



Re: Public Consultation –Draft First Revision National Planning Framework (NPF)

Submission on behalf of Programme Managers of the Regional Enterprise Plans

12th September 2024

Dear Sir/ Madam,

The Programme Managers Network of Regional Enterprise Plans (REP), welcome the opportunity to make this submission in respect of the public consultation of the Draft First Revision of the National Planning Framework (NPF).

The Regional Enterprise Plans were launched in 2022 and set out the collective ambition of enterprise stakeholders across our regions. The plans were developed following comprehensive consultation which highlighted both the challenges and opportunities faced by enterprise in our regions. The implementation of the plans is being facilitated through working groups, comprised of private and public sector representatives.

The submission as set out below, is based on feedback garnered the Regional Enterprise Plans Programme Managers:

1. Strategic alignment of regional economic development:

Currently there are a range of different regional enterprise strategies – for example, nine Regional Enterprise Plans 2022-2024, (with an extension to 2025) with the stakeholder framework and bottom-up approach to the structure of the nine plans. The structure is the driver for balanced regional development with no statutory requirement.

The Government’s White Paper on Enterprise 2022-2030; the National Smart Specialisation Strategy for Innovation 2022-2027; Trading for Impact: National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland 2024-2027 and the three Regional Assemblies Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES) along with an IDA Irelands Strategy 2021–2024 and Enterprise Irelands – *Leading in a changing world* –Strategy 2022-2024, yet it is not clear to what extent each are aligned and are coherently complementing each other across to the nine Regional Enterprise Plans.

Recommendation 1: The First Revision to the National Planning Framework needs to be revised and improved to create stronger clarity and coherence around strategic regional economic development.

2. Mechanisms to deliver on enterprise policy:

The importance of interagency collaboration cannot be understated. Through the existing Regional Enterprise Plans, there exists a framework to facilitate the alignment of ambition to deliver on any future ambition arising from national policy such as the Government's White Paper on Enterprise 2022-2030, National Smart Specialisation Strategy for Innovation 2022-2027 and the National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland 2024-2027 and the forthcoming National Clustering Policy.

The existing governance structures of the Regional Enterprise Plans (REPs) and established working inter-agency relationships are ideally positioned to support national and region-specific investment creating sustainable economic growth across all regions and should therefore be leveraged and fully resourced into the future to ensure balanced regional development to align with the Revised National Planning Framework population projects and future growth.

Recommendation 2: The Regional Enterprise Plans are an ideal structured to implement and support region specific investment and job creation across the regions and should therefore, be leveraged and fully resourced into the future to ensure balanced regional development.

3. Examine strategically and in detail, key emerging sectors of opportunity for regions:

The National Smart Specialisation Strategy 2022-2027 is a place-based innovation policy promoting regional strengths. There is an opportunity and potential to identify strategic employment sectors to look in detail at key emerging sectors with transformative potential for regions such as renewable energy, the bioeconomy, the future of agri-food and design.

Clearly the period to 2030 will bring significant changes in terms of climate change impacts and opportunities. It will be important that regions are supported to maximise potential opportunities for job creation, economic transformation and regional innovation.

To assist this, detailed analysis of identified sectoral opportunities at a regional level could be undertaken, as was previously undertaken by Forfas through the development of Regional Competitiveness Agendas.

Recommendation 3: Undertake detailed analysis to identify sectoral opportunities at a regional level.

4. Investment in Skills and Attract New Talent:

Notwithstanding the wide range of education and training initiatives and apprenticeships, the availability of, and access to skills and talent across a broad range of sectors remains challenging - profiling of talent strengths, and gaps across all regions, for current and emerging industry and enterprise sectors, would help inform the activity of training and education providers.

Training and education provision should be industry led and providers can better respond in being flexible/agile in development and delivery of relevant skills and attracting new talent. There is also an opportunity for greater intervention in second level education to encourage students to broaden their interest from traditional careers and to look at opportunities in emerging sectors e.g., green economy; retrofitting, construction related trades (plumbers/electricians etc.)' block chain and cybersecurity etc. with further collaboration with the higher and further education providers.

Mechanisms for attracting talent to the regions can be more fully developed. There is an opportunity under the implementation of the Revised National Planning Framework for the Regional Enterprise Plan, Programme Managers together with the Regional Assemblies to develop territorialised critical skills lists responding to the skills needs of the regions and their firms.

Recommendation 4.1: Investment in profiling skills and talent strengths, to identify gaps across all regions, for current and emerging industry and enterprise sectors. This would assist to inform the activity of training and education providers at all levels.

Recommendation 4.2: Increase investment is required for Research and Development to improve competitiveness for industry both nationally and internationally.

5. Support for Urban areas and Investment:

The OECD Report '*Towards Balanced Regional Attractiveness in Ireland*' explores the existing governance arrangements making recommendations in relation to initiatives that could support the implementation of the National Planning Framework.

Regional and local planning can benefit for being more agile to allow for increased innovation collaborations among enterprise, involving a range of public sector and private sector actors and academia, looking to shared challenges and opportunities for balanced economic development and growth.

Regional leadership and accountability similar to our European countries, underpin the delivery of regional attractiveness and increase competitiveness.

Recommendation 5.1: Raise the profile of the Regions by measuring and communicating the value of the Regional Enterprise Plans across government, local government and the EU. Given the funding comes from the EU, this will enhance Ireland's region's ability to attract more EU funding in the future and in turn improve Ireland's competitive status within EU.

Yours sincerely,

Regional Enterprise Plans Programme Managers

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