



Northern & Western
Regional Assembly

NWRA response to

Draft National Reform Programme

Ireland

April 2017

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The Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA) welcomes this opportunity to review the consultation on the Draft **National Reform Programme Ireland** April 2017.

Our review of the draft sets out the role of the NWRA in regional economic development and also highlights a number of key issues for the region to strengthening of the rural economy of the NWRA.

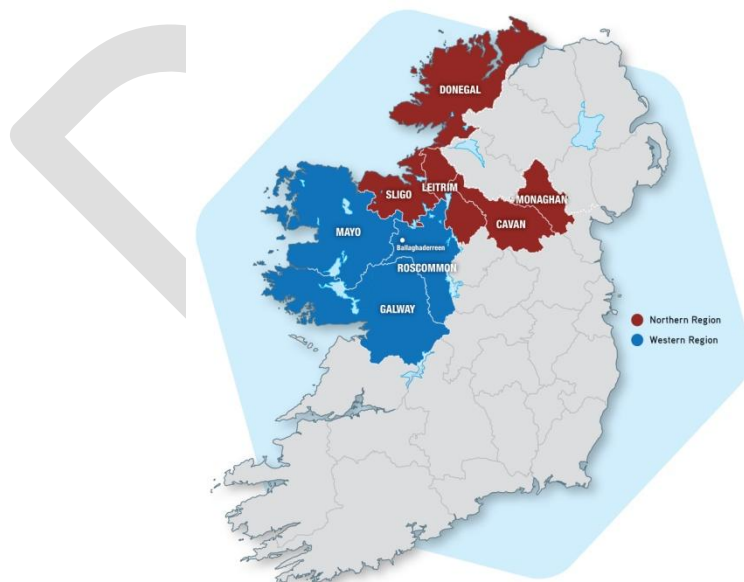
1. Introduction

The Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA), was established in January 2015 covering the 8 county region of Cavan, Donegal, Galway, Leitrim, Mayo, Monaghan, Roscommon and Sligo in Ireland with more than 800,000 citizens.

The NWRA is responsible for:

- Regional economic and spatial planning for the North West region;
- The management of European Regional Development Funding Programme (€320m 2014-2020);
- Developing, implementing and promoting regional development policy and initiatives;
- Acting as the national contact point for EU-funded transnational programmes; and
- Promoting coordinated action to promote effectiveness in Local Government and public services along with promoting transparency between plans, policies and proposals of these organisations.

Map of the NWRA Region, Ireland



The NWRA welcomes the Two of the key areas where the Northern and Western region Assembly have a direct impact under the **National Reform Programme** is on the ***BREXIT***, ***Housing Supply and Spatial Planning*** and the ***EU Funding***

- **Brexit**

The impact of BREXIT upon the state will be felt nowhere greater than in the NWRA region. The exposure of indigenous industry to the changing British Market; the changing pattern of investment cross border; the potential of export tariffs and the impact on commutability, have the potential to have a huge negative impact on our region. The impact could effect not just industry and jobs, but the day to day living of the citizens along our border area.

The travel of the approx 30,000 daily commuters across our land border, must be one of the primary focuses of any Government policy moving forward. The easy of their travel has to be maintained to allow this flow, which benefits both the State and Northern Irish economy.

Funding supports through the IDA and EI towards SME's to deal with the potential fall out of BREXIT must be primarily focused on SME's within the geographical hinterland of the border. They must be adapted to equipment these SEM's, particularly in the Agri food and retail castor, with the knowledge and research to overcome such a force.

However, the potential positives for the region under BREXIT must also be realised. The region is ideally located for use by Internationally Financial Services, who can see the region as an attractive location within the EU but on the hinterland of the large UK economy. The affordable commercial and residentially property, offer the International Investor a high return on investment and a Quality of Life which is fast becoming a lifestyle choice for the modern graduate.

- **Housing Supply and Spatial Planning**

The introduction of the regional assemblies under the Local Government Reform Act, 2014 is enabling the development of a regional focus on socio-economic development in the State. The key role given to the Northern and Western Assembly will be that of driving through regional development priorities which should, be formally agreed between the Assembly and lead Departments in regard to the National Planning Framework.

Following the adoption of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy in 2018, the Assembly will have a range of supervisory and implementation responsibilities devolved from the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, Departments of Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform.

The policy for supporting the renewal of the regions towns and villages has become an important response to the housing pressures in Greater Dublin and Cork due to the cost of housing and congestion /infrastructure deficiencies. The freeing up of housing capacity in these urban centres by regeneration of vacant housing throughout the north west and west provides a realistic and affordable option. Doing so would underpin the potential of Dublin in particular, to attract internationally mobile investment arising from the re-configuration of financial services.

The Assembly welcomes the upcoming Vacant Housing Re-Use Strategy under pillar 5 of Rebuilding Ireland. Presently there are 230,056 unoccupied residential properties (excluding holiday homes) across the state (Census 2011); almost three-quarters (73%) are houses and the remainder are flats / apartments (27%), with the vacancy rate tending to be highest in rural settlements.

By providing grants to owners of vacant homes in need of refurbishment, it assists the owners to bring the house back to productive use, encouraging affordable resettlement of the population to areas which have experience lower population density and resulting negative economic impact.

- **EU Funds**

The NWRA (previously named the BMW regional Assembly) has successfully managed the regions European Regional Development Funding Programme, Border, Midland and Western (BMW) Regional Operational Programme (OP), since 1999. This programme has seen the investment of over €600m of ERDF funding within the region over that period.

The present 2014 – 2020 O P will see an investment of €320 million in 5 Priorities - Strengthening RTDI in the BMW Region; ICT Infrastructure; SME Support, Promotion and capability Development; Low Carbon Economy and Sustainable Urban Development. This investment will contribute to the delivery of the Europe 2020 targets for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, focusing is on specific growth opportunities and targeted growth and innovative sectors identified in Ireland's smart specialisation strategy, building on the region's strengths.

This funding plays a key role in the role out of services to the Region through strengthen its economic and social cohesion and it provision beyond 2020 must be ensured, to allow for the continued balance regional development especially in light of the potential negative effect of BREXIT.