoing basis. The SWRSF works with multiple MNCs, SMEs and micro companies in identifying key skills and upskilling needs using a variety of audit tools from industry-led sector specific roundtables, to SLMRU 1-1 audit forms to online surveys. The SWRSF continues to partner with Enterprise Ireland in the ‘Spotlight on Skills’ initiative and has also collaborated with and encouraged its industry association members to refer local enterprises requiring skills/upskilling supports to the RSF Manager for the purposes of a skills-needs audit and subsequent support in accessing skills/upskilling supports across further and higher education to build capabilities in areas of needs identified through the audit process.</p>
<p>Final outcome achieved:</p> <p>Significant engagement and skills needs analysis completed with multiple company types across key industry sectors in the South-West including manufacturing/engineering to pharma/biopharma, ICT, construction, hospitality, food, professional services and more with onward signposting to a suite of upskilling solutions addressing needs identified ensuring the region has an effective use of skills to support economic prosperity. Where new needs were identified, and new education/training provisions responses required, the SWRSF has worked with industry SME groups to develop new solutions at further and higher education level to address evolving needs in education/training provision, resulting in new courses in areas such as Industry 4.0; data analytics; leadership & management; BIM; ICT and more.</p>

Action 2:
Double the number of participants on the Department of Education and Skills (DES) EXPLORE programme over the 2018 figure. The EXPLORE programme is designed to address the need for enhanced digital skills among older workers in manufacturing sectors within the region.
Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:
RSF, HEIs
Timeframe for delivery:
Q4 2019
Final Status:
Complete
Outline of work undertaken during 2020:
Objective achieved in 2019. The Regional Skills Fora continued to offer the EXPLORE programme in collaboration with ETBs to those requiring enhanced digital skills across manufacturing sectors in 2020 with strong demand and uptake from across micros, SMEs and MNCs following the success of the programme in 2019.
Final outcome achieved:
Access to and uptake of digital upskilling for older workers by multiple SMEs, micro and MNC companies across the South-West region. Programme feedback has been excellent and the impact of the programme in improving efficiencies across company sites and in motivating participating cohorts to engage in further lifelong learning has been noted by participating employers.

<p>Action 3:</p>
<p>Support education and training providers in preparing applications under Springboard+ 2019 in collaboration with local enterprise in order to increase provision of programmes for upskilling and reskilling within the region.</p>
<p>Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:</p>
<p>RSF, HEIs</p>
<p>Timeframe for delivery:</p>
<p>Q4 2019</p>
<p>Final Status:</p>
<p>Complete</p>
<p>Outline of work undertaken during 2020:</p>
<p>Objective achieved in 2019 timeline indicated. The SWRSF continued to support education providers in identifying and developing programme proposals as part of the 2020 funding call to increase provision of programmes for upskilling and reskilling across the region in specific priority needs areas as identified by employers across the region through Forum audit tool structures and the Forum's ongoing collaboration with enterprise.</p>
<p>Final outcome achieved:</p>
<p>Higher education providers in the South-West region successfully secured 90 – 100% funding for multiple Springboard programmes across manufacturing/engineering; pharma/biopharma; ICT; construction; hospitality; management, leadership, finance and more from Levels 6 to 9 of the National Framework of Qualification (NFQ). Programmes aligned to priority upskilling and reskilling needs and opportunities as identified by employers in the South-West region. Demand for and uptake of programmes has been excellent across all three South-West HEIs.</p>

Action 4:

Pilot an initiative targeted at rural and urban (CSO) 'Unemployment Blackspots' in the South-West region. Deliver targeted training to cohort population in identified unemployment blackspots including the opportunity to up-skill where deficits have been identified. Deliver targeted supports and training in areas such as e-commerce to encourage sustainability amongst retailing business, enterprise development and start-ups in identified areas. Pilot to initially target one location in each Local Authority area, with potential for further expansion.

Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:

Local Authorities, ETBs, LEOs, Local Development Companies

Timeframe for delivery:

Q2 2020

Final Status:

Action not commenced

Reason:

Further work will be required to examine how best this action can be achieved and how it can add value to work that is already underway in the region.

Consideration could be given to look at how to add value to labour market activation activities that will be needed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Action 5:

Examine opportunities for further regional applications of the pilot 'Smart Living in West Kerry' Project, with a focus on upskilling and re-training.

Lead Actor(s)/Working Group Members:

Local Authorities, Kerry ETB, RSF, Údarás na Gaeltachta

Timeframe for delivery:

Q2 2020

Final Status:

Action commenced but requires further work

Expected Completion Date:

Under the Climate Action Plan, the South-West Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committee is required to include "Just Transition" as a standing item on its agenda. The Steering Committee meeting on 5th February 2020 heard from the National Economic and Social Committee (NESC) on their work on behalf Government in relation to policy recommendations in light a Just Transition.

The work currently underway through the Dingle Creativity and Innovation Hub and Transition Dingle 2030 could be instructive to other enterprise/innovation/community hubs in the region as a demonstrator of how climate action and digitalisation can be drivers of positive change in communities.

2. Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, Local Enterprise Office activities and outcomes in the South-West Region during 2020

In order to achieve the 2020 employment targets and maintain strong regional enterprise and job creation performance, the Strategic Objectives and collaborative actions identified for the South-West region complement and reinforce the core activities of the Enterprise Agencies, Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland and the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs).

The Enterprise Agencies each have corporate strategies which include national level objectives as well as frameworks for bespoke regional activities that support regional enterprise development potential and leverage regional assets and opportunities.

During 2020, the Agencies and LEOs worked in partnership with regional stakeholders to strengthen regional enterprise ecosystems as well as maintaining their focus on attracting foreign investment, providing guidance and financial supports to the installed base of companies in the region, and fostering new enterprise start-ups.

Enterprise Ireland

In January 2020, 29,958 people were employed by Enterprise Ireland supported companies across the South-West region. This represented a 2% growth in employment from the previous year. However, 2020 is a year remembered against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has of course, been a uniquely challenging year for enterprise and enterprise development. No business in the South-West region has been left untouched by COVID-19. 2020 can also be characterised as a year in which Irish enterprises proved their mettle, responding with resilience, adaptability and innovative solutions to the challenges of COVID-19. Below are some of the more positive moments of a challenging 2020 for the South-West Region.

Client Investments

From a South-West perspective specifically, throughout 2020 there were examples of significant investments and expansions by client companies across the South-West region, including:

- Fexco opened a €21m Research and Development Facility
- Nutribio announced the development of a €2.5m food facility in Cork
- West Cork's Global Shares announced 150 new jobs
- Software company Workvivo announced 100 new jobs
- Aspira opens two overseas offices as it announced 30 high-level jobs
- Carbery's new €78m Cheese plant opened
- PMD Solutions was awarded contracts by the European Space Agency (ESA)

Enterprise Development

Support and investment continued throughout 2020 to develop the start-up ecosystem across the South-West, this includes significant investment into the following initiatives;

- Business Innovation Centre
- New Frontiers Cork IT + IT Tralee
- South-West Business Angels Network
- RDI Hub
- Additional Budget Support for South-West LEOs

Regional Brexit Webinars

Enterprise Ireland, in partnership with the Local Enterprise Offices, undertook a series of five regional business webinars, 'Brexit Customs Briefing Series' the week commencing 7th December 2020. The focus of these webinars was outlining the critical steps to get ready for new customs rules from January 1st, 2021. Over 1,400 SMEs signed up to attend these webinars.

COVID-19 Online Retail Scheme

Under the COVID-19 Online Retail Scheme 56 South-West retailers were approved for funding in 2020. It is clear that Irish businesses are keenly aware of the growing e-commerce opportunities both at home and abroad for online retail. They also understand the necessity of operating an updated and efficient online sales platform that complements their physical stores. This is broadening their customer base and grow sales with some companies reporting that they are recruiting extra staff as a result. Ultimately, retailers who are investing in their online presence now are also strengthening their offering to help deal with the uncertainty and challenges that lie ahead.

2021 and Beyond

Looking forward, key priorities for the region from an Enterprise Ireland perspective will focus on a path to post COVID-19 recovery and supporting the resilience and adaptability of our client companies in navigating the new post-Brexit trading norms. Key to this will be maximising the return on the investments made in the South-West under the Regional Enterprise Development Fund to strengthen regional infrastructure. Other priorities are the further development of our regional hubs and optimising support to South-West enterprises providing sustainable employment opportunities and local prosperity. The collaboration of South-West regional partners in developing the next South-West Regional Enterprise Plan can help ensure alignment of purpose in achieving these goals.

IDA Ireland

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

On January 6th, 2021, IDA Ireland launched summary results for FDI for the country for 2020, and also launched a new Strategy, "Driving Recovery & Sustainable Growth 2021-2024".

Employment growth of 3.6 percent in IDA Ireland supported companies was achieved in 2020. Total employment in IDA Ireland client companies in Ireland now stands at 257,394, accounting directly for 12.4 percent of COVID-19 adjusted national employment.

The South-West Region is home to 211 multinational companies, employing 46,009 in 2020. There are 194 IDA client companies in Cork City & County employing 43,856, while Kerry has 17 IDA client companies employing 2,153 persons.

The region has a dynamic and broad enterprise sector with predominance in Biopharmaceuticals and Medical Technologies; Technology (hardware and services); Engineering and Agri-Food, and significant potential in tourism, International Financial Services and Global Business Services.

The South-West region has seen sustained job creation by IDA client companies over the past decade with employment in IDA client companies at an all-time high. Over the past ten years, the South-West has seen an additional 18,220 jobs created by IDA client companies – an increase of 78%. In the last five years alone (2015-2019), over the period of IDA's last Strategy Winning FDI 2015-2019, employment across the base of overseas companies in the region increased by 12,042 or 39%. Over the same period, IDA Ireland won 147 projects for the region delivering a 37% uplift in investments.

IDA Ireland continues to engage with the base of overseas companies across the South-West region to support, sustain and help grow client operations. Many of these companies have been key employers in their respective locations over many decades and are important contributors to the regional economy.

In 2020, the COVID-19 Pandemic impacted all parts of the economy including all IDA client company operations. Since March, IDA Ireland engaged with all its client companies to provide support and assistance as the companies responded to the challenge. During the year, the South-West region saw a small number of IDA client companies, particularly those in Engineering and those in consumer facing services implement a level of headcount reduction. However, the vast majority have in fact sustained their operations and headcount (with some availing of the TWSS and EWSS schemes) with manufacturing operations continuing as essential activities under restrictions and all client companies moving their non-manufacturing staff to a work from home model, a situation which still continues.

Despite the challenges, IDA client companies in the region have continued to recruit staff across the region and across all sectors over the course of 2020. In response to COVID-19, IDA migrated many of its business development and client engagement activities to digital platforms. IDA Ireland has developed a suite of digital content which can be accessed by potential investors. The Agency has developed this further and has put in place an E-Site Visit experience for potential investors. The use of digital platforms by IDA staff has contributed to an enhanced digital engagement with existing clients and also in hosting e-site visits with potential new investors.

Several Life Sciences investments were announced in 2020 including Gilead Sciences, Hovione, and Thermo Fisher Scientific who each publicly announced plans to invest and hire new roles at their operations in the region during the year. In addition, Pfizer announced in November, plans for a €300m investment with 300 additional jobs across their Irish sites including Ringaskiddy, Cork. In July, Amazon announced that it was hiring 1,000 new roles across its operations in Dublin and Cork.

There were several significant Technology company announcements in November, including Qualcomm who announced a new Research and Development facility at new offices in Penrose Dock in Cork City which is expected to create hundreds of highly skilled engineering roles over the next four years. Cadence Design Systems also announced plans to create 150 jobs in Cork. In December, OpenText announced that they were hiring 30 additional roles for their Cork site.

There were also a number of investments announced by new companies investing in Ireland and the region for the first time including DoTerra who announced plans to create 100 jobs at a new manufacturing facility in Blarney in May; Remitly and Moz, both announced plans to open offices in Cork while SMS Plc announced an expansion in Cork in August following the acquisition of an Irish energy start-up Solo Energy.

IDA's focus over the coming years is to build on the strengths and competencies of the region including the established and emerging clusters with a particular focus on supporting the transformation of high value manufacturing in Life Sciences and Engineering, exploiting opportunities across a range of emerging technologies, and continuing to win services and research and development opportunities across a number of established clusters. Emerging technology trends have and will continue to create new opportunities across the region in areas such as cybersecurity, data analytics, artificial intelligence, smart manufacturing to name a few.

IDA has, and will continue to promote the South-West region for remote working opportunities across our client base as new approaches to working such as home working and hub working gain acceptance. IDA has also engaged with several Hubs to explore opportunities with IDA client companies.

IDA Ireland will continue to seek proactive partnerships and collaboration with both national and regional stakeholders to support the continued winning of FDI to the Region.

Local Enterprise Office (LEOs)

In 2020 the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) continued to be the 'first stop shop' providing entrepreneurs and business owners with advice, guidance, financial assistance, and other supports. The developing pandemic saw their focus shift from assisting with start-up or growth, to triage and rescue. With 31 offices spread throughout the country the LEOs were truly operating at the coalface of the COVID-19 response to the SME sector and provided a 'signposting' service for all the relevant COVID-19 supports available through all State bodies.

The LEOs supported 35,236 jobs across 7,529 client companies in 2020 of which there was an additional 82 companies outside of the Dublin region. In 2020 there was a fall of 1,494 net jobs during the year the State. It is worth noting however, that micro enterprises were adding jobs with a gross job gains across all regions. The challenge ahead will be to restore businesses to growth once the impact of the pandemic subsides. The LEOs provided significant training and mentoring to small businesses in 2020 to help them navigate the particularly difficult trading environment created by Covid-19 and Brexit. Last year, the Local Enterprise Offices trained over 77,000 entrepreneurs and business representatives, up from 37,000 the year previous. 16,231 completed business mentoring assignments up from 10,756 in 2019.

In response to the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns, the LEOs quickly moved to introduce new schemes and adapt existing supports to meet the needs of micro and small enterprises across all regions and business sectors.

The Business Continuity Voucher, introduced in March 2020, offered businesses with up to 50 employees, across all sectors, a voucher of up to €2,500 in third party consultancy costs, and helped companies and sole traders to develop short-term and long-term strategies to respond to the COVID-19 restrictions and prepare for reopening of the economy.

This scheme closed for new applications in May 2020 and within that period the LEOs processed 14,871 applications and approved 12,077 of these to a value of €25.8m.

The **Trading Online Voucher Scheme (TOVs)** was adjusted from a 50% co-funding basis to 90% and businesses who had successfully implemented a previous voucher were now allowed to apply for a second voucher. Further amendments enabled sectors that were normally excluded from the scheme to apply.

In previous years this scheme would have seen an average of around 1,200 applications; in 2020 the LEOs processed 17,315 applications for TOVs and approved 12,984 of these. The unprecedented demand for the scheme saw funding rise from €2.3m to an estimated cost of €30m.

The Micro Enterprise Assistance Fund, introduced in September 2020, targeted a small cohort of micro enterprises that could not avail of existing government supports by virtue of their sector, size or by way of operating from a non-rateable premise, many of which were small local traders who provided unique services within their communities. A total of 196 successful applicants were awarded a grant of between €500 - €1,000 of vouched expenditure on adaptation and reconfiguration costs, as well as COVID-19 consumables such as PPE and sanitisation equipment.

Throughout 2020 and despite the pandemic and lockdowns, the LEOs continued to offer grant aid to entrepreneurs who spotted opportunities in the current climate to start or grow their businesses through their Feasibility, Priming and Expansion grant programmes. To assist in their remit of developing regional employment, the LEOs also continued to offer 'soft' supports by way of their free of charge Mentoring programme, where clients work with an experienced mentor to identify solutions to areas of exposure within their business.

The LEOs have pivoted their extensive suite of **Training programmes**, workshops and networking meetups to an online platform covering areas such as: cash management in a crisis; leading your business through COVID-19; and advice for employers impacted by the crisis.

During 2020, there have been 10,255 participants in the Mentoring Programme and 49,623 participants in the COVID training programmes. In addition to this, the LEOs launched a new 'Lunch & Learn' live training webinar series that is open and accessible to all LEO client companies and prospective clients across the country, with no registration or sign-up required. This new series complements existing online training and webinar programmes offered by the LEOs.

Many of the successful projects under the LEO Competitive fund in 2019 had to be put on hold as a result of the pandemic. These were collaborative projects between two or more LEOs; and LEOs working with other local groups like Chambers, Community Enterprise Centres, Education or training bodies, Local Authorities or colleges. Many of these projects are aligned with the Strategic Objectives in the Regional Enterprise Plans and it is hoped that they can progress.

3. Achieving a Just Transition in Ireland's Regions

The Climate Action Plan 2019 sets out the measures by which Ireland can reduce its emissions from sectors outside the EU's Emissions Trading System by 30% (relative to 2005 levels) by 2030. It sets out ambitious environmental targets for Ireland to meet over the next 40 years.

Just Transition is a key part of climate action policy. It supports the idea that communities and individuals are safeguarded in the move to face the challenges presented by climate change, in a climate-proofed economy.

Under Action 164 of *Ireland's Climate Action Plan 2019* the Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committees were asked to include a Just Transition standing item on the agenda of each of the nine regional areas. This is now in place for all the committees and has encouraged consideration of region-specific impacts that transitioning to a low carbon economy will have in their region, and the possible solutions to mitigate these impacts.

How to manage a transition to a fundamentally new economic future was the focus of work at the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) in late 2019 and early 2020. The Council's work, a key deliverable in the Government's Climate Action Plan and Future Jobs Ireland 2019, was detailed in their final report, *Addressing Employment Vulnerability as Part of a Just Transition in Ireland* published in May 2020.

NESC's report is focused on how to manage the transition associated with climate change and digital automation, and identified recommendations to help Ireland address them and embrace the significant opportunities presented through three broad areas:

- continuous, pre-emptive workforce development;
- building resilient enterprises; and
- delivering high-impact targeted funding to support transition.

In the preparation of their Report, NESC consulted with a number of the Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committees to consider the engagement already taking place in the regions and explore how place-based collaborative solutions could be adopted. NESC presented to the South-West Steering Committee on 5th February 2020 at its meeting in Killorglin, Kerry.

Appendix 1: Regional Funding approved for the South-West supported by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment during 2020

Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF)

The Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF) was launched in May 2017 with the overarching aim of driving enterprise development and job creation in each region throughout Ireland.

Administered by Enterprise Ireland, it supports new collaborative and innovative initiatives that can make a significant impact on enterprise development in the region/across regions, or nationally. Just under €100m has been approved across 68 projects nationally.

During 2020 the South-West region secured funding of €7,377,216 for five projects*.

Project	Location	Description	Grant amount €
Firies Business Hub DAC	Kerry	Food production facilities	€1,151,960
Seirbhísí Forbartha Gnó (SFG) Designated Activity Company	Cork	Regional Development Hub	€2,700,000
SynBioHub Designated Activity Company	Cork	Develop Ireland's first Life Sciences 'BioHub'	€3,063,000
Benchspace Cork CLG	Cork	Organise and equip graduate and existing creatives to commercialise their abilities and grow new enterprise in the region	€342,256
KerrySciTech	Kerry	Cluster for the growth of the science, technology and engineering sector	€120,000
Total			€7,377,216

*See the first South-West Regional Enterprise Plan for details of Calls 1 & 2.

Enterprise Centres Fund

The Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Leo Varadkar T.D, announced over €1m in grants for 15 enterprise centres in the South-West under Enterprise Ireland's Enterprise Centres Fund. Enterprise centres are embedded in communities in every county in the country. They provide space and training for entrepreneurs, allowing them to work remotely, access training and advice, and network with other business leaders.

Approvals (for profit centres):

Applicant Name (Correct legal entity name)	County	Nuts III Region	Grant amount €
CIT Innovation Centre DAC. t/a The Rubicon	Cork	South-West	43,045
Vaaw Ltd/Culture Co-Working	Cork	South-West	41,200
The Box CoWork Ltd	Kerry	South-West	46,600
HQ Coworking Space Ltd.	Kerry	South-West	91,920
Total			€222,765

Approvals (Not for profit centres):

Applicant Name (Correct legal entity name)	County	Nuts III Region	Grant amount €
Ballyhoura Food Centre (Mitchelstown) DAC	Cork	South-West	28,400
Brookpark Enterprise Centre CLG	Cork	South-West	38,560
Churchfield Community Trust	Cork	South-West	37,502
Cork Urban Enterprises CLG t/a Northside for Business Campus	Cork	South-West	103,400
Ludgate Operations CLG	Cork	South-West	117,152
Kerry Innovation Centre CLG t/a Tom Crean Business Centre	Kerry	South-West	95,067
Killarney Technology Innovation Limited	Kerry	South-West	75,600
Mitchelstown Community Forum CLG	Cork	South-West	84,400
Sneem Innovation & Technology Services CLG	Kerry	South-West	77,808
Mol Teic	Kerry	South-West	65,680
University College Cork	Cork	South-West	105,480
		Total	€829,049
		Grand Total	€1,051,814

Appendix 2: Statistical snapshot – South-West

Constituent counties	Cork and Kerry	
Regional Population and change (1996-2016)	546,640 (1996): 690,575 (2016) increase of 143,935	
Total in employment	328,600*	
Labour Force participation rate	60.8%*	
% of Male employment (State)	54.3%	
% of Female employment (State)	45.7%	
Live Register at 31/12/20	21,919	
Unemployment rate	6.3%*	
Persons in receipt of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment at 31/12/20	45,881	
Unemployment blackspots ¹	6 ²	
Employed in Enterprise Ireland companies	220,613	
Total Employment outside Dublin in Enterprise Ireland companies	65%	
Jobs created in Enterprise Ireland companies ³	16,496	
Job Losses in Enterprise Ireland companies ⁴	17,368	
Net Change in Enterprise Ireland companies ⁵	-872	
EI supported employment and number of client companies (2019 – 2020)	2019	2020
	Jobs: 29,958	Jobs: 30,403
	Companies: 701	Companies: 735
IDA supported employment & number of client companies (2019 - 2020)	2019	2020
	Jobs: 42,847	Jobs: 46,009
	Companies: 202	Companies: 211
New jobs created in 2020 by the IDA ⁶	Over 20,000	
% of IDA investments to regional locations ⁷	52%	
IDA net job created ⁸	8,944	
LEO supported employment & number of client companies (2019-2020)	2019	2020
	Jobs: 413	Jobs: -363
	Companies: 942	Companies: 954

1. Unemployment Blackspots are defined as Electoral Districts with at least 200 people in the labour force and an unemployment rate of 27% or higher

2. Unemployment blackspots in the Region: Cork City (1) & – Tralee (5).

3. Enterprise Ireland End of Year Statement 2020

4. Enterprise Ireland End of Year Statement 2020

5. Enterprise Ireland End of Year Statement 2020

6. IDA Ireland Results for 2020

7. IDA Ireland Results for 2020

8. IDA Ireland Results for 2020

* CSO Q4 2020 Labour Force Survey

An Roinn Gnó, Fiontar agus Nuálaíochta
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment

23 Sráid Chill Dara, Baile Átha Cliath 2, D02 TD30
23 Kildare Street, Dublin 2, D02 TD30

T +353 (0)1 631 2121, 1890 220 222

www.enterprise.gov.ie

www.gov.ie

info@enterprise.gov.ie

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