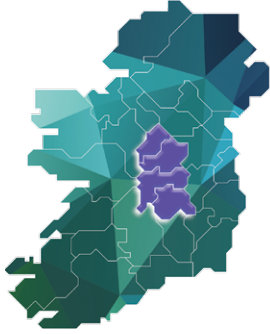




Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



REGIONAL ENTERPRISE PLAN
TO 2024

MIDLANDS



An initiative of the Department
of Enterprise, Trade and Employment



Table of Contents

Minister's Foreword	1
Message from the Chair	3
Midlands Regional Profile	5
Overview of Strategic Objectives and Actions	7
Chapter 1: The Regional Enterprise Plans Initiative	9
Chapter 2: Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024	11
• Strategic Objective 1: Climate Action – Transition to a climate neutral economy	11
• Strategic Objective 2: Build on achievements to date in sectors in which the region has a competitive advantage through Smart Specialisation and wider adoption of digitalisation within business, leveraging the new Technological University of the Shannon-Midlands Mid-West	15
• Strategic Objective 3: Placemaking – Position the Midlands as a community of choice in which to live, create, study, work, visit, and invest.	20
Chapter 3: Implementation	25
Chapter 4: Midlands Enterprise Agencies and Local Enterprise Offices	26
• 4.1 Enterprise Ireland: Focus to 2024	26
• 4.2 IDA Ireland: Focus to 2024	28
• 4.3 Local Enterprise Office: Focus to 2024	30
Chapter 5: Complementary Strategies and Initiatives	31
• 5.1 Fáilte Ireland: Focus to 2024	31
• 5.2 Regional Skills Forum: Focus to 2024	33
• 5.3 The Regional Assembly	34
• 5.4 Local Authorities – Local Economic and Community Plans	34
Appendices	35
• Appendix 1: Membership of the Regional Steering Committee	36
• Appendix 2: Midlands Statistical Snapshot	37
• Appendix 3: Other State Agencies and Bodies Supporting Enterprise Development	38
• Appendix 4: Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (Just Transition Fund)	40
• Appendix 5: Our Rural Future – Rural Development Policy 2021 – 2025	41
• Appendix 6: Regional Enterprise Development Funding	42
• Appendix 7: Midlands Advanced Manufacturing Plan	43
• Appendix 8: MidlandsIreland.ie Regional Food and Drink Strategy	46
• Appendix 9: Methodology	50

Minister's Foreword



A handwritten signature in white ink on a dark purple background, reading 'Robert Troy'.

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

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

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

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

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



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

- transition to a zero-carbon region;
- the continued development through smart specialisation in existing areas of regional strength in manufacturing and food; and
- positioning the Midlands as a region of choice for people to live and for achieving business success.

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

I would like to especially thank the Chairperson of the Midlands Regional Steering Committee Dr Anne Cusack, for her leadership on the preparation of this new Plan, and Sarah Morgan, Midlands Programme Manager for her critical role in delivering the final product. I am also very appreciative of the time and energy given by all the members of the Steering Committee, and for your ongoing commitment to the Regional Enterprise Plan.

To assist the Regional Enterprise Plans, my Department, through Enterprise Ireland, has made available over €126 million in funding since 2018 to assist locally-led regional enterprise development projects. Of this, over €6.8 million has been approved for the Midlands Region under the Regional Enterprise Development Fund and the Regional Enterprise Transition Scheme.

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

I am very much looking forward to further engagement with Anne and the members of the Midlands Steering Committee as implementation progresses.



Message from the Chair



Dr Anne Cusack,
Chair, Midlands Regional Enterprise
Plan Steering Group

As Chair of the Midlands Regional Steering Committee, I am delighted to present the Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024. This plan is the result of a region-wide collaborative approach across all our stakeholders and prepared within the context of resilience and recovery.

The 2020 plan, building on the Action Plan for Jobs launched in 2015 had seen significant improvements within the Midlands Region, not least our increasing employment within the region to 1 percent of the National average, meaning 34,300 more people were in employment in Q3 2021 relative to Q1 2015. This is an increase of 31.6 percent, despite the challenges of Brexit, the acceleration of Bord na Móna's decarbonisation strategy and COVID-19.

Almost overnight in 2020, most organisations and communities saw every aspect of their business and lives disrupted. Once hesitant to change, we all had to reinvent, or risk being left behind. Changes that traditionally took longer to implement were happening immediately. We saw a new world of possibilities for businesses with remote working becoming the norm and many 'pivoting' to become survivors.

As Ireland recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic, we are left facing the challenge of identifying what is required to ensure our future growth.

It was against this backdrop that the Midlands local authorities, state agencies, sectoral stakeholders, private enterprise and representatives from government departments met to prepare a roadmap that will look to support our communities and businesses and drive economic growth over the next three years.

These consultations refined our focus on three key regional objectives that we can direct our efforts to best support recovery and resilience. These themes, significantly, are closely aligned to the Economic Recovery Plan and will include actions that will tackle Climate Action, Smart Specialisation/ Digitalisation and Placemaking.

The Midlands has been the first Irish region to experience the impact of the decarbonisation programme and the transitioning process to a zero-carbon economy. The impact has been significant. Therefore, there is considerable emphasis within our region to develop transformative projects with the support of Project Ireland 2040 funding streams and the European Just Transition Fund as well develop frameworks that will support investment opportunities and sustainable community development.



With the Midlands being the most connected region in Ireland, bordering five of the other seven regions in the State and a highly engaged workforce within 60-minutes' drive of the five key towns of Athlone, Longford, Mullingar, Portlaoise and Tullamore, we are in a strong position to work with the newly inaugurated Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Mid-West to maximise opportunities within business, industry and skills to support the economic growth of our region.

The goal to position the Midlands as a Centre of Excellence in Advanced Manufacturing and as an ideal location for manufacturing companies (both indigenous and FDI) is underway since the launch of the Advanced Manufacturing Plan.

This plan includes the establishment of a Smart Connected Technologies Cluster to leverage identified and established regional competencies in Telecoms and supporting areas including augmented reality, data analytics etc.

Quality of life within the Midlands Region emerged as a strong theme in the facilitated consultations held during the preparation of the Midlands REP to 2024 and therefore a key focus of our Plan is to strengthen this value proposition, positioning the Midlands as a destination of choice in which to live, create, study, work, visit, and invest. The close collaboration of both our public and private sector leads has been and continues to be a fundamental driver in enabling progress on this regional objective.

The MidlandsIreland.ie Regional Food and Drink Strategy launched in 2021 is pivotal in supporting the Midlands as a place to invest, visit, and live. This strategy focuses on strengthening this sector through four pillars, including sustainability, awareness, export capability and food tourism.

The key enablers for our regional objectives include those providing specific skills particularly in terms of digitalisation, and the recent launch of Technology University of the Shannon-Midlands Mid-West represents a significant milestone in supporting the population within the Midlands Region and beyond. We are also fortunate that Technological University of the Shannon (TUS): Midlands Mid-West is home to strategic research institutes such as Materials, Bioscience, and Software – along with Technology Gateways (APT and COMAND), the Midlands Technology Campus and the Empower Eco.

The launch of the Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024 would not have been possible without the unwavering enthusiasm and commitment of the entire Steering Committee. They have been ably supported by the staff of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. Minister Robert Troy and Minister Damian English have been both supportive and committed in their endorsement of the plan and we acknowledge and are appreciative of their continued cooperation.

I also wish to thank and acknowledge the significant work of the Programme Manager, Sarah Morgan and her team within the Midlands Regional Enterprise Development Office.

The ongoing efforts by the working groups to implement the actions within the regional objectives of the Plan are integral to the continued progress of the Midlands and is testimony to the close collaboration and cooperation of the stakeholders within this region.



Midlands Regional Profile

The Midlands encompassing the counties of Laois, Offaly, Longford and Westmeath, and covering over 6,500 square kilometres, 9.5 percent of the total area of the state is home to 292,301¹ people, predicted to grow up to 318,500+² by 2026. The Midlands is the most connected region in Ireland, bordering five of the other seven regions in the State. With strong infrastructure connections on the M4, M6, M7, M8 and M9 motorways, as well as a network of railway lines and bus services, the Midlands Region has a dynamic and connected core with links to coastal cities and international markets with ease of accessibility to international airports and ports.

The Midlands' centrality provides access to a highly engaged workforce with nearly 900,000 members of the labour force within 60-minutes' drive of the five key towns, of Athlone, Longford, Mullingar, Portlaoise and Tullamore. The Midlands has a younger demographic than the national average with almost 50 percent of people under 35 years of age, and an education attainment level which aligns with the national average, with 28 percent of people having third level education. There are also a high proportion of foreign nationals speaking many diverse languages. With a high ratio of jobs to resident workers, the Midlands has a positive net inflow of workers to urban centres which has the potential to grow given access to talent in neighbouring regions.

A significant development in the region in 2021 is the establishment of the Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Mid-West (TUS: Midlands Mid-West), a merger between Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT) and Limerick Institute of Technology (LIT). TUS: Midlands Mid-West is home to strategic research institutes such as Materials, Bioscience, and Software – along with Technology Gateways (APT and COMAND). TUS: Midlands Mid-West will facilitate local and regional higher education access and course choice with university level qualifications for students in the Midlands Region and will greatly assist in attracting enterprise, skills retention, increased direct investment, and strengthen linkages with the existing enterprise base, including through the recently established Advanced Technologies in Manufacturing (ATIM) cluster.

Identified key regional strengths that will support enterprise development and growth and foster resilience include a strong advanced manufacturing base with world class R & D facilities, a vibrant food and drink sector, emerging low-carbon / green enterprise sector in the region; significant tourism offering and quality of life. Stakeholders across the Midlands in recognising its centrality and large number of commuters, have developed a network of co-working facilities throughout the region in both urban and peripheral areas, which serve to position the region as an alternative lower cost location or second site location when compared to coastal cities, while also providing alternative hybrid working options as we emerge from COVID-19. The emergence of the Midlands Region in attracting city-based enterprises and new start-ups, as well as indigenous and international investment, is facilitated by cutting-edge technology, the availability of talent and the emergence of clusters in modern STEM related fields that specialise in research and development at locations such as the Mullingar IMR (Irish Manufacturing Research) Organisation and the new Robotic/Cobotic Training Centre in Mullingar.

The Midlands REP to 2024 marks the third Regional Enterprise Plan since 2015, the first being the Action Plan for Jobs 2015-2017, followed by the Midlands REP to 2020.

1. Census 2016

2. National Planning Framework Population Projections



The objectives of previous plans may be summarised as follows:

The Regional Action Plan for Jobs 2015-2017 Objectives	Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024 – Objectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment growth of between 10 and 15 percent; and • An unemployment rate reduced to within one percentage point of the State average 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustain the momentum of employment growth achieved since 2015 • Reduce unemployment level to at least one percentage point of State average • To ensure that a greater number of people both work and live in the Midlands; and • To see an improvement in labour force participation, especially amongst females, towards the national average.

Since 2015, and through collaboration of all regional stakeholders working for the greater public good, significant progress has been made within the region. 34,300 were in employment in Q3 2021 relative to Q1 2015. This is an increase of 29.6 percent, whilst the unemployment rate also fell from 14.8 percent to 6 percent³, within 1 percent of the State average. The unprecedented social and economic challenges of Brexit and COVID-19 saw the unemployment rate increase to 5.7 percent at Q3 2021.⁴

The strategic objectives and actions of the previous Regional Enterprise Plan, along with the core activities of the enterprise agencies and the LEOs along with other bodies, has delivered strong economic growth within the region. The success of the enterprise agencies and the LEOs⁵ over this corresponding period are outlined in the table below:

Enterprise Ireland supported employment	2015	2021	Change APJ 2015 – Midlands REP 2021
Jobs	9,987	11,416	+1,429
Companies	268	207	-61
IDA Ireland supported employment	2015	2021	Change APJ 2015 – Midlands REP 2021
Jobs	4,682	6,868	+2,186
Companies	36	44*	+8
LEO supported employment	2015	2021	Change APJ 2015 – Midlands REP 2021
Jobs	3,622	4,253	+631
Companies	785	862	+77

COVID-19 has meant that all sectors of our economy have had to review the way they operate, and conduct business; we as a region, along with other regions, and countries across the globe have had to pivot from existing business models. The imposed pivot has advanced plans to digitally transform all aspects of regional economies as we undertake a transition to cleaner forms of energy generation. In developing the Strategic Objectives for the Midlands REP to 2024, every effort has been made to ensure that the Strategic Objectives and related actions are fit for purpose and will serve the region well.

The Strategic Objectives and Actions have been developed to build on regional achievements to date and these have been 'stress tested', against national priorities, those being: **Resilience and Recovery; Transition – Climate and Digitalisation; Enterprise Innovation and Smart Specialisation and EcoSystem Strengthening and Competitiveness** through facilitated consultation sessions.

3. Source: Labour Force Survey, CSO

4. Data referenced excludes COVID employment support data

5. Source; Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment

* 2020 IDA client companies latest available at publication



Overview of Strategic Objectives and Actions



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1: Climate Action – Transition to a climate neutral economy

- Action 1.1** The Midlands Regional Transition Team will work to develop transformative projects with the support of Project Ireland 2040 funding streams and to support relevant projects in the European Just Transition Fund, including the provision of Technical Sector Advisors/ Mentors within enterprise agencies and LEOs to guide emerging low-carbon focused projects across the region.
- Action 1.2** Develop a framework for Local Authorities to realise economic opportunities from the low-carbon transition and empowering communities to embrace Social Enterprise and Community Gain, in partnership with the Eastern and Midlands Climate Action Regional Office (CARO) and the County and City Managers Association (CCMA) and other regional/national agencies and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. Develop and implement Local Authority Climate Action Plans, addressing both adaptation and mitigation measures, including the development and designation of decarbonisation zones, building upon lessons learned from the various elements in Portlaoise, as the national low-carbon demonstration town, including The Cube.
- Action 1.3** Regional Education and Training Boards (ETBs) will develop a National Pilot on Sustainability and a Rural Centre of Excellence within the Midlands Region.



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

- Action 2.1** Work with the Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Mid-West to capitalise and realise business, industry, and skills opportunities presented by TU status to further support the development of the region, including the growth and expansion of Empower Eco, and the development of the Midlands Technology Campus.
- Action 2.2** Deliver on the *Midlands Advanced Manufacturing Action Plan* to position the region as an advanced manufacturing centre of excellence through defined actions across the enabling themes of Education, Training and Skills; Research and Innovation; Support Infrastructure and Networks; and Strengthening the Manufacturing Base.
- Action 2.3** Develop a Smart Connected Technologies Cluster to leverage identified and established regional competencies in telecoms and supporting areas including augmented reality, data analytics etc



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

- Action 3.1** Utilising [Midlandsireland.ie](https://www.midlandsireland.ie), promote and position the region as community of choice, showcasing the value proposition of the region: centrality, access to talent, the existing enterprise base, regional recreational assets, arts and cultural assets.
- Action 3.2** Expand the Midlands Network of Co-Working Facilities (MNCf) in partnership with existing network members, Chambers of Commerce and Local Authorities, to support and develop additional flexible office solutions throughout the region, including the exploration of and the development of vacant properties, through strategic partnerships and in co-operation with local communities.
- Action 3.3** The regional stakeholders will progress the implementation of visitor experience plans and deliver targeted experience economy projects across the region.
- Action 3.4** Deliver the Midlands Regional *Food and Drink Strategy to 2024*, including the resourcing and establishment of Regional Food and Drink Cluster to progress sustainability goals, build resilience and grow exports.

1

The Regional Enterprise Plans Initiative

Introduction

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

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

Policy Context

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

Developing new Regional Enterprise Plans to 2024

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



2

Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024

Strategic Objective 1:

Climate Action – Transition to a zero-carbon economy

Context and Vision to 2024

The Programme for Government – Our Shared Future, commits to an average 7 percent reduction in overall greenhouse gas emissions from 2021-2030, a 51 percent reduction over the decade, and to achieving net zero emissions by 2050. The Climate Action and Low-carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 will support Ireland's transition in achieving these targets, delivering on the commitments of the Paris Agreement and those planned under the European Green Deal.

The Midlands has been the first Irish region to experience the impact of the decarbonisation programme and transitioning process to a zero – carbon economy. The commitment to create clean and sustainable energy forms has resulted in the cessation of peat harvesting for energy generation, which for decades contributed not only to the Midlands economic base, but its social fabric and the development of towns and villages in close proximity to industrial bogs and power stations. The impact has been significant.

In line with the ethos of Just Transition, the Midlands Regional Transition Team (MRTT) was established under the auspices of the Regional Enterprise Development Office, to mitigate job losses, develop alternative employment opportunities and to promote the region for investment. The MRTT has been working closely with the Office of the Just Transition Commissioner, the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC) and local communities to advance these objectives through the National Just Transition Fund and has been involved in consultation processes to inform the forthcoming National Territorial Plan for the European Just Transition Fund.

The *Programme for Government – Our Shared Future*, outlines how local authorities will contribute to the national 7 percent target reduction on an annual basis through the development and implementation of a suite of interconnected climate action and mitigation initiatives. It is through the development of this suite of activities, that economic opportunities will emerge and the Local Authorities in partnership with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE), the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) and the Eastern and Midlands Climate Action Regional Office (CARO) will seek to develop a framework to capitalise on identified economic opportunities.



Actions to 2024

Action 1.1: The Midlands Regional Transition Team will work to develop transformative projects with the support of Project Ireland 2040 funding streams and to support relevant projects in the European Just Transition Fund, including the provision of Technical Sectoral Advisors/ Mentors within enterprise agencies and LEOs to guide emerging 'low-carbon' focused projects across the region.

Action Leader:	Action Partners:	For completion by:
Midlands Regional Transition Team (MRTT) under the auspices of the Midlands Regional Enterprise Development Office.	Office of Just Transition Commissioner MRTT Steering Group MRTT Working Group (WG)1: Education and Research MRTT WG2: Employment Generation MRTT WG3: Employment Continuity Pathways MRTT WG4: Community Initiatives Local Authorities – PPNs DECC	The MRTT Steering Committee and its constituent working groups will meet on a quarterly basis.

Rationale:

The impact of the cessation of peat and peat energy generation has had a significant impact on communities across the Midlands Region, through full time, casual and seasonal employment directly in Bord na Móna and the ESB, but also indirectly through the provision of supporting goods and services. The MRTT, as the collective voice of regional stakeholders will seek to identify and secure supports for the development of alternative employment opportunities for impacted communities, which have the potential to be truly transformative for the region. The MRTT through the working groups, Education and Research; Employment Generation; Employment Continuity Pathways and Community initiatives, will pursue opportunities within their remit and support the implementation of projects under ProjectIreland 2040, including the National Just Transition Fund and the Carbon Tax Fund and projects supported through the forthcoming European Just Transition Fund.

Action Outcome:

- Securing additional investments into the region
- Successful implementation of national JTF funded projects, contributing to alternative employment opportunities
- Support the delivery of relevant operations under the EU Just Transition Fund.
- Contribute to the delivery of the Climate Action Plan 2021



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

Action Leader:	Action Partners:	For completion by:
Local Authorities Eastern and Midlands Climate Action Regional Office	CARO Local Authorities The Cube DETE CCMA Partnership Companies	Publication background paper for the development of the Framework of Economic and Enterprise Opportunities. Ministerial guidelines for the preparation of Climate Action Plans by Local Authorities will issue in 2022.

Rationale:

Local Authorities through the Local Government Reform Act of 2014 were prescribed an expanded economic remit, and Local Authorities must now explore and realise both the economic and enterprise opportunities from transition for the region. In exploring the opportunities, a framework will be developed in partnership with the Eastern and Midlands Climate Action Regional Office, CCMA and Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment along with other national and regional stakeholders.

The Midland Local Authorities adopted Climate Change Adaptation Strategies in 2019 under the provisions of the Climate Action and Low-carbon Development Act, 2015 and the National Adaptation Framework (2018). Local authorities will now be mandated to develop statutory Climate Action Plans (including adaptation and mitigation measures) and the development of decarbonisation zones across the region, whilst utilising the learning of Portlaoise as the low-carbon demonstration town, in accordance with s. 16 of the Climate Action and Low-carbon Development (Amendment) Act. 2021.

Action Outcome:

- Framework for Local Authorities to realise economic opportunities from the low-carbon transition
- Local Authority Climate Action Plans
- Empowering communities training programmes delivered to create greater awareness of social enterprise and community gain opportunities arising from the transition to a zero-carbon economy.



Action 1.3: Regional ETBs will develop a National Pilot on Sustainability and a Rural Centre of Excellence within the Midlands Region.

Action Leader:	Action Partners:	For completion by:
Laois and Offaly Local Education and Training Board	ETBs Local Authorities Partnership Companies CARO The Cube Local Community/Social Enterprise Groups'	Exploration of pilot H1 2022.

Rationale:

The 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals that underpin Ireland’s Sustainable Development Strategy offer the framework and opportunity to support individuals and communities to transition to a greener and more digitalised community and world of work. They present an opportunity to:

- Support the sustainability of rural communities (especially the peatland communities most affected by the Just Transition process).
- Facilitate and support community-based, learner-centred provision that provides life-long pathways for all.
- Provide the Midlands Region’s employers with a talent pool that can fill current and future green and digital skills gaps and attract inward investment to boost local job creation in the region.

Action Outcome:

The greening of further education and training to equip learners with the relevant knowledge, skills and the values that motivate and empower them to become informed active citizens who take action for a more sustainable future; equipping learners with skills for green jobs and sustainable lifestyles.



Strategic Objective 2

Build on achievements to date in sectors in which the region has a competitive advantage through Smart Specialisation and wider adoption of digitalisation within business, leveraging the new Technological University of the Shannon – Midlands Mid-West

Context and Vision to 2024

The *Programme for Government – Our Shared Future* notes that transition to a zero-carbon future will require greater digitalisation, and embracing of greater automation by enterprise to ensure future proofing and greater resilience of our regional enterprise base. This will be underpinned by forthcoming national policy documents National Smart Specialisation Strategy and the National Cluster Strategy.

The actions proposed under this objective seek to build on achievements to date in sectors in which the region has a competitive advantage and to identify and capitalise on regional opportunities arising from the establishment of the Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Mid-West, particularly in relation to Empower Eco and the proposed Midlands Technology Campus.

Ireland's Industry 4.0 Strategy 2020-2025 notes that firm adoption of Industry 4.0 will be critical to maintaining a competitive manufacturing base into the future which will drive national productivity gains and underpin sustainability of high-quality jobs and export-led economic growth. This is particularly of relevance to the Midlands Region, where manufacturing is a bigger relative source of employment at 18 percent compared to the national average of 12.5 percent. The Midlands Advanced Manufacturing Plan to 2024, developed as an outcome of the Midlands REP to 2020, will significantly advance the vision for the Midlands Region, with the aim that by 2030, the Midlands Region will be known internationally as a Centre of Excellence in Advanced Manufacturing and as an ideal location for manufacturing companies (both indigenous and FDI) to establish and grow their business and exports.

The recently published National Artificial Intelligence (AI) Strategy, a deliverable of the National Economic Recovery Plan, will serve as a roadmap for the development and adoption of digital transformation, including the adoption of AI by SMEs and the enhancement of the regional ecosystem.

The Midlands Region is home to several internationally recognised Telecoms and technology related companies and I-LOFAR⁶. Developing a Smart Connected Technologies Cluster in the Midlands will see the region become an internationally recognised location for Telecommunications, which will generate its own organic growth and be attractive for new investors to locate in the Midlands.



6. The Low Frequency Array (LOFAR) is an international network of state of the art telescopes used to observe the Universe in unprecedented detail at local radio frequencies. I-LOFAR is the Irish addition to this network.



Action 2.1: Work with the Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Mid-West to capitalise and realise business, industry, and skills opportunities presented by TU status to further support the development of the region, including the growth and expansion of Empower Eco, and the development of the Midlands Technology Campus.

Action Leader:	Action Partners:	For completion by:
TUS: Midlands Mid-West – Industry Engagement Group Board of Empower Eco Steering Group – Midlands Technology Campus	TUS: Midlands Mid-West – Industry Engagement Group Board of Empower Eco Steering Group – Midlands Technology Campus	Timelines will be determined upon securing of funds to develop projects.

Rationale:

In line with the Technological University Research Network report, support the Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Mid-West to:

- Progress investment in integrated multi-campus digital infrastructure.
- To provide regional cohesion and to facilitate new modes of learning and the prioritisation of capital investment;
- Investment in research capacity building by developing researcher human capital; and
- Implementing a researcher career development and employment framework.

Grow and expand Empower Eco as a Midlands Innovation Triple-Helix Hub (Academia-Industry-Government) based at Lough Boora, a living labs complex for enterprise development, innovation in biodiversity, low-carbon economy and climate action enabled by digitisation with a strong international orientation.

Develop the Midlands Technology Campus at TUS: Midlands Mid-West – building the necessary skills and capabilities in companies, providing a dynamic industry-focused R&D environment with co-location of industry and academic researchers, industry training, entrepreneurial support, access to specialised equipment and facilities, a maker-space, and regional outreach.

Action Outcome:

- TUS – Midlands and Mid-West secures funding to support its new remit.
- Launch of Empower Eco Accelerator Programme.
- Complete the feasibility study and concept development for the Midlands Technology Campus at TUS: Midlands and Mid-West, and progress to completion of design and planning, and secure necessary funding to enable building commencement.



Action 2.2: Deliver on the actions within Midlands Advanced Manufacturing Action Plan, to position the region as an advanced manufacturing centre of excellence through defined actions across enabling themes of Education, Training and Skills; Research and Innovation; Support Infrastructure and Networks; and Strengthening the Manufacturing base.

Action Leader:	Action Partners:	For completion by:
Industry Chair Public Sector Chair	Abbott Diagnostics Grant Engineering Greenfield Global Mergon IMR TUS: Midlands Mid-West IDA Ireland Enterprise Ireland LEOs Regional Enterprise Development Office Regional Skills Forum ATiM cluster	Implementation of the Midlands AM Action Plan will be monitored by the working group at regular intervals, whom in turn will report to the Midlands REP Steering Committee on a biannual basis and contribute to the mid-term review of the Midlands REP.

Rationale:

The Midlands Advanced Manufacturing Action Plan to 2024 states the agreed regional ambition; that by 2030 the Midlands Region will be known internationally as a Centre of Excellence in Advanced Manufacturing and as an ideal location for manufacturing companies (both indigenous and FDI) to establish and grow their business and exports.

This will be achieved through:

- The growing numbers in the region of leading global manufacturing industries (both FDI and indigenous MNCs) and a dynamic indigenous manufacturing sector.
- A shared ambition amongst the region’s manufacturing base for business excellence, international competitiveness, and a willingness to share knowledge with other companies in the region for mutual business advantage, and to pool their resources in order to exploit market opportunities.
- A coordinated and collaborative region-wide ecosystem of business networks, research centres, education and training facilities and government agency actions and supports, which is interconnected with the wider national support ecosystem.

Action Outcome:

Action leads as identified in the action plan will progress and implement the 21 actions⁷ identified within the Plan across the four thematic areas of:

1. Education, Training and Skills.
2. Research and Innovation.
3. Support infrastructure and networks.
4. Strengthening the manufacturing industry base – FDI and indigenous sectors

7. See Appendix 7 for Midlands Advanced Manufacturing Action Plan Actions

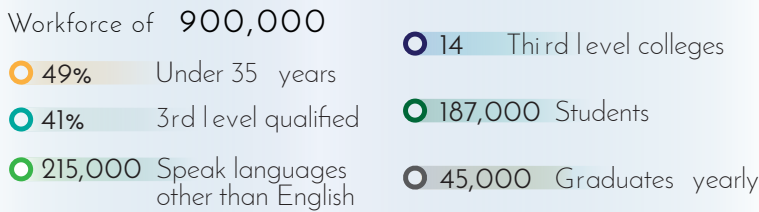


The Midlands Advantage

LOCATION - Direct access to Ireland's



TALENT - Within a 60 minutes commute

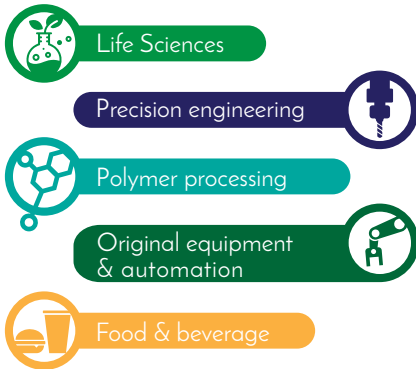


MANUFACTURING FACTS



MAJOR EMPLOYERS

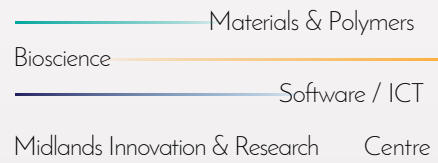
- Abbott Avery Dennison
- Technimark C&D Foods
- Ericsson Steripack Group
- Neueda 3M Teleflex
- Mergon
- Steris Integra Life Sciences
- Spectrum Plastics Glenisk
- Grant Engineering
- Greenfield Global Glanbia
- Aubren



RESEARCH & INNOVATION



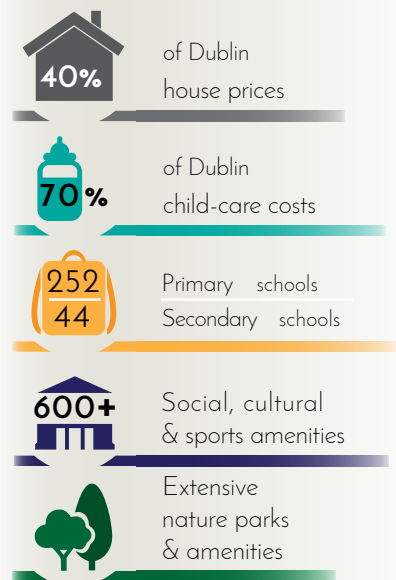
TUS - MIDLANDS MIDWEST



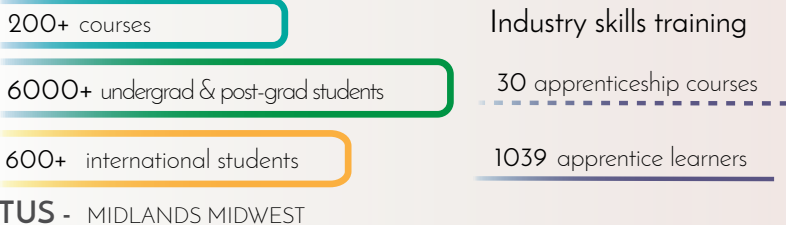
Eco-business Innovation Hubs



AMENITIES & QUALITY OF LIFE



EDUCATION, TRAINING & SKILLS



BUSINESS SUPPORTS



Data sources: CSO

Source: Midlands Advanced Manufacturing Action Plan, 2021-2024



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

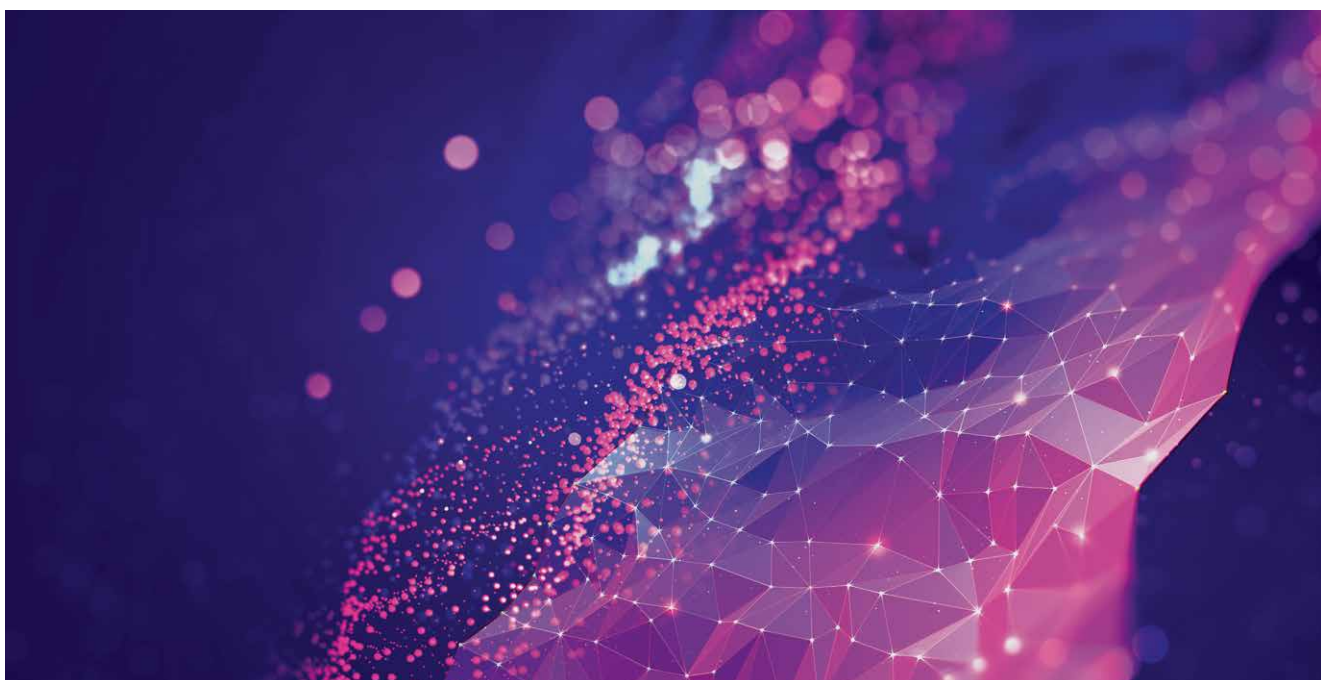
Action Leader:	Action Partners:	For completion by:
Industry Chair Public Sector Chair	Zinkworks Sidero Ericsson Regional Enterprise Development Office streamBirr ATiM cluster IDA Ireland Enterprise Ireland LEOs	Milestones will be established and monitored by the working group at regular intervals, whom in turn will report to the Midlands REP Steering Committee on a biannual basis and contribute to the mid-term review of the Midlands REP.

Rationale:

This action will advance the development of a Smart Connected Technologies Cluster to leverage the collective regional competencies in this area, serving to position the region as a destination of choice for sectoral investors. With the roll out of 5G, this is a growth area with significant regional advantages that can be leveraged through collaboration.

Action Outcome:

- Audit of companies and establishment of the Smart Connected Technologies Cluster.
- Working with stakeholders to refine and strengthen the value proposition and marketing collateral so that the region can be better positioned, both nationally and internationally.
- Connection to other international clusters with same speciality.
- Collaborative R&D projects commenced at Midlands Technology Campus.
- Increased number of start ups.
- Greater share of national R&D funding secured for the region.



Strategic Objective 3

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

Context and Vision to 2024

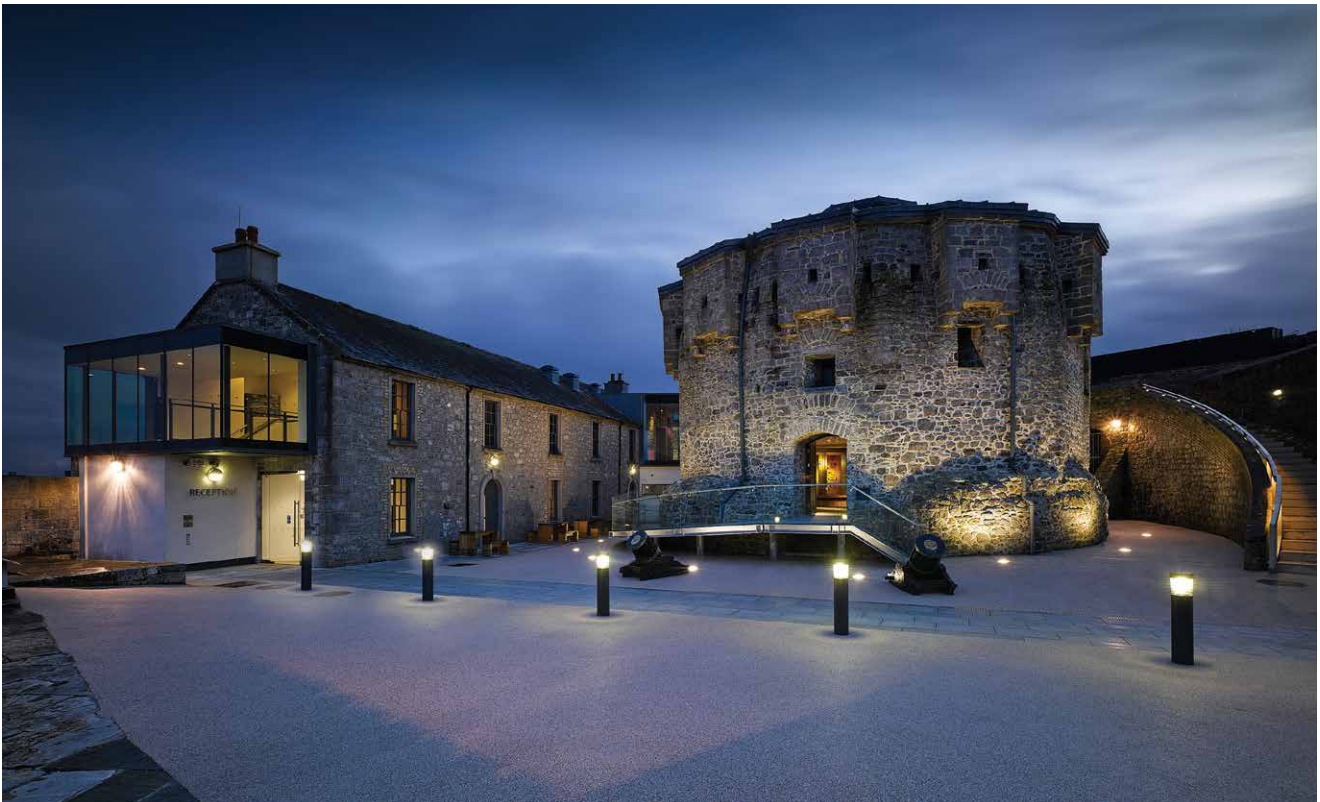
Project Ireland 2040 is the overarching national policy and planning framework for the social, economic and cultural development of the island of Ireland, comprising of a capital investment plan- National Development Plan (NDP) 2021-2030, and the associated National Planning Framework (NPF). The placemaking qualities of principal towns, service towns and villages are a key element in the value proposition of the Midlands Region in attracting new and additional investment to the region.

The Programme for Government – Our Shared Future recognises the key role that placemaking has to play in attracting and stimulating additional economic activity across the regions. A related element of the value proposition is the availability of quality co-working facilities within the region, which will play a key role in our recovery as we emerge from the pandemic, in a new world of remote and blended working and learning arrangements, articulated by Making Remote Work: National Remote Work Strategy, IDA Ireland’s Driving Recovery and Sustainable Growth 2021 -2024 and Enterprise Ireland’s The Future of Work (2021). The Midlands Network of Co-Working Facilities (MNCWF) will seek to grow its membership, develop landing spaces of quality and scale and strive to replicate the success of Bloom HQ in Laois becoming the European HQ for Canadian firm N-Ware.

Our Rural Future 2021-2025 is a whole-of-Government policy for the sustainable development of rural Ireland. It focuses on maximising opportunities for individuals, communities and businesses in rural communities through key objectives such as supporting enterprise and employment, optimising digital connectivity, enhancing public services, improving infrastructure and amenities in our towns and villages, and supporting communities during the transition to a climate neutral society, all of which are promoted through the MidlandsIreland.ie platform.

The quality of life within the Midlands Region emerged as a strong theme in the facilitated consultations held during the preparation of the Midlands REP to 2024. The centrality of the Midlands and access to a vast array of recreational activities; outdoor pursuits, water sports, walking trails, greenways, blueways, mountain biking and a strong cultural and arts offering are readily accessible in the Midlands Region. The provision of enhanced visitor experiences will be pursued over the lifetime of this Plan.

Under this objective the actions proposed, will strengthen the value proposition, sense of place and competitiveness of the Midlands Region, positioning it as a destination of choice in which to live, create, study, work, visit, and invest.



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

Action Leader:	Action Partners:	For completion by:
<p>MidlandsIreland.ie Office and Regional Enterprise Development Office</p>	<p>Regional Enterprise Representatives LEOs IDA Ireland Enterprise Ireland Fáilte Ireland Local Authority Tourism Officers Waterways Ireland Coillte Regional Skills Forum TUS: Midlands Mid-West</p>	<p>Milestones will be established by the appointed MidlandsIreland.ie team with agreement of Working Group Members, and will report to the Midlands REP Steering Committee on a biannual basis and contribute to the mid-term review of the Midlands REP.</p>

Rationale:

'Destination platforms' have long been recognised as a key driver for economic and social development of regions. Destination platforms seek to promote all that is good and positive about the region in one single platform, strengthening regional awareness and reputation on the national and international stage.

MidlandsIreland.ie promotes the region across the straplines of Gateway to Living, Gateway to Tourism, Gateway to Learning and Gateway to Enterprise. The Midlands is now presented with a unique opportunity through transition, to position itself as a young, talented and trendy location, where people work to live and embrace the outdoors on their doorstep, where people can embrace the digitalisation movement, and enabling the 24,000 commuters from the region to work closer to where they live, where culture is celebrated and explored and where placemaking is valued, essentially a region where families living here can have the best of all worlds, for work, rest and play. The central location of the region, gives an unrivalled connectivity on the island, and so is an ideal location in terms of second site location at significantly lower costs than the coastal cities.

With support from the National Just Transition Fund and the Carbon Tax Fund, together with the support of the Local Authorities of Laois, Longford, Offaly and Westmeath, a dedicated team will be appointed to develop the MidlandsIreland.ie platform and associated social media platforms to promote the region as the destination of choice in which to live, work, visit, invest, study and create. The platform will become the 'go to' portal for the Midlands value proposition.

Action Outcome:

- Development of a Communications and Marketing Plan.
- Campaigns underway and promotional events held.
- Increased awareness and traffic across all platforms.
- Cross promotion by all regional stakeholders.
- Increased investment and enhanced regional employment opportunities.



Action 3.2: Expand the Midlands Network of Co-Working Facilities (MNCF) in partnership with existing network members, Chambers of Commerce and Local Authorities, to support and develop additional flexible office solutions throughout the region, including the exploration of and the development of vacant properties, through strategic partnerships and in co-operation with communities.

Action Leader:	Action Partners:	For completion by:
MNCF Business Development Manager	MNCF Members Local Authorities – Regeneration Teams IDA Ireland Enterprise Ireland LEOs Broadband Officers – BCPs ConnectedHubs.ie – WDC / DRCD NACEC	Annual Milestones will be determined by annual work programme team with agreement of Working Group Members, and will report to the Midlands REP Steering Committee on a biannual basis and contribute to the mid-term review of the Midlands REP. Publication of MNCF Directory 2022/2023- H1 2022.

Rationale:

The Midlands Network of Co-Working Facilities (MNCF), established in 2019 comprises both public and privately operated co-working facilities across the Midlands Region. This action seeks to increase the number of facilities throughout the region to deliver on the Programme for Government, the National Remote Working Strategy to enable residents of the Midlands to work closer to where they live, whilst also adding to the value proposition of the Midlands as a landing space for new FDI or as second site location for coastal city-based companies, given the centrality of the region and comparable favourable cost base relative to coastal locations.

Future Jobs advocates for remote working and flexible working solutions to ensure greater labour force participation and improved quality of life, beating the commute and a reduction in carbon emissions, access to blended learning. The Midlands embraces this future of work, with numerous remote working options, along with locationless jobs and blended options set to become the norm for some employees.

National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland 2019-2022 – demonstrates that enterprise facilities based within rural communities, often drive and contribute to the development of solutions to meet local societal challenges through the development of social enterprises which can grow and scale jobs within the community.

With support from the National Just Transition Fund and the Carbon Tax Fund and the Local Authorities of Laois, Longford, Offaly and Westmeath a Business Development Manager will be appointed to drive this action, whilst working closely with the ConnectedHubs.ie and National Association of Community Enterprise Centres (NACEC).

Action Outcome:

- Appointment of MNCF Business Development Manager.
- Biennial MNCF Directory, incorporating Broadband Connection Points as supported by Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD).
- Development and delivery of annual work programmes for the MNCF.
- Development of a landing space of scale within the designated Regional Growth Centre – Athlone and in the principal towns of the region.
- Additional facilities coming on stream through regeneration and the development of strategic partnerships.
- Capacity building for facility managers.
- Greater number of Midlands residents working closer to where they live.
- Ability to access blended learning through designated e-learning gates across the region, support community initiatives etc.



Action 3.3: The regional stakeholders will progress the implementation of visitor experience plans and deliver targeted experience economy projects across the region.

Action Leader:	Action Partners:	For completion by:
Industry Chair Public Sector Chair	Local Authorities Waterways Ireland Fáilte Ireland Coillte Bord na Móna Dept of Tourism and Sport Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media Rural Recreation Officers Local Authority Tourism Officers	Phased development of projects over the lifetime of the Midlands REP, aligned to ProjectIreland 2040 funding calls.

Rationale:

The action partners will seek to support and progress the delivery of the following projects in partnership:

- National Galway – Dublin Cycleway;
- Midlands Cycling Destination and Greenway developments including the planned velo cycleway at Lough Boora Discovery Park;
- Establishment of the Slieve Bloom Development Partnership and the development of an Orientation and Signage Strategy to realise the potential of the Slieve Bloom;
- The development of the Shannon Wilderness Park; and
- Explore the feasibility of the establishment of an Eden-like peatlands based visitor attraction of scale in the Midlands Region, in collaboration with the EU LIFE project.

Action Outcome

- Completion of the bridge over the River Shannon, National Galway-Dublin Cycleway.
- Development and delivery of the Slieve Bloom Signage and Orientation Strategy.
- Progress the development of the elements of the Shannon Wilderness Park.
- Publication of the feasibility study of peatlands visitor attraction in the Midlands.



Action 3.4: Deliver the Midlands Regional Food and Drink Strategy to 2024⁸, including the resourcing and establishment of Regional Food and Drink Cluster to progress sustainability goals, build resilience and grow exports.

Action Leader:	Action Partners:	For completion by:
Midlands Food and Drink Programme Manager	LEOs Enterprise Ireland Bord Bia TUS: Midlands Mid-West Midlands Regional Skills Forum Fáilte Ireland Private Sector Food and Drink Companies (4) Food and Hospitality Services Food Hub/Incubation Facilities Primary Food Producer Local development companies	Working group members will meet on a quarterly basis, to monitor progress of the MidlandsIreland.ie Regional Food and Drink Strategy to 2021, and will report to the Midlands REP Steering Committee on a biannual basis and contribute to the mid-term review of the Midlands REP.

Rationale:

The MidlandsIreland.ie Regional Food and Drink Strategy 2021-2024 was developed as an outcome of the Midlands REP to 2020. This strategy recognises and seeks to reinforce the unique potential of the Midlands food and drink offering– one of excellence, visibility, and pride. It is about making the Midlands the most sustainable regional food and drink ecosystem in the country. The strategy focuses on strengthening the food and drink sector in the region through four strategic pillars:

- Sustainability: Build a more sustainable food and drink eco-system in the Midlands.
- Awareness: Develop local awareness and pride in Midlands food and drink.
- Export Capability: Build capability to support export readiness.
- Food Tourism: Develop a food and drink culture to create evocative visitor experience.

The implementation of this strategy will both support and develop food and drink producers of all scales across the Midlands, with the sustainability agenda at its very core, whilst seeking to overcome the many challenges faced by the sector over the last 18 months and will play a significant role in developing a sense of place, in the effort to promote the Midlands as a destination of choice.

Action Outcome:

- Secure funding to appoint a Programme Manager for the delivery of the Regional Food and Drink Strategy.
- Publication of online searchable Regional Food and Drink Producers Directory.
- Fostering Innovation and Nurturing Capability.
- Delivery of industry focused sustainability goals.
- Harness existing supports, skills and experience of scaled Food and Drink companies to drive national and international sales.

8. See Appendix 8 for actions from MidlandsIreland.ie Regional Food and Drink Strategy



3

Implementation

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

The existing Regional Steering Committee will be maintained with each Strategic Objective and or/ actions having, where appropriate, a public and private sector lead to drive the implementation, who in turn will report to the Regional Steering Committee. The Regional Steering Committee for the Midlands will continue to be chaired by Dr Anne Cusack, who has been appointed by the Department for Enterprise, Trade and Employment. The functions of the Steering Committee are as follows:

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

The Chairperson will convene at least two meetings of the Steering Committee per year and present a progress update on the implementation of the plan. The Chairperson will also lead the Committee in the preparation of two progress reports to be submitted to the Department, mid-term report in summer 2023 and a final progress report at end of 2024. These reports will be the subject of a meeting between the Chairperson and/or the Steering Committee and the Minister during one of the biannual meetings.

The Midlands Regional Steering Committee will oversee the formation of smaller working groups to drive delivery of the Strategic Objective and actions within the Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan. Working Groups will convene as frequently as is required and will report on progress to the Chairperson and the Regional Steering Committee.

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



4



Midlands Enterprise Agencies and Local Enterprise Offices

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



4.1 Enterprise Ireland: Focus to 2024

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

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

Strengthening regional enterprise development will be a key focus in the new *Enterprise Ireland Strategy 2022-2024*, reflecting the varying needs and opportunities of enterprise across the different regions.



Recent developments in the Midlands Region

Enterprise Ireland's team of Development Advisors and capability specialists work with over 207 companies employing more than 11,416 people in the Midlands Region.

Between 2018-2020, Enterprise Ireland invested €23.8m in client companies in the Midlands Region supporting employment creation, innovation, competitiveness and expansion.

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

Strong regional clustering is important to enhancing regional enterprise success. Under the Regional Technology Cluster Fund, Enterprise Ireland approved funding for the ATiM Cluster and is working with other regional stakeholders including TUS to develop further clustering projects in Life Sciences, Financial Services and ICT/Telecoms.

Investment in regional infrastructure that supports innovation and entrepreneurship is central to Enterprise Ireland's regional development strategy. The Midlands benefits from important well-established supports such as the four Local Enterprise Offices in the region, the New Frontiers Programme in TUS, and the BNM/Erinn Innovation/Empower eco accelerator (Accelerate Green) for start-ups and SMEs. Enterprise Ireland continues to support, through collaboration and funding, the region's centres of excellence: Irish Manufacturing Research, Command and Applied Polymer Technologies.

Enterprise Centres are another critical enterprise development support to which Enterprise Ireland has committed significant funding over several years. In 2020, in response to COVID-19, €300,000 in development funding was allocated to nine Enterprise Centres in the Midlands.

Enterprise Ireland's objectives for the Midlands Region to 2024

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

To support these objectives, Enterprise Ireland's strategic priorities for the Midlands to 2024 include:

- The successful delivery of projects funded under the regional development funds including the Regional Enterprise Development Fund, the Regional Technology Clustering Fund and the Powering the Regions Enterprise Centre Scheme.
- A key policy objective identified for the Midlands Just Transition is the development of enterprise capability in the region for green and sustainability initiatives. A major step forward was the recent launch of Accelerate Green—an accelerator for new companies in the climate and sustainability space.
- Collaboration with local stakeholders to identify gaps in the Midlands enterprise ecosystem and to plan and help fund essential regional enterprise-enabling infrastructure. Work with partners such as the LEOs, TUS and Start-up programmes to deliver initiatives that support entrepreneurship and foster an exciting new generation of innovative and ambitious start-ups in the Midlands.
- Enterprise Ireland's sectoral and capability specialists will work closely with clients across the Midlands Region to support their growth plans as well as supporting and assisting companies on transformation initiatives such as climate change, digitisation and sustainability.
- Broadening and strengthening the Midlands exporting base by identifying and supporting first-time exporters, growing knowledge and capability, and supporting SMEs to scale-up their exporting strategies.
- Drive strong and effective regional clustering and collaboration in the Midlands particularly in Engineering, Lifesciences, Financial Services and ICT/Telecoms.
- Continue to strengthen linkages between TUS and industry through the Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund, the Commercialisation Fund, Innovation Partnerships and Innovation Vouchers.
- Work with the regional skills forum and our clients to ensure availability and development of appropriate skills and talent to support company growth.

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





4.2 IDA Ireland: Focus to 2024

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

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

The Strategy has five pillars:

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

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

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

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

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



Regional Economic Impact of FDI

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

Over the period 2021-2024 IDA Ireland will:

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

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

IDA Ireland objectives for the Midlands Region to 2024

There are 49 (2020⁹) IDA Ireland client companies in the Midlands Region, employing 6,868 people (2021). FDI performance in the region has been strong over the past five years with employment among IDA Ireland clients increasing. The region has an impressive range of companies across all industry sectors, with particular strengths in Life Sciences, Technology, Global Business Services, International Financial Services, and Engineering and Industrial Technologies and this base of client companies in the region continues to perform well in terms of their operational sustainability, job retention and ongoing transformation.

Under its *Driving Recovery and Sustainable Growth* strategy, IDA Ireland will target 25 investments for the Midlands Region (Laois, Longford, Offaly, Westmeath) in the period 2021 to 2024. IDA Ireland will build on the strengths and competencies of the region with a particular focus on high value manufacturing, services, and RD&I opportunities.

Emerging technology trends have and will continue to create new opportunities across the region in areas such as data analytics, cybersecurity, and smart manufacturing.

IDA Ireland will deliver Advanced Building Solutions in Athlone, Longford, and Mullingar over 2021-2024. Construction of the first of these commenced in September 2021 in Athlone, with the remaining projects at various stages from site selection to planning. IDA Ireland will also undertake upgrade works at IDA Ireland Parks across the region.

IDA Ireland client companies in the Midlands include Greenfield Global, Standex, Abbott, Center Parcs, Zoetis, Steris, Cardinal Health, Ericsson, Teleflex medical, Medtronic, Avery Dennison, Nelipak.

Recent new additions and expansions include:

Greenfield Global (Portlaoise); Huawei, PPD (Athlone); Ashland Specialities, Antylia Scientific and Ardonagh Group (Mullingar); N'ware (Mountrath); Center Parcs (Ballymahon); and Bionical Emas (Kilbeggan).

FDI in the Midlands Region is estimated to generate €619m for the region and Ireland through Payroll (€404m), Purchasing of Irish Materials and Services (€121m) and in-house R&D spend (€94m) (Source: DETE ABSEI 2019).

The recent establishment of the Technological University of the Shannon (TUS) with the merger of Athlone IT and Limerick IT, will provide added focus and potential for the region in terms of building a strong skills pipeline and greater industry partnerships and collaboration, both of critical importance in attracting new enterprise investment to the Midlands. The new University with campuses in Athlone, Limerick, Clonmel, Ennis and Thurles brings together more than 15,000 students and 1,200 staff across the Midlands and Mid-West further strengthening the potential of the wider region.

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

9. 2020 IDA Ireland client companies latest available at publication





Local Enterprise Office

4.3 Local Enterprise Office: Focus to 2024

The Local Enterprise Offices aim to promote entrepreneurship, foster business start-ups and develop existing micro and small businesses to drive job creation and to provide accessible high quality supports for your Business ideas.

The Local Enterprise Office is the *First Stop Shop* for anyone seeking information and support on starting or growing a business in Ireland.

Entrepreneurs and businesses are supported to:

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

Recent Developments in the Midlands Region

Regions	Client Numbers 2021	Total Jobs 2021	Net Job Change 2021
Midlands	862	4,253	+322

Local Enterprise Offices are located in County and City Councils and are embedded in local communities so that they can provide local responses to local needs. The LEOs of Laois, Offaly, Longford and Westmeath deliver a range of relevant programmes and initiatives to support entrepreneurship and enterprise development in the Midlands Region.

The Midlands Region is the first region in Ireland to experience the impact of accelerated decarbonisation with the loss of peat production and closure of power plants. The Midland LEOs, in partnership with the other members of the Regional Transition Team are working to ensure new jobs and opportunities emerge in the areas of green energy, innovative food production, tourism and other areas.

Collectively, the four Midland LEOs manage a portfolio of 862 enterprises, employing a total of 4,253 people.

These portfolio clients are typically in manufacturing and internationally traded service sectors. They may have received financial supports in the areas of Feasibility Study Grants, Priming Grants and/or Business Expansion Grants.

In addition to these portfolio clients, the four LEOs interact with a much wider cohort of enterprises, providing enterprise training, mentoring, access to subsidised initiatives such as the Trading Online Voucher Scheme, Green for Micro Initiative, LEAN for Micro, Management Development Programmes etc. In 2020, the Midland LEOs provided enterprise training to 5,661 business owners and mentoring to 1,092 business owners.

The Midland LEOs collaborate on a number of joint initiatives, including Export Programmes, the development and promotion of the Engenuity Engineering Cluster, the Going Green Programme, and the development of the Midlands Food and Drink Strategy.

Local Enterprise Office Objectives for the Midlands Region to 2024

The Local Enterprise Offices of Laois, Offaly, Westmeath and Longford Programmes each prepare a four-year plan to inform and guide activities over the time period. The LEO Plans for 2021-2024 were prepared in line with the national, regional and local policies and initiatives.

Key deliverables include supporting and promoting the green and circular economies, engineering and manufacturing sectors, the food and beverage sector, and increasing employment levels in grant aided businesses.

Throughout the Midlands Region, there are significant opportunities emerging through the co-working facilities, eco innovation and investment in tourism, greenways and heritage-related centres. The basis exists, therefore, for building on the strengths of the region in green enterprises and services and developing a co-ordinated and integrated way to create a “whole of Midlands approach” to maximise future accelerated decarbonisation initiatives for the region.

There is a vibrant business culture in the region with growing clusters of Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland supported companies in pharma, software and green energy industries.

In addition, tourism is an important sector with increased investments in Greenways, Blueways, and Mountain Bike Trails.

Local Enterprise Offices Laois, Offaly, Longford and Westmeath are members of the Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committee for the Midlands Region and look forward to working closely with our partners on the implementation of this Plan and continuing the strong spirit of collaboration and collective effort that is essential to delivering on our ambition for the Midlands Region.



5

Complementary Strategies and Initiatives



5.1 Fáilte Ireland: Focus to 2024

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

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

The Midlands Region is served by two of Fáilte Ireland's regional tourism brands, Ireland's Hidden Heartlands and Ireland's Ancient East. Fáilte Ireland is currently preparing a suite of four regional tourism strategies (one for each of the four regional tourism brands), which will be published in 2022.

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

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

At the same time, Fáilte Ireland has remained focused on the medium-to-long term sustainable recovery and development of tourism in the region. For example, preparation of the Shannon Tourism Masterplan (led by Waterways Ireland and in association with the ten Local Authorities), and a Destination Development Plan for the Slieve Blooms.

A very successful Website Improvement Programme was delivered in Ireland's Hidden Heartlands which helped to improve the digital 'shop window' for the region and improve the digital skills of 40 tourism businesses and deliver transformational business results.



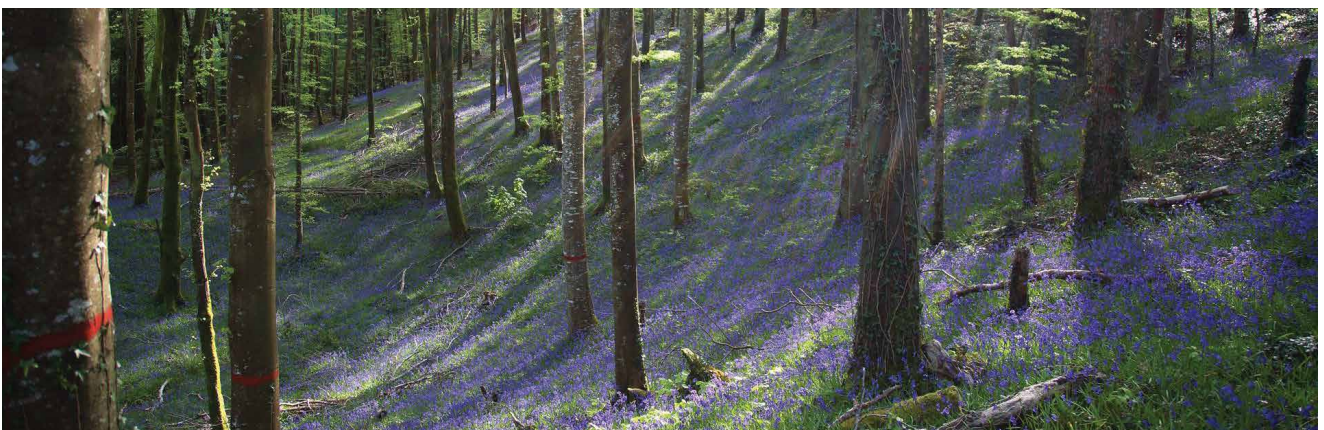
Fáilte Ireland's objectives for the Midlands Region to 2024

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

Priority areas of focus for Fáilte Ireland over the coming three years in the region include:

- Continuing to raise awareness of the region as a visitor destination and of the range of things for visitors to see and do.
- Providing a range of business supports focused on meeting the particular needs of tourism businesses in the region in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic over the next three years.
- Implementation of the Shannon Tourism Masterplan in association with Waterways Ireland and the Local Authorities.
- Working with a range of industry and stakeholder partners to prepare a series of Destination Development Plans that will agree the shared development priorities that will improve both the destinations' appeal and the experience they offer on the ground; and by extension, help to increase visitor dwell time and spend in the region.
- Helping tourism providers to secure new business by introducing them to new markets and buyers and helping them to secure incremental sales. In particular, helping them to hone their saleable experiences to ensure they are picked up by domestic and international tour operators.
- Liaising with Local Authorities and other State Agencies such as Coillte, Waterways Ireland, the OPW and Bord na Móna in optimising the benefit of state assets and attractions for tourism, in particular through the development of Greenways, Blueways, and walking trails, which can be leveraged by tourism enterprises to create new jobs.
- Complete the development of a master plan for the Beara Breifne Way with a view to unlocking its potential to become a significant north-south strand in the lattice work of trails with the Midlands.
- Ensuring that the potential of existing strategic tourism infrastructure, assets and facilities is fully explored and that they are fully leveraged by tourism businesses in order to create new enterprises and jobs, in particular, the Royal Canal Greenway, the Old Rail Trail, the Grand Canal Greenway, the River Shannon, the Slieve Bloom Mountains and Lough Boora, among others.
- Establishing and assisting a range of effective commercially-focused tourism business networks throughout the region and helping them to cross-promote and cross-sell one another.
- Aiding the digital transformation of the tourism industry in the region through a *Digital that Delivers* initiative, aimed at providing improved online bookability for tourism businesses, enhancing their connected distribution and improving their digital skills.
- Develop and execute a sustained strategy for tourism skills and careers to both attract and retain staff within the tourism industry – the absence of staff represents an existential crisis as businesses capacity to trade is being restricted.

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





5.2 Regional Skills Forum: Focus to 2024

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

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

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

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

The Midlands RSF has developed very strong and productive working relationships with all of the key participants involved in the successful realisation of the National Skills Strategy. Progressive engagement with the Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committee, and directly with the Regional Enterprise Development Office, enterprise development agencies (such as IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland); along with the LEOs, Education and Training Board (ETBs), Skillnets, and other agencies serving the third level sector, has contributed to strong socio-economic growth in the Midlands Region.

Skills has been identified as a key 'enabler' through the Regional Enterprise Plan stakeholder consultations that took place in the Midlands in 2021, and as such it will underpin all of the agreed Strategic Objectives and corresponding actions in the Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan.

The Midlands RSF will continue to engage with the Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committee and Regional Enterprise Development Office across all of the Strategic Objectives within the Regional Enterprise Plan; developing pathways in response to identified skills needs across all enterprise sectors in the region. In particular, the Forum will work with all regional stakeholders, to continue to ensure that the requisite skills are in place to facilitate the transition of the enterprise base in terms of their digitalisation and low-carbon transformation.

The Midlands Regional Skills Forum will partner with regional stakeholders on the delivery of a number of discreet areas within the Regional Enterprise Plan:

- Under Strategic Objective 1: Transition to a zero-carbon economy – the Forum will continue to encourage the development of transformative projects in association with the Midlands Regional Transition Team, LEOs, educational providers, and regional enterprise, aiming to leverage potential funding streams available from Project Ireland 2040 and the European Just Transition Fund.
- Under Strategic Objective 2: as a sector of strength in the Midlands, manufacturing has been a key focus for the Regional Skills Forum through a proactive approach to addressing critical vacancies and delivery of progressive upskilling programmes. A detailed skills survey and analysis in association with all stakeholders will be undertaken and appropriate interventions actioned.
- The Midlands RSF will intensify its focus on the promotion of the EXPLORE Programme in order to help meet the increasing demands for digitalisation skills in the Manufacturing sector as a whole.
- Under Strategic Objective 3 – Food and drink sector development – the Forum will work closely with the food and hospitality sector to develop bespoke solutions to labour market challenges that will assist the sector with its recovery from the impact of COVID-19.

More broadly, facilitation of further clustering activity within and across sectors throughout the Midlands and further afield will be an underlying theme which intends to assist all regional enterprises in a successful evolution towards Industry 5.0 and a carbon-neutral economy. The Midlands RSF will also participate in the identification and development of both adaptive and forward-thinking strategies for Smart Technology advancement in the Midlands.





5.3 The Regional Assembly

The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA) covers nine counties containing twelve Local Authorities namely – Longford, Westmeath, Offaly, Laois, Louth, Meath, Kildare, Wicklow, Fingal, South Dublin and Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Councils and Dublin City Council.

Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy

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

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

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

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

The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly RSES can be found here: [EMRA Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy](#)



5.4 Local Authorities – Local Economic and Community Plans

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

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

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

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

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

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

Appendices

Appendix 1: Membership of the Regional Steering Committee

Dr Anne Cusack, Chair of the Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan
Paul Madden, Vice Chair and MD Zinkworks
Sarah Morgan, Programme Manager Midlands REP
Eileen O'Meara Hayes, Midlands REP
Private Sector Representatives
Laois County Council
Longford County Council
Offaly County Council
Westmeath County Council
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment
Department of Rural and Community Development
Department of Environment, Climate and Communications
Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection
IDA Ireland
Enterprise Ireland
LEO Laois
LEO Longford
LEO Offaly
LEO Westmeath
Midlands Regional Skills Forum
Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Mid-West
Laois Offaly ETB
Longford Westmeath ETB
Eastern and Midland Climate Action Regional Office (CARO)
Eastern and Midlands Regional Assembly
Ibec
Waterways Ireland
Fáilte Ireland
Bord Bia
Teagasc
Bord na Móna
ESB
Coillte



Appendix 2: Midlands Statistical Snapshot

Midlands Regional Statistical Snapshot (figures in red will be updated closer to launch)

Constituent counties	Laois, Longford, Offaly and Westmeath		
Midlands Population	292,301 ¹⁰		
Persons aged 15 years and over in Employment	142,600 ¹¹		
ILO Participation Rate	63.4% ¹²		
ILO Unemployment Rate	6.1% ¹³		
Persons aged 15 years and over in Employment (Male)	76,800 ¹⁴		
Persons aged 15 years and over in Employment (Female)	65,800 ¹⁵		
Persons aged 15 years and over in Employment from Q1 2015 ¹⁶ – Q3 2021	Q1 2015	Q3 2021	
	108,300	142,600	
Actual Increase in Employment between from Q1 2015 – Q3 2021	34,300		
Employment Growth Rate between Q1 2015 – Q3 2021	31.6%		
Persons on Live Register in the Midlands at 01/12/2021	11,836 ¹⁷		
Persons in receipt of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment at 07/12/21	2,524 ¹⁸		
Unemployment blackspots ¹⁹	4 ²⁰		
Irish-owned Companies – Total Employment in the Midlands, 2015-2020 ²¹	2015	2020	Change between 2015-2020
	Jobs:	10,415	11,599
Foreign-owned Companies – Total Employment in the Midlands, 2015-2020 ²²	2015	2020	Change between 2015-2020
	Jobs:	5,293	6,985

10. 2016 CSO Census

11. Q3 2021 CSO Labour Force Survey (Midlands)

12. Q3 2021 CSO Labour Force Survey (Midlands)

13. Q3 2021 CSO Labour Force Survey (Midlands)

14. Q3 2021 CSO Labour Force Survey (Midlands)

15. Q3 2021 CSO Labour Force Survey (Midlands)

16. Launch of the Regional Action Plan for Jobs

17. CSO Live Register

18. <https://www.gov.ie>

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

20. Unemployment blackspots in the Region: Longford (3) and Westmeath (1).

21. Annual Employment Survey 2020

22. Annual Employment Survey 2020



Appendix 3: Other State Agencies and Bodies Supporting Enterprise Development

InterTradelreland

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

Skillnet Ireland

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

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

Science Foundation Ireland (SFI)

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

Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI)

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



Waterways Ireland

Waterways Ireland is one of six North-South Implementation Bodies established under the British-Irish Agreement in 1999. It has responsibility for the management, maintenance, development, promotion and restoration of inland navigable waterways, principally for recreational purposes. The waterways under the remit of the Body are the Shannon-Erne Waterway, the Shannon, the Erne Navigation, the Barrow Navigation, the Grand Canal, the Lower Bann, and the Royal Canal. Department of Rural and Community Development The Department of Rural and Community Development also has a role to play in contributing directly to the Regional Action Plans through initiatives such as the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund, the Town and Village Renewal scheme and the Atlantic Economic Corridor initiative. The Department's social inclusion programmes – most notably the Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP) – also contribute to supporting disadvantaged urban and rural communities. Third Level Institutes Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT)

Coillte

Coillte is the custodian of more than 440,000 hectares of land, making it Ireland's largest forest manager and provider of outdoor recreation. Coillte also develops green energy projects, produces panel board and delivers nature conservation projects of scale, focussing on delivering multiple benefits from our forests and land.

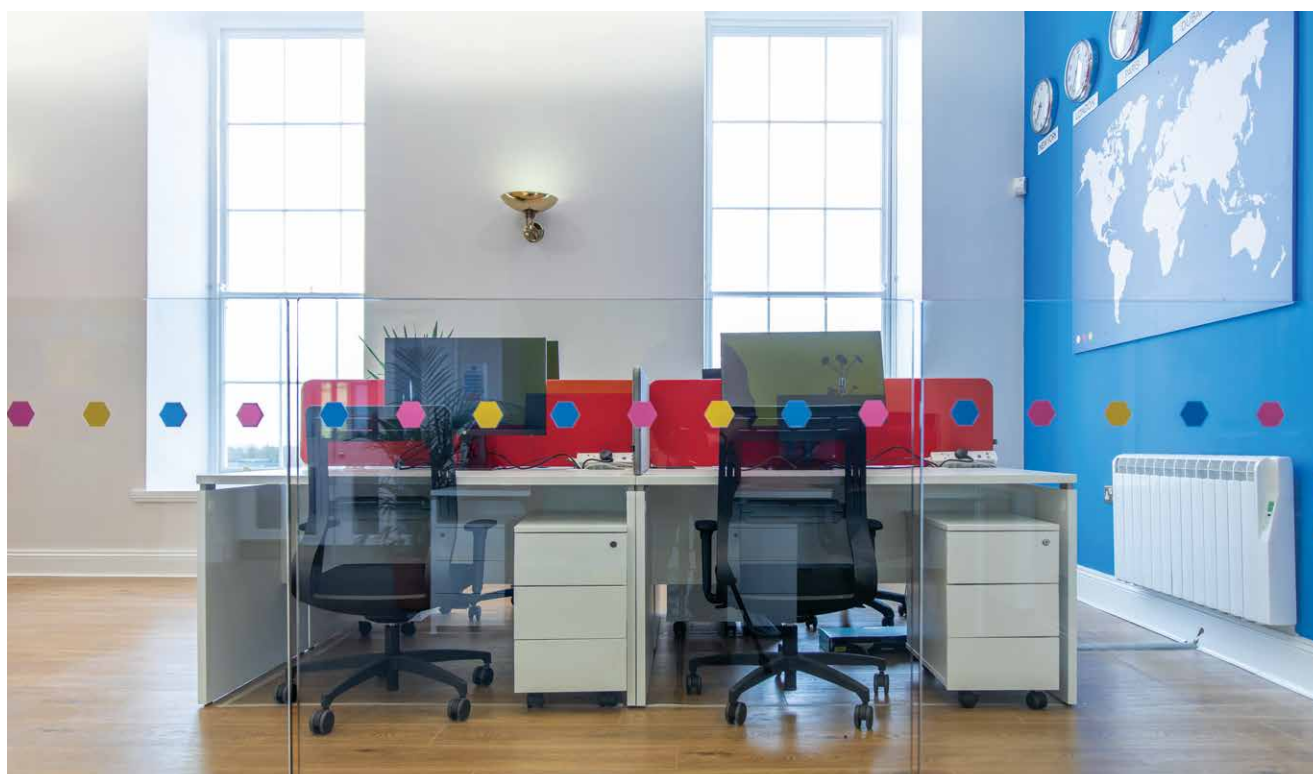
Coillte's vision is to work with nature and to create enduring value and deliver the multiple benefits from our forests and land while leaving an enriched resource for the next generation.

The climate and biodiversity emergencies pose the greatest challenge facing humanity. As Ireland's largest landowner, Coillte is in a position to deliver strategic solutions that help restore nature and improve the integrity of our environment.

All of Coillte's forests are sustainably managed and independently verified by the FSC and PEFC. As an integral part of sustainable forest management, 20 percent of Coillte's forests are managed primarily for the protection of wild species and habitats.

Third Level Institutes

- Technological University of the Shannon (TUS)



Appendix 4: Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (Just Transition Fund)

The National Just Transition Fund (JTF) is a key pillar of the Government's plan for the Midlands Region and is managed by the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications. A fund was made available in 2020 to support communities transitioning to a low-carbon economy. The focus is on retraining workers and generating sustainable employment in green enterprise across the region.

The objective of the Fund is to facilitate innovative projects that contribute to the economic, social and environmental sustainability of the Wider Midlands Region (including East Galway, Kildare, Laois, Longford, North Tipperary, Offaly, Roscommon and Westmeath) and have significant employment and enterprise potential. The Fund supports projects that take a whole-of-Midlands strategic approach and complement other sources of public funding.

EU Just Transition Fund

The EU Just Transition Fund (JTF) is one of three pillars of the European Green Deal Just Transition Mechanism and is a newly established fund under cohesion policy. The aims of the JTF are to mitigate the adverse effects of the climate transition by supporting the most affected territories and workers concerned and to promote a balanced socio-economic transition. Actions supported by the JTF should directly contribute to alleviating the impact of the transition by mitigating the negative repercussions on employment and by financing the diversification and modernisation of the local economy.

The EU Just Transition Fund will be used to alleviate the socio-economic impacts of the low-carbon transition in the most affected regions across the EU by, for example, supporting the re-skilling of workers, helping SMEs to create new economic opportunities, and diversification of economic activity. Ireland has secured an allocation of €84.5 million from the EU Just Transition Fund for investments for the programming period 2021 to 2027.

Ireland's EU JTF will support Ireland's transition away from peat as a source of energy. The European Semester 2020 Country Report for Ireland (Annex D) identified that Ireland's transition away from carbon-intensive sources of energy towards more sustainable, renewable energy sources will have a significant impact in the Midlands Region and workers in the electricity-generating industry.

In accordance with the relevant EU regulations, Ireland must prepare a Programme and an accompanying Territorial Just Transition Plan for approval by the European Commission to secure access to its EU allocation of funding. This Plan will set out Ireland's proposed investment priorities as well as the targeted regions. The JTF regulation sets out a number of eligible investment areas which can be funded. Each Member State selects the types of supports which have been identified as most required and which align with the regulation, and the selection needs to appropriately justified in the territorial just transition plan and to follow the objectives of the European Pillar of Social Rights. All activities should be pursued in full respect of the climate, environmental and social commitments and priorities of the Union.

Supported by technical assistance under the European Commission's Structural Reform Support Programme, consultants were selected by the Commission to develop the evidence base to inform the selection of investment priorities for inclusion in the Territorial Plan. The consultants had extensive engagements with national and regional stakeholders to inform their work through one-to-one interviews, written submissions and online group workshops.



Appendix 5: Our Rural Future – Rural Development Policy 2021–2025

Introduction

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

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

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

Policy Objectives

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

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

Funding streams

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

DRCD supports include:

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



Appendix 6: Regional Enterprise Development Funding

Regional Enterprise Development Fund and Regional Enterprise Transition Scheme

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment's Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF) and Regional Enterprise Transition Scheme (RETS) supports the development and implementation of collaborative and innovative projects that can enable and sustain enterprise and employment growth in the regions. Under the RETS and the three calls of the REDF to date, the Midlands has secured over €6.8 million in funding for five enterprise projects.

Projects approved for Midlands Region

Projects approved award	County	Project description
Irish Manufacturing Research	Westmeath	Develop a centre of excellence in robotics and AR/VR technology.
Offaly Innovation & Design Centre CLG	Offaly	A creative suite to provide a unique, central location and space to access big data in real time through the iLOFAR telescope at Birr Castle.
Mountmellick Development Association CLG	Laois	Facility to provide open plan hot desks, office pods, meeting, teleconferencing rooms and state of the art commercial kitchens.
Portlaoise Innovation Centre DAC	Laois	The development of a Low-carbon Centre of Excellence to assist in attracting and developing companies with a low-carbon focus.
Premier Lakelands Food Hub	Longford	Development of a Food Hub for Small Food Producers.
Total Midlands REDF & RETS Funding	€6,831,880	



Appendix 7: Midlands Advanced Manufacturing Action Plan

The vision for the region is that by 2030, the Midlands Region is known internationally as a Centre of Excellence in Advanced Manufacturing and as an ideal location for manufacturing companies (both indigenous and FDI) to establish and grow their business and exports.

This will be achieved through a suite of 21 actions under 4 thematic areas:

1. Education, Training and Skills,
2. Research and Innovation,
3. Support infrastructure and networks,
4. Strengthening the manufacturing industry base – FDI and Indigenous sectors.

Theme 1: Education and Skills

Action Ref.	ACTION	Lead
AM1.	Conduct a skill needs audit on Midlands manufacturers – in the areas of advanced and sustainable manufacturing – to ascertain the skill need and level and to ensure alignment with existing research, skills development and training offering within the region.	Regional Skills Forum to lead
AM2.	Develop an approach for career Progression Pathways to Sustainable Advanced Manufacturing to enable progression to higher levels.	Regional Skills Forum to lead
AM3.	Develop training courses for management in advanced /sustainable manufacturing to provide critical awareness of data analytics and oncoming technologies relevant to their specific industry.	Regional Skills Forum to lead
AM4.	Develop more modular and flexible training courses, to enable the existing workforce to upskill and reskill, through Skills to Advance, Springboard and other mechanisms, utilising the Midlands Network of Co-working Facilities where appropriate.	Regional Skills Forum to lead



Theme 2: Research and Innovation

Action Ref.	ACTIONS	Lead
AM5.	Technical University of the Shannon (TUS) – Midlands Mid-West and IMR invited to develop and explore further collaborative funding opportunities to enable increased collaboration within the region e.g. collaborative R&D; certified industry training programmes; facilities for early-stage prototyping and production scale-up (including linkages with other education and training providers); ‘test before invest’ in selected advanced /sustainable manufacturing technologies.	ATiM / TUS – Midlands Mid-West IMR to lead
AM6.	Through the Enterprise Ireland funded Industry 4.0 Regional Technology Cluster delivered by TUS – Midlands Mid-West, with collaborators including IMR, to identify advanced and sustainable manufacturing technologies relevant to Midlands manufacturers, including SMEs and LEO clients, and build supportive R&D capabilities in TUS – Midlands Mid-West and IMR.	ATiM /TUS – Midlands IMR to lead
AM7.	Encourage Midlands industry involvement in international research collaborations in advanced and sustainable manufacturing through targeted promotion of EU and National funding opportunities.	IMR to lead supported by Enterprise Ireland / IDA Ireland LEOs
AM8.	TUS – Midlands Mid-West and IMR, in conjunction with Skillnets and other service providers invited to collaborate on technology showcasing programme to promote awareness and understanding of advanced manufacturing technologies – such as cobotics, data analytics, additive processes. Ensure TUS – Midlands Mid-West and IMR’s facilities are recognised, accessible and utilised among Midlands SMEs and LEO clients.	TUS – Midlands Mid-West IMR to lead
AM9.	Ensure that Midlands food companies are aware of Technology Gateways expertise and test facilities in Food Technology available to the region.	Technology Gateways – TUS – Midlands Mid-West to lead supported by Enterprise Ireland / LEOs
AM10.	Explore the feasibility of grouping SMEs and/or LEO clients to pool Innovation Vouchers to undertake advanced manufacturing / sustainable manufacturing collaborative projects.	ATiM to lead supported by EI LEOs

Theme 3: Support infrastructure and networks

Support infrastructure

Action Ref.	ACTIONS	Lead
AM11.	Use targeted promotional campaigns to assist Midlands manufacturing companies, including SMEs and LEO clients, who wish to adopt advanced and sustainable manufacturing technologies, to understand and use state funding mechanisms.	IMR to lead supported by EI LEOs
AM12.	IMR in conjunction with networks such as the ATiM (Advanced Technologies in Manufacturing) Cluster, Engenuity cluster, to encourage increased collaboration between members/ client companies to exploit opportunities arising from the need for flexible, secure, near-shored supply-chains.	IMR ATiM



Support networks

Action Ref.	ACTIONS	Lead
AM13.	<p>Establish, encourage, and support the Midlands Manufacturing Network (MMN) (in co-operation with agencies, Ibec, Chambers of Ireland across the region). Indicative activities of the network include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a communication strategy to promote the Midlands as a location for advanced manufacturing, including testimonial videos from regional industry leaders. • Compile case-studies which showcase industry successes in adoption of advanced manufacturing. • Lunch n' Learn events – showcasing best international models relevant to the vision and adopt best practices for the Midlands manufacturing base. • Partner with regional networks/initiatives in international locations – UK, EU – to facilitate business contacts, knowledge sharing and enable company exchange visits. • Investigate the potential for a Midlands capital investment vehicle (similar to the WxNW syndicate which operates in the Western region) to provide investment capital options for manufacturing start-ups. • Establish working relationships and opportunities to share best practice with overseas exemplars as indicated in section 4. • Develop annual schedule of site visits to best-in-class sites in Ireland, UK and EU to showcase advanced /sustainable manufacturing technologies for industry of all scales. 	IMR /TUS – Midlands Mid-West ATiM to lead supported by EI IDA Ireland LEOs
AM14.	Explore the potential for collaboration across the schools outreach programmes – IMR's 'manufacturing as a career' schools outreach project, Offaly Vex-robotics, and Midlands Science – so as to further enhance the awareness of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) subjects and manufacturing in Midlands schools.	IMR Steering Group
AM15.	Investigate the potential to work with and build on IMR's 'COVID-response' supply chain initiative, which addressed sub-supply challenges through inter-company collaboration, into a wider Midlands manufacturing initiative, in conjunction with the Agencies IDA, EI and LEOs.	IMR Steering Group
AM16.	Support and develop existing networks – such as the Engenuity, ATiM (Advanced Technologies in Manufacturing) Cluster or Midlands Lean Network – to supplement adoption of advanced/ sustainable manufacturing amongst SMEs and LEO clients.	ATiM to lead supported by EI IDA Ireland LEOs

Theme 4: Strengthening the Midlands manufacturing industry base

Action Ref.	ACTION	Lead
AM17.	Complete the feasibility study and concept development for a Midlands Technology Campus at TUS – Midlands Mid-West, and progress to completion of design and planning, and secure necessary funding to enable building commencement.	TUS – Midlands Mid-West
AM18.	Assist companies in conjunction with Agencies and encourage collaborative applications across the Midlands and TUS – Midlands Mid-West and IMR to compete for Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund awards.	Agencies TUS – Midlands Mid-West IMR ATiM
AM19.	Enhance the reputation and leadership profile of Midlands manufacturing through increased participation by Midlands companies in European programmes such as the European Digital innovation Hub, Manufuture, Platform Industrie 4.0	IMR
AM20.	Encourage Midlands manufacturing companies, including SMEs and LEO clients, to incorporate sustainable technologies and practices into their business with the support of EI Green Business Offer / LEOs Going Green initiative.	EI IDA Ireland LEOs
AM21.	Explore funding opportunities to enhance incubation/innovation centres and examine mechanisms to facilitate an increase in the number of manufacturing start-ups throughout the Midlands.	ATiM TUS – Midlands Mid-West IMR LEOs



Appendix 8: MidlandsIreland.ie Regional Food and Drink Strategy

	Objective	Activity	Lead
ALLOCATING RESOURCES			
1.1	Create a dedicated central resource, outside of the industry players, to coordinate activity across stakeholders and maintain momentum	Secure funding and appoint Regional Midland Food and Drink Programme Manager	Food and Drink working group
1.2	Achieve long-term visibility of funding	Establish an integrated sustainable funding plan	Regional Food and Drink Programme Manager
COLLABORATION			
2.1	Industry Engagement and Buy-in	Arrange comms and briefing sessions to establish links, re-engage contributing stakeholders and wider industry	Regional Food and Drink Programme Manager
2.2	Harness combined strengths of the sector	Establish a Midlands Food and Drink Business Cluster, for knowledge sharing in the Food and Drink Sector	Regional Food and Drink Programme Manager Technological University of the Shannon – Midlands Mid-West
		Identify and launch projects to leverage the combined power of the Midland Food and Drink sector e.g. purchasing/procurement	Enterprise Ireland
		Create sector groups for HORECA and Manufacturing	LEOs Bord Bia
		Create industry buddies where smaller companies can learn from larger enterprises	Fáilte Ireland Bord Bia Midlands REP



FOSTERING INNOVATION AND NURTURING CAPABILITY			
3.1	Identify and address skills deficits within Food and Drink sector	Skills Assessment and Training Plan	Midlands Regional Skills Forum, LEOs, Technological University of the Shannon – Midlands Mid-West and ETBs
3.2	Improve hospitality standards, increase local pride, increase buying of locally produced Food and Drink	Create and roll-out a HORECA standards programme to be audited by mystery shoppers and awarded with an ‘excellence’ award. Programme will include a ‘signature’ dish	Fáilte Ireland, Technological University of the Shannon – Midlands Mid-West, Bord Bia
3.3	Build basic commercial selling and negotiation skills of manufacturers	Anticipated Training: Meet the buyer/Routes to Market/Selling Skills/Negotiation Skills/Market Insights	RSF / LEOs / ETBs
3.4	Harness full combined strength of the regional food and drink incubator hubs	Develop hub strategy to pool resources, coordinate funding applications, share best practice and knowledge and increasing awareness of the incubator hubs.	Regional Food and Drink Programme Manager Regional Food Hubs TUS: Midlands Mid-West
		Laboratory and Technical Services support for hubs and larger enterprises. Innovation capability supports for producers.	
3.5	Nurture a culture of innovation in every aspect of Midland Food and Drink	Encourage engagement in existing supports, especially LEO and Enterprise Ireland structures. Explore feasibility of an annual Midland Innovation Awards programme to reward companies and individuals pushing boundaries in areas of food and drink manufacturing, hospitality, product development, sustainability and food tourism. Consider inclusion within existing business Chambers Awards/LEO County Awards	Enterprise Ireland and LEOs
3.6	Harness role of Third Level Sector	Utilise Technological University of the Shannon – Midlands Mid-West and Carlow Institute of Technology as a resources for developing unique and research-led products especially in the areas of food research, consumer research, polymer research, packaging and hospitality excellence.	TUS: Midlands Mid-West Carlow IoT Regional Food Hubs



SUSTAINABILITY			
4.1	Fast-track sustainability projects within Midland Food and Drink sector to create a 'Green Zone' to hit 2050 targets by 2030	Explore the formation of a pillar specific Midland Food and Drink sustainability working group to drive projects within this pillar	Regional Food and Drink Working Group
4.2	Deliver industry-focused sustainability goals	Integrated eco/food strategy including CO ₂ footprint, water and soil quality, biodiversity, food waste, plastic reduction, food miles, eco-energy plan to include bio, wind and solar	Regional Food and Drink Working Group
		Explore role of The Cube, Laois's low-carbon centre of excellence, especially as a source of best practice and learning for Midland food and drink businesses	
		Support the Empower Eco initiative	Enterprise Ireland
		Lean business and competitive edge programme to support producers to save resources and money, delivering commercial and sustainability objectives	Regional Skills Forum/ Enterprise Ireland / LEOs
4.3	Transform consumer behaviour to create a region of green ambassadors	Green Consumer plan to include eco-awareness campaign e.g. The Year of Sustainable Food and Drink, Grow Your Own – Community Farming and schools projects	Enterprise Ireland / LEOs / Bord Bia / Local Food Market Promotion
4.4	Improve on-farm profitability and deliver sustainability goals	Explore beef diversification options	Regional Food and Drink Working Group, Teagasc
		Scope an organic transition plan	Teagasc / Macra na Feirme/ Local Development Companies
AWARENESS			
5.1	Increase local pride, awareness and sales of Midland Food and Drink	Updated and online searchable Food and Drink Directory	Regional Food and Drink Programme Manager
		Create a Midland Food and Drink marketing plan to include producer stories, menu activations, in-store POS material, event calendars	Regional Food and Drink Working Group Ambassador
		Identify food and drink ambassadors to co-create and deliver a reputation strategy. Encourage Midland Food and Drink producers to enter the existing awards like Blás na hÉireann and Great Taste	
		Buy local Midland Food and Drink Campaign	
		Schools engagement project	
		The Book of Midland Food and Drink – “A celebration of our heritage, our producers, products and cuisine”	



EXPORT CAPABILITY			
6.1	Harness existing supports, skills and experience of scaled Food and Drink companies to drive national and international sales	<p>Convene a board of industry leaders as a pillar specific working group. Harness the strength and experience of major players like Tullamore DEW and create a Midland Food and Drink Expo to attract national and international buyers. Create a B2B identity for Midland Food and Drink sector companies</p> <p>Explore industry engagement options for Technological University of the Shannon – Midlands Mid-West and the potential to act as a focal point for food and drink cluster groups/ forums</p> <p>Explore opportunities for enhanced Midland Food and Drink presence and identity at events like Bloom Festival and PLMA/Anuga</p> <p>Explore collaboration on developing routes to market</p>	<p>Regional Food and Drink Programme Manager</p> <p>Regional Skills Forum</p> <p>Bord Bia</p> <p>LEOs</p> <p>Enterprise Ireland</p>
6.2	Create competitive and investment oriented eco-system	Explore Midland Food Dragons opportunity to create investment opportunities and increase profile	<p>Regional Food and Drink Programme Manager</p> <p>Regional Food and Drink Working Group</p>
FOOD TOURISM			
7.1	Create a top-class ground level Food and drink eco-system through bustling food markets	Create a network of vibrant county level farmers/food markets where visitors can engage and meet the makers Give a point of entry for Food and Drink entrepreneurs, test-market capability, farmer diversification potential, visitor engagement opportunities	Local Authorities/ Enterprise Ireland/Bord Bia and Teagasc
7.2	Engage visitors with an evocative and unique Food and Drink proposition, leveraging existing high-profile events	<p>Develop and market multiple food and drink discovery trails to align with existing infrastructure and amenities. Engage and collaborate with existing tourist attractions in Center Parcs, Lough Boora Discovery Park, Emo Park and Gardens, Shannon Waterway etc. Explore opportunities for agri-food eco-tourism to help dial up our sustainability message.</p> <p>Central positioning of Midland Food and Drink at large events such as Electric Picnic, Ploughing Championships, Fleadh Cheoil, Bloom etc</p>	Tourism Officers/Fáilte Ireland
7.3	Create reason for national and international journalists to discover the Midland Food and Drink eco-system	Hosting national and International food and drink awards	Tourism Officers/Fáilte Ireland/Bord Bia/Irish Food Writers Guild



Appendix 9: Methodology

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

January 2021	A round of initial consultations with key stakeholders was undertaken by the Department including the Chairpersons of the Regional Steering Committees, Agency representatives, Programme Managers, and other key organisations represented on the Regional Steering Committees. The bilateral discussions focused on what worked/didn't work well over the period of the outgoing Regional Enterprise Plans.
February-March 2021	In February 2021 the Tánaiste wrote to the Chairpersons of the Regional Steering Committees formally setting out the Department's intention to develop new Plans to 2024.
February-May 2021	The Tánaiste and Ministers of State formally launched the commencement of the process to develop Regional Enterprise Plans to 2024 with meetings of the nine Regional Steering Committees in virtual sessions around the country. Each Committee established a Project Delivery Team for the process, led by the Steering Committee chairperson.
March-May 2021	Each of the Project Delivery Teams met to review the outgoing Regional Plans and considered future thematic areas of focus and agreed an approach for a formal stakeholder consultation with the wider Steering Committee members and other relevant stakeholders.
May-August 2021	An online facilitated Stakeholder Consultation event was held in eight of the nine regions; with a series of bilateral stakeholder engagements and focus group discussions undertaken in the Midlands region. Participants considered topics including: enterprise resilience, smart specialisation, placemaking, transition-climate, digitalisation.
July-October 2021	The Project Delivery Teams re-grouped to consider the consultation outcomes and further develop emerging themes into Strategic Objectives and to identify suitable actions for delivery in the period to 2024. The final draft was agreed on October 1st by the Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committee. Minister Troy visits the Midlands to discuss the plan with the Chair and Programme Manager of the MREP. Site visits to REDF supported projects took place in Laois.
January 2022	Memo for Government considered by Cabinet and noted the Department's intention to publish the nine Regional Enterprise Plans.



An Roinn Fiontar, Trádála agus Fostaíochta

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, 0818 302 121

www.enterprise.gov.ie

www.gov.ie

info@enterprise.gov.ie

An initiative of the Department of
Enterprise, Trade and Employment
gov.ie



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland