

# National Economic Recovery Plan

## Submission

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# GREEN SHOOTS?

Northern and Western Regional  
Assembly



Ireland's European Structural and  
Investment Funds Programmes  
2014-2020

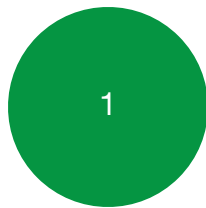
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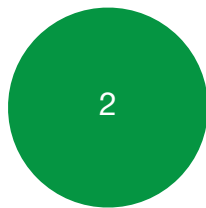
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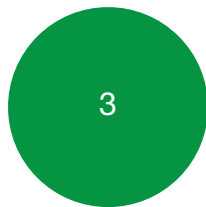
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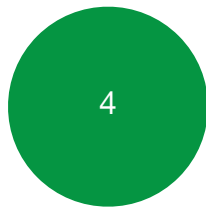
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Regional Assembly



**Northern & Western**  
Regional Assembly

# OUR MISSION

## WE WANT TO...

Be the primary driver for regional sustainable development through planning, resourcing, and delivering programmes with the support of our partners.

## WHILE WORKING TOWARDS...

Consolidating the region as a leader in smart and green practices.

# Northern and Western Regional Assembly

The Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA) is one of three Regional Assemblies in the Republic of Ireland. We work with key stakeholders at EU, national, regional and local level to accelerate and optimise effective regional development. We have three inter-related functional areas, that can develop our region best

1. **BETTER PLACES** – policy making, monitoring / oversight and promoting enhanced co-ordination in our Region through the implementation of our Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy
2. **COMPETITIVENESS** – optimise EU policy and funding instruments for regional / local development priorities
3. **COLLABORATION** – engage with innovative research partnerships and regional based networks to accelerate priorities identified in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies

## Introduction

According to the European Commission, regional disparities in Ireland are among the highest in the EU and more alarming these disparities in Ireland are increasing (Country Specific Report). If regional gaps in GDP are too large and remain consistent over time, this will inevitably lead to further economic decline. Ireland needs to focus on reimagining its approach to regional development, applying coherent regional policies (education, skills, economic development, promotion, smart specialisation etc) in line with most OECD countries.

It has been well documented that the Northern & Western region has not performed economically as well as its fellow regions in Ireland and relative to the EU norm. This is set to continue. As a result of the regions poor economic performance, the European Commission has downgraded the region from a “More Developed Region” to a “Transition Region” post 2020. This only refers to its classification but opens up opportunities for more attractive levels of co-financed EU Structural Funds

- An examination of trends in other key economic indicators of the region reinforces this decision. Commercial activity within the region has significantly worsen over the past number of years.
- Disposable income per head of population within the region remains well below the State average and its fellow Irish regions.

- Furthermore, the region has been unable to attract as many high valued jobs compared to the Irish and European norm, while the region’s productivity levels have also worsened in the past several years.
- Such trends may explain why the region has not prospered economically in recent times, strengthening the argument for greater government intervention or for “Positive Discrimination”. The NWRA published its report titled ‘Region in Transition’ and its available [here](#)

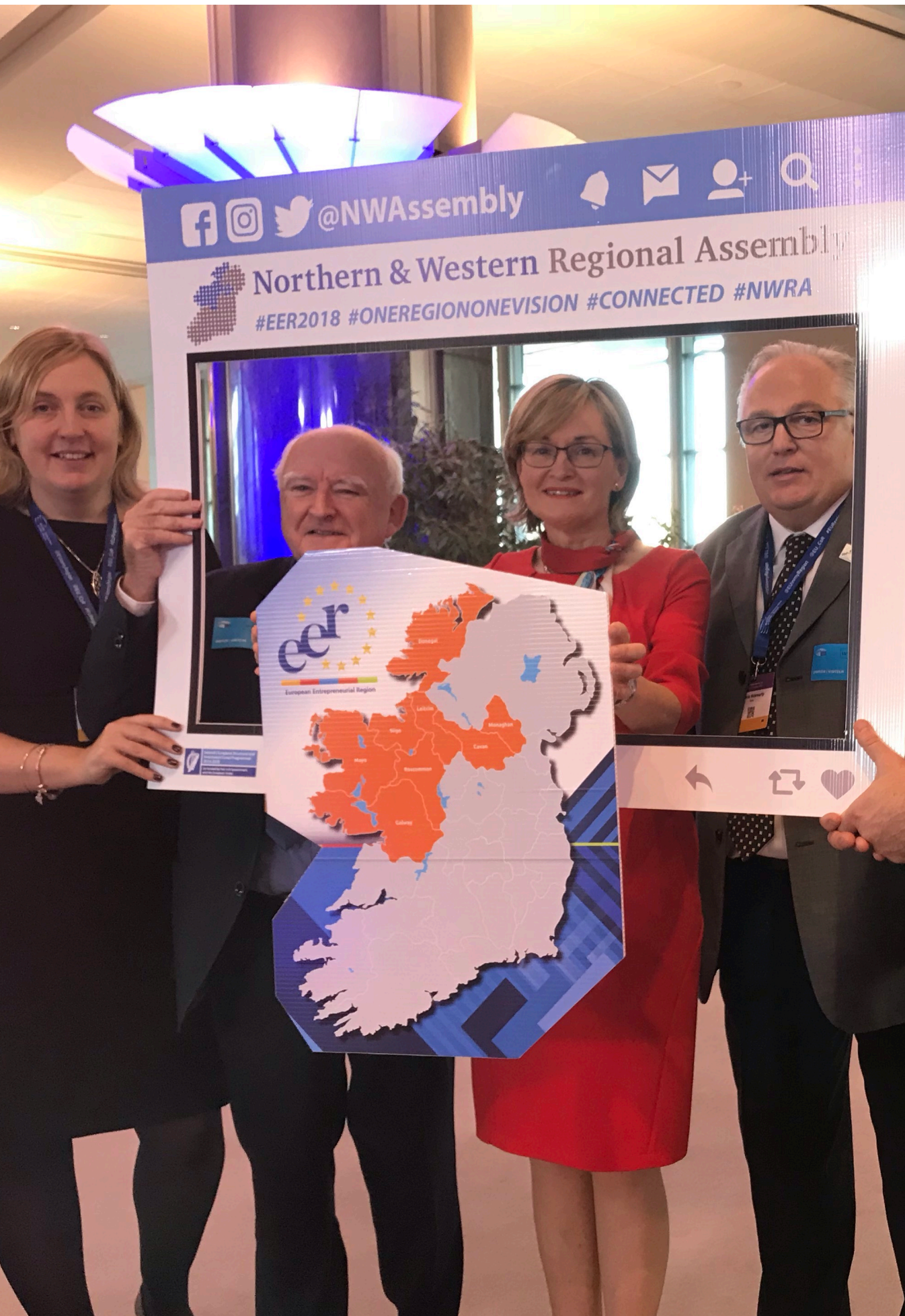
This region and particularly the border area is especially exposed due to

- Economic implications associated with Brexit
- Economic impact of Government restrictions relating to Covid 19

**Gaps in output tend to be accompanied by high levels of unemployment, low levels of disposable income and prolonged population shifts.**

**This will ultimately continue to see shifts towards Dublin, which is not sustainable, and is counter to policies contained within the NPF and current Programme for Government.**

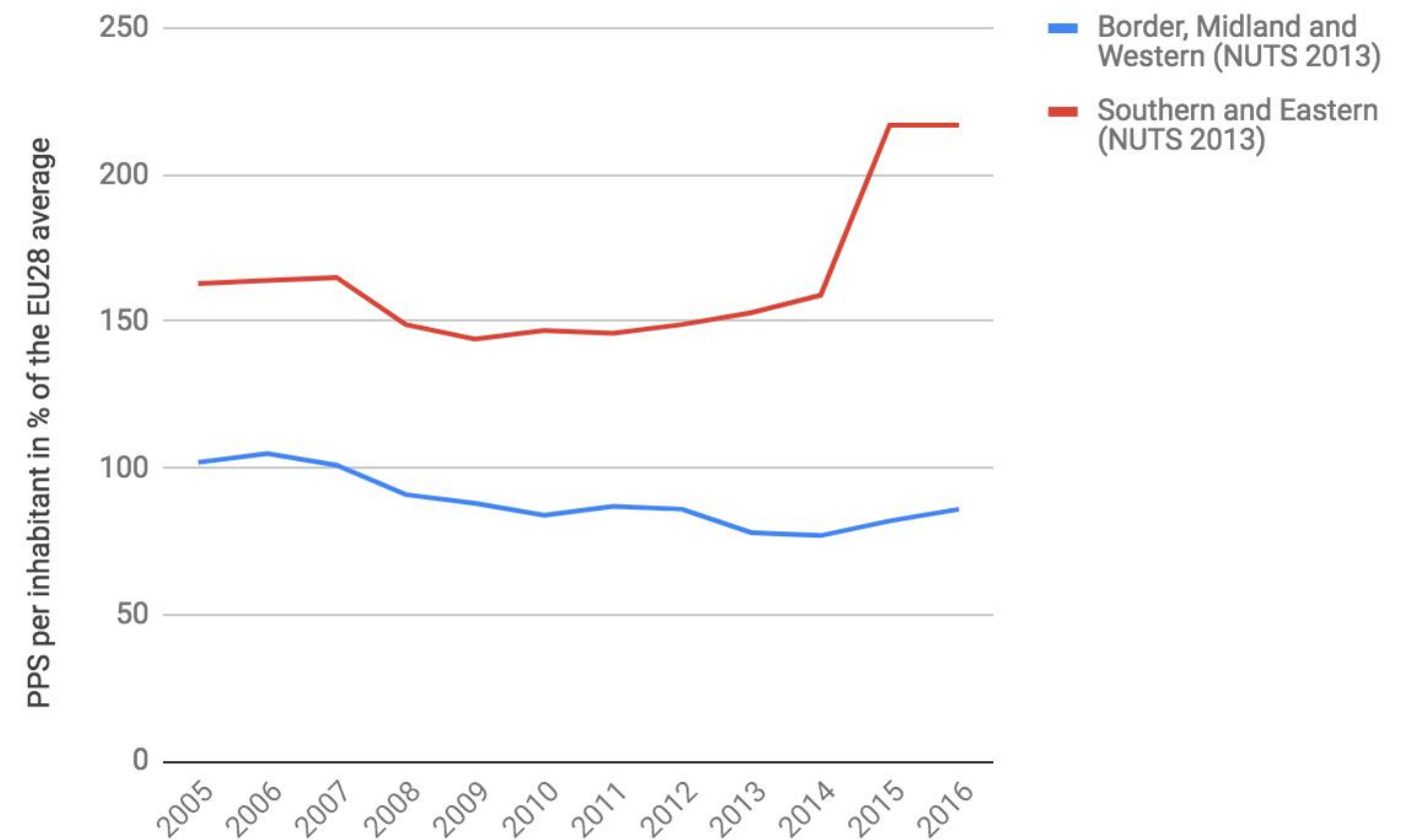




## 1.0 Introduction



Figure 1: GVA breakdown 2005-2016



## Some of our strategic recommendations:

1. **In search of coherence:** the competitiveness of Irish regions is not served by the ad-hoc regional structures applied across various Government Departments and agencies. The Government should consider a cross departmental policy to ‘regional development’ where considerable savings, efficiencies and value can be created

2. **Smart Specialisation:** The National Planning Framework is a strategic planning document for the country. It has taken a bold step to consider sub national spatial propositions. The aligned process of economic development has not been instigated. There is a perceived reticence to pursue economic development policies sub nationally through a metric based or evidence-based approach. Again, Ireland would be seen as an outlier in its approach to ‘smart specialisation’ as a tool for stimulating local entrepreneurial ecosystems. An EU Commission review

of Ireland’s Enterprise Policy referred to us as ‘place blind’.

3. **Positive Discrimination:** Regional inequality is growing. The European Commission classifies regions within the EU as either being a “Less Developed Region”, a “Transition Region” or a “More Developed Region”, based on their GDP per head of population relative to the EU27 Average. Recently, the European Commission downgraded the Northern & Western region from a “More Developed Region”

to a “Transition Region”, providing further evidence of the region’s continued economic decline. Ireland needs to respond and we recommend that EU Structural Funds (period 2021-2027) take a much more targeted and ‘place’ approach to their application. Numerous successful models exist across Europe where this inequality is addressed by financial instruments such as an Integrated Territorial Model (ITI). The NWRA has written formally to DPER seeking the application of this model.





## 2.0 Strategic Context



## 2.0 Strategic Context

The Northern and Western Regional Assembly is one of three Regional Assemblies of Ireland, working with key stakeholders at an EU, national, regional and local level to support effective regional development in Ireland. The Northern and Western Regional Assembly is part of the regional tier of governance in Ireland, primarily focused on the formulation, adoption and implementation of its Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES), oversight and coordination of Local Economic and Community Plans, management of EU Operational Programs, EU project participation, implementation of national economic policy, and additional functions through working with the National Oversight and Audit Commission.

In January 2020, the Northern and Western Regional Assembly published its RSES for the region. In doing so, the RSES – for the first time – brings together spatial planning and economic policy to provide a strategic framework for investment in the Northern and Western Region; marking a significant

policy milestone for regional government in Ireland. Furthermore, the RSES sets the framework for each local authority within the Northern and Western Region to develop their county and city development plans in a manner that will ensure national, regional and local plans align.

The Northern and Western Regional Assembly's RSES provides a high level development framework that allows for effective regional development to be achieved in our region, with our strategy emphasising the importance of developing healthy places and promoting sustainable communities. The RSES adopts a “place-based” approach and attempts to tap into the economic potential that remains unused and not identifiable to outside agencies, so that all parts of regions – whether they be cities, towns or rural communities – can contribute to national development.



Our RSES introduces the concept of a “Growth Framework” because regional development requires an integrated approach to dealing with key strategic investment priorities and isolated interventions will not achieve the ambitions of this region, nor will investment in infrastructure alone. Therefore, the “Growth Framework” aims to synergise investments and plan for strategic interventions; with our priorities focused on developing a region that is “Vibrant”, “Connected”, “Natural”, “Smart” and a “Great Place to Live”, consolidated by a strong settlement strategy focused on “People and Places”

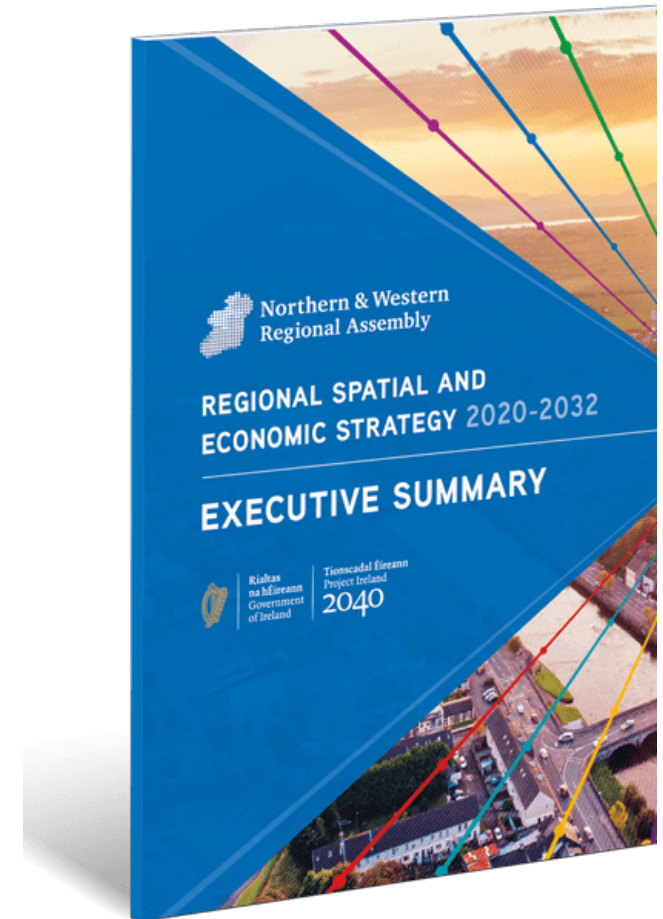


Achieving the spatial objectives set out in the NPF and our RSES will be instrumental to tackling regional imbalances in Ireland. In this regard, the Northern and Western Regional Assembly's RSES identifies key locations for population and employment growth, consisting of the Galway Metropolitan Area, 3 Regional Growth Centres – namely Sligo Town, Letterkenny and Athlone – along with 8 Key Towns, namely Carrick-on-Shannon, Castlebar, Cavan Town, Ballina, Roscommon Town, Monaghan Town, Tuam and Ballinasloe.

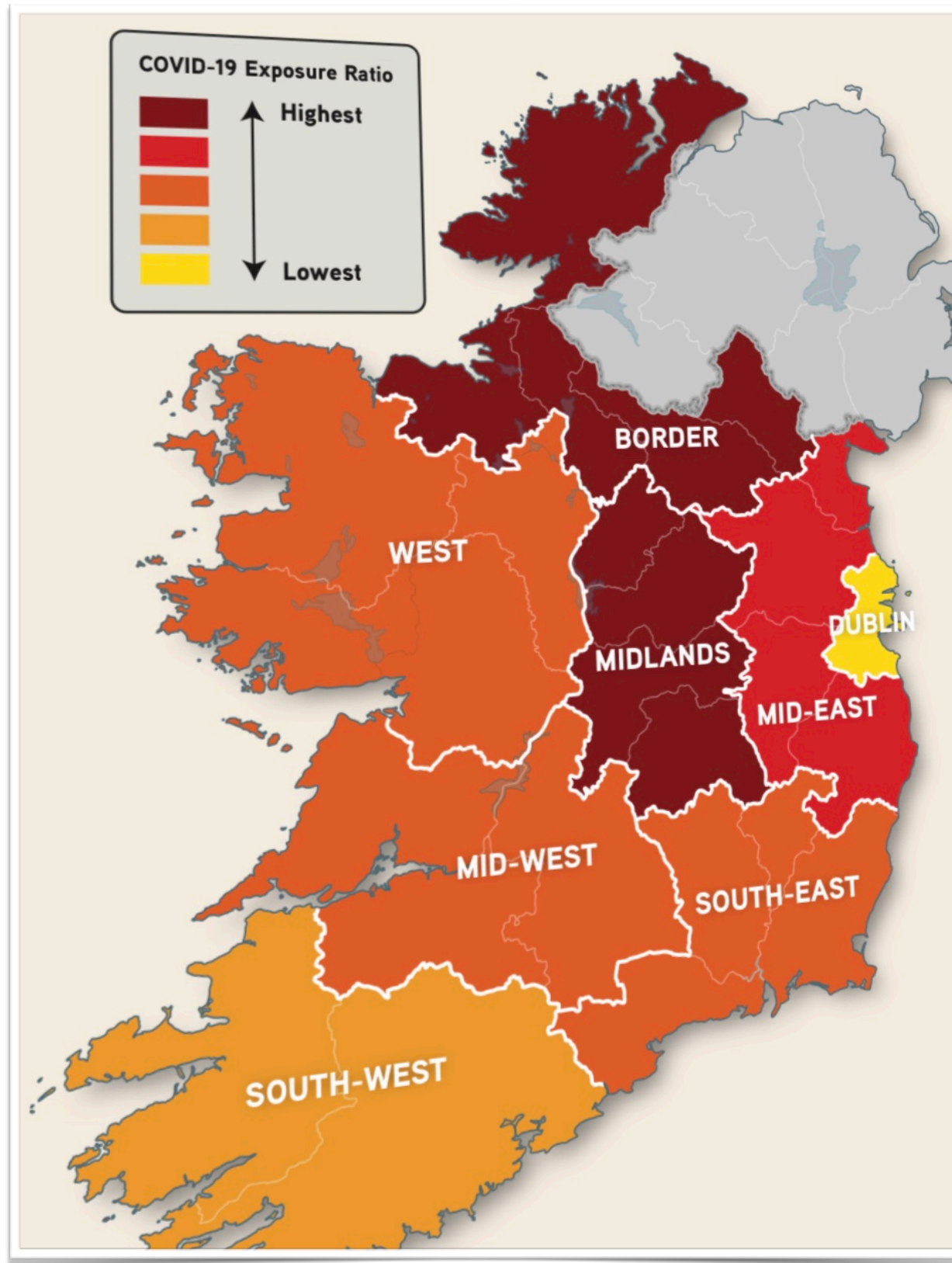
As per Regional Policy Objective 3.2 (A), (B) and (C) our RSES outlines compact growth targets for future housing developments, with at least 50 per cent of all new city homes targeted in the Galway Metropolitan Area to be delivered within its existing built-up footprint, at least 40 per cent of all new housing targeted in our Regional Growth Centres to be delivered within their existing built-up footprints, while at least 30 per cent of all new homes that are targeted in other settlements with a population of at least 1,500 are to be delivered within the existing built-up footprints of these areas. Achieving such compact growth targets along with the other Regional Policy Objectives of the RSES will assist policy makers in tackling regional disparities that currently exist in Ireland.

With this in mind, the Northern and Western Regional Assembly welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the prioritisation of the forthcoming National Economic Recovery Plan. In order to tackle regional imbalances in Ireland, and to ensure an inclusive economic recovery, it is imperative that there is alignment between the priorities of the forthcoming National Economic Recovery Plan and the objectives outlined in the Northern and Western Regional Assembly's RSES.

Delivering the spatial and economic objectives of the Northern and Western Regional Assembly's RSES will be a key component in tackling regional disparities, allowing the region to develop urban centres of scale which will act as employment and enterprise hubs; build healthy and sustainable communities, enhance the region's human capital levels and sustain population growth for the region as a whole. In doing so, the National Economic Recovery Plan can play a key role in contributing to effective regional development in Ireland, supporting an inclusive economic recovery across all of our regions.







## Regional Economic impact of Covid-19



## Economic Impact of CV-19

Since the National Economic Recovery Plan will chart our long term recovery from the economic disruption caused by the outbreak of COVID-19, it is essential that we highlight the economic impact of COVID-19 on the Northern and Western Region's economy to date.

According to the latest regional statistics, it is clear that the outbreak of COVID-19 has already had a notable impact on the Northern and Western Region's economy, particularly for our rural counties and communities due to their heavy reliance on the hospitality, wholesale and retail industries. To assess the sheer size of this economic impact to date, the Northern and Western Regional Assembly has examined recent trends in the following economic indicators, namely:

1. Labour market of the Northern and Western Region
2. Commercial market of the Northern and Western Region

The key findings of this analysis are as follows:

- As of the 23rd of August 2020, the number of residents in the Northern and Western Region in receipt of the "Pandemic Unemployment Payment" totalled 36,766, accounting for 16 per cent of total claimants in Ireland
- Within the Northern and Western Region, the county with the highest number of residents in receipt of the "Pandemic

Unemployment Payment" was Galway at 12,094, accounting for 32.9 per cent of total claimants in the region. The counties with the next highest shares in the Northern and Western Region were Donegal (19% or 6,993), Mayo (14.6% or 5,365) and Cavan (8.5% or 3,128).

- As of the 16th of August 2020, the number of residents in the Northern and Western Region in receipt of the "Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme" totalled 49,887, accounting for 19.6 per cent of total claimants in Ireland
- Within the Northern and Western Region, the county with the highest number of residents in receipt of the "Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme" was Galway at 15,629, accounting for 31.3 per cent of total claimants in the region. The counties with the next highest shares in the Northern and Western Region were Donegal (18.9% or 9,444), Mayo (16.3% or 8,130) and Cavan (8.5 % or 4,233).
- As of Q2 2020 , 163,710 people or 41.6 per cent of the Northern and Western Region's labour force were in receipt of either the "Pandemic Unemployment Payment", the "Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme" or were registered on the "Live Register", highlighting the sheer impact of COVID-19 on the Northern and Western Region's economy. This was above the corresponding national ratio of 39.9 per cent.



- The impact on the Northern and Western Region’s labour market varied on a sub-regional level. As of Q2 2020 , 77,491 people or 46 per cent of the Border’s labour force were in receipt of either the “Pandemic Unemployment Payment”, the “Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme” or were registered on the “Live Register”. This was above the corresponding national ratio of 39.9 per cent and the highest ratio recorded out of the eight sub-regions of Ireland.
- Although the ratio for the West – at 38.3 per cent – was below the corresponding national ratio of 39.9 per cent, such a figure nevertheless highlights the substantial impact of COVID-19 on the West’s labour market.
- From a commercial market perspective , 48.6 per cent of the Northern and Western Region’s commercial units were operating in the most affected sectors, implying that just over 16,515 of its commercial units were likely to be severely impacted as a result of the public health measures. This was above the corresponding “COVID-19 Exposure Ratio” for the State as a whole, which was 46 per cent.
- Both sub-regions of the Northern and Western region recorded “COVID-19 exposure ratios” above the national average of 46 per cent. Of the eight sub-regions of Ireland, the Border had the highest “COVID-19 Exposure Ratio”, with 49.5 per cent or 8,128 of its commercial units likely to be severely impacted as a result of the public health measures. Of the eight sub-regions in Ireland, the West had the fourth highest “COVID-19 Exposure Ratio”, with 47.8 per cent or 8,387 of its commercial units likely to be severely impacted as a result of the public health measures
- All 8 counties based in the Northern and Western region recorded above average “COVID-19 exposure ratios”, with the highest exposure ratio in the region recorded in Donegal, with 50.6 per cent of its commercial units likely to be severely impacted as a result of the public health measures.
- Of the five cities of Ireland, Galway City and Suburbs recorded the highest “COVID-19 Exposure Ratio” with 46.1 per cent of its commercial units likely to be severely impacted as a result of the outbreak of COVID-19.
- Out of the 12 regional growth centres / key towns outlined in the Northern and Western Regional Assembly’s RSES, 9 recorded “COVID-19 Exposure Ratios” above the national average, namely Carrick-on-Shannon, Athlone, Castlebar, Letterkenny, Cavan Town, Ballina, Roscommon Town, Monaghan Town and Galway City and Suburbs.
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# 1. Labour Market Impact

The outbreak of COVID-19 – and the subsequent economic disruption – has severely impacted the labour market of the Northern and Western Region. To evaluate the extent of this impact, Figure 2 and Table 1 identify the number of residents in the Northern and Western Region that have been in receipt of the “Pandemic Unemployment Payment”, as per the latest data at the time of writing .

As of the 23rd of August 2020, the number of people based in the Northern and Western Region in receipt of the

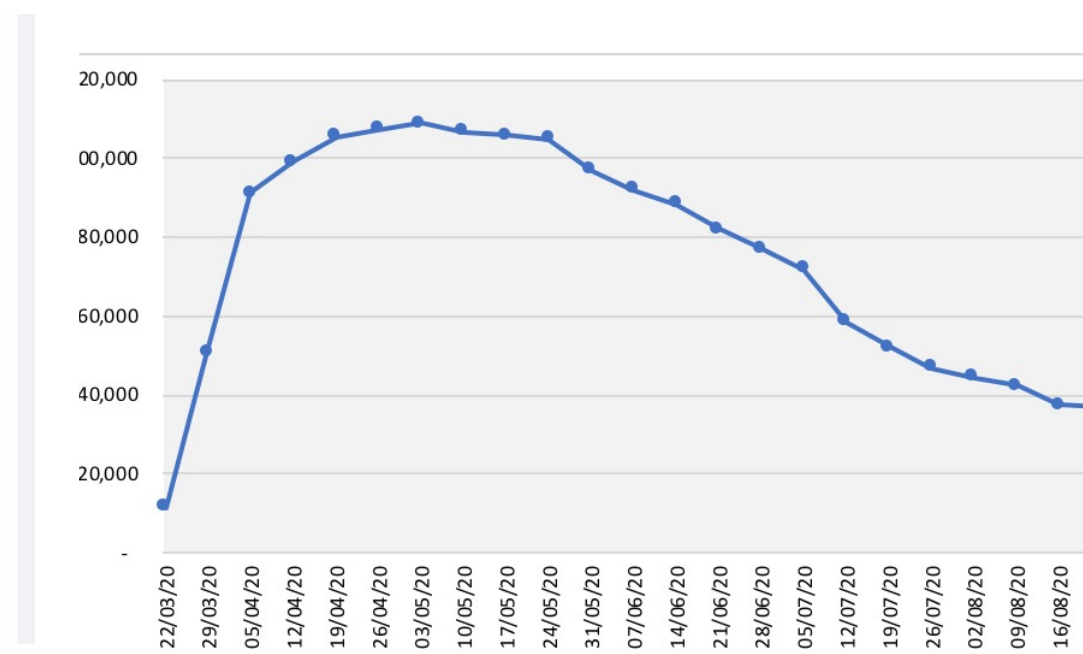
“Pandemic Unemployment Payment” totalled 36,766, accounting for 16 per cent of the total number of claimants in Ireland. As evident from Figure 2, the total number of people based in the Northern and Western Region in receipt of the “Pandemic Unemployment Payment” has been progressively falling over the past number of weeks, dropping from a peak of 108,854 at the beginning of May.

Within the Northern and Western Region, the county with the highest number of people in receipt of the “Pandemic Unemployment Payment” was Galway at 12,094, accounting for 32.9 per cent

of total claimants in the region as evident from Table 1. The counties with the next highest shares in the Northern and Western Region were Donegal (19% or 6,993), Mayo (14.6% or 5,365) and Cavan (8.5% or 3,128).

**Table 1: The total number of people in receipt of the “Pandemic Unemployment Payment” in each County within the Northern and Western Region, as of the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August 2020**

County	Number of People in Receipt of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (23 <sup>rd</sup> of August 2020)	% Share of Northern and Western Region (23 <sup>rd</sup> of August 2020)
Galway	12,094	32.9%
Donegal	6,993	19.0%
Mayo	5,365	14.6%
Cavan	3,128	8.5%
Monaghan	2,798	7.6%
Sligo	2,658	7.2%
Roscommon	2,376	6.5%
Leitrim	1,354	3.7%
<b>Northern and Western</b>	<b>36,766</b>	<b>100.0%</b>



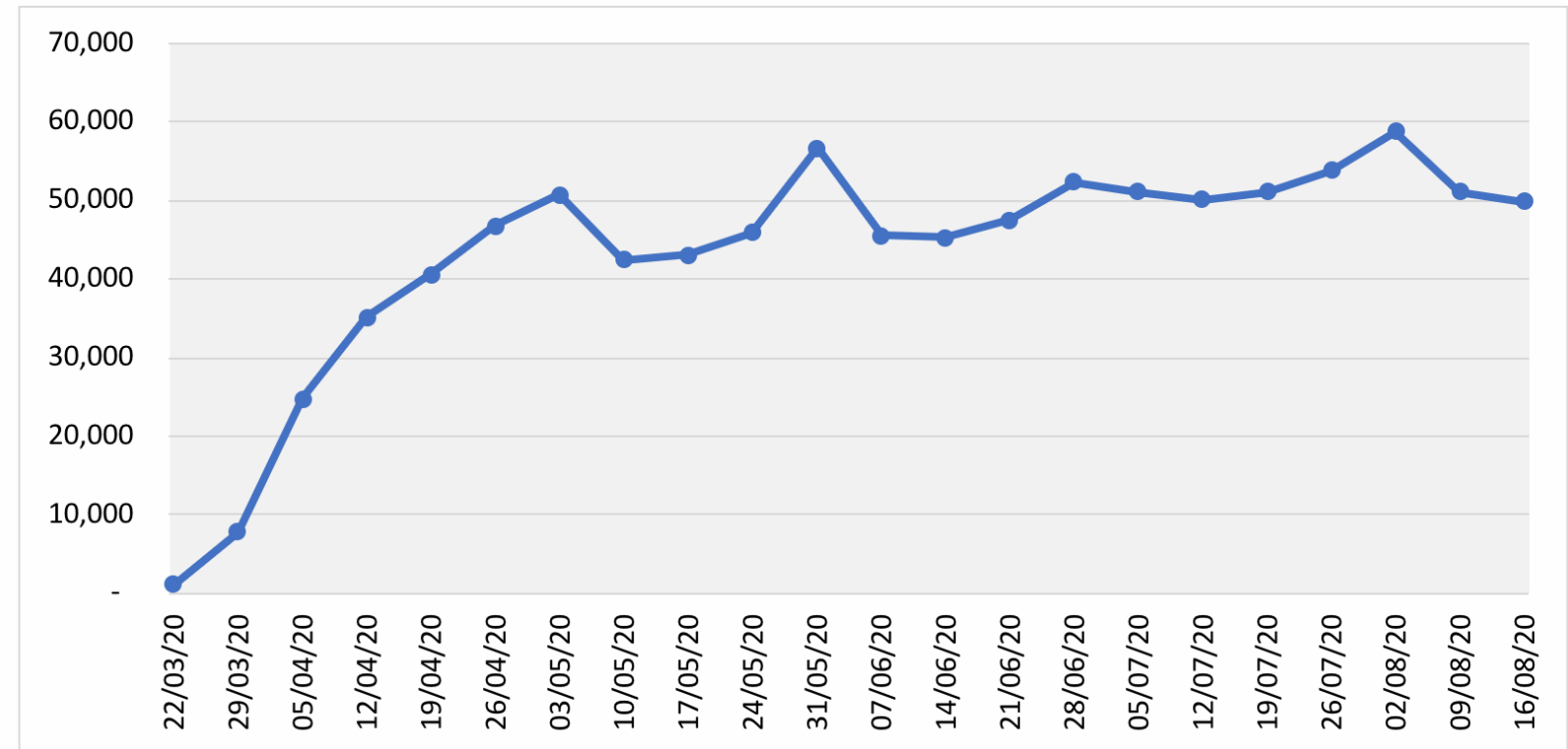
*Figure 2: Total number of people in the Northern and Western Region in receipt of the “Pandemic Unemployment Payment” as of the 23rd of August 2020*



As of the 16th of August 2020, the number of people based in the Northern and Western Region in receipt of the “Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme” totalled 49,887, accounting for 19.6 per cent of the total number of claimants in Ireland. As evident from Figure 3, the total number of residents of the Northern and Western Region in receipt of the “Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme” was down from its previous peak of 58,781 at the start of August. That said, the rate of decline in the number of recipients of the “Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme” in the region has not been as strong relative to the corresponding decline in the number of recipients of the “Pandemic Unemployment Payment” in the region.

Within the Northern and Western Region, the county with the highest number of people in receipt of the “Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme” was Galway at 15,629, accounting for 31.3 per cent of total claimants in the region as evident from Table 2. The counties with the next highest shares in

**Figure 3: Total number of people in the Northern and Western Region in receipt of the “Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme”, as of the 16<sup>th</sup> of August 2020**



Source: CSO

the Northern and Western Region were Donegal (18.9% or 9,444), Mayo (16.3% or 8,130) and Cavan (8.5 % or 4,233).

Predictably such developments will have severely affected the Northern and Western Region’s labour market and its unemployment rate. However to what extent remains to be seen considering the lack of available unemployment rate statistics that captures both the number

of residents in receipt of the “Pandemic Unemployment Payment” or the “Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme” on a regional and sub-regional level

To combat this, the Northern and Western Regional Assembly has adopted a similar methodology to recently released Central Bank of Ireland research which examined the degree to which the labour forces of geographical



areas were reliant on either the “Pandemic Unemployment Payment”, the “Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme” or were registered on the “Live Register”. Using this approach, the Northern and Western Regional Assembly will – on a regional and sub-regional level – express the number of residents in receipt of either the “Pandemic Unemployment Payment”, the “Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme” or were registered on the “Live Register” as of the 28th of June 2020, as a share of its corresponding labour force as of Q2 2020.

To achieve this, the Northern and Western Regional Assembly has combined data from the CSO’s Q2 2020 Labour Force Survey and the CSO’s data on COVID-19 Income Support and Live Register figures as of the 28th of June 2020. Although the number of people in receipt of COVID-19 Income Support and “Live Register” payments change weekly, and data is available up to August 2020, it is important to compare datasets that are compatible in terms of timeframes.

Therefore the data on the number of people in receipt of the “Pandemic Unemployment Payment” and the “Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme” as of the 28th of June 2020 was considered the most appropriate dataset to compare to the labour force data from the CSO’s Q2 2020 Labour Force Survey.

**Table 2: The total number of people in receipt of the “Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme” in each County within the Northern and Western Region, as of the 16th of August 2020**

County	Number of People in Receipt of the "Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme" (16 <sup>th</sup> of August 2020)	% Share of Northern and Western Region (16 <sup>th</sup> of August 2020)
Galway	15,629	31.3%
Donegal	9,444	18.9%
Mayo	8,130	16.3%
Cavan	4,233	8.5%
Monaghan	4,202	8.4%
Sligo	3,408	6.8%
Roscommon	3,085	6.2%
Leitrim	1,756	3.5%
<b>Northern and Western</b>	<b>49,887</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: CSO

As of Q2 2020, 163,710 people or 41.6 per cent of the Northern and Western Region's labour force were in receipt of either the "Pandemic Unemployment Payment", the "Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme" or were registered on the "Live Register", highlighting the sheer impact of COVID-19 on the Northern and Western Region's economy, as can be seen from Figure 4. This was above the corresponding national ratio of 39.9 per cent.

As evident from Figure 5, the impact on the Northern and Western Region's labour market varied on a sub-regional level. As of Q2 2020, 77,491 people or 46 per cent of the Border's labour force were in receipt of either the "Pandemic Unemployment Payment", the "Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme" or were

registered on the "Live Register".

This was above the corresponding national ratio of 39.9 per cent and the highest ratio recorded out of the eight sub-regions of Ireland.

Although the ratio for the West – at 38.3 per cent – was below the corresponding national ratio of 39.9 per cent, this figure nevertheless highlights the substantial impact of COVID-19 on the West's labour market.

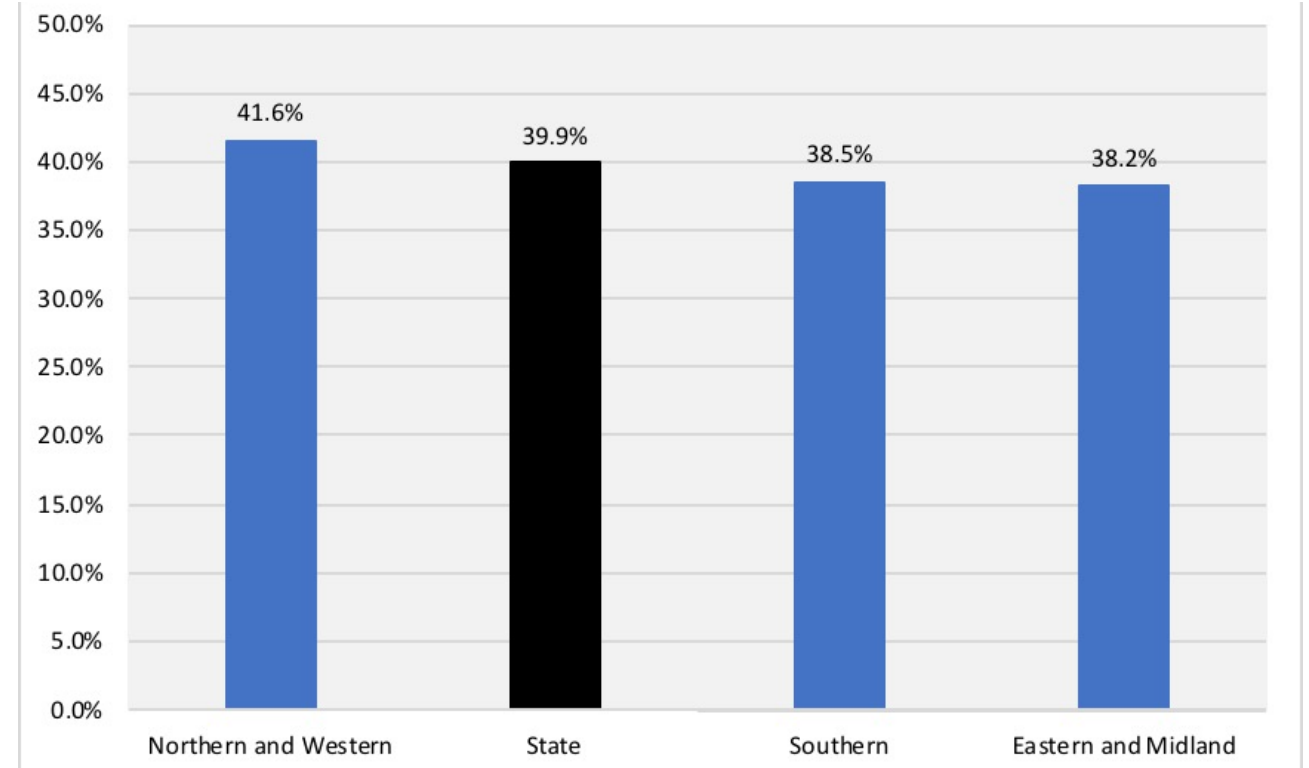


Figure 4: Share of labour force in each region in receipt of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment, the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme or on the Live Register, by region, as of Q2 2020

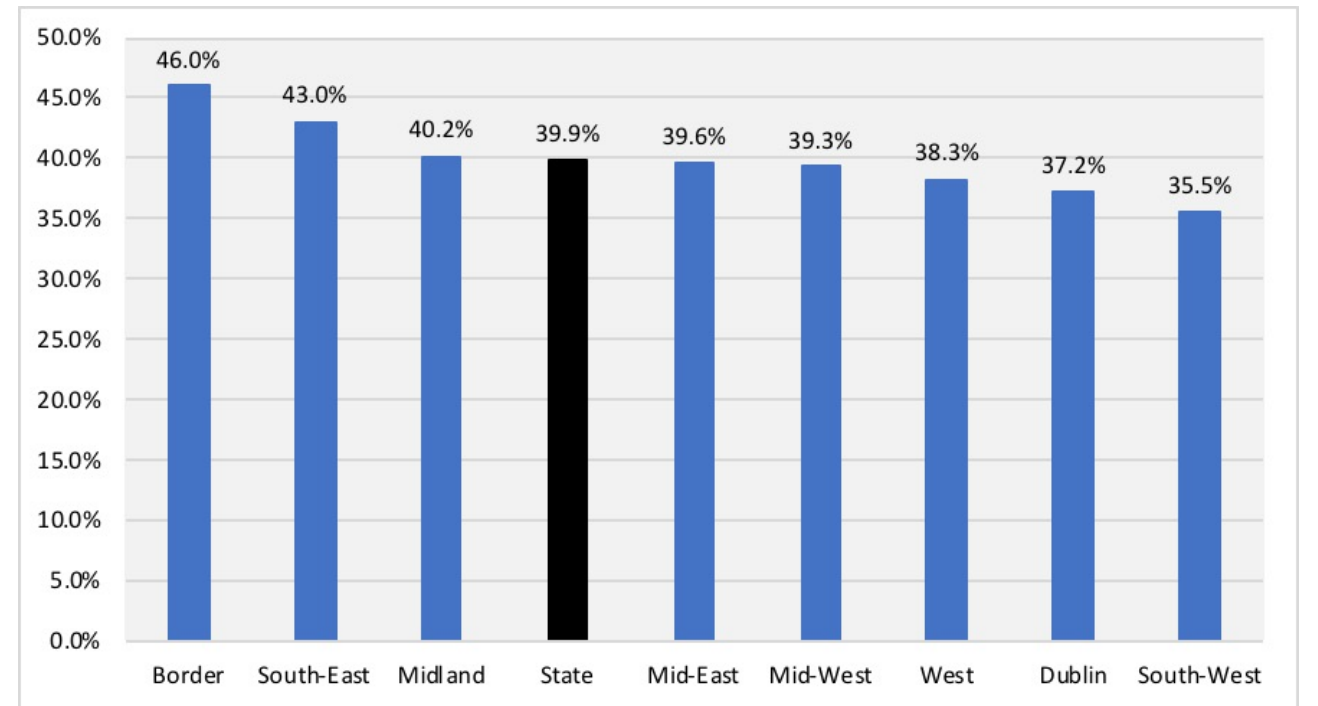


Figure 5: Share of labour force in each sub-region in receipt of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment, the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme or on the Live Register, by sub-region, as of Q2 2020



## 2.0 Commercial Market Impact

Although the outbreak of COVID-19 – and the subsequent economic disruption – has had a substantial impact on the Northern and Western Region’s labour market, the degree to which this impact will be felt across the commercial markets of our regions, sub-regions, counties, cities and towns remains to be seen. On this basis, the three Regional Assemblies of Ireland prepared a “COVID-19 Regional Economic Analysis ” to identify which geographical areas in Ireland were more likely to experience significant economic disruption caused by the necessary public health measures.

Using the GeoDirectory commercial database, and specifically the NACE codes allocated to commercial units as of September 2019, the three Regional Assemblies of Ireland have identified each geographical area’s reliance on the sectors that are likely to be severely affected by the public health measures. The purpose of this analysis was to inform policy makers at a local, regional and national level in order to assist the process of economic recovery, allowing them to identify the degree of economic resilience of Ireland’s regions, sub-regions, counties, cities and towns; a key principal envisioned in the Northern and Western Regional Assembly’s RSES.

On foot of this, “COVID-19 Exposure Ratios” were developed for each of Ireland’s regions, sub-regions, counties, cities and for 199 CSO defined settlements ; the purpose of which was to identify which geographical areas were likely to experience

significant economic disruption as a result of this crisis. Specifically, a geographical area’s “COVID-19 Exposure Ratio” represents the total number of its commercial units that were operating in the sectors likely to be worst affected by the COVID-19 outbreak, as a share of its total commercial stock as of September 2019. The higher this ratio is for a geographical area, the more likely this geographical area is exposed to significant economic disruption as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, as many firms in these sectors are likely to be severely impacted from this crisis. Commercial units that were listed in the GeoDirectory database with the following NACE code classifications were considered to represent the sectors likely to be worst affected by the COVID-19 outbreak.

- NACE Code B “Mining and Quarrying”
- NACE Code F “Construction”
- NACE Code G “Wholesale and Retail Services” excluding commercial units classified as “essential services” as per the government guidelines at the time of writing
- NACE Code I “Accommodation and Food Services”
- NACE Code R “Arts, Entertainment and Recreation Services”
- NACE Code Q.88.91 “Child Day-Care Activities”
- NACE Codes S.96.02 “Hairdressing and other beauty

For the Northern and Western region as a whole, 48.6 per cent of its commercial units were operating in the worst affected sectors, implying that just over 16,515 of its commercial units were likely to be severely impacted as a result of the public health measures. This was above the corresponding “COVID-19 Exposure Ratio” for the State as a whole, which was 46 per cent.

Both sub-regions of the Northern and Western region recorded “COVID-19 exposure ratios” above the national average of 46 per cent. Of the eight sub-regions of Ireland, the Border had the highest “COVID-19 Exposure Ratio”, with 49.5 per cent or 8,128 of its commercial units likely to be severely impacted as a result of the public health measures. Of the eight sub-regions of Ireland, the West had the fourth highest “COVID-19 Exposure Ratio”, with 47.8 per cent or 8,387 of its commercial units likely to be severely impacted as a result of the public health measures.

In terms of counties, coastal and rural counties are more likely to be severely impacted due to their reliance on commercial units that generally require human interaction and cannot be operated remotely. In contrast, exposure is likely to be lower in more urban based counties as such counties rely more on economic activities that are capable of operating remotely; namely activities such as ICT, Finance and professional and technical services.

All 8 counties based in the Northern and Western Region registered above average “COVID-19 exposure ratios”, with the highest exposure ratio in the region recorded in Donegal,

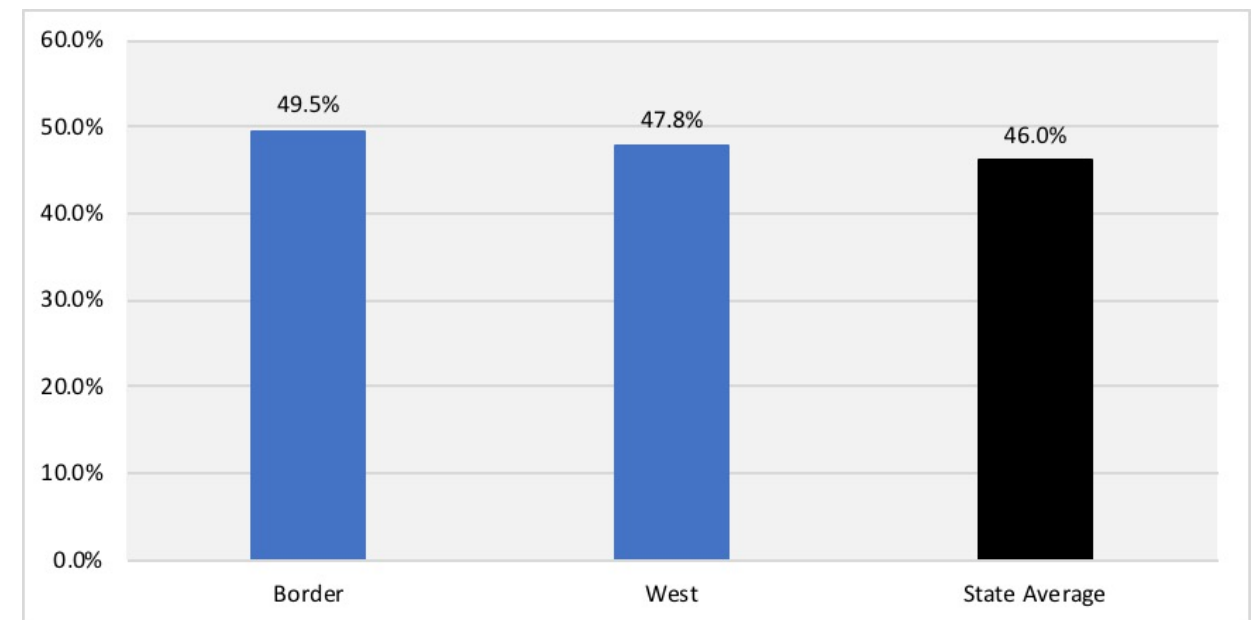


Figure 6: COVID-19 Exposure Ratios, for the sub-regions of the Northern and Western Region, September 2019

with 50.6 per cent of its commercial units likely to be severely impacted as a result of the public health measures.

The next most exposed county based in the Northern and Western Region was Cavan (50.5 per cent) which was the 4th most exposed county in Ireland and then Mayo (also 49.7 per cent) which was the 9th most exposed county in Ireland. Galway – in absolute terms – had the highest number of commercial units operating in the sectors likely to be worst affected in the region, with 4,253 of its units likely to be severely impacted.



Of the five cities of Ireland, Galway City and Suburbs registered the highest “COVID-19 Exposure Ratio” with 46.1 per cent of its commercial units likely to be severely impacted as a result of the outbreak of COVID-19. Out of the 11 Regional Growth Centres and Key Towns outlined in the Northern and Western Regional Assembly’s RSES, 8 recorded “COVID-19 Exposure Ratios” above the national average, namely Carrick-on-Shannon, Athlone, Castlebar, Letterkenny, Cavan Town, Ballina, Roscommon Town, Monaghan Town, while Galway City and Suburbs also recorded an above average ratio, as evident from Figure 8.

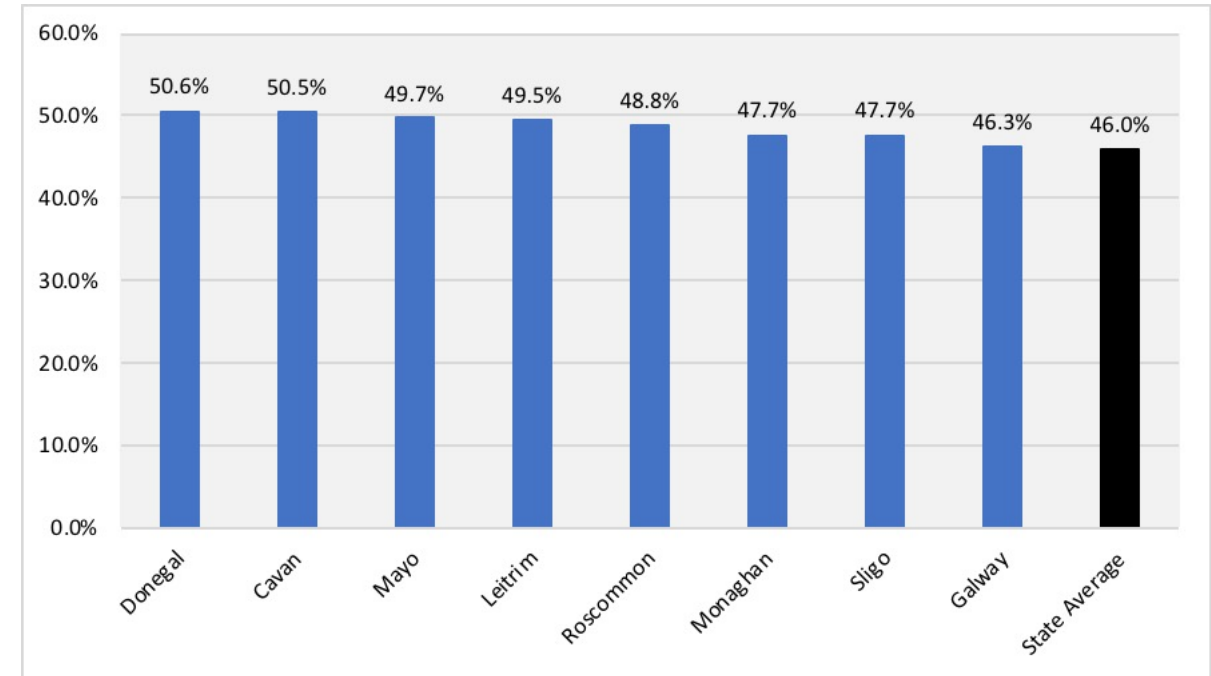


Figure 7: COVID-19 Exposure Ratios, for the counties of the Northern and Western Region, September 2019

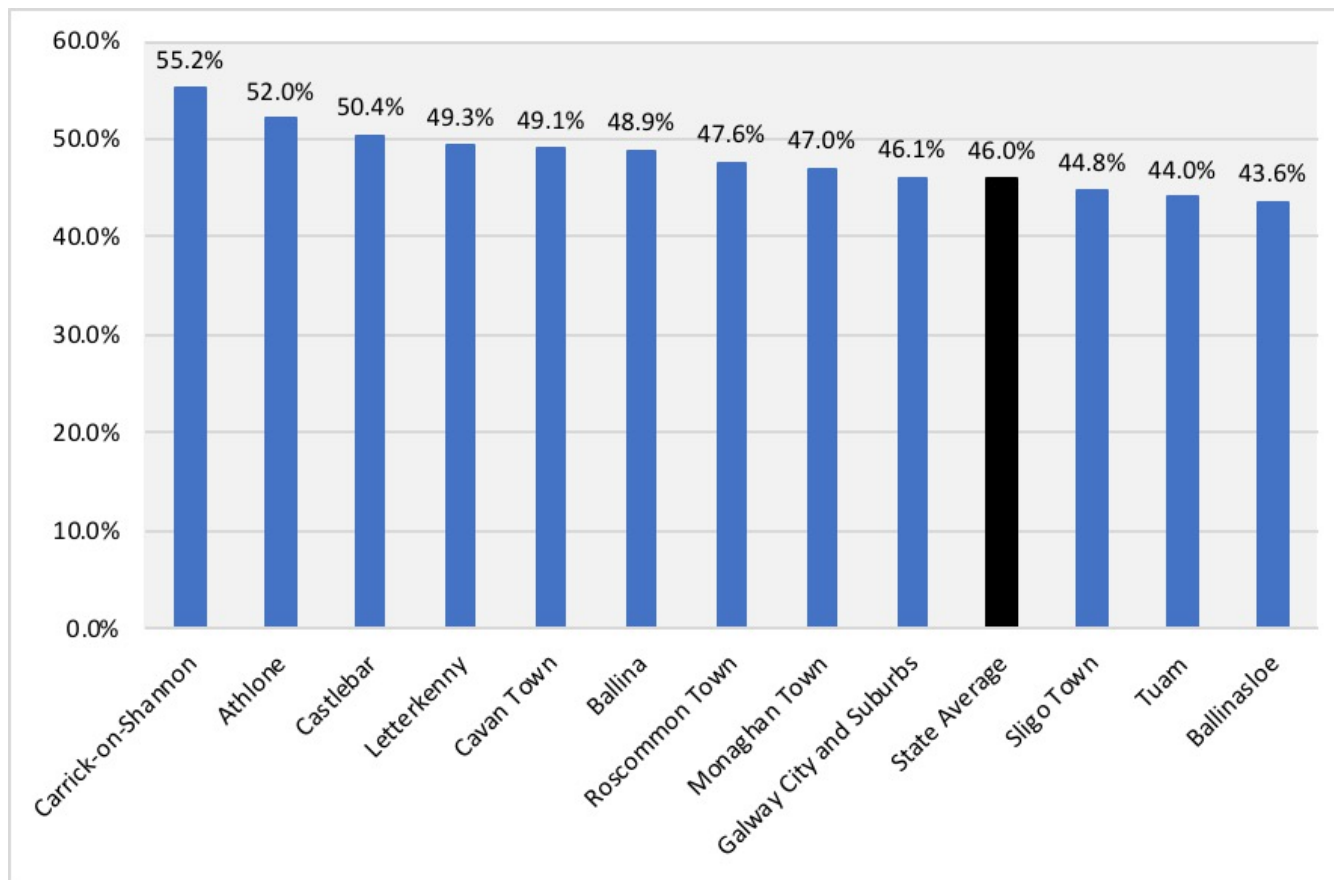


Figure 8: COVID-19 Exposure Ratios, for key towns and cities of the Northern and Western Region, September 2019



## 4.0 Priorities



## 4.0 Priorities for the NWRA

The National Economic Recovery Plan will be key to achieving the overarching vision of the Northern and Western Regional Assembly's RSES; which is to develop a region that is "Vibrant", "Natural", "Connected", "Inclusive" and a "Great Place to Live", while building on a strong settlement strategy that is focused on "People and Places".

The Regional Policy Objectives (RPOs) of the Northern and Western Regional Assembly's RSES are aligned to these five ambitions as well as our settlement strategy with our high level priorities for the forthcoming National Economic Recovery Plan as follows:

### Vibrant Ambition:

- 1. Develop a Smart Specialisation Strategy for the Northern and Western Region
- 2. Invest in the key tourism assets of the Northern and Western Region
- 3. Support the growth of the region's ICT and Med-Tech enterprise base
- 4. Ensure funding allows the region to capitalise on emerging trends in renewable energy production and the low carbon economy

- 5. Support the region's Agriculture industry and its Blue and Bio-Economies
- 6. Enhance funding opportunities for our region's town and village centres

### Natural Ambition:

- 1. Invest in the key natural, cultural and heritage assets of the Northern and Western Region
- 2. Provide additional resources to expand our greenway and blueway networks

### Connected Ambition:

- 1. Support and enhance investment in the region's sea ports and airports
- 2. Ensure the delivery of designated road projects outlined in the RSES
- 3. Improve the connectivity of Northern and Western Region's public transport infrastructure
- 4. Ensure the roll out of the National Broadband Plan and Smart Technologies in the region

## Inclusive Ambition:

1. Deliver infrastructure improvements that enhance the quality of life offering of the region
2. Ensure funding enhances the Northern and Western Region's human capital levels
3. Provide adequate levels of housing to meet the needs of our communities
4. Enhance the level of funding for Co-Working hubs in the Galway Metropolitan Area, our Regional Growth Centres and Key Towns
5. Support Connacht Ulster Alliance ambition to become a Technological University and support development of third level education facilities in Cavan/Monaghan sub-region

## Infrastructure Ambition:

1. Facilitate the delivery and expansion of natural gas infrastructure throughout the region
2. Support and enhance investment in the region's water and wastewater infrastructure
3. Invest in Electricity Transmission network in N&W region
4. Ensure additional infrastructure investment allows for a transition to a low carbon economy

## People and Places:

1. Provide investment in infrastructure necessary to enable delivery of housing stock in line with the compact growth targets of the RSES and the NPF
2. Ensure urban and rural renewal funding schemes are aligned to the spatial objectives of the RSES
3. Ensure Irish Water provide targeted enabling investment in smaller towns and villages to facilitate their regeneration, through development of brownfield and serviced sites.

Key enablers in pursuit of this vision are priorities that make the region:

1. **More Urban** - Stronger urban infrastructure through policies encouraging more compact growth and creating a built environment conducive to sustainable growth.
2. **More Smart** - Smart Region will create new know-how, business and jobs by utilizing openness, digitalization and innovative partnerships.
3. **More Specialised** - Simultaneously, throughout our extensive consultation, and according to the regional innovation actors, increased collaboration and enhanced entrepreneurial discovery processes are essential, in order to realise the full potential of regional collaborative innovation (smart specialisation).
4. **More Green** - Climate Transition is identified as a regional priority focusing on decarbonisation, circular efficiency and climate adaptation



## MORE URBAN

In tandem with European Policy, Ireland through the NPF has introduced ‘Metropolitan Planning’ across our 5 Cities and larger Growth Centres (Sligo, Letterkenny and Athlone). Contained in our RSES specific to this policy shift are a set of comprehensive objectives that aim to create centres of scale which have the critical mass to drive growth, with an aligned functional role and level of services that support sustainable growth. The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy contains the following urban strategies:

1. Galway Metropolitan Area Strategy
2. Sligo Regional Growth Centre Strategy
3. Letterkenny Regional Growth Centre Strategy (including the North West City Region Strategic Planning Framework – ie. Letterkenny/Derry/Strabane)
4. Athlone Growth Centre Strategy

Each of these have a common thread (more smart, more specialised and more green) with simultaneous implementation groupings made up of Departments, Local Authorities, State Agencies, HEI’s, Innovation actors, industry and local socio-economic groupings. Each location has a set of ‘key enabling projects’ for development.

## MORE SMART

EU Cohesion Policy aims to deliver smarter Europe, we need to align our policies to maximise this opportunity. To achieve the

ambitions of our region requires a strong and prosperous regional economy that embraces the overwhelming digital trends underway globally. To make these new technologies work better for all, the RSES ensures policies and systems are in place that can help people transition to a world much more digitally connected.

This has significant economic and spatial implications and if not considered strategically could exacerbate current challenges particularly in the more rural areas of the region. The concept of Smart Region is an extension and the next phase in the development of a Smart City model, which recognises that, for the region to achieve our smart potential future, we need to consider the opportunities, benefits and challenges that smart technologies can offer beyond the traditional applications in a mostly urban context. Adopting a Smart approach to building our regional innovation system encourages the rapid diffusion of knowledge, skills and best practice.

## MORE SPECIALISED

The Northern and Western Region is the perfect location for innovation and change to be embraced and to provide a collaborative platform for the development of a Smart Specialisation Strategy with stakeholders. Harnessing resources from national funds, ESF / ERDF and tailoring interventions in line with the ‘More Urban’, More Smart and More Green objectives.

This approach shall be an integral tool in developing the region’s innovative capacity to nurture businesses, artists, creatives and innovators, thus generating economic growth in key industry sectors. Adopting a Smart approach to building our regional innovation system encourages the rapid diffusion of knowledge, skills and best practice.

## MORE GREEN

This region has the unique natural endowment of ample carbon-neutral, energy supplies that gives us an opportunity of forging and leading the new clean economy of the future.

The RSES sets out policies to address climate change across all strategic areas focusing on decarbonisation, circular efficiency and climate adaptation. There are acute objectives in the RSES promoting innovative investments;

- To improve energy efficiency
- Additional renewable energy production capacity
- Digital management systems developed for smart grids

## Conclusion:

The National Economic Recovery Plan must be cognisant of the dual economy we have in Ireland. The economic data evidence provided within this submission and the fact our region is now considered a “Region in Transition” are unequivocally demonstrates that the Northern & Western Region of Ireland require the National Recovery Plan to positively discriminate in favour of this region.

This approach of positive discrimination not only will assist our region reach its potential, but in so doing will also assist the other regions in Ireland with their challenges, whether that be housing, infrastructure or transport issues.

The historical regional imbalance, coupled with both the Covid 19 exposure (All 8 counties based in the Northern and Western Region registered above average “COVID-19 exposure ratios”) and the potential impacts of BREXIT as a border region will require a new and transformative approach to exchequer support provisions to unleash its latent potential.

A new and dynamic approach, focused on long term regional and national goals, following both the NPF and RSES as the blueprint for recovery, will provide the opportunity for our region to grow and assist Ireland’s recovery., This National Economic Recovery Plan must seize the opportunity before it is too late for the west and border communities.



# Footnotes

1 28th of June 2020

2 Q2 2020 labour force: CSO Q2 2020 Labour Force Survey

3 28th of June 2020

4 Q2 2020 labour force: CSO Q2 2020 Labour Force Survey

5 <https://www.nwra.ie/news/coronavirus-the-towns-most-economically-at-risk/>

6 “COVID-19 Exposure Ratio” represents the total number of its commercial units that were operating in the sectors likely to be worst affected by the COVID-19 outbreak, as a proportion of its total commercial stock as of September 2019

7 7th of September

8 <https://www.centralbank.ie/docs/default-source/publications/quarterly-bulletins/boxes/qb3-2020/box-e-regional-labour-market-impact-of-covid-19.pdf>

9 NUTS 2 regions

10 NUTS 3 regions

11 28th of June 2020

12 Q2 2020 CSO labour force data: <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/lfs/labourforcesurvey/lfsquarter22020/>

13 28th of June 2020

14 Q2 2020 labour force: CSO Q2 2020 Labour Force Survey

15 <https://www.nwra.ie/news/coronavirus-the-towns-most-economically-at-risk/>

16 Comprises of all commercial units excluding residential units. Also excluded are units classified as Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing and Extraterritorial Organisations and Bodies (e.g. Embassies)

17 CSO defined settlements with a population of 1,500 or more as per Census 2016

18 <https://statbank.cso.ie/px/u/NACECoder/NACEItems/searchnace.asp>