



COIMISIÚN  
FORBARTHA  
AN IARTHAIR

WESTERN  
DEVELOPMENT  
COMMISSION

# Unlocking Potential, Driving Change

A Strategy for Regional Growth  
and Collaboration 2025-2029



An Roinn Forbartha Tuaithe  
agus Pobail agus Gaeltachta  
Department of Rural and Community  
Development and the Gaeltacht



The Western Region is entering a new era of opportunity. Through collaboration and shared ambition, the WDC is helping shape a more inclusive and innovative future.





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# Minister's Foreword

I am pleased to welcome this latest strategy from the Western Development Commission, which sets out a clear and confident vision for the future of the Western Region. It reflects the strong momentum that has been building across rural Ireland in recent years and reaffirms the Government's commitment to ensuring that every community has the opportunity to grow and succeed.

The West is defined by its rich heritage, vibrant communities, and increasing opportunities in enterprise, innovation, and sustainability. This strategy recognises that the region's greatest asset is its people; and it places their talent, creativity, and ambition at the centre of future growth. It outlines an ambitious practical plan to build on the strengths of the West over the coming years.

Rural development remains a central priority for this Government as set out in *Our Rural Future*, the Government's whole-of-government policy for rural Ireland. We are committed to supporting the revitalisation of rural towns and villages, creating great places to live and work, and investing in the long-term resilience of our communities.

*Unlocking Potential, Driving Change* is a key contributor to that broader vision. The WDC has consistently championed the West through innovative investment and development, and this strategy builds on that track record.

At its heart are four strategic pillars: *Enabling our Enterprise Ecosystem, Strengthening Partnerships and Influence, Building Sustainable Communities, and Progressing Social Innovation and Social Enterprise Development*.

These pillars provide a clear framework for action—supporting economic development, developing new and growing local enterprises, enhancing quality of life, and ensuring rural areas are equipped for the future. This strategy aligns with our national climate ambitions, ensuring that rural regions are at the forefront of a sustainable, low-carbon future.

It also reflects a strong belief in collaboration. This strategy cannot be delivered in isolation—it is rooted in partnership with communities, local government, enterprise, and civil society across the West. It ensures that the region is not just looking inward—it is reaching outward, embracing global opportunities and asserting its place in Ireland's and Europe's future economies.

In an era of rapid change and uncertainty, this strategy is a roadmap for resilience—designed to adapt and respond to the needs of today and tomorrow.

I look forward to working closely with the WDC as we continue to strengthen the region and support the ambitions of the people who live and work here. This strategy is an important step forward in our shared goal of building vibrant, resilient, and inclusive rural communities across Ireland.

**Minister Dara Calleary, T.D.**

*Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht.*





# Foreword from the CEO and Chair

Our vision is clear: to build a region that leads in sustainability, innovation, and inclusive growth.

*Unlocking Potential, Driving Change* sets out a bold and practical vision for the Western Region, one that recognises the strengths of our past while directly responding to the opportunities and challenges of the coming decade. It is a strategy grounded in reality, shaped by collaboration, and focused on delivering meaningful outcomes across enterprise, investment, and community development.

This is not a reinvention. It is the next phase in the evolution of the Western Development Commission. For over 25 years, the WDC has worked at the intersection of policy, people, and place, supporting high-potential sectors, enabling social and economic innovation, and investing in ideas and organisations with impact. With this new strategy, we are entering our most ambitious chapter.

Our vision is clear: to build a region that leads in sustainability, innovation, and inclusive growth. To achieve that, we will act decisively, investing in companies and communities, supporting a new generation of regional entrepreneurs, and scaling solutions that can work across all rural Ireland.

The WDC will deliver this strategy through a unique blended model, combining long-term capital investment, EU partnership leadership, research and policy development, and on the ground regional engagement. With over €35 million to be reinvested through our evergreen Western Investment Fund and a target to secure €15 million in new EU funding, this is a strategy focused on measurable impact.

That impact already has a foundation. Since its inception, the WDC has backed companies that have delivered €4.8 billion in turnover, €2.6 billion in exports, and over 66,000 full-time equivalent years of employment. Our next phase builds on what works, while opening the door to what's next.

The strategy identifies four interconnected growth drivers—our “Four Hs”:

- **Heritage**, to protect and build on the region’s unique culture and natural capital;
- **Horizons**, to grow globally competitive sectors such as MedTech, AgriTech, renewable energy, and the creative industries;
- **Harnessing Talent**, to ensure inclusive access to the future of work through lifelong learning, AI readiness, and digital skills;
- **Hubs**, to strengthen delivery and innovation through a growing network of Connected Hubs, serving as platforms for enterprise, sustainability, education, and inclusion.

These growth drivers reflect the diversity of our region and they acknowledge that different places require different supports. The Northwest, continues to face structural challenges that must be addressed with place-based responses and sustained collaboration.

We are building on a strong legacy of partnership. The WDC has long been recognised as a trusted connector, bringing together state agencies, local authorities, researchers, and communities to achieve aligned impact.

Through initiatives like Connected Hubs, we are building more than infrastructure, we are embedding opportunity. These hubs now act as entry points for AI upskilling, climate education, remote working, and community-led innovation.

This strategy also deepens the WDC’s role as a strategic policy actor. In addition to capital and delivery, we will continue to shape national and EU policy agendas, supporting balanced regional development, advancing smart specialisation, and championing social enterprise and inclusive innovation.

*Unlocking Potential, Driving Change* supports and complements the Government’s Our Rural Future strategy, as well as key frameworks including Project Ireland 2040, the National Smart Specialisation Strategy, and Trading for Impact.

As Ireland competes globally, the strength of its regions will define its future. This strategy makes the case for a West and Northwest that are ready to lead with confidence, with cohesion, and with conviction.

It is rooted in place, powered by people, and built to deliver.



**Allan Mulrooney**  
CEO, Western Development Commission

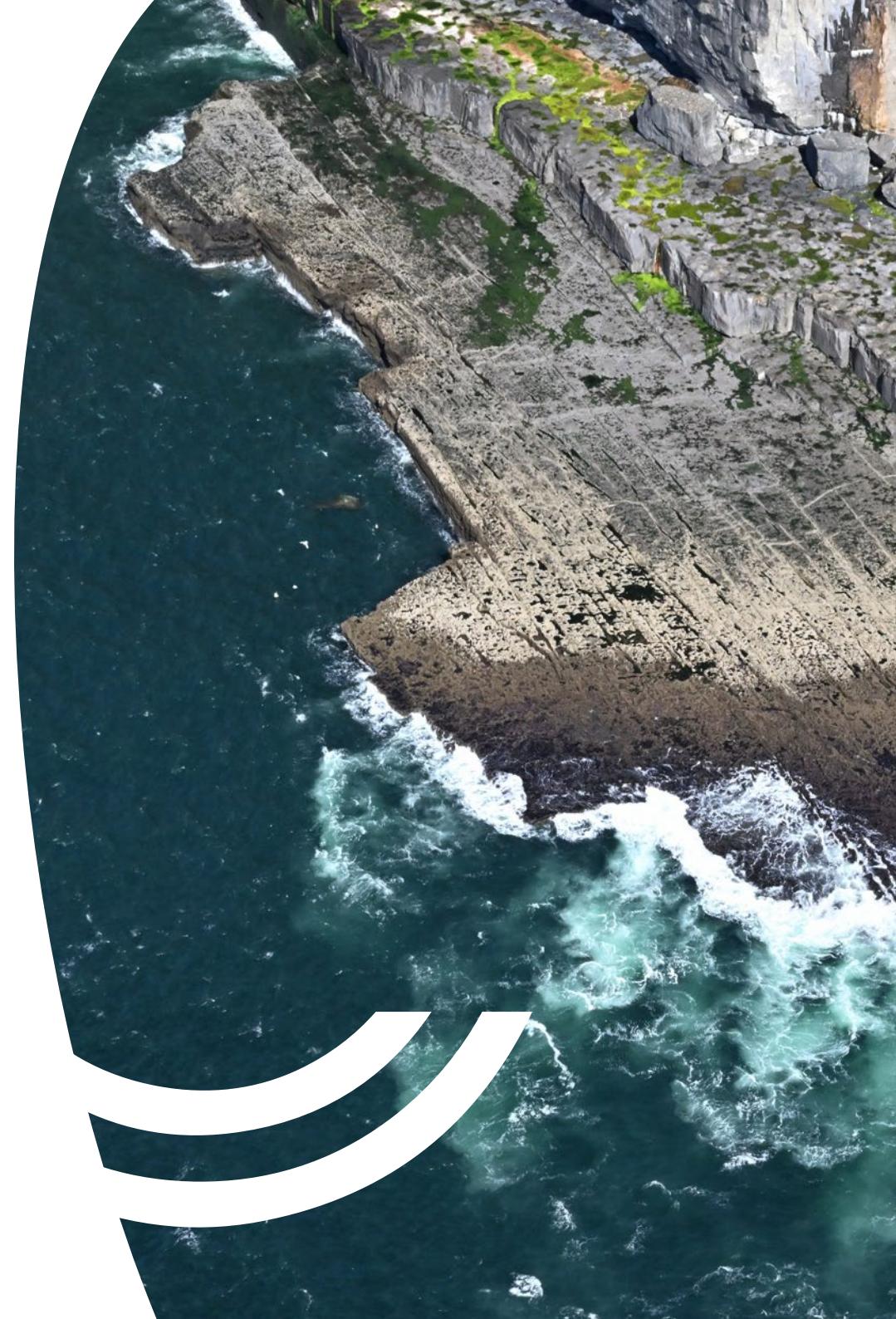


**Eugene Cummins**  
Chair, Western Development Commission

# A Changing Landscape for the Western Region

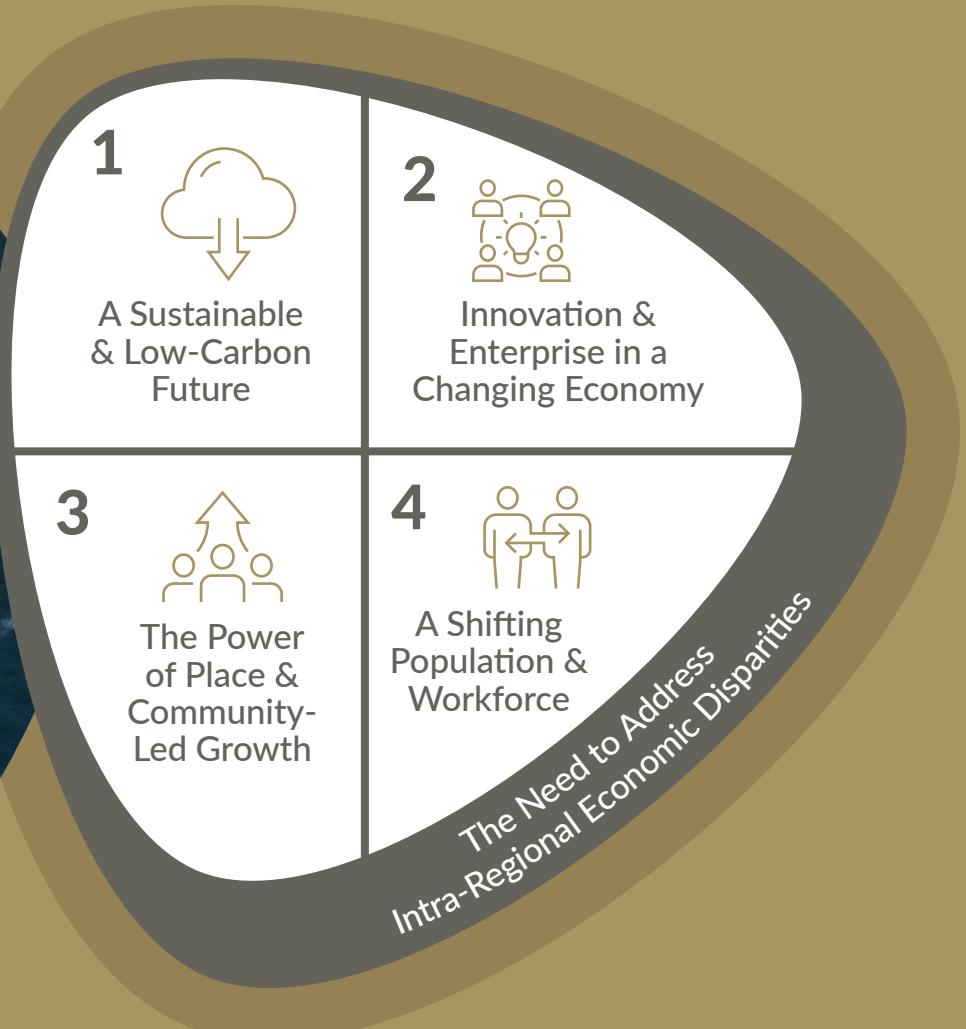
The Western Region is at a pivotal moment, shaped by powerful global, national, and local shifts that present both challenges and opportunities.

To respond effectively, we must focus on the forces that will define our future and drive sustainable, inclusive growth.





Four key dynamics  
will shape the  
trajectory of the  
region over the  
next five years...





## 1

### A Sustainable & Low-Carbon Future

The Western Region has an opportunity to become a leader in renewable energy and climate action. With vast offshore wind potential, innovation in green technologies, and strong policy momentum behind sustainability, the region can position itself as a driver of low-carbon solutions, circular economy practices, and environmental resilience.



## 2

### The Power of Place & Community-Led Growth

The shift towards regionalisation, remote work, and digitalisation has reshaped where and how people choose to live and work. The Western Region offers a high quality of life, strong community networks, and increasing digital connectivity, making it a compelling choice for people and businesses seeking a more balanced, place-based way of life.



# 3

## Innovation & Enterprise in a Changing Economy

Advances in AI, digital transformation, and sectoral diversification are redefining industries. The Western Region is already home to world-class MedTech, AgriTech, and creative economy hubs and is well-positioned to leverage research, skills, and infrastructure to attract, develop, scale and root innovation-driven businesses.



# 4

## A Shifting Population & Workforce

Demographic change, including an ageing population, shifting migration patterns, and skills evolution, requires new approaches to education, talent retention, and workforce development. Strengthening partnerships between universities, training bodies, and employers will be critical to ensuring the region's workforce remains adaptive and future-ready.



These forces demand a clear, forward-thinking response. The WDC is committed to championing policies, investments, and collaborations that harness these trends for the benefit of the region's people, businesses, and communities.

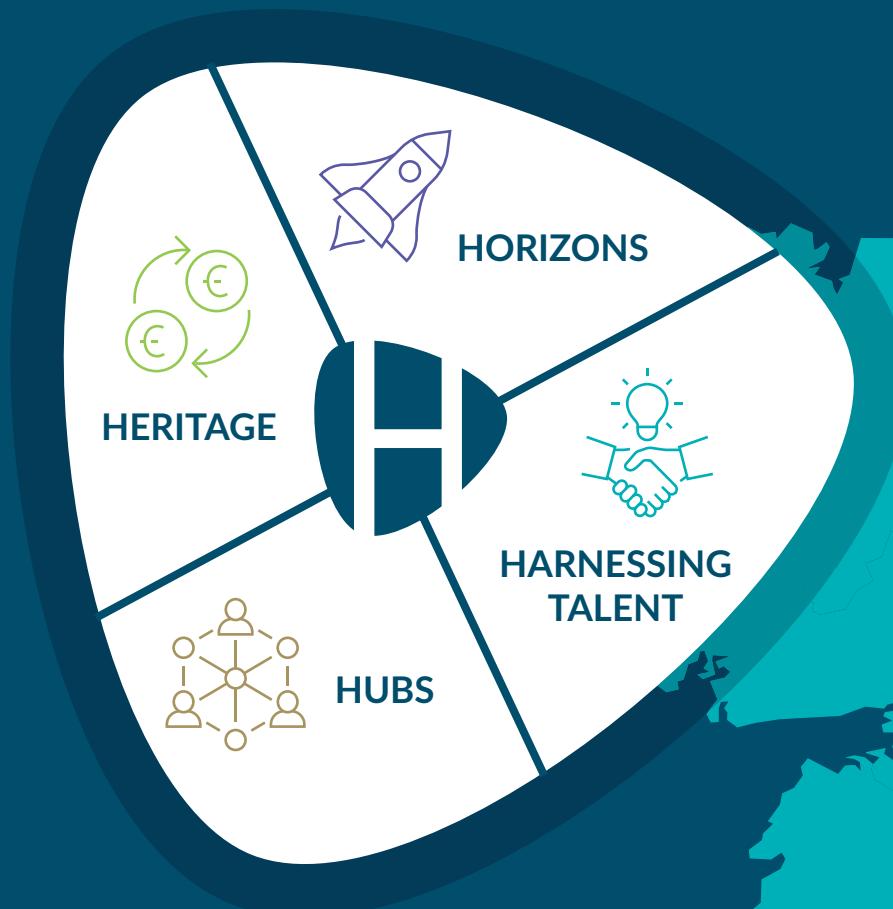
## The Need to Address Intra-Regional Economic Disparities

The Western Region's economy, particularly outside of Galway City, remains highly reliant on self-employed, micro, and very small enterprises (under 20 jobs). Their ability to respond to digitalisation and green transitions lags behind that of larger enterprises, requiring targeted support to bridge this gap and ensure equitable regional development.



# Strategic Framework: The Four Hs

To drive long-term, sustainable growth, the WDC has identified four interconnected growth drivers. These areas are the foundation of our strategy, ensuring that the Western Region remains competitive, inclusive, and future-ready.





## Heritage

### *A Sustainable and Regenerative Economy*

The Western Region's heritage is more than its past—it is the foundation for a sustainable, green, and regenerative economy. By harnessing the region's natural assets, cultural strengths, highly educated population, and deep-rooted industries, we can drive the transition to a low-carbon future.

Through strategic investment, policy leadership, and innovation in areas such as renewable energy, the circular economy, and social enterprise, WDC is positioning the West as a leader in climate action and economic resilience. Our focus is on community-led regeneration, social innovation, and sustainable infrastructure, ensuring long-term prosperity while safeguarding the environment.

Linked to:

Pillar 1 – Enabling Our Enterprise Ecosystem, Pillar 2 – Strengthening Partnerships & Influence & Pillar 4 - Progressing Social Innovation and Social Enterprise Development



## Horizons

### *Pioneering New Sectors & Regional Innovation*

The Western Region must adapt to change. By investing in emerging industries, research and innovation ecosystems, and global partnerships, the WDC will aim to ensure that the region stays ahead in high-potential sectors such as MedTech, AgriTech, digital health, and climate innovation.

Through strategic investment, research collaborations, and EU funding, we will position the West as a testbed for new industries, ensuring businesses have the support, infrastructure, and talent needed to scale and compete internationally.



## Harnessing Talent

### *Developing Skills, Leadership & Enterprise*

The long-term economic success of the Western Region depends on its people. Developing, attracting, and retaining talent is central to ensuring that businesses can scale, entrepreneurs can thrive, and communities can adapt to change.

By fostering a strong entrepreneurial culture, investing in skills development, attracting skills into the region and enhancing leadership capacity, the WDC will strengthen the region's innovation and business ecosystem. This includes supporting female entrepreneurship, digital skills, and lifelong learning to ensure a diverse, resilient workforce.



## Hubs

### *Catalysts for Digital Transformation and Innovation*

The Connected Hubs network is more than a remote working solution, it is a critical national asset that delivers on key national policy priorities, including climate action, digitalisation, regional enterprise growth, and social inclusion. It simultaneously stimulates individual communities to connect and innovate to address their social, economic and environmental needs. By expanding and enhancing these hubs, we can bridge the urban-rural divide, support businesses and workers in transition, and drive regional economic resilience.



Linked to:

Pillar 1 - Enabling Our Enterprise Ecosystem & Pillar 2 – Strengthening Partnerships & Influence



Linked to:

Pillar 1- Enabling Our Enterprise Ecosystem & Pillar 2 – Strengthening Partnerships & Influence



Linked to:

Pillar 3 – Empowering Sustainable Communities

# Our Vision, Purpose and Values

Our vision and purpose for this strategy reflect our ambition to be an extraordinary catalyst for regional development – supporting businesses, communities, and industries across the Western Region.

Our goal is to drive sustainable economic growth, ensuring that both established and emerging enterprises flourish while making a meaningful social and economic impact for the people who live and work here.





## **Our Vision - who we want to be**

We will position the Western Region as a dynamic hub where innovation, enterprise, and sustainability drive long-term growth and resilience.



## **Our Purpose - what we do**

We will lead initiatives that unlock the region's full potential, fostering innovation, inclusivity, and sustainable development through strategic investment and collaboration.



## Our Values - *what drives us*

Everything we do will be underpinned by four key values, summed up as **WEST** – we will always strive to be:



### **Welcoming**

Collaboration is at our core

### **Entrepreneurial**

We will drive innovation with impact

### **Sustainable**

We are building for future generations

### **Thought Leaders**

We will lead with vision



# The WDC

## Who We Are & What We Do

The Western Development Commission (WDC) is a statutory body established under the Western Development Commission Act, 1998. It operates as a state agency under the remit of the Department of Rural and Community Development. The agency was created to promote and support social and economic development in Ireland's Western Region, comprising the counties of Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Mayo, Roscommon, Galway, and Clare. WDC is also a registered charity and has a commitment to ensuring that its efforts prioritise the needs of its beneficiaries. With a statutory obligation to advise the government on regional challenges, it also continues to play a pivotal role in advocating for policies and initiatives that address disparities in income, investment, and infrastructure in the Western Region.

**The WDC operates through three primary frameworks:**

**1**

Through the work of public-facing staff teams, each focused on specific remits and areas of expertise. The teams are: Western Investment Fund; Regional Development and EU; Connected Hubs; Policy; Social Enterprise and Social Innovation; Communications. The work of all these teams is underpinned by Corporate Services.

**2**

Through the work of the Board to guide and support the organisation's ambition for the region.

**3**

Through playing multiple roles in regional development which cut across all teams, which are dynamic and which will continue to adapt to meet emerging needs and opportunities in the next five years. Key roles include: network builder & connector; sector-specific facilitator; strategic investor; innovation catalyst; trusted data source.



# Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)



Secure **€50 million in investment** – including €35 million from the Western Investment Fund – to fortify enterprise and regional development, driving robust economic growth.



Deliver **100 high-impact projects** by deploying €25 million in SME investments, €7 million in social and community enterprises, and €3 million in creative enterprises, fostering lasting economic resilience and strengthening the region's creative industries.



Secure **€15 million in EU funding** to fuel innovation, research, and competitiveness, catalysing regional technological advancement.



Delivering an **expanded Connected Hubs** network of 400 hubs and facilitating 2.5 million platform transactions, while delivering €7.5 million worth of value in carbon emission savings.



Deliver **pioneering pilot projects** in social innovation and social enterprise to strengthen the social ecosystem and drive community-based solutions.



Influence **national, regional and local policy** by delivering high impact policy inputs, engaging with key stakeholders and continuing to lead on innovative research that will help shape the future of the region and of rural areas.



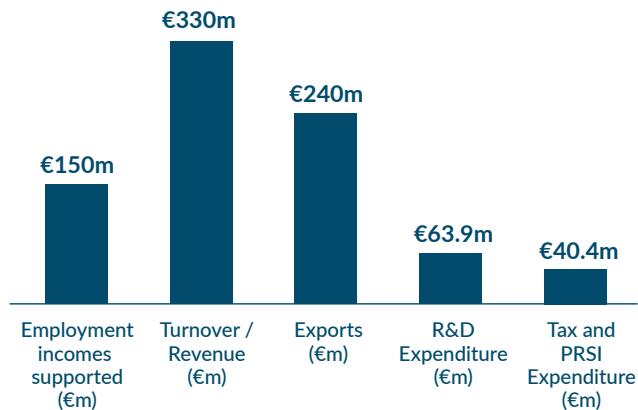
Deliver **strategic campaigns** that elevate the region's profile by reaching over one million individuals annually, generating increased awareness, engagement, and investment.

Over the course of this strategy, WDC initiatives will contribute to supporting 5,000 sustainable jobs across the Western Region. This target reflects the combined impact of key programmes, including the Western Investment Fund (WIF), Connected Hubs (CH), enterprise development initiatives, EU-funded projects, and broader regional collaborations.

This figure represents jobs supported through direct investment, infrastructure development, enterprise growth, and innovation, ensuring a balanced, long-term impact across the region. While job creation is an important metric, our focus remains on fostering sustainable, high-quality employment opportunities that strengthen regional resilience and economic diversification.

# Evolution of WDC Impact over the past 25 years

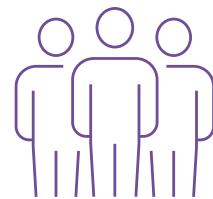
## Direct Economic Impacts of the Companies supported by the WDC



**€1.5b**  
Employment incomes supported



**€3.3b**  
Turnover/Revenue



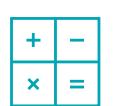
**35,438\***  
Employment (FTEs) from 1999-2023 (3,851 in 2023)



**€2.4b**  
Exports

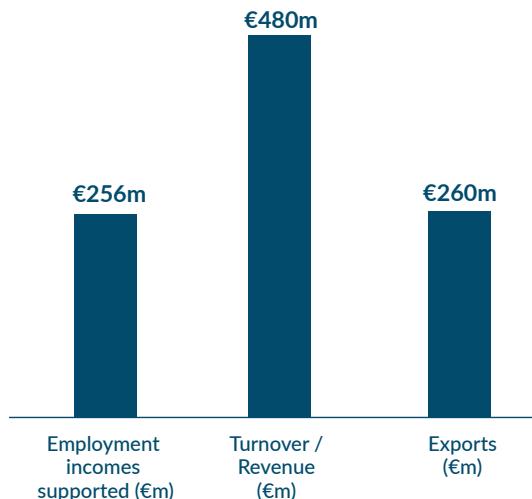


**€639m**  
R&D Expenditure



**€404m**  
Tax and PRSI Expenditure

## Summary of Wider Economic Impacts (Indirect and Induced) of the Companies Supported by the WDC (through the WIF and regional development activities)



**€2.56b**  
Employment incomes supported



**€4.8b**  
Turnover/Revenue



**66,102**  
Employment (FTEs) from 1999-2023 (7,292 in 2023)



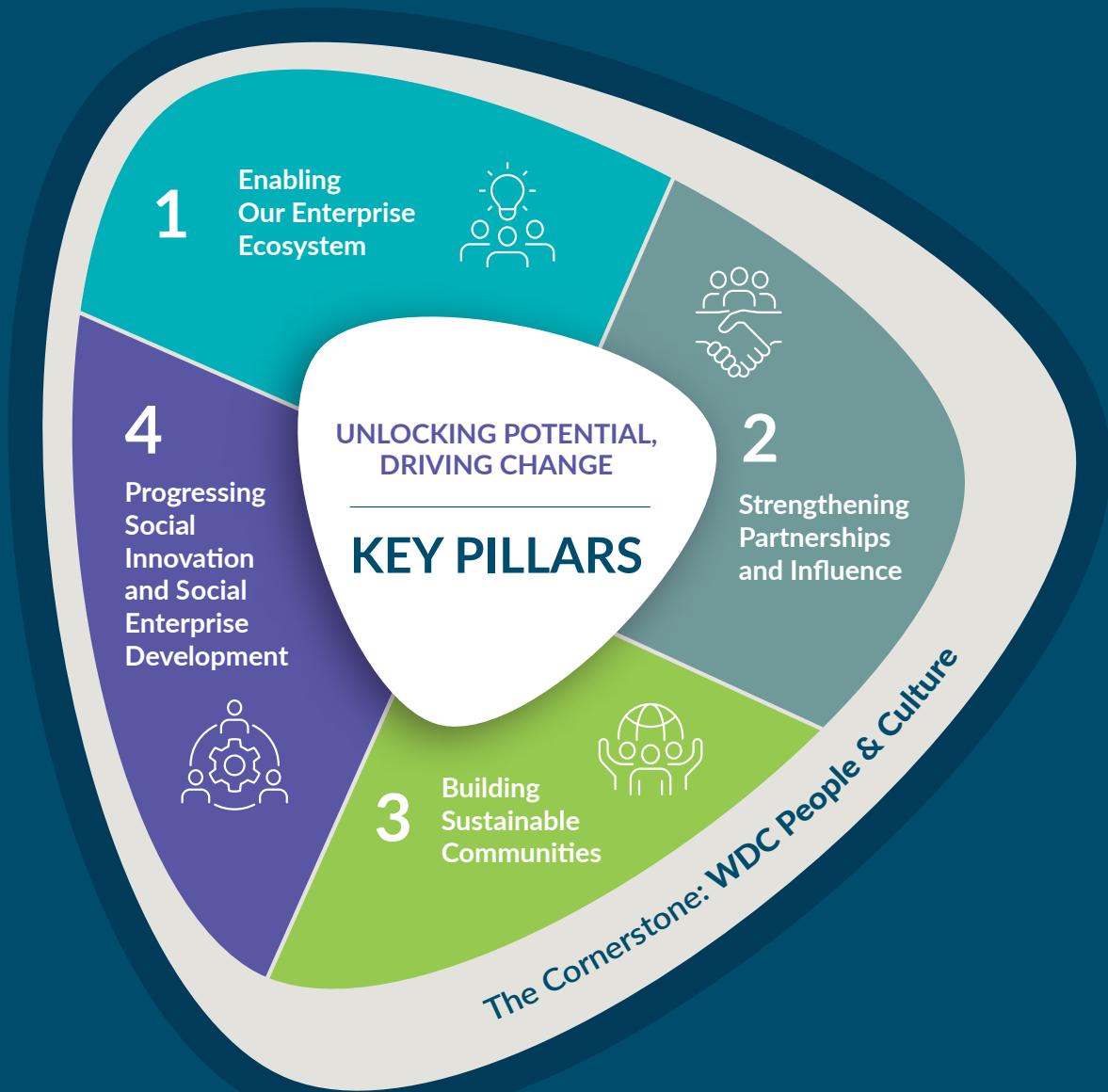
**€2.6b**  
Exports

Source: Indecon analysis of survey data, data provided by WDC and annual reports

Note: \* Figure based on FTE-years (If the same person held a job in a WDC-supported company for 20 years, this would be counted as 20 FTE-years)

# 4 Key Pillars

While actions are listed under a specific pillar, we appreciate that they will have cross-pillar application and impact.







## Pillar 1 Enabling Our Enterprise Ecosystem

The WDC is committed to working alongside the key enterprise development agencies (Enterprise Ireland, Local Enterprise Offices, IDA, Údarás na Gaeltachta and others) to create a resilient, diverse economy that meets the current needs of our region and also positions the region as a leader in innovation and sustainability.

Central to this pillar is the development of a strong culture of enterprise and ambition, empowering businesses and entrepreneurs to thrive. Through strategic support, targeted investment, and collaboration, we will help to build the enterprise development ecosystem across key sectors.

By aligning regional priorities with national goals, we will attract investment and promote innovation to benefit all communities.

## Pillar 1 Objectives

1

### **Support Economic Diversity and Resilience**

Focus particularly on start-up and scaling enterprises which are of particular relevance to the current and future context of the region.

2

### **Enhance Balanced Regional Growth**

Through targeted investments and integrated planning, prioritise support and activity in geographic areas of the region which are lagging in terms of high-value economic activity and/or where there is a particular lack of diversity in terms of the economic base.

3

### **Support the Development of Flagship Projects**

Continue to support the further development of existing flagship projects while also leveraging our experience and resources to drive or otherwise support the creation of new initiatives with significant regional, sub-regional, or sectoral impact.

4

### **Expand Global Engagement and Resources**

Leverage international networks, the global diaspora, and EU funding to enhance knowledge exchange, partnerships, and financial capacity to better support enterprise development.

5

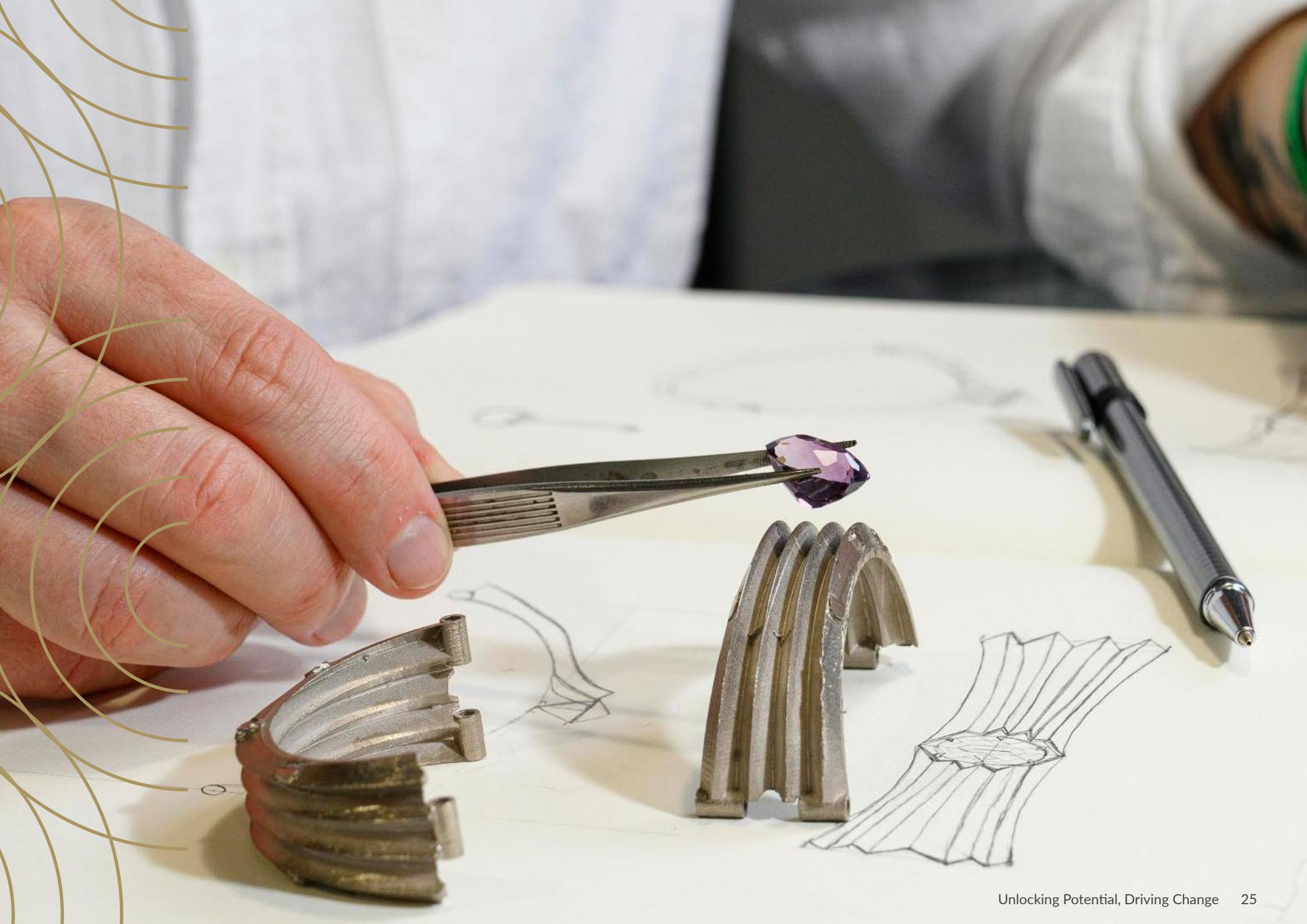
### **Cultivate Innovation and Applied Research**

Support the positioning of the region as a hub for innovation through support for R&D initiatives, SME innovation strategies and collaboration with relevant third-level research activities.

6

### **Enhance the Diversity of the Entrepreneurial Base**

Through investments and other initiatives across the WDC, harness the potential for enhanced entrepreneurial activity which exists in groups that are traditionally underrepresented or that experience barriers in establishing and scaling enterprise.



# Pillar 1 Specific Initiatives

## **1. Investment Fund Management**

Continue to manage the WIF Portfolio – which currently consists of 120 companies and projects valued at €90 million – to safeguard and maximise the financial return and socio-economic impact for the region and to support the development of projects as they scale.

## **2. Investment Fund Expansion**

Continue to make new investments in enterprises that are in both high-potential and longer-established sectors. We will explore new funding mechanisms and partnerships with other agencies and actors to extend and amplify the Investment Fund's investment capacity and impact across the region.

## **3. Support Regional Balance & Rural Vitality**

Prioritise focus and investment in geographic areas of the region which are currently lagging in terms of enterprise development, particularly in the number and scale of high-potential start-ups. Supports for new enterprise development either within or adjacent to sectors which remain particularly important in this largely rural region (for example, agriculture/agri-foods, the marine economy, forestry) may also be valuable in spreading job creation throughout the region and in supporting rural vitality.

## **4. Support Flagship Projects**

Support existing and new flagship project development through targeted investment, cross-sector collaboration, and co-investment partnerships, with a particular focus on high-potential sectors and on geographic areas of the region which are lagging in terms of high-value economic activity and/or where there is a particular lack of diversity in terms of the economic base. These projects will be supported as scalable models that can inform national strategy.

## **5. Support Growth Clusters**

In advance of the upcoming National Clustering Policy and Framework, we commit to working alongside other agencies and stakeholders to support regionally relevant growth clusters in key industries such as MedTech, renewable energy, AgriTech, and the creative economy by pooling resources, investment and expertise.

## **6. Integrated Education and Research**

Focus on integrating education and research initiatives with industry needs and with internal research and development activity in key sectors such as MedTech, food innovation and renewable energy cluster development.

## **7. R&D Centre Development**

Continue to support the development of research and development hubs and innovation centres, following existing examples such as BIA Innovator Campus, Athenry, and the AIM Centre, Sligo.

## **8. Increase the Diversity of the Entrepreneur Base**

Leverage tools such as the Investment Fund, EU programmes, industry collaborations, and research partnerships to support underrepresented groups and promote inclusive innovation. Promoting and growing female entrepreneurship will be a particular focus.

## **9. EU Funding for Enterprise Development**

Actively leverage EU funding to support regional enterprise development projects aligned with both regional and EU priorities.

## **10. Creative Industry**

Support the creative sector including film, digital media, arts, design, culture, and digital technology, through targeted resources, workshops and investment via the Investment Fund. This sector can be a multiplier for economic growth and vitality which is felt across the region.



## **PILLAR 1:**

*Central to this pillar is developing a strong culture of enterprise and ambition, empowering businesses and entrepreneurs to thrive.*



## Pillar 2

# Strengthening Partnerships and Influence

Ireland's success depends on strong regions. When the West thrives, the entire country benefits. A vibrant, resilient Western Region contributes to national economic strength, innovation, and sustainability. The WDC recognises that real progress happens through collaboration, bringing together those who care deeply about the region's future.

This pillar is about aligning regional development with national, cross-border, and EU policies, ensuring the West maximises its influence and impact. By actively engaging with local, regional, national, and international stakeholders, the WDC will act as a connector, catalyst, and champion, enhancing the effectiveness of initiatives, driving sustainable growth, and addressing the unique challenges facing our communities.

Over the next five years, the WDC will take an even stronger leadership role, driving collaboration, uniting regional partners, and delivering on shared priorities with clear action. We will be a powerful advocate for the Western Region, ensuring that its potential is not just recognised but fully realised.





## Pillar 2 Objectives

**1**

### **Co-create & Amplify a Shared Regional Vision and Message**

To support balanced national development, the WDC will work with our regional partners to focus on regionalisation and integration efforts. Through these efforts, we aim to ensure the Western Region's voice is represented in national policymaking, securing resources and initiatives that meet our unique regional needs, and which can harness regional opportunities.

**2**

### **Build Strategic Partnerships for Policy and Sectoral Alignment**

We will continue to build strong relationships with a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including local government bodies, enterprise agencies, education and training institutions, and sector-specific organisations. These partnerships ensure that our regional strategies are complementary to broader national and EU priorities, and will thus facilitate better resource allocation, collaboration, and policy development for sustainable growth.

**3**

### **Position WDC as a Key Facilitator in the Regional Development Landscape**

The WDC's broad remit and extensive geographical reach provide it with a valuable 'bird's-eye' view of the region. This perspective has created opportunities to serve as a trusted facilitator and connector. During this strategy period, the WDC will build on this role, promoting flagship project development, identifying and supporting innovation and sectoral potential, and bridging diverse stakeholders to drive regional progress. We will also engage and leverage diaspora networks for support, investment and knowledge exchange.

**4**

### **Enhance Evidence-Informed Decision-Making**

We will engage with local authorities and other partners to utilise relevant data in shaping local economic plans and strategies. This approach ensures that regional initiatives are grounded in up-to-date, accurate information, enabling us to make informed decisions that align with the region's needs, aspirations, and growth potential. A data-driven strategy enhances transparency, accountability, and effectiveness in regional development planning.

## Pillar 2 Specific Initiatives

### **1. Collaborate with key regional bodies to amplify the voice and position of the region**

We will work more closely with the NWRA and SRA both to implement the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies and to create a stronger collective voice advocating for the region in national policy-making processes across a wider range of areas than would be possible working alone. Building on our ongoing internal research and policy work on infrastructure, we will advocate collectively for improved regional infrastructure in areas such as roads, rail, ports, airports, public transport, housing, dispersed services and the electricity grid. Other key bodies with whom we will collaborate in this regard include the eight local authorities, Chambers of Commerce, Údarás na Gaeltachta, the IDA and Enterprise Ireland regional teams, regional third-level institutions, and further training and education bodies.

### **2. Identify areas where WDC's role as an initiator or facilitator might be particularly useful or necessary**

We will be alert to and, where possible, pursue opportunities to act as an early initiator and/or facilitator of initiatives, projects, and sectoral or thematic networks in areas which are of strategic regional interest.

### **3. Data Utilisation for Regional Planning**

Work with local authorities and research bodies to support the integration of data analytics into regional planning, ensuring that development decisions are data-driven and reflective of the region's needs.

### **4. Educational Partnerships**

All teams to explore and/or formalise partnerships with regional universities, research institutions and further education institutions to enhance innovation and amplify impact through collaborative research and development, skills training, and knowledge transfer.

### **5. Input into relevant national, regional and county-level policy development and planning processes**

Continue to contribute regional data and insight to the policy development and planning processes of all relevant national, regional, agencies/departments and local authorities, via submissions and other consultative mechanisms.

### **6. Shared Island Collaboration**

Explore and strengthen ties with Northern Ireland to foster all-island economic development and address shared regional challenges.

### **7. Renewable Energy Potential**

Work with and support other stakeholders to ensure that the region can take advantage of the enormous potential for energy independence and green industrial growth associated with our off-shore and on-shore wind energy resource.

### **8. Youth Engagement**

Tap into existing youth engagement fora (e.g. Comhairle na nÓg, third-level student representative bodies, etc.) to involve young voices in planning and strategy development for the region.

## **9. Diaspora Engagement**

Strengthen connections with the global diaspora by fostering knowledge exchange, mentorship, and strategic partnerships in alignment with the National Diaspora Strategy and Philanthropy Strategy. We will explore innovative ways to leverage diaspora expertise to support regional businesses and communities and drive long-term economic and social impact.

## **10. Regional Policy Alignment**

Establish an internal working group led by the Policy team to ensure continuous alignment between regional development plans and regional, national and EU policies, focusing on cross-sector collaboration and policy influence.

## **11. Information Sharing and Knowledge Exchange**

Host annual conference/seminars on specific themes of relevance to the region which highlight the orchestration role of the WDC.



## **PILLAR 2:**

*This pillar is about aligning regional development with national, cross-border, and EU policies, ensuring the West maximises its influence and impact.*



## Pillar 3 Building Sustainable Communities

The WDC is dedicated to creating a balanced and resilient regional ecosystem that places quality of life, sustainability, and economic diversity at its core. A thriving Western Region depends on strong, connected communities, where people can live, work, and innovate while benefiting from a high quality of life and access to opportunity. Our approach aims to enhance our communities while safeguarding the region's unique cultural and environmental heritage.

Through a combination of sustainable living initiatives, community empowerment, circular economy initiatives, and strategic investments, we will strive to build resilient communities that offer a model of balanced, sustainable development for the future.

## Pillar 3 Objectives

**1**

### Support the Revitalisation and Community Well-Being of Small Towns and Rural Areas

Support the ongoing revitalisation of small towns and villages and initiatives which aim to tackle some of the persistent challenges associated with the region's dispersed settlement pattern.

**2**

### Build Capacity for Remote and Hybrid Work

Expand digital and remote work infrastructure to attract talent and retain economic activity in rural areas in particular.

**3**

### Empower Communities through Leadership and Skills Development

Promote local community action, capacity and leadership by supporting initiatives in areas such as community energy, digitalisation and social enterprise development.

**4**

### Promote Renewable Energy and Environmental Sustainability

Advocate for the widespread adoption of renewable energy solutions across the Western Region, aiming for a reduction in carbon emissions and enhanced energy independence. We will also support initiatives to achieve Net Zero carbon emissions and promote sustainability and circular economy initiatives across key relevant sectors such as agriculture, transport, the built environment and the marine economy.

**5**

### Amplify Focus on Quality of Life and Community Well-Being

Develop a stronger focus on quality of life considerations and indicators and contribute towards initiatives and projects working within this realm.



## Pillar 3 Specific Initiatives

### 1. Provision of Social Finance

Provide social finance through the Investment Fund to support the objectives, where appropriate.

### 2. Small Town/Village Revitalisation Pilot Projects

Develop strategic partnerships with local authorities and engage where possible with existing initiatives (e.g. Town and Village Renewal Scheme, Town Centre First) and with future pilot projects which aim to tackle some of the persistent challenges associated with the region's settlement patterns and which also support local economies. In this work, we will also further develop our relationships with Local Community Development Committees, Local Development Companies and other local development organisations and continue lending for community halls, centres and related community development projects.

### 3. Renewable Energy Adoption Programmes

Promote renewable energy initiatives for businesses and communities, aiming to reduce the carbon footprint of the region.

### 4. Digitalisation

To remain competitive in an increasingly global economy, businesses and communities need to modernise practices through the adoption of digital technologies. The WDC will develop projects, and work in concert with Local Authority digital strategies, to promote the adoption of digitalisation in communities and businesses. The WDC will utilise the network of hubs, where suitable, as a delivery mechanism for these initiatives.

### 5. Connected Hubs Expansion and Development

Expand and enhance the Connected Hubs programme to support flexible working practices and provide high-quality local spaces and other complementary services for workers, businesses, entrepreneurs and community groups across the region. The network is not just infrastructure, but a platform for digital inclusion, AI skills, and climate education embedded in communities.

### 6. Remote Working Actions

Continue to attract and retain people and skills by building the remote/blended working capacity of the region through the Connected Hubs network. WDC will also continue to play a lead role in developing national data on the incidence and frequency of remote work, to provide an evidence base for policy planning in the evolution of Future of Work practices.

### 7. Sustainable Mobility Actions

Continue to use policy outputs such as the Sustainable Mobility Index to advocate for sustainable solutions to regional and/or rural mobility constraints. We will also support the development of sustainable transport options, including the expansion of rail and transport hubs, to better connect communities and promote regional cohesion.

### 8. Well-Being Framework

Pilot regional well-being indicators in alignment with the National Well-being Framework, positioning the Western Region as a leader in quality-of-life-driven development.



PILLAR 3:

*A thriving Western Region depends on strong, connected communities, where people can live, work, and innovate.*



## Pillar 4

# Progressing Social Innovation & Social Enterprise Development

The WDC recognises the growing significance of social innovation and social enterprises in tackling societal challenges and in delivering inclusive regional development. As the national government, through our parent department, begins to explore this area further with initiatives such as the new National Social Enterprise Policy *Trading for Impact*, the WDC aims to play a complementary and evolving role.

By leveraging our expertise and partnerships, we seek to support capacity building, advance pilot projects, and contribute to thought leadership in this space. While this sector is still developing, the WDC is committed to empowering communities and enabling sustainable, resilient, and socially inclusive economies across the Western Region.

Throughout this strategy, we will remain flexible, focusing our efforts where they can deliver the most impact, whether through expanding our social innovation initiatives or pivoting to address emerging regional and national priorities.

## Pillar 4 Objectives

### Build WDC's Organisational Capacity to become a Key Actor and Supporter of Social Enterprise in the Western Region

1

We will further extend our influence and role in social enterprise development, including meeting our specific commitments under Action 41 of the National Social Enterprise Policy 2024-2027: "The WDC will support individual social enterprises to start up and scale using its range of schemes and programmes" and otherwise contributing to actions which fall within our remit.

### Create a National Test Bed for Social Innovation

2

Establish the Western Region as Ireland's premier test bed for piloting and scaling social innovation and social enterprise solutions. Encourage experimentation in new social enterprise models and promote initiatives that can be replicated nationally and internationally. To achieve this, we will also establish dedicated research and development initiatives to explore innovative solutions to social challenges and develop collaborations between social enterprises, research institutions, and policymakers to accelerate the adoption of new ideas.

### Promote Economic Diversity and Sustainability through Social Enterprise

3

We will promote regenerative and circular economy practices that are implemented and scaled by social enterprises. We will also empower social entrepreneurs to drive innovation and resilience in local economies while addressing societal needs and taking advantage of local opportunities.



## Pillar 4 Specific Initiatives

### **1. Social Enterprise Team**

Build a dedicated cross-organisational social enterprise team within the WDC.

### **2. Social Enterprise Support Programme**

Craft a support programme tailored to a) social enterprises addressing specific regional challenges such as peripherality, succession planning, gaps in market and public sector service provision and declining employment opportunities in more traditional industries; b) exploring new models of social enterprise which can be piloted in the region; and c) community-based circular economy pilots or practices in sectors such as food and textiles.

### **3. Social & Community Finance**

Continue to build the capacity and reach of the Community Finance portfolio within the Investment Fund. Advocate for models which address specific regional challenges and opportunities.

### **4. Connected Hubs Regional Expansion**

Enhance the role of the region's Connected Hubs programme in supporting social innovation and social enterprise development.

### **5. Social Impact Showcases**

Utilise opportunities to showcase successful regional social innovation projects to attract further investment and recognition.

### **6. Cross-Border & EU Collaboration**

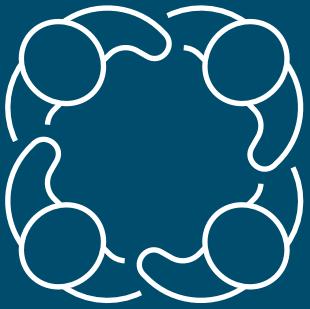
Be particularly alert for and capitalise on EU and cross-border funding and collaboration opportunities which will enhance our learning, capacity and funding in this area.



### **PILLAR 4:**

*WDC is committed to empowering communities and enabling sustainable, resilient, and socially inclusive economies across the Western Region.*





## The Cornerstone: WDC People & Culture

At the heart of WDC's strategy is a dynamic, forward-thinking team committed to delivering real impact across the Western Region. We are building an agile, innovative, and collaborative organisation, empowering our people to lead change and navigate future challenges.

### Our Aims:

- Foster a 'One WDC Team' approach, ensuring cross-functional collaboration.
- Strengthen a culture of innovation, leadership, and adaptability.
- Empower teams with skills and resources to drive regional impact.
- Enhance capacity to collaborate and influence across stakeholders and communities.

### Our Actions:

- Implement leadership and growth development programmes to build resilience and future-ready expertise.
- Enhance digital capabilities and remote collaboration tools to maximise efficiency.
- Expand capacities in stakeholder engagement and place-making to amplify the WDC's role in shaping national and regional policies.
- Invest in staff well-being and professional development, ensuring a motivated and high-performing team.

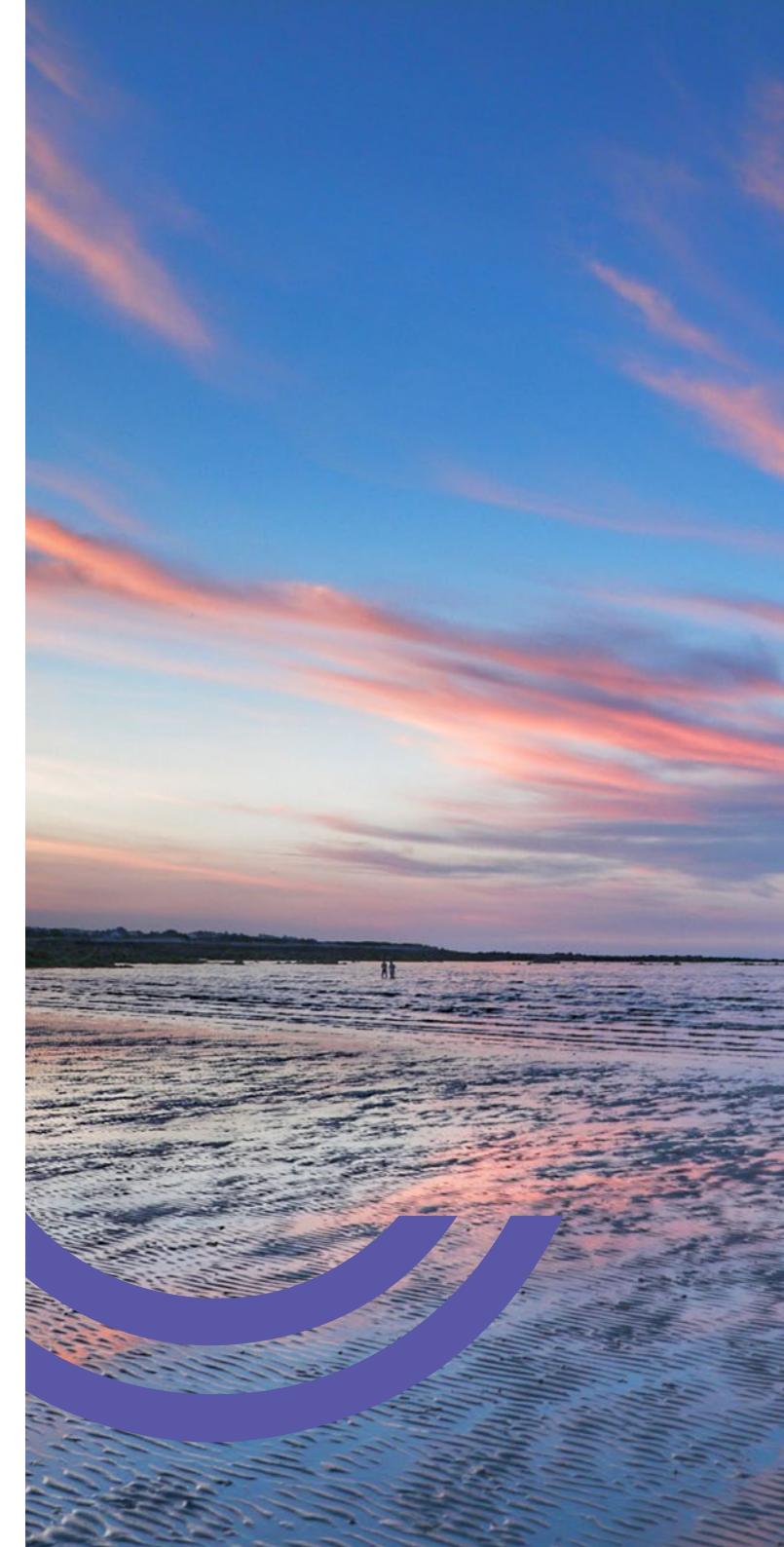


# Collaborating for Success

The Western Region is at a pivotal moment, shaped by powerful global, national, and local shifts that present both challenges and opportunities. To respond effectively and to drive sustainable inclusive growth there are many actions which need to be taken in the coming years.

## These actions include:

- **Achieving Strategic Infrastructure Investment:** Enhancing road, rail and ports connectivity, ensuring sustained growth and investment in Ireland West and Shannon Airports, the rollout of the National Broadband Plan, strengthening the energy grid and energy infrastructure – all of these are key economic enablers.
- **Maximising Renewable Energy & Sustainability:** Harnessing offshore wind, renewable energy solutions and the circular economy to propel environmental and economic progress.
- **Enhancing Digital Infrastructure:** Strengthening our digital framework to empower businesses and workers in a rapidly evolving economy.
- **Empowering Communities:** Driving social innovation to support new economic models that prioritise well-being and resilience.
- **Strengthening Regional Competitiveness:** Attracting investment, talent, and enterprise growth to future-proof our economy.
- **Developing Future-Ready Talent:** Building a talent pipeline aligned with emerging industries—such as AI, MedTech, and advanced manufacturing—ensuring a skilled workforce for tomorrow's opportunities.





WDC has a role to play in achieving all of these actions but only by working in collaboration and partnership with others.

This will be achieved by:

## Deepening Local, Regional and National Partnerships

We will work closely with a range of agencies and organisations:

- Enterprise Ireland, IDA, Údarás na Gaeltachta, and Local Enterprise Offices to create a robust enterprise ecosystem.
- ATU, TUS, University of Galway, other third level institutions and innovation hubs to accelerate research and commercialisation efforts.
- Local authorities and regional assemblies to implement joined-up approaches to economic development and infrastructure investment.
- Government departments and EU networks to advocate on economic, social, environmental and infrastructure policies that directly impact the Western Region.
- Local Development Companies and community groups/social enterprises to build sustainable local communities and to support the growth of the social enterprise sector.
- Local and National Chamber of Commerce groups including the American Chamber of Commerce and those overseas representing Irish interests.



## Aligning with and Delivering on National, Regional and EU Policies

The WDC Strategy 2025–2029 is deeply aligned with national, regional, and EU policies, ensuring the Western Region contributes to Ireland's broader economic, sustainability, and innovation goals. Our work will support key national and EU frameworks in enterprise, infrastructure, climate action, and regional development.

### Key National and Enterprise Policies

- *Project 2040*: the government's long-term overarching strategy to make Ireland a better country by building a more resilient and sustainable future for everyone.
- *White Paper on Enterprise 2022–2030*: Driving high-potential sectors, including renewable energy and AgriTech.
- *Climate Action Plan 2024*: Advancing renewable energy, green innovation, and carbon reduction.
- *Impact 2030: Ireland's Research & Innovation Strategy*: Strengthening research, innovation, and enterprise growth.
- *National Smart Specialisation Strategy 2022–2027*: Prioritising regional innovation and sectoral competitiveness.
- *Trade & Investment Strategy 2022–2026*: Strengthening Ireland's position in global markets.
- *Harnessing Digital – The Digital Ireland Framework*: Expanding digital transformation, AI, and automation in business.
- *National Hub Network Strategy*: Leading the Connected Hubs initiative to support remote working and enterprise collaboration.
- *Trading for Impact 2024–2027*: Supporting social enterprise and impact-driven business models.

### Regional and Rural Development Strategies

- *Project Ireland 2040*: Advocating for targeted regional investment and infrastructure.
- *Our Rural Future 2021–2025*: Supporting vibrant, resilient rural communities.
- *Town Centre First Policy*: Revitalising towns and promoting place-based economic development.
- *Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy (RSES) 2020–2030*: Strengthening regional competitiveness and sustainable growth.
- *North-West, Western & Mid-West Regional Enterprise Plans*: Supporting SME growth, talent development and sector innovation.

### EU Policies and Funding Frameworks

- *EU Cohesion Policy*: Supporting economic development, competitiveness and sustainability.
- *European Green Deal*: Making the Western Region a leader in climate action and low-carbon industries.
- *European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and Just Transition Fund*: Securing investment for energy and economic transformation.
- *Digital Decade Policy Programme 2030*: Strengthening Ireland's role in AI, data-driven industries and connectivity.

## Building Diaspora Connections and Global Engagement

The WDC recognises the transformative power of international relationships, diaspora networks, and Celtic connections in shaping the future of the Western Region. By strengthening ties with global Irish communities, international partners, and philanthropic networks, we will unlock new opportunities for investment, innovation, and regional development.

Our approach is closely aligned with national and international policy, including Global Ireland, Ireland's Diaspora Strategy 2020–2025, and the National Philanthropy Policy 2024–2028. By actively contributing to these priorities, the WDC aims to transform global goodwill into tangible impact, ensuring the West of Ireland thrives in an interconnected world. By harnessing our unique cultural identity and deep-rooted international ties, we aim to turn connection into action.

## Expanding our Regional Role

As the WDC moves forward, we encourage national government to view the region as a space where ideas can be tested, funded, and trialled, knowing that these projects will always be grounded in the specific needs and potential of our seven counties. We are mindful of our proximity to the border with Northern Ireland and are also committed to exploring cross-border opportunities within a Shared Island framework. By leading on regional innovation, we will drive policy influence, investment and development that strengthen the local, national and all-island economy.

*By harnessing our unique cultural identity and deep-rooted international ties, we aim to turn connection into action.*



## A Call to Action – Delivering Together

The WDC is committed to turning this vision into reality, but we cannot do it alone. We call on businesses, policymakers, and communities to join us in delivering together. By partnering across sectors, we will create high-quality job opportunities, drive innovation, and stimulate economic and social transformation across the Western Region.





Unlocking  
Potential,  
Driving  
Change

## A Strategy for Regional Growth and Collaboration 2025-2029

# A THRIVING WEST OF IRELAND

## KEY PILLARS

### Enabling Our Enterprise Ecosystem



### Strengthening Partnerships and Influence



### Building Sustainable Communities



### Progressing Social Innovation and Social Enterprise Development



## 2030 GOALS

**€50m**

Investment of €50m: €35m from Western Investment Fund and €15m from EU to be secured

**10+**

High-impact policy outputs per year, influencing national and EU agendas

**100**

Projects for WIF: €25m in SMEs, €7m in social enterprises, €3m in creative industries

**400**

Expand the Connected Hubs network to 400+ with a focus on AI, digital transformation and enterprise collaboration

**1m**

Reach an annual audience of 1m+ to promote the region as a leading place to live, work and do business

**5,000**

Support the creation and sustainability of 5,000 jobs (direct and indirect)



## FOUR Hs



**HORIZONS**



**HERITAGE**



**HARNESSING  
TALENT**



**HUBS**

# Delivery / Review Mechanisms

## How We Will Deliver

This Strategy will be delivered through a focused, collaborative, and adaptive approach. By leveraging our core capabilities, engaging cross-sector teams, and implementing effective planning and monitoring mechanisms, we aim to translate this strategy into tangible outcomes for the Western Region.

The WDC's work is implemented by dedicated teams that focus on key aspects of regional development. Within the current overall team lies a wealth of expertise in areas such as investment and funding, regional promotion and leadership, policy analysis and research, enterprise/economic development and innovation, sustainability, EU policy and funding mechanisms, social enterprise development and social finance.

These teams, supported by cross-departmental collaboration, will deliver on the initiatives outlined under each of the strategy's pillars. The specific operational roles for delivery are integrated into the four pillars themselves, with the express goal of ensuring clarity and alignment throughout the organisation.

Our delivery approach is designed to be both structured and flexible, recognising the evolving regional, national, and global landscape. By maintaining open communication, engaging with stakeholders, and refining our methods based on feedback and performance data, the WDC will ensure that this strategy remains relevant and impactful throughout its lifecycle. We will build a culture of review to learn from experience.

## Methodology used to produce this report

This strategy reflects a robust and inclusive development process, grounded in collaboration with the board, staff, and key stakeholders through the relevant agencies in our region. From the outset, we engaged widely to ensure that diverse perspectives shaped our vision for the Western Region:

- Extensive consultations included workshops and discussions with government, industry, academia, and local communities.
- Insights from these sessions shaped priorities which were aligned with local needs and national policies.
- The Western Development Commission Board provided strategic oversight and ensured alignment with its mission.
- Board members actively contributed through expertise, guidance, and written submissions.
- All suggestions were reviewed, with the final document reflecting a balanced integration of input.
- The strategy is clear, actionable, and both ambitious and realistic.
- It lays the foundation for sustainable progress and shared success in the Western Region.



## Credits & Acknowledgements

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### Consultation Process Participants

Ad Hoc Committee to Protect the GFA, Washington DC  
Aesop Industries  
Aislann Chill Chartha CTR  
Alpha Innovation  
Amara Therapeutics  
An Mheitheal Rothar  
Ardán  
Ardara Sheltered Housing Association CLG  
Ascentifi  
Atlantic Technological University  
AxisBIC  
Ballinasloe Area Community Development  
Beyond Inc  
Burren College of Art CLG  
CREW  
DNK Media Productions  
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment  
Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht  
Donegal County Council

Donegal Local Development CLG  
Eirmersive  
Encom Energy  
Endava  
Enterprise Ireland  
FeelTect  
Future Mobility Campus Ireland  
Galway City Council  
Galway City Innovation District  
Galway City LECP  
Galway County Council  
HookeBio  
IDA Ireland  
Independent Consultant  
Inishowen Development Partnership  
Institute of Designers Ireland  
Irrus Investments  
Jennings O'Donovan and Partners Limited  
Láirionad Acmhainní Nádúrtha - LAN CTR - Cill Ulta  
Leitrim County Council  
Leitrim Development Company  
Local LEO offices

Letterkenny Chamber  
Lidan  
Mayo County Council  
Mirai Medical  
National Breast Cancer Research Institute  
Northwest Regional Enterprise Plan/Leitrim Co. Co.  
Póca Productions  
PorterShed  
Rockfield Medical Devices  
Roscommon County Council  
Roscommon LEADER Partnership  
Sligo Greenway Co op  
SonorPlex  
South West Mayo Development Company  
Teagasc  
University of Galway  
VERSONO Medical Ltd  
WestBIC  
All WDC staff members  
All WDC board members

## Acronyms

AI	Artificial Intelligence
AIM Centre	Advancing Innovation in Manufacturing Centre
ATU	Atlantic Technological University
CF	Cohesion Fund
DRCD	Department of Rural and Community Development
EU	European Union
IDA	Industrial Development Authority
NWRA	Northern and Western Regional Assembly
R&D	Research and Development
SME(s)	Small to Medium Enterprise(s)
SRA	Southern Regional Assembly
TD	Teachta Dála
TUS	Technological University of the Shannon
WDC	Western Development Commission
WIF	Western Investment Fund

## Local Policies

- LECP Donegal ➔
- LECP Sligo 2023-2030 ➔
- LECP Mayo 2023-2029 ➔
- LECP Leitrim 2023 -2029 ➔
- LECP Roscommon 2023-2029 ➔
- LECP Galway 2024-2030 (In consultation stage) ➔
- LECP Clare 2024-2030 ➔
- LECP Galway City 2024-2025 ➔



COIMISIÚN  
**FORBARTHA**  
AN IARTHAIR

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