



Northern & Western  
Regional Assembly

## Submission on DFHERIS

# Statement of Strategy 2023-2025

March 2023



Rialtas  
na hÉireann  
Government  
of Ireland

Tionscadal Éireann  
Project Ireland  
2040



**The National Planning Framework<sup>1</sup> (NPF) and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy<sup>2</sup> (RSES) of the Northern and Western Region offer an ambitious proposition to address regional inequalities and deliver effective regional development in Ireland.**

Both the NPF and the RSES's aim to deliver a 50:50 distribution of population growth between the Eastern and Midland Region, and the Southern Region and the Northern and Western Region combined by 2040. The implementation of these strategies has the potential to significantly realign the composition of Ireland's population and employment base, allowing the Northern and Western Region and the Southern Region to develop centres of scale which can provide a credible counterbalance to the Greater Dublin Area and improve the quality of life and realise the potential of each region for the benefit of all citizens in Ireland.

Delivering these targets and supporting better balanced and effective regional development in Ireland will depend on several factors including – but not limited to – the ability of our regions to support and grow their human capital base, namely our skills, talent and knowledge. Central to improving our region's performance in this regard will be the ability of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) in supporting and growing the Northern and Western Region's Higher Education Institutes, Further Education and Training bodies and research assets.

This could not be more important considering the notable challenges being experienced by the Northern and Western Region's economy and the fact that the European Commission continues to note that considerable regional disparities exist in Ireland.<sup>3</sup> Notably, these economic challenges are evident from the fact that the European Commission downgraded the Northern and Western Region's economy in recent years – from a “More Developed Region” to lower economic status known as a “Transition Region”<sup>4</sup> – while the Commission has also noted that the Northern and Western Region is now the only NUTS 2 Region on the island of Ireland to be defined as a Moderate Innovator, as outlined in Section 2 of this submission. The continuation of these economic trends will undermine the delivery of the targets outlined in the NPF and the RSES of the Northern and Western Region.

Within this context, the Northern and Western Regional Assembly welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the development of the new statement of strategy for the DFHERIS covering the period of 2023 to 2025. A regionally focused statement of strategy has the potential to significantly reduce regional disparities and deliver better balanced and effective regional development in Ireland, with the strategy providing an opportunity to identify priorities which will facilitate more sustainable development patterns in the Northern and Western Region.

**At a high level, the Northern and Western Regional Assembly believes that the new statement of strategy should examine how a policy of “Positive Discrimination” could be adopted towards the Northern and Western Region's Higher and Further Education Institutes and research assets. The purpose of this policy would be to regain the region's previously held status as a “More Developed Region” and as a “Strong Innovator” and in order to support the implementation of the NPF and the RSES of the Northern and Western Region. A policy of “Positive discrimination” aims to address regional disparities by providing above average levels of resources to struggling regional economies.**

<sup>1</sup> <https://npf.ie/wp-content/uploads/Project-Ireland-2040-NPF.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nwra.ie/pdfs/NWRA-RSES-2020-2032.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/2022-european-semester-country-report-ireland\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/2022-european-semester-country-report-ireland_en.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nwra.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/region-in-transition-the-way-forward-final.pdf>

In this regard, the Northern and Western Regional Assembly makes a number of high-level recommendations which should be reflected in the new statement of strategy, namely:

1. Positively discriminate in favour of the Northern and Western Region's Higher Education Institutes.
2. Support the provision of third level education facilities and services in the Cavan, Monaghan, Roscommon and Leitrim sub-regions.
3. Increase the level of funding provided to the Human Capital Initiative, thereby supporting programmes – such as Springboard – which improve upskilling, skills development and lifelong learning rates in the Northern and Western Region.
4. Positively discriminate in favour of the Northern and Western Region's ETBs.
5. Provide additional funding to the ETBs of the Northern and Western Region in order to promote the service offering and learning outcomes of these training bodies.
6. Improve the level of financial assistance available to SMEs that allow their employees to participate on skills development initiatives – such as "Skills to Advance", the "Apprenticeship Incentivisation Scheme" and the "Explore" program – and employer lead training networks such as "Skillsnet".
7. Provide greater financial resources to support more research and PhD positions in the Northern and Western Region's Higher Education Institutes and research assets.
8. Adopt a regional approach for the implementation of "Impact 2030: Ireland's Research and Innovation Strategy".
9. Facilitate greater collaboration between the Northern and Western Region's enterprise base and its Higher Education Institutes and research assets.
10. Examine the merits in enhancing grant relief rates on R&D funding schemes and providing more direct funding to enterprises undertaking R&D activities
11. Reinforce the importance of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and Horizon Europe in supporting research and innovation in Ireland.
12. Increase the level of funding available for education programmes and research projects that incorporate an all-island dimension.



## 2.1: Transition Region Status

### Key messages

- The Border's GDP per capita has dropped to 52% of the EU27 average, the lowest since records began.
- In 2021, the Northern and Western Region's GDP per capita was 83% of the EU27 average.
- These economic trends highlight the need to adopt a policy of "Positive Discrimination" towards the Northern and Western Region.

According to the latest available Eurostat statistics,<sup>5</sup> the Northern and Western Region's GDP per capita was 83 per cent of the EU27 average as of 2021. Although this represents an increase of 4 percentage points relative to 2020, the Northern and Western Region's GDP per capita remains 11 percentage points lower than the region's corresponding ratio in 2010, and 22 percentage points lower compared to the region's previous peak of 105 per cent as of 2006, as evident from Figure 1. The Northern and Western Region does not seem to be affected by the distortions associated with regional GDP figures in Ireland.

Eurostat have also released their latest NUTS 3 Regional GDP figures,<sup>6</sup> with these statistics showing the economic performance of the Border and the West relative to the EU27 average between 2000 and 2020. The Border's GDP per capita (PPS<sup>7</sup>) – as a percentage of the EU27 average – was estimated to be 52 per cent in 2020, representing a decline of 13 percentage points compared to 2019; suggesting that the economic impact of COVID-19 in the Border may have been notably acute, in line with the findings of the COVID-19 Regional Economic Analysis.<sup>8</sup>

As evident from Figure 3, the Border's GDP per capita – as a percentage of the EU27 average – was down 46 percentage points on its previous peak of 98 per cent as of 2006 and was down 21 percentage points on its performance a decade ago, when the Border's GDP per capita was 73 per cent of the EU27 average. Encouragingly, the West's GDP per capita – as a percentage of the EU27 average – rose to 103 per cent in 2020, which was the first time the region was above the EU27 average since 2015 and represents a 9 percentage point increase relative to its performance in 2019. That said, the West's GDP per capita remains 8 percentage points below its peak of 111 per cent in 2012.

Such figures reinforce the need to develop a policy of "Positive Discrimination" in favour of the Northern and Western Region by providing a higher rate of investment – per student – in our region's higher and further education and R&D assets. Any additional funding resources provided need to support the strategic priorities of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy<sup>9</sup> of the Northern and Western Region, namely for the region to be more "Urban", "Connected", "Smart", "Specialised", "Green" and focused on "People and Places".

<sup>5</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/regions/data/database>

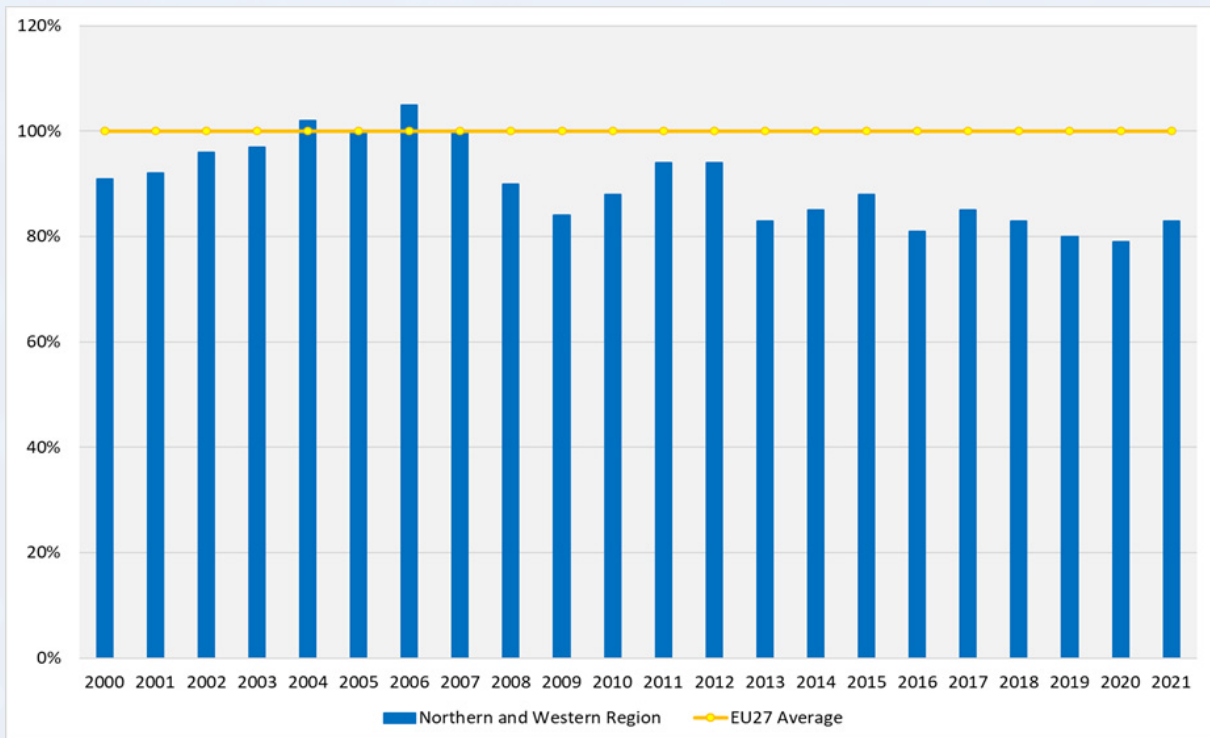
<sup>6</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/regions/data/database>

<sup>7</sup> Purchasing power standard

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.nwra.ie/news/coronavirus-the-towns-most-economically-at-risk/>

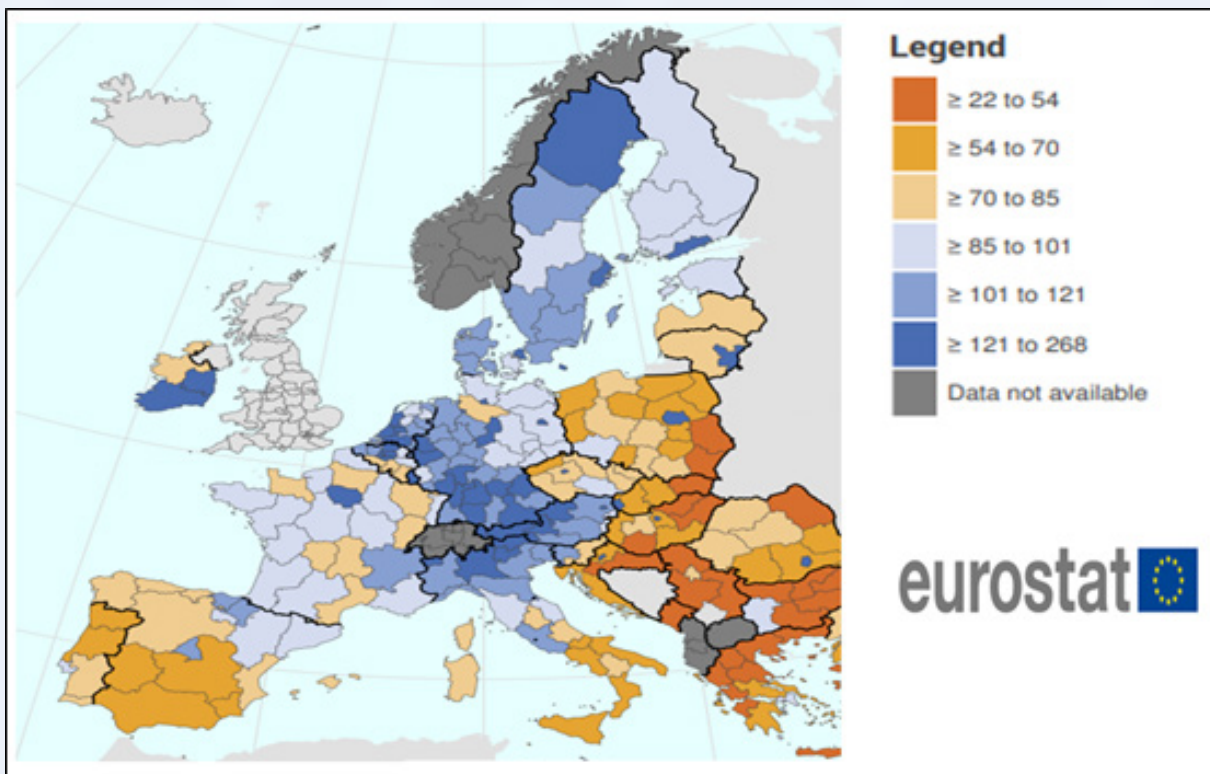
<sup>9</sup> <https://www.nwra.ie/pdfs/NWRA-RSES-2020-2032.pdf>

**Figure 1: GDP per capita – as a percentage of the EU27 average – for the Northern and Western Region, 2000-2021 (PPS)**



Source: Eurostat

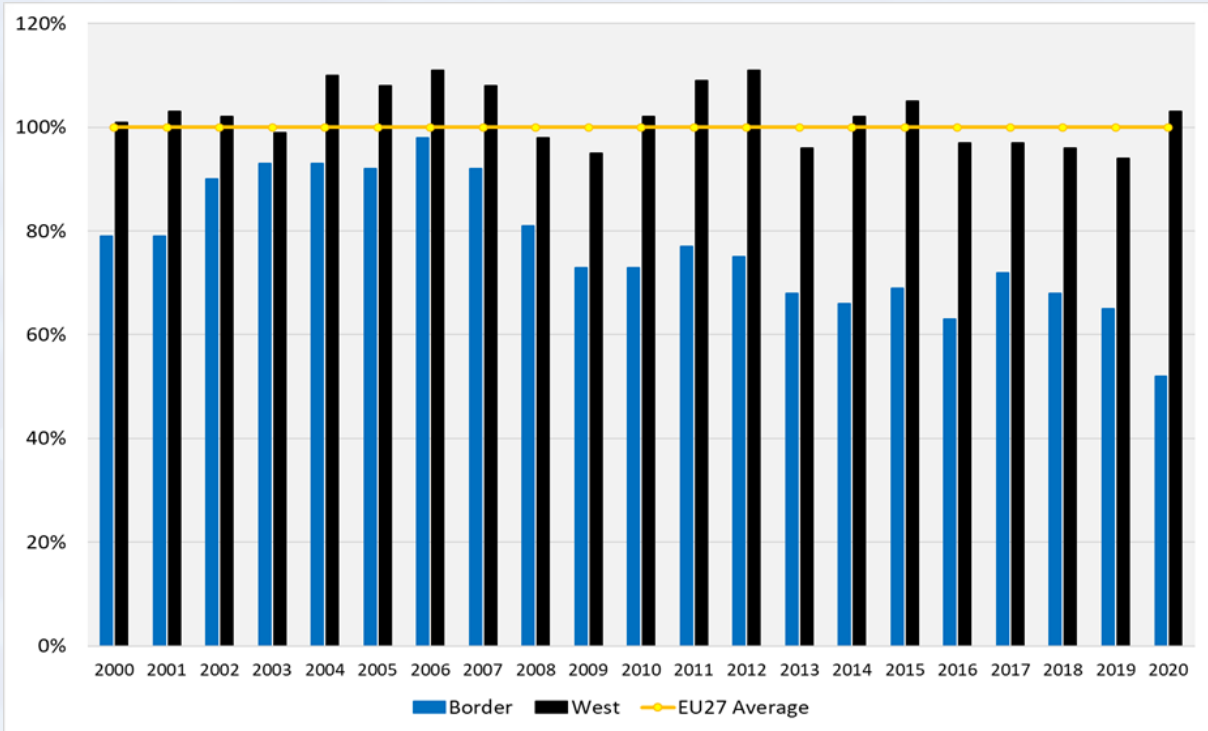
**Figure 2: GDP per capita – as a percentage of the EU27 average – for the NUTS 2 Regions of Europe, 2021 (PPS)**



Source: Eurostat

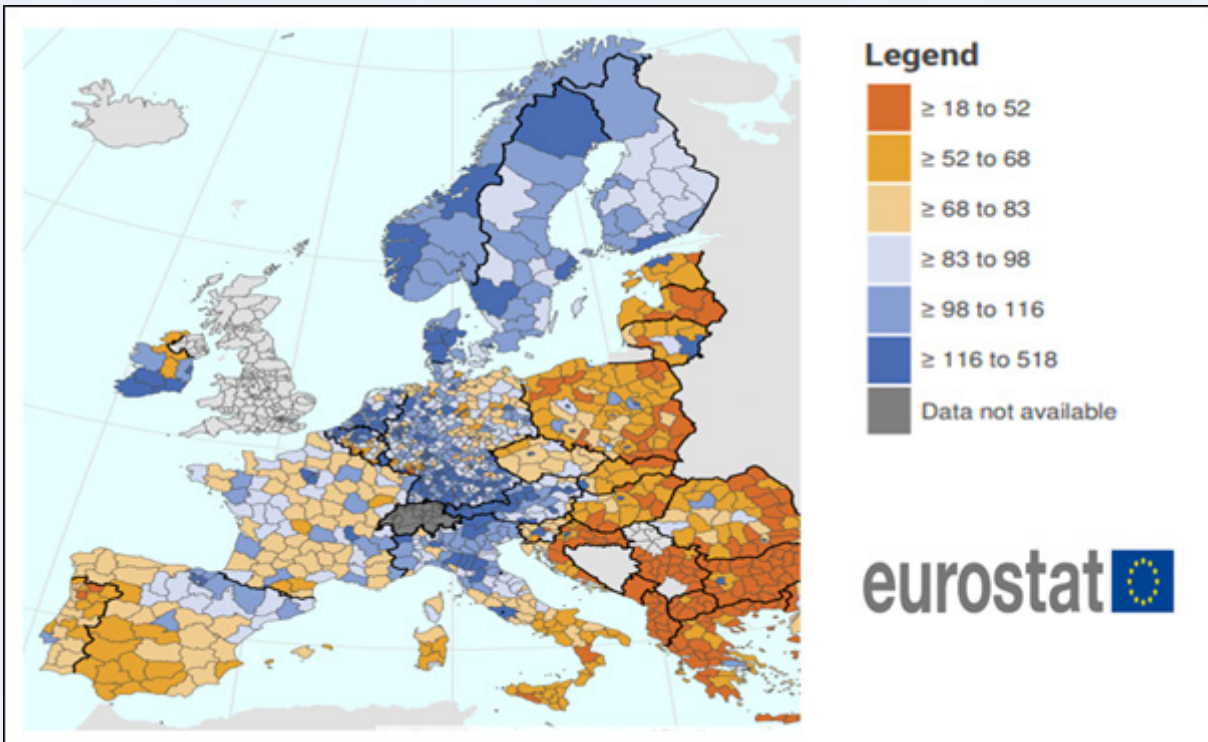


**Figure 3: GDP per capita – as a % of the EU27 average – for the Border and the West, 2000-2020**



Source: Eurostat

**Figure 4: GDP per capita – as a percentage of the EU27 average – for the NUTS 3 Regions of Europe, 2020 (PPS)**



Source: Eurostat

## 2.2: Moderate Innovator Status

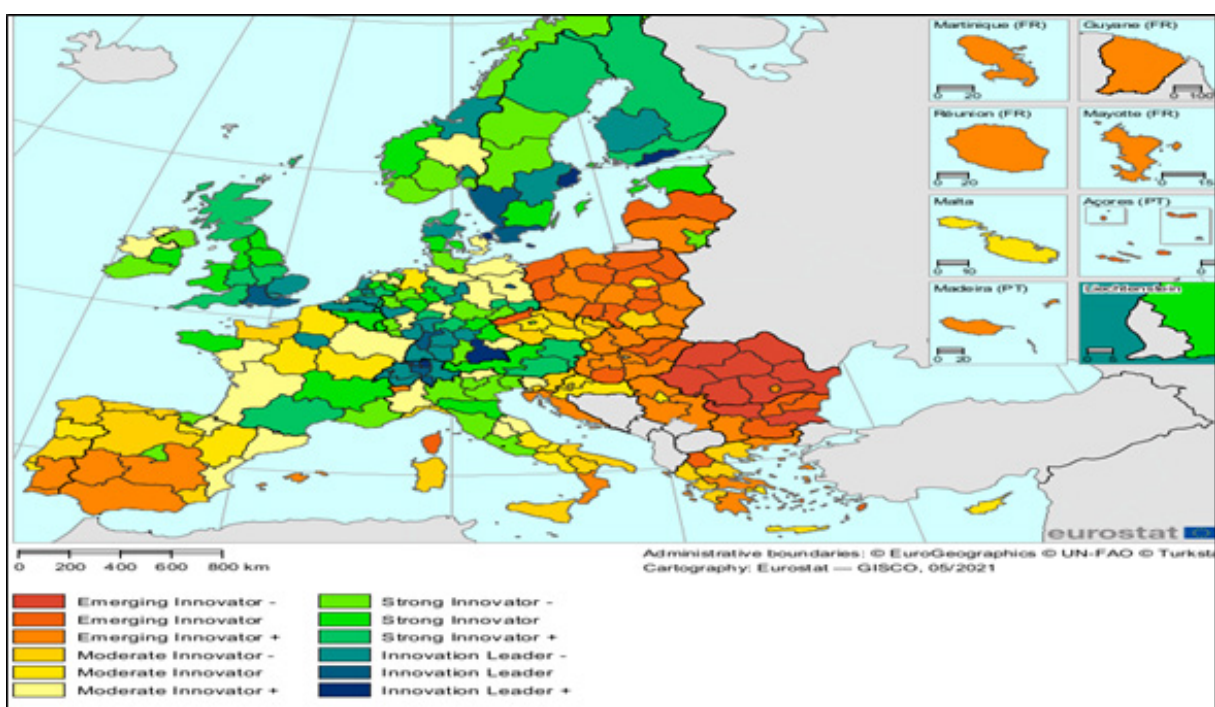
### Key messages

- Northern and Western Region is the only region in Ireland to be classified as a “Moderate Innovator”.
- Region has seen low levels of R&D expenditure in both the public and private sectors.
- Moderate innovator status highlights the need for a policy of “Positive Discrimination” towards the research assets of the Northern and Western Region.

Recently, the European Commission released the 2021 “Regional Innovation Scoreboard<sup>10</sup>” which assesses the innovation performance of regions across Europe, providing a comparative assessment of the performance of innovation systems across 240 regions in the EU. As per the latest results, the Northern and Western Region is now the only region in Ireland to be considered a “Moderate Innovator” – which is a region to record a regional innovation index score between 70 and 100 per cent of the EU average – whereas the Southern Region and Eastern and Midland Region are classified as being “Strong Innovators”, namely regions with a regional innovation index score between 100 and 125 per cent of the EU average. Although the region’s overall innovation index score has improved since 2014, the Northern and Western Region continues to record notable weaknesses – relative to the EU average in 2021 – in terms of:

- ◇ R&D expenditure in the private and public sectors
- ◇ Employed ICT specialists
- ◇ Employment in knowledge-intensive activities
- ◇ Patent applications
- ◇ Trademark applications
- ◇ Design applications

Figure 5: Regional Innovation Scoreboard, 2021



Source: European Commission

<sup>10</sup> [Regional innovation scoreboard | Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&plugin=1)

## 2.3: Growing and Sizable Student Population

### Key messages

- Just over 46,000 enrolments were registered in Higher Education Institutes located in the Northern and Western Region.
- The region's share of enrolments has risen from 16.3% in the 2010 / 2011 academic year to 17.5% in 2020 / 2021.
- Below average attainments rates and above average growth rates in enrolments highlight the need for a policy of "Positive Discrimination" for the region

Based on data from the Higher Education Authority,<sup>11</sup> the number of undergraduate and postgraduate students that have been enrolled in Higher Education Institutes based in the Northern and Western Region has been increasing over the past decade, rising from 34,018 in the academic year 2010 / 2011 to 46,140 as of 2020 / 2021.

During this time, enrolments in Higher Education Institutes located in the Northern and Western Region have risen by 36 per cent, compared to the State average of 26 per cent, while the average annual growth rate in enrolments for Higher Education Institutes located in the region was 3.2%, which was above the corresponding rate for the State average (+2.4%). As evident from Figure 6, the Northern and Western Region's share of enrolments has risen from 16.3 per cent in 2010 / 2011 academic year to 17.5 per cent in 2020 / 2021.

In terms of overall third level education attainment rates, both the sub-regions of the Northern and Western Region recorded below average third level attainments rates. In 2022, 48 per cent of adults in the Border had a third level qualification in 2022, which was below the State average of 53 per cent. Likewise, 52 per cent of adults in the West had a third level qualification in 2022, which was also below the State average of 53 per cent. Of the eight NUTS 3 Regions of Ireland, Dublin had the highest third level attainment rate in 2022 – at 62% – with the Border registering the joint second lowest rate in Ireland, as evident from Figure 7.<sup>12</sup>

The Department of Education also provides data on the number of Further Education and Training (FET) beneficiaries<sup>13</sup> who are enrolled in each Education and Training Board (ETB) in Ireland. Prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, the number of FET beneficiaries registered in the ETBs based in the Northern and Western Region amounted to 63,756 in 2019, with this figure dropping to 43,775 in 2020, with the impact of COVID-19 being credited to this year-on-year decline.<sup>14</sup> Notwithstanding this decline, such figures highlight the importance of the FET sector to the Northern and Western Region's economy and its human capital profile, with the region accounting for 19.2 per cent of all FET beneficiaries in Ireland as of 2020, up from 15.2 per cent in 2014. Considering the challenges being experienced by the region's economy and given that the region's student population is quite sizable and rising, the Assembly believes that a policy of "Positive Discrimination" needs to be adopted towards the Northern and Western Region's Higher Education Institutes, FET bodies and research assets, as a means of improving the region's economic performance and supporting the implementation of the NPF and the RSES.



OLLSCOIL NA GAILLIMHĒ  
UNIVERSITY OF GALWAY



Ollscoil  
Teicneolaíochta  
an Atlantaigh

Atlantic  
Technological  
University

<sup>11</sup> Data provided to the Northern and Western Regional Assembly on the 1st of March 2022

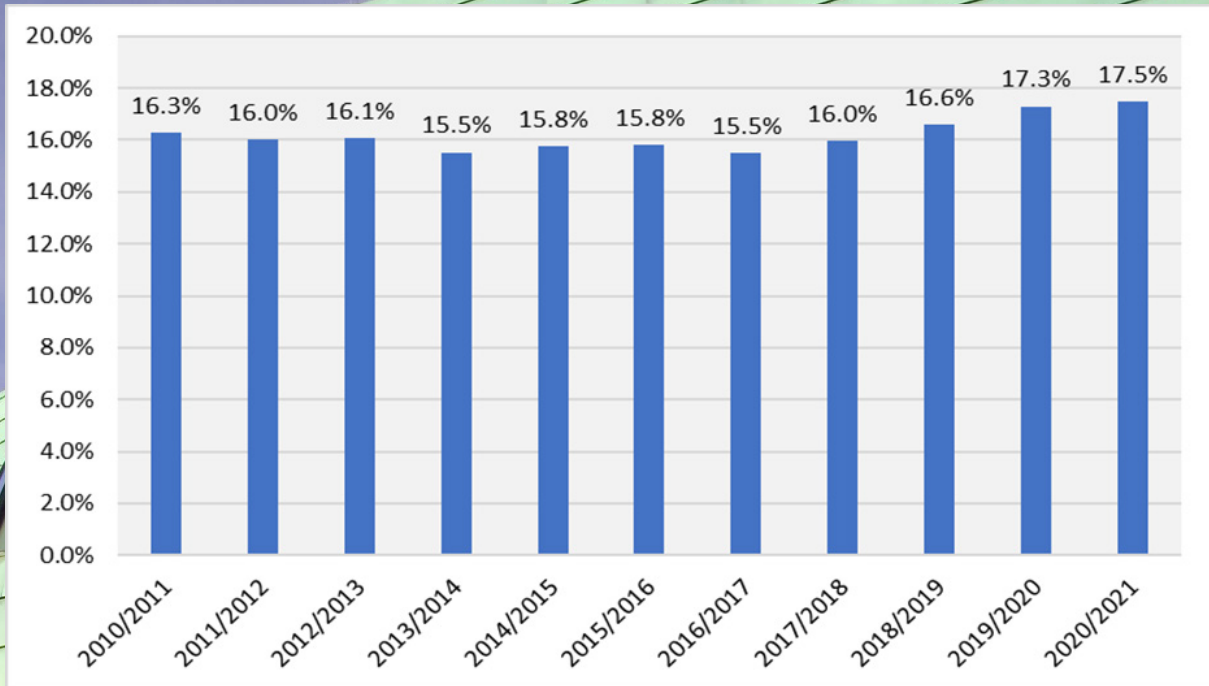
<sup>12</sup> <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-eda/educationalattainmentthematicreport2022/profileofagesexnationalityandregion/>

<sup>13</sup> Beneficiaries metric records an individual learner based on the number of FET courses they have been registered in the declared year.

<sup>14</sup> Consultations with the Department of Education suggest that this decline can be attributed to the fact that some courses simply couldn't be held remotely, or some users didn't want to learn online.

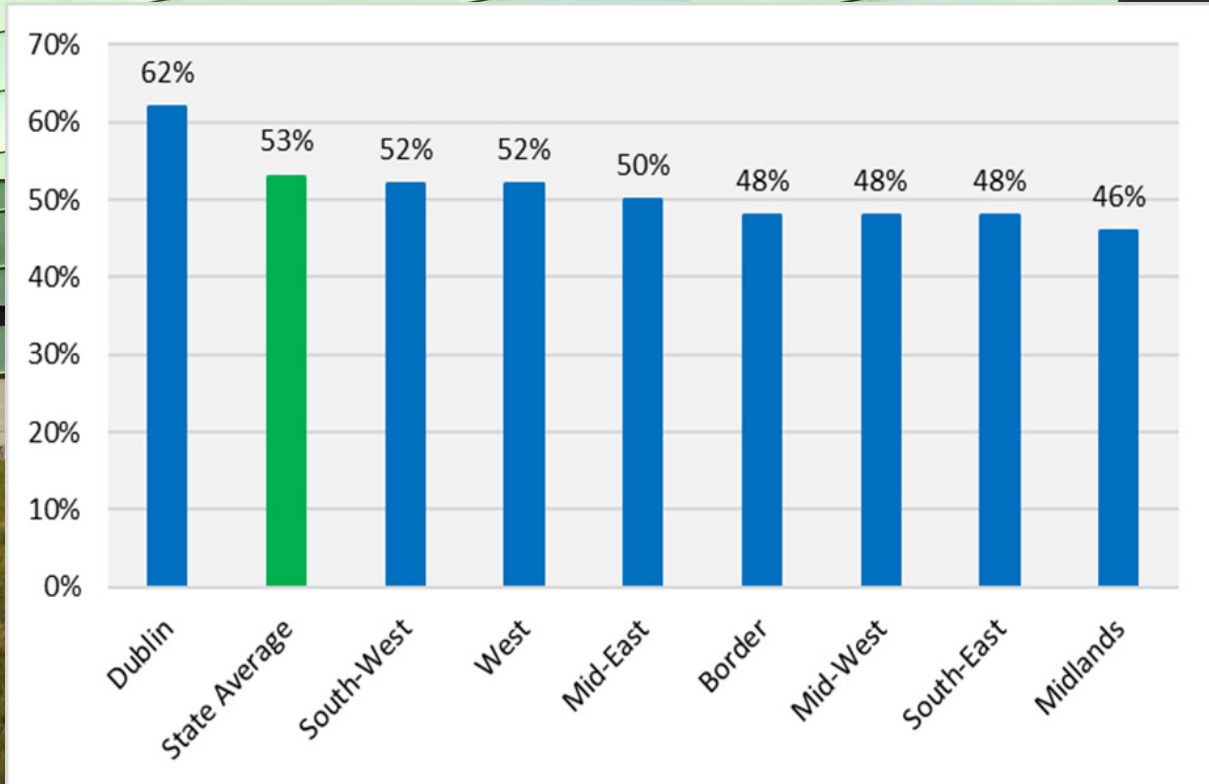


**Figure 6: Number of undergraduate and postgraduate students enrolled in Higher Education Institutes in the Northern and Western Region, as % of total students enrolled in Ireland, academic year 2010 / 2011 to 2020 / 2021**



Source: Higher Education Authority<sup>15</sup>

**Figure 7: Third level attainment rates by the NUTS 3 Regions of Ireland, 2022**

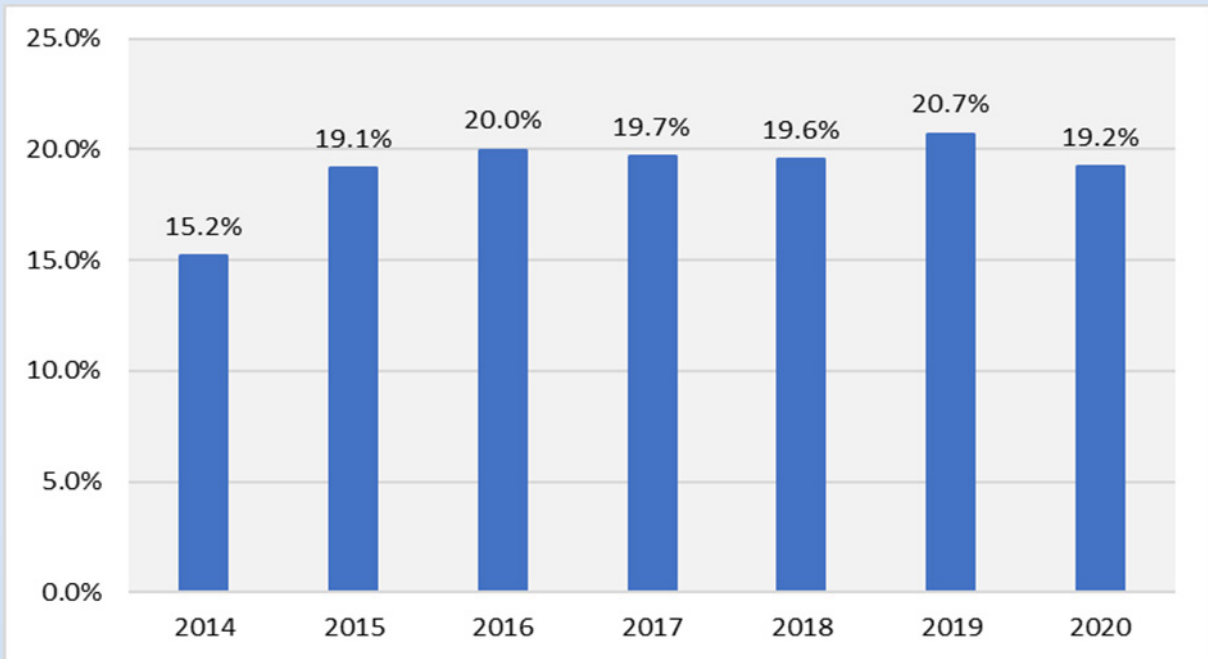


Source: CSO

<sup>15</sup> Higher Education Authority enrolment data. Includes enrollments from undergraduates, postgraduates, FETAC Advanced Certificate, FETAC Certificate, and remote learner.



**Figure 8: Further Education and Training beneficiaries registered in the ETBs located in the Northern and Western Region, as a percentage of total beneficiaries in Ireland, 2014-2020**



Source: Department of Education



## 3: Recommendations

The Northern and Western Regional Assembly has outlined a series of recommendations which should be reflected in the new statement of strategy of the DFHERIS:

1. **Positively discriminate in favour of the Northern and Western Region's Higher Education Institutes:** Considering the economic challenges being experienced by the region's economy – and given that the region's student population has been rising in recent years – the new statement of strategy should adopt a policy of "Positive Discrimination" towards the Northern and Western Region's Higher Education Institutes. In this regard, the new statement of strategy should commit to providing an above average level of capital and current funding – per undergraduate and postgraduate student – to the University of Galway and the Atlantic Technological University.

This will provide ample opportunities to improve the economic and social wellbeing of the Northern and Western Region, allowing extensive opportunities to support the region's skills base, expand the region's innovation capacity, support cross border education programmes given our region's geographical proximity to Northern Ireland and grow the region's economy. For example, research undertaken by the Assembly highlights how investment in the Atlantic Technological University will provide value for money for the exchequer and support regional employment creation.<sup>16</sup> Specifically, the Assembly's research found that the Atlantic Technological University would – at minimum – contribute €700 million to the Irish economy and support up to 3,100 jobs<sup>17</sup> per annum. In doing so, the new statement of strategy can assist in addressing the Northern and Western Region's designation as a "Transition Region", "Lagging Region" and "Moderate Innovator" while enhancing our region's competitiveness and supporting the implementation of Regional Policy Objective (RPO) 7.6, namely "Support and promote the growth, development and success of the Connacht Ulster Alliance consortium's ambition towards becoming a Technological University serving the west and north-west."

Furthermore, any additional funding provided through a policy of "Positive Discrimination" could be used to develop or enhance cross border education programmes and partnerships via our region's higher education sector, with our region's Higher Education Institutes – particularly the Atlantic Technological University – uniquely positioned to capitalise on the potential of a growing all-island economy.

2. **Support the provision of third level education facilities and services in the Cavan, Monaghan, Roscommon and Leitrim sub-regions:** The continued development and provision of third level education facilities in Cavan, Monaghan, Roscommon and Leitrim will play a significant role in enhancing the skills base and education profile of the Border. The provision of such facilities could not be more important for these counties given that the Border – out of the 8 NUTS 3 Regions in Ireland – recorded one of the lowest third level attainment rates in Ireland, as of 2022,<sup>18</sup> while the Border's GDP per capita has dropped to 52% of the EU27 average, the lowest since records began.<sup>19</sup> Supporting the delivery of these type of facilities in Cavan, Monaghan, Roscommon and Leitrim would be in line with RPO 7.7 of the RSES of the Northern and Western Region and would provide greater opportunities to deepen North-South cooperation in terms of skills development and training.

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.nwra.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/atu-economic-impact-study-final-draft-25032022.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> [https://www.nwra.ie/news/new-atlantic-technological-university-will-deliver-e700m-to-irelands-economy-per-year/#:~:text=New%20Atlantic%20Technological%20University%20will%20deliver%20%E2%82%AC700m%20to%20Ireland's%20economy%20per%20year,-March%2030%2C%202022&text=Just%20over%203%2C100%20jobs%20will,University%20\(TU\)%20per%20year.](https://www.nwra.ie/news/new-atlantic-technological-university-will-deliver-e700m-to-irelands-economy-per-year/#:~:text=New%20Atlantic%20Technological%20University%20will%20deliver%20%E2%82%AC700m%20to%20Ireland's%20economy%20per%20year,-March%2030%2C%202022&text=Just%20over%203%2C100%20jobs%20will,University%20(TU)%20per%20year.)

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-eda/educationalattainmentthematicreport2022/profileofagesexnationalityandregion/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.nwra.ie/news/nwra-launches-new-regional-economic-briefing-notes/>



- 3. Increase the level of funding provided to the Human Capital Initiative, thereby supporting programmes – such as Springboard – which improve upskilling, skills development and lifelong learning rates in the Northern and Western Region:** The new statement of strategy should aim to provide additional resources to the Human Capital Initiative, as a means of allowing more students and workers to participate in strategically important courses that will support our region’s transition to a more digital and low carbon economy. The provision of such resources should be informed by the Northern and Western Region’s appropriate Higher Education Institutes, Regional Skills Managers, Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and other training and industrial stakeholders and would be in line with the following RPOs of the RSES of the Northern and Western Region:
- ◊ RPO 7.1, namely “Support the co-ordination of employment skills and support in the region through the alignment of needs as identified by the Regional Skills Fora to include facilities and opportunities for disadvantaged areas and groups in the community.”
  - ◊ RPO 7.2, namely “Support disadvantaged communities facing particular barriers to employment, including actively marketing vacancies that are relevant to them.”
  - ◊ RPO 7.3, namely “Through the constituent LCDC’s, promote vocational and occupational programmes and pathways for progression to a career.”
  - ◊ RPO 7.5, namely “Ensure that the requirements of emerging sectors are reflected in the regional skills needs and resourcing.”
- 4. Positively discriminate in favour of the Northern and Western Region’s ETBs:** The ETB’s high quality service offering continues to make a notable contribution to the Northern and Western Region’s economy. By improving the ETBs infrastructure and training equipment and increasing the level of resources available to the ETBs of the region, the new statement of strategy could help address historical under-investment in further education and training assets,<sup>20</sup> improve the region’s skills, education and employment profile and enhance the performance of the Northern and Western Region’s economy. The provision of additional funding in this regard could also support greater efforts in developing strategic partnerships and training programmes with similar bodies located in Northern Ireland, thereby further supporting the development of the all-island economy for the benefit of all communities on the island.
- 5. Provide additional funding to the ETBs of the Northern and Western Region in order to promote the service offering and learning outcomes of these training bodies:** The new statement of strategy should aim to provide additional resources to promote the positive learning outcomes experienced by ETB graduates – in terms of progression to employment and Higher Education – the availability of industry relevant courses that the ETBs can generally provide free of charge and the availability of ETB courses that provide flexible learning schedules to students.

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.nwra.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/northern-and-western-regional-assembly-pre-budget-2023-submission97.pdf>

6. **Improve the level of financial assistance available to SMEs that allow their employees to participate on skills development initiatives – such as “Skills to Advance”, the “Apprenticeship Incentivisation Scheme” and the “Explore” program – and employer lead training networks such as “Skillsnet”:** These networks and training initiatives are crucial to addressing skills shortages, skills gap and lifelong learning issues, particularly for entry point and low skilled workers based in the Northern and Western Region. Notably, the “Explore” program is regarded as an extremely effective scheme in upskilling workers in the manufacturing sector. Considering the exposure of low skilled manufacturing workers to technological advances – such as Artificial Intelligence and Automation – the preservation and enhancement of funding for this type of training programmes will be crucial to mitigating against any future job losses due to technological advancements. Additional financial assistance in this regard could be used to ease the short-term financial concerns of SMEs while their employees are participating in these training courses.
7. **Enhance the research infrastructure and equipment of the Higher Education Institutes and research assets of the Northern and Western Region:** The new statement of strategy should aim to provide greater capital investment to the research facilities of Higher Education Institutes, research centres and technology gateways based in the Northern and Western Region, with a particular focus on the following institutions and assets, namely:

- ◊ WiSAR Lab
- ◊ Wind Energy Centre
- ◊ Epi Centre
- ◊ PEM (Precision Engineering and Manufacturing)
- ◊ CERIS (Centre for Environmental Research Innovation and Sustainability)
- ◊ CRISP (Centre for Research in Social Professions)
- ◊ Marine and Freshwater Centre
- ◊ MET (Medical and Engineering Technologies)
- ◊ Centre for Integrated Sustainable Energy Technologies
- ◊ Marine Institute
- ◊ CURAM (Centre for Research in Medical Devices)
- ◊ INSIGHTS (SFI Research Centre for Data Analytics)
- ◊ NCBES (National Centre for Biomedical Engineering Science)
- ◊ NFB (Network of Excellence for Functional Biomaterials)
- ◊ REMEDI (Regenerative Medicine Institute)
- ◊ ICHEC (Irish Centre for High-End Computing)
- ◊ NCLA (National Centre for Laser Applications)
- ◊ Teagasc Ballyhaise College
- ◊ National Fisheries College of Ireland, Greencastle



Given that the Northern and Western Region is now the only “Moderate Innovator” on the island of Ireland, it is imperative that an above average level of capital funding is provided to the research infrastructure and equipment of the Higher Education Institutes and research assets of the Northern and Western Region. Furthermore, many of these institutions and assets would be located near the border or have interactions with similar bodies located in Northern Ireland, therefore support in this regard should be provided as a means of improving North-South cooperation on research partnerships and collaborations.

8. **Provide greater financial resources to support more research and PhD positions in the Northern and Western Region’s Higher Education Institutes and research assets:** By supporting more research and PhD positions in the Northern and Western Region’s Higher Education Institutes and research assets, the Department will be able to enhance the capacity of these organizations to undertake high-quality and industry relevant research for our region’s enterprise base, and such an approach should be reflected in the new statement of strategy.

- 9. Adopt a regional approach for the implementation of “Impact 2030: Ireland’s Research and Innovation Strategy”<sup>21</sup>:** In implementing “Impact 2030”, the new statement of strategy should embrace a regional approach, moving away from an outdated and inefficient “one size fits all” policy. Therefore, a smart specialization approach should be adopted in implementing the priorities that have been outlined in “Impact 2030”, ensuring improvements in each region’s research and innovation systems actually support their sectoral strengths and address their own unique challenges.
- 10. Facilitate greater collaboration between the Northern and Western Region’s enterprise base and its Higher Education Institutes and research assets:** The new statement of strategy should aim to develop new networking opportunities – through regularly organized regional smart specialization forums – in order to provide more opportunities for enterprises and researchers to discuss potential areas of collaboration. Furthermore, the new strategy should aim to deliver more promotional activities of the research services offered by the Northern and Western Region’s research bodies and the financial incentives that are available to enterprises undertaking research and development.
- 11. Examine the merits in enhancing grant relief rates on R&D funding schemes and providing more direct funding to enterprises undertaking R&D activities:** It is imperative that the new statement of strategy aims to enhance the grant relief rates associated with R&D incentives and schemes for enterprises and provide more direct funding sources to enterprises undertaking R&D activities. The consensus among international bodies is that governments must support R&D activity because the costs and risks for business – particularly for SMEs – are notably high but the economic benefits for the wider economy are quite significant.

Furthermore, the European Commission’s “2022 Semester: Country Report – Ireland<sup>22</sup>” noted that while the R&D tax credit provides valuable support to business expenditure on R&D, more priority for direct funding instruments could help to stimulate research and innovation and improve the productivity of Irish firms – especially SMEs – with low levels of investment in R&D activity in domestic firms considered a significant weakness of the Irish economy. Within this context, it is imperative that the new statement of strategy commits to examining the merits of enhancing the grant relief rates associated with R&D incentives and schemes for enterprises – particularly for SMEs – and in providing more direct funding sources to enterprises undertaking R&D activities.

- 12. Reinforce the importance of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and Horizon Europe in supporting research and innovation in Ireland:** The next statement of strategy should commit to highlighting and promoting the benefits of enterprises that have successfully applied for funding under the ERDF and Horizon 2020 for R&D activities.
- 13. Increase the level of funding available for education programmes and research projects that incorporate an all-island dimension:** Central to supporting the development of the all-island economy in the coming years will be the ability of policymakers to develop an environment that encourages cross-border collaboration in areas such as R&D, knowledge and innovation diffusion. As a means of encouraging greater collaborations in this regard, the new statement of strategy – through funding streams such as the Shared Island Fund – should increase the level of funding available for education programmes and research projects that incorporate an all-island dimension and encourage partnerships between Higher Education Institutes and research bodies across the island of Ireland. The Northern and Western Region’s Higher Education Institutes – particularly the Atlantic Technological University – would be strongly positioned to support greater research partnerships and cross border education programmes, thereby further strengthening the all-island economy for the benefit of all communities on the island.



**msletb**  
Bord Oideachais agus Oiliúna  
Mhaigh Eo, Shligigh agus Liatroma  
Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim  
Education and Training Board



**gretb**  
Bord Oideachais agus Oiliúna  
na Gaillimhe agus Ros Comáin  
Galway and Roscommon  
Education and Training Board



**cmetb**  
Bord Oideachais agus Oiliúna  
an Chabháin agus Mhuineacháin  
Cavan and Monaghan  
Education and Training Board



**etb**  
Bord Oideachais agus  
Oiliúna Dhúin na nGall  
Donegal Education and  
Training Board



**cavan  
institute**

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/27c78-impact-2030-irelands-new-research-and-innovation-strategy/>

<sup>22</sup> [https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2022-06/2022-european-semester-country-report-ireland\\_en.pdf](https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2022-06/2022-european-semester-country-report-ireland_en.pdf)






## Northern & Western Regional Assembly

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